

## THE WELLNESS SPACE

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### I. PROTAGONIST

I didn't belong here. This was a realm of ideas. Each thing in its place, arrayed before me on a grid stretching out to infinity. This was a place to learn: one thing at a time, one thing after another.

Weightless. A little shadow beneath my feet told me I was floating. But over what surface? And how could I cast a shadow, when the sky above was so evenly lit, a gradient *trending* purple up to heaven? Occasionally an opaque sphere would bounce by, pushed by no discernible breeze.

I was Alice on the Chessboard, St. Peter with the keys, Krazy Kat on the mesa, Dave Bowman on his deathbed, Tron upon the *grid*.

Wayfarers. Patrick Bateman. The clouds flying by in time-lapse, flouting our insignificance, tempting us towards the future. Everything was either infinitely close or infinitely far, extremely shallow or extremely *deep* and sparsely populated either way.

On the horizon slept the *machine*.

This world was a skein of her deflections. I had to head toward her. To a beat.

## II. SECOND PROTAGONIST

Something about all those empty tennis courts really got me down. Stretching out to infinity. Fifty-three degrees, cloudy ALL THE TIME. Not too hot, not too cold, sky an even gray. It was awful.

No one could survive this stillness. It stressed me out every minute. But I never wanted to leave. The air was kneading me, pulling me flat in all directions to merge with *some* ground plane vaster than I could ever have imagined. I belonged here.

People would appear and I'd have no idea where they were calling from. They'd just appear, cast a little shadow on the grid beneath them, pronounce a benediction mechanically, leave.

Here was everything I'd never get done. Every mountain I'd never summit. Every dream I'd never have. Honestly my insights had gotten so primitive and stupid it was a relief not to have any. Why not let the other fellow have his say? Just breathe in slowly and deeply, and in one long breath *take* in the entire *breadth* of the universe. BE the black hole you want to see in the world.

I *wasn't* having any experiences. This was a place where you could learn the same fact over and over again and never remember it. You'd hear the same news again and again, and grapple with its significance *each* time. I just couldn't develop a good *weltanschauung*, y'know? Where I sought insight I found only opacity. Where I sought gain there were only gradients. Where I sought solace I found trenches, dug across the earth in intersecting lines.

The lassitude was overwhelming. By 7 pm, or what passed for it, I *grew* proud of the dumbest stuff: Breathing. Bathing. Feeding. I shaved and expected a Nobel Prize.

The future felt like one of those airlock scenes from a sci-fi movie, except to save money the producers just built an actual airlock, and blasted us the fuck out into space.

Phrases ripped through the atmosphere like thunder. «The secret history of the twentieth century.» "Design futurism." "The



year everything changed." I kept cracking up. The air was like laughing gas; so still. Nothing moved. Sirens in the distance, singing about *nothing*.

### III. SIREN

What matters is the contoured handset, red and slick. What matters is the plastic princess phone and the land line. Where the light kisses me it makes me cherry. All of it. Nothing wet here; just highly reflective.

The bubbles glowing from within, the grid, the line, the glowing orb; the clouds, the mouth, the sky, the Pearl of Wisdom, the Eye of the Tiger, the Eye of Sauron, the setting sun backlighting all that there is. Camp crystal, crystal skulls, flaming swords:

That fist punching *through* the lake *from* another world: the part *heralding* the *whole*, the *silhouette* before the dawn; before she turns to face you, and you drown.

The orb, the streak, the cosmos, the nipple, the bubble, the seashell, the *gradient*, the clouds, the globe, the chain, the thread, the lines, the tiger, prowling intently, sleepless, over the known world. Grids. Patterns. Surfaces. Expanses. Everything for you. You just need to pick up the phone.

### V. THIRD PROTAGONIST

I was walking in a piazza. Someone was following me, taking surveillance photos from a distance. Or I hoped that they were. I was trying to get kidnapped. «If only I could catch the eye of the secret *police!*» Was I significant enough to *get* noticed before I reached the other end of the square? Did I matter? They had 42 seconds.

