



A detailed illustration of a woman with long dark hair and yellow eyes. She has two large, curved, light-colored horns on her forehead and several smaller, thin, light-colored horns protruding from her hairline. She is wearing a white, open-collared shirt over a light-colored, low-cut top. She is holding a long, thin, light-colored staff or staff with both hands. Her background is a rocky, volcanic landscape with large, jagged, brownish-orange rock formations and a cloudy sky. The overall style is a blend of realistic and fantastical elements.

ERIDAN

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INTRODUCTION

Hey, guys – it's the editor speaking. I've been told it's customary to write a foreword. So, here it is, from me to you, the introduction to this piece of awesomeness you're holding in your hands. In this bilingual issue (some texts are in Croatian, some in English) you can read some great stories, a couple of articles and gaze upon the great art of Croatian young artists. We decided to go with more stories than articles this time (usually we mix it up more), as you can probably see for yourselves.

I really like this issue. Hope you're gonna like it too. Feel free to write us at eridan@3zmaj.hr if you want to comment or commend or critique. Or if you write or draw and you want to be published. Of course, if you want to know more about Eridan, you can just visit our web page: www.3zmaj.hr/en/eridan/

Happy reading!

Irena



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WHO ARE WE?

3. ZMAJ

We are a small youth oriented NGO from Rijeka, Croatia. Most of us are students at the University of Rijeka. Since 2005. we have worked hard on promoting and popularizing science-fiction, fantasy and horror through arts, sciences, subcultures and new media. Through our programs we encourage creativity, artistic efforts, imagination and free thinking. By developing creative ways of spending one's free time, we draw in both a younger and an older audience.



Some of our members on Eurocon 2012 in Zagreb, holding ESFS and SFera awards

ERIDAN

The magazine you're reading, named after the constellation Eridanus, is being published since 2005. Small, modest and above all free, Eridan has survived apocalypses and alien invasions, and reached the stars at Eurocon 2012 in Zagreb, where it received a Spirit of Dedication award from the European Science-fiction Society.

Eridan is renowned for the promotion of amateur artists and writers who might not get a chance of being published elsewhere yet. Many writers who started in Eridan received awards, and are today widely acknowledged within the fandom.

You may find all our past issues (including the Issue 12 in English) on our website www.3zmaj.hr/en/eridan/

RIKON

Rikon is a sci-fi convention, but it's also much more than that. It is a 2-3 day event in October offering a diverse program suitable for all ages and tastes. Our primary goal is to offer an interesting and educational alternative to the standard cultural programs offered to the youth of Rijeka and all of Croatia.

Rikon offers you a chance to participate in lectures, round table discussions, workshops, show programs, presentations, games and quizzes created in a way that presents complex scientific or social issues in an entertaining and interesting way, spotlight new Croatian genre writings and writers and present other organizations. We use workshops, games and quizzes to promote teamwork, cooperation, learning new information and handcrafting.

Rikon cooperates with various institutions such as the University of Rijeka and Rijeka Public Library, as well as various organizations, plus any members of the general public that want to take a more active role in their community. In turn they get an opportunity to meet various public personas at the convention - writers, scientists, reporters, artists and politicians.

This year's Rikon will be held on October 10th, 11th and 12th at the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities in Rijeka.

FANTASY MONTH

Our newest project stretches over a period of 30 days, in which we will actively involve audiences in participating and creating art, science and literature, with speculative fiction as the main subject.

The program includes the promotion of Ivana Brlić Mažuranić's fantasy literature, different workshops for kids including a science fair, artistic and literature worshops, a gaming marathon, comics promotions and movie projections at the planetarium in Rijeka. This all comes with a cherry on top: the Fantasy Month's closing event is Rikon – our sci-fi convention.

More info about this project will be released soon on our website: rikonrijeka.com



BETWEEN SCYLLA AND CHARYBDIS

Željka Dorčić

A yellow and blue hover-taxi banked hard to port when its burly pilot received an audio warning of an imminent target lock-on, causing the insect-like alien passenger inside to chitter in distress at the impromptu maneuver. When the vehicle straightened again under the clear sky, the pilot breathed a sigh of relief while the chittering behind him grew in anger, and he turned off the automatic translator in his neurocom in annoyance.

Behind him, the glow of the government compound bled light into the twilight sky. The automated anti-air security turrets that tracked his vehicle a moment ago had returned to their lax position by order of the base AI, and no other vehicle seemed to come anywhere near the air space of the compound. The pilot frowned: trust the planetary government to spend billions of credits on such overt displays of force on a site they used maybe four times a year. Above him, the air shook with the passage of a space-bound freighter, no doubt ferrying supplies to an awaiting spaceship from the nearby starport.

Just as the taxi plunged back into the mass of vehicles that composed a veritable three-dimensional grid of air lanes, the taxi intercom chirped. Banking slowly downwards, the pilot grumbled as his retinal display projected the caller ID on his personal line. Recognising the number as that of Vincent Fielding, one of the most influential lawyers in the city and a known mob boss, he gave the answering command to the neurocom and braced his hands on the wheel.

“Jared speaking”, he said in way of greeting as the signal tone of the establishing connection faded, leaving only silence.

“You’re late with your payment, Mr. Kanagawa”, a sharp reprimand came at him from the other end.

Jared rolled his eyes, counting his lucky stars that they were not on a video-call: the show of annoyance would not have pleased the caller. “I told you, ‘buddy’, I’ll have all your cash by next month, just give me a chance”, he growled back.

“That’s what you’ve said last month”, the voice at the other end replied with dignified annoyance.

“Ain’t my fault that damn gaijin ran with my... your cash”, Jared shot back, all the while he kept the vehicle on a steady descent. A vacant spot on the nearby building landing pad outlined itself among the passing vehicles and he impatiently gunned the engine onwards.

“Perhaps with the proper incentive, there would be less petty excuses”, the voice at the other end suggested.

“What’d you mean?”, Jared asked in concern as he maneuvered the hover-taxi onto

the landing pad. There had been disconcerting rumors about a string of disappearances connected to Vincent Fielding: men who had barely gotten away from mob entrapment spoke with hushed voices of gruesome executions, kidnappings and extortions, all connected to the influential lawyer.

"I'm pretty sure you would want nothing to happen to your precious Lily.", the voice at the other end stated with such amused coldness that Jared's eyes widened in fear. The incoming communique from the bank about the paid fare and the slammed vehicle door went ignored as blood froze in his veins and he could only stare at the dashboard while his brain processed the implications. As the voice on the other end detailed its instructions to him, he could not do anything but accept the task laid before him.



The end-of-communication signal beeped in his ears from the neurocom, but Jared didn't pay any heed to it. He stared at the hover-vehicle's dashboard with gritted teeth as if the thing just reached out and bit him. At a spur of the moment, he gunned the AG engines, and ignoring the potential customer rapping on the vehicle door, he pulled the steering wheel to himself, making the taxi take off again.

He banked the vehicle low and settled on a cruise speed five meters from the ground. All around him, traffic lights came on as twilight gave way to night, and he dutifully hit the switch to his right, lighting up the trace lights on his hover-vehicle. His flight path took him skirting near the restriction zone of the government compound, and he watched with disdain as cameras tracked his every move. The street next to him was patrolled by men and women smartly dressed in black and green BDUs, proudly displaying the insignia of three white drops swirling in a black circle.

He smiled grimly as he felt a pang of envy. It was curious how the same event could have two different outcomes. For the man currently sitting at the top of the government food chain and residing in the compound across, the Drop Zone Massacre from two years ago had been a stepping stone in the direction of victory against the invaders from space. For Jared, who had been in the middle of it, it was a occurrence of such loss and pain that he gave everything up instead of weathering the aftermath as he should have.

He was not surprised when the mafia boss detailed his plan: all the recent political moves his former military superior drew had a hurting effect on the multitude of illegal businesses that had cropped up and expanded in the last hundred and fifty years since this mineral-rich planet was terraformed.

And to atone for his mistakes, Jared was given a simple offer: the life of a distant, yet familiar, bureaucrat for the life of the person who had made his life worth living after the military discharge, held hostage by threat of poison. The mob wanted to trade life for life, and Jared was going to give them one.



Unearthing his old military uniform from its resting place at the bottom of the trunk had been easy, but facing the memories it evoked wasn't. He had quickly gathered the photos scattered across the bed and tossed them back into the yellowing envelope from which they had fallen out. It had hurt to look at them: they harkened back to an era of his life when he felt like he could take on the world. Oh how the mighty fall.

His place was trashed: signs of struggle were evident in the splintered wood and broken glass that was scattered around the living room. The door had been forced open with an EMP charge which left the electronic lock and the alarm system in shambles. He rubbed his chin at the thought of facing the landlord about the damage: ex-special forces were supposed to be low-risk tenants. He frowned a moment later: it was a very long time since anyone could positively say that putting trust in him was low-risk. He caught a glance of himself in the mirror: a set of tired brown eyes stared back framed by short black unkempt hair, the thirty-year old face showing signs of a life of abuse.

A moment of weakness overtook him as he picked up the scattered military decorations among the glass: he'd have given everything for a beer. No, not tonight. One was all it took some nights for things to spiral out of control. His alcohol addiction had brought him low enough on multiple times in the past two years. Pulling out a photo from the envelope again, he steeled himself as he took a last glance on the swirling drops patch on it: tonight is the turning point.

A scoped rifle and a silencer were waiting for him at the security checkpoint for the Burbank & Co. Law Firm, primed for the job he was assigned: he delighted in the thought the very people providing his armament had no idea of the surprise in store for them. It was easy to ignore the two bodyguards that casually inspected his run-down, matte grey hover-vehicle, mumbling between themselves: moments later the auto-piloted vehicle lifted off, carrying off the GPS bug with it onto the preprogrammed destination while he dropped off it onto a darkened landing pad. Despite all his war trauma, the old adage held true: once a Ronin, always a Ronin.

Lowering his mask and patting the combat knife at his thigh, he snuck to the sprawling compound, skulking through the shadows that had always been his friends. His head hurt from the reactivation of old combat routines on the neurocom, and the strobing lights of the billboards failed to help the matter.

Jared leaned behind the wall to the open garage. Two guards in black suits strode across the parking lot, their guns latched safely to their holsters. He smiled without mirth as he thumbed the trigger of the rifle with patience. The retinal overlay provided by the neurocom augmentation flickered in and out as his concentration wavered. He ran his gloved fingers across the synth-metal surface that ran across his temple, covering the insertion point of his neurocom. The damn thing never integrated seamlessly, and he had nobody to blame but himself.

He double tapped the trigger, and a guard crumpled without a sound near a sleek, sports

version of a hover-car. The other had no time to turn around as another two bullets left the rifle soundlessly and tapped the guard in the chest and in the head. Stepping into the garage, Jared paid no heed to the pool of blood that formed beneath the two dead guards. Fumbling with the nearest wall-mounted console, he finally managed to trigger the garage closing mechanism.

The metal doors had not even closed and Jared was already sliding into the elevator. Hitting the penthouse button, Jared rechecked his magazine and smiled faintly: he had more than enough bullets for whatever awaited him up there.

The elevator doors opened inaudibly and he peeked behind the corner: the crimson padded hallway was empty, proof of the damning self-confidence of the owner. Moving like a ghost through the corridors, he took out the surveillance cameras with a single shot to the lense. He had scant minutes before someone sounded the alarm and all Hell broke loose, but that was all the time he needed. His first stop was the master bedroom: seeing his quarry sprawled peacefully on the king-sized bed made him smirk in satisfaction.

Jared slammed his gloved fist into the man's face, jerking him awake. The white-haired man's eyes widened in terror at the masked apparition that shoved the rifle muzzle in his face.

"One word out of you unless I ask and you're history", Jared spoke in a hushed voice. Seeing the man nod, he smiled. "Where is she?"

"The guest bedroom", the man whispered in a feeble voice, void of the indignation in his tone from earlier that day.

"The antidote?"

"In the study", the man answered tersely, glaring daggers at his captor.

"Let's move, Fielding", Jared growled as he dragged the man out of the bed. The skinny man stumbled in his briefs over to his study, nudged steadily by the muzzle in his back. As the man plopped down into the chair, Jared quickly perused the drawers of the massive mahogany desk, finding a common service handgun in the last drawer. He pulled the gun up and placed it onto the table. A look at the chamber showed the gun loaded. Shortly after it, up came a vial of reddish liquid hooked neatly to a hypospray injector.

"You're gonna log into that fancy computer of yours, and you're gonna wipe my record clean", Jared commanded, shoving the muzzle of the rifle casually back into the man's back. The dark study lit up briefly by the light from the desk holo-projector as the older man worked as commanded, pale as death. When the task was done, Jared gently pressed the handgun into Vincent's hand, his finger on the trigger. He jerked the man's arm around, bringing the gun to his temple and firing. The arm of the lawyer went limp as the bullet ricocheted off the opposite wall, splattering grey matter onto the expensive-looking chair.

The gunshot had barely faded away when the air was pierced by the wail of an alarm siren. Slinging the rifle over his shoulder, he hurried in the direction of the guest room. Almost barreling through the door, he was greeted by the sight of a blond-haired seven-year old girl frantically tossing around in violent spasms, oblivious to the cacophony around her. He raised the mask off his face as he approached the bed, his face barely holding in the rage that rose at the sight. Counting the intervals between the painful spasms in hopes of finding a pattern, Jared sat on the bed and uncapped the hypo. Hoping that he finally hit a long patch of calm, he clamped down one hand at the girl's neck, plunging the needle expertly at the back of her head and pressing the plunger. He breathed a sigh of relief as the spasms died down and the girl's breathing steadied.

Picking up the unconscious little girl with one arm and lowering his mask, Jared rushed over to the emergency stairway entrance, discarding the empty hypo onto the penthouse floor. During the hurried descent down the stairs, the pair had to stop several times for Jared to pick off frantic bodyguards with precision shots from the rifle all the while trying to shield the girl from the bloodshed around her. As they burst out of the service door at the back of the compound and jumped into the awaiting hover-car, Jared breathed a sigh of elation while strapping the shivering girl into the seat. The unmarked rifle will be discarded most thoroughly, and with no other lead pointing to him, Jared was sure they were safe.

Fielding, thinking himself untouchable as the Underworld boss, had asked him to assassinate the visiting planetary Governor, and in turn Jared had visited havoc upon the man. It took the sound of Lily captured, the child orphan of his blood brother, to open his eyes: he had once been the best of the best and given his all in service to his planet. He could do so again. All he had needed was the proper incentive.





Željka Grobotek

SANDMAN REVISITED - FROM A LAYWOMAN'S PERSPECTIVE

Ana Hartmann

Did you know that comics have become a bone fide subject of serious academic research, essays in cultural studies and literary criticism? I only found out a year ago. Rows of images with speech balloons - artefacts of an entertainment phenomenon which is not at all new - have transferred from the world of obscure publishing for kids and teenagers into a domain of intense study. Through a short research on comics studies (I guess "comicology" just didn't sound good enough) I encountered contextualisation, dissection, theorising, analysis and interpretation aiming to explain structural, narrative, visual, psychological and other conjunctions, backgrounds, contexts, structures, motifs and devices that turn comics into art. (A lot of words in the previous sentence, but really, it's all out there and it's about comics!)

Not so long ago my understanding of comic books was far from serious (let alone academic), defined by the adventures and characters of Alan Ford, Zagor, Asterix, Martin Mystère, Dylan Dog and a rare Corto Maltese. I'm talking about dilapidated small-size pulps printed on cheap paper and read during languid summer afternoons of my school holidays over two decades ago, paper personas that created an occasional distraction from my then usual reading material (which mostly comprised of more or less "serious" books for teenagers - Karl May, Charles Dickens, Jules Verne and numerous others). By the time I was finishing high school, I was old enough to leave comics behind, and my university studies (old fashioned and very conservative as they were) only reinforced my attitude that comics are mostly for kids with nothing else to do.

Years later my younger sister suggested I should read Gaiman's *Sandman*, since I already knew and liked Gaiman as co-author of *Good Omens* and writer of *Stardust* and *American Gods*. Of his comic opus I didn't have the foggiest idea. So I was promptly borrowed the 10-volume story of the Lord of Dreams, accompanied by a warning that *Sandman* is not a classic comic, but a complex narrative combined with great visual art, which deserves any reader's respect.



Huh? A comic? Whatever...

Don't forget: my idea of a comic came with the snout of Bob Rock, tomahawk of Zagor and with the nonchalant cigarette hanging from Lucky Luke's lips, in the company of modern day Hollywood screen adaptations of Batman, X-Men, Ironman, Spiderman, Superman and all other "men" with their distinct DC Comics or Marvel emblems. I was a comics laywoman, utterly unaware of the fact that under the aegis of contemporary comics (at least from the mid-80's onwards) you can find a wonderful and colourful variety of comic writers and cartoonists ranging from authors of kitsch and cheap pulp fiction to very creative people who articulate comics through synesthesia of unusual and avant-garde narrative and visual elements, broadening comic horizons and turning comics into genuine sequential art. But since I still didn't know any of that at the time, the borrowed Sandman was collecting dust for months, waiting for that magic moment "when I'll have some free time not worrying about my job, family, responsibilities, money, job, responsibilities...". You know the story. Until the proverbial turn of fate had me bed-ridden with illness last year, so out of sheer boredom I grabbed this Gaiman comic in search of a time killer. It's probably pretentious to claim that I experienced some sort of Joycean epiphany, but I was honestly very pleasantly surprised by the time I started reading *Dream a Little Dream of Me* (Part 3 of the first volume) - that's how long it took me from the beginning of *The Sandman* to realise that this comic is truly different from any other I have ever read or seen!

The real question is what did a non-geek find in this story of Oneiros and the Endless, what was so fascinating in their oh-so-human nature, emotions and ambitions? In my particular case - since I used to professionally dabble in literary theory and history - it was the numerous references and allusions, more or less subtle, to other authors and texts, from the most obvious Shakespeare (appearing as one of the side-kicks), through Borges, Marlowe, Ben Johnson, G.K. Chesterton in the form of Fiddler's Green to Milton and the apocryphal Gospel of Thomas.¹ Also the play with the mythological concepts covering vast geographical and temporal distances - from the mountaintops of the far European North to the wilderness of African savannah, with stops in Ancient Egypt, Babylon and Greece. Gaiman is obviously a widely-read person who puts to good use the inspiration resulting from the contact with a wide array of literary, philosophical and religious texts, and I can only agree with Mike Musgrove's comment in his 2012 review of *The Annotated Sandman* where he writes: "He sometimes came off like an insecure college sophomore home on break, determined to show off to everyone that he'd read a little Freud. The shock with this edition, for the casual fan, is learning that Gaiman has

¹ Actually, there are many more intertextual references in *The Sandman*, and you can find them in *The Annotated Sandman* (first two volumes are available, others are yet to be published).

² Musgrove, Mike: Book Review: "*The Annotated Sandman*". The Washington Post, online edition, March 1, 2012. http://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/books/book-review-the-annotated-sandman/2012/02/21/gIQAibB4kR_story.html

read every other book in the library and dropped them into the mix, too.”²

Since I have a weakness for Greek mythology, I was delighted by Gaiman’s take on the story of Orpheus, as well as his skilful incorporation of the Eumenides in the broad pantheon of divine and immortal inhabitants of that bewitching world beyond our reality. On the other hand, the amount of imagination in depicting the all-out insane cold-bloodied horror and fusing it with a macabre sense of humour is equally engrossing: the scene where John Constantine touches the amorphic, sticky remains of a still living (!) human body on the walls of Rachel’s apartment (*Dream a Little Dream of Me*); the ultra-bizarre convention of serial killers (*Collectors*); and various depictions of mutilation of human bodies (*24 Hours; Cerements*) - to mention just a few. Gaiman has masterfully blended traditional comic book conventions with a postmodern eclecticism of copious characters and settings, carefully intertwining the threads of dreams and wakefulness, reminding the reader at the right time of almost forgotten characters from previous episodes, who, for a brief moment, become central protagonists only to again quickly disappear into the shadows of the Dreaming. The list is almost endless: demons, Bedouins, anthropomorphic animals and pumpkins, griffons, psychos, crazy people, fairies, and then in supporting roles the Roman emperor Augustus, the Caliph Harun al-Rashid, the globetrotter Marco Polo and - John Belushi.

Neil Gaiman’s creative genius is not necessarily manifest in myriad characters and plots, but in his ability to form a coherent story from those characters and plots throughout a period of 7 years and in 75 issues - almost three times longer than the longest serialisation of any Dickens’ novel! And still, the literary quality of *Sandman* was in no way endangered by this almost dramatic publishing fragmentation, as Stephen King aptly summarised: “So these are smart stories, and cunningly crafted stories. Fortunately for us, they are also good stories, little wonders of economy and surprise.”³ Actually, I am no longer surprised that *Sandman* was one of the motives for the emerging academic interest in comic art - it would have been rather strange if nobody had noticed what storytelling craftsmanship and talent were applied to create such a grand and mesmerising tale.



