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EQUINOX

Issue 11

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CAMPUS HONORS PROGRAM
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

Equinox is the literary and arts magazine exclusive to the Campus Honors Program of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. It was created, organized, and published by Chancellor's Scholars.

The mission of *Equinox* is to share the artistic and creative talents of CHP members. Its name, borrowed from astronomy, reflects this mission: the vernal and autumnal equinoxes are days of the year when day and night are seen equally. The duality of day and night reflects the balance between academic and artistic achievement among Chancellor's Scholars.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

To Anne, Laurie, Elizabeth, Abby, and Kelly—thank you for your continued support of the magazine. Whether it's helping with a 70 page print request in the middle of the day or sending yet another email to call for submissions, you make it possible for us to showcase this work every year!

To the HSC—we wouldn't be able to put this together if it weren't for the opportunity to come together that HSC provides.

To all of our talented writers and artists—thank you for sharing your fantastic work with us. There would be no magazine without you!

Finally, to our readers—thank you.

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR:

Dearest readers,

Welcome to the eleventh issue of *Equinox*! I am so excited for you to see what a very talented group of Chancellor's Scholars has created this year. Our publications committee this year was essentially entirely freshman and sophomores; you'll notice some updates to the magazine's style to reflect the vision and tastes of our new membership. This was the first magazine I personally got to really dig into, and our committee worked together closely to design and produce a magazine that tells a story not only in the pages of the individual works, but across them as well. I am very grateful to our committee members for their patience with me as I figured out how to get through this process, as well as their passion and dedication to producing an excellent magazine.

Our theme for the 11th issue is Skyrocketing to New Heights, inspired by the Apollo 11 Mission. I felt that this year, with a lot of new faces, represented new opportunities for the magazine to evolve, and the theme we chose reflects this.

I am consistently impressed by the incredible work submitted. Our fellow Chancellor's Scholars have shown us that regardless of major, there is always room for creativity, and it is my hope that this magazine is an opportunity for my fellow students to showcase that creativity and passion when they may not have otherwise had such an outlet.

Many thanks to the incredible CHP staff for giving us the opportunity to publish this magazine—I am very grateful for your support, not just in this, but on a daily basis.

Thank you for reading *Equinox*. I hope you enjoy!

- Margot Pierce

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A MOMENT
MADISON FANNING

CATCHING IT + LUJAH + SACRED HARP

JOE DUBRAVEC

Have you heard it?
There we stood, clapping and yelling
excite the fundamental frequency
reach up to the stage and
across the hollow square for there is
a gold there which you can see and feel!

WE ARE HERE and together in this place
of mountain and ocean and fields
what have we to do but play our harps
Play the drums and organ, run down the aisle
and fall to the ground under the weight of joy

I SEEM THEM AROUND ME FREEZE IN TIME
THIS MOMENT HOLDS THE GREAT LOVE AND GREAT PAIN
THAT WE MIGHT IMAGINE OURSELVES CONNECTED
FOR A REASON OR NO REASON AT ALL
BUT TO USE WHAT WE HAVE PAID FOR
WITH THE LOAN THAT HAS COME TO US
nevermind where from or why
(why should it matter?)



TIME IS MONEY
ISABEL ZHOU



NURTURE IN NATURE
ISABEL ZHOU

ARISTOPHANES NEEDS A BREAK

ELIZABETH SCHERSCHEL

The audience is completely quiet as a young man walks up the stairs to the stage. He pops his blazer as he walks, the ultimate gesture of faked confidence. His hands shake, but he shoves them in the pockets of his navy chinos and stands behind the microphone. The liquid courage in his system somehow abandoned him – well, no, that’s not true; he wouldn’t have made it up the stairs without the several shots he and his friends had taken at the bar three blocks away. Brown eyes scan the audience – his ninth-grade English teacher sitting beside his partner in the front row; his grandmother holding up her video camera in the third row, beaming at him as if he had already accomplished something amazing – before he finally opens his mouth.

“Hello, all. Thank you so much for coming and spending this lovely summer evening out here on the green with us. It’s gonna be a great night.

“We are gathered here today to immortalize and honor two of Greece’s greatest poets. Not perfect, obviously, ‘cause there’s always room for improvement, right? Right. That seems mean, but we should acknowledge their prime was a long time ago – like a couple thousand years ago. They were fantastic playwrights, and we’ve continued to perform, read, and analyze much of what they’ve written for insights into the Ancient Greek people and their traditions ... but you probably don’t care about that. You’re just here for some dancing and singing frogs, right?”

The audience cheered at that. He sighed and rubbed his forehead with one hand, cupping the side of his chin while he stared at them for a moment in mock disapproval. “As a history geek, that’s really disappointing, y’all.” More laughter. “This is my disappointed dad face, alright? I’m devastated.”

“Anyways, obviously these playwrights, Euripides and Aeschylus, are long-dead – again, that doesn’t mean they’re irrelevant – but I’m here to give a memorial speech-slash-quick summary of who the hell these guys are – don’t give up on me yet, guys! It’s basically the sparknotes, then you’ll get your regularly scheduled programming with the rumored dancing frogs, I promise. I’ll try to keep it entertaining, though.

“Tonight, we’ll be putting on my favorite play... or at least the one I’ve managed to finish for this, so that makes it my favorite right now. And I’m not accepting judgment; I swear I had it finished more than twenty minutes before the deadline – but don’t quote me on that, besties, just in case, ‘cause it was probably 11:55 ish when I finally submitted it.

“As you probably know already, it’s named after a super fun marsh animal with a little bit of chaos in their spirits. Dionysus tries to fix Athens – because, well, it’s honestly not in great shape after the Peloponnesian War; who thought Sparta had that much war oomph? – and Athens needs its spirit back. So, he winds up in the Underworld with his servant, and Aeschylus and Euripides are trying to figure out who’s the better writer.

“But, not to spoil the ending – or more like the middle really, but you get the vibe – we’ve got Euripides and Aeschylus guest-starring in the play, so it’s a bit important you have some context. These two guys predate us by a hot minute, but they’re iconic gentlemen in

history, so keep that in mind throughout. Basically, Shakespeare for everyone who pre-dated Shakespeare. Mad respect to the both of them; they're basically Spike Lee and Mel Brooks, but a tiny bit older.

"Aeschylus is uh hella old. He was born in like 525 BCE – for reference, Rome was only about 230 years old then; basically a fledgling country, a teenager not to be trusted." He waited for laughter; for someone to acknowledge that the U.S. was only fifteen years older than Rome was then, but when none came, he moved on without comment. Damn, tough crowd.

"Anyways, he did all the shit good little Athenian boys did: fought the Persians at Marathon, supported democracy and Athenian traditions, wrote some depressing as hell trilogies to that vague effect... you know, all that jazz. Kinda the ancient equivalent to the rich kids who go to prep schools then become politicians then retire to write a few memoirs and play golf. Dude was really, really popular, too.

