

Journey to Hell's Kitchen

By Darien S. Acosta

Her eyes shot two brief blank stares.

The first was only sensed, but I knew then that I was being challenged by her actions; challenged to meet her gaze. Consequently I raised my head to meet her curious glare dead on; being briefly rewarded with the glimpse of her expanding pupils, pupils which belligerently forced the beautiful brown of her eyes to vanish. Her curiosity, it seemed, could only be resurrected for a fleeting moment; much like a tired heart that can only beat in tune with the timed electrical shock of a defibrillator.

After this much excitement, all she could do was turn away.

I continued to watch her, however hesitant, even now, from afar, as my body leaned against the locked door of a conductor's booth. I wondered, almost desperately, whether she too might be traveling alone, meanwhile as she positioned her own body deeper and deeper into the thickening crowd that inhabited this compacted metallic tube.

Peering alongside the shadowy figures that distorted my vision, I was only able to see the back of her shaved head. Her head was oval and hair shaved close to the skin, if she were bald, few would doubt she was a sick one.

The train jolted on a crisp curve and as her body came into my view I noticed that she wore only a simple, ultra black jumpsuit layered by thick polymers. I recognized it to be an interesting attire indeed, and I wondered why that hadn't been the first thing of her that I noticed.

Now, more than intrigued, I stretched my neck over the skull cased minds of these transitory patrons and noticed that there were others, dressed similarly as she; all loosely scattered amongst this rush hour crowd.

Counting passionately to seven, I noted that if their jumpsuits had been dyed with the colors of white or orange, their suits would appear very much as impermeable, skintight biohazard suits when equated to the fashion worn by the general populace.

It was then that I heard the on board train announcement system speak in dead monotonous accent the words "Ladies and Gentlemen, due to an increase in security measures, all bags will be subject to random inspection by Police. I repeat..."

The announcement could only be heard by my ears once before the it was rudely interrupted by the cacophony of what seemed to be many people screaming "LA, LA, LA, LA, LA" in loud monotonous voices. I quickly looked around and noticed that everyone who had been dressed in an ominous black jumpsuit held their palms with a fierce tightness against their ears and it was they who were indeed yelling this childish phrase. It was peculiar noticing how noone seemed to mind or notice whether one outburst belonged to that of the train or whether it came from within the voice box of a human body.

I watched the yellers with a curious intensity and it was then that I realized that this was not a mere gathering of friends or a group of simple minded associates. I had noticed how they all screamed with conviction, the conviction of possible gang members. Yes, surprisingly a real gang, seemingly unlike the rest, unlike the many other disgruntled, pampered children that formed quasi gang associations for the sole purpose of status, fashion, or culture. The ones who stood scattered before me were a group of adolescents brought together for a secret cause. I knew it anyway, but I could prove it by staring at their faceless expressions, expressions void of simple emotion but instead continually being filled by the proliferation of purpose, bearing all the qualities of chiseled stone.

And with that revelation, I was soon gripped by another most terrible notion, I suddenly knew that I must discover their secrets and their cause if my life were to carry on any further meaning.

Soon after they had stopped their raving and as the room slowed to a crawl I felt a force that pushed one's body forward. Now at a halt, the thin stainless steel doors glided open and as the gang brutally pushed their way towards the exit I functioned as I had intended and followed the group in close pursuit. Outside, now on a concrete platform, grey with dirt, their pace became fast and frenzied, but it mattered very little to me, having long become accustomed to expertly weaving in and out of masses people that claim to have a will of their own.

I followed them patiently, and soon anxiously, to the top of a double set of staircases which of natural consequences led to the city's street level. Underneath the densely overcast atmosphere I found it peculiar that the group now positioned themselves into a rather curious line formation. I noticed that the formation was reminiscent of that of a lowercase letter "t". In formation, I watched as they moved forward in a line, nearly in step, with steeltoe boots and the rubber soles of beaten blackspot converse sneakers pounding loudly onto pavement.

I needn't have followed them for long, for soon enough the collective figure furthest from the front, whose suit seemed to me as perhaps the greyest, peered over his shoulder and having taken a fancy in my pursuit, smiled and asked?

"And you are?"

"Myself? I'm just a curious stranger." I replied.

"Or a curious straggler." He said, his interactive demeanor rather boasting of ego.

"I was wondering what was the name of your gang?"

He smiles, laughs, and replied, "We have no name, if you were to call us anything, you can call us the "LA LA" gang, but there are others who know us by different names.... you see?"

"I see."

Then he also added, "That's not to say that we'll never have a permanent name though, it just isn't time for such things. I'm called Noxious by the way. The jumpsuits were my idea, Like em?"

"Yes, very much so, that's initially what grabbed my attention." I said, now internally questioning myself as to why I had felt the need to lie about something so trivial, and soon quickly asked, "How did this all start Noxious?"

"Well this all started pretty recently, but I suppose it really began just as soon as me and Petaurus here, started cutting class and decided to take out our frustrations in a physical form against our school." Noxious explained meanwhile referring once to the gangster in front of him as Petaurus.

"How exactly did you do that?" I inquired.

"We just stood some feet away from the main entrance and started taking turns punching the brick walls. We tried to do this everyday, and it seemed like every other day truant officers and sometimes security guards would approach us with tazers, batons, and pepperspray in hand and force us inside. As a reprimand they threatened us with, I think, every punishment a group of bureaucrats can conceive of, but in the end it only allowed us to discover that they really couldn't do shit. The power they had over us was an illusion, and even better was the fact that our school Principal knew quite well of our actions but had decided to overlook our frequent transgressions simply on account that we had been honor students at his educational facility."

"So he let you off the hook just because as honor students you made his school look better on paper?" I asked, only half surprised.

“Essentially...” Noxious began before being interrupted by the one known as Petaurus.

