

Psychedelic Subversion

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The faceless man exited the small apartment, entering the sprawling main-hallway of his apartment building. The walls were at one point, most likely brushed, shiny metal, but now were covered by a reddish-orange coat of surface rust, rust that in fact covered the entire city. City is perhaps too small a word to describe what truly was an ecumenopolis, for the urban setting sprawled across the entire moon. Small tubes that contained Elevators connected buildings, slightly larger tubes connected districts and sub-sections, and tubes larger still connected even greater portions of the planet-wide (or moon-wide, technically) city, acting as massive highways for its inhabitants numbering in the trillions (there were, of course, intermediate sizes of tubes). The moon was always in a state of hustle-and-bustle and never truly went to sleep; it was covered in lights that could be seen from space, and if one were to travel far away enough, it would glow as though it was a small star. And yet, in the city itself, “bright” was not a typically used word. Not, at least, in the sense of a positive, inviting aura - no, since despite the luminosity, the ambience of the moon could be described as red and sinister. The moon, one should note, was not like the planet Earth, for rather than a blue sky, it had a brown-orange, grungy sky. And, too, fumes and smog and smoke were in no short supply, both from the industrial machine required to power the moon and emissions from the gas-giant it orbited. One should also note how the city and all of its lights were powered: it was entirely powered by using the heat and energy from the center of the moon. All of the power-related operations (and in fact all operations in every sphere) were overseen by the Corporation.

It was this Corporation in which our faceless man found his employment. He did not work inside the core, as it was dangerous work fraught with peril, and his Intelligence Score was too high. Mind you, he was no big-shot executive either, as those positions were only given to the Smarts, and our man was merely a Mediocre. No, far from being an executive, he was instead a simple salaryman, an accountant or a salesperson or something or the other for the Corporation. The faceless man - well, he obviously had a face, and if he were asked to describe it, he likely would have been able to... but ultimately, what he looked like mattered not. He was just one of many; a small, ultimately replaceable, and inconsequential cog in whichever machine he was asked to be a part of (for he didn't have much knowledge about things beyond his own

existence). He surely was a person; with human hands and human feet, and a human torso with pectorals and obliques and deltoids and everything else; with a neck; and on the top of his neck was a head, as is typical for all people. But where his eyes could have been, there might as well have been just holes, and instead of a nose jutting out and lips pouting, there might as well have only been skin, stretched taught across his face - of course he did have an eyes and nose and lips and ears and was a human, but he might as well have been something akin to a clone.

In any case, the man strode down the hallway for some period of time until he reached an Elevator. He entered it and was not surprised that he was the only person inside, as the part of the city in which he lived could only be described as decrepit and borderline deserted. The Elevators present on the moon were somewhat different from the ones that the inhabitants of planet Earth may have used, for rather than buttons that took an Earth-elevator up and down, these Elevators used a system in which they could move left and right and forwards and backwards and up and down as they travelled through a complex three-dimensional array of shafts. He programmed the Elevator to take him to a Level Three Tube, which in turn would take him almost directly through the core of the moon and to his offices. Shortly, he arrived at the Tube station, a large, rectangularly shaped room that connected to multiple Elevator shafts, as evidenced by the rows upon rows of Elevator doors on three of the four walls. The fourth wall truly wasn't a wall at all, as it was itself a massive door. But rather than opening to an Elevator, it opened to a shuttle, which was essentially a massive Elevator in and of itself, capable of carrying hundreds of thousands of workers. They were not programmable like the Elevators were, however, and operated on a fixed schedule.

The man exited the Elevator and saw that a few other salarymen were waiting for the shuttle to arrive. He stood with them and waited too. There was no noise, only silence as the salarymen waited - to an Earth person this likely would have been unsettling, but to them it was quite normal indeed. As the men waited, more men from more of the many Elevators made their way and joined the growing crowd. Eventually, the station was brimming with people, but not quite with life, and shortly the shuttle showed up as the sizable doors slowly slid open and sheathed themselves. The crowd ushered themselves inside the shuttle, and the doors silently closed behind them. The interior of the shuttle was also covered in rust, and there were no windows; so the salarymen waited in silence, just as they had at the station. Their journey was pleasant enough. There was some lurching and turbulence, and unsafe-sounding screeches, but

that was expected as the shuttles were old and had not been maintained all too well. The shuttle stopped right at the offices, so that the workers wouldn't have to walk too far into the place.

He walked into his cubicle and sat in his robo-chair, which was likely rather uncomfortable as it was entirely metal and certainly not ergonomically efficient. From somewhere, a hidden door slid closed, and a soft click indicated that his cubicle was locked and would stay that way until the man's daily quotas had been reached. The cubicle was incredibly small (it only had space for the robo-chair) with rusted walls and a small light on the ceiling. A screen emerged up from the front of the robo-chair and sets of buttons popped out from the armrests. The man began to use the buttons to fulfill his tasks for the day, which likely included accounting or writing or something or the other.

