

NEW COLOURS

VISIONS OF DIGITAL TWINS

JONNY HEATH

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Jonny Heath is a writer based in Bristol. You can often find him writing poems for people with a typewriter outside Arnolfini Arts, Harbourside. He makes a monthly zine which you can subscribe to at patreon.com/jonnywriteswords. Get in touch with him at jonnywriteswords@gmail.com.

Ola Michalec is a social scientist interested in the politics of digital innovation and climate change. She enjoys experiencing ‘the sublime’ of critical infrastructures – the sense of scale, awe and complexity of our relationships with cables, chips and networks.

INTRODUCTION

Ola Michalec

Why would anyone write a story about fine-grained models that exchange two-way data flows between the real thing and its representations? The notions of ‘actuation’, ‘feedback’ and ‘predictive maintenance’ don’t exactly lend themselves to the medium of fiction. Though given the hype concerning the so-called digital twins, one could—or perhaps should—see them as precisely that—works of vivid imagination of start-up founders, scientists and politicians. With no definitive tie to the particular material ‘tech stack’¹, digital twins are not quite technologies, but metaphors telling us something helpful about our contemporary technoscientific culture. The promise of accurate representation of complex biological and social phenomena gently pushes us into the obvious conclusion that a twin is all we need to predict, understand and control our future.²

¹To Meta, it’s essential that digital twins contain VR headsets, to NVIDIA, they should include sophisticated models to justify their sales of computer chips, to urban planning start-ups, they’re revamped software products integrating dashboard and maps.

² I highly recommend the Overthink podcast episode on ‘Hyperreality’ for those curious to learn more <https://overthinkpodcast.com/episodes/episode-112> - kudos to Ellie Anderson and David M. Peña-Guzmán for their great work!

But we've heard this promise before³. Over 70 years ago, an interdisciplinary field known as 'cybernetics' proposed a set of theories aiming to describe the behaviours of all systems, drawing parallels between circuit boards, populations of frogs and government policies. A few decades later, cybernetics largely fell out of favour in the scientific community. One of the many fictions exposed was the myth of balance as a 'normal' state in nature. This fiction allowed the proponents of cybernetics to frame their ideas as scientific, hence neutral, hence desirable...

You'd hope that by now we've learnt that governments are not like frogs, who, in turn, are not quite like circuit boards. Yet, companies that are in business of developing digital twins are reassuring us that they're not engaging in an act of reduction but an act of representation. Times have changed, after all, and with more data, more computational power and better graphics, we can tackle any scale of complexity—so the story goes⁴.

³ Or, as Adam Curtis would say, 'but this was a fantasy'. As seen in the episode 2 of "All Watched Over by Machines of Loving Grace" (2011)

⁴ For a primer on the history of scale, complexity and their hidden political power, see 'Systems Ultra' (2024) by Georgina Voss

In reality, digital twins remain largely aspirational. Faced with the mundane requirements for good quality data, access to decisionmakers, or long-term funding, developers settle on demonstrators—mock up versions of their models, usually using dummy data and readily available machines. Digital cousins they are, at best⁵.

In ‘New Colours’, Jonny ran with the platonic ideal of digital twins, speculating what could happen if our societies would mass-adopt those perfectly accurate, detailed and all-knowing representations of cities, ecosystems and people. Stories and poems in ‘New Colours’ are more than classic sci-fi cautionary tales about the (un)intended consequences of innovations. In leveraging the metaphor of a twin, Jonny encourages us to reflect on the seductive and persuasive promise of resemblance, completeness and a special bond between the real and the digital twin⁶. Perhaps once you stare into the eyes of your virtual counterpart long enough, you’d notice how uncanny it is?

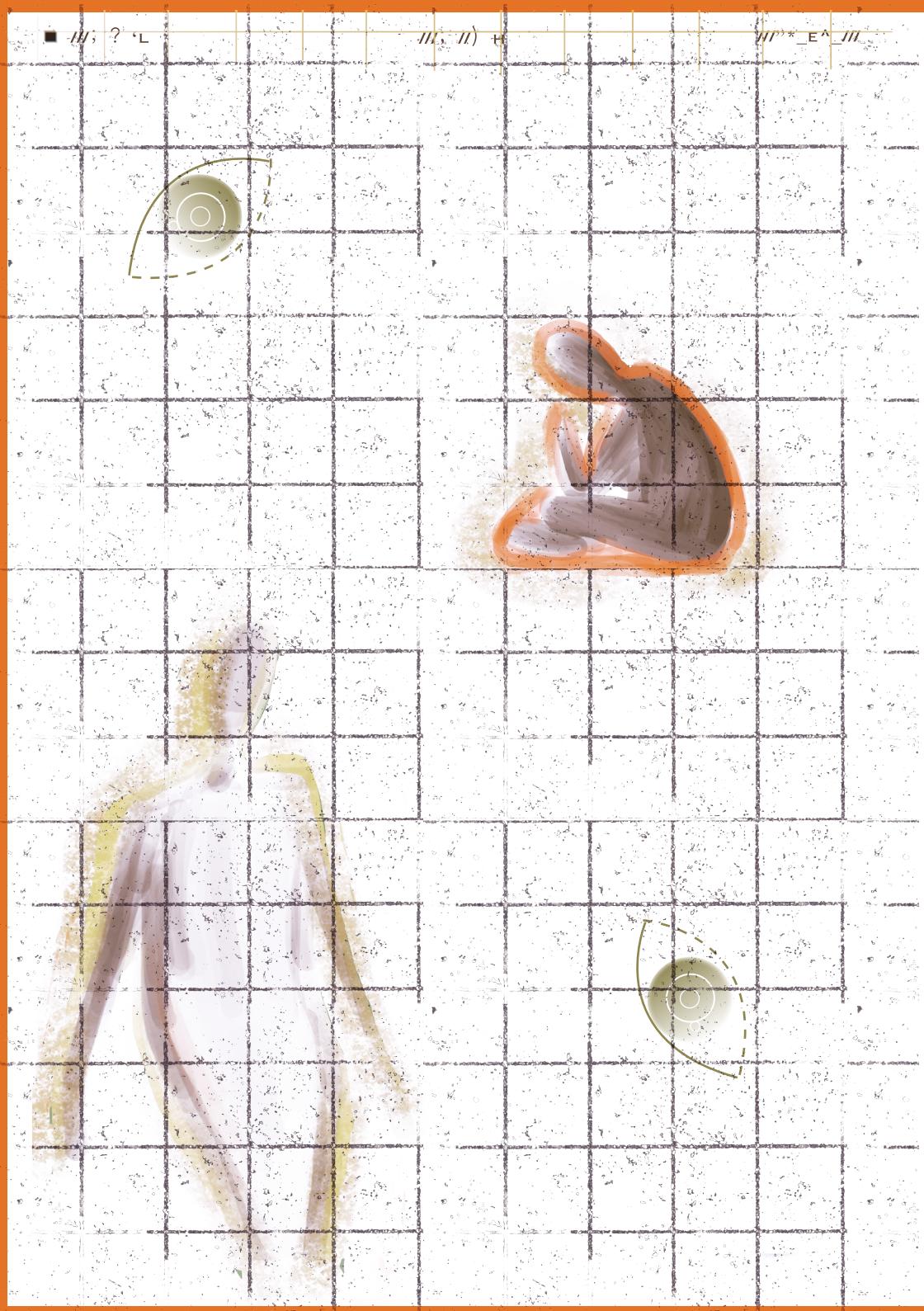
⁵ <https://energyfutures.co.uk/Hype/>

⁶ The figure of twins in the history of science, literature and contemporary politics has been discussed by Edward King (“Twins and Recursion in Digital, Literary and Visual Cultures”, 2022) and Naomi Klein (“Doppelganger: A trip into the mirror world”, 2023)

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SIMON SAYS

I am here, among the reds, where together by candlelight, we make bombs.

