

Planet ZERO Expectations

In a world full of war, a handful of soldiers are sent to save Planet ZERO. Before Earth was destroyed by the Covenant, the human race used a Trans-Dimensional Matter Converter (or teleporter), made by Reed Richards, to travel to Planet ZERO in search for a new place to call home. Before Reed sent the human race, he sent a team of 8 Special Ops soldiers and a squad of Autobots to Planet ZERO to scope out the land. During the search, Ian, Donnie, Han, Henri, John, Mac, Jack, and Ben split into teams of 2 and took different ways to make the search more efficient. Han and Ben took the North-Eastern direction, John and Henri went Westward, and Ian and Donnie went South. During their 12 year trip around Planet Zero, they finally found each other and reunited and took one path back to base camp. As they were walking back, Ben, John, and Han mysteriously disappeared. The first one to notice was Henri, who was walking in front of them at the time of their disappearance, when he didn't hear the arguing between Han and John. When Henri told Ian about the situation, he radioed back to Reed telling him that it is not safe. As Reed heard the news, he told Ian to hurry up and get back to the base. As Donnie, Ian, and Henri were on their way back, they found a crashed rover, which Henri fixed up to get the 3 of them back to Reed. On their way back, all 4 tires on the rover exploded. Ian accused Henri of corruption, Henri was arguing that it wasn't his fault, and Donnie just stood there trying to figure out where they were, when a storm brewed up. Trapped, Donnie radioed Reed and told him that they were going to be stuck wherever they were for a while because of the blown tires and the storm. Luckily, Donnie found a cave where the 3 of them stayed until the storm passed. After about 50 minutes, the storm passed. Donnie went to see what has happened to the surrounding area, when nothing happened but an unusual red and black ooze. He called Henri and Ian to come out and examine the ooze. When Henri came out, he knew exactly what the ooze was. It was the symbiote Carnage. As the symbiote started to ooze back together, Ian was quickly thrown against the cave wall, than corrupted by the symbiote, started to attack Donnie, before Donnie could separate the two of them. It didn't work out for Carnage and Ian, as for they were separated before they knew it. As they were separating, Henri captured the symbiote with the containment canister for Reed to study. As Reed received the sample, he took notice on how it reacted to high-pitched sounds. After learning that, he built a couple sonic blasters to neutralize Carnage. While working, Reed had sent Donnie, Mac, and Jack back out to the scene of the attack, where Mac found a secret doorway in the face of the

mountain they were at. He had called Donnie and Jack over to investigate, when they couldn't get it open. Luckily, Mac had a couple spare paperclips with him and used one to open the doorway. As the 3 of them investigated the hidden room, Donnie whipped up a detection device that picks up any sign of symbiote DNA. As they got 3 steps into the room, the device started going off, alerting them of symbiote DNA around. As everyone else was at the base, Ian decided to get Han, Ben, and John to play this board game called Jumanji. Only John agreed to play the game with him. Ben and Han tried to warn them about the game, but they didn't listen until Reed told them about the dangers. After many years, half of Earth was destroyed by the Covenant, and half the population died as a result. As for our 8 heros, they became known as a world power on Planet ZERO. Our 8 heros were sent back to try and destroy the war on Earth, with the help of one brave soldier, Spartan, and managed to defeat the armada and win back Earth as a reward of their victory. Sending people back, half of them decided to stay on Planet ZERO to continue their life there, instead of living on the partly destroyed Earth. Our 8 brave heroes stayed on Planet Zero to continue their training for the next battle and for the war with the Separatist, and the leader, General Grievous. As of now, the world is saved thanks to Ian, Donnie, Han, Henri, John, Mac, Jack, Ben, Bruce, Reed, Spartan, and the squad of Autobots. After many wars, worlds will be saved thanks to our heroes. Hot Rod and Optimus Prime request that some Autobots go to planet Cybertron and seek weaponry for the battle, but later find out that Cybertron was destroyed. Hot Rod radioed back to Reed letting him know that Cybertron was destroyed and they will be returning empty handed. Reed had told the rest of the team that the Autobots have failed their mission. Henri and John later took the shuttle back to their home planet of Lorian where they have weapons in their storage compartments. Reed had them take Bruce with them for the extra hands to carry the weapons they grab. It took them 7 weeks to travel to the planet, and another 7 weeks to get back to Planet ZERO. When they returned with the weapons, they came back with 10 bags of weapons. The bags consisted of Lorian blades and blasters that form to the wielder. Everybody took a blade and a blaster to use against the Separatist army. That will be the final battle before the population of Earth will be at peace.

The Dead Parts Of Us

The clicking and whirring of the recording device in Jesse's hands was the only sound in the world it seemed. This small little box had been tormenting her for so long, but now she finally had it. And inside it was what she wanted to know. Inside this recorder was all the information about the people who lived inside the hospital. All the people who had entered through the doors looking for the last possible cure to their problems. Jesse pulled over a crate and sat down with the recorder. She needed to hear this. She needed to know why something was calling her to this place. Now was the time to find out everything.

She pressed play.