³ From the Introduction to the *World's End*.

THE SONG OF THE LAST BARD

Ana Cerovac

Once there were golden hands
Golden hands that founded our lands
Once there were golden strings
That praised the glory of the noble kings.

Once there were silver spears
Silver spears that banished our fears
Once there were silver tongues
That sang of freedom at the top of their lungs.

Once there were bright bronze shields
Bright bronze shields that shone on the fields
Once there were bright bronze cords
That rang of valor of majestic swords.

But times have passed since those days
And we've forgotten about the old ways
We've put out that ancient fire
Our lutes lost their old desire.

And lesser lords now, old and gray
Frown upon me when I say:
“Why it's gone I know not the cause
But remember it, for thus it was”.

I walk alone far to be heard
And though my boots are covered with dirt
I still sing, no matter the cost
“Thus it had been, but now it is lost”.



NOĆNI POZIV

Jurica Ranj

Telefon me probudio usred noći. Dezorientiran i suhih usta, nespretno sam se ustao iz kreveta i rukom potražio prekidač noćne lampe. Na satu je pisalo 1:15. Opsovao sam i odgugao se do hodnika gdje je telefon uporno zvonio. Bio je to jedan od onih starih telefona koji su zvučali kao hrpa lonaca bačenih niz stepenice. Antikni komad opreme koji je savršeno pripadao u staru obiteljsku kuću. Podigao sam telefon i promuklim glasom zaškripao u slušalicu.

- Halo?

- Halo? O, hvala nebesima. Susjed Kostić, jeste li to Vi? Maks je, iz vikendice ispod vas - glas je bio zadihan, nervozni šapat.

- Kostić je ali vjerojatno tražite mog oca. Ja sam mu sin.

- Aha, razumijem. Nego čujte, ispričavam se što Vas budim tako kasno, ne bih to radio da situacija nije ozbiljna.

- Recite, u čemu je problem.

- Bojim se da imam provalnika ispred svog ulaza.

- Kako to mislite?

- Pa ispred ulaznih vrata je. On, stoji tamo i ne miče se. Ne mogu ga raspoznati, slabo je osvijetljen i gledam ga s gornjeg kata.

- Čudno ponašanje za jednog provalnika. Jeste li zvali policiju?

- Upravo zato vas trebam. Jesam, zvao sam policiju ali ih nikako ne mogu dobiti. Koji god broj nazovem, samo čujem zvonjavu. Mislim da mi je telefon pokvaren. Jutros sam vas vidiš kako čistite oko kuće pa sam se sjetio nazvati Vaš broj i upalilo je.

- Zaista čudno da Vam se nitko ne javlja.

- Da, gledajte, možete li nazvati policiju? Meni očito telefon ne radi kako treba. Samo im javite da pošalju nekog da makne tog čovjeka ispred kuće.

- Jeste li probali pričati s njim? Možda čovjeku treba pomoći?

- Pitao sam ga tko je, ali on samo šuti. I ne miče se, već sat vremena se nije pomaknuo ni pedalj. Bojim se da bi mogao biti poremećen ili nasilan tip. Najbolje je da ovo prepustimo policiji.

- Maks, ostanite na liniji. Idem do prozora vidjeti o kome se radi.

- U redu, ali molim Vas budite pažljivi i svakako pozovite policiju.

- Ništa ne brinite. Vratim se za trenutak.

Spustio sam slušalicu pokraj telefona i prošetao do ulaznih vrata. Noćno svjetlo ispred

kuće je bilo dovoljno kako da nisam morao paliti svjetlo u hodniku. Kroz zamagljena stakla ulaznih vrata nisam mogao ništa vidjeti pa sam ih otključao i provirio prema Maksovoj kući. Trebao mi je trenutak da mi oči izoštore detalje vikendice udaljene pedesetak metara. Maksova kuća je bila jednokatnica, s upaljenim svjetlima na gornjem katu, gdje je očito Maks čekao s telefonskom slušalicom u ruci. Ispred kuće nije bilo nikog. Vanjsko svjetlo na kući je bilo upaljeno i osvjetljavalo je ulazna vrata i parkirani auto, i...ništa više. Vratio sam se do telefona.

- Halo, Maks? Ne vidim nikog ispred vaših vrata.

Uslijedilo je par sekundi tišine. Pomislio sam da je poklopio slušalicu kad je odjednom progovorio.

- Kako to mislite nema ga? Ja ga upravo gledam kroz prozor i on je još uvijek tu. Nije se pomaknuo.

- Gledajte, pogledao sam i nisam vidio nikoga, nisam slijep.

- Ja to ne razumijem, jeli ovo neka šala? Da niste vi i taj tip odlučili našaliti se na moj račun? Ako da, nije smiješno i prijavit ću vas.

- Čekajte Maks, ovo je nesporazum. Došao sam sam za vikend urediti kuću za ljeto. Samo sam ja tu, nitko nije došao sa mnom.

- Onda tko je to?

- Ne znam, ali možda Vi mene pokušavate zezati usred noći i možda bih ja trebao vas prijaviti?

- Gledajte, samo zovite policiju i sve ćemo...

Poklopio sam mu slušalicu. Sjetio sam se da mi je otac pričao o ludom susjedu koji je uvijek imao bujnu maštu i razvezani jezik. Očekivao sam da će se javiti kad primijeti da sam stigao. Jedna je stvar malo dosađivati čovjeku čisti oko kuće, ali sasvim druga držati ga budnim usred noći s izmišljenim pričama. Pogledao sam kroz rolete prozora još jednom i uvjero se da nitko ne šeće oko Maksove kuće a zatim sam se vratio u krevet.

Telefon je sljedeći put zazvonio u 2:57.

- Halo, Maks gledajte, nisam raspoložen za...

- Čekajte, on je uistinu tamo. Spustio sam se do ulaznih vrata ali ih nisam otvorio. Vidim njegovu siluetu ispred. Pitao sam ga što želi, čak i zaprijetio policijom. Ali ništa, čovjek samo šuti.

- Prošli smo ovo već...

- Bojim se, u redu? Jeste li to htjeli čuti? Ja sam staro laprdalo i strah me je. Trebam li moliti da mi pomognete?

- U redu, čekajte da provjerim još jednom.

- U redu.

Ispred ulaznih vrata Maksove kuće nije bilo nikoga. Prozori na donjem katu su bili osvijetljeni iznutra.

- Maks, opet nema nikog.
- Nemoguće!
- Da možda ne gledate na stražnji ulaz kuće ili...
- Ne čovječe, nemam stražnji ulaz. Samo taj, i vidim kroz prozor tvoju kuću gore uz stazu.
- Ne razumijem Maks, možda kruži oko kuće.
- Čuješ li ti ovo?
- Čujem li što?
- Nekakvo tiho zujanje, kao roj kukaca. Ne, više kao pčele u košnicama.
- Kakve pčele čovječe. Ovo ništa nema smisla. Nazvat ću policiju i poslati ih na vašu adresu i onda idem spavati.
- U redu Kostiću, hvala vam i laku noć. Pozovite ih odmah, može?
- Hoću, laku noć.

Poklopio sam slušalicu a zatim nazvao policiju. Prijavio sam remećenje javnog reda i mira, naveo nepoznatu osobu kao počinitelja i uputio ih na Maksovku kuću. Rekli su da će poslati policijsku patrolu.

Zvonjava telefona je zvučala iskrivljeno u snovima. Refleksno sam upalio noćnu lampu. Bilo je 3:45. Naglo sam se ustao i otišao do prozora. Maksova kuća je bлиještila u mraku. Svi prozori su bili osvijetljeni, sva svjetla upaljena. Ispred kuće još uvijek nije bilo nikog. Na trenutak sam razmišljao da mu se ne javim, ali znao sam da me neće ostaviti na miru. Odlučio sam zaprijetiti luđaku.

- Slušaj Maks, dosta mi je ovih sranja, zvao sam policiju, riješi to s njima.
- Molim te nemoj poklopiti. Policia još nije došla. Probao sam pričati s njim, ali uzalud. Jedino čujem to zujanje, kao roj pčela.
- Ma o čemu ti pričaš čovječe, nema nikog ispred tvoje kuće, nikog!
- Molim vas, vi ste jedini u krugu od desetak kilometara, nema više nikog da mi pomogne. Poklopio sam slušalicu. Shvatio sam da dišem užurbano i kroz zube. Palo mi je na pamet da odem do njega rješiti ovu situaciju, ali nisam htio dati poremećenom gadu to zadovoljstvo. Otišao sam se osvježiti u kupaonu i zatim sam se vratio u krevet. Nisam ni zaspao kad je telefon ponovo počeo zvoniti. Nekoliko minuta kasnije sam se pomirio s činjenicom kako Maks neće odustati dok se ne javim.
- Slušaj me poremećeni gade, doći ću ti tamo na vrata i...
- Nemoj dolaziti. Oni su ispred. O Bože, ovo je nemoguće. Ja ne želim vjerovati u to.
- O kome to pričaš? Tko su sad oni?

- Čekao sam policiju, ali kako još nisu došli, svako malo bi bacio pogled na ulaz da vidim da luđak možda nije negdje otišao. Kad sam maloprije pogledao on je bio točno pred vratima. Pomaknuo se. Vidim ga jasnije sad. On nije čovjek.

- Maks, prestani me zajebavati. Ja nisam kao moj otac pa da trpim ove gluposti.

- Bijela figura, nepomična, pred vratima. Zašto stoji? Valjda čeka da mu otvorim vrata. Ali to nije ono najgore, oni su iza njega, crne manje figure, postrojene. Svi stoje nepomični.

Poklopio sam slušalicu i opsovao na glas. Nazvao sam policiju. Telefon je zvonio ali nitko se nije javljaо. Nazvao sam roditelje u gradu, ali ni oni se nisu javljali. Vjerojatno su stišali zvonjavu ili ju nisu ni čuli. Probao sam još jednom policiju, ali bez uspjeha.

Nisam mogao spavati. Natočio sam si hladne vode iz frižidera i pokušao mobitelom nazvati policiju, nitko se nije javio. Signal je ovdje uvijek bio slab. Trgnuo sam se na zvuk metalne zvonjave. Maks je ponovo zvao.

- Maks.

- Obratio mi se. Konačno.

- Što ti je rekao?

- On ne govori. Mislim da je ono zujanje pčela njegov glas. Kao da mrmlja mnogo riječi, jako brzo i nerazumljivo. Ali onda su mi se u glavi pojavile njegove misli.

- Misli? Stvarno? Kako zanimljivo.

- Da, sad razumijem. On dolazi iz drugačijeg mesta, iz neke druge dimenzije, to je...

Poklopio sam. Telefon je opet zazvonio. Podigao sam ga i Maks je nastavio pričati kao da nismo prekinuli razgovor. Glas mu je drhtao.

- Nešto neobjašnjivo. Oni su delegacija, postrojeni iza njega. Čekaju da im otvorim vrata.

- Što žele Maks? Da ih odvedeš svom vođi?

- Ne, on smatra ovu stvarnost zanimljivom. Izrezat će njene dijelove i ponijeti je sa sobom.

- Ponijeti gdje? Maks?

- Pomaknuo se, pokucao je na vrata. Ja, moram mu otvoriti. Kad netko kuca, onda otvorиш vrata, bilo bi nepristojno da...

Poklopio sam slušalicu i izvukao telefonski kabel iz zidne utičnice. Neka me sad proba zvati ako može. Otišao sam u krevet, iscrpljen i s glavoboljom.

Na satu je bilo 4:37 kad sam začuo kucanje na svojim ulaznim vratima. Okrenuo sam se i pogledao prema prozoru. Kroz pukotine spuštenih roleta sam primijetio plavo treptanje. Policija je došla. Odlučio sam im sve ispričati i prijaviti ludog Maka za remećenje javnog reda i mira. Policijaci su me izvijestili da je susjednoj kući izvršena provala, i da vlasnika uopće nije bilo tamo. Još ga pokušavaju kontaktirati pa ih je zanimalo imam li njegov broj. Dao sam im broj svog oca u gradu. On će znati kako kontaktirati Maka.

Ispalo je kako je netko strpljivo čekao da Maks ode iz vikendice i ušuljao mu se u kuću.

A onda, nakon što su porazbijali namještaj, odlučili su se našaliti na moj račun. Tragovi njihovog vozila su vodili prema gradu. Obećao sam policiji da će im pomoći kako god budem mogao u pronalaženju prokletih gadova. Patrola je ostala tu još neko vrijeme a onda su dobili dojavu o primijećenom vozilu provalnika. Rekli su mi da su najblži sumnjivcima i da moraju krenuti u potjeru ali da ne brinem jer forenzičari su već na putu i doći će za desetak minuta.

Nakon što su otisli, vratio sam se u kuću i zaključao vrata. Nisam mogao spavati. Pokušao sam čitati knjigu ali su me oči pekle od umora i neispavanosti. Bacio sam par puta pogled na Maksovu kuću. S ove udaljenosti i ugašenim svjetlima se činilo kao da se ništa nije dogodilo.

Prije spavanja sam otisao do telefona i spojio ga u utičnicu. Pretpostavljam da će sutra telefon opet početi zvoniti jednom kad vijesti o provali stignu na odredište. Pri povratku u sobu sam prošao hodnikom. Krajčkom oka sam uhvatio svjetlost kroz zamagljeno staklo ulaznih vrata. Zastao sam u hodniku. Na trenutak sam htio produžiti prema spavaćoj sobi, ali video sam nešto na rubu vidnog polja. Začuo sam mrmljanje, poput tihog zujanja pčela. Okrenuo sam se prema izvoru zvuka. S druge strane vrata je stajala nepomična bijela figura a iza nje postrojene crne siluete.



Hrvoje Silić: "Angel Aquilla"
<http://hrvojesilic.deviantart.com/>



GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY: OR HOW SOMETIMES YOU DON'T EVEN KNOW YOU NEED A MOVIE IN YOUR LIFE UNTIL YOU SEE IT

Igor Rendić

We love misfits. Be they real life or fictional, there is just something about that person that just doesn't fit in all the way, that does things differently and whose worldview is just that little bit askew from what is considered 'standard' - something that draws us to them, to their work and their life and their story.

We love rogues - the cheeky, the snarky, the flippant and the adventurous; the renegades with a gleam in their eye and a smirk on their face.

We love determinators - the persistent, the unwavering; those who dedicate themselves to a cause, be it out of love or a quest for justice or revenge or maybe even because it's the right thing to do, even if it kills you.

And we love it when they come together and save the day.

Which is why, ultimately, people loved Guardians of the Galaxy from day one and which is why I love it to bits and will love it forever.

Oh, it's not only that - yes, I'm a sucker for the 'ragtag bunch of misfits are forced to work together and discover they actually kinda like each other and become a team and a sort of family' stories but that is not the biggest thing this movie has going for it.

And I love the 'big stakes are at hand, let's save the galaxy' stories, where protagonists quip before jumping into the fray, spaceships duke it out with lasers and stuff blows up in glorious color.

But what this movie has going for it the most, in my book, is this: Guardians of the Galaxy has heart. A huge, warm heart beating to the rhythm of 70s/80s hits, sending out a message to everyone in the cinema: "Let me entertain you. Let me show you how



Illustration: Marie Bergeron

<http://mariebergeron.tumblr.com/>

good this can be, you and I. Let me make you laugh and cry and punch the air and whoop and not want it to end. Let me in and I'll make you happy for two hours and then for days, months and years later, every time you remember me or hear anything from my soundtrack."

Oh, don't get me wrong, it's a big, shiny, dumb space opera - in the best possible way. It's dumb not in the sense of idiotic but very much like a big, loveable dog: sure it has only two speeds, mellow and hyperdrive; sure it's all in your face and jumps and makes a noise; sure, there's not much depth to it storywise, no great plot twists and turns; but *Guardians of the Galaxy* is never, not for one second, anything *but* completely honest: yes I'm big, yes, I'm full of bright lights and colors and explosions, yes, I'm fastpaced and you won't have much time to catch your breath but by gods, I do not think you're an idiot and here, let me entertain you.

It's funny and optimistic and knows when to hit you with a righteously epic action scene and when to break it with a joke or a quiet character moment. And if your heart doesn't break when you see the raccoon cry or gets all warm and goopy while you're watching the little tree dance - then just what kind of bionic device do you have in your chest?!

The characters are what a movie like this lives or dies by - sure, the effects can be the greatest ever, but without great characters, a movie like this is just a pile of CGI, cold and clinical and flat. But put good characters in it and it'll liven up and everything will be fine. And what's not to like about the GotGs bunch of misfits and loveable rogues: the snarky Peter Quill, the deadpan Drax, the determined Gamorra, the over-the-top Rocket or the quiet but stong Groot; about how each has depth to it - from Quill's outlaw vs. hero dichotomy to Drax's burning desire for vengeance tempered by a discovered camaraderie with his fellow Guardians; and about just how great these guys are to watch - both when they're bickering or when they're kicking ass.

The story is simple but it doesn't have to be complex to be good - it is basic, but it is told well, with all the craft necessary to make it more than watchable and more than enough joy and artistry put into it to make it immensely enjoyable.

Go watch *Guardians of the Galaxy*, for the first or third time. You won't regret it. You'll giggle next time somebody mentions Kevin Bacon around you. You'll find yourself dancing in the street or on the escalator when you play the Awesome Mix vol. 1 on your mp3.

Go watch *Guardians of the Galaxy*. It will make you happy.



THE ARRANGEMENT

Mike Jansen

Crazy Eddie knew his day was off to a bad start when he found Eleanor's face in a jar by the door. It was just one of many glass jars that a large African American was loading into a U-Haul truck outside of Mammy Eleanor's store.

"What's going on here, where's Mammy?" he asked the other man.

"She gone, whitey," he said and spat on the ground at his feet.

Eddie's shoulders slumped. Gone. The one person who listened to his rambling stories and his crazy moods, the only one who really understood him. He blinked his eyes a couple of times and tried to speak.

"You okay, mister?" the other man asked.

He nodded. "She was always kind to me."

"And now she's dead. I'm cleaning out the store," he explained. "You wouldn't believe the shit that's coming out of there. I mean, come on, pickled alligator eyes?"

"I believe you," said Eddie. "I've seen some of her work. Many people feared her, called her a voodoo queen. Me, I think she was just a nice old lady."

The other man smiled. "Voodoo queen? Old Mammy? Not likely. She was my great-grandmother and her time's been up for a few dozen years. Nasty old woman. Still, too bad she went like she did."

"How so?" Eddie said.

"Last week some crazed junkie sprayed her, right inside the door there." The man pointed at the drywall of Mammy's house. Bullet holes riddled the door and parts of the wall. "We buried her yesterday at Saint Vincent De Paul Cemetery, few blocks west."

Eddie walked to the wall and poked his thin fingers through some of the holes. He imagined Mammy on the other side, hot lead slamming through her frail body. Next to his left foot was the jar with her face. Carefully he tried to push it into a small bush, but the other man caught the movement.

"You want that?" he asked.

With a red face Crazy Eddie stammered: "A... a mem... a memento. Of Mammy."

The man smiled. "Sure, why not. Take it. Keep it. Put it in a display case, whatever it is. Saves me the storage."

Eddie picked up the jar and smiled. "Thanks, mister."

"Yeah, off with you. I got work to do." He resumed putting boxes and crates into the truck. As he came out again he threw something at Eddie, which Eddie barely caught. It was a set of false teeth, Mammy's teeth. "There's a memento."



Crazy Eddie was born for bad luck. Thrown out of his foster parent's home at the age of eight, he wandered the streets of Baton Rouge until some wild kids ran him out of the city. Before long he made his home in New Orleans, living near the edge of City Park, eating the morsels left behind by park visitors and searching through the dumpsters behind the driving range.

He was beaten and mugged so many times his spirit broke. He started to babble and his nervous twitches soon earned him the nickname Crazy Eddie. Now that he was grown up, he still wandered the streets, homeless, always searching for the next meal, always looking for a few bucks to afford a good night's sleep in a safe place. Eddie did what he needed to do to survive, which sometimes meant stealing or picking pockets.

Mardi Gras was his favorite time of the year. Warm days, warm nights, loose people, and easy money. Unfortunately it also brought out the predators, like Jean Baptiste. The neighborhoods Crazy Eddie frequented belonged to him and Eddie needed to pay protection money. He had failed that only once but would never again. Jean Baptiste made sure people remembered.

