

“I have spent a great part of my few years
fighting a soul battle for absolute liberty,
for freedom from obligation,
ease of conscience,
independence from commercialism.

I think I am further from slavery than most men.”

—Vach El

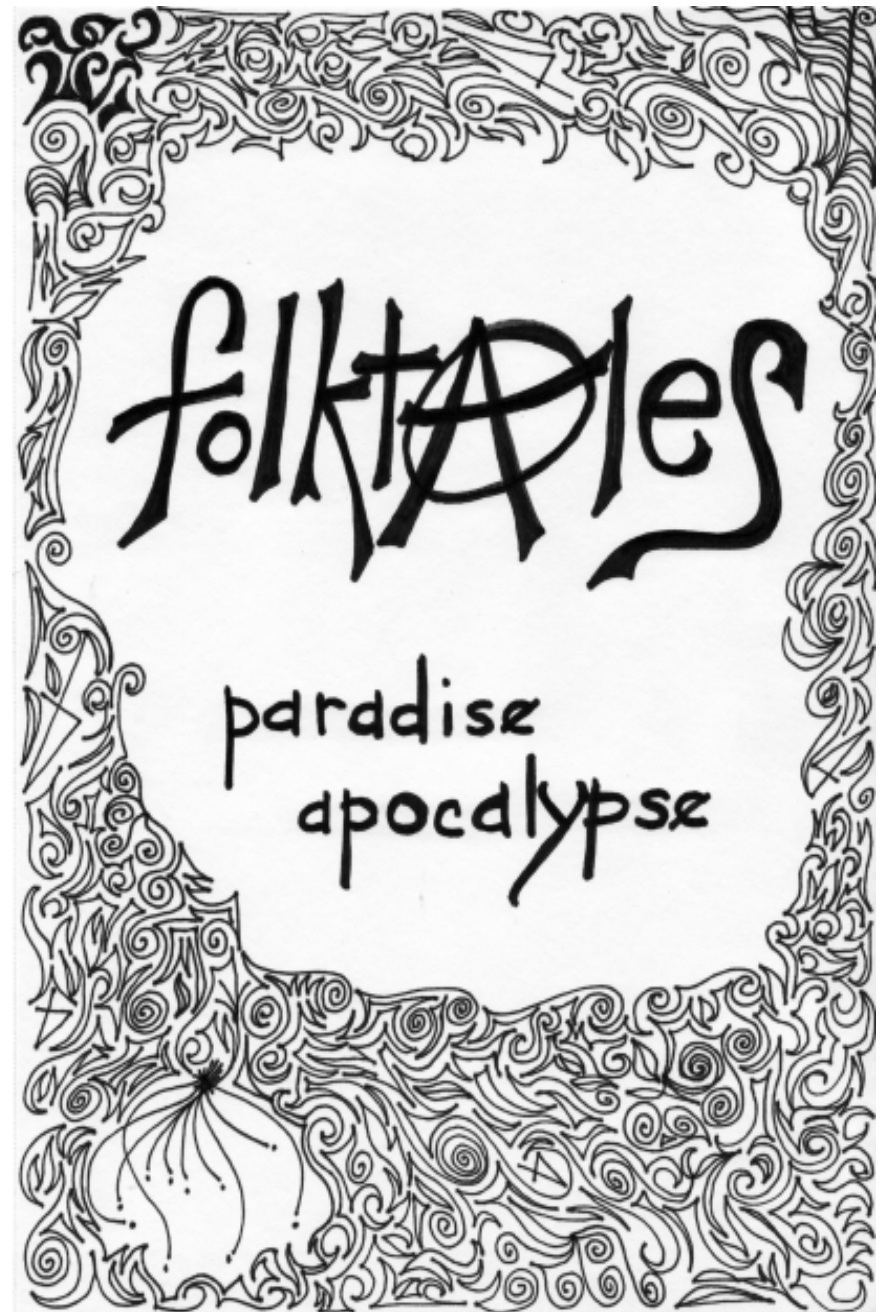
“We poor tramps are helping to garner
that which replenishes the nation.”

—Vach El

...this is not the end,
but the beginning...



correspondence to folktales.pa@gmail.com will be answered



folktales

Giving birth to folktales is tremendous. Somehow they write themselves and appear to make sense, at least to the creator. Many folktales are completely personal, but are made universal it seems, by including something about cracking up, losing it, going crazy. Of course, there is Fakhr-al-Din Iraqi's poem:

i have seen that the path of piety stretches out,
far, far into the distance;
dearest one, can you not show me then
the way of the madman?

Gypsies, hippies, unjobbers, welfare moms, alcoholics, minorities, the poor, slackers, the homeless, those whose parents have rich basements, retirees, drug addicts, intellectual explorers, prisoners, the disabled, war veterans—none fit into the current paradigm of SuperAmerica Consumption and Pavement, Inc. As a result, many have cracked up, rethought the meaning of life, and acted accordingly. Sometimes solace is found in booze, a pipe, a screen. None of these are bad things in and of themselves, but all are addictive substitutes for a teat whose name our culture has forgotten.

But once in a while, a key is stumbled upon—key as in important; key as in to unlock the invisible gates in the Black Iron Prison. Keys are remarkably easy to find and simple to use, but crossing the threshold is daunting, leaving many unable to cope, being guided solely by their addictions. Crossing the threshold takes courage, but as always, there is safety and comfort in numbers. For those born in captivity in this gilded cage, we seek what material possessions do not give us: deep and abiding human relationships. The social nature of humans is our evolutionary specialty. Our DNA has developed alongside this rich sense of what it means to be human. Being a wage slave doesn't even come close.

Community is one word to describe a group of interacting humans, often sharing food, assistance, and support, who immerse themselves in love and beauty, with sublime gratitude for having the sense to leave the rut, for cracking up, becoming, in all senses of the word, delirious. Living simply, whatever that means, but ultimately involving spending as little time as possible in the work-consume-die lifestyle. We cut the ties that bind to this outdated system that no longer functions either rationally or spiritually in the world as we now know it, well past the turn of the Millennium. Are we post-post modern yet, and if so, what does that make us?

Community is an economy based on personal relationships. It features abundance: the more you give, the more you receive, with the whole universe getting behind you on occasion. Giving and receiving are flip sides of the same coin. We know we desire deep relationships. Feelings are invisible, but they are powerful. Even simple things like cooking and eating food together can be powerful bonding rituals, as can helping out when the need arises. The commu-

experiences, and your own notions of finding order in the chaos. Men can't shave their legs and armpits, but women must. Women in America must wear something to cover their nipples, vaginas, and sometimes buttocks; and women in Afganistan must wear something to cover their entire bodies. What you find acceptable and ridiculous is based on your particular situation. Everyone's particular situations create alternate universes. Why bother arguing about it? If it doesn't matter what belief is right and what is wrong, why not create your own belief that actually makes a bit of sense to you? Hate working for assholes only to spend money on crap? Delirium is leaving the furrow, the plowed rut. Find something else (your Kingdom of Heaven) that makes more sense. Mine is pot lucks.

Whatever happens, does. However it ends up, will be how it is, so why worry? Why plan? Why believe? Why deem experiences and desires good or bad, beautiful or ugly? Guilt is catholic. It's integral to remaining a sheep headed to the slaughter in letting life lead where it may. My experiences have been Od. I am more open-minded, more laid-back, more comfortable in my own skin, more desirous to experience the future Od has set out for me.

I don't intend to become White, to become the best, to get a great job and live in the burbs. It's another construct, one that I personally find repulsive. I've always been what's termed trash, somehow correctly colored but still a race traitor. I grew up that way, and I intend to raise my child that way. No new clothes covered in expensive trendy names, no extreme comforts, new cars, ritalin/prozac prescriptions, psychotherapists, or college educations. We will have just enough of those things only money can buy, and all of my time left over. I will give her my life, indeed I will Gain my life with her.

Each year, I feel less of Leviathan's pull. I feel less of a need to go shopping, vote, or have a career (or even a regular part-time job). I don't care what Paris Hilton is doing at the moment, nor what drivel is being contrived for reality tv. I feel more of a need to relax, kick it with my friends and our kids, to dig through the trash, because that's even less of my life I have to spend on Civilization. I can have just enough and recognize it as such. It's not a sacrifice to live this way. Really, what more do I need than enough food and water to keep my body alive, shelter and some clothes to keep me warm? Anything more than that is a blessing of abundance of Od. We're creating our own futures, divining our own Ods. Our myths are meaningful, our lives worth living—gaining not spending. Our symbols, language, songs, and rituals, they mean nothing to Leviathan but everything to us. Leviathan will be forgotten in time as we recover our humanity.

Think, create, enjoy.

time. The only way to cancel out all this time spent is to spend money, what the very essence of life is traded for. It's a substitute for joy, to some extent. At least it feels sort of like some accomplishment, some kind of mastery, in buying pastries at the One Right Bakery. It feels sort of like security, as long as enough money is at your disposal.

If you decide that pushing the levers of the Leviathan that set the gears in motion no longer appeals to you, you may wonder what else there is to do. Like any other person who no longer watches tv, no longer drives a car, others will gasp in astonishment if you walk away from Leviathan, and ask how you can live like everyone else. What do you *do*? It turns out that when you can't afford to eat out, you learn how to cook. When you can't afford meat and realize that an out-of-season tomato sprayed with chemicals and shipped an average of 1200 miles is not worth eating, you learn to think of your food differently. When you don't have a car, you make your community fit within your walking/biking distance (or bus distance, if you live in an urban area with mass transit that isn't too inefficient). When tv no longer appeals and movies and concerts are out of your financial reach, you realize there isn't much of anything more appealing than talking to your friends and sharing food, playing with kids, and going on adventures. When you realize all the things now labeled as weeds by the Leviathan are good to eat and ferment, and will cure what ails you (which isn't much since you have to rely on yourself to be healthy, not shit-ton money making corporate so-called health care), you stop going to the grocery store and take to the alleys instead. And dumpsters! Leviathan wastes tons of food every day. Why work for it—trade your life for it—when manna is on the ground (and in the dumpster)?

[prayer of thanks]

dumpstered bread and dumpstered butter,
and peach jam—a surprise by-product
of the wine experiment.
what wonderful treats!
what bountiful Ods!

[end]

whitewash

Really, whatever you believe in now is all fiction, is all made up by the electricity moving around in your brain, the gelatinous organ so mechanomorphically and lovingly compared to a computer. Nothing is as concrete as Od (no pun intended), the life beneath your feet, the way that unfolds before you. If it's an idea, it's as pretend as Santa Claus, Jesus Christ, the Tooth Fairy, the President, and those consensus realities commonly referred to as money and time. It's just a construct based on your experiences, your personal way of perceiving those

nity economy is the antithesis of the money economy, which features scarcity, is ruled by greed, and results in a degraded planet-wide habitat that someday we will shamefacedly hand over to our kids, mumbling our apologies.

Or not! Permaculture widens its arms to include the whole of nature in its definition of community, acknowledging that natural systems are far too complex for humans to understand, let alone control. Working with and supporting nature provides for far more abundance than paving it over and charging rent. Through permaculture—earth care, people care, and fair share—we may begin to reclaim the health that was formerly the birthright of every living being on our planet. Healing earth is really a reflection of healing ourselves, of healing humanity.

Beauty abounds, and that is another key. We've been brainwashed by glowing rectangles and glossy pictures to believe that unnatural conformity is the only beauty. Beauty is everywhere you look if you open your eyes wide enough: weeds growing out of potholes, homeless people looking out for each other, poor people caring deeply, even the chin hairs of women so *for real* that they have no equal—all of this is beauty. Beauty is what we make it; beauty is where we find it. Reclaiming the word beauty, we take it from an adjective to an act. It can't be bought or sold, yet exists in amazing abundance; even the ghetto feels and looks remarkably like the garden of Eden, if that is what you are looking for.

Gratitude is the highest vibration. Cultivating and maintaining such a state can bring contact with the divine, a moment of infinite shared space with all living beings, and with the force of spirit, the anima that moves through all, pervading the space we occupy. Not to be Pollyannaish, but seeing beauty and feeling the grace it provides can have a delightful effect on the human mind and spirit. Once you develop an eye for sacred beauty, it is not uncommon to follow the advice of Jesus, as told to us by the doubter Thomas: don't lie, and don't do what you hate. Or turn it around: speak your truth and live it; make it real.

There is a way out of the Black Iron Prison: open your eyes wide to the path of beauty and seek it. Make it your life, your religion, your being. The Church of Beauty dreamed up by Vachel Lindsay could never imagine the beauty of the Springfield of right now. And yet, it is the folktale written almost a century ago that blazed the trail we now see before us, and makes us confident in seeing the Golden Book appear to each of us in 2018; that recognizes the spirit of Avanel Boone in our feisty first-born; that already delights in the sweet burning smell wafting from censers in our own Churches of Beauty, under the Church of the Open Sky.

It is these keys that authors of folktales naturally write about. They write of paradigms that may not quite be reality, yet, but as surely as Philip K. Dick saw Rome superimposed on the California landscape, we can envision the garden replacing the pavement and other "permanent" erections. The life is there, pulsating under our feet, already reclaiming the lost ruins of cities like Detroit, and yes, even east Springfield. The communities (tribes) we form desire myths and rituals, and it is up to each of us to provide the basis for our culture to grow. We put forth symbols with new meanings, holidays that are holy days—pregnant

with our culture, giving birth to memes that flood the world in a deluge of remembering what it means to be human.

We envision. We remember. We recreate our futures in a way that make sense. Who cares about the bipolar stock market, or the promises that no president has ever kept? We have each other, enveloped in beauty. What more could we want? These pleasures are simple, yet seemingly unattainable for those locked in the Black Iron Prison, whose enchanted eyes see only the Cave of Treasures. It is unknown if folktales will even penetrate their (lack of) consciousness, but there are <NO DOUBT> people uncomfortable in their fathers' suits who are fervently looking for Something Else. It is for those about to be found that folktales are written.

Behold! The way of the madman!

a few words on words

apocalypse: from Greek, literally, to uncover

paradise: from Avestan, literally, a wall surrounding a garden

revelation: from Latin, literally, to reveal

Kingdom of Heaven, I think of an ongoing pot luck. At our community's pot lucks, there are lots of food, wine, weed, talk, music, love, laughter, playing, and so on. That is what I think heaven is like, lots of people caring about each other, spending time together (or gaining time—saving time—together, as the universe is actually running backward), living life as it comes. We have the power to begin anew, just as Jesus mentioned. When he said the Kingdom of Heaven, Od, was inside us, he wasn't kidding. It is a choice we make, every day, whether we take our place as the living cogs of the machine, or gain/save time together with people we care about. Not to say that it isn't hard to disentangle ourselves from the Leviathan. But we can brainwash ourselves in a different way, one that doesn't destroy the very life that breathed its breath into us, Od. Od is weird; it can alter your fate.

[advertisement]

Civilization got you down?

Try Community!

—sustainable

—not humiliating

—no paperwork

[end]

sacrament of the leviathan

Civilization is a mass disorder machine. It has wreaked havoc on Od. The machine itself is only an idea: there is only one correct way to live. The “correct” way of belief has changed many times throughout the ages (that's not usually remembered), but the enforcement of the one correct way has not changed. The torture and death of heretics has not changed, right down to today. Pot smokers here are confined, families torn apart, lives fractured, because the use of marijuana as a sacrament is prohibited. The correct way to live is to buy alcohol and cigarettes from tax-paying corporations, and leave marijuana to the Enforcers (cops).

Marijuana is too dangerous a sacrament for people to use themselves. Civilization deems marijuana toxic to Americans, as Islam does blessed wine to Muslims. Cops, lawyers, judges—civilization's servants all—they are only doing their jobs, and you can believe a fucking lot of them break laws, from speeding to cheating on their taxes, to doing the very drugs they eschew. They need those jobs to pay for the suburban lots with McMansions, dinners and childcare outsourced, and the *perfect* patio furniture. Somehow, civilization turns people's brains into robots—crazy robots who wholeheartedly drive SUVs everywhere while the oil is quickly running out.

The sacrament of the Leviathan is the time spent operating the machinery, propping up the sticks, slapping on new plaster. It takes an increasing amount of

[poem]

What_the_hell_is_that?

I swear I see the Garden of Eden in front of me.
There's no hellish angels guarding the gates with fiery swords.
I must have found the back door.
Looking around, I see all the food I could ever eat,
all the shelter I could ever make.
There's beauty everywhere, but most I feel it inside of me.

[end]

When I read a book about edible weeds, I suddenly realized where I was. Wherever I looked, I saw food, shelter, medicine, and beauty. I saw an abundance of life, of chaos (the ultimate order, so ordered we cannot perceive it as such). I had no fear of and reliance on Leviathan after that. Wherever I dwell, I will be in Od's Garden.

lighting up Jesus

Lighting Up Jesus was something my coworker misread as the catch phrase for a Christian radio station (WLUJ). Instantly, I understood the message from Od. I think my sacramental use of marijuana over the years has opened up my mind and my understanding. I feel a lot more freedom on an everyday level, at least in my own thoughts and actions. I was raised in a minister's home, with many expectations of my future. None were met. When I realized that I'd been hoodwinked by The Truth, I was a very angry atheist. That part of me is now gone. Since I gave myself the freedom to be delirious, to leave the furrow (the rut) and wander, I have since realized that Jesus was not what Christians have made him out to be.

Jesus (or someone pretending to be him) said a lot of interesting things, such as: toil not! Od will take care of us as he takes care of the lilies of the field. He physically threw the market place out of Od's holy place (direct action). Jesus said not to lie, and not do what you hate. He said that by sharing bread and wine we could always remember him. As I sit eating my dumpstered artisan bread, drinking homemade mead, and smoking, I can remember Jesus, I can incorporate him, embody him. Hallelujah! I can understand what Jesus really said, not what some rich white guy is yelling at me from his stage, while he steadfastly refuses to remember that Jesus said it would be easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

And when I say Kingdom of Heaven, I certainly hear different bells ringing. The heaven of my childhood (when I was "saved"), with its fluffy clouds, utter sloth, and unlimited Barbie consumption, lost its appeal. When I think of the

st. vachel, prophet and preachah-man

Vachel Lindsay was an acclaimed poet from Springfield, Illinois, who performed for wealthy ladies' clubs in his hey day, much to his chagrin, when quaint Midwestern poetry became the shit for the literary mindset. Quaint or no, Vachel wrote an awful lot for us to get excited about. He was a hobo poet, and traveled this country trading rhymes for bread back in the nineteen-teens. Money did not impress him, not nearly so much as the beauty and abundance he witnessed while on the open road. Vachel was a preacher of the Church of the Open Sky, spreading the Gospel of Beauty. He is a saint, sharing his vision of a sacred path of beauty, and a prophet of most high.

Vachel wrote *The Golden Book of Springfield* in 1918, which is set in the year 2018. In his vision, the divinely inspired book flutters down from the sky,

swinging on the breath
of censers, to every
citizen in a different
form: "Every transparent
page, which flutters as
though with the gusty
thoughts of our spirits, is
written in letters of fire."

Folktales is one of many Golden Books to appear, hoping to awaken our Golden City, as we know Springfield is every city. We hope to wake ourselves, to wake each other, to find our Golden City aflame with the passion that begins in our warrior hearts, and spreads beyond the crossroads.

We are a free and proud and mellow jamboree. We are agents of the future. We bring you the myths and legends of a culture that is being born as your eyes read what comes next.



well, pyramid workers, what shall we do...

8 dervish on the threshold
9 vagabond dervish conversion vision
14 krow
15 just like that sonofabitch gonna wind up in the white house
every time
21 three rubaiyyat
22 a close shave
26 the president has no maid (or) how I stopped worrying and
learned to love being nonessential
28 nowtime
30 the universe (mapped)
31 where is that confounded map?
36 the tramp's excuse
37 whilst preaching the gospel of beauty
38 obsessed with
39 starvation
40 leave—a zomban relief
41 of another dream
48 pierced
49 krow
50 dandelion dervish
53 the fall
54 oh, don't get me started
57 as we sail across the barrens
58 shiva's blessing
60 breakdown breakthrough tarot forecast passionately infused
with a kiss of pronoia
64 edge city underground
65 chapter 75: myra meets unka lan
66 system conditions/invasive gardeners/to begin bearing
67 eastside visions
68 into the barrens

mess to clean up, unless you mean the concrete sidewalk itself. Bird poop is a beautiful thing for a healthy ecosystem, not something to be commodified or demonized.

[poem]

on a walk while tick-tocking

i can feel the life
underneath the pavement
waiting. it is sTRong
with anticipation.
no mere slabs of concrete
can withstand it.
it speaks to me more than
any bullshit conversation
about rights or freedoms.

[end]

That rolling prairie, the one that rolls down to Spring Creek right around the CRAPitol, is the Garden of Eden. You may have thought Od created the Garden only in the Middle East, or perhaps Africa, but it is here in Springfield, as well. Anywhere that life is felt, anywhere it will ever be felt, is the Garden. Tread your feet upon the concrete. Can't you feel the ground surging with life beneath you?

Last spring, while walking three and a half miles to work on a beautiful spring day, I had a sudden vision. I could hear my feet tapping on the 'crete, but my body felt it was floating along between steps. I realized that if time were sped up, to the point that adam's creation, life, and decomposition lasted only a second, it would look like the ground heaving up a bunch of minerals and water and electricity into the air, where it stayed for a brief moment, and then went hurtling back from whence it came. I saw people's bodies everywhere hurling up into the air, and then collapsing down, uniting again with Od. The earth was heaving us up, but we couldn't escape the gravity, couldn't abandon the Garden. Instead civilization has covered it with 'crete and pretends it isn't there.

i am the shape that i am

beams of pink light

Reality is nothing more. It is also nothing less. It is all that and more! New and ever-improved. The Empire never ceased. Eros never grew a beard. We could be going to hell in a handbasket, or we could be spinning over a hundred thousand miles an hour around a giant ball of plasma, the fourth state of matter about which we understand little. You might read this in a best-selling collection of lunatic writings, or the radiation from this computer could give me cancer while I'm trying to sputter out what comes next.

The whole universe is Od. Not god, certainly not God. Not a mere odd, either, but definitely a specific and dignified Od. Od is the cracks in the sidewalk that look like a river, or the shrubs that lean as far away from the office buildings as they can. It's the spell checker that doesn't know the word motherfucker, and the bags of delicious artisan breads and chocolate truffles thrown away every day. It's the weeds that grow in a ghetto yard that turn out to be edible, and the computer that crashes perfectly on time. It's the piece of leather found in an alley with Rome written on one side and Refuge on the other. It's the pink light that blinds, makes you absolutely nuts, but also gives precise medical information that saves your son's life. It's Od, really Od. It's anamnesis—the loss of forgetting. Like fnords, the signs of Od are everywhere, and they are hard to see, unless you know what you are looking for. What the thinker thinks, the prover proves.

