

**The Public Be Damned**

*by*  
**Teo**

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## Notes

*Birth increased population to 512,800,011  
On Workday50 Q2 FY4037.  
Mother's income: 20,000 gilder,  
Mother's occupation: care worker.  
Father's income: 30,000 gilder,  
Father's occupation: private soldier.  
Mother to take unpaid leave to raise the child,  
Data on this detriment have been compiled.  
Risk of family facing financial difficulty:  
Very high as the father works in the military.  
Education is forecasted to cost 81,000 gilder,  
We must lower this burden on the taxpayer,  
Child's birth cost 5,030 gilder at Lord's Hospital,  
If income matches his father's, he'll take 20 years to pay it all.  
Birth place: Bronrar, Gildland,  
Birth name: Arthur de la Mer.*

# Accounts 1: The Age of Nostalgia

## Statement 1: The Art of the State

*TODAY'S TOP HEADLINES:*

*Chemical Plant EXPLOSION Kills 26, Injures 58*

*Record High Temperatures Hit Gildland*

*Montpelerin Stock Exchange Up 1.98%*

*Elimperia Forcefully Harvests Organs from Detainees*

*Superheroes Aren't Super Anymore, and That's a Good Thing*

Looking down, Arthur only realised the silent train was coming because of the announcement. Smiling stewards welcomed passengers and were unacknowledged by everyone except for some children, some old people, and Arthur. It was like a mobile restaurant, there were dining tables with complimentary wine and champagne. The enticing flavours of the food hit everyone on the platform as the train arrived. The menu offered dishes from across the world. People speed-walked through carriages to avoid sitting at the same table as someone else. To save time, most ate breakfast on their way to work. Arthur took a seat by the window in a chair large and comfortable enough to sleep on. Behind Arthur sat the Lady with the Red Briefcase, heading to meet someone she loved. In front of him sat someone talking on their phone about business with an earphone playing music in their other ear. The music they were listening to was made by AI. The AI software created songs on the fly based on the listener's tastes and current mood. The program had created trillions of different songs, all unique to each listener, never to be heard by anyone else unless shared by the original listener. This specialisation divided society even more, as people were decreasingly able to bond over music, but was greatly profitable to record labels as listeners consumed more music than ever. Arthur shook his head, as he heard the person beside him listening to a self-help audiobook at double-speed for efficiency whilst playing a game on their phone marketed as 'good for the brain' that involved connecting three shapes of the same colour. Arthur never used his phone on public transport, as he always hoped someone would start a conversation with him. It upset him that the chance of having conversations, even brief ones with strangers, to tether himself to his community and build a sense of trust had been destroyed by personal technology. The person in front of Arthur said on their phone, "There's never been a better time to be alive!" This comment was so shocking to Arthur that he couldn't resist looking at them. Seeing their happiness, Arthur wondered, "How can anyone smile in a time like this, when one knows of the suffering going on around the world? It feels ignorant to smile, have fun and laugh about anything at all, even rude and inappropriate." To freshen his mind with a sight more pleasurable, he looked out the gold-framed window to perhaps be swept away by the majesty of the sky. However, upon noticing billboards playing an ad for something he thought should be illegal, he looked away to the train's chandeliers. Arthur found so much to dislike when outside that he stayed at home more and more as the years went by.

In ten minutes, the train travelled fifteen miles north to Montpelerin, the capital city of Gildland. It was a forest of skyscrapers. Aeroplanes wrote adverts in the sky. Beyond the city centre stood the Pelerin Mountain, double the height of the tallest skyscraper there. Atop the mountain was the Prime Minister's official residence, the Mountain House. Upon arriving at Leemington Station sponsored by Opti Energy Ltd., there was a storm of announcers, ads, thousands of people talking, and conductors whistling. The station was heavily air-conditioned and brightly lit. The commuters crowded the train doors, standing tightly together. Arthur sat in wait of them alighting, watching them with pity and wonder. Once the train doors opened, many ran to work. Those running were workers paid for performance instead of a fixed salary. Most employers knew that, just like how they paid workers as little as possible, most workers put in as little effort as possible. Performance-related pay was becoming increasingly common due to the belief that it was more cost-efficient and motivated workers to perform better. Such workers were evaluated by quantitative metrics, and, in certain occupations, ratings from customers. Studies showed that performance-related pay increased the use of anti-depressant and anti-anxiety medication. Arthur wrote in his notebook about the relationship between the public's stress and the interests of the wealthy, "The increased stress of the people greatly benefits the wealthy. Among the causes of stress are wage stagnation as the cost of living rises, performance-related pay, conspicuous consumption, social media, compulsory unpaid overtime, urbanisation, precarious work, and drama-focused news media, all of which the wealthy profit from. Reversing these causes of stress would hurt their profits so are not reversed. Instead, the public are left with remedies that only further increase the profits of the wealthy such as the increased consumption of prescription drugs, junk food, holidays, self-help books, alcohol, yoga, therapists, and escapist entertainment. A loss in economic activity from workers committing suicide, slipping in performance, or taking days off to recover is more than supplemented by imported labour. Like flowers trampled on by predators chasing prey, they destroy our lives as they chase profit." Arthur got up when they began leaving. One of the runners tripped in front of him. Because she didn't offer payment for help, no-one offered help. There was a time when people provided favours out of instinct, but an app called FiverFavour changed the behaviour of many people. The app allowed users to request favours for five or more gilders. Since its inception a few years prior, it had become common for people to reply 'What's in it for me?' when asked for a favour. Arthur went to help the lady expecting to be refused, and as he put a hand on her shoulder, she shouted, "Get off me!" so he obliged.

Towards one end of the station were the platforms for the transcontinental railway service which connected Gildland to the world's continents via hundreds of underground tunnels for waste, cargo, workers, tourism, and the military. Before the exit there were restaurants in which customers dined alone, a gun shop, a supermarket in which price tags automatically updated based on the popularity of the product and their competitors' prices, a perfume shop, a souvenir shop, a travel agents, and a jeweller's. The shops inspired Arthur to write, "To the passers-by, the abundance in all the glittering shops is reassuring. Visions of scarcely-filled shelves so quickly conjure up images of crises in distant, poor countries. They know consumers are attracted to abundance so they purposely order too much, waste is actually an intrinsic part of their business plans." ... "When shopping, people are in a dream state because they're always thinking of the future. Within each package is a promise of tomorrow. The supermarket sells the feast for later and alcohol for the weekend binge, the travel agent sells the future getaway from this soulless country, the perfume shop sells the fragrance they'll give for a birthday present." ... "The spirit of revolution has been commodified. Why

bother with the dangers of a political revolution when you can you buy a personal revolution? Why bother with the dangers and sacrifices of a political revolution when you can simply purchase a new car, a bigger house, or a self-help book? Even the changing of one's clothing style provides a sort of rebirth. Why attempt a political revolution when you can buy a fictional book about one and live vicariously through the characters? Within every new technology is that same exciting spirit of revolution that used to exist in politics. Who cares for a political revolution when new pieces of technology revolutionise the world every year? The increasingly revolutionary nature of technology has robbed the spirit of revolution from politics. New technology helps pacify wage stagnation with new improvements in size, speed, power, ingenuity, and utility. When going on holiday, the stress of work and political frustrations can be left behind, the thought of their next holiday always remains in their arsenal of coping mechanisms. Holiday packages therefore provide temporary utopias and are an anti-revolutionary force helping maintain the status quo. To shop is to dream. So long as there is abundance, the future is safeguarded, so long as the future is safeguarded, revolution is impossible. The Plutocrats are safe, so long as the people have affordable food."

Above the streets of Gildland, stretching from pavement to pavement, were holographic billboards every fifty metres. They were operated by Securiton, a private security company. In residential areas, the billboards were silent, except for messages from Prime Minister Riley, and the Overwatch, but always audible in commercial areas. The billboards showed each viewer ads relevant to their consumer profile. Multiple people could view a billboard simultaneously and each see and hear a different ad. Most ads were each five seconds long, full of quick cuts, fluorescent colours, and loud actors speaking as fast as comprehension allowed. To Arthur, the billboards were playing an Appallinc ad for the Intermind. What the Intermind did precisely was not yet public knowledge. The ad was silent and had a close-up of a face with a red light in each pupil. At the bottom was written, 'The future is screenless'.

Moving pavements had been implemented all over Gildland to get people in work and shops faster. They were publicly funded, but privately owned. For revenue, they were comprised of screens playing ads. The edges of them were unmoving to allow pedestrians to stand still or exit vehicles.

In the streets of Montpelerin, people made their way around like factory farm animals. It was as though it was overpopulated to encourage people to look up to the billboards. During the ever-rarer days of snow, the roads, train tracks, and moving pavements could heat to melt the snow and thereby ensure workers had no excuse to stay at home. Arthur wrote of the city, "People come here to get rich as quickly as possible with the hope of never returning. There's always loud construction work. If you were to acknowledge with a friendly smile someone walking your way, they'd think you're insane or about to rob them. The Royal Family live here. Riley lives here. Need more be said? Almost none of the restaurants are Gildish. There was clearly no thought put into designing this city, other than to get as many workers, renters, customers, and employers as possible into one place. Someone with respect for beauty and harmony would never mix the bland, contemporary buildings with the beautiful buildings made centuries ago. In truly great cities, beautiful buildings have room to breathe as they're far away from skyscrapers. Sunshine pours down on them and the blue sky serves as their background allowing spectators to concentrate on their beauty, they stand undisturbed in their full glory and in harmony with similar masterpieces, but in Montpelerin our architectural triumphs are suffocated by the cold, intimidating skyscrapers surrounding them. None of the

new buildings are inspiring or innovative, tourists rightly ignore them and go to the great parks and the old, decaying buildings.”

However, the worst sight of all for Arthur was the children going to work. Four years prior, the Age Equality Movement had triumphed in allowing Gildish citizens to work at any age. The movement was started by Pete Riley before he became Prime Minister. He argued in a video titled ‘Gildland, We Need to Talk’ for people of all ages to have equal rights. In the video, he wore white, thick-rimmed glasses, a tweed blazer, and a red t-shirt with the word ‘FUN’ on it. His hair was short, curly, and neon-red. Shortly before releasing the video, he’d worked at Riverlake in the political philosophy department for over a year. Arthur and his wife who worked there, Maria, never got along with him, mostly because of their political differences. The video had gloomy piano music in the background, as he spoke, “Gildland, we need to talk. Millions of young people are desperately in need of our help, and here’s why. Young people are not allowed to work until they reach the age of eighteen because of the outdated notion that work is dangerous even though most jobs today only involve sitting at a desk. Millions of young people are defenceless against the abuses of their parents, simply because they can’t afford to escape. I remember what it was like to want freedom as a youngster, and because there’s not a single day that goes by when I don’t think about what happened to me, a day doesn’t go by when I don’t think about what’s happening right now to millions of young people around the world. In this time of ours, most parents don’t have the time to look after themselves and their offspring. Liberating young people would also liberate their parents as the young would become more independent at an earlier age, and that’s a good thing. Did you know that abuse towards offspring from parents has increased by 49% since the minimum age requirement to work has been eighteen? What makes it even harder for young people to gain freedom is that they cannot vote until they are eighteen years old, and the only reason they aren’t allowed to is because of the old-fashioned belief that young people are less intelligent than old people. This belief is hateful, toxic, and, actually, very dangerous. Young people are better at learning languages than old people, and they are better at homework than them as well, so young people clearly are not less intelligent than old people, but simply have different skills. Young people should be allowed to vote because politics affects them before they are eighteen and will affect them for longer than it affects old people. Everyone is at a varying degree of intelligence and experience on their eighteenth birthday yet age is used to determine whether someone can vote. Do we not say that ‘age is just a number’? There are nine-year-olds that literally know more about politics than ninety-year-olds. We, as Gildlanders, pride ourselves on judging people by their merit, but we are failing millions of young people by judging them by their age. It is incumbent on you who are watching this to start battling for the equal rights of the young. There is no alternative way of saving them. Now, let’s get moving, it’s the year FY4075, stop living in the past, it’s killing our young people.” Riley had written the script for the video then waited for an opportune time to record and release it. His opportunity came after a few weeks when news of two children being tortured by their parents shook the public. Glad to see the public’s horrified reaction to the story, Riley rushed to record and release the video. It was an overnight success, with the help of the minor celebrity Riley had beforehand and a marketing campaign funded mostly by a few wealthy men that caught wind of the idea. Very quickly, children, but mostly adults, protested in the streets, vandalising hundreds of schools at night, including the school Arthur attended and loved as a child. They carried placards with such slogans as ‘End ageism now!’ ‘Only weak, old people fear the young!’ and ‘Our freedom is not up for debate.’ Other popular slogans included ‘Rise up!’ and ‘Smash the system!’

despite every major corporation endorsing the movement. Arthur said to one of his favourite students, Oscar Profundis, “They are so short-sighted. They accepted the first thing they heard without ever questioning whether there could be unintended consequences or that his claims might be wrong, and of course fell for all of those misleading statistics. This would never have been successful, if kids were taught how to think in school.” Like two lone men defending a besieged fortress, Arthur and Oscar dedicated all their efforts to stopping the movement. He feigned an illness to get time off work then attended a protest with Oscar. From a small shop’s roof, Arthur said to a crowd, “My friends! Can’t you see that Riley is acting as a mouthpiece for the wealthy? They want cheap labour! They want more obedient workers! They want you to stop going to school so they’ll have less tax to pay! They don’t care about anyone but themselves! Don’t be so blind! They prioritize your economic worth to the detriment of everything else! Your childhood is a sanctuary from the adult world!” As he was speaking, the crowd repeatedly shouted slogans at him. His use of the word ‘childhood’ particularly infuriated them because it included the word ‘child’. With a simmering face, one said, “Do not use that fucking word! It’s ‘young person’, you cunt!” Before Arthur could comprehend what was said, he noticed another person shout, “Piss off! Who the fuck are you?” He replied, “I am a professor of political philosophy. I am just trying to help!” The revelation of his profession sparked proud amusement among the crowd for his outlandish views were given a simple explanation. One shouted with all the energy they could muster what all the others were thinking, “You oppress the young, you old, Gildish male!” Arthur responded dismissively, “We like thinking our opponents are demonic, so we seem angelic in comparison. You shouldn’t judgement those you barely know.” “People like you shouldn’t even be allowed to speak!” Arthur smugly replied, “You want to censor me, because you’re not smart enough to debate me.” This comment was a step too far for the crowd so they rushed him. Some climbed the building and some ran around it. Arthur and Oscar ran across the rooftops then climbed down and lost them by blending in with the protesters. In search of a new strategy, they headed home. On their way, they came across an old man shouting in support of the Age Equality Movement, “Injustice anywhere is injustice everywhere! If you are silent, you are allied with the oppressor!” Arthur couldn’t resist confronting him, he said, somewhat politely, “May I ask, what is your opinion on the genocide happening in Tulantet, or the forced labour camps in Carambriar, or, perhaps, the famine in Hyneland? Does your silence on those tragedies mean you support the oppressors causing them? Do you not think you’re being hypocritical?” The protester’s response was, “Old male, go away! Old male, go away! Old male, go away!” As they went away, Arthur said to Oscar, “My God! They’re so propagandised they can only speak in slogans!” Once home, he requested a public debate with Riley, but was ignored because Riley didn’t want to show the public there was opposition to the movement and because he resented Arthur from their time together at Riverlake. Despite the illusion created by thousands of protesters in the streets, the majority of Gildlanders were against the Age Equality Movement. Nonetheless, the ACE (All Cared for Equally) Bill was passed through Parliament and granted Royal Assent, giving people of all ages in Gildland equal rights. Several years since the Bill was passed into law, no person under eighteen belonging to an MP’s family worked or dropped out of school, though a few million around Gildland did. After the success, Riley proclaimed that they must go a step further, that old people had been unjust to young people for centuries therefore it was just for young people to be unjust in return, that equality was not enough and that the young must be given legal privileges exempt from the old to compensate for past discrimination.” This idea was quickly abandoned, after widespread backlash. Four years after first seeing a child go to



work, Arthur was still traumatised. Specifically, the image was of a child wearing a suit, holding a briefcase, and looking at the train station's departure board. The image appeared most commonly when it was dark or when he wasn't focusing on something. Before he'd become more accustomed to the image, it was as harsh as sudden light moments after waking up. When he read or heard the words 'time' or 'departure', the image would appear in his mind. He removed the digital clock in his bedroom, because it reminded him of the departure board. At his lowest ebb, he even considered taking a memory erasure procedure to free himself from the torment, but, as this was a new invention, he felt it was too risky. When the Age Equality Movement succeeded, Riley was twenty-nine and Arthur was thirty-seven. Seeing Riley have more success than him at a younger age embarrassed Arthur and motivated him to work harder to make up ground.

To shut out reality, he often walked with eyes downcast or towards the upper levels of beautiful buildings, as the sight of other workers was difficult for him to bear, for he both pitied them and felt increasingly helpless. Arthur once wrote, "Despite our nation's supreme wealth, we have many economic problems. Owning a house is a pipe dream for many young people, many have resigned to the dismal prospect of renting for the rest of their lives. Previous generations of young people were confident they'd fare better than their parents, young people don't think that anymore. The nation's average salary has fallen over several decades, people are relying on unprecedented levels of consumer debt. Deaths of Despair have risen for several decades, as millions of jobs are lost to nations of cheaper labour and because Gildland has no safety net for the unemployed. Sixty years ago, the majority of families lived on one income with only the father in employment, but, due to incomes not sufficiently keeping up with the cost of living, the amount of families able to live on one income has halved. Increasingly, mothers have to work to support their families. In the past, the majority of mothers had the opportunity to stay at home. When I previously wrote that women should have the choice to work and not be obliged to because of financial pressure, I was labelled 'hateful' by my worthless opponents." Arthur wrote this in a book on wealth inequality and he included suggestions for decreasing it. He had hoped his book would help the average Gildlander by informing them of what policies to fight for, but his book was rejected by all potential publishers when they saw his background. Only one publisher provided an explanation. They stated there were too many books in the world written by people of Gildish origin and that, for other groups to be better represented, people of Gildish origin had to be under-represented just as other groups were throughout history, and that they were now only accepting the very best submissions from people in his 'category'. Upon receiving their reply, Arthur wrote in his notebook, "When precisely will they consider representation equal? Will they discriminate against me for a particular amount of time, or when the total books in the world by 'us' decreases to a certain percentage? Perhaps to 5.8% or 5.79%? Without a precise goal, such quests for justice will never end, which means the agenda pushers will never be satisfied because they don't precisely know what they want. Actually, deep down, they want total domination, as all humans do, but they're not foolish enough to admit that. This corporation's 'care' for equality among all people in their publishing and hiring policies is despite the fact that every person to ever be on their board of directors is of Gildish origin. I wonder if board members were chosen for their merits like writers were not? The consequences of this imprudent policy are manifold; all authors of non-Gildish origin, except for the undeniably great ones, are suspected by people aware of this agenda to have been published for the wrong reasons, authors of non-Gildish origin are left wondering if they were published for the right reasons or as part of a corporate PR stunt,

quality is not prioritised so inevitably the general quality of new books declines, and resentment has increased in the country because of discrimination. As usual, the only real beneficiaries are the owners of large corporations for tapping into previously neglected markets, generating free publicity for their books out of controversy, and staying in line with the metropolitan zeitgeist. The rapidity by which all corporations fell in line with the latest social cause bares the sad hallmarks of conformity and insincerity, or was it a coincidence they all came to the exact same opinions at the exact same time?" Considering them beyond reasoning, Arthur didn't respond to their rejection. He self-published the book. It sold twenty copies in its first four years.

As Arthur continued to Riverlake University, the billboards switched in everyone's perspective to a live video of Prime Minister Pete Riley, leader of the ECSL Party, who was to deliver his weekly address as it was the beginning of the work week. Some listened as they walked, but most were uninterested, Arthur tried to not acknowledge him for his voice, mannerisms, and opinions repulsed him. His speech was recorded in the living room of the Mountain House. He sat upon a white sofa, on the wall behind him was a collage of him kissing his chihuahuas on the lips, and he wore a tweed blazer and a red t-shirt. There was cheery ukulele music in the background of the video because it helped keep people's attention and inspired a positive emotional connection towards the speech. "Good morning, my Kings and Queens! I hope you're doing well. I'd like to quickly update you on everything that's going on. GDP rose last week by 0.14%, and we forecast GDP to rise to 0.15% this week. Your economy is stronger than ever before and shows no sign of slowing down. None of this could have been achieved without the hard work, belief, and perseverance, of you. Let's also keep in mind that our economy's success is largely a result of tax cuts, political and economic stability leading to increased investment, and our vibrant workforce." The background music then modulated to a minor key. "However, as I'm sure you know, a tragedy took place last night that threatened your prosperity and lifestyles when asteroid mining facilities belonging to some of our greatest companies were strategically destroyed by Elimperia. Gildland is a peace-loving nation, so, in seeking to avoid military action, we will be increasing sanctions on Elimperia until we are fully compensated for the losses suffered from their attacks on our asteroid mining facilities and polar-region mining facilities. Gildland seeks conflict with no-one and is open to being allies with everyone. I hope to provide you with a good update on our relationship with Elimperia in my next address, as I will be speaking with Supreme Leader Sirkitus very soon. Finally, as always, please remember, in a world where you can be anything, be kind."

There was a time when Arthur reacted bitterly to Riley's speeches even those of the most uncontroversial kind, then a time when he smirked and laughed through all Riley said. Now, as if he'd heard nothing at all, there was no reaction from him. Whilst he ruminated on this change with self-pity, the billboards stole his attention when they switched from ads to an announcement by the Overwatch. In an anxious, authoritative voice the Overwatch shouted, "Alert! A man guilty of battery is on Lowescroft Street! His bounty is 10,000 gilders! Capture him!" The billboards within a half kilometre radius of the criminal's live position displayed a livestream filmed by CCTV cameras. An aerial drone filmed and shone a light on the criminal as he desperately tried to escape. There was gunfire nearby. The crime had taken place on the very road Arthur was on. He hurried behind a car where another person also hid. He saw what was unfolding by looking up at a billboard. Cars sped away and people ran for cover. Pistols screamed across the street as two bounty hunters tried to tear the criminal down.

A shop window shattered as they missed their target. The criminal was running in Arthur's direction. He prepared to tackle him. However, before the criminal reached him, one of the bounty hunters capped him in a leg, collapsing him to the ground. The bounty hunter hurried to the limping criminal and smashed a pistol against his skull knocking him unconscious. The livestream on the billboards ended. Bystanders gawked as the bounty hunter hauled the unconscious criminal to his car then tossed him into his car boot. The bounty hunter then sped off to the closest Virtual Rehabilitation Centre. People nearby that missed the spectacle searched online for a video replay to avoid asking people what happened. The logo of Securitun, the operator of the Overwatch, and the Virtual Rehabilitation Centres, flashed on the billboards. An ad presented by a man with a jovial voice said, "Remember, if you don't want to go to a Virtual Rehabilitation Centre, you can pay ten times your bounty by using the Overwatch app and selecting the 'Freedom' option. To report a crime not caught by us please submit your case on the Overwatch app by selecting the 'Expert Case Reader' option and we'll get back to you in seconds with a verdict. If you want more cash, you can become a bounty hunter today. Simply download the Overwatch app and select the 'Wanted' option to find our wanted list, and turn on notifications for nearby crimes. Don't forget to check our shop for CCTV cameras, laser walls, sentry guns, and much more, now!" Securitun automatically took a fee from criminals upon the Overwatch detecting their crime and paid a commission to the bounty hunters when they deposited the criminal at a Virtual Rehabilitation Centre. If a criminal had insufficient cash in their bank account, Securitun automatically took it from the criminal's immediate family. If the company found no-one in their immediate family that could pay the fee, the criminal would be sentenced to forced labour on the Isle of the Unforgiven, also operated by Securitun. To facilitate tax cuts, the Overwatch replaced the police, Virtual Rehabilitation Centres replaced prisons, and the Expert Case Reader replaced courts.

## Statement 2: Teaching Birds to Fly

Arthur considered Riverlake his second home. He'd worked and studied there for twenty-four years, he'd been going to Riverlake for longer than he'd lived at his home. As Gildland became stranger to him over the years, he increasingly valued the more like-minded people there. The place was full of happy memories of when he and Maria were students, and when they worked there whilst still a couple.

Regarding the current students, Arthur wrote in his notebook, "The decreasing scope of the future increases their anxiety because they are increasingly unsure of what the future holds. The increasing pace of technological progress has made people, especially this young generation, unsure if their future jobs will become obsolete before they retire. Centuries ago, when technological progress was far slower, blacksmiths, farmers, bakers, butchers, woodcutters, et cetera, could find comfort believing the tech they used for their jobs, like a hammer or a sickle, would not be automated even during their children's lifetimes. They didn't have to worry about a robot or a computer program taking their livelihood, they didn't have to worry about re-training or re-locating. Even if the workers of old did have such fears, at least the promise of Heaven had not yet been robbed from them. This current generation will have employment anxieties more than any other in history. There is a growing sense of futility in spending years educating for jobs that will likely be obsolete before they retire. The increased flow and scale of information, the mixing of cultures, increased leisure time, the death of God, and the freedom to express almost any opinion, has replaced the surety of ignorance with the anxiety of confusion. Most people once believed in a religion for their entire life, now most are intensely passionate about a social cause, often out of conformity, for a short amount of time then move on when they lose interest or feel they've sufficiently shown their face to avoid ostracisation. Unlike the past, no-one's sure what beliefs the majority will hold in the long-term, no-one knows what direction the country will turn next. No other generation was ever in such close proximity with people they disagreed with. It's not surprising that most retreat from publicising their opinions, and simply say, if asked, that they respect all religions and cultures, even though they obviously haven't read all holy texts and studied all cultures. They are the first generation to be unsure of what their descendants will believe. Previous generations took for granted that their descendants would follow the same religion as them. I imagine it was a comforting thought that their descendants would be similar to them. Now, only change is permanent. They'll have to work five years more than my generation before they can retire, unless their jobs are made obsolete before their retirement age. They'll witness the world become uninhabitable whilst the culprits sleep soundly in their graves. They'll never know the calm of living in a homogeneous country. Compared to previous generations, they've paid more for their education only to earn less than them on average. As technological growth increases, they'll increasingly feel insignificant. They know their futures are bleak so are blinding themselves with wild pleasures before the inferno begins. They're all a bunch of depressed hedonists."

