

# LONG BLACK CURLY EYES

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First Printing

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# ANTENNA

*Sometimes when I'm walking through a crowded section of the city, I slow down on approaching an intersection, so I miss the light and have an excuse to loiter on the corner for a few minutes.*

The land is still. Nothing disturbs the view. No sound, no motion. If you raise your head to get a closer look, the silence will be shattered by the cackling of a rifle, and a curious bird may start to descend. It is best to be satisfied with brief glances, and leave the scene untouched.

I have been madly in love with a woman I have never met for seven years now. I watch her through the scope of my rifle, as she defends the opposing trench.

Over the years she has taken five shots at me, hitting me three times (luckily nowhere important). I have shot at her a few times, but my heart was never in it. (Also, I am not a very good shot.)

I asked my friend Pierre who works at HQ if he could

look her up for me. Pierre works in accounting, which is a lovely modern steel and glass building in the accounting district, just south of downtown. It's a little early for its style, and the glass facade is interrupted at intervals by structural members that were eventually proven to be unnecessary. By the standards of the neighboring buildings, it therefore looks subtly archaic. It is, shall we say, tentatively modern. This, honestly, gives it an endearingly naive aesthetic that makes me very comfortable. The entire building is constantly fluttering its wings and asking: "Should I be doing this? Is this really the future?" as I sit and silently reply: "Yes! This is perfect."

As a clerk in the military's accounting department, Pierre does, of course, have easy access to the War Department Records Building, a STUNNING piece of brutalist absurdity. Originally designed as a research library for grad students at the film school, it was repurposed before ever opening in its original capacity. It correctly fit the cubic meter requirements for storage and access to the existing records, with space for projected expansion, but with MUCH more space for casual meetings and contemplative study than would normally be specced. It is absolutely impossible to walk those complex convex cement slab spaces without your thoughts drifting into the abstract.

The generals hold their highest level weekly meetings here in the great hall of the building's abdomen, as do The Marxist Youth Theatre Group. No one remembers how they originally got permission for that access, but they're grandfathered in now.

Both sides in this war maintain complete encyclopedias of the opposing forces: everyone from generals

down to the lowliest soldier is extensively documented. Of course I didn't know her name, but when I said: "The girl with long black curly eyes" Pierre immediately knew who I meant.

He chased me down during lunch the following week, so excited he could barely talk.

"I found her! Her name is Gerda and she's Francois Gray's daughter!"

"NO!"

"YES!"

"Francois Gray, the architect responsible for the Level Two Subway Station?"

"The very same!"

My dream girl was the daughter of my favorite architect? Impossible! Truly, this must be the result of cosmic forces! Or random luck. Or maybe I somehow subconsciously knew? I don't remember.

I considered what kind of house she must have grown up in, with a father like that. I imagined a subtle scheme of glass, steel, and childhood, intricately woven through time. A dance of motion and form, carefully intertwined and balanced.

And what personality traits would such an upbringing impart? Presumably there would have been alternating asymmetric phases of embracing and rebelling. Growth and contraction, a slow pulsation stretched over decades. Embracing modern architecture leads to a spirit of rebelliousness within official channels. To completely overthrow that which is allowed to be modified, and replace it with something completely new, within physical engineering constraints and rele-

vant government regulations.

I can feel the wind in my hair just thinking about it.

My baseless and irrational obsession with her grew.

“Also, she eats lunch at —’s every day. Which is next door.” Pierre continued. I ignored him.

I wonder how she had wound up in the military? Once there the career path of marksman would be obvious given her background, but how did she get to that point?

“She’s there right now. I can see her through the window from here.”

And what would her father think of her choices? At least she wasn’t in artillery, targeting his work. I estimated she was about forty now, and I’d first noticed her on the enemy line nine years ago, when she was clearly a rookie. She must have taken some time with grad school and another career before settling in to life in the trenches.

Maybe mathematics? The way she held her rifle, she certainly had the body language of a pure mathematician. Maybe a topologist. And that would segue nicely into a desire to kill strangers. (No, not a desire, but an APTITUDE.) But if she was in a rebellious phase as an undergrad, perhaps something in the humanities? Accounting? Or perhaps mesmerism, if she was being REALLY rebellious against her modernist father. The university had a very well-regarded program in freshwater mesmerism.

Damned Victorian academics.

“She’s sitting alone at a table for two, and just started a very large bowl of soup.”



Well of course she's alone, could there be anyone else in the city with a background like that? She must be alone in every crowd, alone in every conversation. There is no one that can imagine what goes on in her head! A beautiful unique snowflake in a blizzard of hideous unique snowflakes, yapping at her ankles. I mean, everyone has their own backstory, we aren't clones. When I say she is the greatest, I don't mean that anyone else is lesser. When I say you aren't fit to lick her boots, it isn't personal.

"I think it's pho."

I stared into the distance, lost in thought.

"Anyways. See you later." Pierre finally gave up. I could be hard to talk to sometimes.

"Thanks, Pierre. I'll look into it." I wonder what I was referring to.

I returned to my tamales, and that's when I decided to stage an uprising. That would give me cover to defect and join her in the enemy trenches.

Next thursday was balloon day, when all military operations were canceled for the day so people could go ballooning safely.

It would be the perfect cover.

Actually, maybe I would put the uprising off until later, and just go ballooning. That is quite fun, and I could use a day to unwind. Maybe bring my camera, but specifically NOT to shoot landscape or balloon photos. There is no genre of photos that is more formulaic and tedious than photos shot from a hot air balloon. Which means there is vast potential unexplored territory in the stylistic vicinity!

Ah, now I was starting to get excited.

But what... what would I be shooting...

Closeup shots of architectural details. Shot from an angle which can normally only be caught with a very long lens, giving a completely different look.

Mmmm.... potential... perhaps.

I'd have to choose my targets ahead of time, and fly with a very skilled and cooperative balloon pilot.

Balloon piloting is entirely based on moving vertically to pick up winds going in different directions. Which are, of course, all invisible. Quite amazing.

Wait, a better idea: I don't need an uprising, I just need to change sides. I'll secretly stay behind on Switching Day, while everyone else is switching.

*City Hall made a statement today warning unauthorized personnel from venturing down into the underground river, whether it's for exploration, or in pursuit of the blues. The area is extremely hazardous, especially for the non-professional, and you will not be rescued.*

They say that to truly understand your enemy, study the difference in what kind of string quartet the generals listen to, versus what string quartets the soldiers in the trenches listen to. If you hear the generals listening to one style of string quartet, and then you go to the barracks, and hear the same style of string quartet, then the brass are micromanaging every second of the soldiers' lives, and morale is probably terrible. If they're different, then both generals and front-line soldiers are showing a will to live beyond the moment, a yearning for unknown cultural bliss, and they are truly a force to be feared.

The snipers along the third mile of the eastern wall had been giving our forces a lot of trouble lately, and Lieutenant — had been tasked with finding out why. A little surveillance narrowed the problem down to three enemy soldiers, but their entries in the encyclopedia didn't reveal anything enlightening.

So the good Lieutenant began his investigation with some old-fashioned research. Looking up genealogical info, bibliographic search through anything they'd published, going back five years, both academic and non. Watching documentaries on them. The standard stuff. It took a few months to sort through the data, and again the Lieutenant came up empty-handed. All three had published, recently, in their respective fields of research. And none of it was out of the ordinary. Mitochondria diseases in nitrogen-fixing bacteria in agricultural cultivars of kudzu, etc., etc. The tamest of the tame.

Time for some OLD-fashioned research, leather to pavement. The Lieutenant started hanging around the neighborhood all three called home. He interviewed their neighbors, their maid, one of their cooks. He dated one of them briefly. He took their accountant out to dinner twice before giving up on that line of investigation. He x-rayed their dog.

Finally he hit on a real clue.

The three snipers in question had been in a variety of bands over the years, within a larger set of like-minded musicians, who frequently formed short-lived subgroups. (The informal rule was that subgroups could not duplicate any member, and order didn't matter.)

But the trio's recent project really worked. It went

a step beyond navel-gazing nonsense. It reached a higher level. Within the first month of playing out, they were already attracting larger crowds than any previous projects any of the three had been in. They were regularly playing to crowds of thirty, even thirty-five people these days, which was an amazing turnout for the avant-garde scene.

Their fanbase was almost entirely from opposing forces, mostly because that's who spent time watching them through binoculars and sniper scopes. When you see a dozen flyers a day for obscure underground shows featuring unknown bands, but recognize a face on one as someone who actually shot at you yesterday, you're more likely to stop and pay attention. Maybe give them a listen. What's that sniper lay down on trumpet when the spirit takes hold? Traumatized minds want to know.

And then of course, the trio's timing was perfect. They had the incredible luck to be starting a new Scriabin-inspired trio just as the "Great Hush of '16" started.

Both sides had begun experimenting with automated weapons, and the one place where it really worked, without disasterous failure modes, was in assisting artillery targetting. Optical sources weren't of much use, because most interesting targets were out of sight. (Kites were used to excellent effect in battlefield photography, but not for realtime targetting.)

So sound became the target of choice.

Initially, the automated system just scanned for a steady, loud, source of noise, then an operator would give a listen, and if it sounded like an worthwhile target (engine of large vehicle), would pull the trigger cable.

Pretty soon the operator trusted the targeting to put the system in automated mode, and nap through their shifts.

However, at the same time both sides made sound dampening a part of all standard camouflage, and obvious targets went quiet. At this point, the automated system mostly found noisy crowds, at the market, cafes, bars, CP meetings, etc. People very quickly learned how to stay quiet in public, relying on hand gestures as much as possible, and whispering when absolutely necessary.

But one thing couldn't be continued in any fashion: the more clear, clean, and steady a tone, the easier it was for the automated system to pick it out of the background noise, and the more important a target it assumed it was. (Steady regular repetition usuals means machinery.) Therefore, music, especially traditional, popular music, stood out like a searchlight to the listening automata, screaming "SHOOT ME! SHOOT ME!" as loudly as possible.

It was the perfect time for avant-garde, dissonant, polyrhythmic music to flourish. A Golden Age of the difficult and inaccessible.

In the end, it didn't help much. Most people want simple enjoyable music that's just complicated enough to hold one's attention, and tap one's toe. The confusion about music mostly stems from the overuse of the word "music" to describe completely unrelated artistic fields, that all happen to involve sound. If you've managed to find an original twist to the genre, and added an appealing little element of something new, it doesn't matter. You're still playing to the avant-garde, and your audience is still limited to a subset of

that tiny group.

*I'm writing to complain about the teenagers skating in the subway station. All those slanted areas along the walkway are very nice to look at, but the skaters keep going down them, over and over, doing their little jump tricks. It's very distracting to the pickpockets and other subway workers.*

I had just stopped outside the cafe to chat with my two neighbors, Alexandre The Assassin, and Jules The Jewel Thief, when the news report came over the radio that the —, the legendary pink diamond that was temporarily on display at the Pancake Museum, had been stolen! But before the DJ could provide any details, the story was interrupted by another late-breaking news story: that the Prime Minister of Flap-jacks had been assassinated!

I was stunned and turned to Alexandre and Jules to see what they thought of this shocking news, but both were slouched down in their chairs, trying to cover their faces with their shirt collars.

“What’s the matter, guys? Did you hear that news? Incredible, right? We haven’t had something like this since that simultaneous museum jewel theft and political assassination five years ago on this day. What are the chances? It’s a funny old world.”

Alexandre stopped furtively glancing up and down the street just long enough to look up and answer: “Yes, yes. Funny old world.”

Jules too looked up: “Yes. What he said. Oh well, gotta go.”

Both Alexandre and Jules suddenly stood up, threw a few bills on the table and hurried off in opposite

directions.

I slowly continued my way down the street, thinking about the news. Then I decided there was nothing to think about until further details were released and the official investigation went into action, so I decided to go to the library and continue my studies on bee communications.

Specifically, I was interested in the possibility of looking for variations in the waggle dance that might indicate a subtle social order within the worker bee community. Is a particular bee's dance more enthusiastic depending on the set of specific bees in her immediate vicinity? Does a bee deliberately withhold information from social rivals?

This would eventually entail collecting enough photographic evidence of waggle dances to do Fourier analysis on the measurements, and see if there were any statistically valid trends.

I stopped just before the science library and turned down a narrow side street. Two blocks down, I entered the worker bee neighborhood, and just another block on was my destination. Down an alley, round to the back stairs, and up to the third floor, where my subject, a middle aged (two week old) worker bee named Sophia lived.

Sophia was attached to a hive down at the public gardens, that was currently at work pollenating the garden's cherry trees.

Unfortunately, Sophia had only gone out looking for new flowers once this week, and had been unsuccessful, so she had not done any dancing, and I had no new data.

We sat and chatted for a while though. Sophia served Lapsang Souchong tea, sweetened with brown sugar, and some plums.

Sophia's main interest outside the hive is local true crime stories, and she was very excited about the morning's shocking news.

Apparently the Chief of Police already had some suspicions regarding the two crimes, and believed the jewel thief and the assassin, though not working together, were probably personally acquainted.

The fact that these nationally reported crimes were local to me somehow made them seem more distant. They had nothing to do with me, and would never come anywhere near impacting or intersecting with my life, and that just made me realize how all news stories were so far removed that they might as well be fictional, or describing life on another planet.

And so it would always be.

Ah! "Bee"! Get it? I'm always on the lookout for subtle connections and correlations in the world around me. Makes life more interesting.

Anyways. Back to the grind. I said goodbye to Sophia and headed over to the library to do a little survey paper on recent hive dynamics research.

Unfortunately the card catalog at the library was on fire, so I gave up and went home for the day. I used to volunteer with the library fire squad, but that was a few years ago. It's a very popular cause, and they rotate their volunteers through pretty quickly.

The library is built on a small active volcano, and there are lava spills and small fires throughout the basement and first few floors pretty much continuously. The rare



books are kept on the upper floors. The children's books are kept in the basement, on the grounds that children are easily entertained, and direct contact with magma toughens them up.

A small percentage of the library fire volunteers move on to the city fire department. A surprising number of our buildings are built directly on top of small volcanos, and the library alumni have good reflexes for low-key basement fires.

I vaguely remembered a few years ago there had been a bank robbery of some sort... I think it was a jewel heist. And the robber in some way took advantage of a volcano fire in the bank vault... oh yes, it happened at the exact same time as the city Fire Commissioner was assassinated, which was a very surprising event. For someone that high up in the ranks of Fire Department management to be assassinated without a ransom demand and standard manifesto broadcast, was VERY unusual.

I also remember that the cicada swarm was very large that year, which was, of course, fully expected, and in fact, anticiated with a great deal of enthusiasm. Before the popularity of the Blues, the City's tourist industry was almost entirely based on our cicada swarms. Most regions can boast thirteen and seventeen year broods, but we have broods of higher intervals, including twenty-nine and thirty-seven year. Professor —, a notorious local eccentric of early last century, famously claimed that there was a local cicada brood that only emerged at nine hundred and seven year intervals. No proof for or against this claim has yet been produced.

The people patiently await confirmation.

The number “907” turns up a lot in the city, mostly used humourously by hip young people. There is a secret “907 Club” at the University which most likely is just a drinking club. (Or, even more likely, a “make people suspect we’ve been drinking” club.)

But no one knows for sure.

In any case, it is unlikely there is a connection between the cicada and the bank robbery, but it is just one more mysterious fact piled on with the many others.

*Once the prison started a policy with their worst troublemakers. If a prisoner was being uncooperative, the guards would remove all the corpses that had collected in their cell over the years. Without the bodies to remind one that things could always be worse, the prisoners became increasingly depressed, and eventually collapsed into suicidal despair. The practice was deemed to be a form of torture, and eventually banned.*

Revolutionary groups in this City are easily sidetracked. There was a group downtown that started out as four bored professionals dabbling in crime for aesthetic and philosophical reasons. They met accidentally on the rooftop of a building they were all, coincidentally, trying to break into at the same time. They started talking, this led to that, someone opened a bottle of wine, and at dawn they realized they had completely forgotten to rob the — Corporation.

It was too late to get away, but there were all sorts of nooks and crannies on the roof, so they spent the entire day idly chatting, drinking, and napping in an old room that seemed to have originally been a pigeon coop, but then rebuilt for some unknown purpose, and then abandoned to the elements. In any case, the four became fast friends, and started an association of

meeting of downtown rooftops, doing a little robbery, but mostly just whiling away the hours, solving the world's problems.

Then the pivotal moment came. What should have been a routine interaction between a group of newspaper boys doing their rounds and a police officer getting off his late-night shift, blew up in a stupid misunderstanding, got nasty, spiraled out of control, and within a few days led to a city-wide strike and protests filling the streets.

The rooftop group was highly sympathetic to the workers' grievances, and decided they were in a unique position to help. When they were exploring a building from the top floor, they started looking for any method they could use to advance the political cause that was roaming the streets outside. Soon they were focused on paperwork - the first thing they'd look for on breaking into a company was their main filing cabinets. They'd find a few drawers that were lightly used, consolidate the folders in the surrounding drawers to make more room, and move in.

With food and water supplies in one drawer, and the four mischeivants hiding in another, they would sleep all day while the office worked around them, then sneak out after hours and search for paperwork they could alter to affect the course of local history.

They started with very small, subtle effects. Not because they wanted to, but because they were still feeling out what they could theoretically accomplish, and hadn't found anything significant. And yet their small efforts did not go unnoticed. The forces outside noticed the shift of sympathetic affects swirling within the giant structures of opposition.

Corporate decisions self-parodied in the last paragraph of fine print, every other sentence of legal findings contradicted the preceding sentence. Business accounts that were designed to accumulate, suddenly worked to dissipate.

