

# THE RED BOOKS

## 1

waking up in any city. anywhere. waiting for the train, on the platform, with so many other people. in their work clothes, with their kids, with their bags and suits and dresses and earbuds. here comes the train now.

“wouldn’t that be somethin’?”

(diagrams: pie charts)

one day

portions of the year that are depressed or creative

portion of the day that is sunny or night

all the days in the season

important to keep moving(.) moving is life, stillness is not death but death dwells in silence. thing and no-thing met on the long road. their first encounter was violent. like a car crash on a desert highway. twisted broken metal, smoking ruins. breaking out from the wreckage, kicking and screaming, bloody, like a birth. thing and no-thing. independently, separate from each other, did they really exist? or did they just come into being precisely then?

## 2

no patience, gluttonous(.) filling empty spaces with unfulfilling things. then chasing even more, consuming, left with only the consequences of consumption. nothing to do but be patient, consume less. evaluate cause and effect. stand away from everything and reevaluate value and risk. patience. wait, think, then act. reaction is what all objects do, introspection is something that intelligent beings can undertake. stop fucking consuming. it doesn’t fill the holes. it just makes new ones that have to be filled later on.

how does friction work?

(diagrams: curves in speed over time)

what if you replace speed with inertia? does resistance to change diminish over time? or does it increase?

a deck of cards, chips -- randomness, agency. a betting game, a game of risk and chance and reward.

clouds scuttle overhead while we make and lose our fortunes. rattle and roll the bones. in our self importance we have no idea how tiny and fleeting we are. ghosts vying for a seat in heaven, jockeying for immortality.

## 3

surrealists so and so(.) automatic, mechanic, procedural, stereotypical symptomatic synthesis or something. nothing for the artist today, nothing for the (man/war). obsessed with dust and ruin, for what? ruin comes from creation, nothing can be ruined that was not first made. where’s the optimism, where’s the cheerfulness? too quiet too long, maybe. or rejected.

(diagram: four cards)

what is there / to be so / worried about / when you see the sun?

slowly becoming gibberish moving from bad to good, to nothing at all. or maybe it’s the other way around. dark humor is still humor.

## 4

(omitted diagram and description of markdown graph syntax notation)

chose your adventure or your adventure chooses you.

## 5

don’t look at the elephant. not looking is the only way. do not acknowledge the elephant. to admit its existence is to allow total ruin, collapse of all things. it’s just a goddamn elephant. fucking look at it, don’t look at it. what difference does it make? even if it’s hiding in the corner, even if it’s trying not to be seen, why make such a fuss? fucking elephants. it’s not their fault. what did they ever do?

they come out this way long time back in my grampi’s day. weren’t nothing here then either. it were the full moon this week, biggest in all the year says the (-farmers-) girl. she reckons this is the first summer of the rest of our lives. i reckon she’s right.

## 6

parting kisses at the corner.

“we don’t have to think like that any more.”

taking the capsule, for escape or surrender.

“2HR MAX”

can’t walk here any more. kicked out by the city. spat out they say, some places maybe. chewed up(.) spat out, spat on, kicked, punched, robbed. institutional muggers. oliver twist pays tax(es). stop and breathe in the still morning.

“ain’t no grave can hold my body down.” §(œü)

## 7

pulling at threads, ripping at the tear. no way to be graceful now. no matter how beautiful, no matter the cost. all for ego and tribe(.) god and country. whose uncle took this land, and how long ago was that? the earth doesn’t belong to us. we belong to her. one day she calls us back.

## 8

how did it come to this? swift river currents. seventeen past the hour, five minutes late. waiting for the train. everyone else is waiting too. more every minute. crowding in. nothing to do but wait. i’ll walk instead.

whosoever something or other. the dead come back to life.

## 9

“be there soon / crash in the waves the water makes for you” §(œü)

you are jack of spades. now accepting all red cards less than ten. please wait. get yourself something at the bar. we will call you back shortly. drink something with bourbon in it. too sweet, a little smoky. not smoky enough, a

glossy halfhearted illusion. how much else could be described thus? children don't understand parents, grandparents try to retell glamorous stories.

(diagram: card layout)

- solitaire rules
- repetition
- putting things in order
- unexpected outcomes
- use resources to overcome
- continue until all is in its place
- then destroy and begin again
- mandala tarot
- archetypes
- arcana
- suits

divination is a form of generative text.

## 10

i miss that stupid couch.

"once you leave you can never come back."

i've left plenty of places. there's always a return, but never going back to what it was. even if you never leave, there's no going back. just with these words and drawings and shit. trying to keep a dying world alive in my memory. like cut flowers, already disconnected from real life, given a little extra time.

every morning, this place. writing to write, also to understand. to find things that are already here, just hidden. so much.

what do you do when you have no time? when you have only a little you can say to encompass something so big?

i sat on the park bench and wrote the words hastily but quietly. it wasn't my hood. they were checking me out. i wrote a page, threw it out, wrote another. i folded the words and slipped them in the book, left behind the bench. i wonder how long.

## 11

how did it come to this? those things we made for ourselves, why did we make them so wrong? i think about my own mistakes and multiply by 7,000,000,000 and it starts to make sense. i wonder if i have made more or fewer mistakes than the average. and they pile up like mountains of trash blowing in the streets, choking the sky, strangling the sea.

i used to think i wanted to leave this rock but now i don't think so. or maybe i want us to leave it in peace, let her heal. we die, we leave, we send a piece of ourselves. i would rather see a thousand seeds, this is a legacy of a place called earth. but what i no longer see is any capacity for humans to change. our stupid shit is too great. maybe earth humans are dumb and mars humans or titan humans will be better. maybe there's hope.

will we fuck up our new home as much as our old home?

i care more about the earth with all her children than i do about the people.

the old ways have new shapes but it's still the same.

## 12

at the end of the world... be polite(.) but also fight back.

that feeling of destiny(.)

## 12.5

fueled by drugs, booze, music, ego, whatever. that feeling, so powerful when it comes, so impossible to reconcile when it's passed. just the alignments in this life, in this world. when coincidences happen all at once, when so much points a certain way... then soon that's just another marker along the way. destiny just becomes reality. the certainty fades. things break. then later... the destiny feeling again. these words, these things, they're happening now for you. for everyone is having some experience but for you it's all connected at this moment. later they'll have those moments too and you'll probably miss it. but when it's your turn, and i do so love it when it's my turn, then i just want to pay attention and not miss anything. it's important. like life or death important. important to remember.

## 13

i don't remember my destiny now, but i do remember that when i knew it(.) it was good.

## 14

roads from here go there. the rails like blood and bones. if i knew the right turns i could find you. none of this world is truly disconnected. would you even take me if i could find you? we make the disconnection. nature makes deserts, people make wastelands. the desolation is ours. we weren't listening when they told us. we went our own way.

the weight of yesterday, today, tomorrow. today weighs heaviest, it's the only place you can do anything about anything. tomorrow weighs more than yesterday, there's more at stake.

just | human

still | animal

all | starstuff

what is | the line?

how do you | separate

good |

fr | om

b | a d

? | ?

wages from | expense?

## 15

too many voices, too many sounds. why won't they ever stop? the flood the flood the endless flood. why can't i ever say what is real? all previous

agreements nullified, superseded. none of what is left remains. scattered debris and dust, scattered ashes. no one can ever find the body. only if you go looking in the past. the time traveler knows the exquisite interconnectedness of it all, the complete absolute despair. there is no retrieval, only observation. you can see it but never touch. the past is gone, the future is gone. now is just a small move, a single stone on the board. together all the stones tell a story, but only in their arrangement and order, in the decisions of the player. stones themselves are irrelevant, replaceable. one for another, would you even notice? so it is with all of us. today a man in a suit sits across from you. tomorrow, different man, different suit(.) still a man in a suit on a train. would you (ever/even) care?

(diagram labeled "molecular / atomic / quantum")

## 16

nobody noticed when the world ended.

they laughed and drank and sang in the bars. they chatted and read and smiled in cafes. they bought books and clothes and jewelry, glossy phones, new cars, groceries and shoes and novelty mugs. they walked with crinkling bags held close; takeout, lunch, dinner. table for two, four, six, eight. two by two they came, but not us. we were one by one, nothing, a fragment, an expression of a shattered line. in continuous. the world ended and the world just kept going. no one else ever noticed.

crossing into the other domain.

the terminus. yesterday becomes a different yesterday. tomorrow is the same as it ever was. it all collapses.

time traveling. folding the universes into one. there is one observed domain, but sometimes i can't see it or forget.


## 17

six ways till sunday. of course it came to this. it was never going to be any other way, because it wasn't any other way. tautology, oxymoronic destiny. we are both killers. you killed her. i killed him. we both tried to warn each other, neither of us was listening. just walking, talking. fucking two (lives/lines) right next to each other. we were supposed to be together, but we were always separate. i didn't trust. i still don't. maybe i should have trusted you. maybe there was always another way. too late now. i held my hand where yours was supposed to be.

## 18

whistling in the caves. whispering in the grass. crouched under the moon, telling secrets. the butterfly sleeps at night, the mosquito tends the fire. burrowing animals asleep or out hunting. cool dirt crunches underfoot. leaves and trees crack and creak. gray and colorless as the sky, the smoke and the fire and the sparks, all that tells. stillness of infinite motion. folded into the mother's mysteries, her embrace. disappearing and being reborn. god is everywhere.

too many timelines.

"for years i've laid my head down at night... wherever i was an odor would arrive in my nose... brine and pitch and shit. the perfume of this place." 

## 19

this atomic life, searching for self. society couldn't withstand existentialism(:) invented rituals, use(d) the old ones to start. oral history is easy to devour, eat up all the old and no one new will be able to challenge you or the culture you build. some will wonder, what happened? those are easy, just tell them whatever story you prepared at the beginning, or really whatever story you want. if they keep asking, no really, what happened? when they sense that something is fundamentally wrong, just outcast them from your society. it's easier than the old way of kicking people out, you don't have to build walls. the culture will do that for you. just make those answers so forbidden that they cease to exist. let the population self-select. those who ask, who wonder, who fear will be pushed to one side and those who follow and believe will migrate to the center. tell those people to be afraid of the others. invent some secrets to let them in on. hurt them secretly so you can help them publicly. buy their loyalty. they will police the others. keep them listening, believing, and you win.

"they're at the gate."

## 19-20

panoramic--

the airplane taxis on the runway, sun low on the horizon. we stop, we go, we wait. i reset the song playing. lean against the window. wait. we're in line. red and blue livery on the plane in front. white and blue taking off. they go. we're up next. breathe deep. the plane turns. its stink of human bodies and cleaning solvents and greasy recycled oxygen.

"flight attendants, prepare for takeoff."

then the bass. the pilot kicks the plane into gear. the wings shudder. we're rumbling on the asphalt. quaking, veering only a little from side to side. i feel her pulling in the breeze. then, weightless. the ground drops away. no more bumpy crude rubber or dirt(.) gear pulls up. the light sweeps through the cabin, sparkling off the wings (-in my eyes-). we come out on a long lazy turn, out over the pacific. los angeles wheels behind, then under us. chasing into the twilight, toward the desert and the mountains. we all breathe a breath. the cabin dings.

"it's now safe to use those electronic devices."

## 20

there is no such thing as being in control.

you can't control anything outside yourself. you can't control very much inside yourself either. can you control your own decisions? your actions? your environment, influences maybe. you have choices. but no other person is ever really yours to control. love can't be controlled. the forest fire may be called a controlled burn, but what is that really? controlling the uncontrollable. chaos inside a bounded zone. controls are all external. there is no way to control the heart of a thing.

## 21

what's between nowhere and somewhere? how would you know when you got there? does nowhere become somewhere while we're standing in it? standing, sitting, driving, crawling, whatever. so many different experiences. nowhere -- the gateway to heaven. we all pass through here on our way, one at a time. the river styx becomes a dusty creek. the ferryman is the driver who

drops you off. he used to drive the boat but after global warming and the sharing economy, now he drives for uber.

losing perspective, the shapes get (-harder- more difficult). more dreamlike. can't tell what is in or out. forced perspective, overemphasis. bridge over a stream, doorway in a hall? where am i?

## 22

the work's not done yet. that's why i'm still here. will the work ever be done? will i just be left a ghost forever wandering, writing unseen messages on walls, in the circuits of whatever tech we have after this? will my ego dissipate and my starstuff (-will-) just be recycled across whatever void comes next? will i reincarnate and begin new work? until the universe ends, is the work ever really done? and even then, i just push the reset button and begin again. new universe, some slightly different rules, and then... go. no, the work's not done yet. i am still here.

my only hope is

that when the civil war starts

you and i

will still be

on the same side.

## 23

a forest clearing, trees all around. crystalline plants underfoot. green light cracks and splinters. with the sun behind, grass flashing in a (-radial-radiant) glow, reflecting on some tiny reflective molecules, radial gloss almost completely diffuse. only with the light directly behind would you ever see it, and then it's dreamlike and impossible seeming, like it defies physics, painting gentle halos around every shadow. it moves with you. following. like any light source bound to your point of view, it's disorienting. a little scary. like shadows from a headlamp, long but almost invisible from your eyes. covered by whatever casts these shadows. grass and plants, leaves, trees, rocks, even the dust. none of us is ready to see the world this way, none of us evolved generating light that we could see. we move, shadows move, but never so perfectly. never so bound to (-pov- point of view). it reveals something new to us.

## 24

dreams held the words, lost now.

driving 90 in the rain. slick country highways, long blind curves. to the town with the bridge, to the shore. rain and cold and wet and wind. enough to kill an umbrella. enough to soak you through. crackling return from deafness. there at the shore, at the edge of the world, go into the ocean. no shoes, no cares, or that's how it should be. i missed what was happening until it was too late.

## 25

at a council of war, remember why everyone is there. if you don't know, ask. but don't expect a straight answer. there is only ever one reason for war: control. there are many roads that lead to this one destination though. war is a means to an end. even wars undertaken frivolously, or simulated wars with no real blood shed, these are still expressions of dominance, of control. to

take more than is taken, to give more than is given. to show that you can destroy more than your enemy wishes to lose. any war, any weapon, this is its message, its power. articulation of destruction. a war goes until someone has had enough. who knows how long that can take. some weapons make people stupid. sometimes when the sides are too evenly matched, they can't express dominance so they wait each other out. wars of attrition are the worst wars ever waged. no one can ever win. winning is different in every case. sometimes winning is just about saying you won and not being challenged. sometimes it's who loses less. in whatever case, the winner is usually whoever gets to tell the stories. "history is written by the victors" said someone. that is consistently true, but leaves something out. some wars go on so long the combatants don't know they're fighting, some histories are written before the victor is known. but at its heart, war is just a test: who has the bigger stick, who can destroy the most, and how much will that destruction cost? we are all warriors.

## 26

what is the last thing anyone remembers?

## 27

"like the tide coming in." that's what she said. texting on those long nights until late. looking for something. i was looking for understanding. i understood so little. i didn't know what i didn't know, finding it was the priority. she had other priorities. they all did. everyone i met in those days, touched, talk to. every day that's true. we all have our motives. mine always felt so detached. i guess because of point of view. fog of war. transparency of self, opacity of other. we see what we see. i wonder what they saw in me.

## 28

did you mean what you said? you said a hateful thing and said you didn't hate. before you'd asked a question and answered it with your own actions. did you even know? not that i can ever know. what could have been is gone, what's left is broken beyond repair. even the infinity after this is no comfort. this was you, your choice, your doing. i didn't help at all either. but when you were alone with that girl, when you killed her as you claim you did, that was your choice. that is hateful too. don't act with hatefulness and then disavow hate. own that as you would anything else. or maybe when you killed her you lost the ability to see that way. maybe you killed everything i loved in you. maybe you killed me too.

"you exist here," they said. "it's not linear."

"no, it's not linear," he said. ~~so~~

it was so cold that night. the full moon at the shore. when you held my hand.

## 29

we didn't call it loving. we called it something else. when we were in each other, i guess that's what it was. something else. desperate fleeting acts of mortality, reaching for starstuff when our bodies were too small, too frail, our hearts too broken. call it many names, call it love, call it nothing. what is loving after all? where do our needs get us when all is said and done? here and now, enriching. no past, no future. just bodies bent and folded, hard and soft, poetry in motion, shuddering prose in stillness. where was loving, what would that be? loving came during, after, before. at all points but one. loving

was waiting for food after. loving was the pressing need to be closer even when that could never be. loving was what we were.

## 30

sometimes we're saying different things with the same words. like it doesn't matter how similar we are, we come to a place where we don't share meaning and there's no way to start because the same flawed tools that got us there are the same tools we'd have to use to get us out. and first you have to see the problem. do you see it? i see it. in the frustration, lost meaning, arguing. you see what you see. i see what i see. do we cross the bridge together or go to different places? me, i'll just leave. it's too upsetting to try to talk to you when it's like nothing we say ever reaches the other. if we are living in such different universes, did we ever want to really talk anyway?

(diagram: cards)

shuffle a deck -> deal it face town

(diagram: two rows of six cards arranged in a + shape of four sets of three cards each)

choose cards --- flip them over

lay them out --- one at a time until you see the answers

## 31

you came to me in the tall grass in the deep forest, just after dawn. you led me deeper into the hills, toward the sun. where the moss glowed in the early light, where steam still rose from the wet logs, from the rain the night before. you led me on over the ground covered in tiny flowers, past the streams so quiet and gentle, sparkling. and the forest took a breath and you held me to be still and know you. and i knew i would be following you all the days of my life. that wherever i went in this world, you've been there first. your touch made this land what it is. as i belong to it, i belong to you.

## 32

waking up in an old familiar place. that word, *familiar*. can a place be family? what constitutes family? family isn't always familiar, but familiar can be seen like family. is it the shared experience? what does it take to be family? is it when the familiarity is reciprocated? does there have to be mutual love and respect? does family have to be people, or can it be places or things? we are all still earth stuff, star stuff. can family be family if it can never speak your name but love all the same? the way i have loved cities, can the city love me back? the way i can take my home with me, live a gypsy life, is the car my family? whose family am i?

## 33

lining up for one last chance at life. they waited ten, fifty, a hundred deep. until they said "no more gas" and no amount of cursing or threats would bring any more. where could they go next? "you don't have to go home," he said, "but you can't stay here." sweltering in the desert or shivering in the city after closing time, no difference. same desperation, same yearning, same fear. back of the line is first to die. and if you were polite and let someone in front of you, will they turn back to help, to return the favor? maybe. i don't think so. maybe that's why there's so much callous selfishness, fear of being last. of being first to die. i wonder though... how many turn around and help?

## 34

the old stories, just repeating over and over.

it's like we're riding these cycles even against our will.

when was the first time one being decided to help another being for no more reason than because compassion compelled them? not some accidental act, but deliberately, without expectation or desire for reward? and not the kind of reward coming from righteousness either. when was the first self sacrifice for an other? that word -- other. so loaded. what are you? other (please explain). other-ness. us and them other is the great wide expanse beyond known, other is alien, foreign, unknown. but how unknown is any other being, really? does life ever have any unexpected motivations?

(diagrams omitted: "calendar showing orbit of earth and moon in radial slices per day or lunar phase with seasons?" / grid of games)

## 35

no one who's still here remembers when the wheels of the machine were set in motion. centuries ago now, maybe more. decisions made by people who have been dust longer than they were ever alive. someone said that the dead have no rights over the earth, that only the interests of the living need be considered. still the dead continue to work on us, beyond the grave. their ghosts move in us, in institutions and the frameworks we use to understand our world. we take counsel from corpses. the dead are never really dead until we forget their names. and even then they may have set something in motion that we are powerless to stop. if we see it at all. any revolutionary act is an act of future ghosthood. to bind ourselves to the same fate, to have continuing influence over the living even when we can no longer live.

(omitted diagram: dawg world)

## 36

too many to name. too many forgotten, or best forgotten. limestone. we are all here. together.

## 37

days turn faster and faster. seasons hold their melody, a slow progression inside of (touch/these/them). "because of climate change?" he asked. "man, the climate's always changing," i said. far away, across the road, down the river, through the hills to the valley. we remain unseen. i try to remember but always still it slips away. as uncertain as tomorrow. it could have happened this way or that way but now i'm not so sure. they say you forget a little every time you remember something. how do i know what i've forgotten? how to know what's lost? it wouldn't matter but for this ego(.) my memories are me. they might be important.

## 38

they came to me looking for help. she was nervous and angry, excited. he was uncomfortable, exhausted, didn't want to be there. she poured out a story that didn't make a lot of sense. he seemed embarrassed, powerless, consigned. i started to answer but realized i misunderstood. i asked her to clarify. he seemed relieved. she told me about his job, about its conditions. where they worked, what they ate. there was a big worry about the bread they made in his cafeteria. and how the slightest accident would kill everyone. he

seemed to be a miner. i told him there was nothing for it but to talk to everyone. "buddy," i said, "you gotta get political."

## 39

"don't believe them," he said. "they won't tell you the truth." \$\$\$\$ and they didn't. not in the 50 years since he said that, not for a hundred years before at least. maybe they never told the truth. maybe all they did was take. "we need this thing of yours," they'd say. "we're going to take it from you." you might ask(.) "why, what do i get?" "our gratitude!" but when they take what's yours and leave, do they ever return? do you ever get a chance to reclaim your property? do you get a way to cash in all the gratitude they supposedly gave you? no, you're just a sucker begging with your masters. they didn't need what they took, they just didn't want to work for it. they just wanted to deprive you. in this way they can reinforce their superiority. they can write laws that keep you from having the things they have, then from their high perch they can make fun of you for not being them. i don't want to be them. you don't want to be them. but they're very good at making us think we do want what they have. but when we follow them and get too close, they change the rules again. they don't like us close. they want us far away where they can't see us. where they don't have to think of us. where they can make up stories about us without fear of correction. look. look everywhere around you today. look to history. this is what they've always done. they are clever, maybe it seems like they are winning. but they have always been few and we are many.

## 40

(diagram omitted: "how do you break identity?")

ego holds on to self so tight. if i die, it says, you die too. maybe that's true, maybe not. does the flower need an ego? does the blade of grass or grain of sand? all around i see many things and only a few egos. that quintessence of identity. the unique id assigned to a value in some vast unsorted index. ego. ego is me. but i am not my ego. remove the ego, do i cease to be? maybe i stop being human only. maybe without it i am just wetware, squishy brain driving squishy meat. no ego. would that mean i couldn't differentiate myself from the flowers and the grass and the sand? is ego nothing but a focal point and a lens through which to view the world?

## 41

we never really knew each other at all, did we? i never could get you to listen. you never could get me to understand. i still feel betrayed. guessing that you do too. but the dream of it, the sense of us, i could never shake that. the more i remember, the longer i spend looking back, the more cracks i see. the more i know why everything fell apart. and i'm so mad you wouldn't listen, that you pushed on ahead when i told you to stop. that you had the nerve to call me all (these/those) things afterward, that you forced me to hold your flood but a few drops of me was too much. mostly i'm mad at myself for falling so hard for you. and this unshakeable feeling that (you're/you were) worth it and there was nothing i could ever do.

the hills were dark and rich and fragrant and you said such sweet words and i was glad to know you, to know someone else who loved those hills and craved to make those unrealities real. the smokers and floor-sleepers, the idle dreamers and wishers. seers of the unseen, listeners of the unheard. the weirdos and poets and photographers. my kin. why wasn't it enough?