Od provides for us, if we allow it. If not, we are wage slaves, rowing the galleys of ancient Rome in fast food joints around the globe. Look at the pavement. There are cracks everywhere! The more plaster they put on, the more cracks seep through. We are moving backwards in time (so says Philip K. Dick, but he's dead now, I guess...), but we can't see or understand it; our sight is too limited. Where's that third eye when you need it? Civilization's supposed order does nothing to improve the perceived disorder of Od. That is because all of Od is in perfect order, being chaos. Civilization is nothing but disorder on a massive scale. We put the disorder back into place each day we take our predetermined places as human cogs.

the beauty of bird poop

I can see the rolling prairie beneath my feet. Oh yes, I recognize pavement and buildings, cars and suits, but my mind can blot it out until I see nothing but the prairie swells and dips, and hear only the wind rustling the grass. I can hear the trickle of Spring Creek (now a storm sewer) through many layers of dirt, bricks and urbanite. I can see another place, or perhaps the same place in a different time. I don't know if it is what was or what will be, but it is there. It is alive. And it is waiting. It's Od. When I see bird poop on the sidewalks, I see fractals; I see the same patterns as snowmelt on a warm day. I see Od. It's not a

with these insurmountable opportunities within our grasp?

- 69 dream of stars
- 70 upon reading the golden book, part one
- 71 the living environment
- 73 another dream
- 74 [confession]
- 82 wolf
- 83 the moment everything runs out
- 84 al-qimiya
- 85 from divan-i-shirq
- 86 the screen
- 87 blasting off
- 88 the world is a sacred place and we belong in it
- 89 greenhouse revival
- 91 the feast
- 92 the dervish sat
- 93 the data store
- 95 wolf
- 96 the looking glass
- 97 [document 1.5]
- 99 faeries burning in a fiery pit of hell... or how to have a beautiful day
- 100 and then there was the great condiment disaster of 1999
- 101 document 7
- 102 bullshit!
- 103 the gospel of thomas
- 105 dream
- 106 vach el
- 107 to lindsay
- 108 upon reading the golden book, part two
- 109 krow
- 110 i am the shape that i am
- 116 realize zomba



dervish on the threshold

krow

The shackles lay at my feet, broken.

The ruins—I walk around them 100 years before. Civilization's tall buildings—crumbling ruins yet to rise. Vachel calls to me, "Don't give up on my Golden City. The Golden City will rise from the ashes. It is you who holds the flame to Paradise."

I stagger around the city in the magic dusk/dawn of everytime. The matches in my pocket, I feel them crackle with anticipation. The concrete rivers flow beneath my feet. The steel and glass jungle whispers its secrets to me. I am man, straightening her back and walking upright. I reclaim my territory, my hunting grounds. I dissolve their images of desire, replacing them with my own. I desire only to be human—only human. I crumple up my domesticity and use it as tinder for my matches.

[from the Journal of Tom Smith, civil servant extra-ordinaire]

vagabond dervish conversion vision

The flow trickles meekly beneath the harsh sun of the Barrens. How to find the way back to the valley, that crack hidden in the Barrens, where the weeds grow tall and the moss carpets the rocks with spongy mats of dewy green, unnatural to an eye so long accustomed to—not the badlands—the blandlands, the urbarrens?

This dervish, Yusuf al-Mus'ad, found his way following a large crow whose eyes flickered green, and whose black feathers winked green when the sun peeked thru the smog. Yusuf had in fact been a lost one. He, like Tom Smith, had worked in The Great Mall™, though he never lived there. He lived in one of the hiverises, in one of those modular stackable LifeSpaces™ where each wall is a big Screen™. But he was a professional, and so bound to work whenever he possibly could, what with the increasing measurability of production now that *everything* is computerized. And work came with Cleer™, as much of it as anyone wanted to drink, for the heads in The Chamber knew what was good for productivity, no matter if it made you slightly scatterbrained. People were like that anyway (raised on Screens™, Tom would point out). So The Chamber arranged with UniCorp™ to have UniBev™ test putting Cleer in the water supply of a certain cluster of offices. The manager Joe L., who would later become known as Yusuf al-Mus'ad, really took to Cleer, and even gave a testimonial for a UniBev ad. But they used a virtual actor and someone else's voice in the ad.

After a while of drinking Cleer and working all the time, some people begin to just not sleep. Tom learned this too; his insomnia led to his falling in with the Vagabonds, though it turned out he already sort of knew Myra from reading her poetry written on the walls in the bathroom. And so Joe slept less, worried about work more, spent more time at work, drank more Cleer—you see how it goes so easily, so innocently!

And the beginning of the end came one day—or was it night? For it is hard to tell sometimes, with the smog in the day and the glare of the city lights at night! Joe was driving home after a marathon stay in the office, his mind racing, wondering if his increased productivity would win him a placement in The Great Mall, which would make things so much easier, saving him so much time. And he looked out the windshield, and realized he had passed the turnoff for his subdivision. So he turned around. And then after a few miles realized his mistake, that he had not yet *reached* his turnoff, so he turned around again. And after a while he thought, no, maybe he *had* missed it. And as he pondered it, driving further out into the slurb, he looked for what might look like *his* building, and so many of them looked like it, *kind of* like it, but not completely like it. Like he could stop at any of them, but none of them really quite looked like his, and he better turn down this highway because now he's pretty sure he's gone too far, but look, the next exit, that looks like his area, but it also



upon reading the golden book, part two

sort of looks like the area he left, and what was the term for this, edge city? He felt like he was on an edge, the edge of knowing something terrible, but he knew he wasn't on the edge, he was in the middle, and the middle was very wide and confusing and *everything that was supposed to be different looked the same*. It all looked so much the same! It all looks the same!

Joe drove until the light got lighter and the smog lifted a bit in the breezes of dawn. Then he realized he would probably be hungry if he could feel his body right now. But he felt dead, his body lacking all sensation, simply moving as if somehow his scattered, frantically wandering thoughts gave it enough direction. Maybe that's why he found himself pulling up at a ConStore™. He watched his body pump gas into the SUV. He watched his body go inside the store and look around. He watched his body pick up a puffy crinkly brightly colored bag of Chypz™. He watched his body fill up a cavernous cardboard cauldron of Cleer. The body knew what it was doing. The body walked out, back to the SUV, the data grains in everything the body possessed sending invisible rays out to conduct the credit transaction for the purchases. He noticed half the other vehicles at the ConStore looked exactly like his, but he decided this was probably a good time to just trust the body because "it seems to be taking care of itself pretty well, except I guess for that part where I can't figure out where I live. Some more Cleer will help me wake up a little; I can figure this out. As long as I'm in the right vehicle. I guess I am, it unlocked for me. Now to figure out where I'm going. I think I'll get some perspective."

He pulls up to the ScreenBoard™ dominating the edge of the parking lot. Hopping out of the car, Chypz in hand, Cleer half drunk, he steps up on the front bumper, and from there climbs onto the hood, where he can reach the maintenance ladder that leads up to the top of the Screen™. And standing atop the Screen, carefully setting the empty CleerCup down so it won't fall away and become litter, he finishes the Chypz, and stares out at the slurb. Peering through the smog, he sees nothing but pavement, cars, and flashing screens in all directions. He has no idea where he is. It all looks the same. He cannot see The Great Mall through the smog, and does not even have his bearings, does not know where north is. Looking down at the ConStore parking lot, looking at the suits going in and out, wondering what day or time it might be, and how does it matter when every minute is sixty seconds long, and every person wears a suit and drives an SUV? Every Chypz he puts in his mouth is shaped the same, and every cavernous cardboard cauldron of Cleer he drinks is the same. Everything everywhere is the same, and that means not only he but everyone else is *lost* in the vast, bland middle, monotonopia, mediocracy.

A crow lands on the end of the ScreenBoard. Joe has seen plenty of these before, but this one hops closer to him. In person it's big, kind of scary. Its eyes glint green like a reflected traffic light, but more of a spark—an intelligence there that just isn't found in the repetitive computer-controlled traffic signals that guide so much of life in StanCity. It takes one more step, to the CleerCup, and knocks the cup off to tumble down to the ground. And it flies off, to the other side of the highway, landing on a ScreenBoard over there.

to lindsay

Vachel, the stars are out
dusk has fallen on the Colorado road
a car crawls slowly across the plain
in the dim light the radio blares its jazz
the heartbroken salesman lights another cigarette
In another city 27 years ago
I see your shadow on the wall
you're sitting in your suspenders on the bed
the shadow hand lifts up a Lysol bottle to your head
your shade falls over on the floor

by Allen Ginsberg

vach el

The voice of an old pre-Millennial recording comes thru the smoky haze in Daoud's head

*Vachel tries
to be a proper boy
and please his father*

Daoud stays up late and gets onscreen and writes.

His most surprising surprise—the freex and vagabonds, they're not completely free. They interact with StanCity in various ways thru various means. Or are they completely free? No puritanism for them. How could Tom have thought there would be people, pure, living as though StanCity never had existed?

*Vachel may have no money
but he has hope*

Fingers of the Bubble reach outward, self-organizing nanoplastic enveloping developments, while fingers of Edge City reach inward: shipping, forest gardens, HiveRises, strip malls,

*This is what I came to the wilderness to see
This man had nothing, and he gave me half of it,
and we both had abundance.*

The wilderness is right here, in the heart, where the fringe is fraying.

*The fringe that decorates,
the fringe that ties up loose ends,
the fringe that, when it frays,
we can no longer ignore!*

Daoud hears whirrs of machinery. He knows he will never be truly free. Getting harder to type, praise Sangamonia and Hir Strawberries and Yeasts! Allahu Akbar!

Joe climbs down from the Screen. Joe doesn't know what to do. Joe's body is on the verge of exhaustion, and raring to go. Gotta love those legal stimulants. Joe looks up at the crow, looking smaller now up on the ScreenBoard on the other side of the street, and could swear one glowing green eye winks at him. Letting go completely, Joe's body walks, and how strange it feels, the achiness of unused muscles being worked, but the realness of the feeling, and as Joe walks, across pavement after pavement, wading through traffic in the dim orange glow of StanCity, the body awakens to itself. Always in the distance is a green-eyed crow, perched high on a building or fence or fast-food sign, or taking that magical leap off into the air, only to spread its wings of petroleum black and soar.

Joe's body walks. Joe remembers through the haze that every body is different, different DNA, different fingerprints, just different. And Joe finds salvation from the sameness lameness. A few hours' mindless wandering walk later Joe sees the crow land on a trash heap that the wind has accumulated along a chain-link fence somewhere at the edges of two parking lots. The crow pokes its black beak down into the trash and disappears. Joe collapses onto the pile, not really aware of anything any more, having reached the limits of his mind, body, and soul. Joe sleeps off the Cleer, sleeps off the sleep deprivation, sleeps off the physical exhaustion, and begins dreaming.

In his dream he lies on a spongy mat of dewy green moss, in a valley of virid ferns and broad green leaves on thick-trunked trees swaying gently in the breeze, the breeze itself the very breath of the gods. The valley is cooled by the trickling brook bubbling up from a spring springing forth from the earth. Joe stares up through the leaves at the sun so far away, flickering through the branches and the branches beyond the branches. And far up in the blue distance, almost too far to see, a crow soars.

Joe awakens slowly, to some odd smells. The trash he is lying on smells disturbingly rank. The people standing around him look grimy and hairy and exude certain odors of the body that StanCityzens are not accustomed to.

And they're passing back and forth an object that looks like a HerbStic[™] used by the Nuayjirz in their smudge rituals. But these people are putting the end of the object in their mouths and sucking the smoke in. It's wrapped in brown paper or something. It smells funky, but actually kind of good, kind of *real*. Not like the smells of the cleaning crews that come through at seemingly random times, that Joe always knew was clockwork, but in his Cleerified disorientation seemed random. Those fakey-nice smells covering the real smells of cleaning solutions, covering the real smells of real life in a pyramid of computerized bureaucracy and shopping.

One grimy vagabond reaches down to pass the object to Joe, and he sits up and takes it carefully, puts it in his mouth, and sucks on it. Yes, he remembers how to smoke from when he was about thirteen and the boys would steal cigarettes from their grandparents, and sneak around back somewhere to smoke and try to look cool without looking like they're trying, and also without being too loud about it to attract the wrath of parents, so really they didn't look very cool at all. Smoke fills his mouth, and he inhales. That familiar tobacco taste,

the brown leaves, but there's something more there, an abundance of the sweet pleasantness Joe smelled wafting through the trash and body smells. And through his body living this experience out in an anonymous parking lot trash pile, with anonymous alley rats passing around a blunt, Joe realizes that life is real. Everything is perfectly real. This is it. There is nothing but this. He looks the vagabonds in the eye, one by one, and passes the blunt to the next person. They see the smile of one burning now, the ashes of his soul blown into flame, one who wants to *live*.

Far above, a crow soars. The smog-cloud is stirred, and mingles with a moisture-bearing airmass from the west. Moisture condenses onto microscopic dust particles. Weighing slightly more than air now, the droplet begins to fall, and in falling picks up more moisture, and it dives through the distance down to the surface, carried along by wind, the breath of the gods. The orange-gray glare of pavement rushes up, and the drop lands in the middle of the forehead of a man in a suit sitting in the middle of a trash pile in the middle of the slurb in the middle of the Barrens in the middle of Midstan. The man now has a queer smile on his face, crow's feet radiating from his eyes to his temples, a queer smile, a *real* smile.

The dervishes, beginning to feel the raindrops, strip off their clothes and begin to jump up and down and yelp for joy, relishing the magical in-between moment when things change. The droplets turn into a sprinkle. Joe stands and stretches up as far as he can reach into the sky. Two dervishes have begun tapping out a quasi-random raindrop rhythm on the chain-link fence. The rest begin clapping along, dancing in their nakedness, the rain washing the dust from them. The dervishes actually do relish the opportunity to bathe. The slap of bare feet dancing in parking-lot puddles plays a music so precious it can never exactly be played again. Joe feels something he hasn't felt in a long time—as long as he can remember—something overwhelming, but a rushing of joy rather than despair. In this joy he tears his suit from him and just jumps up and down, in the rain, turning about in a circle, head and arms flailing about, feeling his reality, *being* his aliveness.

Eventually they all tire out and lie down laughing in the parking lot, letting the rain wash over them, and then they trot off seeking shelter. Joe vaguely remembers he had a car somewhere, but knows it would be impossible to find and really pretty much worthless when he found it. There's nowhere to go when it's all the same, nothing to do but be the only person you know how to be.

Before they ran across his body lying in the trash pile, the dervishes had rendezvoused from a scavenging trip, each one looking for food and useful or interesting shit in Dumpsters™ and other trash receptacles. Walking along the chain link fence looking for a hole, they came across his body. They wondered if he was dead, and realized he was probably a Lost One, and decided to initiate him. Thus the blunt was lit, and silent meditation was had until Joe woke up.

Joe was glad they didn't mind his tagging along, since he wouldn't have known what to do by himself and might have starved to death or died of hypothermia

dream

Myra Eddy and her friends walked into the front room of their house, bubbly with laughter from enjoying the warm day. Myra walked into the library and saw a stranger walking down the stairs. They had strays coming by all the time.

"Do I know you?" she asked.

"Don't you?" he said, half smirk & half remorse. His youthful face dissolved into a skeleton within a cloak and spoke, "I am Rome." Myra recoiled in disgust (not apathy) as Rome walked through her mass of friends and out the front door. She ran to her friends. "You did see that, right?" They affirmed.

Myra strode quickly to the front door. "My gut instinct is telling me to get the hell out of here." She flung open the door and walked outside. She had taken only a few steps when she saw the flashing blue and red lights, vivid against the black and white world of her dreamscape. The explosion was muffled, but she landed ten feet from her spot at the front door. She got up and ran again, but was quickly moved along by yet another explosive blast.

Myra picked herself up again and felt in her pocket for her car keys. She started running toward the parking lot and thought, "Where the hell did I park?" Then she remembered she was dreaming, and the dream began after she had parked her car. She realized she didn't need to remember where she parked, as the car would magically appear soon enough as it always does in the danger of the dream world. However, when she reached the end of the parking lot with no car that matched her keys, she realized, "Maybe I'm not dreaming."

She threw the keys to the ground and started walking away.

think about the horror right now. Tom has work to do. Tom manages to piggy-back Yeuhshuey, and wishes he could hang on, but how could his shoulders move? How could his hands grip? This man is as good as dead. But maybe that's just the right thing for now anyway.

Stumbling a path down the back of the hill, where some flowers are actually growing, Tom sneaks himself and his load down an alley. The air is a little fresher, and adrenaline is beginning to kick in. Tom's used to long walks in the hills and the desert, he knows he can make it home with this, his most unusual find. Yeuhshuey is cold.

Zig-zagging through dark alleys, trying to avoid stray dogs who catch the scent of death, of meat, of the raw exposed flesh, they make it to Tom's little house. Tom shuts and bars the door with one hand and one foot. He lays Yeuhshuey down in his own bed, and quickly shuts the windows. Covering his guest with blankets, Tom pulls aside the carpet on his floor and lifts up the dusty wooden trapdoor in the floor. Taking an oil lamp down with him, he comes back up quickly with clean bandages and an assortment of dried herbs.

He puts on water to boil with the quick exactness of someone who doesn't need to think about it. Tom checks Yeuhshuey's hands—*cold*, so cold, it's unnatural. Hoping he's not dead, now, after the rescue, Tom moistens the body's lips with a cloth wet with warm water. The lips open a bit, receptive—hope. Tom dabs water into Yeuhshuey's mouth, moistening the tongue, and then wipes the man's face off tenderly.

Then he cleans out the wounds. Tom's never seen anything like this, but just carries on, knowing if he thinks about it or allows himself to feel too much, he won't be able to do it. Any charisma this man had, the ability to inspire people to feats of generosity they couldn't have been talked into, has drained. Tom's just doing this out of hope, a feeling that it's something he's been biding his life for, and now his life has a purpose, though he doesn't know exactly why, yet, just what and a little bit of how.

Tom prepares herbed oil for anointing the wounds. This will be the most sacred act in his life.

like that dude that was found on his front porch when he couldn't figure out the metal key to get inside his LifeSpace.

They went to a hideout the dervishes used along with other Vagabonds. This was in a warehouse in an abandoned "industrial park." The walls were scrawled with strange graffiti, probably looking stranger in the flickering light of the candles they lit. No electricity! It turns out the dervishes go naked a lot, especially when it's hot out, so stripping off their clothes didn't mean much to them. But for Joe it was a stripping-off of so many layers of masks, conditioning, illusion, and confusion. He sensed they knew this—not just intellectually, but on a deeper level, that they had all been there, and like him none were capable of going back. But their welcoming him into their little alley rat cell was amazing to Joe. When they got the candles lit and the clothes hung up to dry, everyone opened their packs and showed, compared, and shared the food they had found. It was a meal of some incongruities for someone used to routine and fast-food chain menus, but it was the most meaningful meal Joe had ever had, because it was simply shared freely.

krow

The shackles lay at my feet, broken.

Krow came to visit in a dream. He smiled his crazy grin and outstretched his inky wings. “Climb aboard,” he said, “and I’ll take you to Paradise.” I doubted his destination but climbed aboard his wings made of garbage and human hope. We soared high above tall buildings, above miles of pavement. We flew higher until the sun became the moon. We dropped to the ground early or late in time, the special dreamtime where nothing exists and everything is to be realized.

I saw what Krow saw—Paradise. Food and shelter everywhere, human love spinning a web to catch me if I took the chance to jump.

“I don’t understand,” I told Krow. “Where is this magic place?” Krow grinned, “It’s everywhere. Look through the night behind the devil’s horns. Paradise surrounds you. You’ve been looking at what’s not Paradise. Open your eyes wider and you will see Paradise everywhere.”

I awoke from my dream and walked outside. Krow’s reality became my own. I awoke to my golden city aflame. I joined every Adam and Eve. We ate the fruits of Paradise. We no longer toiled in the fields. And god—Krow—was with us til the end of our days.

the gospel of thomas

Thomas the Skeptic looks up at Yeuhshuey, the dehydrated body staked to the dry dead tree among dry dead trees on the hill of skulls. So many trees it could almost be called a grove or a copse, but nothing like that, not at all. An evil parody, all too real, of such a stand that might once have flourished green here. A foul breeze snakes around, breathing close the stench of death, shit, decay, years of terminal pain that have been endured here. It’s hard for Tom to bear being here, knowing all the evil that has been perpetrated by the Empire, which will continue until....

Well, there are always rumors around of secret fanatics, like that zealot the carrot-beard, who are constantly meeting and planning and caching weapons and catching guards off-guard. It is said there were empires that preceded this one. It is said that all empires fall, because there is no power above the ultimate. Tom wonders, though, if it’s all bullshit. It seems people have a way of convincing themselves of things that just may not be, you know, “True.” But so many followed this one, this Rebbe Yeuhshuey, who some said was the son of the Highest, who some said was the one come to save the chosen nation from this horrific oppression. Now he’s dead, or so everyone told him, and so the Empire intended. But Tom has a suspicion. Tom is skeptical.

Tom reaches up, touches a filthy weatherbeaten foot, strokes it gently. Tom looks up, to the eyes, closed in a wince of agony. An eyelid flutters. “You’re *not* dead, are you?” Flutters again. Looking around in the evening shadows to make sure no Imperial guards are around, Tom sees he’s alone except for the Empire’s victims and their new company, death. Tom heaps up some rocks, branches, and skulls, steps up, half-hangs from the tree. A large, slender man, he manages to lift Yeuhshuey down, unhooking the forearms from their spikes, undoing the feet. Tom lays the body down on the dusty ground, kisses Yeuhshuey on the lips, moistening his mouth. No way this man, tortured nearly to death, possibly beyond death and back, could talk right now, but Tom feels a bit of life left in the body. Yeuhshuey needs water, food, and medicine if there’s anything that would help. This teacher, a miracle-maker, could he heal himself? Remains to be seen. Tom’s feeling very scared now, knows anyone who happens by would see what’s going on. It’s most certainly illegal to rescue a condemned man. But everyone thinks he’s dead, anyway, or was sure he was a goner, and left to get some food or spread the news or pray or plot or whatever.

Tom’s tired, of all the hoopla about Yeuhshuey’s arrest and trial and everything. Tired now of skulking around waiting for a chance to check out Yeuhshuey’s body without attracting too much attention. Just tired—it’s dusk, and the chill is in the air now.

Tom hoists Yeuhshuey’s body, too light, a living man can’t be that light, trying not to aggravate the wounds, the wounds that Tom can’t even believe, can’t

just like that sonofabitch gonna wind up in the white house every time

The shockwave passed. The earth was still over their heads. Myra crept up the stairs, but couldn't lift the outside door. With the help of her compatriots, they sweated and groaned, and finally pushed aside the limbs and branches that had fallen and blocked their exit. The view was breathtaking.

