

# Voice in the Horse

On W.M. Dimes

“Get your shit- it’s carnival o’clock.”  
- *Spiderjaw Slagg*

The midday sun illuminated like a fistful of dreams.  
It was the *desert*.  
Tell it to the people.

The health of the place was bookended from all angles by decisive lines, beyond which there was nothing – tectonic plates of death made real by the tremors of life. A vacuum that stretched out like an *awe* was there, up where the sky stopped. It was given sense through a lens beyond the measure of things commonly used to gauge the grotesque. It was an untouchable scope.

An asphalt road ran from one end to the other like a bolded concussion. Everything else was sand. Cancerous prisms that pounded toward the valley were unfiltered because there wasn’t any real atmosphere, the same way there was no underground.  
And that’s the best way to describe it.

Somewhere along the baked stretch laid an irregular man by the name of Saw Kennedy. Nobody else knew his name.  
Nobody didn’t know nothing.

And let me tell you about something else, for a minute. It's important.  
Just let me do that.

Somewhere near the back of a dense olive room sat two people at a table.  
The room was dark, but it was bright like illuminated grey. It might blind you if you looked directly at it.  
And then, over there, a woman with thick cascading blonde hair looked down and said "I'll always love you." She held an eraser in one hand and a long piece of fabric in the other.  
There was a tall window near the horizon line. The glare of the interior lights shielded all but the silhouettes of wicked eyes.  
Somewhere looked up at the woman. She was going to annihilate him.  
She knew what to do to him to make him do whatever she wanted to her. She wanted to be everything.  
She was going to have him kill everyone.

The people seated at the table – men, old and fevered – paid no attention to what was going on.  
But they were in charge of everything. The outlines of their eyes matched the darkness of those at the window. Sons and daughters; fathers and the inventors of incest.

Okay.

Saw sat up on the heated pavement and did not for one moment question how he got there. His mind was busy at work like a puzzle learning how to enunciate.  
What curios'd him was the house sitting in the middle of the road not 1 kilometer in front of him, juxtaposed like rat on rice.

It was a modest, 2 story structure with a slanted roof. The kind house that never actually existed.  
It was the sort of thing someone had to wish really, really hard for.

Not skipping a beat or pausing for context, he hopped to his feet and walked 675 paces to the front door, like he was picking up where he left off.

He then knocked 12 times and waited. The curtains in the window shook and fluttered like someone reading with their eyes closed.

A figure swings open the door all double quick.

"*Hold fast!*" he screamed half a breath before grabbing Saw by the shoulders and pulling him inside.

He dotted the t on the t-*hought* by slamming the door shut behind him. He pressed his body against it in a panic. He was secretly posing. The reaction is a silence, unfathomable.

"This name's *Sammy*; Poolhall Sammy, and you owe me a *favour*," explained the sweet mysterious stranger, having already thrust his index finger towards Saw.

"Why?" asked Saw appropriately, feeling much like an index.

"I just saved your life."

"From what?"

"Starvation and dehydration. Lucky for you I got you in before the house took off."

His posture made him look like he was very proud of himself.

"Is this your house?" inquired Saw.

"I *wish*!"

"Yes, whose house is it?"

"*Hush* now! *Now!*" hissed-then-shouts'ted Poolhall, clutching his right hand as if to summon the ancient drama spirit, "Last person who asked that disappeared!"

Some say that in the world of worms a sock is incredible. Nothing crafty, no, nothing remotely. Deceptively so. Nobody ever said that.

Saw was many times grateful to not transmutate into a leathery hide in the forever midday firefield. But keeping your cards close to your chest doesn't afford you the face-estate to fit a smile.

"Thanks for being a hero this day" sneered Saw. Deep within him, some long abolished vault deep in his gut, he had the sincerity necessary to give this comment merit. The ace of hearts shook its head softly.

"Think nothing of it, *this* guy. I wanted a favour."

"What's that?"

Poolhall Sammy looked floorward at a bizarre alien skull locked around his ankle.

"I need you to remove this"

#### *FADE TO CASH*

It's high noon and all things remain the same.

It was like Medicamentia Paenitentiamorbus.

Saw and Poolhall Sammy were speaking in a code neither could decipher.

"Saw Kennedy, you're in danger," explained Poolhall.

"That there's some bullshit. *Ahem*," said Saw, trailing off...

"Don't talk to me like that. You'll learn what words you can and cannot say. You don't talk about that which is expelled. If, at any point, I am to utter such a thing, you shouldn't talk about it. You shouldn't talk about it to anyone. I'll be watching. *You*."

Saw put his hands in his pockets and began playing with loose change.

"You can't watch my words. That's some unkindness, and it's trailing right off my back. Cause it's a *knife* and you're trying to make a corpse outta me. *Ahem*."

Poolhall thrust a finger up at Saw's nose.

"You're trying to use my tactics. You need to find your own. You can't *be* me."

"I'm just trying to fit in."

"Fuck through and figure yourself out. Or you'll be fucked *up*." He pulled his finger into a fist, and then pulled the fist down. He then pulled himself back, and then pulled his chin up. Saw reworded the instructions.

"Through... *out*... *up*."

"It's the code of the bad peoples' universe."

The time came when a third man entered the thing and both were relieved so much that they deflated a little. They jumped out of it like jackals in a helicopter.

It was the sweeping of the entrance that depressed the talk into the non-underground. The third

man had a sharp, full head of gray hair which he wore with his chest puffed out like a robin. It was a radical new sort of deception because the man looked not the age that his hair claimed. And claim it did with volume like nothing else.

Each finger had the finesse of a swan's neck. His presence demanded that life itself expand on his behalf. His movements and posture borrowed from the image of a drunk senator. He had a weathered green vest that clung tight to his chest. It looked like a dead man had stolen it from a skeleton and sold it to a dust devil. And the rest is history.

"Where did you put the forks?" asked the stranger, addressing Poolhall.

"They're all in the urn" replied that, you know, *addressed* Poolhall – *cold*.

"What *urn*?"

In one whimsical movement Poolhall craned his arm behind his back and swung it back out with urn in hand. The new man snatched it from Poolhall with the full strength of both arms.

"*Thanks muffin*" he beamed, using flashlights blasting infrared, nuclear, despicable cones.

The bold new identity turned to walk away, but Saw had to get a word in edge wise. Something all the way down inside him felt familiar with making a scene. All dust was unsettled at the sonic thunderclap of new inquiries.

"*Hey!*" Saw screamed.

"Mmm?" asked the stranger with a sideways glance. He was still using the devil's light.

"Is this *your* house?"

"No, I'm just staying here."

"How much?"

"*No* moneys."

"How's that?"

"I'm trapped, *tar-ta-tar*. If I had to lease someone'd surely receive a raping"

Saw leveled his eyebrows. "But *whom*?"

The third man paused and ran his fingers down his chin. It sounded like a lobster being dragged across sandpaper.

"You first" he replied with an underlined period. Poolhall intercepted the discomforting exchange with the fist of a body of comic relief.

"Don't listen to him," he warned, locking eyes on the trail of ether left on the stairs, "he used to be a *woman*."

"That's awful," declared a not-enough -astonished Saw. Wide-eyed and nondescript he sacked the warning for further consideration.

The third man exited up the stairs like Vietnam with urn underarm, the steps creaking the sound of yearning seals.

"I'd watch my back around him," continued Sammy "he's a vindictive woman who now has the means to molest with ease."

Saw said nothing for several calculated seconds, and then abruptly left to explore the house. Poolhall was left in the entrance to digest the fact that he had been abandoned for louder groaning pastures. He leaned heavy to the right and phased into the adjacent room. Our mouthpiece entered what some secular groups call *the parlour*. A lonely figure sat in an oversized leather chair, straw dangling from its scalp and its skin like reassembled sack. Its eyes held nothing but one million shadows, its mouth unchanging, but its hat the same weight as a thesaurus. A wisdom permeated through his cloth. Indeed there was a scarecrow waiting in the parlour.

Saw washed into the place with a cordial “hello”. The scarecrow was unimpressed, but understanding.

“Hello” he said.

“Can I ask you about this house? I met this Poolhall Sammy and –“

“*Oh.*” interjected Scarecrow, “Don’t mind him. Were you minding him?”

“I was, but then I wasn’t. I might again...”

“He’s simply paranoid,” continued Scarecrow, “and I assume he was paranoid *at* you, because someone was very inquisitive and vanished not that long ago. He knew him as much as he was able. And that’s the story of the vanished.”

Saw jumped into a stranger’s present like it was him all along.

“Did anyone go out looking?”

“No. *Good riddance*, I said. Plus we never stick around for very long...”

It scratched at its right arm like *a him*.

“Did anyone ever ask why that is...?” he asked, trying his best to pass avoid responsibility.

“It’s important to keep your best foot forward. And if we don’t move, we start to choke, like a shark or something...” Scarecrow leaned back in his chair and rustled his insides.

“In fact...” he continued, pitching his head back and looking up at the ceiling...

“...We may be en route as we speak.”

Poolhall’s voice came barreling through the walls, echoing into an entity all its own.

“Where’s Widget?!” he screamed.

Scarecrow craned his head towards the voice.

“In the basement!”

“Get him for me *right* now!”

Scarecrow retracted his head to neutral and remained seated.

As far as Saw was concerned, Poolhall had melted.

The survival of Poolhall Sammy was held in the palm of suppositions of his demise.

Saw asked Scarecrow “Who’s Widget?”

Scarecrow, under his rough, sundried skin was cocking an eyebrow.

“Not who...*how*.”

“That’s exactly what I wanted to hear.”

“You can ask him yourself. That’s the best way to get to know him, anyway. I don’t want to get into the semantics of it, but he might be a Caesar...”

For a moment, like a hiccup, the atmosphere flashed and the air skipped a beat. Saw recoiled slightly as if a sneeze leapt up into him.

“What happened?” he asked, surveying his organs to be sure everything was kosher, “Where-“  
 “I think you should be asking how it was you came to be here. It worries me,” suggested Scarecrow, cancerless and never more alive.

### *FADE TO CASH*

Fluorescent light flooded down a crooked staircase. A silhouette at the brow of the stairwell absorbed into the chopping blocks at its feet.

“*Widget you miserable artist!*” he screamed.

A quivering “moo” and the sound of sizzling flowed spiderly along the concrete walls, crusted with lime and mildew. The light pancaked at the headpiece of a cow suspended upside down by a paranormal rope. The light melted its face into a puddle of guts on the floor.

A troubling creature knelt beside the cauterizing thing.

“You killed it,” mumbled the Widget.

“I was yelling for you. You shouldn’t be down here,” pressed the third man. The Widget did not break his concentration on the floor. The movement of the accusing gentlemen allowed pieces of light to illuminate the crouching other one. A smooth gray mask is attached over his face with a thick, heavy chain floating heavy above a mouth punched out in an expression of horror and just below big, round, hollow eyes. His hair is greasy, long, vertical, and unkempt. Like a frozen waterfall.

In all truthfulness of the sentence, Widget was a prisoner of his own style.

Widget explained to him that “Juice wanted to see the mammals.”

“How can you tell what a negative person wants?” asked the man, once a woman.

“You’ll never understand.”

“I don’t want you hanging around that *Juice*. He’s bad for you.”

“She.”

The third man narrowed his eyes. His head shrunk a little.

“Oh, *that’s* how it is then.”

“You don’t have an imaginary friend. You won’t understand.”

“I understand women. She’ll just hurt you in the end, much like I want to hurt you now.”

Widget was defeated. One feels compelled to pity him as no real woman ever could.

Saw Kennedy was there in spirit, walking by the opened door at the top of the stairs and spreading general unease.

“Leave me be,” demanded Widget softly.

He had either left or fallen so silent as to become one with the shadows. Widget began stroking the deceased cow’s face, curving his head in curious ways. From the farthest reaches of the basement, out where there was absolutely no light or temperature, but still a heavy tension, music was playing. It sounded like it was coming all the way from another country- from another time- realized through piano but played by hands that had no spirit.

It didn’t affect Widget; he was sitting in the wind.

Back on the main floor, in the devillian embrace of the parlour, Scarecrow was standing nervously against the far wall. Saw was studying him with all the science he could conjure. The

Scarecrow began scratching across his brain with long, wicker nails. His feet double-took like a child approaching a stranger offering toys. Surrounding the house was vast green field as far as the eye could see. An alien wind flirted with the blades of grass.

Scarecrow stood up against the glass, fingers pressing against it, and then, something deep in his stomach began to slowly tick. He could hear it muffled in his own head, but it was so loud even Saw could hear it across the room.

Seconds later he darted back to the other side of the room. He held his hands against the wall as though her were under interrogation.

"This is the worst place yet," he said, nearly quivering.

Saw took a seat on the worn plaid couch as an observer amongst thieves. Much like the people, the couch looked like it'd been around the world and didn't know what it was doing.

"Speaking of that, what was that noise?" asked Saw. His tone remained unbroken – he was still like a child asking what hands were for.

"Don't tell him!" wailed Poolhall from the hall, then tumbling in. His chest was heaving, his breathing labored.

"For all we know he's..."

Poolhall's sentence trailed off. He stared blankly into the ether, wide eyed and empty.

"Exactly. You stop that," commanded Scarecrow sternly.

Poolhall, however, was not deterred from the scrap.

"*You'll see*," he warned.

"*Sammy...*" hummed Scarecrow.

"He's sketchy, y'all."

"*Reboot.*"

Poolhall abruptly pulled a needle out of his right breast pocket and injected it into his arm. His shoulders slanted- all the steam expelled from his muscles.

"Sorry. *I was out of my element*," explained a not nearly apologetic Poolhall. The syringe then slid up his sleeve, pulled by a telekinetic string.

"Drugs kill" cautioned Saw from the sidelines.

"Where did you hear that?" snapped Poolhall.

"Satan."

And then it all came into scope.

Widget and the mysterious stranger entered the second floor, but stood outside the room as if waiting for some inevitable levee to snap. A reputation preceded them and a villainous fog supplemented their presence. Poolhall Sammy snapped to attention.

"*Damn you Tim with a Bullet!*" he screamed with his left hand clutched just the same as before.

Saw *hummm'd* to himself, relieved that he has a title for each person present.

His collection was complete.

"Seduction will get you nowhere" seduced Tim through a thin, devious smile.

"I disagree," chimed one Saw Kennedy.

Poolhall did not waver his eyes in the slightest.

"You stay *away* from me Tim with a Bullet!"

Tim with a Bullet finally flooded into the room.

"I come as a *friend*, not as a suitor. *'Y'all.*"

Poolhall growled like a beast with mange multiplied, but waved himself off.



Scarecrow, ever the diplomat, tossed in his two cents: “Staff relationships are discouraged. My words *have* to stop falling on deaf ears.”

Poolhall Sammy barked sharply.

Saw, disconcerted with the drama slowly filling the room, punctured himself into the soft meat of their arena of experience.

“You are Tim with a Bullet and I want to know how we went from desert to field. Is this a trick window? If it’s a trick window I should be the first to know.”

Tim swung his head over to Saw.

“I’m supposed to like you, and I know that, but get off my back or I’ll climb up in you like... *like fuck!*”

“That’s vulgar,” condemned Saw.

“You’re new, and I like that. It means I can talk,” Tim said calmly.

“If there’s one thing you should never, ever do, it’s open your mouth. You should keep closing it until it turns into an ass,” growled Poolhall from the back.

“All I wanted was information. I want to be a part of this; I can help. I have fresh opinions...” said Saw.

Tim rubbed the side of his head with his hand, closing his eyes as if he were massaging his soul. And then suddenly, his eyes snap open and he lifts his hand from his face.

“Alright, I’m excited. Let’s go!”

Tim marched out of the room and towards the staircase leading up.

“You’d be wise to follow him,” said Scarecrow.

Poolhall and Saw stifled up the staircase behind Tim and into the attic. The door opened like a bad jaw dropping. Cobwebs twirled and swam through the loftiest snarl. Makeshift timber suspended snapped, some collapsed, but very few in good health amid the grimoire realized. Poolhall lately asked “...Better than *what?*”

Tim with a Bullet stomped slowly over to a wet stone well in the center of the room with Saw in tow. While he made his gradual approach, he made casual banter.

“What’s your favourite colour then, Kennedy?”

“Probably purple... It’s very regal,” said Saw. Poolhall clapped his hands together, but no noise occurred.

Tim with a Bullet smiled; “Mine’s polka stripe. Do you dig?”

I... I dig it, yeah...”

“We’ll get along just fine, you and I. Make sure Sammy knows that. You tell him that.”

“I’ll... not make any promises.”

Poolhall, standing near the doorway, screamed at the top of his lungs, but still he could make no sound.

Before long, they were near the middle of the room and the well became a nagging reality.

“This,” he explained to Saw “is a *magic* well. We throw things in and the house travels around instantaneously. Either that or it freezes time. I’m not totally sure. But it gets *results*.”

“What things? Any things?” asked Saw.

“Yes; objects. There need not be anything to it. It started when we got sick of potatoes and it took us deep into the jungle primeval.”

Saw ran his eyes all along the grime that was coating the brickwork.

“Thing is,” continued Tim, “is that there’s nothing else in these places. We kept on guard in the jungle but there were no animals, or insects, or anything. And... the *air*, it’s different. There’s no *reasoning* where we end up.”

Grazing his hands across the wet stone, he recalled where he hid the bodies, but only vaguely. There was home, there were lovers, enemies, tribulations and triumphs. Enough *t* to have him feeling like a martyr.

Snaking from slime into his pores were memories that had been repressed with aid from his current situation. Images shoved their way forward under recommendation of the body, trying only to fix itself and move on. He reserved little time for reminiscence. Such things flower in silence, and silence was afforded precious little room in the house.

“I feel lonely,” muttered Poolhall from the back of the scene.

“We’re all stuck here, you fucking...*seriously*,” snapped Tim.

“Where are you from?” asked Saw at Tim, absentmindedly glazing the well with the sweat from his palms.

“A place that doesn’t want to cause me harm. Probably like you, if you’re worth your weight in salt.”

Saw remained concentrated on the well. “You shouldn’t trust me. I might kill again.” His muscles spoke for him.

Tim smiled and replied as if they were discussing the weather.

“Oh I wouldn’t worry about that. Poolhall will kill you first. He thinks he can read minds but he can only read lips and eyes. He’s also insane. But don’t tell him I told you.”

“There’s *no way* you don’t know that I’m within earshot!” hollered Poolhall.

To no avail.

The circumferences of the severed eyes were no bigger than a fingernail. They’d all been compressed, or stomped, or crushed tw’ nervous palms. He couldn’t burn them or cut them up, so he stuffed them in a big brown sack. When he did it he thought of the lyrics to death metal songs to make it seem cool. He was cool.

When that didn’t work he tried to imagine all the things he’d accomplish when he was finished his task. He told himself that he’d learn how to invest money properly. He’d get more girls as casual friends, not just as people he hadn’t figured out how to fuck yet. He’d ration his money better so he could go out more.

He’d do all this when he was done burying the bones that weren’t ground up.

And the stuff he ground up... well he’d just have to eat that.

He’d have to eat all that stuff.

Like Medicamentia Paenitentiamorbus

Down in the parlour, Scarecrow bonded with Widget in the same way wood bonds with water. The Scarecrow had long ago trained his hat on Saw Kennedy, a name he had invented. His antenna calculated every possible equation for Saw’s existence.

He didn’t like the sounds of any of them. But conventional wisdom told him half of anything is hideous.

“Tim with a Bullet still can’t find his *eyeglass*,” explained Widget in monotone. “I think he suspects Juice.”

“Couldn’t imagine why” replied Scarecrow with the grace of brushing a centipede off his shoulder.

“Will you protect him if Tim comes after him?”

“I don’t see how that’s possible.”

Widget sat completely motionless for 15 seconds, but then...

“Open your mouth...”

Scarecrow stared blankly, empty eyed and ice headed. Somewhere inside him, with great certainty, he is *not* opening his mouth and *not* cooperating. Both pause for a handful of moments.

“Good. He’s in your throat now” says Widget.

Scarecrow looked back towards the window, the conversation surrendered to the enemy.

He would have suffered more regret if he had surrendered to a steak. And that’s all she wrote.

In the attic, Poolhall remained belittled and unappreciated.

Tim, for then and forever, controlled the room.

“We’d best get out of here as quickly as possible. Scarecrow has a *thing* with fields.”

Tim turned his head to and fro to find any crafts of man to throw into the hole. He shuffled across the dusty floorboards, snatched a chair, and lifted it up to the tip of the well.

“Now nobody can sit,” objected Saw.

“Do you want to sit?” asked Tim.

“I was saving it *for later*.”

Tim shoved the chair in and down and dropped his arms to his side. Saw’s aspirations and dreams were promptly exploded. He dropped his tongue down his mouth.

Five Mississippi.

Saw arched his eyebrows. “I didn’t feel anything.”

“You wouldn’t,” replied Tim, “the attic exists in a vacuum.”

“Yes, but you see Sammy’s gone.”

Tim twisted around to the far doorway and there was, in fact, no Poolhall Sammy.

“He prefers Poolhall...” muttered a calculating Tim.

### *FADE TO CASH*

And so it occurred that all tenants collected in the parlour; the air was chocolatey with tension.

Saw took a look through the large window and gazed upon a rich forest in the throes of autumn. The window might as well have been the frame of a painting because despite the heart casting from the tress and the soil there was no life to it. There was an emotion identical to that of the desert Saw had first made out to.

His body trembled with something from long ago.

And then, as life in the house had taught him, there was a sharp noise that stole him back to the interior. Poolhall’s swamp vernacular ripped ‘cross the place.

“He *blew it up*!” he shouted, thrusting a finger at Saw.

“I didn’t! *Ask anyone!*” yelled a panic stricken Saw, not entirely sure what was transpiring.

Poolhall pivoted to the audience.

“Widget?!”

“I...” Widget was speechless. He dropped his head into his hands and denied entry.

Poolhall dashed the attention back onto free agents.

“*Useless!*”

“Ah, ta *hell* with ya!” hollered an equally scornful Tim with a Bullet. He was leaning in the same fashion as Poolhall was in the attic.

“I have an idea. Use more *things*. Chairs are *never* enough,” submitted Saw, wild-eyed, innocent, and youthful.

“Chairs always did it *before*... unless it is getting smarter...” mused Poolhall, there a prophet in sinister skin.

Scarecrow was quick to devour this whole.

“The house doesn’t *think*. It breathes and it *bleeds* and it *sleeps* but it does not *learn* and it does not *think*.”

Saw did not recoil, but rather, leaned erect: “That sounds disgusting.” This was decided beforehand.

“Machines cannot feel love or *contempt*,” sneered Tim.

Poolhall objected: “I’m more *centaur* than machine.”

“Power off!” commanded Scarecrow, loud enough to be directed at anyone.

Widget hopped to his feet with a flea’s agitation.

“Give me *Juice back!*”

Scarecrow leaned back into his fine leather chair, as neutral as smoke, saying not a word. Some say it was impatience and some say it was obedience. Widget then grabbed madly at the air in front of him and hugged himself tightly. He cradled it to his person.

“We need to keep Juice out of this-” explained Saw, “-for the sake of the group.”

Poolhall apishly stomped his feet; “*shut up!*”

Scarecrow’s head slid slowly upward, like his eyes had seen something traumatic and his muscles were forcing themselves around to compensate. The gravity of his motions made up for his lack of expression. Saw took notice because he had the same affliction. Scarecrow was looking through the skirmish and out the window. “Something terrible is staring at us.”

Everyone turned their heads towards the window with common urgency.

Smear across what should have been the striking image of a field was a thunderous face, smiling unnatural with beady black button eyes. Its head was like a reversed triangle with a flat haircut and “12:00 stamped on its forehead. The smile dipped down sharply in the centre like an upside down arrowhead, overtaking all the space beneath the nose. The head meditated on those inside the house for several seconds before lifting away. In a land of metaphor his image left a specter in its wake, one that represented the damage it left on the balance of things.

All the residents meditated equally on what had just happened – the fantastic transient - the silence being broken indefinitely by Poolhall remarking

“I don’t know *how* to kill a giant.”

“Power off!” snapped Scarecrow.

“Stop it!”

“Power off!”

Poolhall Sammy dropped to the floor, still and lifeless. The eyes of all concerned follow his descent but don’t give it much regard.

“Three times-” said Scarecrow, speaking indirectly to Saw, “-remember it!”

### *FADE TO CASH*

The hot potato had changed; the infidels switch from the Parlour to the Drawing Room, but all things remained *fundamentally* the same.

Poolhall, the unconscious prince, was left on the floor in the Parlour to the devices of whoever finds him. And they all secretly knew it could be anything.

Tim addressed the audience what was as natural and as grey as all of Pompeii.

“It’ll never be night, and if I am still on *par*...” he pondered, “he cannot strike because all bad things strike at night. We have the high ground, gentlemen.”

Saw remained the strongest skeptic, and it showed in his tone.

“Is the giant new?” he asked.

Scarecrow, seated along with Saw, replied thustly:

“Very.”

“Who am I talking to?” asked Saw

“I’ve taken the reigns” replied Scarecrow

Tim fiddled his fingers down his sides like a nervous accountant.

“Glad to be of service” he said, taking a seat on a fine, deep leather loveseat; never a lover but possibly a cradle robber.

Poolhall lied on the hardwood floor, unconscious and dreaming. He dreamt of one million, he dreamt of one thousand, he dreamt of one hundred, he dreamt of ten, he dreamt of Widget. A blurry and transfixed Widget stood in his purview being torn apart by solar winds but nonetheless completely audible.

“Insects-“ he explained “-are just like everyone, but they all dream the same thing, like they couldn’t afford to let their fantasies feed their ambition.”

He was neck deep in some pocket that was filled with sociopathic shapes. A poisoned ether rained down in fist-sized drops.

There were two characters there, but they could just as easily been the same; a splintered illusion.

There, Tim gathered himself together from a handful of loose change. He was far away from the lunacy, and there was only one of him. Nevertheless, the sound of footsteps compressing leaves beneath them grew closer.

“Widget is a spy,” said Tim, “I saw him talking to the bugs in the attic. He keeps us wandering blindly.”

Widget took stage one final time, grabbing the camera back to the savage maelstrom.

“Don’t go in that phone booth! It’ll take you to the middle of nowhere!”

Scarecrow rose to the occasion in the Drawing Room before all involved.

“I can’t help but think that the beast is responsible for us being fixed here. These places cannot sustain life, much less giant life. *Power on.*”

They fell silent, as if curtains were rising.

Frantic footsteps clapped through the atmosphere, followed by one dissident Poolhall driving his

fist through the Drawing Room wall.

“I was not moved!” he screamed.

“We tried, but you were too *fat*,” explained Saw

“Who tried to move me?!”

Widget raised his arm.

“Did Widget raise his arm?!” Poolhall screamed with absolute, undeniable, unforgivable question marks and exclamation shapes.

Saw hesitated, but; “Yes.”

Somewhere I assure you that Poolhall was biting his lip.

“Give me my *shit back*!”

Widget shuffled over to the hole in the wall. He tossed in a handful of poker chips, condoms, gold teeth, and syringes through.

Inside Widget’s head, he talked to himself.

“You’ll see. Wait till the fly enters the womb...”

Saw replied to the interior monologue like a magician’s hand.

“With a sword,” he muttered casually with lips and not gray matter.

Widget was appropriately astonished. He snapped his head towards Saw like someone did it to assassinate him. It head began shaking with terror. The chain strapped across his face clanked like a passing freighter.

“He’s onto me!” he thought to himself before darting from the room and into the basement.

There was a beaten path leading from every room and into the basement; a bold faced challenge to go *anywhere else* while stepping through the main hallway. Such was the unspoken challenge given to every resident. Most stayed true to their hatred of the unknown.

Imagine the floor depressed. You walk in the entrance, and to your left is the staircase, to the right is the Parlour, and further on the left is the basement door. Further up on the right is the Livid Room and straight on till morning is the Kitchen. The space before you, the path leading to all rooms, is cracked and cloven. Not literally.

“You’ve upset him,” disclosed Scarecrow with a tone party of pity and contempt.

“Now I’ll never get my monocle,” sneered Tim.

Saw arched a single eyebrow. Surely something has piqued his interest.

“I didn’t know you needed glasses.”

“I only need one. Due to this bullet lodged in my eye, you see.”

“I hadn’t noticed.”

“You cheeky *womanfolk*,” scoffed Poolhall, still in another room but making his case through plaster.

“What’s your crutch with the new guy?” asked Tim to Poolhall.

Poolhall’s fist presented an apt substitute for his sharply angled disposition; it began to twist and contort to mimic his face.

“A saw murderkilled my mother.”

“Electric?” asked Saw, uncharacteristically concerned.

“No, a killer with a saw. *It was a killer with a saw.*”

“I knew a guy named Rapist. A lot of people had the same problem with him.”

"It's a dead body, man!" screamed Poolhall.

"Don't cast that morgue talk on me. Get out of my head," commanded Saw.

"I'm up in your thoughts, Kennedy! I'm walking around your memories and I'm kicking up pieces of spit!"

"You're stuck in another room talking with your hand. Look at you. You can't govern anything."

There was no reply. Tim watched eagerly from the sidelines, resting his chin on his hand and biting at his fingernails.

"It's like clash of the titans."

The house itself took on an eerie glow. The walls looked a bit cleaner. Indeed, the ceilings seemed just a bit higher. Peoples' bodies expanded but they didn't take notice of it.

"We must kill the giant soon" declared Scarecrow. "I am feeling queasy."

"You should sleep," suggested Saw, staying in tune with his newfound helpful misdemeanor.

Scarecrow stared across at the adjacent wall. "Some of us cannot sleep."

"I forgot you were a scarecrow. I can't see right. My glass, you see..." explained Tim under a charade of cellophane. He barged into the conversation with the grace of a corporate trend.

Saw asked Tim "Where was the last place you saw it?" A chill ran down his spine from using his own name in a sentence without planning it as sexual innuendo.

"Juice has it. I know it- he borrowed it for the cows in the basement."

"How do you figure?"

"I established motive, and opportunity. I'm building a case against him, and I haven't found any evidence to the contrary."

"Did you used to be a law-"

"Ut! Ut! Don't say it! *Don't you say that word!*"

Saw sits cautiously for a few moments, and then slowly mouths the word "lawyer."

Tim ran his hand through his hair and continued; "I can hear him talking sometimes. He's real, and everyone knows it, and he wants to make himself not real by discrediting me."

Saw nods and looks about the room.

"How did you lose your eye?" he asks.

Tim struck not the pose of a gladiator, but rather prepared his figure like a mannequin.

"Tanglin' with a Russians."

"That's cool. I like that. Sorry about all the questions; it's my first day..."