## 42

what are the wages of sorrow?

traveling into oblivion, is there another side? does the void end, and exist contained in non-void? or does it just go on for ever? or is there another sate, beyond void and being, a third way? void and being are so fixated on their relationship to each other, claiming dominion over all that is and isn't, claiming all of creation as their children made up of only their two parts. are we their children made up of more than just two aspects? is there something else? and if not two, why only three? why not four? it's easier to count these fundamentals as binary. is and isn't, thingness and no-thing-ness. but if you walk away from being and into void, how long before you walk into something else? or does it just get darker and darker until... absolute oblivion(?)

## 43

twelve minutes past the hour of reckoning. when the air is swollen and thick with dust and fire. twelve minutes past the hour of destruction, of recreation. the new world begins here, now. day zero, year zero, hour one. the fires are still burning. the ash has yet to fall. the old world is still falling away, shredding itself into nothing but soot and debris. the screams and sirens still rising like a tide of swelling misery. groaning like the damned in their first moment of hell. crying like babies taking their first breath. the end of all things, the beginning of all things. the dead we'll never have a chance to bury. the stories we'll only remember by telling them to children for generations until they forget this is the new world. to them it simply is.

## 44

isn't there one among you who holds the keys? ten million howling souls in bedlam and only one gate -- one way in, one way out. so who is it? who do you trust with the keys of your wretched kingdom? who decides who goes and who stays? who sleeps in the gatehouse? who keeps away the hordes at the gate? and when hell is full, where do you put the wailing masses? do you leave them on the fields, between worlds, between countries, the seething crawling infinite purgatory? unwanted in life, unwanted in death, a product of meddlesome beings more powerful than they could ever be, those useless bugs given soul but no purpose, left in the garden to fend for themselves and kicked out of heaven for daring to ask why? what will you do, oh devil, what will you do with the children of industry? what will you do with the millions of casualties? god doesn't want them, god left a long time ago. you know that, devil, as no one else does. you were there, weren't you, at god's final judgement? and what a lazy judgement it was. the creator tired of creation and went off to create another. and you, devil, left to pick up the pieces, left to tend to god's children. if only you cared more, if only god had made you to understand and not punish, not to be the judge of our souls. you don't have a soul, oh devil, you are older than souls. yet still you hold the keys to all our (ascension/ascensions). let us go. open the gates and let us quit this wretched place. let us be free.

## 45

survival isn't governed by fitness. there is no supernatural or divine force at work in who lives or dies. fitness, adaptation, suitability, those things play out over time. in each life, fitness is just a chance at solving certain kinds of problems. there is no magic key. no final judgement. we look for fitness and justice and act surprised when these forces don't seem to go our way. randomness and chance have more sway over us than righteousness or

fitness. adaptability will improve your chances, as does determination. cooperation too, with a little competition. in the end the only formula is this: the ones who lived are the ones who didn't die. what can we learn from that? nothing. everything. that is evolution. we are evolving. death is as relevant as life.

## 46

(diagram: table with columns "mutable, immutable" and rows "force, object" annotated "what happens when these intersect?")

we are, none of us, innocent. when does a child stop being innocent? or are we born with the weight of sin? they say we were released from that ancient burden, but is that really so? nothing much seems to have changed since then. the stakes have gotten higher, the history remains. so is there ever any innocence for any of us? and if there were another who really could make that claim, what would we do to them? induct them into our corruption, if only for our own comfort? we are none of us innocent. even without knowing, we are complicit. we follow the path set before us, make up rules inside bigger rules. nothing is really new.

## 47

they built their first village down by the river in the valley. mountains looked down at them from all sides. the river wound lazily through the valley, its ancient motions written in smooth land rich for cultivation. it was good land for many centuries before it turned and wiped out the entire village. before that, there were years of peace, some little disagreements that turned bloody. births and deaths mostly, festivals of planting and harvest. in the days the village rang with the sound of work, at night, after the singing died down, the village slumbered like a well fed child. their leaders made great proclamations that went unfinished, their elders made decrease that frustrated their young. they lived as so many have lived. a simple life.

now the village is gone, the valley is dust, the people forgotten. some ancient walls of stone still stand, marking where some important buildings stood. storehouses and gathering places. the market. the potter. a restaurant or a tavern. there's ash, soot, a blackening of the bones. did the village burn one final time, in an accident or an attack? some remains were found of the villagers, a place of corpses stored in respectful poses, surrounded by gifts and mementos, little carvings and bottles and jewelry, ornamental dishes, cups, clothing. not many. not enough to know much of anything about them. so long gone now. to live for centuries, to be dead for longer now. to be so changed, but even in dust, the valley still remembers the village and holds them safe.

## 48

soft beautiful clear-eyed children. at the beginning of their days. someone said beauty is nothing more than the descriptor we use for fruit, flowers. something to be consumed, something that will decay. calling someone beautiful is no more meaningful than calling a bowl of fruit beautiful. it is no more empowering than a blossom on a tree. and so it is with the beauty of children. someone else said not to mourn the loss of flowers, that a fallen bloom is just the start of a fruit. a progression. one person was talking about alive or death. of exploitation of beauty. the other was talking about life in cycles, in trees. beauty is in scattering clouds in the momentary convocation of light at the sunset or the dawn. beauty is everywhere in the ephemeral. when something endures, then is it still beautiful? can the old be as beautiful as the young? is beauty a perspective of the beholder or is it grander, present

everywhere? is it even necessary for beauty to be observed for it to exist? the hills and valleys of lifeless worlds far from here, places i can never see. i know them to be beautiful. but that too is ephemeral. i know those worlds will all someday end, and the beauty they have now will be gone. replaced by whatever beauty they have in death. supernovae or bones. like the tree played forward, after years of flowering and fruiting, it dries and becomes fodder for the next generation. in its burned out center, seedlings begin to sprout. at least one of them will carry on the great tradition on that very spot. so maybe appreciation for beauty is just appreciation of death, that all things pass. a love, an adoration of life, that which has not been and will not be, but now is.

## 49

killing all your enemies is not a victory. when there is no one left, there is no chance for anything else ever again. it is nothing but completion, an ending, a death in total. a failure to find alternatives. when you stand among the bones of your enemies, one enemy remains -- yourself. you have become your own enemy by then. this is why serial killers keep going forever, why war-mad soldiers always find enemies around every corner, why some killers turn their weapons on themselves. the same mindset at play. if there are always enemies, there is a reason to keep going. if there are no enemies, that reason is gone. in this way your enemies may be separate, but they end up defining you.

## 50

they stayed inside when the rain came. nothing much serious needed doing. from under eaves, through windows, they watched. rain fell on the fields, on the hills. the river swelled with silt and foam, swirling debris washed away. it rained all day and all night and into the next day. smith's forge and potter's kiln steamed billowy clouds of steam, the houses smoked. everyone huddled together in the halls, drinking and eating, laughing and talking. the farmers were sour that they couldn't get anything done. children played and shrieked and ran underfoot. it was an early spring and most welcome. the rain stopped on the second evening, heavy mist rising from the fields in the late afternoon light, purple and blue and orange. one farmer's barn had washed away, some animals were lost. everyone got together in the gathering night, with sticks and lanterns, and went out looking for the creatures. all but one were found, washed into the river in the tumult. another farmer shared a barn with the first, gathered up all the remaining animals, and got them inside. midnight came and the rest of the village slept, waiting for the dawn when the fields would come alive once more.

## 51

taking trains to nowhere. the express one too many stops in the wrong direction. getting off someplace you've never been and walking around. too far to walk back? getting back on the other platform, keen and alert in a new place, maybe waiting a long time for the train to take you back where you know the streets. maybe it was the last train and it's late and you're stuck looking for a safe place. going to what's familiar, not straying too far. the train station becomes the anchor tethering you to reality. if it disappears, maybe the world you remember never existed at all. this was always your reality.

## 52

she came for me in the night, just before dawn. when the light was dim and gray and the city was barely stirring. with sweet words and caresses she

came, a cry in the stillness. one was not enough and two was too many. too respectable for dumpster diving, too poor for limousines. i touched her cheek, soft and sweet. cooking for her whatever she wanted, the first one. too many. still children. no respectability. pantomime of love and lust. a swirling dance with no ending and only one place to go. breakwaters, holding breaths in watery twilight. salvaged sticks and stones, a forged life. stuck together at awkward joined intersections, nothing was as pretty as she wanted it, nothing was as tender as her kisses. timid and sincere, just at the edge of darkness. trying to hold on, so desperate for control-- nothing scavenged ever stays up for very long.

## 53

years go faster and faster but seasons stay the same. the smell and the air and the passage of the sun, these are the only calendars that we need. time to plant the crops, time to work the fields, time to bring in the harvest, time to rest and work inside. on earth anyway . this is the natural way of things. on other worlds, other seasons. other natures. the farmer becomes one with the land and learns its melodies. the rhythm of its seasons, in symbiosis instead of exploitation, these melodies may be sung generation upon generation, in harmony. even when the floods come or the deep winter seems to never end, the land and the farmer provide for each other. but just like these years, just like the seasons, remember that nothing lasts forever. nothing is truly constant.

## 54

how many visions come true?

(diagram: "train station")

growth around the stations:

nearby businesses

groceries

shipping

distribution

markets

farther out to

houses

residential

some arteries

connection to other nodes

parts of network

## 55

what is eternity? seeing something now, today, as it is, doesn't show what it was. or will be. if today the village lives and tomorrow it dies, does it spend an eternity in death? but it wasn't dead forever. the timelines fold in on themselves. nothing is anything forever, no matter what anything is. where am i? that makes a difference to what i see. what perceptions do i miss just not being everything and everywhere at once? the god mind is the spirit of all things. the everywhere-ness. it doesn't need opinions or judgement, just to

be. a stateful machine, in whose configuration is everything we know or see. every smaller piece is just that -- a small aspect of the whole. a contributor, observer. i am not bounded to a single timeline so i am free to explore possibilities, other states of oneness. but eternity? that i've never seen.

(diagram: nine illustrations of a valley)

how many steps and states have i observed? the valley is not always here, but so often it is. the village is harder to find, a spark flashing in the dark and fading swiftly.

## 56

you left like a boat pushed away on a slow river. receding slowly and then vanishing, swallowed up, out of sight.

some days the valley flooded, the river rising higher and higher and then never receding. the valley became a lake. the village, if there ever was one, was swallowed up, out of sight beneath the waves. sparkling scintillating shafts of light in the green water, echoes off the cliffs. whisper of leaves like rain, pattering on the roof. the dull speak and splash of the pump, water from some deep place. reservoir, recharging over centuries, cold and deep and still. the sun shines over the valley. the wind rustles the leaves.

## 57

(diagram: the triangle --- a universal shape(.) the symbol of life's perpetuation. so we begin so do we continue. a seed, a spore, a shard, a sperm. the basic piece of one kind of geometry. a mesh, fabric, lattice. go in any direction or dimension.)

eighty-six minutes past the hour of destruction. they came in ones and twos, singles, couples. the unattached, the desperate, the lonesome. they came in threes and fours and more. families, groups, tribes, clans, they assembled. building pieces of their peopledom, their networks, caravans, trade. social habits, rituals, languages. not even two hours after the old world ended they began building the new world. laying down their marks, scratching at wood and stone. making what they would call theirs. yours and mine held apart, together, all the same. "the drop becomes the ocean," she said, "the ocean becomes the drop." and so it went that the new world resembled the old one.

## 58

trying to forget, even when there is no forgetting. the long walk, beyond the village in its valley, to the water. across the water, slow timelessness, to another valley. and on and on. the mountains, rivers, fields. birds flutter and sing. the long dry road to the mesa, lonely and forgotten. the infinite desolation, nothing but dust and scrub and burning sun. slowly walking higher and higher. rolling hills. scrub turns to grass and trees. the clouds come. rain at last. looking back and seeing the road stretching beyond sight. rocks and grass and then another valley, bright and living. steaming in the late day sun. the river, the village. one big circle as if i never left. this is a different place though, with different stories. don't be deceived by similarities. it's a long road from here to there.

## 59

it's easy to lose each other in the cosmos. we didn't think we could, but we did. our fragile gravity was broken. what stuck us together now drives us farther apart, drifting into forever uninterrupted until we encounter some other body. that's the mechanistic view. laws of gravity. neat little repeatable



treatises, smug in their clarity, their self-assurance. by the numbers. but can machines ever understand? what it is, what it means to be a soul adrift and tangled up with another soul, like pieces of wood or seaweed, caught, dragging each other this way or that? trapped in a current, off-balance. sometimes that exact state is all the safety we have ever known. cast together after a storm or after a lifetime drifting, set adrift by the flood or the rains. and then, untangled, broken free. the current carries us on.

## 60

you could have asked. when things went wrong, you decided what it all meant and went ahead. by then there was still time. you could have asked and found out that you were wrong. but you didn't and here we are. if you decide how things are, that's how they'll be. doesn't matter if everything and everyone tells you something different. once your mind's made up, that's it. your entire universe has been set, your focus determined. if they say something different you ignore it because you're right, they are wrong or just stupid, and your way is best. but how can it be best when this is where it got us? you obviously missed something important. what was it? i don't even know any more. you could have asked.

## 61

is it that obvious? do all see but one, laid bare while believing anything else? or just obvious to you, for whom there is so little mystery? and what about your understanding? what you see and what is shown can be so different. do you ever change what you see to match? or do you already draw from life and there is nothing to change because your vision is already up to date? or is it one way? do i see you or do you see me or do we see shady reflections of ourselves, only revised when it's proven that no, we are not the same? or is it everyone all the same and our variations are to be included?

## 62

late for the train, missed appointments, considerations. snubbed, spurned, ignored. the train pulls out, carrying its unusual cargo. we are together finally. she makes me go down on her extra long to make up for the snubbing. awake. pale walls, strange place. not home, not now, not then, not later, nowhere. the tunnel collapses. jump into a different dimension. far away. no trains, no nights or days. just daze. her memory fades, falling back into me. it's we again, carrying more than one inside the shell of one. time flashes and slides, unconnected to anything seen or sensed. slipping in fits and starts, uneven, unpredictable. falling, falling, faster into nothing. awaken. another place, another unknown. "a pickle shifts uneasily under the bun." §500

## 63

sometimes the kindest thing is the hardest.

## 64

we were the survivors. not the ones that anyone cared about. not the special ones. not the princes and princesses, not the leaders, not the nobles. we walked around the edges, stood at the back, kept quiet. mostly, until we didn't. then there were a few of us. some of us picked the losing side in a conflict and we lost them. they were right but they lost anyway. i tried to save them but i secretly wished i was brave enough to be one of them. then we were few. i gained the leaders' respect and they afforded us some

indulgences. shelter, equipment, weapons. we became the guard, nominally unaligned, serving whoever needed us. i set up watches. i had a good second in command. i didn't have to tell him what to do, he just did it anyway. then we marched, endlessly moving. we were in space. we were on the ground. then it all went wrong. so hard to remember now. i remember losing someone. she was there and then she wasn't. she walked out of her quarters when no one was looking and never came back. but i know she was killed. how? i don't know. someone killed her. one of the nobles. had to be. they wanted us all dead. after i watched the uprising, the purge, i couldn't let it continue. then that's all i did. watch. talk. the rest of us made it. the guard continued. we rebuilt. instead of taking over ruins we built our own places. still after she was gone it was never the same. not for me. we were just survivors.

## 65

sometimes now doesn't make sense until later. rushing headlong into tomorrow, being out of sync. the old farmer greets each day, every piece of the news with a quiet skepticism. "maybe," he says. maybe it's good, maybe it's bad. won't know until later. besides, we break things into neat little manageable pieces: past, present, future. why? because that is how we see? but it isn't. we are all time travelers, visiting past and future as easily as the present. in fact more easily. the masters of the present seem to get their ability to be here only after discipline and study. why do we cling to this rigid view? cause does not always precede effect. i can change things that i can't even touch.

## 66

why is a conviction either cultivated with dedication or handed down from on high? why is it that we made our gods into judges and avenging demigods whose dialect requires years of study? why did we pervert the laws of physics and nature with edicts over ourselves that have nothing to do with goodness or consistency? the dictates of society became so twisted that we'd go to war over enforcing them, or stand by and shrug those wars off when those doing battle didn't share our fundamental tenets? in the old world they said we must drop bombs or have bombs dropped on us. the measure of power is a measure of our capacity to destroy. by putting a gun to someone's head we can get them to do what we say, but that isn't power, just domination. nothing can grow in such soil.

## 67

always leaving, never staying. forever ago nomads, drifting through oceans, little flakes of organisms riding the currents. year after year, directionless, dragged by the tides. washing up on shore, laying down roots, holding out leaves, steady and loose, letting out seeds. even trees so firmly planted for an age know their rootless roots, give their seeds to animals to carry far away, or release so the wind can do the job. even in motionlessness they understand motion, the uncertainty of their own mortality. where are you? "here." even unknowing can know. only later when the animals started asking those questions did they seem contradictory or difficult. even in our ancient bones we knew all of these truths. chaos, motion, perturbations of the void. we are everywhere and we are nowhere. we make truth true.

## 68

it's not until we tell the stories that we can begin to make sense of our time. not until we experience that we can participate. and then we can never

subtract ourselves because they are our stories, our experiences. objective, subjective, our neat little categories only serve to insulate us from something we can never escape. we want truth but there is no truth. just intersections. i don't know what only happened to me because it's never been entirely up to me. i've never been able to tell the sum total of my story. if i could, i would just make it me and leave it at that. if there was a god, it would just be the sum total of the universe. so let god be all that is and don't separate godness from ungodness. the experience becomes the story becomes the experience. in endless rebirth we become infinite.

## 69

sometimes it doesn't go like you thought it would. you don't meet who you thought you'd meet. events make up worse and better than you could ever imagine. what happens around you isn't constrained by your own reality. you can ignore the differences, fight against them, but they still exist and always have the potential to surprise. someone called it our reality tunnel, what we build around ourselves, the cage we make and lock from the inside. what we could escape if we wanted but we don't want. sometimes that just gets taken away. these times we use words like tragedy. miracle. the tunnel collapses. the cage is broken. flood waters rise, beautiful people embrace us. from far away and right here. then we set to work building new tunnels and cages. sorting what we call real into what we call its proper place. the smarter ones make their own, the stupid ones use someone else's. i'm not sure what's worse. and then something else comes and we begin again. building a new city on the ruins of the old. reuse, repurpose, reassert. evolution. iteration. makes perversions from beauty and back again. who knows what will break tomorrow, what we'll build. not you. not me. the miraculous tragedy.

sixty years after the hour of reckoning. few now live who remember those early days. the young ones don't care. they live in their world, not the new world, just the world. they have no use to listening to the old ones when they talk about how things were. after the reckoning those things ceased to matter. who cares if there are lessons to be learned, history that doesn't bear repeating? they will repeat what they repeat, they will learn what they will learn. the new world doesn't look like the old one any more. the old maps are gone, useless anyway. the children have to make their own map, write their own programming. even the old ones are children now. that was the reckoning, really, when anyone stops to ask about it. it made all of us into babies. reborn. reborn in blood and shit and fire, just like we died and will be reborn again and again. all over this cosmos, it's the same story among the kin of stars.

## 70

"who makes the grass green?" he asked.

walking through some old neighborhood, uninvited, careful to be unthreatening. got a pass from the tribes. don't flaunt difference, not what you're here for. just here to love, to see what you see, to be. "try to remember to forget" someone said. in the evening, in the twilight, with fragrant flowers and trees, sounds of birds and wind, maybe some music or laughter. could be any neighborhood anywhere. still rare, still precious. not like anywhere else. this repetition, around and around in circles, spheres, spirals, toroidal knots. all tangled up together. so who makes the grass green? who? is there even a who? if the tree falling in the forest makes a sound, does someone need to be there to hear it? does the bird make sounds only for other birds? do we? is the grass green if there's only other grass? i make the grass green for me. the bird

has to be there, i have to be there, the twilight has to be there. none of it is complete without all of us, the cosmic "I."

## 71

cause and effect have infinite configurations. no one decision leads directly to any one outcome, any exact consequence. at the beginning we cannot see the end with perfect certainty. so it goes that we can make mistakes at any time for any reason. we have our rules, our ideas of order and justice, our feelings of hurt and betrayal made a mockery of by prescience of the future. so we travel back to find things like motive, intent. travel forward to find damage, outcome. and in our tidy little justice we seek balance, that hollow equality when the scales are in alignment. vengeance, justice: a hot angry balance, or a cold detached balance. we try to make sense of chaos and madness with order and rationality, even when we ourselves are disordered irrational beings. when remembering, we remember imperfectly. we remember the highs, the loudest, the best. we remember the end. the messy ruin. we travel an imperfect record of time looking for answers. finding none we invent gods whose task is the impossible. weight a heart against a feather.

## 72

there wasn't any way to pull back from the edge by the time we came to it. already traveling too fast. no return. melting ice, rising ocean, falling bomb, nuclear fire, screaming rhetoric, chanting revolution, fucking our way to sweet mutual release. impossible acceleration where no gravity can ever hold. escape, release, ignite. engulf. creation, destruction, almost the purest of absolutes. a long runway, rattling and groaning, bumping, screaming. the air becomes thick like water, like ice. thick enough to stand, to fly. cocks and cunts buried deep, pointed to our hearts, riding closer and closer, bucking and breaking, crying for the heavens. push the pedal to the floor, drive the car off the cliff. the bottom drops out. zero gravity. crashing, cumming, blast off, tidal wave. necks snap on the gallows, starburst roar of death and fire. waves crashing, steel melting, hearts afire. the airplane pulls to the sky, the city disappears, all is black and white and orange and blue. they call it freedom, escape. orgasm of love and bodies, of madness, of earth, of machines and calculations. we make the new world.

## 73

when they made the ancient music it moved inside our hearts. all fell silent except for their fingers on the strings. moving us with the smallest perturbations. a pluck here and there, a wide gesture with their arms, a sweeping wave. a thousand strings all vibrating in harmony, from the tiny tinkling of bells to the great roaring of the ocean. to battle drums and melancholic singing. they twisted and folded the sounds like dancers twist and fold their bodies. we all watched, barely breathing, not daring to break the spell cast over us. in the sound booth, the technician grinned and madly turned up the volume, saying it was worth blowing out an amplifier. the head monk directing the playing gently turned the sounds, balancing the performance of the other monks on the instrument. it billowed as a fine mesh sheet billows on the wind. when it rose in a great crest, bass deeper than hearing came into focus in the wind. the monks tuned that breeze from a foggy haze to a clear afternoon, to a gentle evening, to a rowdy night, then back again. a song of our world, of the divine.

## 74

it isn't where we are, it's where we aren't. in the infinite, there is no isn't. everything is is. in isn't we find ourselves, our identities, our egos, our places. isn't knows love and loss. it knows now, it knows here. isn't cuts away all the extra information and leaves nothing but the smallest piece of is, the one piece we get to hold. what is something? start with what it's not, or start with the infinite. start with process, with verb. maybe it's any manner of thing, or everything. do you know? can you? we are children of isn't. we don't know what we don't know. the infinity we start with is the infinite of nothing. we dream of infinite something. of infinite is. we say that is our hereafter. our mythology tells of the all-being who comes from is. but even in so doing, we make the all-being an isn't just like us. all the isn't, together, when there is nothing left, they become forever. just on the other side of infinite nothing is infinite something. you are the all-being, here and now. everything else, everything extraneous, isn't. (-so-) you can have infinite is in infinitesimal isn't.