Tiny fragments of information coalesced, and news of the four “roof walkers” (as they were now known) spread. Soon they had volunteers quietly helping in every office. Staplers that had always seemed content with their lot in life suddenly thought about the big picture beyond their immediate desktop environment, and started jamming whenever certain documents were supposed to be stapled. Pens would leak whenever used to write libelous statements about workers. Air conditioners and heating units would conspire to make offices that were making economic conditions unlivable for distant victims, unlivable for their current occupants.

Things got really exciting when the elevators achieved political consciousness.

By carefully coordinating all the elevators in a building with changes in a few key documents in a few key offices, companies would suddenly lose entire floors of their buildings. The entire institution would simply forget the top three floors existed, and they were suddenly available, rent-free, for political use.

At first they mostly used the new space for roller skating, but the staplers pointed out that ex-business office space would make nice revolutionary office space, and the whole protest movement of recent months could take a huge step up in scale and vision. Also, the pens brought it to everyone’s attention that indoor roller skating was extremely loud in lower floors, and the

secret floors would be discovered before long if they didn't cut it out.

Things went very well with the new office space turned into Revolution Headquarters for a few years, but trouble was afoot. The elevators started grumbling. It's not clear what their grievances were, but morale was low, there was constant inter-shaft chatter, and they stopped taking mission security seriously. A few ambiguous comments here, a few there, and the Companies were sending building inspectors in to see what strange subtle things were going on.

The appearance of actual building inspectors shook the elevators out of their lethargy and they immediately returned to the straight and narrow. At least they went back to strict secrecy about the hidden floors. Unfortunately, as everyone later discovered, they had more elaborate plans, and they just needed a little time to get them sorted out. So returning to cooperation with the revolutionaries was a very temporary feint.

One Tuesday about a month after the inspector scare, all the elevators simply disappeared. How they left has never been determined, and where they went is still a matter of intense speculation, but all of a sudden all the elevator shafts, in all the tall buildings downtown, were empty.

The companies immediately had new elevators installed in the empty shafts, and rediscovered the missing floors. The news quickly spread, and within a few months, every large company had a floor audit, and reaquainted any floors in their buildings that had secretly gone missing over the past few years.

The roof walker rebellion was over.

A number of small groups scattered around the City tried to continue the cause, to rekindle the momentum, but it was futile. The moment had passed.

*Pay attention! Doors closing! Antenna up!*

# HEAD

*Shallow graves are neighborly graves.*

Every architecture firm is continuously presented with war-related projects. Often this is just a vague feasibility study. The generals are mostly looking for some nice drawings and a presentation by someone who sounds clever. Very few defense projects make it past this stage.

Some projects just seem like very well-funded nice architecture projects, until you stumble across some little detail involving “prisoner cells”, or weapons storage. It’s rather obvious that if a building’s eyes are at the front, it is a predator, and if they are on the side it is prey.

One memorable project was the Artillery Garden, which consisted of an elaborate garden with large guns instead of fountains. The main idea was to make a relaxed and enjoyable environment, so soldiers could be given longer shifts without complaining. It would also be an excellent place to propose controversial projects

to the brass while casually “inspecting” the “front lines” in complete safety.

Everyone loved it, especially as details of the gardening and supply tunnels were worked out, but the budget got out of hand. In the end, the generals from both sides absolutely refused to lose this precious gem, no matter the cost, and decided to fund it as a joint project. It was also deemed too valuable to risk in combat, so it was finally built in a remote neutral town, with decommissioned guns. A special unit was created to man it, and soldiers were selected for a short rotation, with equal representation from the two opposing sides.

Aside from the demilitarized guns, the gardens are filled with giant stone sculptures of fantastic animals, that are actually alive, but in geological time. (Or so they say.) Perhaps they are living at normal speed, but are completely content and have no reason to move. In any case, it was originally intended as some sort of abstract hunter theme, to go along with the giant guns, but that meaning just doesn’t get across. No one viewing the gardens sees the artillery in that sense. Clearly they exist to batter enemy fortifications. They are not for hunting, and the animals are just (very large) unrelated decorative flourishes.

There was also a very nice (though small) armillary sundial in the shape of a screaming armadillo, and a calendar carved into stone. (There was a project to replace the sundial with a much larger armillary unit in the shape of a pair of fighting wolves. Luckily, after much debate, that project was moved to a different location and the armadillo sundial remains as it was.)

One bonus of a tour of duty at the Artillery Garden



is that Switching Day is simply a day off, since there's so little to do. This has developed into the Switching Day Artillery Luncheon, an event so popular at every level, from privates to generals, that planning and preparation start every year the day after the last one is over. The full year is required to make the event what everyone has grown to expect.

It starts out with a walk to a nearby lake, usually accompanied by goats. (The goat tradition started as something symbolic about devouring anything in sight, but it isn't an important element any more. People do seem to like goats, but they aren't included every year. It really just depends if anyone involved happens to have pet goats.)

At the lake, a single kite with this year's event symbol on it is flown as everyone waits for the last stragglers to appear, and then the entire group continues on to the island.

The method of conveyance to the island is an important part of each year's unique character, and one of the mostly carefully guarded secrets by the organizing committee. There have been variations on rafts, canoes, paddle-boats, hovercraft, tethered balloons, gondolas (boats), gondolas (suspended), zip lines, temporary monorail, decoy monorail, canon (fake), and several types of insect swarm.

Once on the island guests proceed to the stone circle, a circle of large granite blocks within which are picnic tables and the buffet off to the side. (Two specially reinforced picnic tables are reserved for guests from local partisan forces.) The stone circle was originally a calibration target for experiments with kite-based aerial photography. Now it works nicely to keep the

breeze off.

There is a well at the center of the circle, with a small folly. The folly has an archway over the well, and a tower that reaches about five stories up. The winner of the raffle is taken to the top of the tower, and their head is dropped down into the well. At this sign, a gong sounds, and the feast begins. (People say the folly used to be used to make lead shot, but that is not true. And the tower certainly would not qualify as a “folly” if it were.)

Each year’s event has a theme that determines food, drink, conveyance to and from the island, and even staff costume. Attendees arrive in standard dress uniform. The master of ceremonies is usually wearing a costume of one of the platonic solids, but not always. Recent MC costumes have included: cube, icosahedron, pigeon, zombie candyman, and octahedron. Sometimes the MC has an assistant in a prism costume. Their role in the proceedings is not well-defined, but they are always a crowd favorite. (Probably due to the partial nudity.)

In any case, the luncheon progresses, there is a LOT of food. Not much wine. A small degree of rambunctiousness, and many many secret rituals, heavy with esoteric significance. Almost all of the occult references are lost on the participants, either through ignorance or apathy. No one cares for the dark secrets any more, even their own dark secrets! Oh well. You can’t calm a clam by banging it on a rock!

Soon enough it is over, the prism swims to land, and the gathering disperses.

Apparently the civilian world has been getting increasingly jealous of the Switching Day Artillery Luncheon,

and that's the origin of the recent isolation party fad. I'm not sure if that's true though - when I first heard about the new parties, it was described as "a cool new thing they were doing in the big cities". But perhaps there was confusion about that. In any case, it's certainly a lack of an Artillery Luncheon that made people so excited to try the isolation parties.

*Gauthier Collins, previously of the Gray Designs architectural firm, has announced the formation of his own consulting business. He says the new firm focuses on symmetric, reversable, ideologically pure synthetic architecture.*

I arrived at boot camp as part of a large group of fresh recruits, all struggling with our duffel bags as we stepped off the bus. We walked up to the main gate of the base, and had our first taste of military security and red tape.

Each recruit went up to the window at the guard house, and presented their paperwork. A soldier came out, patted them down, then handcuffed them to a small trained bear. The bear led them inside the gate, to the next queue, and received a treat.

It was when I saw the bear pretend to eat the treat, but then spit it out and pocket it when the soldier wasn't looking, that I started to get suspicious. During a quiet moment a few minutes later asked the bear a few casual questions about "life in the woods", and its answers were absolute proof it had never set paw one outside the city.

It was a jazz-head bear if I'd ever seen one. The only hibernating this bear did was passing out from too much liquor at the club. Not to be judgemental, but my parents had spent the last week warning me of the

evils of City Life, and I had thought that they were exaggerating. Which I later found out they were, but at the moment the city bear was a bit of a shock to this country boy.

By the time each of us was processed at the next window, the paperwork had been cleared, and we were detached from the bear and set free inside the base. We followed the main road to the center of the base, then took a left onto the lane with the barracks for new recruits.

Each barrack had been freshly cleaned, painted, and aired out, and the sergeant was sitting out on the front porch. As they slowly rocked in their rocking chairs, sipping lemonade, each would engage in a bit of landscape painting, whittling a birdhouse, or some-such boring wholesomeness. A friendsome smile and a slinky wave invited us over to each barrack, but we kept going past the first few, curious as to what else we would see.

At the fourth barrack the sergeant was barefoot, wearing a Bishop's robe, and howling obscenities as he fired a pair of imaginary pistols at the innumerable hummingbirds at the flower garden along the front of the porch. A few of us thought this seemed interesting, so we stopped there and signed up to be part of his unit. The rest continued on.

After signing our names on his clipboard, the sergeant gave us a quick rundown on the rules for his unit.

- a. Lights out at twice past a quarter.
- b. All barracked before light a goggin.
- c. All sharing to be charismatic.
- d. Cough and drouble, twice at tennies.

e. Stow boxie tight and myrtle.

None of us understood ANY of that, but we learned quick, we did! You had to, or it was duckies up by the baker's dozen! (And what a baker!)

Training started immediately. We did pushups, pull-downs, mile runs carrying five stone of gear, loading and unloading trainloads of lumber, a shift in the salt mines every once in a while, long walks on the beach, volunteering at the animal rescue calming stressed animals, memorizing passages from the encyclopedia.

The encyclopedia used to be memorized at the unit level, so each soldier had to learn one section, and the unit as a whole knew the entire thing. Each soldier's "memory range" - the specific section of the encyclopedia they were responsible for remembering - was kept strictly secret. In fact, it's one of the very few pieces of information about our soldiers that was never included in the encyclopedia.

However, that was a long time ago. These days each soldier only has to memorize one entry in the encyclopedia: their mirror opposite in the opposing army. Since the two armies are of the same size, it is obvious that each soldier has a mirror opposite in the other trench. After a simple one-to-one mapping is completed, every soldier memorizes the encyclopedia entry for their mirror, and the entire enemy forces are known and understood.

But physical training was just getting started.

We were so exhausted and driven every single second we were awake, that we never had time to think about what was going on. A few times a day we'd be washing out our dishes, and realize that we had eaten. Other

than that it was blinding stress and strain.

There was a forced march of twenty-five kilometers, while the sergeant rode by on horseback, continuously yelling: “WHY DON’T YOU TAKE THE BUS? IT’S RIGHT THERE. TAKE THE BUS.” Some kind of psychological conditioning, I don’t know.

We forgot that there had ever been anything to our lives beyond training.

The sergeant in the next barracks over had this fixation on ancient Rome, and he trained his unit strictly by what he claimed was the methods used by Germanicus, as he derived them from the Italian opera “Germanico in Germania”. But the sergeant spoke no Italian, and it’s very doubtful there were many details of Germanicus’ actual training regiment in the opera anyways.

So they trained in faux-Roman armor, with faux-Roman weapons, and tried to stick to speaking in Latin whenever the sergeant was around. Apparently a few of the recruits really took to it, and a few years later, after their discharge, they moved back to ancient Roman times to live.

But after the first week, training is mostly memorizing a huge collection of rules and traditions. And there’s far more to memorize off the books, than on the books.

We learn a rule, then we learn the loophole that allows us to bypass the rule, then we learn the tradition for when bypassing the rule is allowed, then we learn why none of that applies to us...

They also covered us in tattoos of useful information. Basic rules and guides on the easily accessible spots, and classified information on our backs so we couldn’t

see it.

We learned how to identify friend from foe in the darkness, in the fog, on a clear day, at five hundred feet using bird calls, at five thousand feet using radio beacons, and while rolling in the mud fighting over the last piece of food.

We learned how to steal honey from bees, bears, or quartermasters. We learned how to use close-up magic and slight of hand to disembowel an enemy soldier surrounded by his friends and loved ones without ever being seen.

We learned how to be soldiers, and then decided not to. There's no place for a soldier in today's modern army.

*The bees protect us. They spy on us so they know what's going on. They can't protect us if they aren't fully informed. You'd all be dead in a second if the bees weren't secretly protecting you. Always complaining, no idea who you should be thanking! Give sugar for the holidays. Thank you.*

Captain —, Esq., of last season's — Expedition, gracious understudy of the Duke of — in the War of —, wounded twice while performing a monologue on the battlefield after his commander's death, architect of the — Expedition to the near South Seas, and author of six collections of humorous navigation principles in verse, has a new mission which has stunned the chattering classes on three continents, for his aim in nothing less than to reach the Northernmost point of this our Globe within one year of setting out.

The expedition was funded by the Captain's mother-in-law, the great industrialist who revolutionized the

linen industry with her shrewd adaptation of new, experimental technologies from competing industries, and her brutal crackdown and reversal of improving working conditions.

It seems the time is right, for in the past week three other expeditions have been announced, jumping into the race against the Captain to reach the pole first. Four teams of gentlemen explorers, athletes, and scientists in a thrilling race. One to win, and plant his nation's flag, the other three to limp home. All proud for competing in a truly noble spirit.

The dogs howled. The wind howled. The wolves howled. The moon howled. It was truly the arctic, this arctic expedition found itself in. The dogs strained at their harnesses, dragging the sleds over the ridges of piled up slabs of ice that interrupted the featureless flat white of this inhuman, alien land.

A change in tone of the dogs snarling alerted the Captain, and he spun around and fired from the pistol that suddenly appeared in his fist! The polar bear giggled and disappeared to their rear.

Another close call!

This expedition was a calculated fight to the death with nature, and unfortunately, it seemed that their calculations had been slightly off. Exhaustion, frost-bite, and starvation were beginning to take their toll, and they had lost their bearing in the blinding blizzard conditions.

At the moment when the Captain began to fear he would not simply be losing his life out here in the cold ice plain, but he would do so futilely, without reaching his goal, he noticed a thin sliver of light just peaking



through the raging storm. Newly inspired, he desperately lurched forward, followed by the team.

Eventually he reached the mysterious light, just as three other figures also appeared out of the blinding blizzard. The leaders of the four expeditions stepped forward, and all four reached the beam of light shooting forth from the North Pole simultaneously.

Four hands reached out towards the light and grasped one another in manly camaraderie. This was not the meeting of competitors reaching simultaneously for the gold ring, this was the meeting of men relieved to be able to cast aside their secret cover at long last!

For the four arctic quests were four clever diversions from their true goal - a secret meeting of the leaders of the four branches of the Illuminati! Their meeting, to decide the fate of the entire world, was of such importance, of such secrecy, and threatened by such forces, that the North Pole was the only place they felt confident they could talk at ease.

“Don’t move a muscle!” The unexpected order shot out from behind Captain —.

“Now slowly move the muscles that will result in your hands being raised.” the voice continued, whitening across the barren echoness of the ice.

As the four exhausted men raised what they thought were their hands, they glanced slowly from side to side. Behind each man was a figure wearing a black hood, armed with a state-of-the-art six-shooter. They meant business! Free market business!

Suddenly the four mysterious figures threw back their hoods, and revealed their cruelly laughing faces. It suddenly dawned on the men that their captors were

the leaders of each man's exploratory team - their top assistants!

"Now Captain — and friends, you shall die, and the whole world shall revert to chaos and crime!"

The Captain tried one last desperate move: "Wait! I invoke the privilege of handfist. One of our group, against one of your group, no weapons, no tricks. Winner takes all."

"Ah, you are very sneaky, Captain. I should rip out your heart and throw your corpse to the Orcas, but we attended the same fraternity in our University days, and I can never besmirch that honor."

Guns were lowered and mittens slowly removed, as the two men stared at each other, considering the physical test to come.

Lucky for the Captain, he had been punchfight champion of the Linen Factory League for three months running in his youth, and knew a thing or two about down-and-dirty arctic fighting. Eyeing each other across the ice, the two snowy toughs marked out a ring boundary in the snow, with off-sides, center line, free throw, and penalty boxes clearly marked. Each fighter picked a second, and nominated a dispute panel of seven league-authorized players to vote for a referee, to be selected from the workers of a nearby ice mine.

However, this too was a sneaky trick by the revolutionaries, for the ice mine was a union shop.

Fists flew, noses bled, there was almost cussing. The fate of the world was in their hands!

When the snow settled back into drifts against the ring boundaries, the victorious revolutionary stood in the ring alone, surrounded by bones and bits of flesh that

might have previously been the Captain. (Or maybe he ran away.) But the onlookers were all suddenly shocked to see mysterious robed figures slowly appear out of the distance from the four cardinal directions.

A global coven of witches had secretly been following along behind the four expeditions from the very start. They had taken their time during the punch-up to draw a protective circle around the pole, with a radius of one kilometer, and elaborate with magical sigils. There was even incense.

What was their goal?

The lead witch stepped forward and pointed a gnarled, twisted, slightly glowing finger at the victor in the boxing ring. “Your revolution plans to make atheism universal and destroy all ancient culture! Only we can stop you!”

The Marxist terrorists were shocked at this and quickly replied: “That’s simply not true! Marxism is to be applied according to local conditions, not blindly to antagonize local worker feelings. It is only the ruling class that has tricked you into thinking that we are enemies!”

The witches regarded the revolutionaries with skepticism.