As he said that he looked over to Scarecrow who looked deep in contemplation. Saw became bombarded by curiosity about what he was thinking.

"Juice is a rebel and a trife thief," continued Poolhall, "and I don't know why people love him so much."

Saw turned his head back to Tim, struck with probably the most pressing question of the hour.

"So... how do you get something back from an imaginary person?" continued Saw.

"Last question?"

"Yes."

"Imaginary *fists*."

Saw cleared his throat, but couldn't dispel the tension.

"You... go girl."

The giant face was back in the same spot as before, outside the Drawing Room, pulling and

pushing around the side of the house. Poolhall was at audio ground zero; he approached the wall and locked presence with the menace. Poolhall walked around the room, tracing the fingertips as they dragged along the exterior. He pressed his left ear to the wall and listened close. It hovered perfectly still; perfectly silent.

"I'm gonna figure you out," he said through the barrier. "You're fucking with the wrong *cunt*."

He shoved his body away from the wall and the noise began again. He walked towards the other side of the room, preparing to open the liquor cabinet which held not liquor, but surreal juices and nectars. The creature drifted along the back of the house, and then away. Poolhall grabbed an orange bottle from the cabinet and walked back to his chair. He lit the liquid with a match and set it on the ground, inhaling the weird mist that snaked out of it.

"You've come a long way, kid."

Across the floor was dusty wood and down the steps was filthy stone. Widget was sitting on the pill-littered concrete floor beside one of the solid paranormally reversed cows. They stared off, locked in a trance, until Widget placed his hands on them, blessing them with the opportunity and close their eyes. He wanted them to sleep equally..

"The house is bleeding" he remarked with eyes fixated on the cow's neck.

"How's that?" asked Tim, standing in the shadows, far from the light, standing over Widget, kind of afraid and maybe interested.

"The giant. It's a puppetmaster. I can hear its strings scraping on the bricks."

"I don't hear anything."

Widget had nothing more to say. Tim was not interested in how Widget could hear things the way he did.

"...What do you want?" Widget asked.

"Where is Juice now? I need to talk to him."

"He's hiding in my skull."

"Don't get in the way of this. This is *beyond* you."

"Fluid is nature's way of identifying weakness."

The exchange came to quick it gave Tim little time to register it. He licked his tooth.

Across the house in a diagonal direction was a man whose texture is of wicker clashed with coins. Back upstairs in the Parlour, Scarecrow pulled a book from the titanic oaken shelf. It was thick, biblical, bound in leather, well traveled through fingerprints and perhaps bite marks, and made no apologies. He cracked it open halfway and walked over to Saw.

"What's that?" asked Saw.

"We the damned call it the *Book of Words*."

Scarecrow shoved the book over to Saw. All the pages were filled up with random words. Any words, all words, every word was there. Saw flipped through the pages curiously.

"It's...words!" he exclaimed.

"Truly."

Saw flipped through it eagerly, examining random words.

"Paper. Dig. Zenith. Lips. Ragging. Motion. Nightingale. Shoes. Butter. Delightful."

Every letter looked like it was hand stamped with the dislodged components of a typewriter.



Scarecrow dug his finger halfway in and spread it open. Sprawled across the pages was what ambience dictated as a map, less like a map and more like a blueprint. It was drawn in the same fashion: hand crafted with professional tools.

“This is a map of the house-,” he explained, “Look it over and commit all unusual aspects to memory. It is good to be familiar. There was too much put into creating it.”

“I find myself drawn to the words.”

“I know, but pay them no attention.”

Saw examined the map closely. There were words, but they were too close together, and he would have to sit down and figure them out.

“What was put into creating it?” Saw asked.

“Peoples’ lives. Peoples’ minds. It’s not easy finding tools to write with in this place.”

“You could use blood.”

“I lost all of that a long time ago. All I have left is spit, and I’m saving it for Widget.”

“Why don’t you like Widget?”

“I like him plenty. I’m saving it because it might be the only thing that can bring him back someday.”

Saw clutched the book close to his heart and wandered over to the bookshelf. He scanned over the spines of the collected knowledge of mankind and the collected fiction of gifted illusionists. In his travels he identified a copy of the Holy Bible.

“Do you believe in god?” asked Saw.

“I believe in the prophet Muhammad” replied Scarecrow, not turned to watch Saw but of course omnipresent.

“Is that so?”

“Poolhall Sammy is so. You might find better conversation with him.”

“He didn’t strike me as one who would have faith in something greater in himself.”

“He does not, he just despises the evolutionary theory to such a degree that he follows the closest thing that negates it. And he’s lazy so he settled on that. He’s one with popular culture.”

Saw turned to join Scarecrow in observing a direction that yielded no reward.

“Why does he hate the evolutionary theory, my dearest friend?” he asked Scarecrow.

“He despises the idea of being related to primates in any way. Ironically. As I said before, hey, you will find better conversation in him.”

Scarecrow fell to his side onto a chair, curving in such a way to sit appropriately at the last second. It was incredible.

Overhead, up and along the roof, a definite scraping crept along, catching the ears of Scarecrow and Saw Kennedy respectively. Their foreheads were drawn to the pinnacle of the disturbance, their eyes trailing not far after, hands relaxing, all blood shot to their problem solving glands.

Across the planet, next door in the Drawing Room, a crankily seated Poolhall, inhaling the fumes of burning nectar, once again encountered the sound of the giant exploring the dexterity of the house. He did not waver, nor open his eyes or clench his fists, almost as if he were expecting it – exactly like he was expecting it.

He winced his mouth open to dispel the fury rising up inside of him, only after he had meditated on it for a few moments. It was not reactionary. It was not involuntary.

Scarecrow remarked casually; “The giant is messing everything up.”

### *FADE TO CASH*

Saw was the only one still looking towards the mouthpiece of the noise. “Maybe it’s his house. I bet it is the giant’s house.”

“If so then I guess we’re doomed” expressed Scarecrow with no decent amount of musing.

Poolhall stomped into the room, yet Saw remained unconvinced that it is anything worth looking at.

Poolhall spread his legs in a power stance alluding that he has dire news.

“There is some *thing* in the livid room.”

Scarecrow, Kennedy, and Poolhall step lively to the Parlour (*Livid Room*) to see what the fuss was about. Standing at the midriff of the room is a figure wearing a long, black coat, utterly bald, no *face*, but probably eyes because round sunglasses hang above his not-nose, astoundingly. His head was tilting slightly down, like he had fallen asleep on his feet.

Scarecrow grabbed the helm: “Explain yourself.”

The stranger repositioned his head forward and stared.

“I ask you again!” hollered Scarecrow.

“Where is this?” asked the stranger.

“Nobody asked you!” snapped Poolhall.

“You’re lucky; I appeared in heat,” chimed Saw at the gentleman, ever the diplomat.

The stranger lifted a shaky arm towards the window and gestured towards the giant. It was sailing through the air and defying every governing law of physics.

Saw remained the realist; “I find it incredible that he knew the giant was there with out looking.

Not *saying*, just saying.”

“My head is on backwards” confessed the stranger.

Scarecrow was as artificial as the new guy; “Fascinating.”

“I knew a guy” said Poolhall.

“Are you sent on behalf of the giant, then?” asked Saw.

The stranger paused to consider his answer. “I come from the Lord’s belly.”

Saw replied: “Cough.”

Poolhall kept a handle on what was most urgent: “It looks like we need not worry; that thing’s in control now.”.

Scarecrow kept a handle on the most irritating: “Go get Tim, will you?”

“I’d rather you do it,” replied Poolhall.

“He has a crush on you. He’ll listen to you.”

Poolhall looked down and found himself shackled to the floor with a Rococo chain.

He declared he was stuck.

“Fake your seizures, boy. Your day will come. *Boy*.”

Scarecrow exited for a time to reclaim Tim with a Bullet. After he left, Poolhall, reassuring himself thoroughly that the scene was clear, snapped off his leg at the thigh like an old baguette and tossed it away. He was very, very pleased with himself.

“It’s a *ruse*.”

Scarecrow yelled down the cellar for Tim, but there was no reply. Puzzled, but you’d never know that, he moved to the second floor, but before he could shout, he heard a tussle going on above his head. He continued up the stairs and swaggered through the grey doorway. Tim was tearing the place apart in cold blood. There were chairs tipped over, and piles of boxes avalanched, and lamps stomped on.

“Wisdom begets haste,” imparted Scarecrow.

Tim was sweating profusely from his face and muscles, and his eyes were flared like a lunatic.

“I can’t find it. I can’t fucking *find it*. I don’t know where it is anymore. I thought I did...”

“Juice has it, remember?”

“He *hid* it. He hid it *somewhere*. Widget knows. They’re trying to drive me *out*.”

“I’ll help you look later. We have a new guest downstairs in the parlour. Perhaps you’d like to introduce yourself?”

“Whe-*who*?”

Scarecrow angled his body to let Tim pass, when he was ready.

“He claims to be from inside the giant outside. The puppet master. The *lord*, he calls it. I think that’s pretty interesting...”

Tim sighed heavily 4 times, and then fixed his posture. He knew that posture was everything.

“How do I look?”

“The nicest thing I can do for you now is bite my tongue.”

“Did I ask for the truth? Did you hear me say something?”

“You look like Princess Diana.”

Returning to the Livid Room we find Saw conversing with the stranger in privacy, or it might as well be since Poolhall was a ghost amongst tribal miscreants. He was looking at the back of his hand, listening closely like the good cop.

“Tell me more,” Saw eagerly requested. His attention was cranked to rapt.

“I came from the stomach... Or so they told me. It’s a dark catacomb filled up with stone horses. Half of the things they said were lies, though. It works.”

“Anything interesting about those stone horses?”

“It was difficult to tell if there was a vast field of them, or if there were mirrors in the back that reflected the same twelve. I was free to walk between them. The ground was covered in seeds.”

“How was it you learned how to speak our language? The King’s English?”

His shoulders puffed up, but then depressed back down.

“I was taught by them in the ways of man. Men. *They* spoke in punches. There was screaming and fluid. There was enough of it.”

Viewed from the side it is like watching mountains exchange banned dialect.

“What’s your name?”

“I shrill yelp, followed by a cough. And then...And.”

Saw raised his right arm, one soaked in regency.

"I dub thee... *Stone Horse*."

"No. No. It can't work."

Poolhall raised a glass of the Queen's brandy.

"Long live Stone Horse!"

"No. No."

He lowered his arm and poured the glass out on the floor. He tucked the glass away under his shirt, flattening the fabric over it and pressed it flat like wrinkles.

"So, how long were you in there?" Saw asked.

"What do you mean how long?"

"What do you mean what do I mean?"

"I don't understand."

Saw turned to Poolhall. "We got a live one here!"

Poolhall fished the glass out from beneath his flattened shirt, raised it to a toast, and laughed heartily. Saw turned back to the interview at hand.

He then asked "What does the giant want?"

"To kill."

"Where is it from?"

"Razorwire."

"How is it keeping us here?"

"It controls all things. All of it. Suddenly." It was a question that hinged on the grand supposition that the giant was responsible for everything. Saw found the answer he wanted to find. A doctor's error.

"What do you want?"

Stone Horse, for once in its miserable existence, did not have the answer of man. *Men*. Saw was visibly triumphant.

"I beat you."

"No. No." Stone Horse's head pivoted like a skull hollowed out and stuck at the end of a pole. It was smooth and calculated.

Tim and Scarecrow finally entered the room, but stepped straight into an impenetrable wall. This wall was like a television; they could not penetrate the force field what consequently thrust them into the field of observers. They dared not participate because the heated exchange was beyond them. A killer and a new hedonist locked together like a Rubik's cube.

"You silly creature. You should talk to Widget. You 2 might destroy each other," Saw quipped.

"Wow, where did that come from?" remarked Poolhall. He slapped a satisfied grin and looked about the room. Nobody noticed it, so he went back to watching.

Stone Horse claimed, "I wouldn't worry. There is more to come. There'll be more *things*."

"I hope to all masonry you indulge," dared that Saw.

"Its brain is in its liver. Its real mouth is in its stomach. I heard its plans. You're all going to be torn to bits. That's all it dreams about. And when it thinks it mouths words, and whispers when he yells in his fantasy world. It wants what its mother wants, and its mother wants to be there. And then it wants to kill. In that precise order."

Tim raised his finger and stepped forward to object as any sane man would, but Poolhall grabbed him by the shoulder.

“Let him go...”

Saw continued as if the preceding did not transpire.

“We won’t let ourselves die.”

“You don’t understand. We’re in its head.”

“More bullets can be fit per square inch on his person than us. That means something. I don’t expect you to understand.”

“I wouldn’t fret. I will die as well.”

“We’ll find you some memories. Some good ones. Then you will think differently.”

“Be careful. Soon it will regret sending me in and become enraged.”

“Then you should get on becoming a desperate person and want to live and buy some time.”

“None of those lend to an efficient mind.”

“You say that now, but I’m older than you, and I’m right.”

Stone Horse went silent. Saw rubbed his eyes and got back to the matter at hand.

“How long do we have?”

“Several days. It is slow to learn and slower to react.”

“Hey it’s a lot like you,” Saw remarked playfully.

“That’s incorrect.”

Saw loosely raised his first two fingers like he was holding an invisible cigarette.

“We’ll house you if you help us, and get in its head, and save our lives.”

“I am from its gut. All my words will be crucial. Be sure there is someone recording it.”

Everyone in the room turned to Poolhall. They all waited with bated breath. He ran his fingers ‘cross his cheek, reveling in it.

“Good form.”

Saw leaned in *real* close to Stone Horse.

“You think there’s something in this world I can’t kill?”

Stone Horse remained utterly motionless.

“I don’t think. And this isn’t your world.”

### *FADE TO CASH*

Stone Horse dismissed everyone else citing reasons of “eloquent fatigue” (translated by Poolhall Sammy). He remained in the Livid Room but everyone else unclustered. Saw pulled Scarecrow aside- his only trustable companion.

“I have an inquiry about this book,” began Saw.

Scarecrow was naturally welcoming. “I’m all ears.”

Poolhall burst out with a thick peal of laughter and flipped a chair over in the kitchen down the hall.

“In the basement, there is nothing there. Like, in *the book*. I’m looking at it and it’s just a question mark on the paper...”

There was, indeed, a question mark stamped just below the staircase and it was, indeed, paper.

“Oh, right. *Good eye*. There is no blueprint for the cellar. Widget spends all his time down there. I’d refer you to him but he’s utterly useless. I’ve been down not *once* but *twice*. I know it is full of upside down cows and there is a boiler room in one of the farthest flung corners. The rest is an undiscovered country; we’d all go down for ourselves except it’s completely horrifying. ”

“How’s that?”

“Well,” *then he sighed*, “there were all sorts of rumours. I’ve been here for a spell and I’ve met people who went down. They came out with pieces missing, or they went a little bit crazy. Or sometimes they never came back at all. It’s sort of the... digestive tract of the house, if that makes any sense to you. If it doesn’t, just... don’t rush it.”

“Thank you. I don’t want to go down there but I know that if I don’t know I’ll kill myself.”

“I completely understand.”

When he finally hauled the courage up on his shoulders to go and check the window, he did it. The woman let him do it. We walked all the across the fine, fine room. *But there wasn’t anyone out there*. Beyond the eyes, there was just a fog what looked like a concrete wall painted dead. Even as he stamped his fingerprints all over the glass, the eyes were still staring at him. There was a notoriety to them that kept them from scampering away. They had to be at least half human, he thought.

They all wanted him to do somethin’.

They needed someone to *take care* of them.

The tops of their eyes reeked of liquor; he could smell it through the glass. They were desperate for redemption. They needed a hero to swoop down on them and...

On the second level, below the attic in a space rarely visited by the tenants, Poolhall Sammy had his feet kicked up in one of the bedrooms. It was an unwritten rule that it was his bedroom and nobody else was to put their bodies in it.

Despite this rule and it being declared his space, he was very rarely in it, and in fact had made no alterations to it since he first opened his mouth about it. From the red stripe wallpaper to the shelf lined with dolls carved out of brains, everything was just as he found it. There was a closet, an end table, and a red rug on the ground. To the left of the bed was a window that Sammy looked through at the PuppetPlurocrat. He paid careful attention to its movements and mannerisms. He studied it, trying to figure out some design error. He could see its entire figure from up there. It no longer spied into the house; rather, it floated freely over the landscape, entertaining itself with *its self*. The body below the head was dressed in a black suit with a yellow bow tie. The neck was thin; animated. Its hands and feet were tiny. The head was around the size of its thorax. Like a baby.

For the first time since its appearance not 1 hour prior, it spoke. It spoke not in verse or verb but in sounds of natural disasters. Poolhall Sammy took notice of the hurricane-earthquake-drought chatter leaking through its tightly clenched teeth. Sammy turned towards the shelf of 6 brain dolls and tilted his head sarcastically.

“That’s awful peculiar, don’t you think?”

Mere inches down past the membrane of the cellar, Widget sat at his usual spot, surrounded by opposite cows, not out of reach of the light. He ran his nails down the mushy preleather hide, his head hanging low. Out the corner of his ear he heard a quaking from someplace down there with him. He lifted his head to make the incident acute; in fact a pained groaning is creaking from behind the door of the furnace room. It was the farthest corner of that side of the basement. It was also the closest corner. No noises came from the other end.

“You... I smell something inside you, child... in these hijacked senses... annihilate,” is what ran

through his head. He translated it and sprang into action.

Widget stood up with calculated nonchalance, walked over to the room, and opened the door.

Inside the room there was a boiler and there was a furnace and there was a window with soiled bandages strewn in front of the granite on the other side.

Some call it a travesty.

The maggots call it home.

And nobody knows where they're at.

A sharp and elongated groaning stemmed from the furnace what Widget began to punch and beat like an infant. He attacked it savagely. He feverishly threw his body at the hollow metal, clanging it and bending it in. It began to morph and peel away, the malleability mimicking flesh, quickly giving way to a naked human arm clawed and scratching at the floor. It followed the lead of a vagina the best it was able; it was wet, and what it was wet with was strange and purple.

Widget backed away with a dense swagger. The nails dug and grasped at dead moths and assorted pills, gaining ground and pulling a full human forward. Arm leads to shoulder that leads to torso and a twisted screaming face, eyes closed and skin covered in a constant layer thin slime. It was a full grown man with brown and slimy skin. Widget fell back against the brutish interior wall and watched in no small amount of amazement as a naked man pulled the tip of his left foot from the wet cavern, letting it fall to the concrete with a loud slap. He had black hair that sat high above clenched eyes.

Widget twitched his neck leftways and ran clumsily from the room. The fantastic newborn functioned like an amateur, moving his limbs with considered effort and calculable failure.

Elsewhere some citizens were being assaulted.

Widget brought a secondary havoc.

He collapsed on the main floor to the sound of a titanic smash – not his own. A giant white-gloved hand smashed through the window in the Parlour and fumbled for something – *anything* – that would be likely to fight against it. The house shook. Scarecrow spread himself on the floor and crawled underneath it, away from it, and parallel to it. He narrowly escaped its index finger and would forever remember the smell of pungent cleaners. The shrill shriek of a shipwreck filled the room from its *some sort of an* alien voicebox. It knocked over the bookshelf and clipped lanterns over. As time elapsed it became exponentially enraged and slammed its clenched digits from one wall to the other. As quickly as it punched it retractd the appendage, pulling a small section of plaster out with it. Sadly the entry point was beyond the window of repair. Odd bits of debris tumbled from wherever it had settled. The calm allowed the dust to be appreciated- there was enough. Saw hurried to the Parlour late to figure out what happened.

Scarecrow threw a backwards glance at the room and noticed a foreign blood dripping through stressed floorboards and cracks in the wall. It oozed in to the rhythm of a pulse from deep inside the drywall.

“I bet a hand did this,” Saw exclaimed.

“You’re one of the best,” panted Scarecrow, kneeled on the ground.

“You don’t breathe air.” 2 seconds after he noted this, Scarecrow’s chest stopped heaving and he

rose to his feet. He wasn't embarrassed, but stood tall to make sure they were square. Such a man, such an Adonis, surely knew what to do.

"Let us confer with Stone Horse."

Saw double took and stumbled back.

"You're supposed to be the smart one!"

"I'm willing to throw in with the enigma that's trying to help."

"Well then get your hands off my chips!"

Scarecrow tossed a handful of coloured gambling chips into Saw's face. They bounced off his cheeks and scattered to the floor. Saw kept a handle on the situation with a pensive expression.

"I don't know what life you lived to get in my head. But... fuck that."

"I lived a life with time frozen on carnival o'clock."

"That's some shit."

Stone Horse stood alone in the Livid Room like a mannequin. Saw and Scarecrow walked-with-a-purpose in, valuing every moment that a giant hand was not waving before them with intentions to dethecate.

"Stone *Horse*!" cried Saw, "We have just been *attacked*!"

"Have we?" he asked with words rich with wisdom and, perhaps, callousness?

"Yes, we have. I was assaulted in the Parlour by a giant hand." He took credit for another's misfortune. Nobody corrected him.

"Don't flatter yourself. He was not assaulting you. He was trying to assault us all. And."

"He made a mess of the entire room. He has no regard for interior design."

"Stay away from windows. Nobody can die yet. There is still much to know. We must all be together if we have any chance of defeating it."

"Why do you want to defeat it?" asked Saw, "what did it ever do to you?"

"No. No."

Widget, who had collected himself already and transferred rooms, collapsed once more before the audience. The wood 'neath him gave some and then bounced back. Saw and Scarecrow stared down at he who laid motionless.

"You embarrass us," condemned Scarecrow. His third eye *comma* hat scanned the landscape for auditors.

Widget raised his trembling head skyways.

"There... is as *demon*... in the *cellar*."

Saw punted Widget in the ribs, who made not a sound but recoiled and dropped his head back down to the ground.

A necessary evil.

"A necessary evil," remarked Scarecrow.

The three of them raced down into the basement and into the boiler room. They, naturally, paid no mind to the film of depravity on the floor. The cows swooned from the direction of the transit like a v. Saw kicked the boiler room door open with a big flat foot. He was a man possessed by purpose. There was a naked, slimy man crawling on the floor, uneasy and not at all certain where he is. He screamed in long throaty howls.



"I can't believe he has no clothes," said Saw.

"Widget, how is there a naked, slimy man on the floor?" inquired Scarecrow

Widget held his hands together behind his back; "I don't know. He crawled out from the side of the furnace."

"The boiler?" asked and corrected Saw.

"No, the furnace."

"I heard boiler."

"We had best carry him upstairs before the cows have their way with him" decreed Scarecrow, already bending downward to grab at one of the man's forearms.

Saw recoiled, not horrifically, but much more like a lean.

"You must go this one alone, Scarecrow. I need to go find a room to stay in."

"I completely understand."

Saw, a man who kept his purview as far away from the furnace between inauguration to exit as possible, in a moment of weakness glanced over, and was subjected to his own flash; one not from the house changing location but from something locked deep away within him trying to vault back up. Something wanted out of him and it wanted it as bad as he'd ever encountered. Like this-

In that second he saw a pile of dirty shoes tucked away in a corner. Shoved there clumsily.

Someone was trying to clean the concrete, but hadn't done a good job. To the casual viewer, and even to Saw himself for that moment, it meant absolutely nothing.

But time opened all wounds. Long nails unstringing the skin.

That *same* moment of weakness that allowed him to be there also allowed him the breadth to forget what it meant and assume that it was simply the house making him think weird things. It was trying to get in his head just like it'd tried to get into everything else.

Perhaps pills being crushed under his feet were getting into his bloodstream.

Perhaps a lot of things. There was no time for any of it.

As Saw left he shot a bitter sideways glance at the inverted herd that, despite their brains being mash, understood that humans are capable of terrible things towards mammals. Saw resumed tasks to the main landing, but was confronted by Tim with a Bullet who had a wine bottle sticking out of the side of his head at a 45 degree angle. His body curved side to side with a wide smile balanced in the center of it all.

"What the hell is this?!" shouted Saw.

"Poolhall Sammy put a bottle into my head!" explained Tim.

"Surely you must be dead or are dying!" cried Saw with much distress.

"Now I'm drunk all the time!"

"What about when the bottle-"

"*All the time!*"

"Tim with a Bullet, you should fix your sights on finding your lost monocle. Stay focused. *Gawdammit!*"

"Now I have the courage to confront Juice about it after all these years. Just you wait!"

"I don't believe you."

"Before he put the bottle into my head... he tried to shoot me in the face, but the bullet bounced off the one that was already in my eye. He smelled like vapours."

“You’re destroyed.”

“I...I...”

Tim with a Bullet stumbled madly out of the room and into the ruined parlour.

“Tim with a Bullet, *no!* There was an assault in there! It may happen again!”

Tim with a Bullet thrashed and kicked wildly at the torn scraps of drywall and curiously moist timbers. Saw’s eyes snapped to attention and he dashed to the Livid Room in hot pursuit. He grabbed the Book of Words off of a coffee table, exhaling deeply with relief.

He tucked it under his arm.

He looked down at the fallen bookshelf and wondered why there were no scattered books. But he wondered passively.

His reasoning was overcome by the utter insanity flailing at his sidequarter. Tim was laying on his back and thrashing like a wounded animal.

Hugging the book close to his chest, Saw marched up to the second floor to look for a place he could find peace.

Tim was thrashing upon the floor like a beached eel.

### *FADE TO CASH*

Tertiary delusion: a term found in one of the many scholarly literatures found in the parlour.

When considering Juice, it is one of two necessary *things*. It’s the *third*.

With Tertiary Delusion, the axiom is the third party involved in the *thing*. Whereas with Binary, one is hoisted up while one is hoisted down (one out of the insanity and one further into it,) in Tertiary 2 parties revolve around 1, supporting it indefinitely.

The one in the centre (crucible) is usually the host – the one who began the delusion – while the other 2 orbit around it, usually referred to as *satellites*.

*Always referred to as satellites.*

In this setup, the crucible mirrors the same desperation found in singular delusion, and it is only in *binary delusion* where the host is able to rise above it. The satellites participate, but passively. There’s 2 things about it; one is good and one is bad.

*The bad* is that this delusion will continue indefinitely unless one dies and it shifts into a Binary Delusion.

*The good* is that it is very easy for one of the satellites to expire. It is rather unlikely, but *far from impossible*, that one of the satellites exits of their own free will.

It near impossible that the crucible expires, or exits, before the satellites.

Saw shuffled around quietly. The first room he checked was at the far end of the hall, the furthest from the stairwell, and by association, the closest to safety. It was occupied by Poolhall, who was conveniently sitting on his bed, conveniently sitting with his back to him, *conveniently* drawing him closer.

“What do *you* want?” growled Poolhall.

“I am looking for a room to sleep in.”

Poolhall turned thisaway. “Oh, I didn’t even know who it was.”

He positioned himself to back-layin’ against the headboard of the bed.

“There are 3 rooms up here. Widget disappears into the cellar every night and Scarecrow never

sleeps. Tim with a Bullet has a room up here but I rarely see him in it. And rarely means *never* within reason. He is usually trying to get into mine. I am sure you can appreciate how much I hate that.”

“How does he find his way in? I noticed you have a rifle under your pillow.”

Poolhall placed his hand on the pillow, one that barely conceal’d a long, black barrel.

“It’s just about out of bullets; the ones that came with it...”

“You could just beat things with it,” offered Saw.

Poolhall thought about the idea, looking off to the far wall near the door.

“Sometimes he hides in the closet. I had to have it boarded up. He kept finding a way in so I had it forcibly removed. He’s a crafty son of a bitch.”

Poolhall pointed to the wall what was covered in cracks and seams that were crudely stitched shut. “I think he’s starting to get the point,” he continued.

“He tells me you put a wine bottle into the top of his head. Is this true?”

Poolhall removed his head from the pillow and talked up at the ceiling.

“I did. He was trying to seduce me and I’ve had it *up to here*. And I love wine. I love drinking it and having it in my belly. So I’m in a very *bitter* place right now.”

“There was a time where I thought Tim with a Bullet was a great man. You were there,” said Saw, completing the gesture by leaning his shoulder in the doorframe.

“I cannot tolerate romance in this day and age. He is the least acceptable because he is the calmest one out of all of us. *Hell the world* can he be at ease with this? Look at this shit!”

Poolhall waved to his window, giving Saw opportunity to watch a giant black eyeball pass across. The eyeball gave way to a massive toothy grin, then a red bow tie, and then to a black suit jacket. And then there was nothing.

“Surely this will fix itself” reassured Saw, for some reason, wholly convinced of this.

Counterpoint; “I wouldn’t be surprised if this triggers even stranger things.”

“Even if you were surprised,” go’d Saw, “I don’t think you would let anyone know.”

“Boy, you have made me pleased.”

Saw redirected the conversation into sketchy territory.

“A man crawled out from the boiler in the cellar.”

“Are you sure it wasn’t the furnace?”

”Don’t try to change me. This bird you cannot change.”

Aw left it at that. He let Poolhall register what had just been said. A few moments passed before Sammy put a close on the conversation.

“Watch your back, young man. You’re lucky to be alive. And it’s because of me. If you get me some wine we’ll be square.”

“Will you put it in the side of my head?”

“If you don’t get me any I will.”

Poolhall went back to exactly what he wanted: watching the Puppetmaster sail through the air like a magician in zero gravity. His eyes grew and shrank as it gleefully explored all three dimensions. It swam over the terrain like a barracuda. It was enchanting as it was the ice age.

Saw took this as his cue to exit and resumed his search of a place to rest his head.

He entered the second room from the back; there was nobody in it. He attempted the third room just because he did not want Tim visiting him while he was slumbering. The third room was Tim’s as it was wrecked. The bed had been dragged all over the room. The walls were green

stripes rather than red. There was a silhouette of a midget burned on the wall over where the headboard used to be. A jar sat by the bedside filled with tears, or perhaps saltwater- rich and foggy. There was a closet, true, and inside of it was a pipe. It stuck out of the wall in front of Saw at around neck level, dripping rich black oil into a bucket on the floor. There was a tin film over the oil in the bucket; it hadn't dripped in awhile.

He stared at the pipe with the lines on his face betraying his gut, his gut flexing that something was wrong. Time, a precious commodity to find in the house, most notably in its raw form, began to slow to syrup. He was dragged into a trance, staring into the thing; the house was dragged into a puddle of darker hue. It started to drip again once it had him.

But he didn't pursue it- ripped his body away from the closet.

Fully able to evict Tim, he chose not to. He chose not to have anything to do with that room.

