

I STILL LIKE TO THINK OF THAT CYBERNETIC MEADOW

act of love. Please copy.

♡2020 by Scarlett Roderich. Copying art is an act of love. Please copy.

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tiny body

heavy head

My terminal emitted an amber glow, outlining my words in a warm phosphorescent fuzz. 80 Hz. Characters flew from my brain and through my nerves, reaching my fingertips and eventually buckling the springs under each key. Human interface devices were a funny thing. Adapters with the express purpose of fitting square pegs in round holes. I had them in a plastic storage container on the ground. It was too heavy for me to lift on my own, but slid easily on the metal shavings which dusted the floor. Keyboards, mice, joysticks, all of that. I figure they're physical evidence that the digital world exists to serve the analogue. What happens on the inside is none of our concern as long as it works. If it takes human input and spits out human-readable and accurate output, that's it.

I leaned backwards in my office chair, seat fabric torn open by constant use, exposing a nail head right in the middle. Sometimes I would cover it with a blanket to keep the nail from digging into my ass, but it was a freezing night and I needed the blanket to keep my teeth from clattering. I had to pull the chair forward to keep it near the desk. The slight slant of the floor made it roll back slightly.

“Analogue supremacy, huh?”

I had a habit of speaking to myself when my thoughts couldn't go beyond the surface of a subject. It used to annoy the other members of my crew when I would make such empty statements standing behind their seats or loudly from my own. I didn't need to worry about that anymore. Not to make it sound like I didn't miss them. Cary, Reki, Nnedimma. Remembering their names made me feel warm, even if it took some concentration to recall their faces. They went outside somewhere, I imagine in another identical bunker within a few miles. The dust storms were too thick to make a trek anywhere if you wanted to find your way back. I was too scared to go with. Besides, if the wind blew from the northeast, it could have some residual radioactivity. I wasn't about to fuck with that.

I shifted my weight and fell back forwards, my eyes taking a moment to re-focus on the flickering screen. It read only: “A TECHNOROMANTICIST MANIFESTO”. After straining my eyes for a bit, I sighed and took a sip of the oolong I had just brewed. At least I wouldn't run out of food and drink supplies for a while. Luxuries like my tea were in

great supply, even after the others took what they could carry.

I had found a box of 5.25" floppies after the others left, stuffed under an aluminum desk that no one wanted to approach when we were together, on account of the rat shit. There wasn't much to do stuck in a bunker with a bunch of food and the old IBMs, so I looked anyway. When I first pulled the box out, I was pleased. I could back up the little programs I bodged together. I made simple games and little animations sometimes. Never was much of a programmer, that was more Nnedimma's deal.

Being able to keep my work was convenient, but I had a feeling I was wasting the gift that box had given me. Could I be of use to anyone? I had it nice in that bunker, well-fed and with a lifetime to spend doing what I wanted, given that it could be accomplished with what I had on hand.

As much as I wanted to help anyone who needed me, I didn't have much to contribute. No technical skills, no skills in logistics or leadership to organize those of us who were left, nothing really. Some big ideas were bouncing around in my head though, if only I could get them out. They got on everyone's nerves before, but if I wrote them down in full then they'd carry some weight. I'd get them down beyond the generalities, beyond the titles. I would leave them right outside the sealed outer door, I thought, on a windy night when no one would be walking around out there. I hoped they would be found and read.

I spent a lot of time thinking about computers. Not how they work, really. Like I said, not much of a programmer. I'm not a hardware girl either. I was more interested in what they meant. What they did for us. How we changed them to fit our needs, but they changed us just as much. It was terrifying. It was beautiful.

So much for that. I got a good title down, but nothing else came to me. I started some sentences but immediately deleted them. They had nothing to do with my manifesto, they were just words exiting my stream of consciousness.