“Hah Paper! In the end that is probably all that matters to bureaucrats. It is a testament of the "record". In the beginning stone tablets were used as the first recording device, then paper since it was a much faster but less stable method of recording, and then finally digital computing, information that essentially exists only as light, just misguided electrons running at nearly the speed of light in a controlled environment. This final form was even faster but ironically the least stable of all, especially when it might not actually exist as we know of it. The record was intended to be immortal in a sense... Well then, but let's see their records withstand the unrelenting test bestowed by the power of FIRE and...”

Now it was Noxious' turn to do the interrupting as he said in a commanding voice, “Let's not get ahead of ourselves Petaurus.”

An awkward expression of disgust and treachery suddenly shoots across Petaurus' face and he continues to walk forward in silence.

Noxious continues, “So yea, about those walls, everyday the two of us just kept on punching instead of going to class. You could check out my fist man, it's all calloused now.”

He shows me his knuckles and after seeing them I couldn't decide whether the sight of his thick calluses, riddled deep with many purple clots of blood that remained embedded between thick layers of skin, was in essence, revolting or inspiring. All I know is that I soon took a glance at my own fist and considered it inspiring.

“Interesting, is there any noticeable damage to the wall?” I ask.

“For sure,” Noxious answers, “the wall is just starting to crumble. I mean nothing comparable to the Berlin wall or the Great Wall of China, but just as significant... to us anyway.”

“So what happened next?” I say, nodding accordingly.

“Well, after that was when the guy in front of Petaurus, who's name is Maunder, started following us around, and sometime afterward Shenna and Nathaniel showed up, and finally by that point we just started walking around doing whatever the hell seemed to please us. But I can tell you that doing whatever pleased us only satisfied us for so long, you know. Now we're all just tired. Well I'm tired... after that, I don't know, we've become whatever you choose to see now. I can't really remember anything anymore. Too tired. Excuse me, maybe you should talk to Petaurus now....” Noxious concludes as his voice trails off.

We continue walking for a several moments and I have an urge to say thank you but instead I find myself staring blankly at the clots on Noxious' hand.

Suddenly he raises his right fist up to his mouth which now happens to be open. I continue watching him and for the longest time, I can't tell whether he is about to yawn, cough, scream, or perhaps bite or chew off his knuckles. Instead he simply exhales, blowing warm breath onto his cold calloused fist, but I already know that the gesture meant all the same thing and it tells me everything.

My pace quickens and I make my way a few feet to walk beside Petaurus.

“So you're Petaurus?” I ask.

“Yes, but if it's easier. you can call me sugar glider, it means the same thing.” He answers in a hoarse scruffy voice that I failed to take notice of before.

“Why do they call you sugar glider?”

“Well... it's actually because girls have mentioned on previous occasions that I am cute in a weird sort of way, and because every time I find myself being chased by the police I always manage to escape by jumping off of something high... sometimes very high. Oh and I also have

these long ass nails which serve only two functions, snorting blow and scratching out people's eyes." He smiles almost viciously and I laugh.

"Hah. Most people think Noxious got his name because it sounds cool, but it was actually because he used to have terrible halitosis" Petaurus says smugly while glancing back and offering a smirk at Noxious

"Meh" Noxious responds while shrugging slightly, "It's true. Or rather used to be true, nothing more than a trivia question now, for the uniformed. Sugar Glider is just an angry person."

Suddenly I notice a rage begin to build within Petaurus and soon he responds loudly and outright with a rant. "Damn right I'm angry, fucking angry at everything. Angry at people, at commercialization, angry because noone cares enough to realize how deep society has been poisoned."

"Poisoned how?" I ask, pressing his statement with intrigue.

"The poison that stems from the rampant consumerism of the American populace, the need for money for the mere sake of money. The ignorant or perhaps even arrogant dismissal of the fact that the pursuit of money leads to nothing but the pursuit of more money." He contends.

"Interesting." I state.

"Every consumer product that has ever become popular, every corporation that has ever come to power has usually succeeded only after cleverly managing to manipulate or dope the consumer public."

"How so?" I query.

"Take for instance this example involving the marketing of a particular form of diet pills. The pills, which are no different than generic over the counter diet pills, are publicly endorsed by a hot shot celebrity for weight loss and immediately their sales surge and the corporation sky rockets to the top. The company is happy but soon realizes that their product contains a chemical which quickens the heart to a point where the obese would be prone to dying instead of effectively losing weight. The company then alters the ingredients contained within the pill, thereby making the product much less effective for weight loss, but however, despite these facts, sales of the diet pill remain steady and now the company is using their newly found monetary gain to help them maintain their control on the dieting industry, and expand their empire to other, perhaps similar, fields of society."

"So, what diet pill product are you talking about exactly?"

"Oh, you haven't seen their ads in the subway?" Petaurus asks with a raised eyebrow and a crooked neck.

"Maybe, but probably not, I've trained myself not to notice ads."

"Impressive, that's a noble quality to find in someone so enclosed within what I like to call "The Middle of Everything that means Nothing."

"It's the only way I can stay sane."

"Anyway, I'm still sure you've heard of it, TRIMSPA BABY! Now EPHEDRA FREE!"

"Heh." I reply meekly, quite saddened by the fact that he was right about me hearing about the product.

But still, Petaurus continues diligently, "Capitalist societies, much like ours, are run for the sole purpose of control, power, and manipulation. All of these which are concepts so powerful and relevant to one another simply due to the fact that it reinforces the idea that there exists such a thing as security in the world and because the concepts generally attempt to appease the omnipresent human emotion of fear. I seriously believe that the people would begin to fear

their own existence if they could not have it properly defined for them by a seemingly higher power, such as the government. The average person's worse fear is that there is nothing stable in the world, and this is because they fear the unknown, they fear the feeling of dread that lurks behind every corner. The system of capitalism exploits these fears."