“Really! Wait, let me show you...”

And with that the two groups (plus the surviving members of the Illuminati, who quickly switched allegiance to the winning side) spent the next few months delving deep into the primary texts of Marxist thought and working through the issues and implications of applying those ideas to the current world situation.

Within a few short years they had fully joined forces

and were working together to build a better world for everyone.

*There was a spiritualist related arrest today, as the spiritualist known as Madame — was arrested for attempting to defraud a foreign man who was here attending a conference related to the mining industry. He was tricked into believing there was hope for the future. This is Madame —'s third offence, and she is expected to receive a severe prison sentence for abusing the judge's previous leniency.*

There are the party meetings, which are narrowly focused, heavily controlled, uptight planning sessions. Then there are the potlucks, which are a chance to unwind from the struggle, to bond with ones comrades, and to make a good impression on a few curious visitors.

Will they be comrades a year from now, or are they just tourists?

Pasta salad, widely viewed as a last-resort copout, is my favorite. To make for myself, or to bring to the potluck, it is, frankly, a bit creepy how much I like pasta salad. Lately, the key ingredient has been black mint, with a little honey to compensate for the bitterness of the mint. Plus the standard shark, rhino sausage, pasta shells, mayo, scallions, arsenic peppers, morphine, and ground walnuts.

People seem to like it, but nowhere to the level that I do.

Of course, people arrive already focused on the burgers, so that's what they react to. Taste is a very weak sense, mostly overridden by smell, but also very susceptible to entirely psychosomatic influences.

We call our monthly public gathering a potluck, but it's mostly a cookout. Not much food arrives with guests. We put a little extra effort into the toppings and sauce on our burgers, to hide the extremely questionable meat we get from the morgue. Some guests seem to be aware of this and stick to the veggie offerings.

Those guests never amount to anything.

On the other hand, the guests that are aware of the contents, and happily enjoy the burgers, they've got what it takes to join a futile revolution.

So they come for the burgers.

That, and the propoganda.

Our propoganda team always tries out new ideas at the potlucks, with vague ideas, rough drafts, and A/B testing, it's an entertaining onslaught.

We learn much. It is essential to be able to view your own success objectively, and then to make a productive correction. Our instant reactions tend to be counter-productive. You've got to be able to step back and calmly evaluate your plans and reactions, in any situation.

For the sake of objective criticism (and light entertainment), we always leak the time and location of the potluck to the authorities, so they'll keep it under surveillance. A few weeks later we break into their headquarters and steal their analysis of the event. It is both very useful, and very entertaining reading. We usually release the full text as our newsletter for the next month. (Archives of all of the enemy analysis are available on microfiche.)

There was a brief period a few years ago when some

new theory-heavy police detective, overly excited about psychological warfare and game theory, tried to be super-sneaky about this. He filled the potluck report with false or misleading analysis, in an attempt to guide our internal policies. The first few attempts worked, but then he got overconfident and the next report was heavy-handed in an awkward way, which made the subterfuge obvious.

We of course reacted by their playbook, and leaked info that we were aggressively persuing the path they were trying to trick us down. We set up an entire decoy operation, and got the police to launch a massive raid on a basement on the outskirts of town, filled with mannequins armed with cardboard cutout guns and construction paper bombs.

We left one observer to watch and sketch. (We didn't really need to track the results, but — was a promising young artist, and VERY enthusiastic about using her new skills for the cause. So, fine. She came back with an entire sketchbook filled with drawings of mannequins fighting mannequins, mannequins arresting mannequins, mannequins throwing mannequins in the back of an unmarked van, etc.

It was strange.

She left soon after that. I guess nothing in our political outlook or agenda made much sense after watching that go down. I heard that she's been having great success in the art world recently.

Several years after that, we decided to set up a more serious decoy operation, with agents, officers, training programs, command and control, goals and tactics. No one involved could be let in on the secret, so they all did their jobs in good faith. They were oper-

ating under the belief that this was a special project with specific security requirements that meant it had to operate in complete isolation.

One small mistake is that we had left the job of writing the mission statement for the group to an intern, and he lorem ipsummed it. Knowing full well what the presence of that text meant (all our soldiers take a minimum of six college credits in graphic design or typography) they assumed their mission was a sort of dada ferret war dance.

Confuse the enemy, at any cost.

Which... is actually a pretty good, if completely accidental, interpretation of the original intent, which was a meaningless bluff to waste the enemy's time and effort.

Their version turned out far better than we had envisioned.

They built an armada of rafts, each holding one giant sculpture of a famous cartoon character, and sank them in the area the enemy trained their naval recruits. Strange creatures glimpsed fleetingly in the depths, eventually recognized as childhood favorite friends from the back pages of the newspaper... the effect on the seaman ranks was astounding.

Enrollment in introductory figure drawing classes skyrocketed. Night classes in world history and other humanities were overflowing with sailors who hadn't set foot in a classroom since their adolescence. Participation in local theatre troupes TRIPLED.

And, lagging by a few years, but definitely showing a direct relationship, funding for the arts steadily rose.

All key points in our second manifesto. (The first man-

ifesto was, everyone agrees in retrospect, much too militant.)

Not too shabby.

*Head down, incoming!*



# EYE

*I love to find a spot, late in the day when the sun is low, to watch the shadows of a flock of birds which is behind me, out of sight. Black spots on the ground, soaring through dirt, chased by other black spots on the ground. Fantastic.*

Gauthier Collins was Francois Gray's protege. He joined Gray's firm just after the success of the Level Two subway station, and seemed a perfect fit for the excitement and creativity of the time. (His graduate thesis had been on scaling buildings up to take advantage of the aesthetics of the curvature of the earth. Gray viewed this as an abstract, academic treatment of the break from horizontal which featured so strongly in his own work. In retrospect, this was an overly charitable interpretation, and Collins was already reaching far beyond his grasp.)

They had a few good productive years together, but later their ideas began to diverge, and when Gray tried to guide the young Gauthier back to a reasonable path,

he doubled down and lost all sense of practicality. (Or he doubled down on his higher idealistic goals which a short-sighted world never allowed him to reach. Either way.)

Gray had not invented the field of Analytic Architecture, but many would say that he had perfected it, and his name was certainly associated with it. Collins on the other hand, had an irrational and self-destructive (high-minded and spiritually fulfilling) obsession with Synthetic Architecture.

The most successful project he worked on while at the Gray firm was the City Prison. The most important lesson he personally took away from that project was to lie about your motives when working as part of a team. Keep some cover story going that's exactly what they want, and put a little effort here and there into pushing it forward. That allows you to spend ninety percent of your time sabotaging that work and proceeding with your real project.

(Sabotaging your own work is one of the most efficient, and rewarding things an architect can do. Or really any designer or artist. No one knows a system's design flaws like its highly flawed designer.)

For Gauthier Collins, working on the prison project was his first big project outside of academia, and he quickly found his real motivation for his part in it was designing a building that would shield the prisoners from the guards, give the guards a false sense of control and safety, and ultimately allow for and encourage a complete systemic collapse.

One hand designs a panopticon while the other hand introduces dazzle camouflage. The trick is to make the latter seem an essential element of the former.

The prisoners were always encouraged in their hobbies, and numerous facilities were made available to them. The machine shop and sewing room were used to make hot air balloons, ultralight aircraft, gliders, trebuchets, motorized bicycles, elaborately decorated capes, and all manner of weaponry.

Curiously, the prison did not have a single successful prisoner escape in its two hundred year history. (Spanning four different prison complexes over the years.) The theory was that the various projects distracted the prisoners from such designs. (The truth was something else entirely.)

The main design of the prison subtly guides escape attempts into a few specific paths, which were designed to be very easily guarded. However, Collins secretly introduced subtle changes to sabotage the effectiveness of those positions. This made the guards overconfident and thus careless.

Unfortunately, his modifications always turned out to be self-defeating, because his first priority was guiding the prisoner along a path of ideological growth, towards more advanced political awareness. So his escape routes generally led to the prison library, rather than outside the prison, beyond the outer wall.

All of this was revealed long after the fact. Gray never publically accused Collins of anything treacherous related to the prison design, and officially he left to start his own firm with Gray's blessing. Unofficially, everyone around him knew how deeply wounded he felt at the time of Collins' departure.

While they might still have been on speaking terms at that point, the split quickly became public and irrevocable when Collins was quoted by a journalist referring

to Gray as: “That crispy-eared demagogue!”.

After that, they never spoke again.

Collins planned an entire city built in the middle of a lake, on a paper-thin layer of ice. The entire city would be precisely mirrored above and below so the center of gravity remained exactly at the surface of the water.

Of course no movement could be allowed except what was carefully choreographed to be balanced. Vehicles were mirrored, and trucks had to be load balanced above and below. Freight elevators had perfectly calibrated counterweights. Warehouses were organized as if they were going to sea, and a shifting load would send them to the bottom.

The trains... the trains were beautiful. Imagine a train holding hands with a submarine as they race across the horizon...

That was really his one success, and it was an complete disaster. Collins’s work was best appreciated in the future, not in the present.

He famously likes to tell his students that if you have one year to build a bridge, you should spend 364 days perfecting a rivet, and then one day assembling the bridge.

Then he would lecture for the rest of the day about how important it is to stay flexible when approaching a problem, both in terms of issues internal to the design, and external issues of the environment where you are building. Environment in this case encompassing geology, hydrology, ecology, local laws, local customs, local culture. Some of his students liked to extend this idea to the internal personel dynamics of the design firm involved, but Collins rejected that line

of thought.

Collins' firm was once bidding on a bridge project, and one of his former students showed up at a city hall meeting to tell that story, thinking he was helping his friend Gauthier. He was not. Collins' firm has never been awarded a bridge contract.

In any case, it's extremely unlikely he would have gotten that bridge contract, since his bridge twisted through a 180 degree rotation, in reference to an ancient myth from a nearby tribe. (The myth had something to do with a rope bridge hung between the sun and the moon, torn down and rebuilt by a giant invisible spider every morning.)

I think the rivet thing was just an exaggeration he was using to make one small point one day in one class, that got out of hand. Gauthier Collins was notoriously susceptible to feedback loops.

*The Mayor's Office announced today that persistent rumours that members of the public were exploring the underground river have no basis, and should be disregarded.*

The City is at war. The City has been at war for a very long time.

How long? Who knows. The trenches seem to be ancient. They certainly haven't changed position in anyone's memory. As you walk the length of the line, you occasionally come across little architectural anomalies - tiny sections that clash with the style of the surrounding walls, but clearly predate them, or repairs of older work that seem out of place, either in terms of aesthetical detail, working materials, or in some cases, even construction technique and tool choice.

Most of the line is brick, but there are sections of field-stone, and larger stones. Also, there are small sections with noticeably more elaborate detailing work in the brick design. You often also see details left over from past structures. Filled-in doorways, filled-in branches of the trenches, bases for non-existent towers. Ghost buildings.

And none of it is recent work.

There was a club of amateur photographers who liked to photograph the trench and related structures. Over the years they split off separate groups that primarily photographed specific things in the front line environment, and one in particular gained a great deal of support. Eventually the original group and other subgroups died off, and only they continued.

It was the group dedicated to photographing the moss covering the trench walls. They have frequent private meetings, and a big public art show once a year in a downtown gallery. The winning photo from last year's show was a stunning black and white silhouette that really stood out in a gallery full of lush green and golden sunlight. (This year's show is sure to be full of bad attempts at black and white. So it goes. So it always goes.)

There is an official military archeologist that you're supposed to call before starting any construction involving digging, or if you just happen to stumble across something old and surprising. My personal experience is that about half the officers think this is annoying, pointless red tape, and the other half enthusiastically support a little unexpected historic research on their watch.

The most interesting recent archeological find was a

huge mudbrick cistern, filled with eel skeletons. There was a cedar chest buried at the very bottom, mostly collapsed with age, that apparently held only one single item: a beautifully cut, incredibly detailed Jenny Haniver, wrapped in gold foil. A number of papers were written about that find, centered primarily on one of two theories: this was the remains of a feud between eel farming crime families, or this was the remains of a feud between eels and pirates. (Honestly, none of the papers were in any way convincing. Our university is an embarrassing diploma mill.)

Not that any of this is a common, day-to-day issue. Our front-line soldiers frequently go for weeks at a time without having to deal with any archeological questions, and the generals back at headquarters might go for several months between digs. If the word on the street is any indication, it's the lower-ranking officers who are the most enthusiastic archeologists in our ranks, but it's mostly a social outlet for them. Socializing can be difficult in the early years of an officer's career.

Officially, officers aren't supposed to mingle with officers from the opposing forces when off-duty. This rule is very rarely enforced. Some other issue would have to arise. For example, the most popular neutral officer club is almost twenty years old. It surely would have been shut down at some point if anyone in a position to care, cared.

There are special rules covering pairs of identical twins who find themselves officers on opposing sides that are even stricter. But again, there is also a small club that caters to this class.

Non-officers of opposing sides, of course, have no re-

strictions on social contact, off-hours. The majority of romance novels revolve around this situation. It would be considered strange for someone in their thirties to never have been involved in that situation, at least to some minor degree.

Hence the popular rhyme:

Roses are red

Violets are blue

Don't shoot at me

I won't shoot at you.

(The rhyme is traditionally followed by making the sounds of machine gun fire. It is very popular in schoolyards.)

Most people aren't aware that the military have their own calendar. It consists of three seasons, each of which contains nine 23-day months, plus one 22-day month, for a grand total of 687 days. It doesn't seem to correspond with anything, and if they have a legitimate explanation, they keep it secret. It's impossible to find any information about it outside of the military, and within the military only functional material is available: how the calendar is laid out, and what events fall on what days. Anything about the history is officially denied unless you have extremely high security clearance, in which case your clearance is always insufficient.

Get a high-ranking officer drunk enough and they'll admit that wars are fought primarily for the sake of crop rotation. Pure agricultural profit from organic fertilizer. Local farmers rely on the "four field" system - they plant one year each of: beans, wheat, and poppies. Every fourth year the field is used as a bat-



tlefield, and any dead bodies are plowed under where they fall. This provides the optimal mix of nutrients.

This is why everyone agrees to prohibit poison gas.

*The newspaper coverage of City architecture is hopelessly lopsided towards traditional Victorian design. That is the past. The discipline of architecture is the process of replacing obsolete designs with new, useful designs. Nostalgia will, by definition, get us nowhere. Get with it! Get with the future! Tear down the old unsightly buildings and replace them with glorious cubes of concrete and steel!*

My family owned a printing press that specialized in exotic papers. It had been started by my great-grandfather, or perhaps “purchased” (stolen) from a neighbor, the family stories are vague on that point. We had three acres dedicated to wasps for harvesting wasp nests. We also had two rhinoceros for stomping the wasp nest pulp into paper. (They were named Rhinoceros A and Rhinoceros B.)

The name we used to advertize the paper varied. We watched the press and kept track of the market. We called it either “Wasp Paper” or “Rhino Paper”, depending on current trends.

Growing up I always assumed I would take over the business.

Like most teens, I went through a phase of being obsessed with wasps. I dreamt of spinning that off as my own business: The — Wasp Farm. But then I went off to college. The more I studied wasp history the less I was interested in being involved in their commercial exploitation.

Back in ancient times, rhinoceros and wasps lived in a

perfect symbiotic relationship. They lived and worked together. They produced rough paper sheets. They used this paper to coax the monkeys out of the trees. They promised the monkeys that the paper would bring them civilization. But just as the little primates were beginning to show an interest in double-entry book-keeping, there was a problem. The king of the wasps fell in love with a human girl. This broke the rhinoceros queen's heart.

She confronted him in a wild rage. She then stormed out of their nest. She went over to the giant sandcastle the monkeys were building, let out a heartwrenching howl, and kicked it over. The little monkeys fled in terror.

And that is the true origin of the story of the Tower of Babel.

I spent a decade away, running from my apparent destiny.

I wandered the country, claiming I was trying to "find myself". I made friends and enemies. I won a few barroom fights, but mostly lost them. I kept a running tab of enjoying myself at others' expense.

But eventually I was ready to come home.

I started out in billing. This was as standard as business practices could be. There was nothing about my day-to-day duties that were specific to wasps or rhinoceros. But it did relate to other departments. I eventually realized that the billing department was, in one way or another, interconnected with every other department of the company. Starting there actually was a good way to learn how the entire company operated.

I was tricked into efficiently learning the entire system. That was when we moved our accounting system over to punched card machines. Having just learned the processes, I was the perfect person to oversee that project. Physical processes on the factory or warehouse floor map directly to accounting procedures. Accounting procedures map directly to punched card plugboard programming.

At first I thought it would be simple. I overlaid a diagram of the factory floor onto the plugboard. That was wrong, it was more abstract than that. It did require keeping various drawings of the factory floor on hand while working on it though.

Neither the rhinos nor the wasps wanted anything to do with the oily, clanking, electrical accounting machines. The department became a refuge from that side of the business, which unfortunately meant that all the employees that didn't get along with our non-human coworkers eventually transferred into accounting, and their bad attitudes concentrated and grew into a serious problem.

I eventually solved that personnel problem by concentrating my automation work on tasks currently handled by employees with the worst attitudes, and then accidentally throwing them into the rhino pit while nests were being processed.

Stomp, stomp, stomp.

Which, I will admit, was wrong of me.

I was having a rough patch, that year.

Then my life took a serious turn for the worse.

One of the relays from the card sorting machine was

promoted to the head of our department. I was expecting the job, and being passed over was a real slap in the face. I sank into a deep depression that I never really got over. Then I got into a horrible, screaming argument with the lightbulb in our office, and our manager took the bulb's side.