"Saint Luciana Hospital Psych Ward patient files. February 18th, 2029. Doctor Harrison Vitler speaking. My associates have been encouraging me to keep audio files of my patients as my paper methods are shoddy at best. Not my fault entirely, I'm just a disorganised person by nature. Currently I only have five patients in my sector, but it feels like more. I love my patients but their issues are challenging to say the least. I mean, this is a psych ward for a reason.

Patient one: Griffith Coolage. He's sixteen years old and was diagnosed with OCD when he was thirteen. He's no danger to others but he's under a mandatory 72 hour psych hold as of today, due to a recent suicide attempt. His first day seemed okay. Dr. Moore said they made some good steps in therapy, and they are considering stronger medication for him.

Patient two: Tessa Brown. She is another 72 hour suicide watch patient. This is her third time here but its been the longest stretch in between visits. Almost a year she went without coming in. She was first diagnosed with depression at fifteen and she's been in and out of hospitals for the past four years now. She has refused to say why she attempted this time so Dr. Moore is considering extending her hold for her own safety.

Patient three: River Daedra. A twenty-one year old female with kleptomania. While not a dangerous disorder she is detained here by law after stealing thousands of dollars worth of merchandise from her local mall. Such a sweet girl honestly, but I do suspiciously lose my pens and pencils whenever we meet.

Patient four: Logan Bellfont. He is one of my saddest cases. Only ten years old but being held here after shooting his father. He has been diagnosed with General Anxiety Disorder and PTSD from being beat by his parents. They tried to

say he was dangerous but I do not believe that. He's a terrified child who killed his abuser. I'd give him a medal if I could.

Finally my hardest patient. Jessica Hallflower. She has lived here for many years. Currently she's eighteen but she started her treatment here at thirteen. She has early onset schizophrenia, or childhood schizophrenia. Such a rare disorder but it hit her hard. Her first psychotic break was at fifteen when she stabbed a classmate with a plastic knife. It was then she transferred here for full time care. She made progress and right before she turned seventeen we released her. A few months later she burnt her house down in another psychotic break. She believed her parents were monsters trying to kill her. They died in the fire. Now she's back here again. It's cases like hers that make me hate my job sometimes."

"February 19th, 2029. Today was a challenging day to say the least. Most are but today was particularly disheartening.

Griffith made progress some more and I believe this to be a successful psych hold for him. We've recommended to his parents for outpatient therapy obviously. Something bothers me about how rapidly he has recovered though. I can't put my finger on it but I'm going to keep an extremely close eye on him tomorrow.

Tessa had a breakdown during lunch. She began throwing things and screaming about how everyone was going to die so why bother fighting it. She was heavily sedated and hasn't woken up yet. Dr. Moore and I agreed to extend her psych hold for her own safety.

River and I had an intensive therapy session today about why she steals, but I kept hitting a brick wall. She is blocking something out in her mind. Something she doesn't want me to get to. I doubt she even knows what it is, but you can't underestimate the patient. We'll have to explore that further.

Logan hasn't been sleeping lately. The pills we gave him finally kicked in last night and he slept, but this morning he woke up in a crying fit. It took almost an hour for him to calm down. He described running through an endless hall of his house looking for a door, but the only door was at the end of the hall. He could hear was his father's heavy footsteps, but he couldn't see him. So he ran and ran. He's refusing to take anymore sleeping pills for tonight.

Jessica had to be taken out of therapy today with the help of three nurses. I asked Dr. Jack to do a session with her as I was preoccupied with Logan. Apparently when he asked her to describe her state of mind during the fire she had a small break. I don't understand how, unless we need to increase the potency of her medication. She is still having a fit in her room as of right now.

She has never shied away from talking about the fire so I do hope we can find the reason for this latest break."

"February 20th, 2029. I still am shocked by what I heard today from my patients. I thought I had made some good progress, but apparently not.

Griffith completed his psych hold today. He had another therapy session and he successfully integrated his medication into his body. He even thanked Dr. Moore with a hug before leaving. Tomorrow his parents will pick him up. I still have doubts about him leaving but I must put those aside.

Tessa woke up from her sedation and we had a session in her room. She cried for most of it. I did record some of it but I felt that it was too personal to record it all. I'll attach a piece of it onto this for reference. She has me worried. Very. Dr. Moore and I have discussed new medication for her, but I feel as though just increasing her current one will help. We often butt heads over medication.

River stole thirteen needles from a nurse's cart today. They were packaged and not filled but it was concerning. She said she did it because she was bored. I know she is lying but she is sticking to boredom as her reason. I did some digging into her files from other hospitals. Apparently she is a foster child and has lived at group homes for many years. Tomorrow in therapy I will discuss this with her.

Logan has stopped eating. I had to threaten an IV unless he ate something. He did eat a package of crackers but nothing else. He was doing so well but suddenly he dropped. The mind is such a tricky object. One day you can be completely okay and the next you're just rolling downhill.

Jessica and I met again today. I noticed she's been picking at the tattoo on her forearm again. It's a form of self harm I believe. She got the tattoo of an Egyptian ankh at sixteen and has been scratching at the top ever since. She claims it doesn't irritate her and that she does it absentmindedly. It's a nice tattoo though, so I hope she doesn't deteriorate it with her incessant picking."

"Therapy session with patient Tessa Brown. February 20th, 2029. Okay Tessa, can we talk about your meltdown yesterday in the cafeteria?"