Regarding the university itself, Arthur wrote in a notebook, "Within Riverlake's white, Gothic walls, some of the best minds in the world are researching how to lower the cost of producing hand cream, strategies for conducting more effective job interviews, how to make games more addictive, creating a drug to control fat storage, and working on many more projects funded by corporations, to compensate for slashed public-funding. Studies to find the effects of a product or service always include a clause allowing the funder to deny

publication, as a study painting them in a bad light would create bad PR if published. Corporate funding incentivises researchers to choose questions more likely to give outcomes the funders want, as the university has to give a refund if no publication is released. On campus, there are shops selling performance-enhancing drugs to the students. Another source of revenue is intellectual property licensing. Despite some IPs being created from publicly-funded research grants, profits go entirely to the university. However, IPs created from corporate-funded research grants are fully owned by the corporation providing the funding. The government says this is because the public benefit from the research in the form of improved products and services, as if corporate funders do not also benefit from the improved products and services they funded. Less than 1% of students here are from families with incomes below the national average. As public-funding decreased, the cap on tuition fees increased to compensate. As tuition fees increased, the amount of poorer people attending universities decreased. As the percentage of poorer people holding degrees dropped and the percentage of richer people holding degrees rose, wealth inequality increased because knowledge inequality increased. The drop in poor Gildlanders attending universities is more than supplemented by the rich youth of foreign nations. Why was it that public-funding decreased in the first place? Because the financial crisis, caused by financial deregulation that only the Plutocracy benefited from, plunged the nation deeper into debt. To help balance the budget, the public were hit with austerity measures. Meanwhile, the Plutocracy were bailed-out with the public's money. Young people that had absolutely nothing to do with the financial crisis have had their futures robbed from them."

As usual, there were stressed students rushing to arrive on time, a car park full of obnoxious music beaming from their lurid sports cars, social groups rarely larger than two, and students taking performance-enhancing drugs before entering. In a busy part of the grounds, Eric Fidge, a professor of History, and Arthur's only friend, recited poetry from memory with his eyes shut. He did so every day before his first class to keep Gildish poetry alive. He refused to read any work not made by a Gildishman. The only people to ever stop by were those witnessing him read in public for the first time. They would film him in excitement then walk past as though he didn't exist for the rest of their time at Riverlake. Before Arthur got inside, he heard a part of Eric's reading:

*In a moment's chaos, much life is determined.*

*Their hearts were swayed by minds of foul learning.*

*Waters were exhausted and the world kept burning.*

*Billions fell, and the world kept turning.*

*With poesy left unsung,*

*Good and evil became one,*

*And the world kept turning.*

Arthur entered the lecture hall, headed to the wall behind his desk, pressed a button, opening a depository in the wall, and he took from it his briefcase. Earlier in the morning, he'd placed

it in a similar depository in his house, and sent it through the Postway, a labyrinthine underground network of tunnels. Arthur placed his briefcase on his desk and opened the hall's windows and turned on the air conditioner. The moment he logged into his laptop he was blitzed with data. There were twenty unread messages from students and colleagues asking for his help, a news notification flashing on his screen about one of Riverlake's board members retiring, a reminder for a meeting later that morning with the Humanities department, a corporate blog update for self-injury awareness day, autism awareness week, national glaucoma awareness month, stress awareness quarter, and dementia awareness year, and reminders for the mandatory personal training courses that he never bothered with. The personal training courses included the GROW coaching model, information security, sustainability, SMART goal setting, fire safety, communication skills, dealing with difficult situations, effective listening, effective meetings, alternate nostril breathing, hand hygiene, first aid awareness, unconscious bias training, time management, honest conversations, bribery and corruption, modern day slavery, managing emotions, mental health awareness, non-verbal communication, sleep, tackling stress, and bullying. All staff received an invite to a mental health workshop taking place at the university that afternoon. The invite stated, among other things, *'At Riverlake, we look out for each other. That's why we're training staff to become mental health first aiders. We want to create an environment where people aren't afraid to open up. Mental health is important because it affects how we think, feel, and act.'* Arthur thought, "If they truly cared, they'd decrease working hours or increase compensation. Training staff to be mental health first aiders is the cheaper option, of course. Like most organisations, they are simply doing this because studies show poor mental health is detrimental to worker performance." There was an alert from IT warning staff to be cautious of an email scam that had stolen data that morning from a climatology professor. Each department had a league table that ranked academic staff based on the exam results, behaviour, and attendance records of their students. They were sent an email each morning to remind them of the table. The political science department had thirty academic staff members and the four lowest ranking at the end of each academic year had to reapply for their jobs. Arthur used to always feature near the top of the table, but in recent years had begun to slip. During the year that Riley worked at Riverlake, he was also near the top of the table. That morning, all staff were emailed the annual gender pay gap report from the HR Director. Arthur included all staff in his reply, asking when HR would send a report on the executive pay gap due to it being several hundred times larger, and growing faster, than the gender pay gap. He also asked why they were obsessed with the difference of a few thousand in income between genders whilst ignoring the difference of millions between executives and non-executives. He informed them that women's incomes would rise more if companies focused on lessening the oceanic executive pay gap instead of the, in comparison, small gender pay gap. Arthur sent that email every year and never received a response. Maria also sent that same email to support him, when the two of them were on speaking terms. He ignored every other message that morning, except for those requesting his help.

Because MPs were voting on cutting the Humanities, Arthur wondered whether he should deliver his planned lecture or encourage the students to start an economic boycott, the only way he believed the Humanities could be brought back if cut. An economic boycott meant restricting one's spending so as to hurt the economy enough for the government to accept the boycotters' demands. The idea he considered laughable during a comfortabler position in life, now appeared lofty from his lowered perspective. He spent more time fantasising of the boycott's success than thinking of its chances or of other solutions. The only two alternatives

to the boycott he'd thought of were dismissed by him the moment he thought of them. He considered insurrection as a laughable alternative due to citizens only being allowed to purchase guns and the military having a far superior arsenal than any a militia could muster. The other alternative he considered laughable was the democratic route. Every general election in Gildland's history had been won by the best-funded party, and he knew wealthy donors would never support his ideas of wealth redistribution and his dream of prioritizing people's well-being over economic growth. The first problem he faced was that advocating for an economic boycott was considered extremist speech for inciting 'economic terrorism'. The Overwatch was prohibited from detecting speech inside buildings, but Arthur feared that a student or staff member would secretly film him. Many universities had CCTV cameras in their lecture halls, but, fortunately for Arthur, Riverlake was seen to have no need for any, as it was the best ranking university in Gildland and had students of such outstanding behaviour, and that installing them would only make students feel uncomfortable. He decided to wait until the cutting of the Humanities was confirmed before announcing the boycott, to avoid potentially getting arrested for no reason.

Whilst imagining the joy that success would bring, his best and favourite student, Jeremiah John, peeked through the door's window. He felt that Arthur, with his accent, mannerisms, hairstyle, reading glasses, and dark grey suit he so often wore, was exactly what a philosopher was supposed to be like. He dressed smartly all the time and got a similar haircut, because of Arthur. When thinking of him, he often felt that anxiety one feels around a one-of-a-kind object for he considered him the only man in the world capable of saving Gildland. Smiling affectionately, Jeremiah entered the lecture hall. In his soft-spoken voice, he said, "Good morning, Arthur!" In Gildland, such a warm greeting was reserved for people that one felt very close to. The general way of thinking in Gildland was that saying hello was a waste of time and that a nod of the head was sufficient. Arthur was glad to see him, but struggled to show it, he said, "Good morning." "They're not going to cut the Humanities." "Of course they will." "There'll be a huge backlash, if they do. They're not going to risk it." "They will. The worse backlash they'll face is some unguided fools hollering in the streets for a few days. Streets that the politicians will be nowhere near." "I just don't get why they want to do it. It seems so unfair." "It's because anyone that thinks threatens the status quo. Philosophers started every revolution in history. The less people engaged in politics, the easier it is to rule, because they have less people to worry about controlling." "Well, how are they going to justify it then? It seems so obviously a bad idea." There will be no argument against the Humanities for its educational value, the justification will be based entirely on the cold, hard facts of economics. He'll mention student debt and Humanities students being unemployed for longer than STEM students, of course he won't take any blame for the debt and just pretend it's a random act of nature." "They could have at least asked the public what they thought. I don't remember there being any great call for this to happen." "Oh, no, they certainly aren't interested in asking the public. If they did, it would be as a performance to appease people, and they would continue with their plan no matter what was said in opposition to them. We would have the chance to explain that the Humanities has the potential to be a unifying force by providing people with a shared perception of language, aesthetics, and philosophy, and that's just one argument. You could talk about critical thinking, preserving cultural heritages, and providing ethical guidance for soulless corporations." "And aesthetic appreciation." "Exactly, there's many arguments, but by focusing the conversation on what they want to talk about, the conversation is easier for them to control." "I remember reading once that they can't necessarily control what people think,

but they can control what people think about.” “That is true. Do you know which MP introduced the Bill in the first place?” “I can’t remember.” “He has a second job, the fact that MPs are allowed a second job is another story altogether, he has a second job as a partner for a PR firm Elimperia use, and we only know they’re a client because of a data leak. PR firms are under no obligation to disclose their clients, even if they’re the world’s second most powerful country. It’s so obvious that someone from Elimperia’s government asked him to introduce the bill. Sirkitus does not like us criticising Elimperia. He does not like our students holding protests against Elimperia. He does want to wipe out all obstacles in their path to world domination, and other MPs will vote for it to decrease dissent against themselves and get Humanities students into productive jobs, all the while being naive to Elimperia’s master plan.” “That’s crazy.” “I admire them, you have to be audacious to be that evil.” “So, since Elimperia basically owns that MP, what’s stopping them from asking for endless favours from him?” Arthur joked, “The MP’s integrity,” making Jeremiah laugh.

Seventy students began to trickle in. Most listened to lectures with an earphone quietly playing music in one ear. Not all were present, a few were off for a religious holiday. Only holidays involving feasting or gift-giving were well-known in Gildland, holidays for fasting were almost completely unknown and practiced by almost none. Although there were many differences between Arthur and the students, their age, fashion, tastes, manners, and dreams, he noticed an interesting commonality; their depression. He wrote in his notebook, “When one hears spiritual leaders and philosophers speak of how to attain happiness and inner-peace, is it not obvious that they themselves were unhappy and lacked inner-peace, so pursued mastery over them? Despite all the disagreements among philosophers, they share one agreement: life is not good. The happy are too busy enjoying their lives to reflect and philosophise. It is the sad that question where their life went wrong and how they can improve it. There are far too many sad people interested in philosophy hoping it will make them happy. Partly because of this imbalance, praise for anything of the present rarely occurs, more common are venerations of the past, and great hopes for the future, though the latter decreasingly so. My students’ sadness is why they so often sympathise with the oppressed, they recognise their misery all too well, and it’s why they’re so sensitive, happy people don’t get angry about a ‘wrong word’ being used in good faith or condemn people for one opposing opinion. To make matters worse, the more they learn, the more miserable they become, because they discover the fantasies veiling our dark reality and that there is little they can do about them as they live in a Plutocracy, and, the more they learn, the more specific and passionate they get about their conceptions of right and wrong, some of their opinions become refined to such a degree that they seem bizarre to the average person thus leaving them alienated. I am not sure if these students are emotionally prepared for the nasty business of politics or have the stability of mind to view their opponents as anything other than ‘evil’. Their greatest source of happiness seems to come from the defeat of their opponents.”

A guest listener known as Green Eyes came in last. Despite the name, his eyes were not like emeralds, they were like a cow’s. When students asked what his real name was, he’d laugh, seemingly embarrassed, and say he didn’t know the answer, no-one was sure if he was joking. Only Arthur and Green Eyes knew his real name. He was dressed in buckskin. He had a mosquito tattoo covering the back of his right hand. He was about a foot shorter than Arthur and Jeremiah who held their breath when he approached, because he always smelt of mud and sweat. He interrupted the two of them, as the other students were settling down, his smile displayed his rotting teeth, “Hey, guys, what’s going on?” Jeremiah turned to his



skin-sore-covered face, “We’re talking about the Humanities possibly being cut.” “Who the hell’s going to do that?” “Parliament is voting on it now.” Green Eyes turned to Arthur, shocked to see the man he considered strong appearing meek, “And you’re gonna just let them play with your life like that? Let’s fucking beat their brains in!” Arthur, with a cool demeanour, responded, “I love your enthusiasm, but I have a better solution. Take a seat, my friend.” Green Eyes stood his ground, “There’s no better idea than violence. We’re human and they are too. There’s nothing stopping us, but your fear.” When Green Eyes saw that Arthur wasn’t taking him seriously, he shook his head and ran his hand of long fingernails through his long, messy hair, and said, “You’re so fucking lame. I’ll be back,” then walked out. Arthur and Jeremiah smiled at each other, thinking Green Eyes was being over the top. Jeremiah then took a seat, so Arthur could begin.

The students were all anxious and hoping Arthur would talk about what they could do together, if the Humanities were cut. None would have secretly filmed him advocating the economic boycott. However, Arthur greeted the students without mentioning the vote and began his lecture. “Today, we will be talking about the effects of the current economic system on society. We’ll begin with a brief overview of higher education and then go into more detail. Let’s start by considering History. In History, the focus now is on historical figures from around the world and the history of ideas. There is a noticeable neglect of wars and class struggles, and a downplaying of Gildland’s place in world history. I shouldn’t have to explain to any of you the problem with this. We must keep in mind, however, there is no conspiracy to distract people from what’s important. The change was influenced by the individualist culture created by economic self-reliance from the lack of welfare, the prohibition of trade unions, and the decrease in people working at home in their family business over the last two centuries. Another influence was the need for a greater understanding of other countries created by globalism’s demand to market and modify products and services to different cultures. In Economics, financial crises were once taught with historical context to provide a greater perspective. Social, political, and moral aspects of economics were once taught to students in economics. After the 31 Years War, there’s been a strict focus on the quantitative aspects of economics. They are not taught to question the goal of economic growth and they are not taught about the effect their economic models have on wealth inequality. Once again, I must emphasise, there is no conspiracy. This change simply reflects the growing specialisation of our jobs.”

A loud, harrowing chorus of disappointment came from down the hallway. Some of Arthur’s students that had been keeping an eye on their phones for the vote looked defeated at that same moment. When the news began to circulate that Parliament had voted to cut the Humanities from formal education, the lecture was lost to pandemonium. Two walked out. Some began to tear up. Some had their head in their hands. One said they’d leave the country. Even the more reserved students couldn’t hold back their anger. Green Eyes entered and scanned the hall to read the mood. All the futures they’d planned were stolen from them. They wondered how they’d get the jobs they’d dreamed of. They imagined what alternatives they’d have to resort to. Deep inside, the students knew they should have had low expectations of politicians after all they’d learnt about them. None of the MPs that voted for the Humanities to be cut had any immediate family members studying a subject in the Humanities. Jeremiah noticed Arthur was waiting for a chance to speak, so turned around, and shouted to the others, “The professor’s trying to speak!” The message worked and they gradually settled down to listen. Since Arthur now knew for definite the Humanities were cut,

he felt comfortable enough to advocate for the economic boycott, “Look, I know you are all angry. However, in our reaction, we must remain smart and peaceful.” Green Eyes stormed to Arthur’s desk and surveyed it. Jeremiah prepared to protect Arthur. The students gasped. Arthur frowned at him. Green Eyes began sliding Arthur’s papers, glass of water, briefcase, and laptop, off the desk and into the wall. Jeremiah leaped up and pulled him back by an arm to stop him getting to Arthur whilst the students remained in a state of disbelief. Green Eyes turned and asked Jeremiah, “Why are you hurting me? He said we should be peaceful.” Arthur said to Jeremiah, “It’s okay,” and nodded in appreciation. Jeremiah let him go and remained there in case he attacked again. Green Eyes readjusted his buckskin jacket and moved his hair from his face. Arthur, who’d remained standing still by his desk during the incident, asked Green Eyes, “What on earth do you think you are doing?” He looked at Arthur then began gesticulating and spoke to him and the students with great fervour, “I was not trying to hurt you. I was acting as the state is right now to show everyone here the danger they pose, and you played the role of the domesticated citizen perfectly. You’re happy to uphold the delusion of equal rights, and give the state validation by trying to peacefully negotiate instead of insurrect. The notion that we have equal rights will forever be a lie for the state and the citizens’ rights are intrinsically asymmetrical. The state has rights to do what citizens cannot, it can take away citizens’ rights but citizens cannot take away theirs, it can give itself new rights whereas citizens can’t give themselves new rights. The only way we will be liberated is if we follow our own egos and reject all authority. All may do anything they want. Any limitation will be seen for what it is, a restraint on liberty. All barriers in our way will be destroyed, among them: laws, rights, the state, religion, the idea of absolute truth, dictionaries, etiquette, manners, morality, technology, identity, private property, all of which are tools invented by Nature Rapers to be used against the weak. Your defence of these inventions allows their futures and your job to disappear. By being a false ally, you are their worst enemy.” Staying composed, Arthur said, “You have no idea what you’re talking about. Do you really think living in such a way is a good idea?” “Uh, do you think living in a burning building is a good idea? Your house is on fire yet you’re still standing in it like nothing’s wrong. You’re a pseudo-radical stealing energy from the true radicals. You think you’re an enemy of the state, but if they’re not trying to kill or jail you, you’re not their enemy.” “My friend, you’re embarrassing yourself.” Green Eyes turned to the students, “Brothers and Sisters, if you want to follow him, stay here. If you want to take back what was robbed from you, follow me! There is no other way to solve this! Let’s go! Let’s fucking go now!” All students except for Jeremiah ran out with Green Eyes like raging bulls.

Arthur watched in disbelief as the students, all of whom he’d had a good rapport with, rushed out without saying goodbye. Jeremiah went to cheer him up. “What was you going to say?” They heard Green Eyes trying to rally another class. As if oblivious, Arthur replied. “Don’t worry.” Jeremiah still wanted to know, but felt it rude to persist, “I don’t understand how people think we live in a democracy. Riley didn’t say the Humanities would be cut when he was running for election. The public weren’t asked if they wanted the Humanities cut. What part of this is democratic?” “Indeed.” Guessing Arthur wasn’t in the mood to talk about politics, Jeremiah asked, “Do you know what you’ll do next?” Arthur responded, “No,” as he began to pick up what Green Eyes threw to the ground. Jeremiah began to help and asked, “I hope you don’t mind me asking, but, will you be okay financially?” “I’ll be okay. What are you doing next?” In his spare time, Jeremiah had been studying and making architectural designs. When he spoke to others about his projects, most considered him odd for spending years on a hobby he was yet to monetize, and the work was assumed to be of poor quality as

he was not a professional. "I'm hoping my mum will let me work on my designs. There's so much to do, and new ideas come faster than I can finish them. I simply can't have a normal job or to go on a different course. Hopefully, my designs will help me get a job." "I'm sure she'll let you." "I don't know. I still haven't completed one yet. Everything takes so long because they're all innovative, so, I have to research a lot for each project. I respect the old, but I don't want to be a copy. I think innovation is so important because it shows people that culture is still progressing, I don't want people to just look backwards, I want people to be excited about the time they live in. When politicians fail to better people's lives, I think artists, more than ever, must step up to show the world new possibilities." "I wish you luck, but don't waste your time trying to better the world. They'll let you transfer to a different course then when you're older you can get a good job and bury your head in the sand." "But isn't bettering the world why you taught and held protests and wrote books?" "I do what I know. When you get to my age, you realise there's decisions made in your youth that can't be reversed. If I could start again, I'd sell out to the Plutocracy. I'd serve them as a politician or as a businessman. Life would be much easier, if I'd done that." "You're just saying that because you're angry." "I've thought of it for a long time." "I'd rather struggle than sell out." As Arthur finished clearing up, he said, "Well, I hope you never struggle, and I'm sure you'll never sell out. I wish you more than luck." "Likewise, professor." "We'll keep in touch." "We will." They shook hands and said goodbye then Jeremiah went home.

Before going to the meeting, Arthur went on his laptop that survived the earlier attack then submitted his time-sheet. The approver was on annual leave, not returning for another two weeks, and no-one else had permission to approve it. Unlike most, Arthur didn't live payday to payday so didn't mind waiting for the approver to return. He'd been on a temporary contract for over thirteen years. He was promised a pay rise of a few thousand guilders after completing his fifth year, but the promise fell to the wayside as part of budgeting. During that same year, the university spent several million guilders on bonuses for the board of directors, a fact Arthur gladly brought up in the meeting where he learnt the bad news. Despite the grievance, he stayed because Maria worked at Riverlake and there weren't better opportunities elsewhere.

Arthur headed to the meeting wishing he'd told his students about the boycott, he believed the staff were less likely to join as he felt people tend to grow cynical with age. He held the meeting room's door open for the professor behind him, though it was considered rude to hold a door for someone. To Gildlanders, holding a door for someone was to suggest the person they were helping couldn't act independently. Arthur defied the custom, as he enjoyed seeing people vexed by what he considered petty. The man behind him said without any charm, "Thanks, but I can do it myself." Arthur said, "Oh, okay," then slammed the door in his face then, one second later, the man opened it.

Maria, also a professor of political philosophy, was sitting in the front row. She was tall, thin, and had long, wavy, gold hair. When she noticed him enter, she picked up the leaflet on her table and pretended to read it. They'd been apart for two years, and, though he thought she hated him, he still wanted them to reunite. To him, seeing her less was the worst consequence of losing his job. Whilst in their early twenties, Arthur stopped his revolutionary activity upon her request because she didn't want him to get hurt. Though he'd wanted to start a political party in his younger years, when he thought it was a good idea, he never did, because she didn't want him to get in trouble. He followed her wishes to that day despite being apart for two years, to keep alive the chance of reuniting. He was sure starting the

economic boycott, an endeavour almost guaranteed to get him in trouble, would end chances of them reuniting so long as the boycott lasted, or possibly forever if he became infamous, but he felt it was duty and hoped its success would impress her.

The meeting room was quiet. Small talk was generally considered a waste of time in Gildland, so most were reading their phones or thinking about what careers they could pursue next. One of the members of staff sneezed and no one blessed them. Arthur glanced at Maria, as he went to sit by the only staff member he was friends with, Eric Fidge, a sixty-one-year-old, obese, balding, History professor. He sat alone at the back, looking down the nose of his eagle-like face at them all. He authored several dozen books including, *The Tragedy of Gildland*, *The Prose and Cons of Genocide*, and *The Boring War*. Since his respect for others' opinions was so low, he was proud his books were negatively received. Arthur said, "Hello, Eric." Professor Fidge nodded back without smiling, then continued judging the other members of staff. Arthur asked, "What do you plan on doing next?" "I am not telling you. My private life is private." Arthur had learnt to not expect him to return such a question.

The Head of the Humanities spoke as though held hostage, "Good morning, everyone. As you all know, the government has decided to cut the Humanities from formal education with immediate effect. Pete Riley has addressed the following letter to all Humanities departments in Gildland, 'With immediate effect, The HOPE (Helping Our People's Education) Act aims to protect people from financially risky degrees by immediately closing all Humanities departments across Gildland. Compared to other students, those in the Humanities go on to earn 27,904.19 gilders less per annum, and are 55.68% less likely to find employment in the first five years after graduation. Nearly half of Gildlanders between eighteen to thirty have outstanding student loans. The total student debt that Gildlanders owe has tripled in the past decade and is now over two trillion. Cutting the Humanities is a vital step in our long-term plan to reduce student debt. By diverting students into fields outside of the Humanities, we will ensure students go on to live happy, prosperous lives, and that Gildland extends its lead as the most wealthy, innovative, inventive, and constructive nation the world has ever known. Humanities students are welcome to switch to a different course, though be advised the government will not provide any financial assistance for switching. Finally, it must be noted that this act in no way aims to prevent the Gildish people from partaking in the Humanities outside of formal education.' I would like to now speak about the vacancies that we have at-" Arthur couldn't control his anger. He stood up and asked the Head of the Humanities, "What are we going to do to get our jobs back?" Everyone turned to look at Arthur, except Maria. Startled, the Head of the Humanities responded, "There's not much we can do about it." "Let's start an economic boycott!" The others gasped at his crime of extremist speech and were too scared to record someone so dangerous lest they provoke him. Arthur continued, "The only useful power we have is our consumer power. If we and everyone we know bought less, and encouraged millions of others to do the same, the government would see the economy crash then give into our demand of restoring the Humanities, and any other demands we have. It's the most smart and peaceful way. If you're with me, raise your hand." He hoped at least a few would show support, but no-one did. Most turned their attention back to the Head. Being so like-minded, Maria was the only one to agree with him. However, as she was yet to forgive him, she didn't show support. Eric shook his head, believing it was a ridiculous idea. Arthur then said, "This is unbelievable. What will it take for you people to retaliate? They just destroyed your careers and you're all sitting here as though life will magically get better, but it won't get better, if we don't do anything. We must act now!" The

Head of the Humanities responded, “We are all as disappointed as you are, Professor De la Mer, but we will not resort to economic terrorism. Nothing can be done to change their-” “Yes, it can change! Of course it can! Nothing will change with your attitude! They want us to be without hope! You’re oppressing yourself for them with that negativity and forming a tyranny of cynics! In the past, they’ve reversed decisions when put under pressure. It can happen again!” Arthur’s voice was punching, but not landing. The Head of the Humanities appeared to be getting tired of him. Arthur tried a softer approach, “If no-one wants to partake in the boycott, I’ll happily do something else that sounds good. Does anyone have a different idea?” No-one responded, so Arthur tried to draw their voices out in a desperate, sympathetic way, “Come on, don’t be afraid to speak up.” Shy and thinking faces surrounded him. As if going insane, Arthur said to them, “Anyone there?” The Lady with the Red Briefcase watched from a corner of the room, remembering when she cared about the well-being of strangers. Feeling rather embarrassed, Arthur said, “Do you people not care about anything? We’re being thrown away like rubbish and you’re all trying to see who can act the most cool!” He looked around one more time then, seeing no change, threw his arms up in defeat. As he descended the stairs, he said, “Well, I hope you all enjoy your new jobs. There’ll be many companies waiting for intelligent conformists like you, you selfish, short-sighted, cowards. Those students are waiting for your leadership and you’re too cowardly to do anything. You should be absolutely ashamed of yourselves.” Maria watched him go, wishing someone else had advocated for the boycott, so she could show support.