"Those are wild accusations, but quite logical, you have my full attention." I hear myself say, reasserting my appreciation for him, an act I feel is necessary since he is so willing to share such outlandish theories with someone so simple as myself.

"Everything is deeper than what it seems." He continues, "Beauty products such as shampoo and soap, for example, have been marketed to the public as necessary items. And indeed I do not disagree at all, but it is interesting to note that these items only became necessary after companies realized that they could make the bulk of their profits, not by attempting to improve the hygiene of this country's citizens, but by selling a chemical byproduct derived from the manufacture of soap and soapy products directly to the military in bulk form. This byproduct is called Glycerin, and major corporations have been selling this chemical by the tons for use by the military in warheads and other such explosives since after World War 1."

"Wow, very interesting, it reminds me slightly of the fact that the oil used in most lipsticks was originally derived from the fat of whales. Hmm perhaps the Save the Whales movement helped women get over that fashion trend? Would you agree?" I ask.

"Heh, did it really? I wouldn't know" A pondering Petaurus replies.

"Well, I feel like it might have had a significant change, particular the up and coming generation, I'm almost certain. It seems as if, presently for women interested in fashion, it's all about accentuating the eyes, over the lips." I state meanwhile almost questioning whether the statement is actually true.

"Would you say that you are one who is interested in superficial beauty? I ask this because I have no idea how we jumped topics." A quizzical Petaurus mocks.

I am suddenly internally confronted by his question and I wonder within my own being why, indeed, I had been thinking about superficial beauty and why is it that my mind thinks of the nameless woman on the train between points of his arguments. Cleverly however I save my ego, which I am realizing is simply a character construct to effectively channel my emotions, by staying, "Hmm, no, not really, but it would be interesting if one could map the gradual change of what determines 'beauty' over time."

"Hah" He replies hardily, "there's no need for that, all you need to do is analyze Japanese Fetish Videos and you'll learn that marketable beauty leans more and more towards the awkward, the rare, the extreme, and the grotesque."

"I agree very much with that." I reply noddingly.

"In the Greek age, back when their elite were utterly obsessed with breaking traditions, it was women who looked similar to you, however ugly, who were deemed the most beauty, since incest was a rather popular pastime. In the Roman age, when the elite were obsessed with overindulgence, it was the heavy women, absurdly fat at the gut, who were the most sought after. And today, beauty has more faces than that of what society as a whole would consider ugly, but generally speaking, we seem to find beauty in the women who look as though they have already died or who appear to be dying."

His comments strike me like a fist, but I show no reaction and he continues.

"It's almost like an inside joke on the part of our corporate controllers. Life is misery so let's revel in the thoughts of our deaths, especially since it is the only thing that is guaranteed. I'm sure that's exactly what they would like, miserable people are more likely to be haphazard

spenders and are easily manipulated. Yep, it's all about manipulation. Hey thanks a lot for hearing me out, I mean I'm still just as angry, but I feel like I don't have to say anymore. I feel relieved, almost as if I never have to speak another word, now that I have been able to communicate my thoughts....but on the topic of Japanese fetish videos, haha, you shouldn't be talking to me for that's clearly one of Maunder's many fields of expertise." Petaurus says before he turns around to Noxious and they both laugh a loud, vocally exaggerated, haughty laugh.

The one who stands in front of Petaurus, whom he referred to as Maunder is slightly startled by their laughter. He is as tall as the rest of them, however his black suit, which is less grey than Petaurus', looks as if it should burst at the seams as he strides confidently in line on the sidewalk. He is a thick one, and he also has a raspy voice, but less so than the previous fellow. His face remains faced forward and he speaks as if talking to himself. "Eh? Is someone talking about me... right behind my back? Of all things?"

Some time passes and when he hears no reply he stretches his thick neck backward and noticing me asks, "Ahh! So how often do you watch such things. I always feel the need to engage in conversation with someone who actually knows what Bukkake is."

"Well," I say while laughing and in slight shock, "I'm actually not sorry to disappoint you, but I must be honest and inform you that I rarely watch anything of the sort. I only know what it is since I subscribe to a lot of online blogs, and as we all know, some people post some weird shit."

"Haha, well I must inform you... that I'm probably one of those weird people.... but I'm pretty decent in person. Wouldn't you think so?" Maunder asks in an almost pleading fashion, mumbling slightly the entire time.

"For sure, you seem pretty normal." I reply, moving closer to him in an attempt to lessen the possibility of missing a syllable."

It seems that he is flattered by my movement, so he smirks and replies, "But then again what's *normal* really... but one plus or minus the standard deviation from the mean on a statistical bell curve. Furthermore if we attribute and overlay that statistical curve to the IQ scores of a population, that means that normal people only have Intelligence Quotients ranging from about 85 to 115 IQ points." Maunder finishes rather dumbly.

I remain silent and he pauses looking into my eyes in, what I believe to be, an attempt to see if I'm following him on an intellectual level. From this action I suppose that he assumes that I cannot extrapolate on the meaning of his previous statement and decides to dwell on what he assumes to be the obvious. It seems to myself however that he is not as clever as he believes and so I've heard what he's about to say before he says it.

"So I'm actually far above that, I'm considered a genius." He pauses again, this time looking that the muscles on my face trying to note my reaction. However I am sure he sees that I have none, and he continues. "So, if my balance or counterweight is that I enjoy to watch cutting edge Japanese Fetish videos, so be it."

For a moment I cannot believe that he is trying to justify his actions to me simply based on the possibility that I respect intelligence over lifestyle or character, but then I reply, "Hmm, I suppose, but is it really necessary though to take pleasure in viewing a video of a poor young girl being slapped around and penetrated by the tentacles of a dead and rotting octopus?"