"What about it?"

"You were yelling about how life isn't worth living. How there's no stopping death."

"Well I'm right."

"Elaborate for me."

"There's no point in anything we do! Everyone gets forgotten about once they die, and some people aren't even known before they die! Why bother to keep on living if it doesn't matter in the end?"

"There are many people we remember. We remember presidents, scientists, war heroes, movie stars, writers, and artists. We remember kings and emperors and nations long dead. And-"

"Yeah, we remember the people who matter."

"I remember my great grandmother. I remember her smile and the Christmas cookies she made every year. My mom remembers her grandmother who knit a six foot long blanket over 20 years. My dad remembers his great uncle who chewed on metal pieces because it reminded him of the iron mill he worked at. Someone always remembers you."

"I'm not interesting enough to remember. I don't make good cookies or chew on metal or knit or dance or sing or anything worth remembering. All I do is cry and make excuses not to go places and occasionally draw my own blood. Why would anyone ever want to remember me?"

"You're nineteen Tessa. You need to give yourself time to be able to do those things! If you die, you risk never accomplishing the things you want to, or doing the things people will remember you for."

"There's no point in trying to be remembered! This place is so dead there will be no one to remember us when we're gone. There's more dead places here than could fit in one whole city or even in one whole country! I bet there's enough dead places in this place to put one in each person."

"Are you talking about Earth?"

"Yes. Earth is filled with dead places. So are we. Every mark, every scar, every trauma just adds another dead spot in our minds. Why do you think we're in here? We're more dead than human."

"February 21st, 2029. Today, today I can't. I can't do this today."

"March 1st, 2029. I am back from my leave of absence today. My abrupt leave was due to my own type of mental breakdown. Ironical, the shrink needed a shrink. My shrink said that talking is the way I process my emotions, and she told me that recording it in my files would be beneficial to both me and my future patients."

On February 21st Griffith died. His parents took him home and that night he overdosed on his medication. He left a notebook full of sporadic handwriting and poems with no sense or reason in them. I blame myself. I knew something was off but we had no reason to hold him, and they can't say if it was planned or if he just snapped. That happens sometimes. They just snap. A part of them just breaks and who they were flows out of them like water through a leak. My own breakdown wasn't fully due to his death. It was the aftermath.

It was what Jessica said to me when I came in for therapy with her. Word travels fast in here between patients. All she did was look at me with these sad eyes and her red arm. For half an hour all she did was stare at me. 'Tessa was right. There are dead parts in all of us.' Then she just stood up and left.

Jessica's scratching has gotten worse. Her tattoo is being eclipsed with raw, red skin. That ankh looked so pretty, but now it has turned into one of her dead places."

"March 5th, 2029. I am worried about Jessica. She hasn't been coming down to eat. They gave her an IV today finally but her erratic behavior in her room has me more concerned. She is pacing, yelling at the walls, and shaking and rolling on the floor. Griffith's death could not have affected her like this; she barely knew him. But again, the mind works in ways we do not understand. Her medication might not be strong enough to combat this.

Tessa is finally improving though so that is good news. Dr. Moore has changed her medication and now she's more alert and energetic. She smiled at me today and said she was happy to see me. I asked the nurse to keep an eye on her just in case. I'll never forget the hug Griffith gave Dr. Moore right before he left.

River and Logan are improving too. Logan began eating more during my absence and he took a sleeping pill last night. He still is having night terrors, but he is self soothing when he wakes up. I told him to always call a nurse after one and I'll make sure he sticks to that.

River is still blocking something from her past, but we have located a source for her kleptomania: foster care. She remembers having to steal things like clothing and food from other kids to keep herself alive in the group homes. This is an incredible breakthrough and I'm so proud of her. Hopefully we can dig deeper into this part of her. I feel this is her dead place, and we might finally be able to wake it up."

"March 6th, 2029. Jessica has taken a turn for the worse. She attacked a nurse today when they tried to put her IV back in. The nurse has scratches and bites on her arms and face thanks to Jessica. I've never seen her react like this before. I heard her screaming and howling down the hall as they tried to sedate her. It took hours for the sedatives to kick in, like she was fighting them every step of the way. She's never been dangerous before. Not like this. The nurse said Jessica never yelled at her or anything. She just lunged like an animal.

Which of her dead parts is waking up?"

"March 10th, 2029. Jessica escaped today. She broke a window in the bathroom and climbed out before lunch when the nurses were all making their rounds. I found out while in session with Logan and, I hate to say it, we ended early. He understood. The police are looking for her as I speak, but I doubt they will find her. Jessica is dead. Her erraticness, her lack of eating, her attacks; she was dead long ago. I hate to be such a nihilist but Tessa was right. They are more dead parts than humans.

River and I also made a breakthrough, and a downfall. We uncovered her dead part: stealing food from the kitchen at her first group home while the others starved to death. She started crying in our session today, which is to be expected, but the nurses say she cried all throughout the night nonstop. Logan complained he could hear her in his room too. I know it's my job to rehabilitate these people, but is it possible some people are better left as they are?"