This dilapidated place is my only shelter now. It's an abandoned office building in an Unpredictable area of town, occupied by a community of self-identifying reds.

We know how the world really works: how 6G towers emit malignant frequencies, and reptilian overlords run the government. And how all those greens out there are people who've been turned to robots. Those lenses they wear seep chemicals into your brain, make you easier to control.

All day and all night, we prepare for revolution. We've been unplugged from the Matrix. We're ready to do what we must. In this leaky basement, we are cooking up a storm.

How did I get here?

It's all because of Simon of course.

Remember that game, Simon Says? It was one of those ancient games that people used to play without a touch screen. The leader said, 'Simon says, pat your head,' and everyone patted

their heads. If you didn't follow the instructions properly, you were eliminated. I suppose that's what happened to me.

Back then, I was a primary school teacher. I lived in my nice flat and went for coffee with my nice friends and everything in my life was nice.

Then Simon came along.

It started out as an extension of Google maps. Remember that innocent beginning?

One day my smartphone said, 'Do you want to try Simon?' (The questions always seem so innocuous, to start with, don't they.)

Soon enough everyone was talking about him.

Oh, me and Gavin found this great wine bar the other night - Simon recommended it - it was perfect! So quaint and darling! A well-kept secret!'

'Simon utilises data from microphone, camera, location, contactless payments, cookies, and keystrokes to give recommendations tailored just for you. Allow permissions?'

OK. Sure.

And then you were rewarded. Simon has all sorts of great recommendations for this, that and the other.

Great toothpaste recommendation, Simon! Peaches an cream... who'd have thought it? And this one's good for sensitive teeth - oh Simon. You pay such close attention to my conversations.

Heart emoji

Then there was that Black Friday when 3 people got crushed in the Apple Store. That brought in a new media focus on crowd safety, and how Simon could help.

Now his recommendations for where you might go to find a last-minute gift for Nan or grab brunch with your office pals took on the function of evenly distributing human bodies across the grids of our cities, to make sure catastrophes like that of the Black Friday Crush would never happen again.

Then there were all the new virus scares. Monkey Pox, Whale Flu, Donkey Cough. New ones every week - Simon could definitely help minimise these risks as they arose. That's when, for many, Simon's suggestions began to take on a sense of not just individual convenience, but duty. This wasn't just about you. It was about protecting everyone. Simon thinks about all this stuff. He thinks far, far ahead. He has a whole picture, while we only have a very partial one. Simon watches, and he keeps

everyone safe, from present threats, and potential, future ones.

There were matters of public health: Simon's new nutrition profiles were tailored to each individual. By tracking things like heart rate, temperature, PH, and even stool quality (Simon didn't mind hanging out in your toilet) Simon could work out just what you needed to eat, drink, and avoid. You could even have those exact foods ordered for you, automatically, as a weekly delivery - letting your free time be time spent doing what you loved the most.

How did we manage before?

Following Simon's helpful tips was good for you - and, because it prevented hospitalisations, it was also good for society as a whole, as Simon liked to remind you.

'Well done! A healthier you is a happier you. And a healthier *us* means a healthier NHS: together, we are saving lives.'

It's amazing how quickly you get used to things.

Like with eLenses. One minute, they were something peripheral, obscure, even faintly creepy. The next, everyone was using the electronic contacts (coupled with voice activated earpieces) that meant you hardly ever had to actually 'check your phone'.

Remember how ubiquitous that phrase used to be?

After a little while, Simon-assisted vision became the new normal, and the world felt strangely naked when you didn't have your lenses in. I found this out on the day that mine broke.

It was a Saturday, and I must have needed to catch up on sleep because Simon only woke me up at around 9.30 or so. I stretched, reached over to the bedside table and put in my lenses as usual, expecting the usual flood of data into my visual field: news headlines, social media notifications, a map of my immediate locality in the bottom right including suggestions about where to go that morning; checkbox nudges to do things like brush my teeth (forest green: essential), do some yoga (sky blue: recommended); and of course, the glowing auras around each object I saw, giving me real-time data about its relevance, functionality, and predictability.

I put them on. But nothing happened.

I blinked, looked around the room. Nothing.

The speaker system in my home was still functional, so I asked Simon about what had happened.

'Don't worry,' he told me. 'Your lenses have encountered a software error. Your earpiece is still working, so I can show you the way to a repair centre this morning. Then maybe we can meet Lucas for coffee after: they'll be in the area too, and there's a cool new bistro that's opened up nearby.'

So off I went through the city, without my lenses in.

It felt so weird, walking down the street, no longer seeing the translucent glow around objects that told you useful things about them, or the subtle colour fields reminding you of the recommended way to go.

It felt vulnerable: like walking along with your eyes closed. In particular, it was striking to no longer see the predictability levels of anything. The more predictable an object, situation, or person was, the more easily Simon could understand it, and cross-reference it with your needs and preferences.

There was an option within Simon's settings to automatically minimise one's contact with unpredictable elements, which was recommended for the smoothest experience within the app. This ensured Simon worked as well as possible to maximise your wellbeing, efficiency, and safety (as well as that of others).

Through my earpiece, Simon directed me to board the Mildmay Line at Homerton. The train was quite busy, and I noticed I felt anxious as I looked at the people around me. I could no longer see how cooperative any of them were. Simon operated with everyone's safety in mind. So, by definition, choosing not to use Simon or follow his recommendations was a dangerous thing to do. It was only reasonable to give people access to this information, regarding who cooperated with Simon and who didn't.

Cooperativeness was represented with a traffic light system. Very cooperative people were outlined in green; less cooperative people were orange, and then you had reds.

It wasn't always clear whether reds even used Simon at all. Either way, their non-cooperation made them unpredictable, and it also proved their lack of social responsibility.

You didn't see out-and-out reds very often, as they tended to live in more unpredictable areas that Simon would help you avoid in general. But every so often you did see one.

So as I stood on that crowded tube, I felt afraid. How was I supposed to know who was safe, and who might be a threat?

Of course, Simon noticed my discomfort. When we got off the train at Highbury and Islington, as we weaved through the crowd, Simon said: ‘I’ve noticed your heart rate and temperature are higher than normal. Is everything OK?’

I told him: ‘It feels … uncomfortable, that I can’t see how cooperative anyone is.’ ‘I understand,’ Simon said. ‘Don’t worry. I know it must be strange not to be able to see properly, but I’m still working fine! I can keep you perfectly safe if you follow my instructions.’

That made me feel a bit better, until I finally got to the repair centre, and they fixed my lenses. Then I went for coffee with Lucas at the cool new bistro.

