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New Old Treachery

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Guy sat back on the bench, wiped the sweat from his brow and adjusted his brightness. A sideways glance confirmed that next to him Defkid was still engrossed in his spastic vogue. Foot traffic stirred a dusty haze, softly illuminated by the hot afternoon sun reflecting off the yellowing Akbari compound that covered the OpenGarden courts. He dropped his datafeeds to watch the scene dry, anticipating the prospect of his impending liberation. It was a good day to watch old people die.

It had come to this, a forced mid-life retirement. Not long ago Guy had thought of himself a success, a specialist developer pushing the century forward. His AR apps had been considered cutting edge at release, and the income they provided had allowed him to relax, working contract jobs just enough to support his true passion, the enrichment and curation of his archive. A devout follower of the Veridian Path, he kept digital records of every object that had ever

had any significance in his life. Every unwanted gift, child's toy, picture, book, song and movie. Every social relationship that had ever solidified in his presence. He organized and taxonomized, bought and sold, only ever keeping an object as long as it had use, never allowing them to overstay in his time and space. "If you're not sharing it, get rid of it!" the Chairman said. Guy never shared. The archive was his alone.

Years of careful curation passed, and Guy neglected his skills. The worlds he had helped shape were embedded in the ubiquitous data fog that smothered the planet, he figured his job wasn't going anywhere soon. He noted the rise of the gesture frameworks with indifference, dismissing the Wavers as gimmicky interface fanboys, nothing with real staying power he figured. The frameworks matured, and before Guy realized the error in his neglect, apps on the scale that had taken him weeks to construct were being waved together in mere days, the Wavers beat him on price, and were orders of magnitude ahead on speed and sophistication. By the time he made an effort to catch up, he found none of it beyond his understanding, but in terms of manual dexterity and hand-eye coordination he was a dinosaur. His market was cornered, and in the space of a few months he saw his legacy ported out from under him, finding himself eligible for New Welfare. No more jobs. No more inner city. Relegated to a life in the Complex, stuck with the Old, all but a minor accident or ailment away from EuthCamp.

The wind picked up, rustling the thick photovoltaic blinds protruding from above each window of the housing units stacked high around the courts. As far as Complexes went this one was more livable than most. Highly ranked on BBQ:Source, the courts were one of the better food spots outside of the city, giving the Younger a reason to leave town besides visiting their decrepit relatives. An adjacent transit stop meant there was always a steady stream of commuters coming through, picking up their orders on route back to the retrofitted homeshares in what was left of the former suburbs. On sight the scene could be described as pleasant, but the stench of large scale fabrication lingered for years, and sickly sweet undertones of incontinence gels mixing with the old-furniture smell of the Complex residents still gave the place an ever-present air of impending death.

Gyrodrones buzzed overhead, a swarm began to collect to support of a squad of players running in a low crouch along the wall at the far end of the courts. Each member held a full size fluorescent tracking weapon at the ready, Peace Corps recruitment officers kitted out in full ComCap gear headed each team. Guy checked the air for spectator slots and found one open, pulling it down to be allocated a drone from the swarm and get a fly-over view of the MMARTS action. His viewpoint showed the apparent objective; insurgent crab people holed up in an empty tank husk, superimposed on what had been the playground jungle-gym just seconds before.

He raised a finger to gain altitude and panned the drone over, spotting a second squad setting up sniper positions in the shrubbery on the surrounding rooftops. He flicked the view off, never really cared much for games. The kid remained seated silently on the bench next to him, chopping the air in a broken robotic speed-haka.

The Old clustered around in the shade at the long communal tables out on the courts, engaging in lively discussion, arguments and gossip. Those who weren't too afraid to actually go outdoors anyway. The world had moved past them, and most simply accepted this as fact, though resigned to life at the Complex, several could still be credited with at least attempting to maintain a contribution to society. Tending gardens, watching children, teaching old crafts in the open workspaces, or contributing their memoirs and whatever dated wisdom they possessed to the Archives for History to date-mine. Others weren't able to accept their obsolescence, now their primary function was to complain and generally impair progress. They too sat at the tables, clutching tablets that provided lifelines to their trusted media, heatedly discussing events they would never understand in terms of hopelessly dated paradigms. Guy couldn't believe they actually still let these people vote. It wouldn't matter soon anyway.

Still time to kill, so Guy disabled his usual ignore settings and flicked on local conversation. Gaudy, tasteless profiles sprang into view, automatically generated and screamed at out the world

from the wastelands of the old Social Networks. He cringed. Anyone with a name and a modicum of self-respect operated a subtle private node, but crude dichotomous social models still seemed to satisfy the Old in their need for expressing social interactions, and the younger were happy to leave them to it. The opinions screamed at the world from the networks of the Old remained largely unchanged. Many had violently opposed instating New Welfare and razing the suburbs in favor of the Complexes, folding only when the third and final economic collapse had forced them to the realization that their accrued savings and pensions held no actual value in the real world. The last shell had been lifted, and no ball was to be found. Now they deemed material and energy allowances for fabrication their inalienable right, demanded living quarters suited to maintaining vanished lifestyles, and complained about the quality of the healthcare provisions instated to extend their frail and unproductive lives. Good going assholes, Guy thought, you could have taken care of all this 50 years ago if you'd actually given a shit.

