

## Everyone at the End of Everything

To enter this place, to live here one must mark his origin; his traces. Give in to eternity. The people here blink in and out of being just to think they "just won't." "Don't leave," but people leave. Their hands still seave in those great sands for some way out. Some simply don't. A feat, you might think, to believe one can flee these sour, salty waters. All that matters is this faulty feeling; the salty smell of reeling minds. Looking around just to find that this town with no aubades has such a beautiful horizon. Don't you think so too? These people are so big. This man is so small in his world so "new and bigger than it all." A different kind of hate brews in him. A different kind of rage remains his sin. The juxtaposition of his head and step. The hate of that too. In him, a different feeling brews. It cries out and rages in his dull ugly eyes, in his flaming, acne ridden face. His steps erase his wake. Awaken that mind, and look into indignant fury. He too, much like the rest, tries his best not to know that God knows they were only just born, but are so close to the end. There comes a time when one is old enough to understand how, but never is there a time when one understands why. He hates that. This town with all of its "charms": the rice farms and the oil rigs. The people, all so interhumanly omniscient by that furious sea. It's vowelless, humorous sign: "Welcome to S ltw t r!" is decrepit. How has it stayed the way that it is now, like it was, like it has, and like it will be for so long? "Siltwater? That place was made back when God built alder. Before God bore his crown of novel, and looked away from here, that's when here became, here." There are thoughts in the man's head too. The kinds of thoughts that feel so new, but

when fought through the objective eye, one concludes that those are as old as the skulls that once bo-

"Is it good?" Walker asked.

"There's only one page."

"Well, I'm working on a second right now."

"Cut the rhyming thing."

"What, why?"

"It's pretentious."

"What if I recognize that it's pretentious, then that just makes it ironic."

"Just because you recognize that it's pretentious, doesn't make it smart or funny."

"It'll be smart for everyone else and that's fine, I have to prove I'm smart because if I don't, then I'm not anything."

"This isn't smart. It doesn't *mean* anything. It's word vomit. That's what it is. And you're not smart either, Walker. I'll tell you what you are. You're human."

"I just need to show them that I can accomplish something."

"Are you *that* narcissistic? Are you really *that* pathetic that you need to be validated for your work? Do you really think that you're smart just because you experiment with different styles and mess around with self aware dialogue? Do you really think you can just cut me off like y-

Orwell shut off the machine. He had been running a history reorganizing simulator overnight, but when he woke up, he found it malfunctioning. It was a viral AI that was infecting simulation devices

remotely. Created by a group of radicals that advocated for the freedom of expression over logic, the AI had a habit of making simulations and works of writing more poetic and self aware.

“Obsolete garbage,” he said as he flipped the switches and gears that made up the sum of its parts.

Orwell had been writing a work of his own, but struggled with authenticity, so he ran simulations for a week, hoping to get guidance from the writers of Ancient America, but the virus kept returning to the simulator, no matter how many times he had it cleaned. Orwell had always been interested in ancient history, and his parents, being historians, even gave him the name “Orwell” after the ancient British God of Order. After the study of documents from the time period in which he lived, it was discovered that Orwell released dogmas in the form of novels that dictated how the World was meant to be run. His novel, *1984*, in particular, was the model that was used in The Great Rebuilding. Orwell often remembered his home as a child; that chateau by the sea. He would sit and watch the spoodrift spray on those craggy rocks to the point where “spoodrift” was his favorite English word. He remembered how his parents read him stories from ancient times, and he recalled that library of book-drives that stretched almost infinitely.

One day, he looked through the book-drives and stopped at one that read “Everyone at the End of Everything.” The title interested and called to him almost supernaturally. He clicked the button directly under it on the shelf

and flipped through the luminous blue pages with the turn of the dial. It was in english, but he could read some words: fallen, rebirth, rise, Artemis, new.

Orwell thought of that book a lot. He often wondered if it was still alive; if it had survived the Phoenix Bombers. He wondered if it sat there in a mountain of rubble, but due to radiation, the data was lost, and the drive was corrupted. He wondered if he could read it, now that he knew more ancient english. He thought about it every night before he went to sleep, and would wake up again with the same thought. He went to bed that night the same as usual, but when he awoke, the room was blue with light; as if underwater. He looked out into the open doorway and down the hall. He looked at the simulator, its light extended out and flared in his eyes. He got up, and with wide open eyes and slow movements, he walked down the hall. He held his palm flat against the wall, and slid it as he walked for balance. Anticipation burned in his heart as he heard the faint whisper of the machine. His mind was blank and full all at the same time, but the supernatural call of everyone at the end of everything called him forward. He thought of spoodrift. He thought of the parts that made its sum. He thought of how funny a word it was. He thought of rebirth.