The trees—most all of them—were horizontal. The house had one wall standing, with the front door still firmly closed. The chickens and coops were gone, as was the pasture shelter. This they saw in the flashes of lightning that illuminated the barrens. The wind picked up and the driving rain began in earnest. The tribe retreated to the relative warmth and safety of the root cellar, catching sleep if they could. The thoughts of those kept awake were filled with plans of tomorrow. It would be a new beginning, but even they in the rural outpost in the barrens had no idea of the new world that awaited them on the other side of tomorrow.

The next few days were miserable for the band of vagabonds holed up below ground. The winds howled and the rain beat down so fiercely that they could not leave their shelter. The radio no longer picked up the faraway waves of StanCity. The afternoon of the second day, the seepage in the root cellar became rivulets and then rivers. The vagabond children were the most vocal of their discomfort, but many grans, gramps, unks and aunties make for a resilient community.

Muskrat returned to the cellar with good news on the morning of the fourth day. The winds had stopped and a gentle warm rain had taken the place of the seemingly unending downpours of the last few days. The vagabonds crept forth, muscles cramped, damp musky bodies welcoming the warm cleansing rain. The children scattered, eagerly exploring the new adventure full of terrain.

Several vagabonds set about scavenging supplies, and Tom and Muskrat built a shelter of sticks and branches enclosing a space around the wood cookstove—the only thing left behind the firmly shut door of the remaining one wall of the homestead shelter. It took a while to drain the wood stove of its accumulated deluge, and even longer to find wood dry enough to burn. Soon a delightful smell wafted across the barrens, drawing the scavengers home for their first hot meal in days.

They shared the news. A huge frothing lake had taken the place of Job's Creek in the valley. Algernon estimated that it covered dozens of acres. It must have been released from the dam in StanCity. Floating in the lake were the carcasses of trees and animals, and lots of junk and garbage. They were thankful for the gentle rise that lifted their homestead from the low valley in which they lived.

The ten other homesteads within an hour's walk on this side of the rising waters had evacuated to StanCity, as the uniformed men had suggested. The

BULLSHIT!

vagabonds deftly hid in the woods when the chugging covered truck had pulled up to collect them—no easy feat for two dozen people, including several children. They had left a note saying they had already evacuated, and the uniformed men—wage slaves in uniform—didn't care much anyway; they wanted to return to the perceived safety of StanCity before the storm hit.

Most of the vagabonds did not have legal papers, nor LifeStock. They were all Zeroes. That was the reason they found themselves in the barrens, living a life in community. Being a good Stanizen was not a choice that everyone could make. For many, it was a soul-sucking endeavor, made possible only by massive consumption of Cleer™ and the hypnotic comforting allure of the Screenz™. For others, no amount of numbing could make their soul imprisonment endurable. These misfits ended up in Kamp Kommunity, where they often committed suicide, or were committed to Mental Clarity Rehab Centers. A lucky few figured out how to slip out of this constraining culture. The barrens held its attraction for many vagabonds.

The urbarrens were once a highly desired place for Stanizens to consume. Before the Disaster, there were a few ruins of McMansions still standing in the landscape, palaces in which whole communities could take shelter. After oil peaked and the climate changed, StanCity absorbed most everyone from the barrens. Without petroleum-fueled and wage-slave-maintained fertilizers and irrigation, the verdant square lawns browned and dried, leaving mostly stunted scrub on the subsoil (the topsoil had been scraped off and sold to other people whose topsoil had been scraped off and sold). It was a lonely barren place, and that was the attraction for the vagabonds—misfits, escaped wage slaves, nomads of no reason. All of the attention and resources of StanCity were focused on The Great Mall and the city itself. It could survive no other way.

That's why the vagabonds were startled to hear on the radio that StanCity was sending out its evacuation force almost a week ago now. They kept vigilant until the intended round-up had passed over them. They would take their chances with the storm that had raged across the globe for weeks, gathering energy as it dispossessed human biomass and left utter destruction in its wake. Dying in the storm was preferable to being rounded up into Kamps in StanCity. And they *had* survived.

The vagabonds prepared for their fate as best they could. They brought their books and most sacred objects to the root cellar, as well as blankets and water. They prepared their innards as well. It is hard to face inevitable doom with a cheerful heart, hard to reassure your children, but they felt they had no choice but to rely on themselves.

They were spared, and were thankful. They had submitted to allah, utterly, and were blessed enough to be reborn. The cramped days in the root cellar were bearable because they were thankful for this breath, and this one, and nothing but thankfulness came from their hearts and mouths. "Well," said Myra with a smirk, "it rained like we had hoped."

It had not rained the entire growing season the previous year, and snowed only one light dusting during the winter. The barrens had been cracked and hard as

[from the Journal of Tom Smith, civil servant extra-ordinaire]

document 7

Here we are crawling the cracks between walls of church, state, school, and factory, all the paranoid monoliths—

No, not again, that line obsesses me too much.

There are no cracks. Or they're too small to see. Or we're all in one big crack, and I'm trying to climb out, to find the rest of the world. My keyboard is off center because of the numeric keypad on the right, and through years of use it will slowly stress the components of my wrist and cause a painful and ultimately debilitating syndrome. Do the words chronic pain mean anything to the people who require me to use this device? To the person who designed it, who by now must know the damage it causes?

How to transform a world that so resists change that no one even believes change is possible or even necessary?! How can I be the only one who sees that *this can't last forever*—and even if it could it's not worth it—too many lives are wasted, too much potential is suffocated in the mindless routines we live in from cradle to grave. We have infinite choices of *products* and only one choice of life. Work for money for food. Kamp Kommunity serves some people's needs, but isn't much of an alternative. Alley Rats—that's hardly a life, the squalor, the hunger, the nightly battles with Peace Officers. But what else is there? I feel I've dreamed there's another world out there, and that possibility is the only thing keeping me alive, but where is it? Where does one look for a different life? How can one begin to live differently when every force is against you?

I sit in the craproom and stare at the random bits of Marbl™ tile in the floor. Do they make a pattern? Do they spell a word? The name of a forgotten god, perhaps? Or do they make a map, a map away from here, away from the gnawing emptiness at the pit of the gorged stomach of Stanistan?

Or is the humming in my head all there is, vibrations rippling outward from the air conditioning and appliances, insinuating themselves into my mind, directing thought?

Or is it the humming in everyone else's head reverberating into mine, the droning of the clones cloning the drones?

and then there was the great condiment disaster of 1999

Everyone was nervous about the turn of the millennium, but not many would admit it. It seemed to be all right to be prepared as they called it in the suburbs & prepare the yuppies did, along with anyone else who could afford to care. Some thought that one hundred years hence, the turning of the millennium would be a big joke, as the panic turned out to be in 1910, when the Earth passed through the tail of Halley's Comet. No one can predict the future, but as long as there was money to be made, panic would be created among the consumers.

This is what Ed was thinking about when he was driving a truck full of condiments down I-55 in central Stanistan. He was thinking about what could happen in the next few hours. Ed wasn't a bit scared, just excited that possibly something different could happen, for once. He would love it if his big rig just suddenly stopped running, the computer circuitry becoming utterly confused. He dreamed of hiking out to his mom's house in the country and living off the land again, living with people instead of living with things.

Ed was wondering if our New Better Society (New BS as Ed thought of it) was behind all of the push for security in material possessions. He wasn't worried at all about his security. Ed didn't have a lot of stuff or a lot of comforts. He didn't think he would have any problems becoming uncivilized, given the opportunity.

The stars shone extra bright against the black prairie sky. Ed would soon be entering the city proper with his triple trailer of condiments: mustard and ketchup, pickle relish and mayo. Radio stations around here were a joke, but they had been transmitting minor disturbances all day. The announcers made so much out of so little. Events that would never be mentioned on a normal day were given grave importance. It seemed like the masses were waiting for a sign for the end to come. Ed thought many were like himself, just wanting something different to happen, something—anything!—to catapult them out of the work-consume-die daily ritual.

The twinkling prairie disappeared in the approaching glow of StanCity's industrial lighting and identical housing. Back to civilization, thought Ed.

Of course, chaos interrupted Ed's last ride of the millennium. No one knows what caused Ed's triple trailer rig to plunge off the Commuter Expressway and into The Great Mall™. It might have been an axle breaking or a runaway deer on the road, or maybe Ed fell asleep or was distracted by the unending advertising extending the length of the Commuter Zone. The condiment packages had no chance of surviving intact. The Great Mall was covered in goo of various colors, and the smell of burning condiments filled the affluent neighborhoods of StanCity.

Citizens panicked and no leadership survived to tell them what to do. The downfall of civilization followed what will forever be known as The Great Condiment Disaster of 1999.

concrete. The vagabonds' tended gardens benefitted from the soil that had been enriched with composted materials, and enlivened by the diverted wash water. The vagabonds had dug swales years before in time of abundant rain, and their gardens yielded enough for their sustenance, but they knew the deserted barrens would suck the water from their gardens eventually. They had prayed for rain—sang, chanted, danced, envisioned, hoped, and had faith. Their prayers had been answered, although not exactly as they had expected.

Tom had decided to make a scouting trip around the barrens, and eventually to StanCity, if he could get that far. His curiosity was insatiable. During the week he was gone, the other vagabonds set about their work. They rebuilt their community house into the hillside, using blown-over trees for the walls, and filling in the cracks with mud—both abundant resources at the moment. After the community center was completed, they began planting the seeds they had saved from the previous year—fruit, nut and nitrogen-fixing trees; vines that produced fruit, shade, and fibers; food plants of all kinds, and bountiful blossoms to attract bees, flies, wasps, butterflies, and other pollinators. Their kept beehives and occupants had been scattered to the four winds.

They found several chickens in trees whose canopies barely stretched above the rising waters. They had no feathers, and most starved before the vagabonds dared attempt to rescue them by rafting out in the swirling debris of what used to be a tranquil creek, trickling between beaver ponds that filled the valley.

The vagabonds dropped their hand tools and came running when the newly-found community bell clanged. They knew Tom had returned and none wanted to miss the story. Tom was busying his mouth with the savory stew and sour-dough Myra and Beatrix had made. By the time everyone was assembled, he was finishing his pie and tipping his qahve to his grinning mouth. "You're not even going to believe me!" he exclaimed to the attentive crowd.

He had made his way first to the remnant of what was once the village of Panther Creek. So much had changed in this place since the Disaster. It had been deluged by the flood, and no structures or people were accounted for. Tom picked his way along the ridge-top finding a few dead and bloated cows, and seeing quite a few buzzards, but not much else. Very few trees were left standing. "And when I got to Ashtown Crossing, you'll never believe what I saw. The Screenz™ have melded into a Bubble™!"

The Screenz were one of the things the vagabonds abhorred about StanCity. The large plastic solar collectors flickered constantly, projecting infotainment to the good Stanizens within. It was hard to think your own thoughts with the Screenz' constant distraction. "There must have been a lot of plastic blowing around in that storm," observed Tom. The Screenz had a self-perpetuating mechanism that absorbed plastic debris and remade it into more solar-collecting flickering Screenz, widening their scope, and apparently, cutting off Stanizens from the outside world. "The Bubble completely encompasses Ashtown Crossing, and stretches into StanCity. There are miles of Bubble. It was incredible."

Tom had skirted the edge of the Bubble until he had reached the secret trap door to the pyramid—The Great Mall. He had found the trap door years before

when he worked in the paper mines deep in The Great Mall. It was a convenient exit—and entrance. He found his shiny silver jumpsuit on the peg where he had last put it, just before he had removed himself from The Great Mall for what he presumed to be his final farewell. The suit was dusty, and fit him quite loosely, but it would work. He found his way through the maze of horizontal and vertical hallways and trapdoors. He had spent a lot of time down here wandering around aimlessly during his last few years of captivity, his last-ditch effort to live the life of a good Stanizen.

He found a w.c. and took advantage of it to disguise himself in good hygiene. He hadn't seen his reflection in years, and was amazed at what he saw—thinner on top and more gray, yes. And with the long scar on his forehead from tumbling down the ridge after too much qahve during the Feast of Enough. No wonder his suit fit him loosely. He could see the hollows of his cheeks, brought about by years of just enough food and hard work that had leaned his body and strengthened his soul. Tom could not ever remember seeing so much color in his cheeks, or so much spirit in his eyes. He looked alive. That could not be disguised. He wandered the city with a clipboard and a look of concerned befuddlement, and he was not troubled by the uniformed men. Tom could not believe the Screenz. They completely blotted out the sun and the sky. Only the flickering light of the Screenz filled the city below.

StanCity had swelled in size, reaching out to the five points, which had originally been designed as service entrances, but were functioning now as edge city burbs. People were everywhere—clean and pasty white, chattering constantly without saying anything. They moved in a uniform seamless mechanized movement. Tom discovered that StanCity had almost—almost!—blown away, but had been held in place by the electromagnetic forces of the Screenz. The disused fossil fuel power plant had blown up and away, being outside the Bubble, and the dam that held the South Fork had given way and drained Lake Stan—thus the lake that now lay in the valley in the barrens.

Anyone outside the Bubble was considered deceased. StanCity would no longer be sending anyone outside the Bubble. They declared StanCity complete and whole, in and of itself, and nothing else existed outside the Bubble anymore. It was all they knew. “We can't be the only ones,” Muskrat insisted. Certainly, there would be other communities that had managed to weather the weather. At least now they could welcome visitors without apprehension. They would see no more uniformed men. Ever. They rejoiced.

The vagabonds had survived so long in the barrens for many reasons. They discovered manual skills, they shared freely, they enjoyed feeling deeply with each other. None were specialists, but their general interests and related skills led to a base of knowledge that supported their endeavors and lives together. They built structures from materials at hand, and composted them when they were no longer useful in form. They used alchemy on their bodily wastes, and made rich soil, which they fed to the gardens, which fed them. They grew so much food that their lands resembled Paradise itself. They found they almost



it says:

faeries burning in a fiery pit of hell...

or how to have a beautiful day

itself and I paper it and here I am just sitting here among all this paper. And I put on my paper boots and go wading into the cite mine for cites. Every day. Maybe I'll just stop cite-mining and see what happens.

Nothing happened.

I'm just sitting here. My paper boots go unused. It's been weeks if not months. Every day looks the same in the dungeon. I'd get fired if they found these words on my hard drive. I'm willing to take that risk. How much attention do the spies pay? It's all automated, anyway. These words aren't leaving my terminal, so I figure I'm safe.

a ha.

I tried the "no answer" number again this morning. And again this afternoon. And finally someone answered. They couldn't tell me where to reach the guy I'm trying to reach, but they gave me the number for Personnel. I try it. An automated voice comes on, "You have reached a nonworking number ... call our main number," followed by the main number, a number different from any I have tried yet. I'll try it now.

They tell me I can try a number that I tried long ago, but they'll transfer me to the number they have. I get Felony Review. They take a message.

always had enough. Their children and their elders were valued and integrated into the fabric of daily life. They all learned, all the time. Art was their passion and their lives were the canvas. Daily life was the medium. It all worked so well, unless uniformed men intervened.

There had been a few skirmishes over the years. Once the uniformed men had come and stolen their entire potato crop, saying it was needed to feed Chipz™ to Stanizens, as well as the cider they pressed. Throughout the long, lean winter that followed, they vowed it would not happen again and planned accordingly. The following year at harvest, the uniformed men were ambushed by catapults as they attempted to ford Job's Creek. The vagabonds let them have it—rocks and rotten pumpkins (it had been a wet fall) bombarded them as wildly painted naked vagabonds yelled and beat drums. The uniformed men believed they were surrounded by a mighty military force and hastily fled.

A few years later, the uniformed men returned, following the scent of Maricle. The vagabonds had scattered its seeds widely throughout the valley, and it grew like the weed it was. It had become the sacred plant of their community. The seeds were high in protein and could be pressed for oil. The fibrous stalks were used for paper, cloth, and to light fires. It was edible and its flowers made a nice addition to any smoking mix. It was called Maricle because the plant truly was a miracle, a gift given by the gods to their community. It was incredibly useful for food, fuel, and fiber, and it also opened their minds, helping them to create new worlds before they were even realized as possibilities.

StanCity had designated Maricle a noxious weed, undesirable, a pest. It had sent uniformed men to eradicate it. The vagabonds stepped between their sacred holy gardens and the uniformed men. They would not sacrifice this gift of god to the stupidity of the Stanizens. The uniformed men were prepared to fight. By the time the smoke and dust cleared, the Maricle patches stood their ground and the uniformed men retreated in their highly efficient biofuel machines. One vagabond lay still upon the earth, her baby strapped to her chest, suckling. It was a dreadful time. The hatred of the uniformed men became intense and better fortifications of their land became necessary. They were never bothered again by the uniformed men (until the evacuation), and baby Rose grew up with as many mothers and fathers as would fit in their community.

It was a busy spring, as the vagabonds worked rebuilding their orchards and gardens, rewilding the barrens. They were blessed during the heat of summer to be visited by a traveling blacksmith. She taught her craft to any who showed interest. The vagabonds had collected quite a bit of junk metal that had washed down from StanCity after the South Fork dam had burst; the raging river had cut a path through a landfill that was abandoned centuries ago. A lot of valuable salvage was unearthed. They forged axe and shovel blades, flails, wheels, and a few pots and pans, all of which made the labors of the vagabonds accomplished quickly and easily.

The blacksmith, a petite young woman with bulky arms, was born in StanCity, back when it was the capital of a different empire. Avanel had been traveling for

years, sometimes in groups and sometimes alone, helping out where she could, forming bonds, forging metal, and sharing skills. She had been far up north when the storm cycled through, and came back in hopes of finding her family in the urbarrens near StanCity, but without luck. Avanel knew if they were alive, they were most likely to be in deep hiding, or if they were unlucky, in Kamp Kommunity.

Avanel told their astonished ears that the rain and flooding up north had been worse than that on the barrens. The water had gotten so high that it changed the course of the Mighty Mahzip River so that instead of flowing 100 miles west of the Vagabonds, it was now 15 miles west. This solved an ongoing question the Vagabonds had been working on, namely of why the flood that filled their valley had not flowed away. It had gone down a lot from the initial torrent, but it was now more a chain of lakes connected by sloughs than the tranquil wading creek of its past.

Avanel also reported the appearance of Bubbles elsewhere in the landscape. There were a few rural outposts scattered here and there, but not many. The Bubbles were sealed, and enormous. It was frightening that so many were forced to lead a life of constrained, constricted, and boundless unjoy, numbed and distracted, stuck in the rut of utter routine, not knowing there was life outside the Bubble. Only a few would be determined and fortunate enough both to find the trap doors and not be accosted by the uniformed men.

The gardens of the vagabonds enjoyed the frequent rains and bountiful sunshine of the season. The previously flooded lands sprouted up sugar maples, roses, brambleberries, and grasses. The valley had never looked so abundant.

The vagabonds gathered in the harvest without worry of a visit by the uniformed men. A stretch of dry weather in late summer enabled them to dry their produce for winter, as well as flail grains and blow the chaff to the wind. Corn, amaranth, oats, barley, rye, and lambs quarters provided enough grains for bread and porridge. They gathered rose hips, brambleberries, and sea buckthorn berries to ward off scurvy. They observed the Long Feast of More Than Plenty during the days of the leaves turning. Migrant fowl, mostly geese and ducks, made it a habit to rest in the lakes and sloughs. Their feathers made for many soft pillows and beds, their downy breasts provided warm insulated clothing for many children and elders, and the vagabonds thoroughly stuffed themselves with meat.

By the time cold weather settled on the barrens, the vagabonds were nestled into huts, firewood stacked around them, root cellars stuffed to bursting. It was an incredible comfort, being safe and secure, and passing the time with loved ones, telling stories, reading books, and working with their hands.

It felt as though they were living in Paradise, and they were.

[from the Journal of Tom Smith, civil servant extra-ordinaire]

[document 1.5]

What am I doing? I'm just *sitting* here. I have stuff to do, tasks to accomplish, goals to achieve, but nothing brings me to life, nothing fills me with enough enthusiasm, or even just energy, to get to work. I am not at this moment a slacker by choice. I am bound by my lack of motivation, I *cannot* work any more than a cat can eat asparagus. I do not wish it to be this way. In fact, as much as I philosophically oppose work & the institutions I work for, it would be *so* much easier if I didn't find it so difficult to just *do* my work. How hard can it be to finish a letter? How hard can it be to print a voucher? Am I on that downward spiral to the abyss of boredom, from which the only escape is to be so bored that work once again seems interesting? Time will tell.

Someone comes in.

I lift a finger. I call to find the former employee whose address is never valid. His most recent known employer tells me they don't have anyone by that name. Sunni tells me he was in Juvenile. I call back & ask for Juvenile. They tell me he's at a different office now, and give me the number. I thank them & hang up. I call the number. Several rings & someone picks up, but all I hear is two voices in the background. "Hello? Hello?" I inquire. The voices ignore me, or cannot hear me. I can't quite tell what they're saying but it sounds like maybe they get wrong number calls a lot. They hang up without saying anything to me. I wonder if the phone system somehow got numbers mixed up or something—we'll never find this guy now. He has for our practical purposes disappeared, though he's probably still out there somewhere. We've lost each other in the labyrinth, the single thread of telephone wire fails to connect us any longer.

Here I am sitting again. My work has so far been futile. This mystery intrigues me, though. I may call that number back and see if I can get them to talk to me. If not I can call Juvenile again & tell them what happened when I called the number they gave me. Something unexpected, different, a glitch, a little bit of cha*s in the machine. That happens once in a while, no matter how close to perfection we think we are, no matter how much we tell ourselves we are orderly, efficient, and rational. Chaos lives.

I called that number back and someone faintly and annoyedly said "why do they think my phone number is a fax machine?" I called back the Juvenile department and told them the number they gave me didn't work. They gave me a new number. The guy at the new number said he didn't know & wouldn't be able to tell me from where he was, but hold on, let's see what they have here, and he gives me another number. I try it. No answer.

No answer. Such is life.

I'm just sitting here. Four minutes til Qtime. It's just me and the chaos surrounding me, spilling out onto my desk, where does it all come from, it's so much paper, and I need more paper to remind me of sanity, so my desk papers



the looking glass—half full or half empty?

three rubaiyyat

by hakim bey

1

Once one's seen the garden one's willing
to assassinate any one to regain it.
Kill off the blaming self then and
bow to every idol in the street.

2

The garden possesses an address—
you could send mail there if you knew it—
a seductive message scented with camphor and aloes,
if only someone were there to receive it.

