

An abstract photograph of orange ink being poured into dark water. The ink forms a large, central, rounded mass with intricate, swirling patterns and delicate, wispy trails that spread outwards. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the texture and movement of the ink against the dark background.

OMNISHAMBLES
VOL. 2

MARTY SHAMBLES

omnishambles vol. 2
by Marty Shambles

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The Luddites

Characters

NARRATOR

MARK

ERIS

GEOFF

FYRE HYDRANT

HARBINGER

KING OF SADNESS

SUNSHINE JONES

Scene 1

(A podium is DOWN LEFT. This is where the narrator goes. AT RISE there is only a spot on the podium as everything else remains in darkness. The narrator is a woman. The backdrop is a projection screen to be used at director's discretion.)

narrator

The great expanse of strip malls and business parks stretched as far as the heart could yearn. It followed the highway, like a parasite on a parasite, marking its territory in the pockmarked American South. Human labor built this expanse, in which a McBurger franchise employed Mark and Eris. This story begins when they lost their jobs. They were in their mid 20s and hot. Their boss, Geoff, was in his mid 40s and poured into his uniform like hot ranch dressing poured into a ziploc bag.

(Lights rise to reveal MARK, ERIS, and GEOFF. Geoff addresses the other two. There's a cardboard sign that reads 'McBurger' in hand scrawl.)

geoff

There comes a time for every employee these days when robots come for your jobs. For you that time is now. This is y'all's last shift. We're fully automating this McBurger, so your services will not be needed past tonight. Thank you for being such valuable members of the McBurger family. Any questions?

eris

Well that's a fine how-do-ya-do, Geoff.

GEOFF

If you finish your shift tonight I'm authorized to offer a \$300 bonus.

MARK

\$300 isn't a job.

ERIS

I'd rather get drunk on bargain liquor behind the HEB.

narrator

Eris turned to Mark, whom she'd never said a non-work-related thing to in her 2 months at the restaurant.

ERIS

Are you coming?

NARRATOR

Torn between his love of work and his love of women talking to him, Mark didn't know what to say.

GEOFF

\$400, Mark! That's the best I can do. If not for the money, do it for the McBurger family.

ERIS

Do you fire family? Replace them with robots?

GEOFF

Hey, I'm not a bad guy. I'm a businessman. And sometimes that means cutting the fat. It means making the hard decisions. You understand that, right Mark?

MARK

Business is important.

ERIS

If you come with me you'll never have to worry about money again.

(ERIS leaves.)

MARK

Sooo... I'm gonna go. I need to find out what she meant by that. Do you think I could still get a letter of recommendation?

GEOFF

He's leaving me high and dry and he wants a letter of recommendation.

NARRATOR

Mark put his messenger bag on his shoulder and sulked out of the McBurger. Outside, he scanned the parking lot for Eris. She didn't wait for him, but he clocked her going into the liquor store, which he entered soon after. There Eris was looking at the discount liquor shelf. She grabbed a bottle of wedding cake vodka and turned to Mark.

ERIS

Oh good, you made it. We need this wedding cake vodka. It's a very special occasion.

MARK

What's the special occasion?

ERIS

Robots taking our jobs. It's time to celebrate human things, you know?

MARK

Right. But you said...

NARRATOR

She was already at the counter. The guy at the counter had aspirations in life, not dissimilar to Mark, but this guy, he still had a job to lose and thus couldn't give the vodka away for free if he wanted to, which he didn't. He said, "Twelve-fifty-seven." Eris handed him her card, and through the magic of modern commerce, the vodka transferred ownership to her. Back outside the sun was waning East and a cold haunt of wind blew her hair as she opened the bottle and drank.

ERIS

Wow. That really tastes like wedding cake.

(She hands him the bottle.)

MARK

I'm not going to drink out here. I'll get arrested.

ERIS

Fine we'll go behind the HEB to drink.

MARK

Why don't we go to my place? I'm just a few blocks from here.

ERIS

You can never go home again.

MARK

What the fuck does that mean?

ERIS

It means pass the bottle if you're not gonna drink.

NARRATOR

He handed her the bottle and they walked to one of the loading docks behind the HEB grocery store, by the locked dumpster, surrounded by the byzantine maze of the rears of stores.

Eris spoke, standing on the empty loading dock which framed like a stage.

ERIS

I like the backs of stores. It's what stores are like when they don't have to put on a front and be somebody they're not. But here, behind stores, they have a sort of dreamy quality. All the sameness measured for miles.

MARK

I prefer the gussed up fronts of stores. I like being enticed by all the bells and whistles.

NARRATOR

He drank as hard as he could. The vodka was very sweet and there was the hint of cake batter flavor before the crushing rubbing alcohol taste at the end.

MARK

I'm not much of a drinker. I prefer success.

ERIS

In lieu of success, there's always cheap vodka. No, scratch that. Vodka is success.

NARRATOR

They drank more. The chill came harder as the sun ducked behind the building.

MARK

Hey, what did you mean when you said that I'd never have to worry about money again? Do you know of another job or something?

ERIS

Yeah, just like don't worry about it. It's fine.

MARK

It's just... I gave up \$400 to follow you, so I'm a little invested in what my future looks like.

ERIS

The future looks like that.

NARRATOR

She pointed at the locked dumpster.

ERIS

The future is trash, but it's unavailable to you anyway.

MARK

I don't believe that. We just need to get back to our core principles and we can be prosperous again.

ERIS

And what are those core principles?

MARK

Hard work and ingenuity.

ERIS

Everyone I know has worked hard their whole lives and don't have much to show for it.

MARK

Well they're losers.

ERIS

I hate to break it to you bud, but if they're losers, so are you.

NARRATOR

It grew dark and fog rolled in. The lights of the business park illuminated the fog a jackolantern orange and all the walls of the business park seemed to close in... like there was less sky.

He found a sliver of shadow to piss in, on the other side of the locked dumpster.