As a Veridian disciple, the resources Guy was allocated to compensate his newfound redundant status were more than adequate to meet his needs. Quarters in the Complex easily matched the Inner City for size, and in most respects made more efficient use of the energy and space available. Guy's life had been almost completely virtualized, with every new advance in fabrication technology he had digitized more and more of his belongings, opting to use disposable

replicas that could simply be fed back to the system for credit when he no longer had any use for them. Once evicted, moving out of his inner city apartment had been hassle free. He had simply gooped his disposables, digitized the last few real objects he possessed and left. On arrival in the Complex he re-instantiated his belongings in the freshly fabricated living quarters, and found himself in a world where in a certain sense nothing he owned could be considered real. It was time to take the next step. The words of the Chairman echoed through his mind, distorted by repeated recall and the haze of depression; "Envy the dead. Only dead people have no problems. There's no-one so green as the dead." His planned evanescence was at hand, time to gracefully disintegrate and vanish entirely, escape life and embrace decay.

Defkid was the key. The Nicaraguan born son of an Anglo-American oil marriage, orphaned in the exec slaughter after the Pacific spill. Never having spoken a word, at age 7 he signed fluently in three languages, making him a natural to the gestural interfaces that had risen to popularity during his youth. Now he had a Dex rating Wavers would give their legs for, which he focused only for the purpose of his preferred art form. The final artifact, unholy grail of the Neo-Veridian micro-cults. The final condensation of an individuals archive into a single object, freeing them from their data and enabling passage to a next life. There were myriad interpretations of the ritual, Defkid's was particularly lethal. His

artifacts were not only the intercessors of a symbolic transition, he was a taker of lives. Guy had seen the aftermath of his work, the mess it left people in. Smoke rising as they laid out and the world as they knew it faded behind them. If he was going to transition to the next stage, Defkid's work would be his path.

The meeting had been set up by an Initiate of the Protocol. Finding people and their things was usually easy, but the kid had proven impossible to ping. He may have been a prodigal meta-media data-sculptor, but he lived his life as an analog throwback, no profile, no traceable nodes, nothing. No digital record was left in the fog since the murder of his parents. If you looked hard enough it was possible to mine footage of him performing in the background of material available in the vast public databases, but there was no record of his entire process, and not a single view of the virtual workspaces he must have constructed to enable his art.

The encounter had already taken hours, but conversation was kept to an absolute minimum. Guy had recognized the kid immediately when he appeared and approached the bench, signing at him with directed, terse inflection.

[*** you want ***?] Guy frowned and hesitated to respond, waiting to see if his libraries would update to interpret the gestured slang.

[Fuck you want Old Man?] Clear enough. Guy pulled a cheap pair of shades from his breast pocket and held them out as the kid

approached, "Talk" he said.

[Just shut up and push over your archive.] Guy shut up. He watched as the kid began what appeared to be the conduction of a stadium sized orchestra, erratically switching from large scale sweeps to minute gestures, as if micro managing each instrument individually. Only a few of the gestures were recognizable, and any entertainment value soon wore off. The sun broke through the clouds and the wait for the final artifact began.

A gang of toddlers came screaming across the court at the maximum speeds their untethered strollers would allow, cursing and barking commands in K-Gart creole, frenziedly gesticulating like a fast-forwarded pack of crackhead gangster midgets. They easily outpaced pedestrian traffic, riding squealing rings around the fat, lazy and disabled slugging along in their reclining seats. Guy pulled up their sandbox, his eyes immediately shocked shut. He turned his head and opened them again, blinking, bewilderedly attempting to absorb the bizarre fluctuating memescape splayed out around him.

The action appeared to have roots in some kind of cart game, played amidst a landscape augmented with the crude but colorful illustrative style of the four year old mind, incorporating battles and trade fought out with weaponry pulled from an arsenal of a century's media, and based on a system of rules fabricated and broken at the speed of the playground. Kids this young obviously

couldn't draw for shit, but they sure as hell understood building blocks. At birth their mothers had found the glasses to have a soothing effect, now the exocog-natives ran their own worlds. Several had never bothered to learn how to walk, most 'spoke' only K-Gart. The Old would cardiac arrest at the sight of the imagery rushing past in the textures of this realm, and Guy winced as an imagined foe exploded in a particularly distasteful library of gore. He swatted his way out of the sandbox and exhaled. Next to him Defkid appeared to be playing the world's smallest violin at the actual speed of sound. He stopped, stood up and tossed back the shades,

[Now you wait,] he signed, [Don't fuck yourself up out here old man.] He turned and headed up the ramp, disappearing into the Complex. Guy waited.

The sky had taken on a reddish hue when an RC buggy came down the ramp and pulled up at the bench. Guy picked up the bag in its cradle and watched as it whirred off again. Unfolding the bag revealed his final artifact. He turned it over in his hand watching the shadows play on its multifaceted surface. Holographic suggestions of a life past haunted every angle, triggering gut responses, dislodging fragments of memory and fractured sensory flashbacks. He would contemplate this work the the rest of his life, simultaneously freed from yet bound by its content. He felt along the center curve, finding the chamber release and clicking it open.

It's black chamber formed a dense void of forgotten dreams. He loaded it up and cocked back the ignition, staring at it for one last moment before raising it to face level and triggering the incinerator.

Ripping hard, blood streamed into his eyes, his head rolled back as he felt the corners of his mouth tear into a permanent smile.

This was definitely a pipe.