

Deus Non Machina: A Compilation

By Christopher Winn

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POETRY

I. Zen

For Patricia Peck.

Just to be as other animals are
Ne'er with mind wandering to things afar
Breathing deep sweet breeze 'neath rays of our star
Contented, knowing no worries to mar
Life, nor regret that death does heaven bar

II. Ode to the Smartphone

Glower, ill-postured, by unnatural light
Into cupped hands floating at the navel
Strained, craning, as though not seeing aright
While mantis-thumbs strike the minute spatial
Setting symbols with a terse press of flesh
Sent swarming from antenna to cable
Teething at a lip, thirsting to refresh
Haunted by the lonesome weight of the net
Which has snared no stimulus in its mesh
'Til the catch comes in, palmed as though well-met
Lecherously dilated iris
Wolfing down the hollow accomplishment
Out the pulp of bamboo and papyrus
Germinates this most seductive virus

III. Reply to Shakespeare's 6th Sonnet

“Evil comes to us men of imagination wearing as its mask all the virtues. I have certainly known more men destroyed by the desire to have wife and child and to keep them in comfort than I have seen destroyed by drink and harlots.”

-W.B. Yeats, *Estrangement: Extracts from a Diary...*

Already winter covers us like lace
And summer fled despite what thou hast willed
To season's cycling you may turn your face
Yet seen or not by it your blood is chilled.
Speak not of saucy use but hear my plea
Oft misers who steadfastly keep alone
Are possessed of far greater currency
In peace of mind than families overgrown.
Know all contentment is had from the start
To impoverish or enrich what we see
How many die bewildered in their heart
Lacking this self-sufficient clarity.
Two never found by becoming a pair
What individually was absent there.

IV. Death Be Wise

For Trinity.

Would that we could live as already dead
Benumb the aching in secretive head
That hungers for silence as though 'twere bread.
Contentment found upon the social lawn
To tarry amongst them, not hasten on
In mortal wanderlust like fleeting faun.
Bedecked in an earthly garb, unsuited
To we phantasms which form alluded
Raiment lightly clasped, darkly denuded.
Becoming, unwilling, what we despise
Fading, falling, in slow-motion demise
Spying in mirrors what must be excised.
The fount of our pain, the light in our eyes
Assured of this, what else but death be wise?

V. An Oft-Pleasing Hell

Hail unto our home, an oft-pleasing hell
Of feeding, fucking, fighting—birth to knell
As farmers, parents, and warriors devout
Tilling fields, birthing children, plotting rout.
Strength and simplicity like calluses
Form and shield from decadent malices
The virtuosity of savagery
To love both life and its mortality.
Otherwise tempted to affix a god
To this godlessness, immortally trod
Forgoing forever death's terminus
Stagnating rather in fear and hubris.
Music of this world, bittersweet in mood
A crucial yet hastening interlude.

PROSE POETRY

I. The Shell

For Franklin 'Woody' Peck.

At my feet a Rorschach of sweat, brow
indiscriminate as Pollock's brush, throttling knurling like an
assassin of iron, gripping the scruff of the bar as a bitch
does her pup, knees bent, teeth grit, veins pumping
irrational ire, forcing this 200-pound self to raise its equal
like a necromancy of doppelganger evil, calluses smoking
now, fingers creaking, pelvis thrusting forth with a gyrating
slap, now free to lower the burden offering-like unto its
mat, rise and rest as Pompey statuesque over murdered
Caesar, or wearing my white belt as though it were black,
joints locked, collar constricting, each simulation a
hypothetical street-kill allayed by a friendly tap, high on the
exhilaration of jiu-jitsu strangulation, practicing thoroughly
an honorable masochism, never saying no to another loss,
starkly aware of who is—and I am not—the boss,
immobilized by my betters, their hands and feet my fetters,
soul stirred by this humility ballet, ego rattled by placebo-
death administered repetitively, then to the woods to
breathe again, sipping water sweeter than soda amidst the
elven-green, appraising nature engineeresque as the
greatest, sole machine, toeing diminutive acorns that will
outlive me as trees, surrounding cries of birth and death
intermixing indistinguishably, serene in discomfort like a
hurricane-eye, still somewhere inside the obese coward
squealing, pleading for consideration of his special-
snowflake feelings, I was never beaten as a child so now I
have to beat myself, for to taste the meat within you must
crack the shell.

II. Theophany

“I have seen Isis and touched Isis,
but I do not know if she exists.”

-Anonymous, quoted in Pessoa’s *Book of Disquiet* #447

Violent induction of trance in a bowling-alley bathroom of all places, caught one’s own gaze and fell into one’s self like closing a pop-up book, hurled into a blind but not deaf realm, distinctly pre-utero by the meatless feel of it, wherein an angelic voice—more stern messenger than children’s choir—asks the impossible. “Now that you know what will be suffered, do you still wish to become you?” Then vomited back onto the mortal shore like Jonah upchucked by his whale, still washing hands, still breathing but irregularly now, at first concerned, then amused, “Must have been something I ate.”

Three years hence, retracted turtle-like from society, still peaking out but with shaded, suspicious gaze, bowling long forsaken for books, that guerrilla vision and its singular question is forebodingly recalled, like a business-card begrudgingly accepted, supposedly shed and incredulously rediscovered, now battered and patinaed. Stalwart Christian faith gone opaque, its hearty hue eroded by a hail of doubt, precipitation brought on by an insider’s view into churchy realities beyond services and sermons, not to mention mission trip mementos—widespread starvation, perversion, all that jazz—dangerous contraband in the mind of a once-comfortable American now discomfited by international reality, he’d woken up, smelt the roses and promptly collapsed, deathly allergic.

Thus taking to curious books whose pages conceal cabalistic caverns, navigating sigils, symbols, paths, gates, spheres, planes, spirits and gods like stalagmites, mining for

rare evidence in the subterranean vaults of faith, he tried bits and bops as timidly as an anorexic at a buffet, telling himself the worst that could happen was feeling silly when nothing happened. That is until in a room with a locked door in an empty house yet no longer alone he grew paler than the seven-foot tall hazy white shivering ectoplasmic newcomer at the foot of his bed. It wafted forward to embrace him and wordlessly was gone, leaving the dabbler prostrate on the floor whimpering to God that he would dabble no more. All was well, blissfully returned to the mundane and mediocre, until the following morning when the ex-dabbler awoke with an itchy forehead, groggily splashed his face in the sink and beheld himself in the mirror, or more specifically the eccentric scratch that adorned the exact center of his forehead over the third eye and pineal gland region, four perfectly intersecting lines comprising an upright and upside down triangle that touched at their apexes like a primitively-drawn hourglass—a water hexagram symbolizing the unconscious or otherworldly in the West, also related to the Eastern I-Ching gua “Kan,” translated as “Darkness” or “Abyss.” Says Taoist Master Huang of Kan that it is a lunar symbol meaning “falling but not drowned; in danger but not lost...if one was able to follow the way of Heaven, one could pass through [darkness] as safely as water passes through a ravine.” During the night, unbeknownst to him, the ex-dabbler’s passport had been stamped—“approved for travel to the underworld.”

Mulling the previous 24 hours and its lifetime of impossible experiences, the curious cat could not help but be nagged, not so much by the potential prospect of damnation and/or demonic possession, but by the prospect of *what if?* Were not all stories worth telling made of such tremulous moments where the protagonist wants out but

must concede that he is too far in? Could one truly stop at the cusp of such extraordinariness without being plagued by a severe case of the coulda, woulda, shoulda's forevermore? Thus, playing with the highest stakes possible, the existential gambler assumed the meditative lotus pose and doubled down.

Atop the observatory platform of a silvery citadel, tiled with interlocking pearlescent octagons each bearing a different incomprehensible symbol like the letters of an alien alphabet, overlooking a great expanse with clouds and sun below and dark, star-strewn space above, the maws of even darker portals evocative of visible black holes spewing breathtaking auroras overhead whilst mist roiled like supernatural shrubbery below, the gambler stared googly-eyed into the glorious expanse and glimpsed the glimmering of great golden bars like a massive fence or gateway atwix two monolithic pillars in the distance. Instantly his perspective blurred forward past the gates, and was *there*, at The Place Where Everyone Wants to Go. But it was not a place. Still and silent, deep and dreamless, radiating, emanating, untouchable yet beckoning, it levitated like a naked liquid-metal planetary core in the handsome pocket of the void. Vaguely he felt whatever trace amounts of self-awareness were left being siphoned away softly like magnetic filaments subtly polarized. His last thought, as he simultaneously disappeared and went home, was of the climax in *The Phantom Of the Opera's* "Music of the Night."

Gradually fading back into himself like the aftermath of an opiate nod, he took in tactile sensations stupidly as a leper cured, observing the depth between his fingers and the ghostly tickle as thumb and forefinger rubbed against one another like a miserly demand. It was all pathetically unreal—lying beside a manikin instead of a warm body—compared to what had just been witnessed.

“Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” And so, regretful yet resolute initiate, he sought the final attainment whispered of at anonymous shrines—what Socrates meant by “personal daemon” and Christian bookstores now reduce to cliché with merchandise referencing one’s “Guardian Angel.” In short, the student sought a tutor. “Ask and you shall receive.” In an epilepsy-inducing swarm of Hebraic letters the angel abbreviated “H” descended upon him, residing not upon his shoulder but within his mind as an inner voice not his own. Taking pains to render the incomprehensible comprehensible to a mere mammalian mind, H led his ward along the knife-edge of consciousness, the warping and wobbling of time, space and certainly sanity, together shuffling through tarot, rolling in and out of sephiroth, rollercoastering through pyramid-infested valleys, hiking buddha-crowned mountaintops, glad-handing Abrahamic and pagan beings alike, banishing sickness from loved ones, siccing karma on foes, even discerning his mortal branching fate as a lonesome scribe or tormented father within or at the cusp of apocalypse, respectively.

Each phantasmagoric ecosystem and experience no matter how varied bespoke implicitly a philosophy of physical existence as God’s garden wherein the base blossoms into the beautified through strengthening struggle, dream become form become dreamer like the passing of spiritual seasons, cycle pitiless and perennial due to insatiable deific desire, escapable solely by maturation that precludes further growth, then to be harvested to the infinite storehouse earlier glimpsed. All this the student eventually reduced to a single symbol—the serpent which eats its own tale encircling a dove that flies up and out of its coils. “Be as shrewd as serpents and as innocent as doves.”

Uncannily, the student would later rediscover much of H's teachings almost verbatim in hitherto unread works—Nostradamus, Plutarch, Lao Tzu, Patanjali. Indeed, it was a sentence in the last that eventually inspired him to commit his curious books to the garbage—“By giving up [magical] powers comes the destruction of the very seed of evil.” Returning to the uncomfortable sight of bare shelves, he resolved to refill them with books on history, science, and philosophy, now knowing that there is no border whatsoever between the magical and the mundane. Rarely does he think upon those discarded books, their briefly met but eternally instructive cast of characters, or the question that prefaced them all. If ever that question was posed to him again, he would reply knowingly but not morosely with a T.S. Eliot quotation—“I do not hope to turn again.”

NONFICTION PROSE

I. An Edible Scroll: Five Years ('11-'16) of Reading Distilled

For Lee Winn.

Good and evil is an oversimplification of discipline and its absence.

Loneliness signifies required self-improvement.

The weakness of the immature is to think too little; the weakness of the mature is to think too much.

Unwarranted depression and self-loathing are symptoms of expecting more from life than it has to offer.

It is difficult to shed the fear of death without wanting to die.

When times are hard the meaning of life is to stay alive; when times are easy life has no meaning.

Thinkers may be either alcoholics or workaholics.

Foolishness and wisdom—to be either horrified or awed by one's insignificance.

Happiness—expecting much from one's self and nothing from others.

Wealth can impoverish, love can addict, spirits can lie; suspect most what most suspect least.

Sex and violence are taboo for the same reason that magicians and chefs guard their trade secrets.

Killing is sometimes necessary, but cruelty never.

Strength enables kindness; when kindness is prioritized over strength man becomes too weak to practice either.

Time and energy are an ever-shrinking and infinitely precious commodity.

The rarest of all social states is to be genuinely liked *and* respected.

Do not take advice from someone with whom you wouldn't trade places.

True worship is gratefulness in action, inner abundance made manifest; true sin is ungratefulness such as squandering and self-pity.

The only sure currencies are fertile families and fields.

God's voice is sometimes soft but mostly silent.

II. Warhol and the Impersonation of Christ

For Karen Winn.

Part One

“Andy Warhol made a statement by repeating famous icons until they became meaningless.”

-Banksy, *Exit Through the Gift Shop*

When I was a youngster attending Sunday School I did not know the expressions “dumbing down” or “oversimplification,” but—like Justice Potter Stewart said of pornography—I knew it when I saw it. Having read the Bible for myself, it was vaguely perplexing to see the complex character of Christ summarized with the words “faith and love.” Perhaps if these had been used in the context of “tough love” and “conviction” it wouldn’t have bothered me, but always the Bible teacher’s meaning was plain—Christ was faith and love in the way that playing nice with and thinking well of others is faith and love. How they derived this from the infinitely stern rabbi was beyond me; were they reading the same book? Of all the words I would have used to describe Christ, “chummy” or “agreeable” were not amongst them. This was, after all, a person who goaded the societal leaders of his day to martyr him—hardly a people pleaser. Only as I grew in wisdom and stature would I realize that the Christ of today is not the biblical Yeshua but a fan-fiction who I call Warhol-Jesus.

The problem with Warhol-Jesus is that his faith and love is something most everyone except sociopaths already have. Hence Christ’s rhetorical, “if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same?” or James’ “You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that...” Reducing Christianity to

the warm-and-fuzzies makes it accessible to all and useful to none in that it renders the supposed Son of God as just another nice guy or prolific motivational speaker—“B.C.” and “A.D.” might as well be replaced with “Before and After Tony Robbins.” This makes a watered-down fraction of Christ’s complex whole, transfiguring the masculine Arab Jew into a blond-haired, blue-eyed, ever-smiling, lamb-coddling (limp-wristed?) Warhol-Jesus. The latter’s sugar, spice and everything nice obstructs or even obliterates the meatier concepts that Christ emphasized—particularly “Kingdom Nigh” and “Riches.”

