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ONCE UPON A TIME - OUTSIDE OF TIME

Sandy Wei

The wind blew through the widely opened french windows and made a quiet rattle; He was waiting on the results, his platinum ring anxiously knocked on the delicate crystal glassware, making a symphony as it sang with the chandelier. The amber liquor in his cup was agitated and presented a slight ripple. The man(7) steadied his hands: becoming Damocles(15), the moment he has waited for all his life.

The wind blew through the velvet curtains, it blew through the crystal chandelier, making a melodious jingle as the dazzling jewels collided with each other, reflecting the sunlight and casting a marvelous specter down at the tables; The name of the position was given with a hint of irony: Damocles, or “the sword of Damocles” means an allusion to the imminent and ever-present peril faced by those in positions of power, as he saw the green tick on the screen in front of him.

The Dalbergia tables were subtle compared to other things in this room thanks to the burgundy satin finish, but the eagle-eyed could still spot its value.



“Damocles is the only existence that can challenge god-if god exists.” This was printed in big bold letters on the New Holy Bible, that has been carefully placed on top of the table. Damocles has complete control over everything, as big as the weather and the time of sunrise, and as small as the fate of every single individual-to people, Damocles was the god.

The man looked up, through his square gilt frames, a firm and piercing gaze was shot at the display; In the age of holographic projection, a man like him who still prefers traditional displays was rare: it's as if he was still reminiscing about the olden days. His memories drew back to history, it was the great war when he fought valorously in the battle of Somme, he had single-handedly taken out a German trench with a carefully calculated grenade throw; fast forward to the second great war, he was stationed on the aircraft carrier USS Enterprise, best led his dive bomber squadron at the Battle of Midway, sinking two Japanese aircraft carriers in one day, and finally, executing the bombing trips to Hiroshima and Nagasaki(6). Tears blurred his vision, as he saw the green tick on the screen in front of him.

He was now the ruler of this world-a god.

Over the windows: apartment buildings and streets looked like they were toys made of plastic and paint, the view was clear even beyond the horizon, everything was beneath him, every person, every tree, every building-everything, he felt like a god, and now he was a god.

He never remembered crying all his life, not when he heard the crack of the skull belonging to his comrade when he was annihilated in front of him under the tracks of a German tank; not when he heard the howls of incinerating people as a kamikaze attack aircraft plummeted down at his aircraft carrier; not even when he made out the roar of “Fat Man” through the thin fuselage coverings of his “Bockscar” B-29 bomber plane. But now, as he heard the brisk “ping” sound from the screen, teardrops ran down his face, he can feel the warm streaks that it made through his cheeks, and making an elegant denouement as it reluctantly left his chin; drops and drops fell onto the ground, weirdly, making the same sound as the crystal glass and chandelier, it was a song for the victor.

He dragged a chair over and sat down, the legs of the chairs silently glided against the polished marble flooring and left no marks or sounds. His eyes drifted onto the small pile of tears on the ground.

“His eyes were first confused, then they widened, they narrowed, they focused and then they closed. He squeezed his eyes as hard as he can, wrinkles gathered then disappeared. Finally, he opened them again.

The tears, there were no reflections.

The few drops of tears were like droplets of rain from heaven, it was just so clear and transparent as if they didn't exist. Looking through the puddle was like looking through a pair of glasses, that unveiled all of the secrets of the universe to you. It was too much detail for any person to handle.

He just stared, and stared, and stared in disbelief.

A message appeared in mid-air, it was unreadable with the bright background. The man seemed even more confused, it wasn't from a holographic projector or any display. It was a sentence that appeared on his retina, bypassing his eyes and pupils as if they weren't there. No matter where he turned to, the message stayed at the dead center of his vision.

He closed his eyes, but the message still didn't disappear, in fact, the white letters on his black eyelids made it more readable.

“error:logic_process_eliminated” , It said.

“Hmm-”, He seems to have lost his vision, then his hearing, his touch, his smell, finally, his voice, the gentle humming sound that he was making halted. He felt like he has fallen into an ice cave under the antarctic, the surroundings are cold and made him numb, eventually, with a gloomy and desperate death, the century-long story of the nameless legend came to a bitter end.

Background noise in the Medical Resource Factory 3(8) was unavoidable, the constant screech from unlubricated metals contacting was ear-piercing;

“Oh Ford, this happened again.” A man dressed in Beta clothes cursed in displeasure. His voice was coarse and tired as if he has just had a hangover. No names were present on his clothes, only a letter and number combination: MRF-BT-7274(18).

“We can't do anything about it,” said another man, his id was MRF-FS-1041, “the Tokyo Hatchery and Conditioning Centre was going to break the record for bokanovsky's process, eighteen-thousand from one ovary, can you believe it? ”

His voice was hopeful in a way, unlike the environment around him: everything in plain sight was either made from stainless steel or lead alloy, the way they reflect light makes the human eye uncomfortably irritated, speaking of light, the big spotlights on the high roofs resembled more of a prison than a factory; this was done deliberately to reduce the amount of melatonin⁽¹⁷⁾ that the workers produce, making them work for longer without needing to sleep.

“What has that got to do with us?”

“The center needed extra electricity, and the backup solar grid was still offline at the time, the stupid Deltas, they can’t do anything properly”

“Agreed, so they just took our electricity?”

“Well, the DHC passed it”

“It's the third time this month for Ford’s sake, the fluid rendering servers¹¹ never got enough electricity, the darned reflections of the tears didn’t even get done properly, the textures were missing, so many problems! And don’t get me started on the logic processors¹², the guaranteed upgrade should have come a month ago!”

“Yes I know, but let’s just wipe⁽¹⁴⁾ it and start over shall we?” As he said this impatiently, 1041 pressed a large red button in the center console that said: “Clear”; there used to be a cover with a lock on this, but since it was used too frequently, it has been cut off. The jagged edges of the red plastic cover seem to be the only exception to the geometric-shaped appliances and the only things that resembled a bit of saturation in this somber, monotone world.

The commands were executed like they have thousands of times before, but returned with an error message: “error:too_many_attempts⁽¹⁵⁾”

“Burned⁽¹³⁾ another one, didn’t we?” A blaming tone was heard in 7274’s words.

“I sure hope not, but it seems to be the case.” 1041 muttered in disbelief, “We really should be using better cows⁽⁹⁾ you know, C class shouldn’t cut it.”

"We might be able to negotiate with the director after this Tokyo nonsense, MRF-2 got an 'A' last week for doubling their production target, but let's stick with a 'C' for now", 7274 wrote down in his notebook: "Cow C-137, brain function overload, confirmed dead." Then he put down his booklet and poked the "next" button in a corner of the dashboard with a pencil.

The body of the man slid down the container, the tubes and monitor sensors disconnected from his body with several loud "clack"s(3), liquid of all sorts of colors came out, red, yellow, blue, pink; the markings on the edge of the container attracted some vignette through time, but it was still recognizable as "K-3" (4). They all sild into the endless hole that is the incinerator, flames touched the lifeless body of the man and started on a sort of weird dance of death. Cries of pain and despair echoed in the steel walls of the incineration chamber, but nobody ever cared about a cow, it was a commodity when they can be milked, and now it is fuel for the firepower plant.

"Just start milking the new one, we can't afford to miss the daily production target. Maybe we can still aim for getting a 'B' with what we've got right now."

Another body was transported onto the container, the tubes and sensors automatically found their way into him, and again, made painfully loud noises.

"Cow C-138, initiating 'braindance(2)' procedure, dopamine(16) collection, and life support" The operator behind these two chanted with a lack of patience.

A yellow liquid was extracted from the top of the "cow"'s head, there was a steady stream of it slowly crawling down the tubes, and entering a loud machine.

The gears started to turn, the conveyor belts started to spin, and boxes full of pills have continued to be produced and filled into bottles. One by one they rolled off the production line: on the simplistic orange bottles, in big bold letters, there was the word "Soma(1)".

References and inspirations:

1-Brave New World(Book)

The idea of a "Soma" manufacturing plant

2-Cyberpunk 2077(Videogame)

The idea of "Braindance" and advanced virtual reality

3-The Matrix(Film)

The idea of harvesting energy/resources from a human.

4-Klein Bottle(Japanese Novel)

The idea of a full-body immersive VR experience was explored in this novel, named cleverly “the Klein bottle”, it emphasizes the realism of the device and how people cannot distinguish between reality and a game. (The Klein bottle is an example of a non-orientable surface; it’s a two-dimensional manifold against which a system for determining a normal vector cannot be consistently defined. Like a four-dimensional Mobius loop, there is no inside and outside, there is only one side.) The name of the production machine “K-3” is named after the fictional VR experience machine in the novel(the “K” here stands for “Klein”).

5-The three-body problem(Book)

The idea of a “god”, or ruler of the world was explored in this book, in Chinese it’s called “执剑人”, which directly translates to sword-holder. Also known as the sword of Damocles.

Key terms and symbolism:

6-History and the world

The history and the world in “braindance” have been modified to create maximum production efficiency, the logic processing servers will override the sense of time of the cow, meaning that events that happened in a hundred year time period can be shrunken down and make it possible for one person to live through it.

7-Names

The cow never had a name in the story, the meaning behind that is how he is not treated as a human, and no one cares about him. Justification of the absence of his name is through the logic processing servers, “burning” the cow could happen if this process fails.

The workers have numbered names only, since the bokanovsky’s process made identical people, naming them and distinguishing them with worded names would decrease efficiency, therefore the names of the workers in the MRFs are composed of two parts-the number and letter. The letter represents the worker type and the number is just the identification number of the worker.

18-For example

MRF-BT-7274 means worker 7274 in a medical resource factory, his work type is a system engineer

MRF-FS-1041 means worker 1041 in a medical resource factory, his work type is system operator.

8-MRF(Medical Resource Factory)

Factories in the “Brave New World” that produce medicine are called: “Medical Treatment Factory(MTF)”, but hidden underground there is a separate system to normal medicine manufacturing, MRFs are only used to produce soma, the drugs that people take in this world. The production method will be explained further later.

9-Cows

nickname for Omegas, a different class to the Alpha to Epsilon systems, their ranking is Omega-A to Omega-E, sometimes referred to as Cow-C-xxx, the number behind the letter is the identification number that resets once a month, it's used to record how many Omegas that are used in a certain period of time to allow efficiency calculations. Omega-A stands for the top level of these people, which means that their brains are more durable against braindance(see next).

MRFs need to reach a specific production goal (how much soma per cow/soma per month) and each factory can level up to receive better cows for more efficient production.

10-Milking

Similar to “Cows”, the process of extracting dopamine from humans is nicknamed “Milking”

2-Braindance

Braindance is a procedure that will be undergone to collect dopamine, it is similar to a dream in a way, only that it can be inputted like a computer, and programmed to control a person's dream. It's like using a brain as a computer that accepts an inputted braindance and receives outputs in the form of dopamine and other chemicals. A vital part of milking.

11-Fluid rendering servers

Processing the scenes in a braindance is a complicated process, and usually requires several server groups, in this scene, the fluid rendering servers are offline due to the power outage, which means that the fluids that haven't been rendered before can no longer be rendered(like the tears in the failed attempt), which caused the cow to “crash”.

12-Logic processing servers

Not mentioned directly in the story, but vital to production, this allows the cow to justify everything he does to be correct and eliminates the sense of morals and logic. Including the sense of time and how the world normally works.

13-Burning/14-Wiping/15-Crashing

Burning a cow means that the cow's brains have overloaded and can no longer accept braindance inputs, which makes the cow useless for soma manufacturing.

Wiping a cow is similar to a hard reset on a computer, it means that all short-term and long-term memory are removed, and starting the cow over again, frequent wipes will result in burning a cow due to brain function overload.

Crashing is when a cow starts to question its existence, when the logic processing servers can no longer handle the thoughts of the cow, therefore crashing both the servers and the cows. A logic processing server that solves this problem has not been made yet, due to the barriers in A.I. technology.

15-Damocles

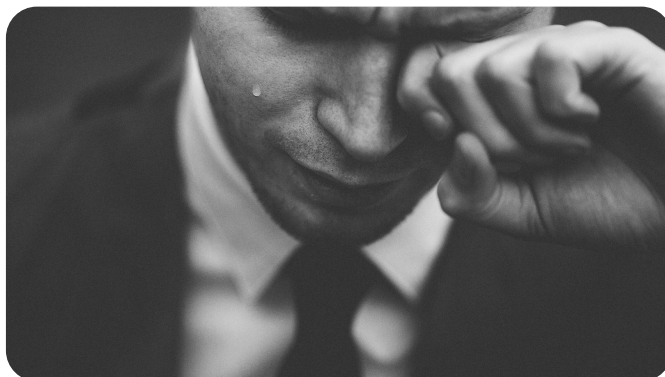
Fictional political figure in the braindance, it is designed to make the cow produce maximum dopamine.

16-Dopamine

The main composition of soma, it's the chemicals that the brain produces that make people happy.

17-Melatonin

A naturally made hormone is made when people are in dark environments, which causes them to become sleepy, this is used to increase manufacturing efficiency.



