

THE RED BOOKS

Transcription Notes

- insertions, changes, or uncertain elements marked with "()"
- * text between "(-" and "-)"
to be removed
- images unlabeled
- diagrams labeled as relevant
- known plagiarized quotes marked with \$
- * footnotes for citations

Rules

- two pages minimum every day
- only offline activities before marking pages
- one page of drawings, one page of text
- at least one sentence of text, assumes two pages of drawing
- drawing optional with two pages of text

6.18.16

1

waking up in any city. anywhere.
waiting for the train, on the plat-
form, 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 de-
pressed 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. twist-
ed broken metal, smoking ruins.
breaking out from the wreckage, kick-
ing and screaming, bloody, like a
birth. thing and no-thing. indepen-
dently, 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, con-
suming, left with only the conse-
quences of consumption. nothing to do
but be patient, consume less. evalu-
ate 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 in-
telligent 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 opti-
mism, 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 adven-
ture 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. in-
stitutional muggers. oliver twist
pays tax(es). stop and breathe in the
still morning.

"ain't no grave can hold my body
down." \$₀₀₀

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. noth-
ing to do but wait. i'll walk in-
stead.

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

9

"be there soon / crash in the waves
the water makes for you" \$⁰⁰¹₀₀₁

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 illu-
sion. how much else could be de-
scribed thus? children don't under-
stand 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 an-
other. 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 any-
thing. it's important. like life or
death important. important to remem-
ber.

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, to-
morrow. 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. scat-
tered debris and dust, scattered ash-
es. 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 deci-

sions 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 shat-
tered 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 collaps-
es.

time traveling. folding the universes
into one. there is one observed do-
main, 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 under-
foot. 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. dis-
appearing 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."

\$⁰⁰⁰

19

this atomic life, searching for self.
society couldn't withstand exist-
tialism(;) 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 chal-
lenge you or the culture you build.
some will wonder, what happened?
those are easy, just tell them what-
ever story you prepared at the begin-
ning, 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 kick-
ing 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 fol-
low and believe will migrate to the
center. tell those people to be
afraid of the others. invent some se-
crets to let them in on. hurt them
secretly so you can help them pub-
licly. buy their loyalty. they will
police the others. keep them listen-
ing, believing, and you win.

"they're at the gate."

19-20

panoramic--

the airplane taxies on the runway,
sun low on the horizon. we stop, we
go, we wait. i reset the song play-
ing. 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 take-
off."

then the bass. the pilot kicks the
plane into gear. the wings shudder.
we're rumbling on the asphalt. quak-

ing, 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 dri-
ver who drops you off. he used to
drive the boat but after global warm-
ing and the sharing economy, now he
drives for uber.

losing perspective, the shapes get (-
harder- more difficult). more dream-
like. 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? un-
til 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 (-ra-
dial- radiant) glow, reflecting on
some tiny reflective molecules, radi-
al 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 gen-
tle 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.

7.13.16

7.14.16

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. \$^{0.01}

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 any-
way?

(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? fam-
ily isn't always familiar, but famil-
iar can be seen like family. is it
the shared experience? what does it
take to be family? is it when the fa-
miliarity 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 gyp-

sy 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 de-
cided to help another being for no
more reason than because compassion
compelled them? not some accidental
act, but deliberately, without expec-
tation or desire for reward? and not
the kind of reward coming from right-
eousness 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." \$¹⁰⁰ 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 state, 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 gen-

erations 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 fi-
nal judgement? and what a lazy judge-
ment it was. the creator tired of
creation and went off to create an-
other. 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 inno-

cent. even without knowing, we are
complicit. we follow the path set be-
fore 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. some-
one 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 meaning-
ful 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. some-
one else said not to mourn the loss
of flowers, that a fallen bloom is
just the start of a fruit. a progres-
sion. 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 genera-
tion. 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 ene-

mies 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 di-
rection. 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-- noth-
ing 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 time-
lines 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 per-
ceptions 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 nowness. but eterni-
ty? that i've never seen.

(diagram: nine illustrations of a
valley)

how many steps and states have i ob-
served? 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 val-
ley. 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 re-
sembled the old one.