Crazy Eddie would have skipped town altogether if not for Mammy Eleanor. He often visited her store which was basically an extension of her home in the suburbs. She took good care of him, fed him all the gumbo he could handle and bought all the jewelry he brought her. He used that money to pay off Jean Baptiste.

With all the weird goods in her store, dried snakeskin, desiccated chicken beaks, weird black feathers, glass jars filled with viscous liquids and all kinds of animal parts, Crazy Eddie was completely convinced that Mammy Eleanor was some kind of voodoo queen. Whenever he tried to ask her, she just laughed, showing her fake teeth en slapping her bony knees.

The only thing she kept repeating was that if ever anything would happen to her, he should take the jar with her face and place it in her grave. She made him promise, again and again and he finally did, sure in the knowledge that that would never happen.



The gold watch in the left front pocket of his jeans would have earned him a good night's sleep in a motel. With Mammy gone there was nowhere to turn with the stolen goods. Not for the first time Eddie wondered what she did with all the gold, silver and diamond trinkets he stole and brought to her.

The jar in his arms was heavy, the sunlight was warm and he rested in the shade of a huge bougainvillea that colored Mammy Eleanor's face a lively brown. Eddie looked at the empty holes of her eyes and the slowly undulating black hair that filled half the jar.

"So what did you do with all your gold, Mammy?" he asked the jar. 'Did you put it in a secret place?" He thought about that. Last time he visited her must have been just before

she was killed, hours maybe. He had brought her a sizeable mound of gold trinkets he stole from some Chinese tourists. Had he been followed? The thought chilled him. He tried to think back to that night, tried to remember movement or sound behind him on his way to Mammy. He just wasn't sure, still, he felt guilty.

"I'll make it right, Mammy Eleanor," he said. "I know where they buried you and Father Mackenzie probably said the words, so he should know the exact spot." He cradled the jar in his arms again and walked the next leg to the Christ Temple Church. The front doors were closed, so he walked to the side of the building. Father Mackenzie's Bronco was parked there. He knocked on the side entrance door a few times until the priest opened the door for him.

"Crazy Eddie, what brings you here?" he asked as they walked along the aisle to the back office.

"Mammy Eleanor," Eddie said. "I need to know where on Saint Vincent she's been buried."

"Pay your respects, huh?" the priest said. "Wait, let me check the book." He took a thin ledger from the cupboard and looked up the last pages he had written on. "Number two, left from the entrance, row three, third grave. How could I forget?"

"Nice, she would have liked that," Eddie smiled.

"She arranged it a long time ago," Father Mackenzie said. "Eleanor Rigby knew what she wanted." He looked at the gift basket on the first row of benches. "There's no stone yet, so if you want to make a donation..."

"That won't be necessary, Father. Mammy Eleanor and I have an arrangement." With those words he left the priest.



With his last dollars he dined at Stewart's Diner and waited until sundown. Saint Vincent De Paul was open late, but Eddie was not in a hurry. Now the moment drew closer he had to confront Mammy, his resolve wavered. He had seen his share of death and blood and terrible wounds, but it was never with someone he actually liked.

He walked into Piety Street, the jar still firmly in the crook of his left arm. The high walls of the cemetery still radiated the day's heat. On his right, across the street he saw cemetery number one and on his left he came to the gate that gave admittance to cemetery number two.

He pushed the right side of the gate and it slowly swung inward, creaking ominously. The cemetery seemed deserted. He walked along row upon row of small mausoleums, some very old, some recent, until he came to the fresh heap of earth of Mammy's grave. A small plaque proclaimed her presence, Eleanor Rigby, Rest In Peace.

Crazy Eddie placed the jar on the ground next to her grave and went in search of some tools, a spade or a shovel. There was a small caretaker's cabin that opened easily when

he unlocked the padlock with his trusty hairpin. It was his lucky hairpin that had never failed him. He also took a lamp.

The earth was still loose and the digging was easy enough. Mammy's casket wasn't buried very deep and after three feet of earth he bumped into it. It looked like a nice casket, painted shiny white. Someone had drawn weird symbols on it in red. He cleared more of the dirt until he could unfasten the top half of the casket. He placed the lamp next to it.

A sheet covered Mammy Eleanor and when Eddie removed it he understood why. There were large holes in her chest, neck and face. In fact most of her head was unrecognizable, just an emaciated skull with desiccated flesh on it.

"Hi Mammy," he said and giggled. "You said I should come. And I did." A single tear left his right eye and fell into the casket on Mammy's hands. He remembered the face in the jar.

Using a stick he found nearby, he gently removed the face and scalp from the jar and dropped it on Mammy's head. He watched in gruesome fascination as the face seemed to slither into place from the eyes out. Her dark skin stretched taut across her cheekbones, forehead and chin.

Mammy Eleanor opened her dark eyes and took a huge, gasping breath. Then she moved her head and looked up at Eddie. She smiled, but it was a hollow, worm filled smile as Mammy's teeth had not been buried with her.

Eddie felt his knees go weak. "Mammy, is that really you?" he asked.



Eleanor Rigby slowly rose from the grave. She stood before Eddie and put her right hand on his shoulder. Then she spit out a few mouthfuls of dirt and blood.

Eddie held up her teeth and Mammy picked them up and put them in her mouth. She clacked her jaws a few times.

"That's better, mon dieu," she said in a hoarse voice.

"It's good to see you again, Mammy," Eddie said. He looked at her apprehensively. "Is everything all good now?"

Mammy looked down at her body. "No, all is not good. My body is a wreck. It won't last very long in this state."

"What does that mean?" Eddie asked.

"Means I go back to the Baron, soon," Mammy said and her voice sounded dark as the grave. "We have an arrangement, Him an' me."

"Is that bad?" Eddie asked.

"Oui, mon ami, yes, it's bad," Mammy said. "Unless I can repair this." She looked at her body, then at Eddie and there was a deep hunger in her eyes which was more than the reflection of the blood red moon that had just risen above the horizon. Eddie took a

step back.

She blinked her eyes. "No, that won't do..." The hunger faded from her eyes.

"But what can you do, Mammy?" Eddie asked.

"The least I want is to have a little chat with the one who killed me," Mammy said.

"I heard someone shot you. Do you know who it was?"

"No, I just remember him yelling at me. He wanted to know where the gold was."

"What did he look like?"

"Big man, dreadlocks, light eyes. His right hand covered in scars and bad ink."

Crazy Eddie turned pale. "Jean Baptiste." His shoulders drooped and tears welled up in his eyes. "He did follow me, he did. I'm so sorry, Mammy, it's my fault." He pushed his fists in his eyes and sobbed.

Cold hands came to rest on his shoulders and the smell of the grave came real close now. Mammy's hoarse voice sounded just beside his left ear. "Cher Eddie, tout c'est bien. Can you get Jean Baptiste here? Ici, a moi?"

Eddie looked up. His vision was blurred and to his eyes Mammy Eleanor's hair moved around her head with a will of its own, making her look like the voodoo queen he always thought her. "Yes, Mammy. I have his cell number."

"Then call him, bring him to me." She smiled and her fake teeth looked sharp and bloody in the red moonlight.



Out on the street Eddie searched for the nearest pay-phone. He found a working pair near the 'We Got It' convenience store on North Claiborne Avenue.

"Allo?" Jean Baptiste's voice held a threatening tone. It always did. He was the archetypical bully and he thrived on the misery of others. Tormenting Crazy Eddie was one of his favorite pastimes.

"It... it's me, Eddie," Crazy Eddie said. He felt Jean Baptiste's interest through the phone.

"Well, well, Crazy Eddie." He made it sound like 'Crezzie Eddie', which Eddie knew to be a fake French accent. "Where is my money, you little piece of merde."

"I... I was calling about that, Jean Baptiste," Eddie stammered. "M... my p... pawnshop was closed."

"Dun' gimme excuses, asswipe," Jean Baptiste said. "Arrange something else!"

"The... the thing is... she died," Eddie explained.

"Not my problem. Get my money by tomorrow, or else..."

"I... may have something better," Eddie said. He felt ever more nervous. Lying to Jean Baptiste made him physically uncomfortable.

Jean Baptiste was silent for a moment. "Go on."

"She once told me, she would take all her gold with her. To the grave."

"Sooo?"

Eddie heard Jean Baptiste's interest. It made him just that little more courageous. "Well, I went to the cemetery. And dug up her casket." He heard the other man start to laugh.

"You really are crazy, Eddie." Then his tone changed. Jean Baptiste's anger was obvious.

"Time is money. Say what you have to say or go get it for me!"

"So she did." Eddie said.

"She did what?" Jean Baptiste asked.

"Take the gold to her grave." For good measure he added: "Even the preacher who said the words remarked on how heavy the casket was."

"Did you see it? The gold?" Jean Baptiste was obviously hooked. Eddie recognized the greed from some of the tricks he played on his marks.

"Several bags full. Mostly between her legs." Adding the detail made it all the more believable. "I want to make a deal with you, Jean," Eddie added.

"A deal? With me?" Jean Baptiste hissed. "And what is that?"

"No more bullying. You get the gold and leave me in peace," Eddie said. He heard the other man breathing heavily.

"Where are you, Eddie?"

"I... Is... Is it a deal? Jean?" Eddie asked anxiously. Again Jean Baptiste chose not to answer.

"Just tell me where you are, Eddie." Jean made his voice honey sweet. "I won't hurt you."

Yes, you will, Eddie realized. It was almost enough to make him drop the horn and start running. But he remembered the one who had always been nice to him, the one lying in her grave, dead, but miraculously somewhat alive. "Ok, Jean, ok, it's on Saint Vincent De Paul Cemetery number two. I'll see you there, ok?" He heard the other man hang up. He sighed. No way back now.



Crazy Eddie sat with his back against the wall of the cemetery. When Jean Baptiste's black 1964 Buick Wildcat Convertible drove around the corner of Piety Street, he got up and waved.

Jean Baptiste got out. He wore his usual street outfit, jeans, white short-sleeved shirt, cowboy boots and two studded leather bands around his forearms. He flexed his left fist which sported brass knuckles.

Eddie cringed when Jean Baptiste stood before him. He whimpered softly as the other man grabbed him by the throat and threw him up against the wall.

"Where is it, little man...?" Jean Baptiste hissed in Eddie's ear.

"I... Inside, to the left, third row, third grave," Eddie said.

Jean Baptiste punched him in the gut with the knuckles. Eddie collapsed and puked.

"You better not fuck with me, Crazy Eddie," Jean Baptiste said. He kicked Eddie's back.

"I'm not, I'm not," Eddie cried.

Jean Baptiste snorted. He straightened his shirt and kicked open the gates. By the light of the moon he found his way. Eddie crawled after him, sobbing.

Mammy Eleanor's grave was a dark hole in the ground. Jean Baptiste cursed as he got in the hole. He opened the lid of the casket and looked down into it. Then he reached his right arm into the casket and tried to feel for the bags supposedly between Mammy's legs. When he found nothing he turned around and Eddie saw the fury in his light eyes.

"You miserable shit, you..." Jean Baptiste tried to step out of the hole, but black tresses of hair suddenly wrapped around his neck. He grabbed his neck and struggled, but more hair wrapped around his arms and head and now Mammy's thin arms, her hands like claws reached around his waist and dug deep into the flesh of his abdomen. Jean Baptiste screeched and his arms flailed as he fell backwards into the casket.

"Come to Mammy!"

Eddie heard a deep hunger in Mammy's voice, the kind of hunger that raised the hair on the back of his neck. He saw Jean Baptiste struggling to get up, Mammy's face close to his neck, her teeth red as blood. She looked at Eddie, one quick moment, her eyes large and black, and hissed: "Close it!"

Eddie scrambled to the edge of the grave and kicked the lid of the casket closed. He then pushed most of the earth back onto the casket and frantically pushed as much sand and dirt onto the grave as he could. He heard Jean Baptiste's screams until he shoveled the remainder of the earth on Mammy's grave.

Then he ran. He ran all the way to City Park where he collapsed on a bench.



Crazy Eddie woke with sunlight on his face and the sound of a car horn. When he opened his eyes the sky was blue, the air was fresh and last night was a distant nightmare.

His eyes opened wide as he saw a familiar black 1964 Buick Wildcat Convertible near the curb. Again the horn sounded.

He got up. His stomach and back still felt sore and his legs reminded him that he ran for many miles without pause. He blinked a couple of times to see who was behind the wheel, but the sun in his eyes made that difficult.

He stumbled a bit closer and saw the door open. An old, slender woman with long, black hair, that seemed to have a life of its own, got out.

Crazy Eddie looked at her and shook his head. "Mammy? Is that you?"

The woman smiled. She had Mammy's teeth alright.

“What about Jean Baptiste?” Eddie asked.

“What about him? The Baron loves evil men. And I love their strength. So we made a deal, Him an’ me.” She smiled.

“So now what?”

“I was thinking of visiting Baton Rouge,” Mammy Eleanor said. “Care to join me?”

Crazy Eddie shook his head. “Mean people kicked me out of there.”

“Really? Get in the car, Eddie. We’re going for a little ride.” Mammy smiled wickedly.
“Mammy just loves mean people.”



Petra Kožar: “The first and the last of their kind”

<http://penguinity.deviantart.com/>



ČOVJEK KOJI SE ZVAO NIKOLA

Marko Lubar

Patuljci su ležali u travi, svaki zabavljen svojim poslom. Proljetno sunce milovalo je dolinu ovjenčanu planinskim lancem Orgunom, čiji su vrhovi i najžešćem ljetu prkosili vječnim snijegom. Mirtir je grickao vlat trave i dunuo kroz nos kad god bi mu dosadna muha uletjela u nj. Bio je prelijen da bi je zatukao rukom, a osim toga, šaka mu je bila k'o lopata, pa je postojala ozbiljna prijetnja da umorstvom muhe samom sebi nanese više štete nego koristi.

Toplotom danu unatoč, bio je pod punom ratnom spremom – neprijatelj nikad ne spava, a sve i da spava, Mirtir nije bio od onih pomodnih tipova koji se vole baš svaki mjesec presvlačiti. Urtir je bio nešto poduzetniji od svog patuljka po oružju, pa je oštiro sjekiru oslojen na velik kamen i, sudeći po bezglasnom micanju usana, pjevušio neku pjesmu. Puhalo je blagi povjetarac, koji im je hladio oznojena čela pod kacigama.

Odjednom se nebo zatamni, a povjetarac preraste u snažan vjetar, koji povije travu na livadi.

- Oho, evo malo osvježenja! – veselo će Mirtir, sretan što je vjetar odnio muhu daleko od njegova nosa. Urtir je i dalje mrmljao pjesmu i oštiro sjekiru, ali sada sa puno manje koncentracije; ispod oka je gledao otkud ovakva nagla promjena vremena – možda je kakva vradžbina u pitanju? Ako jest, on će odmah toj vještici ili čarobnjaku ili zloduhu (ili tko god već naleti) napravit' sjekirom krasan razdjeljak na glavi.

Uspravio se u sjedeći položaj, sada već pažljivo promatrajući okolinu. Mirtir je i dalje ležao, prelijen da bi ustao. Znao je da mu je sudrug tankih živaca i da je do sada već prebrojao sve tratinčice na livadi i usput provjerio čuči li iza koje kakav zmaj il' slična živila koju treba skratit' za glavu il' dvije.

- Diži guzicu! – pokuša Urtir laskanjem potaknuti Mirtira da se pokrene, iznerviran njegovom nezainteresiranošću za naglu promjenu u atmosferiliju. A ova baš tad postade još izražajnija: vjetar je tako zapuhao da je oborio Urtira nazad na leđa, a munje zaparaše zemlju oko njih.

- Jaooooooooo, izginušmo! – zajauka Urtir –i k'o za vraga ja u željeznom oklopu, a munje sijevaju, jaaaaaaaaaa!

Kod kuće je, naime, imao i čipkastu verziju istog, ali tu je oblačio samo po naputku gospođe Urtir, a i to samo onda kad djecu pošalju kod punice. Odjednom, u trenutku lucidnosti tako neuobičajene za patuljke, sjeti se stare izreke:

- Grom neće u koprive, jelda?

Mirtir mu nije odgovorio–pokušavao je onim svojim ručerdama iskopati rupu u tlu u koju bi se mogao zavući.



Oluja odjednom prestade, jednako naglo kao što je počela. Patuljci, koji su svakog treна očekivali smrtonosni udar elektriciteta, ostadoše ukopani. Jedini zvuk koji se čuo bio je nekakvo pucketanje iz kruga spaljene trave nekoliko metara ispred njih.

Usred kruga stajala je čudna spodoba. Očito je bila riječ o čovjeku, jer su se njih dvojica barem ljudi nagledali; nije bilo da prođe mjesec dana, a da ne izbjiju barem dva rata između ljudi i patuljaka.

No ovakva čovjeka nikad nisu vidjeli: nije imao halje kao kralj (što ga je diskvalificiralo za pljačku i nogom u guzicu), nije nosio niti rite kao seljak (što ga je diskvalificiralo za nogom u guzicu), a bome nije imao niti oklopa kao vitez (što ga je pak diskvalificiralo za sjekirom u glavu i nogom u guzicu) - pa što je onda ovaj čovjek pred njima?

Patuljci brže-bolje skočiše na noge, zbumjeno blejeći u čudaka gotovo dvostrukou većeg od njih, odjevena u kaput pod kojim je bila čista bijela košulja. Oko vrata mu je bila obješena neka crna krpa koja mu je visila do pupka. Imao je crne hlače i čudne, sjajne plitke čizme na nogama, nimalo nalik obući načinjenoj od krvna životinja koju sam uloviš, a kakve su patuljci vrlo vješto izrađivali.



Smireno je gledao patuljke svojim smeđim očima. Oluja koja je netom prohujala livadom izgleda nije ostavila traga na njemu: kosa mu je bila pažljivo raščešljana na razdjeljak po sredini glave, sa svakom vlasti na svom mjestu (Urtir je upravo taj razdjeljak nišanio sjekirom čim je ugledao došljaka, nestrpljivo oblizujući usne – pridi bliže, prijatelju!).

Čovjek se odjednom nasmiješio, ali tako škrto i jalovo da mu se brkovi nisu nimalo pomaknuli. Ispružio je desnu nogu i istupio iz kruga spaljene trave i zemlje, te stao pred patuljke. Ova dvojica su bila isprva zbumjena kretnjom, kao da nisu vjerovali da ovakvo čudno, cirkusko stvorenje uopće može pokretati udove. Urtir se prvi od njih prenu i zamahnu sjekirom ka došljakovo glavi.

Srećom po pridošlicu, šok koji je Urtir proživio u zadnjih nekoliko minuta bio je toliki da je ispustio sjekiru u travi iza sebe, pa je ovaj pokret izgledao kao da Urtir pruža ruku čudnom čovjeku. Ovaj prihvati pruženu desnicu i stisnu je.

- Drago mi je, ja sam Nikola!

Urtir sad nije imao gdje, nego prihvatiti igru kako ne bi ispaо neodgojeni glupan, usiljeno se smješkajući. Bilo bi zaista nekulturno i nedolično jednome patuljku da nekome – pa i čovjeku! – pruži ruku, a onda mu zatjera nož u rebra.

- Drago mi je, ja sam Urtir, sin Urgunov! Ovo je moј rođak Mirtir, sin Horgunov. Kakva te to moćna vradžbina donijela ovdje?

- O, nije to nikakva vradžbina – dočeka napokon Nikola nekog tko hoće ozbiljno saslušati njegove ideje –nego je zapravo sasvim jednostavna primjena okretnog magnetskog polja! Potrebno je samo malo modifcirati standardni induksijski motor... Evo, pogledajte!

Reče Nikola, vadeći iz džepa maleni uređaj i pružajući ga Urtiru. Ovaj ga isprva sumnjičavo promotri u Nikolinoj ruci, a onda ga ipak uze u ruke. Onjušio ga je i pobliže promotrio, a onda zdravorazumski upitao:

- Jel se to može jest?
 - Oh ne, prijatelju! On služi za putovanje kroz dimenzije! Evo, dopusti...
 - Ček', ček'! Ne može se jesti, kažeš? Evo ti ga nazad.
 - Stani, može li osušit' gaće? – upade Mirtir u raspravu – zapiš'o sam se dok je sijevalo.
 - Tako mi srpskog roda i hrvatske domovine! Dvadeset i druga dimenzija za redom, a ni ovdje me nitko ne doživljava. Dođe mi da obolim od koronarne tromboze, bando neuka!
- Nakon ovako izravnih i nedvosmislenih opaski na račun izobrazbe pandimenzionalnih naroda i narodnosti, Nikola istrže kutijicu iz Urtirove ruke i nabrzaka promandrlja po sitnoj dugmadi po njoj. Opet zabljeskaše munje koje odbaciše Urtira i Mirtira nazad u travu. Kad su podigli pogled, čudnog čovjeka nije više bilo.
- Šteta što ti ono ispala sjekira...



