

THE TROJANS

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EPISODE 3: VENTÔSE (February 20 – March 20)

"I know how unbelievable this must seem now, today, when our practices are if anything exactly otherwise and those who held court in the old massive shards were either forcibly unplugged or retreated on their own into ever more distant servers, unilateral dial-tone p2ps and desolate mirrors. But there was a time, remember? When the convention was to simplify the figures to the point of extinction. Before the full-repeater rumblepaks, before the PICC lines. Sinon... Are you listening?"

The gallery forks but barely. Cass's hand finds the gauge at the base of his spine and feels the pulse on her fingertips through the small rose window.

"That was how you procreated your brand, like a kind of voluntary absorption and cooptation and then splitting the whole thing down the middle. Mitoses all done at the backend of a prompt. You just had to know how to beg the question just right, you know? Si?"

Sinon nods left and right, and the gallery forks again. A thin wedge of white walls advancing towards them comes to rest, as they do, against his forehead, creasing it along the axis of symmetry and trestled on his nose and chin against the thin blue bruise beginning to green slightly. Cass can't count anymore the number of times they've been given the option.

They're identical now, the paths. On both near sides a thin blindered transom above a central Tilt-N-Swivel 360 doorknob-shaped unoccupied wall mount, and on the far, an inch from the ceiling where Sinon can't see but knows it's there, two opaque disks like albino moles and ticking quietly in unison: the alarms.

With the edge splitting his horopter, each of his mutually blind eyes have an identical hallway all of their own, an identical depth of field the wall's collapse of parallax flattens out. His own inset disk threadily beats warmer. "What do you see?" Sinon sighs. He wants to say: pictures.

"Thinking, Cass," rolling his right eye towards her puts the left fork out into smooth white paint. And rolling it back restores it, saying, "every time we do this, we choose one way or another, but I don't know which way. I know there are forks there, but the ones I see are the same, single one, in parallel to itself."

On edge, she says, grinding into his spine where the plasticine bows in over it, "Then it doesn't matter. If every unique instance is the same, I mean."

"Cass, we've taken how many now, left and right? If they're really different, then why have none of them recrossed? They'd have to eventually, by now. What if each time we come here, we split. We keep walking down both hallways."

"Let's see, Si. Let's see." Cass pushes further in. A rivulet of blood flows from a vertical cut down Sinon's face and trails the wedge of the wall, tending left, and they follow it along what must be a slight and differentiating depression, pooling under the empty mount at the wall's horizontal center. Sinon plies; Cass stops tracing the rim of his gauge and squats to lift him, her hands gripping the crests of his hips, fitting him around the cold metal of the knob. Where his back meets the wall its surface dimples, extending into a furrow from the ceiling to the floor. From eye level in Cass's unbroken squat, an engraved brass plaque reloads between Sinon's legs, and reads:

"Instance Dungeon Containing Large Anthropoid Ribosome, 21st c. SoHo, New York. Gift from the Pfizer Sealed Air and Crystal Candy Corp. Foundation. In this Instance, remaining human characteristics are purely skeuomorphic. Not appropriate for immature visitors. Some discomfort is natural during the generation of new copies of the location. Expect sudden movements."

A sudden breeze in the otherwise dead air brushes her cheeks and the down on the back of her neck as she leans in to take Sinon's cock in her mouth, the compressed, clipped waves of information demodulating his pulse. Unregulated

transfers of high-band current folded back on themselves bend his knees and softly pedal his legs in front of him, on either side of Cass's head.

Sinon's gaped smile emits the characteristic sidetones, the feedback hum of baud on baud, as a white film of nanowebbing envelops him, pressing the length of his back into the groove. The transom above him dribbles a watery salve from its vents, running down his torso and onto Cass's flexed knee. She swabs it with her right index across Sinon's closed eyelids, binding the lashes together at their stiffened points, and down the open slit from nose to chin. The cut's lips pucker slightly outward, staying open where the fused crystalline blood stents them.

"Si," Cass says, gliding her fingers across the stucco of small, firm bubbles that cover him. Sinon, somewhere inside himself, is totally glazed.

Under a miniaturized and crumbling adobe arch dominating a palm-sized heap of fused silica shards a strange sort of coprolith curled up. He leans his good eye down to it and sees the tiny deadlights opening into the hollowed spiral. Inside, some of the shards are standing up.

"Si?" Her breath is on his neck and he doesn't turn, tweezing out an upright shard between two fingers and twisting it in the light. "Where are you?"

A cornice above the adobe lintel advances into his shadow like a hood.

"Cass, I leveled up."