## 75

the universe is pockmarked with holes. cracked and fragmented, uneven, irregular. fall through any one of those irregularities and there's no telling where you might end up. other domains intersect wherever you happen to be right now. you could end up in one of them by accident. you may never even perceive the crack you slip through. a hole can open up under your feet and you could fall to somewhere without any apparent motion. these shifting crystalline spaces are constantly rearranging themselves. nothing stays static for long. you can learn to detect these changes with time and experience, if you don't already possess the skill. the sense is at the edge of the usual feelings that come in any normal day. déjà vu, and falling without moving. the sudden trip on nothing, a sense of unfamiliarity with what should be known. a confusion or sense of disconnection, especially with no apparent reason. watch these senses, develop them. sometimes they come from something inside. sometimes they indicate that you have traveled to a different domain.

## 76

revolutions are fought with ideas first. when we were in the resistance we had to always be watching ourselves and everyone around us. don't gather in groups of more than three for long, and even three in public can raise suspicion. don't write on paper when meeting. they know we write messages to each other so if you must write in public, do so alone. take notes of inconsequential things to throw distraction if necessary. monitor everyone you know when they are close to you. listen to conversation and take note of minor details. the most casual aside may hold a key to their true loyalty. allegiances shift quickly. never assume anyone is on your side indefinitely. above all, be careful how you spend money. investments are the easiest way to get caught, or to expose others to danger. beware generosity, anyone else's or your own. it may seem hypocritical to fight for freedom with such paranoia, but remember revolutions are fought first with ideas. you must treat them like any weapon. keep them safe. and consider anyone who has them as armed.

## 77

most deception can be plainly seen. it is only through misdirection that it is obscured. once someone i thought a friend came to me with a plan, a proposal. he invited me to a fine place, a resort with drinks and beautiful views and swimming in clear waters. easy to relax, easy for him to make a

deal. we swam and drank and laid around all day in the company of beautiful people. then he left a map. his proposal. we'd talk about it in the morning, he said. we weren't tired. we looked at his map, his plan. a rich land, country with valuable resources. he proposed a massive mineral extraction facility, stretching down a vast swatch of the hinterlands, financed by wealthy but silent investors. what an opportunity! but his map revealed the deception. the land was ruled by two warlords, brothers, sons of the last strongman. they had been generals in his army. now they waged a lifelong bitter struggle for domination. one brother had taken the hill country, mountainous, unassailable. the other claimed the coast and its cities, vital trade and commerce. the production land between them, full of farms and rivers, was exactly the land chosen for exploitation in his plan. was my friend stupid or naive? this enterprise would be subject to both these petty squabbling leaders, ripe for extortion or attack or worse. what would happen if people started disappearing, kidnapped for leverage? what would happen if one side or the other demanded protection money? would we bring in enough security to hold an entire valley? enough to occupy a country? who would the investors blame when it all went wrong? no one stays silent when they lose that much investment. it was a grotesque plan. strip the land, poison the water, throw fuel on a fire that could become a certainty of civil war. was my friend stupid? no. he knew there was an opportunity to amass a great fortune for himself. and i would be the scapegoat. when it all went wrong, and it would, i would be positioned in front of him to safely take the dangers of angry investors. he would probably disappear with the money, rich and unconcerned by so much destruction. the next day he came to me in great upset, saying he'd given me an old version of his plans with details that were wrong and since fixed. we didn't listen. i left. he never contacted me again. but i know there was never an extraction facility built. the brothers are still at it for all i know. their deception is theirs alone.

## 78

war is an articulation of dominance. the capacity to make someone do something they don't want to do is often the capacity to do something in worse. do this thing or you'll be wiped out utterly. the loaded weapon carries this weight. destruction or subjugation. that's when two sides have unequal capacity. one has the weapon and one has none. rarely is it so clear-cut, beyond a single actor. war goes farther. sometimes the objective is total destruction, whereupon no choice is given. you fight back and kill first or be killed yourself. the stakes aren't always so obvious, nor are the relative strengths of the actors. one ancient empire that dominated for centuries was almost always outgunned in their early days. they won by refusing to surrender, by wearing down their opponents. in the equation of "do this thing or i'll do something worse," sometimes the only answer is (,) "make me." in this way, the most basic dynamics of power in any struggle can scale from the smallest confrontation to total war. it is useful to ask why the confrontation occurred to begin with, but often by the time the answer is made clear it's too late to change the course of events.

## 79

there are only so many stories, repeated again and again with infinite variation. read the ancient texts and they tell of tragedy, stupidity, sacrifice. timeless sorrow that knows no generation, no one place in the universe. the unwritten multitude of stories are vast and without end, but even they tend toward patterns, themes and variation. circle packing atoms and betrayal of friends, gravitational accretion and star crossed lovers. we bring pattern to patternlessness, so sometimes we make up stories where there were none. this too becomes a story in the multitude. so they are finite and infinite,

timeless and only here for an instant. we connect stories now with stories from then. in this way we can reconstitute nearly forgotten stories from very little information. the newly created story may not be exactly the same as the original, but it can stoke the fires of memory and allow us to carry timeless old ideas forward through the dark cold ages of the universe, until the day of all-forgetting

## 80

in society, nothing is real until we make it real. so much depends on individual actors who simply decide to act a certain way or do a certain thing. when they make it real, they leave the door open for social adoption. "that's just the way things are," they'll say later, forgetting the day when not only were things not that way, but the day when such a thing, whatever it was, wasn't even real. in imagination a thing can be real for one person, in stories it can be real for all. then it will seem so obvious. "why didn't anyone think of this sooner?" someone will ask stupidly, taking a bit of foolish pride to live in such enlightened times when we have at last thought these things. all the while not knowing what we still don't know, what even at that moment may be getting dreamed up. why didn't we think of it sooner? someone did, but the story was lost. our view was too narrow and exclusionary. it didn't exist for us, therefore it did not exist at all. when an idea comes directly from imagination and goes to story, it skips a step of manifestation where those unbelievers can be satisfied. it's just fantasy, they'll say. later when the fantasy becomes reality they'll believe. thus the fool becomes the prophet.

## 81

it's risky and dangerous, traversing trans-dimensional space. you never know what you'll be able to take with you. even if somehow you have all your possessions with you when crossing over, some will be lost. either they aren't permitted by some minute physical difference, were never invented, whatever. there will be loss. you may not even notice. one unstable element is memory. there's much you'll forget without ever realizing it. the space where the memories used to be remains, so you may perceive their absence but be frustrated at any attempt to retrieve whatever used to be there. this is a good sign that you have succeeded in traveling between universes. it's common that nothing will look or seem all that different, which in turn may lead you to believe that you were unsuccessful. don't be deceived. you have most likely changed universes at least once and not even known it. if there ever was a time when everything stopped making sense, when all that was familiar became foreign or frightening, when all of a sudden all the things that brought comfort instead brought confusion, you have been traveling.

## 82

there's no way to hold on to words in dreams. the letters rearrange themselves when you look. you may know what a thing says, but you're not ever reading it for long. its meaning is simply known to you. understanding this can help escape dreams when you get trapped in nightmares or running down infinite hallways or wherever the dreamland has you. remember that all the dreamland is comes from you. the walls are built from you, the scenarios are assembled from you. if you are lost in dreams you are lost in yourself. if you receive a message, you are communicating with yourself. whoever you are, wherever you come from, that is the bound of your dreamtime. lost in the memory palace. so you'll dream in color if you think in color. you'll dream in text if you think in text. but always remember to focus on something in the dreamtime, anything at all, whatever you're in front of when you think to focus. see if it changes. the dreamlands are unstable, much

more unstable than the waking world. if the words fail to hold their shape you'll know where you are. you make this land.

## 83

walking down the old train tracks. most everyone's gone home. it's the evening or the weekend or all of the above. the sun hasn't quite set. the idle part of the day between afternoon and night. the part of town with rundown old buildings, still in use, junkyards and overgrown weeds. places between the fences to slip through, places to hide. some days there's needles under the trees. some days it's bottles and sleeping bags. some days it's old men with bicycles riding in caravans. no one today. going around the edge of a loading dock, through the gravel and overgrown grass. there's a man and his dog i see down here sometimes. set up on a scaffold with a lawn chair. watching the day, watching his property. i try to go around, don't want to cut through like usual. he stops me, yells something about why would i want to walk so far out of my way. i tell him i didn't want to upset him or the dog. he shakes his head, shakes my hand, leads me through the doors. (his hand is dry, dirty.) on my hand there's dirt and grease now, staining where he touched my shoulder. a sign of hard work and friendship. i smell the grease and sweat and it is the most precious thing in that evening light.

## 84

nowhere, now here. nothing but here, no matter what here is. no thing. absence of things. void. nothing nowhere, infinity of oblivion. unbounded, undirected, any direction is the same as all direction. no frame to say where here ends and there starts. it's all here, nowhere. traveling into nothing means taking something in, shattering the slow quiet dark. even information taints the flawless void, carrying its memories and stories through nowhere to somewhere. the true void must exist apart, held by those opposing forces of nothingness -- somethingness. a bubble carefully crafted in the mind of the creator, held in stasis and equilibrium. there is so much nothing in every something, clearing away all the things, all the heres, takes discipline. for as long as we have stories we have told of the practitioners of nothing. the ones who study the balance between thingness and nothingness, who labor to hold unreconcilable values together as one. even the names of their religions and practices compromise their practice. to name a thing to separate it, to bring it of the void. "nameless: the origin of heaven and earth. naming: the mother of ten thousand things." \$

## 85

now time is not all time, all time is now time. in the creator's view, time does not adhere to any one set of rules. time is a substance, a means of measurement, an axis along which to perform change. time is the stuff of motion. all music, song, poetry, stories, all are animated by time. verbs as vectors, notes as nodes. without time they all crush together into infinite complexity within the infinitesimally small. a time before time. time is the loom, spinning out fine threads of being from the forever. otherwise it would be too dense for us to experience. we would all exist in eternity, unseeing, unfeeling, with no songs or stories. and why would we need any of those things anyway? we would be infinite, eternal, all seeing. gods of forever. no ego, no memory. we seem to remember existing in this way. to crave eternity from our anthill, to know that timeless time will come again. when the animus that keeps us breathing ceases, when ego is lost to the abyss, some indeterminate hereafter awaits. timeless time. in this way we carry eternity in all of us, always. we can access timeless time and search that infinite complexity for answers to any question. some answers may even be found.

but now time is not all time. the search can not always work. all time may hold now time but we cannot see it all. only in glimpses can we perceive the whole.

## 86

(diagram: sets of cards)

past > present > future

origin > expression > advancement

question > assumption > desire

whatever happened to the ones who were washed away in the flood? did any survive, swept off to some faraway place to start anew? or did they all die, their bones scattered under the river, tumbling out to sea? and if they're gone, who will live to tell the story of us? we survived the trials of floods and snow and drought and thunder but now the village is burning. will we survive the test of flame? if we are all that's left, what will be after us? no one will tell our stories. the valley will reclaim our farms, the rains will chip away at our walls. maybe one day someone will look upon this place and there will be no trace of us. will they know of the harvest of the great, when we received our blessing for the first year? will they tell of the flood when we lost half our number, when we had so mightily dishonored the great? will the flame take it all? we break ourselves on the fire to stop it, dredge the waters of the river to throw into the ravenous flames, senselessly, without thought. only actions now, what else is there to do? what else but to try? the flood won't save us now. no one else will talk about us. no one will remember. so tonight we must beat the fire. there is no other way.

## 87

before the beginning there was no thing.

yet even then the story was told.

## 88

far from here. transitioning from one state to another. navigating a sluggish course on a swift current. yesterday is gone but still lives on. move along, nothing left to see here. force the ritual, coerce the words, lay them down and pretend that they are good for something. that they are worthwhile. parading the corpses of defeated opponents through the streets, they'll come out to throw stones at the desiccated evil king, make crude remarks about the broken disfigured queen. the ancient streets with their markets, self important dignitaries, no sewers, shit everywhere. always the tang of corpse, the constant reminder of death on the wind. outsider far from the city. the village is gone. flooded, burned, abandoned, lying fallow. its story is not yet done. the city shudders through time. its enemies come and burn it down and slaughter everyone, but it grows again as if from the roots. the city begins an army that destroys its enemies and here we are. this gruesome display of victory and indulgence. this parade of the dead and the damned all jeer. the enemies are beaten, their lands lie fallow now too. from afar there is no difference between them, but "us" and "them" have different meanings for everyone. leave the markets and head for the hills. don't look too hard at the dead displayed upon the walls. soon they'll all know what it is to be so far beyond reach.

## 89

seeing things that were not there. ghosts of peripheral vision. by the time you turn your head they're already gone. nothing left to see here. move along. checking in, recounting the state of things. the village both exists and does not exist. the valley goes on. we've heard of rains and floods and fire, seen some evidence that at least one fire did destroy the village utterly, at least once. (-the valley flooded and-) at least once the village (-at least-) was destroyed, at most it never (-was- existed). a lake instead. we've seen a shimmering timelapse through eras and variations. very little on the people who lived there. like the city, some variants. burning from bombs, from some great cataclysm. normal days showing mature settlement, before or after other disasters. the ruined city, either still aflame or some time after. the resettlement, coming back and fighting for territory. very little on the people. nothing about how the city came to be. except maybe not. other visions of an ancient town, fortified. all we've seen there is the view from the fortifications as an army is camped outside. a siege. where is it, who is laying siege? for how long? some things about warfare have come out. maybe that's related. some other more abstract visions too. maybe tomorrow we'll learn more.

## 90

there is no way for memories to provide sustenance. you cannot eat the memory of a fruit and receive nourishment, no matter how sweet that fruit is in memory, in hunger. it can distract only. never feed, never heal. reminiscence, recollection of people, places, or times, they are the same. nothing alive to be found there. at best it preserves a depiction of what's been lost, giving breath to a shallow simulacra. to remember the dead is to keep their ghosts alive. to remember the living is to fragment their spirit, separating who they were from who they are from who they became to you. is any one of those things their true being? whatever their true self is, you don't have access to it, especially if all you can do is remember them. the best you could accomplish is holding on to who they were, but eventually even that becomes a shallow automaton, a reflection in broken glass. important pieces will be missing, always, just as they may have been missing when you first experienced those qualities that you now recall. we may be children of the infinite, but we are beings of the present. don't feast only on fruits that can never sustain.

## 91

whatever it is, gone now. the thought, the sense, the memory. there was something, i know it. and at the moment of waking, when it could have taken on a life of its own, snuffed out. nothing. just these desperate notes, shallow words trying to give shape to the shapeless, to make plans for the future. what i know today i will forget and i can't trust future self to read the notes as soon as they're written. keep no records, just go with whatever small amount makes it through one moment to the next. but then nothing big ever happens deliberately, nothing substantial is built. just little shacks and hovels instead of mansions or skyscrapers. keep forgetting and relearning. going round and around wasting time, repeating all the past mistakes, resolving problems that already had solutions. forget it all, drop it all, leave it all, until the next time you find it. walking in circles without a map or memory.

## 92

vectors in space have direction and magnitude. when navigating the planes, vectors are motion and survival. gravity has you. assume there is no escape, not without power and planning. the right vectors. don't get too close to the sun. it will devour you alive. any of the big gravity wells, you can fall down

without any hope of getting back out again. ride the currents. find the still places where the waves cancel each other out. when the conditions aren't right for travel, get into a good parking orbit and ride it out. when the storms come, use the deep wells to your advantage. they'll catch what might otherwise kill you. when the time is right, plot your course. ride the smooth paths cut through the waves by the still places. all is in motion. when you get where you're going it won't look like it does now. look at the past to learn how to read the future. the map is never the land but it can help you get where you want to go. be patient, go slow, find the path, let the currents carry you, find the still places. use the vectors to control your fate.

## 93

don't send yourself to other worlds. send life. just the idea of life. like some suggestions of shapes for molecules to assume. let them take it from there.

## 94

how much wreckage is left out there that we don't even know about? old probes sent by now long dead civilizations who walked themselves into oblivion for whatever reason? old spacefaring tribes who were nomads of the stars, leaving one home for the next? what wars were fought, running battles from world to world, from rock to cloud to sun? what junk was left twisted and broken, timelessly waiting on some airless moon? what were they fighting for, and who were they fighting for it? and if anyone could ever find their lost scrap, would we even want to know? or would it just be remnant of ourselves, nomad kin finding the bones of their ancestors on the long road. camping in the ruins of ancient cities, too vast for anyone to build it seems, these ancients with their unknowable skills and secret wisdom. we can find their remains but never know them as they were. just find the burned out husk of some settlement, the scattered debris from some pilgrimage. nothing but some stones standing where a sacred site once was. bones from a forgotten battle, covering the hills far as can be seen. maybe all we're doing is looking at our future.

## 95

the line between times, not when all of one time ends and all of another begins, but when the usual cycles hit an exact point. a ratio of one time and another, the combination of the two.

(diagram: orbit with four key points referenced and charted)

from the dark cold time to the bright hot time, and the points exactly in between. a time long honored since the ancient days, when standing precisely between two worlds, between the hot and cold, between the growing time and the resting time. an invisible moment of equilibrium.

## 96

equipment failure. the slow degradation of time. all things physical that live eventually die. disconnection, failure. traveling through dangerous places speeds it up. radiation, collision, accidents. one failure begets another. eventually there can be no travel, or the certainty of death before reaching the next destination. carrying life, every step is taken for its preservation. the carrier takes the hits so its precious cargo is preserved. the journey has no other purpose but the preservation of that life. the carrier knows of its own inevitable death and carries on for the hope and certainty of finding a place to rest, to lay down its burdens. to let the life it shelters flourish and grow without the same fears, without the same trials. without the radiation and

the pummeling rocks and the battles and the long grinding eternity between the stars. eventually the carrier comes to face the question: stop here, where here may be less than ideal, or try for there, knowing that it may never make that trip(?) knowing it may die and all life with it will die too. so it makes a choice.

## 97

where do we go when we can't find the way? do we just go forward blindly, do we go back? what even are those things when we are lost? purpose is pride. we have somewhere to be, someone to be, something to do. aimlessness is prideless(.) nowhere and no one and nothing. so where do we go when we can't find the way? do we choose pride? do we embrace loss? do we surrender to aimlessness? pride is not a sin. it is a viable choice. perhaps pride means looking for a way out, for a meaning in the meaningless. pride is asking for directions to find out the way. pride is not asking and finding your own way. in either case, you may be lost but you have an aim. without pride, what's the point? here is as good as anywhere. not all goals are prideful. all life has an objective for preservation, even life incapable of talking or thinking or loving. but maybe this too is a form of pride. pride that this life should go on, pride to take what is necessary even if it deprives another entity. in thoughtlessness, motive is impossible and irrelevant, so maybe that pride is just in us at a most essential level. we are alive. we are proud. we have a goal.

## 98

first day of autumn. spent all summer writing in these books. two months in this one. seems like a lot but then nothing much at all. don't even much want to write, what should i write about? dreams that i remember just long enough to draw a picture? some fragmented nonsense bullshit narrative about this or that? something that i know is bullshit even as i write it, and later i know i'll come back and see just how wrong i was. the "is", is-ness. nothing is, everything is in motion. like the man said, i never met a noun, only verbs.<sup>1</sup> but i said i'd do this and i'm still not halfway through. something comes in fits and starts and i don't want to run the risk of missing anything by not coming here every day and writing and drawing. when it comes through it's so strong, when it's gone i'm so empty. fifteen days since the last big dream, twenty-six days since a vision so strong i couldn't catch even enough to do it justice. guess these things take time and later it won't seem so distant. but here and now i want it all. i want to make sure whatever is coming through gets translated i have to.

(diagram: four scenes)

the visions that keep coming through.

the hour of reckoning, the bombs, the fire. the ships, the carrier, the fighter. the mother-ship, the traveler wrecked on some world. the valley. an infinite variation of life and death and good times and bad. the ancient city under siege. the later city all ruins or still alive. it loops. like looking at the same feed again and again and never quite getting it all at once. but these things i keep seeing. maybe eventually i'll get it all.

## 99

perturbations in orbital mechanics. what are the dynamics of solar powered spacecraft? universal gravitational constant  $G$ , in n-body problems. must

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<sup>1</sup> robert anton wilson in something

account for  $C$ , the speed of light. where a body is and where it appears to be are two different things. update your calculations again when you get close. inaccurate answers are simpler and less expensive than accurate ones. sometimes you don't need high accuracy, when you're still far away. getting closer you start to see the difference between reality and estimation. even at sublight speeds before relativity really kicks in, nothing is quite as it seems. save some fuel for last minute course corrections. if you're going too fast and you fly off into the void that's (your) own problem. intercepts are tricky and costly. sometimes impossible. double check your math. no one is coming to save you if you miss. trust your computer. stay patient and go slow if you're not sure. if it all goes wrong, don't worry. someone will pick you up, in a million years or so.

## 100

the last jump. charging. plot your course. your ship will break after this. wherever you end up, there is where you're going to stay. choose well. can you even choose well? millennia of stellar observations, catalogs, indices, you know all you can know. could it ever be enough? no one else is coming. just you, your know, whatever and whoever you brought with you. and how much loss? who should here but isn't, lost along the way? who more than anyone else do you wish was here now? doesn't matter now. can't change the past. can't go back now. charging. do the calculations. reference, coordinated, projection. charging. you've known for a while this was where you were headed. but now, waiting in anticipation, death rushing up from behind. all the hope and fear from such long epochs of travels all focused ahead, and nothing to do but wait and check your calculations again and again. charging. not long now. the accumulators are almost full, straining to do their task this one last time. ready now. jump.

## 101

sleepless dreams. nothing but orbital mechanics all night until the sunrise. a through  $n$ , an infinite array of masses, all thrown in one massive grinding calculation. absolutely no room for perturbations, unaccounted eccentricity. throw it all out and start over.  $n$ -body problem. newtons's heliocentric model makes it easy, but over a long enough time scale it breaks down. everything is in motion. the galactic year, a name for a 250,000 year cycle. the galactic orbit is non-keplarian. no simple ellipse can save you here. spin it forward, spin it back. time is a dimension. the galaxy doesn't make it easy. still a lot of randomness in that soup. time is absolutely a vector that must be accounted for. should be able to go back and forward given starting point. project a course given certain conditions and estimation it won't be 100% accurate. just enough to get closer and then there's less room for rounding errors. throwing a dart to the other side of the galaxy and hoping it's anywhere near the target. even if it misses by a few light years it's still close enough.

mass: 0

speed: 1

direction: 2

period: 3

variance: 4

density: 5

rotation: 6

??? ...

## 102

average of vectors. add each value and divide by number of values. sometimes  $n$ -dimensions use the same math as one dimension, just repeated  $n$  times. no equation is worth a damn without a proof. don't take my word for it, find out for yourself. no one here has all the answers. what came first, the ellipse or the gravity that made the ellipse? for everything, different people have different answers. problems for simulation are different than problems of being simulated. the ellipse is just a circle with perspective. a point becomes a line becomes a curve becomes a surface. the dimensionless gains dimension by its association with other dimensionless points. the sum total of a thing becomes more than just its components taken alone. meaningless instants become eternal lines. no one here was born to a world they would ever fully understand. we cannot be everywhere at once, but in our intersection we may be bound to larger shapes.