"Euripides is a bit more recent; only like the 480s BCE. Iconic in his own right, he did some military service and wrote a ton of plays; he was in fact born to a wealthy family, which meant after his service he had leisure time to write.

"Personally, I love the chaos – having the heroine kill her kids and letting Big D tear apart the King of Thebes? Almost as brilliant as my chorus of frogs – Ope! Although that's not really a spoiler at this point; anyone downtown in the past month has seen my cast walking around in green body paint. Anyways, another spoiler alert: both playwrights are already dead in this play, so look forward to that.

"Euripides, hmm... what to say... Well, he thinks he knows best. He brings a young perspective to things: a bit naive and out of touch with the older generations, totally in favor of equality among the social classes; to hear them all talk, I mean – wow! Having a nurse talk just like a well-educated, wealthy member of society – bonkers. No, in all seriousness, this was insane and totally unprecedented. Basically, it got the same reaction as college students yelling "tax the rich" and pushing for social justice, alright? Either way, you're banishing tradition and causing chaos, which naturally tends to upset the older generations." His grandmother threw him both a grin and obscene gesture, while others politely chuckled. So far, so good.

"And it's not just that: Heaven help the children who adopted his characters – ahem, like Medea; look her up if you aren't familiar – as role models! I mean, honestly. Of course, my heroes aren't a whole lot better – Dionysus is an absolute goofball and a bit of a coward – but I don't offend the elders in the audience, probably, hopefully. Gran's already back there giving me the two-fingered salute, but I think it comes from a place of love, right?" She stuck her tongue out at him, and he winked in return. He stood up straighter and plucked the microphone from its stand.

"Please note, I'm not saying that's a bad thing – people are complicated, and sometimes imperfect heroes are fantastic – but the ancients weren't a huge fan of that. It's kinda like having gay characters in a Disney movie: not really a problem, but people are gonna complain. It's not like he was actively bashing Athens or spilling cult secrets.

"On the other hand, we have Aeschylus, my man who keeps things real. Heroes as morally-uncomplicated heroes! Obviously, we're supposed to be able to root for our heroes without fearing they're gonna kill their children or like piss off the gods and get smited or something chaotic like that, but ya know, gotta have a little spice in life, or you're living

British food.

“Now, we’ve all had that one friend or family member who monologues, right? You’re at dinner, and they just don’t. Shut. up.”

“You!” His grandmother shouted, not unkindly. He tilted his head, tucking his chin to the front of his shoulder as he regained his composure while the rest of the audience laughed with him.

“Okay, fair, rude but yeah. We’ve all had that person in our lives – and apparently, I might be that person in your life. That’s what Euripides liked in his characters. They talked, and they talked, until everyone was wondering when the fuck this guy’s gonna shut up – like you’re definitely wondering right now; I’m close to the end, I promise, probably. I’ll be honest, I went off-script about the time I got to the microphone.

“Aeschylus, now he liked the sibling who’s quiet at family dinners until they just roast the living daylights out of everyone else. Perfect stuff. No notes. Except it’s a little disconcerting to have this girl come on stage then wait a hot minute to predict everyone will die gruesomely, right? I really don’t know what to do with that.

“Not all his stuff was super serious, mind you. He also wrote about a ‘tawny horsecock’. Don’t ask me what that is – I’m guessing... er, hoping... it’s a reference to the carvings on boats – but you know, we don’t really know. He had a tendency to be vague.

“Euripides, now, he loved exposition – details, besties, details right at the beginning – almost as much as he loved the sophist values of over-thinking – I mean, thinking through decisions. At least he talked like a normal person; Aeschylus basically wrote like Shakespeare and Dickens had a child: a sprinkling of verse, some language you don’t really understand, let’s get some more big words in here, make it sound kinda fancy...

“Naturally, as authors and proud Athenians, both men wanted Athens to be the best it could, and that meant gently guiding their audience to make good decisions. Now, I know what you’re thinking: ‘How could the guy who has his heroine kill her kids be indicating Athenian morals?’ and that’s a good question.

“Here’s the answer: Euripides is saying don’t do that, just like he says not to piss off the gods and get smited, destroying your entire family in the process, and Aeschylus says basically the same thing but with the Furies and a slight encouragement of matricide in the name of promoting Athenian justice systems – you gotta read it to fully understand; sorry, guys.

“Anyways, I should shut up so we can start the performance. Hopefully that’s enough for you to understand what’s happening; if it’s not, you’ve got Wikipedia – just laugh where appropriate, and we’ll call it good. Please, enjoy the show.” The audience applauded politely as he left the stage and took his seat in the front row.

“Well done,” his partner whispered in his ear.

“Thanks.” He smiled back. “Here’s hoping the rest goes alright.”

The orchestra began, as Dionysus, Xanthias, and the kids stuffed in the donkey costume took their places onstage in the dark. Aristophanes held his breath as the stage lights lit up the space. Here we go.

After what seemed like an eternity, Xanthias began: “Hey master, how about some of the usual stuff that always gets a laugh from the audience?”

YELLING THROUGH THE LEAVES

HABIB REHMAN



SWISH, SWISH

RYAN VANDEWIELE

Mouth open... Mouth shut... Mouth open... A little wider... Rinse and spit... It was a dull monotony being at the dentist's office. Especially for someone like LeBron James. Dentist visits always made him uncomfortable, but not out of fear or anything like lots of people complained. Instead, these appointments made him feel strange, out of place, isolated. The basketball court was his home, the squeak of rubber soles on finished wood, the flurry of movement of ten athletes ready to give everything to win, the cheers and boos of a roaring crowd, the dazzling stadium lights above like spotlights on a grand stage, the potent scent of popcorn and beer and stadium air and the sweat and blood and tears that only came from his extraordinary team putting everything on the line, finding ways to keep moving, keep passing, keep encroaching on the opponents in a brilliantly fast game of chess until one brave hero finally found an opening and hurled the treasured orange ball up, up, up, rising and stopping at its apex along with all the noise, all the movement, all the distractions, as the world with baited breath watched the ball descend smoothly, agonizingly slowly, but approaching the hoop, bouncing off the rim, the glass, the rim, until finally-

“Swish! Ya hear me? Swish!”

LeBron had zoned out again and missed the dentist's instructions to rinse and spit, which he did bashfully as he was brought back to reality, wishing he hadn't been. This office was small where the court was big, quiet where the court was loud, clean where the court was messy. There was no game of chess, no goal, no opponents. The world away from the court was calm, so calm, unnervingly calm. In LeBron's eyes, it was silly to think of this world as his “normal” world.

This world wasn't normal; this world cut him off from what was normal.



AFLAME
CHANTELLE DIENER

VIKTOR

RYAN VANDEWIELE

(CW: slight blood/gore, violence)

Writer's Note: This work is part of a larger story based on my original D&D character, Viktor. Some bits may seem confusing out of context, and there are some loose ends that remain by the end (I wrote this story as if it could be the first chapter of a novel). Hopefully, you still like the story.