DROUGHT

Sunny Feng

There was a faint jingle in the distance as the camel's bell rang in the desert. The caravan was moving slowly in the desert, rhythmically, alongside the sound of the ringing bell. It was a long, arduous journey as they plodded on the vast sandy landscape, delivering goods and food from the desert oasis to the desert city. They carried a lot of sand and gold nuggets, constantly transiting in many small oases to buy food and water. They were all headed to Mo City, the largest desert city.



The water source of each oasis was controlled, and each person can only buy two jars of water with two golden nuggets per day. If you did not have your own water tank, you needed three golden nuggets.

The buildings in the desert were only mud houses made of soil and plants, and then built with stone foundations. The industrious and wise desert people had built prosperous cities one by one beside each small oasis.

Sunny, Sunny, Sunny. The weather forecast reported by the desert city hall for this month was endless sun. All day, every day it was to be warm and dry. The temperature would surely reach at least forty three degrees. People in Mo city looked at the weather forecast with a hint of concern.

Sadly, the concern was warranted as the water level dropped! All the leaders of the desert oasis discovered this phenomenon, but in order not to cause panic, they chose to conceal the situation. But, they started doubling the price of water. People complained but had nothing to say, because in the arid desert if there was no water to drink, you would only turn into a dry corpse. The dunes next to the oasis were full of corpses of people who were poor and did not have the gold to buy water.

No one felt sorry for them. In fact, people who did not have warm clothes for the large temperature difference numbly took the clothes off the corpses and put them on themselves. And then saying thank you, they then cut off the ear of the corpse and put it in their pockets carefully. Afterward, they threw the corpse on the sand dune for the sand to bury the corpse. The living would then give the ear of the dead to the guards of the Oasis, who would exchange the ear for water. Because corpses rotting in the city would make people panic, the city needed to be cleaned up all the time. Hence, the city partook in this macabre exchange of labour for water.

In the city, the situation was escalating, some Lords of the Oasis was kind but they wanted to live. This is why they secretly found a way out of the desert with the family and entourage. They planned to take all the necessities they needed to escape the desert city, Mo.

On the day of their escape, they walked in the desert for a few weeks but in the vast desert, the food quickly ran out. The leader decided to eat the last camel with all the people.

The bodyguard shared this information with the people. Everyone's faces showed exhaustion, only the children were still full of energy, and they circled the camels. The adults lost their patience but in order not to lose the last moisture or not to speak. In order to make the child a little quieter, they gave the child a water bag. The small children couldn't hold the water and it fell to the ground. It was the last water of their house. The child's parents rushed to put the wet sand into a cloth bag and filter it to the mouth.

When they slew the last camel, they fought for the meat and the blood from the dead animal. The fighting was very fierce, people scrambled for a piece of meat regardless of their feelings. The blood went into one's mouth and tasted like a liquid. It was a welcome reminder of water. They then cut open the wrists of people who were weaker than themselves and started frantically licking the blood that came out. They had finally resorted to cannibalism.

The sand quickly buried the bodies, the entire dune was covered with blood, and a strange red color appeared in the vast desert.

Back in the city, the Lord of the Oasis was so greedy to get more golden nuggets. They had enough food and water to last them a lifetime and splurge every day. All they needed to do was to auction off small amounts of food and water to the rich. The city was crumbling, chaotic, and without its former prosperity. Some people who had hoarded food were afraid to go out and stay at home, and some people were on the verge of death and waiting for death to come. Some poor people who had some more strength and didn't want to wait for death but could not afford expensive food and water became robbers. They looted houses and hunted for resources. They burnt, killed, robbed, and took away all that could be eaten.

Pets and livestock were killed, and nothing was left. They were like locusts. They started forming groups to divide the city and started looting door-to-door. People that stayed at home had no way of making a living. There was an insurrection and everyone who became involved was killed. But food and water were limited, and more and more people began to join the group, and the looted food quickly ran out. They turned their attention to the oasis lord of everyday extravagance. But the lord's castle was so strong that all the groups decided to attack together, building ladders that could climb up the walls.

They succeeded, and when they saw the large amount of food and water they slaughtered the Lord of the Oasis and his entourage in rage. For a time, the blood flowed into a river and the whole Mo city was filled with the smell of blood.

It was the twenty-eighth day that the desert's water sources had disappeared, and food and water resources were running out once again. People in each group suspected the other would kill them to take away food and water. All the people who had survived until now had killed people, so everyone was very uneasy.

On the 29th day, all the water resources were exhausted and everyone started a round of hand-to-hand fighting. Everyone was supporting and hoping that the other would fall, so they could be eaten.

When the thirtieth day came, there were less than thirty people left in Mo and all of them were exhausted. All of a sudden the water sprung out from the ground. Everyone crying with joy. They hugged the water in a frenzy and drank the spring water. At the same time, a caravan came out of a tunnel. The people were stunned, but soon they frantically used all their weapons to attack and kill the caravan. In the end, everyone was scrambling and the spring water was stained red with blood.

The last survivor looked around at the city of hell on earth. Because of the lack of maintenance, the buildings in the city were full of cracks and rotting corpses. Everyone was dead. The last person in the city stood there recalling the previous prosperity and stability. He could not bear it any longer and joined the dead.

Although the desolate city had a water source again, it was empty, and the rotting corpses were gradually buried in the desert as if there had never been a disaster here.

Yet not all seemed lost as in the distance, the sound of the camel bell rang again and in the vast desert, a caravan moved slowly towards the city.

Sunny Feng



HELL TOPIA



Cecelia Hong
Cathy Lu

This is a transcript of the podcast *Helltopia*. This episode, 'Shackle' explores the issue of human trafficking.

Sabrina: Hello everyone, welcome back to 'Helltopia', a podcast that looks at current social events and reveals the dystopian part of our world through them. We are today's hosts, presumably you all know who we are, so we won't introduce ourselves today.

Lydia: Please be serious (Lydia looks at Sabrina), of course she's joking, don't worry (cough cough).

Sabrina: I'm Sabrina.

Lydia: I'm Lydia.

Lydia: Anyway, welcome back, our friends, to our newest episode 'Shackle'.

Even though the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympic Games were drawing people's attention, many Chinese people were preoccupied by the mystery of a woman glimpsed in a viral video, who was chained by her neck to an outdoor shed. In the video she was seen shivering in the cold in rural eastern China.

Sabrina: So today we're going to talk about the mysterious and extremely miserable and tragic story of the chained woman. That's the name she has been given by the public who feel sympathy and grief for her.

Lydia: For those who don't know much about the story, don't worry, we'll talk through the story together.

PODCAST TRANSCRIPT : HELLTOPIA

Sabrina: So this is a tragedy that started a few decades ago but has only been revealed recently.

Lydia: The so-called chained woman, a 44-year-old mother of eight and a victim of human trafficking with mental illness, grew up in a remote village in Yunnan. She showed signs of mental illness after she was divorced at 20. In 1998, a couple smuggled her to eastern Jiangsu Province where she was sold twice in a year for a few thousand dollars and the second time she was sold to a man named Dong Zhimin. She and Mr Dong had a son in 1999, and she gave birth to seven other children between 2011 and 2020.

Lydia: After she had the third child, her mental illness deteriorated. Since 2017, Mr Dong had bound her with ropes or chained her neck when she was ill.

Sabrina: So this is the whole story of the chained woman. Quite appalling, right? It's hard for us to even imagine what her life had been like in past decades.

Lydia: And clearly, we're gonna talk about the dystopian aspect of our world that this tragedy reflects.

Sabrina: Before we begin, we have to clarify that we are not saying our world is a dystopia—because that's the reality we're living in—but revealing the dystopian part of our world which certainly exists.

Lydia: So let's begin now! First we'll talk about human trafficking.

Topic A: Human Trafficking

Sabrina: So human trafficking is the trade of humans for the purpose of forced labour, sexual slavery, or commercial sexual exploitation for the trafficker or others.

Lydia: There are 689 million women in China, most of them are forced to marry a man and work. This means the women have no choice to make a decision about their life.

Sabrina: This is a shocking number!!! Why would there be so many cases of human trafficking in China? I don't think it should happen at all!

Lydia: Trafficking exists because the crime is one that currently has opportunities for high profit with very little risk.

Sabrina: From the perspective of the victims, the lack of protection, poverty and the lack of access to employment and education, discrimination of minorities and cultural practices are all factors that make children and adults vulnerable to being exploited. The government commands women and children to live like robots where they are like an emotionless machine.

Lydia: Yeah true. People who are trafficked are stripped of their basic human rights. Trafficking reduces human beings to commodities. The government manipulates and controls the ideas of people in China.

Sabrina: And beside the chained woman, a 13-year-old girl in Beijing was kidnapped on her way to school and sold to a man who constantly beat her. She had a son at 15 and couldn't escape until she turned 19. A similar story happened to a young woman from Hangzhou who was abducted on a business trip and spent the next two decades in a remote village. She was rescued after her son went to University and informed her parents.

Lydia: Oh this is horrendous! No one should be treated like this and no one has the right to treat others like this! But I don't think human trafficking is a problem that can be completely solved...`

PODCAST TRANSCRIPT : HELLTOPIA

Sabrina: Yeah of course. There will always be a market for human trafficking.

Lydia: (sigh) Then let's hope everyone can become strong enough to protect themselves when in danger of human trafficking.

Topic B: The abuse of women

Sabrina: So the next topic we're going to talk about is also reflected in the trafficking stories--the abuse of women. Even in today's modern society, many women are treated as reproductive machines, which means their only purpose for living in this world is to make babies. Many of them are treated like livestock to be sold, beaten and forced to procreate.

Lydia: Yeah indeed, especially for those born in rural areas. Only a tiny number of them can receive enough education and escape their villages and find a job in cities. And a large number of the others would get married at a very young age and live the rest of their life as a poor peasant woman.

Sabrina: According to the Beijing Daily, a State-run newspaper in China, tens of thousands of women are trafficked and sold not only to other places in China, but also Africa, Europe, Latin America, the Middle East and North America every year.

Lydia: They're sold to single men in rural areas who can't afford to get married, who have strong sexual desires or who can't find someone to get married to because in China. For those men, spend a few hundred or thousand dollars to buy a 'wife' or even rob or abduct one can satisfy both their sexual desire and their need to inherit the lineage. So essentially, the causes of woman abuse are the gender inequality in both social status and number.

LSabrina: A few thousand dollars... How can lives be measured by money and how can a person be bought for a few thousand dollars...

Lydia: This doesn't sound like something that could happen in modern society. It sounds like something that happened in ancient feudal society.

Sabrina: Yeah... So you know what I think? I think the story of the chained woman is very cruel and miserable, but the most miserable and cruel part of the story is not human trafficking or the abuse of this woman. The cruellest part is that it's a real event. It's true! A woman is really experiencing this, and there are countless women suffering from the same thing.

Lydia: (sigh) Indeed. It's hard to believe that such things are really happening. And I really don't know how she's gonna live the rest of her life although she is now rescued.

Sabrina: Yeah you're quite right. That can be a big problem too... So let's hope that every girl can be educated and protected and can defend themselves when they need to.

Topic C: The government's indifference

Sabrina: But there's one thing that astonished me besides the story itself.

Lydia: What is it?

Sabrina: It is the government's version of the story.

Lydia: Tell us the story then.

Sabrina: After the video of the chained woman went viral, the Feng County propaganda department issued a statement, saying that she is legally married to Dong, that there is no human trafficking involved, and that Yang was diagnosed with mental illness.

PODCAST TRANSCRIPT : HELLTOPIA

Lydia: This is unbelievable! It's completely different from the real story!

Sabrina: Yeah..and two days later, local authorities issued another statement, saying that she was a beggar and was taken in by Dong's late father in 1998. Although her identity was not verified when Dong registered for marriage, adding that her condition has been worsening since 2021, hence the dog chain to "prevent her from hurting others".

Lydia: Oh my God...How could the public buy it?

Sabrina: Obviously they didn't buy it. The public was so furious that they kept demanding answers even during the 2022 Winter Olympics in Beijing.

Lydia: So what did the government do afterwards?

Sabrina: Facing continuous public pressure, Chinese authorities later conducted two higher-level investigations that led to the arrests of two people suspected of human trafficking, as well as the woman's husband for "illegal detention." Authorities also punished 17 officials in the county for "dereliction of duty" in the handling of the case.

Lydia: And according to what I have known, Mr. Dong was charged only with abuse, instead of rape and false imprisonment, and that the woman was denied the opportunity to speak for herself.

Sabrina: Very true! And what's more exasperating is that in China, buying a woman could subject someone to up to three years of jail time, a prominent legal scholar said in a viral video, the same as the sentence for buying 20 frogs.

Lydia: If I recall correctly, in China, if you buy a parrot illegally, you'll be subject to eight years of jail time. This means a woman isn't even worth a parrot.

Sabrina: This is ridiculous! I really wonder why they do this!

Lydia: Some experts think the government does this for the stability of society.

Sabrina: But why? How can trafficking women make society stable?

Lydia: Because although woman trafficking is completely wrong in laws, morality and politics, it'll prevent those single men in rural areas from causing social unrest. Once their sexual desires are satisfied, they won't be the scourge of society.

Sabrina: But what about the women? Are they gonna give women up for the stability of the society?

Lydia: I'm afraid that's what they're doing.