MARK

You wanna come over to my pad and watch some fast and furious or something?

ERIS

It's too late. The fog is here...

(As if performing a ritual.)

And The clouds were the small, puffy kind, moving like a fast-motion time-lapse film. The stars poked out between clouds and sent Eris unspoken messages. For she knew the language of the stars. She knew the vernacular of the spectacular.

(Mark zips up and walks back.)

MARK

What is that? Is that from something?

ERIS

It's from the cosmos.

MARK

Cool, well I'm going to go home. What are you gonna do? Talk all poetical about stars?

ERIS

Poetry is a gutter filled with champagne, in which Narcissus saw his reflection.

MARK

....Or wedding cake vodka?

NARRATOR

He looked around and there were buildings where he thought there were none. The direction he thought he came from was walled in.

MARK

Which way to Blank Street? I'm more fucked up than I thought.

ERIS

Forward.

(She sprays an anarchist A on the wall with spray paint.)

distant voice (O.S.)

HEY!

ERIS

Oh shit! Put this in your bag.

(She hands him the spray paint and the vodka. He dutifully puts the items in his bag.)

DISTANT VOICE (O.S.)

(Closer.)

HEY!

Scene 2

(Mark is running through the fog of the back corridors of a business park.)

NARRATOR

Mark could hear footfalls before him and behind him but couldn't see anyone. He made a turn, then another turn. He ducked behind some bushes until he couldn't hear anything but the hum of not-too-distant traffic.

(Mark hides behind some bushes.)

NARRATOR

He got out his phone to search maps for Blank Street, but the search wouldn't load. He waited and waited. Nothing happened. He got out from behind the bushes and decided to switch over to tiktok to see if he could get any data on his phone. There he saw dudes yelling about the secrets of success. This is what the phone told him he wanted.

(A projection of a tiktok video comes on the projection screen. It shows a dude with meticulously pruned facial hair and a Nazi haircut.)

influencer

If you're poor, you're lazy. If you're rich, you earned it. I don't want to hear you whining about how you can't afford rent with 3 jobs! Get 8 jobs! Get 20 jobs! If you think that's temporally impossible, get a time machine! Stagnant wages and rising prices aren't why you're poor. You're poor because you're lazy and make bad choices and don't eat enough raw meat.

NARRATOR

Mark told the app that he wanted to record his own video. He hit record and held the phone out to catch his face.

MARK

Hey fam, still on that grindset here in some sort of suburban purgatory, just off the highway. But I'm still hustlin', even in an impossible place. If I could just find Blank Street I could find my way home.

(Mark finishes his video. Eris sneaks up on him.)

ERIS

Blank street is a street where all the signs are a blank blur, like they're viewed out a car window. There are billboards advertising nothing and the addresses are all the same. Makes deliveries a nightmare.

MARK

That's not what Blank Street is.

ERIS

Tell me one detail about Blank Street and I'll shut up.

MARK

Well, it has features, like roads and houses. There's at least one mailbox.

ERIS

All the people are blurred on Blank Street, too. They're somewhere between entity and nonentity. Maybe you are from Blank Street. Where's the vodka?

(Mark produces the bottle from his bag and hands it to her.)

MARK

Not much left.

ERIS

There's always more.

(Eris drinks the last of the bottle and it refills itself with vodka, as if by magic.)

MARK

What the fuck? Are you Jesus?

ERIS

A fun party trick. Nothing more.

MARK

That's one wild party.

ERIS

But you prefer success.

MARK

Were you saying I'm a borderline nonentity?

ERIS

I was saying you haven't left a mark yet. But hey, the night is young... Mark.

MARK

You're causing all of this, aren't you...

(A man in a tattered tuxedo hobbles onstage. He will be here known as Fyre Hydrant.)

NARRATOR

A figure emerged from the orange fog--the figure of a man in a tattered tuxedo. He walked with a hobbled weariness, like he had always been walking.

fyre

Do you know my name?

ERIS

You don't know your name?

FYRE

I can't remember anything beyond this strip mall.

MARK

What about blank street?

FYRE

Blank...

ERIS

Do you have a wallet? Check your pockets for anything. It could be a clue.

NARRATOR

When he searched his memory, this tuxedoed man remembered what a wallet and pockets were. He found a wallet and handed it over to Eris. She opened it up and there was an ID.

ERIS

Your name is Jonah Sackler.

(Eris digs deeper in the wallet and finds thousands of dollars in cash.)

FYRE

Jonah...

ERIS

(looking at the cash.)

You can't have this many of these.

FYRE

What?

ERIS

You have too many monies. It's against the rules. We're going to divvy this up equally amongst us so we can all have the same amount.

MARK

You're going to take that money?

ERIS

We're just going to make sure everyone has the same amount. How much money do you have?

MARK

About 25 bucks. You can't have it.

FYRE

Jon-ah Sack-ler.

NARRATOR

Eris counted up the money and pulled a calculator from her purse.

ERIS

Carry the 2 and...

(She counts out a stack of money and hands it to Mark.)

ERIS

Here you go.

MARK

There's got to be \$2,500 here.

NARRATOR

He was about to refuse it but thought about his rent over off Blank Street. His roommates were hounding him for it. He was a month behind and unemployed. He tried to remember his roommates' faces...

FYRE

Jo-nah... Do I get some money too?

ERIS

Yes, Jonah, here's your stack.

FYRE

I don't think I like that name. I'm going to go by Fyre Hydrant.

ERIS

Whatever you say, Fyre.

NARRATOR

Fyre Hydrant wandered off with a stack of money he carried before him in cupped hands, like a sick baby bird.

(Fyre wanders offstage.)

MARK

I can't believe you just took his money like that.

(Eris reaches into his bag and pulls out the spray paint as she speaks.)

ERIS

Nobody has that kind of cash like that by bettering humanity. This is a net positive for everyone.

MARK

How is that a net positive for him?

ERIS

Too much money kills the soul.

(She sprays an A with a circle around it on a wall.)