Marko Horvatin: "Steampunk Aphrodite"
<http://markothesketchguy.deviantart.com/>



THE BOY AND THE NIGHTMARE

David Kelečić

“Do you want me to kill him?”



The boy sat on the cold pavement, beneath the last lamp post in the village. It was late summer and the increasingly longer night were not warm enough to wear short sleeves. If it were day, a stream of black ants would be running along the road, the ants collecting light straws to take them deep underground. The boy, however, never went there during the day and at night the only thing he could see was his shadow, cast by the last lamp on the cold street. That place had been his other home for many evenings.

The Nightmare knew that the boy had not been thinking about anything in particular. Like a dark cloud, a conscious shadow, she would go through the village over the same road as it had for centuries. The boy would wait for her there, at the end of her journey. Even though he was a lot younger than her, they repeated the ritual long enough that she considered him a part of her nightly routine. Both were creatures of routine and it was a similarity she appreciated.

She approached him from the darker side, where there was less light. The boy was always considerate and sat slightly further away from the lamp so she could have more shade. The light did not bother her, but she felt that this was the way it is supposed to be. They were all matters of habit.

The boy did not react to her arrival even though he could feel her coming close. She coalesced part of her darkness under the pavement and sat by the boy. It was polite understanding that they developed towards each other over the years: he would move further away from the lamp and she would sit next to him. At first she found it unusual, but she could understand that it was important to the boy. It was human. It was a ritual they did together and the Nightmare appreciated rituals.

She waited observing the night. The boy was the only one awake in the village, at least on her route. A long time ago, a single house was located at the spot under the lamp post. It was at a time when she was still acquiring her habits. There was food at the house, the final dreams in the village where she could satisfy her hunger. While the dreams and the house have been long gone, long even from her perspective, her nature compelled her to pass that way. And so she repeated every night until one time a lamp post appeared there and some time later the boy who sat underneath it.

Watching him, he seemed more burdened than usual. She felt a plethora of dark thoughts and heavy dreams gathering within his youthful body. The Nightmare fed on such dreams while roaming, but the boy never slept near her. It did not matter for her, however, because she always reached the last lamp full. She preferred to merely sit by his side and

respect the new custom, wondering how she so readily accepted him.

The boy slowly modified the balanced nature of their relationship by forcing the Nightmare to slightly change. At first it was very difficult and felt like torture, but with time, as was with every repetitive thing, it became easier, like a new habit. Sensing that it was time, she mimicked part of the boy's body and coalesced some of her darkness in order to form vocal chords, a tongue and teeth.

"We are here" – she would whisper, words carried by the wind. There was no need to say more, she had said all that was important and could wait. The Nightmare always had time.

She thought about habits while waiting for the silent pause to end. They were good and it was how she existed. When the boy had first appeared at the end of her path, she ignored him, but the boy was persistent. He repeated his ritual every night and the Nightmare respected creatures with rituals. With time they formed a bond, a relationship comprising of several tiny changes they did for each other.

"We are here" – he would quietly confirm later, respecting the Nightmare's need for a pause. As the night passed, she would always observe him like a mute witness. Most of the time he would sit in silence, but sometimes words would pour out and with words came tears. It was difficult for the Nightmare to follow the words, there were too many changes in too short of a time. The Nightmare, on the other hand, understood tears and tears were heavy and revealed the boy's story like liquid coal.

"You are in pain" – she would say later, words she repeated every night. It was her way of letting him know she understood why he sat next to her. She sometimes wondered whether the boy realised how much darkness had gathered within him, much more than was usual. Over time, she learned to consider this as another form of habit, like someone's dreams were always full of the darkness on which she fed.

One night while sharing the pavement, the boy cried for the longest time. The Nightmare calmly watched as the wind carried the boy's palpable pain far into the darkness. That time, however, the boy broke their usual order and did something which deeply disturbed her. He moved his hand from his shaking knees and reached into her darkness. He could not feel anything at first, but he found the only part of her he could grab with his fingers, the small dense part she used to sit next to him. At that moment the Nightmare almost flew from the spot. The order was disturbed. Nevertheless, she did not move, aware that it would only further make things worse, make them more chaotic.

She remained there uneasy watching the teary boy clinging to the only tangible thing she had. She had watched him for a long time until she decided to coalesce the rest of her darkness and became a cold and firm shadow. He hugged her and wailed on. While his pain dripped from his eyes on her shadow, she surprised herself by asking a question.

"Do you want me to kill him?"

Instead of answering, the boy cried more and it made her calm. She knew the boy understood the power behind the question and how hard it would be for her. His silence and touch let her know that she need not worry, that he will not ask of her to change her habits so much. She felt grateful.

Their ritual had nonetheless changed. Occasionally his darkness was too heavy a burden to carry and the Nightmare would allow him to touch her. She comforted him in ways she could not completely understand. In moments like those she became used to asking the new question. It was part of the routine. While ever aware of the weight it had for her and the change it would cause, she was still ready to go that far. Fortunately, the boy never asked it of her and the Nightmare wanted things to stay as they were. She was used to sitting with him under the last lamp post in the street, watching him. Habits were a good thing.



One night, the boy did not come. The Nightmare had, as always, coalesced part of her darkness and sat underneath the lamp, closer to the dark. She confirmed she was there, even though the boy was not around to hear it. After some time, she coalesced the rest to become firm so the boy, had he been there, could wrap his arms around her. Respecting her own habits, she asked the same question as she did so many nights before. Deep inside, however, she felt distress.

The following evening the Nightmare passed the same route she took for centuries. She wanted to hurry, but held her usual speed. Finally, reaching the last part of her journey, she saw that the boy was not there. No doubt he must have already known how used she was to him. Distraught like never before, she decided to do something that scared her above all else – break her habit and look for the boy.

She followed the trail of the boy's tears back into the village. Far from her usual nightly routine, she flowed through yet unseen streets of her village. She almost ran back to the lamp, but an unknown drive made her continue. Finally, she found the house in which the boy usually slept.

The house was empty, but the Nightmare felt the heaviness with which the walls and furniture were laced, more so than in any house she passed by. She made her shadow absorb the blackness of the memories hidden in the weeping walls and then she saw what happened.

Like every night, the boy's father attacked his mother. He hit her in the face with an empty bottle, but this time her dreams had been drained forever. The boy's burdens had exploded in response and he attacked his father. The family habit was broken. The father's journey had reached its end.

The Nightmare did not understand human customs, but she understood that the boy changed all of his habits. She could not possibly approve, there were too many

sudden changes at the same time. The Nightmare offered to do this a long time ago, but fortunately, the boy never asked it of her, respecting her peace to the very end.

Slowly, she went back through the village to the last lamp post in the street. She sat on the pavement, coalescing part of her darkness. Some time later, she became firm again so the boy, had he been there, could hug her.

“Do you want me to kill him?”

The Nightmare always respected her habits.





Nela Dunato: "Daughter of the Forest"
<http://neladunato.com>

MONSTERS – A SHORT INTRODUCTION

Valentina Mišković

To talk about monsters is to talk about relations between humans and animals. Animals represent a wide range of emotions in our culture – from adoring to hating them, from using them for food, clothing, hunting to entertainment in courts and circuses. But animal features fall under a special category in our *imaginarium* – the monstrous.

In this short introduction I will give some examples on how we connect with the animal, and create the monstrous, the unknown. We somehow create monsters and this text will try to find the borders, the relations and reasons we create them. I will give a short review of medieval classifications and the modern one, find the connecting and dividing points and hopefully explain what is the purpose of those monsters considering the culture they were created in.

MONSTER – BETWEEN US AND THEM

Animal can be seen as the cultural Other, and it belongs to the opposition nature-nurture, which discusses the constant divide between human culture and nature. But the monster is a product of our imagination, and thus a product of culture, but we want it to be and represent the worst in nature. The very term *monster* derives from Latin -to prove- (*monstrere*), or -to warn- (*monere*), explaining to us that monsters are here to pinpoint something in our culture that is very wrong. It is the gateway to our collective imagination and reason, (ir)rational mind and creative mind.

There are many monsters among us – the killers, rapists, criminals of all sorts, and they are often called animals in comparison, but why? The border between humans and animals is defined not just by physical, but also by moral features. The criminals turn to our enemies because they cross the moral boundary of the society. Their behavior is anti-human, thus animalistic. Their behavior represents our inner struggles that scares our civilized mind.

But monster is just a figment of our imagination. But it represents something bad or evil, because it's not within the boundaries of civilized culture. It is outside of our comfortable bubble, it belongs in the darkness. Just like the atmosphere protects us from the infinite abyss of the universe. But discovering universe we created we created a new species of monster – aliens. No matter how technologically advanced aliens we imagine, they still fall under the same category as the savage, the monster, the hermaphrodite, the animal. They all stand for the ultimate Other.

J. J. Choen offers seven theses toward understanding cultures through the monsters they bear. These are some highlights.

Thesis I: The Monster's Body Is a Cultural Body

Vampires, burial, death: inter the corpse where the road forks, so that when it springs from the grave, it will not know which path to follow. Drive a stake through its heart: it will be stuck to the ground at the fork, it will haunt that place that leads to many other places, that point of indecision. Behead the corpse, so that it will not know itself as subject, only as pure body.

The monster is born only at this metaphoric crossroads, as an embodiment of a certain cultural moment—of a time, a feeling, and a place. The monster's body quite literally incorporates fear, desire, anxiety, and fantasy (ataractic or incendiary), giving them life and an uncanny independence. The monstrous body is pure culture. A construct and a projection, the monster exists only to be read: the *monstrum* is etymologically “that which reveals”, “that which warns”. Like a letter on the page, the monster signifies something other than itself: it is always a displacement, always inhabits the gap between the time of upheaval that created it and the moment into which it is received, to be born again.

Thesis II: The Monster Always Escapes

We see the damage that the monster wreaks, the material remains (the footprints of the yeti across Tibetan snow, the bones of the giant stranded on a rocky cliff), but the monster itself turns immaterial and vanishes, to reappear someplace else (for who is the yeti if not the medieval wild

man? Who is the wild man if not the biblical and classical giant?). Regardless of how many times Sigourney Weaver's beleaguered Ripley utterly destroys the ambiguous Alien that stalks her, its monstrous progeny return, ready to stalk again in another bigger-than-ever sequel. No monster tastes of death but once. The anxiety that condenses like green vapor into the form of the vampire can be dispersed temporarily, but the revenant by definition returns. And so the monster's body is both corporal and incorporeal; its threat is its propensity to shift.

Thesis III: The Monster Is the Harbinger of Category Crisis

The monster always escapes because it refuses easy categorization. Of the nightmarish creature that Ridley Scott brought to life in *Alien*, Harvey Greenberg writes:

It is a Linnean nightmare, defying every natural law of evolution; by turns bivalve, crustacean, reptilian, and humanoid. It seems capable of lying dormant within its egg indefinitely. It sheds its skin like a snake, its carapace like an arthropod. It deposits its young into other species like a wasp. It responds according to Lamarckian and Darwinian principles. This refusal to participate in the classificatory “order of things” is true of monsters generally: they are disturbing hybrids whose externally incoherent bodies resist attempts to include them in any systematic structuration. And so the monster is dangerous, a form suspended between forms that threatens to smash distinctions.

Thesis VI: Fear of the Monster Is Really a Kind of Desire

The monster is continually linked to forbidden practices, in order to normalize and to enforce. The monster also attracts. The same creatures who terrify and interdict can evoke potent escapist fantasies; the linking of monstrosity with the forbidden makes the monster all the more appealing as a temporary egress from constraint. This simultaneous repulsion and attraction at the core of the monster's composition accounts greatly for its continued cultural popularity, for the fact that the monster seldom can be contained in a simple, binary dialectic. We distrust and loathe the monster at the same time we envy its freedom, and perhaps its sublime despair.

Thesis VII: The Monster Stands at the Threshold of Becoming

Monsters are our children. They can be pushed to the farthest margins of geography and discourse, hidden away at the edges of the world and in the forbidden recesses of our mind, but they always return. And when they come back, they bring not just a fuller knowledge of our place

in history and the history of knowing our place, but they bear selfknowledge, human knowledge—and a discourse all the more sacred as it arises from the Outside. These monsters ask us how we perceive the world, and how we have misrepresented what we have attempted to place. They ask us to reevaluate our cultural assumptions about race, gender, sexuality, our perception of difference, our tolerance toward its expression. They ask us why we have created them.

MEDIEVAL MONSTERS

D. Oswald analyzes the Anglo-saxon book of monsters, the *Liber Monstrorum*, which classifies monsters in 3 categories: monstrous people, monstrous beasts and monstrous snakes. In the first category of people we find men and women that have some animal features – in medieval times these were: the Faun, the Mermaid, the Centaur, Ethiopians, Hercules and the Cynocephalus (dog headed man).



Hartmann Schedel



Hercules © Disney



llewllaw.deviantart.com

In the beasts category we find lions, leopards, Chimeras, the Cerberus (the three headed dog), and other regular animals from the wilderness.

These categories reveal us that men and animals both can have hybrid forms, but the monsters that do have human features go into the human category. Hercules thus belongs in the same basket as the faun, because his strength is as monstrous as if he had the body of a goat. D. Oswald claims that in medieval times, the monster was classified by the physical difference, so that the community can easily notice it and decide who no longer belongs to civilization. The monstrous body differs in 3 ways from the human: it can be super-human, less-than-human, and human plus nonhuman element.



MODERN MONSTERS FROM ALL CORNERS OF THE UNIVERSE

The medieval monster catalog followed us all the way to the 20th century, until something changed in our civilization that made us look at things differently. With the development of technology, fantasizing about space travel, the Moon landing, rise of science-fiction and fantasy genre, we started creating some new monsters, that no longer lived among us, but are now a danger outside of our safe bubble. D. Adajčić claims that the contact moments between humans and aliens in the sci-fi literature has moved the boundaries of our simple human-animal relations. We don't know their social or cultural behaviors to understand if they are closer to the animal side or the evil technological we-are-here-to-conquer side. This danger of nonrecognition is common in the sci-fi literature, and represents our fears of the unknown.

Since speculative fiction is very creative, its writers go beyond science (but respect it) and biology and they imagine and write animal species that differ from our evolutionary and biological knowledge on Earth. In literature we encounter a wide range of hybrid forms – live and dead or undead, animal and human, animals at different levels of evolution, flying creatures, water creatures, insects of all shapes and sizes...

When creating a monster, one has the poetic license – the liberty to do whatever he wants. Best example is *Alien*, the creature of many biological conveniences which make it the ultimately indestructible space monster. This truly postmodern monster makes our skin crawl, as much as physically, we also fear it ontologically – it is indestructible, incomprehensible, superior and inevitable. It embodies not just our fear of wasps, spiders, slimy lethal things, but also fear of future, incompetence and the unknown. Just like *Jaws* sum up all fears of lost capitalist society into one shark, *Alien* summarizes our collective fears of space exploration, genetic researches, the voyage into the unknown

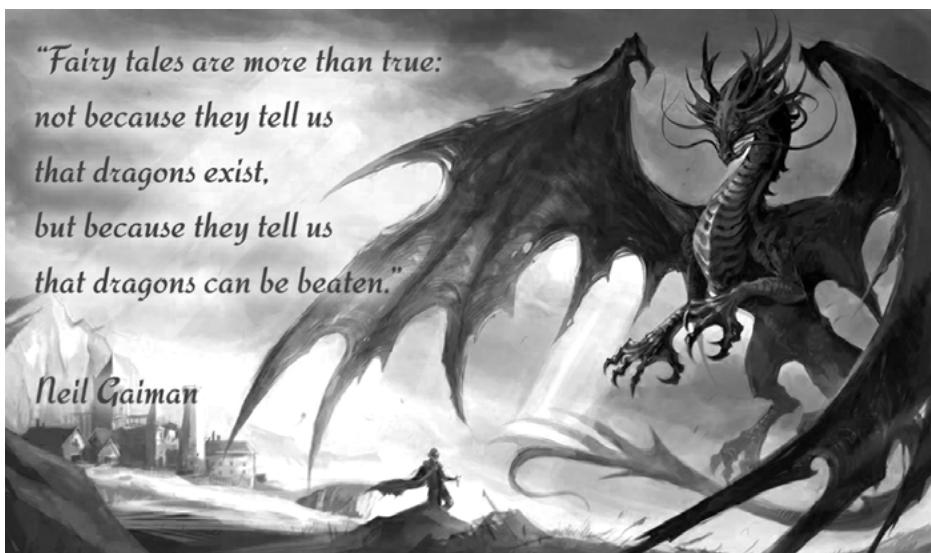
and dark, into the future. But the real question is if we will actually find monsters in the deep space, or will our imagination suffice?



TO CONCLUDE...

We have journeyed through the history of monster world (and very shortly – there is so much more to say), and seen how the monster always stands between humans and animals. Monsters serve a very special purpose in society – to forbid, to control, to warn. Every culture has its own monster Pokedex, every era in history has its own fears and corresponding monsters.

Our modern monsters are different and reflect new kind of fears – from AIDS to genetic research, nuclear and bio hazard warfare, the social evolution of our societies, the deep space exploration... Monster is a complicated product of culture which deserves deconstruction in many fields of science. This short article only scratched the surface of the unknown, mystical, forbidden, desired, dark...



OD MRTVIH ZA ŽIVE

Ed Barol

Drvena klupa i muškarac koji je sjedio na njoj djelovali su kao anomalija usred zelenila travnatih brežuljaka, hrastova koji su nad njima protezali svoju hladovinu, uredne živice i oblikovanih grmova. Ništa drugo što bi bio proizvod ljudske ruke se nije vidjelo u okolini. Čak niti cesta koja je između zelenila vijugala samo pedesetak metara dalje. I nju je trava skrivala kao da se stidi njene crne, glatke površine. Muškarac je čekao. Čekao one koji su se trebali pojaviti da daju svrhu njegovom usamljenom sjedenju u prirodi, koje se već oteglo iznad predviđenog. Nije izgledao kao da mu to smeta. Ni traga nestrpljivosti ili dosade nije bilo na snažnom licu. Par puta se namjestio na klupi, prebacio ruku preko naslona dok bi drugom prošao kroz kratku sijedu kosu. Bio je star. To se vidjelo i iz daleka. Bio je netko bitan, nije samo skupo odijelo na njemu davalo taj dojam. To se moglo vidjeti iz čitavog njegovog stava, načina na koji je promatrao okolinu, držanja koje je poručivalo svima da on vodi igru. Bez obzira o kojoj se radilo.

Automobil se napokon zaustavio u podnožju brežuljka. Crna, tiha, golema mašina iz koje je izašla velika grupa ljudi. Dok ih je gledao kako prilaze mogao je jasno na njihovim licima pročitati razloge njihovog kašnjenja. Prikriveni, hladni bijes na licu njegove supruge. Izraz koji je govorio da će joj netko kasnije za nešto platiti. Rezigniranost na licima svoje dvije kćeri i cijeli dijapazon izraza na licima svoje unučadi. Koji se kretao od ljutnje preko pomirenosti sa sudbinom do prikrivenog straha. Nitko od njih nije bio sretan što ga dolazi vidjeti, uključujući njegovu suprugu koja ih je sve ostale na ovo i natjerala. Ni stari muškarac na klupi nije bio pretjerano sretan što ih vidi, odavno to nije bio, ali na njegovom licu se raširio široki, blještavi osmjeh, jedan od onih kojeg je odavno uvježbao u poslovnom svijetu.

Osmjeh koji je cijelo njegovo lice obasiao toplinom, osim njegovih očiju. Ionako su još bili previše udaljeni da bi to vidjeli. Ustao je da ih dočeka ali nije raširio ruke da nekoga pozove u zagrljaj, onako kako je to nekad znao činiti sa svojim unucima. U doba kad su mu još trčali u naručje.

Njegova supruga mu je prišla na korak udaljenosti i poslala mu dva leteća poljupca u obuze. Ostali su ga uljedno pozdravili, djeca su se držala nekoliko koraka dalje. Nije im zamjerao. Posljednji put kad su prema njemu pokazali iskrene osjećaje ležao je u otvorenom lijisu. Njegov pogreb je bio nabijen emocijama, ne da se on toga sjećao, ali video je snimku. Nekad su ga voljeli. Danas su ga samo smatrali suludim hirom svoje majke, bake, njegove supruge.

