Virus Media is the leading name in trendy, niche, West Coast audio. With a whopping three stores housed in abandoned paint storehouses, it is *the* destination for fans of music to add to their collections, and for jerks of music to be insufferable about when they go back to their desk jobs in Arkansas.

Aisles of CDs, organized by genre, and then further organized by divisions of that genre, stretch as far as the eye could see, and then go to the left where they keep the soundtracks. The walls of the store were lined with old records for collectors and the nostalgic, and new records for new collectors and people that just found a record player in the trash. Planted in the middle of the audio sea, vintage collectable merchandise waited on shelves to become an impulse buy.

It was here in this musical Mecca that Nick showed his otherworldly friends a form of lust that wasn't criminal, or creepy, or crossing physical boundaries. In between two headphones, he could let them hear the lusty lyrics of singers at levels each of them could handle.

For Selena, all restraints could be unlocked, so the unbridled sexual themes of R&B singers who recently came to fully understand their sexualities as women were put on tap for her. Eating ass and kissing girls were simple baby ideas for demons, but it still spoke to her. Hearing it expressed artistically, and not written on a bathroom wall, was a beautiful new experience she could make a connection to.

The unabridged embrace of a good feeling by someone who denied it their whole life. Despite the king’s ransom of sex and fuck words, it wasn’t vulgar, it was truthfull and beautiful. Harmless, but it still had teeth, and would make a US senator catch fire listening to it.

"Damn, this bitch is singing this straight from the trenches." Selena said, bobbing her head to the irresistible rhythm in her ears. She turned to Nick to warn him, "You can not let those two listen to this. They will actually lose their virginities to this."

"I didn't, don't worry. I gave them something easier to digest."

"You sure? Cause they uh…"

The angels shared a single pair of headphones turned outwards and held to their ears so they could both listen to the musical selection Nick had chosen for them. Sariel listened on the right, her hand over her mouth in shock. Abatur listened on the left, leaning over to the side at an uncomfortable 45-degree angle to stay at his sister's level. His eyes wide and his brow wrinkled in concern with what they were listening to.

Neither of them could believe something like this was really pressed to disk and let loose into the world. It was filthy innuendo, dirty, filthy words crafted by some unhinged pervert, directed at some unsuspecting party behind their back. The grungy, oily, grimey thoughts of some creeper lusting for the cardinal pleasures of flesh.

"I let them listen to a love ballet from an opera. An opera in Italian." Nick said in quiet disbelief.

"The mouths under those curly mustaches got a way with wiener words. That's a horny you feel in your heartparts." Selena remarked.

"Are you two okay?"

"This is the most shameless, perverted prose I have ever heard." Abatur said, quivering.

Sariel moved her hand away from her mouth, just enough to speak politely and she could compensate for the rudeness she was listening to, "I knew human lust ran deep, but I did not anticipate how far poetics could drag them down."

"It's a guy singing about his wife." Nick told them.

"His WHAT!?" Sariel yelped.

Even if they were mortified by an Italian wife guy, they still stuck through it, and gave it a fair listen, and they did so without making judgements on anyone else's behalf. From the look of it, they had moved past sinning within reason just for Nick's sake. Now, the four of them were really hanging out.

With that settled, Nick had to unravel the further mysteries of these impossibly weird church kids.

"Hold on a second, can you guys understand what that guy is saying?"

"Yes. Were we not supposed to?" Sariel answered.

"No, it's just interesting." He took up his thinking pose, and the lights in his eyes began to spin around in contemplation. He was reminded of the way he gets when he listens to music in Japanese or Korean, and the way he can get gists of what’s being sung just by listening to the way they’re spoken.

"Maybe… maybe it's kind of what I was talking about with you the first time we met, Selena. About stories that speak to audiences? Can you two can feel that emotion and passion in his singing, the way he’s clearly addressing someone near and dear to him? Like a language that speaks in emotions rather than words? Like communication exclusive to artistic meaning!?"

"No. We comprehend the words on a literal, spoken level." Abatur clarified.

"Oh. You two speak Italian?"