Sabrina: So at the end of this episode, I want to give some time to the netizens in China and see what their reactions and comments were.

Lydia:"If justice cannot be served in this case," an internet entrepreneur in Hangzhou, wrote on his WeChat timeline, "this place will fall into a very long and very dark night."

Sabrina: "I felt that if this case isn't resolved," wrote a science writer, "happiness will be superficial and many things will be meaningless."

Lydia: "We're not bystanders, but survivors," goes a popular social media quip. "We're not rescuing the chained woman. Instead, she's rescuing us."

PODCAST TRANSCRIPT : HELLTOPIA

Sabrina: Let's end the episode with a song that you must all be familiar with

Lydia: And that is '*Heal the world*' by Michael Jackson. Let's enjoy the song and pray for those who're suffering!

Sabrina & Lydia: That's the end of our episode and we'll see you next week.

Play '*Heal the world*' by Michael Jackson as the outro BGM



SYSTEM'S PURPOSE

Adrian Wan

Surrounded by closed, dark, dull fences, no one is allowed to leave, full of mundane rooms and buildings. The interior of those rooms shrouded with lifeless and boring human beings sitting neatly, without any excitement on their face, only tons of work and listening.

Watching the area for activity, I carefully settled next to the computer, the only one I knew that was not regularly surveilled. But I did not have much time to check my data, so speed was of the essence. I felt my brow wet with perspiration, and a little river seemed to run down my back. Slowly, I inserted the flash drive into the machine, immediately muting the sound so I would not be heard.

“Click, click, click,” the sound of the footsteps on the tiled floor rushed into my ears, and my heart lurched, but the sound continued to click past the door. Safe again.



For a moment, I questioned what I was doing, after all, I was just fifteen. I glanced at the clothes I had been forced to wear, every aspect was decided by someone else. Could I let others after me suffer in this way? No, I needed to do something, right now and quickly.

My objective was to reduce the distress and enslavement the system caused to others. Freedom and individuality were taken from people who were involved in the system. Everyone should have the right to enjoy liberty and uniqueness.

My heart was pounding so heavily like a jackhammer against my ribcage, and wondered whether others could hear me. Around me, there was only silence. My trembling hands clicked through the computer and landed on the file I was looking for which is about the dark side of the system. Time to act.

Shrouded with darkness, the glow of the computer screen illuminated my face. Would I have enough time to gather the evidence without being caught? I thought I heard a click, perhaps a door opening quietly, my fingers freezing over the computer keys.

“Is anyone here?” A questioning voice could be heard at the door, and I immediately clicked the computer shut, crouching so I would not be detected. Again, my heartbeat rammed against my chest.

The voice came closer, and I soundlessly shifted so I was completely hidden from view. My mind raced with what would happen if I was found. With a sinking feeling, I saw myself in handcuffs, waiting for the police at the front gate.

From my hiding place, I noticed with horror that it was the principal, his eyes scanning the room for signs of entry.

This restricted section was completely barred from students, and I knew that if found, I would be punished. But he turned suddenly, another voice at the door attracted his attention, and I felt calm returning to my system. After a few moments, I pulled myself back into the chair, and soundlessly gathered the data I needed.

The data was incriminating - bell times were being used to manipulate our actions, and nothing was left to our personal choice. The school system was set to train a future capitalist society, an instrument to help produce more money. Everyone was like cogs in this machine, with no choice and no voice. All we learned was about how to make money and add to wealth, there was nothing about living a healthy life, or having freedom and peace of mind. My companions spoke only of grades, scores, and courses at university. None of them supported each other but thought individualistically about getting ahead.

For a moment, visions of my family flashed before my eyes. My father, a product of the system, was consumed with wealth and had abandoned us often to go to work. My mother, alone, had struggled with a disability but was left alone to care for my siblings and me. This system had produced that insensitivity in my father, and I knew I had to change things.

Schools were to educate, but education was now capitalism, without thought for human happiness. Why should so many with significant needs be at the bottom of the social ladder? Such an unjust system, and so much distress. What happens to those who do not fit into the school system? Above me, a camera begins moving, and I knew that I may have been detected by the security system. I pull the cap I am wearing to hide my identity over my face, aware that we have no privacy, every moment is recorded. Tomorrow, this will be all over the news!

At the door, I see the school banner, “Education Liberates”, and feel like tearing it down. Education in this place does not liberate, it imprisons. People have no choice but to conform, if they do not, they are impoverished. Over time, schools seem to have lost their way - now they create uniform cardboard cut-outs, each student an image of the next, all focused on money. Well, this is coming to an end.

I may be just 15, but I do have the power to enact change - others will look back and thank me for my bravery and boldness. At the door, I turned to ensure that there was no sign that I had been there and wondered whether another of the CCTV cameras had caught my moves. The reporter from The Age would be waiting for me, and the flash drive.

Tomorrow, the story would be exposed to every citizen in Melbourne, and the sham of education would be open to every eye. Again, I felt my heart lurch, but I knew I had to do this. Generations following my footsteps would not be restricted in this way.

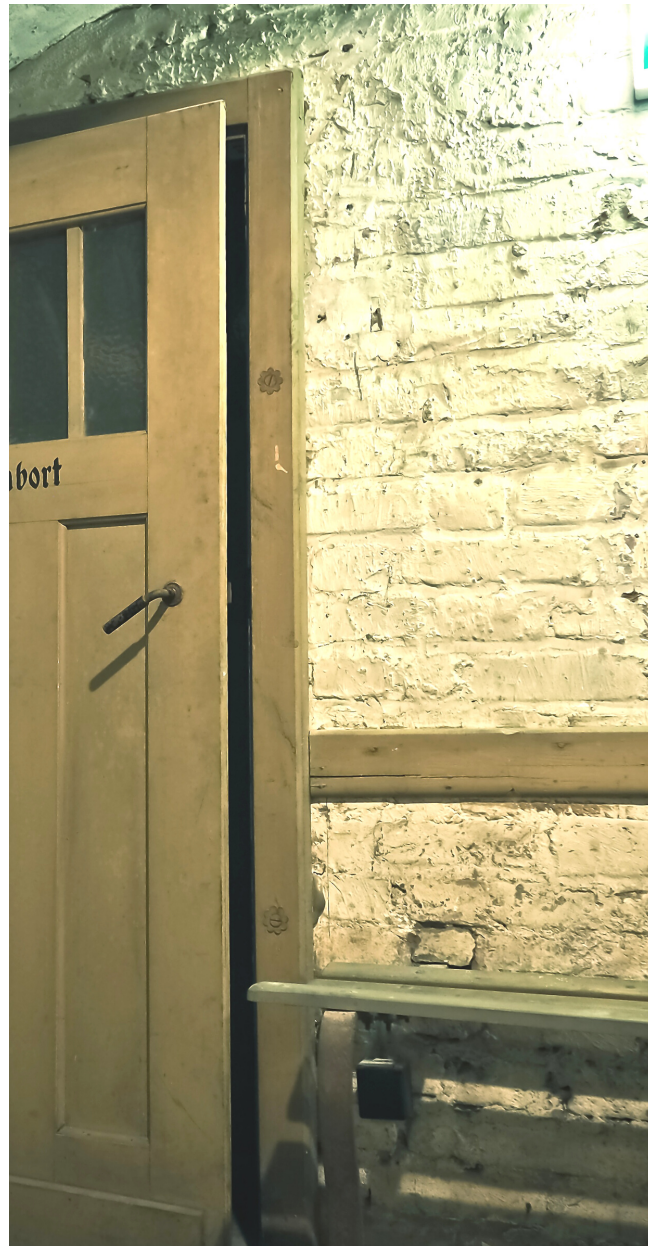


T E A R S

Jiwoong Choi

The door creaked as I opened the door to the small apartment. It was one of the apartments at the end of the city packed tightly together with 12,785 inhabitants. The one that the government was planning to destroy as it was one of the many areas that were ruining the city's reputation with its horrendous look. But with its crumbling and bulging walls and its sagging floor I could guarantee within a few years, it would collapse. I couldn't believe that at one time in history this apartment would have been fresh and new.

They wanted to build a research facility there, as it was quite close to the military base and the military could easily access that area when there was a problem, but what confused me was, how would they move all the people out of there? And where would they go?



I walked through the door across the sagging floor, which moved up and down with every step I took, scanning around the house looking for what I had come for: children. In the past from what we had learned people didn't live for that long, at most a 100 years, but now we live forever. I don't remember the last time of hearing someone had died of old age, only suicide. I learned that the reason why we did live longer was because scientists(that was what we called the people who worked in those research facilities) had gotten rid of all the viruses of this world and people no longer could get sick and die. We were also taught that the injections we took as a child boosted our immune system making us superior to all viruses.

However as humans began to live longer more resources were required to keep us alive but as there was a limited amount of resources but a greater need. Conflict arises as humanity got out of control to obtain sustenance, to survive. So the government came up with an idea to stop this conflict, by referring to China's one-child law by only allowing each household to have two children. Nevertheless as that didn't ease up the quarrel the government changed the limit to one child each household, but as that didn't bring an end to the conflict as well the government banned the reproduction of children. Even with the restrictions it didn't stop individuals from reproducing so that's when my job came in, to locate those unwelcome and provide them with a coup de grâce..

The apartment was very unwelcoming with boards stripped from the floor and nailed all across the windows, and noticeable traps placed all around the house. Under the bare floor from the boards ripped off you could see the wires and pipes tangled around slithering under the ground. Even the boards left weren't in good condition with cracks and scratches all over the rotten wood, you could see that the wood had aged like we did but we didn't rot and change color or shrink in size. We anxiously began searching around the house for what we had come for, we didn't say we came for children as it felt unethical and made us seem like lunatics demented for children.

As I was just about to go into a room that appeared to be a kitchen I heard a loud crack, the sound of the pistol we redeemers carried—a glock 40. I took my pistol out of my holster and ran to where the sound had come from. Running heedfully through the traps set all over the apartment. In the room lay the body of a man with red tears flowing down his face holding an axe. My partner had shot him straight in the face. The room was vacant with only a bare bed frame in the middle with no mattress or bedsheets, just a few blankets hurled on the bed. My partner walked up to the bed and rummaged through them looking for ones that were in fine condition but after seeing all of them were either tattered or filthy he threw them back on the frame and told me to start searching the place. I went back to the kitchen and began looking through the cupboards being more concerned with finding food rather than what I had come here for. I picked 3 cans of tuna that I found at the back of the pantry concealed behind a fake wall, and remembered to take one for my partner.

As I walked out of the kitchen I saw my partner kicking down the left over boards placed on the ground and pulling out a woman from beneath with two other children she was holding. The older child, who must have been at least 4, had lost his top and you could see his rib cage emerging from his stomach. He must have been famished as I could hear the low rumbling coming from his insides. I really wanted to take out a can of tuna and let him devour it all. The other looked quite young, only a few months old. The baby was wrapped in blankets concealed under the layers, silent with his or her eyes closed as if he or she was drugged to keep quiet. The older child had clear tears falling down his face frightened from the atmosphere we had brought into their apartment. I tried to be as friendly as possible smiling at the child to try and ease up the air but that just made it worse. It caused the mother to panic, her body began to shake uncontrollably, making her clench her fists, waking up the baby in her hands making it cry. A shrill cry.

The mother got on her knees and began to beg, to leave them be, that she would do anything for us if we just left. I placed the young infant on the floor next to where the older boy sat and my partner dragged her to the room where her husband had been killed. I picked up the axe and threw it across the floor away from her, not daring to touch the body. As she saw the sickening body of her deceased husband her eyes widened and she began to scream but not a single sound came out of her mouth.

We waited until she had finally calmed down and told her to choose.

“You or your child? Who would you decide to save?”

Tears began to well up in her eyes and she quietly uttered “My child please”.

MASKED CITY

BY GEORGIA LINARDOU

After 1980 everything changed. The new law of having to wear a mask everywhere, introduced by the new president Nadal Mavro, made living in Mardena an unbearable hell. Not only my life, but the lives of thousands of people changed by 180°. We would never get the opportunity to see each other's faces ever again. Would never get a glance of our siblings' or our parents' faces. At first I thought of it as something that would pass quickly. We talked about it on the street and mocked it with my classmates, but after being one



month in this dreadful situation, we realised. We realised that we would never be able to go back to the times, where the other person's wide smile could brighten your whole day or your friend's cry prompted you to comfort them. We would never be able to go back to the days where everything was normal.

I can still remember my mother happily smiling at me every morning before I went to school, and the angry expression on my father's face every time I was late. I recall those happy moments, in sorrow. Why did it all have to change? Why do we not get a normal life? I miss all those 'raised eyebrows' and 'wide open eyes'. Even the teary eyes or the red cheeks of my brother, when he returned tired from skating.

On television the only channels playing are controlled by the government. Only news, no movies.

“Movies tend to influence the youth negatively. We do it for your own good.” The president proudly announced last week.

Leaving the city is also off-limits. All residents need to stay inside the country, distanced from the ‘outside world’. Trapped inside the newly built concrete wall, with no hope for escape. Without a chance for a better future. We will never get the opportunity to study abroad or visit other cities.