He misses a step for a second, and I have visions of him falling flat on his face. Noxious and Petaurus must be envisioning the very same hallucination for I hear them snickering in the background. Finally Maunder decides to speak and defends himself by saying, "Well, if you portray the films in that manner, then of course, even I feel disgusted by it's description, but in the case of online videos, it's all just for shock value. Don't you understand? Online nothing is real! Therefore since it's not real, my conscience is clean of it. For instance, I could compare it to being just an anonymous audience member who never paid for their ticket to see a show."

Upon hearing Maunder's reply I am pressed on whether I should ponder this concept and form a proper rebuttal to engage in argument or simply temporarily relish in my emotions and act rash. For this man I have chosen the latter and replied by saying, "Perhaps Maunder, that does seem like a valid defense at first glance, mainly since you have offered the allusion that you are not supporting the films financially, and indeed, I too agree with your statement, nothing online is real, but I disagree entirely with the idea that your conscience is clean." His expressions widen and he opens his mouth to speak but instead I speak faster, "For you see, our technology as of yet has not managed to progress to a level where CG animation has become virtually indistinguishable from recorded film. But when that time comes, it will be impossible for the casual viewer to tell the real from the fake in terms of film. Therefore, in the future, when video is viewed online, one would be forced to automatically assume that it is fake. For example, this is already done in present day in terms of violence and gore in films. Only that which is false will have proper entertainment value. But in the meantime, I'm sorry to say Maunder, but you're just a sick fuck who revels in being a sick fuck. And yet you still haven't proved to me where your genius lies..."

He is stunned by my judgments, but despite it all, continues walking forward, albeit less confidently, and I watch as his face darkens with shades of a dull red. Finally he replies, almost as if through his teeth "Well...I am a genius. So what do you want to know."

I notice that he is now serious, probably since he has been stripped of his pretentious ego.

"Tell me something random but relevant." I reply in an unbecoming snub like fashion.

"I overheard you're conversation with Petaurus, you should find this relevant... Ok, Mistakes, scandals, and failures no longer signal catastrophe. The crucial thing is that they be made credible, and that the public be made aware of the efforts being expended in that direction. The "marketing" immunity of governments is similar to that of the major brands of washing powder." Maunder replies, obviously impressing himself and few else.

“Interesting, but let me ask you a question, did you recite those lines, or come up with it yourself?” I wonder if perhaps I’m being too aggressive.

“No it’s a quote by Baudrillard....” Maunder says, not apparently worried.

“That’s not really what I meant, but ok, now tell me something that I can’t look up for myself on wikipedia.”

Beads of sweat gain mass on the edge of his forehead and I can already see his future, working in a field he doesn’t believe, simply because all his life he has been taught to learn about everything he also didn’t believe in, or what’s worse, cared nothing about. And he answers with a pitiful hybrid of a whining opinion passed off as fact. “But one can find out about most everything on wikipedia.”

“Can they really?” It may seem like I am taunting him....

“I’d like to think so.” He replies

“And there is where your problem lies.”

Maunder no longer speaks but instead begins to grit his teeth to the beat of his rather unique gait, but only in what seems to be a state of an intense, angered contemplation.

The line that represents the LALA gang on the street begins to bend like a hooked curve as the leader turns a street corner and as I stare into the distance I can only catch momentary glimpses of her as she turns round street corners. I am seriously starting to consider the notion that this girl could actually be the gang leader.

Our line continued to walk for several blocks in silence and it seems that everyone is either lost in the anger and insanity of their own minds or are generously attempting to appreciate their environment by moving their heads in jerky motions, to and fro, the entire motion nearly robotic. But just as soon as I am approaching the center of the gang line, I notice that it is here where two individuals walk side by side and it is they their walking that gives this line its lowercase letter ‘t’ resemblance.

A girl speaks to the companion beside her and asks, “Hey Nathaniel, sweetie, is he part of our group now?”

“Who is?” The man called Nathaniel asks.

“Him.” The girl says, and eerily points her right index finger directly toward the center of my chest without ever looking back or turning her head.

“Honey, you shouldn’t point, I told you it doesn’t make it any less rude just because you’re not facing them. But to answer your question, well I don’t really know, he could just be a friend of Maunder’s, hmm but even that seems highly unlikely, hey, I know, let’s slow down and speak to him...” I watch as the two slow their pace and he speaks again, “Hello, I’m Nathaniel and this is Sheena”

“Hi” Sheena says, finally turning around and offers a wink with her left eye.

“Hey, how are you guys doing.” I ask

“Pretty well actually, thanks for asking.” Nathaniel replies, somehow oddly still connected to Sheena.

A short and silent moment passes before I notice, after looking at the couple for some time, that these two should forever be known as Sheena *and* Nathaniel. This was made even more relevant since I noticed that there was no real way of distinguishing their differences and attempts to tell them apart were made feeble on account of their sameness. The two clung together like eager and voluntary siamese twins.

Once another moment had passed, Nathaniel asked me a question. "So tell me, do you associate yourself with any sort of religion?"

"No not really, when I was a kid, for sure." I say to the couple with much more ambition and respect than I had for Maunder.

"Yes, most of us were religious when we were children, our parents beckoned it of us, some even required it, and since we loved them, we believed everything they said, word for word. Oh by the way, I'm talking about myself. I'm more than fully aware that your situation most likely would have been completely different."

"No, you've got it more or less right."

"Then we've lived similar lives?" Nathaniel asks suddenly very intrigued by the idea of sameness.

"Who knows," I reply, "but we'd only really know if we continued talking before making vague assumptions."