On his way home, as an ad for an employment agency played for him on the billboards, he thought to himself, “It’s not only the thought of how bad things are that hurts, but also the thought of how great things used to be and could so easily be that haunts the mind. There has never been a worse time to be alive. I would trade it for any other, disease, poverty, and all. At least, the people of the past had Heaven to look forward to, we have nothing. When God was alive, the poor were richer than our richest will ever be. This country needs more than just the Humanities brought back, it needs a revolution, and only I can give it to them.”

## Statement 3: Days Without Sunlight

*TODAY'S TOP HEADLINES:*

*Watch the First Trailer for Giant Dinosaur vs. Giant Gorilla*

*Watch this EPIC Video of Riley Jumping Over a Chair*

*MPs Vote In Favour of Pay Rise for MPs*

*Climate Change Makes Us Aware of Our Mortality, and That's a Good Thing*

*Why Sirkitus Is the World's Most Dangerous Man*

Arthur started the boycott by, instead of paying for a train ride, walking over fifteen miles from Riverlake in Montpelerin to his home in Bronrar. On the way home, Arthur set up a direct debit for his Unemployment Fine. In Gildland, an Unemployment Fine of 200 guilders per day was charged to people unless they were in employment or education, under three or over eighty years old, a business owner, disabled, or had a net-worth over 1,000,000 guilders. Arthur refused to consider finding employment or returning to education as he did not want to be distracted from his mission. He was forty-one years old. It was not viable for him to set up a business just for the sake of avoiding the fine, all businesses were audited to prevent such deception. He had no disability. He was nowhere near worth 1,000,000 guilders. Most people did volunteer work to avoid the fine, but Arthur wanted to focus on the boycott. Some people took out loans to pay for the Unemployment Fine, but Arthur had recently been fined three-quarters of his net worth for participating in a stock manipulation scheme with acquaintances he'd made on the internet, so was prohibited from applying for a loan. The fines contributed to Gildland's Corporate Welfare Fund which, according to government propaganda, helped spur job creation by sending cash to the nation's top employers. If someone couldn't pay the fine or get someone to pay for them, they were sent to nations in which slavery was still legal, as part of Gildland's foreign aid package which also included debt traps and waste to poor countries. If a deportee was in debt at the time of deportation, the proceeds of the slave master's purchase would go to the creditors first, and any remaining proceeds would go to Gildland's Corporate Welfare Fund.

Arthur walked home, thinking of the Humanities potentially being cut, and not thinking much of Riley's speech. Having no family or close friends, he increasingly viewed the public like a substitute family. He anxiously scanned the sea of people as he walked through Montpelerin. He cared about how strangers dressed and behaved, like an over-controlling parent, wishing for them all to be like him so they could potentially connect. He believed the more people there were like him the more secure Gildland's future was. He saw couples holding hands and thought of Maria. He always became a little more optimistic when he saw people reading books, little matter which one. He envied groups sitting outside cafés or in parks and imagined being with them, he often spoke to himself at home to compensate for his separation from Maria and her friends. He felt proud as he watched tourists marvel at the historical buildings and statues, though he had nothing to do with creating them, he felt they were marvelling at a family member's creations.

He passed the Houses of Parliament, as he passed through Montpelerin. The flag of Gildland flew over the building. It had the symbols of sixty different religions in red upon a white background. The flag was named the Polysemy and was designed by Pete Riley who claimed the old flag, which had one religious symbol in red upon a white background, 'no longer represented Gildland'. Arthur wrote on the subject, "The Polysemy is symbolic of the division that governments over several decades have purposely caused in Gildland. For decades, the Plutocracy have chosen to import labour instead of implement policies that would likely increase the birth rate to at least the replacement level. One reason they prefer imported labour is because they don't have to pay for their births at hospitals or their education at schools, importing labour is more tax-efficient than increasing the birth rate, imported labour arrives ready to work. We have fallen to where a cost-benefit analysis is applied to a person's life. In this one country, there are people following religions with a history of conflict with the religion of others, people that believe all religions are nonsense, people that moved here to escape religious oppression, people that want to become modern Gildlanders but are peer-pressured by their family to follow their religion, people following religions that instruct them to make their religion supreme, people that follow religions with teachings that oppose laws made under secularism, people that do not feel at home here or in the country of their parents, people that get judged because of statistics about the group they're identified as being part of, people that feel like an alien in this country of their ancestors, people watched with suspicion because they come from a nation Gildland is at war with, people that think to help a disenfranchised group is to betray one's own group, people that believe the government is trying to replace their group, people that get judged by the reputation of the country their parents are from, and people from nations that our masters have bombed recently. If this country was a person, it would be diagnosed with multiple personality disorder. The Plutocracy do not publicly state this situation is divisive, but, rather, labels the critics of the inherent division of this situation as divisive, even though it was the Plutocracy that wanted it to happen. What effect has this had on our country? More people vote based on their identity instead of ideas. Falling tax rates have been welcomed by the majority partly because people generally care less about helping those they don't identify with. The last protest against wealth inequality in Gildland happened when I was only twenty, and considering how far social cohesion has fallen since then I cannot envision one happening again. Increasing the labour supply in this manner depresses wages of the poorest workers by forcing them to compete with more people, many that are willing to work for less since they come from nations far poorer than ours, and, as less jobs become available, people become more willing to work for less. This program is often supported by the very politicians that purport to defend workers. There is no reason to support this program unless you want your country intrinsically divided or if you're an employer desiring a large labour supply. Each concern of a subgroup serves to distract from the concerns of the whole nation, and thus the chance of mass action by the workers against the Plutocracy decreases. It is in the interests of the Plutocracy to have a large workforce that distrust one another. When the government have an opportunity to shift blame on matters relating to this division they always do. For example, when some maniac massacres a particular group, the government immediately throws the entirety of the blame on the killer whilst accepting none of the blame themselves despite the fact that they created the setting for it to happen in the first place, they're the ones that allowed prejudices to clash so freely. The blame should be shared, but they always shift the blame entirely. Shifting the blame entirely to the terrorist instead of sharing it follows the logic of our nation's extreme brand of individualism. 'You're poor?

That means you're lazy, don't blame the government.' 'You're not happy with the world? That means you have a mental imbalance, don't blame the government.' 'Someone got killed by a terrorist? It's the terrorist's fault, don't blame the government.' No measures are taken to prevent similar massacres in the future apart from hollow lines such as, 'We must unite,' whilst not implementing a single policy to encourage unity, such as encouraging assimilation, abolishing faith schools, preventing echo chambers on the internet, and changing immigration laws to prioritise unity over increasing the labour supply. Because a country's education system is limited in the amount of national histories it can teach and the variation of nations that students' parents can come from is only limited by the amount of nations on the planet, there are children that miss out on learning about the history of their ancestors. Such students miss out on a vital element of their identity. Unless their parents teach them or they themselves learn about it, they're prone to feeling rootless, adding to the pain many of them already have of feeling like an outcast if they don't look like the other kids, have a different accent, follow somewhat different cultural practices at home to the other kids, or have a name that teachers and students find hard to pronounce. But what if they were taught that history? Only to feel a connection to a place their parents chose not to raise them? What a greater bitterness that increased sentiment would cause. It is impossible for several different identities to thrive entirely under one government, but the Plutocracy don't mind this because they've gained some new workers, customers, and employers. The psychological distress a native suffers as they see the percentage of their people collapse and begin to feel like an alien in their own neighbourhood is scoffed at and they get called evil and stupid for disliking a change they never asked for or was told about in advance, often by useful idiots that say we should 'choose love not hate'. Calling someone names for expressing their distress is victim blaming, so long as they were expressing themselves politely and not intending harm. After all, people don't choose what they love or hate, we know that opinions are formed by education, genetics, and life experiences. Because the government doesn't simply admit this program is for economic reasons, the impressionable think the purpose of this program is to replace the natives. The government has to paint the program as 'welcoming' and 'open' to avoid the blunt truth that its purpose is economic, and so the replacement conspiracy theory perpetuates. Several massacres against innocent people of non-Gildish origin, often in places of worship, were committed by people that fell for this conspiracy theory. All of this chaos is happening for no reason other than the Plutocracy's interests. I would hate this program less, if it resulted in people reading the great books from other cultures, listening to the music of other cultures, and studying other cultures, but the program has nothing to do with culture, their goal is to create a place with as many workers, customers, and employers as possible. This place can no longer be called a society, it is simply a place for buying and selling. This is the divide and conquer of our time. The Plutocracy want us to hate each other so that we don't unite against them, but we must not participate, we must turn our hatred to the Plutocracy." Arthur's opinion was whittled down to 'hateful' by his detractors.

He knew of some quiet places outside of Gildland and others within Gildland centuries prior where residents so trusted each other they often left their front doors unlocked. He wished Gildlanders could still trust one another, but, in his time, almost everyone had surveillance cameras and metal shutters that automatically dropped in case of a trespasser. The front gardens of the imposing mansions were well-groomed and often embellished with fountains. Almost all homes had wine cellars, theatres, swimming pools, and books by the metre. The opulence of his county, Bronrar, was not the exception, but the standard in Gildland.



Arthur's house gave no indication to his love of luxurious design. His furniture had no patterns. Everything was either white, silver, cream, brown, grey, or black, except for food, and the covers of books in his attic and a shelf encompassing an entire wall of his living room. The walls were all light cream, there were no paintings or wallpaper. There was only one photograph, it hung in the front hall and was of him and his former wife, Maria. Whenever people came to his house and asked why it was 'so plain', he would say he had no choice as clutter and too many different colours caused him migraines. He told the white lie because in Gildland saving instead of spending was frowned upon. He had no problem defending his more unpopular beliefs in public, most of his were unpopular, but he had no interest in debating at home. The true reason was his resentment for spending money. Knowing that money had much power, he considered unnecessary spending to be emasculating for someone that was yet to achieve financial freedom.

At home, he cancelled his water supply, he planned to use waterfalls in the Yeshil Forest. He ended his phone contract. His house ran on solar power so there was no electricity to cancel. He paid off his mortgage years ago. There were caps on bottles, packets, and jars that automatically re-purchased themselves once at a low enough level, all of which he turned off. He ended his subscription to the Wasteway, a service that allowed users to put waste down tubes at the side of their house. The Wasteway automatically separated different types of waste then began a process that eventually dumped it all in the world's poorest nations for their poorest to scavenge through and be poisoned by Gildland's exported pollution. He ended his Postway subscription. The Postway had text filters to block extremist speech, so he couldn't have sent fliers for the boycott through it anyway. Despite cancelling the subscription, he could still receive post. For food and water, he planned to live on the fruit and vegetables from his garden, and what he could find in the Yeshil Forest. He ended his internet connection. Even with access, he wouldn't have been able to promote the economic boycott because there were text, voice, and image filters to block extremist speech on any website large enough to be worth spreading a political message on.

Top universities outside Gildland sent letters to Arthur offering employment which he ignored. The DIA, Gildland's domestic intelligence agency, sent a letter to Arthur in hopes of recruiting him, they also contacted many other professors that lost their jobs, as they wanted to unite the intelligentsia against Elimperia. The DIA created a file on Arthur during the revolutionary days of his late teens and early twenties, the report concluded with the comment that he was 'a loyal follower of dead thinkers'. The DIA never received a response from Arthur.

The day he lost his job, he began writing a speech for the economic boycott. To attract more followers, he decided the boycott should make more demands than just getting the Humanities back. He wrote a manifesto for a political party that he'd create once he was famous. Since he was so confident the boycott would be an overnight success, he considered it vital to have the manifesto prepared in advance so he could publicise it before his star waned. He spent almost every waking hour writing or thinking about the speech and the manifesto. He felt an almost constant need to work. In his downtime, he watched VHS recordings of opera performances, but took many breaks as new ideas for the manifesto came to him frequently. Arthur forced himself to appreciate opera after learning Maria liked it. The more he learnt about why people liked it, the more he enjoyed it himself, before he met her he mostly listened to rock, but stopped because Maria only liked jazz and classical music. When Arthur found a movie he liked, he'd often watch it repeatedly over several weeks until he got

bored of it. He visited his son Francis weekly, because he lived with Maria, and learnt she was working as a cleaner whilst looking for a new job. He insisted on paying her Unemployment Fine, so she didn't have to work a job she didn't want to, but she laughed at him. He told her about the economic boycott with no intent of making her join as he didn't want her to suffer like him, and knew she never spent much anyway. Indeed, she had always preferred saving money over spending it, which was one of her traits Arthur loved. Sometimes, whilst at home, he would dream of being interviewed as if the boycott had succeeded. Imagining a live audience of millions and an interviewer before him, he would sit in his desk chair, stroke his chin, and furrow his brow, as he gave perfect answers to easy, almost complimentary, questions. The imaginary interviewer praised him for his bravery, his endurance during the boycott, conceiving the only plan that could have ended the Plutocracy, and congratulated him for reuniting with Maria.

During this period, he went from thin to gaunt. He didn't abandon the boycott once. He lived entirely on vegetables, fruit, and water. He travelled five miles everyday to gather leaves, water, mushrooms, berries, and flowers, from the Yeshil Forest. He picked fruit from his front garden and picked vegetables from the patches in his back garden, he'd started growing his own fruit and vegetables years prior as a means of saving money and becoming more independent. Writing became more difficult as time went on for he was constantly tired and increasingly struggled to concentrate. He grew so sick of eating the same food everyday, he eventually only ate for sustenance. He felt he couldn't be respected as the leader of the boycott unless he was the prime example of a boycotter. The rage he had for having to go to such extremes, because no-one else supposedly knew how to end the Plutocracy, was only kept under control by his dreams of the glory it would provide.

After nine weeks, he completed his speech and manifesto. On the morning of his return to Riverlake, he put on the suit he wore on his last day there which had become a few sizes too big for him. He had to adjust his trouser belt to as tight as it would allow. His white shirt no longer fit perfectly, it hung over the top of his trousers, so he buttoned his blazer to cover it up. Before stepping out his house, he wrote in his notebook to memorise this momentous day, "I've been alone for so long I feel I'm drifting away from the world, I exist only in others' memories, I exist in no-one's current life. Loneliness is stripping away my identity and I can only imagine who I will become next. Our identities are formed by how others behave towards us. Without others, you're a nobody. Without a title, you're a nobody. The only thing that really matters is what others think of us, I'd rather be a fool treated as a genius than a genius treated as a fool, as I indeed have been my entire life. Like the moon, I am pale from life's drought, dizzy from going in circles, and watching the world alone."

On his way to Riverlake, all that was once intolerable to him became tolerable, because of his stern belief the boycott would soon bring it all to an end. For the first time in years, he felt joyful enough to walk with his head up. That sunny morning in Montpelerin he felt he was walking past history. Whilst Arthur had been away from Montpelerin, white, floating cities, named Lilypad Islands, because they appeared like gigantic lily pads on the sea, had been constructed. Some of the floating cities were used for offices and some for resorts. People arrived and departed on helicopters, boats, and jet skis. They attracted tourists from all around the world, they were the places to be. Gildish companies began to construct floating cities around the world, they were the cause of several legal battles, and would have caused several military confrontations, if any country had leaders crazy enough to oppose Gildland. Despite all of this, Arthur was unaware that the floating cities existed, until he saw them that

day. He began to wonder what else he was not up to date on. For nine weeks, he had not spoken to anyone, the only other voices he heard were those of strangers he passed on his way to the Yeshil Forest. He began to fear what else had changed in Gildland, he especially feared that someone had already succeeded with a revolution, if he had, therefore, just wasted nine weeks of his life and if his sacrifices were for nothing. He walked faster, looking for clues. Children still appeared to be going to work, he looked at the holographic billboards still playing ads, he saw cinema posters for childish movies marketed to people of all ages, he saw corporate virtue signalling in shop windows, he saw jewellery shops full of people, things seemed to have remained similar enough for Arthur to calm down a little. Then when he saw an ad for a kid's cartoon featuring Riley as a friendly character he was relieved that nothing had changed for the better.

As Riverlake came into view, his heart increasingly pounded with excitement. Just as he spotted an opportune place for his oration near the entrance of Riverlake, a disturbance beyond it stole his attention. A couple of students were throwing rubbish at an old groundsman that stood like a statue and stared at them down his nose. One said, "We're giving you something to pick up! You should thank us for giving you work!" People walked by either laughing or pretending not to notice. Incensed, but not surprised, that no-one was trying to stop them, Arthur ran over, shouting, "Get away! Get away from him!" and the two students ran off laughing into Riverlake. The groundsman began picking up the rubbish that was thrown at him. Arthur approached and, when he noticed his face, said, "Eric?" Whilst continuing his work he responded, "My dear chap." "What happened?" "I am not telling you." "Why?" "My private life is private." Arthur looked in disbelief at his friend he highly respected dragged to such a lowly state. "Eric, let me pay your fine, and, if you need a place to stay, you're welcome at my house." "I will be the burden of no man." More desperately, Arthur said, "Stop being so prideful. Let me help you." Eric stopped picking up rubbish then looked down his nose at him, "Well, I suppose it is rude to reject a desperate man." "You're so kind." "My pleasure." As Arthur began to write directions to his home on a scrap of paper from his jacket, he said, "There is one condition, though." "Of course there is," said Eric as he took off the dungarees he wore over the three-piece suit that he religiously wore. "You can only live at mine, if you don't buy anything." "Why?" Arthur whispered into his ear, "The economic boycott. I'm here to give a speech for it." "Good Lord," said Eric, as Arthur resumed writing his address. "Perhaps you can help?" "No." "That's okay. I know you're a coward." "It is not because of cowardice." "So why not help?" "Because this country is finished. We are robbed of our land, robbed of our identity, robbed of our jobs, we are not allowed to celebrate our culture, we are not allowed to celebrate our history. Even the people parading as nationalists are utterly shallow. They cannot recite a single line of poetry from our poets, they cannot name more than six wars we were in, they cannot name one of our great painters, they have read none of our classic novels. There are only pseudo-nationalists now, they just fear people that look different to them, despite them all being part of the same consumer culture. The people that claim to be religious when they fill out application forms or wear those necklaces, behave just as degenerately as the rest. One cannot present an argument for absolute monarchism without being ridiculed. It *is* all over. There will be no happy days. Barbarians rule the world." "All the more reason to help." "No. I learnt long ago our fate is not in our hands and ever since then I have been relaxed. Do not trouble yourself over these degenerates, they do not deserve to be saved, they deserve to suffer for their sins. They will never understand what is wrong through conversation, the only chance of them learning is when reality punishes them for being denied too long. These people will never

join any project involving patience or self-sacrifice, their minds have been diminished by technology and no-one identifies with anyone else. The boycott *will not work*.” “If I fail, then I’ll change tactics. I’m not quitting till I die.” Eric was amused, “Die for these degenerates? Let them rot.” “Well, if you don’t care about people, don’t you at least want your job back or revenge against Riley?” “No. It is impossible for me to hate Riley, because I expect nothing better from him, hating him would be like hating a dog for not talking, it would be ridiculous.” “If that’s how you feel, I suppose I’ll be seeing you tonight, unless I get killed, of course.” Arthur handed Eric the directions home and his house keys. “Indeed. Good luck.” “Luck’s for losers!” Eric said, “I know,” then headed to Arthur’s home with his hands behind his back. Arthur was glad that Eric no longer had to work, but concerned because the amount of days he could afford the Unemployment Fine had now halved.

Arthur stood on a bench near the entrance then shouted, “My friends! Come around, I have something of great importance to tell you.” Students began filming him, and those nearby stopped to listen. With concern, the Lady With the Red Briefcase watched from a distance. Many students walked by without interest. Seeing no students he recognised, he asked himself, “Where is everyone?” Jeremiah, who was struggling to stay awake in a business administration lecture, was rejuvenated by the sound of Arthur’s voice. He left the lecture abruptly, fearing Arthur may leave before he found him. The students chuckled and the professor frowned at him. Arthur said to the audience of a few dozen, leaning towards them and looking intently into their unconvinced eyes, “I was a professor at Riverlake, until the Humanities were cut, and I stand here remorseful for not doing more to help our country sooner. I tricked myself into thinking I would be immune to the poisonous ideas of our government. So view my life as a warning, do not wait for your life to be ruined by them before you oppose them. Your generation is among the most unfortunate in history. You have already lived through two recessions. At this rate, many of you will be worse off than your parents financially. Your student debt will take decades to pay, but previous generations were given free education. If drastic action is not taken to protect the planet, it will become uninhabitable in your lifetime. The rich are spending more and more every election to get what they want and deny us what we want. We must put all differences aside, and realise that the most urgent struggle is between the rich and the poor. If we do not unite and let the wealthy continue reigning over us, the consequences will be cataclysmic. There are so many problems, but what is to be done?” Jeremiah made his way through the crowd to the front and Arthur was glad to see him. Seeing Arthur thick-bearded and skeletal, he wondered what had happened to him. “Though we may bear arms, our military power is no match for the military’s. Our democratic power is non-existent. Riley obeys the wishes of his wealthy donors and the minds of most are swayed by a media owned by the rich. Every election in our country’s history has been won by the best-funded party. Studies show the opinions of the majority match what MPs vote for only 70% of the time, and that percentage would be even less if not for mass propaganda from the wealthy. However, there is one power we do have: consumer power. We can pressure the government into accepting our demands, if we start an economic boycott-”

The billboards switched to a live video of Arthur. The Overwatch shouted, “Alert! A man guilty of extremist speech is by the entrance of Riverlake University! His bounty is 30,000 gilders! Capture him!” The crowd screamed and scattered when the alert began. Several guns were drawn. Arthur jumped down, Jeremiah captured him and shouted, “Don’t shoot!” as he shielded him. The guns were put away. They both looked around in disbelief that no-one shot

then Jeremiah escorted Arthur to a busy street away from the eyes of those that had seen the speech. He let go of him and they began walking to the Virtual Rehabilitation Centre nearest Arthur's home. "I think we're in the clear." "Thank you, Jeremiah. It's so good to see you again. I'm sorry for not keeping in touch." "That's okay. It's good to see you too, it's been so boring without you here. Why were you gone so long?" Once Securitun's ad ended, the billboards showed an ad for a ride-hailing company to Jeremiah and an ad for a psychotherapist to Arthur. "I spent a lot of time writing a manifesto. The boycott is a catalyst for the revolution, and since we'll likely succeed in a short amount of time, we need to ensure a quick transfer of power. If we only get the Humanities back, under this system, it would be attacked whenever the government next felt they could get away with it. The only way to ensure we get what we want is by being in power ourselves." "What exactly are we boycotting?" "It's an economic boycott. We're going to restrict our spending as much as possible to hurt the economy. The government will have to give into our demands to save the economy." Without evaluating the idea and with only the intent to be kind to his crestfallen idol, Jeremiah said, "I'll help you." Then after thinking about it for a second, he asked, "But do you not fear it hurting innocent people along the way?" "The end justifies the means. The innocent will be far more hurt, if the Plutocracy rule them instead of us. Plus, it's not our fault this is the only way we can get in power. Anyone that's hurt by the boycott has only the Plutocracy to blame, they're the ones that deprive citizens of the power to influence Gildland peacefully. Our ideas could never attract enough money to win in such a country as this." "I suppose so." "No-one back there seemed interested, did they?" "No. They looked quite hostile, actually." "At the very least, I'm sure former Humanities students will help." "I hope so, but I doubt it." "Why?" "No-one talks about the Humanities being cut anymore and a lot of the Humanities students disappeared with Green Eyes." "Disappeared?" "They tried to burn the campus down the night you left, the last time they were seen was when they were leaving a Virtual Rehab Centre." "Interesting." "Have you been to one before?" "I have." "Really?" "Really." "Why?" "I broke a law." "Come on, be serious." "Oh, I used to be serious and all that gave me was depression." "At least say what it was like." Arthur took a deep breath, "Well, they are very large, they contain many glass cells, all lit very brightly, observed by figures behind opaque windows. The punishment depends on the crime committed. If you're caught drunk driving, they inject alcohol into your veins. Hackers have their brains connected to malware-infested computers. They strap people guilty of medical malpractice to a table then chuck all sorts of things into them, and people guilty of extremist speech get re-educated." Unsettled by what Arthur was about to endure, Jeremiah's face drooped like a bloodhound's. He turned to ask if there was any chance he didn't have to go to a VRC, but when he noticed Arthur looking smug and mendacious, he realised that he was only joking, and laughed at himself in embarrassment, "God, I'm so stupid." "You're not stupid. You were my best student and now I'm sure you're doing well at... what do you study now?" "Business administration." Arthur laughed loudly. "I didn't have time to think! I had one day to choose a new course! My mum didn't let me work on my architecture." "I see. Hopefully, you won't have to study that for much longer. So, all my students disappeared and you of all people started a business administration course, is there anything else I missed since we last met? I'm totally out of the loop." "The Queen died." "And nothing of value was lost." Jeremiah laughed, "You can't say that!" "One less benefit thief." "Apart from that, not much has changed." "What was the response to the Humanities being cut?" "There wasn't much of a response. Most students moved onto different courses. There were small, peaceful

protests here and there, but they only lasted for about a week. No-one seems to care anymore.”

## Statement 4: Deep Dream

Arthur led Jeremiah to the Virtual Rehabilitation Centre closest to his own home, where he'd been rehabilitated once for stock manipulation, informing him on the way what a VRC was truly like to mitigate the shock he'd feel when they arrived. He wrote his address in Jeremiah's phone, explaining that he wouldn't be able to walk home without his support, he also told him Professor Eric Fidge was staying at his house, and used Jeremiah's phone to set up a direct debit for Eric's Unemployment Fine.