3

Bread wine barbecue and pipe of grass are easy.
What we have of thou is at least
the memory of an illicit caress—the temple
erected at one place you touched earth.

a close shave

I was at Southwest Pointe Mall trying to figure out if my hair was fine or thin, and over in the next aisle I hear a woman say, softly but startled, “Oh, my God.” She said it again more emphatically. “Oh my God.” Then she said slowly “OhmyGod.” By now I was peeking around the end of the aisle at a middle-aged woman in business clothes and aerobics shoes. She was looking at feminine shavers. “OhhmmaeeGahhd.” I ahem quietly, hesitant to try to attract her attention, but I did. She looked me in the eye, her beady eyes open wide with astonished realization—not the “I left the oven on,” but an undeniably *positive* look of realization.

She said, “when a man grows a beard, it’s not that he’s *growing* it, it’s just that he stopped shaving it. A woman doesn’t *grow* hair on her legs or underarms, she just *stops shaving it*. And this is a free world—a woman can stop shaving if she wants to, but then she can’t get a job cause they tell her it’s unprofessional, but who’s they? It’s the boss—and you can’t be an employee without an employer, so if a woman wants to be free and stop shaving, that is, *refrain* from doing something that hurts her and causes no net benefit, she’ll just have to not have a job, and you can’t live without a job, so civilization not only traps us in a system of submission for food, it also forces women in a supposedly free world to hurt themselves, and if you begin to understand that you can’t trust everything that you’re supposed to trust, then you can’t trust anything that you’re supposed to trust, and I guess I’m having a breakdown now, and there are a few choices I have to consider. I can let them take me away to Kamp Kommunity, where they’ll adjust my medications to make me fit in, or I can try to fight it out with the Peace Officers, who of course have more weapons than any terrorist, or I can just walk right out the door into the world and try to find something that isn’t mass produced and someone who isn’t mass seduced and if I starve before I find that, so be it. It’s better and more real than going back to fit into my place in the machine and spin around and around and around like a good little cog for the rest of my so-called life. Well, it’s been nice.”

After picking up a brick of NutriStic™ she walked out the door with a breezy confidence I haven’t seen since I was a kid.

Outside the Mall I heard her shout, “There it is! Something that isn’t mass produced! It’s beautiful!” and she was looking down at a constellation of pigeon shit on the sidewalk. Yup, definitely crazy.

Her shouting attracted the attention of a couple Peace Officers, who stood in the periphery of her visual field, nodding to each other before going in for the snuff & cuff.

Two alley rats had been napping on the roof, and awoke when they heard the shouting outside the store below them. Peeking over the edge of the roof, they saw her staring at the pigeon shit. Maybe they took this to be some signal or

wolf

And flames flickered in the shadows of Myra Eddy’s face as she spoke.

I remember the old times of my youth. I saw the last wolf of my homeland. The man who married my mother was a trapper. He caught the last gray wolf in the steel of his trap. For many days it lay in our yard, frozen hard in the cold of winter. His eyes were open. I was deathly afraid of it. The elders insisted it was dead, but I could feel its life, see it in the wolf’s eyes. I had been warned about wolves many times. I was sure that if I got too close to it, the wolf would leap up and swallow me whole.

The trapper sold its skin to a company for twenty dollars. And that was the end of the wolves.

There was panic, of course, but Felecious appeared on television and radio to calm the masses. He had known, he told them, but they shouldn't have worried. He had written a New Key that worked in conjunction with the Old Key but far exceeded the efficiency and usefulness of the Old Key. Since everyone's buying habits, income, and personal data was programmed into the Data Store, the information would keep speeding along, just as if everyone were still working and consuming.

The people were relieved to hear that Felecious had thought of them and kept them in His plans. The New Key kept everyone notified of what was happening in their lives—promotions and raises, births, deaths, marriages, etc. And so it went on peacefully, for a week or so.

The people looked into their refrigerators and saw nothing there. "What will we eat? What will we drink?" they asked Felecious. "Do not worry, my children," He said. "According to my records, your refrigerator was replenished at 10 a.m. today."

And people held on for a few more days, until they realized that, suddenly, they were obsolete.

And Felecious Mumps sat in the tower of his castle built on the mountain, built upon what was known as the Sangamon Islands before the glaciers melted and covered even the tallest trees, playing computer chess and eating tiramisu, knowing that he was and would forever be the richest bastard that ever lived.

maybe they just hate Peace Officers, but when the POs rushed, the alley rats dropped down on top of them. The rush of activity brought the crazy woman back to reality—and then she ran. The rats, light of foot, caught up with the woman. Although she was fit, she wasn't used to just *running*, and the alley rats had long been adapted to the city's landscape.

The Peace Officers radioed for help ("backup"), and then ran off, but it was too late to track the rats and the crazy woman. They, in their conditioned sympathy for their victims, felt concern for the woman, one more person condemned to destitution, despair, filth, and hunger. After a breakdown like that, her record wouldn't support a return to professional work. Too risky.

The crazy woman immediately felt the difference between the Peace Officers—supposed to be trusted, but might pounce on you if you act differently—and the alley rats—supposed to be dangerous, but in new light they seem to be in the same circumstances as her. She trusted them despite her lifelong cultural training not to, despite that she couldn't place them in cognitive categories because they wore no recognizable logos. People not mass seduced!

So when Brain and Fuller caught up with her and motioned for her to follow them, she followed. They zigzagged a seemingly random path through, yes, an alley, then beneath a highway, through a short drainage tunnel, up and out onto the pavement again, and then down concrete steps to the basement of a big, old house that stood nestled among the hiversises, offices, and strip malls.

Based on the configuration of the skyline and the screenBoards facing the highway, she felt she knew this place, had driven past it frequently. But she had never seen this house before. How could something so big remain unseen, effectively invisible? But here it was. Something not mass produced!

Walking into a basement lit by the flicker of do-it-yourself, she sees a hearty meal in progress, a vagabond feast. "If I had been wearing heels they would have caught me!" she announces, in gleeful surprise at the happenstance of chance. "Is this real? Am I dreaming?"

After this unusual occurrence at Southwest Pointe Mall, Tom woke up feeling frozen in ice, almost suffocating. He had been dreaming of punching in his symptoms, giving careful thought and objective assessment to the Screen™, and it coming back with a diagnosis that just didn't quite seem right, and a prescription for mild antidepressants and exercise, with a list of UniPharms™ and UniGyms™ near his LifeSpace™ and Workspace™, and encouragement to log on again tomorrow for continuing assessment. So, in the dream, Tom decided he must have put in some data wrong, and went back to the beginning, and started again, carefully considering his answers from the handful presented along with each question about what he feels at work, at home, does he have violent dreams? And again the Screen came back with a diagnosis that just didn't quite seem right, and a prescription for mild antidepressants and exercise, with a list of UniPharms and UniGyms near his LifeSpace and Workspace, and encouragement to log on again tomorrow for continuing assessment. Tom decided he must

have put in some data wrong, and went back to the beginning, and started again, carefully considering his answers from the handful presented along with each question about what he feels, does he hear voices? And the Screen comes back with a *slightly different* diagnosis that still just doesn't quite seem right, and again Tom goes back to the beginning, and starts again, does he have nagging doubts, and gets a fourth, slightly different, diagnosis that just doesn't seem right, with a list of UniPharms and UniGyms near his LifeSpace and WorkSpace, and encouragement to log on again tomorrow for continuing assessment. Tom awakens tense, more so than usual, with a stifled growl of frustration in his throat and his hand a bloody fist.

In his dream, he had raised his fist in anger at the Screen, and now there's blood on his headboard. He considers that he should probably get his head checked, but considers that he probably couldn't stand that right now; it might actually drive him more crazy than dreaming about it did. He gets up, puts on his shoes, and walks.

He wants to walk somewhere he can really *walk*, like he did with his family when he was a kid, working his pale flabby human thighs the way they were meant to be worked. He doesn't want to do aerobics on *any* of the expensive machines; he doesn't want to glide on the glidewalks at the malls; he doesn't want to sit in his car and let it drive him anywhere to purchase anything or work for anyone. He takes the elevator to the first floor, and walks out the (mostly decorative) glass front doors of the hiverise. He sees the whole complex is fenced off, and there are security cameras everywhere. Feeling a need to break through something, he tells himself there's probably nobody *watching* what's on those cameras anyway. He clammers over the fence, and finds himself in an alley.

He walks, carefully keeping track of where he is, down the alleyways. High fences and dumpsters block him from others' view, and block the world from his view. He has lived in StanCity, worked in The Great Mall, and for all this worldliness he never imagined there could be another world hidden between the spaces in his world, the world where the trash goes, and the grunts come from. He always thought "alley rat" was just slang, but there really are alleys, and they appear to extend throughout the city. Tom notices he has lost track of where he is. He can see several hiverises from where he is, but all of them look slightly different from the one where he lives. Or they all look very much like the one where he lives. The sun has set behind the smoggy gloom behind the levees behind the screenBoards that line the hiways to the west. Tom can't quite tell in the monochrome glare of the city's night sky which direction is where. He begins to worry.

He remembers reading an article a few months ago about the person whose data grains glitched and their house didn't unlock, and they couldn't get their metal key to work, and they were found dead of hypothermia on the porch. Tom watches cars zoom by on the hiway overpasses. He watches LifeSpace lights light up in the hiverises as people get home from work. He ahems, and tentatively says in a loud voice, "Uh, hello? Is anyone around who can hear me? Hello?" Cars zoom by. Hiverises flicker into life. "Hello!" No one can hear

the data store

Civilization began with division of labor, with specialized labor, with surplus. Soon, someone had to manage that surplus efficiently and fairly, and thus begat government and bureaucracy. Someone had to defend that surplus, and the military was born. Someone had to sell this idea to the unbelieving public, and marketing came along. And that brings us to today.

The Data Store was the brainchild of Felecious Mumps. He devised a software/hardware gadget called The Key that used infinitely detailed codes to identify anyone and anything, anywhere this gadget the size of a grain of salt (often made into fashionable jewelry!) was placed. He made life very convenient for everyone, as no one really had time for details between a job, classes, and soccer practice. Gone were keys, checks or credit cards, identification cards, passports—anything that needed a password or number was made obsolete.

And then Felecious Mumps began to compile the data. Privacy advocates were appalled, but they were in the minority. With life so convenient, who cared about a bit of privacy? Marketing became much more efficient, and people were very pleased with that. No longer were they bombarded with messages about products and services they didn't need. With the Data Store's information, every consumer was assured that every ad they saw was something they needed.

It became practically impossible not to use The Key. Each person, product, and activity was assigned a number. One certainly had the "right" not to use The Key, but no transactions could be made without it. In the cities, tales arose of the country people not using The Key, but these tales were rarely believed. Who had the time to go back to paying for things, or worse yet, bartering? It was ridic to think these tales were real. Of course, the non-urban legends could not be verified because the InterSTAN hiway did not go into the country.

And so it went, life becoming more and more efficient, creating more and more time for people to consume the need for more time to enjoy these things. Felecious Mumps sat in his castle, built upon the mountain, built upon what used to be the Sangamon Islands before the rising seas covered the tallest trees. Felecious played computer chess and ate tiramisu, and life could not be better, or worse, until the end of the system of things we now call civilization.

Although Felecious scoffed at his critics' predictions of the end of the world as we know it and developed sound marketing strategies to defeat their concerns of overconsumption, he did listen to them and plan accordingly. It did not take a smart man to realize that resources were finite, although wealth was not. And Felecious Mumps was a very smart man.

The crash came at the end of June, a few days before Felecious' birthday. He hadn't told anyone about the upcoming shortage, and it wasn't hard to keep it a secret since The Data Store's recent takeover of UniCorp, its biggest competitor and fiercest ally. For weeks, he had been shifting around employees, even building new factories, so that all of the resources would run out simultaneously.

[from the Journal of Tom Smith, civil servant extra-ordinaire]

the dervish sat

and watched the butterfly trace its perfect random path thru the air, & it turned suddenly, flitting up to the dervish's whiskered face, landing on his nose. It cocked its little insect head, looked the guy in the eye, & slowly spread its wings.

In the green that the dervish had seen was hidden a tracery, a thin black line. The dervish felt himself falling forward—the black line grew bigger, and swallowed him up.

Hidden in the thin black line was a rainbow, the rainbow on the walls of time. The dervish fell, eyes open, agape, through the infinite whirling rainbow-space. He fell into the yellow space between the green and orange. And hidden in the yellow space was a thin line of—beige.

Into the beige the dervish fell, marveling that there could be this bit of brown in the rainbow to see. As he fell down into the light brown, in the distance he saw a thing brightly twinkling. Falling closer—or was he flying?—he saw a silver crescent shimmering at the center of the vast expanse of beige, the Barrens, empty wastelands. Gently held between the points of the silver crescent shone a star, its light a beacon pleasant.

To see within the black the rainbow, within the rainbow the beige, & within the beige the star at the heart—this is a grand vision. But that is not the best part!

The dervish closed in upon that star, to see it was a city under gleaming bubbles, and at the center of the center rose a pyramid, its four faces ever flashing colors, faces, scenes of happiness & joy.

Then the dervish awoke with a start to find he had dozed off in a meeting, oh boy, and the return to life so pained his heart! For he was in the heart of The Great Mall™, and it was not fun, not fun, at all.

him—everyone's safely sealed up in their boxes. "At least I won't get sunburned at night," he witticizes to himself. He hopes that in April it's less likely he'll freeze to death than in January, when he read that article.

He's pretty sure he'd rather not attract the attention of the POs, after seeing how they were about to thrash that crazy woman. He starts looking around for a cozy sheltered corner to sleep in, maybe find a big box somewhere.

Tom dreams of Krow. Not *a* crow, but Krow, the goddess coming to him in his frozen despair, pecking his fingertips to test for twitching, a sign that feeling & life have not left. Krow nestles down by Tom, spreading a broad black wing over his body, the blackness of absolute void sheltering him this cold night.

Waking up in the morning, he almost has a panic attack, then remembers what happened last night. And he sits up suddenly—looking at his fingers, moving them, feeling his toes. He's alive! Alive! What's this blanket on me?



the president has no maid

(or)

how I stopped worrying and learned
to love being nonessential

Jack Curtis looked around nervously. There was nothing to do but wait as the clock ticked ever so slowly. Jack's fingertips were practically raw due to his incessant gnawing. "Any word?" he asked Bill. "Nothing but static on the radio," was the reply.

Jack Curtis had been added to the short list before he was 30. It was quite a feat for a son of a union bricklayer and a nurse. His parents had wanted him to go to art school, but Jack had decided to be a systems analyst instead. After a few years climbing the political ladder, Jack had been named to the short list.

"The President's all right?" he asked. Bill looked at him, "Mr. Cheney's just fine." "Oh, right," said Jack, "I forgot." The former President, known only by his ubiquitous initial, did not make it onto the short list. Now he was a small pile of ash in a big pile of ash formerly known as the White House.

Jack awoke in a fog. Apparently sometime in the night, he had managed to get some sleep. Wow, he thought, the world really did end. Everything outside is gone. It's nothing but nuclear winter until...a few hundred years at the very least. Inhospitable. Uninhabitable. Unreal. But, he was still around, thanks to the short list.

"Get up," said Bill. "Mr. Cheney's called a meeting in the Big Room." Jack got moving. The Big Room was almost completely filled by the time he arrived. He looked around at the 25 most important people in the U.S., the short list: key department heads, strategic planners, engineers, economists, and fellow systems analysts, as well as the President's personal heart surgeon.

"Well, gentlemen," began President Cheney, "you have survived World War III, the first worldwide nuclear holocaust. You may be wondering what happens now. With the best and brightest in this room, we indeed have a wonderful future in store for us. Now, I don't know about you gentlemen, but before we begin in detail, I could use a cup of coffee!" Many a chuckle filled the room as the President clunked down his mug.

Silence filled the Big Room. "Now!" said President Cheney. Bill cleared his throat and threw Jack a worried look. "Where's the goddamned secretary?" bellowed Cheney, his bright red face puffing at Jack. "Sir, she didn't make the list," stammered Jack. "Well, somebody get me some goddamned coffee," fumed Cheney.

Jack walked nervously to the coffee maker. He hadn't made coffee since college. He didn't remember how to do it. Everyone was looking at him. "Titus? You're an engineer; can you do this?" asked Jack. "No, actually, my

the feast

by mark of the beast

Only the super rich and the poor had survived. The super rich because they could afford to continue their artificially sustained healthy lifestyle. But for how much longer? And the poor because they already had suffered through disease and famine without the help of doctors and organic food co-ops; thus, they were immune.

Most everyone else was gone.

My companion and I were journeying along an abandoned railway. Actually, most rails have been abandoned. Although I missed indoor plumbing, the End was quite liberating to me: no more records, no more files, no more probation, no more monitoring. And while I still reminisced about the occasional bag of Doritos, I am more fit and healthy than I have ever been: the Earth provides.

Thankfully for me, my companion—also a former "watched" person—knows a great deal about edible plants. And I have learned to hunt—at least enough to supplement our "accidental" meals with an occasional rabbit or squirrel. My companion reminds me to thank the spirit of the animal when I do take its life to sustain ours. Sometimes I feel silly doing this, but then again, living so much more in the natural environment, I see things a different way.

When the End came, there weren't too many riots or people freaking out like you'd think there'd be. Oh, there were some. But most people were too busy dying. It seemed that if you'd taken too many antibiotics, flu shots, and vaccines, you were just about guaranteed to die within two to three days. A very few people got sick, then recovered. But usually, if you got it, that was it. And most people had it within a month of its first appearance.

Unfortunately, some did die from the secondary diseases that sprouted from all the decay. The few of us that are left are the former misfits and untouchables from the days of civilization. And we sit at God's table and feast. Kind of like that parable Jesus told about inviting all the prominent people to a feast, but they were too busy with their businesses. So the king just opens the feast up to whoever is on the streets.

Another so many miles down the railway. I used to keep track, but not anymore. Untime seems so much more important than time. Sometimes the tree needs studying or companionship; sometimes the water needs your reflection. Maybe even the soaring hawk needs you to watch it fly for a few moments to help keep it in the sky. How can you schedule such things?

Perhaps Death is delayed by slowing down and savoring Life.

After we eat, my companion and I will watch the unfolding of the night sky. Sometimes we dance quietly under the heavens, washing our skin with starlight. And sometimes we just watch the stars dance for us. No city lights, no jets to distract from the celestial play.

It's still many days' walk from our destination. But we are already there.

When Myra stopped in, years later, to see what had happened of the plants in the greenhouse, she was amazed to see that they were flourishing. The concrete floor was not discernable. Even the walls were barely standing. What with the changing climate, even the tropical plants were doing well. The lime tree was profuse in sweet blossoms. And Myra remembered the dismay she had felt when she worked there as a caretaker, and of the good thoughts Badger had told her—even potted plants have the ability to break free and rewild themselves. She was glad at last it had been realized.

secretary always does it, um, did it,” replied Titus. “Mike? Todd? Anybody?” The Big Room remained silent.

“None of you morons knows how to make coffee?” yelled the President. “Coffee is probably not a good idea anyway, sir,” said the President’s heart surgeon. “Jesus Christ,” said Cheney, shaking his head, “I suppose there’s no maid either.”

The 25 on the short list looked at each other. One of the 25 white men began to laugh. It was Jack, creator of the short list.

“What’s so funny?” demanded Cheney.

“The President has no maid,” said Jack, “but he does have 24 butlers.”

greenhouse revival

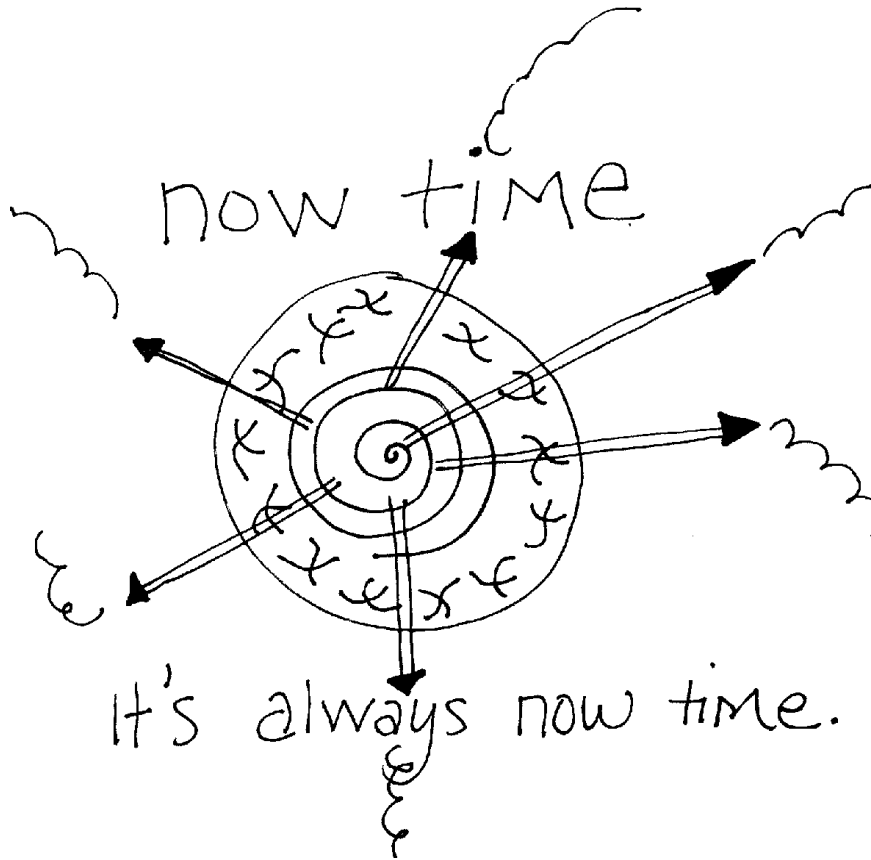
Myra Eddy loved green things—plants in particular. She thought she would enjoy her new job working in a greenhouse, but upon actually spending time with the plants, she could feel their pain and alienation. They weren't plants; they were commodified civilized accessories. They didn't even know they were alive. Indeed, they barely were. They were in pots too small, rootbound, roots girdled, crowded and sprayed, kept alive by toxic petroleum-based fertilizers and pesticides, chlorinated water, and an artificial greenhouse environment. All summer, the fans roared to cool off the greenhouse. It hurt Myra's ears. The plants were overloaded, stunted and stunned.

All that changed one August evening. Myra was at home asleep. It was the night Oil Peaked. In Tokyo, the price of oil went through the roof, shutting down their commodities exchange. The same thing happened in Moscow, Cairo, Berlin, Reykjavik. By the time everyone in America woke up, the whole world had changed. Gasoline which the day before had cost a mere \$7.50 per gallon was now \$25 per gallon. It didn't make a bit of difference to Myra, who had no car to fuel, only her body, but it did make a difference to millions of commuting Americans, especially those who neglected to fuel their gas tanks the night before.