"March 11th, 2029. Jessica is still missing. I saw another patient with a tattoo start scratching it today and I almost yelled at him. I stopped myself though, it would've been counterproductive to yell. I do miss her and I do mourn for her. I can't say for sure I hope she's alive. I just hope whatever state she is in she finds peace.

Tessa is being released in a few days. She is still prone to talking about the dead parts of us but she is genuinely better. She told me she plans to take up photography, so she can fill a house with her pictures and pass them down to the next generation. She is taking steps to be remembered; just the encouraging thing I needed to know today.

Logan is also doing better. His dead parts are healing. He hugged a nurse today, the first physical contact he had with someone in months. I told him how proud I was and he told me he's proud of himself too.

River has gone mostly mute the past few days. She is processing everything. I managed to get a few words out of her today but nothing more. She is still eating and sleeping regularly so Dr. Moore believes this will pass quickly."

"March 12th, 2029. They cleaned Jessica's room today, and found pills shoved down the sink's drain. Many weeks worth of pills were stuck in there. Of course this ups the stakes of her disappearance. If she's unmedicated she is dangerous and that is not an understatement! The news released a bulletin a few minutes ago describing her as unstable, and while I hate having to mark her as such, they aren't wrong.

Tessa told me she is scared of leaving now, but I told her not to worry. Jessica is more than likely dead or far away. I hate saying that. And I hate saying this even more: I do hope I am right."

"March 13th, 2029. I am recording this early because my wife and I are attending a banquet tonight, and I need to get these files done.

Jessica is still missing. There was a potential sighting of her along the highway, but I doubt it was real. She's gone for good, and I need to stop thinking about her.

Tessa gets out tomorrow, and she is feeling better about it. She seems more excited and we had a standard talk about proper medication use. I saw some photos she already took, and I truly hope someday someone else gets to see them.

Logan had another breakdown last night. A terror woke him and it took many nurses to calm him down. He said to me, 'I heard his footsteps again, but louder. Like he was right behind me. But when I tried to run I felt his hands on me. Holding me. Like he used to do right before he'd hit me.' I made a note to work more on overcoming his fear of contact next session.

River is better. Dr. Moore and her have been meeting as I've been busy with Tessa and Logan. Dr. Moore said that River is learning to deal with her kleptomania through acknowledging that she no longer needs to fight to survive. I don't believe she'll need medication, but much extensive therapy.

So many people. So many dead parts to comb through. So much. It is amazing how damaged someone can, wait a minute. I smell something. I hope Dr. Turner didn't take up smoking again. What is that? Is that, fire. Fire! Fi-"

The recording cut out and went dead. Jesse sat there in shock. So that was how it had happened. She stood off her crate and surveyed the skeleton of the hospital that sat before her. It had been ten days since it had burned to the ground. The smoke lingered in the air still. She grabbed the recorder and stepped back through the yellow tape and past the hundreds of flowers at the base of the road. 521 people died inside the hospital including nurses and doctors. Psych ward patients burned alive in their rooms, emergency crews were unable to get through the fire, and electrical flashes caused power outages for miles. It was terrible. It had been terrible.

They said on the news that it was an explosion. That someone had malfunctioned the boiler and the resulting explosion had started the hungry fire. She laughed at that. It hadn't been a boiler malfunction! No fire was that big from a malfunction. Now a short circuit of the generators, that was what really started fires. So few things had been salvaged. Clothing, machines, pillows, a

camera, a compartment filled with pens and pencils, and assorted toys were just a few. Jesse turned away from it all.

She kept walking farther and farther. She had no clue where she was going just that the recorder in her hands was too precious to lose. It was all she had now, well and an ID, clothing, and a water bottle. She'd walk to a different town. One where hospitals didn't burn down. One where people were better. Where they understood about the dead parts and the sadness inside souls.

Her hand strayed to the ankh on her arm as she began picking at the top of it. The warm blood felt nice. She wondered if Griffith had felt that nice when he had died. Wondering, it always led where you didn't want to go. She wondered if Dr. Vitler's wife would cry at his funeral. Sometimes people didn't. The emotions just wouldn't come. Jesse hoped no one would cry. She hoped they'd know for a few seconds what it felt like to have a dead part right where their heart was.

The Musician's Calling

Inspired by: "The Hitch-Hiker", a radio play by Lucille Fletcher

Henry stepped out of the small music shop and groaned at the sight of yet another rainstorm. It was dark, the street lights illuminating the sunset colors of the very last of the soaking wet, falling leaves, a brief blink of lightning brightening the sky every so often. The man stepped out into the rain, clutching his guitar case as he crossed the road.

He took shelter at his usual bus station and set down his case, undipping it to reveal the prized possession that he now owned. He sighed and picked it up carefully. He strummed a few chords. For just a second, he could have sworn he saw the rain stop. He strummed a few more chords and sighed, his heart heavy under the weight of his mother's harsh words. He could never be a musician, no son of hers ever would. He mulled over the thought of her reaction to his new purchase. Henry was mortified, thinking that maybe he shouldn't have gone to such a length to get something like this. His mother had told him that he would end up like his father-naive and irresponsible, chasing some silly dream. At this point, he was deep in thought, dozing off to the sound of the heavy rain until a stranger's voice cut in.