Despite the fact that his working conditions could only be described as borderline exploitative by the Earth people, he was in fact lucky because he at least was able to control himself. Those who were classified as Below-Averages were only used as computing-power. They would be arranged in a great grid of rows and columns, numbering in the millions, and would stand inhumanely close to one another. The Below-Averages would be hooked up to an intravenous-drip and a brain-cap would be put on their head - they would be both sedated and nourished by the IV, and the brain-caps would use their brains only as computing units. Their entire lives would be kept in such a state - there was no sleep, no food, no pleasure at all. Only being used as a biological-CPU, awake yet unable to think, alive but far from living. In fact, the accounting software program used by the man was powered by a grid of Below-Averages. Interestingly, he did not think to be thankful for the fact that he was not a Below-Average, not in the least because he did not think very much, if at all, but also because the Corporation made sure that no one knew what being a Below-Average entailed.

It was with the accounting program that the man finished his final task for the day. He finished with many of his colleagues (this was indeed the design of the Corporations: tasks were carefully delegated such that everyone finished at the same time, plus-minus some small units of time), and found himself towards the back of the steady stream of men heading towards the shuttle that would take them home. The shuttle doors opened as the stream approached (there was no waiting on the way back). But as the man approached he tripped. Over what is inconsequential, but the point is that he did. Hoards did not wait for him, and his colleagues stepped on and over him on their way to the shuttle. By the time he had got up, the doors had

begun to close. He would have run, and probably would have made it in time, if he had known how to, but running was prohibited and therefore not taught to anyone.

The man had missed the shuttle. He had to take an alternate route back home. He returned inside the offices and quickly found a normal Elevator. However, he did not know this area of the city and deduced that he would need to find a Helper-Person - a person who could help him. The only problem that presented itself was rather simple: he did not know where to find the Helper-Person because he did not know how to navigate the city.

He went into the Elevator and programmed it to go somewhere. When he got somewhere, he found it was not the somewhere he needed to go, and programmed the Elevator to go to another somewhere. He repeated that for a certain number of times, going here and there, switching Elevators, then going there and here, trying to find his Helper-Person. Inevitably, he reached a very, very special place indeed, a place that the Corporation had been trying to find for ever and ever. A small alleyway in between massive structures was where the man found himself, illuminated only by the brown-red sky above. And for some quirky reason, something compelled him to follow the alleyway, and so he did; and as he moved forward, he found that the alley became a tunnel, and as he walked through the tunnel and reached the end, he found a door made of something he had never seen before (it was wood), from which a rather strange noise seemed to emanate. Tentatively, he opened it; the noise stopped, and he stepped inside.

It was a small cantina filled with many people, looking at him. But they were not like the other people the man had seen. The patrons wore different clothes from each other, had different hair from each other, and there appeared to be, to the man at least, many misshapen men amongst the group. The man simply stood there taking in the alien sight of unique people, and they, of him. As they all collectively stared, one of the patrons walked over to him and handed him a small pill. Beyond just the misshapen men, and the colors, and the pill, the speaking shocked the man, for speaking - well, it should be obvious by this point that speaking was banned. The words that the patron said could not be understood by the man, being that he had not heard anything remotely resembling human phonetics before, but he still understood to swallow the pill.

Immediately, the pill started to take effect. He felt a tightening in his gut and his muscles. His lungs contracted and his breathing became extremely labored, but only for a slight moment, as afterwards, he found that his breathing became light, lighter than it ever had been. The ambient red left his vision and the light hitting his retinas somehow was unfiltered. Brighter than

ever was how the world seemed to him, in a small, dodgy cantina. He felt his thoughts became clearer, and his instincts seemed to be unlocked. He could dialogue with himself in his brain, he could think. He knew words for things he had never seen before, he understood that the misshapen men weren't misshapen at all and were in fact women. He knew how to speak, suddenly, too, and knew what words meant. He had a name, he realized; he was a *person* and not just a person.

And as his spiritual awakening occurred, fueled by some psychedelic energy he never knew existed, he noticed the walls, rusty as ever, begin to swirl - they were almost breathing. And the rust, he noticed, was flowing, and then all of a sudden bubbling, and then all of a sudden evaporating. And the walls were not rust at all, they were a gorgeous, pristine metal. And it was then when the group of patrons told him that it was not the pill he had taken that had drugged him - it was quite the opposite. The pill had cleansed him of the drugs he had inhaled his entire life: the air in the city was itself a drug, manufactured carefully by the Corporation. It made life red and made things rusty (the planet was actually pristine sheet metal), and removed thoughts and hopes and dreams, and inhibited cognitive ability, and made people slaves.

At this, the man, filled with a newfound sense of rebellion and responsibility, grabbed a bag of pills near him and ran out of the room and up the tunnel and into the alley. "Wait," they called. But the man had a duty - he had to help free everyone. He had to show people that they were living a lie.

As he ran through the alley, which he could now see was a beautiful silver color, to the Elevator from which he arrived, he was stopped by a Helper-Person. The display screen operated by the Helper-Person read, "We have been looking for you as you did not report home and footage showed you found yourself lost. Would you like to go home?"

"No! Take a pill, this isn't real, you're being drugged! Please, let me help you."

Is what he wanted to say. But he couldn't control his esophagus and couldn't open his mouth and no sound emerged. And he was frightened because at that moment he couldn't remember his name, and his vision became red again and the walls started to grow rusty as though it was moss. For what he had failed to learn, in his haste to be helpful, was that the room in which he took the pill was the only room in the entire city in which the air was not-drugged - it was the only place one could take a pill without being immediately re-drugged.

And so, as all knowledge faded, and all traces of his lucky escapade were vaporized from his memory, all he did was nod to the Helper-Person. After all, he needed to go home soon because he had to go to work again tomorrow.