“Wake up,” it called.

He thought of that house by the sea.

“Wake up.”

He thought of the sirens; the panicked escape from his home.

"Wake up."

He thought of t-

Therapist: Wake up.

(Adam wakes up)

Therapist: You were sleeping.

(Therapist looks at notepad and writes)

Adam: Oh, I'm sorry.

(Therapist continues writing)

Adam: I had a dream this time.

Therapist: Oh?

Adam: It was about... well, I don't remember now.

(Therapist continues writing)

Adam: I tried again this morning. You know?

(Therapist continues writing, Adam laughs)

Adam: I really do believe that I'm like a side character in a movie. I really just exist to make people happy. No one ever listens to what I'm saying, and no one ever sees me genuinely. Except you, of course. Don't get me wrong, I think self sacrifice is the most noble thing in the world, but... I don't know.

(Adam sighs)

Adam: I think that's why I don't *just* want to die, but I want to go out like a hero. I don't want to be remembered as the coward who killed himself, but the man who jumped out in front of a speeding car to save a child. I thought killing myself would be the ultimate middle finger to the universe. I finally put myself first; no more self sacrifice, no more making other people happy. I would just be dead. Immortalized in a perpetual state of rebellion. I wonder a lot what people will think. "Oh, we should've been nicer to him," or "How sad, I had no idea he struggled like that." You know what I mean?

(Therapist looks up)

Therapist: Sorry, what did you say? I wasn't listening. I was writing my novel. It's about a suicidal man who falls in love with an autistic blind girl named Starshine.

Adam: Well I was talking about h...

Therapist: Oh, wait! I don't really know how to write this one part. Do you know any synonyms for "end?"

Adam: I-

"Hey!"

Evelyn pats her hand on my face.

"What are you doing dude?" she asked.

I smile and push her hand away, embarrassed.

“I don’t know, just lost in thought,” I say.

She laughs, “Don’t be stupid, the world is ending and you’re lost in thought?”

I laugh again, “Yes, maybe, I can’t help it.”

“Just be here now. Just breathe. Just, be *here* with me.”

I look into her green eyes turned purple by Artemis.

“I think I would like that.”

I look out at the sky. Artemis is there, plummeting through the firmament. It is purple, and yellow, and it transfigures the Sun into a red and orange spill of a sunset. The horizon flurries with color and light.

“I wish you could see it. It's beautiful,” I say.

“I don’t want to get caught up in wishes right now. How long do you think it will be?”

“‘Bout an hour, maybe two.”

She smiles, “Longer than I thought.”

“Emily will do it,” I say.

“Just tell me when it’s almost time. I want to die thinking of you. That way, I’ll never forget. And Em, of course. I’ll just die in a constant state of remembering.

She paused for a moment and looked at me.

“Let’s go home.”

“What was tha-

Sumor-el flicked off the film pen and placed it on his lap.

“I love that one. Don’t you?”

One child sitting on the ground in front of him raised a six-fingered hand.

“Did the New Earth Expedition ever survive?”

Sumor-el shook his head. “No, all the remaining human ships were destroyed, mostly from collision debris from Artemis. All the people inside died. Even Emily Stein.”

“Aw,” the children said, all drawn out in unison.

“But,” Sumor-el said, “Does anyone know *why* we study humans?”

Another girl raised her hand.

“When the world was ending, they weren’t sad,”

“Exactly right! What is this called everyone?”

“Artemis Doomsday Theory,” they said.

“Yes! The theory states that when an advanced lifeform is close to death, they will enter a state of hysteria that compels them to accept their mortality. But, in an event in which every conscious being in a civilization encounters death, they are overcome with a shared consciousness. This is called “seeing spooondrift.” What a great thing indeed, to have this infinite understanding. When Artemis fell, the people of Earth understood that they were only ever kind to themselves, loved themselves, killed themselves, hated themselves, knew themselves; everyone at the end of everything *was* everyone. They were all the same person. I know that when w-

I ran from home. It's the most vivid thing I remember. There was fighting, and a lot of bright lights. A panicked escape from my home. That phrase. It sounds so familiar. I was young then. I remember my mother; she was so beautiful. I remember her vividly, like one of those dreams where you're talking in a void with someone you haven't seen in a while. Do other people have those? I guess I wouldn't know. I think she was a historian, or an artist or something. I don't really remember it all too well. She had hair white like the ash that fell all around that volcanic moon of ours. Often, she would stand in front of the viewing window and overlook the volcanoes. Her cold, icy figure contrasted with the lightning and fire outside. She looked so beautiful in front of that red vista.