"Why the long face? Looks like you got a fine instrument there." A man sat out in the rain, his clothes in tattered rags, his face oily, the dim lights accentuating his deep wrinkles. He had salt-and-pepper hair, mouth and chin hidden by his dirty, white bush of a beard, his skin stretched out like a piece of soft taffy. His eyes twinkled with wisdom and happiness, and his voice seemed gruff, but vaguely familiar.

Beside the man sat a beat up instrument case, stained and cracked with years of use.

"What?" Henry tilted his head, not quite sure if the man had actually spoken. "You look troubled. I wanna know how anybody can be sad with that beauty in their hands" The man gestured to Henry's guitar, seeming interested.

"Why do you need to know?" Henry glared daggers at the old man,.

"Well, I'm a musician myself." The older man took his guitar out of its case and began strumming a familiar tune.

Henry perked up and listened a little, cautiously taking out his own instrument to play with him. They two played off of one another harmoniously, both knowing the song by heart.

As they finished playing, the man asked once again,

"So, what's the matter with that there?"

Henry sighed, maybe it wouldn't hurt to vent to a random homeless guy after all

"Oh, well my mom don't approve of my music. Think's it's a waste of time. But I'm hopin' to make it big someday." Henry replied, clutching his guitar.

"Ah, I see. Do you wanna make music? Does it make you happy?"

"Yeah, of course it does but-"

The homeless man interrupted,

"Then do what makes you happy, nobody'll stop ya. If ya folks don't approve, it don't matter. All that matters is that it's your life, ain't it? So don't wait up for other people. What I've learned is nobody makes a difference in your life other than yourself. So ya wanna make music? You go out and play it."

Henry sighed and dismissed the old man's word. What did he know?

"What do you mean? You're not happy, did you not follow your own advice?"

"Who says I'm not? I'm free to do what I want, when I want, and most of all, I can play my own music the way I want it."

"I guess. . . that makes sense. . ."

"Look, It doesn't matter how many loonies ya got in the bank, or how many cars are in the garage, what really matters is if your doin' what ya love, eh?"

Henry smiled a little at the man, considering this advice as he looked out at the slowly clearing night sky. Finally, the white and green little bus came bustling down the busy streets and stopped at where the two were sitting. Then Henry got up, picking his own guitar case up as he looked at the older man for a final glance of gratitude.

"You know what? You're right. Thank you"

He got onto the bus and hastily sat down, clutching onto his hopes as well as his instrument case. As he peered out the freshly moistened window, he noticed a pair of beautiful blue jays, fluttering among the branches of the trees before the bus began moved once again, toward his destination.

After fifteen minutes, the bus came to a halt. Henry stood, and took a deep breath before swiftly striding out of the bus and making it to the door of his own house. Fumbling with the keys, he nervously unlocked the door and pushed it open, only to hear a very familiar gasp.

"Henry Martin Bernard, is that a guitar?! You know I've forbidden you from such things in this house!"

"Yes, mum I know. But unfortunately for you, I've made my decision! If you don't want me to be a musician even if it's what I love, then maybe you don't love me. You should be happy with my dreams! Not berate me for my only talent I found in myself. I wanna play guitar!"

Henry's mother was convulsing, shaking her head violently "I will not have my son throw his life away, just like your father! Where will you go? What would you do without me?! You'd be starving and alone!"

"But at least I'd be happy with what I'm doing. I love music, and I want to do what I love"

His mother looked down, hot tears streaming down her face as she yanked the door open, "then go! Get out of my house! I don't want you here anymore!"

Henry gasped and paused, staring at his mother for a second, as if not believing her. He packed his things faster than his brain could process, afraid that if he paused, he'd give up, go back to being miserable, go back to being who he wasn't. After what seemed like hours of running away from his past, he finally settled down on the raised edge of the sidewalk, putting his bag and guitar case down beside him, his joints popping and cracking. Once again, he unclipped his case and pulled out his guitar, but this time, he began calmly strumming a song. He played, his breathing grew more steady, his heart slowed slightly. The street lights seemed to brighten around him, the blue jays singing with him as they flew.

Over the years, there he sat, optimistically strumming the tunes until he grew old. Old, new, quick, slow, he didn't care. As long as he could continue playing. Frail, softened, but jolly all around as everyday he sat on the side of the road, doing what he loved. His fingers became rubber, his arms twigs, but yet he still continued to play. He lived with a smile on his face and

happiness in his heart, even as the youth slowly began to melt away from him. Everyday pedestrians would look at him and pity him for living on the street for so many years, for being alone, but the brighter few felt the love and joy in his music as the flesh danced across the instrument's strings.

On one particular evening, as he sat at a nearby bus stop for a quick rest of his ancient bones, his intricate labyrinth of wrinkles changing shape as he stretched. It was getting dark, even starting to rain, but the old man had been through worse, unphased by getting a little wet. He sat at the curb, his guitar in his aged case as he looked over to notice a young man who seemed troubled, a shiny new instrument in the arms. Henry furrowed his eyebrows and cleared his throat, asking a question in a gruff voice.

"Why the long face? Looks like you got a fine instrument there"

The Death of a Walrus

"The time has come," the Walrus said,

"To talk of many things:

Of shoes--and ships--and sealing-wax--

Of cabbages--and kings--

And why the sea is boiling hot--

And whether pigs have wings."