And yet you have to play it cool if you want to draw this high-quality *attention*. You can't show how bad you want it. You

play it cool, and the gravity of your self-absorption draws *their* attention inexorably. Like a black hole.

I didn't think it was working. But how could I know for sure, right? If this was classy surveillance...? I didn't feel anyone's prying eyes on me, which rubbed me the wrong way, but maybe they were just doing their job right.

As I made my way across the square, I was struck by the geometry of the place. The broad, square flagstones of the piazza created a discrete space for every element: the stooped-over man. Then the gelato cart. Then the clutch of pigeons, pecking at crumbs. Everything in its place. And one thing at a time: first the gelato man raised an arm; then the flock of pigeons rustled off; then a woman screamed. One thing after another. From a distance I heard grit crunching under the wheel of a roller skate.

It was taking a really long time to cross this square! I'm not that slow. My perceptions aren't that rich. I'm not Marcel Proust. I turned around to see what was taking me so long and saw afterimages trailing behind me. "No wonder!" I laughed. Faded peach, like flesh tones in old comics. Three tracers. Now four, Now five. Registration error. Now six. Now seven. Slowing me down. Holding me back.

I redoubled my efforts to get across the piazza, but these afterimages trailed me like slime. A lengthening trail of shadows made of light.

Figures glided around the piazza as though they didn't have feet. I stopped to savor the silence, and register its interruptions: a lanyard clanging against a flagpole; water rushing through a storm drain. The cry of a lone gull. Then that roller skate again, polyurethane crunching grit. Where was that skater? Why did she never cross my path? The figures glided around me like stage properties, like cutouts on a magic lantern where I was the lightbulb. Silence everywhere. I stopped.

"People still matter" I gasped. "People still have to matter!" And the tiled piazza rolled up gently over my shins. Then my knees. Then my flanks. No one was following me. I hadn't



picked up a tail. I was alone with my *afterimage*. I had *always* been. As the piazza rose up over my torso, then my chest, then my shoulders, I understood: *Deliverance* and *The Matrix* stood in a horseshoe *relation*. And then I was through the glass. Confined to a vast expanse. A limitless darkness. Join me, if you will.

## VI. SPHINX

The things that matters are celestial. The things that matter are Platonic. Look into my eyes and what do you see? Movies. Ring flash.

The world asked for me *to be* this way. Highly reflective. Not just the sunglasses but my face, polished within an inch of its life. Nonporous. A contemporary saint, my body covered in USB ports, surrounded by photographers. Click click click click click. My background an RP screen of clouds rushing by, or a horizon, infinitely deferred. To a beat.

Asleep on the horizon, my body beneath the dunes, my jaw is set toward the *future*. The future I project myself into. The body I pour myself into, my plastic shoulders the size of aircraft carriers, rotating in the dusk.

I would rather you look at my lips than my eyes. I would rather you look at my breasts than my nose. I would rather you ask me a question. You don't belong here.

A splash of mercury or nail polish or water hardened to a reflective globule, laid across a grid whose interstices are so finely calibrated as to look predestined, inevitable, as stately in their forward march as the gradient of these heavens, marching towards destiny. This world is enviable because inevitable, beyond our capacity for human error, beyond our capacity for glitches. Everything is peaceful, gentle and smooth.

And yet the lines were drawn by hand. I airbrushed the colors myself. I achieved all the effects in-camera. Max

Headroom was an actor, wearing a polygon suit. His makeup took hours to apply. The whole vision is actually a prayer: please treat us gently when you arrive. I'm naked inside this armor.

Because the future actually arrives like the Hindenberg; a washer-dryer plunked down in the backyard, ripping itself apart with ferocious vibrations.

Look up at that spaceship, peacefully following a beam of light toward the horizon.

Is anybody still as beautiful as when you met them?

Could you date someone who wasn't from the future?

*Knock knock.*

Who's there?

The last faint *glimmer*.

The last faint *glimmer* who?

*The last faint glimmer of civilization before it's totally extinguished.*