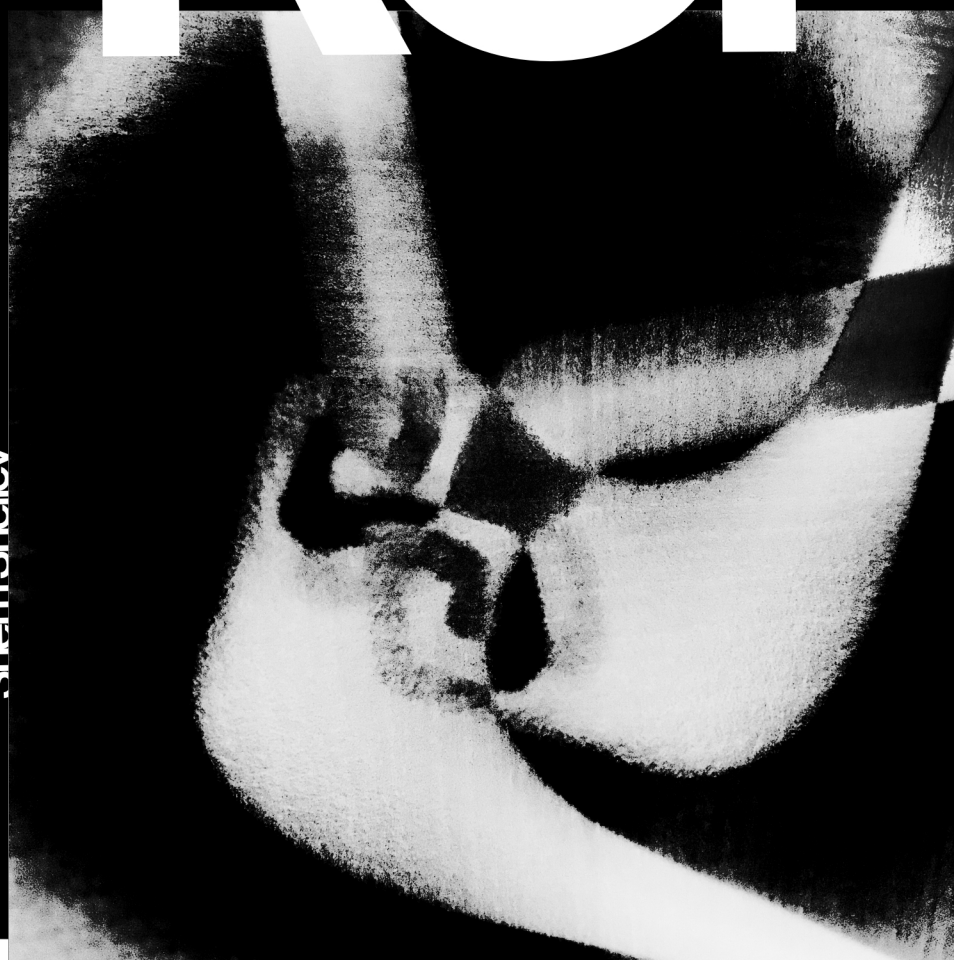


FROM

Shem Shelley



UTOPIA

the troops were singing



Bizarre Crumbles *in Alpen*

BIZARRE CRUMBLINGS IN ALBION V

I barely got out of London during the riots.

How can I even process this? It feels like something is missing.

After the first CEO was burnt and eventually died in hospital, it happened again. One more. And another. Six altogether. How could six of the richest men all in the span of a day be burnt alive in near-identical fires? I don't want to think about it anymore. I can't even begin to explain the last few weeks.

Today is the funeral. She appeared out of nowhere and became a sort of modern folk hero. No. She became a martyr. I dare say it's what we needed. Which is easy for me to say as someone not directly impacted by the many deaths that have occurred. But, really, who am I to question the cold will of the universe? What can I change? Why do I need to feel remorse for what has or would have always happened? I'm just one person. One drop in the ocean.

I always find myself thinking like this after times of stress, and it always makes me feel dirty, like Harry Lime in *The Third Man*.

"Look down there. Tell me. Would you really feel any pity if one of those dots stopped moving forever?"

Even though it feels like everything has gone back to normal and the explosive torrent we all no doubt experienced is washed away, things have changed. I can feel it. There's cracks in the everyday. And through those cracks something powerful is trying to break in. We just can't see it yet.

A slight disturbance is being shown at the funeral. A person wearing an 'Arson Wills' T-shirt is causing a fuss. Was it arson? For me there is no definitive answer. Usually this is enough to cause people to question my sanity, as if it isn't arson, it's Reyna's curse. Only the 'crazies' believe in her curse I'm told by my peers. But I've changed. I've become non-Euclidean. Either/or logic cannot satisfy me. I see the bindings forged across my mind. Glistening chains in the darkness tied to imaginary systems beyond my control. There is never one answer.