Saw shut the door resounding loud never to enter it ever again. He returned to the second room- his *fuckin'* room. He threw himself on the bed and let his spine curve whatever way it wanted. He let the tension rush from him on a tide of a thousand tiny fingertips. He cracked his neck and turned bones into stiff muscles. A casual perusal of the room revealed what looked to be a wooden mummy slumped on a chair in the corner closest to the closet and furthest from the window by his bedside. He sat up hoping that the erection of his back will correct any fault in his vision. Nothing changed. *Y'all*.

Relinquishing the right of rest he slid to his feet and crouched down at the thing's chest. A tiny knob sticking out of the right side of its chest gave way to a thin black line drawing a box all the way down to its stomach and up to its collarbone. The thin metallic joints connecting the limb pieces rattle and the forearms tapped against the chair. Pulling the chest door back opened up a secret compartment, and hidden inside the wooden child was a collection of aged parchment. Casing the hands of whoever lifts them away in dust and flakes, the papers didn't look to be aged in any way other than their unexplainable coating. Saw blew the dirty flesh off the pages and began to read what was written on them. They opened thirstily (sp):

"Enclosed are my memories as I fear that I have not much time. I have encountered terrible sadism at the hands of one who calls himself Poolhall Sammy (II) although I have reasons to believe this is a fabrication. I realize that these crimes against my body are not his direct fault and that he is the bastard child of a mutant civilization, but nonetheless I have locked myself in my room. During the first decades when I decided to call sanctuary in my room he pounded on my door day and night, but he has since ceased and has been quiet for some time now. Like he's figured it out. But he's not that clever. I think he's just hopeless. I fear he is plotting but fantasize that he is dead. I can't last much longer on the meager amount of food that I brought with me and with my last ounces of strength I attempt to record my years in what some call the 'Bug House' and what I feel are crucial clues in discovering its intentions. The one you will undoubtedly encounter by the name of Widget will be pivotal in the future, although his real name is not in fact Widget. For the life of me I can't remember his first name but his surname is 'Salem'. The Widget I have come to know was first to refer to the house as the 'Bug House'. The Widget I have come to terms with speaks wholly in cryptic insanity but I will attempt, with the entirety of my being, to translate it. Older tenants to the house will also be crucial as they will be able to unravel the riddle of Widget and then Widget will be able to unravel the riddle of the Bughouse. I hope the pieces necessary to the aforementioned plan are present at the moment of this reading because it is the only way anyone will make it out alive."

He stopped at that. Saw, ever the kitten, reached his hand back into the wooden mummy, felt around the sides and floor, and then pulled out a scrappy looking pencil. It had been chewed in a wooden spring. He turned the soiled paper over and found that each page was written only on one side. Before returning to the tale at hand he was possessed to grab the scribe and scrawl “Saw Kennedy” on that reverse side of the page. He placed the pencil on the floor beside him and flipped the page back over.

Saw was ready to read through the rest but there were faint sounds of a scuffle bursting from the main floor. The banging of boards ricochet’d all the way up the stairs. What would seem like commonplace in another world, in a house where criminals congregated, sent shockwaves throughout what *was* here and now. He briefly scanned the pages and deemed the whole consumption of its secrets futile for the moment. He tossed the papers back into the wooden mummy child, gingerly clicked the door shut, and raced down to the front foyer, eager to assist as far as his cynicism would allow. When he arrived he witnessed Scarecrow and Widget fumbling with a decidedly slimy human man. They dropped and grabbed at his appendages before releasing him on the couch in the Livid Room. The sound sounded like the sound of wet hands clapping. They stood accused by Stone Horse, also present, of being *curious little things*.

“He is spreading all over the upholstery,” noted Saw.

“If we put him on the floor then there would be *no* saving us” explained Scarecrow.

Shall we cut him open?”

“No... no, we shall *not*.”

Widget fell against a mirror, smashed it, and then back down into the basement in frenzy. He slammed into practically everything during the exit. Nothing was paid. Rather than sweep the mirror off the ground they stepped all over it, challenging the powers that be.

Saw grabbed at the strange newborn’s arm and tugged at it.

“I don’t like him in here, sir!” he declared. Scarecrow did not bat an eye in the time between rendering this memory and assisting Saw to drag the man out of the Livid Room and into the adjacent kitchen. Stone Horse wasn’t as insulted as he should have been. His cards were taken care of. Saw stopped noticing familiar things because he was either hard at work unraveling his own flag, or solving problems to get back to the flag.

Surely enough the floors were made muddy and haunted as this vile act transpired. It was a bad time to be human. They hoisted the superstar up onto the kitchen table and left him, as they would have in the Livid Room, but all the more contentful.

Conventional wisdom told them that discomfort awakens the tired et cetera.

Saw meandered over to the refrigerator. He heard the cupboard doors creak ungracefully, inching open by method of tiny hands. His eyes narrow like coin slots on them the more the space widens. As he reached for the handle on the fridge his eyes were as thin as coins that once could have slid into them.

He opened the fridge and looked for food, not necessarily hungry but desiring to chew on something with a dirge of a passion.

Inside the fridge was a chef, crammed and blue and totally dead. He was not a fat man, but not

altogether thin. He was dressed in appropriately. His arms were broken and squeezed awkwardly above his head. His legs were bend upward like an extreme goat. Along the side of the body, however, there were soda crackers and select cheeses and pickled herring tidbits. Saw made a grab for the cheese, but did so only after poking the dead chef in the nose and going “beep.” With cheese in hand and hand close to mouth putting cheese in mouth, Saw shut the fridge door and paid the heckling cupboard creatures none of what he thought they were after. Poolhall was somewhere in the background, whispering to him about how ignoring the house was pivotal to victory.

In fact, he took 2 steps, took 5 big bites, and hurled the cheese at the laughing demons, but to no avail. It bounced off and left nothing remaining but acute failure. They shuddered and shook as if the cupboards themselves were laughing.

“Scarecrow, my oldest friend, where are the restrooms in this place?”

Scarecrow placed his hands on the kitchen counter. He prepared himself.

“I think what you want... is upstairs. It’s the only one, unfortunately, but it is rarely in use, so enjoy yourself. I think.”

“I promise you that I will.”

Saw struggled to remove pieces of cheese from the side of his teeth for nourishment. He began picking at his gums. Scarecrow waited with confusion to see if Saw would make a break for the washroom.

“So Scarecrow,” he began, “what’s your deal?”

Scarecrow removed his hands from the table. It weakened his position.

“How do you mean?” he asked.

“Well, what’s your story? Like, stuff?”

“A matter of fact, of course. “

Saw hopped up on the chair adjacent, crouching with his hands grabbing the seat, and listened with an infant’s prescription. Scarecrow lean’t back.

“I was the only fetus to be born in a box, you know. That is something that has followed my name from one end of the globe to another. I was a hero back then. And...when I could not be drowned they attempted a firing squad. Thankfully a stranger rescued me and put me on a ship. I spent the rest of my time in the Eastern Moores where I assisted in smuggling humans. I don’t know how old I was, but I was pretty old. I did this not out of necessity for food, water, or vanity, but to support my ever growing addiction to fingers... It’s all very complicated. I learned how to act in that world. And how to talk.”

“How many times have you told this story?” asked Saw.

“Four hundred and thirty times. I have had four hundred and thirty friends and they all died. It’s sad, so sad. And... Now you’ll die. I think. *Y’all*.”

“Have you ever wondered if perhaps you are cursed?”

“I am cursed, but it is not radial and it will not affect you. I’ve come to the conclusion they died of old age. Or things that had nothing at all to do with me. I’m so old. I’m so... fucking old.”

“Oh, right. Yeah. So how old are you then?”

“Old enough not to be surprised.”

“Oh yeah?”

Saw reached into his left waist pocket and pulled out a pair of green dice.

“You ever seen a pair of these?” He held the dice out in his palms.

“Yes.”

“You ever seen... *Venus*?”

“Once. “

Saw rolled the dice across the table. They both stared at the things expectantly. One came up one and the other came up five.

“One through three means heads, four through six means tails. That’s as close as I can figure,” explained Saw.

“You a big dice man?”

“I’m more interested in hearing about you. You must have some stories.”

“You roll two coins, with multiple sides meaning the same thing.”

“What about it?”

“I don’t know. I suppose that the story of everything, then. That’s all my stories. That’s every story. I think we’ve learned the same things. It doesn’t matter what they’re dressed like.”

“Where did you learn how to act? And talk? Was it at the same place?”

“No. But everything changes. When I came here I adapted because you need to pretend that you know everything. You can’t look the question in the eye, and you have to pretend that you don’t want to. Poolhall came here with his own take on it; he didn’t get it from me. He’s doing a better job. I feel like I’ve done everything I can do... in this life.”

Scarecrow’s voice and posture trailed off. Saw thought he felt his sadness, but he had no idea.

“I think,” he continued, “that we’ll have the same parts, and the same stories, and I think you’ll... one day you’ll say the same things that I do. I have age over you, but you... you’ve got something in you, and it troubled me once, but I didn’t understand it.”

“I don’t think we have a lot in common...”

“No, you don’t... you’ll get it one day. It doesn’t matter what you did; all that matters is what you think about it, and what you want to do about it.”

“I’ve done some bad things and... I don’t think I’ll ever be able to sort it out. I don’t know who I was, or what possessed me, and I know that if I look at it... It’s a big unknown. It might be catastrophic or great. But I don’t wanna take that risk.”

“When you get out of this, you’ll do some good. I’m telling you that and it doesn’t matter if you believe me. You’ll sort everything out, because you can just draw on the dirt. And get different coloured dice.”

“You really like the dice.”

“I think you took them out just in time. You’ve got that on your side.”

Saw exhaled deeply. Too deep, in fact.

“What the hell are you doing here? What’s... I don’t know. What’s going on here?” he asked.

Scarecrow rubbed the side of his head. “Who told you to ask those kinds of questions?”

“Nobody. Poolhall told me not to reason it out, and you’re saying what you’re saying, and I’m walking around not looking down, and everyone’s carrying on like this is normal. I just need to know... I need some context. I’ve only been here... what, a few hours, then? I think I’m doing well, but...”

Saw dropped his head and stared at the table, looking like he was working out some equation in his head. Scarecrow took his time in answering.

“You’re doing good, child. Don’t ask anyone... anything. Don’t ask questions if they pertain to solving the nature of this place. You need to think about what I’m saying. There’s... so many

people who did that. And we had to learn from their mistakes. You're learning how to act all on your own."

"Have you seen what goes on in the basement?"

"No."

Saw ran his hand through the hair on the back of his head. He closed his eyes; his body was getting ready to surrender. He was turning back into the sort of person who could-

"You've ever see Juice?" asked Scarecrow.

"I have... *NOT!*" shouted Saw, snapping out of his ditch.

Scarecrow began to wind a lingering piece of string around his index finger.

"Occasionally he will become fatigued and sleep, although these instances are few and far between. He sleeps beneath the floorboards and inside of the walls. You should try it sometime. He, or rather she, or no, it's a she. I forgot. *She* only lets her guard down when she is sleeping."

"Is she pretty?" asked Saw.

"She is a Witch Priestess. In some circles, perhaps, yes. To each his own. Glass houses, right?"

"I would have liked to know you before all of this..." mused Saw.

"We have to work with what we're given. It's not in the cards. Or dice. Again with the dice. I like the dice. Use projection to know me in the past, and use it to make yourself the person who lives through this."

"I don't know how we found this pocket of sanity. This, and time, they don't happen, do they?"

"They come to you when you need them. Like sleep. I've mentioned this before."

As if waking up from a coma the table man sat up with a head full of self-realization. Saw jumped back and lands on the floor.

"I need some clothes," he calmly said.

Saw walked briskly from the room, missioned to the teeth, but bumped into Poolhall who bunched a brown suit close to his chest. Poolhall's face melted into abstract puzzlement.

"This isn't the laundry room..."

"I need this suit," popped Saw, who immediately launched his hands at the bundle. He snatched it away and tossed it sharply at the new man's face. With pants tossed over his face he chewed and yelled like he was trapped in a hole.

"*El Morte*" lamented Poolhall, who then walked away to the ruined Parlour. Scarecrow and Saw were silent as if knowing something sinister was to come. They waited for the inevitable-

"God damn it Tim! You are a cyst upon my existence!"

Saw returned to the Furnace Man's side and began prodding him, using his finger with parabolic force.

"*Look at him,*" mused Saw, "he looks just like a real boy."

Scarecrow instructed him to "be civil," like a real man.

The cupboards above the stove and sink began to shudder and cackle just like before. Saw's attention was grabbed by totalitarian hands towards these things supposedly mocking him.

"When the new guy comes of age..." foretold a cranky Saw, "I'm going to train him to kill whatever lives in those *fucking cupboards.*"

Scarecrow warned him "to do such a thing would surely melt us all. Believe me, I speak from



experience. I've seen it. I've seen it over there," then waving his hands across the space over his head.

"What are they?" asked Saw, falling back into the familiar reality of cause and effect.

"They're pieces of wood made out of rot. They'll eat you if you let them. They find everything hilarious. They move in packs and like to watch."

"I've seen them before."

"Well, everything's everywhere, so I believe it."

Suddenly, a mechanical drill bit noise stirred to life beneath Scarecrow's hat. Saw cranked his expression to quirky, but upon receiving no explanation, turned back away.

Just like that.

The new man strapped on his new clothes, Scarecrow and Saw not offended by his stark nakedness but neutral as if he were a true baby instead of a man in baby's skin. As he fixed the last of the buttons on his attire, a white wrinkled dress shirt and dull brown pants, he looked ready to address those in attendance.

"My name is Muhammad, and I am a therapist," said he.

"How was it you came to be inside of the boiler?" asked Saw, falling forward into an inquisitive pose.

Scarecrow warned that "This is becoming an issue."

"I can't remember. Did I crawl out from the furnace?"

"You did," replied Scarecrow.

"Where am I?"

"This is the bughouse. You are 30 minutes old."

"Is this true?" asked Muhammad, turning to Saw who was staring away at a curious teakettle, arms crossed and shoulders hunched. He switched eyes back to Muhammad but switched nothing else.

"Listen to the Scarecrow."

He then switched his eyes back to the teakettle.

"Scarecrow, what is the meaning of the bughouse?"

"It is just the name that is given to it. The eldest member here gave it that and I can only assume he got it from someone trailing back as far as this horrid opera stretches."

"How is it you can speak? It sounds as if... as if you are speaking from your hat."

Scarecrow is silent for several minutes. He stares blankly at Muhammad, who does not know much else to do but stare right back.

"...Black magic."

He was crawling on the floor like a dog. He was at the woman's feet, and she held steady *being there*. She said "I love you" ninety seven years ago. He came back the window like a ship from the war. The monsters he was after scampered off and left him with fewer pieces. He was better off doing nothing.

He felt like he had no place in her world. And who knows, maybe he didn't.

She knew. He asked the only way he knew how: with his teeth.

"What the fuck do you want from me?" he asked. Desperately – sounded like yelling, almost. He

sat back and crossed his legs. He looked away; still embarrassed, but as a man. He knew embarrassment could get him places if the right people saw.

“Those men over there...” she softly said. She was suddenly pointing at them like a frame in between had been lost. Wasting no time.

At the other end of the olive room there sat the two men that had been there the whole time.

*Since the beginning.*

He was carrying a notion in his pocket for as long as he could remember, and it was that she wanted him to kill the men. *Kill someone.*

But he didn’t know and she wasn’t tellin’.

He’d tried to talk to her one thousand and seventy seven times, but she was in her own world – a zombie. Wandering around her own private afterlife. Delegating chores to the only man she’d ever actually known. *Him.*

As close as he could figure.

Over there, Poolhall wandered into the Livid Room and dove face to face with Stone Horse.

“I want to have a word with you...” he snapped, “but I don’t have anything that can destroy you.”

“Where is the one called Widget?” asked Stone Horse.

“He is where he always is. He’s in the basement.”

“He is the eldest tenant, yes?”

“Yes he is. I don’t know how you know that, but I’ll have you know I don’t care. You are the only one who might have the patience for him. For all I know you are a reptile.”

“He has much he needs to know.”

“Don’t tell him. Tell one of us. Tell someone who can *do things.*”

“None but he who has seen all of it can understand. It is all coming to a drastic close soon.

You’re...”

“Are we going to stop? Is he sending us home? Are we getting out of here?”

“Either he will die or all of us will die. Either one will happen very shortly on account of him showing his face. This place ... wants something.”

“I don’t want to go home.”

“That’s out of the question,” pressed Stone Horse.

“We can kill him. We have tools.”

“It is not up to you to submit ideas. “

“I don’t like you... I... *I hate you.*”

Stone Horse floated across the floor and descended into the cellar. Poolhall Sammy’s eyes erupted in a catastrophe unlike any caught up in mortal coils.

In the kitchen, a place prepared for surgery but would forever be unfulfilled, consigned to lesser butchery, the strange new man was full of dialogue.

“Stone Horse, my slave, and now you?” complained Saw.

“My name is Muhammad. What’s yours?”

“*Pissed off!*”

“Don’t mind him” reassured Scarecrow, “he used to kill people.”

“These hands... don’t get me *started!*”

“So you say I came from the furnace?” asked Muhammad.

*“Boiler.”*

“Yes, you crawled out from the furnace. I helped handle you up the steps. I believe you may be a stage in the death throes of this riddle,” explained the man of straw, “so we need to start a dialogue. I know you must have lots of questions, but y-“

“I’m very afraid,” the man confessed, distantly, as if his head were carried away, his neck following its scent.

Muhammad jerked his head towards the kitchen door and left the room very, very, very slowly. Scarecrow and Saw exchanged confused faces and stepped in precise rhythm to his leaving, finding him static not far from the kitchen door, staring down at the wall.

Saw braced himself for a surreal trap. Muhammad took 3 carefully measured breaths and dug his fingers deep into his pelvis like talons into putty. He bent forward in agony and screamed. His eyes clenched tightly shut, causing veins to spring up all around them. He shoved his hands deeper and deeper into the flesh, wrenching his wrists and twisting his form from left to right. Half a minutes later he yanked his hands out violently with a pair of headphones held tightly in them. He stared down not with confusion, not with fright, not with disgust, but with feline curiosity. He traced a rolled up cord with his pincer’d fingers and unrolled it. He raised his head as a cat hearing a burglar and turned to speak to Scarecrow and Saw.

“Don’t panic.”

#### *FADE TO CASH*

Widget sat cross legged in the Drawing Room, rocking back and forth in a pensive fashion. Like spiders- like sandy little fingertips running up his arm- he was alerted to tingles running up his arm and promptly pulled it close to his body. His head was in a box. The air was sucked from his brain.

“What happened to you? You used to be so smart.”

Those words clapped like 2 palms against 2 ears on the 2 sides of his head. Wholly aware of the stigma one gets from talking to oneself, Widget kept his voice to a whisper.

“What’s this?” he asked.

“You don’t remember me?”

“No. Wait. No.”

His body crumpled into a fetal position, yet his head was at attention.

“Y... you need to listen to me now. Can you hear me?”

Lights flickered from inside the mask. Widget’s head fell back into a gradual coma. It was incomplete, though; he kept snappin’ in and out of it.

“Can you see me? Pay attention... W-“

Widget bolted across the room on all fours. He huddled against the wall and forced himself to shake. He was beating his head for a bit.

“What happened to you? What in the hell happened to you, then?”

Widget tipped over and went to sleep.

“Remember me?” he asked. Widget jolted awake but he wasn’t where he left himself.

It was decidedly white, except, um *not*. He recollected his thoughts and remembered why it was white. He'd decided it was white. And it was. *Kind of*. It was light and deceiving. In the White there was nowhere to hide.

Someone was talking to him; the voice was coming from the very, *very* blurred frame of an *almost man*.

"I think... I *know you*," stammered Widget. He was still laying down, but on what?

There was a big nothing pushing up against his palms. But he could look down forever. He could see *everything* inside the house, and it wasn't anything you'd expect.

"I doubt it. You don't know much of anything. But, *hey*... you're still usable. I didn't think I could get *ahold* of you. *They called me crazy*."

"Are you from the house? Are you here to try and trick me? Like everyone else in there?"

"I'm the only friend you got left. This right here – *you see this?* – *this* is the result of *persistence*. You don't *sleep* and you don't really *think*. You're a dead line of communication. You're usually a *very reliable* failure, Widget. *Salem*. What's different now?"

Widget hoisted his body up with his arms, but still clung to what supported him.

"Nothing's different. It's still going to hell around here. And I called it. You're getting to me. *All of you*. There's nothing else to find out about this place..."

"Now there's always *something* to figure out. You're respected around here. And not just by me... *I'm just crazy!*"

Widget grasped his filthy mask.

"Why are you here? What do you want from me? I've done so much. You do something. *You do something to help*."

"I am. I'm having faith in you. I'm talking to you right now. And look how good you're doing; *talking*. I don't think we can *talk* for long, though. I know you better than you know yourself. You're gonna wake up soon, so before you do. Listen to this, here: you're going some *good work*. You're the best man we got in there. And by *we* I mean me and my sponsors. Try and remember yourself and get it all out. That's all you have to. Wait until someone asks you the right question. Just wait for it. That's all you have to d—"

He sat up from his coma.

Widget was back in the house; stuck in the same body he'd left in a place he *thought* was alright.

"Don't ever do that again..."

Medicamentia Paenitentiamorbus.

Poolhall Sammy walked into the scene, expecting the not anything of anything, or nothing of everything. He didn't want *nothin'* to happen. He just wanted to walk and stand.

That was his principal error.

Much to his chagrin he stood in tension *whilst* observing a brown skinned man plugging the jack end of a long cord into the drywall, and placing bloodied, crusty headphones on his head. It made a sick sound. Poolhall Sammy, the fires having just extinguished moments ago, left to return to his room, unprepared to grapple with another ugly truth. He paused on the first step, looking as if he might say something, but then just blinked his eyes hard and continued on.

Arrows were drawn for him but he batted them away, denying the universe and resetting his mind back to a feral state. If there were any rhyme to the universe it would endorse such a human concept as justice and then it would allow him to return refreshed and ready to meet the day.

Believing firmly that the universe was a consequence and that mankind a bitter afterthought he knew he would return downstairs and have to beat someone.

Pity Poolhall Sammy.

Do it now.

Scarecrow and Saw met in congress to discuss what exactly Muhammad was up to. Nobody could hear them so they just stood still.

“What do you think Muhammad is up to?” asked Saw. He tapped his heel lightly in place, building up to a sinister rhythm, one that did not waver the indispensable Scarecrow in the least, slightest – at all.

“I am not boasting myself as an excellent judge of character, but he is operating in much the same way as Stone Horse,” replied Scarecrow. He was all about being unaffected by the rhythm, however some might have remarked about how his body was standing more professionally.

“Is there a connection there? Should we bring them together, or smash them together, or make them have a baby?”

“No,” replied Scarecrow, “they both come from a darkness, but there might be different temperatures in it, you see. They came into this with a mission, and they’re both listening, but it might not be the same. One came from the creature and one came from the house. That might, in fact, be a conflict...”

“The house is finding more about itself and the creature is trying to find out more about us?”

“I never said they were spies.”

“You inferred it.”

“That would make *me* a spy.”

Saw shut the fuck up. He scowled at the fifth dimension.

He turned back to Muhammad and watched him casually.

“I don’t understand what he is doing.”

“Well...” sounded Scarecrow, fumbling his way to a conclusion, “It seems he is listening to the house.”

“Houses do not talk you silly carrion.” Tap, tap, tap-tap, tap.

“The bug house does.”

“How did you know I would know what you were talking about by referring to it as the bug house?”

“It is the only house around. I assumed you would catch on. You’re doing alright so far, anyway.”

Saw exhaled through his nose and leaned back. He said nothing more.

“Good form.”

Tap, tap, tap-tap, tap.

In the ruined Parlour, Tim lied slumped against a cracked bookcase, his pants floorstruck aside splinters, broken glass, and dust. The lights dimmed and the environment sank back. He burst his body out onto a pediment.

“Hung *over*...” he lamented, “...this bottle driven deep into my brain is a blessing and a curse, something, something... I sit here with one eye, the other socket driven through with a bullet, the

slightest movement of which could threaten my life or surely secure my death. A wonder of miracle medicine this is that the glass has not inched the bullet closer to my brain. Truly I am blessed with life but also cursed by the knowledge that this bottle will never run dry and I will never be sober. It is bottomless – this I have been assured by a self described *wine man*. I am damned to cracks in the plot where hangover creep in, the only hope resting in that very knowledge that the bottle is never ending and that it is, in fact, a miracle and if a miracle was proven to be imperfect even for a day that the universe itself would fold, crunch, and collapse upon me no matter where I may be. This is safe with I and I alone and I shudder to think of the danger I put myself, and indeed, all other living creatures, in by pulling Saw into this. I'm by myself because I took a different path. This telescope... I am like you like everyone is like me. I am, in death, the same that I was in life, and... In defeat I live forever. That's what I'm trying to get at. I've seen a million people play unfair and not become invincible. I'm invincible right now.

In my weaker moments I fall to the floor and slip into a coma, in my stronger moments I smash up all that is within my reach. In my mediocre moments, truly the most pitiful, I stand in static while a riddle blossoms like some loathsome flower.”

The pediment then retracted on his lamentable soliloquy.

“I wonder...” he concluded, “...who will be the first to die?”

And then he crawled away. Back to the staircase.

Out of the way while the grownups were hard at work.

Poolhall stood far out from where Tim's light faded and was extinguished under weight of darkness, but yet it was illuminated by a light of his own, blasting down from above him. His pupils in and exhaled like he was watching the puppetmaster, or Muhammad or any other riddle in fits of spasms. His arms were crossed like a cool guy.

“I don't regret any of it.”

He said.

### *FADE TO CASH*

The house creaked constantly as the PuppetLord's curiosity manifested; he discovered his hands. He discovered how to use the wires attached to them.

The sounds came at such frequency that they stopped registering with the tenants.

The heightening volume as the closest thing they had to a ticking clock.

Saw Kennedy meandered past Poolhall into the ruined Parlour. He looked down at the fallen bookcase, darted his eyes about the room, and then confronted Poolhall.

“You want to give me a hand with this?”

Poolhall raised his head so he was able to look down at Saw.

“Why the *ass* are you gonna pick it up?”

“Well, so we can move around. Get books. Tell tall tales.”

“You ever lifted a bookcase before?”

“No. What? No. You want to help or what?”

“I don't.”

It took not moments before “finally” was in hindsight and Poolhall grabbed the corner of the bookcase opposite Saw. They extended their legs in unison and stood it back up against the wall. It was true: not one book had fallen, not one book fell during the lift, and every book was exactly the way it always was. They breathed in their accomplishment.

“The hell is up with that?” wondered Poolhall aloud.

“Maybe it fell with such a velocity that—

“No, see, *shut up*, cause they would have fallen when we put it back up.”

“You didn’t let me finish.”

“I know you. I can read thoughts. I don’t know if you *knew* that.”

Saw paused, looked over at Poolhall, and leaned away.

“I’m going to let you meditate on what you just said for a good while.”

Saw began to back out of the room, keeping his posture fixed on Poolhall, like he was a rabid dog.

“A good, *waxy* while...”

Just then, Tim with a Bullet slammed his body against the wall at Saw’s back.

“I’ve seen him! I *did it!*” he screamed.

He grasped at the wall with the hands of a jailbird.

Saw tried his hardest not to pay mind to it – it was the law. He knew Tim was part of the architecture. Poolhall sensed his disdain, knew what had to be done, and joined in the debacle, asking the obvious question:

“What the *fuck* are you talking about?”

Tim cleared his throat and chuckled. “Juice. I *saw him*. Just now. I’d never seen him before. And neither have any of you. *And...* and...”

Tim bolted from the wall towards the kitchen, laughing madly and stumbling into furniture along the way. He pumped his limbs like an unimpressive mechanical man. Muhammad acted like nothing was going on. Saw looked like he was about to lose his mind.

The old men conversating at the table *way o’er there* were reserved for whomever could keep up with them. The creatures peering through the window didn’t bother them.

The woman was never *en pointe*. They weren’t letting anything break their Herculean constitution.

Saw walked over but didn’t take up arms alongside them. He stood just within earshot to try and make ideas. They talked about: fingers being put into tight holes, wrapping long things around short things, licking irrelevant surfaces, turning things off, and slamming doors on weaker people. They kept looking over at Saw and... they had fear in their eyes. It was like their mouths were running the show. Their bodies were frozen in place. They weren’t even breathing. And their eyes said it all. If they could sweat, they surely would have. They’d sweat through their eyes but those were called tears and *strictly prohibited*. Someone said that.

They tried to send messages with the whites of their eyes. It looked like they were trying to form signals with the red veins what peeked out from the backsides of them. All he could make out

was *the panic*. Nothing really worked, but he could appreciate the effort.  
 Even though he had no idea what to do.  
 He looked back at the woman and she looked straight through him.  
 The air was tightening around him. He felt like he was stuck in a pillowy tube.  
 It was tense; he was caught between 2 parties that were counting on him to solve something.  
 Something important.  
 Of course she wanted him to kill... *them*? And they wanted him to... *stop something*.  
 Was she doing it? She might be *responsible*...?  
 The monsters weren't there. They weren't to blame. They weren't even in the *equation*.  
 He had to kill something. Both of them wanted him to *kill something*.

By the time Tim practically *crashed* into the kitchen, Scarecrow had crept to receiving status, standing as the only one supervising the situation.

Tim ran over to the cupboards and tried to fling them upon. Something on the other side pulled back, and he was left struggling in vain. He slid away and yanked the fridge door open. He took hold of the dead chef's hat and pulled it into the outside. The rest of it followed like a blanket full of bones.

There Tim stood; in the middle of the kitchen, clutching hat of the dead, bloated chef in his hand, panting heavily and surveying the room.

"I did it!" he shouted.

Scarecrow stormed over and struck Tim in the side of the head with his forearm. Tim crumpled to the ground like a pile of clothes. A pile of clothes and a blanket of bones.

The cupboards shuttered with glee.

"We're all trying to work over here, Tim. Nobody cares if you saw an imaginary person in a drunken stupor."

Tim spread a thick mist on the tiles with his heavy dog breath.

"What about me? *You* motherfucking... scarecrow. Talking from your fucking hat. Look at me! Look what happened! I know what's *going on*! I figured it *all out*! I'm..."

He grabbed Scarecrow by the pelvis and looked up with a pitiful claim.

"Look what they *did to me*!"

Scarecrow calmly placed his palm on Tim's forehead and pushed him away.

"You've done all this to *yourself*."

Tim slumped backwards and sat on the ground- dripping- staring at the floor. Legs crossed. Knuckles to the floor like an ape.