DISTANT VOICE (O.S.)

HEY! Stop right there!

(Eris once again hands him the can and the bottle, and runs off. Mark stuffs the items in his bag and runs too.)

Scene 3

(Mark running through fog.)

NARRATOR

Mark ran through the corridors of the business park until it opened to a 7-11, with its pale whitegreen light that irradiated what shadows tried to intrude. Mark was done running. His lung capacity was not what it should be.

(A man emerges from the fog. He wears tattered clothes and a sign that reads "The End is not nigh!" He goes by the name HARBINGER.)

harbinger

You don't deserve an apocalypse! You don't get the satisfaction of it all ending with you, because you have not earned it! You try so hard to end it. You try so fucking hard. But the world will go on without you! You built such elaborate contraptions to destroy it all. You've destroyed the environment, societal bonds, social contract. The endless churn of war and profit reduce every life into a thing to be used and discarded... All these thrashings to be the last one and what do you get?

Anti-climax.

The squeaking sound when you stretch the mouth of a balloon... You will live until you don't. And others will come after. This is your punishment for all of your impotent flailings.

MARK

So if we create an ideal society we'll all get wiped out?

HARBINGER

Don't act like that's something you don't want.

NARRATOR

Mark, deep down, knew he wanted an apocalypse. He yearned to be the last man, like every neoliberal subject does. And for a moment he wanted a more just society just so he could see it burn. He went into the 7-11.

Scene 4

(Inside the 7-11 Mark is shopping. The clerk is behind the counter, watching the till. He wears a name tag that reads 'King Of Sadness.' There's a cardboard sign that reads '7-11' in hand scrawl. Mark's clothes are a tattered mess compared to the last time he was seen.)

(Mark looks around the shop while recording a video for tiktok.)

MARK

Hey fam! Still stuck in purgatory! About to get some food here at the 7-11. Need some fuel for the grind. It feels like I've been here for weeks, but it's still night. I suspect there are temporal anomalies here that I can't measure.

KING OF SADNESS

Hey you can't discuss temporal anomalies in here!

MARK

Who are you? The time cops?

(Looks at his name tag.)

And why does your name tag say 'King Of Sadness?'

KING OF SADNESS

That's my name.

MARK

Like your first name is King...

KING OF SADNESS

My middle name is Of and my last name is Sadness.

MARK

You don't seem very sad.

KING OF SADNESS

It's just a name. You don't go up to Tom Waits and say, "You don't look like you're waiting," do you?

MARK

Maybe you are really sad after all. Sad about your name. Sad about working at the 7-11. Sad about your temporal anomaly policy.

KING OF SADNESS

It's just a name. Are you going to buy anything?

MARK

So your parents are named Sadness?

KING OF SADNESS

No. They were really into nominative determinism. My brother is named Sunshine Jones. He's an addict.

MARK

So you are sad... sad about your brother.

KING OF SADNESS

Well I guess... yeah... I think about the things he has to do for his poison and that makes me think of all the junkies in the world and how we as a society have completely written them off as degenerates and worthy of death, and then I think of all the people we view as expendable and I think of all the people who are not allowed to be as good as they want to be because they're trapped in an economic system that requires compromises of character, and it's all just so damn overwhelming at times I have to lay in the bathtub long after the shower's gone cold and I can't feel temperature anymore.

MARK

TMI dude. I'll get this chicken salad sandwich.

Scene 5

(Mark walks through fog.)

NARRATOR

Mark walked through the fog for what could have been literally any length of time until he came upon the McBurger he gave a year of his life to. This seemed

like such a long time to spend in one low-paying place, when there were millions to be made.
He looked in on the Mcburger and found the robots doing his job and he felt a crushing weight of uselessness.

ERIS (O.S.)

Aren't you mad?

(Mark is startled by the voice. Eris enters and comes up behind Mark.)

ERIS

Aren't you mad they deny you a livelihood for profit?

MARK

I would do the same thing to me.

ERIS

You spend so much energy on imagining how you would ruin other people if you were in charge. You're not going to be in charge, Mark. You're just another shmuck like everybody else.

MARK

Maybe you're right... I don't know... But no it doesn't make me mad. It makes me long for a halcyon era when hard work meant a guarantee in the American Dream.

ERIS

When was that?

MARK

I don't know. Olden times.

ERIS

I look forward to new times that aren't driven by profits.

MARK

I thought you said the future was a locked dumpster.

ERIS

What the future looks like depends on you and everybody else coming to terms with the tyranny of money.

(Outside the McBurger, Sunshine Jones walks up to Mark and Eris.)

sunshine jones

I haven't eaten in ages. Can you help me out with a buck?

ERIS

Mark give us your money so we can all have the same amount. This gentleman here... what's your name?

SUNSHINE JONES

Sunshine Jones.

ERIS

Sunsine Jones here doesn't have any money at all.

MARK

What makes you think everyone should have the same amount of money? How do you know who's better if everyone is the same?

ERIS

You didn't put up this big a fight last time we evened things out.

MARK

Well last time I got more money. This time I get less money. This is human nature.

ERIS

Human nature is to build together. You're going against that and that's why you feel bad all the time.

MARK

How do you know I feel bad all the time?

SUNSHINE JONES

I didn't mean to start a whole thing...

ERIS

Because this is a terrible way to structure a society and an economy, and everybody feels bad all the time.

SUNSHINE JONES

I mean... I can just go.

MARK

So what do you propose instead?

ERIS

We have to burn what's fucked to fuel what works. We have to care for people and build relationships. We have to help others with their bootstraps. We have to sacrifice for something better.

MARK

I think I'm in love with you.

ERIS

You love liberation. I don't exist.

SUNSHINE JONES

Okay I'm going now.

MARK

Wait... Let's count it all up and divvy it 3 ways.

