[Note to Self: I’m not sure I like this all that much… maybe something here? Needs paring down]

Maeve couldn’t see. This was likely due to the scratchy grey blanket she had chosen to cover herself with, though she liked to imagine it was just a coincidence. She had turned nineteen last week, and needed to be with her own thoughts for a few minutes. The menagerie of friends and family surrounding her was both comforting and also overwhelming, but she could only publicly admit to the former, in this crowd. They had never understood her need to escape to her own thoughts, at any given moment. Too many thinking minds and feeling hearts in closed quarters; she somewhat wished the blanket were made of lead. It was likely the reason she preferred the grey one – it helped her powerful imagination.

Maeve had had a boyfriend for about 7 months at that point. The young man’s name was Kurtis, and she needed to break up with him. He was jerk, it turned out. He had shown up for her one-week-late-for-your-real-birthday-party birthday party, but she knew the moment he arrived at Peter Partridge’s Pizza Party with her hastily wrapped present – another science magazine subscription / issue, which she no doubt already had – that Kurt really didn’t want to be there. He was halfway through the latest CarJack MetroCity (it was in the double digits now, she couldn’t recall or didn’t much care), and all he ever wanted to do these days was get back home and sequester himself in his folk’s basement so he could go about the important business of pretending to be a heartless bastard who enjoyed being a thorn in the side of the upstanding, artificial citizens of whatever fake town the game was set in.

Maeve wondered, at the precipice of artificially intelligent machines, what would happen to games like that, when the citizens inhabiting them began to learn, and form opinions of their own. Opinions of how the players treated them, and why. Would they begin to question the fairness of the world they were fated to live in? Would they question the effect their reactions to simulated violence would have on the players perpetuating them? Would they feel any responsibility toward their players, however much they acted like douchebags at them?

Maeve had began using swear words, in varying degrees, just prior to meeting Kurtis. She wondered if perhaps she summoned him because of it. That was a scary notion. She did not really like using swear words, but it felt like a phase she needed to go through – perhaps fairly quickly - were she to make it to college-ready age properly formed. She did not imagine she would apply to university, since she had (at that point) heard it was all indoctrinated learning anyway, while college was all about applied trades. Come to think of it, Kurt had told her that, in the first 3 months where everything between them had been awesome, because she had been ignoring all of his shortcomings, as, she supposed, he had been ignoring most of hers. What were they? He would never tell her.

There wasn’t much to do under the scratchy grey blanket, sitting as she was, cross-legged on some old futon in Peter Partridge’s parent’s basement. She never called Peter just “Peter”, because she loved alliteration a little too much. For his part, Peter never minded being called Peter Partridge by Maeve Morgan, because he, like she, had a weird but pretty decent sense of humour. He had also had a crush on her since grade four, but would never tell her that, though always regret it a little. That though, as they say, is another story.

“Maevis Morgan!” Peter Partridge piped up, above the din of the group of six or seven seven-to-nineteen year olds laughing and celebrating their graduation day’s heady approach in mere days, “Why are you beneath the blandest of our blankets?”.

Maeve could not ignore Peter’s challenge, for as long as they had known each other, which she recalled was three or four years back now. One of her older friends, she thought – Peter had introduced her to *Mastermind*, a most excellent board game artifact from the misty recesses of time, and the two had become fast gamer friends from that moment on.

Peter’s parent’s copy of Mastermind was famous in his family’s neighbourhood for being in its original box - now held lovingly together with yellowing masking tape, which had been faithfully flaking away for years – *and* having all the original pieces. The photo on the front of the thin box showed a dashing though older man coyly eyeing the camera (*you, the player*), while a sexy super model spy stood protectively over him, probably packing heat. The photo kind of reminded her of a James Bond movie poster. Her mother did not let her watch any James Bond movies, but she imagined they were probably a lot like the posters.

Maevis and Peter challenged each other like pros at that game – most second lunch hours, throughout their senior year. It was better than hanging out in the schoolyard in those days – things had gotten weird after the …Thing happened. The “…Thing” is what Maeve called it anyway, not having any other better ideas since of what to call it, or what to make of it.

“Peter Paul Partridge”, Maeve managed to say, almost clearly, through the folds of her Leaden Blanket of Feel-Shielding and over the re-singing of her friend’s made-up version of their school’s crummy and dated theme song. About half of the group loved the high school, and the other half hated it, with maybe one abstention, which was not Maeve. She shifted her blanket somewhat, so her voice would project better, though still suitably muffled.

“Peter Paul Partridge, I am beneath the best of your blandest blankets because I am hiding from half-a-dozen hellions.” Somebody attempted to poke her ear through the blanket, but she palm-blocked them from inside the blanket.

“Half a dozen hellions, hey?” responded Peter’s voice, somewhere Beyond the Blanket, in outer space. “Holy Hannah!” and then, “Hey, you guys! Maevis Morgan thinks you are hellions! I don’t know what that is – can somebody tell me what a hellion is?”. Most of the group had answers pretty quickly, and by the time the definitive definition had been downloaded and discoursed upon, the pizza guy arrived, and was invited in, because he was somebody neighbour.

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Maevis' arms always kinda reminded Blueberry of French fries, which made her feel kinda racist and hungry at the same time. Blueberry was two-and-a-half years younger than Maevis, and three-and-a-third years younger than Liz. Maevis and Liz were her best friends, since the moment the three of them met properly for the first time, on the fateful early October evening when, as Maevis like to put it, “*the… Thing* happened”. Maevis did not like to use the word “magic”, ever. Blueberry had no problems using the word magic, or believing in it. She had seen it herself, twice, for real. She was reasonably sure she had. Both times involved Maevis’s family in some way, so of course Blueberry loved being around Maevis; Maevis gave her hope.