

The Perfect Soldier

By Anthony Botelho

Well, here you are: the work so far. A bit rough, certainly, but it's early days. After I clean these lines up, smooth this over—more presentable then, hm?

But *functionally*, I am quite pleased. Quite pleased with myself, indeed.

"The perfect soldier." What does that mean to you? It could mean anything, and while I cannot say what it means to you I can say for certain that it means something different than it does for me.

You see, when the Emperor made this request, for a perfect soldier to carry out his will—and that they who can carry such a task to completion will have a seat by his side eternally—he does not truly ask for perfection. For such a thing is impossible. It is the realm of the divine and the infernal.

No, what he asks for is *near* perfection. And near perfection? Well, there are innumerable possibilities of what that could be. So it all comes down to one's interpretation of what near perfection is. Interpretation and execution.

So, surely, the majority of my peers in the sciences and philosophies will have failed to grasp this distinction and are already doomed to failure, chasing a drop in a thunderstorm. Which leaves only the true intellectual titans.

Naturally, the Magician has the advantage of me. With his knowledge of the mysteries and enviable collection of little gems, he's surely concocting some near-immortal species of brute. And were we to arrive with comparable designs, with his tongue as it is in the Emperor's ear, favour would fall upon his work.

So no, I must work from a different angle; not try to best the falcon in a contest of flight. What to do then? What to do?

What is The Perfect Soldier...

The perfect killer? No, if that were the case we would merely send a tide of serpents to meet our foes. The perfect *warrior*? Achilles was the perfect warrior, and brought nothing but ruin upon himself.

No, there must be a spiritual integrity. A moral integrity.

I was reminded then of an interesting notion I had come across in that area, of moral philosophy—recent thought, Eastern; I'm interested to see if it catches on—this idea that all moral failing—*sin*, if you please—can be boiled down to eight bodies, eight spirits, eight forms.

And seeing these flaws laid out so cleanly, it occurred to me that with the correct application of knowledge and the correct procedures one might be able to expunge these flaws, these sins. These bodies.

And so I began.

Now as far as *expunging* goes, Lust was the easiest and most obvious. It's an honest shame we can't all be eunuchs; it would be the end of us, but what a magnificent 50 years of peace and prosperity we'd have.

Then Gluttony. More involved, though still simple enough. By removing most of the stomach, you see, I've found that you can drastically reduce the appetite of the subject. Then have them sustained on a slurry of thin porridge and honey; an altogether unpleasant experience that keeps them focused on their duty.

And Sloth, gluttony's old bedfellow. That's when I needed to start thinking a bit. The force that compels man to leisure is greater than that which drags a stone to the water's depths. So again, I turned to discomfort, to pain, to override that force. Combat it with one even greater.

It took several tries. First the knife went too deep, then too shallow, but I eventually found the right measure. The correct amount of the back and backside to remove, to expose the centres of pain to the open air. To make the act of sitting or lying down unspeakable anguish. To leave only activity then, and vigour.

Yes, yes... But there was still more work.

Wrath then. How to wage war without a warmongering spirit? Well, one could say that the soldier, impure in his purpose, expresses his rage through his blade. What if, then, soldier and blade became one? So that fighting might become a part of his very nature, as akin to it as running or breathing? A simple amputation here, a fusion to the bone *here*... Now he no longer grips the hilt, his knuckles burning white. He strikes with his claws on command, like a trained dog.

As it should be, it finally, truly, occurs to me. That the form of the soldier, the form of man itself, is indecorous to its very core.

The rest falls into place quickly. I pluck out his eyes, that he may see nothing and feel Greed for nothing he once laid his eyes upon. I fear not for his sense of direction or orientation. He only need know one direction: forward.

I consider taking his hearing as well, so nothing may inspire Envious thoughts. But concerned it may impact his fighting ability too greatly, I decide instead to simply take his tongue. That he may not speak of what is his to his brothers, and that they may not speak it to him.

And Pride. Vainglory. One a sin of the mind, the other of the heart. These final two tasks have taken all of my powers, but I have found a way.

See here... a needle. But not the common needle of some seamstress. No, the metal is quite particular. It does not tarnish, and keeps its form under pressure; quite necessary for the procedure.

It is quite rare though. I hope to develop a substitute alloy in the years to come. But, in any case...

This needle, or one like it, is in your head right now. Yes, I know, hard to believe. You hardly felt it, didn't you, when it slid right in? Though you've likely become quite insensitive to pain by now, haven't you? My creature. My lovely, ugly soldier.

Now why have I done this? I've done this because I believed, and believe I have proved to some extent, that different parts of the mind hold dominion over different parts of our very being. Logic, function, feeling, *will*. And after many failures—which I take no shame in, it's all part of the process—I believe have isolated the part of the mind that governs will. And I have inhibited it.

Which I'm sure you don't feel particularly strongly about one way or the other.

But that was your only Pride that I removed. You still have Vainglory, don't you? You are still impure. *Imperfect*.

That is what this needle is for. Your heart, your very soul.

Now of course, I am likely to fail this time. Like I told you, it's part of the process. But do not think your sacrifice is meaningless. You are an important stepping stone. Understand that it's for the good of the Empire, as much as it's for me.

But enough talk; we should get to it. Just relax, and know that this time I actually mean it when I say "you won't feel a thing."