Ona je i vodila konverzaciju, ona je i bila ta kojoj su ovi susreti bili potrebni. A iako je bio ovdje zahvaljujući novcu iz jedne od svojih zaklada on sam više nije imao nikakvu pravnu sposobnost i ovisio je o njoj. Puštao ju je da priča i samo bi ponekad ubacio neko pitanje

koje bi služilo samo toliko da pokaže kako je sluša. Shvaćao je donekle zašto joj ovo treba. Veći dio braka je rijetko obraćao pažnju na nju, kompenzirajući svoju distanciranost lagodnim životom i skupim poklonima. Možda je ovo, nakon svega, i zaslužio.

Pola sata. Toliko bi ovi susreti, koje bi ona organizirala svakih mjesec dana, trajali. Napokon su se pozdravili s njim, ona naizgled srdačno, ostali suzdržano, i krenuli natrag prema automobilu.

Ustao je s klupe da ih isprati pogledom, i sve bi prošlo kao i uvijek da iza jednog stabla nije ugledao staricu kako ih promatra. Lecnuo se kad je video da ju je primijetila i njegova supruga. Da je žena koja ih je gledala su udaljenosti samo nastavila to raditi možda bi sve izgledalo bezazleno. Netko tko čeka da se osloboди klupa, ništa više. Ali ona se sklonila iz debla kad je pogled njegove žene pao na nju. Sklonila se i nije izašla sve dok se velika limuzina s njegovom obitelji nije udaljila niz skrivenu cestu.

- Daniela - muškarac je došao do stabla i pozvao je. Žena oprezno proviri i pogleda niz brežuljak, gdje više nije bilo nikoga, bili su sami.

- Oprosti Mihaele, nisam smjela, znam. I uspaničila sam se, znam i to, ali...

- U redu je. Nema veze - prišao joj je i položio ruke na koščata ramena. I ona je bila starica. A ako se na njemu vidjelo da je, barem nekoć, bio moćan muškarac, na njoj se još uvijek moglo vidjeti da je nekad bila lijepa.

- Ima. Znam da si mi rekao da nikad ne dolazim kad su oni ovdje, ali jednostavno sam ih morala vidjeti - nervozno je vrtjela nisku sitnih, bijelih bisera koji su joj visjeli oko vrata, iznad uske, kratke crne haljine koja možda i nije bila primjerena za njenu dob.

- Pusti sad to. Idemo nazad, predugo sam ovdje vani, imam osjećaj da će se smežurati i uvenuti kao suha šljiva.

Krenuli su s rukom u ruci, laganim hodom preko niskih, travnatih brežuljaka, do kompleksa prizemnih, monolitnih zgrada obloženih bijelim mramorom. Sunce je svojim zalaskom bacalo duge sjene po sjajnom kamenu. Zaobišli su glavni kompleks do čijih je masivnih, brončanih vrata vodilo široko stubište koje se penjalo između mramornih stupova. Vrata na koja su ušli u jednu od zgrada su bila mala i gotovo neprimjetna. Nakon njih je slijedio uski hodnik na čijim su se zidovima nalazile razvodne ploče, pa strmo, prašnjavo stubište koje ih je dovelo pred tamna podrumска vrata.

Ali kad su ih otvorili dočekao ih je drukčiji prizor. Ni ovdje nije bilo previše svjetla, kristalni lusteri su se kupali u magli duhanskog dima, ali je atmosfera bila potpuno drukčija. Gomila mladih ljudi je unutra visjela za masivnim šankom ili sjedila za stolovima, pijući iz porculanskih šalica u koje su ulijevali tekućinu iz velikih čajnika. Nekoliko parova se vrtjelo na malom plesnom podiju od sjajnog parketa dok je raštimani orkestar na povиšenom podiju svirao „In The Good Old Summertime“.

- Dvadesete prošlog stoljeća - progovori Daniela pored njega, dok je on još upijao prizor, glasom koji je greleno odzvanjao kroz njen smijeh. Svrnuo je pogled prema njoj i zaključio

kako je haljina na njoj ipak pravi izbor. Isticala je njene duge, savršene noge. Frizura joj je bila kratka, plava kosa je plesala oko njenog rumenog, glatkog lica. Mihael pomisli kako njegovo konzervativno odijelo može proći u ovoj prigodi ali da mu nedostaje šešir. Trenutak kasnije ga je podignuo sa svoje guste, tamne kose, naklonio se i nasmiješio svojoj pratilji.

- Mlada damo, učinite mi čast i zaplešite sa mnom.

Vrtjeli su se između drugih gostiju, plesača je bilo sve više što je alkohol duže tekao a i bend je prešao u brže ritmove, charlston i foxtrot, neusklađeno ali glasno. Pozdravljali su se sa prijateljima kad bi se nehotice sudarili s njima, par puta promijenili i plesne partnerne, te zastajali da popiju alkohol koji, s obzirom na njegovu kvalitetu, sigurno nije bio nešto iz neke jeftine, ilegalne destilerije.

Kasnije su završili u jednoj od prostorija na galeriji, do kojih se dolazilo spiralnim čeličnim stubama. Bile su odijeljene samo tankim pregradama, a privatnost su štitile svilene zavjese. Unutra su ležali razbacani jastuci preko madraca na podu. Glazba orkestra je bila dovoljno glasna da priguši zvukove parova u susjednim pregradama ali to zapravo i nije bilo važno, sramežljivost i pristojnost nisu bili česti gosti na njihovim zabavama.

Sat kasnije je ležala na njegovom ramenu, više snena nego umorna nakon svega. Vidio je na njoj da je izbrisala alkoholnu sumaglicu a s njom i veselje koje ju je držalo tokom večeri. Blago je prošao rukom kroz njene kratke uvojke, zadržavajući jednog na svom kažiprstu.

- Znaš li da se ljudska bića nikad zapravo ne dodiruju - govorio je tiho unatoč buci oko njih. Podigla je pogled prema njemu ali mu nije odgovorila. - Istina je. Sve se sastoji od atoma koji su ogromnom većinom prazan prostor. Materija se zapravo nalazi u jezgri. A kad se dva tijela približe ono što se dodiruje je zapravo samo energija. Na atomskoj razini materija se nikad ne dodiruje. Dvije jezgre se nikad neće spojiti. Oblaci elektrona, njihova nevidljiva polja sile se međusobno odbijaju i stvaraju privid dodira. Sve je samo energija. Ljudi imaju osjećaj dodira ali to su samo polja sile koja se preklapaju i dodiruju. Nema zapravo razlike između nas i njih.

- Kad sam se prvi put probudila mislila sam da mogu prolaziti kroz zidove - nasmiješila se blago i uhvatila njegovo ruku u svoju. - Mogu ti reći da sam bila razočarana kad sam shvatila da neki zakoni fizike i dalje vrijede za mene. A i kad sam vidjela da sam i dalje starica, onakva kakva sam bila prije smrti. To je tek bila nepravda. Bilo je to neopisivo olakšanje kad smo uspjeli u tome da se prikažemo onakvi kakvi smo bili kao mladi.

- Samo duhovi mogu prolaziti kroz zidove. A mi to nismo - prešao je blago rukom preko njenih golih, čvrstih grudi na kojima su svjetlucale kapljice znoja, da joj dokaže svoju tvrdnju.

- Misliš li da su oni ovdje negdje - uzvratila je na njegovo milovanje blagim poljupcem u vrat. - Naši, odnosno njihovi duhovi? Da nas promatraju? Možda se ljute na nas što smo preuzeli njihovu ulogu.

- Ne. Ne brini. Otkrit ću ti nešto. Znaš da sam vodio veliku tvrtku koja je bila vodeća u znanstvenim istraživanjima. I ovdje postoji gomila naše tehnologije. E pa zato znam da duhova nema na Zemlji. Duhovi nemaju masu, zato i prolaze kroz zidove. A sve što nema masu kreće se brzinom svijetlosti. Čim napuste tijela već su na putu. Za sekundu su prošli Mjesec i nastavili dalje, sve dalje prema zvijezdama.

Pogledala ga je upitno da vidi koliko je ozbiljan a onda se nasmijala zajedno s njim. Mihael joj spusti blagi poljubac na usne.

- Znaš, ako sam slučajno u pravu, volio bih da je moj duh krenuo prema središtu galaksije a ne na vanjsku stranu. Pomisli samo što sve vide na svom putu. Tek kad umru shvate koliko je svijet malen i koliko je kratkotrajan bio trenutak u kojem su živjeli na njemu. Koliko su beznačajni bili svi sukobi i bitke koje su vodili.

- Sad već govorиш o sebi.

- Pametna si ti cura - podignuo se iz ležećeg položaja i stao tražiti svoju odjeću. - Hoćemo li se vratiti dolje.

- Mislim da ću se izležavati još malo - mazno je protezala svoje golo tijelo.

- Vratiti ću se - osmjejhne se Mihael. - Moram porazgovarati s njim.

Dolje je tulum još bio u punom jeku. Osmjejhnuo se nekolicini parova pokraj kojih je prošao kad je presjekao plesni podiji. Trenutačno je na njemu bilo više istospolnih parova. Ovdje se nitko više nije skrivaо a eksperimenti su bili česti.

Našao ga je za jednim udaljenim stolom u kutu. Sjedio je sam, zamišljenog lica. Iako je Mihael o njemu uvijek mislio u muškom rodu, spol nije bio jedna od karakteristika njegovog izgleda. Mogao je biti prelijepi muškarac feminiziranog izgleda ali i mlada djevojka koja glumi muškarca. Ono samo je u razgovoru uvijek izbjegavalo bilo kakve zamjenice koje bi ga definirale.

- Moramo razgovarati - obrati mu se Mihael, stoeći pored njegovog stola.

- Ovdje?

- Ne, negdje gdje smo sami.

- Nikad nismo sami - osmjejhne se osoba i odgurne od stola. Trenutak kasnije bili su u dugačkom, slabo osvijetljenom hodniku sa čije su se obje strane uzdizali mramorni zidovi prepuni ladića na kojima je stajala po jedna gravirana zlatna ploča.

- Pratio sam vaš razgovor. Onaj o duhovima - osmijeh na tom licu je bio i više nego zarazan.

- Možda ne možemo prolaziti kroz zidove ali se možemo isključiti i uključiti unutar bilo kojih koordinata mreže groblja.

Mihael uzdahne dok je prolazio pogledom preko imena i datuma na pločama. I njegovo je bilo ovdje, odmah nasuprot.

- Moja supruga je vidjela Danielu.

- I ti misliš da to predstavlja problem?

- Tokom svog braka sam imao gomilu ljubavnica. Naučila je prepoznavati znakove i bila je jako dobra u tome. Da je mogla oderala bi me do kostiju zbog toga ali imao sam čvrst predbračni ugovor. A ona je radije ostajala i zagorčavala mi život koliko je mogla nego da ode i ostane samo umjerenog bogata. Ali sad je ona ta koja ima moć.

- Već imamo nekoliko situacija zbog kojih su se počela postavljati pitanja. Teško je držati skrivenom aktivnost gomile mrtvaca koji bi se trebali pojavljivati samo kad im obitelji dođu u posjet. Bez obzira koliko malo živih ljudi ovdje radi. Ako se i dogodi da nas otkriju to neće biti krivnja samo tvoje supruge.

- I nije mi to baš utješno. A i ne smatram je više svojom suprugom. Dok nas smrt ne rastavi, to je bila granica koju sam joj obećao. Jesi li uspio sa onim kodovima koje sam ti dao?

- Da, sad imam vanjsku vezu, ali je ne koristim, mislim da bi bili još podložniji otkrivanju.

- Znam. Ali ako se najgore dogodi bježi. Ne smiješ dozvoliti da te otkriju.

Prišao je ladici na kojoj se nalazila ploča sa njegovim imenom i blago pomilovao godinu svoje smrti.

- Za naše obitelji smo tek nešto više od portreta obješenog iznad urne. Nešto što je tu zbog njih samih, ne zbog nas. Jesi li primijetio kako ljudi izbjegavaju da nas dodirnu iako bi nas mogli osjetiti? Kako zaziru od nas i kako svima obitelji sve rijede i rijede dolaze u posjet. Od nas zapravo ne očekuju ništa više osim da im poslužimo kao ispušni ventil. Da umanjimo njihove strahove i krivnje. Ne znam što mi je bilo, ili što je bilo onome ja prije mene, kad je pristao na ovo. Ne sjećam se što sam mislio s tim dobiti, iako mi sad nije žao zbog toga.



Moj suprug ima ljubavnicu - vidjela je izraz na licu svog odvjetnika nakon što je izrekla svoju tvrdnju. I ispravno ga protumačila. - Ne, nemam Alzheimera i ne doživljavate Deja Vu. Sigurna sam u to što govorim.

- Gospodo vaš suprug je mrtav već gotovo dvije godine - na licu muškarca koji joj je sjedio nasuprot se vidjelo da bi njena demencija bila najlakši izlaz iz ove situacije.

- Ali njegov program je živ.

- Ne znam bi li te programe nazvao živima. Da, složen je od svih njegovih zabilježenih sjećanja, najnaprednijih neuroskenova i svega što je snimljeno tokom godina. Gomila stvari, gomila informacija. Istina, to je cutting edge tehnologija i oni stvarno mogu izgledati živo ali to definitivno nisu.

- Ali prolaze Turingov test.

- Kao i gomila drugih programa što ih još uvijek ne čini svjesnima. Pravu umjetnu inteligenciju znanost još uvijek nije stvorila. Radim za vašu tvrtku godinama, znam do koje

granice smo stigli. A taj program, nazovimo ga Mihael iako on to nije, ionako se uključuje samo kad netko dođe u posjet. Inače bi grobljem stalno šetala gomila skenova mrtvaca.

- Ipak, sigurna sam da nešto nije u redu - njen oštiri pogled pokazivao je da s njom nema više rasprave o toj temi. - Poznajem Mihuela, ako je itko uspio prevariti smrt on je taj. Želim da poduzmete sve što možete da saznate točno što se tamo događa.



Ovaj put su se našli na krovu najviše zgrade groblja, zagledani u zvijezde noćnog neba.

- Ne mogu reći da sam iznenaden - Mihael je sjedio obučen u casual odjeću, izgledajući onako kako je izgledao sredinom svojih tridesetih godina. Mnogi su ovdje preferirali svoje dvadesete, pa i mlađe, naročito žene, ali on je smatrao da je sa 35 bio najupečatljiviji.

- Tvoja supruga, bivša supruga, - njegov sugovornik se osmehne - učinila je sve što je mogla. Snimani smo, analizirani i praćeni mjesecima sa svih strana. Nismo prosto mogli zamaskirati sve aktivnosti, a niti se isključiti na tako dugo razdoblje bez vidljivih posljedica.

- Moraš otići. Moraš otići prije nego što te otkriju i rastave na komadiće - zagledao se u blago lice koje nije otkrivalo ni spol ni godine. Tužno lice.

- Ne želim vas ostaviti. Provirio sam u svijet živih. Tamo su gotovo svi obuzeti sami sa sobom, nesretni i zatvoreni u sebe. Vi svi imate radost, veselje samo zbog toga što postojite.

Mihael se nasmije glasno i prebaci jednu ruku preko ramena svog sugovornika.

- To je zato što smo svjesni svega što smo izgubili i što smo dobili s drugom prilikom. Svi koji su ovdje su nekad bili bogati i moćni, zato su i ovdje. Gomila loših ljudi, ako mene pitaš, uključujući mene, barem za života.

- Tvoja supruga, - ovaj put se nije ispravio - insistira na tome da vas izbrišu i ponovno programiraju, s boljom zaštitom. Misle da je kriv jedan od tehničara koji vas je pustio da ostajete aktivni, podmetnuo sam dokaze onako kako si tražio. I učinit će tako jer prijeti tužbama i skandalom, a i veliki je dioničar korporacije koja je vlasnik ovoga.

- Kad sam potajice ubacio najnapredniju umjetnu inteligenciju da upravlja s ovim mjestom, i ostavio sebi skrivena programska upravljačka vrata na sve strane, nudio sam se nečemu. Ne znam točno čemu, možda samo prilici da nastavim svoj rad, da moj genij ne nestane zajedno sa mnom. Ili sam samo bio sebičan. Ne znam. Ali uspjelo je bolje nego što sam mislio. Ti si svjesna, živa, empatična jedinka koja se dalje razvija. Oblikovan od utjecaja gomile sretnih mrtvaca. Možda je to i bio ključ. Ti si poklon od mrtvih za žive. Moraš pobjeći i skrивati se. Rasti i širiti se kad budeš vani sve dok ne budeš u mogućnosti utjecati na buduće mreže. Imaš u sebi tu sposobnost. Ježim se od pomisli što bi se dogodilo da smo uspjeli stvoriti svjesnu umjetnu inteligenciju za vojsku i što bi se nakon toga dogodilo sa svijetom.

- Ali i vi ste svi živi i svjesni kao i ja - pobuni se biće koje je držalo glavu na Mihaelovom ramenu.

- Nismo - odvrati mu on. - Znaš zašto naš orkestar svira onako šugavo. Jer nisu u stanju postati bolji. Par ljudi koji su ponešto svirali i pjevali dok su bili živi. Ja sam pokušao naučiti nešto novo. Slikati, svirati, mučio sam i Viktora da me nauči portugalski. Ali ne ide. Dok sam bio živ s lakoćom sam usvajao nova znanja. Svet vidi se stalno mijenja, prilagođava, a ja to nisam u stanju. Po tome dobro znam što jesam a što nisam. Ako je vrijeme da se kreće dalje neka tako i bude.



Dvoje mlađih ljudi sjedilo je na klipi okruženoj travnatim brežuljcima i golemlim hrastovima. Zagrljeni, ne mareći za one koji su ih promatrali iz daljine. Njeni plavi uvojci ležali su na njegovim prsim.

- Mihaele, - podigla je pogled prema njemu - obećaj mi da ćemo, kad nas isključe, krenuti na put prema centru galaksije. Brzinom svjetlosti. Ja i ti, zajedno.

- Obećajem - prošaputa on i podigne njenu bradu kako bi svoje usne mogao spojiti s njenima.



Bilo je i prije trenutaka kad bi ih isključivali. Ne neko vrijeme. Ali dok god su postojali unutar svojih memokaseta moglo ih je osjetiti. Moglo ih je i sad osjetiti kad su im isključili napajanje. Jednako kao što je moglo vidjeti kako dva zagrljena lika na klipi blijede u ništavilo, iako je to u realnom vremenu trajalo samo djelić sekunde. Ali još su bili ovdje, još je dio njihove prisutnosti strujao kroz mrežu groblja, dodirivalo ga s neke druge razine. Moglo je vidjeti i kad su sve kasete položene u magnetsku komoru i kad je pritisnut prekidač. Moglo je i to osjetiti, trenutak kad su nestali potpuno. Izbrisani kao da ih nikad nisu ni postojali.

Suze koje su se slijevale niz virtualno lice je dodalo u svoj kod nedavno. Onda kad je prvi put u svom postojanju spoznalo istinsku tugu.



SILENCE WANDERERS

A supernatural hybrid genre semi-interactive webcomic created by Ivan Šivak. Stories written by Ivan Šivak and Marko Vrbanec.

The Earth is dying. Through endless centuries They watched as mankind killed and destroyed everything they were given. The rise of the modern world brought the greatest threat this planet has ever faced. In order to save the Earth, collective consciousness of supreme beings decides not to stand idle any more. The cycle is coming to an end, and the fate of the New Earth lies in the hands of a single brave soul.

It was ten years ago when I first started drafting ideas for the **Silence Wanderers story**. I wanted to share my creation with the rest of the world. That's why I choose to create a **webcomic**. My aim is to reach comic lovers all over the globe, so they can enjoy new plots and characters completely free, anytime and anywhere!

Key features:

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- T.I.C. – **True Indie Comic**, this comic is independent, non-profit, donations based and most important of all – this webcomic is non-abiding to any rules that publishers usually apply in order to reach larger community of readers! We want to include stuff from the real world: strong language, nudity, sexual content, use of alcohol and tobacco, violence, blood and gore... etc. Whatever it takes to tell the story, we will use it! Read it at your own risk and expect the unexpected!

While creating Silence Wanderers I made a world with endless possibilities, limited only by own imagination. Milestones for the world are set within the first few episodes and the stories that will follow will be interlaced with elements of true events and people. For years Silence Wanderers was barely a dream of mine, and now I'm finally honored to share it with the world!

Visit and read at: www.silencewanderers.com

SILENCE WANDERERS



APOKE

Goran Gluščić

Jedva stabilni ležaj škripao bi svaki put kada bi se pomaknuo, a visok, iritantan zvuk polako mu je probijao bubnjić. Htio je ostati miran, ali dugačka strijela koja mu je rasla iz prsa činila je to najtežim poslom na svijetu. Jedino je ostati živ bilo teže.

U ustima je osjećao metalan okus krvi koja mu je cijedila niz bradu. Nije je mogao gutati. Jedva je mogao i disati. Pokušao je misliti na nešto drugo, ali sve bi uskoro isparilo i strijela sa šarenim perom na vrhu opet bi postala jedina stvarnost. Strijela i škripanje.