Sariel took the headphone away from her ear to better address Nick without operatic horndogging in her ear, "We speak and hear the Harmonic Resonance. It is an auditory stream of intention and context the angelic mind deciphers for optimized communication. All forms of organized communication register as one nuanced sound to us, and our words register as a language that best conveys our intentions to you."

"Huh."

Nick was reminded that he does actually know a few words of Japanese and Korean, and looks up translations to foreign songs he really likes, and recognizes thematic consistencies in pop music from those countries, and that probably does more for him getting the gist of those songs than some kind of magic emotion language he just made up does.

Nevertheless, he was tantalized by the idea of a more scientific version of his made up communication. The lights of his eyes started moving around in captivated circles again. He asked Selena, "Do you have anything like that?"

"I can smell fetishes. It's that anything?"

Nick's eye-shines began to spin faster and erratically, excitedly processing what he was learning all at once, applying it to what he had already known, and what he could logic out from all of that now.

While he stood around grinning like a fool, Sariel told him, "I am not sure this is a vice I can comfortably navigate at any level. Human art is too hedonistic for the chased."

Nick stopped hypothesizing, latching onto something. "What's angel art like? I know you said angels don't do music earlier, but do you have art at all?"

"Oh, now y'all did it." Selena could recognize where this was going.

"We… do not participate in art in any form." Abatur said, removing his headphone from his ear.

"Like competition, artistry invokes vanity through show-offery and accolades, while harboring envy in the unskilled." Sariel said.

"Oh, you done it now." Selena said while staying out of the direct conversation.

"Mmhm, I see." Nick started to put his thoughts together.

"Here it comes…"

"I wanna show you all something."

“WELCOME TO THE THUNDERDOME, SUCKERS!”

Nick led his friends up to the second level, where a loft overlooking the rest of the store contained the video section. A comparatively small, but sizeable collection of movies and shows on whatever media the distributor felt like printing them on. Bigger than the DVD section of a bookstore, but smaller than a timelost video rental store.

He hoped to change their perspective of art and the artistic process using movies as a more tangible form of human artistry. The movie industry has grown to become the luxury car of human entertainment, ever since filmmakers learned how to make more than prank videos where trains run you over. He began by pulling out a selection from the drama section.

“This is a movie called ‘*The Ledger*,’ it’s about a war profiteer who has a change of heart during one of the most devastating and infamous wars in human history. After seeing how the weapons he manufactured destroyed people’s lives, he uses the money he made selling those weapons to save the people his own country sought to subjugate and exterminate. It was such a powerful and momentous film, it swept award show after award show that year, and so critically acclaimed, it started winning categories that didn’t even apply to movies.”

He turned the box around to show them the blurb that proudly read, ‘*Voted best household detergent, 2002’*

“... and that was a particularly good year for soap.”

Nick pulled another movie from the shelf, another historical wartime drama, sporting the same kind of minimalistic colors and art style for its cover.

“This other movie is called *‘War Boy Goes Home*’ Totally different studio and crew, but it’s also a drama about the same war. It’s got a soldier who comes home to find a world that moved on without him, and then struggles to adapt.”

“And how many awards did this movie receive?” Sariel asked.

“Just two, but those were at smaller shows. It only got nominated for one at the larger stages, but for minor categories that aren’t as impressive to boast about.”

The back of the “War Boy Goes Home” box had a blurb that read “*Nominated for an Academy Award! Which award? The ‘Mind Your Own Damn Business’ award. How about that, huh? I don’t see you with any award nominations.”*

The blurb took up most of the back cover.

“Hmm…” Selena started to think this over.

“Why did this film receive fewer accolades than the former?” Abatur asked. “They are both admonishments of war. I would think that is worthy of a guerdon.”

“That’s the thing, Wa-”

“It’s because one’s about a hero who makes war look baller, and the other is about a schmuck that has to stop doing war so he can come home to his busted ass house.” Sellena interjected, quite confident she had solved the movie quiz.