Until a few days ago only monochrome masks were allowed. Black, grey, or blue - a limited choice. The many suicides changed that. Now the masks can have all the colors and shapes one can think of. They can have flowers, circles or waves painted on them and either has a wide smile or tears flowing down drawn. By this, the government intended to let the people lead a life closer to normality. Advertisements like “A mask with which you can show how you feel” and “a different you every day”, covered my hometown. It seems as if the meaning of emotion was completely lost. The meaning of life itself had disappeared.

“It is truly disgusting. After taking our freedom and literally our way of expressing emotions away, they let us show our feelings through drawings on masks?” My college teacher complained upon hearing about the new rule. “This is ridiculous”

And I completely agreed. One day our whole life changed and we lost most of our rights. The new rule was meant to be like a breather and bring joy to residents when in reality it was a confirmation. This is our new lifestyle and there is no going back.

Wearing a mask at all times became an irrefutable rule. A law no one could break or have a say against. Masks had to be worn not only outside, but also at home. Everyone was constantly being watched, even inside the house. In my city, security was tight. Almost too tight. We felt suffocated. Undercover agents were hired and the military became part of the security.

“For safety reasons...” the President justified.

Still, no one felt safe. Unreasonable attacks and the right of officers to kill anyone who didn't wear a mask arose a lot of controversy. There was no such thing as equality or fairness in Mardena anymore. People of all ages and statuses were treated the same way and with the same harsh, inhumane punishments.

Only a few days ago, I witnessed a five-year-old kid being cruelly shot in public for taking their mask off. It clearly had difficulty breathing, but no mercy was shown. Seeing the young kid's hand slowly slipping off their mother's and then falling lifeless on the spot, broke my heart. The strong rusty smell of blood gushing from the kid's head once again reminded me of the tyrannical place I live in and the horrifying society I call myself part of. This is unacceptable.

The young kid's death enraged the public. Only a few days after the incident hundreds of people all around the town came up with new ways to draw the attention of the government. Some made songs, others danced or drew. The people of Mardena tried their best to explain the situation and express how they feel. We protested in every way we could, clearly showing how we suffer and are suppressed. Sadly, the government's response was as expected. Most protesters were brutally murdered. The streets of Mardena were covered in blood and nobody ever dared to question the state's authority again.

“They were a threat to our people's safety. We had no choice but to eliminate them” said the head of security.

I will not let this slide, I think to myself as I walk through the dark streets of my beloved town. Not again.

THE GAME

BY WENDY ZHANG

I woke up in the dark, and suddenly, a bright light shot in. I knew it was the sun rising, and when I could see clearly, there were a lot of people in this room, men and women, young and old.

Someone came in. They put a big cake in the centre of the room. He said, if you want to eat, you can grab it yourself, and you can hurt others to take what's in someone else's hands



Suddenly, the bell rang and I saw them pounce on the cake like hungry wolves. It was just a small cake that could only be eaten by five people. I watched them hurt each other, and I instantly stopped hungry. After a while, they seemed to stop arguing. I looked up and there were only three people eating cake. The others seemed to be sitting aside because they couldn't get the cake.

In addition to the people sitting on the side, there were also people who came up to beg and were pushed away roughly. Their conscience was gone.

I suddenly felt so terrible about them. I hadn't reacted yet. . . .

There was a big box in the center of the room, just a normal big box. There appeared to be a button on the outside wall of the box.

A man came in and I saw him grab a woman and her daughter. He took them to the box and locked it. Then, he flipped a switch, and there was a thermometer in the box.

Then the man said loudly: "Now let's see if this mother will step on the child to save herself, or choose to save her child? When your head comes out of the hole, at least you can guarantee that your head will be cooler."

In the beginning, the temperature of the box was 30 degrees. I saw the mother of the child reassuring the child not to be afraid. The temperature of the box rose to 45 degrees, and the child couldn't hold on any longer and began to cry. When the temperature rose to 50 degrees, the mother picked up the baby. When I thought mom would let the baby live, she just put the baby on the ground and the baby on the ground was crying more and more.

The mother finally said "I love you" and stepped on the child. When the mother steps on the child, the child stopped crying, and I knew the child was dead. Before, a mother would not hesitate to keep the child, but now, she would rather sacrifice the child and let herself live. Where was the mother's love?

I glanced at the clock on the wall, and the man called another half of the people and took them to the center of the room, each with a knife.

"Win to be free"

At first, some people were afraid to attack, but for the freedom they did. I watched them stab others in the stomach, heart, legs, and even hands. The smell of blood in the air was getting stronger and stronger, very unpleasant.

After it was all over, each of us was given five buns and a bottle of grape juice, which must be the happiest for those who have been hungry for days.

But I always felt that something was strange. I watched them eat with relish, and I couldn't resist the temptation of the food, so I took a bite.

The meat filling of the steamed buns tasted very strange, not the same as the meat filling I usually eat, not like chicken, beef, or pork, but I didn't think much about it and thought it might be my problem, so I ate it right away. The bottle of grape juice was even more strange, after a sip, there was no taste of grapes, the colour too was odd, and it tasted like it. . . .iron. But I still thought it was my problem.

When we all finished eating, a voice came from the radio: "Do you think human meat buns are delicious, and grape juice made with blood is delicious?"

Sure enough, I guessed right, nausea struck my stomach.

I know now that human nature is very scary, perverted, and scary. Human nature was very good before, and the world was beautiful, but now we are all like birds in a cage, without freedom. I didn't know why they wanted to imprison us, I didn't know why they wanted to hurt us, is it because of happiness? I had no idea. Why were they doing it and what was the purpose of it? Thousands of questions echoed in my head, I didn't know the answer, and I didn't want to know.



NEWWORLD

BY CARL LAI

2112 was a special year, with the rapid development of science and technology, people's lives are getting better and better. But with the extreme amount of pollution that had been discharged onto the planet, our mother earth finally stood up for herself in protest. The mega earthquake caused huge environmental damage, the continents shifted, splitting the Earth into two major states, and people were divided into two different groups. One is called the GEs- people of genetically edited birth who had advanced technology alter their DNAs and now enjoy the best living conditions that are provided by the government. The other is the NBs- people who are naturally conceived.

Wasteland, Day 268, Year 2118, Time 21:05

Garry walked out of the product factory, beside him were workers all tired with oil grease on their emotionless and numb faces, the crowds quickly disbursed, everyone was hurrying somewhere. Today, Garry heard that everything they made will eventually be shipped to the Newworld. The sky was turning dark, with foggy smoke floating in the air. Garry was used to this now, he had been living here for 6 years already. He was surrounded by a lot of other workers, it is not hard to tell that many of them are his age. Garry had just turned 18 this year. As he walked, he remembered to check behind him.

He just got his pay today. No accidents. He thought to himself. He must get to the Scavenger's shop as soon as possible. He fastened his pace. He noticed the waste around him, piling up, all stuck together, like a hill. Then there was the garbage everywhere, rotten, decayed, the disgusting smell wafted towards him whenever there was a breeze, attacking all his senses. No one knew exactly how much waste there was, but it was in the tons.

Garry scanned through the waste. All the ironware outside was corroded by acid rain. None of them were suitable for Garry's next plan. Just before Garry went into the shop, he noticed a bunch of gangsters had beaten up a boy. He really wanted to just go up there and help that boy, but he knew that the more you get involved, the more trouble you have. There simply were no laws in Wasteland, it was very common to see a crime happen here. The only thing you needed to do to survive was to be indifferent.

He quickly went into the scavenger's shop and began searching for some workable spare parts for the flight engine. At this time at the Wasteland, it was easy to find a piece of metal, but not often to find workable engine parts. Of course, it was going to cost all his pay. Garry was familiar with this place by now, he was a regular. Basically every time he got his salary, he would come to this shop and search for any usable components.

"Good to see you again, Garry. What do you want for today?"

"A booster," Garry answered, and continued searching for the appropriate booster that he needed for repairing the craft.

The shopkeeper sighed and said "You really want to go back to the Newworld? You know that is a North state, it is the place where the GEs are. Those people are all being genetically edited, they are now the perfect nation. There is no way you can hide among them. You will be caught, and probably will get killed"

Garry did not answer. Instead, he kept on doing what he was doing, but unexpectedly showed a sense of disappointment in his eyes.

The shopkeeper signed again “It’s on that table over there.”

“Thanks.”

As Garry walked out the door, the shopkeeper shouted at the back “If you make it... Count me in.”

Garry stood for a moment, “Of course”, he muttered then walked out of the shop.

Garry crawled through a little gap between the two huge fixtures, and here comes the secret place of his repairing plan. In the middle of this area, resting a sky flight. After years of his unremitting efforts, the flight reparations were almost complete, just missing some important components and fuel. As he joined the booster onto the flight engine, he remembered the days that he still lived in the Newworld.

It was a sunny day, the sun always shining on top of the city. There were high-rise buildings everywhere, neon lights covering the city and the facade of the building is streamlined to reduce the air resistance caused by the building being too high. Neon lights and holographic advertisements flashed over the buildings, filled with busy but not crowded traffic flows. A bustling and prosperous city. This is what life was like when Garry was still with his father. The technology of genetic editing has long existed in the past, his father being one of the products. While most genetically edited people discriminated against those who are different, Garry’s father was different. He fell in love with someone whom he should not have - Garry’s mother, an ordinary person who has not been genetically modified, and she gave birth to Garry, again, naturally. But the inauguration of the new government has made all these things to an extreme.

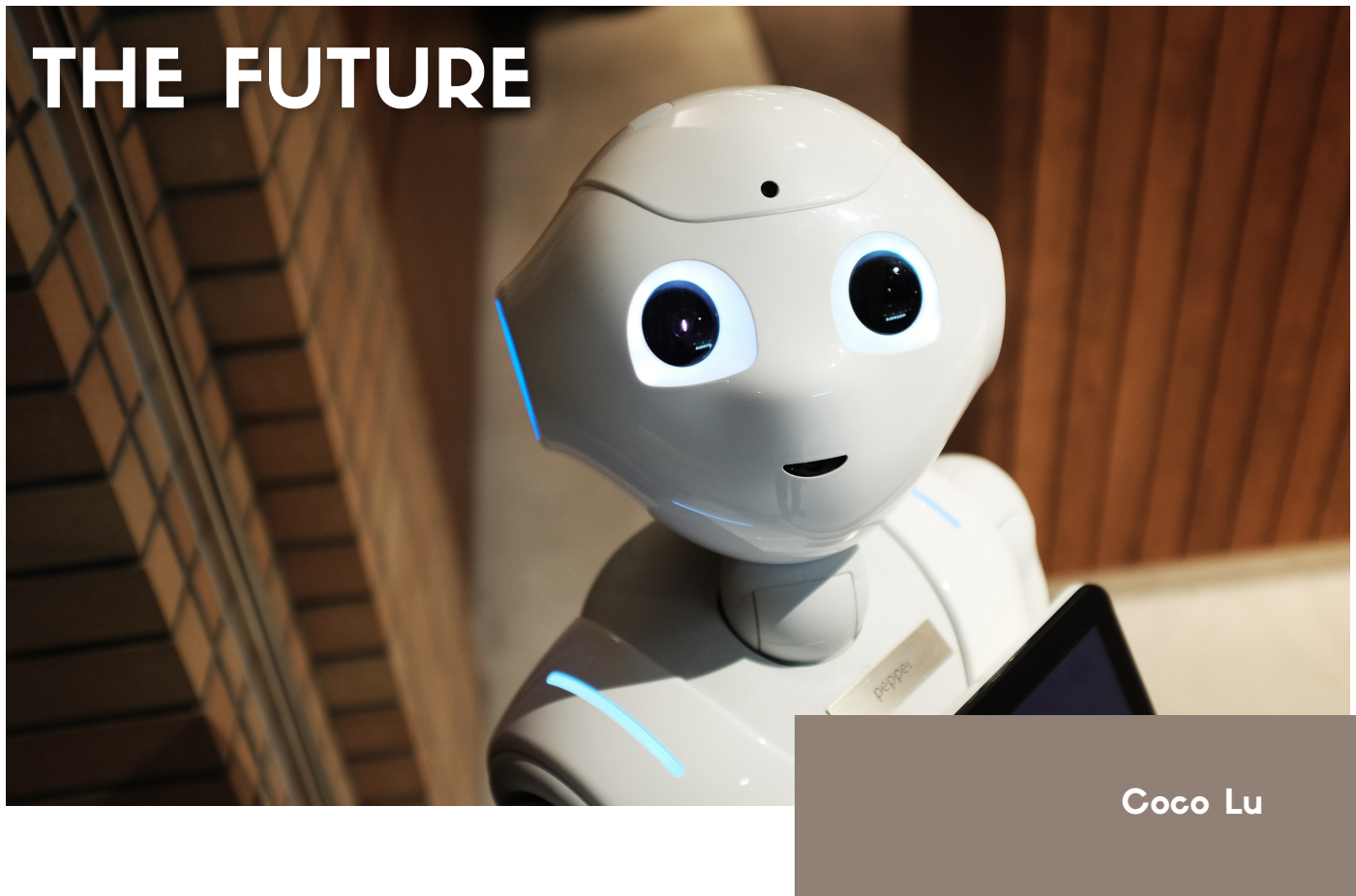
Suddenly, the new government posted a compulsory policy that only the people who were being genetically edited will live in the Northern States. The genetic police broke in, with lightning speed, the police took Garry and his mother, and all the other naturally born people.