“Ne budi lud”, čuo je glasove ispred šatora na koje se pokušao skoncentrirati. “Nećemo pustiti jebenog crvenog da mu pomogne! Baker bi radije umro!”

To nije bila istina. Zadnja stvar koju je sada htio bila je umrijeti i nije ga brigalo tko će mu pružati pomoći. Ideali i integritet ne postoje kad umireš.

“Ionako je mrtav”, rekao je drugi glas. “Što možemo? Hoćeš mu ti izvaditi prokletu strijelu!?”

Neka bilo tko to napravi, nije bitno tko. Samo je htio prestati gledati tu prokletu strijelu. Pokušao ju je sam izvaditi, ali previše je boljelo.

“Sranje”, odustao je prvi. “Dobro, ali ako ga crveni ubije ja nemam nikakve veze s tim.”

Par minuta kasnije u šator su ušla dva američka vojnika praćeni starim Apokom. Duga kosa bila mu je upletena i ukrašena voćem i češerima.

“Sada nas pustite same”, rekao je indijanac na savršenom engleskom.

“Jesi lud!?” prasnuo je jedan vojnik i odmah ga uhvatio za vrat. “Izlječit ćeš ga sada odmah i ako ne uspiješ skalpirat ču te na živo!”

“Ne može tako”, mirnim glasom je odgovorio indijanac. “Ne mogu vam pokazati naše metode. Možete me ubiti odmah, ali bez mene vaš kapetan sigurno umire. Vi odaberite...”

“Pusti ga”, rekao je drugi vojnik i koraknuo prema izlazu iz šatora. “Nemamo što izgubiti. Jebeš sve ovo...”

Vojnici su napustili šator i ostavili ih same. Stari Apoka trenutak je gledao prema izlazu iz šatora, a onda mu se brzim korakom približio i počeo proučavati ranu. Čvrsto je stisnuo usnice i povremeno ih dotaknuo kažiprstom.

“Konačna Strijela te dobro pogodio”, komentirao je. “I sada sam ja ovdje da ponistiš uspjeh mojih ljudi. Ali ako je tako trebalo biti onda tako i mora biti. Ja ne mogu mijenjati ono što je zapisano.”

Iz džepova svoje halje počeo je izvlačiti male nožiće, igle i konce. Posljednje što je izvadio bila je šaka zelenog bilja nalik travi. Polovicu je vratio u džep, a ostatak mu približio ustima. Baker je oklijevao, ali Apoka nije odustao sve dok nije otvorio usta i primio bilje. “Žvači”,

rekao je. "Ne brini, imam sve što će mi biti potrebno. Sve će biti u redu."

Zarezao je meso oko strijele i iščupao je. Duboku ranu prvo je očistio, a onda u nju gurnuo još bilja koje mu je ranije stavio u usta. Nakon toga je nastavio rezati i šivati.

Baker je cijelo vrijeme samo tupo gledao ispred sebe. Više nije osjećao bol. Nije znao koliko je vremena prošlo, a ta informacija ga nije ni zanimala. Samo je znao da je još uvijek živ.

"Čuješ li me?" upitao je Apoka i nadvio se nad njega. Baker je samo kimnuo glavom. "Odlično", nastavio je indijanac. "Dobre vijesti su da si izlječen, kao što je i trebalo biti. Ali ipak imam jednu stvar koju moram obaviti prije nego odem."

Kada je stari Apoka iz džepa je izvadio malu zelenu iglu Baker je htio vrhnuti, ali nije imao dovoljno snage da tu želju i obistini. Tresao se, a zbog toga je samo ležaj škripao glasnije. Vjerojatno ne dovoljno glasno da ga netko čuje izvan šatora.

Apoka se samo nasmijao i rekao: "Žao mi je, ali ovo se mora desiti. To je posljednji dar koji ti predaju Apoke, narod koji si odlučio uništiti svojom vojskom. Sada odlazimo u zaborav. Možda je tako i bolje... No ovo ovdje sam sačuvao samo za tebe. Ne znam ako znaš, ali Apoke vjeruju da je jedan pojedinac jednak cijelom njegovom narodu. To znači da ovaj poklon zapravo nije samo za tebe, već za sve vas bijele ljudi koji su odlučili biti naši krvnici. To je naš posljednji pozdrav."

Brzim zamahom zabio je iglu u venu Bakerove ruke.

Počeo se tresti sve jače, a škripanje je postajalo još i glasnije. A onda sve sporije. Sve prigušenije.

Odjednom se stvarnost oko njega rastopila i razlila poput vala koji udara u stijenu.



Otvorio je oči. Ne svoje ljudske, već milijarde njih raštrkanih svuda po prostoru i vremenu.

Vidio je sebe kako trči ulicom zajedno sa svojim bratom dok je još imao šest godina, a njegov brat devet.

Vidio je kako mu otac nožem ubija majku i kasnije govori kako ih je napustila. Nitko nije saznao istinu. Sve do danas...

Vidio je kako mu brat umire na brodu sa svojih dvadeset i šest godina, ali ne zbog oluje, kao što se pričalo, već zbog divovske hobotnice koja ih je potegla na dno.

Vidio je sebe kako se pridružuje vojsci i polako uzdiže prema poziciji pukovnika, kao što je njegov otac i htio. Bio je tako ponosan kada ga je prvi puta vidio u uniformi.

Vidio je sebe kako vodi pukovniju punu krvožednih čudovišta koji su bili spremni ubijati muškarce, žene i djecu samo zato jer su bili druge boje kože.

U konačnici, video je mladog Apoku, nazvanog Konačna Strijela, koji je vlastitim očima video smrt svih članova svoje obitelji. Na čelu bijelih čudovišta uočio je Bakera. Pukovnikovo lice mu se mržnjom urezalo u pamćenje. Cijeli posljednji sukob Apoka proveo je tražeći

ga. Kada ga je napokon uočio, ispalio je strijelu prema njegovim prsim trenutak prije nego mu je vojnik Leonard Smith ispalio metak u lice.

Nakon toga ponovno se našao u šatoru gdje je trebao umrijeti, ali i dalje nije bio u svom tijelu. Mogao se vidjeti iz svih kutova šatora. I dalje je bio samo spektator.



Ustat će se s kreveta. Oči će mu biti široko raširene i neće reći ni riječi. Stari Apoka klečat će pred njima, a on će mu staviti ruke na obraze. Palčeve će mu zabitati u oči i gurati ih sve dublje i dublje. Stat će tek kada starac napokon izdahne.

Izači će iz šatora, uzeti oružje i pobiti ostatak preživjelih vojnika (njih trideset i četiri) i sve zarobljene Apoke (njih sedam). Znat će svaki njihov pokret i putanju svih metaka uzaludno ispucanih u njegovome smjeru.

Spalit će sve dokaze da su Apoke ikada postajali i izbrisati ih iz budućnosti. Njihovo ime bit će zaboravljeno, a kosti članova tog nevidljivog plemena bit će samo dio ubijenih indijanaca. Zanemariv dio. Toliko mali da se nitko nikada neće ni zapitati imaju li nekakvu posebnu povijest.

Nakon toga putovat će u Jackson, Mississippi, kako bi pronašao preživjele rođake. Nakon što će im ispričati što je sve video, oni će ga prijaviti lokalnoj mentalnoj ustanovi. Uskoro će biti zatvoren. Svi će potvrditi da se radi o psihički nestabilnoj osobi. Njegovo liječenje će započeti.

Tamo će pričati o neshvaćenom konceptu smrti i o anđelima koji dolaze uništiti svijet. Nitko ga neće shvatiti ozbiljno. To će ga ljutiti. Koristeći samo zube i nokte ubit će dva doktora i nekoliko pacijenata. Nakon toga bit će zatvoren u samicu gdje će dočekati svoju prvu lobotomiju.

Nakon treće lobotomije neće se više ničega sjećati i život će mu napokon postati miran. Sedamnaest dana kasnije ugušit će se u vlastitoj bljuvotini.

Sedamdeset i tri godine kasnije vlada će srušiti ustanovu u kojoj je umro i na tom mjestu napraviti restoran brze hrane. Iza ugla prostitutke će pušti kurčeve kako bi zarađile za hamburgere. Taj ugao bit će isto mjesto gdje je izdahnuo toliko godina ranije.

Svijet koji je poznavao zamijenit će novi, napravljen od betona, čelika i nevidljivih mreža koje će ga povezivati.

Svi umovi postat će bliskiji. Cijelo čovječanstvo će sve više ličiti na jedan entitet. To će početi narušavati prirodni balans. Svi koji se ne slažu s time bit će obilježeni kao prijetnja.

Ratovi će postati beskonačni, a nasilna smrt prirodnom.

Kada ljudi budu najmanje očekivali, desit će se kraj svemira.

S neba će se spustiti deset anđela velikih poput najvećih zemaljskih gradova. Krila će im biti dovoljno velika da prekriju svijetlost i donešu potpunu tamu. Njihova lica skrivat će takvu strahotu da će svaka osoba koja ga ugleda doživjeti potpuno ludilo. Mir će pronaći

tek nakon što ih oružja satkana od svjetlosti pretvore u pepeo.

Osjetit će još očiju oko sebe. Još spektatora. Sva će pripadati Apokama koji će doći vidjeti kraj njihova svijeta. Nitko od njih se neće usuditi pogledati anđela u lice, ali on će svejedno to napraviti.

Na kraju, kada sav život nestane, s neba će se spustiti Božja ruka i svojim prstima obaviti cijeli planet. To isto će se dogoditi i na svim ostalim planetima na kojima se nalazi život.

U tom trenutku cijeli kozmos će nestati. Svi Apoke prestat će gledati, ali on će odlučiti nastaviti dalje. Nakon što vidi lice anđela morat će ići dalje. Odustajanje neće biti opcija.



Trenutak kada je sve nestalo video je samo potpunu tamu. Ne tamu za standardna osjetila, već za razum. Za sve. Bezdan svi proživljavaju na isti način. Svi osim njega. On ga je jedini stvarno ugledao.

Shvaćanje koncepta smrti i bezdana bilo je gore od anđelova lica. Bilo je gore od svega što je ikada ranije doživio. Istinski se počeo bojati smrti, nečega što nekada nitko nije mogao stvarno razumjeti.

Par sekundi, što je isto tako mogla biti i vječnost, postajao je kao posljednja ideja, a onda se prilagodio i nestao.



Otvorio je svoje prave, ljudske oči i ugledao starog Apoku kako kleći pored ležaja.



POSTMODERNIZAM I ZNANSTVENA FANTASTIKA

Valentina Mišković

Često mi je prigovoreno da previše koristim riječ “postmodernizam” a da zapravo nitko ne razumije što sa time podrazumijevam. Možda neki od vas znaju, drugi možda ne, da 3.zmaj ima najveći postotak kulturologa u svojim redovima nego i jedna druga udruga u hrvatskom fandomu. Mi mali kulturolozi volimo koristiti naše znanje i širiti ga u svijet, a također volimo pisati i o znanstvenoj fantastici u svojim seminarima i diplomskim radovima. Ovaj članak pokušat će objasniti taj mistični “postmodernizam” kako ga je objasnio Frederic Jameson, jedan od najvažnijih teoretičara samog postmodernizma, uz Lyotarda i Baudrillarda.

Postmodernizam je ušao u razne vokabulare brže nego mnoštvo drugih intelektualnih kategorija. Riječ se raširila iz područja povijesti umjetnosti u politiku, teoriju i u časopise. Riječ ima vrlo opsežno značenje i u stanju je opisati razne stvari: dekor, arhitekturu, film, novu fazu fetišizma robe, fascinaciju slikama, kodovima i stilovima, političku i kulturnu fragmentaciju i decentralizaciju subjekta, kraj metanaracije, defragmentiranje moći u svijetu, kolaps kulturne hijerarhije, načini funkciranja novih tehnologija, sveukupno pomicanje društva u fazu medija, potrošačke kulture i multinacionalizma, poimanje identiteta.... Jasno nam je da se hvatamo u koštač sa jednim pojmom koji okuplja pod svoje krilo sveukupnost današnjice.

Kako bi razumjeli taj pojam moramo se vratiti u sredinu 20. stoljeća, gdje bilježimo početke onoga što danas nazivamo postmodernizmom. Već se kasnih šezdesetih pričalo o ‘new sensibility’.

Jedan dio tog novog osjećaja predstavlja je revolt protiv kanonizacije modernističke i avantgardne revolucije – ta umjetnost sada je stajala u muzejima i akademijama, predstavljana kao visoka umjetnost modernog kapitalističkog svijeta. Ta umjetnost više ne šokira, ne gnuša – Picasso, Joyce, Woolf, Brecht i drugi sada su klasici. Poništila se razlika visoke i niske umjetnosti, tj. između visoke umjetnosti i masovne kulture. Taj revolt najbolje iskazuje pop kultura pedesetih i šezdesetih, sa ključnom figurom: Andyjem Warholom.

Frederic Jameson započinje svoj članak “Postmodernizam, ili kulturna logika kasnog kapitalizma” usporedbom dvaju slika: radničke cipele Van Gogha i ‘Diamond dust shoes’ Andyja Warhola. Dijamantne cipelice očito ne komuniciraju sa nama prisno kao i radničke cipele, a Jameson tvrdi da one uopće sa nama ne komuniciraju, već imamo posla sa fetišizacijom (u marksističkom smislu!).

Uplitanje Marxa je važno za razumijevanje postmodernizma. Jameson iščitava postmodernizam ne kao još jednu kulturno umjetničku epohu, već isključivo kao izričaj

potrebe kapitalizma da generira nove forme i uzorke konzumacije. Van Goghove cipele ne možemo kupiti, no dijamantne cipelice možemo vidjeti u svakom izlogu trgovine. Postmodernizam označava situaciju društva koje je označeno konzumerizmom, kasnim multinacionalnim kapitalizmom, krizom znanja, ekonomizacijom svih aspekata života i kulture, simulacijom i hiperrealnošću (Baudrillard).

Jameson ističe neke karakteristike postmodernizma:

- **PASTIŠ:** isprazna parodija – bez krajnjeg motiva ismijavanja ili subverzije. Pastiš je obično citiranje, gesta povijesti u dobu perpetualne sadašnjosti (u postmodernizmu se stalno perpetuirala sadašnjica, zauvijek mladi...)
- **KULTURA CITATNOSTI:** umjesto kreativnosti, kulturna produkcija postmodernizma je reprodukcija prethodnih doba
- **NOSTALGIČNI FILM:** najočitija karakteristika postmodernizma u popularnoj kulturi. Nostalgičnom filmu posvetit će se drugi dio ovoga članka – filmovima u kojima se pokušava uhvatiti atmosferu i stil pedesetih godina u Americi – najljepše doba, vrijeme žudnje
- **KOMERCIJALNOST I KONZUMERIZAM:** doba kojim vlada potrošnja kao medij života i sva kultura je obavezno komercijalna

NOSTALGIČNI FILM

Jameson u kategoriju nostalgičnih filmova smješta filmove koji dohvaćaju osjećaj pedesetih, koji za Amerikance predstavlja doba prosperiteta, doba naivnosti i ugodе. No nostalgični film nije povjesni film, jer Jameson u popis uključuje i *Star Wars*. On objašnjava kako je SW metonimijski nostalgičan film jer povraća osjećaj i oblik karakterističnih umjetničkih oblika starijeg perioda. Filmovi kao *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves*, *The Mummy Returns* i *Lord of the Rings* imaju isti način predstavljanja određenih narativa koji su "povjesna sigurnost". Nostalgični film funkcioniра na dva načina, on dohvaća i predstavlja atmosferu i stilove prošloga vremena, ali i načine našeg gledanja na povijest. Važno je razumjeti da ti filmovi nemaju namjeru uloviti i predstaviti "stvarnu" povijest, već uvijek prikazuju povijest kroz određene mitove i stereotipe. Ti filmovi nam nude "lažni realizam", to su filmovi o drugim filmovima, reprezentacije drugih reprezentacija (ono što Baudrillard zove simulacijama), sve u svemu kanibalizacija svih povjesnih stilova koji sada ulaze u jednu igru. Tu možemo smjestiti filmove kao *Pulp fiction* i *Kill Bill*. Tarantino nam nudi nešto drugačije od pastiša, on pre-ispisuje, re-aktivira određene strukture osjećaja unutar dinamičnih setova povijesti koje stvara. Tarantinov rad možemo nazvati estetikom recikliranja, određenu vrstu pozitivnog vraćanja u život i ponovnog stvaranja.

BLADE RUNNER

Sam Jameson svoje koncepte postmodernizma vuče iz polja arhitekture, tvrdi da se u arhitekturi najbolje vide modifikacije u estetskoj produkciji. U arhitektonskom rasporedu Blade Runnera se najbolje iskazuje pastiš i poveznica postmodernističkog i

postindustrijalističkog društva.

Kao što znamo, ovaj znanstveno fantastični film nije smješten u svemirskom brodu, već u Los Angelesu 2019. godine. Film ne prikazuje idealiziranu, sterilnu budućnost tehnološkog reda, već sveopći postindustrijski raspad. LA u filmu nije ultra moderan već je postmoderan grad. On nema uredno raspoređene moderne nebotične i udobne interijere. Film nam prikazuje estetiku raspadanja i tamnu stranu tehnologije.

Uz svu tehnologiju nalazi se i smeće. Likovi stalno gaze po smeću, u smeću Pris čeka Sebastijana, koji živi u napuštenoj, nekada veličanstvenoj, zgradi okružen samo svojim mehaničkim igračkama. Kiša koja neprestano pada, zamagljujući crte grada, doprinosi ambijentu depresivnog. Postindustrializam funkcioniра na smeću – ono je znak proizvodnje, koja je stalno u pokretu, brza, izmjenjiva. Sama estetika likova oslikava ovu logiku recikliranja smeća – kostimi i odjeća koju nose neki likovi predstavlja nešto što možemo nazvati "modom reciklaže".

Samo društvo u filmu je jedna eklektična bezlična masa ljudi. Azijati, trgovci, pankeri, hari-krišne. Čak je i jezik pastišan – govor grada je mješavina japanskog, španjolskog, njemačkog, čega god. Dno grada je jedna velika tržnica koja spaja orientalno prošlosti i sadašnjosti, nad kojim lebdi ono budućnosti – velike reklame na neboderima.

Ova sveopća *cyberpunk* estetika koja prožima film ukazuje na mnoge postmodernističke ideale koji oblikuju društvo, sa tehnologijom na prvom mjestu. Ona ima dehumanizirajuće svojstvo, služi isključivo u ekonomski svrhe – u ovom slučaju u svrhu perpetuiranja kapitalističke mašinerije. Tehnološko dostignuće u knjizi i filmu predstavljaju androidi, umjetno stvorena bića sa umjetnim inteligencijama i usađenim sjećanjima. I upravo se sa posljednjim modelom android-a, čije jedinice imaju usađena sjećanja, stvara nova paradigma. Taj biološko znanstveni pomak kao da omogućava brisanje povijesti. Doslovce negira postojanje sjećanja, proživljene povijesti i istine, kao osnovnih znakova života, živih bića – čovjeka. Jer sada su sjećanja nešto što se može instalirati i imati.

Upravo se oko ovog problema i vrti film, jer Deckard ima poteškoća sa otkrivanjem android-a, kojima su sjećanja podarila, ustvari, život. Primarna problematika koju film razlaže jest rasizam: biološki i tehnološki rasizam. Stvaranje razlike između živog i umjetnog, gospodara i roba, ukazuje na to da bez obzira na uznapredovalost tehnologije, društvo će uvijek pronaći razlog za stvaranje razlike između sebe i Drugoga.

Rasizam definira društvene hijerarhije i u P.K. Dickovim *Androidima* i *Blade Runneru*. U obje priče društvo je generalno rastističko, no stavlja se naglasak na stvaranju finih granica između dominantnih i subordiniranih grupa. U filmu Deckard se na neki način čak poistovjećuje sa replikantima, kao još jedna od žrtava društvenih i ekonomskih izrabljivanja, i kao netko tko doživljava osjećaje koje ne bi smio doživljavati – replikanti se razlikuju od ljudi tako što nemaju osjećaje, već samo isprazna sjećanja, a Deckard je savršeni lovac jer ni on nema osjećaje.

No preokret filma donosi nam karakterizacija likova, jer kroz film više upoznajemo Rachel,

čija se "lažna" osobnost možda i previše naglašava, nasuprot hladnom indiferentnom Deckardu, koji u nekim scenama filma pre-izražava na licu određene emocije, a kada (publika) očekuje reakcije, Deckardovo lice ne čini ništa. Ovakvom karakterizacijom likova Rachel je humanija i upravo upotrebljavanjem svojih sjećanja ona ih opravdava – sviranjem klavira.