As I pick the phone up and speak to my distant family happy to be passed around for quick hellos and how are yous, a new storm of disturbance swells. I can barely make out what's going on. After I speak to everyone I hang up and pay attention. Messages come flooding in.

The body is gone!?

No, the body has been switched! Replaced by a man's!

I've seen his face before. He's a tech investor. One of those evil libertarian bastards baptised in the hell waters of Apartheid. He invested in the six dead CEO's tech companies. How is this possible?!

Reyna's curse?!

"The only way to destroy their system is to stop the flow."

I want to say that it's not Reyna's curse. It can't be. A curse can't do this. But, there is never just one answer.

Never.

I take a deep breath and watch the commotion billow. I open the window and stare out, letting the cool air bring some life back into my tired body.

I stand here above the crumbling world beneath me.

Looking at all the dots—no, people moving.

With hope for a better future.



My life and
my deeds
prove what
I'd world!
that I've never
taken you
seriously.

LEY

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omonde
Contreras

an anti-epic poem that will change the course of the 21st century

Chapter 35

"We can't break free? Devils, Daggers and Death."

Slime candles flicker with IMMENCITY
Sick, warm green to g h o u l u n a r blue
Sounds of sleep exorcise a carcass
And defang the stillness—

THE GREAT MAW OF THE FINANCIAL DISTRICT SHUTS

Romonde collects the pigarett ash left behind,
And draws a series of synbols,
And places the open book,
To gorge on shadows.

It starts raining bows of colour,
The muse's curse!

"Know where you are and follow the tongue for entry into the
stratacombs beneath the dreams."

THE GREAT MAW OF THE FINANCIAL DISTRICT OPENS

"Concentrate."

Romonde climbs the tongue and travels down deep under the
underground...

*
* *

CHEMICAL PROTESTANTS, ZEALOTS LIKE KNIVES hunt us on
the mountain no one below can here our fear running through
the green brush sagging this is their land and they made it rain
when they began the chase to execute their red plan thunder all
around us pushing us in odd kilter directions the altitude
wheezing and I lead us to no sane outcome for those of us with
working flesh under are irritating scabs on the skin of their world
and their thunder tightens and traps us sky high on incantation
roads we turn back but militant funeral vehicles stamped with
cold metal funded faces end our freedom dragging us to their
camp —

TEMPLE MADNESS, HAPPY PRISON VILLAGE locked
away in we are one by one taken to the still church with
sola panels to have our night wanders recorded and acid
priests tie us down placing blue and white pills that
unfurl into mort boa down our throats we sit here with no
hope they dug a hole and we jumped in —

BLONDE VIPER ANGELS, FIGS BATHED IN
ELECTROLYTES or electric lights it is their ancient
summoning as they lead us force us to labour cutting
lines severing lines finely chewing through the roots of
light in the soil of the night so we have nothing left to
scatter the concepts are ruined sent to the walls of
electrocution as we use lightning sickles to cut the
bulbwheat again and again and the girl with jewelled
eyes falls when she cuts her own line and the birds flutter
and fade —

HEIGHT AWARENESS, HIS POWER OF ETERNITY keeps
the mountain standing in a void of ridge and furrow blue
blindness I bide my time reading a secret book the
thunder gates tighten and time is near I plan to get
caught with the book of Co-Moon Schism poison the
unwellspring their people chase me when they find it
and send images of childhood friends taking their lives in
my head to slow me down I hide in the women's
quarters I can't remember what my plan was to escape
or get caught—

FAMISHED FISHBONES, REAL UNDERVALUED
CULTURE is what I see in the old H.S. notebook it was my
prize for stopping the end of a dear friend and we
travelled back to our former dormitory to find it fold
bursting with clear stories of how they stole samples
from in our heads in our real heads to grow in between
their pavement cracks worms of all colours new colours
sticky in gestation once outside the green gap through
their thunder fence its always been there no one can see
it I let the second one go without holding on drop and
leave without the others without jewelled eyes without
helping anyone—