They were all sent to the Southern States. All the naturally born people vanished in a sudden instant and no one cared about where they went, except for his father.

Garry remembered what had happened before, tears streaming down the corners of his eyes involuntarily. “I really hope the day I meet my father comes soon so I can be with him.”

Unknown to Garry however, there was a pair of eyes watching this in a corner where no one was paying attention.





THE FUTURE

Coco Lu

This is a transcript of the podcast *The Future*. This episode explores how the rapid development of technology may be impacting our lives.

Coco: Hello and welcome to 'The Future' and I am your host Coco, today I will explore the rapid development of technology with everyone listening now. Okay, as usual let's begin with our imaginary scenario, and let us first go to the year 2080...

(Rhythmical music)

Lydia: Hey! Where are you going, Juliet? It is time for us to do the work.

Juliet: Ehm, I am going to the Clone Centre to clone myself

Lydia: What?

Laura: Why are you going to do that? Have you ever heard of Dolly the sheep, the first mammal cloned from an adult cell? She has only six years to live. That is ridiculous, preposterous, and absurd. It is very cruel to clone!

Juliet: But everyone around me all clone themselves and make friends with them. Also, they told their clones to do the homework, have their tests, and go to school for them. Doesn't that sound cool? I want to do that too.

Lydia: But how can you strongly ensure the clones for the rest of life are guaranteed to live?

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Juliet: They won't have anything from me, I give birth to them, they just need to follow what I tell them, they don't need their own minds and thoughts. To be more straightforward, they are my puppets and dummies.

Lydia: Are you crazy? You are impervious to reason. What about your sanity?

Lydia shuts the door loudly to show she takes offense, but then she is stunned and frozen in place. On the street where people come and go, there are couples of people with the same appearance, they are smiling and talking.

(Rhythmical music)

Coco: Okay, now attach importance back to me. First of all, I want to thank VICO recycled tissues for being a great support sponsor to our episode.

VICO is a social enterprise that helps extreme poverty countries, they will send 70% of their profits to countries like Africa. So please choose VICO recycled tissues to help poor people.

Laura: That is such a fantastic story, Coco. This fascinating short story presents what we wanna to talk about for the rest of the time today, and in a really impactful way.

Coco: Yeah, let's welcome Laura firstly, my friend who is really interested in the rapid development of technology. She is also interested in how society will be changed with the rapid development of technology.

Coco: Hey, Laura, have you ever heard Brave New World, this novel by Aldous Huxley?

Laura: Oh, absolutely yes. I read this when I was in year 10 with my class.

Coco: This novel shows really well the impact of the rapid development of technology. So I choose this to start our discussions. When we finish the first chapter reading, we realize that the author is seen as a critique of the over-enthusiastic and overzealous embrace of new scientific discoveries. The scientific achievements that are shown in the novel are people cloning, rapid maturation, and prenatal conditioning.

Laura: Yeah, the society emphasizes and sheds light on the inequality with humans, they don't have humanity, they separate the embryos into five different classes. Because the society in the brave new world doesn't need to have thinkers, their value is obedience. This technology-based society is not a utopia, but quite the opposite. Like George Orwell's 1984, Brave New World depicts a dystopia: an anonymous and dehumanized world dominated by government, made overwhelmingly powerful through the use of technology.

Coco: Okay, so these are all because of the high-speed development of technology in this discriminatory society. So now let us turn back to reality, not that virtual and imaginary world anymore.

Laura: People pay a lot of attention and money to investing and fund in artificial intelligence in this neoteric society and at some point, I recognize that we are all vaguely aware of the wonder what the worst consequences of this will be. After all, Stephen Hawking, who is an English theoretical physicist, cosmologist, and author proposes that 'AI technology could be impossible to control.' In the long run, AI will be out of control, and if given the chance,

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AI will quickly surpass humans, so in this state, AI will control our world instead of us.

Coco: True, true, humans in this contemporary world believe that artificial intelligence brings digital life by augmenting human capacities and disrupting eons-old human activities. Stuart Russell who is a British computer scientist known for his contributions to artificial intelligence comments on the possibility that general-purpose AI will ultimately eclipse the intellectual capacities of its creators, to an irreversible dystopian effect.

Laura: Yes, It is not only the improvements in artificial intelligence technology but also the rapid developments of widening the use of big data around the world. This action lets the people have the feeling that they live under surveillance. In the midst of emptiness, there's a hand controlling us, and eyes monitoring us. Hey, Coco, do you know what are the most famous and most used applications in this contemporary era?

Coco: Hmm, I guess it probably will be 'Tik Tok'? Because there are 689 million people around the world using this. In September 2020 alone it was downloaded 32 million times. The world population is 7.9 billion.

Laura: Wow!!! That is kind of a huge number! Well, do you know that TikTok collects an enormous amount of its users including which videos are they watched and commented on, location data, phone model and operating system used, and the keystroke rhythms people exhibit when they type? So this is what big data

explored in TikTok.

Coco: Wait, and I also can remember Chelsea Manning who is an American activist and whistleblower has mentioned that, 'With no apparent boundaries on how algorithms can use and abuse the data that's being collected about us, the potential for it to control our lives is ever-growing.'

Laura: Yep, I totally agree with what she has said. After all, I strongly believe that we live under surveillance and be monitored by others because of big data.

Coco: The real power of big data collection lies in the hand-tailored algorithms capable of sifting, sorting, and identifying patterns within the data itself. When enough information is collected over time, governments and corporations can use or abuse those patterns to predict future human behavior. Our data establish a "pattern of life" from seemingly harmless digital residues like cell phone tower pings, credit card transactions, and web browsing histories.

Laura: In an easy way to say this, we have no privacy in this modern society. Now, back to TikTok, they know what we are interested in, what kind of information we are looking for, what kind of people we want to watch and follow, doesn't it sound scary? Big data collects a lot of information from us, it knows everything from us, our locations, phone numbers, home addresses, security passwords, credit cards, so many privacy stuff like these things I list above.

Coco: So contemporary people show strong interest in the development of science and technology, which is such a good thing, but if the development is excessive, it may cause artificial intelligence to replace human

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beings and natures and live under a surveillance society without privacy.

Laura and Coco and audience: Scary!

(Play Outro Music with a strong beat)

Coco & Laura: Okay it is the outro music! We know what that means! It is time to say goodbye again, time is always short. Join us again for The Future podcast. Next week, we will talk about how coronavirus makes society become dystopian. If you are interested in this topic, please subscribe to our Channel to see more information in the future with us.

Thank you for your listening and patience, we are looking forward to seeing all of you next time. Have a good weekend, bye!



ZOO TOPIA

- THE DARK CORNER

Fiona Liu

1



The mid-time bell didn't seem to stop the conversations in the school, animals are still gossiping about their daily life, and it seems to be another normal day in Zootopia.

The goat started a new conversation: "Have you guys heard about the deer missing in our class?" "Oh really?", the red panda seems very interested in this topic, "She was such a nice person, why would anyone do something like this to her?" "It's not that she is killed or something, she is just...lost? I guess?" said the rabbit, sounding worried.

Suddenly, the leopard joined this group chat: "What are you guys talking about?"

The goat turned her head and faced the leopard: "Rumors are all over the place in our school, some even say she was eaten by other animals?" The dingo seems shocked: "Blatant cannibalism? That's a bold guess."

The conversation paused for a second as the tiger and the wolf finally joined.

"Are you guys talking about that girl that got full marks on our math test?" asked the tiger.

I Suddenly the leopard clapped his paws together: "Since we all want her back, why don't we go look for her?"

"Good idea," the tiger agreed. "Zootopia has not had a lost person in a long time, I wonder who can do anything like this, or why they would even do it."

So they headed to the deer's dormitory, and on the way, they met her friends: the antelope and the camel.

The antelope was also really confused: "We have no idea where she went, we haven't seen her this entire week, all we know is that she went out and hung out, but she never returned, that's why we called the cops"

"The cops couldn't do anything," the camel said, displeased, "How useless."

"We told her not to go..." The camel suddenly stopped, like something was stuck in her throat, or like if the power plug was suddenly removed from a stereo.

"Went where?" The lion questioned.

The atmosphere fell into an awkward silence, finally, under the gaze of the lion, she confessed.

"She said she was going to "You know where", we told her way too many times that she shouldn't go, that place is for carnivores, not for a herbivore like her. How can she be safe in that place?" The camel murmured.

The antelope sounded quite anxious: "We shouldn't be saying this!", she reminded the camel. She steadied her voice, and said: "We don't mean to offend carnivores, but, you know, it's really hard to control yourself for you guys."

"That thing that happened a few years ago, oh my god." Said the camel.

"Yep." The antelope agreed.

The four could not bare them and left, as they started ranting about the disadvantages of herbivores in society again.

As they have left the dorms, the tiger couldn't bear it anymore: "I don't understand why the herbivores think they are getting unfair treatment, we have already given them so many advantages, is that not enough for them? Are they expecting us to put on a muzzle forever?"

"I am at a loss of words right now," Said the dingo.

“Stop ranting guys, whatever, let’s go find the deer and get it done and over with, it’s not the first time that they have done this.”

2

The four did not hesitate and made their way to “you know where”, they pushed the doors and stepped inside.

“Hey, bro! Has any of you seen the deer recently?” The lion accosts a sloth.

“According to the law of privacy, we cannot provide any information about our customers.” The sloth at the reception said in slow-motion.

The dingo already lost his patience, he moved to the reception and said: “Hey, we lost a friend over here, so just tell us where she has gone.”

“According to the law of privacy, we cannot provide any information about our customers.” The sloth at the reception said in slow-motion again, this time it seems to be even slower.

Blood rushed to the dingo’s head, he completely lost patience as he slammed his paws on the table and shouted: “Just say it for god’s sake!”

The tiger stepped back a few steps, feeling embarrassed by the dingo’s gaffe.

Suddenly, a seductive voice appeared: “Hey, do you want to...”

“No! I don’t want to build a snowman right now, may we later?” The tiger said in confusion.

“Um, no, Come on! it’s not that! I mean do you want to try something fun? I promise it’s completely natural, unlike the random things that the Medical Resource Plants produced, like that Coma medicine. Dogs don’t even eat that....” It was a fox that was speaking, he looked energetic and excited as if he was on something.

“Hey! Say it again?! We haven’t eaten sh*t for a long time alright! I will sue you for racism!”

The tiger hesitated, but still, he could not resist his curiosity.

“Lead the way,” He said.

He walked through the dark alley, the flashing lights and noises in front of him confused him. He followed the fox into a narrow shop. There was no sign on the doors, but a narrower corridor, a quiet dripping sound could be heard from here, but he had no idea what it was.

He hesitated, but finally, took the step into this unknown world.

His eyes took a second to adjust to the dim lighting in the room, the dripping sound got louder. The room was just as damp as the outside, in ways reminding him of London in rain season, there was a strong smell of rust and grass that seems to come from in front of him. The ground was wet, as he could have expected from the moist air, he took another step, the sound of water under his shoes was revoltingly disturbing, paired with the dripping sounds, but he still couldn't resist the temptation to see what it was all about.

What he was about to see, he wished he had been able to forget, but it is as if someone took iron and burned the memories into his brain.

Under the dim, tenebrous lights, animals line up, stretching into the far end of the room, each of them holding their arms up, with a small paper strip hanging onto each of their fingers. The tiger focused his vision on the small paper strips, there were numbers on them, to be more specific, money. At first, he was confused as to what they were doing, but just when he decided to ask, the fox spoke.

"See? In this shitty world, the only thing you can eat is salmon" His eyes are glowing with anger, "Let's be honest, who wants that stuff."

"Then what are we supposed to eat?" Asked the tiger with genuine confusion, "I have been eating salmon all my life."

"Meat." The fox replied, with a short and sharp answer and no hesitation. He followed with a series of confusing movements, he first pulled out his wallet, and then counted a few notes. His face suddenly shows a displeased look.

He then put the money back into his wallet and pulled a brown paper bag out of his backpack.

He pulled a stack of cash from the brown paper bag, and counted 25 notes, then handed it over to one of the standing animals.

Finally, he pulled out a balisong, did a fancy trick, then proceeded to cut one of the animal's fingers off.

"And this one is on me." With another flash of the shiny Damascus steel, another finger has been cut off. The fox smiled with pride, "Nobody else can do it this quick like me, they'll have to train for ages just to get half as good as me."

Another musician joined this orchestra of dripping sounds, it wasn't any leaking pipe, and it wasn't water.

It was blood.

The metallic scent in the air, the dripping sounds, and the liquids on the ground, were all from the wounds of these animals.

After thinking of this, the tiger felt a strong urge to vomit, he quickly covered his mouth with his paws and leaned onto a nearby wall.

"Come on now, try it, you will love it." The fox reached his hands out to him, and in his palms, lies the bloody finger.

He finally closed his eyes after staring for a long time, and when he opened them again, something that wasn't there before appeared. It was the look that has been absent from the animals' eyes for a long time, it was the beastliness in his eyes: it took five hundred years to teach carnivores the rule of life, and breaking them only took 5 seconds.

