Fortball. A favourite for kids as soon as they are old enough to play, and whenever adults think of the many joys of being a child, the fortball battles comes mind. It is beautiful, really, how almost no matter your skills, you can be of some value to the team. Got a leg-upgrade last holiday? Good, you are on capture duty. Got a good aim with a ball? Trivially assigned to the shooting tower. Both? Flanking team. Whitey has none of that, neither the reflexes to deflect the balls or the brawns to build proper forts. Quite the contrary, he is clumsy, and his strength might once have been slightly above average, but that was in an age were muscled were forged in the gyms, not the factories and laboratories. But he needed none of that, not on the battlefield. His parents, meaning his mom, had betted their gene budget on his mental capabilities. Whitey occasionally wonders how many of his thoughts and interests can be traced back to the lab wearing messiah pretenders. It made it to the district newspaper when mom decided to use the surrogate money to

This was the first time Whitey had felt alive ever since the Eye-cident, as the XDD community had dubbed it. In the locker room, changing into his worn-out sports clothes, it was as if a fog inside his head started clearing up. Much like coming out of a Day Dream, and in a sense, he was.

Now, of course, that all drowns in the acid lakes your team has three transhuman superstars. Then you are just an ammunition gatherer, or if you happen to be either be too loud mouthed or slow, collateral damage. Yeah, not a chance the sharp face one’s mother saved on the surrogate. Not like they could possible invest more into her anyway. Whitey, with a look as if the fog had come back, analysed the almost uncannily perfect face.

“Has to be multigenerational. Natural or dedicated tailors though? Natural, and that’s like… half of my soldiers’ houses worth of face, maybe minus Simó. Heard his dad got a boat that can withstand the ocean. Dedicated…”

His gaze turned to his fellow classmates, currently building up the turtle fort he instructed them to.

“Add Vici’s balloon to Simó’s boat. Assuming the rumours about Ras’ dad’s SUR-razor are true. No, not even close. If she is dedicated,

and the order of magnitude rises by at least three. Guess we’ll soon find out.”

Whitey counted himself lucky to not be on Perfect face’s team. No way he would spend this opportunity on carrying ammo for the superstar trio. On the other hand, if Perfect face had multigenerational dedicated tailors, he’d have to give this one his all. Not to mention her two friends. One of them had already proven herself to be problem, jumping and dancing from the part of their fort already build to the parts carried by her soon-to-be ammunition-gather teammates. Perfect face’s dancing friend “Amateur

Then he realized. They did not care. For them, Fortball is just a game. Entertainment. Just afternoon of displaying their hyperhacked bodies and minds. In the right hands, anger is a tool, but lately Whitey has not been putting too much trust in his hands. *The blinding lights of the Neural Diver*

Incredible. The skin has a smoothness like it belonged to a Tick-Tock girl, yet Whitey had seen her in action. She did burn, but not in the way you would expect. Whitey had not given his hypothesis that she was a Tick-Tock much credit anyway, and it was certainly reputed by not only the fact that she’s not on the floor melting from the inside, crawling for her life towards the nearest water source. To his understanding, there are still a handful of labs worldwide capable of producing military models, but her graceful movements invalidated that possibility.

Elemental, no doubt.

What’s going on? His mind is crystal clear, thanks fortball, yet he can’t focus his thoughts on solving the problem that is Perfect face. His own unnatural, borderline uncanny face is forced by the frustration into a desperate, wide smile, the following laugh broken off by an angry stamping in the ground. Those of his classmates who has served under him before know it’s better to just let it slide. Though outbreaks like that are typically followed by whispers of varying degrees of concern.   
S: “Don’t you think Whitey is taking this a bit too serious? Was he also like that before… You know.”  
V: “Yeah, yeah, the smile dance goes way back.”   
S: “But it *is* just a game after all. We grab whatever we can find in the equipment room, make some barricades, and throw balls at the other side’s barricades hoping to hit someone behind them, maybe even grab their flag.”  
V: “Keep it down, Simó! You wanna get on ammo duty?”  
S: “Nah, Sai knows I’m too good at hitting ‘enemy soldiers’ to waste time collecting balls.”  
V: “Just cut him some slack, ever since his girlfriend, you know.”  
S: “We saw the XDD together, don’t need to remind me of the details.”   
V: “You think *he* actually did it?”  
S: “Cut it Vici. Sure, he does his little weirdo smile dance from time to time, but it’s not like everyone here is a saint. And I’m not talking about Prayer licenses.”  
“But like, why would the cops spend so much energy on the case if it was so cut and clear. And I know you know the rumours too. About his granddad.”