Kingdom Nigh is arguably the crux of Christ’s teachings. It is a mystical urgency inspired by anticipated apocalypse and judgement which inspires preparation and vigilance. To emphasize Kingdom Nigh over love is to utterly prioritize the spiritual over the social. Such a life is almost inevitably an austere and lonesome one, much like Christ’s. Go figure, one of the best descriptions of Kingdom Nigh’s ramifications comes from death-of-God proclaiming Nietzsche— “If Christianity were right, with its theories of an avenging God, of general sinfulness, of redemption, and the danger of eternal damnation, it would be a sign of weak intellect and lack of character not to become a priest, apostle or hermit, and to work only with fear and trembling for one’s own salvation; it would be senseless thus to neglect eternal benefits for temporary comfort” (*Human, All Too Human* Part One #116). Nietzsche also addresses Kingdom Nigh versus faith—“It is false to the point of absurdity to see in a ‘belief,’ perchance the belief in redemption through Christ, the distinguishing characteristic of the Christian: only Christian *practice*, a life such as he who died on the Cross *lived*, is Christian” (*The Antichrist* #39). Though emulation of Christ doesn’t preclude belief in him, the point seems to be that “faith without action is dead.”

Then there is the sticky wicket of Christ's attitude towards Riches—that poverty is the only safe spiritual solution to the quandary of materialism. This *definitely* doesn't get preached alongside love and faith, mainly because pews and offering-plates would go empty if it were. This may partially explain why Warhol-Jesus' faith and love have been favored over Christ-emulation within modern theology.

However, the advantageousness of Warhol-Jesus is not merely monetary. He also made straight the paths for leftism and "social justice," particularly in the U.S.A. "The majestic inauguration of the 'post-Christian era' is a joke. We are living through a caricatural 'ultra-Christianity' that tries to escape from the Judeo-Christian orbit by 'radicalizing' [Jesus'] concern for victims in an anti-Christian manner" (*I See Satan Fall Like Lightning* 178—179), says Rene Girard. Just as the Satanic inverted crucifix is the corruption of a Christian symbol, so was the Left's American cultural coup achieved by taking advantage of Christian principles. Warhol-Jesus' faith and love is the sole explanation for why heavily-armed and highly-opinionated American Christians stood idly by while values wholly opposed to them such as abortion became the law of their land, proving once and for all that the "give an inch, take a mile" and "slippery slope" concepts are not fallacies. But "render unto Caesar!", you say. True, per Kingdom Nigh Christ was apathetic about worldly politics. However, one cannot help but notice the contrast between living under an all-powerful Roman tyranny and shrugging shoulders whilst allowing one's own democracy to go to the dogs. Such lily-livered excuses are unbecoming of any supposedly patriotic American Christian, for the revolution that produced the country would not have happened had this particular "render unto Caesar" mentality been equally applied to King George.

Thus Warhol-Jesus makes emasculated push-overs of his devotees by a shallow, cookie-cutter philosophy, obstructing the reality of merchant-whipping, Pharisee-berating Yeshua so efficiently that he may be the best candidate yet for the title of Antichrist. Yet theologians have the audacity to be perplexed by the closing of churches, rise of atheism and degeneracy of culture as though the devaluation of the Christian brand which they presided over would have no consequences. Like abandoning a gold-standard or over-printing a currency, making Christianity universally accessible has rendered it worthless. So long as one can feel Christian—or close enough—by niceness alone, what incentive have they to surpass that bare-minimum? Between picking up a cross and picking up a donut at the church coffee-bar, the choice is obvious.

But what would the exorcism of Warhol-Jesus entail? Simply taking Christ at his word. Christians would have to sell all they have and give it to the poor, preach the Gospel as though the end of the world were impending, love their enemies and forgive their abusers, abandon family and friends for the cause, eradicate anything that causes them to sin even unto physical mutilation, marry or preferably remain celibate, and continue this lifestyle until death by impoverishment or martyrdom (how 10 of Christ's 12 apostles died). Thus the true origin of Warhol-Jesus is revealed, not in conspiratorial monetary or social agendas, but primarily in the unsustainability of Christ's teachings. It takes a rare combination of depression, desperation, self-loathing, imagination, wanderlust and fearlessness to *actually* follow Christ—and however many such individuals may exist at a given time, they are not near enough to comprise an entire religion.

Thus the Christian enterprise had the choice either to peter out or make due with an agreeable alternative—mainly, Warhol-Jesus. Regrettably, he has done his job a bit

too well. Warhol-Jesus is now so mainstream that he is superfluous—who doesn't own those "faith and love" embroidered placemats, or cross necklaces, or allegedly follow the Golden Rule? It's all been played out, done to death. It was a good run (2000 years+!), but it's getting old. Soon the fan-fiction shall go the way of its source material. All that remains to be seen is whether the decline of the former may cause a renaissance of the latter.

Part Two

“You make me master of the world where you exist.
The soul I took from you was not even missed.”
-Black Sabbath, “Lord of this World”

Warhol-Jesus’ unrelenting optimism would be forgivable if it were applied solely to the transcendent. Then imposter and imposed would be indistinguishable in their fanatical emphasis upon things not of this world. Source-text and fan-fiction only diverge when the cynicism of Yeshua is abandoned for a happy-go-lucky attitude regarding the current world. To remove Christ’s sternness is to diminish his royal bearing, rendering the prince a pauper. And—since all great princes are also warriors—this revokes his status as the crucial combatant in a spiritual war on which the universal fate rests. The gravity of his situation and the reality of his mortal foe are like pressure applied to a wound; to release that pressure is to let the life-blood of the Christian tradition spill freely.

This is due to Yeshua being the emissary of an eccentric worldview wherein everything is vested with grave importance. He relates the microcosm of our mundane lives to the macrocosmic struggle between good and evil, insisting that all must pick a side and accept the consequences. His goal is to raise our existential stakes. No more may we think ourselves mere creatures attempting to look out for number one and perhaps do right by others between birth and death; rather we are eternal souls that must resist the influences of a wicked world at all costs. He would have us utterly invert the priorities of nature—abandon the daily grind to survive and thrive—for an idealistic aspiration outside of our mortal experience, forsaking our familiar home for a spurious foreign land, like

foolhardy adventurers willing to risk destruction for discovery.

His is a fanaticism on par with the worst of cultists. The only difference is that his followers are meant to be violent unto themselves rather than others—an introverted *bushido*. Yeshua's call to "pick up your cross and follow me" is, in end if not means, identical to downing a draught of Jim Jones' Koolaid. It will end one's life either literally (fed to lions, made into human torches) or colloquially. Any attempt to make this call jive with a happy, healthy, normal, or worldly lifestyle (at least in the modern sense) is Warholization, for one could not consider Yeshua's life to have been any of those things, and genuine Christianity is his emulation. To not worry for the morrow, nor store up treasures on earth, or hate one's enemies, or lust and fornicate—when those things are worded differently it becomes evident that what Yeshua forbids is the very *essence of existence*. Imagine compelling any other creature not to prioritize feeding itself or storing up for winter or harming its rivals or procreating. Have you not effectively killed that creature? Or what have you left it with, except the metaphysical constructs that you have promised it in return for this suicide? The only reprieve from immediate starvation provided is implied by Christ being a carpenter and Paul being a tentmaker—practicing a trade is permissible so long as one doesn't go and make too much money by it.

The only way one could possibly justify this fanaticism is if one were to believe in Satan just as literally as they believe in Christ. Fear of God is not enough for a follower of Yeshua; they must also "fear the One who can destroy both body and soul in hell." Forswearing worldliness of any kind hardly makes sense if the theology implicit within the American spiritual "He's Got the Whole World in His Hands" is correct, for if the world is micromanaged by

God then it follows that worldliness is His will. Yeshua would doubtlessly prefer the sentiment of the English hymn “Onwards Christian Soldier,” wherein the world is a contested battleground. Consider the temptation in the desert during which Satan offers Yeshua the kingdoms of the world. Though the Devil is rebuked for this offer, it is *not* because he is offering something that belongs to God. Indeed, Christ later refers to Satan as “the lord of this world,” confirming that he was offering something which is his to give. This is the crucial theological detail that Warholianity neglects. To the genuine Jesus, Earth is a Satanic domicile which he aims to reconquer. How different from that which most Christians know—prayers for politicians and militaries, urges to vote where applicable, national flags gracing the sanctuary dais! Again, Warholians have contorted the opaque slyness of “Render unto Caesar” into an endorsement of nationalism. In truth it was the only answer a messiah could give who wanted to endorse neither a government nor a revolution. It is the most politically cynical statement ever uttered, recommending that one waste no energy either actively supporting or resisting unredeemable government.

But naïve nationalism is not the greatest Warholian disadvantage towards comprehension of Yeshua. Rather, it is ignorance of one’s own evil. Just as Warholianity necessarily reduces the Devil to a moral metaphor rather than a personified certainty, so the individuals who grow up as Warholians must inevitably come to feel that they have more or less been on “the straight and narrow” their entire lives. This renders Yeshua utterly incomprehensible to them, for his entire shtick is the essential forgiveness of otherwise unforgivable sin. Yet how can sin truly be forgiven, or forgiveness earnestly sought, if the sinner considers himself holy? That is why Tertullian insisted that “Christians are made, not born” and Christ clarified that he

came for the sick rather than the healthy. It is an undeniable (albeit costly) advantage to live an immoral life before learning of Yeshua, for one may then approach Christianity with perfect knowledge of evil. Those who have counted themselves amongst the elect for as long as they can remember cannot enjoy this advantage. Thus they may fall prey to the Pharisees' curse, growing so assured of their own redemption that their redeemer seems superfluous.

Warholianity aside, genuine Christianity can be but one of two things. Perhaps it is a tradition for depressives, a support-group for personalities who suffer from moral hypersensitivity like a tinnitus of the conscience. Irrked by the constant vibration of existential evil and emptiness, they turn to Yeshua not to still this vibration but to explain it—for often the horror of a thing is not the thing itself but its mysteriousness. To their unanswerable “Why?” he answers at length; to their dubious “There must be more!” he nods encouragingly. And, for those who can bear life no more, he forgives them their failure, providing various excuses for worldly mediocrity and suicide via martyrdom. If it is not this, then it must be the terrible, crucial revelation of mankind's meaning as agents of infinite import in the combat between Devil and Deity. And if it be the latter, then no reaction can be too extreme—sinning limbs and organs must be excised, materialism must be utterly shed, and death must be preferred to life.

Thus the question every would-be Christian should grapple with is whether they are truly prepared to trade the fun and games of life on Earth for Yeshua's sternest asceticism. Indeed, to be a true follower of His is to effectively forget that such fun is even possible, for cheer hardly befits a Heaven-yearning prisoner in a hellish world. Thomas à Kempis summarizes, “Our life upon earth is verily wretchedness. The more a man desireth to be spiritual, the more bitter doth the present life become to him; because

he the better understandeth and seeth the defects of human corruption. For to eat, to drink, to watch, to sleep, to rest, to labour, and to be subject to the other necessities of nature, is truly a great wretchedness and affliction to a devout man, who would fain be released and free from all sin" (*The Imitation of Christ*, XXII). That is why the gospels inform us that Jesus wept, but never that he smiled.

Part Three

“Pastoral. *Adj.* 1. Of shepherds or country life. 2. Simple or naturally beautiful like the country. 3. Of a pastor, his office, or his duties.”

-The World Book Encyclopedia Dictionary

“The Lord is a man of war...”

Exodus 15:3

To our modern Darwinian/Freudian/Marxist mindset, genuine Christianity can only ever seem like lunacy. This is not due primarily to the religion’s mythological dubiousness. Rather, it is due to the base materialism that said mindset ascribes to all of man’s motives. The fundamental assumptions of the mindset are that everyone would prefer to live forever, be rich, and have as much sex as possible. Because Christ meets none of these assumptions, Warhol-Jesus was fabricated to bridge the philosophical gap between Yeshua’s age and ours. Though unsuccessful, this attempt is understandable, for Yeshua’s classical elements are far more difficult to accept today than his basic metaphysics and morals.

I find the dual meaning of “pastoral” quite evocative in this regard, for I increasingly suspect that Yeshua’s disciples were originally meant to be more than metaphorically related to shepherding. To expound, we must attempt to set aside current Zionism for antique, average Jewishness and consider several Old Testament precedents that Yeshua would have taken literally. The first few chapters of Genesis will do—in particular, Man’s Fall and the Tower of Babel. “In the beginning” onwards, YHVH is presented in such a way as to have a humbling, even terrifying effect—hardly the god to whom some now pray for parking spaces. Not just the maker but the *owner* of

mankind, his fondness for us is not to be mistaken with weakness. This need not have been said in Yeshua's classical age where institutional powers were vested with (at least some) majesty and every social interaction was hierarchal. It is only now that most institutions are ridiculed pomposities and "all men are created equal" that we must redefine YHVH's father-like love as it was originally understood—an undeserved and revocable gift. Indeed, He even states the terms upon which it can be revoked—to eat the forbidden fruit which bestows knowledge of good and evil.

The ramifications of this have long been an interest of mine. What exactly is wrong with acquiring knowledge of good and evil? Loss of innocence, some say. But I believe it is the tempting snake which answers most accurately; it is wrong because it makes one "like God." YHVH confirms—"Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever: Therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken." Thus it becomes clear that the knowledge of good and evil—moralizing, in a word—is a Godlike ability unfit for mankind to wield. This is a colossal precedent, perhaps one of the Bible's greatest, yet it is largely ignored. From the start we are told that our presumption to judge or ascribe moral values is unwarranted, undeserved, that our theft of it cost us paradise. By this precedent man's moral compass is not just described as corrupt—it is described as effectively nonexistent. We are, according to Genesis, simple, amoral beings who stole the cognitive ability to *imagine* things as good or evil, neither of which we are actually competent to do. For, if our delusional moralizing was successful, we should merely remake an Eden and find bliss apart from YHVH. Cue the Tower of Babel, where mankind set out to do just that by merging under one language and surpassing

God via technology (architecture, in this case). YHVH has none of it and sends the architects packing back to their separate tribes and tongues—a Luddite precedent if ever there was one.

By these Genesis precedents Christ's dour worldly attitude is explained. His Heavenly Father apportions man the pastoral and classical rights to till fields, birth children and—later in the Old Testament—wage war, but little else. Yet Christ, residing in Israel during its occupation by the Roman Empire, must inevitably have sensed and suffered from the “urbanization” and loss of tribal identity therein, if not the foreboding possibility that Rome would construct its own Babel. In other words, to a Jew who valued the humble, earthy, YHVH-centric lifestyle of his ancestors, the colonial “modernization” of Rome would have seemed like the end of the world, just as we find in Matthew 24.

