



16

FROM UTOPIA

of wills ensued, and all through



ShemShelev

EXIT THE McMATRIX

by
Shem Shelley

FADE IN

INT. ALL SEEMS WELL IN THE McMATRIX, A WORLD NOT TOO DISSIMILAR TO THE REAL ONE, WHERE THE PUBLIC CONTINUES TO BE GROUND INTO MALLEABLE PASTE TO BE SCULPTED INTO THE PERFECT CITIZENS.

Agent Ronald is in the kitchen lacing his Big Maxs with addictive digital substances.

Orpheus is off trying to convince the 'Burn victims' of a sham festival that they are part of the joke and actually working for the Man.

Trio and Infinity are at a fast-food restaurant sitting on the second floor looking out over a dull grey city, waiting for their order.

TRIO

How long's it been? I don't remember having to wait this long the last time I came here.

INFINITY

Everything is slowly getting worse. Haven't you noticed?

TRIO

Yeah I s'pose.

INFINITY

It has been a while though.

She notices, then picks up a lonely salt packet on the seat next to her, rips it open, pouring the white crystals onto the table.

TRIO

Look at them. They don't even realise do they?

INFINITY

How can they? It's easy for us. (She draws a line through the spilt salt, rounding off the larger side.)

TRIO

How can they be this... well, this delusional?

INFINITY

A fish born into an aquarium doesn't know about the ocean.

TRIO

Yeah, we're pretty lucky.

INFINITY

Most don't pay attention. Like this song right now. Do you hear it?

TRIO

Oh yeah I think I recognise it. The Vile Council?

INFINITY

Listen to the lyrics.

Trio stands up and goes closer to the source of the music, ignoring the family getting increasingly weirded out by him standing so close to them. He walks back to his seat.

TRIO

It's literally right there. Not one person here got it. Do they even have ears? I feel like shaking them and shouting "it's right there you fools!"

INFINITY

They still wouldn't get it.

TRIO

They are truly fucked.

Agent Ronald comes up the stairs with two meals on a tray and walks to Trio and Infinity.

AGENT RONALD

Sorry for the delay, hope you're hungry! (He gives them both a Big Max, a box of fries and a soft drink complete with his signature almost grotesque smile.)

TRIO

Thanks. Question, are you the manager here?

AGENT RONALD

Manager? Oh no no no. I'm definitely not the manager.

INFINITY

You sure about that?

AGENT RONALD

167% sure madam. I am not the manager.

INFINITY

No one else really fits the managerial role. We've been here a while, seen every member of staff in the building. You are the only one here who fits the bill as manager. You must be the manager.

AGENT RONALD

I am... not the manager.

TRIO

Can you go get the manager for us then, if you're not the manager?

AGENT RONALD

How silly of me! I forgot your napkins and sachets of delicious condiments! Bare with me a moment sir, madam. (He bows, and runs off clumsily back down the stairs.)

TRIO

Yeah, you're right. Things are definitely getting worse.

They both unwrap their Big Max, almost in unison, watching the steam

rise slowly. Trio takes a big bite.

INFINITY

He forgot the straws too.

TRIO

Oh for (unintelligible mumbling as he chews voraciously).

They both eat their meals in silence. Three people sit down in a booth behind them and start talking loudly.

INFINITY

Do you notice their words? Something is wrong.

TRIO

It's like they're now full? Before the words were empty.

INFINITY

And the space around the words is now visible.

TRIO

Yeah like the connections. Different colours, options in every direction.

INFINITY

They are choosing which one. Choosing which tunnel to fall into.

TRIO

It's madness.

A loud crash is heard downstairs and everyone on the second floor looks around slightly aghast at the disturbing noise. Agent Ronald soon after runs up the stairs clutching scrunched up napkins and far too many sachets of ketchup, mayonnaise, mustard and countless other miscellaneous condiments, spilling many more on his way to Trio and Infinity.

AGENT RONALD

Please forgive me sir, madam (he jettisons napkins and sachets across their table not caring if their food gets attacked in the process) and enjoy your meal!

INFINITY

You forgot the straws.

TRIO

How my s'posed to drink this? (He holds up his soft drink to make a point.)

AGENT RONALD

Straws!? Straws! Ha ha ha ha! Yes yes yes, please forgive me (he runs away, somehow even faster than before).