58

trying to forget, even when there is
no forgetting. the long walk, beyond
the village in its valley, to the wa-
ter. 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 de-
ceived 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 to-

gether after a storm or after a life-
time drifting, set adrift by the
flood or the rains. and then, untan-
gled, broken free. the current car-
ries 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 impor-

tant. 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 un-
known. "a pickle shifts uneasily un-
der the bun." \$

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 com-

mand. 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 an-

cient 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 experi-
ences. 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 un-
godness. the experience becomes the
story becomes the experience. in end-
less 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 reali-
ty. 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. some-
times that just gets taken away.
these times we use words like
tragedy. miracle. the tunnel collaps-
es. 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 pre-science 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, fuck-
ing our way to sweet mutual release.
impossible acceleration where no
gravity can ever hold. escape, re-
lease, ignite. engulf. creation, de-
struction, almost the purest of abso-
lutes. 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 some-
thing? 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 be-
come forever. just on the other side
of infinite nothing is infinite some-
thing. 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. deja 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.

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 dream-
lands are unstable, much more unsta-
ble 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. ab-
sence of things. void. nothing
nowhere, infinity of oblivion. un-
bounded, undirected, any direction is
the same as all direction. no frame
to say where here ends and there
starts. it's all here, nowhere. trav-
eling into nothing means taking some-
thing in, shattering the slow quiet
dark. even information taints the
flawless void, carrying its memories
and stories through nowhere to some-
where. 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 unrec-
oncilable 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 forev-
er. otherwise it would be too dense
for us to experience. we would all
exist in eternity, unseeing, unfeel-
ing, 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 far-
away 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 re-
claim 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 num-
ber, when we had so mightily dishon-
ored 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 re-

member. 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 dif-
ference 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 al-
ready 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 de-
stroyed, at most it never (-was- ex-
isted). 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 s one 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 hap-
pens deliberately, nothing substan-
tial is built. just little shacks and
hovels instead of mansions or sky-
scrapers. keep forgetting and re-

learning, going round and around
wasting time, repeating all the past
mistakes, resolving problems that al-
ready 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 civi-
lizations 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, no-
mad 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 shel-

ters 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 narra-
tive 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, every-
thing is in motion. like the man
said, i never met a noun, only verbs.¹
but i said i'd do this and i'm still

¹

not halfway through. something comes

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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 travel-

er wrecked on some world.the valley.
an infinite variation of life and
death and good times and bad. the an-
cient 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 get-
ting 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 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 vec-

tor 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 er-
rors. 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 mid-
night. the park was mostly empty, ex-
cept 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, fra-
grant 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. accelerat-
ing, 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 judgment? 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 des-
tiny. 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 polygo-
nal 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 lon-
ers who walk into the wilds and are
never seen again. something eventual-
ly kills us all but some things kill
us sooner, some things kill us unnec-
essarily. 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 in-

filtration, 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 mid-
night 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 despera-
tion, something to be fixed else-
where.

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 be-
come twisted shadows of themselves.
just like us. we are like the trees,
our lives are like the roots. every-
thing 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 pat-
terns. at the center of each a fire,
whatever fire is at the heart of your
house. from a hovel with a weak for-
aged 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. live-
stock, 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 bull-shittin' 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 nothing-
ness 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 genera-
tions 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. es-
caping 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 re-
peats. the old place with its big
rulers, its old gods, its calcified

structure. the new god with promises
and adoration, given the right sacri-
fices. 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 won-
der. 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 com-
mon understanding, shared percep-
tions? then does something cease be-
ing 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 il-
lusion?

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. com-
passion 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 rou-

tines. the crazy ones. one year past
the hour of reckoning and only a lu-
natic 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 inhab-

it. just remember, borders always
change. tomorrow remember to look
again.

11.11.16

11.12.16

148

how much is left of you? where is the most of you? where, what time-line? 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 time-line 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 lest 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 be-
fore, 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 some-
thing. 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, some-
where 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," ~~So~~ 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 organ-
isms 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 ances-
tors 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 any-
thing else from happening. roll up.
bathrooms are clean. play it forward.
crumble. not all at once. a slow
change. good becomes just ok. ok be-
comes 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 any-
way? 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 after-market, 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 ex-
traordinary 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 down-
side. 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 cul-
tured 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 glow-
ing 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 na-
ture. 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 fellow-
ship 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 get-

ting 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, some-
one 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 com-
ing 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 be-
liefs. then, maybe you can see some-
thing 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 every-

thing? 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 de-
spite 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 at-
tacked. 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 cho-
sen.