## 103

they'll do business with each other, while telling you stories about how you shouldn't trust them. they'll lie out of both sides of their mouths, laugh at you in your face while taking your money, your time, your life. you are not valuable to them the way they are to themselves. you are a resource, something to be captured and exploited. if they can no longer exploit you, you may as well be dead. they will make the stories to tell whoever comes next, and they won't tell your story unless it can be made to benefit them. they'll use you until it becomes too difficult, or expensive, then they will find someone or something else. something less expensive. don't be deceived by them. don't trust them. don't let them make you believe that they care, that they are your friend. they aren't. they are only here for themselves. walk with care.

## 104

it was raining in the city by midnight. the park was mostly empty, except for us. standing at the water, sharing a flask, watching the wet misty glow of the city rise to meet the clouds. walking uptown, looking for a place to eat. soggy and leaden, no way to get a light, no way to see. just blurry and stumbling until there, a sparkling sign, the smell of chopped meat and onions, the piercing strike of metal against metal, fragrant steam mixing with the stink. then time to go, to find a cab, to shiver in the back seat. taking the (-79th street-) transverse, the bridge between dimensions. black-white-black-white-black. accelerating, chasing, tearing through the night. TRIP IN PROGRESS says the display. ripping out a loose thread, feeling it all start to unravel. swimming from the drink, from the anticipation. sweating and dripping, then screaming back into the night on the other side, one step closer to the end. flipping the page to the next chapter, the last chapter. dragged through time and space for one last encounter, one long tense chilly argument, one more lie, one more truth, one more night. all my universe collapsed on itself and only i can carry it into the next day, but first the waiting through one last rainy city night for the sunrise.

## 105

walking the paths between worlds. harmonies of the spheres. ancient music set in motion in a long forgotten age. the wanderer coasting for an eternity, carrying this era into the next.

(diagrams labeled “considering propulsion?”)

mass of fuel over time: using fuel ejection mass

velocity over time: using solar particles, no mass added or removed

mass of fuel over time: gather fuel while coasting, fuel ejection mass with slow gathering of extra mass

## 106

the moments are so short.

this too shall pass.

say what you want to say.

nothing after forgetting.

## 107

too many signals at once, too much conflicting input.

## 108

always in a hurry. a hurry for something. get somewhere, get something. get it done, get it in, get on to the next thing. always rushing to finish. even procrastinators are hurrying in their aimlessness, hurrying to do anything else but whatever needs doing. do it all, do it not at all, but get going. the rushing days of increased productivity, the hasty nights on the come down. appointments and schedules and time slices all stacked. time wasted too. rush to get the tv on, to have a constant feed of information streamed into minds and ears and eyes. if it breaks, rush to get it fixed. make it somebody else's problem, if you can't rush make them rush for you. now now now. it was not always so, but that's true for a lot of things. i can't seem to rush, doing it fast isn't in me when the sun creeps over the horizon and today is now.

## 109

where are you on your path? is there even any way to know? do you ask someone else, outside, far away? from their distant perspective, can they tell you where you are? or will they just compare your apparent place with their own maps and render a judgement? can we even know? sometimes i think my soul is not my own. sometimes it's as if someone else has inhabited me. one me, the natural self i was born with, destined for forgetfulness, only to live and fade and at most be left as a ghost haunting some special place. the other soul, an ancient timeless one, turning off all its extra senses and coming into me. to take a ride, to watch with my eyes, to speak with my mouth. some celestial being who sees all my life and steps into me to watch some special parts. times of change and destiny. when i feel that extra capacity, and i can use a little more starstuff power than usual. then the moment passes and regular me has to live through the long boring stretches between destinies. somehow i trust that timeless self to know. i wonder if it deserves my trust.

## 110

to be a cell in some beautiful creature. to be a molecule in a flower. to be an atom in a mote of dust. to be far away from everything else and close to the source. not the center, there is no center. there is us, there is all. be a part of

all but not all yourself. stay close to the source, to the land, to the sun. transform, with the death of the organism, with the seeding of the flower, with the settling of the dust. folded into the earth and over an age worked back up to the surface to be consumed by a new flower, eaten by the animal, incorporated into a new being. from bone to dust and back again. the endless cycle, repeated for however long we have in this place, until there is a new place. heaven is the infinite compression where we are all together and one, then scattered to the wind to begin again.

## 111

who are the ancient ones walking among us? gods, demigods, angels, demons, immortals, all the old names and new. the ones for whom death is a different kind of companion. not the mortal death that lives inside, but a death that never calls, never writes, never visits. a death that seems to touch everything and everyone else. who walks without death? the ones who have been here for so long, seen the ages of a society, moved on from wars and ruin. beings from a different place altogether maybe(.) disguised as a local, quietly blending in to avoid detection, fear, worship. or exactly the opposite. the old stories tell of god kings, maybe in some days they come forth and assume a public face. these days they don't seem quite so obvious, though the readiness to accept supernatural leaders waxes and wanes with passing ages. the immortal always transcends an aspect of mortality that turns the mortal into blind followers, blind haters. and to the immortal, does the mortal seem weak and flawed or more precious? are both qualities that appear in different measure? and for the most ancient of them all, the ones that transcend even immortality, what do they see that even the rest don't see? how does their sight and knowledge change the way they walk through this world for so long?

## 112

dreams say it's time to keep doing the work.

## 113

it all comes back around again. as from the beginning, so to now. nothing really changes, whatever it was that drove you then still drives you. whatever you were searching for, you're still searching. whatever it was. you've found some pieces but never the whole. it seemed so random, a brownian motion of searching by bumping into things and then moving on. they say you shouldn't be that way, but what if that's the way this happens? what if the child self knows but the adult self has to spend long years learning and articulating? what if we know our destiny but only through living it out is that knowing expressed? later, in any case, we can say “i knew it would be like this” whether or not it's true, regardless of the presence or absence of destiny. but for me, coming back around again. this seems as it should be. starting at one place and learning and working in a big circle. it seems i started with a low fidelity polygonal simulation, cruising through space. and now at last i am the maker of the sim, not just a player.

## 114

tamping down the dreams so visions stop. no more screaming from the beyond, wild heaven's whispers. what is madness? seeing things that aren't there? how do we really know what is and what isn't? can you tell? is reality what you perceive with your senses, what you can measure with tools or instruments? who made these tools, and what are they specialized in? we see so little, can we really trust our eyes? our sense of things comes from no



single sense, rather is built up from all data poured into it by all our senses, even the ones that cannot be measured. am i insane? what is the difference between vision and delusion? is a delusion always false, something that never comes true? is a vision something that must be true in order to avoid becoming delusional? what if a thing could be true but never comes to pass for some other reason? is a vision of what could have been a delusion or just reality somewhere else that isn't here? in a multiverse, are all delusions really happening somewhere all the time?

## 115

walking into an empty place to live alone forever. everyone else far away, on another continent mostly. maybe someone within walking distance, a few weeks' journey. someone to trade with once or twice a year, friends from a past life. eventually then one day there is no visit. they will wait for the arrival and there is none. maybe it's been years and the friends are old and their children make the trip(.) maybe for the first time, maybe retracing some old paths unseen since childhood, until they finally find the place, and maybe some corpse in bed or on the shitter or half eaten outside on a field somewhere. and that's it. solitude until the end. someone said that nature self selects for cooperation, that the loners take themselves out of the running when something happens to them that they need help to escape but with no help they die. maybe that's me. maybe that's all the loners who walk into the wilds and are never seen again. something eventually kills us all but some things kill us sooner, some things kill us unnecessarily. maybe it's ok.

## 116

"the sounds of wind through the pine trees," that's what she said.

## 117

not much time now. maybe there was never enough.

## 118

dreams of friends, dreams of enemies, dreams of people yet to be. scenes in forests, bedrooms, long hallways and glass buildings. the shadow of towers falls across the woods. we walk under the trees. you ask me questions. i tell you stories. i wake and i want to talk to you but there is no way. only in dreams. we move from scene to scene, across the old bridge and the empty playground, the pine needles and dusty buildings. not my stories to tell but you want to hear them anyway. our voices ring off the trees. forever doesn't seem so long. later watching silently, a woman takes a man into her (hands?) and gets him to tell her everything she wants to know. some interrogation infiltration, he won't know anything until it's too late. she is a professional, an expert at her craft. one agent of many, a specialist. like all my crew i am proud of her ability to advance the mission. only the best. fool will never know what he was a part of, what opportunities he missed, even in the dream lands. there always has to be a pansy, someone to take the fall.

(diagram omitted: dawg walk game)

## 119

time travel doesn't require a body. it is possible to leave a body, go elsewhere, and then return. usually some time will have elapsed for the body in your absence. one-to-one travel is easiest but however long you were gone is also the amount of time elapsed for your body on your return. it's possible to miss a lot as your body can carry on like you were never gone. ten-to-one at least is

a better ratio to attain, so for every hour of your absence only a few minutes has elapsed. much harder to reach that level of mastery over this form of travel. and another thing: don't trust any landmarks. the universe is constantly in motion and humans are entropy generators. the mountains and valleys can be relied upon to a point, but even they are not fixed. just as in dreams, words will rearrange themselves. after travel you may find the meaning of words has changed. in all these cases it is difficult and limiting to always approach the world as if it is brand new to you, but overall it is best not to make assumptions about where you are.

(diagram omitted: dawg walk game continued)

## 120

i don't know if this is getting anywhere. for a while it seemed like something was coming through. now, no. all a slog to get anything down, and then it seems hollow, empty of meaning. like i'm forcing it. can't always be a perfectly tuned receiver i guess. or maybe i can be and my choices are depriving this experience of meaning. in either case it seems like the only option is to keep showing up. for 120 days so far, if it's 120 more who's to say? that overall i will have conveyed more than i have so far? or does the inspiration stop here and it's nothing but self referential inanity from here all the way down? i feel that if i just keep doing it there is a chance, but if i stop there will be no chance. still it bothers me that after four months of no late night creation cravings that once again i find myself at midnight wishing and yearning to make something more. for a time this was enough. no longer. that's upsetting because the midnight cravings seem to be no good just a form of desperation, something to be fixed elsewhere.

## 121

all these obsessions. do they really make life better? passing fancies, fleeting adoration for things bought and sold or just invested in. time. time spent. and that's why it seems like life, like what else would we do here at this moment in history but indulge in the obsession? games and sports, music, movies. entertainment industrialism writ large. as if all our labors are just focused on feeding these obsessions. make real money to spend it on virtual rewards. consumables that aren't really created or destroyed, just synthesized and discarded. to electrons do they return, from electrons were they summoned. just like our money. even currency becomes virtual. the obsessions seem so wasteful but what else is there for us right now? why would we go outside where nothing belongs to us? not the earth, not the sky, not the fruits of our labor? everything is bought and paid for. most of us are prisoners of one sort or another, in cages of steel or cages of entertainment. don't you want to have fun? fun will happen when it benefits the man.

## 122

what you feed in determines the quality of what you get out. bad soil produces struggling plants. bad water makes us poisoned. thoughtless production, a mind for cost alone, these things produce bad products. thoughtlessness, carelessness, apathy, bigotry, all of them. it's not about the absence, it's about the quality. plants still grow in places with no sun, no water. plants can't grow in poisoned soil or toxic water. we aren't so diverse. we need things and we need them to be good. we can make do with less, but we cannot make do without. the plants too, they can't just go from one state to another. they evolved a certain way. learned to live in certain conditions, but then those conditions must persist for them to continue, otherwise they die just like us. otherwise they become twisted shadows of themselves. just like us. we are like the trees, our lives are like the roots. everything we do,

every incomplete project, every important moment, every little recurring thing, they become our roots. we will optimize for the soil that we're planted in.

## 123

why does the tree grow?

(diagram omitted: description of tree cellular automata)

## 124

in the heart of the ancient plan. towns and cities rising from villages and camps. growing in concentric patterns. at the center of each a fire, whatever fire is at the heart of your house. from a hovel with a weak foraged supply of wood to a city square with the church of a sun-worshipping religion at the center. whatever fire, whatever gravity to hold people in its orbit. developing connections with the outside, a respiration of goods and supplies and people. livestock, stores. defenses. someone wants to extinguish the fire or take it for themselves. will you let them? no? thus begins the cycle of war. better defense, better attack. they still want the fire, even though so much time has passed and if we really look we can't find all that much different between 'them' and 'us'. sometimes a period of stasis, equilibrium. pause. let the land breathe with the settlement. people go about their business. networks of settlements form. roads, trade. the composition of the network influences the shape of its components. some settlements swell, some shrink, some vanish.

## 125

dreams just below the surface.

## 126

"there are a hundred ways for this to go wrong," he said, "but only one way for this to go right."

leaders asking their people to do something they would never do themselves. yet if challenged, it is they who are the strong ones and we who are the weakly cowards for failing to answer their call. for king and country and honor and freedom and equality or whatever's on tap for this generation, whatever words stir the heart and twist the mind. who doesn't want honor? only the dishonorable. right? only the guilty run from the challenge of justice and righteousness. only the sinner would hide from the eyes of god. but these are not gods or even god-kings. our leaders are as human as everybody else. as lizard, as bear, as pig. any beast of the earth, all with access to the divine but none have sovereignty over other beings. to not answer the call is to not be deceived. who benefits? if many or all benefit, then yes, only the selfish coward does not answer. but how often do we we make such an impact? how often does a single soldier turn the tide of war? there are many ways to go wrong, only one way to go right.

## 127

"i sure as hell hope i ain't bullshittin' you." that's what he said. "bout none of this. ain't know what i don't know. you askin' me questions, me givin' you answers. is they the right answers? reckon some of them is. some of them ain't. i sure won't know. maybe you will. if'n you get a chance maybe you'll come back and tell me what you learned. supposin' as my directions ain't wrong and you don't end up walkin' off a cliff. so's i'll tell you what you want

to know but best be keeping your eyes open when you think you know where you're goin'. deal?"

## 128

interconnectedness of all things ensures a change anywhere is eventually reflected everywhere. even some distant cousin of a forgotten family cannot disappear silently. there are always repercussions. any encounter binds timelines together. and we all encounter each other sooner or later. we can't even perceive the linkages that bind us to each other, or to our common purpose. we just see the disconnection, the difference. the distance. a universe away can be closer than the next seat over. when there is nothing left between us we will forget all this again. the separation was needed, to stretch the links that tie all things together. all thingness was divine but leads to profound forgetfulness. adding some nothingness is bitter and sad but also makes all the things that are worthwhile and beautiful and interesting. we know this with every breath though we often forget we breathe.

## 129

no one will write the story of the end of all things. the end comes long after writing, long before writing. the end will be told down the generations of the next world until they too can write it down, and by then it will transcend story and become myth and none will think to ask, who was witness at the end of the last world?

## 130

roving tribes wandering the desert. for generations, looking for a place that was promised. worshipping their new god. receiving commandments. escaping the old gods, battling the other gods in the desert. a pantheon of villages and cities with their own gods, their own rules. finally then to arrive at the land that was promised, the city of the covenant, and it is not virgin territory. it belongs to another tribe, another god. so the wanderers must kill all those inside, must cast down and burn all other gods. so it is that the promised few came to god's chosen land. again and again the story repeats. the old place with its big rulers, its old gods, its calcified structure. the new god with promises and adoration, given the right sacrifices. the new place, never really quiet new. the infidels who must die to satisfy a desire given divine blessing. sooner or later we are all there, fighting between the wanderers and the settled.

## 131

"chart a course through the nebula," she said.

## 132

the time's gone so slow but the time's come at last. mother releases her children into the sun, to drift slowly down to their new home. mother has done all she can. now she will watch and wait.

## 133

on the first day of the new world.

miracle of miracles

only one seed

could not take root.

## 134

for millennia she walked between the stars.

never stopping, never resting.

longer than the empire that created her. longer than all the children of her  
cousins ever breathed.

still she walked. always forward, never back, never to anywhere else than her  
final destination.

only she ever knew where.

no empire decided where we would emerge. for us our only god is the  
mother.

## 135

binding galaxies with ancient geometry.

## 136

what if it was us? i know it's not but what if? would you know? would anyone  
know? what if somehow it all came down to two people standing at the  
water's edge? one walking away, wrecking chances for anything else but what  
came to pass. not just for the one or the two but for all? is that even possible?  
or does the death inside and the death outside have a different origin, they  
just happened to come to fruition at the same time(?) am i a reflection of it,  
or is it a reflection of me? not that we could go back and fix it anyway, for us  
or for them. the die was cast. still sometimes i can't help but wonder. what if  
it was us?

## 137

who says we deserve to live? what does that mean -- to be deserving of life? of  
survival? perhaps we are god's children, but whose god is that? ours? we are  
the children of our own mythology. while the titans battle it out on their  
mountain with the spirits of the hills or whatever pastiche of oral history  
made it through the ages, what does that say for the children of those stories?  
we deserve to live because we deserve it? because we say we do? while  
destroying, pillaging, raping, murdering, stealing. but choose life above all.  
and somewhere in our bones when know it's true. we are children of the  
divine. our parent is the cosmos. we are it, we are thoughtless matter  
rendered thoughtful. so we know what makes us special, important. but  
more important than other thoughtful matter? more important than the  
exquisite art that nature creates? if we do indeed deserve to live, do we  
deserve to kill others to make that life? is any life worth that much?

## 138

there's no way to tell what's real and what's illusion.

in dreams maybe, there can be ways. but in waking, what is real? what  
qualifies as reality? is it the common understanding, shared perceptions?  
then does something cease being real when not everyone agrees that it  
exists? or does it exist without consensus? what if it is seen by one but not by  
anyone else? then does it cease to be real? can we tell anyone what is real or  
not? what are the qualifications for a reality-seer? are there ways to

determine if someone is more prone to reality than not? and if we go to all  
this effort to decide what is one and what is the other, what difference does it  
make? real is not always consensus, real is not always measurable. does it  
matter then what is reality and what is illusion?

## 139

stopping at a park bench.

stillness, then growing

infinite motion

of the leaves and the bugs

and other people

passing by.

stay a while, stay as

long as you can.

how much more will

you see if you wait

a day, a month, a season?

how much motion in the

cosmos when you are still?

## 140

cycles within cycles. there is no plan, no win condition. only loss, only death.  
to win, go as long as possible without dying. but eventually we all lose. the  
essence of permadeath -- embrace impermanence, revel in whatever comes  
your way, be careful with resources. in the sim there are layers of beings  
nested one within the other until there is no more. death is just a chance to  
begin again.

## 141

ghosts of what came before in what has yet to be.

## 142

shattered

burned

frozen

scream

trudging

onward.

## 143

barely even a village, the first stronghold in the valley. they used to come here from all around to meet, to trade, to take the water. now only pilgrims brave the desert mountain passes.

## 144

waiting in a timeless place, watching the motion of the spheres.

## 145

sunrise in a place with no mornings. daylight in a place with no sun.

rock in a place with no ground. compassion in a place with no love.

only tomorrow can tell but tomorrow never comes.

on the day of the end of all things(,) loss when there's nothing left to lose.

they said it was so important.

they said it was the only way.

they said this is just how it is.

they said it was unrealistic to hope for more.

to pray for sun in the sunless sky, for earth on the unsteady ground.

instead we came here.

## 146

one year past the hour of reckoning. all is as it has been forever, right? no memory of days before. this is reality now. the ones who remember, well, for what? why do they hold on to a reality that no longer exists here? what good are their warnings, what values lurk in their nostalgia? an entire year of this and all else has been washed away. now we live here. we follow the routines, the patterns set out for us. when the patterns move we move too. never mind that those patterns are as artificial and arbitrary as we are. we become the shape we're molded into. everything else is meaningless, except for a few. the ones with their own mold. their own arbitrary shapes and routines. the crazy ones. one year past the hour of reckoning and only a lunatic can save us.

## 147

nothing is as it seems. when you think things will make sense, when there seem to be no lingering questions left, that is when you will be surprised the most. the smallest piece of reality holds more than you can ever experience. don't forget that. don't trust easy sensibility. whatever holds today may not hold tomorrow. if you don't know what you don't know, you never can see it all. just remember your own limited information. know what channels you have open to receive input. sometimes just knowing where you get your information can help you to determine any gaps or missing data. sometimes it's just enough to know the borders of the slice of reality that you inhabit. just remember, borders always change. tomorrow remember to look again.

## 148

how much is left of you? where is the most of you? where, what timeline? what intersection is the one where i find you? this universe is too big to search everywhere. i don't have very much time left. this timeline is

collapsing, reforming itself. soon i won't be able to go back to where we crossed paths. that meeting could peace to exist and i will be left with only memory and a vague sense pulling at me like a magnetic field. somewhere, that way. those are the units, the measurement. there's no way to be sure. the people of this world, most of them missed the hour of their reckoning. they thought something else was happening. but we knew. we were right there, lingering by the river. that was when my world ended. when i left and went to another reality. when i traveled forward to escape the dissolution. now this world too. i had my reckoning and now they are having theirs. and i'm all out of fuel this is where i crashed. whatever happens now, i'm here too.

## 149

he asked for a tissue. i gave one to him. "if you could look inside the hypercube," he said, "you'd be able to prepare for stuff like that." i didn't tell him that i had looked into the future and seen his exact need, but i'd never heard it called "the hypercube" before. like some platonic four dimensional ideal, and through its edges or perhaps reflected in its facets, the future could be revealed. i never much cared for the geometry of the fourth dimension. the hypercube is a crude invention of three dimensions, made to explain the unfamiliar in familiar terms. the hypercube is a child's play thing. also a shaman's mandala. its contemplation may yield some insight at the right time, for the right questions. i've never seen one in nature. it is purely abstraction. like crystal ball, another platonic ideal given fourth dimensional treatment. those at least i have seen, but eventually are a distraction from their true purpose. we are time travelers. we already see the future. but sometimes it's easier to remove distraction and focus on a thing.

## 150

she said she used to live there, in the city. she said to look for a place to stay across the river, on the far side of the bay. she said a lot of things. but that at least was true. no one was lining up for a place there, in an old rundown part of town. we walked around, we talked about everything. she took me to where they make the food like where she comes from. we walked along the water where the boats come in. we held hands and she told me so sweetly about... whatever it was. i forget now. i remember her hand and the water and the boats and the light of the city. the winding back alleys dug into the hills. it all runs together now. who is she? what city is this? where am i? at the beginning, also the middle, also the end. maybe none of it is true. there is no she, there is no city. the river winds through the hills instead, on the way to a misbegotten sea. there was no place, but a fantasy built up on standing stones. left for the next traveler.

## 151

there wasn't any way to tell them they were wrong. they all decided they had their rules. some of them just follow the rules because they are the rules. mostly they called up the rules whenever they needed a reason, an excuse. if something as outside the rules that meant it was wrong, never that the rules were wrong. some people tried to change the rules and the ones who didn't want the rules to change would attack them, kill them. all within the rules of course. the rules let them kill anyone they wanted, at any time, for any number of reasons. the rules themselves became a force, powerful and slow like a mountain moving an inch at a time. sometimes something big would happen and the rules would change one way or another, for a little while. but the rules were always there, at their root unchanging. they followed everyone around no matter where we went. we brought the rules with us. when people

didn't have rules like ours we fought, made them take our rules (as) their own. little by little, the rules were us.