Chapter 1, in which, Monsters Come in Many Forms

Viktor had always adored the sight of the full moon gliding slowly across the sky over Esterron, its gentle blue glow bathing the vast city below. The great globe, the queen of the night, the champion of the stars. A beauty that reduced the most eloquent of men to furious scribblings when they inevitably found themselves at a loss of words to describe her. But Viktor did not suffer such misfortune. He was content to simply stare, to soak up the sight with both eyes and soul, captivated in silence by the lady of twilight.

Except for tonight. Tonight, the damn moon was way too bright. It clearly illuminated both Viktor and the body. Escape was going to be difficult. What a pain.

"Um, hey, Mister Viktor?" a voice stammered in his head, courtesy of telepathy. "Y-you've been in there for a while. Is everything okay?"

Viktor grumbled to himself. "Pike, I told you to use this connection for emergencies. Unless there's an excess of blood or alarm bells, everything's fine."

"It's just... I'm still waiting, Mister Viktor, r-right where you told me to, and I'm getting worried--"

"It's been four minutes. I'm fine."

"But, Mister, we aren't even supposed to be here. We weren't hired. Wh-what if--"

"Pikey, I asked you to be my eyes and ears, not my mouth. And enough with the 'Mister' business. I don't like it."

"Sorry, Mi- Sorry."

Viktor sighed and adjusted his dark leather gloves. Pike was still just a kid, but they could use a bit of stern advice if they were going to run with the Assassin's Guild. But Viktor would worry about that later. First, the body.

Lord Francis Casanova von Beckett Winstanley of the noble house of Chalgomery, age 54, died in his sleep at approximately 11 o'clock yesterday evening. An avid politician, he had dedicated his life to criminal justice and civil reform, making it his mission to eradicate the gangs and roguish activity that plagued this fair city. Lord Francis Winstanley was also a generous philanthropist whose donations supported several orphanages and children's clubs. In his spare time, he dabbled in various pursuits and pastimes, including polo, badminton, and betting on horses. He will be missed dearly by all who knew him.

At least, that's what the papers would say tomorrow. Viktor gagged at the thought.

Lord Winstanley, who had far too many names for one person, was a repulsive piece of shit. He was a lowlife who leeches off the weak and vulnerable to build his position of power. His true “pastime” was human trafficking, kidnapping poor young girls from the streets who had no one to report their disappearances and forcing them into prostitution, collecting them like flies in a spider’s golden web. There had been investigations, of course, but they seemed to conveniently disappear at about the same time as the gold in Lord Winstanley’s accounts. Anyone who did express their dislike of the man could be found floating facedown in the harbor not long after. No one dared oppose Lord Francis Winstanley.

No one, except the tall, thin phantom who, at precisely 10:37 pm, when one of the hired security guards suddenly fell ill during her rounds (“Must’ve been some bad fish I ate.”), glided over the southwest barrier and up the third column from the right to the fourth-story window with the deep purple curtains within drawn, where the phantom picked the window lock, careful not to scratch the metal exterior, and stepped nimbly onto the thick carpet that muffled his steps almost entirely before proceeding to the bed, where the unconscious form of Lord Winstanley lay unaware that his life had only mere seconds remaining.

In the stillness of the room, in the silence save the gently ominous ticking of the large clock in the corner, Viktor had loomed over the bed, understanding completely the weight of this deed, taking upon himself the burdens of all who had suffered by this grotesque beast’s hands. He had summoned a glowing dagger of pulsing purple energy, one of Viktor’s psychic blades that would leave no mark on the body. He had studied it pensively before staring back at the figure in the bed. Judge, jury, executioner. No, Viktor was none of these. The law served none, save those who could afford it. Viktor was simply a necessary evil in a world of deceit and corruption.

Viktor did not take pleasure in killing, but staring down at the lifeless, helpless body of Lord Francis Casanova von Beckett Winstanley had brought Viktor no amount of sympathy or remorse. *Sic semper tyrannis*, asshole.

Tomorrow morning, at precisely 9 am, a maid would enter this room and discover the body, no visible signs of assault or cause of death, no evidence of forced entry, no clues that anyone else had been here this evening. His death would be chalked up to his ailing health. This room would not become a crime scene; Viktor refused it. For all the victims Lord Winstanley had created, this monster would not become one himself in the story of a murder or a tragic accident.

But here came the tricky part. Viktor had prepared plenty for this, but it remained the one part of the plan that could ruin everything and expose the crime. But it has to be done, Viktor reminded himself as he pulled back the sleeves of his long, dark coat and removed from a small pouch at his waist a syringe and three glass vials. Slowly, he peeled back the bed coverings and pulled back Lord Winstanley’s pants. It took only moments to locate the femoral artery after years of experience, and then Viktor, lowering himself next to the body, carefully plunged the syringe into the skin and pulled. Dark red liquid pooled slowly within, creeping past each line to the top until Viktor expelled the contents into one of the vials. Just enough blood, not so much that the body noticeably changed color with blood loss.

Viktor grimaced. Sustenance. Such was his fate as the son of a vampire.

“Mister!”

He had just finished filling the last of the vials when Pike's sudden mental cry caused Viktor to jolt, barely missing the body with the syringe and managing not to drop anything, but lightly elbowing the vase on the nightstand beside him. Not enough to fall over, but enough to tip it and cause it to wobble in place.

"S-sorry. Just a bird."

Viktor grit his teeth, the sound of ceramic on wood seemingly magnified in the silence. Quickly, he stashed the vials in his pocket so he could grab the vase with a free hand, listening intently for several moments for any activity signaling that someone had heard. Hearing nothing, he sighed in relief and replaced the syringe and vials in his pouch, then-

The creaking of the door sent Viktor quickly to his feet. A young maid cautiously crept into the room then froze, staring at Viktor then the body then back at Viktor, her eyes widening and her mouth hanging open as realization dawned on her. Viktor pressed a finger to his lips, eyes locked on hers, as they stood completely still.

She must have gotten up for water or something. Sheiße, this is bad. Don't shout. I don't want to have to-. And then Viktor noticed. The maid's loose nightclothes failed to hide her neck and wrists, and in the moonlight Viktor could clearly see the bruises, ugly stains on her golden brown skin where too many filthy hands had touched her. The maid must have noticed Viktor studying her, because she quickly adjusted her sleeves and collar. She carried herself fearfully, fear that Viktor had mistakenly assumed was directed at him but he now realized was just fear, fear of any, fear of all. She was an angel who had been tossed to the devils. It was only natural not to trust at all.

"He died in his sleep," said Viktor in the softest of whispers.

The maid seemed surprised and still frightened, but Viktor locked eyes with her, trying to convey all the sorrow and genuine emotion he felt for this victim. "He died. In his sleep," he repeated gently.

The young woman stared down at the body and back at Viktor, and her eyes began to well up with tears as she understood and gave a small nod. "He died in his sleep," she mouthed back.