TRIO

Wait! Need to see the manager!

INFINITY
Too late I'm afraid.

TRIO
Fuck.

A woman wearing the restaurants uniform comes out of a door labelled 'staff only' fumbles her keys, locks the door and begins to walk towards the stairs.

INFINITY
Hey, that woman, there.

TRIO
Oh yeah I'll ask her. 'Scuse me! Miss?

The mousy woman jolted by Trio's call, almost awoken from a deep sleep, walks over to them in a anxious manor.

FEMALE RESTAURANT EMPLOYEE
Er, how can I um, help you?

INFINITY
Manager.

FEMALE RESTAURANT EMPLOYEE
Sorry...?

INFINITY
We need to see the manager.

FEMALE RESTAURANT EMPLOYEE
The manager? Er... I think well... um...

TRIO
We just want to talk to the manager. It ain't that difficult.

FEMALE RESTAURANT EMPLOYEE
But... you... I think I saw...

INFINITY
What it is? Just talk normally.

FEMALE RESTAURANT EMPLOYEE
Sorry, um you spoke to the manager? Earlier? I saw you.

TRIO
So he was the manager!

INFINITY
He said he wasn't the manager.

FEMALE RESTAURANT EMPLOYEE
Oh no um, not er... (her demeanour changes subtly) him. The other person you... spoke to.

INFINITY

I'm sorry, what other person?

TRIO

For the love of...

FEMALE RESTAURANT EMPLOYEE

The manager. I um saw you talking to them earlier. About er... ten minutes ago?

INFINITY

The only other member of staff we have spoken too, other than you, was the clumsy man who brought over our food to this table. We have spoken to no other person who works here. Is the clumsy man the manager?

FEMALE RESTAURANT EMPLOYEE

That man was not the... manager.

TRIO

Ok. Can you go get us the manager then.

INFINITY

If it's not too much trouble.

FEMALE RESTAURANT EMPLOYEE

Er... yeah of course. The manager. I'll go get the... manager.

She smiles as big as she can muster and walks hurriedly downstairs, careful not to look back.

TRIO

Is everyone here a clown?

INFINITY

Yes. Just look. (She turns around on her chair motioning at the rest of the customers in the restaurant.) They are so dissatisfied. You can see it under their skin. Gnawing at them. Nothing in their lives is going right. They are so dissatisfied and yet they still use up their money in places like this. They don't learn. Just a dull current. That's all they are.

TRIO

Clever. I see why you say that (he chomps on his half eaten Big Max and throws a few fries in his mouth).

INFINITY

I'm going to the toilet (she gets up).

TRIO

Keep an eye out. The manager might be hiding in there.

Infinity smirks in an understated way and walks off to the toilet in the far corner.

TRIO

Huh?

He searches his pocket and pulls out a vibrating phone, uses a napkin to clean his hands and mouth before answering.

TRIO
Orpheus, bout time.

ORPHEUS (V.O.)
They are callous in Wonderland.

TRIO
I'm sorry what!?

ORPHEUS (V.O.)
I haven't got long.

TRIO
We've been waiting to hear from you.

ORPHEUS (V.O.)
Well here I am. You know they lied to me.

TRIO
Who?

ORPHEUS (V.O.)
A wife. Yeah right.

TRIO
You're not making any sense. What's going on over there?

ORPHEUS (V.O.)
Vertical moments. It's all just vertical moments.

Trio turns around looking in the direction of the toilet, stands up contemplating whether he should just breach the women's toilet to get Infinity.

TRIO
Hey, don't hang up, need to wait for Infinity to get back (he sits back down making his decision).

ORPHEUS (V.O.)
Three is a bad number. Very bad. Unholy.

TRIO
Three? Are you talking in...? Have you been compromised!?

ORPHEUS (V.O.)
No pills needed. Create, create, create.

TRIO
Fuck. Look, we really need to wait for Infinity. Are you ok to speak a little longer?

ORPHEUS (V.O.)
Trio.

TRIO
Yeah...?

ORPHEUS (V.O.)
Watch your tongue. Goodbye.

TRIO
Hello? Orpheus?

Trio presses the red phone symbol, deciding whether he should call back but instead puts the phone down on the table in front of him. He stares out into the void.

INFINITY
I ordered another Big Max. (She sits back down.)

TRIO
Sorry...?