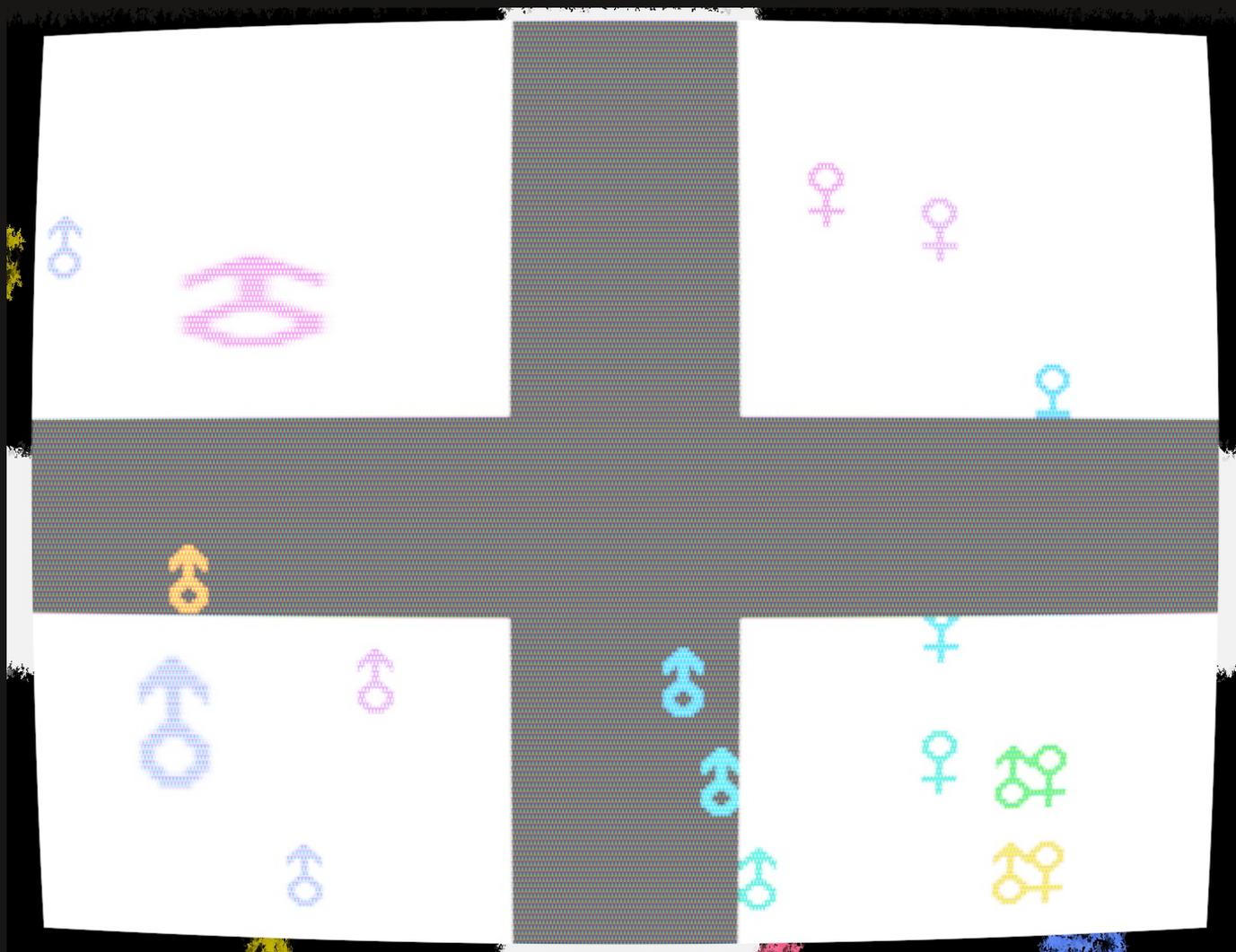
I heard it.

From the wall beside me: a soft mrow, then a deeper mow. A cat? On the other end of the wall was a storage cell, one of the three the others nearly cleared out when they left. Snapped out of my frustration and boredom, I charged out of the computer room and into the hallway where the doors for the cells were. Initially charging for the cell labeled "jedan," I

slowed right as I reached the door, realizing that the cat would probably be hungry and might want to hurt me. After taking a moment to prepare myself for a fight and to adjust to the anxiety that came with entering a room that wasn't one of my usuals, I carefully entered.

Checking every angle as I moved, I approached the section of wall opposite my seat by the terminals. Another box. Kittens. No parents in sight. They were frail things, hardly able to support the weight of their own heads. A little orange one kept tumbling forward any time it tried to stand up. Its eyes were so big, I wanted to cry.