It all came crashing down the next day. I was fired from my family's family business. Tossed out of the official genealogy.

But the wasps never turned on me. I would go back and visit on days the factory was closed. I could always expect a warm reception. We'd drink Turkish coffee, shoot some heroin, and reminisce over the old days. The next morning I'd wake up in a ditch with my wallet missing. The wasps always said it was probably the rhinos, but I never did solve that mystery.

Anyways.

You were asking about Edgar?

On the 15th of every month, without fail, Edgar would turn in a dead body to the police station. They had him fill out all the forms, and he always said that he had "found it down by the river".

But the town didn't have a river.

At one point they had sixteen detectives investigating Edgar, but they were never able to pin anything on him other than drug trafficking, grand larceny, kidnapping, and murder. The judge gave him 120 years with no chance of parole. But when he got out, he went right back to the same routine.

That pattern repeated over and over until the police finally just gave up. They installed a dead body drop box on the side of the police station which fed into an

incinerator in the basement, and they stopped printing up the dropoff forms.

Edgar played flute in the local symphony and was well respected by the community, but he would never accompany the symphony on away performances if it meant he had to be out of town on the 15th.

Edgar had a twin brother. When he was in his early 20s, his twin went missing, and Edgar was charged with his murder. But halfway through the trial Edgar suddenly revealed that HE was the twin they thought had been murdered, and he had actually murdered the “Edgar” that they thought they had on trial!

He was immediately released, and successfully sued for emotional discombobulation.

*The symphony was a visual cacophony, as the audience was attracted from many unrelated sectors of society, and their fashion sense followed no unified theme. White tie intermingled with tie-die followed by leather straps and ironic ruff. I reached my seat quite early, and the scene was washed by staccato patterns of color and texture as different groups and sets walked past. Even once the program began and the house lights hushed, the spotlights on the performers caught veils of alternating colors, as the sonorous ideology of youth currently favored recreational drugs which yielded brightly colored smoke. But even the most melodic of fashion extravagance could not entirely distract the eye from the hall itself. Brassy columns supported lilting curtains of unabashedly raucous extravagance that, for me, was the final perfect note of a lovely evening at the symphony. A highly recommended event.*

It is said that most revolutions start with a single un-

happy alpaca, but I don't think that's true. Certainly it is true for our city, that is well known. But I remain extremely skeptical that it's a common origin story, never mind universal.

Our cause started with a hep cat being thrown from his alpaca-for-hire while on the way to his favorite cafe, resulting in him having lunch at a different cafe, and thus meeting another hep cat with similar fashion sense. Over coffee and croissants they discovered they also shared a few uncommon political opinions, and the first two members of what was to grow into a giant movement united.

The cause stayed at that level for quite a while: two friends arguing radical politics over lunch once a week or so. Their two sons continued the tradition after their deaths, and their two sons in turn. It wasn't until the fifth generation that the cause gained a few new members and began to morph into a serious political movement. Growth at that point was quick though. It coincided with growing injustices perpetuated by the ruling class. The time and place were finally right, and enthusiastic new recruits swarmed.

The movement eventually grew large enough to require a reorganization into a clandestine cell system. The clandestine cell system, where each small cell operates semi-independantly, and only has connections to (and knowledge of) two adjoining cells, is based on the need for secrecy, and resistance to government investigation and counter-insurgency methods.

However, it turned out that its biggest advantage was when a revolutionary force, organized into a tree of interconnected clandestine cells, was then operated on via the Lambda Calculus.

This is what will lead us to victory.

Our cause had been toiling in vain, barely able to hold on to isolated, unwanted territory from government forces that were barely aware of our existence.

Until we discovered recursion, and then everything changed.

We were suddenly able to do complex operations on information regarding our environment. Government troop levels. Troop movements. Government supply lines and logistics. Making sense of an overwhelming number of small bits of information, scattered throughout the personnel of our forces, was now possible. Weather, tides, crops, market forecasts. All were important.

If you know the unit tracking you includes a number of amateur photographers, and you know the salinity level of all local water sources, you can “coincidentally” be escaping after a hit on a government armory along a path that goes by a watering hole where a flock of extremely rare and photogenic birds from the distant south happen to have stopped for the day...

Information is everything.

Working with the Lambda Calculus also helped weed out the dilettantes.

If a comrade gets sidetracked into using the cell structure for pure abstractions, they would be quietly led to a cave, given a last meal, and walled in. Pure mathematics may be an incomparable joy, but it is a joy that we cannot afford to indulge in at this time.

May our children’s children enjoy the luxury of pure mathematics in their lives! It is not something we will live to experience, as long as The State stands between

free men and the number line.

The movement's first really big success was in reorganizing the cell interconnection topology to correspond to our battlefield objectives, rather than the existing order, which was simply chronological for cell creation.

By arranging the cells into the shape of the objective (in the sense of multiple abstract data axes, not a simplistic or literal geographical mapping) the transformation from that which we do not like to that which we demand, becomes trivial.

Our battlefield wins started going from 0% upwards towards the 30% range, which was truly inspirational after years of going nowhere. Most importantly, we were doing well enough to start to get talked about, at all levels of society. We were something to fear for the rich, something to dabble dangerously with for the rich's adolescent children, and something to maybe consider seriously, instead of simply being a punchline to longwinded jokes, among the workers.

We even had children's groups coming round to our secret headquarters to sell us cookies for their annual fundraiser. (We eventually negotiated a cookies-for-weapons exchange program. This was done more for practice in negotiations than for the cookies. Our organization is not famous for our negotiating skills. We once gave up four hostages in exchange for promises to feed them. How did that happen?)

And yet still our cause was missing something. Still we failed to make any new progress towards our goals, organizational or personal.

For the conflict had stalled, fallen into a stalemate. Each side had honed their strategies to be optimally



efficient and provably correct. Also, easily predicted. We needed strategists who could see further to lift us out of this rut.

Thus the cave project. Go and dig out the idealists that we had previously walled up in isolation as a death sentence. Well, times change, attitudes grow. Surely they would be happy to be welcomed back to the cause.

Most of the caves we reopened contained one old rotting corpse apiece, but in a select few an emaciated, but still breathing, body was found. In these rare cases, an individual was found to have mathematical pursuits interesting enough to sustain life indefinitely. It was mathematicians like this that our revolutionary effort needed so desperately at this moment.

The cave project yielded seven survivors, and they were immediately whisked away to a small resort in the mountains where they were feted in luxurious style, wined and dined, surrounded by breathtaking scenery of waterfalls crashing through primordial forest as moose frolicked along the cliffs.

They were studied twenty-four hours a day for several weeks, and then autopsied and studied further. (First for mathematical insights, and then for general medical student training.)

This quickly yielded a number of patents that would certainly be very helpful financing the cause in the future, but sadly nothing that was of immediate strategic use.

Another false lead, as their equations, proofs, and spare organs failed to snap us out of our stalemate with the enemy.

Until one day...

But that's a story for another time.

*What you see is what you see.*

# THORAX

*The Church of The Semimerciful Lord is a great help to those who are helped by The Church of The Semimerciful Lord. Amen.*

The most popular dance hall (not the largest) is — in the West End. The current building dates back about one hundred and twenty years, but it was built on the site of an earlier dancehall that burned to the ground. Including several earlier structures, there has been a dancehall at the site for almost three hundred years. Before that is was a snake pit at the edge of a marsh. Bears sacrificed their young to a pagan diety here for thousands of years before they adopted monotheism. (Hanif bears still bring their young here for an annual ritual, but there is no longer any sacrifice.)

When the current structure was built, after the fire, very careful consideration was given to the dance floor, and an intricate system of support structures was designed to give solidity at the large scale, but flexibility at the small scale. So landing on the floor after a high

jump doesn't hurt your feet, but the overall floor does not sag or vibrate with the movement of a large crowd.

For several decades, the technical aspect of the building was forgotten, and it was simply a popular place to dance. Eventually someone got curious about how much better the floor was than in competing halls, dug down into the archives for the original blueprints, and kicked off a field of study that survives to this day.

Architecture students, even those of a modernist bent who disapprove of all the aesthetics of the building, flock here to study the basement. There's an entire two-story tall space below ground level of flying buttresses and support beams of all sizes, scaling down asymptotically as they approach the dance floor from below. Walking underneath is like exploring a higher-dimension mathematical garden.

Professor —, who teaches the introductory classes in mathematics at the university (as well as more advanced classes in harmonic algebra and wasp manifolds), leads a graduate seminar on the structures of the dancehall basement every few years. This has led to a sizable collection of doctoral thesis on the subject, which is how our City is mostly known in the world of mathematics.

A group of physics students occasionally perform at the dancehall. After careful analysis of the support structures in the thorax, they choreographed a simple line dancing routine (not based on lines) that results in all of the energy of a group of people in a complex figure-eight type arrangement stepping side to side, being transferred to throw a single person at a specific spot, about ten feet into the air. It is a deliberate misuse of the support structure design that would never

happen in normal random dance use. In fact, the practice was eventually banned, for fear that the unnatural load patterns might be dangerously stressing certain points in the structure.

It is said that an occult group met here about fifty years ago, and controlled the town from below. Aside from political, economic, and social domination, this is baseless slander. In any case, they used their power for good, and their charitable work was intended to be anonymous, so it's best to avoid the subject. Some dark places are actually quite light.

The interior of the dancehall is designed to give the appearance of an infinite, complex space filled with various rooms overflowing with revelers, while also being sparse and minimalist in the use of physical embellishments, due to fire safety concerns, given the history of the site. Floor-to-ceiling mirrors span alternating gaps between granite pillars.

Ravens are strictly banned from the building during dry weather, again, due to fire safety concerns. (This via pressure from the insurance companies after the financial losses from the Great Stables Fire of '03, which was found to have been raven arson in part of a criminal protection racket.) Justly or not, ravens have not been welcome in high-risk fire areas since.

(One of the curious features of the building design is that fresh air flows into the main hall, pushing stale air down into the basement. The stale air is significantly lower in oxygen content (at least when the hall is filled with dancers) and thus helps suppress potential fires in the basement areas.)

Some combination, conscious or subconscious, of legal regulation and cultural tradition, stayed the hand

of interior design, year after year. Looking across the dance floor one sees the dress of the participants, and little else. The building exterior, however, is a different story entirely. Every time there was a change of management (and those accumulate quickly as the decades pass) there was a new personal stamp to be placed upon the premise by the newly installed ego.

The changes added new motifs and details, without entirely wiping away previous forms. The whole constantly grew, absorbing new styles and conventions.

One exits through elaborately carved Rococo doors flanked by faux Egyptian carvings with drawings of newspaper comic strip characters of decades ago hiding between the hieroglyphs. Then down the walkway between two rows of Roman columns all the way out to the street. On top of each column is a bust of a famous dancer (or choreographer), about four times lifesized, and painted in absurd garish colors. On Friday nights they all get festive hats.

The roof was a soaring pagoda in deep red and black, with granite minarets at the corners, and white church spires nestled between the fore wings and the hind wings. Trying to access any of this from within required navigating a maze of corridors, stairs, and ladders that led back and forth across catwalks in attic spaces that maybe led to your destination.

Apparently the NW minaret has not been reachable by the building maintenance staff for decades, but the project to cut a path to it from the closest accessible attice space keeps getting put off. Apathy, cheapness, or some sort of superstitious fear? Yes. All of the above. (Also, there are persistant rumours that a very small zeppelin moors there occasionally. Unlikely,

but... who wants to risk running into a rogue zeppelin crew?)

The last time a tower was inaccessible from within its building, it was eventually discovered that the tower was originally a folly built in the garden of a mansion, and connected via underground tunnel. When a new building was constructed around it, it was designed to blend in with the tower. The design was so well done that people quickly forgot that the tower predated the surrounding building. (The explanation to this oddity was discovered by an office clerk studying the absurdly overly complex encumbrances of various properties in the neighborhood for a court case involving easements following bees nests into nearby attics.)

*Help wanted: paper manufacturing plant. Top pay, state of the art facilities. Animal handlers needed.*

We know the exact details of the start of the encyclopedia, because it began with two people, writing entries about each other. Gretchen and Ursula were Captains of two units facing off across no man's land. They started to watch each other through their binoculars, then they started to sketch each other, that led to oil paintings, then lots of notes, and they each found themselves writing an extensive (mostly fictional, somewhat erotic) biography of the other.

These were both published as pamphlets, and proved extremely popular with the front line troops. Word trickled up to command, and they decided to expand on this, in an official capacity, and in a more functional direction. Front line soldiers were encouraged to write down observations, thoughts, feelings, snatches of poetry, but especially factual observations about enemy forces. This slowly grew into the first edition of The

Encyclopedia. (Fragments of poetry in the encyclopedia are usually, though not always, left over from very early entries.)

Before Switching Day became a tradition, each side had their own locally maintained, complete encyclopedia. Afterwards, they merged into one set, maintained in collaboration.

C—, R—:

Private, high marks in school, commendation for loyalty for an incident in which he was accidentally stationed in an unused section of trench, and forgotten. He kept at his post for two weeks, and only radioed in to report that his position was about to be unmanned when he had been without food for five days and thought he was near collapse. Interests: logistics, trade history. Phobias: logistics, trade history.

A—, A—:

Private, high marks in school. Twice officially censured for insubordination and repeatedly threatened with dishonorable discharge. Hanging on by a thread. However: received extremely high marks in classes on strategy. Highly ranked chess player. Interests: horse racing. Showed some interest when softly approached about spying. Could be a good asset. Consider carefully Lt —'s papers on the use of unreliable agents. This is a textbook opportunity.

I—, J—:

Lietenant. History unknown. Brilliant understanding of camouflage, but always uses it for opposite effect. His appearance on the wall draws every enemy eye, such that nothing is ever noticed in his vicinity. Should be captured and interrogated. Cannot be found, even



when dead-center in a spotting scope.

J—, L—:

Raises squid. Has developed a commercial-level breeding facility in a shed his Captain lets him use, but does not apparently sell any. Where the squid go, or what his purpose is in this project, remain complete mysteries. Enemy success, by a wide range of unrelated criteria, have gone up significantly in the vicinity of his shed since he has had use of it. No explanation for this has been proposed. Even interrogation of several of his squid, captured in a special ops mission, has yielded no useful information. Since the initial capture of the squid, no mission related to this has returned.

O—, O— Jr:

Sergeant, excellent squad command skills. Very creative under pressure. Pretends to like fine wines. Engages in a little crime now and then, mostly to impress his peers. Never to the detriment of the war effort. He has previously approached us about being blackmailed. The matter was not pursued.

P—, G—:

Private, usually in the brig. Notorious troublemaker, somehow always manages to avoid a dishonorable discharge. Unknown why he avoids it. Severe alcoholic, no close friends. Keen sports fan. Follows the winball series fanatically. A little too much of a loser to be believable about... anything. Might be sleeper agent of some type. Probably not for our side, or theirs. Perhaps acting like a sleeper agent in hopes of accidentally stumbling into intrigue.

S—, S—:

Apparently, likes to spin. “Spinny S—”, they call her.

Also, acquitted on a murder charge shortly after joining. Not entirely clear if she is aware that she is a soldier.

Snit, —:

There are about two dozen individuals, spread over both forces, with the last name “Snit”. We don’t believe any of them are real. They might be temporary cover identities for special missions, or part of some embezzling scheme involving salaries for non-existent personnel, or some sort of infiltration by an unknown third party. Unfortunately, General I— Snit has shut down all investigations related to this, so we will never know.

*I appreciate the recent articles on surviving early City architecture. The history of our buildings is wonderful, and I especially like your “man in the street” interviews. It shows an honest side of the City that we sometimes forget about.*

The world you inhabit is loosely connected to many similar worlds. The veil between worlds is not a simple wall, but an infinitely branching maze. There are a thousand worlds, many look familiar, some familiar enough to get lost in. You might find one that looks like a perfect mirror of your own world at first. But then surprises arise - a different side won a war, a revolution that succeeded here, failed there, all hymns start: “On your mark, get set, GO!”.

You are reminded that you are not at home.

You are terrified of the possible dystopias, but perhaps you stumble into a world that is better than the one you left behind?

In another world where there is no strife, no jealousy. Criminals and police make love in the streets. Every-

one goes to the opium den and takes a poppy graft to the neck. A quick slice with a razor and the cut stem of a young bulb slides in. A few stitches hold the skin together, and moist bandages cover it and keep it wet until the roots can take hold. The roots spread out at random until they find a path to the jugular. Spreading into the vein in both directions, the bulb starts to swell and grow, and begins to return heaven in exchange for the nutrients and water it takes.

Until the next new moon the poppy embraces the heart and sings dreams more lovely than the most beautiful visions god ever bequeathed man. The angels in heaven look on in jealousy and ransack shops looking for money to score. After the next moon phase the poppy drops off and the dreamer grows cold. The bodies are taken to a spot outside the city where they are laid out in rows, and covered with a thin layer of rich, fertile dirt.

Another moon phase passes, and new poppies grow. Happiness breeds happiness. The circle is complete.

In another world the desperate scrounge for a hit of the cynical smoke, and crawl from nightmare to nightmare, bobbing up for a glimpse of beautiful light whenever they manage to steal a little scratch. When their time is nigh, they grow a basal disc which sticks to the wall or ceiling, and they enter the sedentary phase.

The addict now grows stinging cells that cover his body for defense, as his soul grows into a bulbous polyp and sprouts tiny buds, each a miniature caricature of the desperate twitching adult host. Each bud grows into a full sized opium addict and breaks off to continue the search for his flower of desire.

Play it safe, take it all. Oops, too much. You seem to

have burst into flames.