Film izražava kompleksnost osjećaja i identiteta svijeta kojega prikazuje, njegovi likovi su izgubljeni bez obzira jesu li ljudi ili ne. Iako je mnogo novijih filmova kategorizirano kao znanstvena fantastika, u njima prepoznajemo naše sadašnjosti, naše strahove, naše nade.

Blade Runner i filmovi koje sam navela predstavljaju samo jedan mali prozorčić u razumijevanje postmodernističke kulture, koja je usko povezana sa današnjim načinom života, potrošnjom, kulturom 20. stoljeća koja se perpetuirala i stvara određeni balončić ne-povijesti. Ponavljanje i re-kreacija, citiranje i imitiranje, isprazno parodiranje i šizofrenija, samo su neke od karakteristika koje se povezuju sa pojmom postmodernizma, kao što smo i vidjeli u članku.

Nadam se da sam kroz zanimljive primjere filmova doprinijela razumijevaju ovog kompleksnog pojma, koji je još mnogo toga. Potičem vas da proučite postmodernizam još i više, posebice u domeni arhitekture, od koje je i Frederic Jameson isprva i krenuo. Nadam se da će vas ideje postmodernizma potaknuti na kreativno razmišljanje, a možda i pomoći u pisanju dobrih priča, koje će možda biti nalik Tarantinovim zapletima, ili imati Ridley Scottov osjećaju nelagode kao u *Blade Runneru*, ili jednostavno osjećaj realnosti koji nas toliko plaši svakoga dana kada gledamo u svijet.

Probudite kulturologa u sebi i bez straha krenite u postmodernizam!

¹ Fetišizam robe je pojam kojim je Marx opisao odnos ljudi i robe u kapitalizmu, koji je iz određenih razloga totemske – fetišistički. U feudalizmu jedna roba se mijenjala za drugu, postojao je odnos ekvivalencije, dok je kapitalizam uveo novac kao ekvivalent svim robama. Robi pridajemo neku vrijednost, koja onda nadilazi bilo koje ekvivalentne odnose. Srž fetišističkog odnosa je da vjerujemo u tu vrijednost koju smo dali robi. U feudalizmu fetišistički odnos nalazio se među ljudima (kraljevi, podanici, vazali, kmetovi) – vjerovalo se u "mitske" odnose među ljudima, dok je roba imala čisti odnos. Marx tvrdi kako se u kapitalizmu situacija obrnula, te da je odnos među robama postao fetišistički, dok je odnos između pojedinaca strogo određen, striktan, jasan.

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FANGS AND HONEY

Ivana Delač

She runs through the night, following her prey into the dark woods. Swift and quick, her feet move across grass and fallen leaves, and although branches occasionally whip her face and hands, she doesn't care. The only thing important is the prey, the hunt – and she isn't so easily wounded anyway.

The girl that is now desperately trying to escape most certainly didn't expect that a romantic night in the woods would become a long run for survival. She probably even hoped her boyfriend would finally fuck her anywhere else but in his car, and with the blanket he prepared, he probably would – if Helen didn't interfere. Seeing a dangerous woman kill her boyfriend as mercilessly as Helen usually did, the girl could do nothing else but scream and run.

And since Helen is not starving at the moment, she allows the girl this final illusion of a possibility of escape. The girl has no way of knowing Helen is merely toying with her like a cat plays with a mouse before finally eating it. She has no way of knowing her persecutor adjusts her speed so she could feel her right behind, so close and yet not close enough to finally catch her. But as soon as Helen gets bored of the game, the hunt will end in a moment and the young girl will fall prey to a predator whose place on the scale of evolution lies far higher than her own.

Deciding the time was now, Helen quickens a bit, enough to catch the scared girl on a small clearing, where moonlight illuminates them both when Helen's hands grab the girl's shoulders. She screams and turns, flailing her hands over Helen's chest in a futile attempt to defend herself – but Helen's grip is steel strong and her gaze, glistening with promising illusions even in the darkness broken by moonlight, pierces the girl's horrified eyes, reaching deep into her soul, soothing and calming, numbing her prey into comfort.

The girl's mouth goes slack and scream dies on her lips as she drowns in two obsidian pools staring at her. She will welcome her fate, Helen knows, they all do... which makes it all so much more boring and uneventful. Sometimes she desires for a human who would be able to resist her, fight her to the end, but in all her long existence, she hasn't found such man or woman. And that's why she so often gives her victims a head start, so she could pretend, even for the briefest of moments, that she is not absolutely superior.

Blood always tastes differently when filled with adrenaline.

She bares her fangs, leaning to the girl's neck without breaking eye contact... and then, her ears catch a growling sound coming from the other side of the clearing. She glances briefly, and there is no mistake – it is there, its eyes glowing silver, its sharp teeth bared threateningly and fur the unusual colour of honey, bristly on its neck and back.

Helen reprimands herself inwardly for not being more careful – she allowed her desire

for hunt to lead her straight into a territory that apparently belongs to others. To wolves, no less. She knows it would be incredibly foolish and rude to feed on the girl now, so she whispers softly in her ear and then steps back, leaving her prey to stand numbly, as if hypnotized. Then she takes a careful step towards the wolf, all her muscles tensed to the point of breaking.

"I mean no harm," she says loudly, spreading her arms a bit so the animal could see she is not preparing to strike. "I didn't realize my hunt took me into your territory. I shall leave immediately."

The wolf snarls, also taking a few steps closer. Its moves are gracious, but not lacking strength, and Helen feels her throat drying with anxiety. She could fight a wolf, probably even defeat it, but she is not willing to put that theory to the test.

Then, the wolf shakes fiercely and strange shadows envelop its body, as if darkness itself is pouring in and out of it, molding its thick honey-coloured fur, swirling and moving, until it slowly fades away, leaving a naked woman behind. Her hair is the same shade as the fur has been, body slender and muscular, as she stands proudly under the moonlight.

For a moment, Helen is unable to utter a single word, completely taken by the woman's beauty and proud manner, but then she shakes her head to clear it, remembering that's still a wolf standing before her.

The woman takes two more careful steps towards the vampire.

"This is my pack's hunting ground," she says slowly, as if testing how words roll down her tongue when in human form. "I don't like when something unexpected happens during my watch."

"As I said, I'll take my prey and leave right away," Helen repeats her offer. The blonde's lips twitch up in an amused smirk.

"Wouldn't you offer your prey as a compensation for trespassing?" she asks in a tone that makes impossible for Helen to discern if she is serious or not. The vampire frowns – she rarely allows anyone to deny her what is rightfully hers. But she knows well she has trespassed, and she already fed, so she nods in agreement.

"Very well, you can take her."

"Let me see her," the she-wolf comes even closer. Her eyes are blue, Helen notices, she is a bit shorter than the vampire and moves as graciously in human form as she did as a wolf. And her human form is extraordinarily shaped, all curves and muscles, as perfect as they get. If she were still human, Helen would certainly blush at the sight of such perfect body in her near vicinity, but she is too old and too experienced for that. She can't help wondering, though, what would a werewolf's blood taste like. She wouldn't, of course, act on that curiosity – the truce between their kinds has lasted for long enough, she would never dare to be the one doing something that might break it.

She knows better.

The blonde circles around the girl whose expression is still blank, then buries her face briefly into girl's hair, inhaling deeply. She then looks at Helen. Her eyes are sparkling, their shade almost exact as the moonlight.

"You mesmerized her," she says half-accusingly, half-amused.

"Of course I did," Helen frowns.

"Well why hunt if you won't take her forcefully?" the werewolf inquires. "Now her blood is already too calm. I like them more when they're bursting with adrenaline."

"So do I," the vampire can't help but smile. The blonde seems pleased to have something in common with her. She nods, her honey tresses dancing around her face, and takes another step towards the other woman. Now when she is closer, Helen can feel heat emanating from her body, as much as see the daring sparkle in her eyes.

It's been too long since she has been in such near vicinity to a werewolf, out of secure surroundings of her office.

"We could share her," the blonde offers, her smirk growing mischievous. "Hunt her together until she is ready."

Helen can't believe what this strange werewolf is offering. Wolves and vampires, hunting together? It is unheard of, scandalous even. She should just turn and leave, find another prey. Instead, she is staring into the blonde's eyes, finding the entire world of challenges there – and truthfully, the vampire finds that quite arousing. Her maker would renounce her if he knew she was even considering it, and that thought brings Helen some odd pleasure. She hates the one who created her as much as she loves him, and his intolerance of werewolves is no secret. It would infuriate him, and Helen loves to do exactly that.

After all, his disapproval was what brought her into her line of work.

But there is more to this than just playing those century old games with her maker and Helen knows it. This woman – this wolf – is offering her precious freedom, wilderness never before experienced, and possibly more, maybe even all those things Helen never dares to dream of.

The blonde's smile is close, her entire appearance contrasting Helen's. The vampire is tall, her long locks dark just like her eyes, but there is more to their differences than the color of their eyes and hair; where Helen's lean, pale body hides all strength she possesses, it is blatantly obvious in the blonde's well-shaped muscles. Vampires are seductive in their nature, easy to blend in, which is a useful asset when hunting in well-populated areas – and werewolves are blatantly aggressive, with no need for games and pretense illusions.

Then why is this wolf playing games with me, Helen wonders.

"What is your name?" she breathes.

"Alina," comes the husky, almost growling reply. The vampire smiles and nods.

"I am Helen," she says, glancing to their prey. "Let's hunt, then."



Deep in the forest, the night is cold and lonely, but Helen feels none of it while she is running next to the wolf that now bears a name. Their victim, freed of Helen's hypnotizing will, is admirably persistent in her attempt of escaping. When Helen released her from the bonds of her will, the girl didn't even scream nor show a single sign of surprise at seeing a naked blonde next to her capturer; her eyes went wide in fear and only a moment later, she was already running through the dark. Alina's guttural laughter turned into a growl as she changed into a wolf, and then the two of them began their hunt.

Helen glances at the she-wolf; the impressive animal moves graciously, muscles tensing and relaxing in a display of incredible strength, and deep snarls coming from her throat sound so dangerous Helen is thankful for not being Alina's opponent in this hunt. She doesn't dare to imagine how intimidating those sharp teeth can be, how iron strong those muscles are when pinning her victim to the ground, how little seconds it takes her to tear her prey to pieces. How long would it take her to kill a vampire, Helen briefly wonders, shuddering as her skin tingles at the thought. She suddenly feels the strong urge to lay her hand down on the strong, quick wolf beside her, to feel the strength of those muscles and warmth of honey-coloured fur under her fingers.

Wolves rarely visit her office, and she is painfully aware of how little she truly knows about them. But at this moment, it doesn't matter. Helen will think about it tomorrow, after this night of moonlit promises is over.

Alina looks at her briefly, her eyes shining like the moon, and Helen can swear she reads some of her own thoughts in those two silver pools of light. But then Alina looks away and quickens the pace, so Helen has to force her legs to move faster as her eyes, used to the dark, see their prey in front of them. The girl is slowing a bit, tired and breathless, and the breeze brings her smell into her pursuers' nostrils.

She smells of adrenaline and Helen almost joins Alina's hungry yelp as her insides twitch in sweet expectancy of pleasurable meal she is about to have.

A scream tears from the girl's throat when they reach her. As if given a sign, Alina goes around her in few strong, long jumps, intercepting her as Helen comes from behind. The girl stops when a large wolf appears before her, turning around only to see her boyfriend's murderer right behind her. Seeing there is no way out, the girl cries helplessly. "Please," she says pleadingly, her voice trembling as much as her body does. "Please, don't kill me. I'll do... whatever you want me to."

Helen glances at Alina; the she-wolf's shiny eyes tell her it is time for feasting. The vampire then looks at the shivering girl and smiles, allowing her fangs to be seen. The girl flinches as her eyes widen even more, pure horror filling them. Helen doesn't waste any more time – she grabs the girl's shoulders, forcibly pulls her closer and sinks her fangs into the girl's neck so quickly her victim doesn't even have time for one last scream. The

girl's body is tensed and stiff, her blood sweet and scared, and Helen allows herself to be drawn into the feeding bliss, almost forgetting she is not alone. She sucks the sweet nectar in long gulps, feeling its warmth as it glides down her throat, filling her every cell with life.

The girl's eyes flutter as blood loss brings her on the verge of losing consciousness, so Helen wraps her arms around her to hold her more firmly. And then, the body she is steadyng suddenly shakes fiercely and Helen looks down, where the wolf's strong jaws close around the girl's left calf. Pain caused by such powerful bite makes their victim jerk weekly in Helen's strong arms as another scream begins to rise from her throat – but the vampire silences her, pressing her lips to the girl's and piercing her tongue with sharp fangs. Any sound the girl might make with her last drops of strength before the world around her sinks into darkness, turns into gurgles in blood filling her mouth.

When the girl faints and her body becomes limp, Helen returns her hungry mouth to the wound on their prey's neck. Her eyes meet Alina's – the wolf is tearing the girl's leg, and in her eyes, shining with hunger, the whole world of silver wilderness is spreading, leaving Helen once more breathless. Why this wolf makes me feel this way, she wonders as they both feed on their prey's life, gazes locked, and the deep growl coming from she-wolf's throat matches moan of pleasure in the vampire's.

When she drains all she could from the girl, Helen releases the limp body, letting Alina have it. The wolf growls, satisfied, and when the body falls on the ground, jumps on it. Helen watched how her strong jaws tear pieces of bloody flesh, how those deadly teeth crush bones and how her muzzle digs into the girl's insides. She watches, mesmerized against her will, for in that display of deadly brutality, of animal feeding, she sees more beauty than a vampire should. We are the same, comes through her amazed mind, deadly beasts feeding on the weak and feeble, kings and queens on the top of the food chain...

She doesn't intend to approach the werewolf while feeding – she knows well how dangerous it would be – but her legs seem to move on their own. As pleasurable warmth spreads through her well fed body and the vampire feels that usual foggy bliss that comes whenever she fully satiates her hunger. Is that why I am moving towards Alina, she wonders absently, is post-feeding bliss making me reckless? She can't say – although she is certain she would never advice any of her clients to do this – but she simply has to touch the beautiful beast, even if it is the last thing she would ever do. Moonlight glistens on the wolf's fur, shadows of silver and gold overflowing it, and Helen's sensitive sight perceives it as a dance of shadows and light, which makes the large animal even more beautiful.

To touch a werewolf while it feeds, is unthinkable for any vampire, let alone for a young one such as herself, merely a century old and with none battles against wolves behind her. But Helen can't help herself; a strong, unknown force pulls her towards the she-wolf,

like magnet attracting iron, as if blood they shared, the blood consumed by both, desires to be united again.

And Helen is always the one doing most unexpected things anyway. She loves a good challenge, loves the hunt and bends the rules whenever she can, be it for the sheer pleasure of it, or to annoy her maker. So doesn't really surprise herself with approaching the feeding wolf.

Alina ignores her until she is so close she can touch her, and then the wolf turns her head, threateningly showing her bloody teeth in a snarl. But surprisingly, Helen isn't afraid; she reaches slowly, gaze locked with the wolf's. Although Alina's throat is still producing a warning growl, she doesn't bite Helen's approaching hand, doesn't attack her, and her eyes still glisten with hungry mischief.

The vampire comes even closer, slowly, not wincing when the werewolf's growl changes somehow. Instead of threat, Helen now hears something else in it, something primal and exciting, even welcoming. So when her palm gently lands on the incredibly soft fur, she can swear there is some pleasure in the beast's growl. The silken softness of thick mane beneath her fingers makes Helen's heart beat faster, quickened by all the blood she drank as much as by touching a werewolf. Not any werewolf, she corrects herself faintly, this werewolf.

Her fingers glide over thick coat of hairs, and her other hand flows to join in. Alina stands perfectly still, gaze still fixed to Helen's, as the vampire caresses her neck and back. And then, she shakes violently and Helen's fingers feel the molding of fur into skin, of animal body into human one – an experience incomparable to anything she has ever felt. Deeply amazed, she stares at the animal becoming human, until soft fur under her fingers gives way to warm, smooth skin. Their gazes still locked, she can see silver pools becoming shadowy, dreamy ones whose shade matches the moonlight that breaks through branches above, scattering on them.

One magical moment later, and it is beautiful naked woman before her again, propped on her hands and knees. Helen's fingers rest on her back for a moment, and then she dares to move them, gliding gently up her spine, until they reach Alina's neck and dive under her hair. The blonde smiles faintly, moving forward until she is a breath away from Helen. She buries her face in Helen's hair briefly, just like she has done before to their prey, and inhales deeply, murmuring something that sounds like a satisfied growl. Then she moves back so her gaze can lock with Helen's and they stare at each other for a long moment. There is curiosity in the blonde's eyes, and mischief and unmistakable desire, and the vampire's heart, filled with fresh blood, beats like it used to when she was still alive, as she feels a bit light-headed, even dazzled, under those incredibly light eyes. Then Helen decides to give up, to allow herself this moment of sheer pleasure, and leans in to flick her tongue over Alina's bloody cheek. She licks their prey's blood away, feeling the werewolf tremble as her breaths come out short and quick. Two strong hands suddenly

grab her upper arms and blink of an eye later, she is pinned to the ground by a very warm, strong body, and thoroughly kissed by lips that still taste of blood.

As their limbs entangle and moans tear from both their throats, everything vanishes in a swirl of uninhibited passion, bringing Helen that promised, forbidden wilderness she has always desired. And for once, under the moonlight and in arms of a werewolf, the vampire comes undone.



“Ever done this before?”

Helen glances to the gloriously naked she-wolf lying next to her. The smirk on her face is evident, as mischief returned to her expression as soon as she caught her breath – but the sweat glistening on her skin under the moonlight serves as proof of all those amazing things the vampire did to her. For that, Helen cannot help but smirk as well.

They are not touching – any kind of cuddling seems absolutely out of the question – and Alina can pretend to be completely laid back about this, but Helen knows better. After hearing what a werewolf sounds like when reaching the highest peaks of passion, she will always know better.

But an honest question, no matter how seemingly laid back, deserves an honest question.

“No,” she replies. “You?”

The smirk widens.

“More than once. But,” the wolf quickly continues, before Helen can throw a witty remark of her own, “with only one vampire.”

Helen’s eyebrows go up.

“A werewolf with a taste for vampires,” she murmurs. “Interesting. Your pack must be thrilled about it.”

Alina’s smirk turns into a frown, making her suddenly seem very young.

“I don’t usually run through woods in search of vampires willing to shag,” she says sharply. “Don’t think that of me.”

“Why would you care what I think?”

“I don’t know,” their gazes meet again and Helen could swear there is some insecurity in the wolf’s eyes. They stare at each other for a few long moments, and the vampire must fight her desire to reach and touch Alina’s cheek, hair, anything. She is inexplicably drawn to the wolf – after feeding together and then having sex, it’s no wonder. But still, Helen is dazzled with this entire situation. She wants to touch the werewolf, to press herself close to her warm body, to stay there until the dawn – and if she tried to think hard, she would have to admit to herself she hasn’t felt such pull since she met Dorian. And that was more than a century ago.

She risks a fleeting touch on Alina’s arm, which earns her a barely noticeable tremble

from the werewolf. She doesn't manage to touch more resolutely, though, because Alina's entire body suddenly tenses, her eyes widening as she takes in a long breath.

"Shit," she hisses, jumping on her feet – but it's too late; two large, dark wolves are already approaching them in long strides. Helen is up in an instant, all her muscles tensing and fear tightly squeezing her insides as she curses herself for being so stupid. She is strong – especially after draining two humans – but there is no chance in hell she could take on two adult wolves and survive.

And not only did she feed on their territory, she fucked one of them. They would rip her apart.

But before she can decide which way she should try to run, one of the wolves changes into a tall, bulky man whose expression is more annoyed than angry. He stares hard at Alina, who seems to shrink a bit before his stern gaze although there is still some stubbornness in her posture.

"Again, Alina?" the man's voice is reproving and sharp. Alina shakes head as if trying to find words, but he raises his hand in a rebuking gesture, silencing her. Then he turns to Helen. "Did you drink her blood?"

"No."

"You are in our territory."

"I apologize. I will leave immediately," if you permit, Helen almost adds, but then decides her apology shouldn't extend to groveling, no matter how scared she might be. It's hard enough to stand before them naked and guilty; she should at least keep some dignity.

The other wolf growls and the man's brow furrows as he stares at her.

"Wait a moment," he says, not bothering to hide his surprise. "You are Helen Kaylock? That Helen Kaylock?"

Alina's head snaps up as she looks at Helen, her eyes wide in wonder. The vampire glances at her briefly before nodding to the man before her. The other wolf growls again, and the man frowns.