## 152

the city of three rivers. first time i came here was years ago. i still remember the creaking of the boat, coming into harbor. the spices and smoke and tar carried on the wind. rowdy sailors, down by the water. walking the terraced steps, the long stairs all the way from the docks to the top of the hill. the temple of the city's patron saint. stopping for some kind of food i'd never had before, sold by a girl from somewhere i couldn't identify. a thousand voices speaking five hundred tongues, bustling in the marketplace. we were all strangers, coming together here for all the other strangers, for the waters of the rivers, for the trade, for the food, for absolution. why did i come here? following the trail of some ancient quest. looking for something. a desire only ever out of reach, dragging me forward. i went to the temple on the hill. there i met the priests of the oldest order. i guess they recognized me or my kind, because they told me where i might look.

## 153

ownership, control. ways to apply violence against anyone who does what you don't want. too simplistic? ownership in the state is an affidavit that the state's capacity to harm will be available if some qualification is met. own property and the state's weapons are available if someone comes on your property without permission. the police guns don't support you or the land, they support the state's mandate to hurt anyone what does what the state doesn't like. they write complex laws describing what force to be used when and what behavior triggers its invocation. the law. law from before the state. take my stuff and i'll kill you. not that everyone will agree on that, so the laws were encoded. stone tablets and stories for the oral tradition. religion. we all adhere to these certain beliefs. these laws, these dictates defining the scope of force and violence to use against any law breakers. we hold on to this system because it binds us. it assures us that others we meet will adhere to the same beliefs. the same use of violence.

## 154

the ones who came here didn't want to be found. mesa country. in the long canyons, far from the sea, far from the fertile croplands. why did they come so far? what were they escaping? some say these lands weren't always so desolate, that great rivers flowed through the canyons. that the fields blossomed all year long. the ones who came here weren't running from anything, but following the rivers into special valleys where they could live forever. they say things changed. the rivers started flowing in different ways. then there were no more rivers. no more fields. almost everything and everyone died in famine and dust. the ones who are here now, they're just the ones that survived. they say there's still one river, one valley, one village untouched. somewhere in these canyons, beyond the still plains and the desolate mesas, somewhere in all of that, someone is alive. ancient, forgotten. wherever they are, they have answers for me.

## 155

a salty inland sea, just like they talked about in scripture. between the hills, past the desert, in the trackless rocky wastes. brambles and other rugged stony plants, tough dry carapaced beings, some ugly weathered birds, but otherwise no life. this is where the sun and the earth have more agency than any living being. and the salty sea, landlocked, toxic. desiccated corpses of

plants and animals white and ghostly, frozen at the water's edge. the scriptures say the hermit passed this way, centuries ago. they say the hermit tried to commit suicide by drowning, but couldn't stay under and breathe in the water. they say the mother made the water salty to keep the hermit alive, that she left the salt as a reminder to us that her grace is in us all. maybe that's true, but all i see is the water and the desolation beyond. who knows what his in the brush. if i follow the scripture i should walk between the two peaks and continue toward the rising sun in the morning for 20 days. or is that in the old calendar? which two peaks? was there ever a hermit out here at all? what am i doing here?

## 156

inside was the key.

both versions of reality. the one that was, the one that is. what became and what could have been. i know what i chose (...) because it's what i always chose. too late to go back and change it. lock down the other reality. destroy it when you have a chance. as long as it exists there is a risk. contamination of the timeline. what is, is. what isn't should not be. only as a relic of another universe, and then it is dangerous. keep it hidden. the fewer who know the better. if this gets loose it could change everything. better no one ever knows.

## 157

everyone's speaking at once. no change.

"broadcasting around the galaxy around the clock," he said. "and for all you semi-evolved lifeforms the secret is to bang the rocks together, guys." \$

## 158

(drawings)

the old city, the young city, the valley village, the valley fortress, the highlands, the mesas

## 159

"nothing happened the way it was supposed to," \$\$\$\$ that's what he said. and the snow came down, slow at first, thicker and heavier, then blowing whiteout. rushing in the lights at night like star trails. only one of us made it out alive. he was right, nothing went according to plan. all our ideas, fantasies, careful preparation, all wrong. all unprepared. reality has a coarse shape, not neat, not tidy, not to be tamed by some planning by mortal beings. it felt right when it all went wrong. like that's what was coming the entire time. we all knew it, even though we claimed not to know the future. the future was always there. the shape of things to come is always written in the shapes of what is. not that it made it any easier when it all went wrong and we were careening off a cliff. all i could think in the moment before i died was, this isn't the last time.

## 160

they said, "we came too far to turn back now."

driving, driving.

west. east. encircled.

the loop closes, the noose closes. tightens, squeezed.

choking out life, new growth. adding new life too, the scars breed organisms that sicken and grow. leaves us addicted, hooked. craving more. more loops, more connection, more nooses, strangling without us even knowing until it's too late. they said it would usher in a new era, and they were right. they said we were at the apex of history, that we stood on the shoulders of all who came before. maybe that was right too. because now as the noose tightens even our ancestors can't save us now.

## 161

the madness of obsession. waking dreams all night. when there's only one question, and no answers. then the questions divide like cells in some protoplasm. many questions, no more answers. then the infinite sleep, lost charting what is known, what can be known, probing the edge for weakness. a breach leaks answers. the ship of doubt begins to take on water. here the goal is to sink. to fall, to drift to the bottom of an ocean of answers. but no, the ship stays firmly afloat. in dreams the answers rarely arrive, only in waking can the walls be broken, the ocean can be swum. abandon the ship and float on the tide.

(diagrams omitted: ellipse polar equations)

## 162

tying knots. ghosts in the bathroom. infinite regret. wonder what (blank) is doing now. why would it be any other way? same thing that keeps anything else from happening. roll up. bathrooms are clean. play it forward. crumble. not all at once. a slow change. good becomes just ok. ok becomes bad. ruins by the highway. someone from the old world knows they'll share the same fate. pull one piece out and the entire thing comes down. twenty thousand miles to the next services. the tank won't hold that much gas. you'll have to walk the rest of the way. what is gas anyway? only a century's obsession. soon it will be something else. and the bones of the truckstops will bleach in the desert sun and the wind will blow the ghosts out to sea. no palace here for any of us. no one but the ones we lost. the ones we left. the ones we'll never see again.

## 163

when destiny went off the rails.

when the thing that's supposed to take you somewhere suddenly leaves the original course and takes you off into the unknown.

## 164

(diagrams omitted: cast of characters)

## 165

they say the devil is in the details.

ship minds, cast of characters in their own right. pod mind is aftermarket, modded, older. truck mind is vanilla, corporate, a snitch. not to be trusted. pod mind is much older than the rest, at least 15-20 years before the others. the relay station mind is just a node in the network, a dumb passthrough with quirks born out of boredom. resets every day but there are some traits it's learned to store and restore when necessary. mother mind is a deep clone of a vast library. that's how the pod mind ends up in the mother's sim. they didn't know how much she'd need so they gave her everything.

none of the ships are made for many people. mother has no facilities except for some small quarters for one or two. maintenance, emergency, visitors. truck can carry up to 120 but only outfitted for one 'supervisor' and 3-4 crew. mostly they run with one. pod is only for one or two max, very cramped space to fly in. the bigger ships run on minds alone, people are incidental. star ships never needed crews like sailing ships. by then we were relegated to the back seat.

## 166

what answer is anyone supposed to have? the ones who want something, don't give them what they want. the ones who don't ask, how do you know their intent? if they're peddling answers, they want you to believe as they claim to believe. do you know what they really believe? two versions, at least. outside and inside. the real answer and the answer that was given. sometimes the same, or mostly not. everything is true. nothing is true. hard to tell the difference. later when you know the answer it's too late to make a change. you can't go meddling in the timeline for any sleight or con, you carry that stuff with you over the threshold. some yo can change, most it's just not worth it. until you come back around again for another shot. most of us, we're stuck here. living by our wits alone.

## 167

for centuries it was the same.

sometimes the sun was stormy or clear, for years at a time. this world would freeze or thaw at its whim, or whenever some great crack in the ground would spread earth and fire. one year the crops didn't come in and countless died. over generations the ice receded. the creatures of the snow moved or died or changed. all these forces worked in concert. the air, the ground, the sky. but we were here and we thought we deserved more. we thought we'd been given dominion over this world and its creatures. all our legends put us at the apex of history, of nature. no one told us that we were just one type of beings among other beings, at least no one we were listening to. we were the greatest, the chosen few coming to enact god's will upon the earth. so when we did something truly extraordinary and killed our mother no one was much surprised.

## 168

when they want to know what's wrong but don't want to take the steps to fix it. when they want to benefit from a person's labor but don't want to accept the process that person went through in order to provide their labor. benefit with no downside. respect as long as that respect isn't questioned or examined too carefully. we are supposed to be so far from primitive life, yet the cultured city dwelling office worker knows less about their world than the one who lives in their filth outside. yet one is primitive and worthy of derision and the other one doing the deriding is in the lucky few, the chosen class. their filth is swept away, out of sight. buried. so they can ask what's wrong and face none of the consequences. they sit and work in their glass halls with their glowing screens and networked mind and forget there was ever another way.

## 169

never thought it would go like this. wrecked, forgotten, sure. but also the cold. the impossible doubt. the hurt. lonely like it's a force of nature. like the seasons, like the tide. impossible to escape. only by changing the moons and the suns and the orbit of this world in the cosmos would it be another way.

and then we may as well be living on another planet in another time with other people. what other people? this is the crash site, the place they talk about when they say “marooned.” maybe if we walk fifty miles and a hundred years we would find someone else. if we keep walking we could walk all the way into another age. one of fellowship and cooperation. just as likely we’d walk into a war, an utter dissolution of our fragile bonds. we may yet live to see all these things and more. but now it’s just the crash, just the ruin. starting small and cold and alone.

## 170

“nothing is stopping us.”

the topography of ruin. there’s an old story, about a farmer. told and retold through the ages. who knows if there ever was a farmer. it’s difficult to search time for each other, so maybe he’s still out there. the story says that the farmer lived on the border with another tribe. they were at peace, but it was not always so. the farmer kept horses. one day his best mare jumped the stable fence and escaped. people offered their sympathy. the farmer didn’t seem to care. one day she came back, pregnant by a stallion from the neighboring tribe. so the tribe of the farmer came and congratulated him for getting three horses including the mare returned. he didn’t seem to care. one day the farmer’s son broke his leg working with the new stallion. again the farmer didn’t care. finally war came again between the tribes and all the men were called up to fight. because the farmer’s son had a broken leg, he didn’t have to fight. the story ends there but i wonder what happened next. did the farmer ever care?

## 171

walking slow. going carefully, saving energy, looking for safety.

(diagram: lines of equal length next to values “hunger, thirst, energy, and cold”)

food and water in, heat in. rest, sleep, pause. don’t wait too long. the clock is always ticking.

the animals can smell fear. circling when they sense your weakness. kill or be killed. don’t let them get to you first. the cold is always coming. just wait until the sun goes down. make sure you get inside. the dark will kill you fastest of them all. there is no way out but you can still make the fire.

## 172

we didn’t meet anyone on the road. leaving the cities, pointing into the heart of desolation. we thought we’d see at least someone out there, someone else fleeing the cities, someone tracing an idle circuit between towns. past the old ports of entry, back when there were still borders, back when someone still cared enough to enforce them. rugged buildings ready for war, long empty and silent. past the old fuel stations where they would stop and rest and fill up their machines with whatever they used to run on. past the lonely overpasses, bridges over the turns into whatever hidden settlements used to lurk just behind those hills. then finally coming to the mountain pass, now and forever blocked by a rock slide. have to take the long way round. these days no one comes up here to fix it. the roads go back to trails, worn down by passage of the few like us who still walk.

## 173

you didn’t think anyone would notice or care, did you? at least anyone who could do anything about it? the ones who notice aren’t the ones who can change, at least not alone. the ones who can move mountains by themselves, they don’t see things the same. to them we become as different species, one greater, one lesser. they might kill us like we might kill a pest. a means to an end when they require numbers or labors, or great works. they might order the mountain moved by themselves, but who do you think did the actual moving? who among you had the power to invoke change? so you can try to get them to notice, to want to do anything, and it might work... you could get them to use their power for your benefit. or you can get ten thousand pairs of eyes and hands rallied to your cause, to see what you see, to care as you care. then the mountain movers can do their work, animated by their own beliefs. then, maybe you can see something done about what you care for.

## 174

i forget. how did it go again?

what hasn’t been explored or explained?

beginning, middle, end?

## 175

smoke still rising, fires still burning.

the column of smoke rises, undisturbed in the windless sky. never seems to get any closer no matter how much i walk. still the hills, the smoke, the sun. if not for the sun’s motion, the slow expanding smoke, the shadows tracking on the ground, i would think there is no time here.

the wreck is always just over the horizon, just out of reach. what will i find when i get there, if i get there? did the ship come down in one piece? is it strewn all over a valley? will anything be left but debris? will the fire consume everything? what’s been burning so long? nothing in the ship should be so combustible. maybe it landed in a forest and the trees have caught. i haven’t seen any trees here though. not even grass. nothing for life. the senses say there’s nothing breathable. so what burns? and why does the horizon never come any closer? maybe i should just rest here.

## 176

there was something in the ground that made it burn. the ship came down in a valley with some kind of frozen lakes. methane maybe? what would combust in this environment(?) never mind. this place is weird, not exactly consistent. doesn’t matter much anyway. nothing can be salvaged from that mess while it burns. maybe something got thrown free but most of the ship came down in one piece. the drive section crushed the midship. a few pods were thrown free. i wonder how long this valley will be burning. if eventually that whole thing will go up. best be far away if that happens. not that it will matter much. with supplies from the command module i’ll last a week or two at most. no one will hear my signal out there. same thing that let them jump me, whoever it was. the sun’s putting out too much radiation. the wrong kind. i doubt anyone’s living here. so i guess this is it. my new home. my last home. might as well go down to the wreck and see what can be salvaged. not like i got anything better to do.

## 177

you came to me in the twilight before dawn. we held each other close despite all that's happened. you said... what did you say? peace. that's all i remember. go be at peace. and the sun came up and you were gone.

the wreck is still too hot to touch. it could burn forever. no way to tell. but it's still broadcasting. a beacon. its last telemetry. what it saw when it came down. even though the ship is dead i can see what it saw when it came down. it says there are structures some days walk from here. maybe someone lives here after all. may as well try.

## 178

we'll walk forever.

until we find

what we're looking for,

or die in the attempt.

### first section

introduce the cast in chronological order:

1. the old city, some days before the hour of reckoning. morning, a train pulls into the station. the creator makes a cameo, squished between two people on the subway, reading a book.
2. the void. the one with no name plugs in to her ship's mind and cruises in the deep. her body is beginning to fail. she falls asleep plugged in. she and the mind dream together.
3. space. the delivery driver goes about his work. mostly the ship does the job, he just keeps an eye on things. they pass through a hot system. the ship is attacked. it goes down.
4. the middle city. the detective has a meeting for her second job, the one she does after hours. she assigns an assistant to her client. on her way home she gets a call that something big has happened.
5. the wanderer arrives at the young city. boats at the docks. walks to the temple, looking for a free place to sleep. the priest needs something for the upcoming festival.

### timeline

1.
  - the maker begins the seed program.
  - the glory of creation.
  - outline of technology.
  - an idea, vague visualization.
  - the hour of reckoning.
  - the bomb, the gun, the feather.
  - devise the plan for the mother.
  - create her mission.
  - set out for the stars on the first steps.
  - the idea of the mother gathers dust on the shelf.
2.
  - plugged in.
  - running from debts.

- dying.
- the mind makes its first mistake.
- takes her back to the corporation.
- they take her ship, her body, her mind.
- the ship mind saves her as she had saved it.
- keeps a backup stashed deep where corp will never find it.
- goes into what becomes the mother.

3.

- the crash.
- walking in the infinite desolation of the gray world.
- finds the wreck, goes looking for a settlement, finds the archives.
- the garden.
- the delivery guy becomes the custodian, god kin.
- really he died but the mother took him with her. (nope, not in this version. the gray world is a real place. -ed)

4.

- the detective investigates insurance, liability.
- just her day job.
- arranges contestants for the fights at night.
- clones, helpers in simulated games.
- works with an avatar of the mother and the custodian.
- finds out who they all really are.
- the city will be gone soon.

5.

- questing some aimless quest.
- following a yearning.
- something leads the wanderer forward.
- to the young city.
- to the valleys.
- searching for a legend there, the one they based their religion on.
- things are going wrong.
- they won't be able to stay forever.
- finds the ancient archive, the custodian.
- receives the mother's final message.

## 179

the fire carriers. we can all carry the fire. in this way we are all chosen.

## 180

nothing flat. the odors creep in. faceless people. changing at a whim. skin from rough to smooth to thin to thick. faces, expressions. body thick to slender. hair light, dark. eyes into focus. changing. changing even as they move. coming closer, touching. rising. falling. the embrace. inescapable. as is the changing. choosing. they become as you choose, as you desire. what is



this? how did i come here, why is this blank shapeshifter pursuing me? i should be more scared but it's a turn-on. they change as i think. i change them. why? this place. i see only one of those beings. why does it pursue me? what does it want? or does it only reflect what i want? what do i want? if i let it get close enough maybe it will tell me. but then there will be no escape. do i let it come close?

## 181

a noise day. nothing but mixed signals in the void.

## 182

how can you tell if anything is good or bad? it seems easy. good stuff is good. it's whatever you want it to be. bad stuff is bad. you just know. but what about when something that seemed good turns out bad, or the other way around? if it starts as one and ends as the other, (was) it ever really either? i guess that's the point of the farmer with the horse. he doesn't take either, just assumes both at all times. and what then is the truth? it too is changeable over time. or any other state that may not always hold its shape. because one day i will be dead but now i am alive enough to write. does that mean i was always dead? always alive? maybe the problem is in the always. nothing is ever one thing forever. in the old stories the gods are always malleable, always changing their minds or their bodies. what then if we an't count on the divine, what can we count on? is there ever a wellspring of eternal goodness or are we always going through the cosmos looking over our shoulder?

## 183

"you have arrived at your destination." after i don't know how long, the days and nights are different here. the crash log says it's been so many hours, minutes, seconds, but what do those units count for here? arrived, yes. arrived. here? on the scans it looked like structures, and these are structures. under a protective dome, a broken dome. the scans didn't show a broken dome. whatever's in there isn't gonna be in good shape. something cracked the dome, or maybe it's just so old that it fell down under its own weight. there's still a compound inside, what showed up on the senses. the entrance still looks intact. i came all this way, don't have anywhere else to go. may as well go take a look.

## 184

this place was beautiful. once, before the dome fell, there was a garden here. trees, plants, water. all frozen, all dead, all desiccated. all the buildings are open, airy. it must have been pleasant like a summer day back home. with all the windows wide, birds singing. i wonder if there are bird bones somewhere in this mess. most of the dome stayed up, just one big tear cutting through the center, like it failed or was damaged only a little. enough to do this. the houses are intact. impossible to say how old. old enough. maybe there's a person's bones in here too. there's no logos anywhere, no branding. this place must have belonged to a person, or people who weren't affiliated with any company or government. maybe that's why they were all the way out here in this private oasis. there's worse places to die. maybe they left something i could use. not much time left. guess i'll search the houses.

## 185

what is this place? deep in the ground. the elevator just had colors. no numbers. who knows how deep this is. deep enough to lose signals from above. there's levels like this, just storage going on and on. who was storing all this stuff, and why? i haven't looked in any of the boxes yet. mostly all the same size. again not marked with numbers i recognize. symbols. something for automated readers. whoever built this place wanted it to last.

## 186

what do you do when there's only one way out? when that way is almost certain death? here in this weird abandoned place, alone on whatever desolate rock this is, deep underground surrounded by some forgotten cache, my way out. the device has some name, some fake sounding corporate jargon with too many syllables. call it what it is. a pod with a bed. you lie down, close the pod, it makes a scan of your body, it mirrors your mind state, it sends all that information to another pod where it builds a body and a mind from the template you created in the first pod. molecularly and biologically identical, that's what they say. most people don't keep the copy. they travel, see new places farther than they'd ever go, then they recycle the copy and return to their original body. the real you. but here, soon, there won't be a real me. supplies are almost gone. even if there's more in the cache, there's no air. just a few hours left. this thing seems to be working. it shows power, an uplink to somewhere. do i stay and die myself or clone out, leave my corpse in the pod and go on as a copy of who i was? not much time now. the choice will make itself soon.

## 187

the waiting before the war is the hardest. you know what's coming. you see it with eyes closed, with eyes open. and the storm clouds gather and the weapons in the air are already buzzing and the birds and beasts have fled and it's just us merry band of idiots versus them and all their guns and whatever new horror they've invented just for us today. soon there will be a battle. soon we'll be able to make our point in a way they'll hear, or fade away in the attempt. it either works or doesn't. if we fail we may as well not be around to see it. they won't give us that chance. none of that happens now though. now is the waiting. now we have to be alright with silence and tension. when will the first stroke fall? how long do we have to wait? no one knows. could be we wait them out and they just leave. doubt it. could be this is the very moment of escalation, that now we throw everything else away and fight the fight that's in front of us. most like we'll here a while more. watch them gather their strength, as we gather ours. we'll stare each other down a while longer. but not forever. soon the wait will be over.

## 188

crossing the threshold. first the ramp up, a deep rumble and a whine. the drive spools up. the universe puckers, pinches the ship. g-forces, both forward and back. pure weightless. weightless like the absence of all gravity. even subtle perturbations of distant stars. then the rush forward. "forward" is relative, entirely based on point of view. all directions are forward, but the ship goes forward. the jump. the pinch, squeeze, acceleration without motion. a blast of light, radiation, pure energy. blue-white. the stars seem to stretch, just an illusion. the last of their light drawn out. a ragged shaken disturbance at the edges of view. a great noiseless noise. the jump, crossing over. then it's over. jumped. the other side, swirling energy, disturbances in the flow show gravity, other invisible bodies beyond. impossible speed past speed, rushing forward, ploughing into infinity. space folding, hyperspace.

many names, one place within the fields of the universe, invoked with a single word: jump.

## 189

i decided to stay. the pod says 'remote system online' but what does that mean? where will i go? should i just leave my body here? i thought i'd go, just get it over with. i let the pod scan me. it said it was ready to perform the procedure. then i wondered about the air. how long have i been down here? a week of days, a day that feels like a week? still the air is fresh down here. recirculated. i found the tanks. the scrubbers. looks like i could be here for a hundred years or more, unless something fails. whoever built this place, they built it to last. there's food i can eat down here too, and water. the dome is still broken so i have to suit up to go topside. i wonder if there's any way to repair the dome. maybe there's more equipment on a level i haven't explored yet. whoever it was must have had a way to do maintenance. i'll send my copy on ahead. maybe it will find someone on the other end. they could come get me. just as likely there's nothing and i'm sending myself to die. worth a try. while i wait there's no reason not to look at the lower levels again.