Nathaniel laughs a mild giggle, one that is simultaneously, and exaggeratedly reciprocated by Sheena, before he replies, "Anyone who speaks in that manner must be my brother. So brother, what I am about to tell you, should come as little or no shock to you, but religion is a farce and is no longer necessary. This is not to say that religion isn't important, on the contrary, it was most necessary in early civilization for the advancement of the human race. It helped bring, in most cases forced, people together under a common belief system, turning them into brothers instead of wild animals, or uncivilized savages. It also, in part, served as the prime means of intellectual and cultural control for centuries.

"Interesting," I inform him, "I can agree on some parts."

Nathaniel then asks this question of me, "Well then, can you agree that religion in the common era merely serves as a trite system of beliefs which only still has a place in existence because it is supported financially by common believers, who are either helpless, insane, manipulated or brainwashed." He says this eagerly and meanwhile he is bouncing up and down with excitement, and at certain intervals in his bounce it had appeared as if he had wanted to jump for joy, but this was impossible since he was connected to the ground by Sheena.

"I do agree, but I also personally believe that for some people religion is something that is necessary. Religion can help certain types of people lead better lives than they normally would have otherwise." I say this as I speak from experience.

"Would you say that is because of their faith and their prayers?" Nathaniel continues.

"Probably."

"Heh. The act of praying, when broken down, is simply a form of talking to oneself. Talking to oneself is usually a telltale sign of probable insanity. Yet it seems in cases which involve religion, it is interesting that this is an acceptable form of insanity, one that is often practiced, if not only for the sake of tradition. Indeed, I can definitely see how speaking out loud to oneself about ones problems, will always result in some form of emotional release or another."

"You're probably right, but that doesn't make that feeling of emotional release any less real. In the realm of emotions and feelings some person's logic and cause to a particular action can not be made apparent to the outsider or the third party. Just because

one doesn't understand does not make it insane activity. And besides there are more acceptable forms of spiritual belief that do not include religion." I say, insisting my point.

"Like chants and mediation?" He asks now calmly and inquisitively, but I can tell by the glint of eagerness I see in his eyes that he is simply setting the conversation up in his favor.

"For one." I state with both confidence and caution.

"Well," Nathaniel begins, "I personally don't believe chants and mediation have anything to do with the spirit, it seems more to me as if it were simply a process of hacking or attempting to reprogram certain aspects of the mind. Hymns and Chants allow one to add the literal names of gods, essentially just odd sounds, into feelings or concepts. For example, if anyone who is dedicated, begins to chant to any particular god long enough, then that person's mind, since it is a logical system, will associate the sound of that particular god's name with your body's endocrine system. So now whenever that person recites, let's say, the name of the god of happiness, it is their bodies job to start producing and releasing measurable amounts of dopamine throughout the body. Since this occurs on the biological level it allows for a sense of euphoria to come about solely through the chant. But really chants are just triggers for the programming that has already been put in place by persistent meditation. But of course the ones who are uneducated or pleasantly ignorant would always attribute such an explosion of good feeling to the direct healing hand of a benevolent god. So you see, we have no real spirits. What we define as spirituality is merely the appreciation of the process in which we are learning about how our minds work and how to control it's functions to better suit the needs, or wants, in our lives."

"Ahh," Sheena suddenly whines and then adds, complaining to Nathaniel, "but honey, that can't be true, if we have no spirits, then what about soul mates, like us, we're so perfect for each other..."

"Hmm, I know sweetie, I consider you to be my soul mate, but only for the emotional feeling of the word, even if it's an emotion that I have been programmed by society to feel. But we all know there is no such thing as soul mates." He replies, touching her face with a sensual and comforting gesture.

"Hmph!" But still she scoffs.

"How come?" I interject, grabbing Nathaniel's attention who perhaps was beginning to think he had spoken the final words in our discussion."

Nathaniel frowns and now seems rather unamused by my questions but replies saying "I'll tell you exactly why, there is a hormone called Oxytocin that is produced in the hypothalamus and has a direct involvement in the facilitation of the birth and breastfeeding experience in women and, in terms of both sexes, is responsible for the bonding and formation of trust between individuals. Now this is where it gets interesting and hopefully this will also answer your question. The hormone Oxytocin can easily be replicated in a laboratory and private studies has shown that if a person is within the vicinity of inhaling pheromones which contain oxytocin they would instantly become tremendously more trustworthy. If used in business deals, the deal would always end in favor of the one who isn't inhaling oxytocin, and if given to a pair of individuals, both of whom are of the opposite sex and within the same relative age group, results have shown,

without surprise, that the two would surely fall desperately in love. Haha, as they say love is blind.

“So you give no regard to any type of emotion exhibited by the human?” I ask Nathaniel, in a very insistent manner. He poses a good argument, and his points are emotionally distressing. Already I can feel myself becoming agitated. A sure sign of weakness as I am sure he would describe it.

But then he answers, “I just think any action that has been precipitated by emotion in general is fundamentally flawed and therefore is to be considered insane, particularly since the original action has in no way been governed by logic.”

“Is it better not to feel then?” I continue.

“Listen, if no one felt, human society would be a better place.”

“You’re wrong Nathaniel, I believe it would be exactly the same, most likely worse. Insects are beings that do not experience feelings nor emotions yet they still exhibit behavior traits that they cannot resist. The thing that makes emotions important to the human race, no matter how insane, is that it allows us the benefit of a consciousness and the idea of a free will, if humans did not feel, we would have little or no reason to exist, except possibly as preprogrammed drones. Emotions are the only things that can will us to live. Absolute logic only wills us to death.”

Now he is silent and seems as if his mind had not registered my last statement. So I stare at him and wonder how is it that he seems to blatantly despise emotions but yet he seems to be just as inclined to sudden outbursts of emotion as the rest of us.

He clutches Sheena closer to himself, so close that it seems as if she may suffocate between the muscles of his chest. And suddenly I know his game, he himself uses Oxytocin, perhaps as a cologne dabbed across his chest. In the end he is just another manipulator.