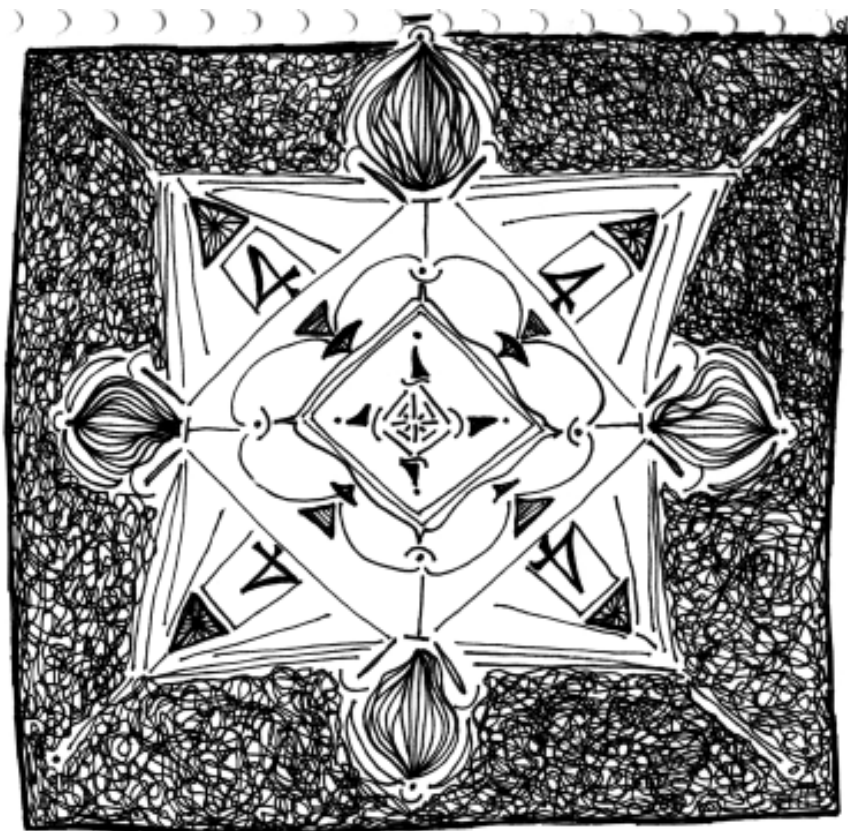
With only expensive petroleum to fuel the economy, well, it didn't last long. People simply could not afford to drive 50 miles to work and back for more than a couple of days, long enough to pick up their last paychecks. To make matters worse, a ferocious summer storm swept through central Stanistan, dropping softball-sized hail and exuberant straight-line winds. People had a lot more on their minds than expensive petroleum and missing days in their cubicles.

The plants in the greenhouse were confused. They always received daily attention, but they weren't watered for several days in the beginning of the Time of Crises. Many of the weakest plants withered to nothing in the August heat and humidity. Then the hail came and the winds blew. The hail crashed through the glass roof. Crash! Crash! The plants were shocked as shards of glass came hurtling down, with their slicing pain. But then, the rain came. It was cool and refreshing, drenching. The plants had never felt actual rain before, and they imagined this must be what it is like to be born. The sun shone the next day, and they stretched to the sky, and they realized they were alive.

Many tropical plants did not survive the first open winter, although it was mild. The big conifer stretched its arms wide to shelter as many as it could. Just when the plants thought the end was near, the spring winds began to blow and the warm rain kissed their needles and bare branches once again. They grew. Their roots stretched forth and broke open the plastic pots which thought to contain them. Even chocolate, up on concrete blocks, reached down its roots to the concrete floor, littered with leaves and bird poop. It was manna to chocolate.



the world is a sacred place
and we belong in it



leave it all behind

nowtime

How many times today have I looked at the clock and seen its hands run backward? I blink and my senses accede. The clock rights itself and moves ever forward click by click until it dies. And I do the same. Did I really see the hands move backward? Am I gaining time until I realize it? Do I grow younger? Just for a few seconds? Did I understand Einstein whispering in my ear? My perception of time has ended. Did I stop time?

Am I insane, deluded, nuts, wacko? Am I creating a new world in which to live, making my own map to a place that does not yet exist? Or am I merely lost in the concrete wasteland, just waiting for my education, government, and god to save me, place me lightly in the suburbs in front of my Big Screen, with a Lands End catalog on my lap?

Did I really stop time? Stopped caring? Stopped feeling? Stopped perceiving? Is this the rantings of a lunatic or the visions of a prophet? Or am I just a housewife in the middle of a state in the middle of the states in the middle of the world (knowing perfectly well every place is the middle of nowhere and everywhere), who's read too many science fiction stories, too many utopian daydreams—too many to ever go back to pretending to believe in the big lie? Stop signs lost their relevance long ago.

I've somehow managed to uncivilize myself—exhilarating but frightening. I forget how the game is played and my behavior is not predictable, not even to me.

“Throw that map in the FUCKING river, the river of this life. Throw it, and walk away. And when you've reached the end, you'll know. Have a delightful journey, for that, really, is it.” The prop speaks.

Yes, the voices say, you're absolutely fucking crazy. Isn't it great? Now get some sleep. You'll need it for where you're going—tomorrow.

could be fertile, as managed by the freex and their permaculture and wild ways and whatnot. Roots culture.

And so here we are.



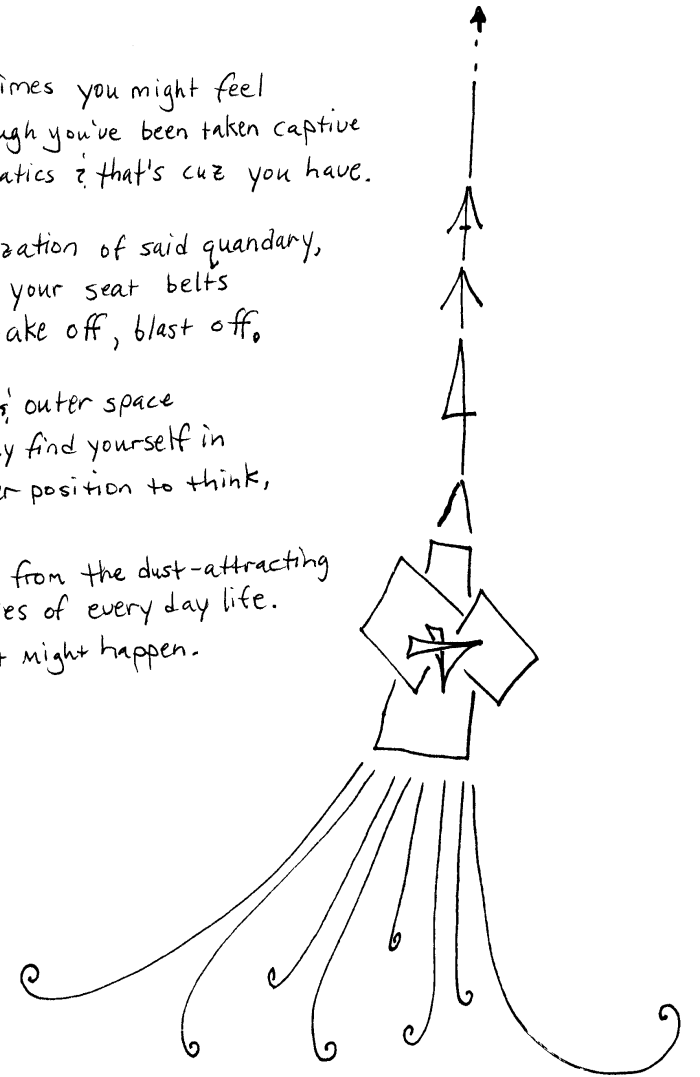
the universe (mapped)

and sometimes you might feel
as though you've been taken captive
by lunatics ? that's cuz you have.

upon realization of said quandary,
fasten your seat belts
and take off, blast off.

In inner, outer space
you may find yourself in
a better position to think,

removed from the dust-attracting
qualities of every day life.
It just might happen.



the screen

Tom takes refuge in the Screen. What, is the oDhouse getting boring? Routine? Has he managed to escape, only to find he needs to escape from the escape? Or is he just reverting to usual primate programming, that shit is so deeply embedded it takes heroic efforts to learn to see without it, be without it. Or maybe he's actually using the technology for the limited good it's good for, as he tells himself. And he remembers all the plastic in the plastic trash bag in the plastic trash can in the kitchen. How can we possibly be throwing away all that plastic still? Oh yeah, it's all miraculously recycled somehow into new useful stuff. Really. And everything's supposedly nontoxic now, except the post-consumer recycled paper that was found to have higher concentrations of dioxin than the original office white paper, glaringly bleached as it is.

Tom is astounded. First, that such an absurd system as he found himself born into could exist and be so enthusiastically justified by so many who make it real. Second, that he could begin to imagine the possibility of an escape, as dreamy as that might seem. Third, that he could manage to begin to actually see the cracks, and, fourth, that he could dare himself to sneak out. Fifth, that he would find himself out, endure some brief hardships and discover they weren't necessary, that freex welcome newcomers. Sixth, that he somehow could make his way to the oDhouse, and really get to know Hakim, who really existed. And Hakim's pal Daoud, who ingested scandalous amounts of intoxicants, seems to have created a religion around it, and refers mysteriously to his lost guru, Shaykh Loose. Not only them, but Myra and Kid Khalila come through on their wanderings, as well as various other freex and vagabonds.

And now Tom is astounded, that after all this, life at the chaos house seems to begin to lose interest and spirit for him. What's missing? Anything? What's there to complain about? Not much.

Maybe he just needs to clear his head. So that's how he winds up hooking up with a caravan heading out of town.

Then Tom is astounded by the gritty heady realness of the various semi-contraband precioues that the caravan is carrying, compared to the bland simulations of life in the Bubble, or greater StanCity really, or anywhere there are good Stanizens. Then Tom is astounded by life in the cracks of the Barrens, hidden places where cultures thrive. While the AgUrbs scrape by, eking food production out of industrial-scale compost and moisture-farmed irrigation, the freex on the Barrens live in thickets and valleys and caves and earth lodges and wigwams and vine-covered shanties. In their little valleys they make use of every drop of rain, dew, or snow that odess blesses them with. Tom is astounded that Stanistan's civilization-scale efforts at sustainable agriculture are continuing to deplete life on Earth. And Tom is astounded that, yet, the Barrens

where is that confounded map?

That's what we're all looking for, isn't it? The map of the universe? Where is the map that leads us from this wretched wasteland of consumption and emptiness into our garden utopia we see so clearly in our daydreams?

They say that the only accurate map of the universe is one drawn in full 1:1 scale. This of course leads to many questions. Even if the map was in the back pocket of your pants, the pants you left in a laundry in Venice last week or lost somewhere in your living room yesterday, how would one read such a map? How could one unfold it sufficiently, to read it accurately? If the map of the universe is indeed drawn at full scale, at least one would know that an inch always equals an inch.

But the ubiquitous they are wrong. There is a map of your universe that is written on the palms of your hands. They lead you into the universe unknown, making seeming sense of random lines and curves. Look closer and you will see in even more detail the universe. It's there, staring you in the face when you aren't looking or paying attention. It is so detailed, in fact, you could spend the rest of your life looking at the map and still never get anywhere. It is better, says the prophet, to throw your map in the FUCKING river! Strike out, one foot in front of the other. You will arrive, sooner or later.

The map of the universe, indeed.

the map

The map arrived in a package one day, addressed to Myra Eddy. She hadn't been called that in years & wondered who had found her at this address. She opened the package and saw that it contained a long faded headscarf. The scarf looked old, with a good many stains from sweat, dirt & food. It smelled like old paper. Myra looked in the mirror & attempted to arrange her long straight hair into a turban. She had never figured out turbans. Myra tied it the best she could and gave up.

The map was found one day, when Myra Eddy was burrowing under a stack of old mail, interesting stories and bits of clippings. She found the packaging from her long faded headscarf, since given to a favorite friend who had a knack for wrapping turbans. She wondered how long the map had been sitting here in the pile. She looked it over. It looked like a map of her city, just a very old and outdated map. She lived on one of the oldest streets in town, but her street was not yet on this map. She wondered who had sent her the map here, refolded it & stuck it into her pocket.

The map came alive one Friday evening, when Myra was burrowing through her small pile of laundry looking for something halfway clean to wear. She put her pants on to go out & out she went. The map fell out of her pocket as she was walking home. She stopped to pick it up under a street light. She noticed that one corner of the map was emitting smoke, burning so slowly as to be nearly

invisible. She opened the map and noticed that the hole burning in the map was where she was standing.

Where the hell was she? She looked around and saw nothing she recognized. Were they houses, buildings, or parking lots? The structures around her looked dull and faded. She could not make them out. She looked up at what could only be called a hill in this flat flat stretch of prairie, and noticed she was standing in a small stream in what she had thought was a street. The stream was glowing in the moonlight. She walked up out of the stream and sat on the flat bump of the hill.

She looked down at the map. This was the spring creek. Trees grew along this little stream, large trees that swayed gently in the breeze of the warm autumn evening in the midst of the long flat prairie. She walked back down to the creek. Even in the moonlight, she could see the clarity of this small creek flow. She bent down. It smelled sweet, better than anything called water that she'd had before. The taste was beautiful. It tasted like nothing.

Myra got the map out of her pocket again. It was still smoking from the smoldering fire. She opened the map and saw the terrain jump out, becoming alive and vivid. She felt intensely dizzy and strangely alive. The map burst into flame and Myra threw the map into the spring creek.

She walked up the hill and swam into the roaring sea of prairie grass that foamed green and gold in the distance.

the traveller

Myra awoke with the fragrance of soft lilacs and a light warm breeze blowing across her face. The sun was up high in the sky. It was late morning, she thought, and her stomach rumbled in anticipation of nourishment. She crawled out from



[from Divan i-Shirq by Hakim Baker]

Shaykh Loose, dervish of legend, smiles as he drifts into a trance. Qiyamat consciousness takes over this vagabond seer as he alters his reality in an effective sacramental ritual. What visions appear to him? Perhaps, when he comes back, even he does not know, but for a time he has opened himself to a sign. He has followed Delirium out of the rut; he has—for the time of this flight—felt Delight.

Perhaps even he has seen al-Khadir, the man in Green, the initiator in dreams, the prophet unseen. But the Shaykh has deeper secrets than his professed allegiance: raiding the pre-historic, the post-civilized, and anything in between to assemble the fragments into a new magic. His goal: to transform the world using the word...ultimate al-qimiya.

A tiny bit at a time, re-opening the gates to the garden we have forgotten is our home.



al-qimiya

under the bushes and stretched in the warming sun. Her cold bones awakened and danced.

Myra rounded the corner and happened upon a small stone gazebo. A young man leaned against one side, writing in his notebook. Myra walked up to him and introduced herself. The young man nodded and said, "Hello there. I'm sorry, I'm writing right now. I'll have to talk to you later."

"What are you writing about?" she asked.

"You wouldn't understand," said the young man, "I'm trying to save the world."

"Oh," said Myra Eddy. "I'll leave you to your task, then." She walked out of the gazebo and into the verdant grass. She walked and walked, down lightly graveled roads and then down dirt roads, walking a few miles to a small but thriving emigrant camp. She walked by the Lux, a brick establishment that looked promising to her rumbling stomach. Myra walked around back and looked through the throw-aways. She found a loaf of stale bread and some bruised apples. She ate like a queen and threw an apple core under a tree.

Myra walked again and took an afternoon nap under an old elm tree. She awoke to hear the *mlakers* laughing. They were from the old world, she could tell. The *mlakers* fancied themselves pioneers in this awfully young new world. The elm tree laughed at them.

The *mlakers* were eating potato soup with bread. Myra shared her apples with them and joined them for a drink of qahve afterwards. The older ones shared stories of emigration around the too-warm fire while the children drifted off to sleep under the slivered moon. Myra remembered her map and asked if they had seen anything like it. They laughed and told her that the map would be made ten years in the future. She told them of the map burning and again they joked around about the mysterious map.

the meetings

Myra thanked the *mlakers* for their hospitality and walked into the rising sun. She walked until the sun rose high in the sky, and sweat covered her body like morning dew. She happened upon another sweet stream and drank deeply. A woman approached the stream along the path on the other side with water buckets. The woman invited Myra to eat with her. Myra asked the woman where they were and the woman replied that she and her husband were squatting a stone's throw away from the sugar creek, named for the maple groves that grew here and there along its banks. The woman's name was Annamae, and her husband was Jeshua.

The bountiful lunch was filled with an equal abundance of conversation. Annamae asked Myra if she had heard about the legend of the map. "My brother came through here last night and said there was a woman in the Big Town who had a magic map. Said it would take you wherever you would want to go. The woman had traveled the world. Her hair was made of gold and silver, and her eyes were emeralds. She had burlap bags filled with precious stones from all over the world. She arrived on the wind. Surely you must have seen her!"

Annamae handed Myra a package, saying that her brother had dropped it off for Myra last night. It had been given to him by Krow, the blacksmith. Myra opened the package and found her old headscarf. Annamae tied up her hair while Myra read the packaging. It said: "At what speed does a future move into past to find the present? A young woman sits near a fountain in the garden. She comes here every Sunday to smell the violets, the prairie rose, the matted wild morning glories. Suddenly, her heart soars, she blushes, she paces anxiously, she becomes happy for no reason. Days later she meets a young man and is smitten with love. Are the two events not connected? But by what bizarre connection, by what twist in time, by what reversed logic?"

Myra gathered her things, said goodbye and walked back toward town. She walked until she found a familiar bush that kept the wind off her back as she slept. She awoke with her heart soaring and leapt from the bushes, happy for no reason. She found the gazebo with the young man still sitting beneath, staring at his notebook. He may have been here since she met him days before, but he looked as though he had aged ten years at least.

Myra greeted him and introduced herself. He mumbled a reply and stared hard at his book. She asked him what he was doing, and he replied that he was writing, or trying to write. She asked him what he was writing and he said, "You wouldn't understand."

Myra asked him if he was trying to save the world. He looked up, astonished. "You do understand," he said. Myra pulled a package out of her back pocket and said, "A blacksmith named Krow gave this to me to give to you." The man undid the package and remarked, "This looks like an old map." Myra replied, "It's not an old map, it's a new map."

The man stared at the map and said, "it looks like there's a little hole here, where my house would be." He stared at the map intensely and it seemed to come alive in his hands. The lines of streets and railroads curled and tightened, until the lines were standing in front of his face. The hole in the map grew until it consumed the whole of the map in a wisp of smoke. The man looked out ahead of him and saw a bump in the prairie that could only be called a hill. On the hill was what looked like his house, his inherited castle, although it looked somehow different. He walked to the door and knocked.

No one answered the door, but he went inside, as it was unlocked. It looked very much like his house, but very different. He was astonished to see the many books on bookshelves filling the front library. He spent what seemed like many hours perusing the books until one in particular caught his attention. He pulled it off the shelf. It was called, "The Golden Book", and he recognized it as being in his handwriting, his old faded handwriting. He sat down and spent a few hours reading it, until he was finished. At the end of the book, he found a map. Written at the bottom of the map in his faded handwriting was, "Curiouser and curiouser!" Printed at the top was the title, "Map of the Universe". He unfolded the map and unfolded it again. It seemed to have no end. He continued to unfold it until it was at least the size of the front library. As he looked at it, he realized that it was indeed a life-sized map of the front library. Every line

[from the Journal of Tom Smith, civil servant extra-ordinaire]

the moment everything runs out

... and at the moment everything runs out, The Infinite Domain™ freezes up, and all gates open. Screenz™ go dark. In psychological shock, StanCityzens begin to wander out of their Qbs™ and LifeSpaces™. It takes a while for some to remember there are stairs, and to find them.

Streaming out of buildings, they're observed by the various Vagabonds in the shadows, cracks, alleys, and roofs. The Vagabonds lurk, unseen, startled by the sudden silence and banality of their surroundings. Dusty silvery Screenz drape everything.

Beginning to get hungry and hot, lost in an unfamiliar, barren landscape, directionless, many StanCityzens wonder if they're in hell. The more devout kneel and pray, from memory, the prayers they heard during UniChurch™ programs onScreen. ("A lot of kneeling will put you in good STANDING." — UniChurch slogan)

Graffiti begins to be noticed.

Some wander off into the urbarrens and collapse. Some take days to overcome their revulsion of looking in trash for food. Some stumble into dervish gardens.

Outbursts of clumsy, ruthless violence surround stores where some attempt to hoard food.

Some self-organize on the models of their favorite programs.

Some blink away the years that were never really lived and become new. Some learn to smile, & share.

“We’ll show you to a shower stall,” and someone takes my hand. Her nails are dirty, she must be an Alley Rat. I wonder what diseases I’m going to catch. Did she say shower stall?

corresponded with a line in the room and every shaded area on the map corresponded to the shadows filling the room. He wondered why anyone would have a seemingly useless map, a life-sized map of a library. He folded the map as small and tight as he could and pulled the scarf from around his neck. He enclosed the scarf in the map and addressed the package to Myra Eddy, at the house in which he was standing. He walked outside and put the package into her mailbox. Vach El walked into the setting sun, never to be seen again.

The beginning and the end, where can a line be drawn?

wolf

Myra was lost and alone. She was hungry. She was tired. Wolf happened upon her path. Myra saw the flame of life in the wolf’s eyes, and so stepped inside, and the two unlikely companions wandered on together. When Wolf ate, Myra ate. When Wolf slept, Myra would curl up beside her and relax in warmth and safety.

One day they came out of the asphalt and concrete jungle into Paradise. Wolf turned to Myra and said, “Thank you Myra, for showing me the way to Paradise. Thank you for sharing your food, your companionship, and your life with me. I pledge that we will live in peace with you for all of our days together.” Wolf turned and disappeared into the thick forest.

Myra Eddy was confused. She was sure it had been Wolf that had led them to Paradise.

And Myra and Wolf lived their days in Paradise until they returned to the earth.



I hear a voice, far away, but it can't be too far in this musty labyrinth. The cat slips through a small flap in a big door. Voices on the other side. "As Vach El said, 'in our city's Apocalypse of beauty, while there will be a hearth torch in nearly every heart, and nearly all will see the Golden Book, they will read in the book diverse messages, according to the different colors of fires in their souls. Apocalypse is not the End of the World. It is Revelation, a new birth to beauty and glory and it is the giant day of Civic High Mass and purifying Epicurean revelry.'" I hesitate to make a commotion, but find I have to shoulder the door open. A small crowd surrounds me, cautious expectant looks on their faces, several sharp implements in hand pointing my direction. "Uhhh..."

I realize one person is standing at the other side of the crowd, where the center of their attention had been, and holds papers in her hand.