Whilst they were in the suburbs of Bronrar, an unscheduled video of Prime Minister Riley appeared on the holographic billboards. In the living room of the Mountain House, Riley stood with a bespectacled, old man the public didn't recognise. Jolly, laid-back ukulele music played in the background. Riley wore a tweed blazer, a red t-shirt with 'Love Yourself' written on it. He said, "Good morning, my Kings and Queens! Today, I have some really exciting news. We will finally be reforming the spelling of the Gildish language, to make it easier to learn. The reform has been conducted by one of the nation's greatest lexicographers, Dgache Ghoti, who will now explain some of the changes that have been made." "Thank you, Prime Minister, it's an honour to be here today, and I'm really excited to see the improvements the reform will bring. Let me run through some examples of the changes we've made. Where we can, we have shortened words. For example, the word 'det' was spelt 'd-e-b-t', now it is spelt 'd-e-t'. By spelling the word with three letters instead of four, we save 25% of our time when writing it and 25% on printing costs. We have also made spelling more consistent whilst making sure we didn't increase the length of any words. For example, 'reseat', 'compleet', and 'repeet' were once spelt like this." Text appeared on the screen showing 'receipt', 'complete', and 'repeat'. "And now they are spelt like this." Text appeared on the screen showing the words in their new spelling. "For more efficiency, an apostrophe is no longer needed for contraction words such as 'They'll' and 'You're', but an apostrophe is still required for a contraction word such as 'we'll' to avoid confusion with the word 'well'. We've teamed up with tech companies, so that, when you type in Old Gildish, your text auto-translates to New Gildish. Resources for education providers can be found in the education section of the government's website. Once again, I'd like to say thank you to the Prime Minister for this great opportunity." "Thank you, Dgache. I really must say that what you have created here is literally a work of genius. It is innovation like this that keeps Gildland far ahead of the competition, and I can say on behalf of everyone in Gildland that I am very grateful for your contribution. I hope that Dgache's work here also inspires you as it has definitely inspired me to think of more innovative ways to make our nation richer and therefore happier and therefore kinder. Finally, as always, please remember, in a world where you can be anything, be kind."

Jeremiah asked, "What do you think of that, professor?" "It will distance us from our roots. Works that are not rewritten will be relegated to the interests of historians, but I doubt that's the intention, there already are so few that care for the Gildish culture of old that it hardly warrants an attack. I think Riley was honest when he said it was for economic reasons, it's one of the few ways to convince a nation of people with nothing in common that an idea is good." "Will you reverse it, if we're successful?" "Of course." "And what else will you do, if we win?" "Oh, many things. You can read the manifesto later. My plan, most basically, is to make people more intelligent, healthy, united, and rich. To make people more intelligent,

Riley's changes to age equality will be reversed to ensure children focus on learning instead of working. Logic will be introduced in formal education. We'll let students concentrate on what they care most about, they'll be allowed to drop all subjects except for language, arithmetic, and logic. So people read in their free time, social networking, video sharing, livestreaming, gaming, and image sharing, sites will be banned, only educational videos will be allowed on television, sports will only be viewable in person, video games will be banned, people will only be allowed to watch one film a week. To make people healthier, we'll ban cigarettes, junk food, and sugary drinks. People that go to hospital because of self-induced problems such as over-eating or alcoholism will have to pay for their own bills, to deter them from getting addicted in the first place. To encourage unity, immigration laws will focus on unity instead of importing as much labour as possible, faith schools will be phased out, students currently in faith schools can finish their educations there, but faith schools won't be able to accept new applicants, we'll fund weekly community events all over the country and invest in public spaces, and we'll change the Polysemy flag to our original flag. To make people richer, there are several changes we'll make. The salaries of MPs will be tied to the average salary of the bottom 90% of workers to incentivise MPs to put through legislation that will help the people. We'll implement pay ratio laws so non-founding executives can't be compensated by more than a hundred times that of the lowest-paid employee. If executives want to increase their own compensation, they'll have to increase the compensation of their lowest earner. And that pay ratio is still enormous. If you look at history, the pay ratio only surpassed that level thirty years ago, and companies performed just fine when the pay gap was below that. Compulsory unpaid overtime is one of the most overlooked injustices of our time. Because of incompetent planning by management and or because they don't want to hire more people and rent more office space, workers are forced into unpaid overtime. Last year, billions of hours were worked for free because of compulsory unpaid overtime, the people are owed billions and that's just one year. We will ban this, and I don't care if compulsory unpaid overtime was included in their contracts, the criminals will compensate the people. Share buybacks will be recognised for the scams they are and banned as they once were. This will encourage companies to direct capital towards their actual businesses, namely their workers, and prevent them buying their own shares to artificially inflate their share prices, which really only benefits shareholders, most of whom are already rich. VAT will be abolished as it's a regressive tax. Since everyone's charged the same rate, VAT takes a larger portion of poor people's income than rich people's, because poor people spend a larger portion of their income than rich people do. We will compensate for the loss in revenue from VAT by increasing capital gains tax and ending corporate tax evasion. Currently, capital gains tax is 20%, regardless of someone's capital gains for the year, even if it was millions, but income tax is 20% for income between 12,571 and 50,270 guilders, and income tax rates rise beyond that for higher levels of income. When we win, capital gains will be taxed at 40% and all income taxes will be halved. To end corporate tax evasion, we'll use formulary apportionment which basically means taxing corporations based on the percentage of their global sales made in our country. Currently, one way corporations evade tax by having their subsidiaries around the world pay royalties to their subsidiary located in a tax haven, this reduces the profits of those subsidiaries around the world thus decreasing their tax liabilities. Our country loses hundreds of billions in taxes every single year, keep that in mind when you next hear some so-called political commentator complain about a famous man wearing a dress or someone telling a rude joke, and ask yourself if they're focusing on what actually makes a difference to the lives of the people in need. We will also recoup the taxes they



dodged in the past. If everyone knew how much they've been deprived of, I truly believe there'd be a revolution, because they'd feel ridiculous going to work whilst these crimes are going on. Letting corporations choose where they pay tax is like letting people choose which country's laws they follow! How could anyone not be angry about it?" Jeremiah and Arthur had gone on walks a few times that year, and Jeremiah was always mesmerised by his long speeches. To him, he seemed to know exactly what he wanted and that he'd thought about his ideas countless times over. He responded to Arthur's rhetorical question, "I think people are angry, but feel powerless." "You're right. When we win, the tax advisors and board members of corporations that dodged taxes will all go to jail for life and they will serve hard labour and be robbed of their assets. They can go to Hell, for all I care. You can get arrested for using a 'wrong word', but you can't get arrested for dodging billions in taxes!" Of course, his suggestion of robbing the rich was illegal, but the Overwatch didn't operate on the road they were on. They were surrounded by dead forestry. Apart from a rare car speeding to or from the VRC, the only sign of life was the sun. He continued, "We must create such an air of hostility towards the rich that our violence towards them upon our victory will be accepted." Jeremiah said, "I don't like the sound of that. I don't we should ever be violent." "But the rich are already violent. When there is no safety net, when the homeless aren't helped, when millions depend on drugs to escape reality, when the government doesn't invest in new jobs, people resort to crime. The problems that drive people to crime wouldn't be so bad, if the rich didn't evade taxation. The rich are the ones knowingly causing climate change which has killed millions and will begin to kill millions more through water shortages, mass migrations which will lead to conflicts over depleting resources, more frequent and powerful natural disasters. Oh, and remind me who are the ones that profit from war? You see, the rich already do encourage violence. Justice is treating the rich violently in return." "I don't know." "No, you do know. You know it's a fact that the rich, specifically the rich polluters, namely the execs in the fossil-fuel industry, are mass murderers. After learning from scientists that their polluting would kill people, they continued to pollute the world, and actually suppressed the scientific research. Millions have died from pollution and millions more will, they spent huge sums on disinformation as a means of covering up their crimes and spent a lot of money on lobbying politicians so they'd be allowed to continue polluting the world. The world's polluters are guilty of mass murder. The rich do not deserve your kindness, Jeremiah, they deserve to have their fucking heads cut off. They should consider themselves lucky for what we're going to do to them." "But surely we as customers are also guilty of mass murder. They wouldn't have made products that created pollution, if they had no customers buying them. We knowingly consumed products that created pollution whilst knowing pollution would kill millions of people. Obviously, none of us individually can be said to have killed millions, but we've all played a part. Surely, you don't think we should all go to jail?" "I don't think we should. As I said, only the rich will go to jail." "I know, but I meant it's unfair to just punish the rich polluters when we're all guilty." "Well, when we win, I can send you and billions of people to jail, if you want?" "No!" "Well, that settles it."

As with all VRCs, there were no signs directing people there. Cars belonging to bounty hunters sped in and out the tunnel at the end of the road that led down to it. Only Arthur and Jeremiah were walking to it. Constant was the struggling, fighting, and shouting of commands by the bounty hunters underground trying to deposit criminals into the VRC. If one didn't know a VRC was there, they'd probably have thought it was the nucleus of a zombie apocalypse. Several rehabilitants emerged from the tunnel in several fashions; running with blood all over their clothes, walking like a drunkard, running into the dead

forest aimlessly, talking to themselves, crawling out seemingly lost. All had dark rings around their eyes, messy hair if they had any, and appeared exhausted. One of the crawling rehabilitants asked Arthur and Jeremiah for help, and tried to hold onto their legs as they passed by. Arthur put an arm around Jeremiah and moved him out of their reach, “Don’t worry about them. They’ll forget us a moment after we pass. It’s difficult to think for the first few hours out of rehab.” “How long will it take you to recover?” “Maybe a couple of days.” “God.” “I’ll be okay. It could be worse. Look at these people coming out alone. At least I have you. You know, their families get notified when rehab begins, clearly no-one cared enough to take them home.” “That’s so sad.” “Until you remember they’re criminals.” “You’re a criminal!” “True, but my crime was for a good end. I doubt these abominations can say the same.” “You never know.” “I suppose. Anyway, don’t worry I’ll be all right.” “I hope so. It’s unfair that you’re being punished for trying to help people.” “Maybe so, but Green Eyes was right when he said that if the Plutocracy is not trying to kill or jail you, then you’re not a threat to them. History is full of people being punished for trying to help their country. It’s a badge of honour! They usually get looked back on fondly by the following generations. One day, we’ll look back on this and laugh.”

They entered the tunnel, staying close to the edge to avoid the cars racing by, descending to where they saw not only what lied below the surface of the ground, but also what lied below the surface of everyday civility. Once they’d descended the tunnel, the VRC came into view. It was a large cavern with chamber doors dotted all over its walls. The chambers chugged and the whole place stunk of blood and petrol. There was a car park for the bounty hunters in the centre. Car lights and flood lights lit the cavern. By the entrance was a waiting room behind bulletproof glass on one side and drug vending machines for the rehabilitants on the other side. Arthur and Jeremiah accepted they could be killed at any moment, perhaps from a stray bullet or by someone wanting to for fun. A criminal freed themselves from their bounty hunter’s grip for a moment just as they were about to be put in a chamber, only to be snatched back and slammed to the ground face-first. With his nose broken, he was thrown inside the chamber. Another bounty hunter forgot to disarm their criminal before they locked them in their car boot, and, once he opened it, was stabbed in the stomach by the criminal. The criminal had the misfortune of being right in front of a professional bounty hunter squad who were in the middle of making several deposits. The criminal took his bounty hunter’s gun and used the corpse as a meat shield. He shot at them, but hit only their armoured vehicle. One of the professionals shot the criminal in the face with a taser in his first attempt. The criminal was then collected and thrown in a chamber. The professional squad wore armour, used tactical weaponry, and drove an armoured truck, it was their full-time occupation unlike the amateur bounty hunter that had just been murdered. One member of the professional squad took the amateur bounty hunter’s corpse to their truck so they could later sell his body for medical research.

As they neared a chamber, Arthur said, “I don’t know how long I’ll be inside, it could be for hours.” “That’s not a problem. I’ll be here.” “I really can’t thank you enough, Jeremiah. I’ll make it up for you one day, when I can, when I’m not as low as I am now.” They received odd looks from bounty hunters, as they were the only pair to not arrive by car and because Arthur still had his arm around Jeremiah to protect him. Fortunately for them, there was such a constant stream of chaos that bounty hunters hadn’t the time to focus too long on anything. Some naive person ahead of Arthur and Jeremiah tried to game the system by scanning a photo of a wanted criminal at a chamber’s screen, but, once the fraud was detected, the

chamber played an alarm for their crime. A bounty hunter pelted a baton at their head, dropping them to the ground, and deposited them in a chamber. When the two of them reached a chamber door, Arthur positioned his face in front of the chamber's camera to check if he was due for rehabilitation. It quickly confirmed he was and a message showed he'd been charged forty-thousand guilders for his rehabilitation, almost half his annual salary. A chamber door opened revealing a white, padded cell splattered with blood. It was only two metres wide and three meters tall. He went inside eager for it to be over with. The chamber door slammed shut piercingly loud, and turned pitch black. Jeremiah scanned his own face at the screen, and received a bounty of twenty-thousand guilders then ran to the waiting room.

In surrounding chambers, atheists prayed to God in demonic wails and rehabilitants crashed into the walls of surrounding chambers shaking him like he was in a head being punched. A motor sounded from the chamber's ceiling. A helmet hanging from a wire connected to the ceiling forced itself onto Arthur and the motor sound stopped. From the speakers within the helmet, the Supervisor, said in a cheery, robotic voice, "Welcome to the Virtual Rehabilitation Centre! The following simulations are of past events from the perspectives of people you are remorseful for hurting. If we cannot detect any past events you are remorseful for, you will experience fictional simulations. Beginning simulations in three, two, one." None of the simulations Arthur experienced were fictional. During the simulations, Arthur was absolutely convinced he was the person he was remorseful for hurting.

In the first simulation, he was a boy he'd bullied in a time when school was still mandatory. The fear of school enchanted his bed to be more comfortable and weighed his eyelids down. He tried many excuses to skip school, but his parents didn't fall for any. He didn't want his parents to worry, so never said the true reason he didn't want to go. The pupils lined up outside the classroom and he was at the back, waiting for their teacher. Arthur and his friends had not yet acknowledged him, they were arguing about a game. The teacher stood by the door and registered them one by one. When he entered, they all screamed as though he was a monster, some shielded their eyes and some pointed at him in fear. This scene was clearly organised by Arthur who watched proudly with his arms folded. He looked to the ground as he made his way to his desk, pretending not to notice. Just before he sat, his chair was pulled, and he crashed to the ground. Everyone laughed wildly, and some took pictures of him. When he moved his chair back to his desk, he noticed string around its back legs which Arthur, who sat behind him, had clearly pulled. Later on, he was asked a question by the teacher, but because he'd spent the entirety of the lesson speaking to himself and dwelling on his wrist that he was sure he'd fractured, he didn't know how to answer the teacher, causing more laughter from Arthur and his cronies. His teacher then criticised him for not focusing. Whilst he still had the teacher's attention, he showed him the bruise on his wrist and asked to see the school nurse, but his request was rejected because the teacher thought he was lying. He returned home and his mother greeted him enthusiastically. He mustered a tired greeting as he passed her and went in his room. He sat on the edge of his bed and pushed his fingers into his eyes and started punching himself in the head whilst screaming and crying.

In a later simulation, he was a policeman. The lights from the shops, police cars, and street decorations made the rain-soaked streets look like a gigantic watercolour painting. Cars were engulfed in flames, smoke came from windows all around, bins were kicked over, lost weapons and armour laid all over the ground. Graffiti covered all the walls. Makeshift barricades were on every street. The police could barely hear each other over the moaning, whistling, horns, and indiscernible chanting of the raging protesters. Police sirens swirled

around them. A lamppost was torn out the ground and thrown into a shop which was then robbed. The same lamppost was then carried by several protesters and launched at him and his fellow officers. A car driven by a protester speeding in his direction was shot down before it reached him and it crashed into a parked car. The protesters continually forced them back. They could see no exit except through death or a miracle. The police began to retreat, but just as they were, someone threw a bat at him causing him to fall. He fell behind the rest, he got up to escape, but before he could, Arthur, then twenty years old, kicked his head like it was a ball. Several other protesters joined in kicking him. Arthur stole his cuffs and cuffed him to a railing then ran off to attack the other policemen. The rest of the mob beat the policeman to death.

In one simulation, he was his son Francis. He'd cried alone earlier in the day because Arthur didn't play with him. After some hours had passed since his rejection, he felt recovered enough to try another attempt. However, on this second attempt, instead of getting him to play one of his games, he decided to choose something he was sure his father would like, though he didn't care much for it himself. He scanned through his father's bookshelf and picked the smallest one. He went to his father's study. Arthur was so engrossed in his work at the computer that he didn't notice him by the door, until he said, "Dad!" Arthur turned and said, "Yes, my boy!" He held the book up, and asked, "Can we read?" "I would love to, but I'm very busy at the moment. I should be finished soon. Can you ask your mother?" Feeling unwanted, he dejectedly said, "Okay," then ran to his room and cried all over again.

In another simulation, he was his ex-wife Maria. She found a letter from Gildland's financial regulator. The letter revealed that, behind her back, Arthur was part of a stock market manipulation scheme and that he'd been fined three quarters of his net worth and banned from regulated financial activity. Her only hope was that the letter was some sort of scam or mistake. She rushed upstairs to where she heard him typing. Expecting the worst, she asked whilst holding up the letter, "What is this?" He stopped working and his demeanour confirmed her fears. She marched to him then shoved the letter in his face and, shaking with anger, more forcefully said, "What is this?" Arthur didn't reply, he buried his head in his hands. "Don't ignore me. What is this?" "I wanted to make enough money so we wouldn't have to work anymore." "By breaking the law?" "I'm sorry." Maria began smacking him, "You idiot! You idiot!" Arthur pushed Maria off him and she crashed to the ground. She stared at him, shocked and furious that he'd do such a thing when he was the one in the wrong.

He thought of the scenes involving Maria, and the policeman, almost everyday, but the VRC also roused other shameful memories from their deep slumber. After six more hours of simulations, his rehabilitation was complete. All he could now see was phosphene and all he could hear was the violence outside. The robotic voice returned, "Congratulations on completing your rehabilitation! You should now be more a more empathetic person. Given the severity of your rehabilitation, it may take a week to recover. To ease the pain, consider checking out our drug vending machines. If you're feeling tired, we recommend Goterpex for only 49 gilders, if you're feeling angry, choose Wuptoril for just 99 gilders, if you're feeling nauseous choose Damdachax for 79 gilders. Until next time!" The helmet loosened itself and shot upwards. The chamber door opened and floodlights attacked his eyes. He was too hurt to leave the chamber, so the back wall punched him out to the sticky, bloody, stone floor. Though there was not a bruise on Arthur's body, he felt all the injuries he'd experienced in rehabilitation simultaneously; the pain from falling off a chair, the punches to the head, the

beating to death from the mob, being pushed to the ground, and those from other simulations. Since the pain was artificial, he endured what would have killed him if real. He didn't know if he was the boy he'd bullied, if he was the policeman he attacked, if he was Francis, if he was Maria, if he was himself, or any of the other identities he'd had during the other simulations. His mind cycled through these different identities holding on to none of them for more than a few seconds, and with each change in identity came the emotional suffering experienced in the related simulation. In the cavern, he saw a rehabilitant commit suicide by running in front of a car, and bounty hunters scramble to recover it so the corpse could be deposited at a medical research facility. He saw a child that had just been processed through the VRC running around screaming with torrential tears pouring down its reddened face in search of the exit. A car stopped, someone hopped out, grabbed the child then drove off with them, Arthur wanted to stop them, but was restricted by his imagined bodily pain. One criminal was about to hand themselves in, but before he could, a nearby bounty hunter grabbed and deposited him to steal the bounty. Because of the guilt and self-hatred the simulations brought to the forefront of his mind, the tangled up identities, the gunshots, the cries, the rumbling from the chambers, his physical pain that would have killed him if not for it being imaginary, and the endlessly traumatic and dehumanising sights before him, he had never felt so fragile, he thought the world was entirely evil.

In the waiting room, Jeremiah had become somewhat numb to the bedlam outside that he'd heard for hours, and, after dwelling on the injustice Arthur was suffering, became absolutely determined to help the boycott succeed. When Arthur's rehabilitation was over, a notice appeared on the screen in the waiting area. Jeremiah ran out and found him on the floor with his hands on his head in agony. His hair was untidy, his clothes were dirtied from the bloodied cell, his trousers had a hole in them from when he was punched out the chamber, and he had raccoon eyes from the simulation helmet. When Arthur saw Jeremiah running to him, he was not sure who he was, he feared that he was going to be attacked by him, and his fear was exacerbated because he didn't have the strength to protect himself, he felt completely prone to all the world's dangers. When Jeremiah said, "Arthur!" some comfort came to him for he vaguely remembered his voice and he sounded concerned for his welfare. Jeremiah put him on his feet. Arthur analysed his face, he felt he knew him, but not his name, or where he knew him from. Jeremiah assisted him out the cavern's chaos, up the tunnel, down the forest-sheltered road where light only came from the sunnied moon, car lights, and ads beamed into the night sky, then through the suburbs of Bronrar where people looked at him as if he was helping a drunk friend, then at last to Arthur's house. The Lady With the Red Briefcase passed them, heading home after some drinks with her friends. Jeremiah had never been so thankful for Gildland's moving pavements. He tried to get Arthur to speak several times during the journey, but Arthur was too overwhelmed by the different identities his mind was carrying at once. As one thought came from one identity, another thought came from another, when he felt like himself and remembered Jeremiah he felt comfortable around him, then the next he'd feel like someone that had never met Jeremiah and was somewhat afraid of him. His thoughts were changing so quickly, and were so confused, he didn't know what to do. Fortunately for him, the morsel of sanity he had left said to trust the young man helping him walk.

Eric, who'd been asleep since nine, the precise time he went to bed every night, was woken by moaning from down the street. He feared who it may be so grabbed the cricket bat, which he'd found in Arthur's front porch. He looked out a window that overlooked the front garden,

and the sight of Arthur being assisted home calmed him. He went down to help for he knew how damaging the VRC was to rehabilitants, not from experience, but because he'd researched the VRC out of a paranoia that he'd be sent their one day for his political opinions. Before leaving the house, Eric scanned the outside but saw no dangers to worry about, so left the bat by the door, and went to help bring Arthur in. He said to them, "Come in, lads. Come along now." Jeremiah was so tired from walking for hours and holding Arthur up during the journey that he had not the energy to properly greet Eric apart from a nod and smile. Eric locked the door the moment they entered then aided them both on to different living room sofas. He ran upstairs and fetched pillows and blankets. Jeremiah fell asleep, before he returned. Eric placed blankets over both of them and tucked pillows under their heads. He kept watch on Arthur as he tossed and turned for an hour before falling asleep.

## Statement 5: “Where Is Everyone?”

*TODAY'S TOP HEADLINES:*

*Steve Cook to Unveil the Intermind in Two Weeks at the FY4079 Appallinc Summit*

*Riley Calls for Unity In Wake of Shonswin Temple Massacre*

*Supreme Leader Sirkitus Warns World Against Decoupling from Elimperia*

*Your Job Is Changing, and That's Not a Bad Thing*

*Former Riverlake Professor Arrested for Inciting Economic Terrorism*

Sunlight pressed against Jeremiah’s eyes and flickered them open. He saw Arthur was still asleep and that Eric had gone. The light beaming through the leaded windows seemed to tattoo them both in diamonds and roses. A lawnmower hummed soothingly in the distance. Outside the window, he could only see the tops of apple trees before a blue-sky background. His tired body was sunk into a sofa. He was so excited to be in the home of his idol he looked at even the most mundane objects with a slight fascination. He looked forward to spending the day with him and never going back to his business administration course. He deeply believed the economic boycott would lead Arthur to power and imagined how great the country and their lives would be after the changes they’d made. The moment, especially in contrast to the suffering of the previous day, greatly pleased him. He felt it was a rare moment in which everything was perfect and that even the slightest alteration threatened to ruin it. Eventually, as he reflected, he recalled other moments in life he’d considered perfect until they were suddenly ruined suddenly and the sad mood he’d subsequently fall into. He ended the moment himself, so it could be sealed and placed in his memory, where it could last unblemished forever. He sprung up and went to the wall of books. Though he wanted to explore the house and gardens, he preferred to stay in the same room in case Arthur needed help. Reading the book titles, he couldn’t help smiling at those he’d read, as well as those he remembered Arthur referring to at Riverlake. There were books on political philosophy, economics, history, military strategy, wilderness survival, and almost no fiction. Books were categorised by topic then author name. If there was a writer Arthur admired, he’d purchase and keep all of their work out of respect, even if he didn’t enjoy all of their writings. Jeremiah picked one which had far more notes sticking out of it than any other he could see, and couldn’t believe the immensity of notes inside. On a few pages, the notes had more words than the book page. His estimation of Arthur rose. A few minutes later, he was distracted from a book when he heard Arthur lightly moaning. He noticed him on the sofa, scrunched up, shielding his eyes from the window. To help Arthur back to sleep, Jeremiah hastily closed the curtains. Eric chose to not close them the previous night because, after helping them to sleep, he didn’t want to appear too nice. Jeremiah sat by his side deeply worried about how much longer Arthur would suffer and he tried to imagine the pain he was going through. When he went back to sleep, Jeremiah returned to the book to take his mind away, but he couldn’t focus, he was too distracted by the thought of Arthur’s well-being. Words didn’t form sentences, sentences didn’t form paragraphs, what he read he couldn’t remember one moment later, he’d look at a page, then look to Arthur, see that he was asleep, return to the book, and

fail to focus once again. His restlessness made him more desperate for Arthur to recover. He looked at his watch, and the hands looked like two men struggling to wade through miles of snow.