The innocent man wanders into a seance out of curiosity. A spirit notices and makes contact. The man is encouraged, and after a time begins to take contact with the spirit world as a necessary daily ritual. The man takes his troubles to the voices from the higher realm, and they encourage him to experiment in many delights that he had previously shunned as taboo. Finally he finds himself semi-conscious in a smokey den, and questions the choices that have brought him here.

But the spirit calms him and breathes encouraging words only he can hear.

He takes another long draw on the pipe, and as his eyes shut and a smile spreads across his face, in a higher realm a spirit takes a long draw on a mortal soul, closes its eyes and a smile spreads across its face.

Recently everyone (who is anyone) have been going to "Isolation Parties". Everyone meets up at someone's estate at a given hour (this is the ONLY social event in the City where people are on time) and has one small drink. Within minutes the attendies are unconscious, and the hired movers go into action.

When the party-goers awake, they find themselves isolated in some surprising environment. The party that kicked it off as a trend took place on a flat barge surrounded by nothing but sea to the horizon. In the center of the barge was a bar surrounding an elaborate fountain stylized with art deco versions of ancient sea related mythological figures, mostly octopus and squid.

The next most popular event took place in a huge zepelin gondola as they traveled through unknown dark-

ness. (The gondola was larger than that of any publicly known commercial zeppelin. Some think the entire thing was faked in a gondola hanging from some contraption in a large warehouse. But it might have been a cargo zeppelin, refit for the evening.)

The isolation parties are all about plausible deniability.

Another event that was highly praised, but not as well known because of limited capacity, took place in a large lighthouse on an isolated rock at a point of towering cliffs. Again, the location could not later be identified by anyone who participated. The entire lighthouse had been redone to accommodate the lavish party, only the equipment to maintain the light remained. Everything else was there for the event. Tapestries covered the walls, tables overflowing with delicacies were found on every floor, and there was a giant furnace in the basement, with pipes running throughout the entire building and a stoker continuously shoveling in opium.

The party-goers leave the event the same way they arrived: one small drink and then unconsciousness. When they wake they've been delivered back to their (hopefully now less-reputable) homes.

The "pillars of the community" of City high society are widely quoted lecturing about what moral decline the popularity of the isolation parties indicates, and how immoderation will be the end of us all. But of course, everyone knows that they are among the most enthusiastic participants come the select evening.

Others say that it is clearly a good time, but wasted on high society scum.

*The City Futurists finally won their long-running court*

*case against the military, demanding that their headquarters to be listed as City infrastructure vital to the war effort. Within hours of the ruling the infrastructure lists were updated, and almost immediately the Futurists' building was hit by enemy artillery fire and completely destroyed. They have been celebrating by racing around the city in their motor-chariots at top speed ever since.*

Revolutionary movements have a age-old, hard-won reputation for factionalism. This is the one point we all agree on. At times splitting off subgroups has released tension, and allowed enough good will for groups to cooperate to fight against the larger enemy. There is a distinct rebound to factional hostility immediately following such a alliance though.

Is revolutionary spirit created, or discovered? Is it within us all, slumbering? Do the teeming masses need to be educated or simply awoken? Clearly the answer is not as simplistic as that, but there is huge disagreement as to whether "educating the masses" assumes a blank slate, or a dormant will to freedom.

We celebrate the first uprising of our City, even though it failed, on the second Tuesday after the first new moon of April. It is observed this way because the uprising involved switching to a new, logical measuring system and a new, logical calendar. Celebrating the memory on a specific day as calculated according to the Gregorian calendar would be an insult to their memory.

The layout of a factory floor is based on the workflow of materials. In earlier times it was based around the flow of the river, the water wheel, and the shafts carrying power from the wheel. Every designer tends to create

based on the theories of a generation ago, so water powered industrial layout continues well into the steam era.

In recent designs, the workflow of materials decides the location of the machines. The layout of machinery decides the location of workers, and the flow of personnel between stations. The flow of personnel decides the location of propaganda workers, both discrete and overt. The locations of successful propaganda work impacts the locations of meeting rooms, for both secret meetings and official union business.

A small group splitting off from a larger organization has predictable tendencies in seeking shelter, in an abstract sense.

All of this means that after years of political work in all of the manufacturing plants in the City, every factory has a continuous gradient of political meeting rooms, one per floor, starting with union HQ on the first floor, and becoming smaller and more radical on each higher floor.

Which of course, means that the most progressive, or extremist, as the viewer might see it, meetings take place between a handful of wild-eyed revolutionaries on the top floor of the tallest factory in the City: the — Factory, makers of fine modern furniture.

Lumber, glass sheets, and brass wire enter in the basement, wind their way up from floor to floor through various mechanical procedures, and eventually emerge onto the roof at finished pieces. The factory has twelve distribution centers throughout the city, and local sales are ziplined to the closest center straight from the rooftop. Items for export take the freight elevator back to the basement to be loaded on small barges, and the

rest take a short tethered balloon ride to the warehouse just outside the City limits.

The rooftop staging area looks much like the ground floor of a small shipping operation. Several sections extend up a few more floors above this level, mostly for a better view for zipline traffic control. It is in the forgotten top floor of one of these towers that the most radical of activist factory worker meetings take place, almost nightly.

There they scheme the end of capitalism, the end of warfare, the next stage in mankind's evolution, and various details of functioning of a truly progressive state, if such a thing as "State" is even to be involved. But first things first. They like to discuss the big picture, but they are well aware of small practical steps that need to be taken first.

Mostly this involves sabotage and assassination. This leads to their weird obsession with the military use of small zeppelins. The most practical step they ever took was to secretly restore and reopen the airship docking facility on the roof of the factory. This had been originally constructed when factory management thought that the underground barges would not be able to handle the number of orders they were producing for export, but after a few years it was clearly not needed and they shut it down, leaving only the zip lines and tethered balloon for direct shipping from the roof.

The radical workers found the roof hanger boarded up and filled with overstock of bureaus in unpopular styles. They slowly cleared it out, pushing only a few pieces of furniture off the side of the roof each night to avoid attracting attention. Soon enough the hanger was clear and cleaned up. They keep their zeppelin



“R907” there, plus a handful of cloudhoppers which they maintain for surveillance operations, but never fly themselves. (Only the most expendable comrades are assigned to cloudhopper duty.)

Every Friday night about an hour after the second shift went home and the factories went dark for the weekend, a small airship would be seen circling downtown, sniping at any members of City Hall that might be out having a night on the town.

They’d usually stop after bagging one. Leave some fun for another day. The airship would continue circling, but they were just hanging out. They’ve fixed up the gondola like a tiny opium den, and they while away many evenings just lounging about, sniping a bit, reminiscing about past snipings, and taking a little smoke now and then.

It’s lovely.

I’ve joined them a couple of times, but I just don’t have the skills to impress them enough to be really welcome. They’re not goal-oriented, or trying to hit large numbers, but they do want to lay a major politician out on the sidewalk in a pool of his own blood, once in a while. Make one kill, and you can hang with them for six months without touching a weapon again. But you’ve got to get that first notch.

It’s surprising they’re so completely unopposed. I don’t understand the details, but apparently there’s some sort of turf war going on in the police department over which department should get the job (and resulting commendation) for shooting them down. Until that’s resolved, no one’s allowed to pursue the matter.

There are always rumours that someone on the inside is protecting them, but I have looked into this several times, and found nothing. The fact is, inefficient bureaucracy is indistinguishable from sabotage. There's a professor at the City University who has built his entire career on the mathematical analysis of this, and he teaches his students that topologically speaking, they are the same thing.

Many of our secret agents sign up for his classes to fulfill our math credits requirements. Apparently his lectures, even on advanced topics, are extremely accessible to the non-specialist.

*Everyone starts off following their own unique path in life, but they all end up in the exact same basement of an abandoned warehouse down by the river.*

# FORE WING

*The publishing industry gets around copyright expiration by keeping cell cultures from their most popular authors alive in test tubes.*

Francois Gray is the most famous architect in the city's history. He's not necessarily responsible for the most famous building (depending on whose top ten list you're reading) but he's certainly the architect that people who can only name one local architect can name.

Gray's style was present in his first large project, the city post office, but not visible. The geometrical forms he has become known (and appreciated) for were hidden behind the scenes: in the mechanisms that moved the mail around the building, and throughout the city. Gray clearly saw positive aspects in all areas of the post office, but swapped what he had previously thought was functional versus what he had considered aesthetic elements for his second large project: The Level Two Subway Station.

The entranceway, loading stations, and connecting hallways of Gray's subway station design are extremely reminiscent of the invisible sections of the post office, while the subway infrastructure that's invisible in the new design is extremely reminiscent of the public areas of the post office.

The post office had conveyor belts, pneumatic tubes, cars in pneumatic tunnels, narrow gauge rail, gravity shafts entwined in complex overlapping diagonal planes that allowed for the shortest possible paths. While designing it, Gray thought that the optimized paths were extremely unaesthetic, and had to be hidden from view. Only during construction did he realize that the complexly interleaved diagonal paths had a visual beauty all their own.

His next project was spawned by that one epiphany, and a map of the automated areas of the post office looks like a rough draft for the public areas of the subway station.

There was also a vast simplification. The post office design represented at its most fundamental level, a massive machine for routing objects through different transport mechanisms. One mechanism for a member of the public bringing in a package. Another mechanism to get that package into the central office. The third mechanism to get that package to the destination neighborhood, etc., etc. Plus special mechanisms (moving sidewalks and pater noster) for post office staff to bypass public hallways and streets.

The subway reduced that down to two types of route: passages for people translocating on foot between the street level entrance and the subway platforms, and the tunnels the subway trains traversed.

Many of the design elements transferred over in a literal, functionalist sense, but others transferred over from mechanical to psychological. The interior of the subway station is not just laid out to facilitate movement of crowds of people between destinations, it is also designed to encourage the desire for such motion. The seemingly abstract shapes of the surfaces around the walkways give a sense of motion in particular directions.

Gray dislikes discussing the early stages of his career, and has refused to comment on the post office design in recent years. Sometimes he is overheard mumbling something to the effect that the first design had “already revealed too much”, or that “the packages are not the masters”.

The designs that were hidden in the post office, and visible in the subway station, became again hidden, functionalist elements of Gray’s third major project: the city prison.

The inclined planes became hidden passageways that formed shortcuts for the guards between cell levels. The cells were laid out in what seemed a very simple, squared, well organized grid. But the design actually hid in plain sight detours and obstacles designed to delay any movement of prisoners, while countering forces among the guards could get ahead via the amorphously designed hidden passages.

The fundamental principle of the prison design was that the more central a path seemed, the longer it actually took. Prisoners in a panic would tend to go in circles.

This is not taking into account the alleged sabotage of the design by Gray’s assistant Gauthier Collins.

Whether that sabotage actually exists, or is simply a matter of an unconventional approach taken out of context, and whether such sabotage actually had its intended effect, if it actually existed, is entirely unproven.

One other thing Gray is known for is being deeply influenced by brutalist architecture, inspired even, but never using visible concrete himself. Even in basements he insisted on foundation concrete being covered and hidden away.

Since the prison project, Gray has only taken on parking lot projects. Usually these are small, secondary lots for a large complex. VIP guest parking, or some-such. He has not commented much on his theory for this period, but it seems his goal is to take architecture down to two dimensional surface so as to perfect his ideas within a simpler domain.

The lots tend to be freeform - an undifferentiated expanse of parking potential, without preconceived or externally enforced guides for the placement of sedentary vehicals.

Surfaces are generally marble or granite, sometimes with sharp exposed ridges to cut up car tires. Sometimes sections move. Either they shuffle their location in a mosiac-like grid, or that rotate along invisible seams.

Then there is the fire. Kerosene unexpectantly shoots out of hidden nozzles and a spark burns a single car to nothing, without touching the other vehicals on the lot. (The first few times this happened, the car owners attempted to sue, but Gray was able to prove that the mechanism was completely random, and therefore he could not be accused of targeting the de-carred.

The lawsuits ended after he won the first few and was awarded legal fees.)

Proof of Gray's fame lies in the fact the his lots are still used, even with the anti-functional design and ever present danger. It is a badge of honor among some to park there. (Also, a frequent attempt at insurance fraud, which the courts typically see through.)

*The Mayor's Office announced today that persistent rumours of the existance of an underground river or rivers in our city have no basis, and should be disregarded.*

Switching Day began several decades ago (or maybe even longer?). Officially, history says it was first started as an efficient way to degauss the large guns. But the effect it has on front line morale is so much greater than that obscure technical inconvenience, it seems unlikely that was ever really the reason. More likely it was just an excuse to get a popular idea past some uncooperative general. In any case, everyone in the army who's ever had mud on their boots is thrilled at a 180 degree change in scenery once a year.

Urban legend has it that when the tradition of Switching Day started, they actually moved the entire positions of the two armies. The City's military forces would pack up all their gear and set back up on the opposite side of the city, now facing south instead of north. And the northern invaders would have to pack up, and move all the way around the city to attack from the south.

That was quickly scrapped, as everyone realized it would just be easier for everyone to change sides once a year. So you fight for The City, facing enemies to the North for a year, then on switching day you drop ev-

everything, take a bag of personal belongings, and march straight across the battlefield to the opposing trenches. Turning around to face your enemies to the South, you settle in to your new home for the next year, as a member of the invading army forces.

The atmosphere on Switching Day is absolutely magical.

The moment of crossing the battlefield, suspended between sides, is a moment of heaven. You pass by soldiers that yesterday were enemy invaders, and tomorrow will be enemy defenders, but at the moment are just individuals like yourself, walking across a field, enjoying the warmth of the sun.

(A large number of supposedly rah-rah-patriotic “Heroically Killing The Bad Guys” paintings that rich people like to hang over their fireplaces, are actually images of switching day, if you look really carefully. It’s a very long running joke among artists who grudgingly paint that kind of crap.)

In addition to the atmosphere on Switching Day itself, it is extremely popular for a variety of very practical reasons.

You get a change of landscape. You get equal time spent on each side, which is much more fair if anything about the war is uneven. Everyone gets the same chance. You get equal time immersed in the two cultures. You get to change your songbook once a year. (Both military and religious songs.) You get a vote on both sides on the conflict.

Some people think of it as a big theatric stunt, and go overboard getting into their new characters. This gets weird when they’ve just switched back to their original



side, but they've lost track. Overacting, pretending to be the person they used to be.

But most people just trundle along, like it's nothing more than moving barracks. But they adapt, and they change. They don't even realize it's happening, but within the week City dwellers have adopted a slight northern accent, and their political beliefs have begun to subtly shift. They start to reminisce about their ancestors living on the steppes, and romanticize the free nomadic life.

Meanwhile, soldiers that have just switched to City defense are suddenly talking about their grandparents working in the textile factories starting at the age of twelve, living in factory housing, six to a room. How they want to make sure their ancestors' sacrifices are not wasted.

Since the sides continuously switch, and the influx of new recruits is reasonably steady, over the years, City recruits and Invader recruits get evenly distributed to the two armies.

The switch also makes maintenance of the encyclopedia much easier.

It is a little weird for shopkeepers and such that deal with the soldiers. One day all their regulars are suddenly on the other side, and act as if it has always been that way.

One particular detail of switching day is taken extremely seriously, never joked about, never deviating from the rule. No long-range missions can occur which span switching day. No soldier will EVER return to base from an extended operation and find that sides have swapped. If it is absolutely impossible to avoid

an operation being scheduled over that date, then it is extended for an entire year.

There is a small village a few day's away by horse that is entirely populated by switching day extended operations that fell through the cracks. Due to the complexity of the paperwork on switching day, an extended, multi-year mission may return to base to find that no one can determine which current side they should be on.

In fact, it's more fundamental and subtle than that.

The side they set out from simply no longer exists. For any human endeavor involves an element of growth, and the growth of the opposing sides in this war, ever alternating, ever intermingled, is too subtle for such simple minds at generals and prime ministers to follow. The dynamics are too complex to say that "Army A" of today has any relation at all to "Army A" of two years ago.

It is said that there is a flag for this war, representing both sides in their odd, intertwined opposition. Supposedly the visual motif of the flag is a spiral, but it is difficult to say, as no one has ever seen it. (Not that anyone denies its existence. Outside federal buildings there is a flagpole reserved for it, perpetually empty.)

*Why post comments from the man in the street on the subject of City architecture? Architecture is the design of BUILDINGS. Streets are simply the gaps between buildings. If there is ANYONE whose opinion on architecture DOES NOT MATTER, it is the MAN ON THE STREET!*

Scientists toyed with the equations for decades. It was clear that a large enough gun with a sufficient explosive

charge could launch an object at the precise velocity required to place it in orbit around the Earth. They couldn't overcome the engineering problems yet, but that could see that the technological advances which would allow it were inevitable.

However, the equations also told them quite clearly that no passenger would survive the trip. The force of acceleration was simply too high.

Finally, an outsider to the field suggested a workaround. Frozen sperm and a frozen embryo could survive launch, and then a remote controlled robotic medical facility in orbit could handle an artificial fertilization, embryo growth and development into a baby.

The baby could then be remotely educated until it was old enough to take on the duties of an astronaut.

Space exploration was viable!

It was now simply a matter of developing the technology to launch unmanned packages to orbit. Scientists had known for years that there were consistent, though infrequent, orbital shell launches from remote forest areas. A team was assembled to rush to the site any time a launch was observed, to study the area and learn who had developed the technology.

However, every time they reached a fresh site it was already deserted. It seemed that whoever was responsible had left in the launched shell. (To certain, as the scientists now knew, death.)

Finally one day there was an unusual launch - what seemed to be the fireball of a normal launch, and then... nothing. No arc of flame shooting into the heavens.