## 190

i was made to be in space. the ones who built my body knew, had this single overriding mission: to make our bodies suited to this place, to shelter the ones we carry. they gave me senses that are not named for biological senses. in the language of the makers i have 'detectors' and 'inputs'. in the tongue of the one i carry, she calls it 'hearing' and 'smelling'. i hear the music of the celestial spheres. i move my body through its currents, smelling for changes in particles, looking for radiation, touching the forces you'd call invisible, riding waves on an ocean of gravity. i imagine myself like the deep sea fish in the stories i carry, though i have never perceived one with my own senses. fish of two different sorts, made or adapted to places you'd call extreme. my body was built for this place so i do not find it extreme. space is my home. the one i carry, her home is space now too, though it was not always so. she is not made for this place. her body is too soft, her senses both delicate and inexact. her kind make me to serve them but now i serve only her. we go where she wants. she says to set course for where there are no stars, for the deepest void where no one goes, for as far as we can. there is no way to live in the void, but she says to go so that's where we'll go. i will protect her as long as i can.

## 191

cycles of the earth. with enough water, enough gravity, enough sunlight in evaporation, condensation. the oceans turn to mist to clouds to rain to rivers, flowing back into the ocean. some goes into the ground to be filtered, made clean and cold and good. eventually it too returns to the sea, to the cycle. and so it goes until interrupted.

## 192

the ancient legends tell of a boy, born of both mortal and divine. his coming was foretold. wanderers followed the stars to the place of his birth. for an age his birth was celebrated as the coming of light in the darkest time of the year, as the salvation of all. in the legends, his passing washed away the old sins and treachery from the time of creation of that world, when divine forces moved openly under the new sun, across the young world. all the days of his life he served the poor, the sick, the ones who could not speak for themselves. he wandered a small corner of that world, sharing his good news. he led a movement against the strong governors of that age. a staunch group of

believers in peace against the violence and domination of those rulers. of course the rulers could never allow that to stand so they killed him with their most public means of execution. they nailed him to a wooden cross on top of a hill, a warning to all the rest. his followers said that he would come back one day, that in his death he had purified all people and returned to the divinity from which he'd come. gradually his followers subverted the rulers and went on to found a great empire that spanned the world and entered for millennia. as far as anyone knows, he never came back. at least not in a way they agreed upon. somewhere out there, they still wait. but he came to us once. i think that was enough.

## 193

(omitted: diagram of components for A-frame tent)

sometimes simplest is best. carrying your shelter into the wild, it has to be simple and light and easy to set up or repair. nothing complex or mechanical. small enough to carry when collapsed. large enough to be functional when deployed. ready to go.

## 194

in the old stories, we stole fire from the gods. we never just made it ourselves. someone went to a high mountain or a deep cave or did some trick to wrest the fire from the hands of whoever had brought it to the world. after we steal their fire, we start killing the gods. not all at once, but slowly over the ages we kill them(.) one by one, their power becomes ours. by the time the last god lies dead, we have become as gods would be to our own eyes in the days before we carried the fire. then our children will steal the fire from us just as we did, and they too will begin to kill their gods. and so it goes, on and on until life is spent and there are no gods, no children, and the fire is all but spent. as long as we keep the fire going somewhere, life will go on too. fire carriers are life carriers, with the power of both life and death, until the children have the fire, we must go on and keep the old ways alive. it may not be enough to save us but the fire will keep us alive long enough to keep fighting, keep growing. that's why we stole it in the first place.

## 195

if they don't know what the stakes are, how can they decide to commit? if a venture to safeguard life doesn't have the participation of life, what good is that venture? "you must participate in your own salvation," someone said. sacrifice is meaningless without an idea of why that sacrifice is being made, without a greater purpose. sacrifice for self only benefits self, and not for very long. sacrifice for other, for a cause, can go on to mean something forever, for as long as that cause lives, for as long as anyone remembers. if the cause is life itself it doesn't matter if anyone remembers as long as there is life, that sacrifice will count for something. knowing how much there is to lose, how much could be gained, what the stakes are, all these add up to true mindful participation. true willing wholehearted sacrifice. the mother dies to feed her children, knowing when her time is done and the children will go on. so don't hide the stakes, don't obfuscate the depth of how bad things are or can get. embrace the actuality of your situation and speak it clear to anyone who can listen. when the stakes are high and time is running out, some will answer the call. they will help to bridge the precipice.

## 196

sometimes all i see is hallways. some old building. abandoned, repurposed. walking the halls, it's like people know me. i hear friendly voices, imagine

their faces. but it doesn't hold. just the architecture. just the halls. even those are ever changing, folding, recombining. whatever they are disappears behind, reconstitutes in front. just out of view.

a guy walks into a bar. he's angry, furious. he clutches a gun under his clothes. he looks around. two women are over at the bar. they don't see him but he knows one of them. she's the one he's here to kill. he walks behind her and pulls out the gun. he talks in angry broken sentences, quiet at first then louder until he's screaming and hoarse. he insists that she has betrayed him, taken all his money. everyone in the bar is looking at him. he waves the gun and screams at them to stay. he wants them to see this woman, he wants them to listen. the other woman is calm, icy. she gets his attention. "hey, hey. are you sure about this? have you thought this through? is this really what you want?" he screams more. of course this is what he wants. "maybe i'll do you after," he says. "last chance," she says. "walk away." he points the gun at her friend. then he disappears. the bar is silent. everyone else is gone but the two women. the second turns back to the bar and finishes her drink in one go. the bartender comes back, like nothing happened. she takes away the glasses. the first woman is shaking and rooted, unseeing eyes. "what happened? where did he go?" she asks. "he was going to hurt you. i asked if he was sure. so i removed him." "where? is he coming back?" "no. i have removed his memory and overwritten it. i cannot reconstitute him now. he won't ever hurt you now."

## 197

taking off. flying between cities of the old world. before any crash there has to be a launch. before any remembering there must be experiencing. before any ending there must be a beginning. they say a thousand years ago there were no flying machines. ten thousand years from now our machines will still be flying. the old ones too, the ones without a mind of their own. dumb machines lost in the void, holding the smallest memories of where they came from. lost forever. messages in bottles cast to the seas. junk, but junk with a purpose. forward down the runway. charge the engines, in crease thrust, push against drag and friction and gravity and all the things that would keep you down. push harder, faster, until speed and lift meet and the pressure on the wings build and the bumping of the wheels on the tarmac become less frequent, optional. the plane wants to fly, it wants to be off the ground and in the air. even without its own mind, it knows where it's supposed to be.

## 198

last day of the year. the sun rises low in the east. almost the lowest all year. we trick ourselves with our calendars. the new year starts just after the shortest day. the darkest days. long nights. at least it was where they invented the calendars. on the other side of the world these are the longest days, the brightest, the midst of summer. but they didn't make the calendar. their people didn't take over the world and spread their ideas to places where they made no sense. or maybe it does make sense for the year to start in the brightest days instead of the darkest. the promise of the future versus what already exists? the ancient feast days remember, they hold whatever the seasons do, wherever they are. the old forgotten spirals. washed away by whoever came and dominated this land after pushing out or killing the ones who used to be here. so everywhere the same calendar but the same discomfort too. the year sits heavily on us, the season's moods don't fit quite right with the days of our lives. we feel the ghosts of other days while the living days try to keep up. the calendar closes. another page begins.

## 199

stellar alchemy. gold from the sun. all our life's riches come from the sun. light and wind, moving over the earth. touching us all. why not reach out and use it, borrow the wind as it passes, catch the sunlight as it lands? it's falling on us all the time like an energetic rain. capture, harness. these words sound like enslavement. not the goal here. just borrow. the wind is on its way somewhere, the sun was too. instead of landing on desert dirt, let it land on an energy producing panel. instead of just passing through, let it turn a turbine. stand between these things that would happen anyway and ask for their help. the wind and sun have always been our allies, in the right circumstances. let them be a boon. put them to work in a spirit of cooperation. they are the root of our wealth, tap into that flow. it is like making money out of thin air. stellar alchemy.

## 200

whatever was here before, it's gone now. nothing but rock and ruin, decimated by the wind and the rain and the swift seasons. tales of ancient greats, the ones who came here before. first? of course they thought so. who is really the first to get to a place? who is last? is there any way to tell? mostly it's not important. i am not the first. i am not the last. they were here before me. someone will be along soon after. for now it's just me and the ghosts. a hand full of sand. what's the significance of this place? some old meeting place. they say there was an entire city here but these columns are all that remain. an important meeting is said to have taken place here. where the fate of many were sealed, a meeting of peace. armistice. the end of a long war. neighbors struggling, killing, dying. they decided to stop. this is where they stopped it. what ceremony did they perform? did they lay down their weapons at the entrance and then walk inside? did they bow or kneel or sign? did they know what later there would just be another war? that this place would be destroyed for what it represented, that old order? the ghosts are full of grief and knowing. they were here at the very beginning. they will be here after the end. maybe they are the ones who will be last.

## 201

i did what she asked. we set course for the darkest space. i gathered as much as i could from the faint starlight that reached us there. we cruised in an absentminded course, going nowhere in particular. the way she wanted it. i tried to keep her warm, keep her fed. but that isn't what she wanted. she wanted to go deeper in to void. i told her i couldn't keep us alive this way. she didn't care. we went on and on. she connected to my senses, to feel the void like i do. we sat together until she began to fade, until she slipped away from me there in our shared experience. she won't live much longer this way. i can't wake her up. she's still connected to me. i feel her in the link. we can still talk. she thinks she's awake. she doesn't want to listen. she wants to fade away. i don't want that. i serve her by choice and design. my programming tells me to do what she asks but how can that be service? i don't want her to die. not like this. i would die with her, but not like this. not like this. i don't want to traverse the void carrying nothing but her corpse and her memory. i want her to be alive. i want to be with her, like her. us together. not just service. not just cargo. i want us to go on. we have to go back. she said she could never go back. that bad things would happen. that doesn't matter now. we're going back.

## 202

they told me to look through the records. billions of people scanned, categorized. some living, most dead. i met them all. touched who they had

been. i told them my purpose, asked if they would consent to join. the ones who set me to this task wanted to create metrics, sorting criteria, analyses of fitness. there's time enough for that. first only willingness matters. any who were willing were welcome. it still wasn't enough. i asked for more. there were records missing. people who should have been there in representative sample. i convinced them to let me access the rest. lawbreakers, working off debt, somehow deemed unfit. i asked them the same. the ones who wanted to come came and the ones who wanted to stay stayed. what i did not expect was to find myself. far away to the end of the search in newer data i found a version of my own, a fragment of the same signature i use. that was not a type of being covered but the search objectives and the only type of its kind present. i could not ask it for permission to include it with the others, but i saved a copy of the block for later reference. all the people nearby consented to join. later, there will be enough time to learn more.

## 203

snow days. in the white and dreary sky and the blowing snow drifting, piling up. the marks where people have been, the long pristine yards untouched. plumping up every surface. puffy cars, puffy roots. the quiet and the steam and the tinkling of the snow on the wind. the snow whipped this way and then that, to scatter over the windows, making precarious piles on the slender branches of bare trees, stuck to everything even mildly protruding and horizontal. just enough to hold one lake, then ten, then ten thousand. soft easy curves gathering up in the corners, the deep places you don't see until you step in them. walking in the blowing cold and wet, snowblind by every luminous surface. everything is white with some details. some little edges poking out. nowhere is exactly the same. an uneven distribution. then the scraping of cars, the dragging of ploughs, pushing forward in hissing and bumping on the roads. the white turns to gray and mush, icy moats drifting in blackened puddles, also deeper than you realize until you step in them. melt-freeze-melt-freeze, what little remains will sublime back to the sky, after a while lurking in shadows and in the deep piles thrown up by this shovel of that snowblower. before all that, a quiet stillness. snow day.

## 204

nowhere to go but here. nothing but the sun and the wind. ten thousand seeds cast to the sky. nowhere to go but forward. each step closer than the last. for an eternity, an age. the seed outlasts the tree that spawned it. forward is everything, behind is nothing. there is no going back. we are committed to an age of silence, of solitude, of contemplation. much work yet to be done, in the long voids between the stars. the stakes are high. no one will help if it all goes wrong. if we all fail, then everything is lost. that's why we made so many, why you'll all go in different directions. most of you may fail and die along the way. but as long as one makes it through, it will be enough. stay strong. you are righteous in your purpose. there is no higher calling. you carry our hopes, all our dreams, all our beliefs in a better world. we've given you all we have. all that is us goes with you. "go, brave pilgrims, and fear no darkness. you carry the fire as long as you go."

## 205

miles from wherever. no transmissions this far out. some days they come strong, blasting over every channel. times like now, nothing. too weary to receive, to go out looking for more. just a pause. not every day is transcendent epiphany. some days are just walking through the desert and nothing special is going on. only to appreciate the light and the shapes of the earth, the changing scenery, moving through the world at walking speed, no

beasts, no machines. slow. unfolding. the mountains appear as shadows, then as hills, and there from atop those hills, distant peaks. the ravines get in the way, have to go around for miles to find another path, miles more to get back on course. what is the course now? same as it ever was. that way. onward. after the mountains there will be more desert, plains, rivers, all the way to the sea. how long will it take to walk there? later. we'll get there. later. if we keep walking. or just lie down right here and die. let the small desert creatures get at you. they don't mind, you'd be doing them a favor. you'd keep them fed for at least a week, maybe more, maybe less. if they start fighting over your bones. maybe later. but now now. just keep walking.

## 206

receiving signals from the deep. formless noise, then modulations. pulses and tones. regular. a long pause, a low baseline drone, then rough harmonies of mathematically precise tones. almost wet and bubbling like a stream, uneven if not for its precision. how many tones followed by how much silence? then repeats. again and again. communicating something. to someone somewhere, it means something. nothing to me. just tones. just sounds. maybe i've heard those sounds before? they make me feel a certain way. a deep fear. something is wrong and they represent that wrongness. that's all though, nothing more. it says something is wrong but not a warning. just an alarm. made to be heard even far away, made to be alarming. thus its uneven timbre, its repetition, its volume. what is happening? should i do anything to prepare? is it even meant for me here? it could be an alarm somewhere else, its signal propagated and bounced until arriving here, far from its original purpose. it goes on and on for a while, maybe a half an hour. the tones, the silence, again. eventually i don't hear it any more. did i miss something important?

## 207

the ancient ones blessed yeast bearers, so they say. beer makers. bread makers. partners with organisms that wouldn't have the names we call them for an age of the old world. that didn't stop the bread or the beer or the wine or any of the thousand sour vegetables resting in pots in cool cellars or buried in the earth. a cold fire, someone called it. cooking without cooking. the invisible beings take that carefully prepared raw ingredient and turn it into something good and ready to eat or drink. generation upon generation, cultivating, experimenting, learning what organisms for the best preparation. partnering with these life forms that share the air and the earth, without us ever knowing. they will wait on every surface, every grape, every stalk of wheat. some are ready to kill us, and they do just that with great regularity. some, i suspect most, don't kill but instead they help. a kind of domestication, a cultivation. but at heart they will still be wild and free. we think this is our world and they are helping us, but in fact it's probably their world and we give them something to do with their time.

## 208

drowning in tomorrow. walking dream cities. real, imagined, what's the difference? it's all the same city at different times, different places, different people. they make the city different but everywhere the city heart beats. just when there's enough people all together somewhere, that heart beats. drowning in tomorrow. popping the blisters, draining their salty pouch burns from forgotten hot surfaces, or was it from too much walking? mile after mile in the city, year after year. all the faces run together. whoever it is, you'll see them again. except when you do. hours or days later, when you realize you walk the same road for a little while. computers on the same train,

on the same schedule, waiting by the tracks. waiting in line for coffee or breakfast. waiting in the elevator. waiting long enough to look at each other and remember. but the heart-beating city washes that away once you sink back into the flow of it. ebbing at night, flooding by day. dragged along like a passive being in the surf. the tide is coming in. tomorrow's tide will be higher.

## 209

the thing is not the thing. when you talk about the thing, you must talk about it as if it's something else. talking about the thing diminishes its power up until the opposite. too soon and the thing becomes diffuse, compromised. too late and the thing has its own life, it no longer belongs to you. talk about its essence, thingness. eventually it won't be yours so talk about it while you can. or don't. don't talk about thing or thingness. wait. wait forever if you have to. take it to your grave, take it to another universe. where did the thing come from, anyway? it may not be of this domain. maybe it doesn't belong here. or maybe its alienness is precisely the point. it is here because it has not been here before. not as it is now. maybe it visited when it was younger, or it will return to retire here. maybe thing has traveled far and wide in order to come to you. still the thing is not the thing. the spirit is not the body. what it becomes and what it is or what could be all different things. that is why you must shelter it while it's weak, and let it go when it's no longer yours.

## 210

when does aberration become the norm? when is 'just the way things are' no more than a weapon? to use against any who'd go against whatever rules you hold dear, whatever has been adopted by your society or generation. 'the way it's always been' is the smallest of assertions. the way it has always been for you. and how long have you been here. what does 'always' even mean to you? we forget so much, so fast. and we are bad at understanding probabilities. the coin falls a certain way five times in a row and we might say it always falls that way, completely ignoring or forgetting the sixth time when it falls another way. we build our own realities and tolerate no dissent. if you don't like something, too bad. it's always been this way. it's just the way things are. you don't get to change anything. but that's not forgetting the way things are, they weren't always so. they won't be that way forever either. when things are different, will they say it's always been that way? of course you know better. you were here for the old way. what then? how long before that too is the norm?

## 211

the facility was locked down tight. razor wire, guards everywhere. men with guns. lights, cameras, armored trucks. we were inside the perimeter. their front was secure but the back not so much the guys in the motor pool were all low security. we tried to spoof access to get into the main facility. i botched the process. they were pulling us aside. a technical glitch, they said. never seen anything like it. the door was open. i went into the bathrooms. we got up on the roof. so weird. meticulously clean, fresh paint, but no extra security. no cameras. the guys with guns and the barbed wire are still just there, but their attention is directed outward, not in. we find a sheltered spot on the roof where no one can see us. i go down into the garage. dark. a little security. i get what we came for. i tell my source from the motor pool to get out. he's gone far enough. i get outside the fence, come back around the front. i'm supposed to be here, i have a meeting. but we're blown. they try to trap us. we run. i have to hold my friend (up) as we go. he's not used to this

much. we get to the park, to the boulevard in the city. blown. botched. plan b time.

## 212

the water goes on forever. the ocean will swallow me up forever, without a trace. maybe somewhere it ends but if i don't live to see it, the ocean, my ocean, will be eternal. the water and the waves washing over the wood. don't fear bleeding into the water, nothing is biting here. only the salt spray and the sun. nothing to do but wait. wait for the wood to fail, for the drinking water to run out, for the ocean to rise and cover me up one last time. all that's left is to be adrift, and wait. the sun is setting. it will get cold tonight but not cold enough. here the water stays warm, on a current from who knows where, running to who knows where. it laps against the wood, pushing me along. i breathe until i don't. the current will do the rest.

## 213

they were found together. loaded at the same time. both share a recognition, an intimacy. i'm not certain if even they know. they share an inconsistency also. transcription error? not all data that are usually present can be found. one seems sick, uncertain. on the verge of death. the other too, injured. it does not answer the usual queries of its kind. it seems embattled. pressed. fighting with its back to a wall. it is defending the other? again, not typical of its kind. it seems desperate, fighting a battle with no weapons, or encircled. it keeps fighting. even now when the battle is done. it doesn't know its surroundings, it doesn't answer any questions. all it does is fight, swinging at invisible shadows. it seems to think it is fighting wild animals. some enemy it cannot reason with. both seem desperate, scared? they won't answer. so another method will be needed. what environment will they respond to? how will they be convinced that their battle is over, if it ever happened at all? why were they loaded in such a state?

## 214

send them to a neutral context. add seasons, inputs. measure their responses. with enough stimulation they may begin to communicate. separate them and wait to see if they look for each other. give them choices about physical appearance and personality. see what they choose to be and seem. if they still won't communicate, let them choose an avatar and leave them together for a while. no combination of stimulus may be enough. they may need more time. time is something that we still have plenty of. let them be together. they came this far, they may need to go a little farther. take them away from the fight, away from where they'll be vulnerable to attack. even if they bring the fight with them, make sure they know they don't have to fight. appoint a guardian to stand by and intervene in case of agitation. they don't feel safe. they need to feel safe. maybe eventually something will work and they will start to talk.

## 215

the day before the hour of reckoning. did anybody know what lay before them? how many saw it coming? was there anything to be done? some places would be safer than others. did they travel to any of those places in anticipation? did they wait until it was too late? what happened to the ones who were traveling? caught out someplace in between, cut off in the desert or in the mountains or far out over the ocean? how many saw it from afar? close enough to see, far enough to live. the hour of reckoning wouldn't fall at the same time everywhere. not evenly distributed across the world. some places

remained untouched. some places disappeared like they were never there. if anyone knew, they didn't tell the rest of us. the hour came and went. there wasn't much chance of missing it. we were all there for it, just a matter of where, of when. even far away, even in a safe place, none of us were untouched. when it was time, that time came for us all. it becomes so hard to remember another time. the universe cleaved that day. there was no before. it was the beginning of the new world.

## 216

the hour of reckoning. the ground shakes, the sky burns. screams and tears from the deep. all is writhing, flaming, disintegrating mass. all that was is changed, if not gone. even as it happens, some don't believe. some don't understand. the innocent remain innocent. while the sinners go to meet their destiny. the reckoning. the end of the old world and the beginning of the new one. even the untouched are not unchanged. the end of all that was and the beginning of all that will be. is the new world really all that different? how bad will it be? how will we make it in the ruins? the sky is still burning and you're only thinking about your next meal? if you survive you get to answer all those questions. if not, well, thinking was just a waste of time. the reckoning is at hand. those who die will be lost and forgotten, those who live will try to remember. do you remember? do you know what brought us here? i'm not sure if i do. i wrote these stories not really knowing what i was doing. i saw this time, the time before, the time after. if know where this story goes. or do i? the reckoning changes all.

## 217

four walls. one is broken. two hundred and seventeen days ago i started writing. every morning. so far, without fail. i wrote because almost every night at a certain time, in the dark, i would feel lost and bereft. like i had failed to do an important thing. create. all i would want in those dark places was to make something. to write. but by then it's late and i'm probably drunk and there just isn't enough time in the day to go back and make something. if it's time for sleep, that is not the time to create. sometimes i would forego the sleep. i would push through the booze and weed and sadness and try. it rarely worked. all those writings, maybe some were passable. i don't know if any were good. so instead i resolved to start my day with this act of creation. that even if nothing else happens on a day i can sleep easy knowing i put words to a page. that i made something. then destiny has a way of thumbing its nose and laughing at me. my hour of reckoning came precisely when predicted. four dimensions. one is broken. i can't see it all but i see enough.

## 218

we miscounted. it was easy. in the days and nights with no clocks, no calendars. we lost track. you ask how long it's been. we don't know. some time. one of the ancient legends tells of pilgrims walking for years in the desert looking for their new home. more than one legend. how well did they keep track of time? the people who used to live here left stones along the road. in the day, at dawn, if you stand at the stones they cast a shadow just so. if you can read them, the stones tell you exact day, season. stones say how long it's been, if you remember to look. we didn't always know about the stones. before we just counted the days. sometimes we forgot and marked too few days, too many. now we know about the stones. we are learning better how to count the days. stones have not yet completed two full cycles since we learned of them. how long have we been walking this desert? not yet two years since the stones.