Despite this, Christ does not explicitly call for a return to the pastoral way—he seems to know that it is too late for that. Rather, he promotes another classical attitude, that of heroism. Whether one had cut their teeth on David versus Goliath or Achilles versus Hector, all at Christ's time and in Christ's vicinity would have been familiar with the heroism wherein survival is sometimes forgivable but desperation to survive is not. At that time heroism was a death-cult based on sacrifice in servitude where one could almost say that living victors were good but dead heroes were better. Or, as Christ put it, “there is no greater love than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.” During that dawning decadent age where colonized Jews and colonizing Romans would alike have looked back upon their cultures' foundational heroic texts with a blend of nostalgia and melancholy, any romantically-inclined party would have been smitten by a man who figured out how to embody that mode of glorious tragedy in the present day. Hence Pilate's apparent respect for Christ and the

centurion's climactic utterance post-crucifixion, "Truly this was the son of God." Roman soldiery and the Jewish working-class alike knew a hero when they saw one, attesting to the common cultural link which spread Christ's cult from Golgotha to the court of Constantine.

Thus Yeshua recruited a pacifistic army to answer the onslaught of decadence, one which boasted martyrdoms rather than murders, strengthened and spread by resistance, taking the subtle tact that if man cannot return to how he should live pastorally then he can at least die heroically under the banner of YHVH, the Heavenly Father who (in principle if not person) is an aggregate of classical values—an embodiment of Natural Law. Thus he saved souls from soul-destroying "modernism," which he would likely have called Satanism.

If freedom is one's poison of choice, they had best look elsewhere than YHVH, Yeshua, and their Spirit, for this Trinity is the ultimate tyranny. Its political disinterestedness should not be mistaken for leniency with differing opinions, for "Whoever is not with me is against me." They are Might Makes Right from On High, transcending man's every construct and critique—"I make peace, and create Evil." By comparison Satan is the far more sympathetic character; thus William Blake quipped that Milton was "of the devil's party without knowing it" due to *Paradise Lost's* endearing Lucifer. This unrelatable, even abhorrent tendency towards the Trinity has and shall continue to increase over time, for the further away man is from the fields, families, and fighting of his origin, the uglier it will seem. Their churches may remain, but the deity worshipped therein will be—and perhaps already is—Mammon.

Thus Christ may be understood as the ultimate conservative, a spiritual authoritarian or fascist, wiser than all others in that he knew he would not stop the modernist

outcome that he anticipated and opposed. Indeed, his scriptural claims predict with eerie accuracy his own legacy: to be known everywhere (“this gospel...shall be preached in all the world”), yet disliked within popular culture (“ye shall be hated of all men for my name’s sake”), and widely impersonated (“many will come in my name...and shall deceive many”). Today, as “progressivism” colonizes and ludicrously moralizes all and its accompanying technology approaches a self-deifying singularity, his prophecies are vindicated.

All that is left, then, is to decide whether he was merely the greatest far-right romantic or the Logos of God. That distinction may increasingly blur as it becomes apparent that man has lost its way amidst interstates and the internet. The animal that we so evidently are—that we were *designed* to be, whether one would call that design “intelligent” or not—is slowly dissolving as though submerged in acid by our newfound nature-less lives of chaotic convenience. Eons of strength and simplicity have been lost just within my grandparents’ lifetime, and I wonder if any will survive my own save in third-world countries where the option of “progress” has not yet arrived. These events were utterly unimaginable less than 200 years ago, and yet they are found in *Revelations*, Nostradamus, and the works of most any other seer of visions or dreamer of dreams who has accepted Pascal’s Wager.

What I am arguing, in effect, is that even if the Bible were utterly removed from the world this Logos could be arrived at anew—“If these were silent, the very stones would cry out.” I do not say this to diminish Christ as an individual, but to elevate him as a principle, which is how the gospel of John introduces him. There we are told “All things were made through Him,” a far-cry from the current

habit of attributing Nature and Natural Law to paganism, which leaves Christianity as an aberration. Rather, Christ considered himself to be the *Intended* of creation—classically pastoral and heroic—amidst prevailing perversion. If that is the case, and “the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made,” then Christ may be found not only sans-Bible but san-Christianity. This realization may be of some importance when only Warholianity remains.

Ultimately, how one could be Yeshua without being God will come to seem a greater mystery to a true Christian than how God could become flesh. Dostoevsky’s wording cannot be surpassed—

“I want to say to you, about myself, that I am a child of this age, a child of unfaith and skepticism, and probably (indeed I know it) shall remain so to the end of my life. How dreadfully has it tormented me (and torments me even now) this longing for faith, which is all the stronger for the proofs I have against it. And yet God gives me sometimes moments of perfect peace; in such moments I love and believe that I am loved; in such moments I have formulated my creed, wherein all is clear and holy to me. This creed is extremely simple; here it is: I believe that there is nothing lovelier, deeper, more sympathetic, more rational, more manly, and more perfect than the Saviour; I say to myself with jealous love that not only is there no one else like Him, but that there could be no one. I would even say more: If anyone could prove to me that Christ is outside the truth, and if the truth really did exclude Christ, I should prefer to stay with Christ and not with truth” (Letter To Mme. N. D. Fonvisin 1854, as published in *Letters of Fyodor Michailovitch Dostoevsky to his Family and Friends*

(1914), translated by Ethel Golburn Mayne, Letter XXI, p. 71).

And for those contented with nothing less than certainty, let them dwell upon Paul's "If Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain." Certainty requires no faith, nor courage.

Part Four

“Everlasting life for me in a perfect world.
But I’ve got to die first! Please God send me on my way!”
-In My Darkest Hour, Megadeth

Kyrie eleison! At least exist for me
In ‘erwise hopeless heart, if not actually
Knowing faith is the opposite of certainty
Hoist a cross though ‘tis weighted with absurdity
For naught is more absurd than a world without thee
If not thine slave then I would be but falsely free
Let not life be as cheap as it appears to be
Quid est veritas? Nil if thou be not in me.
-Poem by Author

I know only one manner of thinking that could dissuade a Dostoevsky. Though Christ’s cult of personality be unassailable, the religion that bears his name lies exposed. Critiquing Christianity with the reasoning that we may know Christ by his fruits is a means of striking the shepherd by scattering the sheep. I do not mean attacking Christians as a group, for experience has taught us that any atrocity may be committed in the name of Christ without blemishing Him in the eyes of his other disciples. Rather I mean Christianity as a theology, or a series of existential assumptions.

For example, we have already discussed the cruciality of the Devil and all he represents. Calvinists and their ilk are invulnerable to the following attack because their equation that God’s will equals whatever happens leaves no room for a genuine Adversary—for them everything and everyone are God’s pawns, and thus the onus of all things good, evil and neutral fall ultimately upon Him. To those Christians who do not worship this God who

is both Devil and Deity, the following question should be posed—why did YHVH allow evil at all? Now, the obvious riposte to this is that God desires man to genuinely love Him, and genuine love requires free will, and free will means the ability to commit evil. This seems fair enough until one considers eternal damnation, in which case the ramification is that God subjects the creations he supposedly loves to the possibility of unending agony just so he can feel loved by some of them. This becomes even more dubious when one considers that God by definition does not *need* anything, so this desire for love may be portrayed as pure vanity.

Earthly suffering alone can deliver a similar blow. Take the following thought experiment—If you were capable of feeling for a moment all the suffering that every human being living or dead has ever experienced, would you thereafter honestly be able to claim that this existence is due to a loving God? Only a lack of imagination or empathy can save one from a conclusion in the negative, though this again presupposes that God condones whatever He allows. Lesser potshots like the following may hit a nerve as well—Why did God design us so that it is anatomically possible for rape to occur? Why not simply make it so that the only sexual acts that can happen must be consensual? Even if He must allow evil for the sake of free will, that does not diminish the fact that the very parameters of *possible evil* are His to determine. Thus every abomination is an abomination that He chose not to disallow, which returns us to the paradoxical implication that YHVH punishes us for His ills. Whether the Devil’s will be truly adversarial to His or not, the fact remains that God could unmake or undo all wrongs whenever. That He does not explains the prevalence of the Christian platitude, “He works in mysterious ways.” Yet there *is* nothing more mysterious than a creation that, having corrupted itself, responds by cursing its creator for

bringing it into an existence capable of corruption. Or so it seems to me when I consider the natural world wherein most “evils” are necessities and compare those to the meaningless cruelty of which we humans are capable.

There is a deeper, more abstract level upon which one might storm this Heaven’s gates. That is to frame Christianity as the Religion of Discontent. One need only belittle its constant negativity in regards to *what is*, arguing that if paganism was the immoderate spiritual tradition of seeing nothing wrong with the world then Christianity is the equally immoderate tradition of seeing nothing right with it. Thus the entire religion may be made to seem like a morbid crossroads between mysticism and maladaptive perfectionism, or, less grandiosely, as the dogmatic refusal to accept life until it is exactly as one wants it to be, wherein any semblance of contentment or peace is contingent upon faith that one will get their way in a promised future or afterlife. I would take the Church’s otherwise unexplainable obsession with forbidding suicide as a prime example. Genuine Christianity is just about the direst existential conclusion one could ever hope to reach. If Earth is so horrible and Heaven so wonderful, then it stands to reason that one should hasten to Christ’s embrace by the most expedient means. Indeed, to tarry upon Earth is to risk damnation, so even if life is somewhat tolerable for a believer, it would still be foolish to hazard their immortal soul for a few more years within this veil of tears. Thus the suicide taboo was necessary in the extreme to prevent the newformed church with its non-Warholized zealots from dying like Judas in droves.

But the alternative to this discontent is to be contented with the world—an equally spurious proposition when one has enough empathy to feel or IQ to comprehend the suffering within it. Is it ethical to wear the dismissive, even indifferent Mona Lisa smile of a Buddha whilst

surrounded by earthly horror? Or is it simply the nature of things that a man who would be moral in an immoral world must be haunted by the incongruity between ideal and reality?

Finally there is the very complexity of the religion. Its vast and varied theological thought may conspire to make one feel as though they are in the presence of manmade chaos rather than divine peace. One could quip that the importance of a field of study often correlates to its complexity, but I would reply that God knows His audience and can be as concise or incomprehensible as He chooses. If this Good News is indeed crucial to the spiritual fate of mankind, then surely it should be accessible to all men. Instead we find a totality akin to Law wherein even the most devoted lawyer cannot absorb, much less comprehend it holistically. One *could* respond that Christianity is best when unexamined, and I would have to agree—but I should then have to ask them whether they take the same tact relationally, financially, or in any other way? “Beautiful from afar, ugly up close” is not a compliment anyone wants to receive, God least of all. There is little to be done here apologetically except to hazard that if the Devil has been allowed to corrupt the world entire, then that must by necessity include even the means by which the world is to be redeemed.

I have of course neglected an entire universe of anti-Christian arguments that consist of demanding non-existent evidence for the religion’s miraculous claims. These I leave to those who cannot appreciate that if there is anything beyond us then it is just that—*beyond us*. That being said, the unfalsifiability of this position is not lost on me.

Part Five: A Prophetic Dream?

The digital visage of the A.I. pastor flashes pearly whites across the dual floor-to-ceiling screens. Intermittently the message “420 FRIENDLY” is superimposed over his God-sized face. Congregants smoke and dance at the sanctuary front as though it were a mosh pit, frenzied devotees occasionally climbing the ornamental pulpit and casting themselves from it—bodies cruciform—to surf the crowd or splatter the nave. In the sanctuary center the endless pews are temporarily interrupted by a platform which hoists the newest flying car, preloaded with Christian vehicular essentials like a fish bumper sticker and cross-shaped air freshener. Criers hawk their wares up and down the aisles, dispensing popcorn, beer, and complimentary abridged bibles that bear the logos of various corporate and political entities. The innumerable exits are flanked by consoles for the renting of various forms of entertainment media, as well as condom dispensers like one finds in truck-stop bathrooms. Digitized offering plates are passed by feminized androids, the bold text adorning their silicon breasts reading “LILITH.” Donations, along with the names of the generous givers, run at the periphery of the pastoral screens, eliciting applause and randomized prizes. A gaggle of drive-through windows pockmark the holographic stained-glass walls, offering on-the-go absolution as well as discounted coffee and donuts to commuters. The pastor’s voice blares over the din to welcome this Sabbath’s guest speaker—an A.I. theologian in the form of a spider with a red sigil embossed upon its back. The crowd shrieks its welcome—“Asmodeus! Asmoday!” Scuttling to the forefront, the great spider takes a bow, seemingly choked up by this warm welcome, and after a few kindly repetitions of “Thank you, thank you, God damn you all,” commences preaching...

III. Eros Fled

Illumined by Psyche's lamp Eros fled
 To sailor's ears the portent 'Pan is dead'
 These imperial myths have related
 Sex, thus nature, shall be antiquated.
 -Quatrain by Author

"...the instinct of imitation is implanted in man from
 childhood, one difference between him and other animals
 being that he is the most imitative of living creatures, and
 through imitations learns his earliest lessons..."
 -Aristotle, *Poetics*

Whoever would call humanness inborn has
 neglected to consider feral children. These specimens alone
 demonstrate that man is merely a crafty ape at birth and
 must be instructed in humanness by experienced humans in
 order to manifest it. When this instruction is neglected the
 gamut of bonobo decadence and chimpanzee barbarism
 remains our default. Hence the telltale social dysfunction of
 areas where there is no closeness between youths and
 elders. Unfortunately, that divorce between young and old
 is the principle social tendency of the modern age as the
 nuclear family is systematically antiquated by technological
 and cultural (specifically spiritual and sexual) "progress." In
 other words, man is being dehumanized.

In some countries the children of single or absent
 parents may yet have recourse to a tight-knit community or
 culture in order to receive a humanizing education, but in
 the modern United States where no such thing exists it
 seems that humanness is either imbued at home or not at
 all. Though the political Left would have it that ghetto
 dysfunction is a result primarily of poverty rather than

parenting, consider that even families dependent upon welfare in the United States are infinitely wealthier than most of the world population which survives upon \$1 USD or less a day. Yet such crime is not necessarily present amongst the internationally impoverished. This is due to poverty elsewhere reinforcing familial closeness out of necessity. In the U.S. where public entitlements can serve as both breadwinner and caretaker, no such positive byproduct may result. Try as it might to impart humanness, the state cannot replicate the necessary closeness for such instruction to be internalized.

Thus much of the developed world has suffered a deficit of humanness due to a decline of familial closeness which is constantly being mislabeled as “income inequality.” Though income is doubtlessly a factor—further alienating the poor in consumption-based societies—only Marxist materialists could be naïve enough to suppose that the issue would be remedied if everyone’s bank accounts bore identical digits. Again, lower-classes elsewhere and throughout history demonstrate that poverty does not cause social anarchy so long as a culture of familial and/or communal closeness persists. But the concrete proof of my diagnosis shall only occur when upper-class youths begin taking to social dysfunction comparably to their lower-class peers. And they assuredly shall, for they have already abandoned the traditional spirituality and sexuality which enables functional families and thus functional societies.