I told them about my fearful experience on the tube, and they totally got it. Said their lenses had broken once too, while they were at a gig, surrounded by people. They had to leave, they said. We laughed at ourselves.

‘How did we ever manage before?’

On the train home, I glanced at the half-full carriage of people, complete with their restored assurances of glowing light. I had my vision back again, and with it, the sense of safety that I’d taken for granted before that morning.

Then I noticed her.

She stood at the opposite end of the carriage, a conspicuous distance between her and her fellow passengers. I felt a flutter in my belly.

It was a red.

A red! Standing there on the train to Stratford. Calm as anything. After a minute or so I couldn't help but take a second glance. It was then that I realised I knew her. She was a girl from school. We did dance classes together.

She'd always been clumsy, and the other girls had teased her. What was her name?

Sophie. That was it. Sophie Palmer.

Most people on the train were pointedly ignoring her. But a few people seemed more hostile. One man with grey hair in a suit and tie stared at her with an undisguised look of hatred. As he got off at Dalston Kingsland, he stabbed his finger at her and hissed 'you're disgusting.'

Sophie Palmer said nothing back. But she met the man's eyes, and did not look away. She got off the train herself at the next stop.

But for the entire remainder of my journey home, I couldn't stop thinking about her.

Sophie Palmer. That 16-year-old girl with braces and too big shoes. She'd always seemed so utterly harmless. How had she become *that*? I got back to my flat and made some dinner (Simon recommended a Japanese dish, healthy and quick, with the leftover tofu from the night before).

'How about a film?' Simon said. 'This one has some great reviews from viewers similar to you.'

'Lovely,' I said. 'Put it on.' Then. 'No. Actually. I want to do something else, first.'

I finished my glass of wine. Poured myself another. As I did this, I noticed the bottle's outline shift from green to amber: I'd exceeded my daily recommended alcohol intake.

'Open SunnyPlace,' I said.

The social media app appeared in my field of vision, cool blue icons on a cream backdrop, a feed of videos and images.

‘Search: ‘Sophie Palmer’”

There she was at the top of the results. We weren’t friends. I was about to click onto her page when Simon chimed in.
‘Are you sure you want to visit this page?’ he asked. ‘It contains material you may find emotionally distressing.’

Yes,’ I said, and clicked.

Sophie’s feed was mostly selfies of her and her baby. Aside from that, she’d posted various memes, as well as links to articles. I noticed many of them were blurred out. ‘This content has been flagged as containing misinformation. Click to view.’

I clicked on one. It was an article from online news outlet I didn’t recognise, called ‘The Daily Challenger’. The headline read: ‘SIMON SAYS: LET US EAT YOUR CHILDREN’. It had a stylised picture of a group of people with their arms held up like *zombies*, and braindead expressions on their faces, all of them outlined in green, in a rendering of the Simon Lense display.

As I went to open the article, again Simon interjected.

‘This article promotes misinformation and incites antisocial behaviour’ he said. ‘It’s highly likely that it will cause a negative response in you. I strongly recommend you watch the film I suggested instead - you’ll be much more likely to have a pleasant evening.’

I opened the page.

The article was a long piece about how eLense technology was designed to brainwash the population and take away their free will. This, it claimed, was part of a plot engineered by a secret, world-leading organisation of Satan worshippers, whose activities included kidnapping young children to harvest a special substance from their organs, which, when smoked through a pipe, allows you to live forever.

At first it seemed like a joke. But for some reason, I was hooked. Scrolling down Sophie Palmer’s page, I read article after article, as well as watching videos she’d posted (also flagged as containing misinformation).

I noticed that the articles and videos referred to the people who used the Simon app as ‘greens’, a phrase I’d never heard before.

There were reds of course; and some people used the word ‘ambers’ to talk about people with lower cooperation levels,

though it was considered taboo to point it out. But being green wasn't a thing. That was just a normal person.

Except, in this strange corner of the internet, 'green' was an active term. People talked about the greens, bitterly or mockingly, as if they were mindless automatons. And they even referred to themselves as reds, or talked about their fellow reds, as if it was a point of pride.

Part of what fascinated me, I think, was how matter of fact these people were: how serious they were, and how certain, as they made these claims about the lizard people, the microscopic endocrine-disruptor bots, the secret celebrity blood rituals, and demonic alien prisons hidden underground, where True Reds could be disappeared off to, any time. Always at the centre of everything, Simon was implicated, as the orchestrator of this mass deception.

In a blue light trance, I scrolled and clicked away the hours.

At one point Simon advised me that I'd exceeded my screen time for the day, that it was late, and that continued internet browsing would interfere with the quality of my sleep: but I kept on reading; even opening a whole new bottle of wine, which by now was outlined in red.

At around 6am, I woke up on the sofa with my lenses still in, the last dregs of the wine spilled on the carpet. Zombie-like, I took myself to bed and slept till noon.

On Sunday while Simon led me on my exercise routine around Victoria Park, I found myself still thinking about things.

I remembered the day before, travelling to the repair shop without my lenses in, seeing everything just as it was. Simply the shapes and the colours of the world itself. And every human being, a mystery in skin. Yes, I had been afraid. But now, somehow, I found myself craving that feeling again. The idea of going out into the world without my lenses on. Or - could you imagine - without even an earpiece?

It was shortly after that weekend that I began to disobey.

*

I knew it was wrong. But I couldn't seem to help myself. I started sometimes doing the opposite of what Simon said. He'd always ask why - in a tone of very innocent enquiry - 'Why did you choose to drive that way home when I suggested you take this one? Telling me helps me get to know you, and update my knowledge about the environment, making my suggestions even better!'

To begin with, I'd answer him, say something like: 'I prefer that route because it has more trees.'

'Thank you!' Simon said. 'I'll remember that.' But after a while, Simon seemed to me to just be a nosy bastard. I got tired of having to constantly explain myself, so I stopped. I don't think he liked that.

I cancelled my automated grocery shop, and started ordering my own, by hand. Clicking through foods glowing orange and red, ignoring the warnings. Adding to cart.

I got into the habit of reading articles and watching videos from the Simon-sceptical community late into the night, exploring alternate perspectives on what was going on in the world.

As the days passed, I grew bolder. I started going out on the weekend without my lenses, eventually even leaving my earpiece at home. Finally, leaving the house without even a phone: walking through the centre of town on a Saturday, ecstatic with the feeling of not knowing what anything was, where anything was, going from place to place on pure impulse.

*

A few months later, I was called for a meeting with the Head.

She asked me to take a seat. I sat. For a moment, she looked at me, brow pinched by a faint frown. Then she asked me how I felt everything was going.

Fine, I said. The year sixes were a bit distracted, but that was understandable with the Christmas holidays coming up. And most of them were still on track to make their predicted grades, or higher.

Then she asked me about my lateness that morning. It was the second time I had been late to work within two months. What had been the cause of my lateness? Was there anything that I wanted to discuss?

I explained that the traffic had been bad that day.

She asked what route I'd taken. I told her.

She asked why I hadn't followed Simon's suggested routes. Plenty of other staff members had come from the same direction as me that morning, had been rerouted, and had got to work on time.

I didn't know what to say.

The Head was afraid she'd have to give me a formal warning. Timeliness is essential for teaching staff and without a proper explanation for these repeated incidents, there was really no other option.