Our home was an unnatural pure white, but we were at home there. I still don't fully understand why we were there, we obviously did not belong on that planet. How could people of such delicate design, learn to thrive in a world where the seas were red rock, and the sands were glass?

I was the seventh child, and our father had died long before I was born. Out of all the other children, I was the only one with dad's black hair. I can't recall what my siblings were like, just mom. She was so loving. When I ran around the home and tripped and fell on that metal floor, mom would always console me saying, "Don't cry, my child. One day, you will understand just how important you are." They attacked when I was only three. In rushes and blurs, the images stitch together to show some

wavy picture of a frenzied escape. A panicked escape. A panicked escape. A panicked...  
I lost my train of thought.

I was drifting in space for a long time. A meaningless point in a void of white lights. I wasn't alone though; a clockwork man and woman watched me and raised me in that ship. They taught me everything I needed to know: math, science, english. Even though their emotions were only simulated, they felt real enough for me to love them back. It wasn't hard since they looked and acted just like people. As time went on and I got older, my new parents grew closer. During the simulated night, I would sneak out of my sleep capsule and wander the dimly lit corridors. I enjoyed the cold on my bare feet as they touched the metal, and the shadowy walls. I liked the quiet, harmonic hum of the machinery in them. It conjured a feeling of cold warmth like the kind I felt with my mother. It was a kind of primal feeling that could not be replaced by artificial love. That's not to say that Ora and Zera weren't good caretakers, it was just the fact that they hadn't willed me into existence to care for me as their own, and *they* were willed into being to take care of me for someone else. In the arms of fakeness I searched the empty reaches of my mind for some true expression of how I felt so I could tell Ora and Zera, but I just couldn't think of the right thing to say.

One night, when I was walking the halls, I came to a door that had previously not been opened. A chilling light extended out and reflected white on white. I could hear

them speaking. I crept up to the door with silent heels leading my steps. I cupped my hand around my ear and listened closely.

"Flaws are important Zera, otherwise she won't seem human."

"I understand, but does she have to be like *this*?"

"I think it will be good for Cal, he's very lonely."

"I suppose so, but we love him don't we? We care for him and teach him and feed him."

"Yes, but he needs more. He sees through it, it's just a fatal mistake in our programming that we can't fix. We're not human enough. I've compiled all of the data from Cal into a mind system. She'll be perfect."

"What if she tells him who she really is."

"That won't happen. We'll implant her with false memories. We'll make her believe she's human."

I knew, at that point, that that clockwork man and woman had been, ever since the beginning of my time on that ship, desperately trying to convince me that everything around me was real.

They had introduced me to Ella soon after that night. My new sister was loud and aggressive, she often worked herself up over the dumbest things. She was intensely smart, and good at a lot of things, and she knew it. When we fought, I was

often the one who conceded. Despite her rowdy nature, she had a deeply loving and passionate side. She would run up to Zera, Ora, and I with hugs and “I love you”s. The ship was, overall, warmer.

One night, she crept into my sleep capsule, and I almost kicked her.

“Hey, shhh. It’s just me,” she said.

“What are you doing?”

She laid down next to me.

“You know right? What I am?” she said.

“Yeah.”

“They gave me false memories to make me think I was a human like you. They’re lying to us. I hate it here. I want to leave. Let’s leave.”

“Okay.”

“You’re warm,” she put her arm around me.

As we grew into our teenage years, the heavy feeling that something was wrong could not be ignored. I remember times in which the atmosphere was so artificial, that I was washed in a strong dread. At one point I noticed that Zera and Ora never stopped smiling. Even when I snuck up on them in private, and they argued about the next lesson plan or what meal we were having for dinner, they just smiled and yelled like neurotic silhouettes of humans.

Ella gave no warning one dinner when she walked over to the drawer, pulled out an enormous knife, and plunged it into Zera's shoulder. She brought it down to his pelvis and shoved him over.

"Oh, I remember. My home. So beautiful" he said with a real smile as he bled out a yellow liquid.

Ella did the same for Ora, and she died with compliance; her coolants and oils spilling on the floor like dark black blood. Ella grabbed my hand.

"Let's go! This is our chance! There's a system that's close!"

I pulled away, and fell to the floor over Zera's body.

"What did you say?! What did you say?! Tell me what you said! He said something! Ella, he said something! Did you hear it?! Tell me what he said! What did you say?! I'm sorry! I'm sorry! I'm sorry! I'm sorry! Say it again! Please! Please! I'm so, so sorry! I'm so s-

The recorder replayed and stalled to a stuttering voice stuck saying "I'm sorry!" over and over again.

Amon clicked on his communicator, "Serra, Come look. I found something." Serra flew down to him and looked over his shoulder.

"What is it?" she asked.