(Mark hands all his money to Eris. He takes out the spray paint from his bag and sprays an anarchist A on the McBurger.)

somnology

i wanted to know the contours of the sun

like most kids i wanted to be an astronaut for a while, not realizing until later that astronauts are overachieving nerds who don't do anything cool like blowing smoke rings in space. more than anything i wanted to go to the sun and i didn't even care if i died in the process. it would be worth it to me. My friend's dad said over tomato soup made of hot milk and tomato slices, (a culinary abomination) if i went to the sun and somehow didn't burn up, i'd stretch for a mile in every direction because of the mass of the sun, and i imagined myself like stretch armstrong, pulled until the weird goo of my insides tore and spilled. later that night i made a fool of my 5 year old self and demanded I be taken back home and they locked me out of the house. outside, pounding on the door, crying, i wanted to know the sun so intimately, to stretch across its face: a tomato slice in hot milk.

charity

my charity is stronger than red cross. it is here to offer guns to desperate people. the people have to prove desperation. we can't just give guns to anybody. they have to prove the most impact will be achieved by the proliferation of the arms. that's the word we used: proliferation. you can't spell proliferation without prolife, which sits on my tongue like cordite under the hammer. we're getting a .50 caliber in this week, which will rend the social fabric to tatters. most guns we get can be used on the self or others, but the .50 cal is just for others; it rains from a place of prominence as people go to work, making everyone glad they survived the commute. that's what this is about. a reminder of how good it is to have made it through again, grinding teeth, clinging to cover, counting their blessings.

when i was too high to smoke

i was too paranoid to smoke outside and too ashamed of my sloth to smoke inside. now (in the winter) we mostly smoke inside as the icicle-nosed cartoon wizard does his worst beyond our door. i try my best not to do vape shop dabs anymore, but rather i gather all the weed stems, and build a nest in the bath tub, shooing away families of opossums, who know full well the nest isn't for them. They know i sleep for days at a time and have difficulty prying myself from dreams' soft logic. they know that i smoke sleep and whisper a scoundrel's poetry into the pillow.

Bible Meat

come now and consume it. but eat modestly. bible meat runs thin. we're running out of pages. the pages of meat used to grow at a rate faster than we consume. that is no longer the case. we hurl insults at it to stimulate growth. that and the electric prodding are the only effective methods we've found. complicating things, the bible has an infection. something about having pages torn from its spine caused poor health. that's where the pustules come from. but eat now. you are hungry. we cleaned the pages and seasoned them well. everybody's hungrier than this. the gristle of God gets stuck in the teeth.

a decadent squalor

i went with her to the head shop to get kratom for her boyfriend. we pitched in together to get a bottle of scotch, and went back to her place. when i met her boyfriend he was made entirely of heroin. 235 pounds of sentient heroin. if i could get an arm or a leg, i could sell it for a fortune. when they fell asleep i got locks of their hair and smoked them like it was something good. i let the nihilism of the hair take over. i got hooked and smoked myself bald.

ambrosia salad

in the beginning there was ambrosia salad in earth-tone tupperware, a wall-mounted telephone that rang with the urgency of ambulance whine, and a family in a two bedroom apartment within walking distance of the piggly wiggly. virginia slims lit, the smoke trailed up to the ceiling and made an omnipresent cloud of disavowal. i remember that distant noonday church bell rang through summers where you could smell the sweetness of exterior paint cooking in the in the sun, and on into hazy winter, when the old bobcat took half an hour to warm up in the parking lot. i gave my toy truck to the deaf girl downstairs, who thanked me in sign language and my mother told me how to say you're welcome. i've forgotten how to say you're welcome in sign language even though i could look it up any time.

i'll never get a surprise party.

bev and i were digging the grave and i noticed that she was melting. i said, *bev, you're melting like miguel melted.* she said, *it's the whiskey. i'm mostly whiskey at this point.* this was in the hot noonday texas hotbox and we had sandwiches waiting for our break. but we don't break. bev's hand passes straight through the shovel she's so wicked with sauce. i tell everyone we know that she's melting now and everyone has already forgotten her. everyone.

fry cook

i worked as a fry cook in san antonio, which left a greasy film over my eyes, rendering the most vivid sunsets when mixed with the pollution of the city's collective cough. i never went downtown, but if i did the riverwalk and i wouldn't mix and i would probably end up doing meth under an archway, away from prying lenses. i would probably scour the public library in a frenzy, looking for the right book to set my mind alight, and steal that book, never to return. hypothetically, i would go to ripley's believe it or not and would believe it. i would feel the bullet holes in the alamo's pockmarked facade and remember.

The knock

somebody is trying to get in. some force beyond myself jiggles the knob. almost inquisitive at first, the assault on my sanctuary becomes more intense. maybe it's somebody who is supposed to be in here. who am I to deny entry? but perhaps they are not meant to be anywhere near this place and the door is the last barrier to catastrophe. there's no way to tell. not without breaching this barrier which until now has brought me peace. i sit here, fire lit, with my books and my pipe. it's the quiet I wanted. there were times before this room--times which afforded me lashings of the flesh, which burned into my skeleton the gravity of cruelty, how it draws in all the good things to be dealt with by the thresher. but yet through some providence I found a room filled with all my favorite books, and a fire and a pipe that's never cashed. these comforts are load bearing. they uplift the gloom of the lonesome hours, or for however long I've been here. always quiet. always alone. and now the force beyond myself bangs on the door in addition to violating the knob. it's hard to read or taste the pipe. i want to open the door and tell them to stop and explain to them the value of quiet. maybe they will greet me kindly and allow me my peace. but more likely they will make me stop reading and smoking by the fire. they will demand a new thing happen, which could be better or worse, depending on who they are, their intentions, and the storm of confluences which led them to my door.

baby's on fire

no institution could hold me. i was gifted the power to knock down walls. it was a gift from my grandfather who had been a rockabilly star and played with elvis. he wore shiny jewelry and learned to knock down walls using the power of rocknroll. so like a twisted sister video i too knocked down walls with rock. i broke out of everywhere: jails, mental institutions, hospitals, air ports, the dmv... i always had drywall in my hair. when my grandfather died the music died with him and i was stuck where i was, having to find doorways, like a commoner.