W: “I better hope it’s flanking strategy you too are discussing so intensely. New target priority update, ignore Perfect face, focus on her two friends instead.” Whitey’s faced brimmed with newfound determination.  
V: “Who’s ‘Perfect face’?”  
W: “You know who. Miss Billion-dollar body.”  
V: “You really have gone mad Whitey. She took out half our team last battle!”  
“Not accurate. She did take out twenty of our forty-one soldiers, yet she had the full attention of at least thirty. And not one of them managed to hit her.”  
“So why don’t we all just focus her and give her Upper League lips a taste of Blue Ocean 5-3 dirt!”  
W: “The obvious counterstrategy would be to just turtle in, which would ruin our focus. But I will give you, she seems too arrogant to hide. But that’s exactly why we must not give her any attention. She and her friends are here to play a game, and we are their toys. They see Fortball as a game where the goal is to have as many eyes admiring their all too perfect bodies. Last fight, we did just that. Entertained and gave them all the attention in the world.”

Vici quickly cuts off Simó before he can comment on the nature of Fortball.

“I don’t know Sai, aren’t you overthinking this a bit? We all know you care a *lot* about Fortball. Don’t get me wrong, your enthusiasm is contagious, and we like… fighting alongside you. But how come you know the girls on the other side of the trenches don’t feel the same? I don’t mean to be rude, but could it be that you are just a tiny bit jealous?”

Jealous about their maxed out genebudget? Their war ending performances, without any steel enhancements? Okay, maybe. No, definitely. But no, he was certain the titantrio did in fact not engage in this war. How did he know they ?

Sai “Whitey” had at this point figured out why they were here: They wanted admiration etc. etc. But why *here*? They surely aren’t from any of the Blue Ocean parks, nor would they have any reason to attend their college. The Whistling dancer sports a genescheme that could’ve been, but her attitude, skills and company say otherwise.

## Characters

**Sai “Whitey” Hill** (he/him): Extraordinarily pale, rumours that grandad was a Devil.

**“Tai Li”** (she/her): Whistling charm. When doing acrobatics, clothing made to whistle, similar to arrows flying through the air. Standard DNA scheme, wants to look different than everybody else.

**Simó** (he/him)**:** Thinks Fortball is just a game. A fun game, but still just a game.

**Vici** (she/her)**:** Thinks Whitey has gone over the edge.

## Notes

**XDD**: Extreme Day Dreams. My version of 2077’s Brain Dances. Day Dreams (DD) are common and legal, Extreme Day Dreams (XDD) are the illegal versions.

**Surrogates and tailors**: Surrogate mothers are commonplace, though usually artificial wombs are used. *Tailors* are biological women whose sole purpose is to give birth to perfect children, or, if the parents are rich enough, child. The tailors are pumped full of geneboosters that prioritize the birth of the child at all costs, typically even at the death of the tailor. Upper league parents are known to use multiple generations of tailors, meaning tailors give birth to other tailors, who after a desired number of tailor generations can give birth to the parents’ child. In areas where family is everything, less wealthy families are known to dedicate members to act as a form of lesser tailors themselves, hoping to produce

**Upper league:** Catch-all phrase for the wealthiest, most influential of society. Includes highest ranking corpo and the government.

**Acid lakes:** Polluted water in the Old City.

**Old City:** Today’s Copenhagen is buried under hundred of meters of new buildings. The remains are called Old City.

**Neural Diver:** Program or device capable of exploring a persons mind and memories.

**Tick-Tock:** Wind-Up girl.

**Blue Ocean:** One of many almost identical suburban parks in the same district. Similar vibe to [Vivarium](https://www.estudiosirlandeses.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Vivarium.png).