Gyroscopic. Ocular. Googlifying. System.

I haven’t closed my eyes in three days.

I’ve been too busy wandering the bottom of the ocean, conversing with Plato, and watching the pyramids rise. I’ve also been fucking Marilyn Monroe.

I haven’t closed my eyes in three days. Three days is nothing.  
Why would I want to? Need to? The backs of my eyelids offer only darkness, sadness, isolation. “I’ll sleep when I’m dead”, Pops always said. Well, back when we used to talk anyway. I have soared over rainforests, conquered ancient armies, and traveled the stars. But I fear I may have flown too close to the sun. (I touched the sun, once.)

I’ve heard stories about GOGS burning out, mostly rumors and conjecture. They didn’t fry my eyeballs, or blow my brain out of my ears, or burn a hole through my face. No, they just. Just stopped. I was in the middle of climbing Mount Everest when suddenly, everything went dark. I thought I had fallen, been trapped in an avalanche, or that my lantern had been lost in the snow. But I didn’t feel the frigid cold. The howling of the lashing winds was suddenly absent, vanished. No, something had gone horribly wrong - I felt nothing at all.  
 I didn’t want to believe it at first. As my senses slowly adjusted to the change in stimulation, I began to feel a pit opening up in my stomach. My arms felt sluggish and heavy as I fumbled, blindly, with the single switch on the GOGS - “ON”.

It didn’t work. For several minutes, I didn’t move at all.  
 A strange sensation came over me, and I felt a stinging in my eyes. I slowly peeled the GOGS from my face. My eyes throbbed with pain as they adjusted to the dim light of the apartment. A single red LED strip cast an eerie glow around the cramped room. (Why bother lighting a room that nobody “sees” in?) It felt like a submarine I was in, once, during WWII.  
 My hands refused to let go of the broken GOGS. I tried to stand, but my legs did not cooperate. I un-plugged from the Nutri-Dock. All at once, my angry body began to revolt against me. I fell out of my Lifepod and hit the floor with a heavy thud. Slowly, I crawled across the room, unnoticed by my family, who were busy with their own simulations. Cora was probably revisiting our wedding day, as she often did. Courtney was surely a damsel-in-distress, pacing in the highest room of the tallest tower, waiting for her knight in shining armour to rescue her. Donny was probably still playing with his friend Thomas, who had passed when he was just ten years old. We didn’t interact much outside of our GOGS. We didn’t interact at all, really. Not anymore.  
 After an eternity, I pushed open the door to the bathroom. With a triumphant heave, I pulled my chin to rest on the toilet bowl.  
 I vomited for several minutes.  
Every second was familiar agony; my stomach felt like it was burning, ripping itself apart from the inside. My head pounded. Too many Nutri-Paks. Too much time in the Lifepod. You’re only supposed to stay in there for eight hours at a time, but nobody follows that “rule”. Between the Lifepod and the GOGS, you don’t have to leave the virtual world for several days, sometimes even a week. It feels like a lifetime, though.

I vomited some more.   
*“Experience Reality”*, they had said. What happens when the “real world” becomes reality once more?

Slumped on the bathroom floor, I started shaking. Why me? What the fuck is supposed to happen now? I wheezed, exhausted from the physical exertion.   
 You only get one pair of GOGS. If they break or you lose them, you’re shit-out-of-luck. They say you’ll go crazy if you stay in the “real world” for too long, after using. People used to kill and steal GOGS if something happened to theirs. That’s why it’s safer to just stay inside, protected by a host of locks, codes, and bioscanners.   
 I haven’t left my apartment in years. Why would I?

After the introduction of GOGS, people stopped going outside altogether. It wasn’t immediate, but the risks of leaving became too great, as did the rewards of staying inside. You only had to take them off when you needed sleep, or an occasional meal. My record is four weeks without food, twelves days without sleep. The Nutri-Paks do a fantastic job of giving your body the nutrients it *needs*. Eating is always more pleasant in the GOGS - your brain tricks your body into imagining that the pasty Nutri-Pak is actually London broil, Alaskan salmon, or a feast of sushi. It’s too bad they wreak havoc on your stomach. I’d still say it’s worth it though. I don’t really mind throwing up anymore - I’m used to it.  
 The waste? Lifepods take care of that, too, to an extent. Always wear a backup diaper.  
After a healthy four hours of sleep (sometimes fewer) you can plug back in. It was rare to catch someone else without their GOGS on, and when you did, nobody felt up to much talking. A simple nod, and perhaps a grunt, replaced the, “hello, howareyou, horrible, yeahmetoo, goodnight” that we used to exchange. Precious seconds that could have been spent falling asleep, or back in the GOGS.  
 That’s when it hit me.  
I would never fly again, never gaze into the eye of a tyrannosaurus rex, never wield Excalibur, never fuck. (I haven’t slept with Cora in years), never be happy. The “real world” is an illusion, a limbo, a prison. It’s a cruel joke compared to the hypnotic power of the GOGS. I tried pulling them back on in desperation, hoping, praying that they would magically work once more. No matter how many times I slid them onto my face (self-adhering) or thumbed the ON switch, they refused to cooperate. An empty void replaced the portal to my fantastic dreamworld, my sweet escape. Anger exploded in my veins. I hurled my GOGS at the wall and they hit with a dissatisfying *plop!*, before landing on the floor. Indestructible, they say.

Out of habit, I thumbed a lever on the side of the toilet. As it flushed, it emitted a small *ding!* as it dispensed a Zzz. Part opiate, part sleeping pill, these suckers were specifically designed to combat the hellish transition between Lifepod and bed. They’re also supposed to numb the senses, but my ability to smell had returned. I swallowed my Zzz dry, and laid back on the bathroom floor. As my body began to tingle, an odor of vomit and shit surged into my nostrils, desperate to infiltrate them. I thumbed the lever again.  
 As my head began to swim with relief I realized it was unlikely that I would make it back to the bedroom. I closed my eyes and tried to imagine being high above the world, watching the Earth spin and twist in an endless celestial dance. I knew that it was spherical, and blue, and green, and some other colors, and that space was black but. No matter how hard I clenched my eyelids, I could see only darkness. I tried to imagine the Serengeti, but the elephants were all wrong. The cheetahs were spotless. The antelope were missing entirely. I tried to imagine Marilyn, but her back was turned. My spine tingled. I thumbed the lever again, and again, and again. (How many of these are you allowed to take?)

It took me several minutes to muster the remnants of my energy. I wormed back into the living room, hoping that Cora, or Courtney, or Donny would be awake. Hoping they could help, somehow. I made it to the center of the room, only to find that they were all still safe and sound in their Lifepods, worlds apart, each enjoying the fulfillment of their greatest desires. I clenched Cora’s ankles and shook, trying to extract her from her private realm, but she was too deep. She had been in her GOGS for nine days.

The Zzz began to take full control. I reached out for Cora once more, but my heavy hands never made it to their destination. My head gently pulled to the floor, as if gravity had suddenly become much more serious about its duty. I tried to resist, but I was magnetized. As my eyes began to shut, I felt a sensation I had not encountered in years. I was alone, surrounded by the people I loved. My face was wet. In the darkness, I tried to imagine, but I