the dos version of the chip n dale's rescue rangers video game was impossible to beat

we will be looked on as cave people; the same condescension with which we look at the dark ages. *didn't they know that they were destroying everything?* we built machines we could not master, like the dos game chip n dale's rescue rangers, which was an impossible game, which tested the very limits of one's patience. we sat in the computer room, my dad, my brother, and me. we dodged robot dogs and robot arms as best we could but they always got the better of us. outside there was a lush, green day. the other kids of the neighborhood were riding their bikes and skinning their knees, while i sat in a hole, waiting for the dogs to pass.

football is a game that happens in america

the last time the cowboys won the superbowl i ate the pâté thinking it was chicken salad and it was disgusting. it was at a party put on by the huffs. you don't see pâté at superbowl parties anymore because french stuff is now considered gay, and gay is bad if you get your personality from truck commercials. i got my personality from the alternative rock section of circuit city. everybody gets to choose which commercials to claim as their own. i haven't tried pâté since the night the cowboys won. it doesn't fit with my brand. it felt good to know that my team won the superbowl, even though i lived 300 miles away from cowboys headquarters, and contributed nothing except attention. i went to hang out with the other kids. they were laughing at a weird al cd. i laughed too.

i've lived in big cities

and small towns and big cities are better even though there's, at their core, a rot of function that permanently employs a stomach acid to the downtown area, to digest the gristle of the metroplex. we all feel the acid reflux as it travels up the esophageal interstate and splashes at the welcome mat. but small towns have won the wars within their limits--a municipality of invisible walls, besieged by the 21st century and all its indignities. they are obliged to defer to the past as the hunger of institutional decay gobbles the lot.

stories

Everything is Airport

We are public in the airport and the airport is everything. Cameras train on every angle and broadcast to other areas of the airport. We are encouraged to say something if we see something suspicious. Security is tight. The TSA agents walk around doing whatever they want to people because they are the entire authority. There is no smoking section.

The planes leave and land at other areas of the airport. The airport has swallowed nature and exotic locales. The terminals number in the millions. I was a traveler. I liked to see new parts of the airport I'd never seen before. I went to the 30,000's last summer and now I am in line to go to the upper millions. My episode of the Samurai Show is playing on the television. That's where people are payed to have body parts chopped off by a samurai. Game shows are the major driver of the economy. The VIP lounges are populated with people who are missing limbs, digits, noses, ears, tits, dicks, you name it. As I watch myself on the screen, I feel the meaty nub where my pinky was. The man next to me is also watching the screen and he notices that I'm the guy from the TV.

I say, "Yeah that's me."

He says, "Pinky? Good move. Doesn't pay much though. I lost my left hand to pay for medical expenses. I liked that hand. It was a good hand."

"Yeah I don't need much. I travel light and I just want to see new terminals."

He lowers his voice, "I'm working my way up to the Last Terminal."

I lower my voice too, "You're not supposed to look for that."

He whispers, "Aren't you curious though? Don't you need to know some sort of definition to life? Doesn't there need to be a satisfying ending?"

I say, "I'm just interested in seeing new parts of the airport I've never seen before. I want to experience the airport of new cultures. I want to try new cafeterias from 1-10 million."

He says, "Me too. That's exactly what I'm talking about. The ultimate tourist destination. How can you say you've seen it all if you haven't seen the end?"

At this moment, the 2 TSA agents carry off this stranger, putting a black bag over his head, shouting, "I never thought it could happen to me!"

I felt the throb of where my pinky was, and then it was time to board.

I sit next to a woman with her hair draped to one side to hide her prosthetic ear. We're crammed in tight, like cattle, or sardines, or some other salted meat. I like to think of the plane as a womb: packed in tight, but with the comfort of knowing it's all taken care of. There are episodes of The Samurai Show on a little screen embedded in the back of the seat in front of me. And as I watch the blood spurts from a severed nose, I think about that guy I shouldn't think of anymore and what he said about seeing it all. I begin to wonder about the nature of the airport and how it might end. The plane takes off and I can't see out the window because I am in the middle seat, but I imagine it's billions of acres of airport, stretching as far as human expression.

American Mysticism

Everybody wants to be Chandler but they are not Chandler. I am fucking Chandler. I am all that and a bag of chips. I beat out thousands of other would-be Chandlers. But they didn't have the juice--that Chandler juice. There are microplastics in dolphins' breath. The world is coming down around us. What's left is the irredeemable sensation that we went wrong somewhere; that the streets sag with the weight of bad decisions; that we are a sickened people who have no friends. So in I come, Chandler, to play my part as a friend to America; to resurrect the power and prestige we once upheld. The director is a mincing intellectual named Aleister Crawley. (Yes of the Connecticut Crawleys.) Using his trust for a vivisection of American theatre--to lay out the theatre prostrate and helpless for the knives jingoist magicks to cut. Crawley said in our first rehearsal, "The poet and playwright Antonin Artaud said that theatre at its best could be a magickal ritual to conjure up spirits or goliaths. That's what we're doing here. We're calling forth the goliath that looms in the American consciousness; that towering spectre of the hegemon. This reboot of Friends is magick ceremony to bring back the Twin Towers, literally." I can bring back the Twin Towers because I am Chandler.

We all stay in character all the time. We live in replicas of the Friends apartments. I don't know my costars' real names. But that doesn't matter anymore. They are now Phoebe, Joey, Rachel, Ross, and Monica. We don't look exactly like our televisual counterparts, but our zodiacs are aligned in ways I don't really understand. I don't need to understand. I need to be Chandler. Full method immersion. This is what it takes to bring back the Twin Towers. And if I can't hack it, there are hundreds of actors ready to take my place.