Slowly reaching towards his waist and removing another pouch, Viktor walked carefully forward. The woman took a small step away out of instinct but did not flee. Viktor extended the small bulging pouch forward, which the woman cautiously accepted in both hands. The soft sound of gold coins clinking within was a sound she quickly recognized, eyes wide and mouth open in shock. Viktor normally saved the gold for last-minute supplies and bribes as necessary, but...

"Take it. When it's safe, run. Start again. Take as many others as you can."

The woman nodded rapidly, then suddenly wrapped her arms around Viktor's neck and buried her face in his chest in a tight hug. He stood there dumbly in shock but eventually returned the embrace, awkwardly rubbing her shoulder in as soothing a gesture as he could manage. He could make out the woman's muffled repetition of "Thank you" into his shirt as her shoulders shook with quiet sobs.

After a moment, Viktor gently pushed her away. "Now go. Be safe, and don't be sorry." The woman nodded again and, gold in hand, hurried out the door and shut it slowly behind her. Viktor stared at the door for a long time. "Don't be sorry." It was a motto of sorts in the

Guild, a wish of good luck. It meant to most not to get caught and be sorry for their crimes, but Viktor thought of it differently. To Viktor, it meant not to be sorry for what you do, to choose a course of action that leaves you without regret, something that you can justify to yourself as the right choice as you see it even if no one else may agree.

Viktor was sorry for many things. That woman was not one of them.

“Mi- Sorry, Viktor?” Pike asked timidly, shaking Viktor out of his reverie.

“Almost there.” Viktor returned his attention to the room, sliding the body’s pants back, placing the vase carefully back over its dust circle, rearranging the bed coverings, brushing his boot imprints from the carpet, and returning to the window. He glanced back over the room, making sure nothing was out of place. Nothing had happened in the bedroom of Lord Francis Casanova von Beckett Winstanley. He died in his sleep.

With that, Viktor shut and locked the window again then, after checking that the coast was clear of guards, crept quickly and silently down the wall and over the fence to where the squat halfling form of Pike awaited him in the bushes.

“Wh-what happened? What took you so long?” asked Pike as they took off running from the manor.

“Shut up and don’t worry about it,” Viktor snapped back as they hurried towards the city. “Just remember, not a word to Gunner.”

“R-right.” The thought of their boss seemed to shut Pike up quickly.

As they ran, Viktor gazed up. The full moon remained high in the sky, casting the same gentle blue glow over them. He couldn’t help but remember her, the one who had told him the stories of the moon, the queen of the night, the champion of the stars, the lady of twilight. The one who was content to simply stare, to soak up the sight with both eyes and soul, captivated in silence.

Lily... Have I kept my promise?

They ran faster into the night.



WELCOMING THE MOON
HABIB REHMAN

UNEASY LIKE THE MOON

FATIMA NAVEED

My morning bed shows how rested I was—
made and in place:
slept by a corpse
solid tired, drowned right away
by the pulsing ripples of a galaxy.
Sideways duvet, vertical pillow:
kept awake by lying lullabies
that told the story of a
life well-lived,
but not by me.

Nothing breaks quite like the heart
that dreams of what it cannot be:
One, jagged half made of mare
(ripped from reaching so far
that the yearning dragged it from between ribs).
One, jagged half a remnant of the average, basalt
terrain of a supposed current, so much lower than the
mountains that reign above.

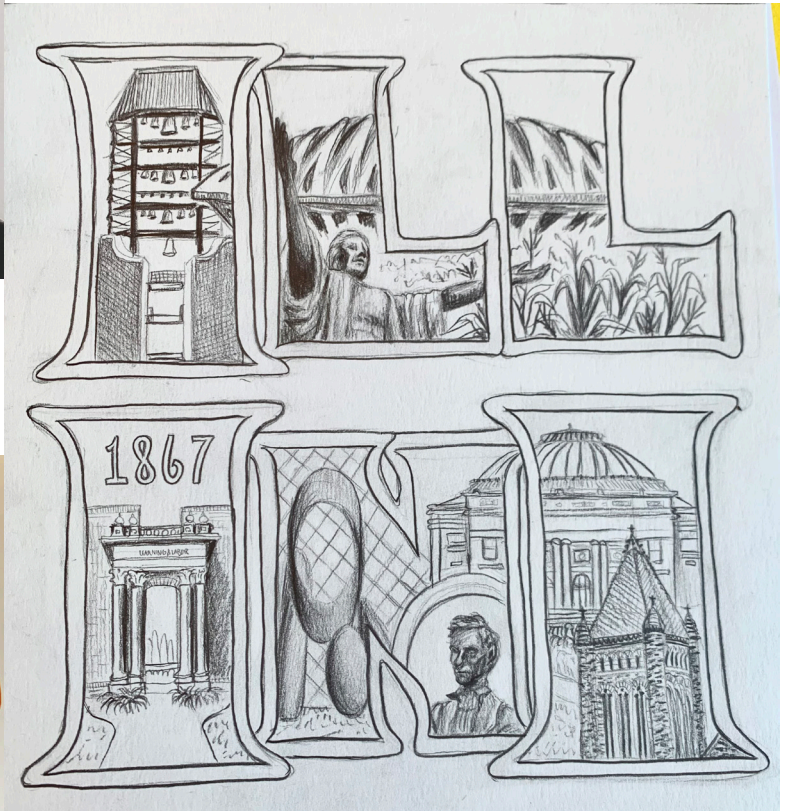
I am more than defined by
disordered cloth and illusions,
conjuring histories and legacies
from ideas of confusion.
Unconscious yet gathering
thoughts of unreality;
rest easy tonight,
sleeping on a deep breath of clarity.

You are more than the designs
imagined by your mind—
there are craters of depth, and
glaciers shifting into place and
icebergs secure in position from
unyielding afflictions.

You are aware and awake
and changing tides you can choose
to break
or to live like a timid flame that stares
into the darkness and ignites.
Tomorrow, you have
stories to write
because you are bound
for more,
souls to mend, and
people to confound,
but not now,
so
rest easy tonight.

HALLMARKS OF THE ILLINI
CHARLOTTE HOLAS





The mural, located at Conrad's in Champaign, features the South Quad Bell Tower, Alma Mater, State Farm Center, Morrow Plots, Hallene Gateway, Alice Campbell Alumni Center Fountain, Grainger Engineering Library Statue, Lincoln bust in Lincoln Hall, Foellinger Auditorium, Main Quad, Altgeld Hall, and the year the University of Illinois was established all within the iconic call and response of UIUC.

BASHFUL SQUIRREL

KURTIS LEE



STRANGE HAPPENINGS

LEONI REILLY

The lights shone bright on a windy fall evening as Jerold drove his bus around the U of I campus. Winding around the continuous loops, he sometimes lost himself in the monotony of the circuitous motion.

Strange incidents became normal on MTD buses; Jerold drove around college students after all.

But on today of all days, everything seemed to be ordinary and that was just fine for him. He let the tension fade out of his shoulders and neck as he turned onto Gregory Drive.

The trees swayed in the wind and the grass danced with a passion like no other on the south quad.