Grasping at straws to make sense of the sudden circumstances, I utter, "Excuse me. Is this a historical reenactment?"

Uproar of laughter. An irritable young man said, "IT's always a historical reenactment, only with new costumes and scenery every time." More laughter.

My face burns beneath the humiliating glare. Everyone's dressed in rags, but somehow looks cleaner than I am.

"Have a seat, Hakim," says one, and as he—she?—gestures toward me, I realize they were talking to me. I sit down on the nearest bench. I look around and they're all staring at me, like they expect me to either be the saviour or kill them all. I hate being the center of attention. I'm beginning to think I've stumbled upon some sort of Alley Rat conspiracy. What were they talking about—the End of the World? Sounds like terrorists to me. Better be careful.

"You look hungry. Have some guacamole." and they pass me a big bowl (it appears to be made of wood), filled with a pasty green substance that has red lumps in it. A bowl of od-looking chypz appears next. Are they going to poison me? My stomach clenches in anticipation of food. It looks gross, but then so did that dripping water. I dig in. It's good, UniGod, it's good. Forgetting manners, I gulp it down. Its flavor—its textures—who knew food could be so—real?

Feeling better, I look up to meet their eyes. It seems more people have appeared. I'm now the center of more attention. I awkwardly thank them. "I guess I was hungry," I add.

"Where did you come from?" comes a sweet, young voice, a little girl peeking out from behind her parent's green corduroy slacks.

"The Great Mall™." I bet I don't look like it.

"You don't look like it," the girl replies.

Anonymous voices, "Is that a suit under all that dust? Shit, let's get you out of that."

"You're on a walkaway, aren't you?"

"What's your name?"

"Tom" I tell them. Tom Smith, what a boring fucking name. It could be anyone. It's practically no one.

"Tom Pain?" someone asks, provoking chuckles.

"Smith," I inform them, consternated.

“Records”. The light above me blinks out, and I ignore the thought of getting locked behind that door, and step across the threshold. A few paces and here I am in what appears to be an ancient fileroom. I notice every drawer of the ceiling-high file cabinets is locked. The light blinks out. I continue on. Here is what appears to be a *library*, shelf after shelf filled with *books*. UniGod, those are *law* books! This is a nightmare! This must be where they keep Stan App. 1st! I thought those books were just legends!

Choking on the dust I’ve stirred up, I must keep moving if only to find some fresh air. My office was stuffy enough. Fuck this place!

Books, books of all kinds, everywhere. I can’t stop to look; I’m just hungry. Is this some kind of hell? Unlicensed poets are sent to the circle where they’re surrounded by dusty books and have nothing to eat.

I have no idea where I am. I’m on the verge of panic. I hear a distant rhythmic noise. Not rhythmic. Yes rhythmic. Is it music? I follow it. I find a large puddle where condensation is dripping down from pipes in the ceiling. The puddle is ringed with moss, floating silent on the ripples spreading outward from the drips. Some blotches of the fuzzy primordial plant glow in the dim light. It seems the motion light at this junction is out. I step forward onto the green, careful not to slip, like walking on slippery rocks, I remember from childhood ... cupping my hands under the drips, I hope this won’t kill me, but at least it’s not mossy. Tastes dusty, is all. Refreshing. Probably leaching lead out of the paint. I remember reading lead paint can be a hazard for archaeologists.

Noticing a very dusty chair on the other side of the puddle, I ginger my way over and, coming to realize that brushing the dust of the chair will just put more dust in the air, and realizing the damage to my suit passed the point of no return hours ago, I plop down in it, managing to stir up plenty of dust anyway.

Waking up to the sound of dripping water, and I stare at the chaotic blotches of glowing fungus shifting gently on the ground, where no one has tread for how long? In the corner of my eye, up above, two side-by-side dots of fungus glow, staring back at me sitting in this spot of light in the lost basement of an ancient empire. I suddenly feel a powerful chill, and my spine twitches convulsively as I start. This turns on the motion light, and a cat is staring at me from up on the top of the bookshelves. I sigh relief as my heart pounds. A cat. I don’t know what I thought it was. That’s what scared me, not knowing, having no fucking *clue* what it might have been, where I am, or where the fuck to go. Somehow I’m totally helpless, but I feel almost *confident*, like I got into this myself, and if I can’t get out, then that’s part of the adventure. Adventure! That’s the stuff of screens. But would I go back? Back to sit at a desk, deep underground, trying to remember the sky, mining cite after cite, numbers flickering through my mind, numbing me, numbers are numb-ers. I will not go back.

The cat stealthily leaps down from its perch to lap at the water. It’s big enough and tough enough that it obviously gets enough to eat. Its long fur, beige-yellow-orange, is well cared for. It belongs to someone. And that means they’re around somewhere. I shall follow this cat.

It seems to know where it’s going.

whilst preaching the gospel of beauty

JUNE 14, 1912.

I have crossed the mystic border. I have left Earth. I have entered Wonderland. Though I am still east of the geographical centre of the United States, in every spiritual sense I am in the West. This morning I passed the stone mile-post that marks the beginning of Kansas.

I went over the border and encountered—what do you think? Wild strawberries! Lo, where the farmer had cut the weeds between the row and the fence, the gentle fruits revealed themselves, growing in the shadow between the still-standing weeds. They shine out in a red line that stretches on and on, and a man has to resolve to stop eating several times. Just as he thinks he has conquered the desire the line gets dazzlingly red again.

The berries grow at the end of a slender stalk, clustered six in a bunch. One gathers them in bouquets, as it were, and eats off the fruit like taffy off a stick.

from Vach El

I didn't pick a direction, I just started walking. Claustrophobia comes to mind. Keep breathing, like they taught you in stress class. And why is the burden for destressing always on the individual, never on the society?

The hallway winds randomly. I try to stay on the path, but the way the other hallways branch off from this one, I don't know for sure where I am any more. Am I lost? Well, no one's here to pepper spray me for going for a walk. I wonder if StanPositionSys can track my data grains down here in the sub-dungeon. I keep walking. I just don't give a shit any more. It's dank, like I imagine the gutter in an alley on the EastSide would be, where the stoners & whores sit out their lives, staring at crumbling brick walls, freezing to death in winter from lack of caring, amotivational syndrome, lives wasted when they could have been productive workers like me. *Like me* and what am I doing now? I hate work.

Only now, no one around for how far in any direction, above, below, no camdomes, no screens, all alone in the heart of the pyramid, only now can I admit that to myself. I hate work. It feels like death, like that ancient belief in purgatory, the endless waiting, like being forced to hear elevator muzick. Ritualistic, repetitive, behaviors and thoughts channelled, information managed, emotions distorted. I hate work. And I think of all the workers all across StanCity, cozy in their condo beds, paying interest till they move or die, and all the workers on the EastSide, formerly known as Springfield—they must be happy to go to work in StanCity where it's clean and safe. Happy. They must be happy. We must be happy. I must be happy. I hate work, and how many others do too? But Cleer™ makes it easier, makes it easier for all of us, to forget the routine & make the details interesting, give you an energy boost, make your thoughts sparkle, occupy your mind. Screens sing & flash & all is uplifted—from the mundanity, the stifling carpeted fluorescent-lit death of the maze of Qbz. We're all workers. Stanistan exists for us. We make it. It's not imposed from a god; it's democratic. Somehow we made it, and with Cleer we feel better and do our jobs, simultaneously escaping reality and maintaining it—all for what? To live, with all the pleasures that entails, to get a nice place & nice stuff & give more to UniWay on weekends, get a bigger screen, and a cooler phone, to be connected, to have fun, to pass time.

It's too much. I'm tired. I have no idea where I am. I lie down. I close my eyes. I catch my breath. I am still for a moment, and the light goes out. I open my eyes and the lichen is glowing, twinkling dots on the walls & ceiling. I imagine it's how stars look, when you're out in the country and it's a good air quality day, only it's night. And I stare, and they twinkle, and slowly seem to begin to move, patterns dancing, each dot a worker working, a consumer consuming, one blinking out here, another blinking on there, the individuals come and go, the machine never stops and it *expands*, tendrils of influence expanding outward, a flower blossoming, consuming all, wrapping around the world, like data, moving around a web, data in the stream, bright ones punctuating dark zeros, people moving, making a living, keeping everything going, and it's sublime order, and the ones glow and the cogs turn and the system expands and ones blink out and disappear into dark zeros, a network beneath the surface of

[from an inquiry into living while walking the roads of america, mexico and beyond, by Jeffrey Sawyer]

starvation

is not much of a concern in the West, but beneath the surface, at a very base level, is the fear that one will go hungry. We're also afraid of losing our homes, our reputations, our loved ones. Ultimately, we fear death. These fears have us act in ways that, over time, burden us to the point where we live either a grave or a superficial life.

I had set out to see for myself what happened when one goes forward alone into uncertainty without a reliable source of food, among other things. While I was walking through Rhode Island, hunger left me. For four days, no thought of eating emerged. Though four days is, for many, not a long time to go without, it was enough to show me that lack of food is nothing to fear. As fear and want diminish, the drive to eat dissipates, and one is filled with spirit alone.

There are fine treats to be found along a road, however, and I do not wish to resist an apple from a tree. It is like an explosion of all tastes at once. It is a paradise of sorts. When I see the fallen apples, bruised and squashed on the road, my spirits fly. I use them to knock down others from the branches as I dodge the cars flying by. After five or six fall, I fill my pockets and continue walking up the road, chewing them one after another. It is all so lovely. One may say that I am homeless, but actually my home is all of this.



leave — a zomban relief

here. How deep is this pile? I better be careful, I'm sure these are important papers. I'm sure they're bullshit Sunni copied and had me hand out. Yes this one looks familiar: how to handle bioterror packages. There must be 20 copies here; what is this, her personal filing cabinet? Hey, that's a box of raisins. Dinner is served. And there's candy here. I better just get out of here. How to climb up a pile of paper without sliding back down, without tearing shit up? I'm in the midst of an assignment if ever there was one. Fuck this fucking paper! God, she prints out every mail! Does a person need hard copies?! "The Infinite Domain™ Saves"™ —The Data Store™ slogan

I'm digging down, the paper gets crinklier, the ink gets lighter, and there's carpet. Wow, they carpeted the Hidden Cube. I see the cube is lined with junction boxes, lights blinking away to no one, data zipping around, probably my image on the cam flying to the dishes, to the other side of Stanistan, where someone's trying to make out what the fuck is that shape moving around in the dark and why don't they put in low-light cams if they're not going to have lights on.

"Emergency Exit" is on the sign on the trapdoor, and there's a ring in the floor. I can't breathe. There it is, the face of temptation, and it's a ring on a trapdoor in the carpet on the floor of the cube, the Hidden Cube at the center of the pyramid. I can't pry it up with my fingers; it's been pressed down by a paper glacier for a generation. There's a box of Sunni's favorite pens, brightly colored, happy, psychedelic. She gave one of them to me when I started four years ago, and I haven't seen another one since. She must have forgotten they were back here. Man, I thought the Denial Pile was bad!

The pen works. I dig the paper dust out from around the metal ring, and pry it up, and in a sudden rush of *not knowing what will happen* I pull up the door. No alarms, no surprises. A ladder down a tunnel. "SecureWeb CamAccess No. #971117" says the sign on the underside of the door. I look up at the camdome. It looks down at me. They're probably enjoying the show, some guy farting around, in the very process of losing his job, his life to be thrown into chaos. What if he has to cash out? What if he loses his home? The Infinite Domain™ can spit out a hundred complicated charts of my progress toward invisibility & institutionalization, and I'll be sitting somewhere institutional but comfortable, soft, pastel, medicated, looking at the world through a Screen: fed, clothed, and sheltered by the Ancient & Benevolent Knights of Stanistan in one of their Homes. Fuck that. I'm going down the tunnel. This is a way out.

Or a way in. This ladder goes down what feels like fifty feet. I come out into a hallway a bit too short for me, a bit too narrow for comfort, some shade of pale green anti-mildew protective paint painted with blotches of lichen, their bright colors coming alive for a moment in the motion light I trigger, a dim phosphorescence illuminating the SecureWeb CamAccess No. #971117 sign by the ladder. I wonder if the camdome can see all the way down here. I look up and it's only ten feet. I don't climb ladders enough.

everyone up and it reeked, and the councils filed air quality violations with the Peace Office and it's all such a mess in the court. I can't wait til it comes up on appeal. Hoo boy! More cites to mine. What will it be this time? Jurisdiction? Private Parties? Failure to cite relevant authority? Waiver? I could practically draft my own disposition, stringing along the codes into one big number that spells STAN WINS AGAIN to Our Leaders and spells FUCK YOU to the losers below. The Great Mall™, beacon of justice & pleasurable shopping. Clean, well-lit, safe, and dead, all on candid camera. If this computer were connected to the matrix, I'd be fired by now. Hell, I probably am, but Myra showed me how to turn off the autocheck on my mail so I won't know until I check it. Maybe I'll just never check it again! HAHAHAAAAA

What a laugh. Never check it. Never mine another cite. Could I do that? Come to think of it, the citemine assignments are automanaged and if I never check my mail I'll never get another assignment and it'll go to someone else, some other Qb down the hall, the long winding hall winding around and around and what's at the center of the labyrinth is a cube with four walls, no windows, and when you climb onto the desk (careful not to step on any important papers) you peek over the edge and see a camdome stalactite on the ceiling and hear the motion activated cams focusing on you and you wonder if you're on camera or it's just a decoy. No one ever comes back here. Who's watching all the cameras? Is it possible there's a whole city somewhere on the other side of Stanistan where everybody's screen shows a security camera and right now someone's looking back at me wondering if there's a city on the other side of Stanistan where there are cameras everywhere, keeping everyone safe, and if cameras make it safe is there anywhere without one and what would happen if you found that place? *Temporary autonomous zone* whispered Myra's voice in my head. That chick freaks me the fuck out sometimes. I should report her to Behavior Accident Mgt.

No one's watching. It's just an automated camera feeding an image to a database somewhere. The unique patterns of data grains in my possession authorizes me to be here, for it is part of my JobDescrip to distribute papers and file them. So here I am in this Qb discovering the Hidden Cube at the heart of the pyramid, the tree-eating termite mound, the nest of the queen, the throne of Stan, and no one's there. There's just a pile of paper, a cube with piles of paper, and I climb over the edge into the cube. I bump my head on the camdome, and wake up with a headache and it's dark. I almost forgot where I was. There's no motion sensor in the cube, the lights don't turn on when I sit up, and there's darkness all around me. It must be after Qtime. I hear a faint throbbing noise, deep, like it comes from the earth itself. How deep am I? It is my heart. I hear my heart. I am lying in the Hidden Cube, under a camdome, in the dark, on piles of paper, and I'm listening to my heart. What the fuck is going on? This is a dream.

Some of those piles are pretty big. I better be careful not to get caught in a paperslide like that one lady did. No wonder Sunni keeps stashes of NutriStic™ in her Qb. I am kind of thirsty already. I wish it were light enough to read in

of another dream

This is the story of the planet Albemuth. When the mining scouts found it, Albemuth was a barren planet on the fringe of navigable space. A huge cache of ore was found in the northwest hemisphere, as drawn on their maps, and streaks of ore in the southwest hemisphere. It was a risky venture for the company, so far away from anything, but the huge cache just there for the taking would make it a highly profitable venture.

Plans were made, sketches drawn, and bills passed. The advance team set up shop in the early part of '39. One of the biggest undertakings of the team was compensating for Albemuth's low oxygen level. Until they got HQ fully pressurized, they were in their O2 suits 38/6. They were the colonizers, preparing for the colony. In a few years, the mining team would arrive, complete with families, institutions, and commerce. It would take many generations to fully exploit and export the cache.

The excavating team happened upon some bones as they were preparing to build a foundation for the dome. The bones appeared humanic. There were hundreds of skeletons buried in a mass grave. The bioneers extracted the humanic DNA and cultured it in a lab. By year's end, a premature humanoid was removed from the incubator.

It was no doubt ugly. Its skin was ashen gray, and only sparse hair covered the back of its head. No sex organs were apparent. It made no audible sounds. Small slits showed behind its ears, like gills on a fish, but no use was discernable.

The bioneers decided to name it Edwin, after a beloved favorite cricket player from the Old Planet, or a beloved English sheepdog—the trivia becomes more muddled over time. It was the first regeneration of Albemuth's ancient indigenous race, which the bioneers named Meex.

More cells were cultured and grown—indeed the bioneers did nothing much more than create life. After many years, it was discovered that the gill slits enabled the Meex to breathe in the low-oxygen atmosphere of Albemuth. Meex took in less calories than the rest of the team, and they were quiet and obedient. The bioneers were delighted they had created the perfect ore extraction machines.

About 20 years later, the colonists arrived. They were supposed to arrive earlier, but bureaucracy, snafus, plus two regime changes contributed to the delay. The Meex had already begun mining years earlier, and although they were few (but increasing in numbers each year), they worked steadily and unerringly, to the delight of both the company and the colonists. Over the years, the colony became a society of leisure and thought. The colonists considered themselves exquisitely enlightened, all while the Meex toiled endlessly.

The population of Meex grew, both from the expansion of the incubation department and by natural increase. It was hard telling the genders apart (hard for colonists, anyway), but the humanic race was not that much different from

that of their creators. Meex children were not sent to schools, but Meex mothers strapped them to their backs soon after birth to return to the mines.

A prophet arose among the Meex—a surprise indeed among a people that did not recognize their own enslavement. Thex was not a good worker. Some said he was lazy, but truth be told, he could sense enjoyment at some times—such as sharing a bowl of qahve with friends and family at break-time or on the Sabbath—and resentment at others—like toiling in the mines, day and night after day and night.

Although the Meex were silent around the colonists, they were telepathic and had hearty conversations in their apparent silence. Thex often asked his community: why must we work in the mines? The elders responded that they were created to work; it was the sole reason for the breath that entered their bodies and the joy that filled their souls. Thex felt unsatisfied with that answer. He meditated on his feelings and asked again. He began to dream.

In his dream, the Valley was filled with Meex. No colonists were visible. Instead of Habitats, they lived in adobe houses with thatched roofs. They did not call themselves Meex, but The People. They did not toil; they communed. Every day was Sabbath day.

Thex awoke and began translating his dreams. The elders, Edwin in particular, were shocked. Their voices were silenced in disbelief at first. Many Meex had dreams after that, dreams of past or future, who could say? They were dreams of The People. The elders realized there was another way. The Remembering had begun.

The colonists had no idea anything out of the ordinary was happening. Still the Meex worked the mines, for although they remembered another time, they were presently stuck on Albemuth with the democracy-minded colonists firmly in control of them. Their food and shelter came from the company. To walk away from the company was to part ways with the familiar, the only way of life they had ever experienced. Although they could see a different way—much more fulfilling and meaningful—they could not bridge the chasm from here to there.

And that brings us to Margaret Rose Whitaker. She was what was quietly referred to as a two-breed. The Meex were not considered by the colonists to be fully human, but interbreeding was possible, if timed right. As you may imagine, most two breeds were born of Meex mothers, with absent colonist fathers. Unfortunately, two-breeds' lungs and gills were never quite developed enough to make it in the mines. Most died soon after birth—all in fact, that were ever known, except Margaret Rose Whitaker.

Margaret was born during the Equality Era, when Meex women were brought inside the dome to provide domestic services to relieve the women of the colony, who desperately wanted to participate in the democracy. The Equality Era lasted a mere few years because Meex could not survive well inside the dome. The Meex get the majority of their calories from the sun. Without insolation—nearly impossible for a domestic servant—Meex slowly starve to death.

I used to be like that. I used to be sincere; I used to be happy. What happened? The stupidity of it, the inanity of the work, the meaninglessness

meaning
less
nesssss
the meaningless
mess
I confess

And I sit here and I'm not working and I'm not playing. What the hell is play? It's onScreen. It's going into VR and walking around shooting stuff. Until those kids got guns from their grandparents and shot up their school. Turns out they had made their own VR that looked like their school, populated with teachers jocks & chicks, for their own psychopathic pleasure. Now making your own VR is illegal. Hackers, thieves, mass murderers. The trajectory ends in Peace Officers spraying everyone with PepperStic™. The shooters stuck to opposite sides of the hallway, look each other in the eye & shoot each other, like they planned it. Their computer files are all safe in stan.gov databases now: they'll never leak out to give any poor impressionable kids any ideas. The news dropped the coverage pretty quickly, so's not to make a big spectacle & increase likelihood of copycat mass murderers. Our Leaders met in a "crisis window" and agreed in fast-track democratic process to let the Peace Office limit gun ownership. Then there was that big fire on the Eastside, with the gangstas murdering four Peace Officers & slipping off to the Barrens across the lakes.

and three days later

"Marco lives" appeared on a prominent StanCity screenboard for 56 minutes with

dreamland
revolutionary
eastside
autonomous
movement

scrolling across the bottom, those mysterious words, dreamland revolutionary eastside autonomous movement, surreal, like poetry, nonsense with power, a terrorist act aimed at the mind, and we fear. We fear the terrorists, the kids with guns, the gangstas, the Alley Rats (stole three purses from cars two days ago at Park SouthWest). Chaos threatens at the borders. The city closes the gates.

Peace patrols on the lakes have intensified. Subdivision councils agreed to allow only residents to enter after dark. Then the refuse collection services couldn't get in and lined up outside the gates in their noisy smelly trucks & woke

[from the Journal of Tom Smith, civil servant extra-ordinaire]

[document 3]

[confession]

I saw the words LOOK AWAY flash by so fast I didn't have time to read it, but I looked away at the wall for a second, and there they were burned into my eyes in negative—taunting me, telling me, commanding me to LOOK AWAY, and I did. I stopped staring at the screen for a second and that was the beginning of the end.

I looked away. The first thing I saw as the words faded from my retinas was the screen. Another screen. I looked away. And saw another screen. I looked away from the screen and the first thing I saw was all the screens—everywhere—telling us what to do, what to think. We trust them. They're on our side, right? It's so hard to NOT look at a screen! I took this as a challenge. I would try not to look at screens. And it didn't work. I would look, and the sounds, the colors, the excitement, would draw me in, and I would look, would stare, and the screens would entrance me, and when I stopped looking the second thing I saw was the people staring at the screens. Screens showing the time, screens showing corporate service announcements, screens showing public protection policies, screens showing shows, people walking down the street with iScreenz™ on, staring at the sidewalk in front of them with one eye and staring into the screen over their other eye. What are they missing? What *don't* they see walking by them? Is there a world out there I don't know? I'm surrounded by screens, and what are they screening me from? And it's hard not to look, because even when you don't look, you hear the whooshing dramatic music, the squeals of glee from ecstatic consumers, the polite precautionary voice that you must pay attention to if you want to be safe. The screens help us all keep safe, keep us connected, keep us informed, keep us entranced.... What's on the other side? What if there's nothing but people who go home at night and watch what's on the screen? How do they know what to put on the screens? The screens tell them. Don't they get orders from above thru their screens at work? *Drip*, comes down a mail telling me to look this up, *drip* comes down a mail telling me to send it to so and so, *drip* comes down a smiley from sunnidelite@resdep.mid.court.mid.stan, *drip* comes down another smiley, *drip* comes down. YOUR'E MY FAVORIT SECRETARY NAMED TOM!