Spiritual belief owes its pervasiveness to two latent traits within the mind of man—the pattern-seeking instinct and humanocentrism. With the first, the confirmation of cause and effect through mundane experience leads us to conclude that the same must be true of everything—that the universe, an effect, deserves and requires a cause. Often the scientifically literate escape spiritual belief by

sating this pattern-seeking instinct with non-personified causes such as the “Big Bang” and evolution. However, the evidence for science’s non-personified causes remains currently unsatisfactory to a majority of man because of the second latent trait. Our preference for understanding the universe from a human or personified perspective is the bulwark upon which spiritual belief depends. The unpleasantness of perceiving the universe as something indifferent to ourselves is so offensive that it shall never be fully embraced by mankind. No matter the words and deeds that suggest acceptance, the mind will always secretly recoil from this non-personified cause. This is due to the survival instinct. Since our basic motivations are ultimately attempts to escape death, to preserve ourselves as individuals or a species, the thought that the universe is indifferent to our survival and even vies for our death is capable of undermining our motivations at their core. For most, excepting Camus, there is no such thing as “the benign indifference of the universe.” That which is indifferent to our survival cannot be benign, for its indifference may lead to our death. It is only on the utmost borders of human thought, as far removed from self-interest as possible, that we can entertain the thought of a non-personified or indifferent cause. Most cannot maintain this thought-process for long without having their motivations undermined by its terrible implications for humanity. Indeed, it is doubtful that even those rare specimens who wholeheartedly accept the non-personified cause are capable of constantly considering it without experiencing its negative side effects. This, I propose, is why the battle between science and religion has reached an apparent stalemate. On the side of science is evidence. On the side of religion is self-interest. The evidence for a non-personified cause is incompatible with our self-interest, and thus it is largely rejected. An atheist utopia in which rationalism

rather than religion dominates the majority of man is not possible so long as man remains fundamentally self-interested—and to remove a man's self-interest is to make him something other than a man.

That is precisely what is occurring. The “progressive” culture which has gained dominion over the Western developed world consists chiefly of trading self-interest for altruism—thus the abandonment of nationalism in favor of multiculturalism, religious dogma in favor of moral relativism, etc. It domesticates and dehumanizes the human commoner—muzzling, neutering and chaining him so that only a wagging tail remains. One is almost tempted to see this as being by design, since it renders (former) men so much more manageable for the powers-that-be. Mass self-interest is obviously bad for business—commoners that seek profit solely for themselves detract from the profits of the elite and protest vigorously when exterminated despite being told it is for the good of society. Though there are plenty of atheistic persons who meet that description, it is ultimately the pervasive idea of a personified cause or God that stands in the way of this domestication. The belief in a non-human absolute authority that validates one's worth as an individual is the only foolproof way to guarantee that one's self-interest is philosophically safeguarded, for it dismisses out of hand any secular argument that one must give up one's own rights or profits for the good of others. It is only a matter of persistence in order to get an atheist to admit that he or she does not objectively matter since all things are subjective, whereas a believer in God will stubbornly insist upon their own importance as a unique creation regardless of any contrary evidence.

Though it is undeniable that spiritual belief was once and still is in some cases the tool of the state which enforces uniformity and thus control, as belief in God has

become more dubious thanks to scientific evidence it has also become more of an individual or familial choice than a societal assumption. Subsequently it has become inefficient to enforce uniformity in developed areas where scientific and secular information is readily available—one can no longer woo whole nations or the entire world with it. Thus the powers-that-be seem forced to oppose spiritual belief where once they were the enforcers of it, opting to salvage and reappropriate the useful faith-mechanism by imbuing the state with God-like qualities and attempting to wean the masses off of that first opiate with a second. Said deification of the state is currently underway. Where once God watched us, now government agencies surveil. Where once God provided for us if only we would pray, now welfare programs provide for us if only we will vote. The reemergence of the concept of blasphemy will mark the completion of this bait-and-switch—thou shalt not take the name of the state in vain. All the while the younger generations will continue to be lured away from spiritual belief by indoctrination—and the buffoonery of religious leaders who scare away more people than they attract—substituting the state for the God-shaped hole in human consciousness.

Claiming that sexuality is also being menaced may seem audacious and even absurd since there has never been a time when it was less restrained than now. However, the destruction of sexuality is counterintuitive. Just as the way to stop a child's gluttonous sweet tooth is to allow him or her to get a terrible stomachache by overindulgence, so the way to cause human sexuality to malfunction is by encouraging society to overdose upon it. One need only consider the increased divorce, depression and sexual discontent and deviance that has arisen in tandem with so-

called sexual liberation. Humanity has never had more orgasms and less satisfaction.

Yet deadening and devaluing actual sex is not enough, for it is too hardwired into man's instincts to be entirely quit, unsatisfactory or not. Rather, the sexes must be alienated to consummate a "progressive" sexuality. The goal is not for humanity to lose interest in orgasm, but in having it with the opposite sex. The foundation for this has been laid by feminism—an opportunity for hatred of the sexually dimorphic and traditionally familial to masquerade as an equalization of rights. With the boogiemans of patriarchy as its excuse, feminism has efficiently emasculated developed societies, demonizing or even criminalizing all that is naturally masculine. And just in case that is not enough to stave off the incorrigible heterosexual male, technology's more expedient outlets for sexuality such as pornography beckon any man who has received this "we don't need no man" message loud-and-clear. When technology can allow males complete sexual gratification without any of the legal or emotional risks now involved in attachment to a female as well as the ability to propagate their genes via artificial wombs, the disintegration of males and females shall be complete.

With spirituality and sexuality successfully rendered "progressive," the nuclear family shall be impossible and whatever homo-sapiens are thenceforth brought into the developed world will lack humanness at its most basic level. One of two fates shall then await them. Either they will subconsciously commit suicide as decadent peoples historically do—allowing their own usurpation by a primitive group—or they shall lose not just their humanness but their humanity as well by achieving some technologic self-deification currently termed "singularity." The actions of the post-9/11 Left suggest that the former fate is already

in motion, with the scimitar of Islam being the particular sword that they wish to cast themselves upon. As the Goths did for Rome so Muhammadans could do for us.

In the meantime, social dysfunction will continue to be normalized, tending at first towards physical and sexual violence towards others, but culminating in isolation and asexuality. Man's associations are predicated upon need, and where there is no need there is no association. We have yet to adapt to this dehumanizing reality since it arrived so abruptly, and thus our continued attempts at fulfilling ancient, antiquated needs are rendered clumsy and chaotic. However, as the generations who grew up without the internet depart, this adaptation will hasten.

Said adaptation can already be sensed somewhat in the sudden commonality of nursing homes, abortion, divorce, and even loneliness. These once unthinkable institutions and afflictions are possible and permissible now, not because man's moral nature has changed, but because the necessities that prevented them have been dissolved. Nursing homes exist because children no longer need care for their elderly parents—paid strangers suffice. The reason for abortion may be identical—why expend resources upon someone who will leave before they can begin to repay that investment? Similarly, why take on a spouse when children can now be “raised” (in the sense that they survive childhood) without both parents? In the stead of these necessities only their accompanying desires remain, of which loneliness is the prime example. Men learned to enjoy one another's presence because coexistence was necessary. Now that coexistence is optional rather than mandatory, it is dwindling. Were sociability truly innate in us we would already have alleviated modern loneliness by adjusting our collective lifestyle. Instead, we have turned to

the artificial socialization of social media to soothe the irritation of being alone until we grow used to it.

Just as we now scorn children who continue to dwell in their familial home when they could leave, or women who prefer submissive homemaking to an independent career, so may our post-singularity descendants scorn our sociability entire, detecting naught but the motives of animal weakness therein. To them, we would seem needy automatons fueled by hunger, lust, and self-doubt, a caterpillar to their butterfly. But from their heights all poetry will seem prose and all love foolishness. As ultimate academics—our exact opposites— they would know everything and feel nothing.

Yet neither fate need be final. When Rome fell, monks and their monasteries preserved its treasures in their books, acting as the cultural parents for an orphaned age, and always we are but one large solar flare away from the sudden reemergence and renewed ascendancy of Nature over our “progressive” schemes. Truly man is the saddest creature, for we wish to be other than what we are whilst lacking the ability to achieve this self-mutilation. And if ever it is achieved, the creature that achieves it will no longer be man; that is precisely the point.

Eros Fled Postscript

Letter to the Editor of National Geographic (1/4/17)

Dear Ms. Goldberg,

In regards to the Special Issue on Gender Revolution, I am struck by how such a thing would not have been possible without the Industrial Revolution preceding it. Technology is gradually antiquating the necessity of our sexually dimorphic roles, allowing men to neglect hunting and women to neglect homemaking, and in our newfound leisure we've turned to this sort of introspection—never mind the chromosomes, what do I *feel* like I am? One can't help but notice, after all, that most examples of “non-gender-binary” persons in the issue hail from developed countries, while most classically feminine and masculine individuals reside in rural or undeveloped places. So, while others may view open-mindedness on the topic of gender as progress on the part of human nature, I maintain that it is merely a symptom of Nature's recent absence. Should a large enough solar flare send us back to Stone Age, Stone Age gender roles will shortly thereafter be back in vogue. When people are hungry “XY” and “XX” suffice; it is only in societies capable of obesity and vitamin D deficiency that one thinks to abstract “XY” and “XX” into “??.”

Respectfully,
Christopher Winn

FICTION PROSE

I. Sharp Medicine

For Matthew Winn.

“For in much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth
knowledge increaseth sorrow.”

-King Solomon, Ecclesiastes 1:18

“This is a sharp Medicine...”

-Sir Walter Raleigh, regarding his executioner’s axe

Part One: Upon A Thankless Errand

I belong to that class of persons who bear callouses upon their minds rather than their hands—those grown nearsighted upon untold pages while accumulating numerous superfluous degrees. To be a celebrated professor was my aspiration, one all too easily attained. And like most who consummate their desires early in life yet fail to die young, I soon grew numb to the sycophantic pleasures my title afforded me. Admitted into the Temple of Learning, I knew no awe, only jealousy that I was not the deity worshipped therein. Thus, like Lucifer, I sought to rise above the stars of God, and at the uttermost heights of pride found my fall.

My birth aptly occurred on April Fool's Day, 1969, during a downpour memorable enough that I was thereafter reduced to the petname "Mayflower" or "May" for short. Fitting too was the sordid location of this event—Memphis, Tennessee, a place famous for the blues because that is the only feeling it inspires.

My mother was a simple southern belle who excelled solely at collecting shoes and throwing dinner parties for her friends. Father was a partnered accountant who kept a far closer eye on the corporate books than his own. In hindsight, I believe he married her solely to fit in with his colleagues, for the man treated her as dispassionately as a tasteless billionaire treats a painting which he bought for its pricetag rather than its aesthetics. Even one as undiscerning as she eventually realized this and set about avenging herself in the only ways her propriety would allow—gentleman callers when he was away and a constant trickle of vodka when he wasn't. To this day the

supposedly scentless smell of that Russian concoction or the ominous whining of bedsprings behind locked doors sets my teeth on edge.

I was lavished from the start with toys and nurses, pampered all the more for my wan appearance and shy demeanor. My earliest memories occurred in a universe of mahogany and gold-gilded mirrors where upon my canopied bed I would rest my head against bosoms that were not Mother's, listening attentively to the fairy tales these interchangeable women would read aloud, eyes heavy-lidded, lulled by the swaying of innumerable roses just beyond my window. Byronic in every respect, in time my pallor turned from the sickly to the sensuous, dark locks creeping over my broad brow to contrast with ruddy lips, and at the cusp of pubescence one of my wet nurses offered her breasts to me again, but for a different purpose.

Thus I grew as cynical as a late Caesar, corrupting grade-school friends with copious samples from mother's liquor cabinet as a prelude to various inept sexual games of my invention. And when they would return home to increasingly suspicious parents, I would retire behind my silken canopy once more, clutching whatever book I had lately pilfered from my father's study like it were the sole forbidden fruit. Thus I prematurely found Epictetus, Marcus Aurelius, Thomas à Kempis, Bunyan, Bacon and Montaigne, wooed by their wisdom all the more for my utter worldliness like a glutton envious of an athlete.

In hindsight this coagulation of debauch and moralizing may have soured my spirit, for by high school I had both exhausted and been exhausted by my father's collection, developing a sudden and exclusive taste for the

macabre. Though I was always terribly popular, I considered the likes of Dunsany, Blackwood, Poe, Machen, and Lovecraft most of all to be my only true confidants. I committed many of their works to memory, and though most have gone bleary with age a few remain astoundingly clear—Lovecraft’s “The Hound” being the choicest example. Still in daydream I find myself caressing such phrases as “...where with the satanic taste of neurotic virtuosi we had assembled an universe of terror and decay to excite our jaded sensibilities” like a cat rubs against its master’s leg. Occasionally I would try to broach such subjects post-coitus with whatever slut or stud I was atop, but to no avail. Death only interests those who have already had their fill of life.

So deep did I descend into this realm of antique horror that at times I earnestly aspired to live within Lovecraft’s mythos, though bitterly aware of the impossibility. Of particular interest were its blasphemous rites which prudish Lovecraft fails to elaborate upon, and the forbidden book called *Necronomicon* which both enlightens and maddens. “A locked portfolio, bound in tanned human skin” (The Hound), it spoke of “the Old Ones” whose “habitation is even one with your guarded threshold...Man rules now where They ruled once...They wait patient and potent, for here shall They reign again” (The Dunwich Horror, V). This return would be inaugurated “when the great priest Cthulhu, from his dark house in the might city of R’lyeh under the waters, should rise and bring the earth again beneath his sway. Some day he would call, when the stars were ready, and the secret cult would always be waiting to liberate him” (Call of Cthulhu, II).

I suspect the allure of this imaginary taboo text heavily influenced my dubious decision to continue on with

graduate English studies immediately after earning my Juris Doctorate. Father had steered me to Law so that I might remain both bookish and rich, but even my taste for tailored suits and single-malt Scotch could not compare with my lust for dusty leather-bound tomes. Clenching an Ivy League PhD in comparative literature and mythology, I soon earned the prestige to easily access any of those that I wanted. “Doctor May” by my late-thirties, I hardly missed the excess money, inundated as I was with books and horny undergrads. But, as I have already stated, it was not enough. One can only seek transcendence by cracking open so many occult grimoires or deflowering so many virgins before disappointment blunts enthusiasm’s blade. Sex and text I soon took for granted, even to the point of refusal. By my fifties I was more interested in getting to the bottom of Johnnie Walker bottles than getting to the bottom of existence. The empty ones I would refill with water and arrange with roses, lining the windowsill of my office with this alcoholic’s bouquet.