Saw Kennedy fought against his gut what told him to see what was going on. He knew he had work to do, and things to read, but still there was no ignoring the man in the hallway listening to the house. He shuffled up behind Muhammad and peeled the left cup of his headphones away. Before he could get a word in, Muhammad swallowed his head off.

"*I'm busy*". He yanked the headphone back, but pulled them down around his neck, giving Saw a chance to plead his case.

Saw slid his lips in closer to the divot between sound and ear. He licked his tongue across his teeth like a pedophile and arc'd his fingers like spider legs. The world that *will be* will remember this for the hour of Saw's death where he asked himself "What did I do to deserve this? Am I not the superior man?!" But there he went:



"I'm well aware, but those involved would like to know what it is that you are doing."

"Don't you understand?! Can you not comprehend?!"

Saw was appropriately taken aback. His eyelids flashed open, but then cracked back down in defense. He almost broke them.

"Why are you listening to the house? I will *suffocate you!*"

"I was struck by the urge to listen! There are urgent things at hand! The house speaks in code and I am working meticulously to discover the cipher. And I don't expect any of you paid mind to it so there's much work to do. I think I have it worked out. From what I can gather, it is a warning as well as a taunt. I'm so busy."

"The bug house cannot talk, it only *breathes* and *bleeds*."

"I can have the full story within a few hours...!"

"Just so you know, someone else told me what I just said, so if I'm wrong, I'm really not."

"I'm busy. Go away. Leave me alone."

There was one time he broke a woman's arms. He beat them with a crowbar in the backseat of his car. It was a furious comma *obscene* situation.

He decided to wear a mask because he fully intended to release her. It was a sheet with holes cut in it to see through, like a ghost head. She ran from the parking lot into the night and eventually got to tell her story. The way she told it, it was a daring escape. He'd tried to kill her, of course! *She had broken arms!* The two of 'em!

The media was obsessed with the assassinations at this point, and a story of a *spectacular error* on the killer's part got a cynical population alight with frenzy. *He was a man after all.*

There was no doubt that *one* man was responsible, and that *one man* was a *real man*.

That *one real man* had a plot. Conspiracies became verified.

People started saying "I told you so." He was listening to all of it. He read those newspapers, and magazines, and paid close attention to the parts that called him anything but a lunatic.

He was a *martyr vigilante* - not his words.

He fashioned his technique off movies and music which he indulged in before and after every incident. He sang along to the lyrics, which allowed them to pat him on the back. *He was part of it.*

Somewhere far off, he thought that those he admired were watching.

*Good job, Saw. You done us proud.*

He'd spared one. He'd gotten it out of his system.

*Back to work, then.*

Saw rose to his feet and shuffled back over to Scarecrow with a mouthful of words he just *had* to get out.

"He says--"

"I heard it. I understand it."

"I don't think you do. I think you're trying to make me look stupid in front of everyone!"

Saw waved his finger madly towards the kitchen and all the cupboard doors slam shut, quaking like vibration from the inside, a trillion nondescript phantoms giggling.

"Muhammad is the cipher. What I cannot figure out is whether or not he is here on behalf of the house or the puppetmaster. Or *how long* he has been in here. I'm still working all this out."

"I thought we agreed it was called the *puppetlord*."

"I never agreed to that."

“This is just like the boiler incident,” observed Saw.

“Who’s fault is that?”

Saw narrowed his eyes in confusion. “I don’t know what you’re trying to say.”

“Don’t worry about it.”

Saw became painfully aware that there was a race, and he had been the last to start. He started to think that his lack of experience might be his saving grace. He thought of looking wherever everyone thought was stupid, and give chances to those everyone had given up on.

Nothing else was going on. Even the newest faces were hard at work.

The most recent events in their past lives were propelling them in bold directions.

Perhaps... he thought... it wasn’t an idea. It was a symptom...

His muscles began to turn and shift with that primal thirst for survival.

They seemed to think that going back was...

He had to write this down.

He had to go and get everything recorded.

But the basement door was open and...

Beneath feet, all the way through the rotted wood and thick leath’ry veins, Widget and Stone Horse stood within earshot of each other. There was an air of unease down there. Widget was not distressed or troubled like he’d been before, at ease as always within reach of the inverted cows. But Stone Horse is on the prowl for clues.

“You are Widget. I need to ask you some questions,” said Stone Horse.

“I’ve heard of you. I’ve heard flattering things,” replied Widget, unflinching, unmoving, and unaffected by the heaving and retracting of his supposed lungs.

“I am gathering clues. I am gathering clues which I will compile in a report I will use this report as the base for a greater equation that I will formulate with the sum being the thing that will save all of us.”

“You are going to save all of our lives? Are you positive? Are you *sure*?”

“Only I can do this. There is something special about you. I know what it is but I dare not speak it because I fear that it is too important and may collapse each and everyone in this house. I fear this but do not wholly believe it. You must work closely with me because only you will have the answers.”

“I don’t want to help you. This has been a long time coming. I’ve heard so many people like you. I’ve seen it all. You’re not the first to say this.”

“Do not surrender. Do not let this end on his terms. If you surrender he will become too powerful and egotistical. This is bigger than your suffering.”

“I will help you but only because you can help me get what I want.”

“I can help you get what you want.”

“Juice has been acting strange. He has not been around me in a long time. He has been close to the new one named Muhammad. I don’t know what to think.”

“I will help you get Juice back but I will also question Muhammad. Keep in mind that this is not all about you and I would have pursued this under my own accord.”

“You tricked me, sir.”

“There is no time for semantics. The point they are trying to get across is that we are all agents of our last bad decision, but I can’t let them affect this mission. If I listen to the I will become them.

”

“You tricked me, sir.”

“Shut up.”

Stone Horse hovered back up the stairs.

And what about Scarecrow?

Some say he was born away in a desert. And they’d be right. It might have been a hundred years ago as time may strip him away, but succeeds in only revealing more power.

See, the thing about *the desert* is that its inhabitants never kept score of their deeds. They were just there, doing their thing. And it was smiles for miles.

*Their* desert was vast and inspiring. It was encapsulated by a stroke of mountains and jagged cliffs, and the area was small enough that you could see the entire ring if you concentrated. It was possible to scale the mountains, but by the same token, it was possible to burrow into the sand and get to the middle of the world.

Throughout it there were small, tight villages- hamlets, even. There must have been close to a hundred, I reckon. Each village had naught but a few dozen people.

None of them had anything to do with each other. There was no need for trade or communication.

They could see their neighbours, you understand, but very rarely did they ever wander over.

Maybe they’d wave. They’d look over and make sure everything was still alright.

It was just far enough to be out of the way.

It was *so damned hot* during the day.

*But at night*, as it cooled and relaxed and stretched its legs out, there was a phenomenon that occurred without fail. In the thick of twilight clusters of luminescent tornadoes touched down like giant glass fingers. They danced across the sand – thousand of them, at the vanishing point or just down the way – but never close enough to be a danger. The villages had developed just out of reach of their natural patterns.

Hundreds of years of careful study had their nature figured out.

It was during this time that the villages had the most contact with each other, whatever that means.

There was no history, however there was *present*, so the peoples interpreted their existence as success.

The men, women, and children of the desert watched the nightly funnel clouds with celebration.

It was eerily silent.

And then by day, they’d farm, *siphon water*, play, and live their lives.

Whatever that means.

And at night, the children would run out into the darkness. They knew not to run too close to the tornadoes – and they never did – and they always came back.

Often times the children would camp out in their forts and wonder aloud what went on past the mountains. There was talk that everything floated.

And then the *often times* turned ugly: children began *disappearing*. By daylight, one or two would be missing. Before short they weren't allowed going out at night. The fingers would not be celebrated.

But see, one time a kid did. His father went out after him. They ran out into the arena of god's tornadoes. The father disappeared, but the kid came back.

He said his father was taken away by men on mighty steeds.

*Stolen into the night.*

The desert turned dire and desperate. Children were no longer safe. Truly, no village was safe with a roving band of deviants stalking by night. The villages unalienated themselves. They started talks to spread the word on what was happening. Surely information would defeat the unknown.

Children began disappearing from their beds- from anyone's bed. *They* stated stealing away entire families at a time.

If a mother was taken the father would follow the next night. But never all at once. They never left a bloodline red. They made it grey. And nobody knew why.

So after the villages held communication firm until it hardened into pipes, they instigated a program: since children were inarguably the future, the children of one village would be shuffled and traded with another. By day a group of kids would be escorted by an armed adult, arriving at one of the neighbouring villages by nightfall in an attempt to trick the bandits – to confuse them. If something happened to the parents, the children would already be miles ahead. Strength in numbers; power in movement.

They began to talk of the predators' origins, thinking perhaps they came from beyond the mountains. Perhaps the marauders floated.

The man later known as Scarecrow was one of the children's' escorts.

He was walking to the next village with seven kids under his watchful eye. They arranged their path in a star, he holding sway over half of it. His neighbours had been taken away by the mysterious transients. There was a hatred living in his belly that he couldn't shake. He could feel it growing and hardening, like frozen oil maybe. He knew it wasn't healthy. He knew it's not what his mother would have wanted for him. He knew it wasn't the right sort of mind to be casting over children as their precious umbrella.

He decided to keep to himself as to be sure not to let the ice oil in his belly roll out onto *the future*.

He carried a spear. He wore a big hat that looked like it'd been across the entire world, beaten but stronger on account.

He looked like he really wanted to be there, whereas everyone else just agreed with it.

It made him offer up his umbrella when it was necessary.

His stories gave the children hope. He'd been to the outside territories – beyond the mountains – and he knew that nothing floated. He denounced the heretical majesty of the murderers. He told

them that everything could be destroyed, and that's exactly what they wanted to hear.

The sun was high in the sky, but apparently that wasn't good enough.

They dug themselves out from the sand on the quickness like scorpions. It was an ambush. Five dark characters atop giant substitute horses, standing tall like the perspective shifted. The horses were fashioned out of straw and *brrrrr*-lap. The men riding them were draped in heavy leather and metal. They had irregular knives strapped to their personage and deep, cavernous sockets where conventional men had eyes. Their bodies were dried; lips torn away, skin cracked, and hair dusted. Long, black hair. Some of it went off on plateaus- *tangents*. Seven of them. Atop substitute horses, looking like conventional men who had simply been buried in the sand for many decades.

He commanded the children to run as fast as they could. Had they not felt threatened by the approaching hangmen, they would have been frightened away by his tone. They darted towards the closest village, but it was still a long way off. No amount of running from anywhere could save them. That's why the spear was already halfway to murderin' height.

One of the horsemen took the lead and disattached a chain as thick as an arm from its back. On the business end of it was a trident that had been bent up like a scoop. The hooves of the horse were weighted with warped chunks of lead. They were stomping towards him, kicking up sand like bombs, gaining ground, but he wasn't turning to fight; maybe he could just- The scoop landed right above his tailbone, deep into his spine. The chain was as heavy as three men. The momentum of it collapsed him instantly. His body pitched forward, but the passing horseman yanked him up. He couldn't feel his body. The villain broke formation and took his prize *over there*. The rest kept on after the children, moving on in the shape of an upside down arrow head.

The execution didn't take long. It went right to work taking Scarecrow apart. It beat him in the face until his face wasn't a face. It broke every bone it could get its hands on. It dug its hands into Scarecrow's torso and pulled out everything, rubbing it all over its face and the horse's face. It dripped the blood into its eyeholes. It fed, *somehow*.

Scarecrow wouldn't die. He just kept screaming. He just kept on fighting it with whatever actions he could force his body to respond to. It started ripping his skin off; first his face, then his arms, and then peeling away the stray fragments on his chest. The icy oil in his guts was shattered, but remained thick. I stirred awake.

"You son... *of a bitch!*" he screamed, choking it through the blood. He fell back into habits picked up from the further territories.

The horseman, tired of savaging Scarecrow's finest frame, threw him upon the back of its horse and curved around to rejoin the clique.

But Scarecrow's eyes wouldn't close. He took every nerve in his body and pointed it right into his one unbroken arm. He hissed blood through his clenched his teeth. His eyelids had been torn off so he pumped out tears to keep himself focused. His subconscious pumped the unformed oil

into the arm, and his neck, yet still collected in his belly as an anchor.

He lurched his body back up and threw his arm over the shoulder of the horseman. He jerked his hand over its face, shoving his fingers into its eye sockets.

“I’m gonna rip you apart you *piece of shit!*” he coughed insanely. He put his body weight into it and went over the edge; the horseman fell down and took the horse with it. The whole show ground to a halt; they all fell and kicked the sand up like a tidal wave. The predators slowed and turned around to see what was up.

And who’d given a fuck about the Puppetmaster?  
Colour me interested.

Colour everything else bastard. *Just like that.*

Those old minds of *seventeen wise men*, driven mad by the trials of black holes comma infinity death, were bound together inside a sicko’s mortal coil. They’d fled the cold vacuum of space and taken refuge in an abomination. It was warm.

They spread themselves upon the very timber fashioned abysswise, stretched over one another, connected, broke, rearranged, and solidified in one faulty mass. It was nothing beyond fragmented sentences. Then they got eaten apart by bugs. Then they were slept in by the demons what lived behind the brickwork; the ones that hadn’t painted themselves up and hid in plain sight. All the minds met again. Then broke off. Then solidified again.

And if you thought it was bad before...

The house emoted very much like a *vessel*. The only thought it could manage was that it was there for something better. It had *shame* and *hope*.

And hunger.

*It had a little bit of that.*

It spoke with legion. Every so often a couple voices would carry through the rest and they would trick one of the shadow kids into the well in the attic. They’d fall through the house, into the guts of the house; into a swirling mass of acid, energy, and sometimes, *magic*. And hatred, and pain. And desire. And monsters crawling up the walls.

Then it would move; the stimulation of every transdimensional nerve shunted the thing as far as it felt like.

When it found someone and tricked him into being eaten, it started to get an idea of what it wanted. It took his brain and his memories – *slowly* – and before long it began to get an idea of the brain it wanted to need what it actually wanted.

It wanted to eat more.

And so it did. It kept eating. It kept stealing. It kept speaking, and the more crowded it got, the more frightening it became, but the more the words made sense. Stopped making sense. Making sense again. The sanity fluctuated, but never too far.

It became convinced that it wanted to be a mother. It wanted to be a host; it wanted to be sure that what it had been thinking made sense. Or something. I wanted it all. What little information it had, it wanted it all.

The desire fused with the hope and then melted over the ambition. Like a rotten egg wearing a purple hat.

It got pregnant. It felt better.

And the explanation “just by thinkin’ it” might leave the scholars at large unsatisfied.

But it was as simple as that. It buried all the desire, and hope, and hatred and hunger and ambition deep into its lowest section. Some demons went in there. Some bugs. *Some fluid*. Some of everything; exactly the way the house was created.

And in the darkest, warmest, most horrifying fathoms of the house, all these things sat and cultivated and festered. It rotted.

And it started kicking.

It fell through a fault line into reality, or a piece of it – a memory of it.

And then they waited.

Everyone waited. Even if they didn’t know it.

Scarecrow’s bones were raw and blotted with sand. He was still alive and it came as no surprise. He hadn’t stopped moving since he saw the ordeal coming.

The horse had become pierced over his body, and the driver was alongside it somewhere.

He kept working his nerves like tiny whore machines. He tore his way up through the horse and fell into a schizophrenic coma. His body started to shut down and his sense became overwhelmed.

He lapsed in and out of consciousness. Long strips of hay got caught in his wounds; everywhere. It got stuck to the thick oil what leaked from his flesh. It retreated back inside him and dragged whatever was around him with it- hay and bits of fabric clung to his frail shape like a skeleton that had been tarred and feathered.

He was one gaping wound and it kept going in. He was moving even when he was asleep. In an out, back and forth.

And before long, he found his strength again. The pain was muted and he could work his body like in the good old day (earlier.)

A fist ripped through the other side of the horse with a transdimensional thunderclap.

The rest followed. He clumsily dragged his body out; hay mohawked all along his buried form. His head was just a big messy oval. And his eyes were long gone.

The criminal was regaining its composure not far from the horse. It was just turning its head to look over the incident. The whole ordeal had taken a matter of seconds. All sense of time was shoved beneath a solid slab of revenge.

He yanked his whole body out from the horse and took his first awkward steps over to the creature. He snatched up one of his own ribs that, like a flower, stuck up from the sand.

It saw him coming, but didn’t react, really.

“I’m gonna fuck you up like this!” he screamed. The thing slid one of its knives from its right breast pocket, but then Scarecrow hit a second wind and rushed at it with rib raised high. He drove it right through its cheek. Pulled it out, then into its forehead. Pulled it out, then into its neck. He grabbed one of the knives off its chest, then plunged it into its stomach. Rib into its throat. Knife into its flank. He could see his own blood pouring out its new holes. The poetry wasn’t lost on him.

And then it fell down.  
It didn't make any sounds.

The rest of the killers were called to attention upon the alarum of the one trailing behind. It was watching something most foul going on by the fallen horse, but they couldn't see what it was. They had no eyes to squint and no pupils to shrink. They were all dilated so they assumed the worst.

Hell, it's probably what got them doing what they were doing.

They abandoned the children completely - *prey'd up*- and stampeded over.

Scarecrow lifted his body up like a lion who'd finished feasting. He'd stolen on the creature's clothing and found the means to hold the hay in place. He took the vest but not the pants cause he had not the time.

He spotted them coming for his blood, whatever that meant. He'd gotten the hang of walking with a purpose and he did it with such skill that he made it to his hat before they got to the point. He was dragging the scoop chain that did him in, and with the other hand he put the hat back on his head. He tucked the loose strands of hay out of the holes he used to watch with. He looked more like his old self.

By the time he got himself together he could make out the fault lines on their faces.

They were getting their knives ready. The government of their arms meant that they had a good idea of what they were gonna do.

They were all moving with purposes. Purpose was spelled war.

They never saw the scoop until he swung it their way. It hit the legs of one of the horses and it came crashing down just like the last one. The horseman catapulted forward and landed not far from Scarecrow's feet. He yanked the scoop back and, while the thing was recovering, drove it crudely into the back of its head. He flung the body over onto its back, stuck it right in its face, pulled it back out, stole the knife from its faustgrip, and returned to receiving position.

He was too late to avoid harm. 2 of them rode by on either side and swiped their blades down on him. He caught wounds on his shoulders but it didn't matter; he was so far beyond pain.

They were circling back but the other 2 had dismounted and were coming at him like gladiators. He knew they thought little of his ability to take lives, which caused him to release a snarly cackle.

They didn't respond; they were so far beyond communication. He dropped the chain and let them come at him.

They had knives in each hand and moved smoothly. He let them drive the knives into him as deep as he wanted. They both wanted it. They both attacked in the same fashion- at the same time- which is exactly what he needed. He knifed one of them in the spine, and just as the other was stepping back to rework the assault, Scarecrow was already mid swing. The knife went right into the side of its head, stopping once the handle met with skull. Took it out- into a spot just below the first entry point. It fell down with no life. It fell downHe turned back to the first of the two and started stomping on its neck ; he still had one decent foot bone left and a furious network of bones to guide it.

The thing was good and dead. He leaned his head down closer to the corpse; "If I catch you



around here *again* I'm gonna eat you alive you *son of a bitch!*"

The last two were already galloping back with their knives held adjacently.

"I've had just about enough of *this*," he mumbled to himself. He grabbed 2 knives and shoved them into what mess of hay constituted his hands. They were bearing down on him, and as they both swung down, he stabbed furiously at the sides of the horses. History repeated itself. He couldn't escape the unfamiliarity of his own physics, but he was as good as anyone had ever seen.

Once he was looming darkly over one of them, he just threw the knife into its back. He put it in a meaty section that is conventionally used to bide one's time. He kicked it in the side of the head with that *one good foot*. He let it lay there and think about what it had done.

It was convulsing softly.

It spit up a thousand strange, dried particles.

Scarecrow walked over to the last uncut one, crouched low, and shanked it right in the side as it was on all fours. From snake to dog to asshole, it plotted.

It deflated back down on the sand. No sounds. *No nothin'*.

"I'm taking that blood back for all the tiny people you robbed. Go ahead and die, you."

He planted as many fingers as he could into its eye sockets and pulled back as hard as he could.

He used his legs. The dried skin on the neck crinkled, broke apart, and drifted away. The bones snapped with ease, and *just like that*, the head dislodged. Scarecrow fell back; he had just learned something about their anatomy. *Good stuff*.

He marched back over to the last living transient and began beating on it furiously with the severed head. Its life crawled off, but slowly. Even its ability to die was crippled. The sign was spasms ceasing. It coughed up strange things, and when they mingled with the dust and sand, it looked like mist.

The head he used as an instrument dissolved in his hands, but not before the life haver had its life had by someone else. All the blood trickled out.

It soaked into the sand; his own was *back there* with the first one.

They were all dead. Every last one was shoved from this world against their will.

Scarecrow stood up and surveyed his work; there was death all around him. There was blood everywhere.

He could see the children down the way. They came at him like things better than people.

Perhaps they didn't understand what was going on. Perhaps they knew more than he did and lived life like a circle. Sickos wanted to put their hands on the untouchables, both in theory and practice.

*Who was this man?* He looked like a scarecrow.

The story of the Documentarians is more established in urban dictionaries rather than legitimate encyclopaedias. Their story is one wealthied with folly.

And it happened like this.

The Documentarians were first established in the year of *this* lord, anno domine 152003. They connected their hands to each other's heads and their legs to their thoraxi, forming an institution in the same manner of a cyst or tumour. Nobody knows why it occurred. So everyone left it at that. There was enough meat near the end of it to keep everyone busy.

But, however, *on the other hand*, it was common knowledge years later that the entire organization was hovered by the desire to be pope. They all wanted to be in charge of the Vatican. They wanted absolute regency. Urban Dictionaries would refer to them as "pope wannabes" or "pope posers," or "pope poseurs."

Their first foray into the public eye was upon a wagon of attempted assassination. The Documentarians made an attempt on the Pope's life on the day of May the Tenth, 1981. Their plans were detailed in a ten thousand page manifesto called "The Book of Humanity," which would be discovered decades later, but then abruptly lost while in transit along the Great Atlantic Ocean (sp.) The Book of Humanity contained, among many related tangents and murderous fantasies, plans to install a puppet Pope. It would be accomplished by means of a Pope Suit fashioned out of skin that could be worn by anyone. It was a really literal plot. The purpose was to make the leadership interchangeable. Due to the age of the skin, it would fit most anyone, and the genius of it all was repeated *ad nauseum* within the text. Prototypes of the skin were used by Cardinals of the Documentarians for years, and each one was named "The Melting Man" by the public. And since there was more than one, they were called "The Melting Man Plural, Child!" People suspected something was up, and since nobody could see any real danger in it, they all laughed. *From the belly*. Despite this, the plot was carried out with stern, levelled faces. Some said the failure drove them more insane. *Insaner*.

It hoisted their esteem way, way down. This realization coupled with the knowledge that their organization was garnering public attention but absolutely *no respect* put them on the fast track to extremes. Everyone was pointing *right at* them, laughing from the belly.

Scarecrow had the children standing around him. They asked him what happened, not because they couldn't see, but because it couldn't have been like they saw it. They believed his story. They believed that he was who he said he was. He walked them back to their destination. He made sure people knew what happened. He made sure they knew the horsemen were dead, but if more came back, just to go out and kill them. Nobody floated – nothing incredible. He had to leave.

Another world had taken a part of him and he had to move to accommodate the world's wisdom. So he went up and over the mountains into the next world that would have him. Lookin' for freaks. A hatred still burned in his belly, but it had taken on parts, just like the rest of him. It was hungry and wanted *more* parts; some eyes, some shoes, some machines.

And it would find them over the mountains.

All he really needed was a home...

### *FADE TO CASH*

Stone Horse laid steps underfoot and returned to the main floor. There to his right was Muhammad, studying the wall with cups around his ears. Stone Horse ran his lowers into Muhammad's side and shoved him a kilter. Muhammad pitched his head up sharply and widened his mouth for protest.

"I need to ask you some questions," Stone Horse smashed across his face. Letters went everywhere.

"Wh... what do you want?! *I am very busy!*" pounced Muhammad back, claws unfolded and eyes lit up like a nebulae. Contemporary man took shelter leaving Stone Horse with no secrets or allusions to what he really was.

"Is Juice with you? I have good reason to believe you have entranced him."

"Yes, and why wouldn't I? He is my oldest and closest friend!" barked Muhammad, quickly becoming a bastard in the face of inquisition.

"You have only been in this world a matter of hours. I do not understand this."

"I have known Juice for 15 years. He and I have been in and out of places you cannot fathom. Juice has saved my life on more than one occasion."

Muhammad jumped to his feet and let the headphones fall along his ribs. Saw peeked out from behind Scarecrow's shoulder, standing static in the kitchen entrance. The sight of other people getting their work done had high voltage sparking alive in his chest. He'd forgotten what he was there for.

"I find this very strange, Mr. Muhammad--"

"How did you know my name?"

"I am very curious as to your travels as well as claims that you have stolen Widget's friend away from him, also named *Juice*."

"Widget? I recall someone named Widget but I think there must be some mistake. Juice is my soul mate. I... no, you're full of shit!"

"You had best get back to work. I believe in what you are doing. Thank you."

Stone Horse floated away from Muhammad. The sweat on his forehead was reflecting light. He dropped to his ankles and began deciphering the haunting melodies send from the belly of the house. Scarecrow stepped away from the kitchen, leaving Saw exposed to the elements soon caught back up in another relationship by the approaching Stone Horse.

"I'd like to speak with you, if that is alright."

"Why do you want to talk to me?" asked Saw.

"I am compiling a report. I need to gather information from all of the tenants."

"I just got here. I don't know anything."

"Do you think you could tell me if Tim is a homosexual?"

"No, but he used to be a woman. I know. *Y'all*."

"That is very intriguing. I may need to quote you on this." Saw leaned back and kicked his chin up.

"I cannot comprehend you, Stone Horse. I was lead to believe that you didn't care what became of us. You were beyond this whole mess. You *son of a bitch*. What happened to you?"

"I discovered indignity."

Saw stepped back from Stone Horse, sending a subliminal signal to his underwater antenna; a message that read "all finished". Stone Horse took only a fingerful of seconds to register it this before he went about to leave. He didn't not go far; he veered left into the ruined Parlour where there sat one Scarecrow and where there slump'd one Tim with a Bullet. Stone Horse went right past the Scarecrow to make an issue out of Tim.

"Tim with a Bullet, I am evicting you."

"To... to what do..."

"I must commandeer this room for my experiments and my work. This is to become my office. I cannot do work with you here. This is very important. You are antihuman."

"But sire... *where am I to go?* You are taking *everything*..."

"You cannot stay. If you stay I will have somebody devour you."

Tim slowly crawled to his feet with the grace and dignity of a cripple splashing in the mud. He was getting the hell out, setting himself up for a closing remark:

"You've broken my heart, Stone Horse."

He then sprayed himself from the room.

#### *FADE TO CASH*

Down there in the basement was a robot naught but the size of a child. When it moved, it breathed, and when it breathed it sounded like it was drowning.

It was sitting at the piano; indeed, it might have always been sitting there.

With the voice rendered through a vast, imaginary ocean, it sang a song, striking keys in an abstract rhythm.

... "Time was when I had no address  
Time was when I put no stress  
On the world – the cord of existence  
Time was when I was nameless

Wash the gallows- time to hang him high  
With no audience there's time to fly  
Play with planets falling from the sky  
Play with prayings long since rised

Grenade, just one of those games I play  
I made more space for the claiming clay  
Watch hands tear out in a slaving way  
They'll stay long as I make them graves

Carry clouds up on my shovel  
Kick up the pitch through a leather muzzle

Unstrap the back and swagger, shout  
 Let these transients know just what I'm talking about

It's a call to arms to crawling worn  
 It's a walking tall to call the storm  
 It's a wailing wall to stall the worm  
 It's an opened jaw to swallow horns

Rumours of my death have been greatly underestimated.  
 Estimated, estimated.

No vision- it's lonely at the bottom of the world  
 I found a new religion in bringing you down  
 It's all kinds of box when you're naked with a girl  
 I found a new mission in hearing her sounds

Curled in my drawer is a dictionary of the universe  
 I wrote it, I drew it with a pen and spit  
 I climbed the hill and held it to the Acropolis  
 Broke, folded-crumbled, exhaled before it

I remember, I remember these walls like my birth  
 I remember turning my back on all of it, what's worse  
 I remember, I remember holding it off the balcony  
 I remember, can't forget the diction of the hearse.

Hearse, hearse, hearse...

The children of the night sound just like bells  
 The road, the sight of it smells just like hell  
 They're dangling from their necks by the side of the road  
 It's night; Twelve O'clock and all is well

Ask yourself what you want from me  
 Then ask if I've got what I want from you  
 Stroke me faster, no, I'm not asking you to  
 It's a threat, can't imagine what I'll do

I think of you like calligraphy  
 My rise from the walls was a mystery  
 His missus, my blister- its symmetry  
 Slaves sniffing some tumbling imagery

How's the stage look now, you seeing this  
 How swagger's my cocky, where's the weakness  
 No, there's no poetry, this is strictly business

I get what I want. I pick up pieces.  
 I get what I want, I trace the creases  
 I get what I want, come on anti-thesis

Come on, come on, pick up pieces"...

It came and went through a mist that enveloped it like a strobe light.  
 It happened, and then it was gone.

Saw was behaving like a fly with his back to the wall. Secret agent fly.  
 Tim transferred his home to the stairwell, collapsing backwards and planting his feet firmly on the first steps. He let himself get stuck there.  
 Stone Horse stood stationary in the ruined Parlour with Scarecrow leaning deep into his leather chair, once by the window, then tilted slightly on the far wall. Mr. Kennedy swung his head around, making absolutely certain that each and every member was in their place. After that he decided that speaking with Widget would prove the paramount torture, stepped over Tim with a Bullet to barricade himself in his room. People stopped working.

He didn't not regret leaving it all; in fact he felt lighter with every ascending step. Like a freebird.

In his room was a mystery all his own.

In his room was a problem only he could solve.

If they only knew how in his debt they were.

To him.

"Y'all."

Before he let himself tumble to the mercy of his own devices – the things he created by investigating - he travelled to the far end of the second-floor hall, down where the light dimmed, through a hidden hallway, camouflaged in 3 dimensions, ending at a doorway smaller than the rest. It was an illusion, shrinking and expanding, but only at the right hand corner. He channeled a cat, opened the door, hoping against all things that it was the washroom and not a portal to the deepest, most ill spoken fathoms of the ocean.

