

Musambique

A long, long time ago, when people could still remember how music used to make them smile, there was a great city named Musambique. Now this was no ordinary city, for its inhabitants were the creators of the melodious sound that everyone round the world enjoyed, music. The citizens of Musambique, the harmonious ones, at least, led prosperous lives within their pleasure-dome, making their wonderful melodies along the river Alph. The river which divided the city. Just as Paris is divided by the Seine, Musambique's districts lie parceled out by the winding white Alph. Now one of these districts, the southernmost one, on the outskirts of the Alph's reach, beyond the edge of the shining city lies the district of the discordants. Those who would exchange harmony for clashing noise and hard-to-swallow truths, administered with gruff, scathing voices. The discordants were sent out a long while ago, and while they prospered in the dark, the shining light of the classics was always preferable to travelers, and eventually, the discordants fell into obscurity.

The story here begins with a boy. Just a city boy. Born and raised in south Chicago. One fateful night, he took a train, going anywhere. Many trains later, he ended up in Musambique. The city captivated him, held him in its trance, and he loved every minute of it. Every day he walked the busy streets and heard that wonderful music oozing from every part of every wall, every alley, every door, and window. Life was bliss. He was finally free from the hells of his previous life, from his demons, from the things he carried with him. But one day, he ventured into the darkened parts of the city, across the Alph, to the outskirts, where the old discordants were. Looking around, he did not hear the music, and was intrigued. Many of the people here simply shambled about, moving from place to place with no purpose. Buildings all around lie in near ruin- glass smashed from nearly every window, it was as if a great fire had ravaged the district, as if the buildings themselves saw too great a sorrow, and their wounds never healed. The boy could see why this place was often forgotten.

He walked down the main street in the dark, grey area of the city, with scarce people meandering about like rats, scurrying without purpose beside survival. Still, the boy continued down the road, among the large, stone buildings with wild broken buttresses and capped by gargoyles of a ferocious nature. Inside one of these such buildings, the boy heard a sound. A cacophonous, discordant melody that attacked the city boy's ears. After a moment, the harsh bass mellowed, and the boy was enraptured. He flew to the door of a crumbling gothic church, where upon the broken pulpit stood a man in black robes, preaching a song that rang with metallic tones. No one sat within the pews, indeed, there was no one else in the building. The old discordant sang to an empty audience, to no one but the boy. He stood, enthralled by the confusing, harsh noise that rang seemingly with no sense whatsoever, but it... worked. It worked wonderfully! The man in black finished his cacophonous sound with an explosion behind him. The boy snapped from his trance and applauded. Hooting and hollering, the boy clapped wildly, confusing the old sorcerer, who stepped down from his mock stage.

"Who are you- what was that sound?", the boy asked.

“I... am He for Whom the Bell Tolls... Meta of Llica... and that was what I... see”, the black sorcerer answered.

“What do you see?”, the boy inquired, taking a few curious steps forward

“Dreams... dreams of war, dreams of lies, dreams of dragon’s fire. I see the downfall of harmony, the raising of Mega, god of Death, his companion, the Slayer, and the herald Anthrax. With their return, our music will be enough to finally rival those harmonious ones across the profaned river.”

“Your music is already enough!”, said the boy, “You talk about the hard truths that no one in that perfect world would dare to speak. Yet you tell them in such a way that anyone could understand, whether they had been there or not.”

“Then you see it as well”, replied the sorcerer, “You have met hardship in your life, and so were drawn here to me.” He took a step towards the boy.

Taken aback, the boy stepped away from the black cloak. Something about the creature was off. Yes, indeed, it was a creature, not a man like anyone he had seen before. It outstretched its knarled, bony hand towards the boy as the world seemed to teeter back and forth. He hit the ground, felt it’s hard embrace on his back, the cold stone impact knocking the breath from his lungs. As he drew in another breath, the cold stone faded with his vision. The boy was falling, falling. Tumbling down, tumbling down, indeed he was free... free falling. Wind flew around him, sucking the screams from his voice, silencing his terror. Then he began to see.

The boy saw his father, his jaw locked, his hands red, ripe from a recent beating. The boy saw a girl, his first love, hanging from her ceiling, just as he found her. He saw the countless others that turned him away, afraid to look inside, afraid to see him for who he truly was. They knew, they all knew, it was inevitable. The boy looked at these visions of his past, of these demons he thought he left behind and saw what everyone else had seen before. He saw what his father tried to beat out of him, what the girls were so afraid of, what his friends hated and exiled him for. They only woke up the demon within him.

Realizing this, his vision became clear. The skeleton hand reached for him once again, and this time he took it. He clasped the hand with all of his might and felt the fire within him grow. The boy recognized his purpose, and was shaken by it. No, he was beyond shaken, he was disturbed.