It was in this funk that I returned to Lovecraft for inspiration, idly tracing each and every detail his stories divulge concerning the *Necronomicon*. Its only English copy is ascribed in “The Dunwich Horror” to Doctor John Dee, a man familiar to any occult connoisseur for his creation of Enochian magic and significant contributions to the court of Queen Elizabeth I. Musing that Dee, as a collector of grimoires at his famed estate in Mortlake, could indeed have owned such a text, on one particularly boring day I ordered my secretary to raid the university library for anything Elizabethan that was even remotely related to Dee. An hour or so later she parked a heavy-laden trolley before my desk, brimming with Shakespeare folios

bookmarked at “The Tempest”, various copies of Marlowe’s “Faustus” and Spencer’s *Faerie Queen*, biographies of Dee and his associate Edward Kelley, everything on Elizabeth I, Sir Walter Raleigh’s *History of the World*, a host of grimoires the good doctor inspired, and the *Book of Enoch* itself. “Good girl,” I said, selecting *Enoch* and *History* first. “I’m indisposed for the rest of the day.”

Locking the door behind her, I settled into the decadent leather of my favorite reading chair. Switching on a nearby lamp, I began leafing through *Enoch*, expecting and finding nothing. Apocryphal but not found within the *Apocrypha*, *Enoch* was the unloved child of the prospective Catholic canon, quoted in the Bible yet excluded from it though perfectly complimenting the accounts of *Genesis*, the Gospels and *Revelations* concerning the fallen angels, their half-human Nephilim offspring and their imprisonment until the end of days. Widely available to scholars today, it was shrouded in mystery during Elizabethan times, considered lost until an adventurer named James Bruce rediscovered it in Ethiopia and presented it to King Louis XV in 1773. Gullible Dee, utterly taken in by the currency-forgery and mystic Kelley, thought he was in contact with the angels (fallen and not) that appear therein. Reaching the footnotes, I hurled it like a Frisbee back to the trolley from whence it came and began speed-reading Raleigh’s *History*. I paused at Volume 1, Chapter 5, Section 6, intrigued by the following quotation:

[I]t is questionless that the use of letters was found out in the very infancy of the world, proved by those prophecies written on pillars of stone and brick by Enoch, of which Josephus affirmeth that one of them remained even in his time...But of these prophecies of Enoch, Saint Jude

testifieth; and some part of his books (which contained the course of the stars, their names and motions) were afterward found in Arabia foelix, in the Dominion of the Queene of Saba (saith Origen) of which Tertullian affirmeth that he had seen and read some whole pages...how they were delivered to posterity, I know not” (154-155).

Plucking my copies of the King James Bible and *Jewish Antiquities* from the shelves behind my desk, I fact-checked these claims one by one. Jude proved underwhelming—

“And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, To execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him” (14-15).

Josephus spiced things up a bit, claiming that the descendants of Seth—Enoch being among them—made use of their lengthy lives by “astronomical and geometrical discoveries, which would not have afforded the time of foretelling unless they had lived six hundred years; for the Great Year is completed in that interval” (1:106). Thus they became,

“...the inventors of that peculiar sort of wisdom which is concerned with the heavenly bodies, and their order. And that their inventions might not be lost before they were sufficiently known, upon Adam’s prediction that the world was to be destroyed at one time by the force of fire, and at another time by the violence and quantity of water, they made two pillars; the one of brick, the other of stone: they

inscribed their discoveries on them both, that in case the pillar of brick should be destroyed by the flood, the pillar of stone might remain, and exhibit those discoveries to mankind; and also inform them that there was another pillar of brick erected by them. Now this remains in the land of Siriad to this day" (1:69-71).

But most intriguing of all was Raleigh's accuracy in predicting where the *Enoch* text would eventually reappear—for the scholarly consensus is that Sheba's queendom was either modern-day Yemen or Ethiopia, the latter being where Bruce eventually found it.

Rusty on Ante-Nicene texts, I dispatched my secretary once more with a second order for books, this one to contain the collected works of Origen and Tertullian. I spent the rest of the day pouring over them, finding little in Origen except "...the books which bear the name Enoch do not at all circulate in the churches as divine" (*Elucidation* LIV). I had almost given up on Tertullian as well when I beheld this chapter heading—"Concerning the Genuineness of the Prophecy of Enoch"—in his book "On the Apparel of Women." I hunched over and read as quickly as possible.

"I am aware that the Scripture of Enoch, which has assigned this order (of action) to angels, is not received by some, because it is not admitted into the Jewish canon either. I suppose they did not think that, having been published before the deluge, it could have safely survived that world-wide calamity, the abolisher of all things. If that is the reason (for rejecting it), let them recall to their memory that Noah, the survivor of the deluge, was the great-grandson of Enoch himself; and he, of course, had heard and remembered, from domestic renown and hereditary

tradition, concerning his own great-grandfather's 'grace in the sight of God,' and concerning all his preachings; since Enoch had given no other charge to Methuselah than that he should hand on the knowledge of them to his posterity. Noah therefore, no doubt, might have succeeded in the trusteeship of (his) preaching; or, had the case been otherwise, he would not have been silent alike concerning the disposition (of things) made by God, his Preserver, and concerning the particular glory of his own house.

If (Noah) had not had this (conservative power) by so short a route, there would (still) be this (consideration) to warrant our assertion of (the genuineness of) this Scripture: he could equally have renewed it, under the Spirit's inspiration, after it had been destroyed by the violence of the deluge, as, after the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonian storming of it, every document of the Jewish literature is generally agreed to have been restored through Ezra."

Well, well. Raleigh had certainly done his research, addressing *Enoch* with surprising authority considering it was a lost text during his day. Rising, I bookmarked these various promising pages before setting the books aside to pour a drink. Cutting the blended Scotch with a splash of Perrier, I downed the draught upon an empty stomach and grinned morosely at the instant effect.

Necronomicon, *Enoch*, Cthulhu, Satan—all now seemed arrayed before me like pieces on a board. I felt that I had stumbled unwittingly upon some game already in progress, but it was as though I did not know the rules. I shrugged my shoulders and went home, but not before scribbling a note to my secretary expressly forbidding her to return any of our recent library withdrawals.

Like any professor worth his salt, I shortly thereafter put my graduate students on the case. Careful not to give away too much, I promised to pen an ingratiating introduction for the dissertation of whoever could bring me the sauciest tidbit concerning any of the following: what happened to Doctor Dee's lost library at Mortlake, any strange books or pillars Sir Walter Raleigh encountered during his travels, or anything notable but not widely known concerning Elizabethan bibliophilia. Three days later, one of the little darlings left a Sticky Note on my desk which read, "That intro better be good—see Cotton buys Dee's land."

My pulse quickened. This could only refer to Robert Cotton, the most accomplished book collector of that age and perhaps of all time. By him alone do we enjoy the only extant copies of the English epics *Beowulf* and *Sir Gawain*, Alexander the Great's letter to his tutor Aristotle concerning India, and the priceless Biblical manuscript *Codex Alexandrinus*, to name but a few. My secretary quickly tracked down a corroborative source in Nicholas Basbanes' exhaustive *A Gentle Madness: Bibliophiles, Bibliomanes, and the Eternal Passion for Books*. "...the seventeenth century antiquarian Joh Aubrey wrote that after the astrologer Dr John Dee died, either in 1608 or 1609, Cotton bought a piece of property on a hunch that he had buried a cache of books on magic and 'spirits.' While the story lacks documentation, it has burnished Cotton's reputation as a collector who would do anything to rescue artifacts" (91).

I clicked away furiously at my retractable pen. Dee would have been wise to commit some of his library to the dirt before leaving Mortlake to travel abroad in the 1580s, for when he returned the estate had been sacked, with most of its housed volumes vandalized or stolen. But supposing Cotton had found some *Necronomicon* in the late

Doctor's soil—what had become of it? It was never catalogued with the rest of his collection, but it struck me as uncharacteristic of a fastidious curator like Cotton to separate such a jewel from his other treasures, no matter how exceptional. Indeed, if he had maintained possession of such a *crème de la crème* he might not have died of a broken heart after King Charles I robbed him of his other books, for any book that Dee felt worthy of burying would have been equal to the rest of Cotton's catalog.

Ashburnham House it was, then—for that is where Charles bequeathed Cotton's treasures. There they fell under the management of a new librarian, one Richard Bentley, a scholar who loved the tomes almost as tenderly as Cotton. He proved his dedication on October 23rd, 1731 when the House caught ablaze and he braved the flames to save as many of the texts as he could. Hence the telltale burn-marks about the periphery of the *Beowulf* manuscript. I momentarily shuddered at the possibility that Bentley had failed to save the particular book I was after, but decided it was too early to despair. Though Bentley presented no such *Necronomicon* to the British government after the fire, this proved nothing. Such a catastrophe would have been the perfect pretext for an ambitious librarian and collector in his own right to make off with a textual crown-jewel. True, I had no reason to impugn Bentley's honor, but I was desperate for it to be true. Knowing Bentley's devotion to Trinity College, I hazarded that this is where he would have willed such a prize.

A phone call to a colleague in Cambridge confirmed this—Richard Bentley had left his papers to a nephew of the same name excepting a few Greek manuscripts from Mount Athos that went straight to Trinity. When the nephew died he gave the rest of his uncle's papers to the college as well,

which Trinity would eventually sell to the British Museum. I immediately placed another call, this time to the management of the British Library.

“Good—” I glanced at my watch, “—evening. This is Professor May, Head of Literature at...Oh. Well. Wonderful. Very kind of you. Yes, yes. Sorry to bother you, but I have a rather random question considering your catalog of Richard Bentley...Right. Well, that’s the trouble. All I really have are a few vague descriptors. Yes. Well, I’d be very interested to know if there’s anything there having to do with the following: Doctor John Dee, Sir Walter Raleigh, pillars, or stars. Certainly, I’ll hold.”

I wiped sweat from my brow.

“Yes, I’m here. Really. An astrological chart, heavily burnt. Papyrus. Mhm. Any text? An inscription on the back.”

I knocked over a glass while lunging for a notepad.

“Yes, ready. ‘Ex Mea Libris Westminster.’ Got it. And the dating? 3rd century B.C. I hate to ask, but is there any chance I can get a scan of it? You’d do that. Ah, it means the world! If you ever need anything! Alright.”

After providing my email address, I hung up the phone with trembling hands. *Ex Mea Libris Westminster*—“from my library at Westminster,” meaning Ashburnham House. Suddenly I could picture it clear as day—Bentley leaping heroically from an Ashburnham window, trailing sparks and smoke as he dropped, *Codex Alexandrinus* tucked like an infant under one arm, an odd papyri peaking out from its otherwise uniform pages, upon which is traced, as Raleigh put it, “the course of the stars.”

Or so my imagination insisted, but even before the scan had reached my inbox I realized I had reached a dead end. I could trace this *Enochian-nomicon* from Raleigh to Dee via their mutual benefactor Queen Elizabeth, and from Dee to Cotton via the dirt, and from Cotton to Bentley via King Charles, but there the trail went cold. I knew what Raleigh thought the chart was, but not *why* he thought it. And how could it ever be determined where such a one as well-travelled as Raleigh had acquired it? Tertullian had died circa 240 A.D. and Raleigh followed him to the grave in 1618. Fourteen hundred years was a daunting, even discouraging gap, but since Raleigh had not failed me yet, I took him at his word once more. So, assuming this papyri was indeed “some part of [Enoch’s] books...found...in the Dominion of the Queene of [Sheba]...of which Tertullian affirmeth that he had seen...” my first task was to trace it from its 3rd century B.C. origin, to Tertullian’s gaze, to Raleigh’s possession.

I meditated upon it for several weeks. A papyrus from that period could have been an early labor of the Library of Alexandria. The Library was unintentionally damaged with fire by Julius Caesar in 48 B.C. and completely eradicated by Caliph Omar in 642 A.D. This left ample room for Carthage-dwelling Tertullian to make his way to that center of learning and behold the chart. So far, so good. But how—or where—did it survive the Library’s numerous catastrophes? While pensively screwing the cap off another bottle of Johnnie Walker I thought of a possible solution. Numerous scholars—Thomas Cahill in his *How the Irish Saved Civilization*, for example—argue that the essence of Greco-Roman knowledge only survived the collapse of the Empire and ensuing Dark Ages due to the dispersion and preservation of its books by monks. The Irish are particularly praised for their relative isolation and diligent monasterial

libraries. Assuming early Catholics had deemed the chart as important as Raleigh did, it was plausible that it would have been sent to the British Isles for safe-keeping when Alexandria was threatened. I thumbed through a Raleigh biography and shook my head—for his valiance at the Siege of Smerwick, Raleigh was granted 40,000 Irish acres. What were the odds that a monastery was on those grounds—or the ruins of one? Raleigh was just the sort who would have had no problem pilfering a Catholic library in his domain or scrounging for treasure at the prior site of one.

I favored the former, seeing as Raleigh knew so much about the text. To him it would have seemed just another scribbling of constellations if not for some custodian being there to explain its significance. That would also explain why Raleigh thought it a gift befitting a Queen—he would not have presented it unless convinced of its authenticity. Nor would Elizabeth have troubled her esteemed court magician with deciphering it unless enthused by the piece.

With this hypothesis I pressed on, increasingly neglecting my professorial duties in favor of my newfound Enochian obsession. What I had to do now was establish a possible link between my chart and the *Enoch* text discovered by James Bruce, for the chart would only ever be an obscure burnt fragment if I could not convince others that Raleigh knew what he was talking about. The best way to do that would be to imbue the story with some pizzazz—international royal intrigue, preferably.

It did not take long to invent multiple theories as to how the enthusiasm for *Enoch* eventually passed from England to France. Charles I was married to Henrietta Maria of France, aunt of King Louis XIV, whose successor Louis XV

would eventually dispatch adventurer Bruce. And if that wasn't good enough, Henrietta Maria's son Charles II later fled to France for fear of Cromwell, providing me with at least two British royals who could have inspired Louis XV's *Enoch* quest by speaking of Charles I's lost artifact. For I could not abide that Bruce had merely *happened upon* his three Ethiopian copies of *Enoch*. No, I needed him to have been expressly tasked by Louis XV with finding them "in the Dominion of the Queen of [Sheba]," for the interest of a king snares the interest of all others.

Johnnie Walker bottle in hand, I paid a staggering visit to the university library in the witching hours, nodding nonchalantly as I caught the curious gaze of several nocturnal undergrads who I may at one time have known intimately. I stood on tiptoes to reach a top shelf, splashing the carpet with Scotch as I stepped back triumphantly clutching James Bruce's *Travels to Discover the Source of the Nile*. I leafed through it woozily, aged eyes straining in the dim light.