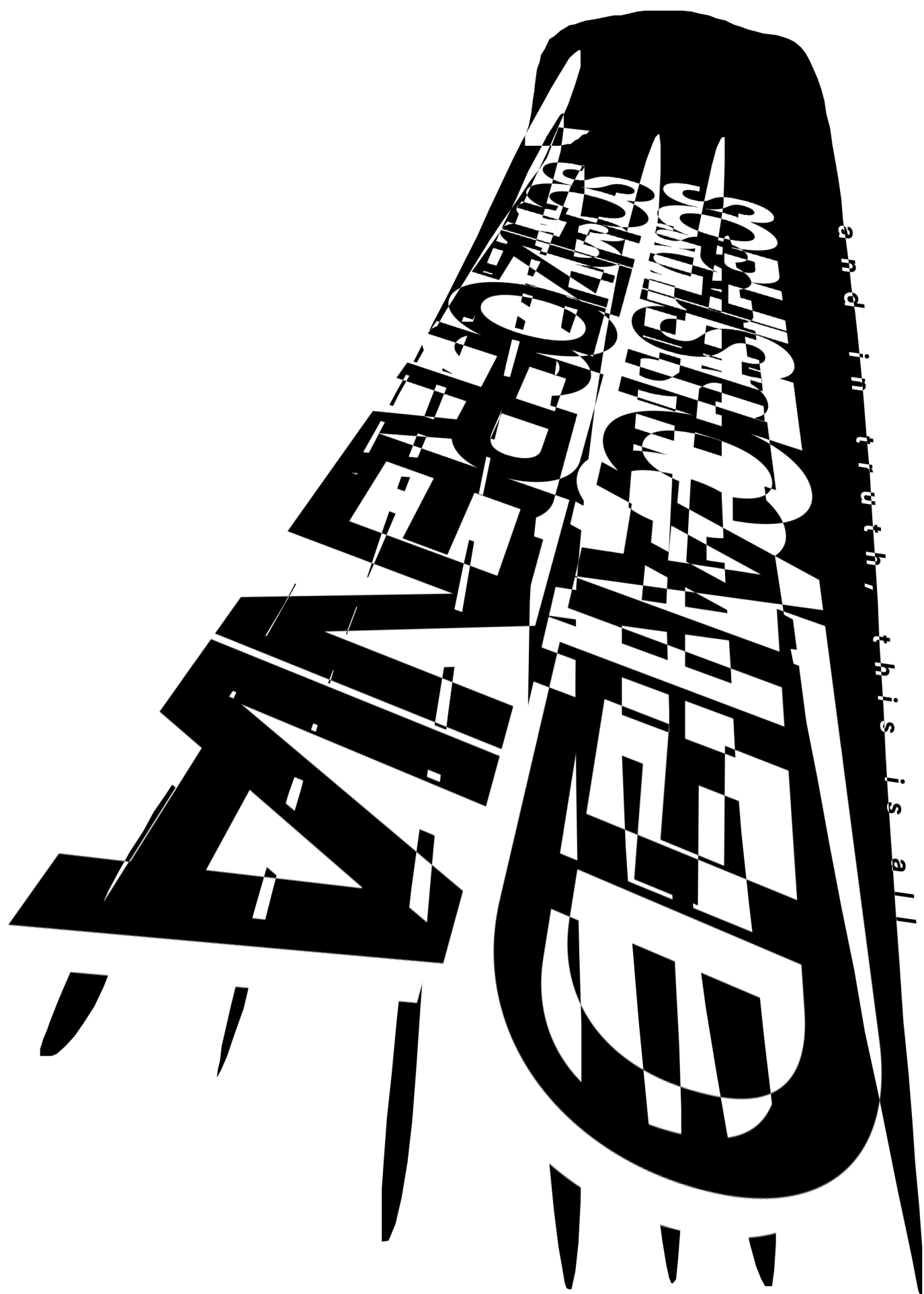
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* *

Swamplands of the tongue
continue into the pink darkness,
as moist papillae buds bloom and
tower into shivering bald cypresses.

Soon the patches of red grass formed from lightning
shapes wither,
And
 the
 tongue
 gradually
becomes
 a
 river.