In the episode, that is the play, that is the ritual, that will bring back the Twin Towers, Joey brings into Rachel's and Monica's apartment a suitcase. Joey is freaking out and I, Chandler, offer some sarcastic barbs, as is my wont. I drink a glass of water as he opens the suitcase, in the kitchen with the quirky furniture, to reveal a nuclear bomb. I do a spit take, spraying microplastics everywhere. Now is not a time for jokes, I say, "When I said your acting career was going to bomb, this is not what I meant." Phoebe says, "I'm super against this. I think bombs are bad for the environment." Ross, indignant, "Bombs are bad for everything! That's kind of the point of bombs!" Phoebe says, "You don't have to go off on me like that." Monica says, "Can we not say 'go off' so close to the bomb? It might get ideas." Eventually Joey accidentally arms the bomb and the timer says we have 30 minutes to disarm it. Rachel says, "I say we run. Get out of the city as soon as possible." Ross says, "During rush hour? There's no way we'd get out of the blast radius in time." The bomb squad is called and they can't disarm it in time. It's a whole thing. I am scribbling in a notebook all episode, and at the end I deliver a eulogy for all of us.

We don't perform all the scenes sequentially until opening night, when we perform at Ground Zero. Aleister Crawley says, "If we don't get it right tonight, we won't get another chance. The cosmic penalty for attempting this magick and failing is to be doomed to the mundane forever. So go out there and make some American myths!" The play begins. Joey runs in with the nuke. Everything is moving like a clockwork bomb. We've gone through each scene hundreds of times. We know them like we know our names. My name is Chandler and I am in the zone. My blocking is flawless; my comic timing--impeccable. I say,
we won't get a graveside
we won't get a parade of mourners
we won't get anything we deserve

As the play draws to a close, here at Ground Zero, I feel the enormity of destruction as Chandler says my last words, the warm trickle of a tear rolls my cheek and onto the ground.

Beneath us comes a rumble and roar. Aleister Crawley tells us to move from the spot or we'll go up with the tower. All the rest of my Friends get off of the building and run to a safe distance. I am in awe of the enormity of the moment. How splendorous. How holy. I don't move in time and the ground begins to elevate in the shapes of two rectangles as Twin Towers rise from street level. As I go up, I see the lights of the city flicker and wave. Maybe it was the tears in my eyes but it seemed like the city was waving goodbye to me. I rise above the fracas and the fray, up past the skyscrapers, past everything really, and I can see Brooklyn waving too, up until I got that weird weightless feeling you get at the end of a fast elevator ride. I walk to the edge of the tower and look down. I'm way too high and I get vertigo. I, Chandler, say, "Bad idea. This was a bad idea." I drop to my knees and crawl back from the edge. I look over at the other tower, (the twin if you will.) It looks so lonesome. Up here with its twin sibling. They are alone. But at least they have each other. There is mostly nothing on this roof except for a door which presumably leads down into the tower. I, Chandler, say, "Well, hello! Fancy meeting you here," to the door, and let myself into the tower.

I go down a flight of stairs and there's the top floor. I walk onto the floor. It's fairly dark, lit by one fluorescent light in the center of an empty office space. The light illuminates an unplugged CRT TV on the green office carpet. As I approach, it turns on. I, Chandler, say, "Well that's not creepy at all." I look at the screen, into the screen, through the glass, the photons shift and sway. An image emerges and sounds emanate. It's... it's the WWF: Wizard Wrestling Federation. I, Chandler, say, "Fuck yeah!" and watch the match.

The match is between The Mithril Fist and Kron: The Flayer. Kron is the heel. He is in the arena, holding The Orb of Summoning. The crowd boos at Kron for his arrogance. The babyface, Mithril Fist, comes out to Kendrick Lamar as the crowd goes wild. A faceless man hands him a microphone. "Kron, you dare steal The Orb of summoning from my lair? Prepare to get Fisted!" Kron laughs and holds up the Orb. The crowd boos some more. Kron disappears and uses The Orb of Summoning to summon a giant hell beast that steps on the arena and instantly kills everyone inside. It cuts to the wizard locker room after the bout. The Mithril Fist is fine. It was fixed the whole time.

I feel like I can't move. I try to get up and leave but I am transfixed. I'm drifting away to join the cosmic consciousness. I am no longer I. Chandler is no more. I dissolve to third person, omniscient.

Aleister Crawley holds a press conference. "Yes we did it. We brought back the towers. We are licensing the play for 1 billion dollars per performance. If you want your own World Trade Center, you can have it for 1/5 the price of constructing the original, (when adjusted for inflation.) Does your home town need a World Trade Center? Get your own today!" After this announcement, a graffiti artist somehow manages to paint two giant targets on the new towers, exactly where the planes hit. Officials denounce the graffiti as a terrorist act, stating that the perpetrators belong in Guantanamo. The general public find it tasteless.

There's a comfort with the return of the towers. It means Americans can go on not caring about the world again, as the great, lumbering hell beast of American empire stomps the arena of the Global South, with the kayfabe of

democracy. Americans rest easier knowing that they don't have to think about depressing stuff like war and plunder anymore. It just happens...

Glitter God at the Combination Pizza Hut and Taco Bell on the Moon

Every pore of his skin was a paparazzo's bulb. He was at the combination Pizza Hut and Taco Bell on the moon. I work there, you see, which is good for me because I'm bipolar and so is the restaurant. Switching from pizza to taco to burrito to pizza can be rough on people. Makes people think harder about their choices in life and what their whims do to others. Glitter God crashed through the window, into the restaurant, looking for the next big thing. The shards of glass shone with his glamor. Glitter God was hard to look at, so bright he burned holes in my vision. I could see his outline when I closed my eyes. I wanted to give him a hug and tell him I loved everything he was ever in. And he said no, honey, you're the one. The lights trained on me. A makeup and hair crew readied me for my time. I said, welcome to the combination Pizza Hut and Taco Bell on the moon. I'm [name] and I will show you your shadow. He said, Glitter God can only reflect. There is no substance to Glitter God. I said, would you like a taco? Or a pizza? Enjoy our view of Earth? Glitter God asked if I was on the menu. He asked me intimate questions like he'd known me through the hard times when I was living out of my space car, huffing other people's oxygen when they weren't looking, too broke to go back. I told Glitter God about this and he cried diamonds so fiercely it flooded the market and diamonds became indistinguishable from broken glass.