Without an alarm, Eric woke up precisely at seven, as he did everyday. When Arthur was at the VRC, Eric rummaged through the attic, not bothering to put anything back where he'd found it, and pawned a dozen antiques so he could buy food. From the stash under his bed, he took out the ingredients for his breakfast only a moment after waking up. He made a sandwich of butter, raspberry jam, Camembert cheese, and ham, then ate it in a minute. As Jeremiah heard him descending, he was excited to meet him for he loved making new friends. Eric stopped by the door, looked down at him, and said, "I hope he has not obliged you to stay." "Oh, he hasn't recovered yet so I wanted to keep him company." Eric glanced at Arthur then back at Jeremiah, "I say. Well, if I was you, I would get out whilst you can." "Why?" "Why?" He is a fool." Jeremiah laughed, "I don't think so." He got up, offered his hand and said, "I'm Jeremiah, it's nice to meet you." "Thus far," said Eric, as he ignored Jeremiah's hand and went to sit down. "How was the reaction to his speech?" Jeremiah sat back down. "It wasn't great, but the Overwatch interrupted him." "And you think that if he was not interrupted people would have fawned over him?" "I think that-" "Has it dawned on you that he started this foolish boycott after he lost his job and not before?" "Yes." "And do you not see the significance of that?" Whilst Jeremiah was thinking, Eric answered for him. "He is only doing this because losing his job has made him desperate. How could such an intelligent man believe in such a foolish idea? He is asking people in the same comfort he was once in to live a life of hardship for some puerile fantasy. People will only join if, or, rather, when they fall into a similar predicament he is in. You cannot get people to revolt when their lives are comfortable, they only revolt when their life becomes unbearable. No matter how accurate and striking his speeches are, his plan will not work because it is poorly timed and he is asking too much of people." Jeremiah contemplated all Eric said and couldn't find a fault. He responded, "Maybe, but Arthur knows more about the boycott. It'd be wrong of me to defend his idea. We've only spoken about it briefly." "Yet you put yourself in danger for it." "I was just doing what felt right." "My dear chap." Jeremiah asked sincerely, "What do you think we should do?" "I think we should leave Gildland whilst we can then put our feet up." "We can't leave!" "Oh, yes, we can." "Why should we leave?" "Because there is no hope." "You do have hope. Anyone that chooses to live has hope." "Oh, no, no, no. You misunderstand. I do not live because I hope for a better world, I live to watch the circus. I am utterly detached from the events of this world, I am a humble spectator, I enjoy watching naive people attempt to stop the inevitable. There is no use in attempting to save in this country, we are not wealthy enough." "Arthur taught me about how influential they are, but they don't have absolute control. There's always hope." "I see you are reading the Economic History of Gildland." "Oh, uh, yes. Have you read it?" Insulted, Eric upturned his nose at him and Jeremiah said, "Sorry." Eric steepled his fingers, "As you will go on to read, slavery was not abolished because of humanitarian reasons, slavery was abolished for economic reasons. To simplify a long and complex story, slavery was holding back economic growth. Slavery had many people stuck in low-skilled jobs instead of being educated to fill the new jobs created by industrialisation. Though slavery greatly benefited the slaveowners, the rest of the nation was worse off because of it. Since slaves had no money or freedom, the new economy missed out on extra consumers (industrialisation massively expanded the amount of consumer goods), and the new economy missed out on creditors, debtors, inventors, and entrepreneurs. If slavery was better for the economy than freedom, there would still be slaves.



When slavery was legal, politicians, philosophers, and scientists openly supported the idea that some people were only worthy of slavery. It was this belief that prevented free people from seeing slavery as abhorrent and thus allowed the machine of misery to continue. Now that our current economy requires as many people as possible from anywhere in the world to be part of our workforce everyone is suddenly considered equal, because the powerful need the workers to all get along. What seems like moral change is just a change in what is best for their wealth. Their morality derives from their economic interest.” “Well-” “Of course all the changes didn't happen on the exact same day, some people were unaware of the master plan, and had to be dragged out to the streets and clubbed to death first, but it only took a few decades to change what was seen as perfectly normal for thousands of years all over the world. So, do you think this is all a coincidence or do you think the wealthy have absolute control?” Gathering from the wreck of his shattered view, Jeremiah said, “At least-” “And public schools were only created because industrialisation required an obedient workforce that could read and write. When most people worked in agriculture, they were happy to leave the common man as dumb as a mule. Did you think public education was introduced out of the goodness of their hearts? My poor chap.” “Well, at least slavery has ended.” “That *form* of slavery ended.” “What do you mean?” “Our chains are not made of iron anymore. Our chains are beautiful, melodious, delicious, fragrant, entertaining, comfortable. The miseries this government create are tolerated because people do not want to jeopardise their pleasures. People will only support someone like De la Mer when their fridges are empty. He is just another egomaniac desperate to make a name for himself, terrified he will not be remembered by historians.” Eric actually held a very high opinion of Arthur, but was trying to dissuade Jeremiah from helping him. “Eric-” “Mr. Fidge.” “Mr. Fidge, I think you've misjudged him. He didn't have to allow you into his home, he didn't have to do all the hard work that he's done. Just look at how much weight he's lost during this boycott, and he knew he'd be sent to rehab because of his speech. He's trying so hard. He's not doing this for selfish reasons, he is a nice man.” “I fail to see how being nice is much better. Do you know what the origin of the word 'nice' is?” “No, I don't.” Eric looked away in contempt then said upon returning to Jeremiah, “The origin of the word 'nice' is 'stupid', and, as I am sure you have noticed in your short life, only stupid people are nice. Niceness is a compromise of the weak for they have nothing else to offer the world.” “Mr. Fidge!” “Yes?” “That is such a horrible thing to say.” “I do not care. If you want to help others, you should prioritise being smart, not nice. Any power-crazed menace can seem nice. Any detrimental belief can seem nice, if spun well enough. It is a lot easier to seem nice than smart. If you wish to stop electing fools and tyrants, look for smartness and ignore their cheap attempts at niceness. Leaving this country to go on holiday would be the smart thing to do, but, alas, I depend on a nice man.” “If you wish to leave, may I ask, why do you stay here?” “I am not telling you.” Jeremiah wasn't sure if he was joking. Eric elaborated, “My private life is private.” Jeremiah found Eric alluring. He wanted to learn more about him and hoped there'd be something for them to bond over, so changed subjects, “What are your interests outside of history, Mr. Fidge?” Taken aback, Eric said, “Well, I like watching plays.” “Oh, yeah? “Yes, but only tragedies.” Although Jeremiah had only a small knowledge of plays, he asked with the fervour of an enthusiast, “Which ones?” Just as Eric was about to respond, they noticed they were starting to wake Arthur. So, Eric took out a handkerchief then shook Jeremiah's hand with it and bade him farewell. For the rest of the day, Jeremiah remained by his side whilst Eric split his time between gardening, reading, eating from his secret stash of food, and keeping Jeremiah company. It

was not until late in the night that Jeremiah finally gave into the lack of stimulation and fell to sleep on the sofa.

Arthur woke up the next morning, and, to his delight, discovered he'd crossed the bridge of recovery. He sat up in his sofa, believing he'd cleared a monumental obstacle and that his bravery and the mistreatment he'd faced were about to be rewarded by a gain of at least a few supporters from his speech. The solidarity he felt with those imagined people and the help he imagined they'd bring made the pain feel worthwhile. Whilst he was sat up in his sofa, contemplating what had happened and what to do next, Jeremiah woke up, and was glad to see him looking healthier. "Morning, Arthur." "Good morning." "Are you okay?" "I'm much better." "Do you know that you slept all through yesterday." "Really?" "Yes, you went in on Workday50 then slept through Restday19, and today is Restday20." "That's not too bad. It's about the same time I took to recover from my first there." Tongue-in-cheek, Jeremiah asked, "Do you feel rehabilitated?" Arthur responded sarcastically, "Yes, punishing me has changed my opinions." "It does scare people out of stating such opinions, though." "Indeed." Arthur paused and his introspection turned melancholic, "It makes one scared to do almost anything, after remembering how fragile a good life is, and it reminds you of all your most haunting regrets. I've done some unspeakable things in my life, Jeremiah, and I do hate myself for them." "At least you acknowledge the wrong you've done, there are people that, I'm sure, have done far worse things than you and feel nothing. Plus, what you're doing now will more than compensate for any bad you could have possibly done. You said yourself that all of life is interconnected, sometimes in ways we don't realise. If you hadn't done those things that you regret then perhaps you wouldn't have the motivation for this boycott that will help millions of people." "That's just wishful thinking, Jeremiah. I've treated people terribly, especially when I was a teenager. I wish I could speak to everyone I hurt and apologise, but I haven't seen them in years. If I did apologise, they'd think I was crazy or joking. Anyway, let's talk about something else. I'm heading to the forest soon, that's where I've been showering and getting my food and water from. You can come and help me carry some back, if you want?" "Of course. I'd love to help." "Great. I'll get Eric to help us, I'll be right back." "I can go upstairs for you, if you want?" "Oh, no, it's okay. I'll be back in a minute."

Arthur went upstairs, collected towels and soap then knocked on Eric's door. A rustling could be heard from within then once it was silent, Eric said, "Speak." "It's the man that saved your life." "Enter." Arthur went in, "We're going to-" "I am not happy with my accommodation." "Why?" "Because there is no running water and there is no food and there is no heating." "What were you expecting? We're waging an economic boycott." "Which will not work. If you stop it, we could enjoy ourselves." "Stop being so negative. We're going to the forest to get food and water now." "Oh, wonderful, come back soon." "Join us." "No, thank you." "Why not?" "Will we have lunch at one of clock?" "We'll probably have it a bit before then. Why?" "Because that is my lunchtime. I would rather stay here and eat from an apple tree." "I'll stop paying your Unemployment Fine, if you don't come." Eric felt defeated, "I just want to be left alone. I want to do nothing and I am not even allowed to do that!" "You'll enjoy the walk, Eric. Come on." Eric sighed then got up to go downstairs and said to Arthur in passing, "I will remember this. I am an elephant in more than one way."

Jeremiah was waiting in the hall and Arthur introduced him, "Have you met Jeremiah?" "Yes, I have met this obsequious fanatic of yours." Arthur snapped back, "Don't be rude to him." "Okay, well, this moderate fanatic of yours. You should be ashamed of dragging him into this." "He's an adult, he can decide what he wants." "Adult'? There are no adults anymore,

there are only children, and children with responsibilities. Gildland is an infantilised nation that can be tricked into believing anything. Quite hilarious, if you ask me. In fact, there was—"Can you take a Morphdrone each, please?" Arthur opened the cabinet in the front hall and handed out the white, cubic devices then fetched gardening gloves. The Morphdrones were purchased by Arthur's son Francis a few years earlier. Francis believed his dad disliked him and thought giving him an expensive birthday present would change his opinion. After Eric put on his shoes and picked his Morphdrone back up, he said to Jeremiah, "Do you recall when I said slavery was abolished?" "Yes." "I was wrong." Arthur said, "Don't worry, Eric, you won't be here much longer." Jeremiah asked, "What do you mean?" "I can't afford both of our Unemployment Fines forever, maybe for fifty more days I can" "I returned to you the bounty I received at rehab, won't that help?" "Even with that we still only have, um, forty-five days, I believe." "I can pay your fines, I have some money saved." "No, Jeremiah." "Why?" "I already feel guilty for what you've done these last two days, spending that sort of money would be too much." "I really don't mind." "But I do, and that's the end of it! Oh, and, if Eric suddenly becomes more polite to you now, you know why!" The Morphdrones had symbols engraved onto them, displaying all the different objects they could morph into. Once outside, they selected the fan option on their Morphdrones then threw them up lightly and the drones morphed into hand fans that waved back and forth whilst hovering by their heads. Arthur selected the bucket option on his other Morphdrone, so it would carry the towels and gardening gloves for him, and it hovered before him a few inches above ground.

Eric walked with his hands behind his back, Jeremiah walked with a hand in a trouser pocket, and Arthur walked proudly with his hands to his side. As they left the front garden, they noticed a man in a hi vis jacket working on Arthur's street name sign. They guessed he was repainting it, but upon closer inspection realised it was being renamed from McCarthy Road to a name they couldn't yet decipher. Arthur stepped off the moving pavement to the still section of it and the other two followed. Arthur said, "Hello, excuse me." The man glanced at him and was disturbed by the dark rings around Arthur's eyes, but then continued changing the name on the sign. "What exactly is being done?" "Renamin' street." "Why?" "Di'n't you 'ear? Riley's gettin' thasands changed." "Why?" "Dunno, said sammin 'baht been' inclusif." "What's the new name?" "Kir...mizi...Chi...chek Road, I dunno 'ah to say it, mate." "Kirmizi Chichek Road? What does that mean?" "Dunno." Arthur decided to leave him be. Feeling powerless, he said, "Okay, well, I hope you have a nice day." The man said nothing in return. As the three resumed their walk, Jeremiah said, "That reminds me of something I forgot to tell you." "Yes?" "When you were gone, I guess you didn't hear about the Native Tax?" "I'm completely out of the loop." "Riley introduced it a couple of weeks ago. The tax is compensation for the country's colonial past. He said something like, 'It's time for revenge. Descendants of the colonised are disadvantaged by its legacy, so it's fair to disadvantage the descendants of the beneficiaries. Discrimination against the innocent can only be compensated by discriminating against the evil.'" Arthur was surprised that Riley had not implemented it sooner. "How much is the tax?" "He increased the income tax of natives by five percentage points and decreased it by the same for non-natives." "What did everyone think of the change?" "They were mostly in support of it, even the natives. Anyone against it was called prejudiced almost as soon as they started talking. I think a lot were silent out of fear."

As they travelled north east to the forest, the high altitude of Bronrar provided them with a panoramic view of Central Montpelerin. In Jeremiah's opinion, its buildings were mostly

unimaginative, uninspiring, and unwelcoming. He said to Arthur, “If you ever become PM, I want your permission to demolish all of the ugly buildings.” “Be my guest.” Jeremiah spoke with a passion that Arthur loved, “I can’t stand to look at it. The buildings look like the very boxes and cabinets they contain! No expense is spared on beautifying them because the buildings are ‘only offices’, people have no choice but to go there. They don’t care that people spend much of their waking-lives in them, but, when a building is dull, people that enter them feel like a product placed in a cardboard box, and those that pass them feel like they’re walking through a warehouse. People love to feel that they’re somewhere special, and for that to be achieved there has to be at least some effort put into beautification. They do not realise how important beauty is in making a happy country.” Arthur remembered saying that last sentence, though not precisely when. He felt proud to have influenced him. Jeremiah continued, “When we replace those buildings. We must keep in mind what constitutes objective beauty since architecture is, by its nature, a public artform, people can’t turn a blind eye to buildings as they can with paintings confined to a gallery. Because of our will to live, we are attracted to life and afraid of death. Humans are attracted to forests that contain food because we, obviously, need to eat to survive, and we are not attracted to forests destroyed by wildfire because going there would not be beneficial to our survival. Everywhere in the world, people that appear healthy are considered more beautiful than those that appear unhealthy because we are attracted to those we think will produce healthy offspring and fearful of those that will not. We consider flowers beautiful partly because they signified to our ancestors that an abundance of food and more hospitable weather was approaching after the harshness of winter, or, if they had been travelling, the appearance of flowers signified that food may be nearby. Our preference of life over death is perhaps most obvious at funerals where flowers are placed on the coffin as if to shield our minds from death. The reason those dull, ugly buildings make people miserable is because their appearance indicates a rationing of resources, a lack of care, a lack of imagination, all of which make those in such places feel unimportant. But buildings that are decadent, that have intricate elements, that have excessive features, or that are unique, have the *potential* to be beautiful as such qualities indicate there was an abundance of materials to be used and that the creators cared about the appearance. However, what must be avoided is aiming for beauty by repeating glories of the past because that would show a sign of cultural stagnation.” Eric scoffed, “Well, if you want to make people happier, why stop at the demolishing of the ugly buildings? Even the beautiful ones are just vestigials. The Holy Home is a vestigial of our vanishing religion, the museums contain vestigials of our unacknowledged history, the libraries are vestigials of our once-literate nation, the Hexington Palace is a vestigial of the absolute monarchy that was defeated by the most ungrateful peasants the world has ever seen. The beauty of such buildings are merely reminders of our lost greatness.” Surprised, Jeremiah asked, “You’re a monarchist?” “So long as the monarch follows the word of God.” “You don’t support democracy?” “To have democracy is to have test subjects run an experiment. I like order and harmony. By letting the lowly have opinions, chaos inevitably follows. There are so many ways of viewing the world, so many books leading people astray from the Light, so many people incapable of logical thinking, so many different interests. Freedom of thought leads to confusion, democracy leads to conflict. Elected representatives will often prioritise the short-term to help win their next election, whilst ignoring the country’s long-term prosperity. A monarch has no concern for re-election, so prioritises the long-term. Every few years, the public fear a party with a different ideology taking power. Instead of zig-zagging through the future, monarchy offers stability. We would all be happy and united, if we obeyed the Book

and stopped trying to drag Heaven to earth. The last hundred years can be summarised as a pathetic attempt to drag Heaven to earth.” “I’m sorry, Mr. Fidge, but your criticisms aren’t fair. This country isn’t a democracy, it’s a Plutocracy. If it truly was a democracy, political donations would be capped at-” “You have no idea-” Arthur interrupted Eric, “Ignore him, Jeremiah. He’s a contrarian because he wants to appear more intelligent than others. He can’t achieve that by making a discovery, or creating something of use, so must resort to being different to stand out, as though he holds knowledge unattainable to the rest of us.” “My conclusions were not made by insult or injury and they will not be unmade that way. I am not a contrarian.” “In the opinion of no-one other than you.” “You are terribly funny.” Pitying Eric, Jeremiah said, “Please, Mr. Fidge, continue what you were saying.” “No. I am not in the mood now.” For the rest of the journey to the forest, Arthur and Jeremiah spoke a lot to each other, they observed their surroundings and spoke about their families, whilst Eric remained silent, ignoring Jeremiah’s invitations to talk.

Once they arrived at the Yeshil Forest, the cuboids, cylinders, and smooth surfaces that dominated civilization, which had in a sense confined their imaginations, fell away for shapes free from utility’s demand and man’s capability, providing such a sense of emancipation they felt they’d stepped into a different world. No concrete blemished the emerald dream, no rumbling motor disturbed the concert of nature. As Jeremiah hadn’t been to such a place since childhood, the mythological books he’d read in the intervening period filled the caves with treasure, the pools with nymphs, and the trees with fairies. For Eric, the forest evoked thoughts of the River War. The Yeshil Forest, the largest in Gildland, lied in the eastern parts of Bronrar and Montpelerin. The Bayuz River, which separated the two counties, weaved a wide, deep, and flat path through the forest and over much of the country. The source of the river had once been located in Taelon, the only nation that bordered Gildland’s north. Three hundred years earlier, Gildland declared war on Taelon to capture the source of the river and won in a matter of weeks, a victory Eric felt proud of despite not participating in it as he’d been born centuries after it ended. Due to Arthur’s readings, he envisioned the forest aflame, and pitied the charities fighting against world’s most destructive polluters. During Jeremiah’s daydream, Arthur called to him from further in, and so he went. “Here’s how you pick stinging nettles.” “Stinging nettles?” “Oh, yes, they’re very misunderstood, just like me.” “I had no idea they were edible.” “Put this on.” Arthur handed him one of his gardening gloves. “All you have to do is hold the stem and pull it out.” Jeremiah did so then Arthur said, whilst demonstrating, “If you want to eat them raw without getting stung, just pluck a leaf, fold then roll it and bite.” Jeremiah copied him. “Hmm. It’s very strong. I actually really like it. How did you learn about this?” Arthur smiled wistfully and said, “I was taught by an old friend.” “I see. Mr. Fidge, do you want to try some nettles?” Eric screwed his face in repulsion then turned away. Jeremiah held his fan then tapped its bucket icon then it morphed into the desired shape. He placed nettles inside the bucket as Arthur did then they proceeded with their journey, collecting berries, flowers, leaves, and mushrooms. Further inside, Jeremiah noticed sunlight falling upon a holly bush, whilst the bushes beside it were in the shade, making it appear like a miniature solar system then, when the wind blew the canopy, the holly bush sparkled like a Christmas tree. He couldn’t stop smiling in wonderment as they went by it. Eric asked, “What are you so happy about?” “Look at that!” he pointed. “Can you believe it?” Without looking, Eric said, “Yes.”

There were few others in the forest. No-one acknowledged them as they passed and they didn’t acknowledge anyone either. Deep within the forest, there was a group of fifteen

tourists taking photographs in front of the largest tree in Gildland, three-hundred foot high, fifty-foot wide, the ladies wore ripped short-shorts, were squatting by the tree with middle fingers to the camera, had their eyes closed, and tongues out. Arthur and Jeremiah walked behind the cameraman, to be polite and to forget about the sad image. Eric stood in front of the camera and said to the ladies having their pictures taken, "I once mourned the decline in marriage, until I realised there are no women worthy of marriage anymore." The ladies furiously told him to leave and shut his mouth. "How sad it is that you think housework for a husband is slavery and office work for a boss is freedom. Can you not see how labour has robbed your muliebrity?" The cameraman finally plucked up the courage to try to move Eric. Before he was touched, Eric said, "Worry not, I am leaving. A stench of rotten fish pollutes the air." To the side, Arthur was grinning and shaking his head, and Jeremiah was embarrassed. When Eric caught up with them, Jeremiah asked as they resumed walking, "What was that about, Mr. Fidge?" "All women are whores." "Yet you're still a virgin," responded Arthur. Jeremiah was too shocked by Eric's comment to hear Arthur's joke, he said, "Mr. Fidge! How could you say that?" "I apologise. I was wrong." "You was." "Some are not whores because they're too ugly to be." "Mr. Fidge!" "What are you so vexed for? Are you a woman?" "I am not!" "Do you know what becomes of women that are too ugly to become whores?" Jeremiah refused to answer. "They become feminists." "Mr. Fidge, stop it." "Feminists are failed women." "That is such an old way of thinking." "It is not, but what is wrong with something being old? Is 'new' a synonym for 'good'?" "Of course not." "Ah ha. As I was about to say, women are like that because they cannot contribute anything else to the world. They are not as athletic, creative, or intelligent, as men, and therefore have to resort to promiscuity. They've been free and encouraged to do as they please for decades, yet can you name one great book, composition, sculpture, or painting by a woman? No. Clearly, they are not equal." Sarcastically, Jeremiah responded, "Such an original opinion." "It is not an opinion. At any rate, I do not look down on them for their behaviour, I would be the same if I was one." "I'd hate to hold such cruel thoughts." "Or correct ones, apparently. Their hysterics, and love for the weak, have corrupted politics, since they tricked people into thinking they were equal to men. Fools celebrate them being given the vote yet the country has worsened since they were given it, and I believe a proper inquiry is in order regarding their destructive influence on politics. I am sure the politicians that knew women to be more conformist than men were happy to give them the vote. That most cult members are women is worthy of note. I am against women's suffrage, because I care more for women than I care for men. I want them to be free from the stress of politics, I want them to focus on child-rearing and housekeeping to make happy families instead of having a stressful career. Apparently, that makes me a bad person. Apparently, people like you are the good for having nudged them into offices and politics and the army." "I thought you was a professor of History?" "I was." "Oh, okay." "Of course, I receive no rebuttal." "Those opinions aren't even worthy of rebuttal." "I bet you are the sort of person that believes women have always been oppressed because school told you so. Are you aware that it was once legal to flog men, but not women? I have more examples, if you should so desire to hear them." Arthur asked a question he already knew the answer to, "So, do you consider women equal to men?" "No. I prefer women, as I have already stated. They are for more lovely and precious and charming. I would send all the country's men off to war, if it meant protecting one good woman. Does-

"Look!" Jeremiah pointed ahead. The three of them stopped. A deer darted towards them from the wide, flat path ahead. As it approached, they noticed an arrow in its side. Their eyes scanned the thickets on the path's right and the shiny, grass slope on the path's left for the

bowman. The deer collapsed a few metres before them. They heard a rustling in the bushes ahead. Four naked people, about the same age as Jeremiah, emerged from the other end of the path, holding hands, skipping and singing in celebration. Eric hid in the bushes. Arthur said, "They've already seen us, you fool. Stop being a coward." Eric kept silent. Arthur stood partly in front of Jeremiah, as the naked people approached. They picked up the deer without acknowledging Arthur or Jeremiah, then, as they were taking the deer back to where they came from, one blew a strawberry at them making the others giggle as they continued singing. Noticing Jeremiah looking at them with his hands on his head and his mouth ajar, Arthur asked, "What's wrong?" "Do you remember me telling you about the students that disappeared?" "Yes." "One of them went to Riverlake." Arthur became just as stunned and said, "Green Eyes must have brought them all here." "What's he done to them?" "God only knows." "We should report this." "Perhaps, they're better off with him. They seem happy." "They seem like a cult." "They could be a happy, little community, for all we know. It wouldn't be fair to sound the alarm without investigating them." Once there was a long space between both groups, Eric emerged from the bushes, and the three continued their journey. Eric said, "You will not be investigating them will you, De la Mer?" "No." Jeremiah asked, "Why?" "We must focus on the boycott. I don't want to get distracted." A few moments after the naked people disappeared round a bend in the path, a cheer from what sounded like a dozen people came then they continued singing. Eric said, "Must we go that way? Do you not have enough food?" Arthur said, "We have to get to the waterfall. It's not far." The singing of the group grew louder, as the three companions carried on, their minds all fixed on what the singing was about, as they were not singing in a language they recognised. The three went round the same bend the naked people had. Looking down the steep slope on the path's left as they walked, they noticed a dozen more naked people with the ones they saw earlier, all of a similar age to Jeremiah. A few crowded the deer, chopping it with machetes whilst a few stood behind them watching, all singing the same, all dressed the same, all standing or sitting in the same way. Eric observed, as the three continued walking and looking down at the naked people, "It's as if someone's cloned the exact same retard over, and over, and over again." Jeremiah responded in amused shock, "You can't use that word!" "Do not be such a bore you little tyrant. I love retards, after all, we get along pretty well, do we not?" "Thanks." Eric laughed, "Why are you offended? It is only possible to be offended by an insult, if one believes it contains an element of truth. An insult one believes to be devoid of truth is laughed off as ridiculous, as one is not made uncomfortable by it. Instead of controlling what everyone else says, would it not be wiser to grow thicker skin? You need to be more self-assured, my lad." Eric then spoke to Arthur as though Jeremiah was not there, "Was he really a student of yours? He's like a spawn of Riley." Arthur responded, "That's the most horrible thing you've said all day!" Before they could continue talking, a horn, low and resonant played a long note from a distant place in the forest. Eric flinched, birds flew in the opposite direction, and the singing stopped. The naked people abandoned the deer and ran to the horn, only taking their machetes with them. The horn was played again, as they disappeared from the three companions. Eric asked Arthur in worry, "Does that usually happen here?" "I have heard that call before... We needn't worry, the waterfall is not near whatever madness lurks there. Let's carry on, gentlemen. Green Eyes is far away, I can assure you." Eric said, as he gritted his teeth, "The next time I say that I do not want to do something, De la Mer, my wish will be respected." "It's not that bad, Eric. In fact, we've almost arrived at the waterfall, you'd have heard it if you wasn't complaining!" The three couldn't help suspecting the horn was about them. They walked faster than they had all day

and were nervous of sudden sounds. When Eric heard the waterfall, he leant against a tree and said, panting, "Wait." They stopped for him, and Arthur asked as he looked at him wearing his three-piece suit, "I can carry your jacket, if you want?" "No." "Do you want to undo your top button, at least?" "No." "Are you sure?" "My weight is the real problem." Jeremiah said, "Don't be daft, you're not fat." "If I am not fat, then the word has no meaning." "I think being large suits you, Mr. Fidge." Arthur laughed, but then noticing pity on Jeremiah's face, said, "Oh, I thought you was joking." After a couple of minutes passed, they continued when Eric gave the go ahead. They walked ahead of Eric, but slowly for him.

