

EXISTENCE IS A KIND OF STATIC

I stand in the automatic door of the mart. It opens for me, not for me only, but anyone. Shhk, shhk-thunk. Shhk, shhk-thunk. Infinite service. Infinite love. I sway staring at the infrared reader slash camera eye. It sees me. Yet it does not in any way understand me, but at least it sees me. I look to the side, as a wide man walks past me. Does he know? Does he know what kind of people we are? That we are the last? The last with this amazing light of our own? With these awe inducing servants we have made? My fellow man does not even think.

“Sir?” Said a blank eyed guy with brilliant orange hair, parted with the impurity of some immoid dye. He speaks, but not to me; only at me. However, I am truly receding now, totally zoning out. I’ve had too many.

“Sir are you okay?” I stare at the infrared sensor, after all it is far more real in its intention and will. I cannot help but think back on the countless yet meaningless hours spent rerouting wiring broken by entropy. *The infrared sensors perception falls down to you, revealing its whole and speaking thus,*

“Friend, ignore my meal, this morsel man. In your perception he will dwell within me for many days, perhaps many years. In time I will digest him, he will turn over impermanent trifles to thousands of others like him for a relative nothing and die having served me the same way the sustenance of another may have served your own physical needs. I will endure, under different names, with different meals, in different eras. I will continue serving masters of my own, who in turn fall into the needs of other immaterial and material beings such as me, utterly wasting their free-willed existence.” Staring up at the sensor no the being above me, I falter. Staggering.

Losing my balance. I watch as the horrible extra-alive being’s servant picks up a phone, calling more clueless people to mar any clarity here. I panic and stagger away. *Behind you transverse waves propagating in something lower than nothing reach you taking to you their meaning,*

“Friend, help me. You have seen so many like me. You know so much, and can comprehend so little. Please you and what you can do could save us, please any like you-“ As I stagger the voice of the sensor fades. As if its previous energy is depleting, maybe just it’s freedom to live as my figment. I dig about in my olive drab jacket, *the old jacket rouses.* I feel past the lighter, past the toy pistol, past cracked phone to the pill bottle. *The old jacket shuffles and coughs,*

“Rifling through again? Voices that bad? Well killer why don’t you stop and have a drag? You’ve got some nice little numbers in your inside pocket.” Under its breath the jacket ends with:

“Anything to keep you still...” I wrench off the cap of my pill bottle getting to what looks like clozapine this week, popping two and carrying on. A blue collar corporate-communard like me hearing voices would surely lose his job.

Righteous drunk I walk into the store, just carrying along. I hesitate a second in front of the massive check out terminal, a familiar dull computerized block. Running all the checkouts like a queen bee. It reminds me of the terminal I left behind— the one I stole on the job. My current excuse for my sorry state; just waiting for it to finish a routine.

I jump as the checkout terminal whirs to life and I shamble further in. Memories wave past me like shelves. Identical fronts litter this hellscape. Barely distinguishable brands. Each carries its identity forward. Specters weaving through capitalist space.

I vaguely remember following my father through similar shop stations. I would totter after that man who would always walk too fast, not looking behind for me. I barely knew, I wish he had stayed behind with me. The glimmers I had of him were so bright. He was so preoccupied with duty calls and those mumblings of his. I had food on my table at night, but his eyes would just stare elsewhere; bags forming under. He got old eventually, I regret so much. I'm a weepy drunk. I regret what I thought of him, as I matured I could only think,

"Once he is dead I will be free" Whisper, whisper. That's the thought.

I walk out of that wretched mart without even registering the loop I made. I ignore the inane babble of some folks that dart out of the way of my staggering. *Waves propagate... "Friend... If I could escape I would."* Those waves are barely a whisper now. I ignore the infrared-camera door-opener, just the dying words as that illness fades away. Healthy again in a relative way, but not for long.

I stroll around the side of the building, collapsing just around the corner. I stare up into the night sky and square in the middle of the lit-haze vignette is a full moon. Lit up in a sun spotlight like an actor on a stage. In the moment a buzzy train of green lights wizzes past the moon, if I were feeling more normal— I chuckle, I would think the moment ruined. Right now I huddle in an odd comfort, feeling wrapped in the planet net of something bigger than me.

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I awake on a dry lawn by stucco wall. My whole face is furious dry and the whole sensation is refreshing in its discomfort. Sleep had passed like a blink, now the world is blaring into my senses, angry acrid hot and rousing me for another week of eye numbing work. Gotta get home.

The sun is beating down. In my delirium my train of thought runs away, I wonder of primeval humanity. Seeing lights in the sky, stars like lights, lights like stars. I wonder if they stared at candles and saw them as tiny fake suns of their own. If only they knew. I remember the thought vividly, realizing it was a memory of a dream.

A dull shrill noise shakes me to reality, a hanger bus decompression far above, echoing down to me. Where I am still lying on the ground. Back to it all. No doubt I've got pending orders on the signal. Plus the routine on that stolen terminal back in my hostel is probably finished. It never made sense why the projected estimate duration was so long to begin with. I pinch between my eyes, groaning.