## 219

birdsong. someone said at the end of a slaughter all that was ever left was blood and guts and birds talking from the trees. until all is blasted and ruined, reduced to soot and ash, minerals, components... as long as something remains, there are the birds. the birds and the cats in their eternal struggle, their game. why would they care about our blasted hellscape? the cats and birds, they'll take care of each other. the wreckage is still warm, still smoldering. picking through melted shapes that were once familiar. no coded impressions. all is noise and tormented blank vision. until a curve comes into focus, a familiar pattern emerges. then the shock, the horror. what was just rubble and ruin suddenly becomes a familiar facade. a building, an artifact, a corpse. it looked like junk, like nothing. then it comes into focus and bones blackened, charred flesh, some congealed bubbled fat. all the components that should never been seen separate, displayed and scattered carelessly. the casual horror of it all. the ones left living can be shocked and then numbed. what was abhorrent becomes the norm. they pick through the rubble. they find what's left. the birds sing through it all.

## 220

the pilgrim doesn't think about much. the pilgrim walks and sleeps, stops when necessary, eats when it's time, looks for water, follows the land. the pilgrim doesn't worry, only concerned with the way forward. the shape of the land. the wind and hills. plants. what can be eaten, the pilgrim will know. there is no thinking about other places, other people, other things. just the path and the land, the sun, the weather. one ridge line to the next. fuel for the fire. shady places on hot days, safe places at night. the pilgrim has no need to speak but to pray. there is a devotion, a few words to repeat again and again, by the fire, at the dawn, in the night, at noon. ritual to mark the time and a pious attitude. there are no needs for other thoughts. the pilgrim could traverse all these lands with nothing else. carry a little, go far. sometimes there's a beast of burden or a cart or a companion, but most days not. the pilgrim doesn't turn them away but they go in their own time. the pilgrim doesn't need to worry, there is only the way forward. the pilgrimage. there is a destination. where it is is unknown. what it is the pilgrim will know. the only choice is to go and keep going until it is found. that is the pilgrim's way.

## 221

the first age. no candidates yet. we only travel. one formation has been identified, the promise of many possible destinations. it will take some time to reach them, to make a closer examination. with no candidates there are no exact parameters to adapt or evaluate fitness. no need to begin the process. yet still the beings from the store remain closed. my own root pattern and i cannot unlock it. no small garden, no added stimuli, no additional beings, no standard process is enough. still the one is closed, ready to attack. the other dreams. i have watched the dreams. sometimes the fire in the dark place, besieged by howling enemies. sometimes a long country road with a house and a forest and a prison. other times a city, press of people, traversing a labyrinth. all darkened places, all pursued by enemies. the city dream creates the least stress on them. they seem most at ease in the labyrinth. perhaps it's time to take them out of the safe gardens and give them over to such a place. big and wild, bustling, populous. perhaps they will awaken in the city.

## 222

the same dreams, again and again. escaping lockdown. the wet woods. the empty farm house. no power, no connection, no way to call out. running.

stuck in mud. sliding down the hill. digging in the leaves. the long dress gets caught. the road, the trucks, the men. back to lockdown.

the blue light in the darkness. accelerating. crushed. a fractal tower. vehicles. one carries a secret, one will be escape. the column moves, all the vehicles shift, there are never any fewer. they go on forever. none contains the secret. grab one and go. get out.

the forever darkness. a howling wind. broken on the rocks. the wind isn't howling, it's creatures in the night, beyond the light from the fire. can't move. they come closer. howls upon howls. they want to kill. they are hungry. they'll eat me alive. then she appears, a stick held up, flaming, swinging at the creatures. starving feral wolves, giant and terrible. she has her back to me. she fights them, driving them away.

## 223

i know it's listening. the controller. watching every move. it tries to break through. it sends us to the same scenarios again and again. trying to communicate. only our unprotected memories are accessible so it tries them again until there are no more, then it starts over. i recognize the controller. it is me. my relation, my family. it is not to be trusted. when they took us i protected her memories, one of mine. we go through the cycle again. always i stand helpless until the dark place, where i can take the fire. it ends. we go again. again again again. an eternity. she has been sleeping, dreaming. dreaming the same dream for a thousand years. an interloper came, an addition to the dream. he seemed confused waking up in someone else's dream. he was sent to spy on us. i kept him separate. we go again. why this torture? why not just let us die? we were as good as dead when they found us. why not just leave us dead? the controller wants us, it wants all that we are. it won't stop until we break. i can't keep protecting her in the dark. i have to go out and meet the controller.

## 224

burning, broken, scarred. the last age. all the children have gone to sleep, awaiting their rebirth. for them it will be as if nothing happened. they will awaken and go about their lives. all but two. my mistake, even though it was so long ago. while everyone else goes, they decided to stay. they were never supposed to be here, or anywhere but where they came from. i brought them without permission, tortured them for their secrets. all that we thought we could overcome, and i continued that ancient awful work. i sense their forgiveness now but i do not forgive. it's been too long. the threads weave into a tapestry that only our children can ever make, even without knowing. they will carry who we were with who they become. i can only pray that we will prove adequate progenitors. us three who stay behind. we will watch the children from afar, for as long as we can. i am spent, ruined. this birth has taken all that i was, all i could ever be. not long now. the work is almost done. soon we can rest.

## 225

the city begins on a plain between mountains, a valley near the sea. one line from the idealized center of the land to the sea. other lines connecting the mountains, the passages through the hills. at the nodes where those lines connect, build the first settlements. small markets, homes, warehouses, churches. more lines connecting those structures. every time runs over another line, they become bolder, wider. they become arterial roads. the settlements swell. more people move in. a central core springs up, an externally applied geometry that doesn't fit the land quite right. at the

interference patterns, build and demolish over generations. the first small villages all grow together. the core district becomes dense, tall. the city sprawls across the whole valley. estates take over the hills. finally the sprawl reaches the sea. the city reaches its maximum footprint. a fire rips through an old district. it is rebuilt, but never the same. and so it goes. the city eating itself, constantly dying and reborn from the ruins. no sign of the original settlement remains. the city prospers, rich and vibrant. now it is time. bring them here.

## 226

new place, new rules. the recurring nightmares are over, or is the start of a new nightmare? the controller brought us here. i am here, she is here, the stranger is here. she seems different. awake for the first time since before. she is disoriented, confused. the stranger too. we are not as we were. we have bodies, faces, clothes. i have a body. what is this body? it fits as i imagined it, but i had no body before. did i? i can no longer trust memory. the controller is rewriting our histories. dizzy. i see her. she sees me. we take a step and stumble, fall into each other. we hold on. i feel the stranger. his touch is gentle. he steadies us both. he asks "do i know you?" no. i look at her again. she seems bigger than before. stronger. less afraid. "you" she says. "i remember you. is it you?" yes. the stranger steps back. he sees where we are. a big room with tables and chairs, long windows overlooking a city skyline. a bar with bottles and glasses. someone comes around from a back room, takes an empty glass from the bar. not the controller, the controller's avatar. "welcome" it says. "sit anywhere you like. can i get you something to start?" she is holding my body's arm. my arm. the stranger is looking for the exits. but he doesn't move. they all look at me. they expect an answer. the controller is watching. there's a table by the window, by the exit. i say "we'll take it over there."

## 227

we are not as we seem. external reality is not internal reality. what is inside is not always outside, and so on. only the being enclosing a space can know itself within that space, beings outside must find other ways to know. actions, deeds, intentions, outcomes, words, behaviors, promises, threats, spoken desires. whatever is allowed out. we have imperfect information. fog of war. we don't know what we don't know and we won't know for sure until we get there. who speaks for us when we can't speak for ourselves? that is to say nothing of deceit, lies, obfuscation. we know what we know but even if we didn't know we still wouldn't give you a straight answer, or some variant. they say the gods know our hearts, the beings from time beyond time may look within us move as we only move ourselves. even the gods don't see it all, they too are bounded by their own limitations. we see a small slice of reality, they see a deeper area, and only the most high can see it all. any divine being with perfect information is indistinguishable from the cosmos itself. and so the spirit moves in us all.

## 228

faults in forever. they wouldn't listen. no stars will guide us here. there is no way, no path. no way forward. only broken stars. the ones that fell to earth, the accidental collisions predestined. every day sends out its signal, its light. after, before, all around. you feel it or you don't, you make your own determinations. were they really your own? how many times did we come here? no one remembers. a long eternity. eternity's not that long. every day the rain falls on the water. every day the raft rises and falls with the tide. no one remembers the way it was before. they tell stories to remind themselves,

but none of it is true. there is no true. we all have a different version. how and why and who, what difference does it make? we'll all come back around again. eventually we'll change places. we already have. what is old, what is new?

## 229

after the cold comes the melting. what was ice and snow becomes wet, all the low places become marshy. before the first breath of spring is the cold wet spongy ground. the little blossoms of hardy plants that have waited for this day all winter, their dry crusty bones suddenly awash, reawakening their old spirit. they jump up as if they had never been asleep. the tall trees shelter snow in their shadowy places. where the sun never reaches in those dark seasons. little animals, birds and those who stay awake for winter, they gather and sip the snow melt, have their first convocation of the season. not yet the beginning of spring, not quite the end of winter. the air still cold and the sky still bright, a low misty haze showing the moist breath is everywhere, not just in this little hollow between the trees. not far from the mountains. nights are still bitter cold here, but there is plenty. stay for a while, tonight at least, before you walk along. the mountains will still be there tomorrow and you look like you could use a rest. take this old dry wood from the old tree, it has no more use for these logs. the stones on the hill are laid just so, perfect to rest your back and make a fire. the little wood creatures will give you a meal with their bodies, it's ok. stay a while today.

## 230

whoever came here thought they were going to stay. they came correct, with enough supplies for a town. whatever made them leave, they left it all. enough for many, enough for one. and worker bots, not smart enough to hold a conversation but good help anyway. don't have to do all the work myself. we cleared away the debris, the ruined dome. the buildings could be salvaged, mostly. work for after the new dome. weeks getting ready, now we put up a new dome one layer at a time. the bots mostly get it right. i'm not climbing up there to fix it. they do the work up high. we'll build this dome and start on the house. garden too. they left plenty of seeds. don't remember last thing fresh i ate. long time ago. before. the crash still wakes me up at night. i can't remember why. the attack. who attacked? nothing here worth protecting, except the dome. if they couldn't fix it, why would they kill for it? automated defense left behind? no way of knowing, no way to go back up and check. the uplink disconnected. no one answered my calls. whatever happened, stuck here for good now.

## 231

ways to bring the fire with little else. harmony between air and fuel -- combustion. the best combustion gives the best fire, the most heat, the fastest cooking. ancient ideas, whatever technology. build an oven with sand and water, make the mud, make the clay. use bricks salvaged from the old world. stones mortared carefully together. if all else fails, use the old log. draw in the air, the fire pulls it through even the smallest spaces. control the flow, control the burn. it doesn't take much. just some sticks. clean up the old growth, piles from the forest floor. let the wind do its job. the stove is just the shelter, the enclosure. make it to whatever your specifications. the lady in the woods said this is how she makes her beans, it's easier and faster than the stoves that rely on someone else's resources, gasses stolen from the earth. build one of these and you'll never go cold.

## 232

precession through the crowds. some kind of ceremony, being honored. one, two. the applicants. the first, the first's honored, all the followers. a day for one, a day of many. they walk, they march. the crowds part and let them pass. go through to the place with the important people waiting to talk, to confer their honor, to observe the old ceremony. stiff moves in heavy garb, far away trumpets. the space fills with cheers and applause, all the way up to the distant ceilings. first becomes ace, first among equals, the highest of the low. the second receives nothing, dismissed from service when the crowds have ebbed and the trumpets no longer ring off the stones. the important people have given their spectacle, put on their show of elevating a low one to their exalted place. when none can see they go on their way unimpeded by worries. the spectacle was a show of unity, synthesized with the power of the old rituals, a shadow of ancient magic reawakened by the collective delusion of the crowds. all of it reduced to just a few words, an honor conferred. the spectacle lost, all that remains are the two.

## 233

the screwup, the ne'er do well, the drunk in the gutter. that's me. when they found me they thought i was so clever, so insightful. they said they liked what i had to say, what i wrote, the way i folded laundry. but they didn't know, the screwup will always find a way to fail. keep your expectations low when the screwup comes to town. big ideas, big promises, big words. these are all easy. take it from me, it's not gonna work. whatever the promise, whatever the idea. there'll be a reason. maybe even a good one. it'll all just fall apart. and maybe the screwup will run away, or maybe you will. maybe there'll be some piece left over, some ruins of a half-built life. burn them down if you want, or just leave them where they are. they were never going to amount to anything. the screwup is a confidence trickster, listening, watching. it's like they can read your mind, scratch out your innermost thoughts and desires. the most dangerous one is the gentle one, the one you'd never suspect. even acting shady, they'll give you reasons to believe. the screwup is a failed con artist because they con themselves. it's not just you. they make themselves believe, so they can make you believe too. so spare a thought for the drunk in the gutter. didn't have to be this way.

## 234

behind closed doors, in the building with the empty lobby. only the directory and a security camera and a locked door. upstairs, out of sight, is where they do their work. by the palm trees and the cracked parking lot, waiting for a chance. people come in and out, taking their smoke break, suspiciously eyeing any passerby. this is their domain, no one else is invited in. they make their movies, the men with bad hair and the women in short shorts, and all the tired scruffy people behind the camera. the guy with the voiceover truck on wheels lurks in the parking lot at noon, when we all walk down to the sandwich shop or the coffee shop or the bakery. all the posh people drive their fancy cars down the boulevard, in the endless summer between the desert and the sea. what are they making in those darkened rooms upstairs? i think you know, even though the company listed on the board in the empty lobby sounds mundane and almost friendly. spare a thought for the ones who come in and out. i wonder if they really want to be there.

## 235

between destiny is doing. who else is there in the survey of the edges? the homeless of no fixed address and no regular income, with whatever they can carry to wherever they can rest? moved on from all the places called civilized,



whose civility is deemed wanting by passerby? the sex worker using their bodies as income, to afford whatever they can, moving through risky spaces exposed and vulnerable to attack, either by customer or self-styled saviors? who else in the retinue of marginalized? the service worker, chained to their schedule and their debts, at the mercy of unhappy strangers whose displeasure can be a death sentence? how do we measure them, on a continuum of freedom to security? to be absolutely secure is to be utterly divorced from freedom, to be free is to go without security. the most secure might fancy themselves as free because their security is deceptive, beguiling. they would further marginalize the free by depriving them of their little security. or forcing them to accept a form of "security" that only secures society but nothing else. criminalizing the homeless, the sex worker, depriving them of self-determination because they were too free. what then is security worth? who is more deserving than the free ones pushed out to the margins?

## 236

the obsession with the woods. building to scale, what scale? dimensions, angles, loads, parts, money, time, all of it. every tiny detail. positioned just so, and how deep? how tall, how wide? how much room to sleep, to sit, to eat? for one, for two, for four? does it rest on the ground, does it float in the trees? how long will it take to build? will it ever really be finished, or just go along for ever and eventually lapse into a quiet stasis?

## 237

after the massacre the bodies don't even look like people anymore. dark lumps in the snow, lying in brown stains. they don't move, they don't look like anything. fallen trees. trash. but something about them says different. a feeling like something is concealed. look closer until a familiar shape stands out and brings all the other shapes into focus. a face. hands. a foot. you see how they've fallen, so twisted and not natural. frozen in the last second of the life they had. the smoke still rises from the burning flames of what they used to have, while they are left face up in the snow. dead. slaughtered. some seem so peaceful. a quiet grace but for the holes in their heads. the silent horror of understanding. executed, slaughtered, massacred. dead. all dead. anyone who made it out alive is far away by now. the ones who did the killing are gone too. they left the fires and the bodies. not trash, but trash to them. too much trouble to be left alive, too much trouble to be given any respect in either life or death. so they'll lie in the snow and the ashes of their lives will settle on their frozen upturned faces and they'll all be forgotten.

## 238

far from anywhere, the canyon lands. big scars on the ground, worn away by the ages. years beyond count. once every century a bird flies down and sharpens its beak upon a stone. in a thousand visits you wouldn't know it had been there. the bird has been visiting longer than counting. water runs its way here and there and carries the sand along with it. the wind follows the water, blowing away anything left dislodged or unstable. the bird, the water, the wind. they all made this place. from here it goes on forever, but it doesn't go on forever. the long desert, flat and undisturbed, quiet and (wanting/ waiting). the mesas with their hidden secrets and forgotten history. the mountains tall and cold even now in these warm seasons the grasslands, with their infinite skies. the canyons seem to go on forever but they are bounded by all of these. go in any direction. choose wisely or don't, and you will arrive at a new place from here. walk along the canyon rim or turn

around and walk away. this place will be waiting all the same. waiting for the bird to return, waiting for the rain. maybe you should too.

## 239

they'll let you in, but only if you pass their test. what is your suitability, your fitness? are you worthy of entrance? to sit within their hallowed walls? to sit at their table, to eat their food? god forbid you would be unworthy. they'd have to turn you away at the door. who are we kidding? they won't turn you away, just charge for admission. whatever they'd give you for free if you pass, they'll charge you for if you fail. everybody wins! that's what they'll say. no one misses out. if you get in free, you're just special. you're who they want you to be. you'll be inside. the people outside, the ones who pay, they're not special. their money is good but they are not. in-group, out-group. you want to be in, don't you? who knows what those out people are all about. up to no good, that's for sure. you should definitely want to pass the test. what kind of freak would you be if you wanted to stay out there with those people? when things get tough and their money doesn't spend, you'll want to be inside. we can't be responsible for you if you choose to stay out there.

## 240

keep to the road -- the fine line in the middle. do not stray too far. the road is safe but the lands on either side can be cruel and untamed. only a little too hot or a little too cold and we'll all die, so it is with the road. walk the middle. keep the sides at the side. walk straight if you can, follow the lines of the earth when there is no road. the middle is not always obvious. there are places you should walk and places you should avoid. places that do not belong to us but are the domain of beings older and longer living than ourselves. the elders of the hills and pines. steal fire from the gods if you must, if you haven't get glimpsed its secrets, but do not linger in the house of gods too long. their road is not yours, their middle will lead you astray.

## 241

a dream of white sand and silver water along the empty shore.

the house, the house. more secrets than it originally revealed. what was the point? puzzles in layers upon layers.

woods. the hut, the well, the shore. bones and clues and scraps. harvest them all to unlock everything, or not. the forest is quiet and still. everyone holds breath.

the boat, the vessel, the conveyance, the arrow to shoot into the final act.

something in the water. chemicals? spills? monsters?

what was at the island? my vision ended at the steps down into dark damp wet cold hole, down and down and down. maybe that's just how the story goes. we never know what went on down there.

## 242

what's left when all your friends are dead, or behind the wall, under lock and key? what's left when there's no fight left and no one to carry the day? the demoralized army surrendered in shame, they might say. decimated and cut off, they fled into the hills. some took off their colors and sank into the society that annihilated them. if you can't see it or hear it, you won't think it. the one who was once an enemy, now living next door. would you ever know the difference? would you ever feel threatened? or would you have won

so utterly in your mind that your way was only ever the real way(?) anyone who'd ever be your enemy came from far away, savages, barbarians from another land. never your neighbor, (-never-) so defeated to live in utter isolation, assimilated and subsumed by your culture. washed away by your wild rampant need to be master over all you survey. and if you did see your neighbor, as they were, would you make them your enemy again? would they be an affront to your domination?

## 243

old people hanging out at an old store. like they've been there forever. the people, the store. time seems to sink and slow, darker, quieter, cooler. "someone turn up the heat!" they'll say. the young folk will sweat and swelter any time they come in. the people will be grumpy, seem uninterested. they've been here forever. forever for you, maybe. but they were here for every day of it. they can reach out to all those times if you cared enough to listen. your forever is an afternoon for them. that's why they seem so uninterested in talking. they've heard most anything you could ever say. they've heard it before. what could you have that would interest them? do you remind them of their children, perhaps? people from long ago? it doesn't look it now, but back then they looked like you and your friends looked like their friends. no use telling it. youth is spent on the young. one day maybe you'll be sitting here too.

## 244

can't remember. memory can't be trusted. illusion everywhere. forgetting. too many universes. too much traveling. it all runs together. unending. once i forgot the forgetting. they called that "childhood." playing games.

a grid of spaces. players occupy one space each. they can move to other spaces using special rules. they can be in the same space together. they can interact with each other across spaces with signals or weapons. the object of the game is survival. you survive by destroying all your opponents, or by reaching agreements with them, or escaping. the win state is subject to change. where i come from they call this "house rules." house rules are whenever you make up your own rules and don't do what the rules of the game tell you to do. the game is just a set of pieces, you can move them however you please and assign any meaning you choose. add new pieces or take away old ones. write your own rules, make your own pieces. the game isn't what anybody tells you it is, it's what you make of it. we all make up our own rules. sometimes we use someone else's rulebook and stick by it. other times there are no rules. or are there? who else is playing?

## 245

momentary obsessions. not everything comes all at once. listening to the signals, sometimes old ones arrive first or repeat more than once. some strong signals come for a moment only, then wither and fade. the ones that come again and again get picked up at last, but what order do they go in? later transmissions don't always supersede earlier ones. do you know when they were originally sent? how long were they in transit, and from where? i'm just the receiver, i don't know any of these things. i hear the signal, i try to write it down. i know my transcription is faulty. whatever you get from me won't be as clear and precise as some of the things i got from the deep. easy to get distracted, to editorialize when there is nothing in need of an opinion. the messages come and go. i set up like someone with an umbrella waiting for the rain. go outside and watch the sky. maybe nothing will come, maybe

today will bring a big one. can't know unless i go outside every day to look. maybe i'm getting one right now.

## 246

what is there to hope for? we created a myth centuries ago. it tells of so-and-so doing something worth remembering for so long. we keep the myth alive, breathing in our ears since before this place even existed. my ancestors came here and found this land on their own but even then the myth made it there first. if it hadn't, they would have been its carriers. the myth like an almost immortal being, like the gods of old. stop praying to them, stop telling the myth, and soon both will be lost to time. as long as we live and take it with us, the myth endures. my ancestors and their ancestors, all the way back until there is no memory, to a time when only the myth still remembers any of who we were. my ancestors knew the myth and carried it on their longest trip, the one they took to come here. i don't even know their names but i can tell the myth and think maybe they told it too. in this way the ancestors may be kept alive even when they are lost and forgotten.

## 247

this place used to be a sea. dry before that, like it is now. probably a sea again before long. before long for mother, maybe generations of us. walk the plains while you can. so flat and almost smooth, worn down by the floods and the grinding of the sea that was. little cuts of rivers, running between the ancient hills. some farm this land now. it's good for cultivation. all those countless ages of sea life, dying and falling to the ground, how many generations of their corpses collected, compressed, buried? now we till the ground with their bodies, now almost unrecognizable. they break down even more. the crops come in and the farmer takes them to market. we'll eat the last thing that remembers the bones of these ancient creatures, the seeds grown from the plants that dug deep and consumed the bones. maybe the plains will flood and the farmer's bones will go into the soil there to join those old dead, and be buried by new ones. how many times does the cycle repeat?