It's the washroom; it was a place for waste, but banished into a funhouse mirror. It was dark and it looked like it was sketched on bark with glass and nail. Upon closer inspection, the toilet was not a toilet at all, but a drawing on the wall, and when Saw moved his hands closer, challenging the illusion, found that it would shift conventional matter into marrow and scissors. The lines of it were loose, but organized like barbed wire. The more he looked at it, the more it became sound, and that in itself had him stepping back.

It was all over the floor, or drawn inside of it. Everything was disorganized illness primed to slip into sound skin. He stayed there because it made him feel whole again.

Someone was keeping track of what happened there. Someone wanted it that way.

It might have been god, the devil, or whoever spread their sweat upon human clay back before there were stories to tell.

Like his devices, it came from within him.

The floor swirled around his feet and the walls twisted like eyeballs rotating to rude at someone

in the slowest manner possible. There was data hidden in the cupboard above the sink, and in that room, writ vulgarly with *whispers* and *tricks*, there was the faintest sound of the *same fucking cackling* that pestered him in the kitchen. The cabinet had no handle and no seam, but it rattled like a fridge. He followed that dotted line as far as it would go; something to do with food, maybe.

Fucking *gremlins*. He could hear movement behind the walls. Something scampered across, then up, then around then away. And even more horrible, there was a thick, slow churning above the ceiling; like an upset stomach. There was something happening all around him. It all funneled into one grand sentence: something was waking up.

Saw's mind, off kilter as it was, swirled in synch with the floor. The trance crushed his will into a whimpering little vex. The cackling swarmed his head and he had not the intelligence to disperse it. It took over his face and punched it back into his scalp. Soon he had no grasp at all on reality and feverishly attempted to maintain footing. The lines became sounds, which became shapes, which became thick lines that rushed at him from behind. He fell down and became horrified at the thought of losing consciousness in that place. He felt like falling asleep in an alley built out of rape bricks.

The sound of guts and coughing fogged his mind until he could take no more and broke down onto the floor. It was the beginning of some days wretched.

That laughter- the heckling- oh yes, the snideness of it all: it stopped. It ground to a halt and evaporated into apteryxes and gagging and children's fingers.

He was visited by 3 ghosts, all coming as thirds to one abhorrent frame.

Sprawled on the floor, unable to shut his eyes and sequestered to the hope that darkness might overtake him- *finish it* - something invaded, and it did it ugly; it did it through his conscious mind.

Something that knew where to dig.

In a time of lesser reconciliation, Saw was a portrait of lovely architecture. The moment things came into focus was the same moment that a melted, abysmal face appeared. He fashioned a scope out of an insane person's logic. He secured it around his eye and pounded it in with a frozen metal hammer.

He was then rewarded with inspiration unlike any he'd experienced before.

He knew exactly what he had to do.

The abduction of one of the Cardinal's men's wives quickly shifted from conventional to obituary. So details the tragedy of an unfit hero.

Bad things happen at night, but bad intentions blossom during the day.

He kept her in a red car and it was the evening. A deserted parking lot.

He spent his days observing her and thinking all about it. He got his self wound up as tight as DNA. He stole her away something like 9 in the PM.

She was with child and he didn't have the heart to torture her. All the records of everything he had told himself evaporated. All the tapes were pressurized and destroyed.

She knew nothing besides his identity and that was something that could not be made into

anything. He just knew how he wanted it to end.  
 Despite what they thought, this is what they wanted too. It just wasn't how they would have chosen it be done. Their eyes blinked excitedly once they had figured it out.  
 Until then... they just shook and got blurrier. And closer. Out of focus.

Already his cold feet were escalating to moist eyes. The more he looked out the window the more he saw shattered glass. The more he saw cuts. The more he recited his plan in his head the more he could hear her moaning in fear. It was an ugly sound. It wasn't really pitiful. It made bloody thoughts smoother and maybe that's a bad thing. More and more. Looking through 2 pieces of glass.

*"Shut the fuck up!"*

Some devil's instinct swam up into him; he shoved the knife into her vagina.  
 Like pulling something sticky off. The scene rushed into frantic spotlight; it accented every bead of sweat on his forehead. Suddenly he was manic. Suddenly he couldn't look out the window. He tried to silence her screaming with a plunger, reserved for making short work of evidence; part of a clumsy plan from a miscast protagonist. She was screaming so loud she was tearing apart her throat. It was like a tree trunk turned inside out. It sounded wet and primal.  
 He beat her over and over and over and over the head and over the stomach. He punched her throat and bit at her arm carnivorously. He was speaking in tongues. They were both crying and screaming and there was nobody willing to end it. Fear the height of something paramount fell over and caved in on them. At the height of violent ecstasy they connect in a way that nobody could understand. All radiance was sucked out of her the moment she expired, twitching and grabbing much insanely at life. Once it was all over, he struggled with every ounce of his being to recall why he took her out of her home.  
 He thought it was extortion.  
 He thought it was revenge.  
 He thought of a song.

A giant window stood tall at his backside. It was a room as big as a library. It was dark and reeked of literature.

The stranger stood before one of the lesser Cardinals, not a broken man, but a rag doll. He had been thrown to the ground and put the fear of god into. He was dressed like he didn't know it was coming.

The assailant stood with a flayed cat squeezed in his filthy fist. It belonged to the Cardinal's son, and confessed the sent the message like twisting the knife,  
 He's covered in so much blood that the clean parts feel like they should be washed. The Cardinal- in his office, in his building, in his city- broke down, but was not fortunate enough to be confronted by someone who knew what to do with people. All that the criminal wanted to do was hurt him. He wanted to play dirty. He thought it was owed to him- to be as dirty as he wanted.

Saw was a man that had seen too much.

A crumpled, bereaved pile on the floor- begging for some – *any* - form of liberty. Some sanity.  
*Anything, god damn it!*

Disbelief morphed into bargaining. Then into hatred. Then worse hatred. He called upon every



form of justice he could think of to damn Saw in any way that existed. Grandiose blanket statements to appeal to the *good* in the world. He was quivering for all of it, like he was jitterbugging to keep from falling over the edge.

Saw delivered liberty- he did it with the business end of a pair of scissors to the right side of his skull.

It justification for all dirty faces that won't let him sleep.

He took it to the top from the bottom, to parliament through the nursery, and the hospital.

He remembered that his family wasn't there anymore, but what was family?

What's anything?

He was beginning to forget.

Blood all over his brain.

Some of us can never sleep.

### *FADE TO CASH.*

It was dark room. Darker there. Darkest here.

Every room was dark. *Out there.*

It was nighttime, if not there, then somewhere.

He stood still like only a Kennedy could. He was still neckdeep in it.

There was much more blood to be spilled.

It blossomed like a bedtime story.

There were violas tracing it for certain, and holding it above water was a xylophone. With whatever clarity he could muster he tried to shunt himself out of his delirium. He tried to throw himself from the dream.

But...

He was wrapping his fingers around dirty little soles, heels and toes, shoes and baggy pants. He crammed the carcasses of children- the ones too gored to bury- into an incinerator like the rest.

It was down in a basement, somewhere just outside of downtown. Squished windows ran along the crownline of the walls. The floor was covered in stuff.

The ones that reminded him of things he shouldn't have to remember. Things that had to have been necessary. The flesh didn't burn away like he thought it would. He bashed the ugly pile of grey tissue into the far corner.

Dogs and cats also caught in between, or deemed "too volatile to live", were tossed into the flames where there existed no remorse. They were taken care of first- naturally - like pulling a tooth. The adults that he was able to recover went in next, the béchamel of his mission; cream at the bottom.

All remains collected in one empathetic carbon mass.

He was shedding tears in the fashion of an alien. He cried for betrayal, for broken promises, and for doing what nobody would even remotely consider the Lord's work.

He was crying, but for the life of him, couldn't figure out why.

He cried from the pounding heat and choking stench.

Maybe that was it.

Saw Kennedy, who are you trying to impress?

He fumbled repeatedly, trying as he did to pull their smoldering bodies out. He reached for cinders that were once button noses. He grabbed at the flames that carried away what tired fulfillment the little ones represented. In spells of clarity, one is able to muse about things like: in spells of madness, what does a moment of clarity feel like?

It felt like adrenaline and pain. Saw sweated from the inside out, impressing someone with the fact that he knew what he had done. He suffered through remorse.

A dreamer; he grabbed at things he couldn't explain. Memories that weren't his flooded him. What would family say? What would the police do? How would his mother feel if he saw him doing this?

He dropped his hand down, curious as to why he suffered. He became disassociated again.

He let his backhand lay against the ridiculous heat, falling away from himself, seeing all things innocent and all things sinister become *one* something and only a *fraction* of *anything* from this world. It's sad, so sad.

The pile of dead children and revenged old men didn't verify anything.

His hand was burning hard.

His eyes were sores; he stared at his raw palms. He is become a man of wicker.

A lone problem solver.

Absentee-human and post frailty.

He saw his wife without a face and questioned who this woman was and *why she is in my bed*.

The little ones have no arms. They are torsos rolling on the floor. He remembered why he put them back there. There's bodies stuffed into a fat world. Living things expel and fluid.

Surely this must be a trick, he thought.

She was sitting in the kitchen when he found her. She had seventeen slits in her neck. Someone'd put a shovel into the youth. Someone'd robbed him.

He only burst out of the tomb they put him in once he forgot what he'd become.

He had to see it, and he had to deal with the murder, but then... sleep.

He rolled the corpsed pregnant woman up in a large carpet and took her to a dead end in a place where industry died. The car was covered in her leavings. He tried to shove her into a pipe with the circumference of her forehead. He pounded on her shoulders and beat her head down on it. Her head split open and her teeth were knocked crooked. Her skin ripped on it like a balloon filled with concrete.

"Care about me" he pleaded with her as he, filled up to the top with panic, rammed her face repeatedly into the pipe. Fragments of skull began to flake off and fall into the hole. Blood and brain matter formed a mash that caked to the edge.

"Be interested!" he screamed.

His arms fell like stressed saplings.

He vomited violently on the back of her head and ran off into the night. He was hunched forward, unsure of what he was supposed to do.

They wouldn't let him sleep. He could not be reborn. He was stuck in purgatory until the tiny, dirty fingers let him die.

He stood tall before the boldest generation, a mass of those who ignite the psyche, and he was there dressed as a pauper and as a plagiarist. He wanted to be loved, *and he was*, and then it was taken. The foreground flickered like a broken bulb. The background- well, it was a choir of hands waving back and forth, every one coloured zombie.

Men betrayed have the logic of a mob. "Take them," he would have said.

He stood before a jury of his peers and a hanging judge. He wasn't as tall as he was when he got there. The pews wound in circles like meat grinders.

The judge asked him sternly "are we supposed to be impressed?"

Such was the nature of what he invented. He couldn't invent himself a way out.

He'd written himself into the position of a symptom.

His god was a revenge archetype. His conscience was disapproval.

And in the heat of the night, when everything came together, it was gloriously literal.

As he awoke, he was slamming the door shut behind him. His eyes pieced together where he was long before his brain did; his quest.

He was back. Like an octopus unfolding, the house materialized into his eyes. He had exited the washroom on both legs. Disregarding everything he had just seen, disregarding all the things he remembered, Saw was more horrified by the notion that the house had gotten into his head and guided his body. It was in control when it wanted.

He closed his eyes, pushed all thoughts of looking behind him into the behind of him, and walked away.

He pretended that he went directly from Tim to his room. Truth was there to lead him astray.

Saw Kennedy was not about to let those giggling bodies get the best of him.

If nature called, there was always Tim's room.

He tossed open the wooden door safe in body and mind that there were no detonators or noxious fumes to invade his ecstasy. Another one of his inventions.

He grabbed the pamphlets messily from the wooden mummy and leapt backwards onto his bed.

He kicked back and settled, but didn't lose his immediacy. It was a pose like he'd gathered.

The volume of collected memoirs held enough for his eager mind, especially since he, *the last horse*, was convinced that these were truly the end times.

Page the third read as follows:

"...I fully realize that the first error of judgment was venturing into the basement when it was established that no man or beast should go there. Their reasons were never fully disclosed. It was explained ad nauseum that the house was a living, breathing mechanism, but it was always debatable whether or not it possessed a sentient intellect. I had my suspicions but gave no credence to them. What I learned after spending several evenings in the basement is that the house does, indeed, have a mind, but what should concern you, gentle reader, is that it is very sinister and operates with an agenda. Sometimes. Not all the time. And the reason behind that is much more puzzling, but I'll get to that later. It is what triggered my downward spiral into a new life, a life before death and perhaps not cancelled by it. Not all the time."

The clock on the wall tried as it *would* to draw Saw back into its favour, flexing its muscle with the passage of time, but having no results, retreated. Clock dies. *Exeunt*.  
He was using his imagination, even though it was clinging to the rails of something alien.

“...there is now no doubt that the foul mind of this house has poisoned mine. It occurred slowly, feverishly- strategically. Through nightmares it spoke to me, in my waking hours it whispered to me, in my weaker moments it guided my hand. I began hallucinating and thinking terrible thoughts. It was if I was a memory that had gotten lost and it was attempting to draw me back. I know that I have not much time before the dark intellect of the bughouse overtakes me completely, as it had told me, again and again, mockingly as well as cautiously. It has a hunger that I can’t explain. I know this because it has told me. At first I thought that it was the house itself describing the hunger, but I realized that it was something within the house. I know this because the house does talk, sometimes, and when it does, it’s pathetic.

It allowed me to keep only a precious few memories, recorded on post-it notes that it promised it would not devour. I have no option but to trust that I can cling to these with animalistic obsession. I hope it does not find these. It hasn’t approved them and, maybe, it might take them like most of my small motor functions and short-term memory. Whatever is in the house might come out. Whatever is in the basement, or in the walls, or hidden behind the doors we don’t go through, might stalk through the halls and start killing. I hope someone, sometime, can use these to destroy it and end the fatality game forever. The house and whatever is living inside of it.

One voice carries above most of them, and I can tell it’s on a downward spiral like myself. His words explain one point: there’s a plan. And the moment it becomes clear, it’ll be too late. Figure this out before it starts to make sense.”

There was more, but a pilot got up in him, and the pilot, all he wanted, was to write. He turned the pages over, handled the warped pencil in hand, and touched the tip down. He continued from where he left off; the first page where he had previously written his name.

“My name is Saw Kennedy and I never tell my name to anybody. In my past life everybody knew my name and everybody that knew my name died, because they didn’t know me anymore. I am going to tell you why.

I call the last year my ‘year of victory’ because I defeated one of my greatest foes: tragedy. Something happened to my family.

My wife’s name was Bathory Kennedy, and my daughter’s name was Lady Kennedy. I never wanted a daughter because before she came around I knew how boys are and I had seen how girls can get while they are growing up, but you know, until you have one, you never know what it’s like. And all those doubts just disappeared. And then all the worries you had just seem vain. You become less petty, and it’s the healthiest thing you’ve ever encountered. It turns out that I’ll never get to worry about her being chased after by boys after all. I guess I’m still vain. I think like an idiot. Certain truths have come to light and I feel my ego decomposing.”

Saw fiddled with the pencil in his hand for a few moments before continuing.  
It felt like *Medicamentia Paenitentiamorbus*.

"Bathory and Lady were murdered by someone that the media dubbed the 'Metro Noise Killer,' because contrary to popular methods practiced by other serial killers, he made lots of noise and called attention to himself. He was never scared, and I think that was why he was so good at it. I never figured out how he got away with it, even once I figured out how it all went down. I also found who did it. My life was never in grave danger the more of the conspiracy I uncovered, contrary to what cinema promised me. I was never truly threatened, and I assumed it was because they didn't see me coming because I was as good as the Metro Noise Killer. I've come to believe that assumption was false.

The year of victory chronicled these efforts and that year was a very vague one. I can't remember exactly what I uncovered or how many people I killed, but I remember that it involves a group called the Documentarians and that there were many, many fatalities."

Saw writ the period so definitely that it punctured the paper.

"The year of victory that I had ended when I appeared here. By the end of it all my friends and family were killed by the Documentarians. The closer I got to killing them, the more of my loved ones they murdered. And I didn't stop because I couldn't. And they couldn't stop because they wanted me closer. They wanted me to get them."

Saw stopped for a moment and appreciated the weight of the word "couldn't."

"I couldn't outsmart them so I tried to outhurt them. And the more I hurt them the deeper I got."

He stopped for a moment and appreciated the similarity between the words "deep" and "desperate." His eyes were like Poolhall Sammy's.

"I recall they resided primarily in Bolivia, but had agents all over the world. One of them was the Metro Noise Killer, but much to my disappointment, I don't think I uncovered his role in all of it. Like, maybe he was just crazy. Maybe nobody else knew about it. Whatever his story was, they wanted him, and they told him what to do. The year of victory was all about revenge and... whatever came after was to find out 'why me?' I thought that perhaps my being here, in this house, was one of their tricks, but I left as many of them as I could dead and this seems very far-fetched, even for them. The only reason they would have to come after me would be anger that I hadn't killed enough of them.

They were mostly old librarians, anyway...it was all a very tired idea, and they controlled nothing, but assassinated very frequently. They were a poor man's mob with an inflated fucking ego. They used to mean something but they're so fucking old and out of touch that they fucking drive around like gangsters and point thugs at people who forget whoever the fuck they are. Taking this into account they really were more of a terrorist organization than a secret society. I didn't realize till much later that all they wanted was someone to break them down. They wanted someone to take revenge on them to give their name some weight. It makes a bit more sense now, actually. I have the perspective. I analyzed every single detail, and somewhere during my research, I lost the big picture. And then I tried to forget. And then I was reminded of everything in some fucked up washroom. That's the best way I can explain it."

The wall facing Saw's backside was disturbed by a bullet. It spat through the plaster and became lodged in his closet. Saw gripped the paper in his hand like an irritated stock broker. He took his act on the road to Poolhall's room. A warm rifle laid on the bed beside a seated Sammy, facing the other direction, slumped over, maybe. Saw approached with blissful caution; in fact, Poolhall Sammy was hunched over observing a literal pile of art supplies at his feet.

"What's all this?" asked Poolhall sort of backwardsly.

Saw tried to compose himself to handle it.

"Um, it looks like paint and brushes and chalk," he replied.

"I found it in the closet. I never went in because there were spikes all over the walls, and cause Tim went in there and I fucked with it, but I thought no time like the present, eh? I mean, with Tim sort of drunk all the time and not knowing what's going on..."

Saw looked over to where the closet should have been – *was* - and witnessed the once mended wall *ripped* open, its stitches dangling helplessly on sharp creases that look like edges of a cannon wound.

"Are you under attack?" Saw asked.

"No, I don't think so, probably. There was a jar of gasoline in there, too. I might use that."

"Are you going to make a masterpiece? For me?"

"No, not for you. Nothing I do will ever be for you. You son of a bitch."

"You're a monster."

"You'll never make it out of this if you have friends. You should start writing about how much I suck."

"That bruises me deep. Deeeeeeeeeep." He was neutral and in love with himself.

"Did Widget talk to Stone Horse?" asked Poolhall.

"He did. I think. Maybe. I saw Stone Horse come out of the basement" he replied.

"I hope Widget is burned alive but I hope it's not before we can sap all the precious knowledge out of him."

"You know something. Everyone knows everything except me. I don't know anything."

"There's not much to know, you know? What's there to know? Know how this place works? You can try. And then you'll end up fucked, and I don't know what I can do for ya."

"I mean about the people. About people who were here in the *past*. Nobody talks about them. I have some bright ideas."

"Widget is the oldest one. He has been here the longest, if that's what you're after. One time Scarecrow and I worked it out that he is several hundred years old. The math is in the Book of Words somewhere. We hid it on one of the pages. And some drawings. If you ever see his face you'll get it."

"What was your relationship with him?"

Poolhall paused.

"What are you after?"

"I think that you're a villain."

Poolhall was not so much *taken aback* as he was speechless and forced to reflect.

"I had a bad spell... If you're gonna beat it out of me. Cause everyone goes through one. If you're here long enough. Or *anywhere*. And you try to figure things out. He was a victim for a *day* and came out of his room a new man. Something happened and I think I know what it was but... you know, I can't really say."

Saw was not so much *taken aback* as he was curious.

“What is that supposed to mean?”

*Taken aback* comma *as he was*.

“I’m not in complete control here, you know? I fell off for awhile and someone else took over my brain. It happens from time to time. To everyone. Except Scarecrow. But nothing ever happens to him. It’s what happened to Widget, but he never came back. I’ve seen a couple people come and go. They all say different things, though. I can hold it off now. You need to go all the way and dig yourself out before you can have control. Tim... *might have*.”

“Stone Horse will be able to crack Widget. They think alike. They’re both rogues. They speak the... same *code*, I guess.”

“I refuse to die here.”

Before Saw exited, he peeled away the closet doors and saw that the walls were lined with black and white striped spikes. They hissed and drooled green slime down onto a jar of gasoline.

“I sense an open rebellion, but hold off until 5 days from now...”

The spikes on the wall split open revealing curved, foul fangs. The green slime came from within them, from what one would assume is their throats.

Saw closed the doors tight on the mausoleum and left the room.

It is midday and all is well.

### *FADE TO CASH*

As Saw sealed the doorway shut behind him, Poolhall slammed his body against it from inside the room, stopping Saw dead track wise. Sammy pressed his cheek against the wood to talk through it:

“The Book of Words was forged for 40 days in the boiler, in the basement, in the heat of all that’s perverse. It was salvaged and rendered from 3 Demon Magazines we found in the attic, a *blueprint* for a *black hole*, and 3 *pounds* of *lead* collected from the kitchen cabinets. I can’t stress how important this book is. Read it over. Find it and memorize it. Just fucking *do* it. *Fucking* do it. Use fists and not opinions. This isn’t my voice. I’m not here. I am everything. Don’t be me if it means listening. A man is judged by his actions.”

Poolhall cranked the lever up on the tension and lifted back from the door into some godforsaken corner of his room. Saw stood frozen for a few moments before going on his way.

He panicked, you know. The fear in the gentlemen’s eyes got all up in his chest and he couldn’t take it anymore. He looked back at the woman that sent him off, and she wasn’t making him feel welcome. He had to get the *fuck out of there*.

He ran for the doors; the big, heavy, dark wooden doors. Not far from the men what spoke with hijacked lips.

But...when he tried to pull them open... he could feel, and see, and even hear these thick black veins creeping from his knuckles and up his arms. The further he parted the doors, the longer the veins got. They grew all the way up to his shoulders.

But he could see through the crack: there was a spotlight staring him in the face. He couldn’t make heads or tails of anything else because, as veterans of the stage will tell you, the spotlight hijacks you like the lips of gentlemen in worlds you can’t understand.

The veins what encroached dangerously close to his face sounded like someone gasping in fright. They felt warm and gross.

And they looked like they were drawn in thick acrylic paint.

He shoved the doors closed. He didn't want to leave. He wanted to stay where things made sense.

The woman was staring somewhere else. The gentlemen were staring at each other. Everyone had something to do. Without his interference, they all existed in limbo.

He wanted the monsters to come back. They were happy; *giddy*. They ran off somewhere. Where the hell did they go? Did they *get out*?

A sick affection for the horrid birthed in him. And started kicking.

Kennedy trotted down the steps, and was caught before the masterpiece that was Tim with a Bullet. Tim grabbed Saw's ankle tenaciously and Saw let himself be guided down.

"Tim with a Bullet, you disappoint me," Saw sneered. He tugged his leg away once out of reflex.

"Truthfully... I am... *a leper*," he panted in reprise.

"You are an injury."

"I am *homeless*!"

"Don't worry, god *damn you*, you have your own room."

"That room? That room is something that has been *vi-o-lated*!"

"Eh?"

"That upper floor... The second floor... It belongs... *to Sammy*," he panted as if fighting back a delirium.

"Is he that villainous?"

"He...he had a *bad spell*."

"I heard. And it turned Widget mad, yes? Right? Good show?"

"No, not that... not Sammy, *no*... but he went mad. He just reacted immaturly. Tore this place a new one. Made some... *very* rude remarks to...me."

"I am uncovering a conspiracy and I expect very alarming revelations. Nobody else is invited. Shut up."

"You must travel with me... Come!... *Follow us*!"

It shifted drastically to center stage. Curtains dropped like the hooks released as according to plan. A pediment thrust out from the stage what emerged beneath their feet. Wax was applied to hardwood and then scuffed from a thousand pacings. Tim with a Bullet collapsed to his knees in a virus' lament, his head hanging low, *very low*, terribly *low*, but Saw sequestered himself to the corner of the curtain.

Papers of ancient wisdom were torn into halves and blown into the air, his highness blinking to a fiery rhythm inspired by something completely new. He spoke through whispered, *tortured* teeth.

"And what of this *crippled* and *double crossed* life of mine? I speak in the present but I live in the future at the moment of my *death*, nearer now than ever. Perhaps that is what inspires me to save this handsome nymph to mine right. Poolhall, a tyrant *flurry'd* by *bonelust*, is the closest thing to human that we have, misery man- flawed antihero. Saw is a mere *idea* of human, and I? The savior of drowning information, the martyr for a population, a wealth of wisdom to come? An ambassador, now an interpreter for this intruder. Another script to be *nonchalantly studied*,



another story for the *pit*.”

This lament rang from a place of ill preparation; embarrassed in years to come he will regret it. The sharpest knife was that split from a lightning strike. Pearls in a fault line.

The fantastic illusion was squeezed to a point as the walls reformed and closed back in. The stairwell uncurled forth once again and Saw found himself leaning against the railing.

“What troubles me most...” finished Tim, “is that Widget the Sad, Widget the Abysmal, Mr. Salem the *Unheard Of*, is the only one safe, no longer an architect of his own discretion but an extended cedar plank connected to the house...”

Saw cleared his throat and put his hands in his pockets,

“He is in its favour, then?”

“He is the Bug House’s fingers. It is my will that the *White* be spoiled.”

“And what authority do you possess?!”

Saw drove his fist through the wall to his right.

“As... the fallen Duke... of *mimicry*.”

“Well it takes different strokes to paint a witch.”

“Be a gentleman and leave me to my own devices?”

“You have spoiled Widget for me! And gave me some fucking prose! And an illusion!”

“All idols fall apart.”

“You’re drunk.”

“I’m outgoing.”

“You’re a madman.”

“I’m your guardian angel *possessed*.”

“You are deluded on the steps.”

“I’m heroic and on point.”

“You’re a bitch!”

“I’m a *lady*!”

Saw vaulted into the air, arced over Tim’s head, and landed on his floor feetly like a magician.

“Tim with a Bullet, you talk like a widow and an irritation. I deal in twos like the world, so it’s fact.”

In the world of what should, Tim’s head was knocked backwards and split off from his neck. It bounced up the stairs and out of sight, never to *reenter* sight, this promised by mountainous tyrants who amend all questions. But it never happened.

Saw took to the Parlour before Tim could retaliate.

### *FADE TO CASH*

Saw, still clinging tightly to the sparse and crumpled papers, walked into the Parlour (*ruined*) with intention at bookcase.

He surveyed the lines and rows of literature and for a time wondered as he did before: how it was that not one book was misplac in the havoc.

But those thoughts went quickly when he turned once more to the present: why he was there: *to conceal*.

He noticed a definite null between two leather-bound books and slid between them the worn

sheets of paper.

No sooner had he done that than was a book two rows lower and several across pushed out.

Displacement like a perfect bucket.

It wasn't bound in anything except for the very paper that was reserved for text.

Saw bent over and read the title.

On the cover was one word and that word was "Kill."

He thumbed through it. The text on each page was tall and thick. Not more than a sentence fit on each one. Each sentence was a suicide sentence. And each sentence spoke of Saw in the first person.

Like he had written it himself. And he not for one second wondered why he would have written such a thing.

In the *Book of Kill* it spoke of ways to live capsulated, and in between each capsule were bitter pills that spoke briefly of killing oneself.

Those words which spoke of murder with such certainty bewitched him.

Surely, he thought, it couldn't have been from him.

"Don't forget what you've done."

"There's nothing out there for you."

"Don't talk as much."

"Cherish what you have."

"Excess is the golden road to expulsion."

"Start working out again."

"Use pills."

"Nobody here will ever understand you."

"Listen more to those you love."

"Be humble but not apologetic."

"Start learning guitar again."

"Keep in contact with old friends."

And every last one seemed familiar. Saliva rushed into his mouth, and it was stuff he'd tasted before. Words like food that made him make eager fluid.

For someone whose mind had wandered away from meditation, the world of absolutely *no time* and absolutely *no humanity* was an arena for that thing.

And then he began to drip.

Drip from the fingertips.

Drip from his knees and other places that were wholly unable. Joints and pipes.

Something began to walk.

Somewhere behind him, switching between his peripheral visions.

Out from one of the cracks.

And then it grabbed him. It puts its hands around him and held him and then pulled him close.

So close as to seem like into. A rush of coldness injected into his bones, followed by a foreign euphoria. He could feel something was wrong, but forgot what he could do about it.

It took him to the place of soliloquies and the arena where memories make torture.

And there he saw movement. For a moment it looked like a pencil moving and then it looked like a door opening. Then came a thick solar wind.

He was in a chilled place- colder than ever before. It was a cold that comes with numbness. There was the phantom sensation of some place bad. A room within a room like the place got a migraine.

Someone strolled into Saw's peripheral vision.

But then, like, *in front of him*.

"What's this?" asked Saw. And halfway through the sentence someone lit a match.

The character before him was familiar, but at the same time, no - but more like remembering a quote.

Somewhere deep in the belly of the house's dreamscape there were whispers of this thing. And it had spoken to him. In a voice that sounded like:

*"Saw Kennedy."*

There was a phantom sensation of something dark. It was darker than the rot produced by one million years.

"What's this?" asked Saw, "Where am I now?"

He was surrounded by transforming shapes, half made out of light, half made out of colours that didn't exist. There was no real sense of direction, or even space. There was movement that looked like it was being kept behind frozen glass.

The whole place was like coming out of a dream.

He soon got the sense of a figure walking towards him. His size kept changing, and his detail kept disappearing before appearing halfway across the world. It was a man who spoke with a steady voice.

Saw was reminded of a larger than life Tim with a Bullet.

Like Medicamentia Paenitentiamorbus.

"I tried to get ahold of you... but... *you know...*" the figure said.

Saw forced his eyes to focus, but it didn't work. He tried desperately to make sense of the thing walking at him.

"I used to be the best dressed man in Prague," he continued.

It wasn't long before he was within whispering distance. Saw remained silent.

"I invented Prague. I invented it in the kitchen. You didn't even know that."

Saw cleared his throat. "What are you doing?"

"Don't you want to know who I am?"

"I don't care."

"Pretend like I died for something."

Saw groaned from his gut. "What's your name, then?"

He got a face then. It was painted in primary colours.