Out of nowhere, Jerold became blinded as a flashing light exploded in front of him. Screech! He stepped on the brakes with the swiftness of a flying eagle diving toward its prey. Students screeched in the back of the bus.

“Is everyone alright back there?” he asked. A series of mumbled voices replied.

“I’m gonna have to stop the bus,” he said. “I need to check out whatever that was. It should only take a moment.”

Jerold stepped out of the bus and peeked slowly around the corner. The light was slowly fading, but he could still faintly see it across the street. Approaching the light, Jerold looked around. There was nothing else surrounding it. But could he reach it? The light moved up and down and around a series of bushes, eventually staying put in a small experimental corn field.

“Not the Morrow Plots, idiot!” Jerold exclaimed. What was he supposed to do now? Disobey the greatest rule on the U of I campus? Or venture further into the unknown and discover the tiny light occupying his thoughts? Jerold chose the latter. Who wouldn’t want an excuse to visit the forbidden corn field! Hopping the fence in stride, he located the light source and just as he was reaching for it... poof! The light went out. The only thing left in its place: an I-Clicker.

“An I-Clicker on the Morrow Plots? How odd,” Jerold said. This was indeed an odd occurrence. The only way an I-Clicker could get here was if a student brought it in or threw it over the fence. Why would someone do that though?

“C’mon man! We have places we need to be,” yelled a student from the bus.

“Coming!” Jerold said. As he walked back to the bus, Jerold could not help but wonder about the mysterious light and the I-Clicker that remained.

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 9, 2022
JOE DUBRAVEC

I.

Darling, there are so many things left to say
(though i would not call you darling)
but the world falls apart so slowly
and there is much left to go
and everything must go.

II.

I can imagine myself in a lot of places in life
But all this imagining gets me nowhere.
A room where long bodies move
To music I can't hear
But I'm still listening very closely.



FALLING LEAVES
ANIRUDH KUMAR

GRANDMA'S HOUSE

ROSIE MARTINEZ



TEDDY R. AT THE UNION STARBUCKS

ELIZABETH SCHERSCHEL

Occasionally, the Illini Union Starbucks sees some familiar faces: there's Dan, who stops in a couple times a week before his shifts at Chipotle, and TA Allie, who needs caffeine to function and happens to walk past the Union Starbucks daily. Occasionally, the Illini Union Starbucks sees some less-familiar faces. On a Wednesday morning, while fueling up for a day of Illini spirit-fueled studying, Sadie walked into the Illini Union Starbucks to find a man on horseback proudly waiting in line ahead of her. He seemed unbothered by the fact he had a horse where horses were clearly not welcome – though considering the number of people in pajama pants, how weird was a horse really? – while he stared transfixed at the cell phones of the teenage boys ahead of him. With how much attention he was giving the TikToks on their screens, it wouldn't surprise Sadie if he'd never seen a cellphone before – well, that and the fact he wore a uniform she was pretty sure her cousin had worn for Spanish-American War reenactments.

When the barista called for the next coffee-addict – I mean, customer – Teddy urged his horse confidently forward. To the barista's credit, she didn't even blink at the animal's presence; she worked the morning shift – she'd seen weirder.

“What can I get you?”

“Greetings, young lady. May I please order a coffee?” She stared blankly at him. “You just want a plain coffee?” His eyebrows popped, intrigued. “There are other options?”

“This is Starbucks.”

“Whatever you suggest.” She raised an eyebrow as if she didn't believe him, but she wasn't gonna give him too much of a chance to back out. “Get the man a unicorn frappe,” she told her coworkers. One of them cackled. The barista turned back to Teddy, whose eyes had grown to fill the round frames of his glasses comically. “In a tea cozy.”

“I have no idea what any of that means.” He didn't give any indication of alarm or discomfort, though he definitely should have been freaked out – Sadie knew well unicorn frappes were not for the faint of heart.

“That'll be \$5.66.”

Teddy paid, casually handing money down from his position on horseback as if he'd done so before, and guided his companion over to the seating area. When he finally received his drink, crocheted tea cozy and all, he and Gilbert (his horse) gave it their firm stamp of approval.

AFTER SELLING THE SIBYLLINE BOOKS

ELIZABETH SCHERSCHEL

Callida femina, postea regem digressa est, aerem absumpsit et celocem paravit.
Mulier sine statuta destinatione ad pelagus solvit cum amante feleque solis sodalibus.
Cotidie, deis gratulata est quoniam clara astra caeruleaque maria apricitatemque
habuerunt. Fele gremio incubante caldum gustavit et libros lectitavit. In aprico mare
natavit et cum mors eam postularet, placide contenta in altum pontum defecit.

The cunning woman, after she left the king, used his money and bought a boat. She set sail for the open sea without a determined destination, with her lover and their cat, her only companions. Each day, she gave thanks to the gods because she had clear skies and the blue waters and the sunshine. She drank her tea with her cat on her lap, and she was in the habit of reading books. She swam in the sun-warmed sea and, when death finally came for her, she sank peacefully down into the deep sea, content.

POLUS' LIFE WITHOUT HIS SON

ELIZABETH SCHERSCHEL

Omnis actus fine, Polus suum filium, cui Polus saepe collocutus est, memoravit. Occasu solis, Polus et filius ad litus ut defluentes colores spectarent cucurrerant. Filius pisces ex undis sussultantes miratus est; Polus filium dum vir infantem commutavit miratus est. Nunc Polus solus imaginem filii manens in litore stat. Utinam ne solus sit. Polus mare suum pedem summergere permittens infert et memorat.

At the end of every performance, Polus remembered his son, to whom Polus often talked. At sunset, Polus and his son had gone to the seaside so that they could watch the fading colors. His son admired the fish as they jumped over the waves; Polus marveled at his son while a man replaced the boy. Now, Polus stands on that same beach alone, waiting for the ghost of his son. If only he were not alone. Polus steps forward, letting the water overcome his feet, and he remembers.

**46%* of the Great Pacific
Garbage Patch is made of
discarded fishing nets.**

***Approximately the weight
of 3,908,158 average cars**

SUBMERGED
CHANTELLE DIENER

A WATCHFUL SENTINEL
HABIB REHMAN



CELEBRITY IN CHAMPAIGN

MARGOT PIERCE

“Order for... Cumperpatch? Cucumberatch?...”

“That’s Cumberbatch, thank you very much,” a deep voice intoned. The voice in question belonged to a tall man in a crisp black suit, looking much out of place in the McDonald’s otherwise brimming with overserved college students looking for something greasy after an eventful Saturday night. Benedict grabbed his order (quarter-pounder with cheese and a large fry) from the counter and began to attempt to weave his way through the throngs of students crowded around tables and shouting questions towards the counter about whether the ice cream machine was actually broken. He didn’t get very far, though, as he was soon stopped by a shriek from one of the tables. A young man jumped up from his seat and stood in front of Benedict, a look of disbelief on his face.