-Lewis Carroll, the Walrus and the Carpenter

"God is dead." This quote by Friedrich Nietzsche carried intense philosophical weight, denoting a radical change in man's relationship with the divine. However, the meaning he supposed it to have was not nearly as important as the meaning it truly held. As even with his various intelligences, Nietzsche did not understand the nature of gods. Gods are living beings similar to plants and animals. But instead of feeding on flesh or light they feed on belief. And the only way they can die is via starvation. In the early days gods lived for a very short amount of time only living as long as the mollusks that accidentally believed in them. But, via evolutionary advances living creatures developed the ability to communicate between one another. This allowed gods to gain multiple believers and to effectively live forever. Gods still starved with new gods taking their place but, for the most part, it was stable. This environmental stability was disrupted by the very same forces that drove Mr. Nietzsche to make his statement. With the power of industrialization men could kill each other at a rate never before seen. Followers of particular gods gained the ability to kill most believers of another god through suppression and genocide. So by the time of Nietzsche at least some gods were, indeed, dead.

And gods continue to die. For example, a god most recently died in a small coastal town about thirty five miles south of San Francisco. In this town there was one of America's largest egg farms. It was an old place. The fence, once sturdy, would fall with a strong gust of wind. The barn was once painted red was now a faded pink. Inside the barn there was machinery that looked as though it belonged in a museum. It was a place where dust prevailed, muting color everywhere. The only part of the farm that looked even relatively new was the chicken coup. Inside this coup sat the youngest thing on the farm, Nicholas Gorchakov.

Nicholas Gorchakov, by his genetics, would not be a person that you would expect to be working on an egg farm. For three-hundred year his family had been responsible for building the ships that would be used in the Russian navy. This contract allowed his family to amass a large sum of money. But as the political climate of Russia rapidly changed the Gorchakov family was forced to leave. As America was accepting immigrants from all countries, Nicholas's Grandfather decided to settle near San Francisco. With the family fortune Alexander Gorchakov bought a cigarette factory, but he understood ships, not cigarettes. One bad and Greedy business deal lead to another and in one generation centuries of wealth was lost. This forced Nicholas's father to choose a more modest line of work, becoming a carpenter. And this economic position forced Nicholas to collect eggs for a living.

One misty morning, while Nicholas concerned himself collecting eggs, in Russia a walrus sat on a hill. The walrus watched as three of his last followers were buried. The same forces which drove Nicholas's family out of Russia were now killing that regions gods. Now the great god, Morbog, was left

alone in the land he called home, waiting to starve. For about a year he waited to no end. By now he should have starved. So he went to a soothsayer who told him that he had one last believer in a faraway land.

It was a normal Tuesday. Nicholas woke up and collect the eggs that were laid the night before. Then he went into the house and ate breakfast with the other farm hands. After breakfast he went to feed the chickens. He did this until lunch. After lunch he collected the eggs that were laid that day. With this done he ate dinner. Then he read a book for about an hour. After a long day Nicholas went to bed. As he was laying in bed attempting to get to sleep Nicholas saw something strange. In the door way stood a fat figure that was wearing a top hat. This figure concerned Nicholas so he rushed to turn on his light. This was a mistake.

In his doorway stood a walrus. The walrus was wearing a three piece suit, shiny black shoes, and a top hat. As Nicholas held a shocked look on his face the walrus calmly reached into its pocket pulling out a cigar. He lit it puffing the smoke into Nicholas's face. With this Nicholas developed the composer to ask, "wha...what are you."

"A god my dear boy" the walrus responded in a clear and concise voice, the type of voice you would expect Rockefeller to have.

Without thinking Nicholas asked, "What God?"

"I go by many names, but I believe that you were told my name is Morbog"

"That...that is a fairy tale told to me by my grandmother"

"No matter how you have heard of me, the important thig is that you have. Without you I would be dead. You are my last believer. I need you to survive. You need to tell others my story." After saying this the walrus vanished leaving three bronze coins. To understated, Nicholas was startled.

The next day Nicholas asked his friends if they had drugged him. Nicholas, assumed one of his friends had slipped mescaline in his tea or something. They all denied this. After coming to this realization, in his head, Nicholas heard, "I am real, now time is fleeting, tell others my story."

Later that day Nicholas went to see his best friend, John, at the police station. John had never wanted to be a police officer instead wanting to fly planes like his father did. Unfortunately the air force would not accept him due to his stature. John and Nicholas ate lunch in a quaint public garden about half a mile from the police station. As they ate lunch next to well-manicured bushes Nicholas began to explain what happened to him last night. Once he finished John calmly asked Nicholas to tell him the story of Morbog. So Nicholas told John one of the stories his grandmother had told him. "Ok, back in Russia there was once a king who ruled over the poorest kingdom in the land. But, his kingdom had control over the major waterways that went through Russia. After a famine hit, the king prayed to the Gods to give them help and only one god responded to the king's prayers Morbog, a malnourished minor god of walruses and greed. The king asked Morbog what he could do to help his people and after some thought Morbog responded that he had an idea. Pulling out a silver circle, Morbog explained to the king that it was called money and that it didn't have any value until you applied value onto it. Under the instruction of Morbog the king had his smiths make one hundred coins from worthless metals like silver and gold. He then gave them out to his citizens promising value for each coin. Soon the empire

made their coins a standard currency by forcing every merchant that used its water ways to trade with them. After only a year the poor and hungry kingdom became a fat and rich empire. As these 'riches' spread so did greed, making the walrus fat"

As soon as Nicholas had finished his story a storm cloud moved overhead raining on the two men. They left in two separate directions heading back to work. On Nicholas's walk back he had to cross a beach and as he walked through the sand the walrus suddenly began to walk next to him. "You have done well" the walrus began "it's a place to start but I need more"

"How many will you need?" said the carpenter's son.