At the end of the path, Jeremiah stood in awe of the waterfall. From a giant, multi-level, rock, covered in vibrant vegetation, several large streams of water descended from the top, falling into pools at each level before falling to the next. Arthur led them to the bottom, where the water poured down in many thin streams adequate for them to drink from and shower in to alleviate them from the sweltering heat. Arthur gave Jeremiah towels and soap then showered at different parts of the waterfall. He didn't bring any for Eric, because he knew he would refuse to shower in public. Whilst they were away, Eric looked outwards from their elevated level to the vast landscape where the horn played, determined to never return to the forest, and wishing he was still working at Riverlake. A few minutes later, Arthur returned and Eric asked, "Can we leave when your epigone returns?" "I thought it'd be nice to eat out here." Eric huffed. Arthur asked "What's wrong?" "I would not mind helping you, if I thought this boycott had a chance, but it will not work, and you know I am right. You told me many years ago that you cannot succeed without huge financial backing, yet you contradict yourself with this boycott." "I know." "So why not let us leave this country and find work elsewhere?" "Because that would be admitting defeat." "Oh, for goodness' sake. The years of young men are war, we should spend our final years on holiday." "We will, my friend." When Jeremiah returned, they sat under an oak tree, and eat from what they'd collected. Meanwhile, Eric stood near them, gazing into the distance. Jeremiah asked, "Aren't you hungry, Mr. Fidge?" "Yes." "Eat with us. There's a lot here." "Eating outside is degenerate." "But there's no-one else here and we won't judge you." Eric said nothing in return. Arthur broke the silence, "I need you to do me a favour tomorrow." "What do you need?" "I'd like you to ask the students what they thought of the speech. If you find anyone in support, encourage them to join the boycott, but be careful. Don't show you support me until they've shown support. I know how disapproving some people are of this boycott and I don't want you to get on someone's wrong side, but keep in mind, they will assume you're against me because you captured me, they will be apprehensive to show support in front of you, so make them feel comfortable, but not too comfortable." Jeremiah smiled, "Okay, I'll try to remember all of that. I'll ask my family if they'd like to help too." "That would be great." Jeremiah then asked what he'd been thinking of all day, "Would it be more convenient, if I stayed at your house during the boycott?" "It would be. You can do that, if you wish." "Do you think I should drop out of Riverlake?" "Definitely not." "But then I'd have more time to help." "I know, but I don't want you to jeopardise your future. We haven't gained a single follower yet. There's no knowing if this will succeed." Once they'd finished eating, the three companions collected water in their buckets then headed back to Arthur's.



## Statement 6: In A Vague Way

*TODAY'S TOP HEADLINES:*

*Espillis: Jennifer Clark Becomes First Person to Land on Another Planet*

*Elimperia Leads Legal Challenge to Gildland's Sovereignty of Espillis*

*Six CRUSHED to Death During Stampede at Mega Sale Weekend*

*The King of Kindness: Riley Helps a Waitress Pay All Her Debt*

*So, Clogs Are Back, and We're Totally Here for It*

The next morning, Jeremiah went to Riverlake in search of opinions on Arthur's speech. The previous few days made him consider his studies to be of even less importance than before, he felt he'd become detached from his fellow students, that he was set loose from the crowded path and that his duty was to welcome others on to Arthur's path leading to the next world. For the first time since the cutting of the Humanities, he felt his life had purpose. Having a reputation for being friendly and talkative, he didn't look odd going from student to student and striking up conversations. When he found witnesses to it, he unearthed only negative opinions at the end of his carefully conducted conversations. Among the responses were, "I suppose he's kind of right, but does he seriously want people to decrease how much they buy? I don't even buy that much to begin with!" "I didn't get why he was complaining so much, life isn't that bad here. We have it a lot better than other countries." "If he wants to change the country, why doesn't he just do it the democratic way? Boycotting the economy will hurt people." "He reminded me of an alcoholic rambling on a street-corner." and "Yeah, the country has a lot of problems, but destroying the economy would hurt people that didn't actually create the problems. That wouldn't be fair." After dozens of attempts at trying to find a supporter and failing to find one, Jeremiah decided to call it a day, dreading the implications for Arthur's future.

When he returned to Arthur's, their familiar voices warmed him as a traveller returning home through a blizzard is warmed by a fireplace. The door was answered by Arthur. "Jeremiah! How did it go?" He answered, as they moved into the living room, "I'm sorry, Arthur. I asked so many people, but I couldn't find any support." The news delighted Eric who was sat on a sofa with a book. Though Arthur had prepared his mind to cope with failure, it took a few moments for him to speak after hearing the disappointing news. "What did they say?" Jeremiah spoke carefully to avoid hurting his feelings, "They agreed with much of what you said, but they didn't think the boycott was the best idea." Thinking the students were mad, Arthur humbly said, "Okay. If you don't mind me, gentlemen, I'll be heading to my room. I'm going to work on a new plan." Eric threw his arms up incredulously, "So you have not learnt your lesson?" "I think I have, actually. I need to explain the boycott more thoroughly. I'll be back!"

Arthur collapsed onto his bed. The wall of hope he'd built to keep his painful thoughts away collapsed and his mind was flooded with the thought that the country he once loved would never be saved, the guilt of bringing Jeremiah into a lost cause, the thought that the time he'd

spent writing the manifesto was for nothing, the prospect of never accomplishing anything great enough to impress Maria into reuniting with him, the possibility of his body not surviving the boycott much longer, and that he, and Eric, would have to resort to soul-destroying jobs in Gildland or to leave the country for survival. He wondered if he'd lived in his head for too long, that all his ideas seemed to make perfect sense only because he was talking to himself for so long, and that his fantasies distracted him from reality.

Jeremiah picked up the book he was reading the day before then laid on the sofa opposite Eric and began to read. Eric peered over his glasses at him, "Why do you not read with a pen?" "I didn't know I should. Why should I?" "To converse with the author, to take notes, to ensure the author does not make your opinions for you, to reflect on what you read without bulldozing through the pages. Reading is not a race. It is better to read a bad book well than a great book badly. If you read a bad book well, you will at least realise what not to do if you write. If you read a great book badly, you are likely to spread foolish opinions about it. No serious thinker reads without a pen." "I'm not sure if there's a pen around-" "And why are you reading with your feet up? That is a fairly rude way to treat a book. You have welcomed the author into your reading place and you are in conversation with the author. You should be more respectful." Part-amused, part-intimidated, Jeremiah said, "I'm sorry," then put his feet down. To Jeremiah's rescue came a replay of the speech Riley gave earlier in the day on the holographic billboards outside. Riley, wearing a tweed blazer and a red t-shirt with a cat on the front, said with a fixed smile, "Hello, my Kings and Queens! I hope you're doing well! It's that time of the week to catch up with everything that's going on. Your GDP rose 0.162% last week and we forecast it to remain at 0.162% this week. Your economy is going straight to the moon! Without your hard work, the rocket would have never left the ground, and let's remember what also contributed to the strength of your economy: a vibrant workforce and lower taxes. Yesterday, I had an extremely positive meeting with Supreme Leader Sirkitus of Elimperia. After many weeks of negotiations, he has agreed to fully compensate us for the losses caused by Elimperia's attacks on our asteroid mining facilities and polar-region mining facilities. Many Delusionals have said these accomplishments were impossible, some even said that Gildland and Elimperia, as the two most powerful nations in the world, were destined for war with each other, I think they've learnt to never doubt Gildland again. I hope this news provides you with hope for the future, as it does me. Finally, as always, please remember, in a world where you can be anything, be kind."

Eric said to Jeremiah, "A blind man leads Gildland." "What makes you say that?" "The idiot fell for their trick. Elimperia is retreating now to attack when they are better prepared. As usual, Sirkitus outsmarts Riley." "How do you know?" "I just do." "I'm not sure. I think we should be more hesitant when criticising politicians. So many people rush to criticise them, and feel smart doing so, but would such critics really do better in their position? I'm not so sure. Their alternative suggestions are often the echoes of experts, but politicians also listen to experts. Of course, we should remain vigilant, but we should also be humble enough to not expect their decisions to always be in line with our wishes or to always have perfect results. I think it would be disastrous, if politicians thought to themselves, 'No matter what we do, people always criticise and never praise us, so we may as well be corrupt.'" "I think Elimperia should be nuked before they can rival us. Is that an echo of an expert?" "That's an extraordinary thing to say." "It is not. You must kill them completely to prevent the threat from resurfacing. Instead of kicking the can down the road, we should exterminate them, like with any virus. Elimperia is rotten from the top to the bottom." "You shouldn't hate the

people, you should turn your hate towards their masters.” “I hate who deserves to be hated. Why not tell those savages to stop behaving in a way that inspires hate? It is funny to see people such as yourself pretend to care about them, yet, if I asked, ‘What would you miss, if they disappeared?’ you would not be able to answer me. Their hands have made no invention, their eyes have created no beauty, and yet we are told to respect them. Of course they want to be considered equal to us because they know they are inferior, they are intelligent enough to know that, though not humble enough to admit it. I have never seen such a vulgar coupling of arrogance and incompetence. They are a savage people completely incompatible with civilization. They speak of being proud, yet have nothing to be proud of. They have contributed nothing to the world but crime, disease, and complaints. By being kind to them, you are being cruel to everyone else, as everywhere they go depreciates in beauty and civility. Can you name a single place improved by their presence?” Repulsed, but still composed, Jeremiah responded, “Perhaps, if you ever spoke to one, your mind would change. They’re some of the friendliest people I’ve ever met.” “Only because they wanted to steal something from you.” “You speak as though they only have a right to exist, if they serve you in some way. Don’t you know all humans share a common ancestor? I think that’s a beautiful thought. Realising humanity is a family is one of the happiest discoveries I ever made.” “One can only be swooned by such a thought, if one has no love for their own people, which is, in case you are unaware, determined by blood, and if one has no interest in preserving it from the grey mass. There is a clear correlation between people that have no love and respect for, or even knowledge of, their own people’s history and culture, and cowards that claim to love everyone.” Arthur, who had been eavesdropping since hearing Eric raise his voice, went down, and said, “Eric, you just gave me the idea for our next plan!” “I did not.” “Yes, you did. Hearing you speak as you never would in public gave me an idea. I should teach people about the boycott in the privacy of my home, where the Overwatch cannot detect extremist speech. To get people here, we will host a philosophy class, which, remember, is legal as philosophy is only banned from formal education, then, during the class, I shall explain the boycott to the participants.” Jeremiah asked, “Let me know how I can help and I will.” “If you could try to find participants, Jeremiah, I would be most grateful. Look for people that have similar views to us, do not restrict yourself to Riverlake, and tell them the class is on Restday21 at 1pm. Tell them that learning philosophy will help them get a good job, just make up some explanation if they press for details on how it will.” “No problem.” “Oh, and, don’t tell them I am the one teaching the class, if word gets out that I’m the teacher, some people that want to kill me may arrive.” Eric said, “Or tell no one at all and save yourselves from humiliation.” “Not trying at all would be far more humiliating than failure. Now, Jeremiah, we have work to do.”

Over the next five days, Arthur prepared the class with Jeremiah’s assistance. The failure of his first speech made him second-guess what he wrote, and walking several miles every day to the Yeshil Forest, depleted much of the energy he could have spent on writing. They prepared two classes, one for if the students responded positively to his explanation of the economic boycott, and one for if the attendees responded negatively. If they responded positively, the class would morph into a sort of seminar for the boycott, if they responded negatively, Arthur would teach them the history of philosophy for the remainder of the hour to avoid a confrontation or any awkwardness with them. Jeremiah spent days trying to invite people on the streets to the class. He would ask, in his friendly way, “Hello, could I interest you in a free philosophy class?” only to be ignored or told to get out the way. From Riverlake, Jeremiah was able to get three attendees, each had studied philosophy before it was cut. After

the total failure of his first speech, Arthur felt grateful for the paltry sum of attendees. Jeremiah asked his family to partake in the boycott, and no-one took him seriously.

In traditional Gildish fashion, the attendees didn't arrive a second earlier than they had to, as that would have been considered an inefficient use of time. Only at events which required queuing or were first come first serve would they arrive earlier than the start time. The Lady with the Red Briefcase watched from the house opposite Arthur's, and looked forward to the class ending. The first attendee arrived in pyjamas. Fortunately for Arthur, the dark rings around his eyes from the VRC had all but disappeared. He showed how deeply he valued each student when he greeted them. "Hello! Welcome to the class. I am so thankful you've come." They nodded back and asked, "Is this really free?" "It is. If you would kindly follow my assistant into the living room, I will join you momentarily." Jeremiah led them in. The next attendee came in sportswear, Arthur smiled and said, "Hello! Thank you for coming." They nodded back then asked, "Is this class definitely free?" "Yes. It is completely free." "So, what's in it for you?" Arthur thought of how to avoid mentioning the boycott, "The enrichment of minds." "For what purpose?" "Pleasure." "Oh, right." "The class is just in the living room, if you would kindly follow my assistant." The third attendee, wearing blue pyjamas, nodded to Arthur. He said warmly, "Good afternoon! Welcome to the class. I am very glad that you've joined us. Please do follow my assistant inside." He closed the door and Jeremiah led the final attendee in. Jeremiah had arranged the room for Arthur so that the sofas were under the window and the dining chairs for the attendees were in the middle of the room facing the wall of books. To prevent an attendee secretly filming when Arthur began to speak of the boycott, Jeremiah had asked them as they came in to turn their phones off stating it was for copyright purposes, they all obliged. Eric sat upon a sofa, smirking at the attendees as they went to sit down then at Jeremiah as he sat beside him then at Arthur as he entered to begin the class. All the attendees felt quite uncomfortable because, despite his enthusiasm, Arthur appeared to be at death's door. "Good afternoon, everyone. It is a pleasure to have you all here, and I hope you all enjoy the class. This is our very first one, so please do not fear developing that insanity often caused by philosophy, at least, not today." No-one laughed. Arthur moved on gracefully, "But if you do come away with anything after this first class, I hope it is a desire to continue learning. To begin, I ask each of you, what do you believe?" He smiled and gestured towards the first attendee, "If you are ready, please take the stage," then stepped to the side as they stood in front of the others. Confidently, the attendee said, "I think we should always tell the truth." Arthur asked, "'Always'?" The attendee turned, "Yes." "What if you were providing shelter for an innocent person, and you were asked by a soldier of a tyrannical regime where they were? Wouldn't it be right to lie to the soldier?" "I suppose so." "Should a scientist always tell the truth?" "Definitely." "What if an environmental scientist has told the government what action should be taken to prevent millions of deaths, but is ignored? Would it be right for the scientist to exaggerate their findings to shock them into action?" "I think that would be right." "Can we conclude that the truth should not always be told, and that it is better to lie in certain circumstances?" "Yes." "Very well. You may now take your seat." Arthur gestured to the next attendee, "Would you step forward?" The attendee went and said, "I believe slavery is evil." "Why is slavery evil?" "It just is." "But why?" "Because it's evil to force someone to do what they don't want to do." "But what if a person doesn't wear a seatbelt because they do not want to, should they be forced to wear one for their own safety or should they be allowed to do what they want?" "They should be forced to wear the seatbelt." "So, perhaps, slavery is evil for a different reason?" "It is wrong to force someone to do what will not benefit them." "Are you sure slavery does not benefit

people? Some people use their freedom to destroy themselves with drugs, also causing many problems for their loved ones who they may end up depending on or hurting in some other way. Perhaps, such people would have fared better as slaves?" "Only people that use freedom irresponsibly should be enslaved." "But do you not think that there are better ways to deter people from abusing their freedom? Maybe they could be given advice on how to live a healthy life or given some other peaceful form of assistance?" "Oh, yes, yes, of course, there are better ways." "When we consider if something is good or evil, we must always ask ourselves 'Good to what end?' or 'Evil to what end?' If one wishes to create an equal society then slavery is an evil for them. If one, for some grotesque reason, wishes for people to be exploited then slavery is a good for them. Make sense?" "Yes." "Thank you for your contribution. Please take a seat, so we may hear what our final attendee believes." Arthur gestured to the final attendee and once they took the stage, they said, "I believe Pete Riley has made the best of all possible governments. Because Riley has enough resources to know of all the possible forms of government, but there can only be one government in Gildland, Riley is all powerful, Riley is all good, and we are the most powerful country in the world which gives us total autonomy. Therefore, this we have the best of all possible governments." Eric sniggered. Arthur kept a polite, contemplative expression and said, "I think that's a flawless argument. Can anyone detect an error with that belief?" One attendee asked, "If Riley is all powerful and all good, why does evil exist? Why does he allow theft, rape, and assault?" "It is true that evil does occur, but it is the price that we pay for the freedom that he allows us. If there was no evil, there would be no good. He could prevent all such seemingly evil acts if he thought it was for the best by creating some sort of extraordinary mechanism, or by changing our genetic makeup, or something beyond our limited minds, but we would be robbed of our freedom. Evil is a consequence of freedom." Arthur asked the attendees, "Are you happy with that response?" "No, because it doesn't address evil that is not a result of human action. People still suffer from cancer and are killed by natural disasters. They occur despite the fact that a cure for cancer has been discovered, and geo-engineering can now prevent any natural disaster." Arthur wasn't sure if these statements were true, since he was out of the loop, so refrained from criticising them. The defender of Riley replied, "I know cancer and natural disasters seem evil to us, but we must remember our knowledge is limited, whereas Riley's is infinite because of all the tools at his disposal. Just because we cannot see the positive outcome of a supposedly evil event does not mean there isn't one. For example, last year's earthquake in Silvershire resulted in roads, bridges, and factories being destroyed which allowed for more modern replacements. A transition that would have otherwise taken decades to implement happened in half a year." "I never saw it that way." Arthur said, "Excellent. Thank you for sharing what you believe with us, it was most intriguing." The final attendee sat back down and Arthur took the stage. "Now, allow me to tell you something I believe. The politics of Gildland is dominated by the wealthy. History shows that the highest-funded party has always won the general election. The wealthy fund the campaign staff, the campaign ads, the campaign technology. Without the help of the wealthy, the ECSL Party would not have been victorious two years ago, they owe the wealthy their existence, so have no choice but to do what they ask. Most of the media that people consume is that which is produced by a few large corporations. Those corporations are the only ones that appear at the top of internet search results, alternative outlets are not 'verified' so don't reach people. These major corporations are owned by men with very different interests to workers, so will not allow any revolutionary voices that threaten their wealth and power to be heard. Billions are spent every year on lobbying to manipulate politicians. Many MPs have second jobs and

are free to take a new job immediately after their term, creating a Revolving Door between business and politics, they represent their business friends, not us, and that is not a conspiracy theory, look at studies of their voting history, they do not represent the majority of voters. I believe there is only one power that the people can use to make a political change; their consumer power. The people could launch an economic boycott by decreasing how much they spend, even a quarter decrease in how much they spend would cause enough economic damage to make the government panic. The leader of the boycott would make demands to the government such as increased environmental protection, democratic reforms, increased regulation on technology companies, economic reforms, and media reforms. The boycott would only end once their demands are met. That is what I believe. Do you believe the economic boycott is a good idea?" An attendee said, "Not really. Things aren't that bad here. You'd just be ruining the lives of innocent people by damaging the economy." Another said, "I can't imagine anyone I know doing that." The third attendee said, "It probably would go nowhere, but even if it did, the leader would probably be killed by the government before it got anywhere. A suicide by two shots to the head and all that." Arthur's light of hope that he was able to spark in the last few days died once more. He said, "You all make valid points. Anyway, let's carry on with the rest of the class." At the back of the room, Jeremiah buried his head in his hands and Eric sat tall and smug, excited that the boycott may soon be over. For the rest of the hour, Arthur gave a class on the history of philosophy, as though all was well.

Once Arthur had said goodbye to the attendees, he stared lifelessly at the closed door. So depleted of the will to live, he lumbered to the living room, and took a seat in what looked like an arduous physical effort. Jeremiah watched him with helpless concern. Eric looked out the window at the exiting attendees, and, contemplating their beliefs, said, "I must say, some people really do qualify as human by the slightest of margins," then turned to Arthur, "and, yet, they are the heathens you want to save, they are 'the people' you romanticize, they are the reason we live on a diet of water and plants, instead of leave for another country. They are crippled souls of half-made thoughts, guided by vague ideas of right and wrong, impressed by the brightest light shone at them." Arthur stared in silence into the abyss, preparing for the end then, as though to himself, said, "It's so embarrassing. I'm such a fool." Jeremiah said, "No, you're not." "I am. I should have known the boycott would fail." "It isn't easy, but we can still succeed." Eric said, "When will you understand the magnitude of what you are attempting? The majority follow ideas just as they follow fashion. What you face—" Jeremiah said, "It's not—" "Listen to me." "It's—" "Listen to me and you will learn something. What you face is a monumental challenge, and De la Mer knows what I am about to say is true because we have spoken before on such matters. A revolution will never happen in this country, the window of opportunity closed decades ago. People are told during school that only women and the non-Gildish are oppressed. This encourages the rebellious spirit of the people, that will always exist due to the suspicion the governed have of the governing, to be directed towards structures expendable to the Plutocracy. Through public education, the government actually tell students what to rebel against. People unwittingly side with the system oppressing them. By focusing on every inequality except wealth or class inequality the result is that all of you underlings are equally oppressed. Over these last decades, various consciousnesses have arisen and replaced class consciousness which was crowded out then died from neglect. You two are trying to rally the working-class against the rich, but in this country the working-class don't look at themselves as such anymore, they view themselves as

fragmented individuals capable of succeeding in our mythical meritocracy ‘if they work hard enough’, they do not want to destroy the rich club they hope to join.”

Jeremiah agreed with Eric’s point, but still believed there was hope. Since he didn’t want to be verbally attacked again, he hoped Arthur would give an opinion. However, Arthur, had not been listening to Eric. He was focused on what to do next. Since he’d lost his job, he’d been more afraid of living than dying. The thought of ending his suffering provided a comfort beyond any that life could bring then. He wondered, if, out of his death, he could draw attention to the boycott by writing a suicide note that would garner such attention that it would spark a revolution from beyond the grave, and, as he believed its success would make her forgive him, felt it be better to be loved by Maria posthumously than never again.

## Statement 7: The Festival of Ideas

*TODAY'S TOP HEADLINES:*

*Intermind to be Revealed TONIGHT*

*Introducing the Speakers for the FY4079 Festival of Ideas*

*Yes, There Will Be Less Native Gildlanders in the Future, and That's a Good Thing*

*Sirkitus Tightens Control of Elimperians' Internet Access*

*MPs Vote Against Proposal to Ban MPs from Having Seconds Jobs*

As eight days passed, Arthur's commitment to revolutionary suicide grew. He searched for other paths to victory, but found nothing other than fantasies derived from fiction, and inspiration from history made impossible by developments in technology. Knowing the pain would soon be over, having a sense of control after not knowing where his life would turn for so long, and the thought of a posthumous revolution provided him with a serene happiness he'd not enjoyed since he was with Maria. He kept a leash on his happiness, however, never allowing it to dissuade him from suicide, the very act that made happiness possible. The only book he read since committing to his new plan was one on the afterlife that Maria had left behind, it was titled *The Dearly Departed are Stars in the Sky*. Just like Maria, he always wanted to believe in an afterlife, as he imagined God's love would ease all pain and that the insignificance brought by boundless time would render all of life's failures irrelevant, but remained an atheist due to his respect for science. Excited but terrified, he planned to commit revolutionary suicide on the day he could no longer afford the Unemployment Fine, and to think of other solutions for the boycott until that day.