“Oh my god, it is you. Benedict Cumberbatch is IN OUR MCDONALD’S!” he screamed. The other students at his table jumped up too, clamoring to get a closer look with calls of,

“You’re my favorite Marvel character!” and “Sherlock is literally the best!”

“Thank you all, really, I truly appreciate it, but I really must be going.” Benedict looked around, giving wary smiles to the students.

“Wait, no, hang on!” the student who had jumped up first protested. “Have you seen campus yet?”

“Well, um,” Benedict faltered. “I was simply here for a speaking engagement over at the, uh, State Farm Center, yes, that’s it.”

“Then you haven’t seen anything! Come on, you have to let us show you around.”

“It’s 3 in the morning.”

“When’s your flight back to London?”

“Well, it’s at noon, but—”

“It’s settled then. Come on y’all, let’s show Mr. Cumberbatch what U of I is all about!”

By 5 a.m. Connor (as Benedict learned the boy's name was) and his friends had taken a bewildered Benedict on a full blown tour of Champaign-Urbana. They explained each of the buildings on all four quads, took many selfies with the Alma Mater, and managed to find their way into the Altgeld Bell Tower (in the middle of the night). The last spot on the campus tour was the apartment where Connor and his friends lived. They showed Benedict around the tiny kitchen and abysmal living room, then collapsed onto the couch. Benedict, his suit looking significantly less crisp, stood in front of the students.

“Well, gentlemen, this has really been lovely, but I ought to be on my way, as it is quite late, and I haven't slept a wink—”

“Wait, but Mr. Cumberbatch—”

“Please, at this point, you can call me Benedict.”

“I have a gift for you!” Connor leapt up from the couch and dashed towards his bedroom. “It's my most prized possession—I won it with my dad a few years ago.” He returned to the living room and held it out to Benedict.

“Oh, Connor, really I couldn't—”

“No, seriously, take it. I insist. You're my favorite actor! Don't argue with me, you have to get going, don't you?” Connor and his friends ushered Benedict out the door, calling their goodbyes and thanking him for his time. The door slammed shut, leaving Benedict on the sidewalk.

“What the hell am I supposed to do with a taxidermied deer head?”



REACHING
ISABEL ZHOU

PARTY OF TWO

ANISHI PATEL

Cast Of Characters

Ava: 22. Female. Asexual.

Bea: 22. Female. Lesbian.

Scene

A crowded and claustrophobic college party. Loud music can be heard from another room. People are drinking and smoking pot.

Time

2022.

ACT I

SCENE 1

SETTING: A college party. The room is full of drunk people, and many are smoking pot. Music can be heard from another room.

AT RISE: Bea and Ava stand together nursing drinks. Bea is slightly tipsy, but neither are very drunk yet.

BEA: There has to be someone!

AVA: Leave it alone Bea, I'm not gonna hook up with some stranger at a frat party.

BEA: Okay, fine. I'll go.

(She scans the crowd. A girl who looks very similar to Ava walks in with a cup.)
Ooh look at that hottie! With the badass boots.

AVA: (Laughing.) Oh my god I think I have the same boots! And the same bralette!

BEA: What? No way! I've never seen you wear a bralette, you've been holding out on me!

AVA: Yeah, yeah.

BEA: Oh my god. Is that Naomi?

AVA: What? Where?

BEA: Look.

(She leans into Ava's space and grabs her hand to point in towards a corner of the room.)
In the corner there.

AVA: Holy shit! Is she-

BEA: Making out with Kristen? Fuck yeah she is! You go girl!

(She calls across the noisy room.)

AVA: Fucking finally!

(They turn to each other laughing. Bea notices how close they are and backs away a little. Ava doesn't notice.)

BEA: Seriously. They've been pining for like, 2 years now.

(Beat.)

Anyway, I took my turn. Now you. Who do you think is the hottest girl here?

AVA: Bea, really, I don't want to pick someone.

BEA: Alright, I get it. You just don't want to admit it's me. Don't worry, I'll keep your secret.

(She winks. Ava playfully shoves her.)

AVA: Your humility is astounding. I'm not picking you.

BEA: I'm hurt! What babe has cause you're pretty eyes to stray from me? I shall hunt them down and challenge them to a duel!

(She plays it up, trying to make Ava laugh.)

AVA: Oh my god, no one, Bea.

BEA: Come on, I'm not saying you have to fuck them, I'm just asking you to look. There must me hundreds of people here, one of them has to be your type. So pick!

AVA: I don't find any of these high-off-their-asses people hot.

BEA: Then pretend they aren't high. How about- That one! There! She's hot.

(She points to someone with the same hair color as herself.)

AVA: I guess. She's...pretty.

BEA: But is she hot?

AVA: What does it mean to be hot, really?

BEA: Well-

AVA: If you say "Bea" I swear to God I'll leave.

BEA: Fine, fine! Anyway, it's a simple question, is she attractive or not? It's not that hard. We're living in fourth-wave feminism girl! I promise I won't judge you for getting a little sexual.

(She winks.)

AVA: Really, Bea, isn't that a little shallow? I can't just look at a person and be attracted to them. I need to know them.

BEA: Maybe it is shallow, but everyone does it anyway. You don't have to love someone to know they're hot. I've seen at least 3 different girls eyeing your ass today. It's a compliment!

AVA: Ew what? That's not a compliment, that's invasive.

BEA: It's not- whatever. Just pick a person anyway. People go to parties to be looked at, it's fine.

AVA: I'm not gonna answer. Just leave it alone.

BEA: Okay jeez.

AVA: (Sliding down the wall to sit on the floor.) Sorry.

(Beat. Bea slides down next to her.)

BEA: I was just curious. You're my best friend, I'd like to know what kind of person you might like. You know, who will I see slipping out of your room one morning and stealing you away from me the next? (She tries to joke.)

AVA: (Leaning into Bea, forgiving.) As if. Like anyone could pull me away from you.

BEA: Good. 'Cause you're stuck with me too.

(They turn to look at each other, holding eye contact. Ava takes Bea's hand.)

AVA: Good.

(Beat. Bea suddenly pulls away, flustered.)

BEA: Anyway. Um. (A new song starts up. In the other room.) Oh! I love this song, you know I love this song! We have to dance.

AVA: I don't know, I don't really want to go back into the crowd.

BEA: Then we can dance right here. Just us, feeling good, having fun. Come on!

(Bea stands and reaches out to Ava. Ava gives in, allowing herself to be pulled up off the floor. The two laugh and dance stupidly, badly singing along with the music.)
(Eventually Bea stumbles and Ava catches her.)

AVA: (Laughing.) Be careful! You're such a mess, Bea. I fucking love you.

(Bea hesitates, maintaining eye contact, then leans in to kiss Ava. Ava seems confused, and once she realizes Bea's intent, recoils.)

BEA: What's wrong?

AVA: Um. You tried to kiss me.

BEA: Yes. I thought-We were-!

AVA: I don't want to be kissed.

BEA: I don't understand. We were having like- a moment, right? I know I didn't image that.

AVA: Not a kissing moment!