When the team arrived at the site, they found a heavily

burned clearing, and a half-dozen dead ape-men partially covered in burnt spacesuits, and one ape-man engineer clutching his clipboard, gasping in pain.

His name was Adam, and he quickly told them everything they wanted to know about their research. Afterwards, he pointed out a rock carving at the edge of the clearing, under which they found a box of microfiche detailed all aspects of the ape-man space program.

(The team had noticed these rock carvings at other sites, but had dismissed them as primitive pagan idolatry.)

Using the microfiche data as a starting point, within just a few decades the scientists had developed their own artillery launch systems, and managed to put a robotic station into stable orbit.

After the station went through the full set of diagnostic tests and all minor glitches were fixed, one shell of eggs and one shell of sperm were delivered, and sent into the complex robotic fertilization machine.

After many false starts, the correct chemical environment was achieved and the factory production was initiated.

In the first wave of production approximately twenty thousand initial fertilizations produced one thousand embryos, which yielded several hundred fetuses, and thirty-seven hatched units.

Soothing maternal sounds were sent up to the infants via spinning toruses. One of the nannies would speak soothing words intended for the babies into the torus, which then spun in the opposite direction at the speed of sound. The nurturing words were then held like standing waves in the tube, as the box holding the

torus and flywheel where lifted by steel ultracable up to the orbital station.

Software updates and batch program runs are easily uploaded to the station via boxes of punched cards, also lifted by cable. The box fits directly into the card reader unit, so remote operation is simple and error-free.

Of the original group of thirty-seven babies orbital babies, thirty-one survived to adolescence. At that point their population began to grow, and the space station changed from a medical experiment into a world.

Herein follows a very condensed history of the orbital community, starting with year one, the year of the first orbital birth.

The first seventeen years are referred to as "The naive years". Everything went exactly according to plan. Everything went as predicted, and the children followed the instructions from down below, at Mission Control on Earth.

In the next two years, the orbital inhabitants got rebellious. Adolescents approaching adulthood began to question the mission, their lives, and the "world" they had been thrown into. (This was expected of course, but of the half-dozen responses that had been planned, none worked as intended. Every solution seemed to simultaneously fail and insult.)

After this were a few tense years in which the rebels toned it down a bit. Things generally went by the book, but with constant questions and complaints. Rebellion was only held in check by uncertainty and a lack of self-esteem. And then suddenly... everything was fine, and the inhabitants of the orbital station went

back to complete cooperation. Some apologies about not understanding the big picture, seeing it from the ground's perspective, etc. The planned future seemed back on track.

And then one day all communications stopped, and Mission Control realized that the cooperation of the last two years was completely fake, and simply a cover for their secret work in preparation for a complete break.

Then followed The Quiet. Mission Control decided the rebels were either bluffing, or oblivious to the severity of the difficulties they would face. They decided to wait them out, expecting it to last no more than a week or two. After the first year of complete silence, many cynics concluded that the station had proven too difficult to manage, and all the inhabitants were now dead. However, in the sixteenth year of The Quiet, lights and some unintelligible radio transmissions were detected, which proved that life continued.

After that, it began to get interesting.

*The City Newspaper was criticized from all sides for being biased, but no one could agree on the bias. It seemed to change from article to article, from day to day. The morning edition was biased against the night, and the evening edition was biased against anything the tended to happen during the daylight hours. Eventually they discovered the bias generator in the printing press had been incorrectly installed. They never fixed it though. Institutional inertia, rose-tinted glasses, same old, same old.*

Early on, we dedicated significant resources to the revolution's publishing program.

Publishing has always been considered one of the six legs of the movement. As with all our other endeavours, it was isolated and protected by the cell system. There were several arguments put forth that publishing required extra secrecy and autonomy. The importance of what they were doing demanded it. The fact that they were broadcasting information about our cause would tend to lead to accidental release of data useful to our enemies.

In the end, the publishing group formed a cell system both based on a stricter cell organization, and in complete isolation from our general system.

They worked in darkness. Without guidance, without feedback. With only the ideals of the cause as their guidebook.

Due to the carefully considered factor of random circumstance, the most driven and inspired comrades in the publishing house were the graphic designers. Given the task of taking the message (to be written) to the masses (to be found), they strove forward without any guidance or restraint.

The results were FANTASTIC.

They imagined potential comrades, still sleepily accepting the status quo, straining to find an explanation for the subtle but uncomfortable itch they felt as they viewed “this perfect world” and found it slightly, but increasingly, imperfect. They strove to reach these future comrades through their press.

Pulling styles and influences from every facet of society and every period of history, the designers broke ground into startling new realms of typography and layout with every pamphlet and flyer that issued forth. They

successfully merged contrasting styles that should never be mixed, over and over. They surprised themselves and learned not to hold back.

Their motto: “Pushing the envelope too far is better than pushing it just the right amount.”

Grab an eyeball, stuff it full of beauty. Grab a brain and shake it until it liquifies. Only later will the target realize it had been reading political tracts.

The feeling of accomplishment that resulted from tricking people into being receptive to truth was the beginning of the publishing program going off the rails in the most spectacular of wrecks.

First there was the literacy program. Always included in our long-term planning, the publishers decided it was undervalued, as literacy led to a larger audience for their work. Flyers explaining our plans for a literacy program gave way to educational pamphlets, and a whole series of books for self-guided continuing education.

This led to a series of math texts, history texts (veering slightly back into the relevant, except they were mostly ancient history), literary analysis, art criticism, and art history.

The project had scaled up such that the only way to continue was to hide behind an innocuous commercial operation. A publishing company where seven of the twelve members of the board of directors were secret revolutionaries, but none of them knew who due to the cell structure. They spent their days providing the best possible design, scheming the best possible maneuvers within the publishing industry to get the most texts into readers hands, and they spent their



evenings in high society, scheming to keep their secret identities intact.

Were they operating as secret agents? Were they operating as sleeper cells, waiting for the correct time to operate as secret agents? We didn't know. Eventually even THEY didn't know.

Soon enough not even our own agents could tell which publications were secret revolutionary tracts, and which were just commercial publications that existed as distractions and decoys.

At one point they had a dozen people (how many of them were agents is unknown) working on a facsimile reproduction of an ancient occult text written by insects, to be published in collaboration with an exhibit at the City Museum. Which was a very impressive piece of artwork, but how exactly was it related to our political aims?

Then the CEO (who was secretly the comrade in charge of the operation) decided that this was an entirely artificial distinction, and there was no difference between any undercover operation and its cover story. (Apparently his argument was that in an ideal state (after the revolution succeeded) there would be no difference, so by making that true now, he hastened our triumph.)

All that mattered to him now was that eyes were opened to receive, and then the eyes were fed.

We were beginning to discuss unpleasant possible solutions to his aims no longer aligning with ours, when the secret police uncovered his secret identity, and took the problem out of our hands.

The punchline to that whole story is that a quick

thinking comrade grabbed a truckload of their best publications out of the warehouse as the police were kicking in the doors of their HQ, and the revolution has been funded almost entirely by slowly leaking those rare editions out to the collector's market for the past decade.

It really is some lovely design work.

*Mankind soars into the heavens on machines of aluminium and cloth.*

# HIND WING

*An important technique in photography when framing a shot, is to be able in your head, to turn off all meaning and just see the lines and shapes in your viewfinder. Arrange them nicely. Switch back and forth until both views satisfy.*

A marketplace is a capillary of streets.

One street carries in truckloads of merchandise and distributes it to all the tiny stalls down little aisles and alleyways, and then carries away the empty trucks. The other street carries in a continuous flow of people in search of material goods, distributes them down ever decreasing branches to all the stalls down their little alleyways, and then carries away the satisfied shopper, loaded down with acquisitions.

Ideally, it would seem that the two roads could simply mingle without the capillaries, alleyways, and fixed stalls. But the involvement of the human factor requires a complex marketplace. Everyone must be coaxed into properly playing their part.

The architecture of the marketplace is actually very simple and clean, viewed from the frame of reference of commercial products being bought and sold. The trip through the market from that perspective is simple and joyful, like picking greasy daisies while skipping along a conveyor belt in an iron mill on a clear spring day. The view from the perspective of a resident of the City is completely different: like a rat trying to find cheese in a maze, but the cheese is broken up into many different pieces, each to be found far down another dark twisty branch. All the while, the eye of the panopticon stares down from above, its purpose and intent unknown and unknowable. The invisible whip of freedom is near at hand.

The market square (offices, marketplace, warehouse: head, thorax, and abdomen) is the only recently constructed piece of traditional architecture in the City. The architect responsible is famous, but goes by a pen name and always wears a mask in public.

It is widely assumed that he is a known figure in mainstream modern architecture, and thus must preserve his anonymity when working with archaic designs and styles.

There have been several assassination attempts. No explanation has been given (not that one is needed).

There are claims that there have been slight changes to his figure immediately after each attempt, implying that his name is a cover for a series of like-minded individuals. But this implies a larger pool of this niche talent than seems likely, and a far more complex backstory than seems reasonable for something that is, honestly, only very slightly mysterious at best, and not actually criminal.

They say that adults either remember being children or do not. Thus the adults who designed the marketplace either remember their childhoods as pickpockets and thieves, and designed the marketplace to be convenient for such, or they don't remember, so they're oblivious as to what would be problematic for such. Either way, many subtle details of the marketplace design favor the small and quickly fleeing over the large and suddenly handcuffing.

One interesting thing about the market is that there are some old arrows sticking out of the upper floors of the buildings overlooking the northeast corner that are said to be from the — battle that led to the founding of the City.

If you listen to the tour guides, you will learn that there was a battle that raged through the city. They used bows and arrows, and after it was all over everyone left the arrows sticking in the sides of houses as they were, as a reminder of that day. The lower ones have all disappeared over the years, but if you look up, at the right angle, you can still see many sticking out of the upper floors of three and four story buildings.

Or so the tour guides say, and so it was probably true many decades ago. But all the arrows disappeared slowly over the years, lost to flickers and the elements. But people liked the mythology, so they started replacing them as they fell out or fell apart. Arrows are only made to be used once, to injure someone. They're cheap wood, cheaply made. You can't expect them to last centuries of exposure to the changing seasons.

So the ones you can see, in the spots the tour guides like to point them out, are obviously fake.

But there are certain spots where, if you go up on a

ladder and look very closely, you can see holes or little stubes of what remains from a real arrow, from that early battle. You have to look on exposed beams or main posts, since any siding or shingles would have been replaced over such a long period.

There are also numerous hinged metal grills in random spots on the side streets around the marketplace, that lead down to the river. Some of them are still used for access to trasport, but most of them are forgotten and long left to rust. (And some of the long-abandoned access grills have freshly oiled hinges and secretly replaced locks.)

*Citizens are reminded that there are no small zeppelins roaming the city at night, so don't bother reporting sightings to the police.*

During a period many years ago when things were going badly for us on the battlefield, and death interfering with the upper links of the chain of command was a serious concern, we briefly experimented with life extension technology. The result was a horrifying disaster, and its use was quickly outlawed. Unfortunately those individuals that had undergone the process were technically still alive, and could not be abandoned.

The results of that strange little side trip into disaster are still with us. The Central War Council currently consists of four civilian leaders, four civilian advisors, six generals, and five disembodied brains in vats. The brains all used to be generals, but their current rank is ambiguous.

All of the brains' real names have been forgotten, and all paperwork lost to time, which strongly implies that they are far older than officially claimed. Several of the brains have occasionally been heard murmuring

obscurities about “those wretched galvanists”, which supports the theory that they date back to the era of animal magnetism experiments. (Although that covers a rather broad range of years. We will probably never know the full story of the five brains.)

The brains have regressed over the decades. The council only meets once a year, because it takes that long to explain one meeting’s agenda to the detached brains. In addition to a slight variation in coherence over a period of about nine to thirteen years (depending on the brain, but consistent for an individual brain), there is also a slow downward trend that does not reverse. At this point, it had been going on so long that none of the brains would be considered coherent enough to be let out of hospital care, even if that was physically possible. They are in very bad shape.

Agenda items are often written in contorted language so as to manipulate the brains’ idiosyncratic voting styles.

Each brain has a particular bias, and none of them can be reasoned with.

In any case, the brains are now simply referred to by number.

Brain One votes “yes” every seventh vote, and “no” for the rest. Except on major holidays and the 12th of July, when its expected vote is reversed. There has been much speculation as to what holiday Brain One is celebrating on July 12th.

Brain Two will only vote “Wolf” or “Wolves”. Occasionally someone figures out a way to phrase an item such that those are valid votes, and VERY rarely it’s a legitimate issue in a serious item, but mostly everyone

just ignores Brain Two.

Brain Three will always vote for anything that includes two different types of metal in approximately equal parts. So our steel barrelled artillery pieces have INCREDIBLY extensive and elaborate brass inlay on the carriage, and our portable radios have builtin vibraphones.

No one can figure out what criteria Brain Four uses. He voted against a jeep aquisition because it involved too many “circles”, but then voted against the hovercraft alternative because of “the triangles”. Yet he registered two yes votes (no one ever figured out how) for the over-the-horizon radar array, which was entirely geometric figures, because it was “warm”.

Brain Five will support any project that involves importing parts from the four cardinal compass points. It's very flexible with what counts as “related to a project”, so many millitary purchases simply have a large celebratory feast for fielding the first unit, consisting entirely of foreign cuisine.

Sometimes an odd pet project of some general sneaks through because they figured out how to appeal to a few brains, and no one noticed. So no one paid attention to the silly proposal that obviously wasn't going anywhere... then BOOM. It wins and we're stuck with it.

This is why we have a mesmerist balloon force of seven balloons, playing soothing tapes, with a giant pocket watch swinging underneath each balloon, instead of a basket. Also why we have a leech-based weather forecasting machine in the basement of the archives. (Which, curiously enough, has the likeness of two wolves carved into the base.)



There is a serious problem at all levels of the military (both sides) in that issues that should have been solved many years ago, which cause actual problems in an ongoing fashion, are ignored because they're viewed as quaint eccentricities of our cultures, thus something to be defended instead of something to be fixed. How else would the brains still have votes? Or the insane projects not be canceled? We defend something based on "tradition" the day after it's invented.

*I know it's been a few years and no one cares, but I am still furious that the Armory Museum was shut down, allegedly because it didn't make any money and the building it's housed in is too difficult to heat. I don't believe any of that, and I know I'm not the only one. Someone should go back in time and stop this from ever happening! I will try to visit next week and hopefully that timeline will have resettled for a better outcome.*

The city was built, as most are, on the banks of a river. For the first few hundred years as the small village grew into a large town, the river provided power and transport. Lumber arrived from upstream forests, and imitation antique furniture was shipped off downstream, with misleading paperwork. Grist mills and sawmills slowly gave way to line shafts powering machine rooms filled with belts and pulleys.

As technology progressed, the river became less important, and as factory use of the water changed from power to chemical processing, less pretty. Eventually disinterest led to the river being buried beneath cobblestone streets. In just a few decades most people couldn't even point to where it lay.

It was still used, of course. But away in the darkness.

Boxes to be shipped went down stairs or elevators, and most didn't think about where they wound up. The port city's port was lost in a basement.

The waters are too dangerous for free boats. The only thing that can safely pass are narrow barges, tethered by rope to carts on both sides that creep along narrow gauge rails through miles of darkness to eventually emerge into daylight far from the city. (Attempts were made to reduce the guide carts to deadweights passively pulled along the rails, but it never quite worked. The system stubbornly required a helping hand in places, and the carts remained manned. Two small side tunnels were added, one on each side of the river, for returning carts upstream.)

The city council has made unauthorized entrance to the river tunnel illegal, but relatively easy, so as to subtly encourage adventurous types in the city to go exploring. There is a small but vibrant community of urban spelunkers who share all their discoveries: disappointments as well as accomplishments.

In this way the city use them as free labor to watch for any structural changes or problems that might develop.

The city council ignore most of the exciting things they turn up, looking only for information that might impact the daily routine of those who spend their entire boring lives above ground. To date, this approach has mostly yielded reports of sluice gates that were leaking and needed replacement. But it also brought them one important discovery, before anyone else had a hint of the news. For it was this underground exploring community that first noticed the arrival in the quiet parts of the waterways of a significant population of

freshwater blue ringed octopus.

At first seen purely as a danger and possible liability, the “Blues” eventually became a source of city pride and significant tourist income. They now even appear on the city flag. (The civic flag, used for parades and public gatherings, not the municipal flag, which is shown in court and city hall offices. That flag is simply a field of black knives dripping blood. It isn’t as nice, though many people prefer it, out of a sense of tradition.)

(And the rumours that teens have been sneaking into the tunnels and teasing the blues to get deliberately bitten for a non-lethal dosage of that sweet sweet cephalopod toxin are simply not true. Or they’re at least exaggerated. I mean, let kids have their fun, right? What’s it to you?)

Anyways, it’s far too dangerous to go teasing the blues in the dark. Black oily currents sweep through claustrophobic brick tunnels. Whirlpools suck debris under, and narrow barges shoot past.

There is one section of the river where the main tunnel separates in two. This was not part of the original riverbed, it’s left over from industrial use of the river - one of the two tunnels formerly led into the wheelhouse that provided power to an entire building full of lathes. When the wheel was decommissioned, another factory down-river of the side-tunnel continued to use the water, for washing out freshly died textiles. That use ended a few decades ago, but the tunnel remains split in two for about a mile.