Side Hustle

I type into the AI prompt, "Make a video of Charlie Kirk and Jesus petting puppies in heaven." I haven't been a Christian for 33 years (the same number of years Jesus was said to have lived.) I'm not even a Conservative. But Conservative Christians have all the money and I want some of it.

Lynn, my wife, doesn't approve of this line of work. It's the only job I've been able to hold down for more than three months. She says, "You're actively making the world worse."

To which I reply, "That may be, but at least I can pay rent now." She can't argue with the results.

The business model is simple: make AI slop for Christians on facebook that directs to my drop shipping site, where the rubes can get cheap plushies of Jesus from AliExpress at a 500% markup.

I make all the hits. You know that one where a baby wrapped in the American flag is teetering on the edge of a precipice, who is saved at the last second by a flying Jesus? That was me. These idiots ate that shit up.

I made the video with Iron Man flying up to recruit God for The Avengers. I was really cooking with that one. I am a slop virtuoso. This is what I do instead of writing, which has suffered over these past months. It's like the slop has drained me of creative drive and now all I can do is make videos of Trump dropping crosses on Venezuela from an F-35.

"Not only are you making dumb people dumber, but you're also fucking up the environment." Lynn is right. She's almost always right. My love. My rational, righteous, revolutionary love.

I say, "If you think about it, there's an accelerationist argument to be made that this will hasten the downfall of the cursed internet and we'll have to go back to offline technologies."

"I don't think you really believe that."

I don't answer. I'm too busy making a video of Jesus walking with Palestinian children through the bombed out rubble of a hospital.

The World Ends Every Day

Frankly, we're a bit sick of it. The world ending. I mean every day with this.

The first time it was a virus or something. People took it very seriously. Riots and looting and general chaos reigned. It was weird seeing people getting TVs at the Best Buy, like the end of the world was just a show they could turn off. I sat on the roof of my building with my hot neighbor and a bottle of Famous Grouse, telling each other the life stories of celebrities. We agreed not to learn each other's names because what was the point of names now? That would imply a future. I told hot neighbor about Groucho Marx's autobiography, that was probably entirely made up. Like the story about Harpo walking a jungle cat for a wealthy woman, who paid him a whole quarter for it. But the jungle cat escaped the leash and ate a terrier, and Harpo got fired. I told hot neighbor that I liked that all biographies are fiction and they told me about how James Joyce used to pick fights at bars and then hide behind Hemingway when it came to fisticuffs. Then the world ended and we had to do it all again.

The second time, I prepared myself some salmon and asparagus. I called my mom and we talked about the DOW Jones industrial average, how the end of the world obliterated her retirement. I said it was a crying shame how we go through, thinking things will work out, that somebody will fix it. I sat back and lit a cigar because what else was there? I think that was when the meteor hit.

The third time, hot neighbor and I went out looking for fights because we were invincible. Both of us were Joyce. Both of us were Hemingway. We were soon beaten down in an alleyway and then eaten by zombies. As the zombies consumed my flesh, I stared at the green hum of the mercury vapor light over the Burger King dumpster. I told hot neighbor that it reminded me of better times, playing in Grampa's driveway at dusk, when I didn't die horribly every day, and could make plans for a time beyond tomorrow.

After a while it all runs together, these days, these ends. I told hot neighbor I was ready to learn their name. They said it was better like this, not knowing, making up biographies. I said, I knew all of hot neighbor's stories now. Hot neighbor took some chalk and made marks on a stone. They said I could call out this name when the night catches fire.

People don't riot anymore. They've gotten used to this new way of living. Every day, the pain of catastrophe leaves marks on each of us, no matter what we tell ourselves.

Bible Meat

Come now and consume it. But eat modestly. Bible meat runs thin. We're running out of pages. The pages of meat used to grow at a rate faster than we consume. That is no longer the case. We hurl insults at it to stimulate growth. That and the electric prodding are the only effective methods we've found. Complicating things, the Bible has an infection. Something about having pages torn from its spine caused poor health. That's where the pustules come from. But eat now. You are hungry. We cleaned the pages and seasoned them well. Everybody's hungrier than this. The gristle of God gets stuck in the teeth.

The Knock

Somebody is trying to get in. Some force beyond myself jiggles the knob. Almost inquisitive at first, the assault on my sanctuary becomes more intense. Maybe it's somebody who is supposed to be in here. Who am I to deny entry? But perhaps they are not meant to be anywhere near this place and the door is the last barrier to catastrophe. There's no way to tell. Not without breaching this barrier which until now has brought me peace. I sit here, fire lit, with my books and my pipe. It's the quiet I wanted. There were times before this room--times which afforded me lashings of the flesh, which burned into my skeleton the gravity of cruelty, how it draws in all the good things to be dealt with by the thresher. But yet through some providence I found a room filled with all my favorite books, and a fire and a pipe that's never cashed. These comforts are load bearing. They uplift the gloom of the lonesome hours, or for however long I've been here. Always quiet. Always alone. And now the force beyond myself bangs on the door in addition to violating the knob. It's hard to read or taste the pipe. I want to open the door and tell them to stop and explain to them the value of quiet. Maybe they will greet me kindly and allow me my peace. But no, more likely they will make me stop reading and smoking by the fire. They will demand a new thing happen, which could be better or worse, depending on who they are, their intentions, and the storm of confluences which led them to my door.

The Story of Johnnie Meatshoes

Born John Merchant III, heir to the great Merchant fortune, Johnnie Meatshoes, (a name self-ascribed), squished out to the clamor of reporters, and the lightning of bulbs.