NEIGHBORHOOD WITCH

As far as urban legends go, this isn't a legend. It happened. I saw it happen. I never got involved, but I saw it happen. I'm friends with the people who live next door. No, on the other side. Their other neighbours were the ones who did it. Well, I kinda understand why they did it. There's only so much you can take. But... yeah they were loud. The middle house renovated, took out all walls and with that horrible little Pomeranian, the noise increased. I heard it at my friends, but it was louder on the other side. I don't want to speak ill of the dead, but these people were animals. All manner of noises you could hear. The other neighbours couldn't handle it. The council didn't do anything. They had to suffer. They could hear it all across their house, even upstairs in their bedrooms. They pleaded with their neighbours making noise, but they refused to do anything. That's why I don't blame them, even though... but yeah, it really did happen. They left. You could see they all became physically ill. I was glad they were finally moving on. Finally at peace. I saw them the day they left and I saw them hand it over. It was weird. I spoke to my friend who said it was a parting gift. An outdoor plant. They said they'd had their differences but now they were moving on, they wanted to make up and leave all their pain in the past. And then they left, and then no one seemed to move in to their old home, and then it started. They planted it and at first, nothing happened. I was strangely drawn to it. Every time I went to my friends, I'd look out and see through their lattice fence the weird plant that didn't grow. It just died. One day my cat escaped. I was distraught and went to my friends to ask if they'd seen her. They told me to look outside. I'll never forget what I saw. Hundreds of cats of all colours spilling over from their neighbours garden with the dead plant. In every direction. They tried to shoo them away but the collective hissing was unbearable. All they could do was watch from inside. I have no idea what they were doing. All I know is that days after there was a pungent, acidic smell that wouldn't go away. I gagged walking past their house. Yeah my cat came back in the evening. She acted like nothing had happened. All I know is that after that night, the plant started growing. In days it went from near-dead to the size of a ten year old. It looked so odd. I couldn't quite grasp its shape. It looked alive is all I could think. It wouldn't stop growing. The shape got more and more horrible. I'm shivering thinking about it. It grew to like six feet tall. You could see the top of it on the corner leading to our road, the head sticking out above the walls and fences. Once I swear it even turned to look at me when I was late coming home. Standing on the corner, the moon was out and it had eyes. Never ran home faster than that before. That's when the family went missing. It was the dog barking that caused suspicion. All their cars were there, so there was no reason for the dog to be constantly barking. Once the police were notified and went inside, all they found was the dog in a lonely corner, and roots everywhere else. These sickly roots all over the house spread out from one point in the garden. Yes, the plant. And it was dead again. Just like when they planted it. No one knew what happened to them. One forensic person noticed a drop of blood on the roots and that's how they found them. That's how they found what was left of them. All of them. Under the plant. Buried in the soil. All of their remains. Even the kids. And not just them. There was another kind of body too. All shrivelled and weird my friend said. A month later they came back. Yeah, the neighbours who left. The people who were tormented all those years. No one dared to bother them after that. The house? Empty ever since.





Roll To Determine How Your Enemies Will Perish



1

Summon the **DEATH NIGHT BIRD** to feast upon your enemies sacred pineal gland, crushing the link between this world and the next, and watch them tumble infinitely in the void, nether alive nor dead.

2

Send visions of **MINUSCULE PURITANS** hunting your enemies genitalia, clad with sharp weapons ready to slay the impure beast at all costs, and tell them the only way to rid of the minute mob is to use fire.

3

Cast a spell of **INVOLUNTARY CANNIBALISM** onto your enemies closest loved ones, and watch them loose every inch of their own body, looking deeply into their loved ones tearful, deadening eyes, screaming.

4

Grant a **RAGEFUL SENTIENCE** to your enemies skeleton, watching the demented architecture of bones attempt to free itself with an unheard of force, eventually ripping out of the binding skin that is its prison.

5

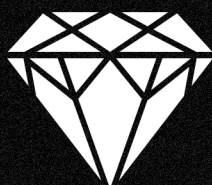
Using **MOLECULAR ALCHEMY** make your enemies body toxic to H₂O and watch them slowly disintegrate, their maddening struggle to understand why 60% of their chemical composition is now a poison.

6

Programme a **MIND VIRUS** in your enemies head that uploads false memories of immortality, making them think they are indestructible and eventually causing them to prove it, with obvious disastrous results.



Roll To Determine What Treasure You Will Pluck From Their Corpse



1 REGRET

A regret so powerful, immense change will come to you, forcing a new stage of evolution/devolution. Roll again to determine which, even numbers for evolution, odd for devolution.

2 THE JEWELLED WORM

An entity of evil that caused your enemy to despise you. Seeing it makes you realise that a simple surgical removal is all that was required for you and your enemy to be the inseparable allies you were always meant to be.

3 CARD OF DEATH

Forged by cybernetic devils in the 9th dimension, the chrome card was flung to a specific point in space-time, ready to dispense justice. A voice manifests from the card: *"For your crimes, you have been sentenced to death."*

4 FRUITS OF ILL LABOUR

A tantalising fruit born from your enemies demise that offers a 1 in 6 chance of eternal youth. Take a bite and roll the dice to determine. 1- Memory Loss, 2- Ideology Reversal, 3- Infrequent Invisibility, 4- Unwavering Religious Beliefs, 5- Eternal Youth, 6- Instant Gravity Negation.

5 A GLASS STAR

A tool to measure your inevitable decline into the decaying depths of pure evil. The small amount of shade contained within is a reminder of what you did, and will grow with each new heinous act you are sure to enact.

6 AN ALIEN FETUS

Sickly green, dripping with luminescent fluid, the alien fetus stretches its amniotic tentacles towards you, like a snake hypnotising its prey. You won't realise what is happening until it's already been done.

Enjoyed this issue? Consider buying me a pizza as eternal gratification



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