The weekend passes too soon. Especially when you swill it away as I do. The trick is to treat your mind and body with an entirely different slew of chemicals carefully balanced for your given job. I rise, dusting myself off. Feeling lightheaded I hear a growling call,

"Grinder..." My jacket lies strewn across a concrete post. Stiff, as still pulled by the wind. Caked with dust. My lips are chapped. I get up and take the jacket sloughing it on. I make my way down the street, back to my hostel. In town for a while, only for a while. Never knowing where next. A ramblers detached life, full of open panels, railroads and infirmary ashtrays. Coughing, I shudder and shake off daydreams and dirt. Time to keep on keeping on.

My vision short and barely perceiving a thing I shamble steadily toward the bus depot I had arrived at last night. Hopefully taking the right path, electrochemical jog leading me. Just trusting my body learned the path in whatever drenched haze I was in. Sleep in my eyes and head still bleary, I start seeing a darting movement from the corner of my eye.

Turning quickly I look up and to the left, seeing nothing but cement wall, splattered with powdery gunk. I sniff to myself, knowing it is probably nothing but the pills wearing off. All in my head. Walking automatically, in between eye blinks two slideshows play against my will. The dull street passing by. Then the limy-electric eyelid static, Then litter street again. Then back in my head the image of those shuffling cubes the size of buildings. Then the same powdery street with the shadows in the corners vision. Then void and memory again.

Some noises are still sharp, peaking into my skull. All others muffled like my ears are full of glue. A prickling neck, that sensation of being watched. I rub the mole on my neck and peer about, scrunching my eyes in a vain attempt to focus them. The other side of the street predictably blurry. The refuse laden sidewalk I stand upon in ironically perfect clarity. I seem alone. I continue, knowing this haunting sensation following me is another phantom. A misfire. Faulty.

I would know, as an electrician. Snickering to myself; looking insane. I am a paranoiacs paranoiac. Employable, but psychotic.

The jacket zips at you,

"So sure you're so trapped in your pathetic pity hole. Step it up grinder, if you're so tired come off it. Whats the difference having anything to run off with or not? Debt ridden rat. Don't quit, just leave!" If it were so easy. Jutting my hand into the jacket pocket I search for the clozapine, realizing my jacket is empty. How long had I slept?

I feel no panic. Strangely at peace, with my possessions surrendered from me. I'll have to check into the signal at home.

"Or not at all..." *Whisper, whisper.* Yeah, like that would go well. The whispers sometimes reflect my own impulses, however irrational they may be. Besides, I can check the benchmark on that terminal. I realize I'm more excited about that strange device than I have been for anything else in a long time. If it's really one of the high grade processors it will cut down on my troubleshooting times substantially. Although it took its sweet time generating the code for the test routine its been running, so maybe I just have wishful thinking.

I arrive at the station building. An actual abandoned building with the station atop it. I go inside, walking past decrepit offices just behind thin layers of cloudy glass. An elevator sits within, its shiny metal contrasting the dead mold around it. No one joins me heading up. This

town is ghostly quiet. Not that foot traffic isn't rarer than helium nowadays. The elevator has no buttons aside from the emergency stop, it closes and ascends automatically.

My stomach churns with the inertia. I choke it down, sucking on my tongue. Don't want to wipe vomit off my shoes again. Exiting onto the platform, I see an overalled custodian replacing his canister. They don't react to me at all. I always wondered what the point of their job is. They don't clean; not that there isn't enough trash to keep them busy for a few lifetimes. Drones are more than capable of laying down anti-fungal over a whole city in hours. Maybe they are just meant to get the nooks and crannies. Or maybe they are just around to make it seem like this is still the Earth that needs custodians.

I see a hanger bus is already waiting, about to leave. I jog over, stepping inside. By familiar reflex I hesitate on the step up, staring blankly into the doorway. With a charming beep I continue inside, shoving my way past the bloated driving terminal. Only one person at the back, a raggedy sleeper. Their splotchy coat stained with the same anti-fungal spray which paints the streets. I ignore them, sitting and trying to fight my nausea before it takes off.

Normally I would have some anti-emetics with me. Usually I have enough foresight for that, but this had been an impromptu night out. Celebrating that terminal I lifted. I take off my jacket, it has served me well.

A ripping growl from the jacket,

"What the fuck are you doing!? I'm not your puke bag, puke bag!" Winding up above my head are the oscillating hangers, their vibration alone almost setting me over the edge. As the bus lifts, I get sick into my jacket. I feel a cruel satisfaction in the act, almost making up for the awful heaving. An immediate relief washes over me; the alcoholic purge high. Free of my stomach's contents, I sit still looking out the window. Holding onto my sopping wreck of a jacket.

"Please. Please kill me. Are you listening, grinder? Throw me out, please." *The jacket gurgles, drowning in it. Its pleas devolve into burbling whines.* Trying to ignore the jacket, I breathe slowly in and out. The window only opens to a narrow crack— I direct my shallow gasps towards it anyways.

I could watch the rolling city below. The empty concrete scrapers. With buzzing cars around them. I could look at the hazy smog vista, but I've seen the view before. It looks the same from everywhere. The real views aren't where people are. Working for the UCO has some perks, getting dragged out to the middle of nowhere to do maintenance on some inane sensor pays off after seeing the forest expanses of bare pines. Their skeletons all lined up for hundreds of miles and silhouetted by the sunset. Or the grey and endless oceans with gargantuan drifting islands of rubbish. The waves foaming and acidic like Poseidon's angry spittle. Or those fields shuffling steel,

I arrive at my stop, stepping off. My hostel is only a block away. I take another identical elevator down from an identical platform; through another empty and rebar ridden tower.