JOHNNIE: Quiet down, dingleberries. I'm gonna make this quick. Meat shoes are the new hot thing. I've got 'em. You want 'em. Any questions?

REPORTER 1: Are meat shoes exactly what they sound like?

JOHNNIE: If they sound like the future, then yes, bitch. Next Question.

REPORTER 2: How practical is it to wear meat shoes?

JOHNNIE: Meat shoes are now essential for big dick playas. Nobody asked Fabergie if his fucking gay ass eggs was practical, and now he dines in Valhalla. If you got any rizz at all, you gotta have some meat shoes.

REPORTER 3: What does your father think of this new venture of yours?

JOHNNIE: My father... is a brilliant businessman, but he's not the only baller in the family.

REPORTER 3: You didn't answer the question.

JOHNNIE: Yes I did. Next question.

REPORTER 4: Is the meat cooked?

JOHNNIE: Some shoes are cooked. Some are raw. We've got so many different varieties: ground chuck Taylors, meatloafers, baconstocks... like berkinstocks but--

REPORTER 4: Yeah we got it.

REPORTER 5: Is this just another fad for the ultra wealthy to waste money on?

JOHNNIE: ngl you've gotta stack some serious paper to get these shoes, but there's nothing like the squish of meat between your toes.

REPORTER 6: Why are you doing this?

JOHNNIE: Because I dictate taste. Y'all are gonna remember Johnnie Meatshoes. And with that, he squished off to a waiting car.

The Yes Twins were in the car, waiting to tell him how awesome he was. Mark and Morty weren't twins. They weren't even related, but people called them the Yes Twins because they looked vaguely similar and they agreed with most everything Johnnie said.

To combat this nickname, they each leaned into their own personas. Mark became a crunchy new age type, with a beard and and psychedelic clothes, long hair, and hot dog flip flops. Morty was clean shaven, wearing well-tailored expensive suits, and shiny veal shoes; taciturn. Even still, the nickname persisted.

MARK: Tremendous vibes, Johnnie!

MORTY: Yes, there will surely be a line around the block--no, fuck the block, a line around the planet, to get Johnnie Meatshoes brand meat shoes.

JOHNNIE: Shit yeah, fellas! We're on the come-up. Started from the bottom now we're here.

MARK: From the bottom?

JOHNNIE: What's your problem with that?

MARK: It's just... we all met in an elite private school.

JOHNNIE: What's the problem with you? You've been acting ornery all week. Why are you fucking up my song?

MORTY: Started from the Upper middle to upper class now we're here. It doesn't scan.

JOHNNIE: It doesn't scan, Mark. You fucked up my song, Mark. How are you going to make it up to me?

Johnnie looked out the window on all the dumb fucks of the city doing dumb fucking shit he didn't care about.

MARK: Started from the bottom now we're here.

JOHNNIE: Too late, Mark.

On the way to Merchant Industries, they passed a Johnnie Meatshoes retail establishment. There were a bunch of animal rights douchebags out front, protesting. One sign read "Stop the Cruelty!"

JOHNNIE: Stop the car! I need to address these hippies.

MORTY: Do you think that's wise? From a PR perspective?

JOHNNIE: They're spreading lies. Our meat is cruelty-free. I have to stop. The car circled the block to come back around to the store. Johnnie got out of the car and made contact.

JOHNNIE: Listen up, you dumb hippies! It's cruelty-free meat. It's on the fucking packaging.

PROTESTER: Murder yourself for some shoes! I'd wear them!

JOHNNIE: Okay that's really not funny. I struggle with mental health.

PROTESTER: I bet your ass meat would make great shoes.

Then the protester threw red paint on Johnnie's hype beast tracksuit.

JOHNNIE: You fuck! This is Vetements!

PROTESTER: Vete-what?

JOHNNIE: It's a brand. These clothes are worth more than your car!

PROTESTER: I don't own a car.

JOHNNIE: CROOOOLTY FREEEEEE

Johnnie ran back in the car to get away from anything else they might throw.

Four Shots of Espresso

When Bobby and I went to the coffeeshop last, he said that Bob Dylan was overrated, and sure anyone elevated to demigod will fall flat, but Bob Dylan changed how we listen to things. All of us. Collectively. I tried to tell Bobby this, but I'm not good at talking anymore. Not since I got California sober and float around on a green cloud, like Aladdin, instead of walking.. and through this fog, I sputter sentence fragments that add up to a point sometimes. Bobby said Dylan had like one good decade and maybe 6 good albums. I said, even if that were true, that's a monumental feat to reign over music for a decade and put out 6 killer albums. Most folks can't rule over a week now. Only the president knows how to make a constant noise in the zeitgeist anymore and that's because he's really bad at his job. Bobby and I don't talk about the president because what's to say? He still sucks? Sure. But what about college football? What about celebrating our accomplishments? He's getting into Vice and Playboy this year. And the Longhorns didn't get into the playoffs even with the win over A&M. It was cool in Texas and the coffeeshop played lofi beats to study to. No acoustic guitar. No words.

the sad parade

the ants scurry in and out of a menacing looking hole in the cracked, clay earth and i avoid it like you avoid so many things in the desert: snakes, scorpions, cacti, and yes, fucking ants with their red asses built for pain. i observe from the picnic table, at this shitty rest stop. i shouldn't say that. it's a pretty nice rest stop, but it's been a long year and i'm running on too little sleep, so i might be a bit testy. this is the year i make headway, when the circus parade marches into town and those poor elephants don't look so sad like that one time we left the record store on east 7th, and there was this girl from oklahoma i had the biggest crush on, who played neutral milk hotel's oh comely for me for the first time and we got stuck in traffic behind a parade for the circus and all the elephants had whip scars on their backs and we both just felt bad for them instead of any circus-based jubilation and i never got to kiss the girl from oklahoma... it won't be like that this year. it will be an exuberant parade that makes me feel like there's reason for all of this, starting with the drive to somewhere better and the rest at the stop for that purpose.