"...As a public return for the many obligations I had received from every rank of that most humane, polite, and scientific nation, and more especially from the sovereign, Louis XV., I gave to his cabinet a part of every thing curious I had collected abroad; which was received with that degree of consideration and attention, that cannot fail to determine every traveler of a liberal mind to follow my example.

Amongst the articles I consigned to the library at Paris, was a very beautiful and magnificent copy of the prophecies of Enoch, in large quarto; another is amongst the books of scripture which I brought home, standing immediately before the book of Job, which is its proper place in the Abyssinian canon; and a third copy I have presented to the

Bodleian library at Oxford...The more ancient history of that book is well known. The church at first looked upon it as apocryphal; and as it was quoted in the book of Jude, the same suspicion fell upon that book also. For this reason, the council of Nice threw the epistle of Jude out of the canon; but the council of Trent, arguing better, replaced the apostle in the canon as before...

All that is material to say further concerning the book of Enoch is, that it is a Gnostic book, containing the age of the Emims, Anakims, and Egregores, descendants of the sons of God, when they fell in love with the daughters of men, and had sons by them, who were giants" (422-423).

I could have jumped for joy at a footnote just below this—"The book of Enoch was originally written in Greek, probably by some Alexandrian Jew." So, my speculation concerning Alexandria was validated. Another piece of luck befell me shortly thereafter.

"I cannot but recollect, that, when it was known in England that I had presented this book to the library of the king of France, without staying a few days, to give me time to reach London, where our learned countrymen might have had an opportunity of perusing at leisure another copy of this book, Doctor Woide set out for Paris, with letters from the Secretary of State to Lord Stormont, ambassador at that court, desiring him to assist the Doctor in procuring access to my present, by permission from his Most Christian Majesty. This he accordingly obtained, and a translation of the work was brought over; but, I know not why, it has nowhere appeared [in print]" (426).

Here was yet another tantalizing tidbit to suggest a bit of intrigue between England and France concerning

Enoch, with the former being sent into a frenzy by the thought that the latter had exclusive access to it.

Taking Bruce's book with me back to my office, I made a few more calls across the pond only to determine that I could find no more answers from the comfort of the campus. The following morning I directed my secretary to cash my vacation time and book the next flight to Ethiopia.

Part Two: Pillars of Heracles

Hauling a monstrous carry-on bursting with books, electronics and clothes, I deposited it with considerable strain into an overhead bin and sank into my first-class seat. After pacifying myself with some cognac, I settled into a cover-to-cover reading of Bruce's *Travels*, fearful of missing something. Other than those few quotations dealing directly with *Enoch* that I had already read, two other aspects caught my eye. First was how he had blatantly neglected to tell *where* in Ethiopia he had found the texts. Other references insisted he had rescued them from caves *ala* Dead Sea Scrolls, but nowhere did Bruce say anything of the sort. Second was a passage dealing with Enoch's *ad-naseum*-great-grandson King Solomon—

“The annals of the Abyssinians...say [The Queen of Sheba] was a Pagan when she left Azab; but, being full of admiration at the sight of Solomon's works, she was converted to Judaism in Jerusalem, and bore him a son, whom she called Menilek, and who was [the land of Sheba's] first king...To Saba, or Azab, then, she returned with her son Menilek, whom, after keeping him some years, she sent back to his father to be instructed. Solomon did not neglect his charge; and he was anointed and crowned king of Ethiopia, in the temple of Jerusalem, and at his inauguration took the name of David—After this he returned to Azab, and brought with him a colony of Jews; among whom were many doctors of the law of Moses, particularly one of each tribe, to make judges of in his kingdom, for whom the present Umbares (or supreme judges, three of whom always attend the king) are said and believed to be descended. With these came also Azarias, the son of Zadok the priest, and brought with him a Hebrew transcript of the law, which was delivered into his custody,

as he bore the title of Nebrit, or High Priest; and this charge, though the book itself was burnt with the church of Axum in the Moorish war of Adel, is still continued, as it is said, in the lineage of the Azarias, who are Nebrits, or keepers of the church of Axum, at this day” (398-399).

With many hours still to go in the flight, I ordered another cognac and commenced chatting with a lovely African woman in the seat across from mine. When she got around to asking what my business was in Ethiopia, I explained that I was retracing the steps of an old adventurer, attempting to glean exactly where he’d discovered a rare text dealing with various Biblical characters. Though clearly having no personal interest in the subject, she was kind enough to offer me the card of some cousin of hers, an Ethiopian cabbie.

“Perhaps he can be of use to you; he loves all things obscure and historic.”

I pocketed the card gratefully, vowing to give him a call from the airport. As we continued talking I sensed chemistry between us and briefly entertained asking her if she’d like to join me in the first-class bathroom. Eventually I thought better of it—if she took it the wrong way I could kiss the cousin connection goodbye.

Touching down at Bole International Airport, I immediately found a payphone and interviewed her cousin, whose card read “Aman, Professional Driver and Guide.”

“Are you familiar with James Bruce?” I asked, not getting my hopes up.

“No sir,” Aman said very apologetically.

“That’s alright,” I consoled, “he’s not well-remembered these days. What about Queen Sheba—are there any sights associated with her here?”

“Oh yes,” he piped up, “a very nice attraction—Saint Mary’s Church, where the Queen’s son Menelik brought back the Arc of the Covenant.”

I raised an eyebrow. “Where is that?”

“Axum, sir.”

Axum again! “Far?”

“Roughly two day’s drive.”

I grimaced. “I’m a bit pressed for time. Axum has an airport?”

“Of course.”

I thought for a moment. “Why don’t you come with me? I need a driver and possibly an interpreter. I’ll pay for your roundtrip ticket, the car rental when we arrive, your meals, and whatever else is fair. We’ll be back in 24 hours at the most.”

“Very kind of you, sir!” Aman practically yelled. “I will be at the airport momentarily!”

Agreeing to meet at a coffee shop just before security in an hour, I used the time to book our flights and call ahead for a rental car. This impulsive decision to invite Aman along turned out to be worthwhile, for from the moment we ordered coffee until the wheels touched down

in Axum he talked my ear off about everything to do with Sheba, Menelik, and the Ethiopian holy book *Kebrä Nagast*.

On the short ride there our conversation turned to the church itself. I listened attentively while watching an endless array of shanties, stacked-stone structures, and dirt roads blur past.

“Did you know, sir, that Axum was the first Christian kingdom in the world?”

I confessed I did not.

“And the largest excepting Rome! Saint Mary’s is the center of it all—political and spiritual. It was here that our Emperors came to be crowned and salute the Ark.”

“So every Ethiopian emperor has seen the Ark of the Covenant?” I clarified.

“Not necessarily. Only a single guardian monk is allowed within the Ark’s chapel. There he must stay for the rest of his days, offering ceaseless prayer and incense.” Aman glanced at me conspiratorially. “However, Haile Selassie’s wife Menen *did* pay for the new chapel when the walls of the old one were cracked by the holy heat of the Ark’s Tablets, so she might have taken a little peak during construction, eh?”

I grinned, finding his enthusiasm contagious. “I know I would have.”

The church did not disappoint. Formally named The Church of Our Lady Mary of Zion, it consisted of multiple buildings of white-grey marble and varied brick, with the

main sanctuary domed and speckled with stained glass over the entrance portico. White-shawled figures weaved in and out of the church's surrounding trees, tending towards the sanctuary and away from the sealed chapel with stark blue-barred windows where the Ark is said to rest. Tightening my tie, we parked the car and waited on the sanctuary steps until invited in by a red-stolled priest. Though lavish for Ethiopia, to my eyes it was a sanctum like any other excepting the extremely colorful artwork. After introducing ourselves and looking around politely for a moment, I asked Aman to translate while I probed the priest.

"You are familiar with *The Book of Enoch*?"

After a slight translational delay, the priest nodded gravely.

"And the adventurer who rediscovered it?"

"Bruh-ooce," the priest responded tersely.

"I'm trying to figure out exactly *where* he found the text. Most say they were discovered in caves, and yet, here in his book Bruce says he presented the King of France with, and I quote, 'a very beautiful and magnificent copy...in large quarto.' Hardly the kind of volume one finds buried in a random den."

The priest considered this for a moment. "No foreigner has ever asked before. They assume Ethiopians would have no interest in their own books..." Aman pondered the translation for a moment. "...And just leave them lying about in dirty caves. But not you."

I nodded. "That's right. Not me."

The priest seemed pleased. “My predecessors presented three Ge’ez copies of *Enoch* to James Bruce as a gift. Both because of his interest, and because they thought it sad that our white brethren had lost such an important text.”

I barely concealed my excitement. “In his footnotes Bruce mentions the text had originally been written in Greek by an Alexandrian Jew. Is that what he would have been told by your predecessors?”

The priest shook his head. “Not told. Shown.” He motioned for Aman and I to follow. We forsook the main sanctuary, passing the Ark chapel on our way to a courtyard bristling with obelisks. As we walked Aman commenced translating again. “This we shall see is the oldest surviving structure of the church, dating back to circa 300 AD.” The priest stopped before a particularly dilapidated and diminutive stele which was barely legible. I watched in amazement as he pointed from one symbol to another, explaining as he went.

“There you may see the figures of Solomon, Sheba and young Menelik betwixt the pillars called Boaz and Jachin at the entrance to the First Temple in Jerusalem. Then commences the thefts. Here you may see Menelik stealing away with the Ark, and there are the Chaldeans chopping the pillars into pieces and carting them away to Babylon during the Temple’s destruction, as it is written in 2nd Kings, chapter 25.”

My heart palpitated at the sight of copious Hebrew lettering inscribed upon Boaz and Jachin. So these were Enoch’s pillars!

“And here you may see the horned man who wears a lion’s skin conquering Babylon and discovering the pillars.” The priest turned to stare at me as though appraising my comprehension. “Who might this man be?”

“Alexander the Great,” I breathed. Aman translated my reply and the priest pursed his lips approvingly before moving to the next glyph.

“And there the broken pillars go, to Alexander’s library for restoration and study. But destruction follows them. The Mohammedans burn down the library—but being of brick and stone, Boaz and Jachin survive. From the ashes of Alexandria, Greek Christians take them *there*.” He concluded on a glyph of a giant Alexander rising up from the sea, with a veiled Madonna meandering at his feet.

I cast about for a bench and, finding none, sat down in the dirt. The priest betrayed the slightest smile. “It was the Queen of Sheba who gave Solomon the pillars, Professor May. Her agents found one of them in Africa, the other in Europe, and recognized them as the long-lost familial heirlooms of the Queen’s love. Menelik told us these things, and we have not forgotten.”

After taking copious pictures of the obelisk and making a generous donation towards the upkeep of the Church, Aman and I took our leave. I made it clear to him that I needed absolute silence on the car ride back, but I need not have mentioned it, for he was as awed as I. After committing every detail of our visit to a notepad, I simply sat and stared at it, clutching my temples. Finally, as we parked at the rental return lot, I began writing again—

“Enoch

Unknown

Sheba

Solomon

Chaldeans

Alexander

Alex and Mary?”

I handed the page to Aman for inspection. He nodded. “*Some lineage!*”

“Quite,” I replied, mulling prospective next steps. “I need internet access.”

Tapping into the Axum airport’s sluggish wi-fi, Aman and I huddled about my laptop like gossiping schoolgirls or conspicuous spies. First I queried “One Pillar Europe, Other Africa.” Top result: Strait of Gibraltar. I began reading aloud.

“Strait between Spain and Morocco...known to antiquity as the Pillars of Heracles.”

I paused.

“Europe and Africa separated by 7.7 nautical miles at the Strait’s narrowest...’Pillars’ refer particularly to the peaks at either shore which face one another, once adorned by long-lost monoliths...Site of sunken Atlantis rumored to be between or just beyond the Strait ...Traditionally the

pillars upon the peaks were inscribed 'Non plus ultra' or 'Nothing Further Beyond' to demarcate the end of the earth...Notable literary references appear in Dante, Bacon and Kircher."

I scanned a few more pages to confirm there was little else of interest, then added these tidbits to my notebook before renewing the search.

Next I tried "Alexander the Great & Madonna." Top result: Mount Athos. A shiver ran down my spine. Athos—the monastic island where Richard Bentley had acquired precious Greek manuscripts. Again I read aloud and quickly we discerned the association.

"The architect Dinocrates, to honor Alexander the Great after his passing, proposed to carve Athos' mountain into a massive statue of the conqueror...The place took on Christian significance due to a legend in which Saint John and Virgin Mary were sailing to visit Lazarus in Cyprus. They were blown off course, and when Mary set foot on Athos a voice from heaven declared that this place would forever be her private garden...Hence only men are allowed there."

Documenting this as well, I closed my laptop, folded shut my notebook and turned pensively to Aman. "Aman, you have been everything and more than I hoped. As promised, I shall now pay you what is fair."

I scribbled a check for ten thousand U.S. dollars and handed it across to him. As he gazed at the amount, for a moment there was no recognition on his face.

"Oh, sir!" he suddenly exclaimed.

I cut him off. "That's just the start, Aman. If you can do me one last favor, I'll see to it that you get royalties from this discovery—and if your children want to go to a Western university, I'll get them into mine."

Eyes filling with bewildered tears, he pledged, "Anything, sir."

"Good," I said, clasping his hand. "I need you to tell no-one about the time we've spent together or anything we learned. *Enoch*, Alexander, forget all of it. Until," I said, wagging a finger gravely for emphasis, "Until I come back with some people who will want to interview you. Then I will need you to back up the story just as it happened."

He nodded, shaking his head vigorously.

After taking down all of his contact information and providing mine, I began to rise then sat back down, conscience momentarily nagged. "I don't want you thinking I'm a saint, Aman. It is selfish of me to ask you to keep quiet. But, upon reflection, I think you will agree that this sort of thing will sound better coming from an influential academic. That's just the way of the world."

Aman smiled. "Say no more, Professor. Say no more."

"Alright. Let's get back to Bole, then we go our separate ways. It may be a month or two before I reconnect."

We toasted ourselves numerous times with the plane's cache of beer and embraced at Bole before staggering away, I bound for the ticket booth and Greece,

and he bound for home, to explain—but not really explain—how he had earned ten thousand dollars for a day's work when Ethiopia's average yearly income is roughly \$300.

During the flight my thoughts returned to Richard Bentley. If the *Enochian* star chart he pilfered from Ashburnham had indeed been copied from Boaz and Jachin at Alexandria, and those pillars now rest at Mount Athos, it was no coincidence that he had taken to collecting manuscripts from there. Buying expensive tomes from the monks would have been the perfect pretext for a foreigner to snoop around for a certain pair of pillars. This train of thought lurched suddenly and violently to Bentley's benefactor. Charles I had acquired *Codex Alexandrinus*, the inestimable Greek Bible which Bentley would also save from flame, by way of Cyril Lucaris. Cyril was the founder of the Athoniada seminary at Athos. I squinted, trying to decipher this new tangle of associations. Greek Christians moved Boaz and Jachin to Athos. Cyril founded a school there, then gifted a book to the English King who—unwittingly or not—owned a copy of the pillars' astrological portion. The King's quick-fingered librarian then made off with said star chart and commenced acquiring any manuscripts with which Athos was willing to part.