"That, cannot be defined my dear boy."

"Well, if I am going to be telling people about you, I want something in return."

"But of course, there is always a price, what do you desire? I can deliver you the secrets of the gods, the riches of kings, the fish of the seas, or if you desire the flesh of the virgins." The beast took a long puff from his cigar looking exasperated by the speed of his language. After his pause he thoughtfully added "but of course after you gain me followers"

"So, nothing now?"

"Yes nothing now"

Nicholas returned to the farm no longer concerning himself with the affairs of gods or walruses. Nicholas returned to his normal life. At least for a moment because the next day John had been given a letter saying that he had been drafted to go to some country with a funny name, this was a shock at first but ended up being a blessing as he was going to be trained on how to fly helicopters. Except for that mild disturbance Nicholas's life went back to routine. But, after that time of peace, a hungry voice appeared in Nicholas's head. It told Nicholas that it was starving and that he needed to tell people his story. He ignored it. The next day he heard the same voice again and again once a day for five days. Then it disappeared. The next night as Nicholas was going to bed he saw a sight of horrors. It was Morbog that was unmistakable, but he had grown thin, his clothes no longer fit, hanging loosely off his body, his eyes were sunken, and his top hat had sagged. This image stayed in Nicholas's head. No matter how hard he tried to shake the image. The next day Nicholas decided to go to San Francisco, he could not tell you why.

As he entered the city, Nicholas felt power emanate around him. He was a messenger of the gods and felt like it. He walked down Pine. As he walked Nicholas saw every facet of his era, from a women giving fortunes, to men selling peace. It was a typical day in San Francisco. Looking around, Nicholas found a place to do what he had to do. He stood up on a rather large stone and began to talk. Nicholas did not know the power of what he was standing on. One hundred year ago it had been used as the block on which human capital was sold. This made that stone hated like no other stone, and hatred breeds power. Because of this power Nicholas was able to quickly generate a crowd.

As it turns out Morbog was rather lucky to be in need at this time in place. As the citizens of San Francisco at this time were perfectly primed to believe in a god of greed and money. They heard stories of him giving his followers money and thought in that self-important tone all too common of their

generation "that could be me." Day after day Nicholas returned to the stone collecting more followers each time.

One day as he was walking back to the farm Nicholas caught a glimpse of the most beautiful women he had ever seen. Her very existence was pornographic. She was wearing a flowy shirt that had a diamond pattern repeated on it, a t-shirt with a penguin on it, and rose colored glasses. When he saw her first she was leading a group of similarly dressed individuals in a chanting of Hare Krishna. As they were repeating the mantra Nicholas and the girl met eyes for a split second. He walked up to talk to her but decided to not mid stride.

But he continued to tell stories. Some he knew from his childhood. Some he heard from a well-fed voice in his head. After doing this every day for a week, a bag of money was laid at the stoop of his door. So he continued and the money kept coming in. Nicholas was beginning to gain a reputation in the city with some beginning to think that he was a profit. One day as he was speaking he saw the girl that he saw before, this time dresses like a Babylonian priests, as he was speaking he saw her listening. Once he concluded she shook her head in disappointment. For about three months he toiled at his work telling stories on his stone which now was gaining a different type of power.

One day as Nicholas was sorting through his mail he saw one letter that stood out. It was marked as being sent by the United States army. It said that Nicolas's friend John had been killed in action, with the date and location of his death. John had no living family, his mother was killed by cancer and his father through a particularly heated argument over politics that ended in gunfire. So it only made sense that the army would tell Nicholas of his friend's death. With this disheartening news Nicholas, more than ever, felt like he needed to tell others a story or two.

Once he felt that he was done for the day Nicholas walked back home in a somber mood. As he walked back he met the priestess he saw before. She was wearing the same penguin shirt as she was when they first saw each other. In the breathy overtly sexualized voice that you would expect by looking at her she asked or rather told him "you look bad. Somebody died." before Nicholas could speak again she said "you are going to come with me" ushering Nicholas into her van. On the side of the van there was an abstract picture of a wizard fighting a dinosaur as the Cheshire cat looked on in the background. Inside the car there was carpet lining every surface in every color of the rainbow.

They drove to a shack with a sign reading "acid tests" over the door. They entered a room with various beanbags and lava lamps scattered about. The girl handed Nicholas a piece of paper that had the picture of an oyster on it. He was told to let it dissolve on his tongue and he followed the instructions. Nicholas did not remember what happened next, only certain details. The only part that he could remember was a penguin wearing a clean white shirt, an overcoat, and yellow tinted sunglasses that looked as though they were made in a much earlier time. Depending on how you looked at it, it either looked like the penguin or the girl who had brought Nicholas there. It softly said to Nicholas "you know, I HATE walruses."