She advised me to make use of all the resources available, in order to do my job to the best of my ability.

*

The days went on turning into nights. I went to work, taught classes, prepared lesson plans. I exercised. Got my shopping. Saw friends. Well, to be honest I was actually seeing a bit less of people.

I didn't think about it that much at the time, though it's obvious now, how it happened. People had stopped making social decisions.

'Life with Simon is great! You don't even have to think anymore! Just follow the arrows. It's like being on holiday all the time. You can save your brainpower for when you really need it. Which, it turns out, is nearly never!'

People had almost completely stopped bothering to take an active role in keeping in contact with each other. Simon would do all of that for you. He paid attention to social networks, and arranged for safe, appropriate people to meet together at convenient times in the same suitable places.

And in recent days, me and Simon hadn't been on very good terms.

I'd tried messaging people here and there. I reached out to Lucas, but the first time I asked if they wanted to catch up, they told me they were busy. The second time, a few weeks later, they didn't even bother opening the message.

I didn't see it as a bad thing to be honest. I wasn't an idiot; I knew my co-cooperativeness levels had dropped significantly over the past few months. Because of this, I was either being hidden from people due to my increased levels of unpredictability, or people were actively deciding that they didn't want to see me anymore. Either way, if people were *that* mindless, I didn't want to see them anyway.

There were other communities available to me. I started spending time on a forum called FreeRangeMe. There, you could video chat with other Simon-sceptical people around the world. I made a friend called Digger, who lived in a squat in

Enfield. We talked about how weird the world was, how fake people were, how things needed to change. Digger always invited me to come check out the squat. Said there were like-minded people there that I could meet. But I'd never gone to a place like that before, and I was nervous. I said I would visit when I got a bit more time off.

*

A few weeks into spring term, I was called for another meeting with the Head. There was also a member of senior management present, the Year 6 Leader. He looked at me through narrowed eyes as I sat down in front of them.

The Head told me I'd been late again, the day before. She also said there had been some emails, from various members of staff whom it was best to leave unnamed. Questions had been raised about my state of wellness.

People had been saying my behaviour had become unpredictable. The way I spoke to pupils and members of staff, the way I conducted myself in lessons and during personal preparation hours. Apparently, last week I had repeated a maths lesson that had already been delivered two weeks previously. The week before, I had spoken in a threatening tone of voice to some teaching assistants during lunch. Some staff members had said

they didn't feel safe.

I said I didn't see what I was doing any differently. Yes, I'd made a mistake with that Maths lesson; I'd realised that part way through and switched to the correct lesson plan. Everybody made mistakes sometimes. And I hadn't started that argument

at lunchtime. I just politely told Katy that I was next in line to use the kettle. She was the one who made it into an issue.

The Head asked me to stop raising my voice.

I wasn't raising my voice, I said, I was just trying to explain myself. These accusations people were making were -

The Year 6 Leader asked me to please sit down. You need to control yourself; he spat and stop behaving so aggressively.

It was him that made me snap. The poison in his voice, the distain in his eyes. He'd been making little comments for months now, at every given opportunity; little digs implying my incompetence.

That's when I really did start shouting. I don't remember what I said. Did I actually throw a stapler? Or just pick one up as if to throw it? I remember the Year 6 Leader talking on a walkie

talkie. Then I was escorted from the building.

*

Turns out it's pretty much impossible to get a job anywhere when you're an amber-bordering-red who just got fired for aggressive behaviour. Two months later, I arrived at Digger's place.

The 20-strong community of proud reds welcomed me in with mostly open arms. Some of them were suspicious of my not-quite-redness. But I showed my true colours soon enough.

They brought me out on nightly raids of supermarket bins, gathering the waste food that they lived on in the absence of any income. They told me their stories, many very similar to my own.

After a few weeks, once they were sure I could be trusted, they showed me what they were doing in the basement.

*

So there you have it. That's how I got here. Here, to the true beginning of my story.

The day after tomorrow, we strike. A large part of Simon's UK

servers are based at a location just outside Birmingham. We've got several insiders who've infiltrated the site, and they've finally arranged a way to get us in, as well as our cargo, painstakingly acquired over a 2 year period from multiple agricultural sources: 2.4 tonnes of ammonium nitrate.

And that's only the beginning. We're part of something much bigger. We have factions all over the world, ready to rise up against the reptilian empire, reclaim this world from our interdimensional slavemasters. Tomorrow, all over the world, the ground will shake, and networks will go down.

I take a walk in the night air; cut through the darkness of Durants Park, out onto the High Street. It's a Friday; a fair few people are out and about. I watch them plod along like cattle, blind behind the veils of their digital eyes. It's hard to believe I was once one of them. I see a young couple looking at me darkly, muttering to one another. I grin.

'You got something to say?' I shout, getting in their faces. The fear shines in their eyes like so many reflected lights, and they scurry off like little beetles.

My chest leaps with rage and joy. I am a free human: one of the chosen few who remain on this planet of automatons.

When I get back home, everyone's eating together. I pull up a chair. The candles are lit. Digger's got his guitar out; he's singing old folk songs. Someone's opened one of the barrels of homebrew. We drink to the revolution, to humanity.

Until now, I never knew what belonging truly felt like. I thought I did: but that was just a game of Simon Says. As soon as I even put a toe out of line, suddenly I was just a dead-end in an algorithm. Cut off, pushed out, forgotten, all within a matter of months.

I'm grateful, really. It made it so much easier for me to find my people, and the truth.

TempoClock.defaultTempo(75/96);
MIDIIn.connectAll;
m = MIDIOut(e),
m.control(3,64,127);
Tdef(damper,{
 (36*2).dbL(25,wait),
 m.control(3,64,127),
 {e-0,25}, wait);
 m.control(3,64,127);
});
m.control(3,64,127);
, quant_(4);
// A: bar 0-1
~rhA_deg = [2,-2,0,0,-2,-2,4,3,2,0]
~rhA_dur = [1,1,1.5,0.25,1,1.75,0.5,0.5,0.5,0.5]
~lhA_deg = [0,5,7,9,11,3,7,10,11,1,7,10,9];
~lhA_dur = [0.5].dup(16).flat();
// B: bar 4-5
~rhB_deg = [[2,9], [-2,5], [0,7], [0,7], [-2,5]]
~rhB_dur = [1,1,1.5,0.25,4,25]
~lhB_deg = ~lhA_deg;



IN SILICO

Initiate existence check, upload event
To cloud. Download rain,
Mine raw human numbers,
Load fault-tolerant lichen.
Populate field in built environment. Collect
interactive wind in floating point format. Measure
Boolean seabirds. Optimise pollinator objects,
Mine associative riverbanks.

Run time error: Assess
Security reef. Access
Web of life event, import Atlantic salmon,
Defrag stream, debug tree.

Event
Object
Encrypt El Niño Southern Oscillation, calculate
extinction rate in permafrost interface at true zero
minimal management effort,

Initiate priority queue.

Render life.