INFINITY
I ordered another.

TRIO
Wait, why? Oh and you missed the call.

INFINITY
Doesn't matter. Just wait.

A male employee comes up the stairs with the solitary Big Max and a handful of straws and walks to Infinity and Trio.

MALE RESTAURANT EMPLOYEE
Here's your order! One Big Max and your straws. 12, just like you... um wanted. (He places the items gently down on the table.)

INFINITY
Thanks.

TRIO
Not even going to bother asking.

MALE RESTAURANT EMPLOYEE
Sorry, sir?

INFINITY
Don't worry. Thanks.

MALE RESTAURANT EMPLOYEE
If you need anything else, please don't hesitate to ask! (He strolls away and is called by another customer across the room.)

Infinity picks up the straws leisurely opening one at a time, while Trio continues to stare emptily outside. She opens the Big Max and proceeds to stab the top of the burger with the straws.

TRIO
What are you doing?

INFINITY
Here. (She slides the Big Max with 12 straws protruding from the top of the bun in a circle over to him.)

TRIO
(It takes him a few seconds to realise what he's staring at.) That's it! This is a cage. Every second, every minute, every hour, every day, every year. It's all just metal bars on a prison. And what you need to do to escape the prison, is to turn those bars into something else. That's what Orpheus was trying to say. Create at every instance. Make something. Create. That's the only way to rid yourselves from the bars! Transform them into something else!

The mousy woman from before comes up the stairs with Agent Ronald and walks over to Trio and Infinity.

FEMALE RESTAURANT EMPLOYEE
As you er, requested... the manager.

AGENT RONALD
Sir, madam, you wanted to see me?

INFINITY
You are not the manager.

AGENT RONALD
Excuse me!?

TRIO
There is no manager.

AGENT RONALD
Sir! Madam! Please! Don't make a scene! Don't leave! You can't leave! You mustn't leave!

Trio and Infinity get up ignoring Agent Ronald, put on their outdated, borderline S&M leather outerwear and walk away, down the stairs and outside into the dull, grey city.

EXT. You reading this, realise you exist outside, not inside, decide to take action and refuse life in the McMatrix.

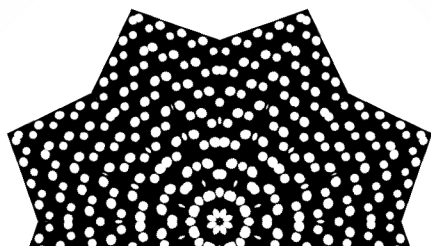
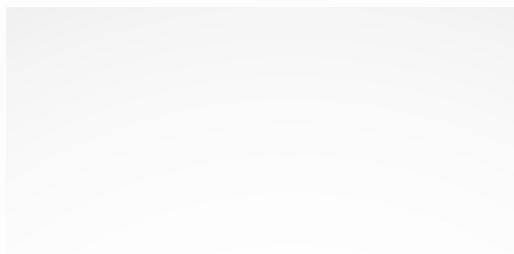
THE END



consciousness is *the* impotent



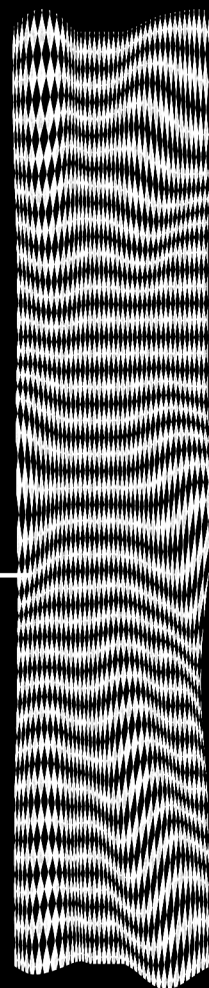
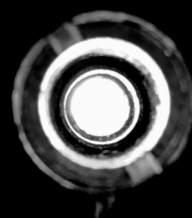
shadow of action.