At the point where the tunnels rejoin, the current is strong, unpredictable, and extremely turbulent, and this point has what is thought to be the only under-

ground lighthouse in the entire country. As an underground lighthouse, occasionally subject to intense pressure from the river flow, it is connected to the bedrock at the top and bottom, instead of merely at the bottom, as with most other lighthouses. It flares out at the top and bottom, and at the thinnest section, directly at the vertical midpoint, is the third order light, and reinforced quartz windows. It looks a bit like a cross between an early diving helmet and an insect eye, as the clear area for the light is made up of several hundred very small openings, each holding one quartz crystal.

(It is unfortunately, due to its unconventional location, not connected to the global lighthouse rail system, and they thus receive their copy of the global lighthouse newsletter "The Electric Flabbergaster" a few days late each month.)

There is a special interest in the lighthouse among some of the spiritualist set, who believe the design of the quartz windows for the light follows some occult specification, and allows a view into other worlds.

Other believe many different worlds, existing side-by-side without being aware of one another, each one filled with more inconceivable mysteries than the last, exist because they can be seen through the lighthouse window. The eye creates the vision, and mankind, filled with broken and failing understanding, sees this in reverse.

*There was a spiritualism related arrest today, as a spirit known as — was arrested for attempting to defraud a City man, —, by pretending to be a different spirit, and fraudulently representing an investment opportunity as being endorsed by the former spirit.*

There is a revolution brewing. There has been a revolution brewing for a very long time.

It was a very obscure movement for many years, but it has increased in size and influence dramatically in the past few years. Backing various unrelated causes, without telling people our secret affiliations, has boosted membership an order of magnitude. (Especially active has been our hobbyest photography club. We encourage members to take photos where they work, “Looking for the artistic angle in mundane locations”. Since most of our photography club recruits are military, they end up giving us vast amounts of photographic evidence of enemy capabilities and fortifications.)

Unfortunately, very few of these members ever transition over to fully aware revolutionary members. Really, calling them “members” in any sense is just a rhetorical trick to make us feel better about being a very unsuccessful revolutionary group. Any honest study of the history of our group would make us all give up in despair. So we have concluded that self-deception is an important tool in working towards our final goal. We use strict “need to know” security precautions as a cover for our willful ignorance.

It’s a temporary measure. (Hopefully.)

One recent trick for improving morale that seemed silly at first but worked much better than expected was switching over to the French Revolutionary Calendar. Between being a simply better calendar (giving everyone a pat on the back over being smarter than all those “suckers” out there following the Gregorian calendar), it isolates our members a bit from outsiders, which is an important part of brainwashing in any healthy cult.

Try scheduling a night of bar-hopping when everyone's on a different calendar! The bars shall remain safely un-hopped.

But then some of the group started slipping into French in casual conversation in public places. It became a trend almost overnight. This odd quirk was obviously noticed and easily tracked by undercover police.

After complaints from a lot of naively enthusiastic fresh recruits about this, we assured them that everything was fine, then started feeding them false information so they would accidentally, in their revolutionary and egotistical zeal, leak it to the police.

Which soon led the police to ignore any politically suspicious suspects if they were speaking French.

Which gave us a convenient cover for our most important missions.

Which was soon enough noticed by them.

La la la.

On and on.

Eventually, off the books but involving the highest ranking personnel from both sides, there was a secret bilateral meeting in which we agreed to outlaw rationality and causality as weapons of war, as they invariably lead to infinite tit-for-tat waste, if not apocalyptic escalation.

There was briefly some confusion over the rational application of this new rule. Would obeying the rule run afoul of the rule itself? The answer was "No", and "Don't overthink it.". Apparently there's a more convincing argument, which is sadly classified.

In any case, the rule was quickly adopted at all levels,

and everything has run much smoother since.

From what we hear, city hall is furious that rational argument has been banned from voting considerations for city military budget items, but other than that, everyone seems happy with the situation. (And most council members warmed up to the situation when they realized what a lovely excuse it was. The situation was out of their hands! The few bitter holdouts were well known radical functionalists, and nothing else could have been expected.)

It's difficult to look back on our progress because we've spent so much time engaged in psychological warfare on all fronts, no information can be taken at face value. Our records are written to manipulate morale, not to record history. There are some good third-party sources, but they leave many gaps. Aside from newspaper reports (ignoring the commentary), police arrest records, lawsuits, and third party archives of correspondence, there are a few comrades' diaries that have turned up and shed an enormous amount of light on past events and environment.

We don't have a year for this entry, but it seems to indicate that the cause long predates what our official history claims, and dates all the way back to feudal days:

"Feb 16: Stole another cow from city hall in a triumphant blow for peasant's rights. Our pasture is right next to theirs, so they'll probably notice, but we gave it a new hat in the latest style, so maybe not. Starting tomorrow it will be milked for the people instead of for the establishment. We did nothing wrong. I hope someone invents Pasteurization soon."

But there are problems with this text, and serious crit-

icisisms deserving further study. In the meantime, we use it in the intro class for new recruits, where it is equally praised and mocked.

*Mankind crashes into earth on machines of aluminium and cloth.*



# ABDOMEN

*Technically, I was a stowaway.*

Mael Edwards is considered the father of our City's modern architectural movement, but his career was actually filled with disappointment. His first major design was city hall. This was a well received building, but there was an embezzlement scandal related to the funding. Mael was not involved, but it tainted the entire project. There was no press, the fact that a new building has just appeared in the center of the city was forgotten on the very next day.

Mael stepped away from this disappointment into what he thought was a small project to get back in the right direction. However, it was an example of absolutely perfect timing and aesthetics. His design for the Film Library building was exactly what the University, the students, and even the public wanted. It was simply beautiful, but with just the right elements to feel dangerously unconventional.

His "small project" turned into a success that he was

never able to surpass, in his entire, long career. By the end it was a dead weight chained to his ankle.

The original idea for the Film Library looked like a geometrically perfect cross-section of a snail shell from above. The stairways and elevated walkways crossing through large open areas were either linear or perfect arcs, making the intersections with the spiral curving walls complex yet organically clean.

On first entering the building, you find yourself in a huge foyer that stretches all the way to a series of skylights on the top floor. Surrounded by the balconies surrounding the main library collection on one side, and an oversized spiral staircase on the other, both sides are convex, reenforcing the organic feel, even though all surfaces are raw featureless concrete.

The center of the main stairwell is open at the top, yielding a small round courtyard which is one of the most beautiful places in the city during a major rainstorm. Visually as well as acoustically.

Seemingly solid walls have secret passageways hidden within. The entire microfiche collection was stored in a secret basement that was overlooked when the military's records department was moved in. A world class collection of literature on film history and theory is still, so they say, hidden in a room somewhere in the basement.

There are also stories that it can be reached via a tunnel in a sub-basement from a nearby building, and that students use it occasionally, without realizing they've entered another building.

The next project Mael took on was a new observatory for the university.

At this point in his career, he thought that applying his growing knowledge and skills to a project with the same basic aesthetics as the library would allow him to really shine, and take a huge step forward. He planned to make the library look like a raw rough draft.

The observatory seemed like a dream project, for Mael, and for the city. But it went wrong at every step.

He repeatedly tried to replace traditional observatory designs with new solutions, and was burned every time. The most basic principle of observatory design is that the main telescope is mounted on a pedestal that is solid all the way down to bedrock, and disconnected from the rest of the building. The rest of the observatory is a shell, hovering over the telescope, resting on the land around it, but not touching that pedestal at any point. This completely isolates the telescope from vibrations caused by people walking on the various floors in the building.

Mael thought passive counterweight designs that had recently been introduced in earthquake-prone areas of the world could easily quench the tiny vibrations at issue in an observatory. Unfortunately, it was the frequency and not the amplitude that was the problem, and this one simple mistake doomed the entire project, yet was not noticed until the very end of construction, when calibration of the optics could begin.

The building was isolated from a certain range of external vibrations, and it was eventually repurposed for high security interrogation cells. But that was neither the aesthetic nor PR win that Mael was seeking.

And of course, Mael is remembered for giving us his student, Francois Gray. Mael's masterpiece was a fresh inspiration of a young mind, a simple idea executed

cleanly. It always grated on him that he could not surpass it after decades of study and honing his craft.

Francois' masterpiece, on the other hand, was a very carefully designed complexity, years in the making, that was clearly the result of steady progress over a long career. It was the career arc Mael had craved, but not the style.

*The exhibit on the history of insects has been postponed, as lawyers attempt to find an amicable solution to the lawsuit brought by the ant colony in the hedgerows behind the museum.*

The annual Officer's Dinner started out as a fancy feast for the officers to relax and get away from the war for an evening. (Actually, the event that started the tradition, about two hundred years ago, was based entirely on looting a fancy hotel. It was apparently greatly enjoyed, and started a trend. The tradition of putting fake names on all the paperwork for catering is the only surviving reference to the earliest days of the dinner.)

The dinner was restricted to the City military for most of its history. Only since switching day started has it become a neutral event, open to officers from both sides of the war.

Of course, people tend to assume that the big annual feast for the officers will be an event with highly sensitive information being casually tossed around by drunk generals without a care in the world.

So we make it a point to have lax security for staff on that night.

The serving staff is therefore always filled with secret agents, mostly from the revolutionary forces, but there are always a few agents representing an oppo-

ment we simply cannot identify. They are always EXTREMELY hostile, driven by the dream for revenge and justice over some great atrocity... we assume? They're always too angry to give coherent answers, and they think we're playing with them when we ask about the basics.

In any case, this is the most useful day of the year for feeding incorrect information to our various enemies.

Also, enemy secret agent staff simply make the best servers. They go completely above and beyond what is required of serving staff, overcompensating and acting as they believe the "upper crust" expect them to, and because they're terrified of being identified.

But that of course gives them away.

For a few years the dinner remained approximately what one would expect: an extravagant dinner with exotic food. But they carefully selected mildly nonsensical foods (unappealing combinations or preparations) in a subtle effort to throw the enemy agents off the right track. (The officers, especially once slightly drunk, will enjoy anything if they're told it's exotic and expensive.)

After a few years of that, it was decided there was no point whatsoever, as the opinion of the enemy on our staff's taste in food was of no consequence to the war effort, and a new approach was taken. Inspired by the way some animals behave erratically to confuse their prey, the annual officer's dinner evolved into a food-themed art display, involving the most provocative and transgressive artists available.

Very little of the food is actually food any more.

The star fruit mirror display is all aluminium, and

set on plates within complex arrangements of mirrors. As you walk past it, the geometry of the star fruit goes in and out of phase with the geometry of the mirrors. It is mesmerizing. (Although, not in any way appealing as food. Not that it is food, but even so. The sculptures of star fruit do not make you think about eating star fruit, they make you think about geometric metal sculptures.)

The original starfruit sculpture design involved hidden motors occasionally spinning the sculptures up to appear as blurred circles, but they kept breaking apart and killing people standing nearby, so after a few inconclusive votes, the organizing committee finally ruled against the kinetic elements.

Not that they ruled against all kinetic sculpture: the electrified razorblade fountain was very successful, as was the dark room with a viper pit.

Lately there have been murmurings among the staff, when assembling the installations (and especially when being injured while assembling the installations) that things have gotten out of hand, and there might be a sinister reason that all the art has gotten so dangerous lately.

Our artistic director, —, assures us that no one is more concerned about safety and security than he is. He points to his mask and reminds us of the terrible, unnamed accident in his youth that marred his face and forces him to hide his features at all times. Asked directly, he insists the accident was too traumatic to talk about, but from a few accidental slips in conversation over the years, we know that this horrible event involved either: a racecar accident (possibly backwards), a hunting incident while on desert safari,

an explosion during important laboratory research, or an attack by government soldiers while he was inexplicably and accidentally in the company of a large number of terrorists.

*You should write an article about the lost subway line. I know some people think it's a myth, but I rode it two stops once when I was coming home from a new year's eve party about twenty years ago. It was blue.*

The lunar terminator, the line between the sun's light and the deathly void of darkness, travels around the moon every 28 days.

28 days is 672 hours, and the moon's circumference at the equator is 11,000 km. Which means that the terminator travels across the lunar surface at just over fifteen kilometers per hour at the equator. Or some fraction of that at higher latitudes.

A little irresponsible musing on those facts will inevitably lead any right thinking citizen to the same obvious conclusion: The Lunar Terminator Race Extravaganza!

(Ten to fifteen km/h might seem high for a long race, but you must consider the great leaps allowed by the moon's low gravity.)

There are two possibilities: run at sunrise, trying to stay close to the line. If you get ahead, you fall into darkness and twist your ankle. Or race at sunset, trying to stay out of the darkness. If you fall behind, you disappear forever. (Presumably? What do I know? I don't think anyone's ever bothered to search for the losers. Maybe they're still out there?)

Out of a most idealistic sense of sadism, the lunar race is held at sunset.

The details of the race were decided on about thirty years ago. There were a few slight changes in the early days, but for the past three decades the race has been identical.

The race starts on the eastern edge of Mare Imbrium, cuts across the crater and ends near the western edge. The precise starting point is near the area crossed by O'Tamor's ill-fated 1903 expedition. At this latitude, the terminator is moving about two-thirds the speed it would at the equator. More reasonable, but still a quick pace.

The starting point is a deep, narrow chasm. The bottom is lost in darkness, and no one has ever explored it. Maintaining the mystery amuses. The race begins when the light of the approaching terminator line strikes the far side. The rules are precisely written that no runner can touch the western side of the chasm before light hits. All runners start their initial sprint and jump over the ravine slightly early, timed precisely to hit the far side just after the terminator.

As an indication of how exact this has become, and how carefully trained the participants, in last year's race, out of seventy-eight contestants, only four were disqualified to touching the far side too early. And the last to start was only three seconds behind! (It can also be pointed out that this obsession over starting the race a second or two ahead of your competitors, for a race that takes hours, is pointless and misguided. But the crowd loves it, and it's all part of the psychological warfare aspect of athletic competition. "Life's Idiotic Tapestry" and all.)

Long leaps are the essence of speed in this race, and getting slightly ahead means landing in darkness. Even



without being ahead of the terminator, the landing spot of a sufficiently long jump will not be visible until the racer is partway there, soaring without control towards impact. A bad landing can mean losing your lead at the very best, and more likely an injury or spacesuit tear leading to asphyxiation.

All of which makes for an extremely exciting sporting event, where men and woman from all walks of life (but mostly astronauts living on the moon) strive for the unacheivable, and carelessly throw away their young, promising lives. It is the pinnacle of good sportsmanship and easily avoided deaths. Do any two great principles make a better match?

Most people alone on the lunar surface for the first time, instinctively try to stay quiet. They keep their breathing shallow and slow, for fear of disrupting the silence. Even knowing that this makes no sense, there is such a feeling of being in the presence of something ancient and overwhelming, it's hard to resist that impulse. There is a small cult on the moon of people who think this feeling is the result of having "direct contact with the universe", without Earth's protective atmosphere in the way. They believe that the universe is god, and god is terrifying. It is a small cult. Interesting but harmless. They have nice hymns. They sing very very quietly, so as not to be noticed. But if you stay still and listen very carefully... they are quite beautiful, with a unique vocal style.

There was a period shortly after the race began, about twenty-five years ago, when people started abusing a loophole in the (very vague) rules, and entering ringers from outside the lunar racing community. First it was orangutans and sun bears, but eventually it got as far

as lions and tigers before the rules were tightened up. The record for time to finish line from that era has long since been beaten, but the record for competitors eaten still holds.

These days the controversies lie in spacesuit design. For MANY years the suits have been based on a very old, conservative design, low tech by today's standards, but trusted by all the old-timers. It incorporates alternating layers of rubber and papyrus, and traces its design all the way back to the stunningly primitive papyrus suits worn by the astronauts of the very first Egyptian moon landing, which was launched in the 20th Dynasty as a counter-attack against the homeland of the Sea Peoples.

In any case, papyrus is favoured as a suit material far beyond its practical use, but the introduction of new, dramatically better materials, remains a controversial aspect of the race.

*There was once a very handsome Prince who ruled over a small kingdom nestled high in the mountains. One of his subjects was a poor orphan girl who toiled all day long in perpetual misery. The End.*

Many of my new comrades arrive as I, stepping onto the docks after spending months working aboard a ship to pay for passage from their home country. We are all terrified as we disembark from ship into the unknown. The path from the farm to the factory is a blindfolded leap into an intimidating world. Just getting settled into life at sea, here we are getting ready to jump into unknown city life.

From the underground docks we walk along wet cobblestones in the claustrophobic darkness of low ceilings and busy workmen on all sides. A few hundred

feet seems like an eternity, but eventually the tunnel leads up the stairs to the light, into another layer of bewilderment. The main street connecting the docks with the warehouses and factories is alive at all hours. Our crowd of outsiders huddles together and heads in the direction we were told - the only information we have about our destination: "North a few blocks, the buildings with smokestacks are hiring."

We start passing factories that look promising. The floor manager is lounging by the loading dock, looking over the new prospects. A few of us peel off at each building, entering the factory mouth to apply for a position. I keep going, and decide the fourth factory we pass looks promising. I see a few lathes through the front door that look just like the model I learned on. Seems like a good sign.

The factory needs workers, and they take me on the spot. They had their own housing, so I was all set for the moment. I could look for something better after I was settled. The factory housing had their own rules:

- a. Lights out at 2:00 am.
- b. Workers to be either in their quarters, or out of their quarters.
- c. We are all in this together. Share with your comrades.
- d. Double servings on Thursdays, to be split with Fridays.
- e. Keep all aisles clear and uncluttered, for fire safety.

After a few years, those of us that have become politically active are usually holding down two jobs: something in the factories or underground docks eight hours a day, and then a writing job for some activist paper

on our off hours.