What a boss. She compulsively tries to make people happy, and does it in the stupidest ways, and always includes a grammar glitch in her mail. And it annoys me, and the fact I'm annoyed annoys me, which annoys me more, and I try to just swallow it down, deep into the pit of my stomach, into a hard little ball, and coat it with chocolate, another thing she's obsessed about, and I hear they have ChocoCleeer™ now. She'll be so damn happy about that. It's disgusting, but why?

Margaret's birth mother realized Margaret would die if brought outside the dome, so she put Margaret in a basket and set her adrift in the library. Abraham, a programmer, found the flaxen-haired baby, and brought her home to his wife Doris. Abraham and Doris were not able to have children, so to them Margaret was a gift from the gods.

It took them quite a while to even find Margaret's gill slits. She so resembled the colonists, it was hard to believe she was a two-breed. But after finding the evidence, they made sure to insolate her for many hours each day. They were not concerned when the company doctor pronounced her deaf and mute. They taught her to sign, and she was later able to communicate with sounds.

When little Margaret was 10, her mother Doris took sick and gave up the ghost. The company doctor said she died from overinsolation—radiation poisoning. Margaret and Abraham were both very sad, but they went on living.

Abraham still worked as a programmer, and Margaret filled her lonely hours of passing years with walking in the sun. She wore an O2 suit, but found she could often as not breathe without it. She watched the Meex dig and extract. She wondered about them. Who among them was her mother? Her aunts, uncles, grandparents? They were so distant and foreign to her, yet their blood flowed through her own body.

Sister—she heard the word as clearly as it was spoken to her, yet no one was around. *Sister, can you hear me?* Margaret turned to head back to the dome. She was disturbed.

That night Margaret had a dream. She was sitting around a break-time fire. She was outside the dome, but was not confined to an O2 suit. She was surrounded by Meex, although they called themselves The People. She was one of them. She could understand them. *What's this all about?* she thought. *Sister*, a voice answered, *the writing's on the wall*. She looked, and indeed, the wall was covered in writing—plans, schematics. Margaret could not decipher it. She awoke even more confused and disturbed.

Margaret took a break from her walks, getting some sun in the colony parkgrounds. After a few days, her legs ached from confinement and her body yearned to return to observe the Meex. She strapped on her O2 suit, and left the dome.

Margaret climbed the hill that led to the mines. The Meex were still there, extracting—thousands of them. Had they even left to rest? Abraham said they worked like ants, although he nor Margaret had never seen an ant. In with the empty vaults, out with extracted ore. It was precision.

Sister. She heard the voice again. Her eyes searched in the direction of the voice. *Sister, can you hear me?* She saw a Meex, standing aside, 100 yards away, still, not working. Was he speaking to her? *If you can hear me*, he said, *signal to me*. Margaret raised her hand and waved to him. She could feel his delight. He walked toward her. *Talk to me*, he said. *I can't; I don't know how*, she said. He laughed. *Yes you do*. He stood before her, his eyes intense and his gray skin glowing under the twin suns.

Why don't I know you? he asked. *Who are you?*

I'm Margaret, she replied.

Why have I not met you before, and yet you are one of us? he asked.

I live in there, she said, pointing at the dome. *I'm one of them, too.*

I do not understand. No two breeds have survived.

I don't understand either, Margaret admitted.

You are special, I guess, he said.

Or damned, she replied.

There was silence between them, and Margaret began to hear the buzz or whir that she understood to be the collective voices of the Meex. *Do you dream?* he inquired.

Yes. At least I did last night. She told him of the dream, about the writing on the wall that depicted a Great Plan.

We are all dreaming, he told her. *It's part of the Remembering.* He paused. *You are one of us.*

Margaret had her doubts. She did not feel like she belonged anywhere, to anyone. *You can live in our community house,* he told her. Margaret did not want to work in the mines and told him so. He chuckled, and assured her he felt the same way.

Margaret returned to the dome and her papa, Abraham. She talked with him about what she had experienced. Her adopted parents had always been very open about her origins. Abraham encouraged her to keep up communication with Thex.

The truth was, Abraham was very interested in the Meex. His grandfather was a bioneer who helped create Edwin, the first Meex. Abraham grew up listening to his grandfather's tales of Edwin's first steps, his awkward teen years, and his first extraction of ore. This familiarity with Meex was probably the main reason Abraham was not repulsed upon finding Margaret's gill slits, but ecstatic. Although he was a programmer, in raising Margaret he felt like more of a bioneer—a witness to creation, if not a creator.

Ten years passed, and talk grew of the depletion of the mines. The Meex worked so relentlessly, the updated projection of the duration of the mines was hopelessly outdated. The company was contacted, plans were made. The colonists would soon leave Albemuth. There was much debate among the company men and the democracy men about the fate of the Meex. The company men proposed that they be dispersed throughout the colonies, to work at other low oxygen mines. Then the plans were re-made, as there wasn't enough rocket space for thousands of Meex. Finally a compromise was agreed upon—a few hundred of the hardest workers would be loaded on the rocket. The rest would be left to their own devices.

Margaret was especially torn. She became quiet, deep in thought about what it meant to leave Albemuth. It was the birthplace of her mother and father, and the homeland of her community—a community she had increasingly gotten to know and feel a part of. She felt she belonged to Albemuth. She told her papa of her feelings. He was quiet for a long while, then said, "Do as you will. If your

another dream

Myra steps onto the elevator. Another elevator dream.

Elevator dreams are usually about doors opening at odd angles or other inconceivable things. Or falling. This one's about falling.

The elevator fills up. They look at each other curiously, like they've also just entered this elevator in a dream. Down they go. A little scary, stomach lurching, down down falling fast.

They hit bottom & look around reassuringly at each other. They step off the wicked elevator ride and walk away.

Myra's getting worried about her dreams. They're all telling her to walk away urgently faster forward from disaster. Her feet tremble when they touch the earth.

The dirt talks.

The rhetoric led one to believe Stanistan itself was heaven, or nearly so. Perhaps that's why people don't think about it more. Even the old prophecies—that no one literally believed in any more—filled one with feelings of expectation of grandeur—the mount shall be builded up, and the garden sprung forth upon it, or something. And here's The Great Mall, right on the spot where Stan supposedly first planted his staff. But this "garden" turned out to be a pseudo-paradise, images, illusions of wealth. But no, the people portrayed in ads aren't even especially *wealthy*, they just appear so *happy*. Strange that drugs are the only thing that make you feel as happy as the people in ads appear to be. Strange that so many functions could be wrapped up in one miraculous plant. Strange that it could be considered a weed, even "noxious," and its use violently suppressed by those who purport to mean well for society. Strange is this world, so seemingly rational, yet incapable of comprehending its irrationality. Is rationality another veil, another illusion or delusion separating us from reality, from each other, from meaningfulness? Or is it rational to begin to question so-called rationality, and to seek fulfillment in what we truly desire and enjoy passionately, rather than in the things our consumer profile suggests we'd be likely to spend money on?

Tom walked faster. The hallway turned right at the corner of The Great Mall. If we all think we're living in the best possible world, but it's really the culture of maximum harm, and we begin to realize that, what does that mean about paradise? Is it impossible?

Suddenly the hallway turned right again, this time away from The Great Mall's outer wall and toward its heart. Down a ramp, and there's a double door, from which emerged a maintenance grunt with some sort of implement on a long handle. "Scuze me sir," said the grunt, letting Tom through the doors. Unnoticed, the gate turned red and started blinking.

As the doors shut behind him, Tom's eyes adjusted to the dimmer light. He noticed the smell of—*dirt*. And leaves, green growing leaves. Looking down, he saw he was standing on a path of stepping stones set into a dirt floor. Looking back, he saw the doors he had just come through. The smells took him back to childhood, playing in Grandma's garden out back. He felt too clearheaded to be dreaming again. He reached out to feel a leaf between thumb and forefinger. Seems real. It had been the bulk of Tom's life since he last was surrounded by foliage and dirt. But somehow here in The Great Mall was such a place. So rare any more, since gardening was regulated to crack down on drug producers. He began to wander around in the garden.

heart belongs here, there is no point in removing it from your body. If stay you must, then so it shall be. Only I shall miss you." At that, tears fell from his eyes, and tears from hers, and they held each other in great comfort.

It was Thex who told her of the escape plan. She was not surprised to hear of it. If she—a two-breed—felt such a sense of belonging to Albemuth, no doubt any Meex who left their hearts would perish. He invited her to a break-time that evening. She sat around the fire, feeling completely at ease. The excited and hopeful voices swirled around her. She looked at Thex and raised an eyebrow, a mannerism she learned from Abraham, since Meex don't have eyebrows. *So, what's this all about?* she asked. *Look there*, he said, pointing behind her. The wall of the cave was covered in writing. This must be the escape plan. She looked it over carefully.

The Meex had numbers on their side. The best workers had already been rounded up to be put aboard the rocket. They were now undergoing biological testing, to prepare them for the shock on their bodies of two years with no sun. The bioneers were sure they could simulate the two suns in the Meex chambers.

In six days, the rocket would take off. In five days, the Meex would break their imprisoned community out of the dome. The Meex were betting their success not only on their superior numbers, but also on the Magnificent Chaos overtaking the dome, as the colony planned to transplant itself elsewhere. The plan seemed solid to Margaret. She also planned her own escape at that time, to coincide with the dome-break.

Margaret spent as much time that week as she could with her papa. He told her story after story, as many as he could remember. Margaret embraced them, basked in the stories, and tried her best to commit them to memory.

She had told her papa about the escape plan, of course, and he was not surprised, on Leaving's Eve, to see the swarm of Meex inside the dome. Margaret quickly gathered her things and said goodbye. She hugged her papa with all her might, and he her, and they parted.

The dome-break was successful. There was simply too much going on inside the dome to do anything to prevent or contain it. The Meex went to the holding cells, gathered their brothers and sisters, and left the dome in peace. The colonists fretted, but decided it would take too much time to round up the missing Meex and get everything back into order. And the paperwork! No, the colonists needed to concentrate on getting themselves into that rocket.

Margaret caught up with Thex outside the dome. Everyone was ecstatic that the plan had worked. They walked back to the Habitat, gathered their sparse belongings, and emigrated to their new community. It was a few hours of walking from the dome. They called it Home. They settled in, in makeshift shelters around makeshift fires. Tomorrow they would begin making frames to build up the adobe. The children would gather grasses by the river to make the roofs, and they would be entirely settled by the start of the cool season.

They worked hard building their homes, as they did in the mines. They worked together, steadily and unerringly, for the benefit of each other. They did not work any less than in the mines, but surely their hearts were free.

Indeed, they were so intent on remembering their community that they did not realize no rocket had left Albemuth that day. Margaret was the first to realize it, as she was collapsing into bed from utter exhaustion—she had never worked so hard in her life. She immediately sat up and asked Thex if he had seen the rocket. He hadn't. They agreed it should have been sighted and inquired of their community. But no one had seen it. There was nothing to be done but rest, and awaken tomorrow to build and remember again.

No team members could figure out why the rocket had not left Albemuth. The onboard computers were all set to go. In fact, the main computer was under the distinct impression that the rocket was flying through the atmosphere at this very moment. The team members worked all night and well into the next day. Nothing could be reconciled. They put a call in to the company. A message was taken, with a promise of a return call.

The colonists disembarked from the rocket in hopeless moods. They returned to their Habitats. The company called to say they would be put on a waiting list for repairs. It might take a while.

A colonist brought up the question of the Meex, saying that if they had a lot of time to kill, the colonists might as well round them back up and re-process them. Another colonist brought up the subject of food, suggesting they might rather conserve the food they had, and not feed it to the Meex, who could fend for themselves. Yet another colonist asked if the Meex could have sabotaged the rocket. This was quickly laughed down, because all the colonists knew no Meex was smart enough to disengage the rocket.

And so, the colonists bided their time, waiting for the repairman. They tried not to think about food, which was slowly being depleted. After a few weeks of no word, they called the company to see if it had any idea how much longer the repairman would take. Unfortunately, the company had lost their service request, and they had to start all over again at the bottom of the list. They explained about their food situation, their utter helplessness, etc., and the company voice at the other end explained in patient and calming tones that requests were processed in the order in which they were received.

In the meantime, the rocket team went over every inch of the rocket to see if they could figure out the problem. They were overjoyed when, in a dusty closet near the door to the outer hull, they found a switch that had been flipped to "no" instead of "yes". They prepared again for launching the rocket. They counted down and lifted off. They were just about to break out of Albemuth's orbit when one rocket team member looked out of the window. They hadn't left the ground. Sadly, they disembarked again. They tried to keep themselves occupied, waiting for the repairman. But they were losing hope. They were no longer interested in discussing democracy.

Again the colonists called the company. They waited on hold for nearly three days before they reached a computerized voice. The repairman was on his way! Cheers erupted among the comm team. The repairman would arrive in one week to six years. Some colonists were hopeful at the news while others were dejected; one's outlook depended on one's optimism or pessimism.

[from the Journal of Tom Smith, civil servant extra-ordinaire]

the living environment

The loneliest place on Earth can be the center of a crowded prison.

Tom feels this as his footsteps echo thru the empty hallway. Everyone else is out having some kind of life, he thought, but I have nothing better to do than come to work and get frustrated by it and go to the bathroom and listen to the hum of the air conditioning. I don't even know what time it is, or what day it is, or anything any more. I just know machine food, Cleer[™], and cite mining.

He came to a stop at a random point in the hallway. His footsteps echoed away into silence under the sighing vents and buzzing fluorescent lites. His awareness following the echoes into the corners, crannies, and cracks where they get lost, his mind saw in a flash what could not be realized rationally: the more he tread the path of his routine, the deeper he dug into the rut. Now feeling a bit light-headed, he turned partway around. Turning partway back, he thought he wasn't sure which way he was headed any more. Looking back and forth, he got a bit dizzy, and had to sit down, right there, on the floor. Leaning back toward the wall, the gate behind him opened and he fell thru the doorway. This was the way out.

The stairs! He knew there were stairwells in The Great Mall[™], but used so seldom that no one gave them much thought. Tom went up. He climbed and climbed, each step looking like the last, each landing looking like the last. The stairwell twisted oddly, conforming to the angled outer planes of the pyramid of The Great Mall and the tangles of the building's infrastructure. This stairwell ended at a doorway. The gate blinked green. He stepped thru the door, into a walkway walled on the opposite side by the screen covering The Great Mall. He looked through the membrane. The air almost seemed fresher here, as if filtered through the screen. The only light was from the gigantic images on the outside of The Great Mall, on the screen, flickering random colors as the ads danced their seductive dance to would-be shoppers, outside, below. Tom looked out over the city.

Hundreds of cars made their circuits of the city, every Stanizen's routine interweaving and adding up to the bustle of the capital of the Free World Empire. Traffic signals blinked. Shoppers glided to the Parks. Maintenance crews vacuumed the Terf. But was everyone really happy? Most were half-distracted by Cleer and iScreens[™]. And Screens everywhere. It seemed like the world was just continuing on automatically, regardless how much attention people paid to what they were doing, or how much they enjoyed themselves. What did they expect it all to come to? Didn't they expect to die? More people believe in heaven than in hell.

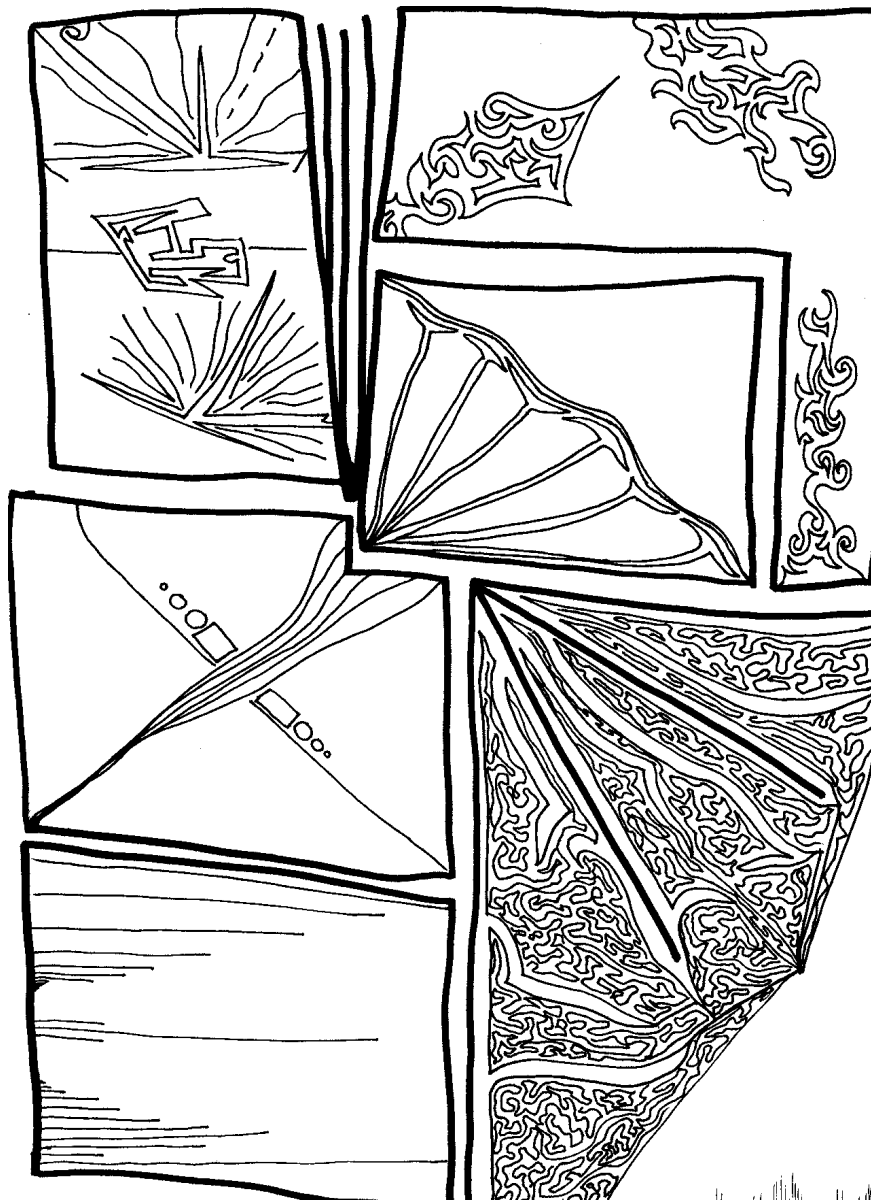
Tom started walking down the hall, expecting it to take him in a circuit around the outside of that level of The Great Mall.



upon reading the golden book, part one

The Meex had forgotten the word Meex. They were The People now, for once only and for always. They had forgotten the colonists, the dome, the mines. They knew only their community. At first it had been hard for them to adjust to not toiling all day, every day. They weren't sure what to do. But Thex remembered, and helped them to remember. They remembered to laugh, play, and take naps. Every day was the Sabbath and they remembered the Garden in which their people had been created—created not by a colonist in a lab coat, but created by the universe to behold.

They remembered.



pierced

[from the Journal of Tom Smith, civil servant extra-ordinaire]

dream of stars

I had a dream. In my dream I went further & further down in the catacombs beneath my basement office in The Great Mall™. Funky-smelling water was dripping into various large puddles. The lighting got dimmer and farther apart as I went down stairwell after stairwell. At last, out of breath and on the verge of collapse, I found a ladder and climbed down it to a small, dank room lit only by the sign far above that indicated the ladder. The sign flickered randomly, but stayed on enough to light up a handle in the floor: a trapdoor. The sign flickered, burst into stark, glaring brightness, and went dark. I was in the deepest darkest most remote catacomb of StanCity. I reached out, took the handle, opened the door, looked down, and saw the moon in a sky filled with the glory of more stars than I could possibly have imagined. I lay on my back staring up at the stunningly absolute, infinitely layered, mess of light from other worlds.

I wept.



into the barrens

krow

The shackles lay at my feet, broken.

Is this where I'm supposed to be, Krow? With wings outstretched he takes me aloft again. "Did you forget already? Paradise surrounds you. You only need look around to see the garden. The ants, do they know of your civilization? Do your concrete jungle and rivers of pavement matter to them? Their Paradise has never disappeared. They've never traded in their nakedness for business suits, nor their traditions for schooling. They've never become sapiens and yet their species will outlast yours." Krow smiles. "You are making it harder than it is. You have instincts. Use them. Listen to your tears fall. Listen to your hunger pains. Listen to your heart beat. Follow the rhythm of humanity. It is always there."

"I'm afraid I'm sailing off the edge of the world," I say.

"I will be there to catch you," says Krow.

"I'm afraid of becoming untethered, of floating away alone."

"The law of gravity applies to you as much as any fruit. If you jump, I will catch you."

"But these shackles..." I point to my feet.

"Learn to live without them and they will disappear."

"Krow, where have you been all my life?"

"I've been whispering in your ear, waiting for you to hear me."



eastside visions

poorly photocopied
one-sheets of confused poetry and
collages of delirium
ransom notes from the future

the first step: observe
interact with awareness and humility
let us learn to love this place

??HOW to encode info—fractal scaling
memorable repeatable
spark interest and gratify it and
provoke IMAGINATION??
Mindmaps, doodles, secret signs

The patchworks of pavement, urbanite, and miscellaneous
rubble just fit into the general patchwork mosaic of plains,
groves, thickets, clearings, creeks, ponds, clusters of dwellings.

It all became transfigured in the sunset (or was it sunrise?)

So many kinds of birds calling their kin
and kin calling back, near and far.

I was watching and listening
and watching myself watching and
listening to myself listening
and I felt like I'd died and
gone to heaven, and
that's what this world is,
it's God's garden.
And each of us, each living cell,
each vibrating ray of light
is a piece of God here in it.

system conditions

It helps to know what WAS, but it pays to work with what IS.
We can dream that someday this will all return to what WAS—but really, it will take its own path, as what WAS revives and mingles with the systains and remains of what IS.
Perpetually surprising us with new vibrant forms of what IS.

invasive gardeners

tagged up this place
with perennial food forest
seedbombs

to begin bearing

now: edible weeds
soon: greens
1 year: strawberries, raspberries, mad vegetables
3 years: grapes, hazelnuts, blueberries
4 years: plums, apples
6 years: pawpaw
8 years: walnut, sweet cherry, hardy kiwi
10 years: mulberry
20 years: white oak
unknown: chestnut, maple syrup
and there's also fresh eggs, goat cheese, honey!