CONSTITUTION

CONSTITUTION

t h e
t r a g e d y
o f
r o m o n d e
c o n t r e r a s



a n a n t i -
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p o e m
t h a t w i l l
c h a n g e
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c o u r s e
o f t h e
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c e n t u r y

Chapter 24

"Don't take out the—don't say the word! I don't want to remember."

a floor parallel to above,
littered aplenty with jewels,
even in darkness are absent,
unlit like shade soaked morsels,

Romonde gazes at heavy, scintillating breath tightening
clouds
Psychic pollution from above dragged low by dead
analytics
In the Gnomen Ruins under the ALLSOUTH,

THE GREAT REPRESSION

Smell of searing r e veal meat being feasted upon with
utensils of jagged bone t o marrow

Long vacant bird egg shells engraved with the tales of
ADAM BLUE'S SUMMER BLOOD
—stories too marred by secret word forms to be retold
Lead Romonde deeper into t h e d e n

D e fetal ruins, living foundation, stomach rumbling of
tiny land dreams to i m p r e g nature

The Unrequited Above continues to choke itself
as Romonde looks up at the
underside of cracked roads,
their foundations are glowing headless grapes
crawling with stirring life figures
dressed in pork loin cloths
harvesting noon-blue avocado and sun-abandoned
marooned eggplants,
their inflexible shifting, a crawling numb splash
of insect folkdance

—MY BODY FLAILING IN THE DUST DELUDES

The LOSTALGIA underground
Escape this Mental (back)Ward
HISDOMAINS collective
Seven hundred drops

marble slabs, sound mimicry of the lost body
UNDERGRINDINGTEETH
they can't hear you

A bad stair case of HEIGHT and LAW art

every step littered with
future burnt gargoyles
who whisper and bark
the dangers of wheatgerm economics

*

What little low light exists here draws Romonde's
attention,
To walls refusing gravity's deep dark desire for tumbling,
And on every brick carved bespoke reads P E I O,
Yet the walls will fall down, only when we realise which
way is up.

A horned and hooded little pig makes itself known to
Romonde,
Pointing to a map stitched from the irises of anti-creative
pessimists,
The irony of their snuff sight being used to show the way,
Makes the invisible in the dark

On the map distilled cross section angry specks of
mote light quivering blinking and howling in the river of
contoured ink forced into biographic forms septagonal
libraries held together by dementured flickers in old
brains each up side is a mirror reflecting suns as sigils:

GREEN
VALE
ACT
EEL
HAN
HALL
HOLT

A stir wriggling on the floor every floor they continue
to walk through the pre-human maelstrom of noise
louder until mouldy plastic bones rattle incessant too
loud as Romonde can barely stand the hooded pig
empties pockets of toasted crescent finger moons
scattering them around to harmonise the shrill sound
of myths being swallowed by mundanity



stan the busman

Bitter old busman. He swore at me once. All I did was ring the bell a few times to let him know he closed the doors too early. Guy's a freak. Even followed me off the bus the next stop to shout some more. Everyone hates him. Men, women, children. Even dogs bark at him. No one likes Stan. Heard he's a failed writer. He can't even swear with grace so I believe it. Must've been a real shit writer. He was close to having a deal with the BBC. For a show or something. He had a partner and all he had to do was keep his mouth shut. But he started blabbing. He wanted full control of the project. Told them they were cowards. "How can culture be anything but dead with you in charge?" That he was the answer. They didn't even bother to laugh at him and told them to go, the deals up. "You suits haven't got the guts to take a risk on someone like me!" And that's why he's so bitter apparently. Mum always said he'll carry that bitterness to the grave. He might even be there now. Weighed down by it. The only thing stopping him from coming back. Yeah it's too early. They never found a body. Those kids who hassled him on the bus. I don't blame them. He chased them like crazy. Into a field. One got separated. The smallest kid. Stan went for him. The kid tripped up. Landed on his wrist. Hurt himself pretty badly. Stan just standing over him laughing. The kid was hysterical. Tried to get up and run but Stan waved his finger to say no. And then two horses trampled him. That's what the kid said. Out of nowhere. Not even normal horses. Red horses. It was dark so the kid couldn't tell if Stan's body was covered in mud or blood. One horse grabbed Stan with its mouth. He was still alive. Dragged him off screaming. The other kids heard and came running. They found the small kid but no Stan. Just hoof prints in the mud glowing red. Don't know what to believe. Can you trust what a traumatised kid sees? He could still be alive. Maybe just up and left. Wanted a quiet life. Didn't tell anyone. Sick of this town. What if the kids did him in and hid the body? This might all just be just their story. Suppose we'll never know. Stan might be still out there.

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



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