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, touch-
ing. 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 weight-
less. weightless like the absence of
all gravity. even subtle perturba-
tions of distant stars. then the rush
forward. "forward" is relative, en-
tirely 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 en-
ergy. 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 en-
ergy, disturbances in the flow show
gravity, other invisible bodies be-
yond. impossible speed past speed,
rushing forward, ploughing into in-
finity. 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 per-

ceived 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 al-
ways 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 pro-
tect 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 fol-
lowed the stars to the place of his
birth. for an age his birth was cele-
brated as the coming of light in the
darkest time of the year, as the sal-
vation 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 me-
chanical. small enough to carry when
collapsed. large enough to be func-
tional 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, qui-

et 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 sea-

sons 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 en-
slavement. not the goal here. just
borrow. the wind is on its way some-
where, 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 al-
ways been our allies, in the right

circumstances. let them be a boon.
put them to work in a spirit of coop-
eration. 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 roofs. 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 sublimate 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 contempla-
tion. 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 be-
liefs 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 tran-
scendent epiphany. some days are just
walking through the desert and noth-
ing special is going on. only to ap-
preciate the light and the shapes of
the earth, the changing scenery, mov-
ing 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. af-
ter 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 bub-
bling like a stream, uneven if not
for its precision. how many tones
followed by how much silence? then
repeats. again and again. communicat-
ing 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. to-
morrow'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 re-
turn 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 genera-
tion. '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 for-
getting the sixth time when it falls
another way. we build our own reali-
ties 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, run-
ning 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 dis-
tributed 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 be-
lieve. some don't understand. the in-
nocent 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 be-
ginning 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 smol-
dering. picking through melted shapes
that were once familiar. no coded im-
pressions. 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, flam-
ing, swinging at the creatures.
starving feral wolves, giant and ter-
rible. 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 progeni-
tors. 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 dif-

ferent version. how and why and who,
what difference does it make? we'll
all come back around again. eventual-
ly 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 tomor-
row 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 im-

portant 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 free-

dom 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
sharpen 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 car-
ries the sand along with it. the wind
follows the water, blowing away any-
thing 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 forev-
er. the long desert, flat and undis-
turbed, quiet and (wanting/waiting).
the mesas with their hidden secrets
and forgotten history. the mountains

tall and cold even now in these warm
season.s 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
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 re-

mind 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. forget-
ting. too many universes. too much
traveling. it all runs together. un-
ending. 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 oppo-
nents, 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 remem-

bers 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 re-
members 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 any-
thing 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. life-time 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 ex-

cited 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 every-
thing 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-miners. 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 un-

der their laws, which always changed
when they wanted more. and they al-
ways 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 sav-

ages, the beasts of civilization.
they say civilization is good, the
epoch of our lives. we should want to
be civilized. but i see what civi-
lized 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 col-
lapses again and again. the people
don't much change. only the land re-
mains, 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 con-

templated? 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 fi-
nite 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 for-
gets. on and on until the ultimate
forgetting, when even the philoso-
phers 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 remem-
ber.

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 recon-
struct the exact scene. impossible to
put the pieces back together. eventu-
ally it's only the feeling left, a
wisp of old music recovered from some
archived recording. just memory over-
written so many times even its con-
figuration, the arrangement, is in
doubt. and only the smallest feeling,
warmth in the heart from a sun long
gone, a season long past. anniver-
saries 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.

the place of bones. ancient trials.
the hill overlooking the old town,
the rolling farm land. there are lit-
tered 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 with-
out 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 memo-

ry. 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 dark-
ness. follow the mother's tears,
scattered on the wind. follow whatev-
er 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 head-
first into the void and fear no dark-
ness. fly until all words lose mean-

ing 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 anticipa-
tion. 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 look-

ing 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 be-
cause 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?

3.27.17