“You’re sick. I’m on to your game. How could you force someone to love you?” I ask, anger and disgust rising up and collecting in the cavity behind my eyes. My veins pulsate and I can only see red.

He replies, “Simple, It’s a sick world. And besides how else am I supposed to get what I want if I don’t take it by force. And besides this is better for her, she’s happier this way, with me. I just wish she wasn’t so dumb, but I’ll find others, and it will be just as easy.”

We walk in silence and now it is I who grits my teeth and says, “I’ll be back.”

“Of course you will, but it won’t make a damned difference either way, so just move on ahead, and leave me be.”

I decide against conflict for the time being and instead walk forward until I begin to step into the faint shadow of a rather tall, lanky looking individual. As I approach, he does an about face and while walking backwards, introduces himself as Dimitrix and asks “Hey what’s up, do you have the time?”

I have no watch but in the distance, rather conveniently placed, I can just about make out the long and short hands on the face of a high rise clock tower and I answer, “It looks like it’s just about 3:23.”

“Interesting.” Dimitrix replies, now seeming genuinely intrigued and ponders for a moment.

“What is?” I ask, wondering if I am perhaps interrupting a complex chain of thoughts which will be irrecoverable the moment I speak to him. But I speak anyway.

“Oh, just time.” He answers, still apparently deep in thought.

“Yes, that it is. No one understands it.” I reply when suddenly Dimitrix begins to laugh and suddenly catching himself in unwarranted laughter pauses again for a couple seconds.

Soon Dimitrix replies and begins with, “Or maybe it is that no one cares to understand it, You see I have this peculiar theory for how time works. For instance I believe that time only exists for the being who is aware that it exists, therefore it is humans who created the concept of time and therefore it doesn't matter whether time necessarily exists or not. But I believe that the amount of actual time spent in one's life is insignificant and virtually meaningless. What I mean is, it is meaningless, because a person's consciousness can only exist in present. All other events in a person's life, past or future, can only be recalled as memories. Memories which also cannot be verified and which may or may not be even less real than time itself. So if we decide that I only exist in the present then I have to assume that everyone else I meet that appears to be human must also exist in the present. But you see, that is where the concept of age comes into play, their present is not necessarily my present. I believe that it is only I who exists in the present, and that everyone else exists in some version of the past or future. I have this idea especially since time is relative and can be increasing or decreasing depending on the speed at which one's body travels. Therefore I believe that when I pass an old man on the street, I am not witnessing his present but his future, and conversely, when I pass by a child I am not witnessing their present but actually their past! Imagine in terms of the youth, what you experience as present time is their past. What power in the possibilities of the youth, The future fears the past, just as old men fear children.”

I am surprised by his theory and add “That is a very enlightening theory, thank you for sharing it.”

To which Dimitrix replies, “No problem, I've got plenty more where that came from.”

Dimitrix and I exchange pleasant smiles and that was when we both began to cringe as a large truck rumbles alongside the street, clanking and stressing its wheel bearings as if the vehicle were actually attempting to flatten the tarmac down to the level of the potholes instead of simply traveling across. After the truck makes it's way past our position that is when I spot a slow moving military humvee driving slowly down the very same street.

At first I thought that perhaps I had been the first one to see spot the military patrol vehicle, but looking forward again, I noticed that the girl is already facing their direction, simultaneously grasping her groin with her right hand while offering a tongue in cheek salute with her left as well; just as the humvee begins to move within range. One by one down the line the gang members mimic her actions and stance.

The soldiers riding within the humvee eye the gang line with glares of fury and deep loathing. For a second I wonder if the gang might be starting trouble but I am instantly relieved once I notice the vehicle begins to accelerate, just as the soldier sitting in the passenger side window removes a toothpick from his mouth and flicks it in our general direction. I watch the toothpick with wonder as it rotates through the air, hitting the edge of the curb before bouncing and finally rolls slowly atop the sidewalk, until it finally comes to a rest beside my foot.

That was when Dimitrix spoke to me and said, “We don't really know why we feel the persistent urge to act in this way, but I do know that it is very relieving to act out.”

“I don't see anything wrong with it,” I say before adding, “sometimes the ability to perform unnecessary actions is admirable. In this case, enticing.”

“Hah, I like the way you think. Want a cig?”

“Sure”

“Did you know that 90% percent of patients diagnosed with schizophrenia and 70% percent of patients who are Manic Depressive are avid smokers?”

“No I did not know that, that's a very interesting fact.”

“But wait, be careful with the facts, they can easily be misinterpreted, that's not to say that there is a correlation between mental illness and smoking, it just means that people with an existing mental condition may be tempted to self medicate themselves using Nicotine. And, heh, this is the funny part, even stranger still is the fact that schizophrenics rarely die of lung cancer; this despite their tendencies to smoke about 2 packs a day, but I digress.”

Dimitrix pulls out a lighter, and holds the flame to the end of my cigarette before asking, “Can I ask you a question?”

“Shoot.”

“How much time do you spend online?”

“Too much it seems.”

“Do you think there's a problem with that.”

“Only sometimes, not really for me, but I see how it can be a problem for society when considered in it's entirety.”

“Exactly, isn't it strange that we, now as adults, find it hard to pry ourselves from benefits of a life lived online even though we were originally raised to think that we should never dedicate so much time to a piece of technology that would mainly serve as a means of entertainment?”

“Yes, very strange.”

“Just imagine what type of people our generation's children will be like. What monstrous flaws in character and perhaps even mental conditions will our children be prone to develop as they will undoubtedly be raised online since near birth.”

“I don't really want to imagine that.”

“But you should, even though I'm sure we'll begin to see it soon enough.”

