Everyone jokes about how silly he is afterwards and laugh at Whitey for acting like some big military man. Yet they all long for the next Fortball match. They need it. In a world full of absolute misery and complete euphoria, they live a life of the mundane. The acid bathers of the Old City would give everything to live in a Blue Ocean Park, yet Whitey’s fellow college students can’t help but long for more. They want to experience the thrill of being a street punk blazing through the neon blasted concrete streets, or to stand at the top of a skyscraper with the whole of Copenhagen beneath them. They will never experience any of that. They will become corporate drones, living a perfect life of mediocrity. Their Companion will find them a partner, a house and decide when and how many kids they need. Once their kids have died, all traces of them will be left and their impact on the world forgotten. That’s why they come back to play Fortball again and again. They laugh at Whitey’s silly rules and gestures, but it means the world to them. Every Sunday morning, when they finish the locker room ritual, they join Whitey’s ranks as soldiers. Though they could never admit that to anyone, least of all themselves, for that would be accepting that their life could be anything but exemplary monotony. And not just theirs, but their parents’ life as well, and whoever might have come before them. So, they continue laughing, and they continue coming back to don their uniforms in the college locker room.

Sai “Whitey” Hill has inadvertently created a cult following around a children’s game at the college he attends. The last few years, the rumours of the Fortball warzones have spread from 5-3 to the other Blue Ocean parks, and now organized Fortball play is commonplace at all institutions where any form of P.E. exists. Even the corpo-heads over in Rhea’s open office hellscapes have experimented with replacing pizza Friday with Fortball.

Rituals and roles. That’s Sai’s secret sauce. It is beautiful, really, how no matter your skills, given the right role, 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 balls or 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 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 actually made it to the district newspaper when Mom decided to use the surrogate money on geneboosting instead. His mom also made sure that his oily, pale skin was blamed on the lacking surrogate. But in this moment, scanning the battlefield as the two opposing forces are building up their forts, Whitey would say it was a worthwhile investment. For the first time since the Eye-cident, as the XDD community had dubbed it, Whitey is feeling truly alive. Back in the locker room, changing into his worn-out sports clothes he inherited from some older cousin years ago, 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, all that wisdom about purpose 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 of his soon-to-be opponent who just came into view alongside her two friends.

“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, not even within three orders of magnitudes. If she is dedicated… Whatever she is, we’ll soon find out.”

They never call him anything other than his name, but everyone else addresses each other by rank. So, when Sai walks up to the short Brazilian girl in red uniform, it is “Runner Vici” that is told she will have her troops ready to counter-flank. Surprised, she stops her warmup.

V: “Why the change, Whitey? The Red Devils are ready, and we did pretty good the last two weeks, didn’t we?”

W: “More than good. The sprint against the ghosts from the Plantation Klan? I’m sure they are still in denial about the fact that a bunch of ‘mudlickers’ could snatch their flag. I assure you, Runner, neither you nor your Devil’s performance have anything to do with this. Look closely, to the right of their guard tower. You see those three girls? The one with the sharp, pretty face and red outfit clearly chosen to highlight her expensive body, the one with waving purple hair and unpractical, long, yellow dress. Really, can’t see them? Look! On the top of the tower, the acrobatic blue dressed one. Yup, I really do think that is a small cape.”

Sai never laughs during the fights, but when the blue supergirl somersaulted down and landed on the head of a soon-to-be ammunition-gather teammate without him realizing, he could not help himself and blew a bit of air out the nose. However professional the stunt might have been, it was the act of an amateur. Rule number zero of Fortball: Don’t show off your skills before the match.

First combat round went horrible, but as his soldiers have come to learn, Whitey doesn’t mind losing the first fight if it provides useful analytics. And he has a lot to analyse. Whitey counted himself lucky to not be on Perfect face’s team. No way he would spend a Fortball opportunity on carrying ammo for the superstar trio. On the other hand, Perfect face had just made a performance that really made him question the opportunity of that she has had multigenerational dedicated tailors. Had she been alone amongst fresh soldiers, Whitey would be worried. But she brought two friends. The cape wearing blue acrobat he and Vici had laughed at made a joke of his turtle defences, practically running vertically up their fortifications. The

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***After first match***

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.   
V: Huh? Yeah, I know nobody here has a Saint license, why you bringing that up?

Simó looks just as confused for a moment before he replies.

S: “Ah, sorry. Forgot you need your Companion to translate everything into easy talk.”

V: “Not my fault Sai forces us to run on reduced features. Anyway, let’s get back on track. Why would the cops spend so much energy on Whitey’s case if it was so cut and clear. And I know you know the rumours too. About his granddad.”

Whitey arrived to interrupt two his two elite troops’ discussion with a face brimming with newfound determination.

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.”   
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!”  
W: “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.”  
S: “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.

V: “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… uh, 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 and all that stuff. 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. Uses his Companion sparingly, and only ever on assistant mode, never with full features.

**“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.

**Mihn** **Weili** (she/her): Daughter of the Weili empress who runs the Sanguine Sciences megacorporation. Is in Copenhagen to look at the prospect of setting up a major blood harvesting facility. Has been instructed to get familiar with the locals and their customs. Found out Fortball has a cult-like following in the suburb parks, and decided to investigate.

**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 person’s 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).

**Companion:** Personalized A.I. “Super Siri”. Can make all kinds of decisions, from life choices (e.g. romantic partner), explaining complex words and subtext to math test results. Many, especially in the lower social statuses, are deeply dependent on their Companion, to the point of not being able to find their way home without it. In higher social layers, anything but mildly assisting features are frowned upon, as the members of this part of society ought to have features, either biological or cybernetical, that surpass anything the Companion can offer. The reduced features include things like automated driving.

**Mudlicker:** Slur used about refugees. Originates from the fact that many poor refugees get their food from muddy lakes.