Book reviews, movie reviews, etc. We avoid explicitly political commentary, and what political elements there are in our varied writing, are only moderately progressive, coaxing the uninformed reader very slowly towards the light. Our — always tells us to make it easy for your audience to come around to your point of view. Don't be confrontational, even to a position you are militantly opposed to. Step back and consider what you are trying to achieve, and what approach will accomplish those ends. Don't attack people you want to be allies.

We do sometimes criticize radicals, but everything is phrased very carefully to condemn them for, perhaps: individual attitude and emotion. We carefully never criticize their actual political arguments. Last week — wrote a hysterical article criticizing contemporary Marxist fashion, while subtly building up sympathy for the garment workers union the whole time.

The newly radical tends to be super radical, looking for any excuse to be more extreme, not yet fully understanding what they're being extreme about.

“Cauchemar Auto Protestateur” and all.

After wandering the the landscape of the left-leaning for a while, the aspiring radical begins to think about approaching the actual revolutionaries. It might begin by always taking a route home from work that passes the revolution's recruiting station, and walking really slowly past the front door. Or maybe even stopping to thumb through their brochures and take a complimentary cup of coffee. This will eventually lead to an invitation to the potluck, where they can be either thrilled or horrified at the thought of where their life

could lead.

If they do join up, after a period that's either idiotic hazing ritual or essential security background check, depending on who you ask, the fresh recruit is sent to school. It was decided by an early leader that the only way to get a recruit up to speed, in the same frame of mind as the rest of the cause, was to work through the history of our ideology just as we did, over the years. So the recruit is taught each incarnation of our thinking not as history, but as correct political thought. And the next day they are taught that what they learned the day before had some errors, which have now been corrected. The subject slowly spirals in to what is now considered correct.

(Sitting in with the intro class is a stark reminder to any old hand of how incredibly inefficient our revolution's meandering progress has been.)

Much of what you learn is decided by which classroom you happen to land in: which professor you wind up listening to. Each professor seems to have their own personal little grudge with the world - some little issue they need to attack from an unexpected angle. Some like to make a hero out of a nobody, or a nobody out of a hero. Some like to relocate a well-known story to another time or place.

Some professors like to take the students back to Spartacus as evidence that revolution is an essential aspect of humanity that has always been with us.

And then there was one notorious professor who argued that Spartacus wasn't a gladiator, and never fought in any battles, but was actually a mathematician who invented calculus 1800 years before Newton. For that he was, of course, burnt as a witch. It was

later discovered that this professor was not actually a professor, and was a trader that was temporarily down on his luck, and squatting in an unused classroom. He was eventually made University President.

*The only thing shared is history. Deceleration begins.*

# GROUND

*The ant is capable of carrying 1,000 times its weight. But it isn't. It's just standing there. Be the ant.*

One interesting aspect of the prison is that the way the main hallways and wings meander in circuitous ways results in the existence of many interior courtyards. Some accessible, some locked away, some only to be glimpsed from certain windows, at uncomfortable angles. All part of the prison's self-defeating architecture. The invisible courtyards inherently cultivate many secret ventures, protecting them from spying eyes.

At the very heart of the prison, known to all, secretly in plain sight, a large courtyard takes sunlight from above, dirt from below, and care from many hands. Some visitors are told that the prison garden is a model example of progressive reform, but there are many contradictory things believed about the garden, at different strata of prison life.

The garden is run by a civilian volunteer from outside,

with an indirect connection to the building. Gerda Gray arrives every morning around 11:00, disappears into her office, and deals with paperwork and telegrams for an hour. After that, she sips a cup of coffee and wanders the garden, casually taking it all in. After this, she settles down to a few hours of serious garden work before calling it a day.

The garden is productive. It produces flowers with sap that addict and destroy people. But they pay well before they die. It's a good business. Once a week a detective tries to sneak in as a buyer or worker. He is added to the mulch pile. Prisoners help with the work. The product is mostly sold to law enforcement. Cops, lawyers, judges. The circle of life is complete.

Occasionally someone gets sloppy and an undercover detective is dropped into the mulch pile intact. They just sit there, complaining endlessly. So very annoying.

"You tried to murder me!"

"You're all under arrest!"

"I'm hungry!"

"My feet are cold."

"Turn the radio up I can't hear it."

"This is yesterday's newspaper."

"This potato salad is too spicy."

"This is the abridged version of Trotsky's History of The Russian Revolution. It's missing the entire summer of 1917!"

Whine, whine, whine. Eventually someone ties one end of the cop to a hot air balloon and walks away.

But perhaps there is more to this garden that is not as



it seems to those that know it is not simply a garden. (It certainly is a garden, given the existence of dirt and plants. And many of the garden workers only care about the garden, even though they are aware of the other issues.)

Perhaps the secret room in the shed in the corner that holds many kilos of unprocessed poppy sap hidden behind a false wall behind rows of tools is primarily a distraction from the secret room in the shed in the corner accessible through a trap door beneath the tools which holds row after row of weapons and ammunition.

Primarily, but certainly not exclusively. And many of the garden workers only care about the poppy production, even though they are aware of the weapons. And many of the garden workers only care about the peppers and the scallions, even though they are fully aware of the poppies.

In the opposite corner from the shed with two secrets are the beehives. There are four hives, each home to one giant robotic bee. The bees go out at night and hover in the darkness above the streets, listening. Their high gain microphones pick up whispered conversations and record them on spools of the finest wire. They are controlled by vacuum tube logic. Their electrical requirements are such that they must either trail a long cable back to the nearest telephone pole, or only go out during a thunderstorm, with a kite flying above to attract lightning strikes.

The beehives are operated by a special division of the secret police, and it amuses Gerda to no end that their investigations do not include the garden that so graciously hosts them. (And she does secretly make a copy of all the data they collect, which is a great help

to the cause.)

Aside from unknowingly feeding the revolution a copy of all the intelligence they gather, the only real problem with the robot bees is that they will get distracted from their mission if they see a real bee in distress. The robots will always stand by to guard a swarm waiting for its scouts to decide on a new hive location, which the secret police grudgingly accept is a valid use of their time. But even an individual bee having a hard day will divert the robots like it's a matter of national security.

*Spirit Radio is being rebroadcast in our world this week by EKLM907 on the terrestrial dial.*

The trenches are manned by soldiers on high alert, but as you get closer you realize the soldiers are just plywood cutouts. Plywood on high alert, never careless, never asleep. (The number of plywood soldiers that have been convicted of treason can be counted on the fingers of one hand. Of course, if your hand is plywood, that could be just about any number. The fact is, I just don't want to tell you how common plywood treason is.)

Headquarters is a maze of offices with officers sitting in front of giant piles of paperwork, but the officers are just mannequins. (The paperwork is real. Paperwork is always real.) Jeeps dart back and forth, but they're empty and following tracks around and around like model trains. Ask the drivers where they're going, and you'll get a blank plywood stare in response, and a repeated denial that anything is wrong or out of the ordinary.

Did we ever actually have proper soldiers in this war? Do you remember people in headquarters, and jeeps

driving to different destinations as needed, or was that all just a fever dream?

Bombers regularly fly overhead, but no one knows why. Most people have started to think of them as being part of the weather.

Regardless of what it may or may not have been previously, it's all fake now. Well, perhaps fake is not the correct term, because that implies a purpose of deceit. What was real has slowly sublimated, and the husk left behind loosely bears its shape. We are surrounded by the molting left behind by a war that ended years ago.

Wild animals have started to move in and take over the barracks and some of the equipment. Wolves in tanks chasing down their prey. Hawks radio in intelligence reports on rodent activity. Weasels have learned how to fill out and mail requisition forms. (The bees, who cannot operate the typewriters themselves, are trying to teach the weasels deceit and forgery, but it is very slow work. Not that the weasels are slow learners, they just have better ways to spend their time.)

It is impossible to say when the government military began to fall apart. They kept up appearances long after they had ceased to be a functional army.

When the animals arrived, they found that most of the plans and maps in HQ were really just construction paper with macaroni and glitter glued to it. Crayon drawings of dragons fighting dinosaurs, fingerpaint battlefield plans, wobbly cardboard tube telescopes.

The generals had spent most of the last few years fighting over cake in a never-ending birthday party for "Johnny", who no one could find, or remember. The

otters and crows joined in the fun, and it got so out of control that the nurses gave up and fled back to the medic tent. Most of the larger mammals joined the kitchen staff, and within a few days of the animals taking over, there was actually enough birthday cake for everyone, and things started to calm down. (Until a few days later when they realized that they had used up the local stocks, and logistics had dried up years ago. When the bees finally tracked down contact info for the various bits of the supply chain, they found companies that had been forced to shut down production lines and switch to other markets, as the government purchase orders dried up. Getting things back to normal was not an option, though they did renegotiate for the most important basic supplies.)

The animals dispute all of this, and claim they've been here since the beginning. They say they allowed man a smidge of autonomy in a tiny little playpen, but they didn't expect so much self-delusion (and self-destruction), so they had to shut it down, for everyone's safety.

I tried to find someone to ask about mankind's response to that, their opinion on the subject, but I couldn't find anyone. Perhaps they've all gone into hibernation, or off on a vacation or distant migration. I tried city hall, but the door was locked and the windows were shut tight. (When I tried to break in, I discovered that most of the "windows" were just painted on a blank wall.)

A large wool blanket lay over the building, and the entire structure slowly rose and fell with the slow breath of deep sleep.

I suppose it's too late to find out now.

*I was here before the city. I was here before the city was a tiny village. I watched as they buried me, and then complained that I was hidden in darkness. I still carry your trade, and drown your unwanted. I will be here when the city is long gone. Next year I will flood, and you will remember.*

I sit down at a blackjack table and motion to the dealer. He deals me two cards. But as I look closer, they are not normal casino cards, but something else. Something more elaborate and abstract...

“Are you giving me a tarot reading?” I ask. As a hanif, I consider such things pagan and forbidden.

The dealer shakes his head, and grips his sword menacingly.

Then I look closer and notice the cards are actually two thin clay tablets, covered in cuneiform. At a quick glance the text seems to be describing some epic or disaster, in Sumerian.

“The flood myth?” I ask the dealer.

He again shakes his head, and pauses from cleaning the blood off his sword. He appears to have second thoughts, and then whispers: “A creation myth, but not that one. Earlier. Much earlier.”

Then it struck me. I had just been reading about this in the news a few days ago - the museum was having an exhibit of artifacts from early insect history, including tablets of a Sumerian translation of the insect creation myth!

The Sumerian was difficult - it was a little later than the dialect I had studied in typing class, but I could make out most of the key words. It seemed to be referring to the period of “Lost Time” in early insect his-

tory, what modern scientists call The Andean-Saharan Glaciation of 450 million years ago.

I was thrilled to have a chance to closely examine such an important item from insect history, but what did this have to do with me?

I looked up at the dealer one last time, as he swung his sword and sliced right through my neck.

“A man was caught cheating at the casino last thursday, and beheaded by an alert security guard. It was the guard’s third kill this season, and he is now halfway to earning a free coffee from — Coffee, 120 Strass Street, downtown.”

About forty years ago a historian specializing in mythology started to notice parallels in world mythology and world religion. Similar details in stories from vastly distant civilizations were popping up with an unreasonable frequency.

All major world religions revolve around the eternal conflict between good and evil, but no one had noticed that these two forces are almost always represented by an octopus and a squid.

In some cases the squid is not evil, just confused and manipulated by secret sinister forces. (Usually sea urchins.) In one case, the octopus is not particularly good, just apathetic and tricked into good deeds by mysterious secret forces of light. (No details about the forces of light are revealed in that cult’s stories, but it seems to be a metaphor for photosynthesis. How that relates to the neutrally-ethical behaviour of the “every man” octopus is... obscure.)

Interestingly enough, if you read the mythology of the actual octopus and squid communities, neither follow

this pattern. Octopus do not acknowledge the existence of evil, and squid are dogmatically athiest and only tell stories about hunting.

There is a nomadic tribe that lives in the eye of a hurricane that thinks good is represented by grasshoppers, and evil by locusts. The hurricane they travel inside is very odd for being so long-lived. Most hurricanes start out in the ocean, spend a week gathering strength, hit land, and disappear in a day or two.

The tribes' hurricane however, has been slowly wandering the deserts of — for at least sixty years. (Earlier references are ambiguous.) Some people think the tribe guides the hurricane's path in some manner. Representatives of the tribe refuse to comment on this, but it is interesting that they have taken out a large number of technology patents that seem relevant to weather control and navigation. But, as they point out, what really is a "large number" of patents in this day and age? Is there some particular number of patents that their tribe must not surpass without becoming "suspicious"? Seems kind of judgemental. It is probably a subject that should just be left alone.

Academics studying the region the hurricane frequents have also noticed that recently, elevators have begun appearing in the deep desert regions. Sometimes leading from the base to the upper lip of a cliff, or wall of a narrow canyon, but sometimes just going down from ground level in the middle of the dunes. But the elevators all have "Do Not Enter" signs, so no one has been able to discover where they lead.

Professor — was obsessed with snapping. It seemed too good to be true to him. The shape of the hand and fingers, the location of the muscles, everything

about the hand was so perfectly designed for man to make a snapping sound, he thought there must be a strong evolutionary reason for it. He eventually concluded that snapping must have been a communication mechanism for primates before we developed spoken language. (We was wrong.)

There is a hermit that lives in a cave just outside the city limits. He hunts small game and collects berries and roots. But mostly he makes his living by reading peoples' fortunes in their entrails. He slices them open, roots around in their guts, sometimes pulls a few pieces out to get a better look, then puts everything back in place, wraps a bandage around their torso a few times, and calls for an ambulance. His cave is quite clean, relatively speaking, and his customers have a reasonably good survival rate.

He does well. He has a very solid reputation for accurate readings. Obviously the price is high. He does not get repeat visits, but you never hear regret from his customers.

*Reports of an emerging cicada brood have been discounted by officials, as there is no known brood that would be emerging this year.*

Revolutionary types who try to take up an instrument as a new way to get their message across rarely accomplish much. Propoganda is never appealing, and it takes a subtle touch to make genuinely good art (in any medium) with a serious political message. Wanting to want to say something is just never the same as actually wanting to say something.

What is needed is good art with a subtle nudge in the direction of political growth, and that is never produced when political propoganda is consciously the



end goal.

But there was a group of comrades a few years ago who tried again and again to set their message to music, resulting in horribly awkward tunes filled with kindergarten level politics. They were aware that they were failing, but they had no awareness of how badly, so they kept at it. But one year they had a little side-project, intended as a joke for a single performance, at a big Halloween party.

It was intended to be a parody of their own set. Not themselves exactly, but imagining a group just starting out, with even less talent. The music was stripped down to a bit of percussion on non-percussion instruments, and a few slogans shouted over and over. Perhaps it was their view of how they had started out (thinking that they had progressed).

It was FANTASTIC, and they had NO IDEA why.

But they went with it. Embarrassing as it was, that this succeeded where all serious efforts had failed, success was success, and they grabbed ahold with both hands.

At first they played internal events: party planning committees, training programs, the occasional potluck. But their fame leaked out, and they were soon being invited to play public, well-promoted events. It was controversial for a moment, until the upper ranks realized that no one from the government had the slightest suspicion that the members of the group were actual revolutionaries.

They were a huge hit with the general public, and then, unexpectedly, with the anti-revolutionary faction of the City. This caused a little cynical introspection, and the group almost split up. But the shiny gold

coins again won the day, and the group decided again to ignore all implications, and forge ahead.

They soon realized that they had accidentally stepped into a very clever situation. Their popularity with the anti-revolutionary crowd gave them two fantastic wins: they were playing primarily to the unconverted for once (the message actually stood a chance of having an impact), and the authorities assumed the members of the group were all anti-revolutionaries themselves. The perfect cover!

Obviously their complete invisibility to the authorities could be of great practical use to the cause. But equally, it was realized that they had to maintain their current level of parody and sarcasm. Since they were reaching a large, wide-ranging audience they would be tempted to try to write serious material, which would be a complete disaster.

The only way to keep them on the straight-and-narrow was to keep knowledge of their success from them. They'd be rushed out of shows just before the final song so the crowd wouldn't have a chance to cheer. We'd stage completely fake shows where they bombed. We took the day's newspaper and replaced the good reviews with utter slander, then printed our own copies. It worked. At least for a while.

Unfortunately one night at the end of a show they disappeared into the crowd and wound up at a party filled with adoring fans. Our carefully laid schemes of psychological manipulation were completely undone in an instant, and we had no choice but to announce the next day that the band had broken up.

And then we killed them.

But we've started a new project to attempt to recreate the accidental state of affairs that led to — being such a success. We've got three acts in early stages now, and they're all extremely enthusiastic. Hopefully at least one of the three will pan out.

In the meantime, most of our comrades spend their free time listening to a Scriabin cover band that's been getting popular recently. The recordings I've heard didn't do much for me, but I'm told it all makes much more sense live, when you can see them playing their instruments. Or is it just the excitement of the setting and the crowd? It can't hurt.

I've had a intense gut reaction of "Why? Why did you make this?" to a lot of artistic endeavors I've encountered recently. Maybe it's just mood or context. Sometimes it's reassuring to like something light, to know you haven't become excessively snobbish. And then sometimes it's reassuring to hate something light, to know you haven't entirely lost your critical eye.

Obviously meaning to one is frequently nonsense to the next. Depth or breadth? Every poetic line should be backed up with Boolean logic. I know it's just an overactive cynicism gland that perverts and distorts, but I haven't been able to crawl out of this rut quite yet. I'll wallow in it for a little longer and then maybe go see the fortune teller.

I have some sick days accumulated.

*And the elevator doors finally open on the ground floor.*