Laying on a sofa, he read *The Dearly Departed are Stars in the Sky* for the second time that week. Meanwhile, Eric laid on the opposite sofa gazing at the white ceiling, imagining what the world would be like if certain world leaders hadn't gained power, how many potential tyrants and heroes were lost to plagues, if people followed the saying 'History is written by the victor' to its logical conclusion, how maps would appear if certain wars had different winners, and if certain philosophers had not been born. They were shaken out of the amber evening's stillness when they heard someone jogging towards the house. They looked out and found Jeremiah returning from his mother's home. Since joining the boycott, he visited his mother everyday because his phone's service was stopped immediately upon cancellation. As Arthur let him in, Jeremiah said straight away, "Arthur! I have an idea! I was watching a film at my mum's and it got me thinking. Why don't we publicize the boycott by using an allegory? You can tell it in the busiest part of Montpelerin and the Overwatch wouldn't detect any extremist speech. You could say 'magic' instead of 'money', 'magic ecosystem' instead of 'economy', 'the strong magicians' instead of 'the wealthy', 'the weak magicians' instead of 'the people'. You could explain how 'the strong magicians' used their 'magic' to influence the government's decisions without caring for 'the weak magicians' then say 'the weak magicians' decreased how much 'magic' they used to damage the 'magical ecosystem' so that the government would be forced to give into their demands. If you tell them it's an allegory at the start, the listeners will understand." Arthur was charmed by his effort and



passion, but was surprised that someone he had such respect for would have such a bad idea. Judging the expression on Arthur's face, Eric feared he thought it was a good idea. "That's very good, but I doubt people will understand it." "But we should at least try. We're running out of time." "I think it's best if we remain patient, and keep our minds open for ideas we're sure will succeed, instead of focusing on ones that are not so likely." "Do you have any family members that could join the boycott?" "No." "What about your neighbours?" "I tried them when I first began." Jeremiah finally lost his temper, "You've given up. You haven't come up with one new solution all week." "I haven't given up. I'm just waiting for a solution worth our time." "There's no time to wait! We have to act now! The boycott is killing you!" "The boycott can carry on without me. I am not that important." Jeremiah shook his head in disbelief. Arthur said, "Look, since these could be our last days together, let's do something fun, let's play a quiz, it will take your mind off the whole matter." His indifference made Jeremiah feel even more desperate to get across the urgency of the situation. "A fucking quiz," Jeremiah muttered.

Arthur went to the dining room and Eric followed him in relief. Jeremiah stood in the middle of the living room debating if he should tell the allegory in public without telling the other two. He noticed *The Dearly Departed are Stars in the Sky* on the coffee table, and found it curious that Arthur would read a book twice in a week, especially one he'd never previously associated with him. Arthur shouted from the dining room, "Jeremiah!" and he went to join them. Having noticed the large pile of letters in the living room, he said, "Have you seen how much post you have?" "Yes, they're all scams." "There might be something important." "No-one sends me anything important." "You never know." Feeling bad for rejecting Jeremiah's plan earlier, Arthur shrugged his shoulders, "You can have a look if you like." Jeremiah went to retrieve the letters from the Postway in the living room, hoping for something that could give them hope. He put the mountain of letters on the dining table and took a seat. As Jeremiah began opening letters, Arthur asked, "Are we ready, gentlemen?" and they said they were. "First question, who was born first, Captain Goldring or King Prothero II?" Eric looked down and stroked his brow. Arthur waved at Jeremiah to get his attention then pointed to the wedding ring he still wore. Jeremiah smiled, wrote the answer, then continued opening the letters. Eric mumbled, "I have never heard of Captain Goldring. How bizarre." "You're going to have to give it a guess." "Fine. I am ready." "The answer is... Captain Goldring." Eric slapped the table, "Blast it!" "What did you put, Jeremiah?" He turned his paper around, "Captain Goldring." "Ah, good job. Even *Professor Fidge* didn't get that one." "I learnt from the best." "Well, it-" Eric said, "Ask the next question." "Yes, sir. Gildland has been at war in every year of its existence except for eight, what was the most recent year Gildland was not at war?" Eric looked down once more to think.

Arthur noticed Jeremiah was reading a letter with deep concentration, so asked, "Is everything okay?" "I think you should read this." He handed over the letter, and Eric asked, "What is it?" "Arthur's been invited to the Festival of Ideas." The letter read:

*Dear Arthur de la Mer,*

*After hearing in the news of your arrest at Riverlake, I felt inspired to write this letter of invitation to the FY4079 Festival of Ideas. You may find this invitation odd as the festival does not typically feature such thinkers as yourself, but that is precisely why I invite you. I think it is of the utmost importance that the festival starts displaying a diversity of ideas to*

*sharpen our minds and soften our hearts. You may also find the invitation odd due to our strife in our Riverlake days, but let's reconcile, let's not live with grievances.*

*Each speaker will have fifteen minutes, to ensure a wide variety of views can take the stage, some speakers well-known, some not well-known, some Gildish, some non-Gildish, all with the shared dream of making the world a better place through their ideas. We hope to be honoured by your presence at 8PM on Restday1 Q2 FY4079 at the Dasgiers Hall in Montpelerin, with your speech beginning at 10:30PM, and the festival ending at 10:45PM. We have placed your speech last as it was a very late addition and all other times had already been agreed, we hope you understand. To ensure your position please respond at least seven days before the festival.*

*Yours sincerely,*

*Pete Riley*

The letter came with six box seat tickets and a letter from Securiton acknowledging the clemency granted to Arthur from Riley for extremist speech at the festival. Riley founded the festival a year before becoming PM. The Festival of Ideas often reached several million viewers in Gildland and several million more around the world. It had a history of turning unknown writers into international best-sellers and unknown intellectuals into public intellectuals. Seeing he'd finished reading, Jeremiah asked, "Will you go?" Still looking at the letter in slight disbelief, he responded, "I must. This is unbelievable." Eric closed his eyes in disappointment, he had been getting his hopes up with each passing day of inaction that Arthur was about to end the boycott. Jeremiah asked, "Do you think the crowd will support the boycott?" "No. The crowd will be full of Riley's fans, they'll hate me when the host tells them what I believe, but there will be enough people watching online to kick-start the boycott. This is what we've been waiting for."

Jeremiah sent the reply by using the Postway at his mother's house, since Arthur had ended his Postway subscription. Over the next thirteen days, Arthur prepared the speech of a lifetime with the assistance of Jeremiah, mixing into it the passion of a song and the wisdom of his library, keeping in mind their previous failures, and the audience of the festival. Arthur spent hours rehearsing the speech and Jeremiah provided feedback, identifying lines that didn't flow well and suggesting how certain lines should be delivered.

Once the late afternoon of the festival had arrived, Arthur tidied his hair leaving no strand out of place, he washed his face thoroughly, cleaned his shoes with water removing parts that couldn't actually be seen from a standing distance, doused himself in aftershave as he'd ran out of soap, and put on the suit he kept away for special occasions. His teeth had yellowed during the boycott so reminded himself to smile with closed lips. As Arthur and Jeremiah, were about to leave, Eric said from the living room, "I hope you remember my warnings, when you fail." They left without replying or saying goodbye.

Under the night sky, Montpelerin glowed in magnificent colours and the Bayuz River glittered from afar. In Montpelerin, the two men passed exhausted swathes of people leaving work, and traffic that was immense, but quieter than it would have been years ago due to the increased use of electric cars, allowing the two of them to talk without having to raise their voices. Through the wide and neon streets, crowds were heading to parties, theatres, casinos, yacht parties on the Bayuz River, restaurants, and Lilypad Islands. They noticed many more people dressed smartly than there usually was, which they found to be a pleasant, but curious,

surprise. The number of such people increased in frequency, all heading in the same direction. A crowd's murmur grew in volume as they approached the Festival of Ideas. Along with a couple dozen other people unaware of the what was going on, the two were politely asked by security guards to step aside for the queue of limousines piling up behind them. They carried on and soon had a full view of the event. It was the Gildish Business Awards. There were thousands of fans at the red carpet waiting for pictures with their favourite business executives, and paparazzi were there too. There were awards for best company, best CEO, best tech company, best comeback, best invention, best ad, and many more.

A few streets later, Arthur and Jeremiah were both shown an ad for a pharmaceutical company called VNV, "Feeling sad? Feeling bored? Feeling angry? Feeling nervous? Feeling unmotivated? Well, this may surprise you, but you're almost definitely suffering from a mental illness. Speak to one of our health experts on our website for free and you'll find out how we can help." Arthur asked, "Did you just see that ad from VNV?" "Yes." "It's absolutely disgraceful. Big Pharma's message, intentional or not, is that all mental distress is entirely because of an individual's own bad luck and not even partly caused by government decisions. Their suggestion that drugs are the only solution makes people feel more depressed, as it gives them a sense of helplessness and generates a resentment towards the lucky ones that don't have to take medication. There are so many causes of mental health problems the government could help stop; precarious work, urbanisation, compulsory unpaid overtime, and social fragmentation. But by individualising the problem, such political issues become overlooked in the discussion of mental health." "We'll change all of that, Arthur. Don't worry."

They passed Leemington Station sponsored by Opti Energy Ltd., the station Arthur used to travel to for work. In the train station, a free newspaper called, the Hypomnema, was available for commuters. With disappointment, Arthur watched people read newspapers like how an environmentalist watches oil spills, imagining the damage caused and the tremendous effort required to reverse the pollution. He said to Jeremiah, "Just look at those newspapers, they look like comic books, for God's sake. In the old days, the entirety of each page used to be comprised of text, now the majority are comprised of images. They used to contain poetry and book excerpts, now you'll only find the lowest elements of culture." "It's a disgrace." There is no reason to read the news, save for laughing at how pathetic the mainstream has become or to see what nonsense people think is important." "You never read the news?" asked Jeremiah, struggling to perceive life without it. "Not in years. Why would I?" "To keep up to date with the world!" Arthur sniggered, "No. It keeps readers up to date with a shallow and sensationalised perception of the world. It is intellectual pollution."

The holographic billboards switched, in the perspective of all viewers, to Appallinc's live conference. The world watched in anticipation for the Intermind finally being revealed after months of hype. Appallinc had more cash on hand than any company in history, but, in the previous ten years, had only created accessories, a music streaming service though several existed already, a video streaming service though several existed already, and slight improvements on their already existing products. They sent messages of support on their social media accounts for the Age Equality Movement for good PR, whilst simultaneously evading billions in taxes that could have helped teachers, healthcare workers, the elderly, and the disabled, and creating such bad conditions in their factories that suicide nets had to be placed around them. Their ads and hiring policies were designed to make them appear inclusive and appeal to as many customers as possible, whilst almost every member of their

board of directors was an old, Gildish male. Despite their great wealth, they asked their fanatics to help crowdfund the InterMind with the compensation being the option to purchase the InterMind two weeks in advance and a free sticker. The CEO and founder of Appallinc, Steve Cook, never allowed his children to use the tablet that Appallinc created, because of how addictive and stupefying it was. The product helped him become a billionaire and considered a genius by many, and he made no effort in stopping the product from being used by children outside of his family. The CEO jogged onto the dark stage, wearing a black t-shirt, and blue jeans, with a grin towards the audience full of excited fanatics. “Hey, guys! What’s going on? Hey! How you doing?” The crowd died down and he continued, “It’s so great to be with you here today, we have a lot of really cool stuff to show you guys. Let’s start with what we know you’ve all be waiting for.” The screen behind him displayed ‘The future is screenless’. The crowd stood and cheered, as if their lord and saviour had arrived. The CEO smiled proudly at them. “The wait is finally over, the InterMind is here!” The screen showed the InterMind, a black, plastic ring, on the index finger of an outstretched hand. The screen behind showed relevant images as he said, “With the InterMind, you can throw away your phone, your monitors, and your televisions, because it has everything you love about those products and more. The display appears before you, and, as the InterMind can read your thoughts, you can control it with your mind. There’s no need for an instruction manual. You want it do something? It does it. The knowledge held on the world wide web will be instantly accessible to you and the InterMind will detect problems you’re struggling to solve and tasks you’re performing inefficiently and offer suggestions for you, helping you perform at work and everyday life. Static screen sizes are so yesteryear. With the InterMind, you can change the display’s size to encompass your entire vision or for it to be as small as a grain of sand, and you can also change its location in your vision so that it’s to the side as you work on a different task in front of you. The InterMind is great for privacy, only you can see what you are watching, you don’t have to worry about nosy people looking above your shoulder anymore. The InterMind is great for your health, you won’t have to sit in an uncomfortable office chair for your monitor, or crane your neck for your phone, or stay inside for your television, because you can see the display floating in the air anywhere you are. The InterMind’s brilliance does not end there. The first app I’d like to show you guys is the TalkSmart Pro. Who remembers auto-complete for email and text? It’s funny how all of that seems so archaic now. If you don’t know what to say in a situation, you can now use TalkSmart Pro to provide you with quick suggestions. If you can’t go a day without embarrassing yourself, or if you haven’t got time for small talk, quit trying to think of things to say, and turn on auto-pilot to let TalkSmart Pro do all your talking for you. With dozens of options such as ‘Intelligent person’, ‘Confident person’, ‘Friendly person’, ‘Funny person’, and ‘Intelligent, confident, friendly, and funny person’, you can talk however you want.” Nerds wildly applauded. “Whilst we were working on the InterMind, I asked my family, ‘What do you want the InterMind to do?’ and a lot of the ideas can, I think, best be summarised as, ‘Make tasks go faster, because I’m really busy with work, and I want all of the free-time I can have.’ For a while, I’ve thought that we humans, though we’re okay at certain tasks, were actually really slow when compared to really great pieces of tech. This next app is the first one we made with the goal of speeding tasks: PaySmart Pro. PaySmart Pro makes paying for what you love easier than ever. In the past, we used shells, silver, bank notes, cards, and phones to make purchases. They were okay, but they would get lost, and creating them takes up valuable resources. With PaySmart Pro, when you’re in a shop and see something you want, it’s purchased right away. There’s no need to spend time debating if the

product will make you happier, if you need it, or if you can afford it, let the PaySmart Pro take control and make the decision for you. It will save you time, and save you headaches, you're gonna feel great. Just turn your brain off and enjoy. What's also great about the PaySmart Pro is that it can identify items anywhere in the world. When you have the 'Vision' setting turned on and you're in the office and you see, for instance, someone wearing a pair of glasses you like, but are too scared to ask where they got them, the PaySmart Pro will identify the glasses for you, and show you shops you can buy them from. Another great app we have for you is Real-Life Special FX. When you're wearing the Intermind, and turn this app on, the world around you is augmented. Walking through a green field is cool, and, you know, you might see some cows, a little cottage, a quaint watermill, and I mean, they're okay, but with Real-Life Special FX the landscape will automatically come alive, you will see fantastical animals, castles, magic spells flying everywhere, and hot air balloons in the sky, anything you want." The crowd applauded when they saw what Steve Cook described appear on the screen. "This next app is one I know you've all been really excited for after it came out in the leaks; the Simuli." The crowd cheered, he appeared to be talking about the most important thing in the world. "For the first time ever, you can experience fully immersive simulations of your own choosing. With the Simuli, you can become anyone you want, anywhere you want, and live any life you want. Inside the simulations, you can be in any historical period, any fictional setting, choose how the other characters in the world behave, adjust the level of immersion to be fully immersed or immersed but still conscious of reality, and you can adjust many more settings to tune the simulation to your taste. Currently, for health reasons, you can only stay inside of the Simuli for eight hours a day, but our engineers are working around the clock to make it safe to use constantly. Simulations are the next artform, the last one there will ever be, and we've made them so easy to create that all you have to do is imagine, and what you want will be created. The final app that we'll be showing today is the Hivemind. With the Hivemind, you can share your thoughts, emotions, memories, or point of view with anyone you want. You can share your display, share what you just bought with PaySmart Pro, invite your friends to your Simuli, download simulations created by other users, and, perhaps, best of all, you can actually go into someone else's mind and experience the world precisely as they do, it's like a livestream from inside their head. You'll gain a greater understanding of their thoughts and feelings. In this world full of hate, love brought by understanding is needed more than ever." Wild applause ensued.

As the CEO continued speaking about their other new products, Jeremiah said to Arthur, "Technologists have a bigger impact on the world than politicians." "You're right." "Technologists are the new tyrants, politicians are just business admins. The Intermind will provide superior brain power to its users. Other workers, who perhaps don't want to use it or will struggle to afford it, will have to buy one to keep their jobs and avoid failing in the labour market to workers with the Intermind. There will be debates, because of new technology, as there usually is, but, in the end, everyone will have to conform to remain competitive." "Unless they want to live in a forest." "Exactly. People have a choice to not buy it, but people will have to conform unless they want to be looked down upon as some outcast cave-dweller. This is how technology tyrannises. This process of technology being released without foresight will lead us to complete technological enslavement. We will become more and more dependant on technology made by corporations, we will not be able to remember anything on our own, we will not be able to think for ourselves, our entire lives will rest in their hands, even dreams will be made by corporations. We can't trust politicians to restrict technological growth, because any corporation rich enough to make powerful tech

is powerful enough to lobby politicians. Tech companies are hostile to regulation and state it slows down innovation, so instead they're trusted to self-regulate under the premise that they wouldn't release products that hurt people as doing so would hurt their profits. You know, many politicians own stocks in tech companies, so have no interest in restricting new sources of revenue from them. The people should be allowed to vote on what technology can be released." "That may improve things, but after hearing that applauding, it's difficult to believe they would vote against it." "If people were warned of the dangers, they'd understand. If we informed them that tech companies hire psychologists to make products addictive, I'm sure they'd think twice." "I'd like to think so, but you know what they'd say, 'People should be free to buy what they want, so long as it's not hurting others.'" "I know and that's what's so crazy. The existence of such technologies that enslave people are permitted in the name of freedom to buy what you want, but freedom without the guidance of education is destructive. What freedom will people have when, instead of educating themselves, they fantasise for hours in simulations? What freedom will the rest of us have when the government can get away with anything because millions can't live up to their democratic responsibility? When it's released, more people will stay at home because the Intermind simulates the entire world. Communities will disappear even more, less people will make friends because the Intermind will simulate for them all the friends they need, less people will start relationships because the Intermind can simulate their ideal relationship. This will lead to people having even less children than they already do, our people will all but disappear, and the less families there are the more asocial the country will become. It's funny that these sort of tech products are hailed as genius when all they do is dumb us down and make us more dependent. If the government prioritized our well-being over the economy, the Intermind would never be released. This one piece of technology will cause more destruction to Gildland than our greatest enemy could have ever dreamed of, but the Intermind will be welcomed with open arms because it's good for economic growth! Who cares about there being no real communities left? We have virtual ones. Who cares about the birth rate decreasing even more? There are many desperate to come. Who cares about people becoming lonelier? We don't know them. Who cares about any of these things? It's good for the economy. No-one would accept the Intermind, if they understood." "But what about the PaySmart Pro app? It lets you buy without thinking. Isn't that a good idea?" "Don't get me started."

The pair arrived at the Dasgiers Hall moments before eight. They were able to walk straight in as almost all other attendees were already seated. An usher led them to their box seats and informed Arthur that he'd be taken backstage fifteen minutes before the beginning of his speech. Jeremiah asked the usher if food would be provided, he was told there wouldn't be. The chairs were deep red, there were golden balconies engraved with floral patterns and adorned with golden angels. The proscenium was gold and had gold statues of historical figures that few in the world, but Eric, could have named. A chandelier of several thousand crystals hung from a ceiling depicting a skyful of angels. The aroma of various drugs and freshly cooked popcorn filled the warm theatre. Arthur scanned around and saw no sign of Riley. He looked around and realised that only Jeremiah and himself were in suits except for a few others. There were five-thousand people there, and they were mostly in their late teens to mid-thirties with a few grey-haired people here and there. Despite being in the theatre, Arthur was still so surprised to have been invited that he couldn't help suspecting a mistake had been made. Observing the rest of the festival-goers so different in style and behaviour to himself and Jeremiah, his suspicion gained intensity. The two of them felt the entire world was depending on Arthur's speech being a success.

The chatter around the theatre sparked by the rumour about Franco Pinshera was silenced a few moments after it had reached the two of them, when the lights went down. A spotlight shone upon the podium and an announcer said, “Everybody, please give it up for tonight’s host, presenter for Loudmouth Radio, Rosana Ferrera!” Heroic, orchestral music played as she entered the stage in a light pink dress and went to the podium. The crowd quietened and she began, “Good evening, welcome to the FY4079 Festival of Ideas, the fourth of many to come! We have many great speakers for you tonight, so let’s get on with the show. Our first speaker has written 164 articles for the Justifier, gaining 4,052,301 views. He will be teaching us why friendships are oppressive. I had a friend once who told me about how her ancestors were oppressed, they were raped and enslaved, by just about every tribe they came in to contact with. She seemed very sad, so I leant in to her, and said, ‘You can oppress me any-time you want, baby!’” The crowd laughed, whilst Arthur and Jeremiah thought it was tasteless. “Please welcome Bradley O’Neal!”

Rosana left and O’Neal entered. The audience applauded and the speech’s title, *Friendships Are Oppressive*, appeared in white on the black screen behind him. He stated that friends are wastes of time, as they organise endless get-togethers, that hearing the thoughts of the same few people repeatedly over years decreases one’s imagination and creativity whereas in solitude the mind is free to roam, that friendships cause conformity as one fears ostracisation, and that friendships encourage one to become reliant on the emotional support of others which creates the possibility of being exploited. The crowd reacted positively to what was, in effect, a justification for the loneliness most of them experienced. The Lady With the Red Briefcase left the hall and went home. Arthur leant into Jeremiah over the applause, “Imagine wasting your one chance to speak to millions of people like that.” “It’s a common occurrence.”

As O’Neal left, Rosana returned to the podium and said, “Our next speaker is the author of the multi-award-winning YA fantasy novel, *Thunder Bridge*, loved by the young and by adults which has sold 881,927 copies. Tonight, she will be teaching us why compliments are offensive, so please welcome the stupid and ugly Giselle Belbec!” When Belbec entered the stage, Rosana scurried over to hug her and Belbec playfully feigned anger at her then went to the podium. She stated that compliments are offensive to everyone that does not receive them because compliments rest on cruel implications, and that, by complimenting something, one is implicitly offending everything not being complimented, and as all that aren’t complimented outnumber those that are complimented, compliments should be illegal because they sadden more people than they make happy. She stated that complimenting a certain nation as industrious implies that others are lazy, and that one can only compliment a person for being beautiful, if they believe ugly people exist. The crowd, thinking of how they’d never been complimented by people outside of their family, were excited to advocate for compliments being made illegal, and applauded Belbec with great passion. Rosana returned to the podium then said, “The next speaker has taught over 9,346 students in her career as a professor of political philosophy in Viviray, and will be talking about conspicuous consumption. At least someone’s saying something important tonight!” The jibe didn’t go down well among the crowd, but Arthur and Jeremiah were delightfully surprised to discover their feelings were shared by her. “Yeah, yeah, cry some more. Welcome to the stage Lucy Wilson!”

“What is conspicuous consumption? It is the purchasing of goods for the purpose of appearing wealthy or having a high social status.” ... “High fashion companies rely on people

wanting to differentiate themselves from the poor. The introduction of fashion logos and a wider array of clothes a century ago has worsened social fragmentation.” ... “People that display their wealth to others via items covered in high-end labels unwittingly engage in the manufacturing of desire which, like magic, makes the less well-off dissatisfied with their life and encourages people, that should be taught gratefulness, instead to aspire to be entrepreneurs, traders, and investors, and thus help the economy grow.” ... “Some think they’re superior to others by amassing more expensive objects than others, but they are just the tools of corporations, they’re the fools that fell for the delusion sold by corporations, that happiness can be purchased. They think they’re demigods, but they’re actually just tools of corporations. Instead of looking down on the poor, these shallow people should look up to see the corporations looking down on them.” ... “The wealthy rarely engage in conspicuous consumption, they tend to be wise enough to fear the pitchforks. Conspicuous consumption is more common among insecure people trying to appear to have a high social status than those that actually have a high social status.” ... “In trying to appear rich, poor people engaging in conspicuous consumption keep themselves poor by consuming instead of investing.” ... “To save the environment, unite people, prevent bullying, and help the poor save money, everyone should be given the same seven logo-less outfits per year, all brand names and logos should be removed from products and all non-essential items should be rationed” The audience applauded. Arthur and Jeremiah thought she made some great points, but weren’t sure if her idea of giving everyone ‘the same seven logo-less outfits per year’ was supposed to be a joke.

As Wilson left, Rosana entered the stage with a glass of red wine and began introducing the next speaker. “Our next speaker is extremely controversial. Now, I don’t mean ‘controversial’ in the usual way that word gets thrown around or like those lame political commentators that brand themselves ‘controversial’ to appear rebellious, I mean actually controversial. The idea he’s about to present is rather shocking, but, who knows, maybe the next generation will consider it perfectly normal, so if you want to seem wise keep an open mind. He’s going to explain why a man’s offspring belongs *entirely* to him. Now, I would say to you guys, ‘Don’t get any bad ideas,’ but since most of you are fat virgins that will never have offspring, there’s no need for me to warn you.” Most of the audience booed. “Please welcome Robert Marquis.” They applauded the new speaker just to be polite, hoping his speech would not be as cruel as Rosana made it sound. Marquis said, “In ancient times, fathers were granted every right over their offspring. Offspring that parents couldn’t afford or burdened them otherwise, such as through deformity, were killed no matter their age.” The crowd turned sour. “It is a cruel stupidity to think mere existence is the greatest good when ending someone’s existence can free the living from so much misery.” One of the more confident crowd members threw a bottle at him, but missed his head by a few inches. Marquis was reading as the bottle was thrown, so only noticed it when it hit the back of the stage. He turned around to see what it was and other crowd members felt encouraged by the first attack to launch food and drinks at him. A few hit him and dozens missed. He ducked behind the podium and got hit in the sides as he covered his head. The stage manager rushed on stage with a microphone to address the crowd, “Stop! Stop!” The bottling stopped and a group of assistants went to clear the mess and dry the stage as fast as they could. Marquis stood up and remained alert, as he began to wipe his face and clothes. The stage manager put his arm around Marquis, “If one more thing is thrown at the stage, the festival will be over.” The crowd whistled in disapproval, believing they did nothing wrong. “Don’t test us. You’ve already paid and there will be no refunds, if we leave early. You have nothing to gain from



attacking our guests. We still have a lot of great speakers coming up, so don't ruin the festival. Okay?" The crowd began to calm down. "Good." The stage manager left and Marquis continued as if nothing happened, "Just like someone's blood, snot, urine, mucus, excrement, all belong to a man so too does his sperm, therefore a man has a right to do whatever he wants with his sperm as he does with his other bodily fluids." ... "We are all just bundles of atoms. The death of a human only *appears* to be different to the death of a worm, but they're all just bundles of atoms." ... "One has the right to destroy what one has created, and one has the right to use what one has created however he pleases." Once Marquis' speech ended, he was booed louder than earlier, and he put two middle fingers up with a large grin then left the stage. Jeremiah asked Arthur, "Do you think he actually cares about that idea?" "It's difficult to imagine he does. Some philosophers are so desperate to make a name for themselves they'll say almost anything to stand out. It's quite sad, really."