“What, no, it’s-”

“I was under the impression the man returned home unscathed. When did he break his bottom?” Sariel asked, confused and unintentionally interrupting Nick again.

“He didn’t literally break his ass open. He’s a loser who didn’t get rich killing foreigners, and you have to watch his life crumble to pieces because he’s a poor murderer nobody likes.” Selena sounded suspiciously like an impression of Nick, without meaning to.

“But the good movie is about a guy making a fortune from his president kicking poor people in the dick. That guy turns around and makes it rain on the dick-kicked poorbos, and that lets them escape and undermine authority, and *that* makes him a hero. Humans like heroes. They like villains too, but not losers. So the cool movie wins, and the lame movie sucks shit.”

Nick loves his friends.

“The heroism and selflessness of the balling man does appeal to me more than the War Boy’s loss.” Sariel remarked.

“Yes! Its abundance of accolades are well earned!” Abatur added.

“Yeah, I’d wash my socks with a movie like that.” Selena concurred.

Nick loves that these people are his friends.

“You guys are great. Thanks for coming out tonight.” he said.

“You are welcome!” Abatur said with a big smile.

Nick took a beat to regain his train of thought, “*‘The Ledger’* was written and directed by the grandson of a survivor of that war. He had a real connection to what happened in the movie, and that kind of earnestness can be felt by people watching it. That commitment to telling a real story from the heart is what won it those awards.

The following year, a ton of movies were reworked or put into production about that war. All of them, emotional dramas, including *‘War Boy Goes Home.*’ The problem was, most of these movies were made to capitalize on the hype surrounding *‘The Ledger’* and were rushed

out before audiences went cold on the idea. The lack of integrity and desperation for awards was pretty obvious."

"So the moviesmiths were overcome by greed and hubris, and wasted precious time and resources in the pursuit of a trophy that would never be theirs, and their worthless movies were deemed absolute failures! A very good moral and an excellent story, Nick!"

Nick was surprised by how brutal Sariel could be. "It… uh… It's not worthless though. That's the thing about art, all of it has some kind of value. Even the most repulsive work has something to be gained from it."

"Well yeah," Selena pointed to the price sticker on the DVD, "They're selling it. for $3.99 instead of giving it away for free or hucking it in the trash. But it's still a bad movie that wins loser awards."

"Mmhm…" He took up his thinking pose after hearing her say that, "Think about that while I show you something new."

He made a quick dash to another section to gather more examples. In the animated section, he thumbed through several different options, picking one movie out, then another, and another. He put two back and pulled out one more. He let out a huff mixed with indecision and a tad of frustration before settling on a movie that made for a really good example, but more importantly, one he couldn't bear not talking about to his friends who had never seen it.

He walked to the family comedy section and pulled a single movie off its shelf, already knowing what he was looking for, easily hunting it down just by finding its place in the alphabetical arrangement.

"So this movie is called *'Carmine.'* It's a fantastic animated movie about a kid in Italy who fights to save his mother's life from a crime family by using magic powers! It had a stellar crew of industry veterans that worked on it, most of which already won awards for their previous projects! Anyone with even a passing interest in animation has seen this one."

The idea of a child fighting the mob with a magic gun sounded too good for Selena not to get a little excited over, even if the cover made it look artsy-fartsy. She already figured Nick was planning on showing her this whenever he got the chance. The angel siblings on the other hand, were impressed by the artsy-fartsy cover, but concerned for the safety of the large-headed boy weakly clutching a glowing white firearm. Hopefully he was using his magic to call an adult to get rid of it for him, or turn it into something nicer.

Nick let them have a moment to digest the info and fully appreciate the movie. Then brought the other movie he pulled off the shelf in front of it.

"... and this… is '*Doug Swampson: Fart Patrol.*'" Selena's eyes and mouth opened wide, laughing louder than she ever had. Nick began slowly crumpling in on himself trying not to join her. "It's a movie… about a cop… and he tries to stop a heist…. And he… he… farts too much."

Both of them began scream-laughing thinking about what plot threads a movie where a guy farts so hard it becomes debilitating in the line of duty could have. The angels were very confused.

