

[system::call-upkeep-helper]

There's a god living in the attic, I think. I haven't seen it yet, but soon I will, I'm sure. The only trapdoor is in the dining room, a board of whitewashed plywood covering a window into the darkness above. One night I was sitting, alone though not uncommonly so, at the little round table. I forget what I was doing, but it doesn't matter now. I was aimless. I tilted back in my chair, testing the limits of my gravity, when I caught it out of the corner of my eye—the attic. Open.

The yawning darkness above me had hold for only a brief moment, cunning and deep, before my chair found its limits and I crashed headfirst on the linoleum. My eyes fled shut from the pain shooting through my skull, and I took a time to collect myself. At the end of that time, still lying down, the chair horizontal under me as if sitting in rotated perspective, I opened my eyes. A big, white, ceiling greeted me. Well, a shitty acoustic popcorn ceiling, the usual affair in these older houses, barely renovated to keep up-to-code every other decade or so. The attic was shut. Got tired of watching.

Afterward I lay in bed, trying to think of nothing in particular, failing. I was thinking of my ex, that girl from a year or more before, gone now. Not too far gone: when had it been that she moved out? A week? two? She kept saying the house freaked her out, and it was a mess, and we should just move in with her parents, and she couldn't understand why I stuck around. She certainly didn't feel the need to stick around. She just didn't get it. It was never my choice whether I stayed. Anywhere else would be the same. I stared at the ceiling blankly, trying to think of anything but her.

In my dreaming, there was a stain on the ceiling. It bled down and out from the edge, where it met the wall over my head, red-purple in the filtered moonlight, forming a *moire* across the acoustic ceiling nodules like the surface of water. Like a million tiny rays, intersecting a plane at odd angles, making long and short lines in a dizzying array. Like an oscillating sine wave ringing through my ears loud, loud, louder. Like a halo.

I figured I would take a look, so here I stand. My phone-flashlight in hand, a mask for the dust, a chair atop the table, pushed over to the trapdoor. I don't know what I want to find. I don't know what I'm expecting. But I have to look. I clamber atop my jury-rigged masterpiece, and the door opens smoothly, without a hitch. Well-oiled hinges afford a relative ease to the weight of the plywood.

I had been worried about falling through, but I see now there are beams and joists at even intervals spanning the area. More than enough to hold a body or two. The ceiling is low enough to force me into a stoop, but not so low as to require a crawl.

Moving the width of the attic, soon my hand strikes something I didn't expect. A router. With a little, blinking, red light. Lost connection. Crying out. A network of cables run out of the back, fanned out then bundled together, like nerves. *Ganglia*. No—just fibres, no neuron bodies. *Pseudo-ganglia*. Where do they go? I turn my light out into the darkness once more, my free hand following their length, an oscillating sensory experience: smooth, tied tight, smooth, open, smooth, tied tight, smooth, fanning out once more. . .

I count my paces. I must be over the bedroom now, or near. The cables multiply, forming a dense network before me, spreading out across my compressed height. My light offers only glimpses through their depths, convoluted by their pattern. Through the gaps I think I see an outline of something, sitting in the nest of cables. The cables catch on my face, my arms, like streaks of rain as I push towards it, my light torn from my hands, but it doesn't matter; I have to *see what lies there*.

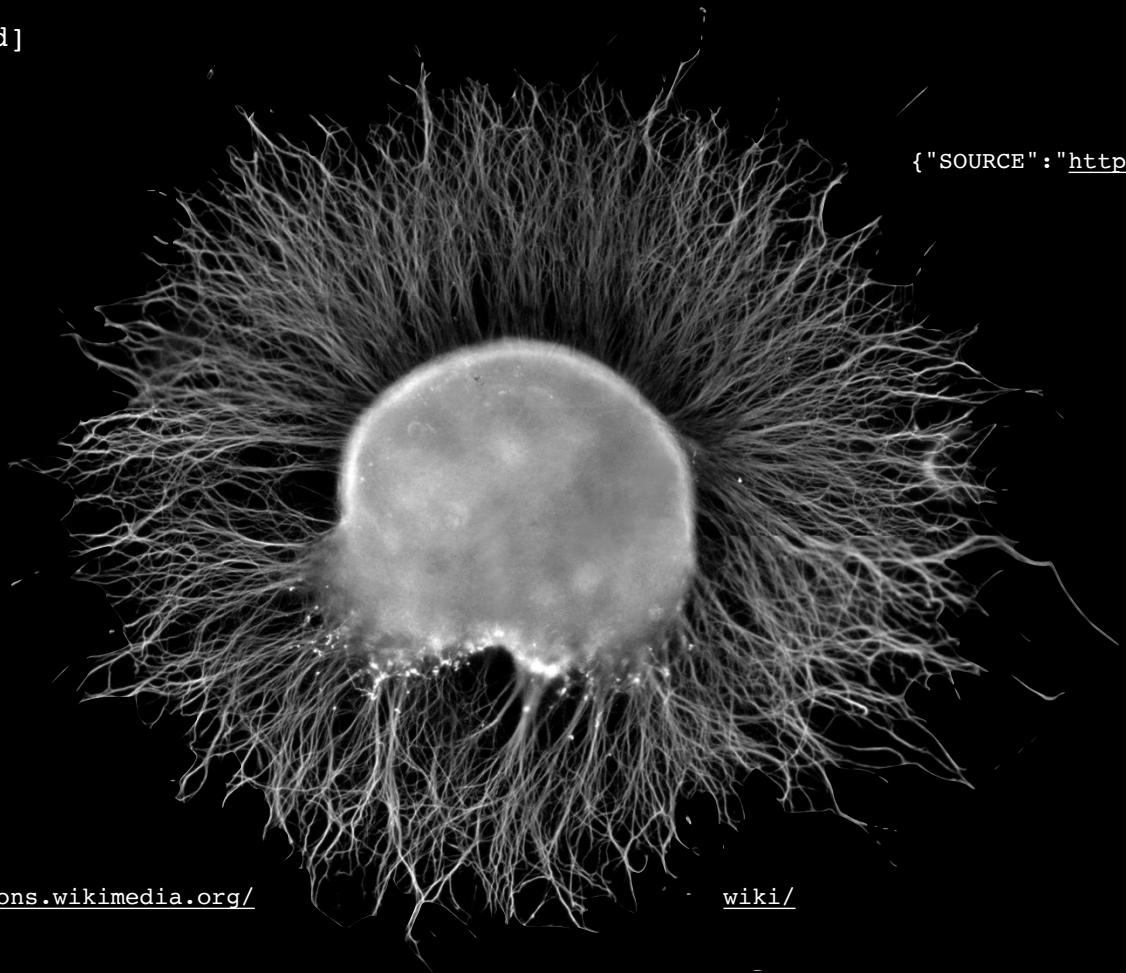
Like stumbling into a clearing in the forest, a ray of sunlight shines down on me. Except here, it shines up, from the center, and only in dim red, bubbling out of the cables. The network, coalesced into something tanglibile, a form to the desires in their pulsating data. A *soma* to the ganglia. A figure lying there, the wires puncturing her skin in every vein, every artery, every nerve. A million million connections, filling her every cell. Her eyes are wide

open, but they are gone. They had rotted away a long time ago. She didn't need them anymore.

I'm already on my knees, as in prayer. I can see the haloes with my eyes closed, the holes in her continuity, the continuity in the network, the network in the *soma*, the *soma* in the data.

I think I'll stay here, for now. Her eyes are too long gone, but I think she'll need a new spleen soon. And someone needs to hook up the cables.

[end]



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