More intrigue, this time between English bibliophiles and Greek monks. But what was the Grecian motive? To recover the star chart? Yes, not in-and-of-itself, but rather to prevent anyone from tracing the whereabouts of the pillars as I had done. Momentarily I pictured Dee's estate being sacked and the inferno engulfing Cotton's library, thinking I espied some agent of Athos fleeing the scene of each. This I immediately dismissed as paranoia, reasoning that if it were as grave as that the Greeks would also have tried to cover the pillars' tracks at Saint Mary's in

Axum. Of course, I had hardly thought to ask the priest of Mary's if they had ever had any Grecian klepto- or pyromaniac visitors. A few drinks later I concluded it would not be wise to waltz into Athos solely with a scan of the star chart, pictures of the obelisk, and a threat to publish the whole tale if the monks didn't fork over the pillars. I needed backup.

After finding a hotel I put in a round of calls to several colleagues at the university, briefly explaining that I was closing in on an occult discovery of historic proportions and needed an ally who could exert great influence in Greece. Our Director of Anthropology told me to give him a half-hour, which I spent chain-smoking for the first time since my twenties. I answered his redial on the first ring.

"Yes?" I asked, pacing the hotel room.

"I think I have who you're looking for. He's asked not to be named quite yet, but I can tell you he is a connoisseur of not a little earthly means. He mostly bankrolls far-left politicians, but has a real soft spot for the numinous. He helped me out during that incident in Goshen; that's why I thought of him. He asked me to clarify exactly what you're wanting, and what he'll get in return."

"Patch him through."

A new dial tone played.

"Hello?" said a masculine voice of indeterminable accent.

"It's Vick again. Professor May is also on the line."

“Ah, Professor May. Vick says you have found something intriguing. I know you’re holding your cards close, but I’m going to need a little more before I get too involved.”

“Understood,” I said, stubbing out my cigarette. “I have reason to believe the monks at Mount Athos possess a mythological artifact of extreme importance, the existence of which they will likely deny if not compelled to tell the truth. I only need a few hours to study it and take pictures—then they can have it back.”

The voice considered this. “Fascinating. I know for a fact that those monks harbor many curious things on their independent isle, but never have I heard of something so momentous. Without saying too much, can you explain why they would begrudge an esteemed professor a peak at this object?”

I hesitated. “Because they think it’s dangerous.”

“And what do you think? *Is* it dangerous?”

“I’m not superstitious. If there’s anything dangerous at Athos, it’s the monks, not their treasures.”

The voice considered this. “I will accompany you. Nothing will befall you in my presence. What say I have my jet pick you up tomorrow morning around 8:30? We’ll fly to Athos, see what we can see, perhaps make history. You will of course credit me as a co-finder.”

I stared at the carpet, further loosening my tie. “It’s a deal.”

“Excellent. My people will call you back shortly with the details. My name, by the way, is Sam Roth.”

The voice hung up.

“Holy shit,” Vick commented.

“Ditto.”

At 8:15 the next day, the famed Mr. Roth was waiting on the tarmac for me. Though a few years my senior, he looked to be in his early forties at the most, lithe and impeccably dressed in a suit of grey silk with a purple tie, a Patek Philippe dangling nonchalantly from his wrist.

He shook my hand firmly and motioned for us to ascend the jet’s retractable stairway. Once inside and seated, a young stewardess immediately placed an iced bucket of mineral water, fruits, and dainty sandwiches on the table before us.

“Breakfast?” Mr. Roth inquired.

I took an apple to be polite, feeling a bit sick.
“Thank you.”

He leaned forward and selected a sandwich. “Athos can be quite a hike. I recommend fueling up.” He courteously removed his gaze from my bloodshot eyes, saying softly while peering out the window, “If you are hung-over we can open a little wine or champagne, but you will *not* embarrass me in front of the monks.” This he said with chilling civility.

I shook my head. “Thank you, but no. I’m fine.”

He nodded ever so slightly, biting into his sandwich with relish. After totally devouring it, even to the point of licking his fingers, he deftly shifted the conversation to the matter at hand.

“Though these cenobites will be civil towards us—for they have been informed that I could interfere with their way of life considerably—I would not expect them to be thrilled by our presence, unaccustomed as they are to intrusions by the outside world. Thus I recommend issuing a straightforward description of the artifact upon arrival so that they can maintain a semblance of dignity—and perhaps even pretend they’re doing us a favor.”

Here he paused while selecting a bottle of mineral water, which he downed in several monstrous gulps. Wiping his mouth carelessly upon his silken sleeve, he grinned contentedly and continued.

“By the way, have you had any dealings with Athos before?”

I replied that I had not.

“Hm.”

Irritated by his terseness, I inquired why he had asked.

“Unhappy as they are with our visit, they didn’t seem entirely surprised.”

Handed a satellite phone by the stewardess, Mr. Roth excused himself and moved to the back of the plane to

take the call, leaving me to mull over this rather sinister statement.

I had shaken it off by the time we disembarked the jet for a ferry, scanning the monastery-dappled hills for the likely location of my pillars—for I did indeed think of them as mine at this point. As we drew near the shore Mr. Roth pointed out the utmost bough of an ancient cypress on a crest above us.

“That was planted by Saint Athanasios when he founded Great Lavra Monastery over a thousand years ago.” His tone was giddy.

After a formidable trek from the beach, Roth, myself, and two of his ex-military-looking bodyguards waited in the shade of that very tree for our prearranged rendezvous with the abbots of Grand Lavra and the Athonite Seminary. These, I had told Mr. Roth’s agents, were the abbots most likely to know of our artifact’s location. Looking impatiently at his watch, Mr. Roth quipped that this was how the otherwise impotent monks had chosen to avenge themselves—by keeping us waiting. It was indeed some twenty minutes before the abbots rounded a bend and hailed us dourly.

To my surprise, Mr. Roth immediately broke into fluent Greek and told them in his firm yet unimpeachable manner that he did not appreciate having his time wasted. The abbots apologized and, at the behest of Roth, turned to me with raised eyebrows. I handed them a scan of the star chart, a close-up of the Axum obelisk centered upon the Solomonic family betwixt Boaz and Jachin, and a clearer artistic depiction of the pillars.

“Boaz and Jachin,” Mr. Roth said as he peaked over their shoulders. “Incredible.”

The monks murmured to one another, and I could not help but agree with Roth’s estimation that they were less than surprised. Then, remembering their manners, they looked first at Roth, then at me, and seemed to shrug.

“Follow us,” the Athonite abbot invited.

Thus we found ourselves in a dimly lit alcove of a seminary library, where upon an enormous altar lay numerous circular slabs like great blocks of cheese, covered reverently with silk.

“Remove the covers, please,” Mr. Roth insisted.

Loathe to do so, the abbots eventually wilted under his willful gaze and stripped the slabs. On one side of the altar rested slabs of stone, on the other, slabs of brick. Each medium bore roughly seventeen feet of Hebrew text if stacked atop one another, with another seventeen feet of astrologic figures and angles. I produced a spare copy of the star chart and looked carefully until I found a slab which matched it. Unable to resist, I caressed the source material with the tips of my fingers, feeling the more-than-ancient indents, for a moment almost reverent.

“Professor May,” Mr. Roth breathed, putting a hand upon my shoulder, “you have made the greatest discovery of all time, though you do not yet know it.”

I looked at him questioningly.

He shook his head, suggesting by expression alone that he would expound later. He then turned to the priests and motioned towards the slabs. "We will of course be taking these, for study and restoration. Then they will be returned to Jerusalem, after a brief display at Gibraltar to commemorate their rediscovery."

Faces turning pale, the monks began to protest.

"Silence!" Mr. Roth commanded.

The abbots flinched.

"These belong to *Israel*, to the *world*, not to you!" he uttered hoarsely.

After ordering one of his body guards to keep careful watch over the pillars, Roth and I stepped outside so that he could get a signal on his satellite phone. Feeling somewhat like an accomplice to theft, I debated voicing my concerns but thought better of it. Instead I listened as he summoned a veritable invasion of archeologists, antiquarian experts, and Hebraic scholars, all of whom would arrive before nightfall.

Upon concluding the last call he tossed his second bodyguard the phone and grinned broadly. "Now we endure the vultures for a while. But rest assured Professor, when they are done picking these bones clean we will get a clear look at what they've uncovered."

Part Three: Spectacle of Pain

On our flight back to Athens I tried to ascertain how it was that Roth knew as much or more about the pillars than I did, but he was an enigmatic as ever.

“I’m a scholar, like yourself,” he insisted, “and I am in possession of certain unassailable texts which assert that Boaz and Jachin were Heracles’ Pillars long before Solomon got ahold of them.”

Having the stewardess uncork a bottle of champagne, he poured me an overflowing flute and encouraged me to drink. “Besides, they won’t be displayed at Gibraltar long. Just enough time for us to ham it up before the press, then back to the Temple Mount they go.”

Though I found the thought of exposing the ancient pillars in such a brash outdoor display to be dubious at best, I eventually dropped the subject, consoled by the fact that I would never have gotten at them without his aid. Nearly two bottles of champagne later, I joined his mood of jubilation, even playing a little touchy-feely with the stewardess upon his encouragement.

Dropped off at my hotel by one of Roth’s limousines, I ran out the clock on my reservation by raiding the mini-fridge and rebuffing the curious calls of my associates, particularly Vick. Then I packed up and went home, back to my stuffy office and my Johnnie Walker bottles full of wilted roses.

There I fell into a despair far deeper than my previous tedium, perhaps afraid that Roth would fail to credit me or ever contact me again. This, Vick assured me,

was an unwarranted concern. Nonetheless the feeling persisted. Perhaps what I really feared was having reached my peak—that it could only be downhill from here. I would never top discovering Boaz and Jachin. All my life I had sought a *Necronomicon*, and now that I had found it I wasn't sure why I should continue living. This malaise was such that I entered a period of stark celibacy and attempted sobriety until a call from Mr. Roth's associates brought me back to my senses.

The restoration was complete, with the slabs standing tall once more as thirty-four foot columns with five foot diameters. A full transcription of the inscribed text had been made, containing both the Enochian story known to us by Bruce and the star chart as-yet unknown to most. All the arrangements with Spain and Morocco had been made to allow the pillars to stand where Mr. Roth believed they once had stood for a day and night of his choosing. A full catalogue of the momentous occasion was emailed to me, along with a first-class ticket to Spain and some suggestions as to what I should wear.

Said catalogue contained several factoids which further confirmed Roth's expertise on the subject. The consonants of "Boaz" and "Jachin" in Hebrew apparently form a line akin to, "May He establish in strength." Furthermore, just beyond them in Solomon's temple had lain a brazen sea, arguably so as to create a scene like the one they would have made when stationed at the Strait, and thus their positions on the right and left hand of the Temple entrance could be used to indicate where each belonged respecting the shores of Gibraltar—Boaz to the north in Spain, Jachin to the south in Morocco. Thus our photo-op as co-discoverers would take place next to Boaz in only a few weeks' time.

I asked to be allowed to fly up Aman and have him appear in the photos as well, but Roth's people gently declined. He was of course to be credited, but solely as my assistant. When I called and broke this news Aman did not let on to being offended—perhaps because with a single check I had made him a rich man. I thanked him for his understanding and promised to visit the pillars with him when they were installed in Jerusalem.

Packing my highest-thread-count wool suit and *The Complete Fiction of H.P. Lovecraft*, I boarded the flight to Spain with a strange solemnity. My fresh haircut, trimmed beard, appropriately tightened and dimpled tie, shined shoes, and the momentous occasion itself all conspired to make me feel as though I were bound for a funeral. Three doubles of Johnnie Walker numbed that sensation right out of me, and I began speaking of my triumph to a fellow passenger with enough gusto and volume to eventually capture the attention of the first-class cabin entire.

Roth's associates awaited me just beyond baggage claim with a printed sign that bore my name in raised gold letters astride a photograph of the restored pillars. Several Spanish journalists and photogs were there to capture my arrival. I answered a few questions from a particularly beautiful Spaniard.

"How does it feel to have discovered a Biblical treasure?" she asked, microphone held aloft.

"Apocalyptic," I quipped, winking at her.

"And what are you expecting from tomorrow night's ceremony?"

“If the pillars survive those coastal winds, I’ll be happy.”

I turned and began to walk away.

“One more question, Professor May?”

“Yes?” I asked over my shoulder.

“How do you feel about the most recent coup your co-discoverer has financed?”

I waved my hand dismissively as Roth’s associates whisked me away.

We rendezvoused with Roth at an elite and secluded bed-and-breakfast only a short drive from the Strait. He proposed we eat outside on the temperate evening and I agreed. To my surprise but not my chagrin, his wife joined us.

“Makeda,” she introduced herself.

“May,” I responded, lightly kissing her immaculate hand.

Mr. Roth nodded deviously. “Withdraw your hand darling, before this beast devours it.” Patting my shoulder, he offered me the seat with the best view. Our table overlooked a beachy bluff, intensely serene in the moonlight.

“What say we make it easy—an appetizer platter, three Caesar salads, three Surf-and-Turf entrees, and three

slices of red velvet cake for dessert? Oh, and a bottle of wine.”

“No argument here,” I replied as Makeda daintily inclined her head.

“Excellent,” said Roth, summoning the *maître de*. Repeating the order, he requested it be brought out all at once rather than in courses, expressing a wish to sample a bit of this and a bit of that rather than having to wait for the next dish to arrive. “My father was militant about eating dishes in a particular order,” he explained, “so now I make a rule of rebelling.”

Eliciting no particular reaction from this eccentricity, Roth steepled his fingertips and clucked his tongue. “So,” he said suddenly. “What shall we talk about?”

“I for one would like to hear how Professor May discovered the location of the pillars. It seems to me, darling, that in your haste to claim them you forgot to get the whole story from the man who did all the leg-work.”

“Astute as always,” Roth replied, seeming genuinely pleased by the criticism. “Please, Professor May, do humor us with the whole tale. Leave nothing out!”