BEA: (Defensive.) God, you're such a fucking tease! Mixed-signals much?

AVA: (Sarcastic.) I am so sorry I told my best friend that I love her.

BEA: Don't even. You know exactly what you sounded like.

AVA: I didn't sound like-

BEA: We've been flirting all night! You've been flirting with me.

(She reaches to grab Ava's arm.)

AVA: Don't touch me!

(Beat. They are both hurt and confused. Ava starts to leave.)

BEA: Oh, sure. Run away because a hot girl tried to kiss you. You fake fucking lesbian.

(Ava stops. She turns back to face Bea.)

AVA: Excuse me?

BEA: What? You don't like being called out on your bullshit? You call yourself a lesbian, but you can't take a little action? You're a fucking fake.

AVA: Oh that's rich. Just because I'm not fucking around with a new girl every week like you doesn't mean I'm not a lesbian.

BEA: You're just jealous that I actually have fun.

AVA: Is that what you were doing when you tried to kiss me? "Having fun?"

BEA: That's what people do in college, Ava. They have sex and they party, and they make-out with their friends for fun.

AVA: Nobody actually does that.

BEA: Yes. They do. You're just fucking sheltered.

AVA: (Less certain.) People don't actually walk around craving sex all the time.

BEA: Yes. They do. I do. Everyone does.

AVA: Well- I don't!

BEA: You're not fucking pure because you don't kiss people.

AVA: Don't put words in my mouth. That's not what this is about.

BEA: Then what is this about? Am I that disgusting to you?

AVA: God, Bea, not everything is about you okay? (Reaching for calm.) I am not disgusted by you. I do not think I'm better than you. I just don't want to kiss. Okay? Not just you, anyone. I don't want to kiss anyone.

BEA: What are you saying?

AVA: (Laughing, but not happily.) I don't know, Bea. I just- Ugh. I'm not disgusted with you. You're the moon in my fucking sky. I always want to be around you. But kissing just feels... wrong somehow. Like snakes slithering under my skin or something. But I really like you.

BEA: Oh. I really like you too.
(They smile tentative, watery smiles at each other.)
Can I hug you? Nothing else, just a hug.

AVA: (Nodding.) Please.

(They hug for a moment. When they pull apart, both are wiping away tears.)

AVA: I'm not naive, you know. I just don't feel like what you described. I've never actively wanted sex. Or even really thought about it.

BEA: Really?

AVA: I kinda just thought people exaggerated about sex to be like, cool or something.

BEA: Oh. I always thought you were just... I don't know, a prude? I'm sorry I said what I did. I shouldn't have reacted so badly, I just felt like you were judging me.

AVA: For what?

BEA: For having sex. For being "promiscuous". Being slutty.

AVA: Bea, no. I'd never judge you for that. I'm so sorry I made you feel like that!

BEA: (Hesitantly.) You really never want sex?

AVA: It's not that I don't want it, exactly. But I don't like, crave it. I don't know, I just don't think about it that often.

BEA
Huh. So... you're not attracted to me?

AVA: No. Not really.

(Bea shrinks in on herself.)

But I do like you. You know, like like you.

(Bea laughs a bit.)

BEA: Oh really? You like like me?

AVA: Yeah.

BEA: How? How can you like me like that when you aren't even attracted to me?

AVA: It's not that weird. Romantic attraction can exist without sexual attraction. I mean, you said it yourself, you don't have to love someone to think they're hot. You don't have to think someone is hot to love them. Or- you know- like them. (She giggles nervously.) It's called asexuality. It's a real thing.

BEA: Why didn't you ever tell me?

AVA: I really like you, Bea. And I couldn't stand the thought that you might think I'm weird. Or broken. And I've only just started learning about myself and it's scary, realizing how different you are from everyone around you. I still feel like I'm constantly three steps behind everyone else, trying to unlock this secret everyone else is apparently in on.

BEA: God, Ava. I believe you, I don't think you're broken. I'm... confused. And I want to learn more. With you, hopefully. I like like you too. This- your asexuality- doesn't change that.

AVA: So. What does this mean then?

BEA: That's for us to decide. For now, why don't we get out of here? We can have a chill movie night, figure this all out tomorrow.

AVA: (Reaching for Bea's hand.) Tomorrow.

THE END

IKEBANA
TARA LEININGER





BASKING IN WARMTH
HABIB REHMAN

AIR POLLUTION



92% of the world's
population breathes
substandard air

CONTAMINATED
CHANTELLE DIENER

PROPULSION COLUMN #5752 - VOLSCE

DANIEL CUDZICH

The perimeter of the Teralith will forever remain a jarring sight, decorated by gently misaligned horizons of metal plating that have no meaningful orientation against the boundary of weightless space. The curvature of the vessel's exterior is distinctly absent when standing on it, making the exterior less of a hull and more of a sprawling, seemingly limitless terrain. Etched with valleys that house fleets and speckled occasionally with the skeleton spires of antennae towering above the hull, what would otherwise be an expansive metallic desert in an interstellar void provides whispers of a well-lit interior as window halls cut collinearly across the tops of large, smoothly paneled blocks that stand among a gridded complex of symbols, surfacing, and piping.

In rare instances though, larger appliances rise from the exterior as the paneling slopes, and in tandem with the collinear window halls, these devices provide a foreboding, singular directionality to the engineered surface of the Teralith. While directionality in architecture is common, it is rare to find such an ominous example as one might find here, for it indicates that this textured metallic desert, as well the entire interior it conceals, is supposed to move in the alluded direction, despite no discernible bow, stern, or engine block from the current view. And so as angled horizons slope away in the interminable metalscape, chambers emerge from it that stretch nearly parallel to the hull for thousands of kilometers, towering progressively taller along their lengths and eventually terminating in a gaping exhaust angled slightly above the horizon in its respective direction. Encapsulated by guiding pistons and pipes with diameters comparable to cities, the extensive reinforcement in these exterior installations suggest a device with unrivaled power.

The purpose of that encased device is megalithic: Propulsion Column Number 5752, common name "Volsce," is designed to deliver precisely 54.711 zettanewtons of gimbaled thrust via the nuclear fusion of bulk hydrogen, harnessing the proton-proton chain with incidental occurrence of the CNO cycle acting as a nuclear afterburner.

Such a description is apt but incomplete, succinct yet missing the presence that the device imposes upon its witnesses. "Propulsion column" strips this machine of the context that the name "engine" or "motor" would provide, an agent of motive power from fire; the uniquely nuclear nature of this fire, coupled with its scale, seemingly encouraged the kind sir to christen this device not with the context of a classical rocket engine, but something else. In stripping that context, especially that of a fire that is chemically violent but containable by solid material, the kind sir introduced an abstraction with the novel title, one that contradictorily evokes passive architecture.

The biohazard symbol is an abstraction, too; on its own, it is entirely meaningless, and this cleverly stitched pattern of hollowed circles imparts a pleasing rotational symmetry that could be mistaken as art. Prior to its standardization, it was simply geometry. But attach to that geometry the threat of impending death, as accompanied by an excruciating infection that may very well be untreatable, and witnessing it becomes one of the gravest, sternest

warnings possible.