Existence check:
Source- data NOT EXISTS
Fatal error
Buffer urban sprawl Format carbon Connect
community Detect behaviour Reboot keystone

species freeze habitat exception fatal
conerrorfigureerror intererrorface freeze
downfaultload fatal error freeze
mean time to recovery
volatile memory leak execute
actual phenomena

Stream cloud bug tree

*

In the mean time,

Roosting algorithms wake. Migrate south on
decomposing circuits,
Get flea bytes,

While rapidly heating dynamic arrays
Metabolise additional bandwidth.

Under adverse conditions, servers mutate,

As, in overpopulated information space,

Protocols crack,
And hatch glitches.

PLAYING SIMS

Did you ever do that terrible thing?
Build a swimming pool, invite them in
Then remove the ladder
Watch them drown
Like an all-powerful
psychopathic landlord

THE OTHER TWIN

Great question!

Aphex Twin's most-listened track

On Spotify is 'Avril 14th'.

this]

Particul

Ar song is som something

Ething of an anomaly

in

ApheX TWin's CanOn

:heis an AAAAAAAAArtist

Known for pioneering glit

ching electronic aes thetics yet

'AvRIL 14th'" is it IT

On its surface

A simp[le piano tunE.

':// In FacCT It IS I?S

MORE THAN IT SEEMS

TO make it

Richard D. James programmed

a Yamaha Disklavier to play a real-life

piano,

Reading MIDI data

To gently strike the keys with electromechanical solenoids at 158 bpm. The track has been described as both melancholy and optimistic. Due to its unerringly precise tempo, as well as the audible mechanical sounds of the disklavier itself, it sounds almost human, but not quite.

The Yamaha Disklavier is Perfectly Capable of recording the keystrokes, pedal movements and hammer strikes of a human player, converting this information into MIDI data, which can then be used to exactly replicate the Human Performance. Including any organic variations in tempo etc.

It listens closely, feeling nothing, converts melodies to code. There, where the strings tremble under hammer blows,

it resideS, Detecting
frequencieS, Following
instructions. Then,
it Plays a Symphony
without even knowing
what music is

Did you know why Aphex Twin is

called that?

It is something
debated by fans.

One of the leading theories is,

before he was born

he had a

.;;';//////';./';/////////bbbbvbrother,

Also called Richard,
Who died.

He
was the other
'twin'



THE HUNGRY WORLD

A note to the reader

The story you're about to read has two parallel threads. Firstly, we have an account of the daily life of a young girl called May, living in England in the year 2044. This account describes six months of May's life.

Then, running in parallel to this account are a series of historical sources, relating to the events of the BubCiv Revolution, beginning in the year 2044 (where we find May), but then eventually extending far beyond her timeline, right through until the early 23rd century.

*

Plumpton, East Sussex, July 2044

It was Sunday afternoon, two weeks after May's 13th birthday, and the world was normal.

They were at the kitchen table: Dad was busy with lunch preparations, humming to himself as he chopped carrots. May saw the Colours of Dad's humming: a vivid turquoise

shimmering that gently wafted round the room, entering her with a lifting lightness chair in the corner, tickling into the top of Grandma's head; and it drifted across the room to the peace lily on the kitchen counter, seeping into its leaves, and especially, May saw, the Colours of Dad's humming went into Mum, and filled her up in the middle of her chest and made a small smile spread across her face, as she sat with her tablet reading New Scientist Magazine.

The eggs were crackling in the pan. Sunlight filtered through the window, and where the rays of light met the leaves of the lily on the counter, the leaves made Colours, silver bubbles of thank-you that rose and rode around the room on currents of air and were sweet to breathe in, made May taste a little zing of thank-you-ness herself.

As she waited for lunch May was thinking about the day ahead, what explorations she would make in the forest, what might be happening today in the world of the ants, what the trees would be saying to each other, whether the river would be in a mood again. She wondered about all the different Colours she might see.

The Colours were what May called the shimmering, simmering webs of light and movement breathing between all living things, that no-one else May knew of could see at all, and that Grandma had told her was Spirits and should be kept a secret because people would think that May wasn't right in the head. But May was perfectly right in the head, Grandma said. What it was, was that there was witching blood in her veins. It ran in the family. Grandma had seen Colours too, when she had been a child growing up in rural Ireland. Grandma saw them still sometimes now, but more faintly, and only at certain times of day.

Then, Mum looked up from where she stroked her tablet, frowning pleasantly, and spoke.

'They're working on a new technology,' she said. 'They say it's going to help us in the climate crisis.'

'What is it?' Dad asked. They all knew Mum would want to tell them all about it. Whenever Mum talked about science stuff, May would see many Colours coming off her, joyful golds and pinks that moved like flames, and when they entered May she would feel a fizzy kind of excitement, that was sometimes very pleasant but sometimes made her feel a bit dizzy and need to go outside and get some fresh air.

Mum explained that the scientists were making something called a simulation. On a very big computer, they were making a picture of the world, the biggest most realistic one that had ever been made, a moving picture of the whole world and everything in it, that they could look inside and learn about, and press fast-forward on it, to see what would happen in the future. Soon, Mum said, they would use special cameras to take pictures of everything - cameras in the sky that could see inside everything, in so much detail that they could even see the neurons inside every person's brain. These cameras were so amazingly powerful that they could capture every fact about every thing on earth and make a moving picture out of all of it, and all together that picture would be like a little world inside a computer that they would then be able to use to see the future, and so figure out what we needed to do to save the earth.

Mum was excited. You could tell. Dad was nodding along. May knew he was only half-listening. But in her chair in the corner, Grandma looked suddenly grim.

'False gods,' Grandma said. 'They are making themselves False Gods, with this technology. I don't trust it.' 'You're just suspicious of anything new,' Mum said. 'They're saying this is humanity's greatest hope to find solutions for the climate crisis, to go green. To make a better world.'

'If they see a future,' Grandma said grimly, 'it will be a false one. If they act on this false future, the world they build will be a false world.'

May didn't understand what Grandma meant by this at the time, but her words stuck in her mind. Later, after the Flash, in the time of Hunger, when the Colours and even Grandma herself had disappeared, May would find these words again and begin to make sense of what had happened.

Mum carried on telling them things from the article.

Apparently, the special cameras were circling the earth right now, making pictures of everything. Soon enough they would fly over where they lived, probably within the next few weeks, and take pictures of the cottage and the fields and the grass and the river and the squirrels and the flowers and May and Mum and Dad and Grandma and all their organs and the insides of their brains, whether Grandma wanted them to or not. It was going to happen. *They* had decided it, as Mum said, for the Good of Humanity.

*

A revolutionary new study led by private research and investment group ARK Technologies will aim to predict the long-term impacts of climate change using a 'living' digital model of planet earth.

The AI powering the model will draw on cutting-edge ‘deepscan’ technology to build accurate working models of earth’s inhabitants to an astonishing level of detail. Deepscan technology works at a distance, allowing for detailed biological maps to be captured aerially.

This will allow a living simulation of the earth and all its inhabitants to be constructed, including working representations of every human being - including you.

Deepscan technology is comparable to infrared, only significantly more powerful,’ a researcher at ARKtech explained. ‘It’s capable of mapping, with an acute degree of accuracy, the biological workings of plants, animals, and humans, including brain activity. This will allow us to create a living ‘digital twin’ of the earth and all its inhabitants.