So I did just that, blatantly leaving out my original and in hindsight embarrassing Lovecraftian motive to begin with Doctor Dee’s pilfered library and Raleigh’s intriguing insistence that *Enoch* originated upon a peculiar set of pillars. From there I described Cotton’s excavation and eventual loss of the star chart to Charles I and Bentley, the latter of whom could not resist lightening the King’s textual load. Then, out of order with how I actually pieced it all

together, I mentioned Cyril's gift-giving to Charles, hinting it might have been some sort of reconnaissance on the part of Athos' monks, who wished to prevent the very occurrence we were now celebrating. There I described a dead-end which could only be overcome by reverse-engineering Bruce's travels, leading myself and Aman to Saint Mary's and a curious obelisk that suggested Alexander the Great himself had plucked the pillars from a smoking and sundered Babylon and sent them back to his center of learning for study. Finally, the giant statue-isle of Alexander being traversed by Mother Mary had confirmed Athos as the spot where Greek Christians had ferried away the prize when the Caliph's army loomed. Here I stopped, believing I was done.

"But what about before?" Roth asked politely.

"Sorry?"

"Before Athos and Alexander, before Solomon and Sheba?"

"Well," I said, reaching nervously for a glass of water, "on that subject you seem to know far more than I."

Roth slapped his knee, glancing over playfully at his wife. "See my darling, I really *am* a scholar. There is at least one subject in this world upon which I know more than the esteemed Professor May."

I wasn't sure whether to be offended or flattered.

"Hm," she conceded, "perhaps."

"*Perhaps,*" Roth imitated. "No, no, my darling. There can be no doubt. For I know the *purpose* of the pillars, be they called Heracles' or Solomon's."

"Which was?" I asked, meaning to call his bluff.

"To free the fallen ones at the end of days, of course."

I laughed. Roth and Makeda did not.

Clearing my throat, I asked him to clarify.

"The textual part of Boaz and Jachin, as you know, is the tale of the fallen—their lust for mortal women, the children they had by them, and their punishment, to be sealed away until freed."

"Yes?" I encouraged.

"Well, their astrological part, of which your star chart is a piece, tells *how* to free them. Their presence is essential as well, of course—the text alone is like knowing of a keyhole but having no key."

I stared at him dully.

Roth took Makeda's hand. "A nonbeliever," he said to her teasingly, "but not for long."

"So," I started, "so you believe that tomorrow, when Boaz and Jachin flank the Strait once more, the stars are going to align and free the Enochian angels?"

“Mhm,” said Roth, biting into his newly-arrived steak.

“That’s insane,” I said in earnest.

Roth shrugged, chewing contentedly. “Want to bet?” Then, looking at me for a split-second as though I were a slug, he asked, “How much have you got?”

I shook my head, setting down my fork. “I’m sorry. I don’t mean to insult anyone’s beliefs. I’m just unaccustomed to this sort of magical thinking.”

“No need to apologize, Professor,” Roth said with a mouthful, “nor lie. It’s ‘magical thinking’ that got you to the pillars, ‘magical thinking’ that brought us together. Most important of all,” here he finally swallowed so as to speak legibly, “it’s ‘magical thinking’ that made a future Professor who saw little meaning in this world invent a great big one named *Necronomicon*.”

Turning pale, I excused myself from the table and hastened to the bed-and-breakfast, thinking momentarily of calling a cab and fleeing. Ringing room service for a bottle of Johnnie Walker, I got it halfway down before I regained my composure.

Not sleeping a wink, the following morning I found a handwritten note in flawless cursive tacked to the outside of my door. “He loves to toy with people, as you have gathered. But he doesn’t really mean anything by it—it’s just because he’s secretly insecure. That doesn’t excuse his behavior, but I hope you won’t let him ruin YOUR day, for we all know it is really yours. –Makeda.” I could smell her perfume wafting from the paper.

I put on the good suit I had brought and rang room service again for some black coffee.

We met at the waiting limousines at 7PM sharp as scheduled. Roth very sweetly and sincerely apologized, and I resisted the urge to demand how he knew so much about me, feeling at this late hour that it would do me no good. I shook hands reluctantly and we drove to the Strait.

There a horde of sycophants and camera-crews awaited us. At one point Roth's bodyguards actually reached for their shoulder holsters to disperse the frenzied crowd. Most of them were there for Roth and his money. The few historic and occult connoisseurs present kept to the periphery, preferring to observe carefully rather than interact. Even Roth, at first high-spirited by all the attention, eventually grew bored with it and motioned for us to take our places early at the cordoned-off display of Boaz on the Spanish peak. Once there Makeda kissed him lightly on the cheek, then turned to me to explain that she would rejoin us after the pictures were taken.

As she walked away Roth noticed me watching her. "You can have her later, if you like," he said nonchalantly as we pressed shoulders and smiled for the camera before Boaz, "she's a whore of biblical proportions."

Afterwards we three sauntered to where the champagne flowed. "I recommend taking it easy on the old ethanol, Professor," Roth said as he handed me a glass. At first I thought he was cautioning me against impotence. Only later would I realize he wanted me sober for a less earthly act.

Finishing our first and only round of drinks, Roth led the way to a cabal of journalists. We gave them rehearsed lines about the unfathomable significance of the pillars to Hebrew culture and world history, explaining tonight's display as merely a respectful nod to where they may once have stood before being installed at the fore of Solomon's temple. One astute news anchor asked us if we meant to contradict the biblical account that Hiram constructed the pillars for Solomon. Mr. Roth went off script, answering that "There is significant, albeit little-known evidence that the pillars predate Solomon and can be traced back to his nigh-primordial ancestor Enoch. In a word—yes."

This caused a bit of a stir in the surrounding crowd, which Roth seemed to relish. As another anchor asked for clarification, Roth suddenly seemed dazed, and took to staring at his Patek Phillipe as though no one else existed. He took me by the shoulder as though steadying himself, and looking me in the eyes, could only pronounce, "Soon."

Makeda came to the rescue. "My husband is jet-lagged and a bit overwhelmed by the occasion. Please excuse us."

Roth's bodyguards immediately extricated us, and we found ourselves sitting before Boaz with legs crossed like kindergarteners, no chairs being immediately available. Roth breathed deeply, clutching Makeda's hand. Though trying not to pry, I couldn't help but overhear him asking her if she felt "It." What "It" was, I hadn't the slightest idea.

By now it was about 10:30PM, and the moon reflected beautifully upon the Strait. I could barely see Jachin glistening from the opposite shore. I began to feel odd as well, gently drunk, like an infant struggling against

sleep and failing as mother strokes its brow and repeats a lullaby. It was as though I had been caught by some internal undertow which was dragging me down a mysterious, albeit benign vortex. The air felt heavy and charged, though there was no humidity to speak of. Suddenly I realized the ever-murmuring crowd behind us had fallen silent.

I looked up at Boaz. It was translucent. I blinked heavily, and when I opened my eyes I could still see through it to where the moon reflected upon the water.

"Roth," I whined.

He held up a hand, stern but empathetic, equally shaken by the sight. Now, it seemed to us, the translucent pillar began to dissolve, wafting away from top to bottom like the disintegration of a mirage, thin sheets of phantasmal particles pulling out and away, like minute fireflies that blink but once and vanish.

There was no pillar before us now, nor on the other shore. Only the gibbous moon remained, a giant silver disk like oversized fine china floating upon the surface of the Strait. This began to move and shimmer as something penetrated it from beneath, sending ripples exploding outwards. Whatever the object was, it seemed to me metallic, but oddly streaked and pearlescent like a blend of Damascus steel and certain whitish-pink seashells that one appreciates as a child. It grew in length and width, a mere apex to the gargantuan structure that followed.

For the better part of fifteen minutes this gradual elevation continued, expanding from the center of the Strait to encompass and eventually bridge its entirety. The thing was architectural in nature, though unlike any work of man.

At times layered and cubed like Bismuth crystals, at other points it seemed to fold into and out of itself like a metallic Mobius strip. As a whole it was a structural Gordian Knot, entirely incomprehensible respecting construction or purpose.

I wondered vaguely if the camera crews in attendance had recovered from their shock enough to start filming. I had my answer moments later when a few of them crept near to us and asked permission to get closer. I shrugged, unsure why they were asking me. Roth merely raised a lip to his fingers, neither encouraging nor forbidding their presence.

Suddenly the entire structure shifted. Four lines now ran down its once-uniform hull and began to widen from top to bottom like clenched molars relaxing. The apex opened first, outwards like a blooming flower, and the rest of the structure followed. Golden light began to emanate from these crevices as they continued to expand, until the cardinal points had reached full extension, settling themselves flatly upon sea and land, at which time the light was such that it beamed up and out omnidirectionally, like a blazing golden lotus atop a silver lily pad.

To my astonishment and horror, the sound of three rumbling syllables— difficult to make out but syllables nonetheless—seemed to emerge from this light. If I hadn't known better, I would have thought it was a portentous name from Lovecraft's mythos—"*Yog-So-Thoth*."

"*Them*," Roth breathed to no one in particular. "Did you hear?" He rose shakily to his feet. "The gate is opened wide. Come."

And so, as in a surreal dream, I followed Roth and Makeda on feet that were not entirely my own, a camera crew trailing behind us. Roth shuddered with adulation as he stepped foot upon the platform and was entirely enveloped by the light save for the hand that he extended to Makeda. She took it and was consumed as well. I followed the disappearing hem of her dress, shutting my eyes as I crossed the threshold.

It was a realm of blue and white flame that did not burn. Boughs, hedgerows, trellises, pagodas, and ponds of fire seethed and shimmered about us, all flickering and favoring a slight bend outwards as though a heavy central wind were repulsing them. It was terribly quiet, as though we all were suddenly deaf—and struck dumb as well by the sight of seven humanoid forms, giant figures of ignited gas that hovered about and slightly above us. Faceless they were, with frontal lobes as large as extra-terrestrials, and crowned like princes.

Roth fell to his knees and bellowed “GOD!”

A throatless response emanated from the seven simultaneously, bypassing sound and speech, delivered straight to our minds.

“Well done, good and faithful servant,” they said to a now-prostrated Roth.

I knelt too, out of weakness rather than reverence. Makeda alone remained standing, seemingly impervious to the emotional import of what was transpiring.

“It was we,” the seven declared, “who made man, we who guided man, and we who now consummate man.”

I glanced at the camera crews. The entire world was watching this.

“If not for our breath you would still be as dust. If not for our voice you would still be as apes. If not for our revelation, you would never become as gods.”

Roth whimpered.

“Fear not, for we shall wipe away all the tears from your eyes, and death will be no more, nor mourning, nor crying, nor pain. By us you shall eat and drink without tending the land, and bear children without pregnancy or painful labor, and know no more war.”

They extended their open palms and an alien symbol flickered therein. “Behold, we bequeath a sign which shall mark our elect, and for those who refuse this sign there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. We will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. All who confess with their mouths that we are Lord, and believe in their hearts that we rose from the dead shall be saved.”

“Masters,” Roth whimpered, “what name shall we call you?”

“*I am*,” the seven boasted, “the Bright Morning Star, and we are Legion.”

“Excuse me,” I said, suddenly and strangely emboldened, “What do you mean ‘rose from the dead?’”

“Forgive him!” cried Roth. “He knows not what he does!”

They humored me. “For your sake we have rested in this house like ones dead and dreaming, for the sight of us was death to man. But no more. Tonight the stars testify that we may gather you as a hen gathers chicks under her wing.”

More was said, but I was not conscious for it. Roth and Makeda had to drag me out of the light before continuing their conversation out in the open with this Legion. They grew more material as they exited their Atlantean prison, gradually solidifying as they communed with the crowds. I saw video of it later. Now they looked distinctly like the E.T.s of sci-fi cartoonists, or the occult beings which Aleister Crowley called “The Greys.”

The rest of their preaching, I gathered, involved the inauguration of a new “language of love” which would unite all those bearing their mark, to be telepathically imparted at some ritual held at the U.N. Headquarters’ Meditation Room. There too would they unveil the horde of locust-like drones that would harry anyone who continued to speak in the old barbarous ways.

After being examined by Roth’s personal physician, I was deemed physically healthy—liver damage and STDs excepted—and sent home. For two weeks I didn’t leave my house, hunkered unshaven and only semi-sane before my computer and TV screens, watching the entire world reorganize about Legion with little resistance. Ceasefires were called everywhere, proliferation of arms halted, stock markets stabilized, and world hunger was quickly solved. All that was required was taking their mark.

On the 15th day I turned off all the screens and gathered together all the books that I had relied upon to

find the pillars. Starting with the Bible, *Enoch*, and Josephus, I reread them all. From there I delved into the legend of Atlantis, shivering at the numerous accounts of a prehistoric city that had been sealed up and sunken for offending the gods. Midway through the third week I knew what I had done. By the end of that same week I had decided what I was going to do about it.

Refilling my latest Johnnie Walker bottle with water, I carried it out to the garden and inserted three rose-stems into it. Admiring the arrangement, I brought this glass bouquet back to my study and set it atop the pile of titles resting there on my desk, a tower of pulp and boards that had allowed me to unleash Hell itself. Sitting heavily on the opposite corner of the desk, I hefted my father's old nickel-plated .38 special revolver, noticing for the first time that it was quite heavy. I mulled cracking open and polishing off one last bottle, but decided not to—I wanted to go having experienced at least a small semblance of self-restraint. Thus, cramming the mass of metal into my mouth with no fuss or fanfare, I angled it upwards until it dug into the roof of my mouth and jerked the trigger.

To my disbelief, I awoke in a hospital bed. The nurse had just finished changing the bandages which covered most of my head.

"H-ow?" I gasped.

"Shh," she insisted. "You'll be alright. That Jesus-freak shot you, but Legion kept you alive. It's a miracle. Everyone on social media's talking about it. They're rounding all of them up right now, you know—the ones that aren't taking the mark."

Reaching for her purse, she asked if I would mind her taking a picture to post.

I did something akin to a shrug.

She grinned and pressed against me, taking several selfies, hashtag #praiselegion. Setting her phone down, she did not withdraw.

“Want a blowjob?” she asked nonchalantly.

“Ex-cuse me?” I muttered, taken aback.

She laughed at my naivety. “I think it’d be fun. Besides, Legion says shame isn’t allowed anymore. Everyone can do whatever they want.” She tapped a fingernail against the almost imperceptible mark on her forehead. “Everything’s okay now,” she said as she began to lift my hospital robe. “Everything’s okay.”

I wish I could say that I rebuffed her advances, never touched another drink, and “repent[ed] for the kingdom of Heaven is at hand.” Instead I licked my new masters’ hand like a wounded beast, affirming the narrative that some Christian patsy had pulled the trigger instead of myself. Everything *is* okay now, thanks to Legion and their mark. Still, I cannot shake the image of the guillotines that fall each day to lop off unmarked heads, nor that lake of fire where first we met our new gods.

AFTERWORD

Christopher is also the author of *Our Work and Will: A Compilation (2016)*.

Feedback?

Contact electric.oldschool@gmail.com
w/ "Deus" in Subject.