After that day, the disturbed man did not dare set foot back in musambique. He lived among the discordants, learning from them, living with them, becoming them. Each day he sulked about like all the others, and each night he was renewed. When dusk fell and he awakened, the disturbed looked across the grey expanse of the city before him and watched as the gleaming city continued to shine, brighter in the night than it did at day. And he hated it. Oh how he hated it. He loathed that city. He loathed those that lived there, those that cast out people who spoke the truth, people like Meta. He saw sorrow in his friends, the man who worked the shipyards, his hands chaffed from a life of slipping knots, the protestor, who was locked up so many times he had been avenged seven fold, the green-thumb who prospered during the day, and little Lincoln.

Oh, Lincoln. A boy who watched his brother hang himself. A boy who was not whole and could no longer speak. Young Lincoln, who slept alone in the park.

Though he was disturbed, he was not insane. The man wanted better for his friends. He wanted to give them a place in Musambique. To etch out a niche in the threads of the harmonious song for them. But most of all, he wanted to show those stuck up bureaucrats downtown, at 100 Billboard Heights, that music meant something more than a good melody.

So one night he stole away. Wreathed in black, the disturbed man walked the river Alph and arrived in Musambique. He heard the harmonies again, but this time it did not phase him. The music had changed. It was different now, it was not as... real... as it had been before. The sounds he heard that day rang with a deep pulsing vibration that shook him to his core, that disturbed the darkness within him. And he laughed. "So... that's what you call music" he thought. It had changed. The music that lit up the night of the city shook the walls with hard bass, while electronic melodies and the sounds of instruments floated daintily above. He grinned in wicked satisfaction. For the first time since he heard Meta's song, he felt true bliss.

Upon his return to the bleak city, he gathered a small crowd of wandering citizens. "My friends," he said, sitting upon some refuse, "Friends... You may all look around and see the destitution, the desolation of our city. You may look to each other and despair. We are living in a dark time. The old discordants, those whose cacophonous sounds have long since stopped ringing through these streets, those discordants are no more. Their legacy has been snuffed out by those who would rather imagine dragons than to swallow the harsh truths of the world. Truly it is a dark time."

On this somber note, many turned away, but the man stood, pulling briskly at the side of his hood in agitation. "You all heard that sound! Their song- songs like those preached by Meta of 'Llica! You heard it! You waited, hoping it would call out again!" he turned, looking to Musambique, "You heard the shadow reckoning, but your fears have kept you blinded! You think all is forsaken? No! Listen to me now, all's not forsaken! You need never feel broken again, for sometimes..." he gestured to the ruined building behind him, "sometimes darkness can show you the light."

"What light?"

"The light of hope. Musambique has fallen off its pedestal. The city now seethes electronic noise, bereft of any meaning. Meanwhile- here we stand! Proud! Full of songs that voices have never shared! We've never dared to disturb that sound of silence that lies between the old ways of discord, and of the old ways of rock. Now is the time to dare."

And so it was in the discordant city. That disturbed man went from place to place and preached his songs as Meta had. Beautiful songs to those that could listen past the noise. For indeed, there was noise. His voice started rough, unintelligible, evil, and dark. But he found his sound. He grew into his voice, molded it, and weaponized it. He armed an entire people within this broken, crumbling wasteland. So then, the brave and the bold went to march on Musambique.

It wasn't hard to get in. People ran out of sight, the new discordants and their dark attire frightened people away. They marched through the streets, singing anthems as they walked those lonely roads, their brothers, sisters, and shadows, the only ones who marched beside them. That's all they needed.

Arriving at 100 Billboard Heights, the seat of power in Musambique, the black parade was greeted by several men in colorful suits. Three stepped forwards. The man in the middle wore a dark blue suit patterned with various horned insects. The men on either side weren't men, per se, but robots in sequin suits. One gold, and one silver, their helmet visors blinked and beeped with all sorts of colors and shapes.

"We want to speak to whoever's in charge!" Shouted the slip-knotter.

"Oh, I'm sorry." The man in the middle answered, "You can call me Lennon, these are my humble assistants. Together we oversee the city of Musambique and it's harmony."

"Har-mo-NYYY", The robots echoed in autotuned tones.

"Unfortunately, you lot are uh, disturbing that harmony."

"We come for a good reason, Mister Lennon. My brothers and sisters and I live in near squalor across the Alph."

"Ahh, so that's where you're from. You didn't strike me as discordants right away. Just some.. young punks trying to come round the bend and change this city's tone."

"Ha-ah. Daft Punks." The robots added, fist-bumping behind Lennon's back.

"Call us what you will, sirs, I only ask to be included. This city's glimmering surface is just a façade. You're all living a hopeful lie, telling yourself that life is peachy keen, when really there's a sickness within everyone around. A sickness that we carry with us every day. A sickness we have come to terms with, accepted, and are living a fuller life than you all could here in your pleasure-sphere."

"Dome"

"Whatever!"