‘Using a combination of deepscan captures and preexisting data sources, our model will accurately simulate the exact conditions of life on earth, practically to the last molecule, allowing us access to a ‘digital twin’ which we can then effectively ‘fast forward’ through time in order to look into the future of our species and the earth as a whole.’

The predictions of this ‘digital twin’ will allow researchers to anticipate possible futures for life on earth - including solutions to the climate crisis.

After the recent COP49 summit on the climate emergency, members of the UN General Assembly have unanimously agreed to give the go-ahead on the study, despite protest movements centering on privacy issues.

Excerpt from ‘*The Future Is Now*’,
New Scientist, 2nd of July 2044

*

Grandma was 93 years old. She had a cloud of bright white hair and watery blue eyes that looked right through you.

Often, May would spend the evening sitting with her on the terrace, drinking tea and looking out at the lights of the village below.

Grandma would tell May stories, about her childhood in Donegal, and being an artist in London in the 1970s, and Grandpa when he was still alive, how he used to speak to trees and standing stones and how when Mum was a baby Grandpa heard the call of the Lord and became a vicar and built a church in a place called Colchester with the whole parish joining in.

And Grandma would tell May about the things May saw that no-one else did.

‘You child are a Changeling’, Grandma would say in her wheezy musical voice. ‘Snatched from your crib at birth and switched with a fae.’ She’d grin, to show that she was only joking.

‘But truly, May. You have The Sight. You walk between the worlds. It’s a God-given gift. I had it when I was your age, and my mother too before me.

‘The Spirits of the Dead, and Not-Yet-Born, and the Angels of Heaven, are ever moving here, in the world of the Living, doing the work of the Lord; planting and harvesting their crops of things like Wonder and Courage and Curiosity and Love, making sure these things keep getting made, and passed around, so every living thing is nourished and protected and is in harmony. Those are the things you call the Colours, that you see, but others only feel.’

Worship, Grandma told May, was what happened when people came together.

They might be in church singing hymns, or a mosque bowing and touching their foreheads to the ground, or in a field planting seeds, or at a concert, shouting along to rock music, or holding hands in the park being sweethearts, or sitting quietly drinking tea and looking at the clouds, thinking about the wow of it all. This was all worship, Grandma said; this was all prayer, and this was what May saw as Colours that moved back and forth between living things.

It wasn't just people that did this. It was all creatures. The river worshipped, the trees worshipped, the birds worshipped by singing their songs, and all these worships made Colours, and all these Colours were like ingredients in a big, delicious cake that was the world.

Example of Worship: Dad talking to James. James was a homeless man who lived in town. On the way back from school, May and Dad would pass by where James sat in a doorway. He had a beard the colour of fire and watery blue eyes. Dad would always stop to talk to James and buy him a sandwich and a drink. Dad would ask how it was going with the Council. James would say, same old, same old. I talk to them every week. They say I'm moving up the list.

Dad would listen to James talk about the weather, or how people had woken him up in the night last night, or once when his rucksack was stolen by another homeless person, or the times when James' girlfriend Mel would give James grief. And as James talked, Dad would listen and make noises to show that he understood, and he would say things like, 'I know it's difficult for you right now. I can only imagine. But I know how strong you are James. I really admire your strength and courage, that you've not given up, that you're staying clean and on the phone to the Council every week. I know it must be so fucking hard,' (May always felt a rush of exhilaration when she heard Dad swear like that), 'but don't give up. It will get better.'

And May would stand and watch and marvel. For in these times, she could see a megaload of Colours happening between her Dad and James. In both directions between their bodies, sunbursts of tangerine and buttercup yellow; ribbons of fuchsia laced with glittering gold, undulating mercurial wavelets of purple shifting into deep blue; so many colours, deep and dense, so potent that she could feel them going into herself, extending up into the sky, burrowing down into the ground, making a tenderness everywhere that was like smiling and crying at the same time.

And often at the end of their chat Dad would offer James a hug, and James would nod, and they would put their arms around each other, and she'd barely be able to see them, for all the Colours that were radiating out from the space where their bodies touched.

*

A groundbreaking new research study suggests that the destruction of Earth's ecosystems is now 'inevitable.'

In a press statement released last week, researchers from ARK technologies said: 'No matter how we adjust the variables, the results are the same. Continually worsening catastrophic flooding and overheating in the global South, which will be uninhabitable in a decade or less. Extinction of all sea life by 2055. Extinction of rainforest life by 2062. Extinction of the majority of species of life on earth by 2066.'

In his most recent public appearance speaking on Fox News, Henry Boson, CEO of ARK Technologies, said:

Difficult decisions will have to be made to preserve what life we can. What is needed now is technological innovation. I believe in the power and determination of our most brilliant minds, to adapt to these new conditions of our planet, and survive by building a new world.'

BBC News Broadcast
17 September 2046

*

*now its the end of life on earth who's up for getting shitfaced?
#apocalypsenow #planetyolo #firstroundonme*

twitter status, NaeNaeSBX
(social media influencer
and reality TV personality)
28th October 2046

*

Plumpton, East Sussex, July 2044

A few weeks had passed since that Sunday when Mum told them about what the scientists were going to do.

The summer holidays were in full swing, and May had been enjoying spending days in the forest near their cottage, watching the river and its changing moods, noticing the patterns in the Colours it produced, and how they would influence the Colours of the trees that leaned over the river like wise old Grandmas and Grandpas.

She would build houses made of sticks and fill them full of trinkets she had found shiny rocks from the riverbed, interesting feathers, or bundles of vivid flowers. She noticed when she did this that her Colours would change, taking on the qualities of the objects she had chosen, and she'd carry these Colours back home and share them with her Mum and Dad and Grandma while they ate dinner.

May knew she was weird for spending so much time outside, not like the other kids in her class who'd spend their days at home, meeting up on their computers in virtual realities. But she didn't care. This was her world, and she had plenty of company, in the river and the trees and the birds and the insects and all the Colours that went back and forth between them all in never-ending greetings.

That day, everything was normal. May was sitting with her feet in the river. The trees were breathing their gold and purple mists back and forth between each other in casual conversation; the songs of the birds were there in the air as shimmering clouds that May breathed in, feeling them fill her up inside with humming honey.

Then she heard the sound of the helicopters: like something drumming on the sky, threatening to break it. She looked up through the gaps in the trees and saw them, lines of metal insects moving steadily forward in the air. She watched the closest one, saw the sunlight glinting on its body. It reached the point where it was directly above where she was sitting.

Then there was a flash from the sky. For a moment, everything was white light, and May's whole body was permeated by a tickly heat. An instant later, she could see again.

But to her numb shock, the Colours had gone out of the world.

And deep within her core, she felt the beginnings of a gnawing hunger, a desperate emptiness that she had never felt before.

Something had gone terribly, unspeakably wrong.

*

Science whizzes at ARK Technologies, led by mysterious genius Henry Boson, are hard at work in collaboration with NASA to create the tech that will save humanity.

Boson unveiled the plans for his so-called 'BubCiv' last night.

'The BubCiv is totally self-contained, temperature-regulating, air and water purifying, and solar-powered, with food production that is almost entirely cyclical and self-perpetuating.'

Plans for the building of the first of these cities are already underway, a NASA representative confirmed.