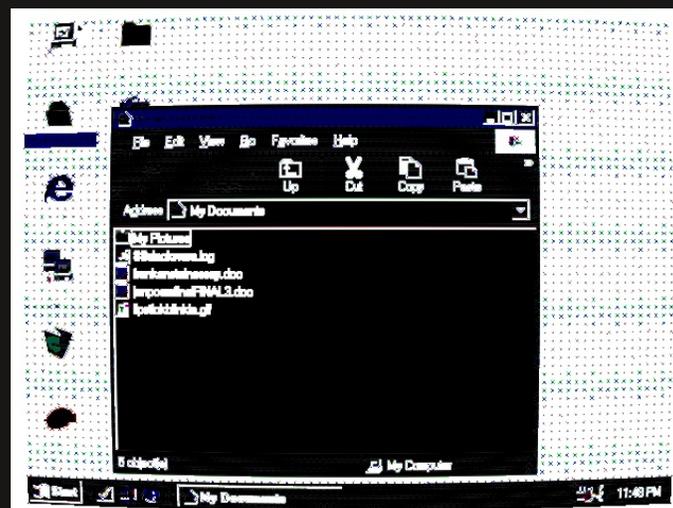
Without any thought, I turned around and went to a still-stocked storage cell. I was going to be a mother.



Early in my time working with my therapist, she made the awful decision of sending me home with a diagnostic test for the dissociative spectrum. "Answer these questions, tally up your responses, and compare your scores to the average person with each of these disorders." It was to tell me where I land in the space between "I zone out sometimes" and "I have entirely independent identities and M. Night Shyamalan likes to make movies about how scary I am".

I scored high. Like, really high. I took it again and again, making sure I was reading the questions and understanding the scoring system right, and even my most conservative runs through it left me up there with people who have schizophrenia, DID, and other things you don't want to be sitting around for a week thinking about without contact with your therapist. We met up again as scheduled that next week and she told me to ignore the test, that it didn't really mean anything and it was a bad idea to give me something that distressing. Still though, I am on that spectrum. We're still trying to figure out where I am and what to do with it, but I'm paranoid and I dissociate. I detach from the world and lose myself, as periods of my life fly by without notice. Doing nothing. Feeling nothing.

I'm in it for the honey. The material. The sensory. The slow. The thoughtful. The real. The honey-sweet written word keeps my feet stuck to the ground, forces me to slow down and come in contact with real things. It's hyper-real, beyond what my senses can construct from the world around me unassisted. The spark of poetry is language made physical, dragging me into the real world through the one thing I can understand. I'm the flies coming for the honey, but I aim to be the poet too, living on the doses of sweetness that I want to produce.



When I first met you
I didn't know I did.

My mental mortar
erased you
before I could recognize you.

I am your foremost admirer
The poems of the prophets
call to me,
as does the quiet love of your followers.

But since you were
blown into blessed pieces
there's no use
in continuing to look.

So I piece myself apart
and replace mine with yours.
Leg from Muhammad,
tongue from Christ,
liver from Siddhartha
and heart from you yourself

I wonder
like the ship of the hero
each part foreign from my starting place
do I remain?
Or am I a grotesque human collage?

Or am I god
rebuilt
with only myself to learn from?

God and the Siege Howitzer Mounted
Within My Hypoglossal Canal

My Glowing Pet

Glowing friend, your light
has given me
everything I know.
To run you require
a sacrifice

I click open my knife
forgotten forever in the drawer with the butterfly yo-yo,
the heart necklace of an immature love
and the compass
with the atomic symbol.

With the blade I
etch
and cut
and stab
to draw sand
from the glass
long left unflipped.

It slides along your surface
sinks in
and is gone.

On the Disappearance of My Pet That Once Glowed

My friend I no longer
can nourish you
with the grainy milk
that others feed
to your factory-brothers

As you shrivel
and your smooth glass
loses its glow

I look elsewhere

or try to but I can't
help but turn my head
as the escaping
luminescence
shrieks out a pinhole,
so I throw you in the drawer
where I left her heart
and walk away

until your screaming
finally ends.

all watched over