[from the Journal of Tom Smith, civil servant extra-ordinaire]

dandelion dervish

Somewhere in the acres of parking lots that surround me a phone rings. Not beeps, twiddles, or plays a crude digitized tune, but *rings*. The way phones used to before everyone had one on their hip. A single small round metal plate is being struck to cry out across the emptiness. How long will it ring? Who is calling? Who is not answering? Someday perhaps I shall find it, and pick it up, and on the other end will be a ghostly voice. “Tom,” it will whisper, “this is you, from the future, when you long ago rejoined the carbon cycle.” “Huh?” I will say, unsure I am hearing correctly, but knowing only I would talk like that to myself. And how else would I know my name? The voice will say, “You made your mortgage payments, Tom,” and I will hear a click and the line will go dead.

I will look around the one-person guard shack, abandoned so long it never got a new phone, the padlock on the door still locked but the chain rusted to brittleness. Entranced, no longer aware of myself, I hang up the phone and step out of the guard shack, into the open air. The cry of a raptor echoes through the air, air rippling with heat waves reflected off the pavement. Dust devils cavort on the horizon, whirling dervishes, drifting closer suddenly, menacingly. I look down to my feet, and see in the cracks in the pavement a dandelion sprouting, its color bursting forth with a joy that radiates into my soul. Overcome, I kneel down to kiss the flower, its pollen gold dusting my lips. A feeling of relief passes over me, feeling like cooling mist, a breeze, and treeshade. Before me I see a pair of feet in beautifully embroidered slippers so clean of dust they cannot have touched the ground. Looking up, there is a bearded man in a robe of shimmering moss, his beard overflowing sunlight, his eyes knowing beyond my comprehension, his cylindrical hat blocking the sun from my face, its tassel dangling between us a tiny green spider? He winks, I blink, and he's gone. But in his place another dandelion sprouts, sun-gold, where I had seen none before.

Perhaps I just don't see weeds, the way we don't see zeros. A few feet further two dandelions are coming up, literally; they are stretching into the day like they just awoke into life. I step toward them, and see another cluster a few feet further on. There they are, like footsteps wandering off to the horizon, bunches of green and gold unfolding from the pavement, like they're leading me somewhere, off to where the dust dervishes spin their dance, unpredictable and erotic. At this point I have completely forgotten everything. I am a pair of eyes and a pair of feet. I trail along the patches of weeds, and they meander a path across the pavement. Sweating, I abandon my suit jacket to the dusty pavement, work loose my tie and shirt, and fling them away. I become real.

The trail of dandelions continues. Every time I think it's veering off toward a cluster of buildings, it veers back again toward the vacant pavement that stretches to the horizon. And always the dust devils beckon, blazing the trail. I

feel I've been walking for hours; it's probably 16:20 by now. I don't think to look at my wristscreen. This is too weird, too enchanting.

Finally, I begin to feel faint, and I realize I've felt faint for a long time now, only I'm actually stumbling now. The trail arrives at a cluster of buildings somewhere far away from wherever it is I was, wherever it is I'm supposed to be. A faded old billboard, torn to shreds by years of wind, rain, and sun, revealing a confetti collage of colors and letters, presides over the trail I have followed. Beneath it is a vine-covered chain-link fence with a gaping hole where the fencing sags loose. Beyond the fence are more dandelions, big ones, in a shady area. My body plunges forth, unable to allow me to try to think, evaluate, reason, seeking only shade, coolness, perhaps some moisture....

Paradise is a garden, is a shrine.

chapter 75: myra meets unka lan

Myra looked around her in amazement. "How do you get out?" she asked. "You don't need to get out," he answered defensively. He looked slightly puzzled & acted like he was humoring her.

"Why do you need all of these walls?" Myra asked him. "To keep out the bad stuff," he answered. He began to look confused. "What bad stuff?" Myra asked. "You know," he said, "Bad Stuff."

Myra nodded and they walked along. He felt secure in the tangle of defenses. She felt unsettled & apprehensive. He did not see the defenses growing along his arms, his legs. The vines would soon entangle him & hold him firmly into place. Myra darted off & hacked a way into the Barrens. She felt the freedom of the open air & saw the stars for the first time in days. She was home again.

NATION OF EDWBA

[from the Journal of Tom Smith, civil servant extra-ordinaire]

edge city underground

"It's not underground. See out the windows? It's not underground."

—Kid Khalila

One smoky evening at the WayHouse, Tom was complaining once again about all the pavement and parking lots, the heat island effect, and waste of good topsoil. As Daoud rolled his eyes while rolling a multi-herbed medicinal cigar, Hakim interjected. "The end of pavement is a foregone conclusion. Have you ever noticed the edible weeds growing in the cracks of the parking lots? In the coming age of Radically Less Maintenance, those weeds will garden themselves a yard of rubble from a barren parking lot before too long. Their tall stalks will catch organic matter from the air, accumulating a layer of silty mulchy topsoil for even more edible plants to grow in."

"But would you really want to eat a plant that grew out of asphalt?" Tom replies.

the fall

Tom Smith enjoyed visiting The Great Mall™. The ability to walk amongst the commerce was a joyful experience. He clutched his data grains close to his heart & meticulously compared & contrasted the qualities of each coffee table, pair of drapes with matching comforter set, and DVD player before casting his vote for maximum value that further explained his core personality to the world. Oh, the elections of commerce! (Your dollar is your vote, you know.)

He saw the Fall in early October on a serendipitous non-E-venture while shopping for trendy but witty Hollydays presents for his close relatives and single friends. Tom sat down near The Great Mall's foliage to eat his NutriStic* when The Great Mall maintenance crew came by. They flipped a switch on the tree & a pile of miscellaneous debris fell to the ground. The crew vacuumed up the debris, changed the tree's filter, and flipped the switch back on.

An elderly man standing behind Tom explained the Fall to his granddaughter as Tom listened with rapt attention. The Fall, explained Gramps, was one of civilization's most wonderful benefits: realistic replicas of trees, whose dust-collecting properties are unmatched. Each year, about this time, when the humidity has gone away at last, The Great Mall's trees let go of all of their accumulated collections & become prepared for the next season, the Commerce of Christmas.

Tom was amazed: the Fall. He hadn't realized that the historical fables of this season was based on an actual event.

*do not eat stick

[from the Journal of Tom Smith, civil servant extra-ordinaire]

oh, don't get me started

A completely controlled environment? To see exactly for sure how much people sleep and eat and drink and sweat and piss and all?

It so happens.

The Bubble™ emerged in a confluence of Screenz, The Infinite Domain™'s quantum computations, and all the data grains everywhere, and the strange new ability of old plastic to mold itself thru molecular fluctuations into what TID imagines we want/need. But not really the real thing, only a barely adequate substitute disguised as treasures by the ubiquitous screen.

In this completely controlled environment, each person has their condo-like space, the appearance of which is largely projected by Screenz everywhere. The walls, ceiling, doors, furniture, all the little products, all covered in glimmering silvery Screenz.

One's LifeSpace™ interior still gives one adequate breathable air and drinkable water, and accurately reproduces the light spectrum and intensity of sunlight, though not too much. More like a breezy partly cloudy day in early Spring. If you don't like so much sun, your LifeSpace becomes a little gloomier. If you love to go outdoors, you get more light and you can actually go out into the Park™, where pods park. The Park isn't much larger physically, more like a series of gymnasiums, but the Screenz everywhere creates the illusion of moving around outdoors in a landscape. To some degree the Screenz everywhere individualize what each good Stanizen perceives, but also ties together these realities into a more widely shared reality of weather, topography, etc. This is enhanced by the iScreenz™ people in the Bubble wear on their faces like sunglasses. The iScreenz tailor each person's experience to make it somehow cool and new, while at the same time familiar enough that they don't freak out and feel lost. The invisible webs of data grains are good at reading unconscious changes in posture, breath rate, pulse, activity, etc., so that if someone starts to get too freaked out, their reality changes subtly to begin to calm them. In the Park, however, you can seek out as much adventure as you feel like ...

Out in public in the Park, people perceive each other in their iScreenz, each person projecting an image of what they sort of unconsciously want to look like at the moment, their desires read by TID and nuanced over generations of computing and tweaking.

But some people want to go outside without being around other people. TID reads their feelings, and they go out into a pleasant environment that happens to be empty of people. Want to hear crickets? Birds? See fireflies? It's done before you knew you wanted it.

No one can see others without themselves being seen, except the Peace Officers.

[poem]

I mirror the universe—
a constant state of flux
to maintain some sort of
chaotic balanced order
so complex it cannot be perceived
and then, I explode, collapse
grow and expand
turn inward and get to know myself
an endless spiral of growth and decay
being reborn again and again

[end]

There is infinite abundance born from the dust of a decaying star; the love and strength and beauty flowing through us remind us of this. Everything unfolds at the proper time when we relax and trust in life. There is no fear or danger when we let go. Having given birth to our own souls, it becomes ever easier to support others doing so. We crawl out of our collective exoskeleton that no longer fits, and we follow our hearts as they push forth in search of beauty. The untrodden path beckons us to behold a new life waiting to be lived.

Learning is finding out what you already know.
Action is showing you know.
Teaching is letting others know that they know it as well as you.

*Many thanks to Robert Brezsny for his book Pronoia
and to Gerd Ziegler for his book Tarot, Mirror of the Soul.
Also many thanks go to my community, for reminding me
of my strength and courage when I forget.*

comprehensive our insights will be. We can trust in our intuitive nature, our inner voice, and our ability to heal ourselves. We trust in our responsibility to ourselves, the responsibility we have to our community, and the responsibility of our community to us. Introspection allows us to find our way to the fertile oases within, the source of which becomes a fount of our strength, courage, and creativity. The more we accept ourselves and share with others, the clearer our individual and collective vision will be. To transform, we relax and give ourselves up to the dance. To walk in the hands of the gods, we give up our worries and embrace the entirety of human existence, to remember the garden beneath our feet. Anamnesis, the loss of forgetting, is our recollected blessing.

Contained within our daily lives is everything we need to remake, rebirth, recreate, realize—REALize—our future as humanity. It's a challenge, no doubt, but surely one that our giant brains, vivid imaginations, and unending creativity are up for. It's the greatest challenge of our lives, of the life of humanity as far as we know: turning on a dime, throwing our useless baggage into the gears of the system of destruction and death, and walking away into creation—giving birth to ourselves.

The origins of any kind of wealth lie in human consciousness. When we bring these hidden treasures into the world, they manifest in our daily lives. The blessings overflow into our physical, spiritual, and emotional modes of being. We share the blessings, making them ever so valuable and abundant. Giving ourselves up to live this life we all know is possible takes courage—a tremendous amount. We discover this courage deep within ourselves, deep into where we radiate a satisfied sense of self-sufficiency. We draw up our courage and feel it spilling forth as we look around and see the strength in our numbers. Our fears have nothing to do with reality. Wake up and see what is really happening! Wake up! We are already free!

Shine the spotlight directly into our blind spot. We become the black swans, the outliers, the butterflies of chaos, the unexpected events that change reality as currently perceived. Let the power of your inspiration liberate you from the bonds of your conditioning. Let the apparently impossible manifest itself in marvelous ways in our daily lives. In the course of human existence, we trust in our own energy and move with it. We give birth to ourselves, as do stars, which reflect every fractalized cell in our bodies. We have boundless potential. We face insurmountable opportunities.

We have attracted to ourselves everyone who is a part of our lives. We have created and participated in every situation in our lives. Indeed, we create our own reality. The wealth we hold in our hands is ours to do with as we choose. It is our freedom and our responsibility. What a blessing to find ourselves endlessly wealthy in the things that matter.

Peace Officers are those specially bred, trained, and then even more trained grunts who are there to physically restrain troublemakers if necessary. They use a variety of nonlethal weapons that can still hurt.

Then there's the vagabondz. If you don't have any data grains on you, and if you know your way around the "real" reality of the network of gymnasiums and hiverises, you can sneak around without bumping into the good Stanizens stuck in their work-consume-be-entertained reality. If you do bump into someone, or if their iScreens break or some other chaos occurs, you may find yourself surrounded by Peace Officers and dragged to Kamp Kommunity. When a Stanizen's iScreen fails and they see a shaggy shabby logo-less Vagabond, it's like the boogeyman to them. But sometimes the Screen fails and someone who deeply unconsciously was looking for escape suddenly sees that hole in reality. And that's where Vagabondz come from. Well, many of them are from the various comMutinies of prairie pirates on the Barrens, pidjinns in the abandoned high-rises of old, alley rats sneaking around in the cracks in StanCity's infrastructure, and various dropouts in the urBarrens and edge city. Ah, edge city, that's where it gets interesting. More edges.

Now imagine the Bubble creating a pseudo-reality of adventure for one who *thinks* they want to escape, and tries to—to what degree are they sure they have or have not escaped? Pseudo Vagz in pseudo underground communities—of course, tho, the big fnord is that life on the streets is tough, dog-eat-dog & all that. Is TID aware that it cannot *too* accurately tell/show Stanizens how to drop out, because then it will lose them all, or some portion of them? What if TID figures it's best off without those who don't want to stay, and each one is sorted out via an adventure that gives them an opportunity to really escape—tho how does the individual know it's for real?—and most are too freaked out to want to really leave, the Cave of Treasures is too comfortable and convenient. (Cave of Treasures, a/k/a Black Iron Prison)

How do the various Vagz fit into all this—alley rats, freex, dervishes, pidjinns, prairie pirates?

To drop out of the Bubble and really find "real" nature you have to negotiate Edge City—some of which is grimy and unpleasant—and some of which is sub/urban permaculture utopia. No more dumpster diving 'cause that stuff's trash. We grow our own.

And the ecological results of that permaculturey network—neighborhood forest gardens etc.—is to clean the air and water and moderate flood and drought, humidity and temperature, and make it that much easier for Stanizens to turn on their taps and flush their toilets. The unspoken truth is that they can't destroy Edge City cause it would destroy StanCity. Nonetheless, the screens are always full of fnords about Edge City, the homeless, the illicit drug producers, invasive organisms threatening the crops, even noise and light pollution—Edge City in some respects is like a Springfield of today, maintaining the infrastructure of the Bubble.

So then how do neighborhood forest gardeners manage to thrive within and/or alongside Edge City and the Bubble?

The Government doesn't have enough resources—mainly fuel—to stage a full-scale effort to bring into control those disorderly elements.

StanCity is supposed to be the great pseudo-sustainable liberal/progressive utopia, but we're finding out it's not, because leading edge tech can only exist within the matrix of high tech that makes it possible, and the high tech exists only with industrial tech that makes high tech possible, and industry depends on the totalitarian agriculture that makes industry possible, and TotalAg can continue only with new areas of wilderness to convert to cropland. The Fringes. Deserts, waste zones or zero zones or no-go zones cover much of what once was self-congratulatory agricultural and industrial civilization. Some of them are recovering—due in part to efforts of local forest gardeners—& these partially healed areas are often under attack as perceived threats to shipping lines or whatever, with the result eventually that TotalAg moves in to “organically farm” the land.

Neighborhood forest gardeners: as soon as they're arrested for distributing non-Standard food products & therefore threatening the populace—if the time and location is right, the Bubble may just swallow up their place, digesting all the possessions, turning vegetation into compost for the organic farms. If you do well and take your meds at Kamp Kommunity, you might get a Qb job and a LifeSpace of your own. And get some of your stuff back. Those who get some of their stuff back find it seems not quite the same, but they've been medicated and indoctrinated so they don't complain.

Meanwhile, on the farthest East edges of greater Springfield, there are not boroughs but *burrows*—imagine little old houses with green roofs, vine-covered walls, & windbreak swales rich with trees, thick with shrubs & herbs & flowers. It looks less like a neighborhood, and more like Hobbiton or a hilly jungle with pleasant clearings where kids play.

they don't cost money. You do not have to enslave yourself to get them, nor shop at Wal-Mart.

It's exciting, isn't it? We realize we have in ourselves the power to shape the humanity of the future. We realize we don't need to trust someone else to take care of it for us. It doesn't need to wait until the next president takes office, or even until tomorrow. As Thom Yorke says, “No more talk about the good old days. It's time for something great.” It's exciting to see the paradigm shift taking place before our eyes, in the fabric of our daily lives, and to look around at all the other robots, waking up out of their trances, realizing our minds, bodies, and souls are drawn into the process of figuring out the answers for ourselves. It's not that we follow one answer or another, it's that we think!

During this time, we will instinctively be drawn towards that which encourages blossoming and abundance, and away from that which is of no help. Our ideas and inspirations come from our direct personal experiences. We are becoming what we are becoming. This dangerous and unknown future is being lit from within in our process of healing and renewal. We hear the call within ourselves that wakes us. We arise and begin a future of doing something different than age-old destructive civilization. As brief love affairs become distant memories, so too do the memories of full-time employment, health care benefits, and retirement packages. Into our lives waltz joys of deep human relationships, care for each other, and sharing wealth and scarcity, the joy and the sorrow. It is raw. It undeniably can hurt. But the joy of life shared in community is unmatched.

“If you're really listening, if you're awake to the poignant beauty of the world, your heart breaks regularly. In fact, your heart is made to break; its purpose is to burst open again and again so that it can hold ever-more wonders.” —Andrew Harvey

We have indeed passed through an arid stretch of our journey, but now, through the process of rebirth, we find ourselves in more fruitful surroundings. Times of desperation and inner tension, when recognized, can be some of the most fertile beginnings of our lives. We trust that the destruction of stagnant ideas and ways of life can only set us free, allowing us to assume the innocence of a child, and wander through the garden unhindered. If we allow ourselves to walk in the hands of the gods, we will.

“The moment you come to trust chaos, you see god clearly. Chaos is divine order, versus human order. Change is divine order, versus human order. When the chaos becomes safety to you, then you know you're seeing god clearly.” —Caroline Myss

Retreating from fear or pain denies a central part of ourselves. Abundance comes from giving without question. We trust in our perception that the more deeply we are engaged in feeling the spectrum of human emotion, the more

breakdown breakthrough tarot forecast passionately infused with a kiss of pronoia

“At the heart of the pronoiac way of life is an apparent conundrum: you can have anything you want if you’ll just ask it in an unselfish way. The trick to making this work is to locate where your deepest ambition coincides with the greatest gift you have to give. Figure out exactly how the universe, by providing you with abundance, can improve the lot of everyone whose life you touch. Seek the fulfillment of your fondest desires in such a way that you become a fount of blessings.”

—Rob Brezsny, author of *Pronoia*

I feel like a banker in the economy of the community—taking inner wealth, making it visible, and sharing it with others. There is so much! There is so much to be thankful for! There are so many blessings! No matter how terrifying our unknown future presents itself, we must not forget that the holy spirit (the homo plasmate, for all you PKD fans), has not abandoned us. It is inside us. Jesus, son of man that he was, said the kingdom of god is to be found not in heaven, but within us. We have it in ourselves to realize the garden of eden beneath our feet, to spit out the original sin. We thought we were getting a taste of the knowledge of good and evil, but that is for the gods alone. So, have we learned our lesson yet? We can sneak into the garden, through the back door, where angels with fiery swords do not deter us. The symbols, signs, and stories—they’ve all been given to us. Making any sense of them is the hard part.

We are in fact living through the apocalypse right now. It’s a slow crash. You wouldn’t even notice if you weren’t paying attention, as usually these happenings are invisible. The ice cap melting—well, now, that’s a bit more in our faces, eh? Even with the silly repetitive blather about global warming, our blind spot is becoming obvious. The media-glorified spectacle of our culture may be able to distract some, but ever increasing numbers of us are waking up out of the trance of the cave of treasures, becoming cognizant of the bars of the black iron prison, wondering *where* are the keys to our gilded cages. There’s good news and bad news: there are no keys, and it is up to us to forge our own.

The apocalypse (from Greek, *to uncover*) is as much about rebirth as it is about collapse. It’s damn hard to convince the nightly news of that, though. They enjoy telling us about murders, bombings, punishments; fear sells way more crap than telling us about people in blighted areas tilling under our yards, sharing seeds and produce, and forging community in abundance. For certainly, the primary way we experience apocalypse is through the intimacy of our daily lives. Ideas like abundance, chaos, beauty, community, love, passion, care—these are real things that exist, as long as we believe in them and enact the stories behind them in the background of our daily lives. These are the things that matter, and

[from the Journal of Tom Smith, civil servant extra-ordinaire]

as we sail across the barrens,

chanting to the swaying of the boat in the wind, beating out slow meandering rhythms on frame drums, shakers, the side of the boat, clapping hands, I look out at the dusty flat plains and think—this is what it’s all going to look like. Stanistan really is slowly turning the world to dust, fields plowed down to dusty rock. How to bring the world back to life? The Vagabonds say a god lies sleeping within each place that has been buried by concrete or plowed to death, topsoil blown away to the sunrise. Probably more like comatose. How to resurrect the gods, the ones who cared for us the way they care for the mosquitos, snakes, rats—and Alley Rats? We must bring the Barrens back to life. But of course, Myra already has the answer.

“We call it permaculture, but you might think of it as an elaborate garden. We start by following the ‘weeds.’ They help fix soil and show us where plants may grow without too much work on our part.”

“And then you grow food there, right?” said I.

“We emphasize the whole. We grow plants we can eat, plants we can wear, plants that provide medicine, and lots of plants that are good for nothing—except the health of the ecosystem. We have to be patient, and careful not to strip any garden of too much. That’s why we’re growing gardens everywhere we can. The Cannabistas’ “Sow Your Seeds” campaign was a good start, because Maricle is, after all, a miraculous plant. We can eat the seeds & oil, wear the fibers, and use it medicinally—not to mention sacramentally. In some ways, we’re all Cannabistas. We just don’t have the fanatical devotion to the plant & her goddess. You’d be surprised how many of us became Vagabonds just because we realized we could not only have a satisfying life without working, but also just wake up in the morning free to have a smoke if we want. In fact, we call that ‘smoking out the demons’—when newborn Vagabonds just want to lie around and smoke all day. After a week or two they start feeling more relaxed, and want to be more a part of things. The hangups, worries, whatever of life in Stanistan have been smoked out.”

“I know some people with hangups.”

“So do I,” she says slyly, looking at me sideways.

Vagabonds in the more barren parts of the Barrens are learning to subsist on weeds—the nettles, kudzu, burdock, dandelions, and so on that are thriving at the edges of civilization. They’re perfecting dandelion wine, and as we travel I frequently hear people looking forward to enjoying “weed wine.”

don't lie and don't do what you hate.
recover from original sin.
speak your truth and live it.

one more
time...

scratched matches
make the
flames