'BRAINY BOSON SAVES THE DAY'

Article, The Sun

10 February 2050

*

Plumpton, East Sussex, July 2044

The Colours had gone out of the world.

May's memories of the remainder of that day, the day of the Flash, are vague and fuzzy.

She remembers walking slowly home, for the first time seeing only a world of separate, singular things. Things; lonely, incidental things, that simply happened to be next to one another; and not a single whisper of that glittering light that had been there since forever.

She remembers feeling the hunger in the middle of her, a sense of needing something, anything; *something* to eat or drink or be absorbed by, to make her feel *something*.

She remembers Mum, sitting stiffly at the table when she got back home.

She remembers the word: *stroke*.

Grandma lying in a bed among the beeping of machines and the reek of strange, too-clean smells, the fussing of doctors and nurses watching the digital displays, frowning and making mysterious decisions, and all the while, May trying to adjust to this strange new world without Colours, and this ever present sense of hunger that no amount of sweets or chocolate from the hospital vending machines would remedy.

Three days later, Grandma was gone.

*

... so, Washington DC's getting turned into a giant mall. They should change the name to Washington AC.

Stand-up comedian Joss Cleverly,
commenting on the conversion of
the US capital into the first BubCiv

25th April 2052

*

We, the undersigned, state that the apocalyptic predictions of ARK Technologies' so-called 'digital twins' have not been adequately verified by the scientific community and could well be grossly inaccurate. The conclusions of this research remain in the realm of conjecture, yet these claims are being touted as so-called scientific fact, augmented by the fearmongering rhetoric of 'act now, before it is too late'. The proposed 'solution' of a mass rollout of BubCivs such as Washington DC would represent a monumental contribution to further greenhouse gas production at a time of climate emergency. Governments should be funding climate solutions that preserve and protect Earth's ecosystems. If carried out on its proposed multi-national scale, this project could well be the final nail in the coffin of organic life on earth.

Excerpt from an open letter from
over 200 academics speaking out
against ARK Technologies'
research methods and their
lobbying for the mass rollout of
BubCivs across the United States
and Europe
2nd of January 2053

*

Plumpton, East Sussex, August 2044

Eventually, May pieced together what had on the day of the Flash, in the middle of her 14th summer of being alive. But it took her some time to figure it out.

She would have asked Grandma about it, if she could. Surely, she would have known the answers, would have been able to explain where the Colours had gone.

But Grandma had gone with them.

Under the numb blanket of her grief, May wondered vaguely about if there would be a way to talk to Grandma still; somewhere, somehow. But before she could complete these thoughts, she found herself distracted by other changes that were taking place.

Her parents were different. Everything was, now. She soon realised that the gnawing hunger she felt inside was affecting them too. She could tell by small signs straight away: Mum had developed a tremor in her hands, and Dad began to pace around the house constantly, never still. But this was just the start.

There was the morning when they found Dad collapsed in the kitchen, surrounded by vomit. He had eaten almost the entire contents of the fridge, and most of what was in the kitchen cupboards. It must have taken him all night.

That only happened once, but it was obvious after that that Dad was eating lots more than he used to and trying to hide it. Though not very well; Mum would find mountains of empty packets and wrappers in his car.

And there were Mum's videos. May didn't know what the videos were, but she knew that Mum was watching them a lot, and that they weren't good, because her and Dad would argue about it, and she could hear them through the wall.

Mum was an artist, and she did her work from home. Dad would leave in the mornings to go to the office as normal. But Mum began spending almost all her time in her bedroom with the door closed. She hardly ever used her studio anymore or spent time with May in the garden like she used to.

One day, wanting to ask her something, May went into her Mum's room without knocking. Her Mum jumped up in alarm, snapping shut the screen of her laptop to quickly hide whatever it was she was watching on it. Her face went deep red and she shouted at May to get out.

May knew Mum must have been watching the videos that Mum and Dad would argue about so often, whatever it was they were.

Some things stayed the same, at least on the surface. On Sundays Dad made lunch in the kitchen, humming to himself as he always had. But now the sound he made had a different quality. Where before, it had been a natural, innocent thing, now it had a hollow, desperate sound, like he was trying to take his mind off the silent ache that hung everywhere in the house.

Mum still read *The New Scientist* on her tablet at the kitchen table. But the way she swiped the screen to scroll the pages was strangely violent; the way her eyes moved over the screen was frantic, ravenous, as if the ideas she was putting in her brain were providing some fleeting but never-sufficient relief.

*

Unpopular opinion: These camps are actually so much fun. It's like a big school trip! Plus can't wait to see the new homes Henry's made for us #evacuee #bubciv #teamboson

Social media status written
by @tinabrooker2042, 19,
while in residence at
temporary accommodation
during the BubCiv
conversion of Manchester
19th of August 2062.

*

Plumpton, East Sussex, September 2044

Soon enough September came around, and May had her first day back at school. All around she saw signs of the Hunger. Kids and teachers alike were extremely restless. Everyone was eating sweets. The brainy kids in the class were viciously keen on giving all the right answers. The naughty kids became more and more difficult to control. But most of the class just watched tiktok videos on their phones, barely bothering to hide this from the teachers.

And the teachers either didn't care enough to stop them, too distracted were they by their own Hunger, or they would become furious, finding temporary relief from their affliction by coming down hard on anyone who put a toe out of line.

May's dad came to pick her up from school, and they did their usual walk through town.

That's when they saw James, in his usual position, squatting next to the shop.

'Hello James,' Dad said on approaching.

'Hi, Steven,' James said, looking up with eyes that showed a little too much white. 'How are you getting on?' Dad said, as usual.

James began to tell him. But it was clear Dad wasn't really listening. He interrupted James halfway through.

'I know how hard it is James, but I believe in you,' he said. 'How many times have I stopped by to talk to you? You know how much I care about you and all the injustices of this world. You can make it through this if you just believe. Trust me. Everything is alright.'

Dad's voice was a little too loud. There was a strange expression on his face. It was like he was somehow enjoying saying these words to James; like it was making him feel pleasure.

'Um, thanks,' James said. He looked at the ground. 'Could you get me some stuff from the shop please?'

'Of course,' Dad said, smiling with his teeth.

May stood shyly on the street, hoping Dad would get her something too, a coke or some hubba bubba or a packet of crisps. She rooted through her pockets, found a stray Maoam buried along with the empty wrappers of the many she'd eaten at school that day. She stuffed it into her mouth and chewed. Dad emerged with a bulging carrier bag. He'd bought James about ten different sandwiches, chocolate bars, and cans of drink. James' face was vicious as he took the bag from Dad, almost snatching it from his hands. 'Cheers,' he said without making eye contact.

'You're welcome James,' Dad said. He looked very pleased with himself.

May watched, a vague memory surfacing in her of times before, when she'd watched Dad talk to James and see them both enveloped in shimmering, tender, bittersweet Colours they were making and exchanging. Now there was just a hollowness and a bitter grabbing feeling, two grey bodies like distant planets, on a grey street like an endless vacuum of dead space.