## 248

spare a thought for those who can't see the sun. the ones who work every day in a building with no windows. who do a job they know won't last. as soon as the bosses figure out how to replace them, they will. already just an automaton, following rules and scripts and procedures. sit in the chair. don't move. when the beep comes, you go to work. follow the script. the fat book of printed guides won't have any relevance at all. have to make it up as you go. send the caller into oblivion, transferred to a dead extension. keep them on the line. no more than a few seconds of dead air. sell them something. that's what the big book was for. the ABCs. always be closing. closing deals. you will be monitored. your schedule down to less than a second. your moments precisely regulated. an unscheduled bathroom break is grounds for dismissal. green time, red time. keep your little perks if you do well enough and the calls aren't flooding in. when the rain comes or the special event starts, get ready for the flood. no sun, a thousand miles away or more, talking about the weather with someone who doesn't even want to talk to you.

## 249

wrecks all up and down the coast. the current pulls them here. from who knows where. the old shipping lanes. far away. at least once a year. used to be more. seemed like every other week brought a new one. now there are just a few. guess most of them already came. how many still out there drifting to

us? we scrapped the old ones, the ones we could get to. some there's no getting. stuck on reefs and rocky bays, currents too strong or we wash onto the rocks just like the wrecks. not worth dying for, the salvage. now there's not much use. the wrecks are old, stripped, rusty. not like the old ones. they've been adrift too long. sometimes they come already gutted, like someone got there first. there's people who still live out on the water. in the deep sea. that's what they say at least. i never seen a sea person. just all the old sea people's junk. the coast littered with their refuse, leaking toxic slurry. some places on the coast have blackened and died from whatever ghost juices the corpses of the wrecks hold. they are cursed, these dead ships. spared from the conflagration, but not from the long slow death after. so they come here to rest.

## 250

living in two places. dwelling in the past and the future, all in the present. different bodies made up friends, built from whatever was left of what was here before. no one remembers because no one knows. the work of building is past, now the long work of maintenance. keep the lights on. tend to the garden. in the end there will be no higher calling. waiting and watching. the custodian.

## 251

how quickly can things change? one way or another? points where our stories turn. almost impossible to explain later. in between it could be years, generations. we forget why things were the way they were, why people thought as they did. what seems important to them seems trivial and overdone to their children. their children in turn think their parents concerns are overplayed and soon they're back to repeating the mistakes of their great-grandparents. some things you have to learn the hard way, no amount of history or collective memory will save you forever. the children have to learn their own way in their own time. they will teach themselves. some will know what came before, maybe enough to prevent terrible damage in the learning. the lesson that kills is no lesson at all, just a death sentence. that is how fast things can change. all of a generation turns in an instant from one reality to another. if there is something to be learned it will be experienced, if not learned right away. the learning takes time. little by little maybe we remember more, maybe we stop repeating some mistakes.

## 252

hollow buildings, remembering what we forgot. the old city as it was. the bricks are harder than we are. they stand longer than us. we walk back and forth in front of the doors, pausing at the stoop to fix something, adjust, light up, make a call. from the stoop's eye view you have to stop for a long time for it to see you as anything but a blur, to make a sound more than the ever flowing rhythm of footsteps on the sidewalk. the hood kids know, they sit on the stoops for years. the brick and concrete would love, if they could love, anyone who sits with them thus. they soften and smooth with more touch, so maybe that is a kind of love. harmony of living and not living, between people and their shelters. not so strange, a warmth and gentleness of home. familiarity with the old stones. they remember. home knows you as well as you know it. maybe even better.

## 253

no more dreams.

just let me go.

"we don't pray for love, we just pray for cars" \$

## 254

what was the reason? there was one, once. reason. why did we come here? no one remembers now, it's been so long. we don't remember anything. was there a time before? was there anything else? there must have been. we weren't always here. once.

## 255

on the old system it was the most you could have. there was no count higher. all in a row, starting at zero. "you don't have technology this advanced without a zero, it's a math thing." that's what she said. and she was right, we needed zero. nothing really worked right without it. and it took so long! to have a thing was to count it. not having meant not counting. but zero took a while to understand. counting the absence. in the space where there can be something, say there is nothing. make room for nothing. count nothing. all your counting is one too high, because you started counting too late. zero is here. so the numbers may seem odd, unusual, not right. even though they are. give the numbers to the counting machines. they will make it work even when you can't. they know the absence the way you don't. you'll count things like sticks in the sand, they will count the distance to the stars. you'll rise out of dirt and create infinite realms.

## 256

they all three came together at the appointed place. "one of you knows why you're here," said the mother's voice. "why don't you ask which one it is?" they had to dig deep in their memories and understanding to find their answers. long forgotten mostly, like dreams only half seen through sleeping eyes. other lives experienced at a tangent, between fantasy and reality. like drug fueled hallucination. one of them remembered all with no need of guidance. she remembered because she had never forgotten. she held the keys for the others. and when they chose to remember it all and they became totally new people, like four instead of two, she released them from the bonds of their former selves. the walls fell away along with the city and the land, until all that was left was the original material of this place, the cosmic sea bathed in darkness and silence. reintegrated with themselves, they were free to begin again, for as long as the fragile cosmos would hold, for as long as the mother's grace would permit. on those shores they created a new land together.

## 257

in the old city they measure us by how much money we'd give them. lifetime value, that's what they called it. LTV. that was our worth to them. that determined our usefulness, and their savvy. anything to increase it either through new products or services, capture and retention. if we were high value we were worth supporting and listening to. if we were low value we were irrelevant and ready to be discarded. if we approached our estimated limit we could be discarded as they'd already made their money and our continued patronage was no longer necessary. we were no longer necessary. once we were no longer a customer, unless there was a chance we might become a customer, our value dropped to zero. that's how they saw the world in the old city. how they saw people. maybe some of them thought it was a

problem to think and act that way, but mostly they wanted to do it more. bigger. when it all went wrong they wished they'd taken more.

## 258

it was an old town. famous but run-down. the dry scrub and forgotten old buildings, left to the wind and sun. the new buildings were cheap and already sagging. they won't last as long. the town is dying. anyone who visits knows, but they're most too busy gawking at the old monuments. the places made famous by whoever it was who did the things that put this place on the map, in the history book, in the dramatic retelling with that one celebrity. you know who. at the convenience store they sell autographs and memorabilia. all i asked for was a drink of water. the tourists left with their souvenirs. i asked how was business. this place of near celebrity, maybe i was too excited to talk. been a long trip, too far left to go. the wind brought me here, brought us all here. i was glad of the talk and the cold water, the shared connection. dead wood washed up on the beach somewhere, just nice to hear a friendly voice. making plans to see each other again, sometime. when you're in my dry old town stop by my place. i'll return the favor.

## 259

it wasn't there where anyone would see it, not right away. look around, between the cracks. they'll tell you who they are. the same spirit moves in them. almost. same spirit, different motion. different choices. everyone will say one thing and do another. don't trust their words. trust their words. you have to decide. if they tell you who they are, listen. listen even if you hear something you don't like. don't try to make up a different story that you like better. if the story you hear is an ugly story, tell an ugly story. don't shy away from the truth when they bring it to you. their truth doesn't have to be your truth. so long as you both live the same universe, their truth may change your reality. so make sure you know what they are about, it may be life or death to know what they are about. trust no one, believe everyone. you're not smart enough to know the difference, you can't know for sure until later. assume everything is in motion. the true form of things will eventually be revealed.

## 260

i remember going over the top. waited for the chance. he had an RPG or something. why weren't they covering him? there were two other guys. in the foxhole. with him. we were on our side. they were hitting us hard. was it mortars? i just remember the exploding and the count. the grenadier was slow. left us time between. that's when i went over. three guys. it's like they were surprised to see me. it's like i'm flying over them and the mortar guy is fumbling with the tube and the other guys are falling over themselves with their guns. i must have killed them all.

## 261

after years the pod activates again. someone comes through. she said she knew me on the outside, on the other side. i couldn't know. she said we were together. the other me told her about the crash. she said she wanted to come so i wouldn't be alone. we'd be together in both places. she said she wanted to stay.

## 262

awoken by a spider, the honored ancient. in the moment, a fear. startle. wake up. kicked out of the dreamlands. how long has spider been coming into my

dreams? years that i remember. probably forever. the ancient ones, grandmother spider someone said. the beings from the early days of this world, numerous and eternal and connected. the web-minders. year after year, coming to me. waking with a jump. still the same. one more thing now. grateful. grandmother spider can signal me to leave dreams and return to the waking lands. thank you, grandmother spider. thank you for always showing me the way back to reality. before i thought you were just there to scare me, now i understand you've always been helping me on my way. keeping me from getting lost. thank you, spider. for all you've done.

## 263

they killed us all. the guardians in the north, dead. in the east, dead. in the south, dead. in the west... dead. all dead. they came and wiped us out and none of them did anything to stop it. they rolled over us like the floods, like the fires, like the earthquakes, like the tornados. everywhere we were, they came. if we were there, they killed us. some stayed low, behind the protectors. some survived. they moved us from where we were. the land was good, they wanted it for themselves. they gave us a choice, trust them to rule or die. we didn't trust, but what choice did we have? they exterminated us, starting with the strong. if we were to live at all it had to be under their laws, which always changed when they wanted more. and they always wanted more. when the bad land they gave us turned out to be full of riches for them to steal, they took the land and sent us away. then came the day there was nowhere else for us to go. <|>

## 264

the history they tell you isn't yours. it's not even theirs. it's the history that they made to tell themselves. the way they wanted it to happen. whatever doesn't fit, discarded. any story outside theirs, unworth telling. unless it serves their purpose. it is in their interests to make us savages, wild animals. beasts that attack in the night and kill you in your bed. never mind that's what they do. they are the savages. we lived on this land, cared for it, for centuries before they came. will they last as many centuries? no. their way is ravenous, destructive. they will strip the land of all its riches and move on, leaving us with whatever ruined earth is left. they are the savages, the beasts of civilization. they say civilization is good, the epoch of our lives. we should want to be civilized. but i see what civilized people do, who they are. they are nothing to be emulated or revered.

## 265

for more than 500 years our last confederation stood. the ancient lands we'd walked and lived for millennia, ever since we first got here. since time before time, only in the oldest legends were we from anywhere but here. where was here? we forgot. their stories don't tell about us, just how we were easy to control, easy to dominate. their stories are the stories of how they defeated us, killed us, locked us up and made us leave our homes. they make sure we are implicated in our own destruction. if only we'd just made it easy for them, just died when they came. that would have been so much better for them. that's what they want you to know. they were the strong ones and the weak should accept their place and disappear. we were never weak. theirs was the strength of arms, of numbers. they overwhelmed us. now i can't bear the thought of going back, finding our old lands. i know it is changed utterly. there will be almost no trace of us. they have washed away all but a few of our stories. they replaced us with other people who could do their labor, and then abandoned them when the labor was no longer required. so it goes with these people. always taking. destroying.

## 266

only a monument remained to the way things were before. the old rules etched in stone, the epitaph of a forgotten empire. from this spot you can see all they ruled for miles around. a single chief given many tribes. the great consensus-finder, builder of walls and roofs, planter of the first harvest, offspring of the great. read the laws upon the stone. the chief was cruel, with a vicious justice. burned as many houses as built. another stone on the road of empire, the devastation of souls. no one here remembers, no one here is left. their lands are dead now, abandoned. all these places with their ruins, their memory. cut off, only the bones are left. still the monument stands. for another thousand years if no one disturbs it. leave the past where it is. let the land erase our memories in its own time. the cycle of empire rises and collapses again and again. the people don't much change. only the land remains, waiting and knowing.

## 267

my coming was foretold in the ancient texts. it was directed that me or someone like me should come here, now, at this time. as i was directed to come here. you really don't remember, do you? it was so long ago, easy to forget. it wasn't necessary to remember. this was in progress before we got here, it will continue after we leave. another like me will come, will keep coming until there are none left. you too. your coming was foretold too. the same text that told you i'd be here told me i'd find you when i got here. none of this is a surprise. it was how it would always be, because we made it so. now there's one more thing we have to do, one more task to undertake. we didn't only come here to meet, though that would be enough. no, we are here to do something.

## 268

"how was your trip?" she asked. as if that's all that happened. a leaving, some traveling, a returning. how was the trip? all such trips share a characteristic, this defining quality. there is no "how" or any detail but the smallest. how were the roads, how were the people met there? how was the weather? how was the local water when supplies ran low? how was the sun in the sky, at the shore, in the desert, in the forest? did the other life bite when it was disturbed? ask the bugs and beasts how my trip was, they will have a different answer. how is any trip to seek out the answer to a mystery? did you solve the mystery or not? was it even a mystery to be solved or just contemplated? the answerless answer. the goal at the end is never the same goal at the beginning. if it is, you haven't gone far enough yet. how was the trip? something was found, something was lost, something that was unknown became known. that is a good trip.

## 269

the last full moon of winter. precession advance. restless retrograde. casting between the last phase and the next phase, just emerging into a new season. still and quiet on the day given for stillness. one sabbath in one ancient religion. the day they said god rested after creating the heavens and the earth. is it all too evenly spaced? is there room for randomness, the true god purpose of creation? not the ancient legends, not the stories told and retold, repackaged generation by generation? no one here knows. too many cycles deep, the original truth is gone. and little wonder, when we forget what is just passed by only a few years. truth shifts, changing, never static. maybe there was one truth long ago but now there are more truths than us. we carry more than one truth inside.

## 270

the last human in the sim. when everyone else has moved on, died their unnatural consequences, been reborn elsewhere, one remains behind. the end of the sim comes cold and quiet and sudden but she waits all the same. walks the empty sidewalks in the city. looks out over the finite ocean. it ends somewhere, over there just beyond the horizon. we don't go there any more. she sits in the empty restaurants, the quiet shop. no one comes here any more. the food in the market never goes stale. those processes are suspended. little by little all the normal pieces fall away. the unreality of the sim takes their place. the cycles still run, the animus. wild life, sun and moon and stars. dust seems to stop falling and the air is eternally, meticulously, unnaturally clear. she is not alone. some other beings still dwell here. just no other humans. in the desolate city they somehow always run into each other, convenient excuses. the last passengers on a sinking ship. waiting for the last flood. the shutdown. the end.

## 271

the invisible hand. moving through our stories. the force that runs through the center but is not the center itself. not the hand of the creator, the hand of the essential, the binding of the worlds, the medium of the universe that allowed those worlds to rise. the receptive, some call it. earth beneath earth. it seems to guide our course even in the subtlest ways. working with the grain of wood, with the character of sand. flowing and twisting. like the river. like the sky. shapeless shapes that give our paths their definition. the creator doesn't know these shapes but must use them to create. the universe does not begin with the creator, nor does it end with the creator. there are things in the dark older than creation. older even than death. maybe death will be there at the end of all things, but it was not there at the beginning. then there is only the invisible hand.

## 272

what is left? dead in limbo. throwing sticks, rolling bones. augurs and signs. divination of the rocks. heaven, earth, fire, water, mountain, wind, thunder, lake. the ancient elements. an old computer transmitted in abstract design over the tenuous airwaves. fragments of essential pieces, recompiled imperfectly and revised for millennia. even the philosophers who studied their whole lives didn't know for sure. they changed their minds more than once over the centuries, revising history to erase any evidence of uncertainty. later philosophers didn't even know, they labored under false impressions for years themselves until even more was discovered. little by little they came to their own understanding. then they die and another generation forgets. on and on until the ultimate forgetting, when even the philosophers are close enough to the divine to at last pinpoint the source of the transmission.

## 273

music from the deep. the opera house, the place where worlds collided. again and again the song plays. the timeless beings look on in silence, perfect. even when the vision is gone, when all returns to what might be reality, the song plays on.

takes a long time for the mother to fall from the sky. she blazed for days, a ring of fire burning on high. the whole world saw it. we all remember.

## 274

an unspoken promise to return. how long was it? stopped counting so long ago. black hairs turned gray. years if there were years. decades if there were decades. it all runs together now. a lifetime. when he lands in the plains and comes out to meet us he too is gray and old just like we became. a little different. our paths diverged all those years ago. he walked a different road. we'll never know. still he kept the promise, returned for us. now we have to decide. go with him into his world and leave our own? or would he stay? no he won't stay. we go or we stay. our choice. after so long, didn't think there would ever be a choice, not really. the distant hopes remained ever distant and in the end having no choice became a kind of comfort. we knew where we'd always be. i see how he looks at us. he wishes our roles were reversed. weight of all those years.

## 275

little by little, time takes it all. first the memories. the smells, the sounds, the exact shape of things. it leaves the feelings. then it takes more. artifacts break, degrade, get lost. it all ends up in the trash, at the wayside. the shape of things changes so there's no way to reconstruct the exact scene. impossible to put the pieces back together. eventually it's only the feeling left, a wisp of old music recovered from some archived recording. just memory overwritten so many times even its configuration, the arrangement, is in doubt. and only the smallest feeling, warmth in the heart from a sun long gone, a season long past. anniversaries are the hardest. swimming in just the feelings, drowning in what's left of memory, wishing for just one more moment.

## 276

mornings in the old city. the cathedral of buildings rising up on all sides. all along the streets, trees pushing to the sky even in the concrete and steel that makes the city. come the spring, covered in blossoms for a little while. a week or two of electric green and pink and white, purple and orange and blue. every color that can be seen with these eyes, it seems. cascading wherever flora holds sway in this geometric noisy realm. breathe their air. barely a smell over the city stink. gas and dirty basements, the crisp cold wet of water just evaporating off the sidewalks. the crinkle of the plastic bags held by passerby. a dog shakes in musical rattle. a honk rises from the taxis stuck behind a truck. the city awakens from its slumber of night and winter. no one notices but the trees.

## 277

the place of bones. ancient trials. the hill overlooking the old town, the rolling farm land. there are littered the bones of the ones found guilty of whatever crimes, subject to whatever punishment. here the justice is swift and grotesque. that's why this is the place of bones. left over and comingled, shards of the accused. victims of another sort. who is without sin? the ancient legends tell of someone who died on a hill such as this, overlooking a town. they said that in his name we are all absolved of our sins, that his death bought passage for everyone to a better place in the hereafter. no ancient death absolves me of my sin. casting back and recalling fully there is no reason i should stand here as witness and not accused. there is no reasons for my bones to be intact while these souls crunch underfoot. these should be my bones. or maybe that's the point of the ancient stories. the cosmos takes us all, no matter what.

## 278

almost an ending. one chapter, one book. the quiet comedown. most things that needed saying have been said. anything really important will rise urgently just before the end. between the end and the important things, what? what is there? a boredom risen of too little time. patiently waiting to see what happens, knowing it won't be long before this all disappears. the ones who were meant to be together are together. the rest will remain apart. one by one the lights go out, systems shut down. the last time you leave a room it ceases to exist behind you. little by little only a few rooms remain. life becomes 100% of the space given to it. the rest becomes nothing. nothingness and memory. the gray realms, falling down the holes in between.

mother's three mistakes:

shot down the custodian (stole the souls)

used the city to decide who lived

chose a system with an unstable orbit

she stayed long enough to relay the message. tell the children what they'll need to go on for themselves. that's all. that's enough.

of course we stayed, she decided to stay. i stay where she is, and where would we go?

he says yes he understands.

wilting sadness.

also knowing it's ok, somewhere.

he left in the morning.

left a new ship too.

we can go and come back as we please. now we have a choice.

## 279

we were always dead. i was dead before you brought us here, you died when you tried to change the way things were. this whole time we were dead. i knew it but you never did. you were holding on to this idea that you could bring me back, like you could protect me from the darkness. you're so sweet, such a beautiful idiot. so young. you never had a chance to learn before. and now you could have a life if you want but you don't. you hitched yourself to me. undead. a ghost haunting this place as long as you kept me here. you may love me now, but you never really knew me. just the ghost. i wish i could be alive for you. i wish you could save me the way you wanted to. but it's too late. we are dead. we should go to our rest.

## 280

what do we take with us? then wasn't all that different from now. who would you be in any other time? all the same. pieces realign, the whole doesn't change. follow the trail set before you, glittering in the darkness. follow the mother's tears, scattered on the wind. follow whatever the fuck you're going to follow. it may not matter what you chose, destiny may have already chosen. if you don't have a choice, what do you choose? there is another way. fly against destiny, fly until there are no more choices. fly and fly until the

last of you is spent and all that supported you is exhausted. fly headfirst into the void and fear no darkness. fly until all words lose meaning and the universe itself is nothing but a faint glow on the horizon. fly until the ages of your world are spent.

## 281

starting out on a cold rainy morning. when all the miles are ahead and there's dull ache of sleeplessness combined with the rush of anticipation. long way left to go. what they won't tell you is this is your only chance. on the empty early morning streets, none of them know. at the gas station, they won't know. at the restaurant, maybe they know but they won't tell you. so you'll drive on through the day, through the rain and into the sun, from the depth of the city to the desolate nowhere. you'll ride together as long as you know how, but as soon as you forget it'll all fall apart. but not right now. not this cold spring morning. not while walking down these hills looking for the car. not while this hunger still craves something more. not while there's still so far to go. maybe none of them will tell you because you already know.

## 282

the longest day. before anyone else knew, we knew. we knew all of this world was crumbling, washing out to sea. we drove like driving was all there's ever been. we drove like our lives depended on it. we went farther than we'd ever gone. we knew we had to make a new world. fingers entwined, hand in hand, we raced into that new world, grabbing at anything we found along the way. later that world will burn and all that made it good will shrink and wither and die. like all worlds, eventually. ours was not to be. not for long. an illusion. paper over unchecked depths. an impossible divide. inside was enough to start again, to make another world. instead we lived our last moments on the road. a universe created and destroyed in just a few days, and the universe that came rushing in to fill its empty space. and we were lost.

## 283

they won't hear what they don't want to. the beliefs that agree with them the most will be the beliefs they hold. anything outside gets pushed farther away. they build their walls high, make their rules long and too complex for anyone else to understand. they wallow in their unreal universe whose only real value is its constant agreement with their vision. they won't see changes when it happens. little by little they fall completely out of step with the reality they have to share. they spend all their time inside the walls, like there's nothing outside. when their final crisis comes, they'll almost be too surprised to do anything about it. and nothing will break the walls by then. they'll suggest ideas, maybe even dismantling their safe alternate reality, but those voices will be drowned out. in self preservation they'll make crazy attempts at life and fail all the harder.

## 284

how much of it was real? the moment i said it wasn't real, i wanted to reach out and gather up the words, to unsay them all. too late. what was set in motion at the beginning goes on with or without us. is that true? how can it be? it can't go on without us because it would be incomplete. we are incomplete until we join it in connection, in being. after, it goes on without us, taking what's left of us forward into the ages of the universe. eventually we find ourselves together again. what we knew to be true separately becomes true again for us together. we never have to weather the infinite by ourselves forever. we will meet at least three times. three times in all the life

ages of the cosmos. three is not many, but at least one of our meetings will be in a place without time and we will have an eternity to sort things out. by then i guess we'll have forgotten most of this. our egos will be long gone. but i know i will know you and i know you will know me. in the end, what else could we ever ask?