The next day the local newspaper ran a story, "Even one time can be too many: Local farm hand emitted into Mental Hospital after attending acid test."

Upon the Mountain- Cori Salsgiver

Up upon the mountain tops
the glossy white glows,
where the wind never stops
and what melts is never the snows,

where even wolves bundle up
and hot chocolate's in your cup.
The weather outside the window wails
and you hear the pitter--pat of the hails.

Up upon the mountain tops,
slip and slide above icy drops.
Layers upon layers of that cold winter snow
where the wind never stops.

Up upon the mountain tops,
listen, listen, you will hear
the sound of chilling silence in the air
where no one dares to speak or climb
up on those cold, snowy mountain tops.

Up upon the mountain tops
I trudge carefully in the freezing climate,
but the people don't understand
what a thrill it is to climb it.

Up upon the mountain tops
keep moving, moving.
Don't slip or fall!
One wrong move,
then your heart will stop.
There, you'll be forgotten,
frozen,

up upon the mountain tops.



Story 11

Like a simile
Like a simile
Like a simile
Like a simile
Like a simile
Like a simile
Like a simile
Like a simile
Like a simile
Like a simile
Like a simille
Like a simile
Like a simille
Ok ok ko no backspace
This story is a disgrace
I made it just in haste
I drove my car one day and
That day that day i look out my window and I say
Hey hey hey
To all the passerby
And I say why are you be and I say Why am I me and I say philosophy
And I say scrap all that
And I say why not take a bat to your hat
And I say because they say so
And I say Okay okay ill go ill go
And I drive away
And they say gee whiz i gotta take a piss
That is the end right there

I Hate Feminists

I hate feminists

I hate feminists who preach consent until BDSM is mentioned
I hate feminists who refuse to say male or female when referring to bodily autonomy
I hate feminists who bash women for choosing traditional living
I hate feminists with double standards
I hate feminists

I hate gays

I hate gays who think they can touch girls because "I'm gay, I'm not hitting on you"
I hate gays who think you need to be either a hunk or a twink
I hate gays who bully and hide behind their sexuality
I hate gays who divide interests into gay interests and straight interests
I hate gays

I hate lesbians

I hate "gold star" lesbians who refuse to date girls who've been with men
I hate lesbians who think straight sex is automatically unfulfilling
I hate lesbians who demonize men
I hate lesbians who try to turn girls
I hate lesbians

I hate humans

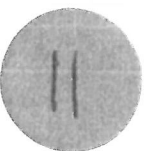
I hate humans who believe only some deserve human rights
I hate humans who refuse to accept science
I hate humans who manipulate and play mind games
I hate humans who don't help those in need
I hate humans

I know this poem didn't rhyme
But nowadays those who speak are vilified
Words are supposed to be our connection
But yours don't matter if they're not to perfection

I don't care anymore
I won't lay submissive on the floor
You can't preach both sides at the same time
So buckle up baby, I'm drawing the line

Streelight

A beacon of light
Against the night's siren's song of softness.
The golden glowing life raft,
In a sea of mist
Draws ever closer
And comforts with a throne
Of wood and metal
Encircling with a faux halo of sunlight
Serene and fuzzy
But where the darkness begins
Outside the pool of light
Lays all uncertainty
And when this light is behind
That sea of uncertain mist
Will do its best to drown
Until the next life raft floats along



Voices

Through the whirl and whipping
of heavy wildflowers,

I heard a voice.

Coming calmly from a cloud,
it appeared to be calling to me.

I continued comfortably on-
puzzling, perplexing, problematic.
Voices came lurking from the gravel,
threatening to trip me from behind
like virulent snakes.

I persisted on-
serenity, stillness, silence.

Atop the cliff
voices

F

A

L

L

then spread their wings,
taking flight over my head.

They were disregarded-
blissful, beatific, buoyant.

Searching for more.

Rolling hills under feet,
hands to azure sky.

Ocean waves wash over the stream,
swept by the current

I bury myself in.

The Disillusioned

You were once someone I thought I knew

The illusion that together we'd bloom

The more I began to know you the colder you grew

Soon all your words faded with some particular gloom

The events leading up were threaded with pain, sewn

together by anxiety's loom

Soon I grew distanced too

In the end seclusion will be your bride and the disillusion my
groom

Hibernation

Do I decay
Do I melt and rot away
Do the raven-feathers lose their shine
Are my possessions no longer mine
Do I haunt you
Do I haunt a makeshift grave
What I want to do
Is to take back the life I gave
Do the goggles and earrings rust
Does the polish fleck and fade
Is it right, dear, is it just
Why nobody came to my aid
Please loot my corpse, I beg you
I won't need my things anymore
Although I would like to keep
The soul I hide deep in my core
Black, shiny and small
Only as big as a stone
My soul is brittle and hollow
Made of tears, blood and packaging foam
I've wandered a great many years
As a bloodsucker, my wounds are deep
So if I look dead to you
Please know that I'm only asleep