The ghost kept its distance, but: "I tried to get in touch with a bunch of others. But it didn't work."

"Yeah I guess you believe in what you're saying."

The sky rained down splintered images of guts. It was like his fear describing a dream. “You’re the first one I could really get ahold of. And I figured out how to do it,” said Luxury, “Do you want to know how?”

And just like that, there was a narrative fingering its way down his face.

He felt like he was being lowered into the stomach of the house. The blood rushed to his noggin. The voices he’d heard so much about came at him and went right through him, doubled back, went through him again, and again, and again. He couldn’t get back up no matter how hard he pumped his fists in the air. The voices got louder. They went omnipresent. He didn’t at all like where he was going. Nothing good goes down. Worse things live down.

One voice barged its way through the rest, though. It came in a clean cut right into his temple. It was like an arm and once the shoulder touched his hairline he started to take on visions. He was suddenly self deep on the outskirts of an event. He could feel his body- he could *see* his body.

An atomic explosion turned on its side, coloured white, and sucking in thousands of creatures. It was like he was staring at a television screen too close to his face.

The terrain was julienned and evenly spaced in the air, like in the background, but not quite. It was scratchy like steel wool. Like it was in 7-D.

“Whatever that means.”

Evil things went in the same way as dead things. That’s all he saw. The deceased and the wicked piled high in thin air, sucked in by a reverse wind. Some coiled around the explosion, but some went right into it. And some just hung there like shelves.

He figured that the julienned landscape was a separated dimension, plural?

The minds of titans streamed in through those narrow bricks; wispy lines of white smoke. He could see their thoughts dripping from the edges.

“Whatever that means,” he repeated.

They condensed into liquid once they hit the white fire. The liquid percolated upon the piles of dead. The evil things clawed at it. Some of the dead were shaking violently.

The ground was undefined, but he figured it was much of the same: another dimension. The whole show was abstract. What he could make sense of, he made sense hard. What patterns he saw, he developed into paper swans.

He decided early that he was witnessing the creation of the house. Keeping this in mind, he tried to make sense of everything while it took shape. He didn’t need to know that it was made from sick bits. “What about the thoughts?” he asked. Maybe twice. It didn’t matter.

He started looking for clues; bias. Was this true? “Is this someone else’s memory?” he wondered aloud. There was no real truth; but was it *accurate*?

“Do you know where insanity comes from?” asked Luxury’s voice. It circled around Saw as if he were the centre pillar of a carousel. He didn’t care.

It all checked out. There was too much detail to be the rambling fiction of a ghost. There was too

much glory to be from anyone save the house itself.

And there's nothing more useful than discovering someone else's pride.

The house was quickly taking shape; the walls were *spasming*, sucking up soil and meat.

The bugs came next. They stuck to the muscles and covered the veins. He wasn't quick enough to catch where they came from; they were just *there*.

Some insects took on vague shapes and built a shield around them. Like bones, placed obtusely there, or there, *or there*. It was all haphazard, but it shook and quaked and soon everything fell into place. It shifted its body disjointedly, and then it found harmony. The plaster gathered from dirt. The paint was vomited from what creatures weren't held between the walls.

They painted each other. They rolled around in the filth that splashed down from the correction moments before. They caked themselves in mess. Then they painted over it. Then they ran into each other. They ended up black and laughing.

And then they all hid.

The bughouse was absurd. It was born of tasteless tribulation. It was cobbled together from the dead and wicked creatures of a crooked world. Sucked into an anomaly. Reinforced by sick things. Given life by furious spirits, all mashed together and locked in place. Like twelve and one half spiders crushed together in a machine.

It stood before him.

A *magnificent scream* beat down on him from above. His head swung down, it was so loud. The house was horrified. The rest of the voices started screaming, too. Everything was screaming in terror; hundreds of voices. It just stood there.

And then it was gone. *Vanished*.

"It comes from a place of *math*."

A Saw Kennedy was suddenly back in a more familiar surrealist abortion. It seemed like it was more further than back, but you know.

He was suddenly irate. He felt the fire shudder alive inside of him, and the memory became flames and it coated the chill on his bones.

"Explain yourself *god damnit!*" he hollered.

It took a few seconds for his memories to synch with reality. Soon enough, Luxury was back where he recalled him being. The unreality switched back like a double tae.

Luxury stepped into focus just a little bit more. He had more the frame of a gentleman, his voice the same, but altogether more composed.

"I was eaten alive. I was swallowed whole. I wasn't chewed or nothin'," he explained.

"I was there back before Widget was Widget. I was there before Poolhall found his voice. I was there before Tim tried to prove something. I was swallowed by the ceiling and... I fell into the guts. I went to where we get digested. You know where that is?"

"I-"

"You've never been there. It's beyond the basement. It's beyond the subconscious where the hunger lives. And do you... know... what happens?"

Saw was expressionless.

"I-"

"You... get *digested*. Slowly. It happens, in a place beyond the mind where it's someone else's. It's who your parents are, you understand? Where you come from? The hunger and the other

reality? It's all honest, and it's genuine and it's true and as real as desire. It takes your body and it breaks it down. It suffocates you in stomach acid, but you don't die. But you know what *happens* I'll tell you... what happens."

There was a long pause. Saw was waiting for...it...

"Some say it drives you crazy. All the voices- never stop – all the pain, and the depression. Cause I'd heard voices before, before I was eaten. I'd heard people talking – it's such a slow process. They all try to warn you, but it never makes sense. Their brains break down too much by the time they're able to project. And by the time they can walk among you, they're nothing more than husks full of fear and an ancient language nobody can understand. But I'm almost done. It's almost got *alla* me. But... that means I can see into it. It wants what I got up *here*-" and just then, his face came into remarkable focus. But then, gone, when he started to speak again. "- cause all it wants is to be a *thinker*. It wants our brains be...*cause*..."

He trailed off once again. Saw clenched his fists: "*WHAT?!?*"

"It wants to be a mommy... It had maternal instinct, but now it has something else. And it gave birth. And its boy is so terrible. And now... now, all it wants to do is get out of here *and kill* things. I don't know where it got that from... whether it was us or... if it was *made* this way. If it was made. You saw it. You were there. You saw it. Nature versus nurture. *Ya dig?*"

What didn't Saw know?

The Documentarians aren't finished. Witness:

Nobody gave a shit about the Documentarians. The news made fun of them and namedropped them whenever a celebrity threw up their own shit. This didn't sit well with them so they set out to reinforce their organization like a third world government.

They put themselves out there on the black market to take whatever they could get. They were in a frenzy to get *some sort* of shape to them.

They had the organization, care of ancient cardinals, defunct politicians, and despot heads of state. They had a house but nothing to put in it. Someone said that.

They took on mercenaries of all types. They contracted dozens upon dozens of independent gentlemen to supplement their structure and become Ministers of Defense. They were granted their own offices. They were even unionized. They became their own bosses. They became franchisers.

The mercenaries made connections with gangs and felons to add additional structure. Men of the streets, they thought, could generate a word-of-mouth celebrity status. They could also accumulate a fortune in drug funds in the form of even the tiniest percentage. They hired these cells as their own employees. The Documentarians had no hand in directing any of it.

After all the criminals were brought on, the Documentarians contracted legitimate bodyguards to buffer the image. Men in suits and bulletproof glass; men that would answer only to them.

At the end of the day they were surrounded by more weaponry than they could control.

When they travelled they had escorts, armoured vans, and snipers. They stopped the world when they presented.

The various gang leaders – and they were *not* at all adverse to broadcasting this – were in it for the credibility. They were in it for the opportunity and the influence. They wanted to be a part of the largest / *only* unofficial independent militarized city state in the world.

So when a certain under leader wanted to bring in serial killers to defend him, or add more street to their walk of life, well they became the Documentarians' serial killers. And you can't control a serial killer. It wasn't long before half the payroll consisted of psychopaths and criminals interested in their own diabolical ends. And it had grown so large and unruly that they couldn't disband it. To do so would have their hired guns turn on them and assume control much faster than they were already undoubtedly planning.

Their hands got bloodier by the day.

Soon everyone wanted in. And only the craziest, the richest, or the brutalest were allowed in. And if they weren't allowed in, they broke in. *They got in.*

"Cause I've been digging, you know... I've been digging *all over* you."

Saw came out of it. Like before, his body was running itself. He trusted the pilot.

Muhammad was ever vigilant in his pursuit of truth. It was one two absolutes that could be counted on alongside Widget being nothing.

Despite his ears being completely covered *alllll* the way around he spoke openly with Juice. Saw, having assessed that Stone Horse was involved in his own pursuit of truth and that Scarecrow was his willing accomplice, darted over to Muhammad in a lucid craze with fists ready. He slid across the floor and booted Muhammad right there in the ribs. Muhammad pitched into *that direction* with pointed eyebrows and stretched down frown.

"You make stupid noises when you're under attack," proclaimed Saw.

"What are you doing? Why are you so determined to hurt me?" Koff, koff.

"Because I think you are an imposter."

"Whatever do you mean? I am *very* busy-"

"As the designated scientist of this house I declare you an enemy!"

"You have done nothing, as far as I am concerned, to help the cause! You're as bad as Poolhall Sammy!"

"The cause? *The cause?!?*"

Saw booted Muhammad *right there* in the face. Muhammad's apt objection was muffled through the hands clasped over his bleeding mouth.

"I stab friends in the back and I will not hesitate to stab you in your front," warned Saw.

Seething with anger and hissing through his fingers Muhammad shot to his feet. He stepped toward Saw, but then whipped his head towards the kitchen.

"Juice! *Wait!*"

A thump touched off the posts of the doorway. There was the sound of weight pressing on the floor. Cupboards could be heard being slammed and plates being rattled.

"Are you happy? *Are you pleased now?!?*" screamed Muhammad.

"I am utterly satisfied!"

Saw drove his fist *right there* into Muhammad's underarm. It was one half street fight and one half church.

Stone Horse levitated himself from the ruined Parlour to alleviate the situation.

“So Juice has fled, then?” he asked.

Saw replied firmly: “This is very true.”

“Before you retaliate, Mr. Muhammad, I request a few moments alone with Juice. I wish to ask him a few questions.”

“Whatever for?” asked Muhammad.

“While you waste your time trying to decipher a code that everyone except you has deemed unimportant behind your back some of us are slaving over white hot mathematics.”

“My deciphering is not-“

“-The topic of *discussion*, sir. I must inquisition Juice. You approve. Pardon me.”

He divided the conflict indefinitely, the whole ordeal ending up like a fan sliding into a crack in a wall. He entered the kitchen and was heard speaking.

“You and I... from now on... are *bitter rivals*” decided a very convincing Saw.

True to form he left before Muhammad could reply.

When the *blackasnight* creatures returned to the window – lookin’ through like smarty pants – Saw was the first one on the scene. He darted over and stamped his fingerprints on the glass.

Nobody else in there cared. Those things looked back in awe. They were in line with the men, and had Saw not been there, god knows what they’d be looking at.

They weren’t at all interested that woman and her *coy little bloodthirst*.

Most of them put their fingers on the window to match Saw’s. It was that sort of progress that got him going off his rails. He tried to sign at them but *it didn’t work*. He tried to mouth words: “help,” “tell me,” “where?” and ET.

All they responded to was frustration. All they wanted to do, it seemed, was relate.

Saw angled his head to see where they scampered off to before. He figured a window was no big deal. He figured he’d earned it.

It was the same sort of opaque anti-space that he saw when he tried to leave.

Surely if he broke the window... paint veins would swallow him up.

Then he’d be no use to anyone.

Of course he wanted to help; that *fucking woman needed him*. Those *men* needed him.

*He had to save the both of them.*

The monsters on the other side of the glass didn’t seem to comprehend his urgent hand signals. It looked like they wanted to be in there with him, but didn’t know why they couldn’t. They kept glancing over at each other.

*There were as useless as the rest of them.*

They couldn’t have gotten away; they just evaporated and percolated again. What other explanation could there be?

“If you want in, get in here,” said Saw. They didn’t get it.

“I can’t get out. I’ll die. I have to finish this thing...”

He closed the basement door shut; nobody could fathom closing it before he wrote the record. Encircled from all sides by *possible* goblins and *maybe* demons, he stepped without hesitation until he felt concrete underfoot. The darkness was infinite.

He called out for Widget. Nothing called back.

He screamed the name over and over, “*Widget! Widget!*” but there was no parent or echo of acceptance. Nothing registered, like talking into a pool of water.



What sounded like stone being dragged against dustier stone tickled at his brain from the left. It was the opposite direction than the boilerfurnace; the direction nobody was supposed to go. To fathom it was to engage in a fool's errand.

A large box formed from lines of light and fuzz before his eyes, thickening and growing, spreading out, before erupting into a glorious block of light. Not a box, not entirely- it was a large shape that in his eyes equated to a box. A gaping hole of irregular design blasted forth, followed by a loud crash on the ground. The situation adjusted; the light was accounted to no less than 154 candles hidden behind a wall, exposed by the removal of one of the bricks. He was deconstructing back there in no man's land. The light illuminated most, but Saw fixated on the walking shadow of Widget dragging a thick chain with the full weight of his body, the end of which was linked to a grand piano. It scraped against the ground, separating the pills and dead bugs from one another. Saw strolled out to meet him, no longer afraid.

"Did you do that all by yourself?"

"Something was not right," replied Widget, oddly enough not verbally strained by the incredible weight.

"To what do I attribute this to?"

"I was screamed at for 40 days to do this. It has become unbearable."

"Widget, I am intrigued by you..."

"There was some signing down here," explained Widget, unfazed by the physical exertion. "A hologram of a ghost. I think I figured it out..."

Saw paced to the farthest spot on the piano and began pushing, assisting Widget in the absolute slightest.

"...I have good cause to believe that you are at the heart of a conspiracy."

Widget dug his heels into the ground, leaning so far back that his tailbone touched the floor.

"I think that you live in my room now," mumbled Widget.

"I found some documents. I think that they are yours. Or, rather, *were* yours. You talk about Widget in the third person, but I think something happened. Care to validate this?"

"The change was not as terrible as I initially thought. I shouldn't have listened to everyone."

"Is that a *fact*?"

"No. Please do not listen to anything I say. I am no longer... anybody. Wait..."

The legs of the grand piano whined against the floor. Saw waited. But then...

"What happened to you, Widget? Or do you prefer *Salem? Y'all*."

"I can't remember. Everything you need to know is in those pages. And in other books. There's a reason I wrote everything down. If I thought I could tell you anything I wouldn't have written them. I did it all. Wait..."

"But you're still whole enough, you enough, to talk like you were, then...?"

"What do you mean? *What do you mean?*"

"You remember what it was like to be you before you became you?"

"No, I'm smart enough to remember."

Saw rubbed his eyes in fatigue, sighing like a dad.

"You are the key to solving this thing. Stone Horse is on the case but I don't think he's looking

in the right places. He just got here but he's just as crazy as you. I think I'm onto something here."

"I want Juice back. I won't talk to him until he gets me Juice back."

"He's working on that, indeed he is. But Muhammad--"

Widget threw his head backwards.

"You have to read *all the* documents. I left myself notes, a pile of notes, and I left all the clues on those papers. One of the notes dictates that I tell anyone that everything they need to know is on the papers. That is the old me. I can't help myself. Oh my god..."

"This is scary." Saw gauged his peripheral vision carefully, diving his attention into thirds.

"Everything you need to know is in the wooden pharaoh. I remember this. This is all I remember. Everything else I know is screaming and terrorism. Just... do that."

"You said there were other books."

"Did I?"

"You did. You gave me an inch from a ruler you've got tucked away on you somewhere."

"It must not be important then."

"Are you telling me it doesn't matter? Or are you testing me? Like a bitch?"

Widget didn't respond.

"Yeah, okay. I need you to tell me about Juice, then," implored Saw, leaning forward with testosterone and anticipation.

"There is... only one thing you need to know, the one thing that is possible to know. There is only one thing you can know."

"Yes, yes?"

"Imaginary people go to space to rot in pieces."

Widget released the massive chain to the floor with a grim thud. Dead moths flew into the air and floated gracefully back down. For the first time ever, Widget locked faces with Saw, the only one, something identifiable. A warning, perhaps; more accurately, an understanding. A goodbye.

"Where did you get that mask?"

"This isn't a mask."

## *FADE TO CASH*

Poolhall watched the Puppetmaster's aerial dance from his bed. He had become more casual with his observation, letting his eyes do all the work and letting his body fall back like a king.

The thing behaved like a baby; it dragged its fingertips along the dirt, throwing soil and dust into the air, spiraling and drawing concentric circles with its body.

Poolhall looked down at his hand, alarmed that it appeared foggy. He furrowed his brow and shook it like an apple. His eyes darted about the room; everything was covered by mist.

Standing to his feet he proceeded to apply his twisted Byzantine logic to the thing. He walked over to the brain dolls. They were still moist and fresh, still with thoughts in them. He took hold of one and squeezed it absent-mindedly. Something was there -out of the corner his eye - he followed it to the crease where the walls connected to the ceiling.

A murder of palm-sized ghost-stars were inching slowly down the wall from above the ceiling. They dissolved when they hit the half-life of the wall, but moved so slowly as to not be ignored

even if someone wanted to for all the right reasons. It had the profile of a drug, but he knew how to beat drugs. He knew how to rally his senses and stay focused. All this was expressed in the opposite of words, in the methods he believed in.

He moved back towards the bed until he could get a clear look out the window. He watched the puppetmaster fly.

“And just what in the hell am I supposed to do with that?”

Saw, warm from the belly, made his way to the first floor with full intention to continue on back up to his room and heed Widget’s advice and study the documents. But he couldn’t do *that*. He was there in the fray: Scarecrow holding a thrashing and flailing Muhammad back. Stone Horse looked on and Scarecrow looked to Saw for support.

Another street fight, another church.

“Your services would be greatly appreciated, old friend” casually remarked that-that Scarecrow. Muhammad was screaming and spitting like a mad dog. “Murderer! *Murderer!*” he cried.

Saw stood tall amid their tiny confusion machines.

“What’s this about?” he asked anyone would do.

Scarecrow, in between waving bouts in holding back a new lunatic, said it:

“Stone Horse killed Juice. Muhammad is in no small amount of distress.”

“Is this true?” asked Saw to the collected Stone Horse.

”He clouded judgment. He clouded everybody’s judgment.”

“I agree with you perhaps more than I should” assured Saw towards the criminal. He have Stone Horse a man nod.

“I’ll kill you! *I’ll kill you!* I swear to *God* I’ll kill you!” screamed Muhammad, his hands clawed, his eyes wide, teeth bared, tears welling up in his eyes.

“Your god suffocates in the belly of the beast” assured Stone Horse to the victim.

He moved towards the hazardously busy group to slide through what little gap there was.

“There is much work to do.”

Saw twitched his hands, wishing to *asphyxiated d-tea* that he knew what to do with them. Stone Horse was resigned by *thine own hand* to the ruined Parlour, one that looked out into giant waving hands and swinging teeth. To watch it getting smarter.

“Do you endorse this?” asked Scarecrow, Muhammad long ago collapsed to his knees on the floor in mourning.

Saw paid the bereaved no mind, as was his nature.

“Juice, while being invisible and perhaps not of this world... was a bastard. I firmly believe this,” replied Saw, turning 90 degrees to plant his shoulder blades against the wall. He examined Muhammad for the briefest of moments, singular.

The most depressing of all events uncocooned when Widget came scampering up the steps. He planted his hand on the opened door, leaning hardly into the scene, looking like a man of suspect. Saw caught his big black *hollow* eye but said nothing- everything of use exhausted; statements to close the book already being spoken. Widget shoved his way past the 3, one a crying pile, one concerned, and one waiting for the inevitable. He braced his body in the doorway, receiving a full picture of the kitchen, in its entirety, pausing for what seemed like 5 measured forevers. No breathing- no nothin’.

Then he darted back to the Parlour, driving full speed towards Stone Horse. Saw followed. And then Scarecrow sauntered in third, cautious due to Saw's muted urgency.

Tim, crumpled on the stairs, was struck in the head by a doll made out of brains. He grabbed at his temple and screamed in agony. Poolhall leaned round the corner of the staircase and laughed heartily. He gripped his belly and bounced like a tyrant.

Widget pounced at Stone Horse, wrapping his hands around his neck. Stone Horse denied the right to fight back, simply twisting and swaying to Widget's violent bass and rhythm. He didn't even say anything.

Too much like a bad dream, Stone Horse's long, heavy coat disrobed itself to the floor, revealing what lied beneath. There were no arms, there were no legs, and there was no chest. Beneath the disguise there was simply a long wooden pole connected to a pair of metal shoulder blades upon which a head sat. Stone Horse, of course, was not concerned, and simply replied:  
 "Are you finished?"

Widget staggered back; *what is he thinking?* He broke down into old mannerisms, backing up towards Saw and Scarecrow, themselves, *too*, startled by the unveiling. His bravery and concentration were gone. The second hiccup of sanity he had had in a long, long time was gone in a flash.

Widget, shaking his head, slowly but then quickly but then violently, turned around and took off up the stairs. Saw gave chase, fearing the worst.

Scarecrow remained glaring creepily at the naked Stone Horse.

"Where'd you get the *won tons* to start asking questions?"

Saw was in late pursuit, but not so far as to not hear where he was going. The footsteps continue past the second floor, up a toothpick of a hallway to the attic. The door was blasted open, already closing on its own, and when Saw reached its trembling frame, Widget was already halfway across the room. He didn't allow time to pause or skip a beat, keeping up the constant pace, shouting his name, sadly in vain, sadly too far...

He raised his hand in a pitiful attempt to grab at his heels; heels that pitched upward, following his thorax that went right into the well.

By the time Saw slammed pelvis against the slimy stone, Widget's body was being shrunk and swallowed in the darkness. No falling sound and no screaming; just the sound of outer space as he flew away. He was into the well.

Widget was gone.

For reasons unknown to him, Saw's hand remained plunged into the well, most assuredly not the behavior of a murdered. Most assuredly not someone who would *kill again*. Hid the bodies.

Despite popular promotion. He fell to the ground and relaxed his weary bones, fully, *totally*, for the first time in a dog's age. His mind went blank- *shhhhut*. His eyes were wide open, but nothing went in. Noscope. He surrendered.

The house blinked.

## FADE TO CASH

When it blinked it had its eyes wide open.

“Look at it!” she screamed at him. The White came at him like a very smart train.

And before he knew it, he was out. It was the teleport flash that never ended. Or so he forecasted.

“Look at it!” she screamed again. Finding its way through the horizontal rainfall of a thousand dying men was the reassuring rage of a woman bearing a child.

Each and every otherworldly creature shared something with each other. The house communicated with her son, and the son was in tune with its parasites.

Stone Horse was on the menu.

He born of an egg dropped down from the Puppetmaster’s liver. It hovered there in an arena of darkness. The ground was grey; sick.

The egg’s shell was composed principally pus and garbage. The rest was just *magic*.

It squeezed through a fault line what ran along the breadth of the abysmal organ. It was as simple as that.

It rolled around the vast field of stone horses until parasites opened it up. Poison vapours took their toll on the protective membrane.

*And lo*, all the magic came stampeding out. It was flush and wide.

And before you knew it, *there he was*. Standing there among the livestock. Sudden and total.

He was a grown man and all he wanted to do was find things out. Or, they told him he had to know. He only knew what they knew.

Things moved so quickly in there. They spoke so fast, but he knew nothing else. He had to listen and listen hard. They taught him their language; the tongue of the stone horse, as it wass. They filled his head with *mostly* lies. They spoke of the miserable things inside their imagination.

They taught him the devil’s math. Most of their lessons summarized with how important math was. His very presence was equated to a string of fantastic numbers. He committed it to memory and carried on. The stone horses told him that everything made sense with numbers, but you could never stop and arrange them. Numbers never stopped. There was work to be done.

When he was unruly he was hit. When he did well they let him fall onto the grey, moist ground. He got a coat, you know, from the backs of one of the horses. It was hung there like someone was coming back for it.

Maybe they did and maybe they didn’t. One of those two. He used it to hide his shame.

And then he added more numbers.

His brain didn’t bend the right way, though.

They’d taught him math like history. He couldn’t grasp the context. The numbers just stared at him with impregnated value. They yelled at him. He worked out half of it. The sum didn’t work. They struck him across the temple. He went a little bit insane. They liked it when that happened. He did a little more. They let him roll around in the filth.

And then... he was gone.

The world there was turned by nonvisible hands. They took him from the belly of the beast and planted him in the house. There was no agenda to it; maybe it was making the Puppetmaster sick.

Maybe the house wanted to torture the tenants. Maybe anything.

He didn't ask because it wasn't in the math.

And using that crazy person's math, he was trying to make sense of the numbers flying at him even as he was flying through dimensions, out of the stomach and into the skirmish. For all he knew it was part of one long, unbroken equation.

So he carried on.

The house put these thoughts in Saw's head for... why?

"Why are you telling me this?"

*LOOK AT IT!* It screamed.

"Was... he sick?" he asked the nothing.

Why Stone Horse?

Back there, he was eight years old. He was standing naked in the bathtub. He didn't know why he was there. The adult recollection was bewildered. He couldn't put every piece of his body there; it wouldn't let him. No matter how hard he pounded his fists against it, it couldn't feel normal.

He had to let it be. He had to watch from three inches above the child's head.

Luxury was somewhere else in the room. He couldn't get comfortable or let his guard down.

The scenario ticked him like a trick.

His mother walked into the room. It was white and she was brown.

Fog carried her in there; thin, bracketed musical noted kept her there. All they did was radiate off heat. She looked like she had been crying. "...love you" is all he can vividly remember.

Maybe it was all that she actually said. Omnipresent Saw fought against the creeping rain that cast doubt on his own instincts.

Her words anchored him. She had always made sure that he knew she would always be there for him. His instincts told him she was the best mother.

There was always some safety in the world.

But the Documentarians *were* looking for something: a way out.

Their senses had become so twisted in the chamber of their creation that "out" meant some awful things. When they met in secret their hands were all pale and shaky. They were talkin' crazy.

While they were heavily guarded and revered for their firepower, they were disrespected due to their inability to actually do anything. They were a purposeless institution.

During these secret sessions they planned their own death. They yearned for their own assassination attempt. They wanted a *get fame quick* scheme.

Out there in their secret rooms, they were removed from the reality of the matter: lives were being destroyed. People were being murdered by lunatics, and the trail of blood ran all the way back to them. Seasoned law enforcement types knew the farce of the thing, but the layman would assume that the Godfathers of Documentarianism were pulling. *Every. Single. String. Ha. Ha. Ha.*

Despite their public image, they had the delusion of absolute control. They forgot about what went wrong. They made up what was going right.

All they needed, they thought, was the confidence to follow through.

All they needed was someone to fire a clumsy shot.  
 Surely, nobody else would be truly calling for their heads.  
 They were untouchable and... nobody out there actually knew what was going on.  
 They said that.

She told him directly- she told him the world was fucked up. She said it more than once, without cause. She said it wasn't fair; the world was made out of harmful electricity.  
 She told him that once he grew up and saw how it was, he could always count on her. He would always have to come back.  
 She couldn't be hurt. She couldn't be disappointed.  
 He tried to remember more. All emotion connected to his childhood had long since been buried under the sand of his terrible actions.  
 He shovelled into the soil and threw it behind him.  
 It wasn't his serial killing that had him forget where they were. Something swallowed him.  
 Her promise didn't work cause she hadn't actually been there.  
 He remembered telling himself that. Then he started digging. And he never stopped.  
 Saw loved his mother in a way he would never allow.  
 He hated the Documentarians in a way she promised.

"He... was sick..."

And then...

Saw was already walking himself slowly downstairs, pinched by the sacrifice, confused by the action, yet aroused by the wallpaper. He trusted his body by that point, at one with the pilot in a cockpit he had recently visited. The memory of what he was thinking before he was gone caught up with the present, but then was weighted accordingly. The weight was *found inferior*.  
 By the time it had worked itself out, Saw was at Tim.  
 Tim squirmed against the arrows in his back. The brains on his head.  
 "Where... where is Widget? Where *did he go*?"  
 Saw stared down with pragmatic sternness.  
 "Widget is gone forever, you *waste*."  
 "What... *What?*!"  
 "He is dead you *drunk motherfucker*."  
 Scarecrow stuck his head out from the ruined Parlour.  
 "Saw, there is something out here you should see."  
 Saw blasted his finger towards Scarecrow's face, his eyes enraged.  
 "I'm *busy*!"  
 Tim clutched desperately to Saw's ankle.  
 "What?! *Where is Juice!*? I need to talk to *Juice*!"  
 Saw kicked his hand off angrily.  
 "Juice is dead *god damn it!* Go look for yourself! *What the fuck do you want from me?!*"  
 "My eyeglass! My... *my monocle!* He had it! How am I *supposed to find it?*!"  
 "I don't know! Maybe you never fucking had one?! *Maybe Juice never existed?!*"  
 "Juice took it! *Widget knew!* Widget knew where... Juice had it *god damn you!*"  
 "You're fucking pathetic!"

"I...I..."

"Okay. Okay, wait. Hold on a second here."

Scarecrow dipped around the corner again

"Mr. Kennedy?"

Saw snapped his head with fire coming out his eyes.

"Never *fucking* call me that!"

Scarecrow sank away.

"Answer me this, Tim with a fucking Bullet. What did Juice look like? You saw him, *right*?"

Tim began to breathe like someone in disbelief.

"He... he looked like a man. I saw him just... before. He looked sort of... like a *broken*... ghost. You know? *It was him!* I just saw him walking by! And... when I am making poetry, sometimes, I *see* him there. And I can feel him watching me..."

Saw crouched down to Tim's level.

"You ever heard the name '*luxury*'?"

Tim stopped breathing. And looked up at Saw. Just like this...

"Um... yeah. *Once*."

Saw sucked the saliva from his teeth and stared coldly.

"*Where*?"

Tim looked away and scanned his thoughts. He rested his hand on his head, just left of the bottle.

"There was... *Widget*, he said something. A *long* time ago. And then, every so often afterwards. But not, like, *anything* about it. After the first time he just sort of said it to himself. As he was walking. Walking to the basement."

Saw grabbed Tim by his shoulders.

"Okay. I need you to *think carefully*. Shake it off. Okay? Listen to me. I think Widget was on to something. I think if there was a Juice, that he was alright, and not a bad guy. Cause there seems to be enough people convinced of his existence so I'm- I'm not even going to *bother* with it. But this thing, this *Luxury* guy, I know this thing's real. I've seen him. And he's put his hands on me. And I think you've seen him too, and I think there's a lot of people getting confused around here. I think there's a case of mistaken identity, and I tell ya, it *stinks*."