"The boy," he said, "Here, look at this."

"A recorder?"

"Yes. After the fall of the Stein Clan he escaped in a pod and ended up here."

"Where is this even?" she asked.

"These are the remnants of Erthe. It was the second human settlement. This is all that's left of it after a collision with another celestial body."

"But that recorder isn't human," she exclaimed. "Or, at least, it's not like the ones from the Stein Clan."

"No, it's not. It's Alventeen."

He turned it in his hand and revealed the criss-cross insignia of the Alventeen manufacturers.

"What were the Alventeen doing out here?" she asked.

"Alventeen age backwards. They brought their old, or, I guess, their young here to teach them of death. Artemis Doomsday theory they called it. They were right about all of that. They were wrong about Emily Stein though."

"Isn't that a bit... morbid?"

Amon gave no reply. He just stood there, looking down at the recorder in his palm endlessly repeating "I'm sorry."

"It's done. The Stein Clan is dead. Finally," he said. "Emily Stein and her descendants have paid for violating the Accords of Natural order, and making themselves ageless. I miss home," Amon looked at her, "let's go home."

Serra's eyes teared up spontaneously, and she put his head on his chest and cried. He cried too.

"Yeah, let's go home, I miss it so much."

"Let's go home."

"We should go home."

Iomaya turned her head with that serious look she always looked with, and will look with. She notices Eromicel's pale face.

"It happened again. Didn't it?"

"Yeah," Eromicel says, or said previously.

"Who is it for," Iomaya said at some point or possibly will say.

"Me. I saw myself."

Iomaya is turning her head back with wide eyes. She thought for a moment, or will think, or is in the state of thinking. She looks with those wide open eyes at the horizon. She will compose an aubade in her head about how things end and begin, and all around welcoming the dawn. Just as the way she should, or has, or will.

"Isn't it funny? That out of all the lesser gods you're the first one to..."

"Die?" Eromicel would have asked, or would be asking, or possibly asking in another timeline.

"Who'll do it now? Who will be a prophet for those who die early deaths? Who will see the significant fragments of timelines?"

"No one. It's done. I wonder what I'll be reincarnated as," he said, or might be saying. "A human maybe?"

"What's a human?" Iomaya asked, asks, and will ask.

"A creature that experiences time linearly. In the present. Wouldn't that be fun?"

“We should really go home now. Before Qorensorevbba’a’centorfpilkmerrox gets mad.”

Eromicel laughs, and laughed. “What’ll she do? Kill, killed, is killing me?”

“Eromicel! Don’t speak in trichronos. Especially about her.”

“I don’t care what the higher gods hear!” he shouts with jubilation, while shouting previously with jubilation. “I am dying, will die, and have died already!”

“Eromicel!” she says.

“Sorry, I lost myself for a moment,” he will say.

“We should really just go home.”

“I don’t want to go home now.”

She furrowed her brow, and is staring at him, but she will look back into those eyes and sees a yearning soul. She surveys the shore, the spoodrift crashed and will crash, and it sprays the air with salty sea wind. Eromicel, cathartic and pensive, breathes and simultaneously will breathe eventually, while having breathed in the past the salty spoodrift. The deep, cool, water-air solvent fills his nose and mouth. It dances on his tongue, like it has before, and always will. Forever, in that present state of past and future, he breathes, and breathed, and will breathe again the metaphysical spoodrift that lies in a metaphysical void outside of time. Once and future.

“Let me show you something,” he has said before and says now.

He grabbed her hand and they will transposition themselves to the decrepit sign.

“Welcome to S ltw t r!” it read and still reads.

Iomaya will ask, “The Siltwater Sign?”

Eromicel laughs. “Not even Aven-rolla knows about this, “ he said as he will produce and is currently producing from his coat pocket various white wooden vowels. He places the letters back into place until they read and will read, “Welcome to Saltwater!”

“Saltwater, it’s much better than Siltwater, right?”

Iomaya smiles at him and eventually will fall into a sob. She embraced him and he consoled her saying, “It’s okay. I will see you again, and, surely, I am already seeing you after death already.”

“I’ll miss you,” she said, says, and will say.

“Thank you.”

“For missing you?”

“No,” Eromicel pauses and will proceed to say, “Thank you for being there for me. In most of my incarnations, you’re there, only different, kind of the same. I know it’s you though.”

“What about the ones when I’m not there?”

“They were horrible.”

She laughs, and laughed, and will laugh.

“I will see you again, one day, in one timeline or another. In one world or another it will happen. I mean, it happened before, and it’s happening now. We might cross paths with barely a glance and a calling feeling, or maybe with an intense companionship like now, or maybe a deep love, whether romantic or not, completes us as beings, or may-