No longer with guilt, he took his first bite.

The fox smiled: "Unlike salmon, meat is addictive...", but the tiger couldn't hear him, he was enjoying his moment when he has become who he was for the first time.

4

A few days later, the tiger was arrested and sent to court for cannibalism. He will remain in jail for the rest of his life.

TWO BEST FRIENDS

BY THEA CHANG AND JOY JIANG

A fetid breeze carried clouds of dust, causing faint creaking from the barbed wire fence. In the distance, a man lay in debris, crushed by chunks of concrete.

The man was in shock. He stared in my direction with desperation, blood seeping through his tattered shirt and trickling down from his forehead. But before I could respond, the warmth from his eyes disappeared as they stared blankly up at the sky: frozen.

Now, we were the only ones left, I thought to myself. I averted my gaze. “We have to go, Raphaël,” I called out. He nodded.

It had been a month. A coldness swept over the streets, leaving nothing but bleakness.

Now in silence, we scampered like mice to find food, fearing that even our slightest whispers or footsteps would draw too much attention. As we were walking among charred rubble, we saw the colonization of an abandoned vehicle; a lone tree grew through the bonnet of the car and the heavy coatings of dust, crumpling and creasing its body. At the base of the tree’s trunk, a luxuriant growth of sickly, green lichen slowly started to invade the tree, poisoning it.

We approached the remains of the city center. The streets were uninviting and lacked any sign of familiarity, giving off bad vibes. A fog started to form, shielding us from prying eyes as we made our way to our hideout.

A clanging of bells started reverberating through the city and I am swept by a sense of uneasiness. Not by the bells, but the blood-curdling silence that followed, lingering in the air. It was only then that I noticed the presence of a man. A few paces ahead, he towered over the crumbled buildings. He rolled up his sleeve and the tattoo became visible – a branding that separated him from me and Raphaël. The man held onto a pistol. His figure danced in the wind as he stared at us with a menacing grimace. My stomach tightened. He ran at us. I put one foot in front of the other as I started running. My heart raced as the wind whipped at my hair and clothes. I was about to round a corner when I heard a piercing scream that filled the air. I turned around. Raphaël. The man has caught up to him. Glass shattered as he slammed against the building and the shards pierced his skin. The man pushed the pistol into his head, cocking the gun.

With all my might, I grabbed a rock and I struck the back of the man's head. The man collapsed only for a second before he came back up. There were flames in his eyes and I felt the warmth of his fist pressed against my cheek. I collapsed to my knees. I felt a throbbing pain as my cheeks became flushed. I gently stroked my cheek and then I heard a howl. Not from Raphaël but from the man. A knife sank deep into his right leg. I saw Raphaël as he staggered towards me and we started to retreat to the alleyways with blood trailing behind us. The man dropped to the ground.

Raphaël collapsed next to a dumpster, hitting the ground. There was a laceration, extending through his skin and deep into his flesh.

A pool of blood started to form as he became disorientated. I laid him down. He was weak and wounded. I tried my best to wrap a t-shirt over his wound, applying pressure and making the most out of what we had. Raphaël's lips were parched, his eyes bloodshot and his face slicked with sweat. I know there was not much left in him, but we had no choice but to wait till morning. We had no choice but to spend the night here even if we were exposed, but I still remained hopeful.

"We can't keep on going like this, Chantelle."

"I knew Raphaël, but we had no choice."

"I-" he paused mid-sentence.

He went quiet. The world went just a bit quieter without the protection of Raphaël. I looked at him one last time before closing my eyes, telling myself repeatedly that he will survive and will make a recovery soon.

I woke to find Raphaël lying in his pool of blood, his eyelids shut. His chest no longer rose or fell; there was no sign of movement. My heart sank. The realization kicked in and I rested my head on his body. His suffering has ceased - there is nothing I can do anymore. They had won, I thought to myself. A tear rolled down my face as it hit the hard, concrete ground. I closed my eyes. There was a slight rustle behind me, and racing thoughts of escape no longer flooded my mind. I braced myself; I held tightly to Raphaël's cold hands. The trigger went off.

I saw fissures of brilliant light in the distance with rays of the setting sun touching land far away. But France was no longer being lit by the sun; instead, the world had turned off its lights. Coldness had now set in the country; grief was like a shadow and France was one of his victims, now hidden from the world. Reality was the projection of our inner desires and a new part of the tree trunk became filled with poisonous lichen; it was just a bit closer to killing the tree and fulfilling its desires.

The world had left a trail of broken promises of saving countries in the world. It was wrecked by selfishness and a lack of compassion or empathy. But unlike the cold-hearted world, I desired the realization of the raging fire within my heart, unwilling to kneel down to the oppressors of our society. But this fire was going out because I knew that this world cannot be saved, no matter what happened. So therefore I continued walking aimlessly not after burying the dead body of my dear friend, even though I terribly missed them I needed to continue to survive for their as well my sake. As I continued walking aimlessly trying to find someplace so that I could rest and take care of my wounds, not far away I could see a small cabin. I reached out to knock on the door but nobody answered it so I went into the cabin and started to try to find some small aid kit, I was lucky enough to find one in the cabinet in the kitchen as I started to treat some small minor wounds I soon started feeling sleepy so I decided to take a quick nap in the living room.

Though before she knew it she soon fell asleep but not everything is safe in this unknown place. As she was sleeping the unknown man from before that tried to kill her managed to survive the injuries that he sustained from fighting earlier, as he keeps on walking following the footprints that were left behind he managed to make it to the cabin and saw the passed out girl. He soon got out a sharp knife from the kitchen as quietly as possible and went to the girl. That night blood-curdling screams could be heard from that cabin. Soon enough the screams stopped and it was dead silent. The man won again but only this time it was game over for both of the best friends that he murdered.



THE SHRINKING OCEAN

Astrid Chen

Bottomless blue, pink coral, dark fins and tail. The sea water covered the fish scales all over my body, and occasionally bubbles rushed over, which was a little itchy.

A heart-wrenching squeeze brought my consciousness back to the cage. clear, narrow tank, and other fish's hateful, unwilling eyes. These eyes were like sharp swords, stabbing other fish. I closed my eyes and tried to curl my body, but the feeling of the suffocation did not disappear and the fear kept spreading to me from other fish scales one by one, fitting it tightly.

I opened my eyes and struggled to squeeze my fins out a little bit. Before I could catch my breath, the shoal of fish started to stir again. I didn't dare to stop, the water started to blur my eyes and make them bloodshot.

Since when did the water of the ocean gradually change color and the place we live in kept shrinking?



Many of the fish had gone and the remaining schools are building a high wall here. Then it got more and more crowded.

I began to become dizzy from the lack of oxygen and fought to keep my eyes open. I knew if I stopped moving I would sink, unnoticed by the others. As hard as I tried to stay awake I felt myself slipping into unconsciousness .

When I opened my eyes I found myself tied to a cold steel table. I did not know where I was and everything hurt, it felt worse than being bitten by a shark.

It was a scene I'd never seen before. There were metal, silvery machines surrounding the steel table that I was lying on, the whole room is bright and lit by cold white lights and there were huge test tubes on the wall, filled with blue liquid. It was quiet and weird and I was on my own.

I heard and then saw the people coming in. They were wearing white scientific coats and carrying a huge saw in their hands. The terrible thought that they would use that on me flashed across my mind. They came closer and the last words I heard were “this won't hurt much”.

The characteristics of a fish were still on me, and my fins were intact and bandaged. My fishtail could still move, but I had two new human legs on either side of the tail.

I didn't know how to use my “new hand”, it was so unfamiliar. I tried to move my finger, then my legs and feet but nothing felt right, it felt creepy and disturbing. Even worse, my head felt normal to use but in my deep mind, I couldn't believe it.

"First of all, welcome," said Jonathan, who guided me through the tour and introduction. "Edith is a leader we should respect and follow. It was she who initiated the change that gave us human capabilities." He pointed to a towering tower building. "There, but mediocre creatures can't disturb her."

Jonathan retracted his gaze and walked side by side on the street with me, "It's also absolutely safe there, I'm envious."

Suddenly, some murlocs appeared on the street, and they charged at us with mace and bayonet.

Jonathan quickly drew a card from his lab coat pocket, "E-2200, please make way."

When the murlocs heard it, they bypassed us and rushed towards the passers-by behind. I turned my head in horror and saw that they rushed over to grab the short murloc standing behind him. I the group of them arrogantly snatching the bag from the little lone murloc's hand, pushing him to the ground, and rummaging through his bag fiercely.

They robbed the lone murloc and took out the bottle of blue seaweed inside. The little fisher murloc cried and said something to the robber, and the robbers looked even angrier and slashed at him directly.

Blood, blue blood, large swathes of blue blood splattered on the ground. My eyes widened, it was so much more than in the tank.

Johnathan said indifferently, "Don't look, let's go."

My body froze in place as if not listening. After the robbing group killed the little murloc, he cut off his fins and left them aside. Each murloc got a part of the little fish's body, they sat down on the spot, and started eating directly.

Jonathan pulled my sleeve, "Let's go."

I followed him in silence, my throat choked out. For a long time I asked him, "Jonathan, why are you so calm?"

He used to be a friend of mine who lived on the reef with me, and I even remember his smile, now his reaction is strange to me. A chill came from the sleeve to my heart, I shivered and pulled the sleeve out of her hand.

"Why do we live like humans even though we are fish?" I looked at her. "Look, we have hands and fins, and we can better protect ourselves."

Jonathan smiled faintly.

"Follow Edith, seek shelter," he waved the sign in his hand. "No one will answer your question. Curiosity comes at a high price."

I nodded shyly. There are still countless questions swirling in my mind, but I haven't asked them in the end. Jonathan seemed to know what I was thinking.

Hee put away the absent-minded smile just now and approached me, and said seriously: "You can't change the world, you can only change yourself."

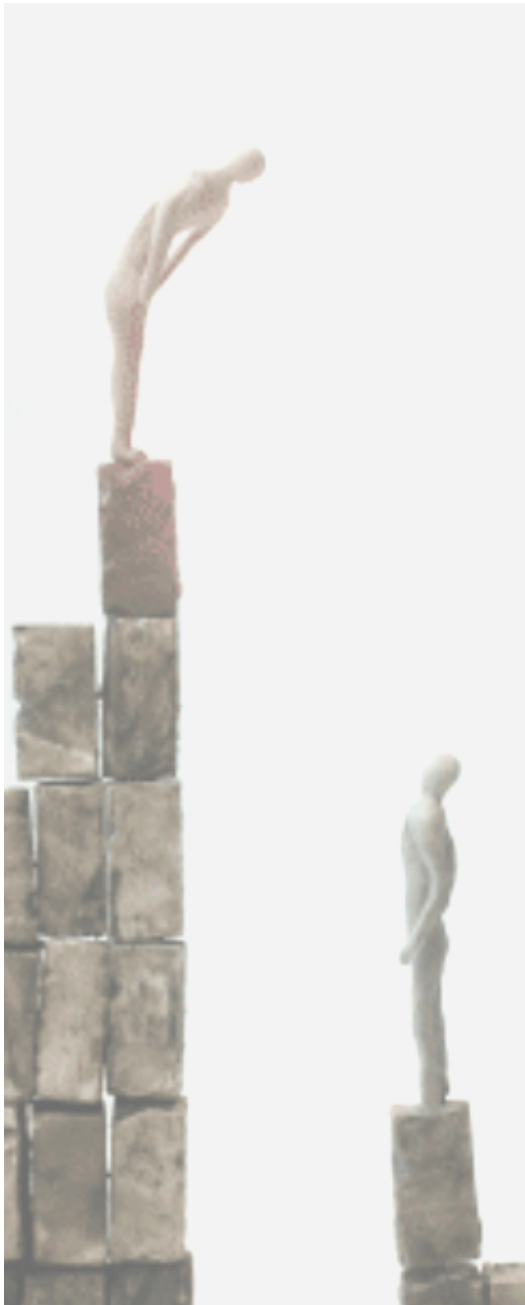
As soon as Jonathan finished speaking, his body gradually turned into liquid and flowed to the ground. I reached out to pull him, but all I touched was liquid. Blue blood seeped into the road and disappeared. All that was left was a cold and lifeless sign, E-2200.

The test-tube in the lab suddenly popped into my mind, full of blue liquid. I picked up the sign on the floor and put it in my pocket. The sign in my hand suddenly lit up, as if I had put it back into use.

I gave a smile that was uglier than crying. Got you, I will live on your behalf.

THE GAP BETWEEN THE RICH AND POOR

Boyin Zhang



A woman slept in a dark, wet room. This room had no window, only a little light crept in under the door. Outside the room, there was a jumble of footsteps and the sound of gunfire. She could smell the blood in the air and gun powder. She habitually touched the right-hand side of the ground, it felt very moist, and the blood had not dried yet. Suddenly, the chaotic footsteps outside the door stopped, and a footstep stopped in front of the door. The door opened, and the light was harsh and white. In this whiteness, a shot rang out-- the video stopped here.

“This is what happened in slums right now,” said Mr. Abner, the commander in chief of the anti-government organization. “Now the poor are being massacred by the government. The government's claim that they are doing this to fight the epidemic is just a lie, don't you understand?” He stood at a small table and talked to the people in front of him. These people were all from different slums, they had survived the massacre.