"I do see your point, punk, though you're beginning to sound like a new meta. That's just something... we cannot afford." The robots nodded their heads in affirmation.

There was a squealing of tires, and suddenly several large vans appeared and surrounded the punks, the new metals. There was confusion, shouting, blows were exchanged, screams flew from the crowd as they fought and fought, but it wasn't enough. The officers of harmony overpowered them, rounded them up like cattle, and put them away into the vans. One by one the vans drove away, Lennon standing there with his two machines, offering no comment but a wave goodbye.

The vans took the black protestors to the other end of Musambique, to a place all discordants dreaded. The place they were sent to die. An asylum with no real name, but a loving moniker

from all the staff who worked there. Upon arrival, the punks were thrown gruffly inside, locked in, and told, "Welcome, to the Hotel California. You can check out of life, but you'll never leave."

Two months passed. That initial feeling of denial, the sucker-punch to the heart, the reminder that they were outcasts crippled the group. Of the twenty or so that marched on Musambique, four did not survive the first few months.

Everyone was hurting in some way or another, but most looked upon the disturbed man with distain. They all hated him for spurring action, for getting them into this mess. All except young Lincoln. Tensions boiled over into bloodshed. A fight broke out between those that hated the disturbed, and those who still believed his song. Two of his supporters died in a brutal fight against the antagonists, taking one with them. Another could not stand the pressure and took the easy way out.

One fateful day, the disturbed gathered everyone around the stark white lunch room. Though they had all been stripped of their dark attire, the punks still stood in direct contrast with the walls and floors around them. He sat backwards on a chair, addressing the whole crowd, supporters and all. There was a faint murmur about the group, no one knew what to expect. Their voices went silent as soon as their former leader began to speak.

"In the back of my mind, I can barely even remember when there was nothing left to hide... And they had found a way inside. I was forced to walk alone, to live in an empty home. All I wanted was to hide, and numb this ache inside..." He turned to the gleaming city, just barely visible out the window on his left. "And I'm still afraid of that light. Of the thousand voices that shared laughter at my demise. I knew, if I was to survive, that infection, this sickness within me, had to die. This thing we call a sickness, this disease, is pain. Pain of loss, of sorrow, of real experiences that no one else knows. Well, my brothers and sisters, my blood. Since our failure, no, my failure. This sickness has increased tenfold." The sixteen were silent, they looked among each other as he walked to the window. Tenderly, he placed his hand upon the glass. "I used to look around and watch as the other kids played, played in perfect disarray. That disorder was always beautiful to me. You could never expect it, never perfect it. But it was a part of me, a part of you, a part of all people. Yes, this thing they call sickness, this pain of our past may be greater than all others, but it makes us strong. I for one, am down with this sickness.

"And just what good does this 'sickness' do you? All it has ever brought the rest of us is pain and isolation!", the slip-knotter quipped. "This asylum is to be our grave! I did my time- and I want out!"

"I know the sickness has empowered me! I know it has shown me the truth of this world, and if no one else is willing to hear then we will make them hear! My disciples, let your voices be heard! I have seen fellows, and I can foresee more falling, I can feel you die in this asylum! We weren't ready for this asylum, but we will overcome it, the establishment, the Billboard! We will overcome and make our voices heard!"

"huzzah!" Cried most of the crowd, but some remained unmoved.

“The old discordants fell away into obscurity- what makes you think we have a chance?”

“Our voices ring with the power of their words, yes, but we are a new generation, empowered by pain and torment we will show them bleak harmonies that pry at their very soul! We are the ones that will open their mind, leaving the hardened cronies left behind. With the masses on our side we can accomplish anything.” The Disturbed threw up his fist in the air. “With ten thousand of these, we will bring forth a revolution to musambique that will shake it to its core- dare I say, *disturb it?*” There was a chorus of chuckles from the crowd, but still some remained unmoved.

“You got us into this mess, who do you think you are that can make something like that happen?”

“I am no one. Not alone.” He said, looking about the room, meeting everyone’s gaze who dared look back.

“No,” a young voice said, “You’re our leader. You’re the only one who can make this happen.” It was Lincoln. The mute spoke. And he spoke the truth. Everyone knew it in their hearts but it took the young boy’s words for them to finally see. “All my life I’ve been pushed around. My brother was there to help, but he wasn’t there when I needed him most. When he took his own life, I was... one step closer to the edge. Since then, thing after thing has hit my life like a ton of bricks. Another step closer each time- and Im about to break. I kept everything inside, and even though I tried, what everything had meant to me became a memory of a time that I tried so hard, and got nowhere. Not until I met you. So come on, disturbed man. Leader. Let’s cross this new divide.”

For the first time in a very long time, the disturbed man wiped a tear from his face. He looked again to the sixteen men and women and saw not despair, not darkness, but hope, and light.

“Alright then” he said, pulling a smile into a contorted grin, “Raise up those fists! It’s time to make some noise!”