“Exactly, I always find it is utterly depressing when I discover that large masses of people use the internet, not as a means for the benefit of their lives, but instead as a means of coping with the sense of void they feel in their lives. To turn one's life to the fake, the simulated, and to work desperately to try and make it as real as reality is disenfranchising in my mind.” I suggest.

“Indeed, the fact that people can find an increasing amount of virtual entertainment within their homes simply serves as proof that as time progresses society will become increasingly isolated.” Dimitrix suggests and then adds, “We seem now to live in an age of terror, so as such our media continues to portray the world and society as this increasingly dangerous and belligerent place, so much so, that I am seriously starting to believe that more and more people are overwhelmed with anxiety and fear whenever they step outside the confines of their homes. Yet the irony is the fact that over time our

country's crime rate will continue to drop, just as the prison population rises to new highs and just as our general population continues to increase. Yet with the portrayal of the media, it seems as if the complete opposite were true."

Dimitrix pauses a moment to think and then states, "Excuse me, but I feel a rant coming on, don't be frightened ok."

"Haha, unlikely." I say while laughing.

"Alright, just thought I'd warn you, I've been told I'm overwhelming at times."

I watch as Dimtrix inhales a great amount of smoke from his cigarette before holding his breath for several seconds and finally exhaling the grey smoke while staring at the way it seems to disperse into the air as many tiny spirals. He begins to speak softly at first, but then with a consistent rise in tone, "There is no right for people to profit from the ailments of other people. There is even less of a reason for people to profit from ailments that have been knowingly and openly forced onto them. Today the pharmaceutical industry markets prescription drugs to the consumer despite the fact that they must be 'approved' by a doctor. The term is called Direct-To-Consumer (DTC) advertising, and it is prohibited by governments throughout the world with the exception of the United States and New Zealand. In these countries the idea of 'the doctor' has begun to degenerate as the citizens diagnose themselves and haphazardly request specific medication based solely on advertising. It may soon be the fact that Doctors will become merely people whose title and issued license denotes undeserved respect."

"That's insane." I reply.

"That is nothing, New Zealand's Ministry of Health is attempting to curb DTC advertising by putting forth legislation that will ban the practice within a year, and meanwhile our own Food and Drug Administration has no such intentions. In this country alone, drug companies spent \$343 million on aggressive advertising for such impotency drugs as Viagra, Levitra and Cialis this past year. Altogether these companies brought in a revenue of about \$1.36 billion; all money cleverly siphoned from the American people with the help of advertising. It has come to point where the American public have merely become tools for the corporate elite to prey upon. Obesity rates are rising over the years at a steady rate and will continue to grow because of aggressive campaigning by fast food corporations. Cases of a high cholesterol in the obese have significantly dropped because of the recent surge in medication, some of which has been known to have terrible side effects on the patient. There is a perpetual delusion that this is a country of freedom, but that idea is simply a pitiful attempt at hiding the fact that this society is based on an intricate system of control that functions on many different levels...."

All I can now, do is smoke and listen carefully to Dimitrix's rants, I have little to say.

So Dimitrix continues, "...the future's children will be bred to be complete tools. Indeed this is what the great thinkers and intellectuals of the previous generation had foreseen would happen to our generation. And they were in no way incorrect in their presumptions, for we are a part of the MTV generation, unconcerned about anything that isn't directly concerned about us. With the increasing social isolation of middle class America, the depraved conditions in which third class America exists in, added with the overindulgence of first class America, our country is surely headed toward the doom of our existence as we know it. Computers will render children "less animated and less capable of appreciating what it means to be alive, what it means to belong in the world as

a biological, social being," and it will instead "teach children a manipulative way of engaging the world."

Finally I add, "It just seems like society is just going to produce more and more psychopaths."

"Yes, that is true, but I worry most about the brilliant minds that will come about in the future, I worry perhaps as the past has worried about us as we were being raised." Dimitrix explains, "And yet I'm still a fuckup, in my own way. It just seems as if the brilliant minds of the country cannot help becoming fucked up in their own way especially because they are the only ones who see the futility of it all, and cares enough to feel sad. Yet it is we who are the rebels, the revolutionaries, the visionaries, the intellectuals, the artists. But then again, perhaps in the end we are all just insane and should be put out of our misery if society wants any real hope of remaining constant or improving. Yet, I still like to believe that within us lies the power to put society on a pedestal, praise it, improve and that we have the power to spit upon it and destroy it, if we should see fit..."

Dimitrix stops in his tracks and takes the time to flick his cigarette butt into traffic, coincidentally hitting the windshield of speeding SUV, before continuing, "We are the young, the power lies within us, we have it, but yet we wait for it to be handed to us. We all wait in line to be approved by elder more conservative beasts, who will only grant us the key if we follow their system of education. A system of education that not only serves to educate but also to condition and brainwash. We are on the edge of knowledge. We push it forward. We create. We destroy. We are a generation born, bred and powered by the internet. The most open and comprehensive knowledge base that has ever existed. Why do we need to wait on lines like our forefathers carrying out outdated traditions, participating in the perpetual rat race of college, corporate jobs, being hounded by credit card companies and debtors, waiting for a degree which 'certifies' us. All this when we can just take it!"

Dimitrix is now nearly panting and I do not find this surprising after witnessing such a blatant display of mania. He stops in his tracks again and takes a couple moments to catch his breath before looking at me with an expression of exasperation. I nod and smile in appreciation.

"...Fuck dude, shit I need another cigarette...." Is all Dimitrix can say now.

"I stopped watching tv and stopped reading printed newspapers long ago. Now I only focus on myself and my friends. Some of my friends however I can only really communicate with online. Which eventually leaves me by myself, doing nothing, online, at my computer."

"Me too, man, me too... move on ahead, you should talk to Canter."