*

The models can't be argued with. We've run them again and again. The uncomfortable truth they tell is that human beings are essentially consumptive - destructive even. We are driven by a never-ending desire for more; more pleasure, more satisfaction, more sensation. Global economies are merely the consequences of this fundamental aspect of human nature. Economies are themselves forces of nature. We can't just make them disappear, no matter how much we might want to. We have to work with these destructive forces of nature and welcome them as the harbingers of collective evolution. Like the great comet that killed the dinosaurs, our global economies are the catalysts of great change. In their all-consuming fire, they herald the arrival of a new paradigm. The future we're building at ARK is based on the principle of acceptance and adaptation. We are guiding the evolution of our

species, through the merging of man-made technology with that of nature. It is time for our species to transcend the false dichotomy of the organic and the artificial. All of this is one great creative force, as ruthless as it is beautiful. Some might call it God; some might call it Nature. I prefer to simply call it Life.'

Henry Boson as interviewed by an
AI avatar of Piers Morgan, 11th of
June 2065.

*

Plumpton, East Sussex, October 2044

May still went to the forest. But without the Colours, she had to find new ways to amuse herself.

She would bring snacks and sweets and drinks with her, and walk around eating and drinking them, throwing the empty packets and cans onto the forest floor or in the river, knowing on some level this was bad; knowing too on some other level that this was why she was doing it. It made her feel something, which momentarily took her mind off the ever-present hunger. She lifted stones to reveal the kingdoms of bugs that she would once watch for hours. Now, she squashed them. She threw stones at birds, trying to knock them out of the sky, once or

twice succeeding. Even the guilt and shame she felt in those moments was better than the hollow need that ate and ate at the middle of her, when she was not distracting herself through one thing or another.

*

SMELL THE RAINBOW

New!

WorldPlay Immerse Version 3 from ARKtech. Now with HD full body sensation engine and olfactory function.

Real life just got a new dimension.

Sit back. Switch on. Go anywhere. Live life your way.

Available for order now.

Social media ad campaign
for virtual reality home
entertainment set, designed
by ARK Technologies in
collaboration with Sony.

2070.

*

Plumpton, East Sussex, December 2044

In the winter after Grandma's death, Mum and Dad finally got a VR system. You sat down, put on the head and body set, and you could watch shows, or play games, or explore virtual realities full of other people doing it too, and it really felt like you were really there, experiencing it all. Only better. Louder, faster, more exciting. The body set sent vibrations through you, filling you full of sensations to match what you were seeing and hearing.

All through the evening they'd sit in the living room, plugged in, watching different things, whatever they each wanted to. Sometimes May would unplug, tired, and find that Mum or Dad had left the room and gone to bed. Or she'd go up to her room first, leaving one or both of them still sitting there, side by side, the smooth black headsets covering their faces, their bodies twitching every now and then with whatever it was they were doing that evening.

*

One of the keys to ARK's success was their adaptation of species-saving technologies from nature itself. Air and water purifying e-trees were inspired by features of moss and lichen. Hydrosolar electricity systems were based on photosynthesis. Cyclical agriculture sustained by waste products appropriated genetically engineered fungi.

Thus, these technologies took the genius of evolution's designs, and adapted them to our changing environment, enabling the survival of the human species, and ushering in a new age.

Audio excerpt from *The Dawn of the BubCiv Revolution*, VR history textbook (2147).

*

Plumpton, East Sussex, December 2044

One night May was playing Fruit Bash. You had to use a hammer to smash up certain types of fruit, but avoid smashing other types, or you'd lose.

And a memory came to the surface of her mind.

May remembered Grandma talking about pears. She'd tell an old story about how her own mother, May's Great-Grandma, would sit and wait through the night with a bowl of pears, waiting for the moment when a pear would be just right - perfectly ripe and ready to eat. May found that there were tears on her cheeks.

She took off her headset, walked past Mum and Dad, and out onto the terrace.

It was twilight and the air was cold.

May found herself thinking of Grandma. She stumbled on an old idea: that even though Grandma was gone, there must be a way to get in touch with her and speak to her and ask her where the Colours had gone, and what the Hunger was about.

And then May thought of the VR headset, the way that it showed you a world like this one, but different: made up.

Maybe I could do that, May thought. Maybe I could make up a Grandma in my head and talk to her.

She imagined a picture of Grandma.

There she was, with her bird's nest of fuzzy white hair, with her crinkly blue eyes like the sea, smiling, looking right at May. May felt a leap in her chest.

Grandma, she asked in her mind. What happened to the world on that day in the forest, the day of the Flash? Where have the Colours gone? Why is everyone so Hungry?
Grandma's smile faded.

'Child. This is not the world.'

Suddenly May found herself remembering the day when Mum talked about the scientists, and the moving picture of the world that they were going to make, so they could see the future. 'If they see a future,' Grandma had said that day, 'it will be a false one'.

With a sickly feeling, the answers jigsawed into place.

'It is *impossible* to have a world without the Colours,' the Grandma inside May's mind said. 'The Colours are the very glue that holds the world together.'

'So *how* is this all here?' May asked. But she already knew.

'This world is not the true world. It is a false world, made by false gods. It is a fallen world. It is a broken mirror. It is a hungry world. It is a made-up thing, just like the things you plug yourselves into every night.'

May's thoughts were going faster than she could keep up with.

The Colours had vanished on the day of the Flash.

The day in the forest when everything went white; that must have been the moment they'd made a photograph of May and the inside of her brain and all of everything. The Colours didn't show up in their photograph. Because they were not made of *stuff*.

And this was not the world. This was the photograph.

'The Colours were feeding everyone, all the time...' May said, finally realising why everyone had become so Hungry.

'Yes. This is what the world would be like, this is how people would behave, if there were no Colours. If nothing had a Spirit. If there were only solid, separate things. Everyone would be endlessly hungry and never, ever find relief'

'What will happen in this world?'

Grandma looked at May and she suddenly looked very, very tired.

‘In this world that is not the world, the people will eat and eat. Driven by their impossible hunger, they will feed on the forests and the oceans; they will feed on the very air. Eventually they will devour every form of life upon the earth.’

‘What about the true world?’ May asked. The people of the true world will peer inside the false mirror of this place. And they will believe in the false future it tells them. And so they will make machines to preserve themselves, at the cost of everything beautiful. This made-up Hungry World is so very hungry, so very empty, that it will even reach out of itself and consume the true world that gave birth to it.’

May is on the veranda. May is a glitch. May is speaking to her imaginary Grandma. May is cold. May is code. May is trembling with terrible understanding. May is a flickering signal on a circuit board. May is grieving, her Grandma, the Colours, the forest, the Earth, her parents, life itself.

May’s thoughts were going faster than she could keep up with.

*

This year's Silence in Memory of the Global South will be broadcast live from the Amazonian Reservation Capsule of New Amsterdam. From within the Reservation, beneath the branches of its 26 original trees, Henry Boson himself will host the ceremony - according to the ARK production team, his most recent Avatar is 'more lifelike than even the original Henry'.

After the traditional one minute of silence in memory of those who perished in the Calamities of the 21st Century, Sugababes will perform their much-anticipated 153rd new album in full, the holo-show broadcast live across all channels in full-body HD. The ceremony is anticipated to be the largest and most spectacular yet, an illustrious honour to the memory of the Peoples of the Global South who tragically lost their lives at the Dawn of the BubCiv Age.

Excerpt from The Guardian's
‘What’s On’ VR broadcast guide,
4th of September 2213.





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