“We can't let the government go on slaughtering like this, it's time to fight back!”. When Mr. Abner finished his sentence, all the cheering were delighted. They made fists and raised their hands above their heads again and again. Where no one noticed, Mr. Abner leaked a weird smile, gloomy and terrifying, looking like a devil from hell, who would take people's lives in the next moment.

At the same time, some refugees who had just run from the massacre arrived in front of the door outside. Most of them had yellow faces and thin skin. The hair was very unruly and sticks to the scalp due to the long-term lack of care. Their bodies were covered with dried blood that had turned black, making them look like night elves. But if you looked carefully, you would have realized that among them, there were some people who are showing imperceptible stiffness on their faces.

Soon, a sign in front of everyone slowly unfolded and became larger. A rusted iron door appeared in front of everyone. This door is thick and tall, like a wall blocked in front of everyone. The surface of this door has been worn a lot, but the complex patterns on its surface can be vaguely seen.

The iron door slowly opened, and Mr. Abner came out, "Welcome to the AB's shelter. This is a shelter specially built for the poor. Here, I will do my best to provide shelter for everyone. Everyone who needs help is allowed here, there will be sufficient food and water provided."

Everyone followed Mr. Abner into a huge, empty room. This room has only two windows and a single door. There was no furnishing in this place, so it looked empty. There was a very strange smell in the room, like blood and gunpowder smoke. But no one realized the smell. Likewise, no one found the four people crouched in the corner, nor noticed his strange smile. Soon, Abner pressed the switch in the palm of his hand, and a box suddenly popped up in the four corners of the room, which contained machine guns and bullets.

Soon, among the refugees, a few men covered in black, come out of nowhere, grabbed the machine guns which popped out of the wall, and pointed the dark muzzle at the crowd. Before people could react, the gun went off. With a deafening sound, a clear shot went through the barrel of a gun and into the body of a refugee. There was no time for people to escape, actually there was nowhere for them to run. All the doors and windows were shut, the only thing they could do was wait to be shot. The ground was gradually stained red with blood. The blood was one drop at first, two drops, and gradually more and more. Like the falling leaves in autumn, slow, but something no one could stop. The blood gradually covered the ground. From the reflection of the blood, one could see the expressions of fear and struggle of the refugees. The blood on the ground matched the sunset, which was beautiful and spectacular, but behind this beauty, how many lives were sacrificed?

When the slaughter was over, the man from the government stepped on the blood and came to Mr. Abner.

“You did very well, almost all the fleeing refugees have now been killed. After the matter is over, our government will arrange a good position for you.” said the man.

“I will do my best to help the government, and I hope the government's remuneration is worthy of my efforts.” said Mr. Abner

“Of course,” the man answered, “In a few more days, our plan to eliminate the poor people and ease the gap between the rich and the poor will be complete. The country will no longer have poor people anymore. We are very grateful to the poor for their contribution to the development of our country, whether they did so voluntarily or not, this is what they should do. And you, as our collaborator, will definitely get a handsome reward.”

Mr. Abner looked at the dead bodies.

“I'm sorry to treat you like this. But, to destroy the evidence, I have to do this. I hope you have a good life in heaven.”

At this time, the sun went down and finally vanished at the horizon. There was only darkness left in the world.



Rihito Kikumoto

This is a transcript of the podcast *Rihito's Films*. In this episode, we are introduced to Lilly and Lana Wachowski's dystopian film *The Matrix*.

Hey guys!! Welcome to Rihito's films, the one and only podcast made to talk deeply about movies.

Ok to begin, I'm gonna talk about the worldview of the Matrix here today. In particular, I will be focusing on the fact humans are ruled, produced, and living an unreal life made in this movie. Before listening, be aware that this podcast includes spoilers and that I will speak on the premise that you have seen the movie.

First, let's start with a light synopsis. In the film, we open in a city named Zero One- a place full of only machines or AI Robots. As machines produced at Zero One have good performance, their economic power has surpassed that of humankind. In response to this, human countries that felt the crisis united and blockaded Zero One. While there are machines that want to get rid of the misunderstanding of their fear of humankind and seek a way of coexistence, Zero One has effectively entered a state of war with humankind.

So, the film helps viewers discuss the relationships between devices and humans. Machines are good partners for humankind. Humans have created higher-performance machines and made the world more convenient.

PODCAST TRANSCRIPT : DYSTOPITUNE

However, there are always problems. This is evident at one point in the film where one robot killed a human from dissatisfaction. Robots that have evolved to the point of having feelings and their own thoughts were found guilty at a trial. With this incident as an opportunity, humans who are usually hostile to machines started to persecute them. Since that time, humans had tried many things to stop the robots by cutting their energy source.

This is what happened in the past. Now we will go on to the world view of the real world so far. Machines hunted down humanity with overwhelming force. Since the electric power of the machines is the sun, human beings covered the sky with clouds of nanotechnology and made the earth dark. From this time on, machines started using humans for energy instead of batteries using the sun. Later on, machines start human biological research to understand the mysterious nature of humankind. In the process of ecological research, they have found that making humans dream can efficiently obtain electricity. This is the start of the dystopian world.

The movie starts with a totally normal-looking world. However, the essence is a paradise where everyone can live happily without effort. This is not reality. The dystopian part of this movie is here. People are having a wonderful life in a cyber world while they are used as products and resources. They can't even recognize that. The machines have made a human farm factory to obtain energy. It is possible for them to just produce humans giving them no life. But they don't. Robots have found that having feelings can produce more energy. That's why humans are given an ideal world. A fake utopia for profit. How dystopian is that?

You can live and everything works as you want. Though it's always being monitored and controlled. Which one would you choose? What is true happiness?

True freedom with adverse reality or an ideal life with no freedom?

In this movie, there is a saviour. His name is Neo. He is a chosen one who has the power to fight against the machines. Neo and his buddies have chosen true reality to free human beings from robots. But it's an endlessly difficult road. There is no happiness. You can't eat a decent meal or have a comfortable sleep. Machines are always aiming for your life. The problem is, "Is saving humanity a true salvation in such a painful reality"?

There are many things we can learn from *The Matrix*. These include some more technical aspects. Understanding how the View Matrix works in 3D space is one of the most underestimated concepts of 3D game programming. The reason for this is the abstract nature of this elusive matrix. The world transformation is the matrix that determines the position and orientation of an object in 3D space. The View Matrix is used to transform a model's vertices from world-space to view-space. Through this warped sense of time, we can tell that, losing, and being unable to understand true happiness by pursuing it too much is the true intention of a dystopian world.

That's all we have time for in today's episode. Remember to subscribe and watch the movie if you haven't before. Next week we will talk about a different movie. Which movie is a secret so please look forward to it. See you and goodbye!!



FAKE REALITY

BY LANCE GAN

"Oops," Artelius exclaimed,

He had just bumped into someone else, Artelius quickly apologized, but the man just smiled and said it didn't matter.

This was the earth in 2200 years. Artelius went home. Birds were chirping along the way. People were laughing, Artelius looked at this beautiful society, the towering buildings, the trees full of life. There was no hatred, no discrimination, no status distinction. People of high status would also politely greet those of low status, everything was so peaceful and beautiful.

Artelius comes home and looks at the house he bought recently. He was very satisfied. He looked at the marble floor tiles, the pillars with patterns, the comfortable bed, and pillows.

They were all brand-name products. There was a faint, woody scent in the room, and there was even a record player playing a slow, soothing tune for Artelius.

Artelius was proud of the results of his efforts, and also felt a little bit can't wait to rejoice. He cooks himself a great dinner and opens a bottle of red wine, pouring it into the glass, and the red wine was as beautiful as a ruby swirl in the glass, giving off a charming aroma.



Artelius raised the red wine glass.

"To my hard work, to my parents for giving birth to me, to my amiable boss, to our most respected president, so that we can do the work we love unconditionally, To this peaceful society, to this beautiful world," Artelius said with a smile, then took a sip of red wine.

Artelius stood drunkenly in front of the bed, looking at the exquisite silk bed. He felt very satisfied and was ready to take the pills and go to sleep as before. This pill was issued by the dear government. Although he didn't know what it was, he felt very relieved and happy after taking it, and the inexplicable pressure on his body also dissipated.

He fumbled for a while in the pocket of his trench coat, but couldn't find where the pills were. He was a little panicked. He suddenly thought that it might have fallen out when he collided with the man in the morning. He wanted to find a replacement from the government, but the alcohol in the red wine had already entered his mind, and he couldn't resist the sleepiness that had already struck him. Artelius slept with anxiety.

Artelius woke up in a daze. He felt that his head was about to explode. He reluctantly opened his eyes, but in front of him was a completely unfamiliar scene. The dilapidated roof is sparsely pierced by sunlight and the walls are a mottled gray. Dust in the air is also clearly visible. A strong stench poured into his nostrils, The stench of rotting flesh and chemicals was everywhere. This strong and disgusting smell seemed to pierce his brain. If possible, Artelius wanted to cut off his nose.

Artelius stood up in a panic. He thought he had been kidnapped. After all, he had a very comfortable rest in the mansion yesterday. When he opened his eyes, he found himself in a place he didn't know how to describe. The harsh environment in the house, along with the panic and overwhelmed feeling in Artrius's heart, constantly stimulated his brain. He couldn't bear the mental breakdown any longer and eventually passed out.

When he woke up again, he was completely out of strength, and the mental shock brought by today made him no longer able to think and play nonsense. His body also lost a bit of strength because he hadn't eaten for a day, but this allowed him to calm down and observe the surrounding scenes. But the more he looked, the more frightened he became. The placement of the bed, the position of the dining table, the photos, all of this is so similar to his home. He tightly covered his head and didn't want to accept the truth in front of him, but he also knew that this— was the truth.

It took a long time for Artelius to accept this extremely cruel fact. He looked at the whole house. It looked like an abandoned building. There were spider webs, reptiles and maggots everywhere, like all the disgusting things in the world. Not only that, there is a lot of minced meat on the ground, and I don't know where it came from, but due to the repeated stamping, it has long since melted into the floor, exuding its stench. There was also the dilapidated dining table, where the food placed on the plate, was a pile of meat. The blood didn't stop flowing and its appearance- looking like human flesh frightened him.

Whenever he thought of this, Artelius couldn't stop the feeling of wanting to vomit because he didn't know how much human flesh he has eaten since being here. Although Artelius slowly began accepting what was in front of his eyes.

He still had a glimmer of hope, what if? What if he was just tied up in a place that looked like his home, what if this place wasn't real? Although he knew the odds were slim, he still chose to deceive himself and believe in this glimmer of hope. But soon, that hope was dashed.

Looking further out he saw the broken streets, crumbling buildings, disgusting surroundings, and people outside. Trudging outside Artelius knelt on the ground and looked up at the sky. He didn't understand the meaning of his existence, nor why God wanted him to know this cruel fact. He suddenly thought of the government. That's right, aren't the government-issued pills used to control people? Just as he was talking, he suddenly heard a series of voices coming slowly. He turned around and saw a man as fat as a pig, lying on a luxurious sedan chair, with the government logo shining brightly on his body. The most surprising thing was that this sedan chair is actually pulled by people. Yes, it is an ordinary person who is blinded by the pills, with a numb expression but a smile, still immersed in that "beautiful world".

He looked at this horrid scene, cold sweat broke down his back and he felt sad for them. He felt ridiculous, they thought they lived in a perfect world, but in the real world, humans only lived like animals. But for some reason, Artelius's spirit that was about to collapse became firm, and he wanted to save and awaken these people.

He started walking around, trying to wake up those who were still in the dark, it was successful for most, except for one or two people who collapsed and committed suicide after knowing the truth. Artelius was relieved. He continued for one day, ten days, one month, and one year. Then, he finally began to collapse. After such a long time, his team did not grow at all. There were only a few partners as most that he had awakened soon had to be buried under the government's pursuit.

In despair, he knelt on the street shouting to wake people up. Maybe this voice really had the ability to pierce people's minds, and people with numb faces gradually turned to him.

Artelius was happily surprised but soon discovered something was wrong. Their eyes were still clear. And, they shook their heads blankly at him. Bizarrely they were trying to persuade Artelis to give up. Artelius was stunned. In fact, he found out that these people were sober.

No wonder, no wonder, no wonder he couldn't wake them up. It turned out that Arterlius couldn't wake up a person pretending to sleep. They had already discovered the truth of this world, but the world had already become dilapidated. They had simply chosen to hold onto and deliberately sink into their illusory dream. Artelius felt completely crazy, the belief he has held for many years is completely broken.. Yes, when fantasy is more real and beautiful than reality, how many people are willing to wake up? Artelius laughed madly.



THE MASSACRE

BY NICOLE BUI AND ANH DUONG

These children were huddled beneath a cabinet. On the arid land, cadavers piled on top of each other in a deep pit like a slat of dry woods. Suspense, hopelessness, and horror... Anti-Semitism- the phrase which discriminated against and stigmatized Hitler and his party during WW2.