"THAT'S the award winner! I'll bet my life on it!" Selena said between gasping for air.

"Don't, it's not in the slightest!" Nick said, wiping tears from his eyes.

"ARE YOU SERIOUS!?"

"Didn't win a DAMN THING!"

"Oh no!" That must have been so depressing for the fart man." Sariel said in earnest. So earnest that Nick and Selena were knocked back into frantic laughter. The other people in the movie section, and some people downstairs, started to put space between the hysterical, multicolored group of silly-billies.

When they were finally able to stop laughing, Selena said, "Okay, fine. I guess I'd rather give an award to a magic kid than a cop too."

"Well that's the thing! Carmine didn't win any big awards either!"

Each of the otherworlders were surprised by this turn. Sariel sat down with Selena and Nick and said, "But I thought you said it was a beloved movie. Many accomplished moviesmiths forged it together! How did it not meet the criteria for an award?"

"Animated movies are treated with a lot more scrutiny than live action ones. At major award shows, they lump them all together into one category, and the ones that win are usually whatever ones the judges saw with their kids, and those are whatever ones were made by big studios that year. A gritty, mature, and heartfelt animated movie had very little chance of winning."

Sariel tried her best to put this all together in any way that made sense, but none of it came together at all for her. "If this movie is beloved by so many people, and the farting man brings you and Selena uproarious joy…"

Nick and Selena stifled a very large laugh.

"... but neither of them have awards to prove it, what does a movie award mean in the first place? What criteria must be reached before magic big head boys and flatulent officers are given their due!?"

"There is no criteria. Awards are given out based on the opinions of just a few people. Some artists want the recognition of an award, and some even spend their entire careers trying to get recognized by a single committee, but a lot of them do it because they just want to.

The crew of Carmine had wanted to make something big together for years and kicked the idea around whenever they'd meet up. And Bob Haynes who played Fart Cop kinda just wanted an excuse to go on vacation with his actor friends and used the movie as an excuse to do it.

It's not about getting rewarded for your art, even though they would like to be compensated fairly of course, it's about personal fulfillment."

"It is… self-care." Abatur said silently, mostly to himself.

"Yes! You got it! Art gets made for more than just awards or showing off, or getting their wife hot and bothered with songs. They mean things to the artists, and the people who watch and listen to them. It's fun and fulfilling to make movies for yourself, or with your friends, and work with other people. And it's fulfilling to give your ideas and feelings life and connect with other people who might feel the same way."

Selena clapped her hands together in sudden realization "Just like with the song about eating ass! I felt that!" She noticed how uncomfortable that made the angels and changed course almost immediately, "Or… the ice cream and the viddy games from the other week. I felt those ones too."

"Does this mean that while we were sinning we were simultaneously interfacing with another human's attempt to share their passions with us remotely?" Abatur asked Nick.

"Well sure, to a certain extent I guess."

Sariel gasped, "That means, by trying to deny them from you, we were disrespecting the hard work of an artist and their feelings! Oh dear."

"I wouldn't say you disrespected it, you just didn't get it."

"It takes time to get human stuff, but if you give it a chance, it'll surprise you." Selena told them, "Like a wise breakroom sage once said, *'There's no rooms when you snub… when you snob at…'*

Uh…"

"There's no room for snobbery in enjoyment?" Nick had overheard Tess' motto from the door of the design office at work.

“There’s no room for snobbery in combroberry!” Selena said with her full chest proudly.

“I don’t think that applies here.”

“Yes it does.”

Sariel stood up and bowed her head, “Regardless, I would like to apologize to both of you for my disregard of human traditions. It seems piety and morality are more complex than I believed, and I have much more to learn.”

Abatur joined her, with much more vitality, “I would like to humbly request extenuation as well. Human culture is deeper and more nuanced than I previously anticipated, but I would like to experience and analyze it further!”

“Yes! We would both love to learn more about what your world has to offer!”

“I would like to ride the roller coaster!”

“Yes, we- **WHHHHAAAAATTTTTT!!!!???”**