The man who I assumed to be the one called Canter was a pale man, with hunched shoulders, and an apathetic manner of moving about. As soon as I approached he immediately gave attention to my presence, but only in the most hostile way.

"And what are you staring at?" Canter asked, almost violently.

"A man."

"Hah, you think you see a man walking beside you, but what you fail to realize that is that you see not a man, but an animal, a beast."

"You have a human name, Canter, and you speak in a language and of concepts that I can understand, therefore you are a man."

“That is utter nonsense, language is arbitrary, if you change less than 2 percent of a humans DNA, the creature you are left with, no one would deny, would be a mere animal.

“Does that mean you don't consider yourself human either?”

“Being Human, is a learned trait. Breed a child in a self contained environment, teach him nothing, and all you are left with is just another animal. The word Infant in Latin literally means one without a voice. Do you think just because we have voices and communicate on an established protocol called the English language that we are any better than any other living creature in the universe. Of course the answer is no. We are merely animals who have developed the ability to organize our own delusions.

“Heh.”

“Humans are just machines, who believe that we are actually in the driver’s seat but we are not. Your idea of consciousness isn't a result of your brain existing or functioning as a whole, it is the result of the random cause and effect stimuli of the universe being processed that allows the feeling that one exists. Change one simple thing in the carefully established and balanced hormonal levels of the brain and suddenly, what you thought you knew about reality and consciousness, no longer matters, since it no long exists. When our self righteous, egotistical, personalities are broken down, whether by physical or chemical means is irrelevant, all you are left with is a wounded animal, no better or more divine than the all the rest....Everything about us is based on the personality construct that has been pre programmed by probability during conception. Our DNA has already set the foundation of who were are and how we function, but it is only human culture that forced us to believe that we are something greater than we are. The only reason humans feel the need to love is to ensure the propagation of the species. The only reason humans feel the need to hate is to ensure that the weak will falter and allow those with functional survival traits to pass on their DNA. Society still runs on the principals of the animal kingdom, don't be misguided, you'd be a fool to believe otherwise. Humans will never create their Utopia.”

“You seem to have no faith in the human race.”

“Faith is just a word, it means nothing to me, I will be more than glad to walk through life as the long wolf, doing as I please, whether it be murder, cheat, rape, or steal. If I see someone dying, I'll look into their eyes, and I'll decide on a whim, whether I should help them. Perhaps I'll save their life, or maybe I'll kick them in the teeth. Nothing matters anymore, but excuse me, anymore isn't the correct word, I meant to say that nothing ever mattered. And that is the reason why, till the end, I'll do whatever keeps me interested. And I'll do whatever the hell I please. If you tried you'd have a hard time changing my mind, I've long decided that this was how I was going to see reality, it's the only thing that makes sense to me. Now leave me be.

After speaking to Canter I realized just how tired I had recently grown of all the ranting and complaining. Listening to the members of the LALA gang speak of life has depressed me tom almost no end, and this endless walk has made a weary man of me. And yet I must press on, for the only one in front of me now is probably the real reason that I am even here.

I approached her despite being plagued by feelings of apathy, anger, anxiety, and I'm sure, pain, very soon. She walks forward tirelessly; I had taken many steps before I come within a speaking distance that seems proper.

Before I ask for her name I ask, "Where are you leading these people?"

But she replies coldly, with authority. "I haven't decided yet."

"You seem to have decided on a general direction?"

"That could change at any point during the journey?"

"What's your name?"

"Comrada."

"Comrada, do you want to know my name?"

"No."

I stay silent until she breaks the silence and says, "Don't take it personally; I'm not good with people."

"Is it because you hate them or because you're afraid?"

"It's just apathetic, I'm devoid of emotion, don't let it bother or concern you, I've always had this feeling of emptiness."

"Was it really always like that?"

"For as long as I can remember, when I was told I had a problem, I was taken to a therapist who ordered some tests run and they took some brain scans. They concluded that the receptors in my brain that regulated emotion and my body's hormonal reward system were strange, but that it could be repaired with medication. I took the medication, but I still feel exactly as I did before."

I must have appeared deeply saddened by her story, since she again repeated, "Don't let it bother or concern you."

"Still, may I ask you a question?"

"You may, but I honestly wouldn't care either way."

"Do you believe in Love?"

"Love is just a word."

"Do you believe in Life?"

"Life is just something that has been given to you."

"Do you believe in Death?"

"Death is just something that happens to you."

"Do you..." I stutter

"To tell you the truth, I don't believe in anything. I don't believe, and I don't seek, I don't hope, I just am, and I don't like to talk about it to anyone."

I remain silent but continue to walk, until I ask her, "Do you dream?"

"Yes."

Her reply excited me to the point where I instinctually grabbed Comrada by the shoulders and held her still; her skin was pale and cold against my skin, and I whispered in her ear, "Let us plunge ourselves into the deepest pits of dream, and return intoxicated from our elaborate delusions of grandeur, and then let us talk, and by talking, by simply talking, it will be true..."

"You are a fool; you have learned nothing from all of this." She replied, "If I cannot move, everything will fade away."

The roar of a train suddenly erupts and emits itself in all directions, resonating distinctly against my eardrums and instates a sense of dread and confusion as everything slowly becomes a haze. I feel my body being violently jerked forward and realize that the force of inertia has thrown my body off balance and soon I find myself on the floor of what had long become a derelict and lonely train car. I looked around and saw there is

noone left, not even the woman named Comrada. All that existing now was this sound of a static death. I want to cover my ears but the dread is overbearing as the electronic conductor's voice begins its announcement, "The next and last stop is Hell's Kitchen...Everybody off. CHZZZZZZZ"

If daydreams were reality, I would have died a thousands deaths.

"Life is a scream in the face of a bright madness, then! Life is a silly sound like a death rattle from an insane clown dying in the night, then!"

-Richard S. Shaver