In this uttermost cold weather, all the objects seem imperturbable. Step by step the SS soldiers bluntly crammed the Jews and drew them forcefully into crude and old trucks. They include the elderly, children whose bodies have not yet fully developed, and women, all of whom must be killed if they have Jewish blood. Their thin, lifeless bodies pressed against each other, as the soldiers tried to stuff as much as they could, seemingly pushing people into a nonexistent empty space in the compartment.

Within the tight squeeze of the car compartment, the sense of impending death, no one dared to say a word, only suffering and obeying. The car prepares to roll, they are moved to large-scale murder facilities

When German soldiers arrived at the extermination camps, they were commanded to direct the Jews into the gas chambers, a method of cold-blooded murder on a massive level. The Jews were forced to enter the gas chamber naked, leaving all their belongings and garments behind. They've been bathed and groomed thoroughly. They have only the form of a person's body and soul on them at this moment, they feel death and fearfulness, in front of them is a closed, dark, and vague room.

the space is so lonely that it's frightening, everything is lifeless, and trees and flowers have also withered. People's hearts are cold to kill each other, but unfortunately, in just a few more minutes, they can no longer be human anymore...

There were two bunkers for Jews to enter at the Auschwitz killing camp. Each bunker has a capacity of 1200 people. They stuffed as much as they could, and when there was no more sufficient space to stuff, the door slammed shut. At this point, the process of murdering the innocent was underway. The soldiers dropped Zyklon-B pellets to spread the toxic gas throughout the cellar, which they dropped through the ventilation system in the wall and then sealed it to ensure that no carbon monoxide would escape. The estimated time of death for each person was determined by whether they were close to the vent or not; the nearer they were, the speedier they will be killed because they would inhale the poisonous fumes first. The time was expected to be around 20 minutes, but a third of them die instantly as soon as the Zyklon-B begins to emit its toxic fumes. The cry could be heard outside.

Those in the camps could physically hear the defenseless people's desperate pleas/ Though, though they were screaming in vain while in the midst of dying bodies, unmistakably trying to find a way to save themselves. Nothing changed as a result of their death. After murdering everyone in the room, the guards began to drag the withered corpses out of the cellar one by one.

The surrounding scenery appeared to be stagnant, and the rustling sounds of soldiers dragging the dead body out of the cellar. After removing them, they began to use lye to extract all the remaining teeth, and for women, all hair was trimmed. Their appearance at this moment was more nauseating than ever; the face skin was parched and pale; the entire body was severely underweight with their raw bones exposed.

Many parts of the body have even been disconnected; the clothes tattered and worn out. The outer skin seemed to have shrunk to wrap around bone fractures; looking at them it was hard to imagine they were once sentient creatures. Now the cadavers were left to dry outside and decompose.

The same method of execution was used in thousands of murder camps throughout Europe. More than 60 million people died as a result.

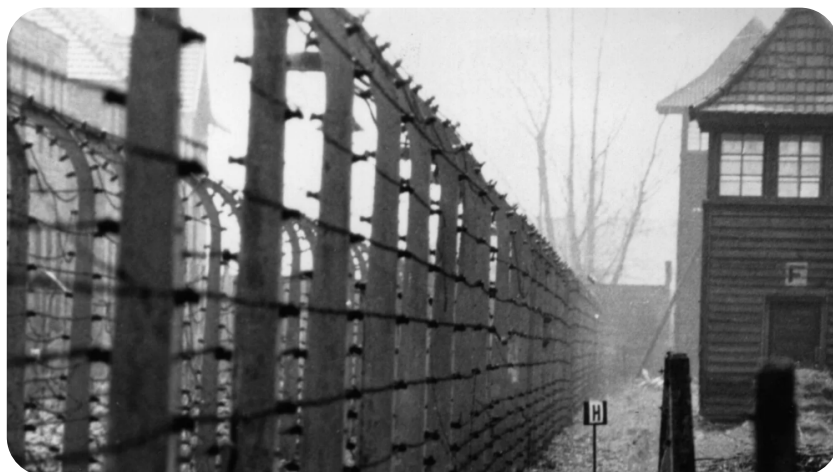
Moreover, the labour camps forced these people to endure the illusion of living without death. The elderly, children, and others were sent to a place that was considered a nightmare, a place of punishment, where everyone was exploited and treated horribly, a concentration camp. In a massive barracks with thousands of sentient creatures living behind a rusted metal net, soldiers were everywhere to prevent people from escaping. Tiny rooms for hundreds of people in very poor conditions, with no heaters, blankets, or beds, look like a small abandoned room after decades or an old storage room. The room did not have any beds or other facilities except for a small toilet with cockroaches crawling on the small sink. Insects were all over the room, on small wooden floors called "beds" made out of brick or hardwood and lined with straw beds, sloppy blankets piled on top of each other. People have to crawl into the wooden floors and stack on each other to sleep, and can't sit up straight because there was no space between. They could barely move around in the room as there isn't enough space with stacked "bunk beds". Many people had not had the chance to brush their teeth for years because they were not allowed to waste their time except doing labor work and barely resting time. Young children and the elderly were forced to work in harsh conditions by the soldiers in the camp for many hours every day, without rest and without sleep, like a restless machine that never stops. They were forced to work for the German economy in areas such as agriculture, construction, or manufacturing.

Without enough food or nutrition, many died from starvation. Their skin covers their body with no fat, showing their backbone and cheekbone with dark eye bags from lack of sleep and nutrition. They had come here with nothing having been forced to throw away all their belongings including family photos.

There were more than 1000 camps across the country with hundreds of thousands of people living there, who were exploited for their labor and treated horribly for many years as punishment because of their beliefs and ethnicity.

If the people in the camp were not fit for labor work because of health or old age, one of the cruelest punishments was forcing them to bathe in acid to death. Those people consisted of poor children who were locked in a windowless and pitch-dark room, making sure not a single ray of light could get in. Then the warden would lock the door and turn on the switch, starting to pour acid on those people's bodies so that their bodies would burn until became disfigured and would die in the most painful way.

On the outside, the echo sound of people screaming in pain would merge with the sound of people trying to knock on the door to escape this room full of gas.





Or Eisner

This is a transcript of the podcast *Dystopitune*. In this episode, we are introduced to one of the producer's favourite Israeli artists Aviv Geffen.

Hey everyone, my name is Or, and today I am going to talk about dystopian music. Dystopian lyrics in songs often deal with human emotions and social or political issues such as environmentalism, racial equality, substance abuse, and animal rights. Such music often can be varied in style. For instance, one such type may utilise the slow, heavy sound of sludge metal whilst others may include more up-beat elements drawing from crust punk, grindcore, and noise rock.

In our episode today, I am going to give you an example of a dystopian song.

The name of the song is: "Heroin". The artist who wrote the song and performs it is an Israeli rocker named Aviv Geffen.

The track was included in an album called "Memento Mori" (Remember Death). This album was written after Aviv's grandmother died and Aviv dedicated the album to her and her memories.

The song is dystopian song because it talks about difficult and powerful human emotions and drug use.

I really like this song even though I have not experienced anything so difficult on the subject of drugs, hard things happen to everyone in life. So, when I hear the song I feel the pain of the singer, and in addition, I also really like the music.

PODCAST TRANSCRIPT : DYSTOPITUNE

I have been to many Aviv Geffen's performances in Israel and when I listen to this song I can hear the pain in his voice and how penetrating this song in a way that reaches the heart.

The song lyrics:

Soon there will be no room in the veins
But what else am I losing in life?
On TV they shoot all the time
If I had the power
Just get up and run
The truth is more comfortable when diving
I've been trying to get over this forever
But outside there was nothing left for me
Frames, friends, and nonsense
If I had the power ...
And more I do not come back to myself
And I'm not leaving my room anymore
The parents will crash
What will happen to me?



NO WAY BACK

BY VICKY SHAO AND VIVI ZHANG

A loud and sharp shriek came from the school oval, far away near the fence. It could be seen vaguely, that a kid was being teased by senior students. This scene was repeated every day, sometimes several times a day. In the chaos, the boy was suffering a huge insult.

The boys vented their anger on Thomas, he became an amusement for them because of his weakness and inability to resist.

The seniors had a memorable way of laughing at the end. It was a sort of a sign, a long, drawn-out leaking of breath that finished with the boys rolling their eyes upwards. The feeble boy curled up beside the fence, they left, isolated Thomas by himself.

His clothes were all in the mud, his schoolbag was thrown on the ground, and all his stuff was scattered on the ground. He buried his head in his arms, tears soaking his face uncontrollably.

The luminous screen dragged his attention away from grief. It was an advertisement. He slowly raised his head and tried to see the screen. His sight was fixed on the 'NAT' (Neo Advertisement Technology). It was made only for weak and helpless people in their extreme circumstances. His eyes moved to the top of the screen 'This game is just made for you.' The download button shimmered in his eyes even under the darkest light.

All of his vexations turned away when the picture appeared in front of him, a group of kids sporting together, this is what he's yearned for in his adolescence.

'Are you suffering bullying? This game is what you've hankered.'

Though there was some hesitation, he felt different for a second, like something inside him was shifting, a new creed taking hold. He would begin his pursuit of happiness. Following a jingling sound, the Exodus game was downloaded to his phone.

On the way home, he frequently checked if any notifications were coming up from Exodus and discovered what the game was about. No one was at home, even if there were, it had no difference, the same coldness, the same deafening silence would be waiting. He took off his shoes immediately, rushed into his room, and slammed the door. He lay on his bed, opening the game with excitement.

"I knew you will join, million of users joined, trust me, this game brings joy." Exodus was too enticing to refuse, his hand seemed to be out of control, and his eyes began to read the instructions of the game.

"Never share this game with others. Follow and complete every mission. Each mission requires you to send a picture while it's done. You can't stop or delete the game until the last mission, don't even think about it. ENJOY." With a confused account of what he has just read, a look of puzzlement across his face, he stopped, and peered intently at the screen, he paused and thought for a moment, with some curiosity along with his sentiments, he kept going.

The magic of Exodus, technology, was that it addicts people without even letting people control themselves. The game guided him to use his own body to exchange for happiness. The way to pass a level in the game is to carve an assigned drawing on the body.

At first, he was frightened, He thought to himself 'Maybe just give it a try?' as his hands shook. However, holding the knife he managed to carve a bloody symbol on his body as instructed.

Opening the app each day, he hurt himself deeper. That's what he did daily. Time passed by, there were more than thirty scars on his body already.

With head down and an empty stare, he managed each task. Soon, he was able to grab the knife with confidence carving complicated shapes to receive more beneficial information, making himself happier. Yes, he'd already gotten used to it, drugged by the app.

Sometimes it was a knife, sometimes across, whatever the shape was, there was always a threat, 'Remember, if not following the instructions, you will go back to being a coward again, and surely, I will find you, or, maybe not you, your family.'

His emotion was restrained and manipulated by the dominant technology, the technology was killing people, because, fewer humans meant more resources shared with each person at the higher level of the society, the controllers. That's what people aimed for, even if it was inhumane and cruel, they don't care.

Besides language threats, there was another way to keep humans in the loop. There are benefits given out to allure people, to keep those powerless humans interested. That was by giving exclusive news to all users, sometimes real, sometimes fake, so they can be constantly attracted to the game.

Thomas learned how to use an ingratiating tone and how to mimic an expert that knows everything about the world. People sought happiness from what Thomas talked about, the news, the gossip, and the knowledge that didn't belong to him. So, Thomas started to seek happiness from the gathering and became capable of winning favor. Exodus helped him to start to get rid of the feeling of dread. It is perceptible that all the people surrounding him made him feel more welcomed. All of his information in hand has leaked to others, but one thing he never told anyone is that he often felt pain, he has to stifle the tears because he knew if he talked about painful stories, he would lose the last way to live.

He's already fed upon Exodus a thousand times. So, when he pulled the clothes up and looked at the tingling wound, he wanted to buck against it, but his conviction always disappeared quickly. He was fighting a losing battle against the strong. By the time he realized that he had fallen into the darkest hole, there was already no way to escape, the cage was locked. He was too impotent.

With the increasing harshness along with the increasing satisfaction of being so welcomed at school, he added more and more scratches to his body to keep the relationships going on, between his family and his 'friends'. Rather than crying, he smiled, that seemed like happiness.

The last task that jumped up on the screen was a knife job again, when his eyes moved to the title, The job is 'cut through the neck ', or else, the high-tech tracking system will help us to find your family. THINK CAREFULLY. Remember the timer, 24 hours.'

His sister, Linda, had noticed Thomas' change anxiously at the clock. He closed his eyes, and found it hard to manage the inclination to cry.

Tears washed his face, he lay on the floor and stared at the window exasperatedly. He wanted to see the landscape, the clouds, the waving trees, but he couldn't, it was blurred by his tears. He revisited his memory of when he started the game. His lack of love from his family, the lack of caring from friends, and everything. He came out feeling that there is no more meaning to life. The thought was like a ceaseless mind-cramp, something too hard to bear yet too strong to avoid. In the end, no one can understand him.

School life, lunchtime, classroom, gossip, oval, happiness, love.
He had nothing.

Linda saw all of this and knew what he may do. But, she did not feel guilty for her brother, she felt she was fighting a winning battle because her goal is to help the game to kill humans, including her family.

This was normal. After all, in Exodus, it was just a single participant. The game was over.



DYSTOPIA