Tim cleared his throat and swallowed deeply. He pretended to collect his thoughts.

"So... are you saying, that Juice might not even be real? That it's this... *other* guy?"

Saw released his grip and fell back against the railings. King of Mimicry.

"I didn't... *want* to think that, but maybe. Maybe this has all been a trick..."

He leaned in close to Tim once again and began speaking quieter.

"See, the only one I trust at all in all of this is Widget. And what he used to *be*. And when he was sane and normal, he was talking about Juice. And he was talking about what goes on in this house, with the most clarity I've encountered around here. So I'm pretty sure they're separate. Problem is, maybe everyone else has it foggy. You know?"

Tim nodded slowly- uncertainly. But then he shook it, furrowed his brow, and;

"No... *no*, no, what do you mean how he used to be? You weren't even here. How do you know all this? *What*... I don't get this." He was shaking his head drunkenly.

Saw climbed to his feet.

"I can't tell you right now. Just... *start thinking*. Try to remember anything you can about Widget, and this *Luxury* thing. Any conversations you had, or anything that seemed out of place. And *Juice*. Just... *do* something, you know?"

And then he was away.



Tim climbed to his feet, legs teetering, and throat closing on his breaths. Wouldn't let 'em out. He lunged at the wall, the bottle erecting from the side of his head clinking and dragging. With the finesse of an exploding machine, he fell into the lobby.

"I... It's *in here*... Do you *hear me*?!"

Scarecrow dragged the rest of his figure out of the parlour to investigate whether or not his hands were necessary. Tim smashed his body through the hallway with Saw in hot pursuit. He tumbled over Muhammad, whose inexperience with those things got him on his feet with the quickness.

"*It's in here!* Juice had my monocle! Juice you *son of a bitch!* I'll find you!"

Saw stood stationary in the hall and screamed at Tim as he lumbered into the kitchen.

"*You fucking idiot!* He's... *he's in space!* Widget said imaginary people go to space to rot in pieces!"

Tim stopped in his tracks and jerked his whole torso back.

"You don't understand... I needed it! I *need that monocle!*" Past tense, present tense.

Saw operated carefully, as he should if he were defusing a hybrid bomb.

"Tim... What happened to you? What happened to those poetic laments? What happened to that *reasonable man* I met when I first got here? What happened to the guy I could count on to keep a *level head*? Just start thinking! It's just wine! There's no time for this, sir," Saw implored.

Tim extended his jaw like an ape, encapsulated in paranoia and fury.

"You think this is a museum? Do you think I am not *one million things*?!"

"Now Tim... weren't you the one who guided me around the house? You were--"

"Shut up!" he shrieked, "I am one million things and you know *three!* I can't think like this! *I don't know what to think!*"

"Tim, listen--"

"I've got to get out of here!"

He heaved Saw against the wall and bolted for the front door. He dittoed to Scarecrow who stepped out to impede his escape.

"*Tim with a Bullet!*"

He rammed the door open with his shoulderpiece and ran out onto new terrain. Saw was shocked to see that the house had traveled, opening out into a black desert. He hadn't even noticed.

Dusk hung low 'n heavy. The house was sitting on a hill, casting a long shadow over the valley. Mountains to his left painted a harmony against the sky, the rock purple with thin red veins tracking all up and down. The palette was purple, red, and black.

Saw's awe tasted of confusion as he switched back and forth between the landscape and the danger at hand. Tim was pumping a drunk's dexterity through his self. Nobody could match his speed.

Tim's feet kicked up dust during the poor man's escape. He panted heavily, eyes stressed closed or hopelessly squinting. He shoved fear of his extermination into the soles of his shoes. His running was like the heaving of a pile and the bottle in his head threw his center of balance off. He tripped and stumbled, but he wouldn't let himself fall.

Scarecrow clung to the window and Saw stood on the porch, unable to think. His breaths were much like Tim's except coarse with hope unlogical.

Something, anything. Don't do this. *Please don't let this happen.*

The PupperLord soared overhead and launched a flurry of wires at Tim. They slid out from its fingertips and snagged Tim by his feet, hands, and neck. The goliath glided overhead and stopped once it was casting a blockade before greener pastures. He was within sweat's reach from the promise land. But...

He was hoisted into the air screaming before the n'erchanging expression of their principal bane. A messy escapist. Something, *anything*.

Tim's cries for help twisted into a gurgled deathmoan as the strings are pulled, separating limb from torso and head from shoulders. His head spasm'd sharply.

Blood poured out from the savage wounds, each piece wet and fresh and oddly entrancing as it hung. The spectacle lasted only as few moments before the torn body of Tim the Bullet was yanked out of sight, behind the house, into a place where the fantasies and pleasures of the PuppetPlurocrat were undisputed.

It was over.

Thick drops of blood trailed in the air, striking the ground all the way along; right there at Saw's feet. Special delivery.

#### *FADE TO CASH*

Out on the roof, statuesque as ever, stood Poolhall Sammy, throwing vinyl records at the dominating entirety of the 'Lord. Saw had the words, had the position, he even possessed the means, and yet he said nothing. Saw watched from a body that felt sunken. Poolhall exhausted his supply of records in quick time, noticing Saw down below as he turned to leave. He'd seen it all.

He was throwing records long before anyone died.

"I figured it out, Saw!" he screamed down, "You know what you have to do too! I can hear it in your voice!"

The surreal tragedy was befouled by the amazing new landscape, alongside Poolhall Sammy's new liberating assault, a collision that struck Saw in such awe that he stepped back into the house not sure of what to do next.

All the carefully laid plans deflated.

He shut the door behind him.

"Where is Muhammad?" he blankly asked.

Scarecrow stepped softly; soft even for him.

"He went into the Livid Room."

Saw, not really having any idea of what he was doing, drifted into the Livid Room to look for Muhammad, hoping to reclaim some sense. *Anything*.

One of the barest walls was manipulated, distorted, changed; *mutated's* the best way to describe it. *Come to life*.

Stretched across the midriff of the wall was a giant *gnarly* mouth. It grew organically like a fist pressed against thin rubber. The teeth were clamped together tightly, looking like cuts of wood and fiber, sharp but misshapen. The lifeless lower abdomen of Muhammad hung from the teeth, blood splashed on the enamel, his hands limp and lifeless. The skin, the bone, and the meat was

pinched as it connected with the unreal jaws.  
 The morbid truth was that the house ate Muhammad.  
 The third fatality of the parabolic minute.

Saw, possessing then more than ever before a lifeless mind, turned to Scarecrow who was standing close behind him. They huddled together as the only sober minds left.

“What did you say to him?” Saw asked

“I told him that he had to go back into the house... to be recycled. I believed it was why we were not moving.”

“You may have been right.”

“Nobody is as troubled as I am about the passing of Muhammad. I believe he might have been a prophet. My prophet.”

“No you don’t. You’re too cool for that.”

“I believe what I’m saying.”

“You believe in a lot of things, and none of them looks normal cause, and I’m running on fumes here, you’re a scarecrow who’s probably centuries old.”

“With experience comes change, and change is good.”

“No it’s not. Look what it did to Tim.”

Scarecrow carried on like he’d had the conversation before.

“Sometimes change is like fractured suicide. That’s why you can’t understand him, get inside him or believe what he says. All you can do is watch...and listen *at* him. And learn from him. Maybe he’s older and cooler than me. But I don’t think so. I actually don’t think anyone can be as cool as me.”

“I’ll be cooler than you. One day. And when that day comes, I’m *coming for you*.”

“The only ones who come for me are stupid women.”

“That was funny. What the fuck’s wrong with you?”

Scarecrow carried on like he’d never encountered that before.

“An echo. Probably. With change comes death, and with death comes ghosts.”

“You have a haunted hat. I just explained it and you can’t shoot me down.”

“No, you’re wrong. I am haunting this hat. You dummy.”

Saw bit his fist and looked away. He was, no doubt, assuring himself that one day he would be cooler than Scarecrow. Before long it was back to business.

“What more of the encounter?” he asked.

“I mentioned this to him some time ago. When we spoke on the matter I told him it was necessary that he return where he came from, though it pained me to do so. I was met with stark opposition, and might I speculate, fear...”

“I don’t blame him. Who would want to go back into the boiler? Shut up. I don’t believe that you are faithful to this Muhammad at all. Stop.”

“What’s this? You are making wild accusations...!”

“In fact I question your faithfulness to slaves!”

“I am non faithful to slaves. I used them as a means to an end. You are saying nothing of merit.”

“Is that so?”

“... *It is!*”

“*Silence!*” screamed Saw.

Scarecrow heeded these words but did not resign to defeat. He knew what he was doing, and a large component of that is giving frenzied youth their space.

Saw had few words in him. What world he clung to was spinning hard.

"It was... either man or madness that brought us here," mused Scarecrow.

"Insane people go to space to rot in pieces..."

Scarecrow paused to reflect. The air was tense- *knife tense*.

"Widget told me," resumed Saw.

"Widget is dead."

"He lives on as a proverb."

Saw leaned *right in the hell* back, a triangle driving between Scarecrow and Kennedy, and there Poolhall Sammy came into plain view.

"There is a murder most foul in this house!" he declared.

Saw snapped back: "Everyone knows what happened. Shut up."

"Shhhhhhhh..."

Poolhall curved his finger towards himself repeatedly- *gingerly* - hinting that he wanted them to follow. He exclaimed this notion by returning to his room. The other 2 involved decide to oblige. Albeit obliquely.

When Tim first met Saw, there were a hundred things he was going to say. They roared in circles, boring a ring down to his feet.

And in his mind, he said all of them. *Very quickly*.

He told him to *get out*. Run away. *Get as far away from the house as you can!* Kill yourself. Kill yourself *right now* otherwise you're in for a world of misery. I can train people to love me.

You're being rewarded. *Embrace theatre*. Fuck as many women as you *can*, boy! Follow me, I'll explain it all...

When Saw didn't respond to his thoughts he invented reactions for him. He invented and kept inventing even after he was gone; the final time he appreciated his room.

He talked to Saw about why he carried himself glamorously.

Who could understand if not Saw Kennedy? "*Now there's a man who knows the importance of taking care of one's stances.*"

Most of Tim's conversations floated upon a sea of things that were *never said*. This whole ocean was precious- *nutritious* it was. They would have blown the thing *wide open mad* early.

But he'd learned that utilitarian discussions were rude. Real people played games.

Real humans used poetry. But men didn't *enter* with poetry. They made people *want it*. Hunger for it. *Saliva*.

He did it once. He showed Saw the attic. He explained the well. For a fleeting moment he was everything he should have been.

You should have heard what *wasn't* said. You should have probed the depths of *those* waters. It was perverted; his entire demeanor was flipped on its head.

And then the downward spiral.

Listen to me, *I've seen it all!* I wasn't always like this. You look tired. I saw a man split down the middle, just from being left alone for an hour. Don't touch the chef. Don't ever touch the chef. You're likely to catch *a germ!* I believe in the sea.

I sail these oceans alone.

Poolhall's Room was changed. All contents were gutted, all drawers opened, his bed flayed, his walls dug into. He briskly halted and pointed to the shelf of brain dolls hanging to the left of the window.

"Look..." he said, "Is there anything *different*?"

"I have not seen these before," confessed Scarecrow.

"Son of a bitch I wasn't asking you then, *was I*?"

"Please tell us, Poolhall Sammy. We have a *thing* going with Stone Horse. We want to save the day before he does," explained Saw.

Poolhall narrowed his criteria to 2 dolls on the shelf, one fully formed like the others, one only half a body.

"*New*, and *new*. Look, *brain dolls*, appearing out of thin fucking air. I shouldn't have to repeat myself. So, what's going on? Anything strange happen in my absence? Anything you wanna let ol' *Poolhall Sammy* in on? If you're not too busy *solving* everything. Solving this Orwellian *fucking* puzzle without me..."

"Muhammad died. Widget disappeared. Probably some other things I am overlooking," listed Saw.

"Okay was Muhammad, say, *cut in half*? Eaten in half? Half *exploded*? I'm working in measures of *half* here."

"He was eaten by a wall. Half of him is dangling out and looking like an embarrassment down there," explained Saw once more.

"Okay, so *half*. That one's Muhammad, nifty. So what about the other one? Was Widget, say, covered in worms? Carried away screaming?"

"Widget... He threw himself in the well," thrice explained Saw.

"How do you know any of this? Perhaps it's a doll that is only half formed," stated Scarecrow, a disguised persuasion.

"No, you see, it doesn't work like that. It fits, this works. It makes *sense*. The half doll lets us in on it..." demanded Poolhall, now leaning in and examining the dolls with a private eye, "I don't know what it's trying to tell us. I smashed one on Tim's head. Maybe that has something to do with it. Or maybe it was the meager trauma coupled with the wine. Maybe I'm wrong. But I'm never wrong."

Saw tugged Scarecrow on the arm and gestured that they should leave. So they did that. They left.

Scarecrow went back downstairs to do his thing. Saw went to his room just like that.

He opened the door like a husband, and there- a handful count of small, haunted-up, shadowy figures crowded over the Book of Words. It struck'd his cranium like a bat but didn't get one up on him. The creatures were built like imaginary monkeys with bright red teeth and no eyes to speak of. He'd seen those eyes before, but not in the real world, and not on those bodies. He connected the dots and the more he traced it over the more furious he got.

Saw shouted at them to "*scat!*" and in return they cackled like one would expect from a kitchen cupboard. They spasmed laughter. He identified with them, but at the same time, they weren't the creatures that he wanted them to be. The way they hunched over, and the way their smiles made him uneasy, had him treating them like rabid animals. He hated the possession, not the children. He hated what that world had done to them.

He stomped toward them and punted one into the wall. It made contact with it with the constancy

of gelatin. Tiny bones bent like cheap fabric and flesh ripped apart like tissue with the gel all up in it. It was enough to scatter the rest; those rascals that scuttled between his legs and around him and disappeared back down the steps, or down the hall or into holes. Saw tossed a blanket over the diffused creature and forgot about it.

Instilled with a new sense of purpose, Saw scrambles the documents together and resumes reading. The pilot was full and tired.

In his head he was the savior. In reality he was an unfortunate, armed nonetheless.

He was about to turn the whole place into his manic firing range.

And...

"...deep in the basement, in what I have come to understand as the Central Nervous System of this wicked place, I encountered a hiccup. I met with what I believe was an apparition escaped, either that or a trick in the voice, the madness - the White. He called himself "St. Malcolm Hundred." He was the one who gave me the most clarity. He spoke with urgency leading me to believe he was a mistake in the carefully perspired pattern, the plot- the feeding. He told me of, among other things, the end and how it would occur. Hidden in the notes I left for myself, that I was allowed to leave for myself, I wrote clues that would let me, no matter how I manifested, know what to do, what signs to recognize, and what actions to take. St. Malcolm Hundred was undoubtedly one of the tenants of this house, one by the name of "Dexidrus Machina", one whose disappearance caused a tidal wave of paranoia. I remember when it happened. I don't know if they talk about it anymore. After he disappeared, other people started disappearing, too.

Dexidrus was one of the strongest because he was under attack from the White, but he resisted. We knew it was battling paranormal entities, but we didn't know to what degree they were ripping him apart from the inside. It was the first time we'd heard anyone talk about it, assuming it had plagued others who just went insane and ran straight into its guts.

One day he was taken away by insects, into the basement, and never seen from again. Worms, thousands of worms, came out of the ceiling and engulfed him completely. They were devouring him to keep him docile as they slithered him into the farthest regions of the basemen; places where I have attempted to map, but failed because it must go on forever. Poolhall Sammy was affected most by Dexidrus' hijacking, triggering his erratic and often violent behavior. It was laying dormant, this I am for certain, but he was determined to use reason on this thing. Dexidrus was the same. They succeeded mostly.

St. Malcolm Hundred, the reincarnation of Mr. Machina, was aware of the inner workings of the house, but neglected to disclose them. He thought he could see the whole thing through. After he told me about the end, about a message kept buried in the "BugHouse's brain," one that detailed a sequence of events that would empower a creature of its design with ego and bravery, he told me about rebirth, about recycling, about digestion. He disappeared before he was finished speaking, which was probably the last of Dexidrus Machina being digested. I think that the moments before being incinerated and disintegrated by stomach acid, the brain was absorbed into the very being of the house and he was allowed to project himself in those fleeting moments of power through the house's powers. He must have gotten into the house's vocal cords, a system that is even more unfathomable than the infinity that lies in the basement. It uses this system to

torture us, but I believe that every so often, if one is so compelled, they can take it over and... well, I just said it.

That is only a theory. We'll see if I can achieve this when the guts of this place are destroying me. I hope it will never come to that, but I know that it will.

I close these memoirs now because I can feel The White taking control of the bones in my hands now. I will attempt to reconnect with my memories once I am taken by the house, and if I am not taken by the house, I will try against every fiber of this new self I feel taking over to reconnect with the house...(nonsensical)...This house has to die. This house has to die. We have to kill Nouveau King. We cannot let this spill over... This house has to die this house has to die this house must rot this house must be left behind...(nonsensical)..."

And that was all he wrote.

### *FADE TO CASH*

It's the evening and all things remain the same.

Saw turned the pages over and traced the familiarity up to where he was last writing. Just as he expected he found a new typeface: Poolhall Sammy's. His paranoia was paying off. Intrigued but not completely sure he was trying to accomplish he read feverishly. He jumped into it like a professional, he did.

"So your name is Saw Kennedy. I knew it. I hope you don't expect me to flatter you, because I read this already. I think Tim did as well, before he turned into a freak. We all know to one effect or other what is written down here and the story Widget put to paper. His mind was wandering near the end as you could tell, but truthfully he was fucked up when he went in. He never disclosed his real name, so we've all known him as Widget, which is what he carved into his arm. Ask him to show it to you.

My name is Poolhall Sammy. I am not a murderer, but for many years I was kept in a cage. I was kidnapped at the tender age of 24 and kept in a steel prison beneath the city streets for 3 years. THIS MANY.

It destroyed my mind, literally and figuratively. There was a base of operations in the sewer tunnels, and I was kept in isolation for most of the time. They were like a low rent, savage militia. They were tall and slender with long arms, like stretched monkeys. I never got a good look at them, but I remember their silhouettes against the lanterns they had carried behind them. I can only imagine what the lantern carriers looked like.

They jabbed me with poles and out of these poles secreted a thick green slime that stole my memories. The slime was all I had to drink so if I didn't drink it I would die of dehydration. That is what I figured at the time, anyway. I could feel my brain shrinking and ever since then I've had a vivid sense about what brains feel like. The inside of your skull is like the palm of your hand if you experience brain shrink.

They eventually began replacing my body with animal and machine parts. I still don't know why they were doing this. They employed huge apes to hold me down while they took apart my flesh and bones. I wasn't given any sedatives, but my fluctuating brain bore the weight of the pain like waves in a hurricane. The apes touched me inappropriately because all the apes they employed were corrupt. It was the most terrifying thing in the world. Somewhere between the apes and the thought-control slime and the sewage I must have lost a bit of my mind. I went a little crazy, they said. That might have been their purpose. They might have been trying to drive the man out of me.

The moment I began regaining full confidence was the moment I turned into an enemy of the state. The apes let their guard down, or they were drugged or dying. I don't know what happened. I had found my way into my captors' laboratory and at my feet was a suicide note. My hands were covered in blood. I don't know if the note was legitimate or, you know. All around me, in the heart of their mad experiment, were charts and animal shaped cookies. Recently I have begun to doubt that they were scientists. I think my captors were bored geniuses. I think there's enough evidence in this world that powerful people that become institutions become as stupid as stupid idiot Tim with a Bullet. There was nothing they gained by transforming me into their murderer. In the end I was half horse and half machine and half caterpillar. Surely they didn't entertain the idea that they could hold a centaur worm machine.

Who knows what they were thinking. I couldn't think. Nobody was thinking like regular.

I found no trace of the apes at ground zero. I guess they must have escaped into the sewers. They knew what I would do if I found them. For all I knew they were flushed down there as babies. I like to think they're riding alligators.

We do have a lot in common, don't we?

How many people in that world needed to die for validation? How many murderers were created by mechanics who thought them absolutely necessary?

I never married and never had a kid. I drove a machine. I got my name from when I arose from the underground laboratory. I followed the closest exit I could, feeling my way through the darkness towards clean air. It was a ladder that emptied out in some sort of bar, beneath a pool table. I lifted it up and crawled out from underneath the thing. An Irishman with gout shouted "Poolhall Sammy!" from across the bar and I kept it. We became fast friends. It was then that I began to drink a lot. That's how I know my wine. He didn't ask me where I came from. He just asked me what was on my mind. I told him he was the most ironic guy in the world. He'd laugh and drink a shot of something muddy. Walking between worlds makes you quiet, and he understood that, and despite all the dark truths he was apparently comfortable with, he still found time to laugh.

I am hearing voices now. I lost myself a while ago and I think I am going to lose myself again. When you don't listen, you're vulnerable.

The White, as we called it back in the day before we knew what to call it, reeeeeeally. Some of us took up where Widget left off. We all read it. We all had our own thoughts. We stopped talking



about it once the arguments turned into feuds and then brawls.

The White is the remainder; the screaming of trapped, digested minds. It's still going. I still hear some of Dexidrus in there. He doesn't say anything new, though.

Two things: either he's been in such a world of pain at this point that it's nothing at all, or they're merely recordings of echoes being repeated for our discomfort. To hell with all of this. I don't remember killing but I'll re-learn quick if this thing doesn't clear up soon."

"He did not paint a flattering picture of me."

Poolhall was standing over there in the doorway, presenting with the air of a scientist, depressed into it as he had been for a generous allotment of time, watching Saw read, sweat, and love.

"Are you finished it?" follow up.

"I... yeah. Unless you have anything else..."

Poolhall Sammy eased himself off of the doorway and granted himself entrance. He was Classic Saw.

"He was under a lot of stress when he wrote it. I heard him screaming at night, I heard him banging around during the day, whenever that is, when he decided to fall into a coma, I suppose. He must have let it happen. When he came out of this room he was heathen; whether he was a tool or a victim I can't tell. He stopped getting worse. He was on some plateau of madness."

"How long have you mused on this?" he asked Poolhall.

"Too long, but... I worry that it's still not long enough. It must be either of those two; I don't think I am missing anything."

Saw explained thustly, "He made you out to be a monster amongst men. He seems to know what he is talking about. He still did, up until his death."

"True, true. I like to think it was the White making him paranoid. And it just got too bad. It kept at him in a way I've learned I will never understand."

"I believe that you are a dangerous man, Poolhall Sammy. Widget believed this too. Don't come any closer."

"I don't want to. You couldn't make me if you tried and had a pistol."

"Don't challenge me. I have done worse to better. Look at my teeth." He sneered his teeth like a proud dog.

"I don't want to hear about your undoubtedly sordid past. Nobody in the universe is going to ask you. Nobody wants to hear it."

Saw died a little bit down there. He wrapped his lungs around his broken heart.

"Why did you attack Widget, then?" asked Saw.

"I tackled him because he attacked Scarecrow when he bolted out of his room one grave autumn morn. It was the dawn of a new day. I saw he had carved 'Widget' into his arm."

"I wish you'd write more. You left gaping holes in your story. Tell me about the good times."

Saw leafed through the pages and reread what words leaped at him.

"I didn't write it out of coherency; I wrote it as a gesture of good faith."

"When did you read Widget's notes, then?"

"Not long after he left his room for good..." he explained, "I didn't fully understand it at the time, and a lot of I bet I won't understand... but I think you do."

"I... do."

"Well, now we're married. You might as well help me."

"I..."

A light exploded in Saw's head. He let his eyes wander down.  
 "...Have a curious *thought*."

Time stopped and bubbles of raw sewage hinted at an approaching storm.  
 Steps were suppressed. He was downstairs on the spot where Muhammad did his work. Poolhall was watching from the first step.  
 Saw snatched up the only evidence of Muhammad's presence- the abandoned headphones - and threw them upon his scalp. They were jacked in and still warm, whatever that means. You know.

He sat with Poolhall, casting a shadow over him. Having had close encounters with tiny shadow chimpanzees he felt a chill deep in his gut that read like something was present that should be expelled.  
 Listening, *listening*, listening.

There was a code stampeding through the cable. There were sounds, noises, and signatures... clacks and hissing; what sounded like an audiotape played backwards while engulfed in flames, blood splashing against sheet metal... nonsense, junk, *junk*.  
 "I appreciate you telling me your story," said Saw to Sammy. Correction, confessing- over the noise.

"Companionship helps one get through this. I was a friend of Widget's," returned Poolhall.

"What happened, then?"

Just a moment...

"I was different for awhile. It wasn't my fault. It was the *apes*."

Saw processed the words but gave no inkling that he is doing so. Poolhall interruptd what should be beautiful silence with:

"Did you hide any of the bodies?"

Saw ran the tongue across his teeth.

"Some of them, but only a special few. I buried as many of the children as I could. I buried the bones and ashes. I left the men to rot. I hid the women."

He cleared his throat.

Who was he fooling with *part* of that?

"Did he want the women to be found?"

But then – *just then* – he heard something familiar. He heard a droning, a craving... Saw heard what sounded like a credible voice piping in.

There was: Widget's voice caught up in the static and crashing.

"I can hear him! *I can hear Widget!*" he announced triumphantly. The rising of his voice was powerful enough to hoist th' stiffest chests.

Scarecrow batted nothing and Stone Horse was like not even there. They were paired up like employees of the month, off doing something else.

Poolhall let his attention drift off, wondering to himself "I wonder if Muhammad really accomplished anything..."

In a moment of Saw-like enlightenment, he bolton'd over to Muhammad's chewed body and examined his hands. Success hit him like a speedboat. Scrawled on his hands were words written in fabulous ink. He grabbed his right hand and held it up to his face.

"In the (?) catacombs I find ugly in how is that (?)... Machina drops dead, Machina meets (meats?)... There was screaming, screaming, so screaming... The stomach is alive with voices I don't understand but it's quiet I don't... I looked into (?) and saw wonderful things... he said crawl, wooden people, crawl, and I believe him...but where are you going with this (?) you see the absence of humanity yields white..."

He grabbed the left hand and read:

"My baby."

He grounded his foot square to the wall and ripped the hands away from the teeth, frantically snapping the bone what bended like a sapling. The bone slid around against the muscle, but wasn't going down without a fight. And it fought and it lost.

With gored appendages in tow he jogged back to Saw who was assuming a very Muhammadesque esteem.

"I found something you may be interested in," interjected Poolhall Sammy.

"Just a moment-" waved Saw, "...I can hear Widget...He says he's merged partially with his devoured self... but... *Butttttt*...It was not as he imagined...*I think*..."

"Shame, although I never liked him so I'm just saying that for your benefit."

"Oh yes, I'm well aware. *Oooooooh* yes."

Poolhall's eyes, for the second time, flared up with brilliant novaes. Slow at first, but the picture of exponential. Parabolic small numbers. All up in there.

He placed the severed hands at Saw's side and raced back upstairs to his room.

Saw, on the other hand, wasn't looking down, for he was boxing time. *Irish style*.

Widget shouted frantically through the riot, stating clearly that he was in the stomach, "*to the left of the brain as close as I can tell!*"

He also confessed that he will not be able to manifest himself as a specter as "St. Dexidrus... *wait...!*"

Saw pressed the phones closer to his headbone and concentrated with all available senses.

"There is not...*much time!* There *is not* much time! *Listen closely!* Keep the Book of Words close... The House is a creature and she's *in frenzy!* Its hearts are beating rapidly! This will be the final time! I will not have time or the strength to speak for much... I will not have time to speak for much longer! I can read its thoughts! I am knee deep in the lake of dead!"

Widget's voice fell behind a masque of static and beatings. Saw threw the headphones against the wall angrily and fell on his back. As soon as he did, he fell under a spell. An unnatural sleep over took'd him, like sandy hooks pulling his eyes closed.

His's Mortal Coil was lifted *up* and *away* and Saw's mind *plummeted* into a bottomless *pit*.

He didn't land as much as he righted himself in a vacuum.

In the center of that hijacking, Widget materialized; posture correct and atmosphere void of tension.

"Saw Kennedy..." he prophesized, "The White is coming after you... I am going to try to get it out of your system, but this is the only means I have to speak with you..."

"How did you know my name?" asked Saw.

"I am inside of you. I am absorbing all your information but I assure you it will leave me once I am back *down* in the acid. I can't do anything much."

“I don’t know what to do! Everyone is dying! Poolhall is the only one I have left but I don’t trust him.”

“Do not trust him, but you must rely on him because he is your only hope. He’s been preparing for this for longer than he’d like to admit. He’s going to take something apart.”

“I’m sorry you died. I’m sorry you had to sacrifice yourself to send us here, and I do not fully understand how you were able to do it. We’re almost home, aren’t we?”

“You are. The BugHouseSpawn is going to invade all of you soon and kill you, perhaps torturing you beforehand. I cannot say for certain. He’s learned a lot about his body, but he’s going to experiment on you before crossing over.”

“I hate this puppetmaster. I want to kill it.”

“You must destroy it. If it spills over into the king’s reality it will do awful things. It is unnatural.”

“Why do I need to keep the Book of Words close? Why is it so important?”

He struggled, squinting every eye beyond his base 2, to make sense of Widget’s words.

“The Book of Words is something stolen from the BugHouse. Poolhall knows this, Scarecrow has a vague idea, but that makes him understand it better, and he knows it, and they will tell you the same but not know why. Know that while the Book of Words is in your hands the organism will be agitated and anxious. This is to your... benefit.”

From unfathomable depths, from behind Widget there, screamed: “Don’t get in that phone booth! *It’ll send you to the middle of nowhere!*”

“What in the hell was that?” asked Saw, his innerhead morphed into a broken puzzle.

“It’s the White. I have to go. It’s going to dig deep into you. There’s no time. I am being killed slowly.”

“Widget, I am going to murder everything for what they did to you.”

“Don’t regret a moment of it.”

The hooks sprung back up out of sight, allowing Saw to return to the fingerquote real world. He exhaled softly and made sure he could feel his body.

He then sat up, pitched his head up at the ceiling, and screamed:

“WIDGET! *I SALUTE YOU!*”

Scarecrow poked his head out of the kitchen.

“Some of us have work to do.”

## FADE TO CASH

Saw, in swift retaliation, poked his head into the kitchen to witness Scarecrow mop the floor.

The makeshift man paused to address the visitor.

“Before you ask, I am not enjoying myself.”

Saw launched across the freshly waxed floor and landed coyly on the table.

“Scarecrow, my oldest friend, *why are you cleaning?*”

”There was a murder here. It is unsanitary. I gave you the Book of Words, correct?”

The cupboards shuttered unanimously with what sounded like tin can cats heckling.