Propulsion columns were their own meaningless concept too, a linguistic hole in the litany of terms describing all the fantastical devices available for generating forward motion in the vacuum of space, but the kind sir has stepped in to provide a meaning to this pair of words. Generalized to all propulsion columns in the Teralith, this pair symbolizes a nuclear fire that does not merely mimic the reactions of a star's core, but compacts them, accelerates them, and amplifies them into a maelstrom that cannot be contained by any known material. Through magnets both brutal yet finely measured, feedstocks of hydrogen are bled into a space that could engulf a moon, the entirety of which is contorted by an electromagnetism that first strips the nuclei, then collides them, and then continues to do so increasingly violently while simultaneously accelerating the entire feedstock along an axis before superheated ejection into the abyss.

The abstraction of a propulsion column, the title of which could be ostensibly applied to any coaxial arrangement of thrusters, instead comes to represent an engineered, indivisible ferocity that rivals a stellar nova. Fusion engines had existed long before the construction of "Volsce," but none had the power to singlehandedly disrupt a planet's orbit. Now, if I so wished, I could accelerate the entirety of Ceres at half a G with "Volsce" alone, and hundreds of thousands of these columns are integrated into the Teralith, each of which are designed to similarly obscene specifications in providing enough thrust to accelerate the light-month-long vessel.

Nuclear violence begets more nuclear violence as the magnetically forced collisions of atomic nuclei release gamma rays that, in stark contrast to traditional fusion engines, become reabsorbed within a hundred radial kilometers of seething, fusing protons. The reaction accelerates as the feedstock tears through the immense containment region, barely kept at steady state via the influx of megatons of hydrogen, the conflux of magnets operating at hundreds of teslas, and the outflux of exponentially accelerated helium-4 that, upon CNO cycle afterburning, produces a relativistic plume that outshines a star and could push several if properly applied.

I have brushed my fingers along the tungsten-tinted linings of tokamaks before first light and operated the collider furnaces that blessed us with the discovery of posturanic, stable metals. As one of the first to forge the unholy materials that enabled the Teralith's construction, I now hover above the hull at the stubbed, electromagnetic nozzle of "Volsce," and I utter its name with solemn unease. Gazing down the cylindrical column, its directionality is oriented towards me. Every pipe, seen as wiry threads from this distance, is intended to direct hydrogen fuel in one direction only: out. Every panel, seen as constellations of dull platelets above locally irregular yet rotationally symmetric equipment, is intended to shield the machinery providing the impulse for moving the Teralith, a vessel that only the kind sir could design, fueled by energies that only he could fathom. "Volsce" is by no means the largest device or space that the kind sir has constructed, but it imposes so much more than the cavernous atmospheres most of his spaces command.

Currently, the column is pristine, free of char, awaiting first light. First light marks the moment when the threat of discharge will be realized, when the Teralith will finally be wrenched from its original construction location and ride on fusing pillars of hydrogen

burned far more efficiently and intensely than any star could achieve. A light-month-long vessel, the behemoth that the kind sir insisted be built to serve as the metropolis to beat all metropolises, will be accelerated by “Volsce” and several hundred thousand others like it to a presently undisclosed destination. To accelerate the colossal hull alone is a monstrous task of its own, and these machines will haul the entire interior too containing the fuel, the inhabitants, and lord knows what other black magic the kind sir built inside.

This is, quite frankly, preposterous. It is a fantastically grand thing, firing thousands of columns in succession, and I doubt it will come to fruition.

First light will not come for “Volsce,” nor will it for any of the other propulsion columns, no matter how well the engineering was executed. Devoid of life as it stands now, harnessing technologies nostalgic in origin yet magnified beyond astronomical scale, it exudes liminal power, an offer to be the violent, brilliant envoy from point A to point B, but its home is an aberration, and its purpose is absurd. The concerted, linear movement of these immense masses, both in the expended fuel and the vessel, is such a convoluted harnessing of physical laws that it veers on breaking them. To the unacquainted, the column indeed breaks physical understanding; technical descriptions duly provided by its overseers include names and numbers that glide over the layman’s mind, leaving an impression of impenetrable majesty constituting something godlike. “Zetta-” and “Tera-” are disservices not to “Volsce,” but to the poor men in its vicinity who stand from a window hall and ask what the column achieves. They ask, and they are told that it will fire, that it will deliver a discharge to move trillions of intelligences, and I assert that it will never do so.

Its panels anticipate unholy temperatures under magnetic fluxes where diamagnetic effects threaten to implode the entire containment chamber, its piping primed to deliver megatons in seconds, and those are the only actions these objects will enjoy: anticipate and remain primed. I have no doubt that the columns can function, and they always will hold that capacity to function, for the kind sir’s engineering is impeccable. But the decision to fire will never be made. The kind sir will continue to madly design and optimize, deluding himself into more fantastical projects. The Daedalus, Prometheus, and Hephaestus projects, the last practical Endeavors, have long passed their prime with the completion of the Teralith; with those gone, with so much of the interior remaining to be populated, I know that he has forgotten about firing the columns as he dives into increasingly unjustifiable constructions. Using the deep interior of the Teralith to expand his famed colliders, refine the relativistic furnaces, and devise progressively absurd machines, he will soon forget the outer space that the Teralith was supposed to navigate, favoring instead the convolution of inner space and the delightful concepts it brings. And each of those concepts will be given names that obfuscate, as is customary for the kind sir, with each specific term adding to a labyrinth of properties and mechanisms belonging to machines larger, more powerful, and more elusive in purpose than the last.

Fusion engines and torch drives already imbue in their titles the power they wield and the purposes they so brutally, assuredly achieve. Propulsion columns were the first of many machines to take an innocuous term and imbue into it a terrifying, transitory power, and the same transformation awaits for acronyms like “QME,” words like “skating,” and phrases like “retopologizing the local geometry.” The names will inevitably be disservices, veils to concepts

that never should have tread this reality and by proxy will never be fully understood by someone less unhinged than the kind sir. I only suppose it is the engineer's instinct to provide accurate, if lackluster, technical descriptions rather than the affectionate, poetic titles that enhance symbolic relations to objects.

The names may be disappointing if not outright meaningless, but the signified objects are testaments to the kind sir's uniquely productive madness. Blessed be the man who christens the machines, for he wields their impressions unto the unfamiliar, the unacquainted, and the astounded. The unprecedented scales of the Teralith do need defining and naming after all, for it was built for us.

And blessed be the man who understands magnetohydrodynamics, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven, or in this case, a propulsive force that would rend a star to shreds.



PAINTED ORANGE
HABIB REHMAN



DOOR COUNTY
ISABEL ZHOU

AMOR DE MADRE
ROSIE MARTINEZ





PLAN YOUR TRIP TO MARS BEFORE 2122

DEPARTURE
CHANTELLE DIENER

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Skyrocketing to New Heights