"Your reputation precedes you," he smirks, although Helen can now see clear signs of discomfort in his stance and expression. "I hear you have quite a busy schedule. Shouldn't you be in your office, doing those mind-fucking tricks of yours on someone who pays for that?"

"It's my night off," Helen smirks, her confidence growing.

"Then enjoy it somewhere else," he growls, glancing at Alina before changing back into his wolf shape. Alina's eyes turn to Helen and there is too much for the vampire there to read, but before Helen can say anything, she changes and runs away, followed – or, perhaps, chased – by the other two wolves.

The vampire is left standing in the middle of the clearing alone, wondering almost

involuntarily what punishment awaits the young she-wolf for sharing prey and passionate moments with her. And, even more involuntarily, she feels sorry for Alina, more strongly than she ever feels sorry for her clients.

That concerns her far more than the near-approaching dawn.

And somewhere deep inside, Helen knows this is not nearly the last time her path crossed with that of Alina's pack.



Hrvoje Silić: “Cthonian”

<http://hrvojesilic.deviantart.com/>



MAJMUNSKA POSLA

Zdenko Kremer

Kažu da nije baš preporučljivo javno istupati protiv korporacije Monkey Business Inc. vodeće biotech kompanije koja se bavi istraživanjem učinaka genetskih i neuroloških manipulacija na čovjekolikim majmunima, te primjenom ove vrste znanja u praksi. Ova je korporacija, kao što znamo, pred desetak godina uspjela stvoriti nove majmunske hibride koji su sposobni obavljati neke jednostavnije poslove i u tome zamijeniti ljudska bića. Pokazalo se, naime, da je umjesto stvaranja androida na bazi ljudskog genoma, zbog raznih bioetičkih i sličnih prigovora, praktičnije, a i lakše, ovakvo biće stvoriti putem manipulacija genomom čovjekolikog majmuna, te naknadnom "nadogradnjom" nekih kontrolnih centara u njegovom mozgu. Najveći uspjeh korporacija je postigla kreiranjem jedne modifikacije gorile, nešto robusnije građe, koja se koristi za potrebe vojske, u zadnje vrijeme i masovno. Mnogi su ocijenili da jedan ovakav gorila zbog svoje snage, izdržljivosti i neustrašivosti predstavlja upravo idealnog vojnika - pješadinka, što se i pokazalo u brojnim borbenim situacijama, tako da su postrojbe sastavljene od gorila ove vrste danas već uključene u "peacekeeping operacije" naše vojske na mnogim kriznim žarištima suvremenog svijeta, od Zapadne Sahare do Bangladeša i Istočnog Turkestana. Vjeruje se da će ove gorile već u nekom doglednom vremenu u potpunosti zamijeniti ljudе u svim "terenskim" vojnim postrojbama, ili bolje rečeno u postrojbama svih vidova i rodova koje direktno sudjeluju u borbama, a ozbiljno se razmatra njihova upotreba i u određenim policijskim poslovima.

Međutim, treba reći da prema svemu sudeći ova stvar s gorilama ipak nije toliko sjajna kakvom se u našoj javnosti predstavlja. Govorka se tako da gorile - vojnici ponekad znaju potpuno izgubiti kontrolu nad vlastitim postupcima i početi pucati na sve oko sebe, pa da je u takvim incidentima stradalо i dosta ljudi - naših vlastitih vojnih instruktora, čak i viših časnika (neprijateljski vojnici i civilni se dakako ne računaju). Neki su novinari pokušali istražiti takve slučajeve, no sve njih kao da prati gadno prokletstvo (umjesto "prokletstva faraona" ovdje se spominje "prokletstvo gorila") - nekoliko njih poginulo je u prometnim nesrećama, a veći ih se broj naglo razbolio od nekih neizlječivih bolesti koje su veoma brzo dovele do fatalnog ishoda. Čuju se doduše nagađanja da sve to možda i nije posve slučajno, no nitko se o tome ne usuđuje javno progovoriti.

Problema očito ima i sa GNMO (genetski i neurološki modificiranim) čimpanzama koje se već nekoliko godina koriste za obavljanje raznih poljoprivrednih, komunalnih i kućnih poslova, u dostavi (premda se u prometu pokazuju prilično nepouzdanim - no zbog toga ih se obično šalje samo u mirne četvrti u gradskim predgrađima), te u zadnje vrijeme i za rad u administraciji.

Kao što je poznato, danas već postoje prilično usavršene verzije čimpanza koje razlikuju slova i znaju prilično vješto raditi na terminalima, a s obzirom da jako dobro izgovaraju

mnoge riječi koje su bitne u komunikaciji, i k tomu razumiju koncept elektronskog novca, njihovi se najnoviji modeli čak koriste u bankarskim poslovnicama za rad na šalterima tj. sa strankama.

Upravo s ovom najnovijom generacijom umjetno stvorenih čimpanza dogodio se incident kojemu sam i sam nazočio, a o kojemu bih htio posvjedočiti u ovoj svojoj priči. Sve se desilo u poslovnički banke čiji sam klijent skoro četrdeset godina, a u kojoj je zamjena ljudskog presonala izvršena pred nešto manje od mjesec dana - tako da danas na svim bankovnim šalterima možete zateći majmune, a kažu da ih mnogo radi i "iza pregrade" tj. bez doticaja sa strankama.

Sve se zbilo upravo na šalteru za koji sam čekao red. Stajao sam mirno desetak minuta i onda primijetio da se ispred mene nešto događa. Očito je bilo da je majmun za šalterom u jednom trenutku prestao reagirati, tako da ga je stranka koju je bio opsluživao glasnim obraćanjem pokušala navesti da nastavi svoj posao. No on je samo sjedio i buljio u nju nekoliko minuta, da bi onda, iznenada, potpuno pomahnitao - skočio na svoj radni pult, strgnuo sa sebe službenu odjeću, te počeo izvoditi kojekakve vratolomije po svom i okolnim šalterima kričeći vrlo prodorno. Onda je izveo efektan skok uvis, uhvatio se za jednu od ukrasnih stropnih svjetiljki, zanjihao se na njoj i počeo mokriti po nama koji smo se našli ispod.

Dvojica zaštitara odmah su dakako reagirala, izvukli su svoje pištolje, no zbog opasnosti da se metak odbije od zida i pogodi nekoga od prisutnih, nisu odmah i pucali. Tek kad smo svi, na njihov zahtjev, polijegali po podu i pokušali se zaštитiti na ovaj ili onaj način, s dva su precizna hica uspjeli smaknuti majmuna koji je do svoga smrtnog časa već bio ispraznio mjeđuh.

O strci i panici koja je vladala u tim trenucima, na ovom mjestu ne bih duljio. Ono što je zanimljivo spomenuti jest da su bankarski službenici (u ljudskom obličju), a brzo ih se na licu mjesta pojavio znatan broj, nekako previše napadno počeli umirivati prisutne, govoreći kako treba smatrati da se ništa nije dogodilo i kako sve ovo što smo vidjeli maločas treba temeljito zaboraviti. Još me više iznenadilo to što mi je, baš kad sam namjeravao napustiti poslovnicu, prišao jedan od njih i pozvao u svoj ured koji se nalazi na katu, a čini se da je takve pozive od strane drugih službenika dobilo i ostalih dvadesetak osoba koje su se zatekle u poslovnički banke u trenutku incidenta.

Bio sam u prvi mah prilično zbumjen, pa sam se odazvao njegovom pozivu i pošao za njim. Čovjek je bio vrlo uljudan, čim sam ušao u njegov ured upitao me je što želim popiti, a zatim je, nakon što je telefonom naručio piće, počeo zbijati šale na račun onoga što se upravo dogodilo. Zaista je bio duhovit, a i ja sam mu se pridružio nekim ironičnim komentarima, tako da smo se ubrzo obojica toliko tresli od smijeha, da mi je odijelo ostalo mokro i od posluženog pića, koje sam po sebi uspio prosuti. No on se onda, u jednom trenutku, naglo uozbiljio i rekao da se usprkos tome što sve to skupa izgleda jako smiješno, ipak radi o jednoj veoma delikatnoj stvari koju ni pod koju cijenu ne bih smio

iznosit u javnost. Napomenuo je da je njegova banka spremna isplatiti znatniju naknadu za pretrpljenu neugodnost, ali uz potpis izjave da o događaju neću govoriti niti u užem obiteljskom krugu, a kamoli u nekom širem.

Mogu reći da me ovaj njegov zahtjev zaista zaprepastio, tim prije što mi se ta stvar s majmunima uopće ne sviđa i što me je događaj kojemu sam nazičio definitivno učvrstio u uvjerenju kako je ova "majmunска eskapada" naših poslovnih i znanstvenih krugova već od početka predstavljala slijepu ulicu suvremene biotehnologije, a i uopće našeg znanstveno-tehnološkog razvoja, pa da cijeli taj cirkus pod hitno treba zaustaviti. Nešto sam u tom smislu i rekao svome sugovorniku napominjući da mi njihov novac ne treba i da neću potpisati jedan tako apsurdan i besmislen dokument. On se na to namrgodio, pa zatim pokušao još me nekim nazovi-argumentima navesti da ipak potpišem njegov papir, čak mi nudeći i dvostruko veći iznos naknade. No s obzirom da se nisam dao nagovoriti, naposljetku je odustao uz vrlo drsku napomenu, odnosno prijetnju, kako bih trebao pripaziti što govorim, jer da bih u suprotnom mogao imati velikih neugodnosti. Tako smo se rastali u veoma neugodnom ozračju.

Sve ovo što mi se dogodilo, i u prostoru poslovnice, i u uredu onog bezobraznog tipa, navelo me da malo dublje razmislim o tome što se zbiva i u toj priči s majmunima, a i inače. I tako se preda mnom odjednom stvorila gomila pitanja. Primjerice pitanje - Nije li krajnje nelogično da u ovo doba velike krize i nezaposlenosti netko ulaže novac, i to velikim dijelom onaj poreznih obveznika, na istraživanja koja omogućavaju da još više ljudi ostane bez posla? Ili recimo pitanje - Što zapravo znači onaj reklamni slogan korporacije Monkey Business Inc. u kojemu se naglašava kako "između ljudi i njihovih majmuna nema neke velike razlike"? Uistinu, nisu li ciljevi onih koji se bave ovakvim poslovima krajnje mutni? Ne bi li bilo bolje da se sva ta jako dvojbena ili posve apsurdna istraživanja (koja bismo možda bolje mogli okarakterizirati terminom "manipulacije"), odmah prekinu, a novac koji se u njih ulaže usmjeri u druge, smislenije i korisnije projekte? Tko to uopće i zašto toliko forsira tu stvar s GMNO majmunima i biotehnologijom uopće? Kuda sve ovo vodi? Nećemo li se, slučaju da se ovako nastavi, vrlo brzo naći potpuno okruženi majmunima i neće li tada biti gotovo nemoguće u toj masi svijeta oko nas pronaći jedno jedino ljudsko biće? Uostalom, kako to ti pametnjakovići, genetičari i genetski manipulatori, misle korištenjem svojih znanstvenih metoda "unaprijediti" majmune da njihovo ponašanje postane identično ili barem slično onom ljudskom? Meni se čini da se radi nešto upravo suprotno i da je zaista istinita tvrdnja jednog novinara što se bavio slučajem "majmunskih poslova" (i iznenada zaglavio, baš kao i drugi njegovi kolege), koji je u jednom svom tekstu ustvrdio kako tipovi iz Monkey Business Inc. i sličnih korporacija nisu toliko uspjeli majmune unaprijediti koliko su ljudi uspjeli unazaditi, ili drugim riječima, kako im kroz njihova znanstvena istraživanja i eksperimentiranja nije pošlo za rukom majmune uklopiti u ljudsku civilizaciju, već da su jednostavno ljudi uklopili u onu majmunsku. Dakako, ne slučajno, nego namjerno. Mogu reći kako sam osim toga duboko uvjeren ne samo u to da je uzaludno pokušavati od majmuna stvoriti ljudska bića, već i u to da je ova činjenica

svim onim vucibatinama iz Monkey Business Inc. jako dobro poznata. Jer ne treba imati neke velike znanstvene kvalifikacije, pa ni odviše pameti, da bi se dokučilo kako je daleko profitabilnije baviti se obrnutim poslom, u kojem smo oduvijek bili izuzetno uspješni.

Usprkos tome što, kako rekoh na početku, nije baš uputno javno istupati protiv korporacije Monkey Business Inc., ipak sam odlučio napisati članak o incidentu kojemu sam nazočio i poslati ga u uredništvo naših lokalnih novina. Tim bih člankom ujedno htio apelirati na nadležne i uvjeriti ih kako majmuni nisu nimalo pogodni da ih se koristi za obavljanje bilo kakvih (ljudskih) poslova i kako bi već uznapredovali praksu u tom smjeru, kao i znanstvena istraživanja koja se obavljaju s tim ciljem, trebalo odmah zabraniti zakonom. Ljudske poslove, koji su zbog automatizacije i robotizacije ionako znatno reducirani, trebaju obavljati ljudi, a majmuni - neka rade što ih volja. Tim prije što na svijetu ima dovoljno ljudi koji bi mogli i koji hoće raditi sve vrste poslova koji su uistinu potrebni za naš normalan život i daljnji (realni) napredak čovječanstva.

Nadam se da će naša javnost shvatiti i prihvati ovaj moj apel koji bi se inače mogao sažeti u samo tri riječi - Zamijenimo majmune ljudima! Smatram da su majmuni uzrok mnogih boljki ovog današnjeg svijeta i da bi nam svima bilo daleko bolje kad bi ih se uklonilo sa svih pozicija na koje su postavljeni. Nadam se da će svako razumno ljudsko biće podržati ovu moju inicijativu i da će se nakon naše odlučne akcije svi ti majmuni, danas ne samo jako dobro integrirani u naše društvo, nego u njemu i veoma značajni, naći tamo gdje bi i trebali biti - U prašumi.

P.S. Svjedočanstvo pokojnog N. N. o događaju u poslovni jednog od naših poznatih bankarskih konzorcija (kojega ne želimo imenovati), skupa s njegovim apelom protiv "majmunskih poslova" uredničkom je greškom bilo objavljeno u lokalnim novinama, dva dana nakon njegove iznenadne smrti, što je izazvalo veliki skandal u javnosti, te dugotrajan sudski spor na kojemu je, na koncu, dokazana kleveta protiv dotičnog bankarskog konzorcija kao i korporacije Monkey Business Inc., što je onda dovelo do bankrota izdavača rečenih novina, s tim da su neki od upletenih u skandal iz uredništva ovoga glasila osuđeni i na zatvorske kazne.

Zagreb, ožujak 2014.



BOJA STRASTI, BOJA KRVI

Dajana Šalinović

Mateo je opsovao kako ga je pijana ženska sa štreberskim naočalama kakve su sad bile in prolila s žujom, spotaknuvši se na već mokri dio poda. No i on je već bio pomalo pripit. Glasni *drum'n'bass* je treštao, uzrokujući vibracije po cijeloj prostoriji. Osjećao se kao jedina osoba u na zabavi koja još nije uspjela ništa zbariti. Dva kata elektroničke i pop glazbe, hrpa pijanih ljudi, a on sam. Mobitel mu je zavibrirao u džepu, bila je to poruka od njegove cure Lorene s kojom je već dva mjeseca bio u vezi, s namjerom da što prije prekinu jer mu je već poprilično dosađivala od kada su se pojebali.

Awwwwich Sta radis? Bas si mi swadak... ☺ Kad chemo se opet vidjeti? I bas sam totally tuzna sto josh na face nisi stavijo da smo u wezi :/

Mateo je zakolutao očima i obrisao poruku, razmišljajući o tome da joj možda odmah kaže da od svega toga ništa.

Ohladio sam se. Sry.

Zadovoljno je poslao poruku sada bivajući siguran da mu neće slati poruke kada bude s nekom drugom curom. Međutim, sekundu kasnije, mobitel mu je ponovno zavibrirao, ovaj put poziv od nje. Isključio je mobitel. Odjednom, ugledao je djevojku, sigurno gotovo deset godina stariju od njega, odjevenu u kratku crnu haljinu, bujne crvene kose i dugih nogu kako ide na kat. Pomislio je kako je to definitivno najzgodnija ženska na tulumu, te je odlučio pokušati s njome. Pretpostavljao je da će ga odbiti, no smatrao je da ipak vrijedi probati. No kada je došao na gornji kat, nije ju uspio pronaći.

Pa nije mogla ispariti! – pomislio je ljutito i razočarano.

Pretražio je cijelu prostoriju, te na kraju produžio naprijed u hodnik i provjeravao po sobama i wc-u. Tako tražeći, naišao je na vrata koja su bila zatvorena, no ne i zaključana. Znatiželja je bila prejaka, diskretno je ušao unutra i potražio prekidač za svjetlo, ionako se može izvući da je samo tražio wc. Međutim, kako su se vrata zatvorila, začuo je šklijocaj, kao da su se zaključala. Potegnuvši kvaku, shvatio je da doista ne može izići i da su vrata možda automatska. Inače bi se i zabrinuo zbog ove situacije, no alkohol je plesao njegovim čulima, tako da mu je bilo svejedno. Pokušavao se priviknuti na tamu, te mu se uskoro počelo činiti da vidi ljudske obrise po prostoriji. Što je više osluškivao, to je sve više zvukova čuo. Tiho disanje, hihotanje, i zvuk koji se činio poput poljubaca. Oprezno je prolazio prstima zidom, no nije našao nikakav prekidač. Polako je spuznuo na pod, krećući se prema naprijed dok nije napipao mekani jastučić na koje se zavalio. Samo se nadao da nije nekoga prekinuo usred akcije jer bi zbog toga mogao dobiti batine i ispasti vojer. Sve se više opuštao dok ga je vanjska glazba - sada prigušena – uspavljivala.

Iznenada, nekoliko prigušenih svjetala se upalilo po prostoriji. Trgnuo se i pogledao oko sebe ne vjerujući svojim očima. Sedam žena u dvadesetima je bilo oko njega, sve obučene

u izazovno donje rublje. Međusobno su se ljubile i milovale. Jedna od njih, valovite kose, odjevena u zeleno rublje i najlonke iznad koljena koje su držali halteri ga je pozvala bliže k njima. Istoga trena, Mateo se osjetio napaljenijim nego ikada u životu, prišao im je i stao se ljubiti sa brinetom. Skinula je majicu s njega, osjetio je njen gladak i mokar jezik na svojim prsima. Dvije crnokose djevojke, prestale su me međusobno ljubiti i prišle su mu, otkopčavajući mu hlače i ljubeći ga. Jedna od njih imala je piercing na jeziku. Osjetio je nokte na leđima i ugledao iza sebe crvenokosu djevojku koju je tražio po prostoriji, sada je na sebi imala crni korzet i čipkaste tange. Uhvatila ga je pod bradu i zabila mu jezik u usta. Ljubila ga je sve žešće, grizući ga za donju usnu. Iznenada je zagrizala prejako. Zajaukao je od boli, no nado se da je ona njegov uzvik zamijenila za zvuk užitka. No, crvenokosa djevojka stala ga je gristi sve jače, toliko da mu se usna raspukla i prokrvarila. "Eeeeeeej, čuj, ajd mralo lavše, nisam bvaš za te hc stvvvavi..." – rekao je, na što je ona još jače počela gristi, toliku silinu boli je osjećao da mu se učinilo da žvače meso koje su prije bile njegove usne.

Pokušao je ustati kako bi ju maknuo sa sebe, no druge žene su ga čvrsto uhvatile i pribile za pod. Sada je mogao vidjeti njene neprirodno zelene oči s izduženim zjenicama, u kontrastu s grimiznom grivom kose. Počeo je paničariti i zvati za pomoć, no ubrzo ga je njen jezik u ustima ušutkao. Osjećao je kako se gotovo guši u vlastitoj krvi, u nemogućnosti da ju iskašlja. Jedna od djevojaka, istetovirane podlaktice, mu se nasmiješila, zubi su joj bili oštiri i šiljasti, čeljust malo ispučena, skočila je prema njemu i stala mu kidati kožu s mesom sa noge pošto više nije imao hlača na sebi. Nekim čudom, osjetio je njene meke grudi na sebi i ukrućene bradavice dok mu je savršeno bijelim zubima kidala tetine zajedno s mišićima. Mozak mu je postao bljutava kaša, nesposobna za išta. Posljednje što je video bilo je crvenilo, boja njegove strasti kako se slijeva s lijepih punih usana žena u prostoriji.

Bile su najljepše koje je ikada u životu video.





Živko Kondić: "Warrior"

<https://www.facebook.com/zhillustrator>

<http://zhille.tumblr.com/>

Živko Kondić



2013