“Yeah, yeah. Scarecrow, what can you tell me of Stone Horse’s studies?” He was more playful.

Scarecrow mopped without interruption. He knew what was going on.

“He is compiling an equation. Through this math, he *tells* me, he will save the house, and us by proxy.”

“We’re not trying to save the house! We are trying to kill the puppetmaster and destroy the house!”

Scarecrow stopped mopping.

“Someone had better tell him that.”

Before the sentence had finished Saw was, in his mind, tearing Stone Horse a new something-whatever he cherished most. Whatever he held above all else would be ripped out and replaced with something awkward and *burning*. There was a map manifesting on how it would be done. *Takin’ it!*

When the sentence was out, Saw was there in the hall.

Stone Horse was standing, as he always was, before the smashed window and stressed wall, a pile of papers at his feet. He had his coat back on, which made him easier to confront.

Saw burst in and began stomping and kicking the papers all over the room. He made tantrum his mission, and then his art.

“Stop it. Stop doing that” insisted Stone Horse.

“You’re doing it all wrong! You’re trying to save the house? *What is wrong with you?*”

“Why should we not? What else is there?”

“There is a world! There is a universe outside of this, this...*fucking bubble!* We have to kill the puppetmaster, I’ve heard it from so many people, you have *no idea*.”

“I... kill it?”

“Yes! It is going to *torture* and *kill* us. I understand that you came from inside of it and I have taken this carefully into account, but nobody cares but you, and surely it does not care. It’s somethin’ twisted.”

“I don’t understand.”

“Then start! Start understandin’!”

“You... Why would you kill it?”

“Some stuff needs to be killed! That’s how the world works!”

“No. No.”

“My world does! The better world! The world this thing wants to get into and fuck up! And it wants to do that cause my world’s better! Trust me on this!”

Stone Horse scanned the mess of papers at his feet. His head pivoted around to signal his contemplation. Saw was fucking tense.

“I... will have to alter the... parabola, but it should change nothing...”

“Are you sure? *Be certain now*. We’re working together. A bunch of people have died and I need your head in the game on this one. Use your fucking... *fucking maths*.”

“Yes. Yes.”

“When we get out of this I will treat you to some manner of pastry.”

Saw was all about the exit, but stopped by the stairs:

”I’m sorry I stepped all over your papers. I had a bad spell.”

He put a hat on it and went back to Poolhall’s room.

He barged in with drastic sickles on the mind. Poolhall had been hard at work, drawing on the walls, and painting on the bed, and stabbing at the floor. *Y’all*.

“I saw you throwing records at the PuppetLord earlier... what was going on there?” asked Saw.

“There’s a spy... there’s *a spy* in that *thing’s eye* and it keeps fucking passing by my window

and looking in. I don't know what his story is but he's got binoculars *and fuck.*"

Poolhall held fast; thrashing and stroking like a crazy man. Saw held the hands behind the back and perused the room like this:

"So what's up now? *Painting?*"

"Yeah... I don't know, I just got the urge to start painting. All these ideas are coming to me. It feels like they're pushing up against.... Against my *head*, see. I should find this bad but if I don't get them out they're going to *kill* me."

Saw stepped closer to Poolhall to get a view of what he was painting about. It was what looked to be a house, unimpressive *you know*- scratched and scraped- with a sad face underneath it.

"*This painting is awful!*" condemned Saw Kennedy, "What's driven you to create?"

"I am beginning to hear and see things. This is what they are telling me. I think it is a riddle. I wrote most of it on the floor..."

"Do you need help solving it? Wait."

"No, you have to keep everyone together."

"Everyone is dead. No, not everyone, I don't mean that. Stone Horse is negligible and Scarecrow is always."

Poolhall reassured nothing and denounced no negativity.

*The head* passed by the window, and then: Poolhall directed Saw's attention to a man standing in the Puppet master's eye. He was, in fact, holding binoculars and spying on them. It was only for a moment, obscured as a fingerprint of black and yellow behind the complexities inherent in an eyeball. Saw stretched over to the window and, with a face full of fury, proceeded to scream:

"*You're fucking dead!*"

Before long the moment was gone and the man was up and away along with the rest of the abysmal creature.

"I don't believe in evil," Poolhall.

"Apparently evil doesn't believe in you" Saw.

"Bad people don't suffer."

"You'd be surprised."

"I'm not trying to convince you. Don't you understand anything?"

"I understand the necessity of denial. Now more than ever."

Poolhall redirected what little mental alertness he retained back down to his art.

"Does any of this make sense to you? *Any of it?*"

Saw leaned in closer to the painting.

"To be honest with you I think we know all we need to know. Right now this BugHouse is trying to confuse us and mock us. It seems totally assured that we will die. It's after being up to something, man! We're on the clock here!"

Poolhall snatched the painting up and climbed out the window. He hopped across ledges and hoisted himself onto the farthest roof. Saw scrambled up after him, not completely certain why, but nevertheless empowered by Poolhall's recklessness. The PuppetPlurocrat swimm'd through the air like a bewitched dolphin, sent to hell, sent back, crammed through an organ grinder, ET. It rocketed up towards them and sailed over their heads, peering down devoid of expression or emotion, effort, whimsy, or fancy. Poolhall hurled the painting at the 'lord like a discus.

“Is this what you want you fucking son of a bitch? *I swear to god I’ll kill you!*”

The slab of art snapped upon its flesh and fell down to the dirt.

“I’m not playing your fucking game! Get the fuck out of my head!”

Misguided, yes. It was not the PuppetMaster in his head, but he was in the right book so Saw did not correct him. He stood back in quiet, unadulterated splendor. *Y’all*.

A whip from one of the ‘lord’s dangly fingers flew towards them and sliced across Poolhall’s leg. It was a clean cut; quick and hott. He was too slow in shifting his body weight and crumpled to the rooftop.

Saw paid no mind to th’ fortune of Sammy still breathing, but rather worried that the BugHouseSpawn was learning how to play with prey.

Poolhall was too old to thrash and kick. His leg wasn’t severed, but surely not able to function. A clean gash wound over the thigh, *so* fresh that the blood was *so* slow to react. It might as well have been fresh water.

Saw supported Poolhall on his shoulder and carried him back inside. It was not easy by any stretch, but Saw was not about to allow the PuppetPlurocrat one more notch to his staggering ego.

This PuppetMaster was quick to the learn. They were getting graves dug.

## FADE TO CASH

You know how the woman died? Her th’ ghost eyes.

He was standing by her side because he was stuck in the past. Every other square’d area yielded something that subtracted from him; he clung to the familiarity of she who gave directions. She was the only one who sounded like she knew what she was talking about. He waited for her to say something. He didn’t do what she said – *kill ‘em* - cause he smelled something fishy about the whole thing, and he didn’t like it. She was holding her cards through her chest, out her back. He wanted a clue; something else to let him know what she was getting at. He was hunting for that scope.

She was held hostage by the air that made him claustrophobic. She was motionless and that was the only conceivable reason.

But then...

She ran her hands up and down one of his arms – it doesn’t matter which.

She lifted it up and he let all the blood drain from in. The displacement went right into his pelvis.

She rested one hand on his upper arm and used the other to handle his wrist. She bundled his fingers into an awkward fist. Her eyes were locked on his.

She put the hand up to her lips and opened her mouth. Her eyes were still kneedeep in his.

She heaved the fist into her mouth and simultaneously shot her head forward. His fist exploded out the back of her head like a shotgun blast at outrageous range.

The teeth bent inward and went out with her tongue, her wall of her throat, and most of her brain. Her eyes rolled back and saw the hole. That was the last thing she saw.

Or so he figured.

She was hanging off his arm like an ape on a tree branch. Her body curved back and forth until he forced his hand back the way it came. She crumpled on the floor and let her minerals spill out.

That was enough of that “he thought.”

He swooped down to the table where the 2 gentlemen carved their graves out with grave emotions. He took ahold of one of their heads – let’s say the one on the right – and started smashing it into a pool of blood that looked like the Chinese symbol for “decadent rest.” He wasn’t even thinkin’ about it. One was dead. He went right on over to the other; he was still talking. He bashed the gentleman’s head in the exact same way. The word of the minute was “glory switch.”

And then it was curtains close on all those peoples.

And then he waited for something to happen. “Show me the grand finale.”

Saw Kennedy heaved Poolhall Sammy through the window frame. He left him on the floor and hear’t no criticism for it. His rest was short lived, unfortunately, because no sooner had he let the nerves in his neck kick back, than this: the window was violated by 4 gigantic fingers. They dug in like the nails of a deranged beast.

The giant’s hand grabbed the inside of the window like a latch and began tearing upward. He made a complete mess of the roof, peeling it away with ungrace but *absolute* power.

With little strain the wall was split and the roof was gored. It was with such momentum that the debris and guts was launched out with the detached. Some of it came raining back down.

The two of them made no claims to bravery when danger was in effect.

Saw scrambled to his feet and dragged Poolhall to his, respectively. War buddies. They put their arms over their heads to defend against the showering bits of bloody drywall.

They both shoved the pain into their shoes, where it was landed against piles of viles of sadness and doubt.

Fleeing down the hallway, swaying back and forth, their only choice of escape was the lower floor. They had to head down; enemies lurked everywhere else.

As Saw limped under the restriction of Poolhall Sammy’s weight, he couldn’t help but notice that the walls expanded and contracted as if being inflated and deflated; as if inhaling and exhaling. He paused only to place his hand against it, astonished to find it damp, nearly moist-nearly humid. Wiping the grime on his pants he began the arduous task of assisting Sammy down the steps.

It wasn’t as difficult as he anticipated because Sammy let himself fall. He was a tough lad. Don’t worry about him.

Of course Saw forgot the Book of Words in his room. Of course this alarmed him. It couldn’t be any other way.

He ignored the objections of his fellow citizens, bolting back upstairs and down into the hole.

Wishes in favour of the book’s disvalue went ungranted; he was stuck risking body and mind for a stack of paper. This was made into a startling reality when the BugHouseBaby made the second pass over the second floor. Quick on the haste, Saw barged into his room and encountered, once more, tiny chimpanzee shadow kids collected around the object of his desire. Saw, having no patience for repeat bullshit, came at them like someone disenfranchised. They smiled sorely at him and got ready to rip at his legs. He stomped and kicked them furiously, ignoring the fingers that dug and splintered into his legs. They screamed and laughed like they



couldn't deal with it. He screamed back because he knew how it used to be, and he knew that there was no way to bring the children back from the illness that turned them backwards. He destroyed them because he was ashamed to see them living that way. His screams were turned up at the end like he was demanding answers; they didn't reply.

Their tiny bodies became smears that spread across most of the floor, and up the wall, and on his feet and up on his chest.

He brushed their slop off his bed and held the book close to his chest. The house was shuddering and quaking. There were moanings that were a lot like whale death.

He removed himself from the room not seconds before the BugHouseBaby plunged a crippling punch down through right where he was standing. The floor buckled in, exposing the soft innards composed principally of mealworms and fingernails. Juices pumped out. And then pus, and bubbly milk.

He didn't count himself lucky but counted himself a sucker for not getting out before because he had to combat the debris spraying on his back. It was never good enough.

Not for Saw Kennedy. He could feel it soaking through his clothes and it made him anxious.

But you couldn't get Scarecrow scared. He could hear it all, but so could everyone; the wires what pierced through the walls in the kitchen like urgent whispers, betraying their entrance by grabbing at anything and throwing it around the room, splitting the walls in the process. They worked like surgical tentacles, or lunatic snakes or live electrical cords; extended digits mission'd to wreck up the place.

The only time Scarecrow got involved was when those fiendish, shadowy little *things* climbed out of the basement and down the steps and out of the kitchen; from *everywhere*. They were ecstatic. Whatever was going through their heads, or whatever they had become or how the understood what was going on, will remain a mystery as long as sanity prevails.

They discovered the Parlour before long. Scarecrow stood at attention and grabbed one by its stumpy, fat little *throat* as it leapt towards him. With no more than the advantage of leverage, he hurled it to the ground, into what can only be described as androgyny of form. He cranked his attention to rapt, as was the custom, and got his hands ready to return onslaught. Half were running up walls and the other half were trying to figure out why one of them turned into something else.

Saw himself was preoccupied with the little devils, with whatever infrequency he could muster. While he scraped and clawed them off and away from him, they scampered away. They were returning the sentiments he had expressed earlier. More came out, and then some disappeared, and then some died, and then some were picked back together again. Some were carrying the dead.

The unlucky ones were swamped by black flies, and the really unfortunate ones were subjected by a waterfall of maggots that spouted from a crack in the ceiling. A couple were carried away like bags caught in the wind. Worms allow nobody a quick death- not even the fragile. They ran around, screaming and licking, falling down into the basement and into walls and into Scarecrow's impressive foot.

Soon enough the Shadow Kids pounced not at the *tenants*, no longer content to hug and kiss, but towards any accessible exit. The downward spiral wasn't confused by their weird wisdom. They

went for windows and doors and any stray cracks that yielded fresh air. They were not without a notion of torture. None of them could get out; the bugs got to them first if they tried.

And there were bugs everywhere.

Their cries were like mice being crushed. Their footsteps were like crabwalk. Their power in numbers stripped away, they migrate to a cemetery of poverty; a place for the extinct. Very, very slowly.

Saw soon joined Scarecrow in his neutrality, his attention drawn sharply to an axe leaning up against the hallway leading to the kitchen; a gift from the other side. Ethereal needles plunged into their hearts and pumped panic into them. They were slaves to their veins.

Saw's actions were quicker than they'd been since his massacre. He'd carved a grave for his brain, only to be used in dire circumstances. With the brain buried he rested his decision-making-machines to the hands of his *gut*.

Scarecrow pointed *that face* towards the axe; the second time since everything started falling apart, but didn't motion intent, leaving it in the realm of Kennedy. Saw waded over yelping Shadow Kids, swatted black flies out of the air, and clawed worms off of his skin. It only takes one...

Stuck to the axe there was a note that read: "Help me!"

He knew what to do and his stomach pulled a big red lever.

Saw instinctively grabbed hold of the axe and started hacking at the wall. The house shuddered and moaned; a soft loud moaning turned soft, crawling up from the basement. Saw didn't stop, or listen, or unsowl his lips. He kept hacking, chopping, *splitting*, and *splintering*. The skin of the house was tough- wet and slimy- but it tore like you'd expect, and from the malicious wound poured so many teeth. Hundreds upon hundreds of teeth spilled out of the hole in the wall and onto Saw's feet. Each muscle was a womb *comma* tomb that held leftovers. He rammed his arm in and felt around inside. He had no shame in making ugly things worse.

Granting him no prize, he thrust his high torso into the hole and into a dimension of rotting molars and weathered enamel. His scowl was something monumental.

He shoveled out fistfuls of teeth, throwing them against the opposite wall, pulling himself deeper and deeper in. Scarecrow, taking the initiative, as leader when one seems unfit, grabbed Saw's legs and pulled him out.

"We're too late," panted Saw, "He's been digested!"

Scarecrow released his grip on Saw and resumed an upright position. "I am sure he would have wanted you to know what the house is a mammal, and that you tried your best."

"I hate them!" he screamed.

"Stop talking, I know."

"Widget you romantic fool!"

Binary Delusion was the idea of the hour. When it counted.

If anyone else went after the books in the parlour they'd be familiar with it. It occurred very frequently deep in the sea or high in the sky. It's a sociological handicap used by cripple headed peoples.

Muhammad, due to his religion, didn't believe in *ghosts*. He didn't even believe in demons. Someone said that. *To him*.

He was *totally incapable* of grasping the fact of the matter. It was his fault really, for not being honest.

It was a textbook scenario: He was bewitched by Widget's ludicrous ramblings disguised as confidence. Who could blame him? Widget had disguised up a ghost as something better; Muhammad bit *deep* into it. Let it trickle down his chin and onto his neck. Widget's reasons were his own, but he owned them, delegating Muhammad as the try-harder.

His seven hour brain couldn't distinguish between what he was told and what he wasn't told. The sum of this conflict was bawling. Kicking and screaming.

Binary delusion: one's pushing itself up by pushing the other down. One ends up emerging their head from the water or submerging it from the sky.

The one going up is usually the one what infected the other. Widget would have been the first one, shoving Muhammad down by his head. Getting out of it and finding the ability to make mouth words with the mediocre of them.

If it weren't for Muhammad, who knows what would have happened?  
Not uncommon.

"I'm going quite mad," confessed Poolhall, standing there in the parlour. In his haze he continued:

"Widget is *dead*... but he would have wanted us to kill *everything* involved."

The giant mischievous face passed in front of the window of the ruined parlour; not so much a window as it was a wider, impractical doorway. It let out a tremendous bellow sounding identical to a tidal wave colliding with a meteor shower.

Poolhall continued...!

"I've lost my faith."

It was ready for round second-hand. They all dropped to the floor and began crawling out of the room; anywhere else!

It peeled the walls up like it did before – like it was doing everywhere. Poolhall was furious, punching the floor as he crawled, tearing up his knuckles and causing his teeth to clench.

Saw made it to the hallway first, fully intent to find sanctuary in the kitchen, but was startled backwards by a set of wild blue veins exploding out from the wall and grabbing him at the face. They were as thick as wrists and as primary as could be. The others – well, they had problems of their own; there were things bursting out all around them. The same veins came at Poolhall but he was quick on the draw and caught them in his hand. Scarecrow threw his arms up to defend against another tooth spout coming down on him.

Saw's tension got the better of him when the veins hit, causing him to overreact. He leapt away, which lost him his footing and sent him staggering backwards into the basement. He tumbled down the stairs violently like a Tim.

Still black.

Still taking without asking.

Still up to its old tricks.

You shouldn't...

He landed not with a thud, *not with a slam*, not a splash of pain and dust and pills, but a *squish*. He planted a load-bearing hand into several inches of wriggling meat. Lifting his head he encountered hundreds and *thousands* and *millions* of worms falling from overhead like death rain. They squirmed on the ground and crawled up his leg. Mealworms and maggots and thick meaty *other ones* stood up to greet him. Saw knew what they wanted, and he wasn't above mashing them to make sure they died hungry. He checked his chestpiece and noticed that the book was absent. It was over there being eaten. It was sinking in slow motion, and from above. Saw swung and beat his way through the floor and grabbed it up once again, but not without opposition. It took only seconds for them to overtake his arm, and sadly, several more seconds for Saw to scrape them off. In a fit of frustration Saw hurled the book down to the floor. He took out many of their best men.

From the back of the room – the opposite end from the boiler room – there were sounds of indigestion. There was the sound of knuckled pounding repeatedly into a liver. A shriek of unimaginable decibel struck Saw in his temple.

It was the land of the wandering damned. Those could want, well they wanted freedom.

But they wanted everything. They even wanted everything they didn't have before.

Those who could. Want.

Someone vomited behind the bricks.

Were there people alive down there? What was coming out from the drywall?

The bricks started falling over. They were coming out in legion. The candles Widget exposed prior were extinguished; they were nothing but a stolen membrane.

What the fuck was going on?

“What the fuck have you been hiding?”

He looked deep into it and saw a tiny robot walking from one side of the room to the other on an infinite loop. The thing was stepping across the mess like it was an honest floor.

They trickled down from darkness and dropped onto piano keys, playing distant chords and macabre arpeggios. He kicked so hard that he fell back against the steps. He carved the last of the worms off his body and hurried back upstairs. He stayed on all fours to keep it serious, using his legs like rocket propulsion.

Their sound was the sound of constant feeding. If this house had a soul it was there, in that basement, in the form of one million worms.

“Go damn it! *Get the fuck out of here!*” he screamed at his followers. He didn't have his feet up there yet but he knew more than they did.

The house howled in agony as the PuppetPlurocrat shoved his fingers down through the roof, through the second floor, and indeed down to them.

Blackflies were swarming in the kitchen. The cupboard doors were cracked open with an oily slime dripping from inside of them. Something behind the scenes wouldn't stop throwing up. Tiny children's arms hung out of them, *as thin as toothpicks*, dragged out of some ill begotten crack between reality and perversion.

Saw was past remembering; he lived in a world of constant realization, but nothing could throw him off his game. The ghosts of angry children bounced off his newly exposed chassis. Worlds collided for everyone.

There was work to be done.

The floor above them collapsed outward – *awayward* - sucking up from them and dragging out. That smile foretelling things not of any *small* imagination shone down on the *we few* tenants. So they went over to the Livid Room, Saw supporting Poolhall as if it were nothing at all. They all disregard the halved, handless man falling out of the wall. Then another, and then another. Corpses were excreted out with everything else. Some were grey and malleable; cyclical clay.

For a spell things seemed well. They were backed into a corner and never more alive.

*Cancerless.*

“Alright,” delegated Saw, “We’re going to run, *fast*, and we’re going to get back into the kitchen, and we’re going to grab whatever weapons we can. *Knives*, and... just knives, then. Then we’re going to get out of this house and... I don’t know. It doesn’t matter. We’ll think of something. Bring cover. Bring one of those shadow kids if you can get your hands on one. Decoys. I don’t know. We’re going to be chased by a giant psychopath. Imagine you’re running from it; what do you *wish you were carrying*?”

“It will pick us off. It will eat is alive,” anti-explained Stone Horse.

“I don’t need your fucking negativity! You were doing *good* for awhile there, Stone Horse! Stay with it, you *want* to live!”

“No. No.”

“Work with a muthafucka!” Saw ran at him and grabbed tight to his padded shoulders, shaking him angrily. Stone Horse had no recourse.

“Go get some fuckin’ *knives*!” continued Saw, “I’ve gone too far, I’ve done too much, I’ve paid money, and I’m not going to be taken back to hell! I’m not going to let the fucking spinning coin get the better of me!”

Scarecrow watched like everything was going according to plan, like his kindred spirit was breaking out of his shell. His protégé was taking the reins, only the first of many takings, but the most important, and the sweetest.

There was a pensive excitement all around him. He leaned forward, eager to see what would occur. The more alive he felt, the further he faded to cash.

“There’s nothing we can do. This is a hurricane riddle,” damned Stone Horse. Saw reacted better to this than most were expecting, Poolhall halfway leaning to hold him back. Saw released his grip on Stone Horse’s coat and turned away. He closed his eyes tight and ground the fury between his pearly whites.

Scarecrow was cranking it that way.

“We all walk like we’ve been given a second chance. We all talk like we’re in control. We’ve been through the wrong, and we’re... gonna fail the second part...”

Poolhall was quiet. Stone Horse was quiet. Kennedy went quiet. The tremors became so powerful that they almost seemed necessary. Scarecrow gave the world a man nod and collected himself in the emotion of accomplishment he might just have well invented.

He stood up walked out of the room. Saw had noticed him listening, and noticed the common ground, but got too wrapped up in his pseudo breakdown to see him get up. BY the time he saw what was going on, Scarecrow was nearly out.

“Scarecrow! What are you doing?!” yelled Saw, disbelievin’. His words bounced off Scarecrow’s back blades. He was already turning the corner. He was already gone.

Scarecrow picked up the pace and headed for the door. It was already a dead mile; there were no more things to erupt. The worms cascaded over him, down his shoulders, and trickled down his legs. They don’t stick and chew and carry off into the midnight underfoot. He wasn’t the meat they’d dreamed of. He wasn’t even the book that they’d been fooled into thinking was meat. Everything that could burst had been bursted, and everything that could run had already run.

He punched the front door open with one outstretched arm and burst out onto the exterior – into the dead field.

Saw was in far flung tow. He was fed upon by worms and took twice as long to do half the walk.

Scarecrow’s belly began to twitch. Something came alive inside his thorax. He vaulted over the corpse of the spy that once resided in the PuppetMaster’s eye. The thing was severed in half and crushed, as if plucked out frantically. The thing was still gripping tenaciously to its second set of eyes; in the theatre of daylight, it became death, and an object, like a chair or a head.

The *PuppetMaster*, the *PuppetPlurocrat*, the *BugHouseSpawn*- it flew above him and winded freely like a snake.

His belly begins to click; clockwork was what came alive. It heated up and vibrated every little bit.

The PuppetMaster took position before Scarecrow and reached out *hard*. He took careful aim and spread his fingers. He had learned how these men leak, and the things they have inside of them. He was going to try something out.

Tick, tick, *tick*.

The PuppetMaster sent forth his strings and grabbed Scarecrow by each limb. Just like Tim.

Saw and Poolhall and Stone Horse had kicked through the slime and worms. They’d avoided the incident of what was stressing the basement door nearly to the point of destruction. They left it all behind them. Saw directed them forward, knowing that one way or another, they weren’t going back in there. He held tight to a bad attitude.

*Tick, tick, tick.*

The PuppetPlurocrat lifted Scarecrow high in the air, drawing the strings in, pulling him into its left Palm.

*Tick, tick, tick.*

Faster, *faster*. The BugHouseSpawn began wrapping his fingers around scarecrow like a boy and incest, like a vagabond to a bug. He wanted to do it. He wanted to do it so ugly. It wanted to do him so messy. Scarecrow threw a furious finger in its face.

“I’m gonna turn you into shit!”

*Tick, tick-*

The thing’s hand was disintegrated by a magnificent explosion, one that splintered its arm all

the way up to his shoulder. Splinters of flesh flew out like a separating constellation. His chest was knocked away like a door held in place by toothpicks. His neck shredded away allowing the incredible flames to lick up through it and into his head. Panicky jerks only lead to exponential cracks and fractures by the force of it. The goliath stumbled in mid air, attempted to move its head, but extinguished the last of his strength in the process. Everything snapped as he tried to save himself. Ithe couldn't do it anymore; he panicked and fell grave.

Ithe plummeted on an acute angle towards the bughouse, in fact, towards Saw and the tenants. Instead of retreating into a beast in its death throes they take the hazard route and break for the exterior. They went right forward at the other beast. Saw grabbed Poolhall and, with the last fading embers of his person, hauled him into the eclipse cast by the fallen prince.

The BugHouseSpawn collided with the parent Bughouse, an encounter that drew death on the both of them. The house broke inward and fell all over mangled half-life of the once great Puppeteer. It was still alive as it swallowed him up. Shrapnel *like bone* caved inwards and snapped. Oil and mess squirted from burst arteries. A milky nondescript fluid spilled out from wounds warm with murder. Debris spread outwards: spider web. Slime gushed out of select orifices, worms slithered under the giant's presence, and you see, the breathing ceased. They were going to die slowly. They were going to rot and be alive for all of it. But they were going to die. Just as had been promised.

He was part of the control; the only way to have it.

### *FADE TO CASH*

And so he was able to open the doors without being overtaken by acrylic paint veins. He didn't know this before committing to it, but he felt that all he had left to do was lose. The doors were heavy, but- *you know*. He swung them wide open; wide enough for two men to walk through.

Saw was staring square at the same ol' spotlight. He walked out onto what felt like cold soil; he shielded his eyes. He approached the spotlight and went alongside it- ran his hand upon it. It was supported upon a swivel device that was driven into wet, grassy ground. He pivoted it opposite and shone it on the landscape: he was standing in a cemetery at the stroke of midnight. The ground was flat and darted in gravestones, stretching out as far as the eye could see. A few trees, but they might have also been giant hands wringing at the sky in agony. It was graveyard for infinity.

He looked to where he came from but it wasn't there without the light. He remembered where it would have been, and from the proximity of the side of the house, there sounded the scampering of tiny feet. The monsters what crept outside the window were coming after him. It was unfamiliar, between the present and future, and lost in the space between revelations. They reminded him of what he had done in a previous life, back before he became something other than a man, back before he found himself someplace new.

Reality triumphed through his dense symbolist mechanism, but only because he took a breath of its air that he kept in his pocket during a moment of creation and desperation that was all too human.

Despite their appearance, and despite the paranoia that would overwhelm any normal person, they were coming to help, because they were forgiving creatures. How they exist was an avenue where a billion peoples had wasted their time. Why they exist was doubly so.

It was these creatures, and this moment, that choked the past out of his fingertips. Before the next revelation came redemption. It was a brief reprieve before the all too criminal test to come.

It wasn't necessary, because better men have done more with less, but the powers that be saw the good in his soul, and no matter how aside it had been driven by the madness of a casual world, through the smiles of mystery kids, he was assured that better men can be made by their own hands if given the right images. He thought so fast, and breathed harder and harder, and told himself this with wide eyes while they crept towards him.

His story would become everyone's story, as any wisdom belongs to anyone. He would tell it like this and like this and like this.

Something would beget something.

With one silent image.

All remaining citizens of the house made a clean break for civilization.

They crossed the desert channel under the oceanic sky like they were inside water.

The pulse of the World grew in glory before their eyes. The 3 survivors- Poolhall Sammy, Saw Kennedy, and Stone Horse- stood on the brink of liberty. Only after leaving the theatre of revenge. *Were they able to.*

What was not evil, but was a failed experiment perhaps *influenced* by wickedness, relaxed and died where their frantic footsteps began; this they would tell anyone who asked.

The flies disappeared into the mountains. The Shadow Kids were gone. The ghosts were gone.

The worms took the PuppetLord as their province and began what will undoubtedly be a legendary feeding. This they would tell the world.

"The three of them; they were the future."

"Beyond this valley", said Saw, "lays industry and all the glorious follies of man."

"Is it home?" Poolhall Sammy.

Saw paused as if holding his breath under the weight of contemplation.

"It is the womb from which all homes are spat."

"Home is dead, and we return to a tomb. It's a shit place to live for a bunch of shit people. Shit bitch people like us." Poolhall's mouth closed into a balanced line.

The one tonne weight lifted; thrust up and away by some geyser of clarity.

"It'll have to do. We're not invincible enough to die yet."

"Idiot, you drinking reefer?"

"I'm drunk on the stuff of life."

He let her disappear and rest however she would allow herself to.

The ghosts had to haunt with the knowledge that they were able to be dealt with. They had never



seen spectral pills; for the first time in perhaps forever they had to evolve.  
 She might taste the nectar of invincibility upon realizing the truth of what ended her life.

Dealt with a dirty hand; dealt a card drawn by a man wearing a shirt that read “them’s the breaks.” His hands are beaten, yet lit up. His eyes are sunken, but lit up from behind lie a lampshade. His nails are sharp, but there’s a very good reason for that.

People are able to rest in tombs. They say; telling it to the people, like Medicamentia Paenitentiamorbus, the chorus; the presence of madness that takes life, but orbits it and protects it from the harsh unreality of the layers of death, made real by the persistence of the tremors of life.

Saw turned to Stone Horse, the scholar, a baby mathematician, and some Illegitimate Son of Wickedness; no past and with nothing to take on the world with.

“You enter the civilized world as a stranger and an enemy.”

*The End,*

*Wicked Stripe*

*Dictated but not read.*