Three more speakers came and went for fifteen minutes each. All receiving warm reactions from the audience. There were now only three more before Arthur. The secret speaker, an obscure philosopher named Floriano Pasolini, and Pete Riley.

Rosana re-entered the stage. Cheerfully, she introduced the next speaker, "Now is the time for tonight's secret speaker. This philosopher requires no introduction, so please welcome Franco Pinshera!" He was bald and wore a white turtle neck. During his speech he held a cigarette stylishly to his side the whole time and was in an uncharacteristically dour mood. "There is no such thing as an affluent society. Even in this richest of all nations, where the poorest live like the rich of other nations, people still remain in need of income and consider themselves to be without, in want, poor, and so on, and so on, and so on." ... "For an economy to grow is for some to be left behind when their jobs are made obsolete and for consumers to decrease their own wealth so they can increase the producer's wealth. Therefore, relative poverty is a consequence of economic growth." ... "It is impossible for everyone to be rich, there must be poor people for the planet to have a chance of survival. There are not enough resources in the world for everyone to consume as much as the rich, the lifestyles of the rich are therefore only possible because of the penury of the vast majority. For global equality, every human in the world should be allowed to vote in all elections around the world, because what happens in one country affects the people of another, as all countries are connected." ... "Richness comes from differentiating oneself from the poor, not merely one's own affluence." ... "The nation's aim of GDP growth implies that our current level of development is unsatisfactory and must improve. Instead of being told to be grateful for what we have, we are constantly told to want more thus making contentment impossible. The demand for growth, and the implication that we should be dissatisfied with what we currently have, confronts us in the government's aim of growing GDP, businesses aiming to grow profits, and the ads shoved in our faces telling us we need something new. Ungratefulness can make the world's richest man feel poor." ... "Happiness has become impossible for this country. What does one need to be happy? Self-reliance, but the mass replacing of family businesses with wage labour ended this over a century ago. And when all jobs are automated, people will become entirely reliant on the government. One needs to be part of a community, but this is no longer possible because of technology giving people more reasons to stay comfortably at home than go out and because of the mass importation of workers, customers, and employers dividing the once united nation into fragments. One needs to be optimistic about the future, but climate change prevents that for anyone that can accept harsh truths. One needs to be grateful, but the ubiquity of ads remind us of what we don't have and what

we're insecure about, making gratefulness difficult." ... "The gap between ever-increasing production targets and what people want to consume must be bridged by manufacturing desire. The alternative of reducing production targets is not allowed by our government's aim of increasing GDP. The more desires that are manufactured, the wider the gap between what one has and one wants. These desires aren't related to our basic human needs, these are desires conjured out of thin air. Products we truly need don't require advertising, as we already know we want them." ... "The growth of GDP is praised as an absolute good, but how is GDP calculated? GDP is simply the sum of goods and services in a country. It is merely a quantitative measure that ignores the quality of life. Included in GDP is the cost of repairing a broken window, anti-depressants, machine guns, and so on. A two-hour train journey to work is better for GDP than a fifteen-minute one because the cost of the ticket is higher. If air pollution worsens the smog of a city, the increased consumption of electricity and light-bulbs would be recorded by government accountants as an increase in GDP." Usually Pinshera's speeches, interviews, and public lectures were full of jokes and optimism. His humour was one of the main causes of his fame, but that night he had a dark aura. The audience was disappointed and concerned to see him so different to how they were used to seeing him. However, they were happy enough to see him in person to give him the loudest applause of the night up to that point. The audience agreed with most of his speech, but made no plans to change their lifestyles because of it. Arthur and Jeremiah enjoyed the speech, though they were disappointed by the absence of solutions.

Rosana returned to the stage, and showed her disinterest, "Our next speaker will be talking to us about the Post-State Era. I would make a joke, but I have no idea what the hell that is. So, here to enlighten us is Floriano Pasolini." He was an obscure philosopher with no accomplishments deemed worthy of mentioning. He was middle-aged and had unhealthy skin. He was placed before Riley on the schedule, as the organisers knew the crowd wouldn't care for his speech. They believed the dull reaction to him would accentuate the wild reaction Riley was to receive. He appeared to be nervous when speaking. The apparent nervousness provided an unintentional drama to all he said. He was not actually afraid of public speaking, his apparent nervousness was simply his fear of the future weighing heavily down on him. His speech ended in a similar fashion to how most of it had been, "Xeno-data renaissances a negentropic process of hyper-specialisation leading to a synthetic textuality. Nano-politics accelerates schizo-culture by artificializing assembled particles from the tertiary power structure towards the syncopation of the biorhythm. The epoch of human-gods will be a nucleated govern-mentality after we inter-transfer from the real to the virtual. The blood machines will plug into the blood-filtering machines which will plug into the air machines. Humans become entire countries and fall into a noetic state of somnambulism and exosomatization." His speech was full of words that no-one understood but himself, even Arthur, Jeremiah, and Riley had only a faint idea of what he was talking about. The crowd applauded with only the next speaker in mind.

Rosana took to the stage, "Now for the moment you've all been waiting for. Our next speaker is the man that made the Age Equality Movement possible, designed the Polysemy flag, and is your prime minster, Pete Riley!" The crowd's excitement was greater for him than for any previous speaker, their electricity could have charged Montpelerin for a day. He roamed the front of the stage, wearing a red t-shirt with a cartoon tiger on the front, a tweed blazer, blue jeans, white trainers, with a large smile, waving at audience members. Then all of a sudden he stood still and put his hands on his hips and stared at a man in the audience as though he'd

insulted his mother. The audience didn't realise his mood soured until he went to the podium and yanked the microphone from it. "Stop the applause!" The crowd quietened. Everyone wondered what was wrong. Riley walked to the edge of the stage and with ice in his veins asked the man, "Why are you wearing a suit?" The man looked at Riley with confusion and terror. Everyone stared at him. His teeth chattered from anxiety. His mind was racing so quickly he had to slow his speaking to avoid stuttering. A boom operator hung a microphone over his head. "I don't kn-" "Stand up." The man stood up. "I don't know. I didn't know I wasn't allowed to." "Where are you from?" "Gildland." "No, where are you *really* from?" The man gulped, "I was born here, but my parents are from Serven." "And where was the suit invented?" "I think, in Gildland." "Yeah. It was invented in Gildland two-hundred years ago, so why are *you* wearing it?" "Um..." Before he could answer, Riley said, "Get the *fuck* out of my festival!" and pointed to the door "And don't try to assimilate ever again! Assimilation is codeword for colonisation! Do not appropriate Gildish culture and do not assimilate. Assimilation is self-colonisation! Assimilation is self-colonisation!" The crowd chanted the slogan with him. The man looked around in panicked disbelief, mentally preparing to be killed. Those in the chairs around him all rose and pushed or pulled the man to remove him from the festival. Riley continued to pace the stage, watching the man get removed. Arthur's watched on quivering in anger. He firmly expected Riley's petty and cruel behaviour to be complimented or excused if necessary by his followers and most of the media. Jeremiah leant over the balcony, fearing for the man's life. The man made no protest, he put his arms up as if guilty, and ducked his head. Once down an aisle, a couple dozen people followed, pushing him to the exit, some tried to yank his jacket off, but failed to because he was being forced out so quickly. The rest of the crowd applauded those shoving him out. Jeremiah asked, "Can I go out to see if he's okay?" Arthur responded in a vexed, but controlled way, "No. He'll be okay." The usher returned. "Mr. De la Mer, if you are ready, would you kindly follow me backstage." Arthur got up and said to Jeremiah with excitement, "Here we go." Jeremiah stood up and hugged him, "Good luck." Then Jeremiah turned to the usher, "Wait. Can I come?" "I'm afraid not, sir. Only staff and tonight's speakers are allowed backstage." Arthur patted him on the shoulder, "Don't worry, I'll be back soon, plus, you wouldn't want to miss Riley's great idea, would you?" "Certainly not." Arthur winked then left with the usher. Riley went to the podium to deliver a speech entitled 'Gildland Needs Multilegalism'. He said, "I would like to start by apologising for what that self-disrespecting traitor made us do right there." The crowd clapped in agreement. "I would also like to remind you that my latest book *Multilegalism* is available for purchase and there are five-thousand signed copies that you can buy here before you leave." Riley began his speech with a noble air, "We claim to be an open-minded, welcoming, society, and I think that in some ways we do live up to those ideals, but we still have a long way to go. Gildland has a vibrant mix of cultures from all over the world, but, because we have only one legal system, the many cultures that could flourish end up existing here in oppressed forms." Riley paused to let this point sink in then continued, "For example, our legal system allows no-one to get married, some cultures permit a man to be married to multiple women simultaneously, and some permit a person to be married to only one person at a time. Now do you see how, because of our legal system that has no consideration for other cultures, many people in Gildland are unable to live out their culture to its fullest extent? Who are we to claim that one culture is superior to another? If someone believes something, it's because they believe that it's good, and we should respect that. We must keep in mind that there is no universal right or wrong, there are only differences in opinion. A lot of great entrepreneurs and vibrant cultures, don't come to Gildland because we

have only one legal system, I think it's time we create a multilegal system to continue creating a truly loving, diverse, welcoming, non-dangerous, non-toxic, vibrant society." The crowd cheered fervently as the tolerance that had been pummelled into their brains over decades through media owned by the wealthy, and formal education, was taken to the next level. "If a culture permits a caste system, orders the circumcision of infants, respects the word of their God over science, then who are we to oppose any of that? What difference do their beliefs make to you? Instead of criticising them, why don't you haters out there listening actually try to understand their oh-so-scary beliefs? Here's how Multilegalism will work. Parents will assign their offspring to one legal system at birth, you may change the legal system you are assigned to at any time, and you can only follow one legal system at a time. I hope for Multilegalism to be as expansive as possible, I want there to be thousands of different legal systems! The more the better! We must create a nation where everyone is loved! By allowing only one culture to flourish under the legal system, a hierarchy is made, that hierarchy causes division by providing a sense of superiority to the dominant culture. There is no alternative way to create a united country. In order for society to be united, all cultures must be equally respected, and that is only possible with Multilegalism." The crowd roared. He gazed into the distance, a vast dream appeared to seize his mind, tears began to form in his eyes, he bowed his head, the crowd's approval meant the world to him, he used his t-shirt to dry his eyes. The crowd whistled and cheered in support. He raised his head and said falteringly, "I just don't understand... why our nation's so divided," he then wagged a weakly held out finger, "but... I do know we will resolve it together! Multilegalism will promote understanding between different cultures, I know it will. I will not rest until we all get along. Thank you for listening, my Kings and Queens." The crowd stood up and made as much noise as they could and Jeremiah remained silent in thought of Arthur's speech.

Near the stage entrance, Arthur was reading his speech to himself with such focus that Riley's was mere background noise. He was distracted from his reading when a thunderous applause met the end of Riley's speech. Rosana passed him and went on stage. Riley came backstage exhausted. He was greeted by compliments and hugs from his entourage. Arthur and Riley were just a few feet away from each other. Arthur was watching Rosana and hoped Riley would greet him so he could say he deeply appreciated the opportunity. He approached Arthur with a pitying smile, "How are you, mate?" Arthur turned from Rosana to him and they shook hands upon Arthur's offer, "Yes. Thank you for having me. I really appreciate this opportunity." "It's no problem. Have fun up there, all right?" "I'll try." Their conversation was interrupted when the crowd applauded at the end of Rosana's introduction for Arthur. The two of them shook hands again. Riley wished him good luck. Arthur thanked him then entered the stage. The audience disliked him for his social views that Rosana had told them about and made fun of. Nevertheless, they were still polite and applauded him as he entered the stage. Jeremiah stood with excited pride, clapping so loud his hands hurt. Arthur waved at Jeremiah who gave two thumbs up in return. Both believed his speech would be the end of their misfortunes and that they'd finally be able to put the world on the right track. However, before Arthur could reach the podium, the unthinkable happened.

## Statement 8: Kill Your Idols

All the lights went out and a cacophony from the stage terrified everyone. Fearing for the worst, audience members shoved past each other to escape and turned the flashlights of their phones on. After a minute of chaos, all the lights turned back on. Their panicked imaginations were settled, when they noticed Arthur lying flat on the collapsed stage. They were so relieved and glad to see him defeated, they couldn't help laughing wildly at him. They crowded the front of the stage and took photos and began filming him. Believing the crowd would sooner pick up a fallen coin than a fallen man, Jeremiah tried to find a way to him. The moment was so humiliating, he judged his entire being by this one moment of profound humiliation. The laughter, that he felt would last forever, weighed his aching body down. He wished he could have disappeared. In pain, he slowly rose then stumbled for balance, as the stage's platform had become tilted from the collapse, causing more laughter. He was willing to forgive them for their first round of laughter and shrug off the collapse as a bizarre accident, but the second round and no-one backstage helping him was the final straw. He walked to the edge of the stage to speak to the crowd. He didn't think they could be reasoned with. He simply wanted to express the years of anger he'd felt for being disregarded. With tears trickling down his cheeks, he threw his arms wide and said to the crowd still laughing at him, "Come on, laugh! Laugh! Laugh your heads off!" They crowd quietened. Noticing them settle down, Arthur encouraged them again, "Come on, laugh!" A few began to pity him. He calmed down a little, "I've only ever tried to help people through my work. I hoped my ideas would save us all from the problems we face, but... you wouldn't have listened anyway... so, go on then, everybody laugh!" Most of the crowd felt guilty, but, for some others, what Arthur said made no impression.

Arthur went backstage, wiping tears from his face. Engineers went to fix the stage's platform. The stage manager jogged to him as he was rushing through the backstage area, apologising for the collapse and saying they'd love for him to continue his speech once the engineers had fixed the stage. Arthur refused to respond. He heard Riley laughing about the stage collapse in his green room and carried on in search of Jeremiah. They found each other in a hallway. "Arthur, I'm so sorry. Are you okay?" Jeremiah hugged him and Arthur responded, "Yes. Let's go home." Jeremiah put an arm around him and they began their way back to Arthur's. Riley began to deliver the closing remarks and apologised for the stage collapse, thanked everyone for attending, and told them to look forward to next year's festival. The audience began to leave the theatre a few moments after the two of them did. The streets were as lively as when they entered. Jeremiah said, "Keep your head up. I think the video of the stage collapse will go viral, more people will watch the video of you than of any other speaker. Riley will be the one that looks bad, not you! This could be a blessing in disguise!" In that moment, Arthur realised that the video of the collapse could help the boycott, but he was tired of living, physically and mentally hurt, he foresaw much more hard work for the boycott to succeed, hard work he couldn't imagine devoting anymore, he wanted freedom from trying, he wanted to escape. To avoid disappointing Jeremiah, he said, "I suppose you're right." "I think I am! Forget about the past, think of the future." Arthur made no response, he was determined to leave the world. For him, suicide had once again become his sole consolation. The thoughts that his pain was finite and that his death could help bring attention and integrity to the boycott made living bearable. Jeremiah continued talking to help take Arthur's mind off the stage collapse, "What you said to the crowd reminded me of an idea

I've had for a long time. It is impossible for everyone to be happy under the same government. Instead of forcing people of all different opinions to live under one government, people should have the freedom to choose from a variety of city-states that all have different governments. The founders of each city would decide permanent, fundamental elements like its economic system, political system, and identity. People would have a wide variety of cities to choose from, there'd be a place where everyone could feel at home. People would be relaxed knowing that those fundamental elements of society they value most highly will remain as they are. If someone dislikes the city-state they're living in, instead of fundamentally change it by voting or boycotting or protesting and causing conflict with those that don't want the city to change, they can simply evaluate other city-states they'd prefer to live in and move away. No matter how much is written or how many debates are held, the influence that experiences and genetics have on our political opinions create insurmountable barriers to unity. You know, we must keep in mind we're not hated necessarily for our ideas, we're hated because people fear our ideas will worsen their own lives. In other countries, there are people with views our opponents would find even more disagreeable, but they don't care about them because they live in a different country and therefore make no difference to their lives. The person considered an extremist here would be able to find a city they could call home, one where they'd no longer be an extremist, they'd become peaceful, because they'd live in the sort of society they want. The violent would become peaceful, as they would live in a place they want to live in. Everyone would have somewhere they can feel at home. After all, what is it that extremists want precisely? Nothing special. Community, belonging, meaning, security, a sense of permanence, just like the moderates and the peaceful. They don't really want to be violent, everyone would rather be peaceful. They only turn to violence because they feel they have no other way of achieving what they want. The relationship between the people of this country is the world's worst marriage, what we need is a divorce for irreconcilable differences, we need to all go our separate ways. The problem with our current form of government is that it has a monopoly on the sovereignty of the land. The government rightly rallies against corporate monopolies, because corporate monopolies have the ability to exploit people. It's a shame the government don't rally against their own monopoly. I mean, could you imagine the debates and the dissatisfaction among the people, if every five years the country voted on which one tech company they could buy from or which one supermarket they could buy from? It would be ridiculous." Arthur thought Jeremiah's idea was noble but impractical, "That sounds like a nice idea." "Would you consider it when you become PM?" "Well, you have a better chance of becoming PM than me." "What makes you say that?" "You're a lot younger than me, you have more time." "You're only forty-one!" "The point remains." "You shouldn't think that way, Arthur. You have loads of time, and I will be paying your Unemployment Fine when you no longer can." "Don't waste your money.."

They passed through several streets with the crowd of festival goers shortly behind them. Jeremiah heard several people sprinting from somewhere behind him. He turned and saw the crowd parting for a group that seemed determined to attack Arthur. Jeremiah said to Arthur, who was too lost in thought to realise what was occurring, "Run!" Arthur turned to see what had worried him then they both ran as fast as they could. Jeremiah slowed himself to stay beside Arthur who struggled to run due to his fallen health and the pain he felt from the stage collapse. Realising Arthur wouldn't be able to escape and that they were about to be caught, Jeremiah turned around and ran directly at the group. Arthur was too tangled up in his mind to notice Jeremiah go to confront them, until he himself had jogged forward a few more

metres. When he noticed Jeremiah was no longer by his side, he looked over his shoulder then stopped, dismayed at what he saw. Jeremiah was running at the group, one versus five. Arthur went to help. A moment before colliding with the group, Jeremiah planted his feet and threw his hands up in surrender. Two of the chasers knocked him and the next three stamped on Jeremiah as they passed. The billboards switched to a live video of the group and the Overwatch shouted, "Alert! A group of five men guilty of battery are on Gladstone Street. Their bounty is 20,000 guilders each! Capture them!" The five sped to Arthur who, not caring what happened to him anymore and only wanting to inflict at least one strike against them to partially avenge Jeremiah, charged at them the best he could. And then came what felt like a miracle. Two pistol shots roared from behind the group, two were hit in the leg and collapsed at once. The other three scattered across the street. The crowd dispersed. The bounty hunter capped the other three in the legs. Jeremiah's plan went as intended, the Overwatch had saved them both.

The bounty hunter was six foot six, muscular, his hair and beard were well-groomed, and he was in his mid-thirties. He wore a black sweatshirt, black combat trousers, and black military boots. He arrested the first two he'd hit and watched the other three get captured by strangers across the street. Arthur hurried over to Jeremiah who'd rolled off the pavement. He was lying on his back with tears rolling down his drooping face from the pounding agony in his chest and the back of his head. Arthur embraced Jeremiah tightly and hated himself for what happened to the boy. The bounty hunter, with a hand on the back of each criminal's neck, asked in a gravelly voice, "Do you two need a ride home?" Arthur opened his lamenting eyes, "We live all the way over in Bronrar." "It's no problem." Arthur would have politely refused, but seeing Jeremiah still hurt in his arms, he accepted the offer. Arthur helped Jeremiah up and followed the bounty hunter to his SUV. The bounty hunter told the criminals to get into the boot and remain silent during the journey. They obeyed him and he went over to help Jeremiah into the car. Arthur sat at the back with him and gave the bounty hunter his address. The bounty hunter asked why they were attacked and Arthur invented a story about a dispute. He didn't want to mention the boycott, because for all he knew the bounty hunter would have kicked him out of his car for the idea. Both could have fallen asleep in the car, as they glided softly through Montpelerin's galaxy of lights, over the Bayuz River full of boats hosting parties, and through the suburbs of Bronrar. They both could have said much about the attack and the stage's collapse, but said nothing because of the bounty hunter's presence. Arthur dreamed of an alternate reality where the stage had not collapsed. Jeremiah, wishing to offload the burden of hate, looked for reasons to pardon Riley, wondering if Riley actually knew it would happen. With each failure the two of them experienced, the more Jeremiah despised Eric for being ungrateful for Arthur's charity and, not helping promote the boycott.

Eric stayed up past his usual bedtime of nine, confident that Arthur had spoken to an audience impervious to his ideas and that he would finally admit defeat. At eleven, the bounty hunter dropped them off at Arthur's house. He gave Arthur his business card and they said farewell. He read the card and learnt the bounty hunter's name was Dean Ford. They went inside and Eric met them in the hallway. Observing their drained expressions and the shoe-prints on Jeremiah's white shirt, Eric was excited to see they'd failed and said to them both, "Have you learnt your lesson now?" As they were both heading upstairs, Jeremiah said resolutely without looking at him, "We're not giving up." Eric said to Arthur in agitation, "You are living in a dream world! I remain suffering here, because of your delusions!" The combination of what he said, how he spoke, and past grievances formed a dissonant chord to

Jeremiah's ears. He stopped and turned to Eric, and said what Arthur had thought for a long time, "Maybe, if you ever helped us, we'd be more successful. Maybe, if you ever stopped complaining and actually tried to help others for once in your life, this country would not be finished as you claim it is." The shocked and incensed look on Eric's face scared him. He carried on upstairs, hoping to be left alone. With the revival of painful memories, Eric said, "And how would *you* know that I never tried to help?" Jeremiah turned around again, "I know you didn't. Your generation inherited everything and left mine with nothing because your generation is full of selfish, lazy, and entitled people like you." "I tried innumerable times to help this country. I worked harder than the two of you. I spoke with countless people, I wrote countless letters, I formed my own advocacy group, I spent most of my free time travelling across the country to help. I tried over, and over, and over again to save this country from the very Plutocracy that you two complain about and no-one listened to me. Perhaps, you should stop being an arrogant child and listen to what I say. I do not speak from ignorance, I speak from experience. Nothing can be done." Jeremiah stormed upstairs and slammed his door with all his might.

Arthur decided to give Jeremiah time to calm down and returned to his own bedroom to write his suicide note. It began as a tirade against Riley:

*The Coward, more commonly referred to as Pete Riley, defends every group in the world except for the one that people would say he is part of. When someone from his 'group' commits a massacre against another 'group', he blames the killer and mourns the victims. When the roles of the killer and the victims are reversed, he makes excuses for the killer, stating that people should have been more respectful and should not have angered the killer. The Coward incessantly attacks the culture that people would say he's part of and unconditionally defends all others. He is not empathising, he is cowering. Such resentful people that practice self-hate and push the limits of normality, similar to those freaks at the Festival of Ideas, gave the 'wing' that stood up for the working-class a bad name. Anyone that wants to reduce wealth inequality gets lumped with them, because in the vast majority of political discourse you're labelled as being on one wing or another wing, an infuriatingly simplistic way of viewing people's complex minds. Even shallow, vapid, stupid people like Riley have complex minds, though it may not appear so. Through profit-seeking media content and profit-seeking algorithms, media corporations damaged the name of that 'wing' that used to defend the working-class by promoting the most attention-grabbing parts of it, that which was abnormal to the rest of the nation. Intelligent, but calm and composed, thinkers of that 'wing', not being as exciting and worthy of click-bait as hysterical clowns like Riley, were overlooked. Labelling people as 'hateful' neglects the complexity of people and implies their opinions are entirely based in emotion. Insults don't convince people they're wrong, they only tear us further apart. By labelling them as hateful, you distance them from you, they close their ears to what you say next because they view you as their enemy, they become defensive. If you want to change someone's mind, you should speak with respect, no matter how much you want to insult and shout at them. The encroaching billboards often feature ads for self-improvement programs and products, yet the idea that someone's opinions could be 'improved', which, I suppose, means to become like one's own, is not considered as they fling insults at those they disagree with animals incapable of using language to express themselves. I have also noticed a disturbing habit people have in labelling their opponents. If they learn you believe a couple of particular ideas, or even one, they immediately assume you follow an ideology those ideas are often associated with.*



*People enjoy labelling others as it makes them simpler to comprehend and therefore easier to attack and destroy, it allows the labeller to stereotype their target, bog down their target with insults, and associate their target with tyrants and other criminals. Do they think those they disagree with are 'hateful' because their own opinions are based in love? Is that an accidental admittance their opinions are not based in reason?*

*Considering that self-interest is the fundamental driving force in life, they actually enjoy believing groups other than their own face discrimination, because to pity someone is to feel superior to them. Tragedies are more popular than comedies, because tragedies make one's life appear better by comparison, so to do they enjoy believing that others are oppressed because it makes their life seem better by comparison. The reasons for defending what you identify with are obvious, but why defend what you don't identify with? The sensation of power over those reliant on your help, the momentary delusion your own life is so without troubles you can afford to give away time, energy, or money. They don't actually care for those they claim are negatively discriminated against. Pitying those in worse situations to themselves makes them feel more grateful for their own lives. To make this gratefulness more pleasurable, it is not enough to merely pity those they consider beneath them, they go a step further by dedicating their lives to helping the pitiful. By prioritising others' sufferings over their own in their minds and actions, they are able to distract themselves from their own sufferings. Others' sufferings are much more bearable to manage, quite simply, because they are not their own. To increase the importance of others sufferings over their own, they call themselves 'privileged' and thereby trivialise their sufferings as well as the sufferings of people in a similar socio-economic situation to themselves. Therefore, whenever one throws a hint of doubt on the oppression a group they believe faces, they feel, with great fury, as if their own sufferings are being said to not exist, or when anyone makes an offensive joke towards those they enjoy pitying, they attack the offender as if they themselves are being offended. As they avoid resolving the problems in their own lives, the permanent desire to help others instead of focus on their own problems carries on indefinitely. What appears to be concern for others over themselves is still a concern for themselves. A bigot may get pleasure when they hear of a certain group being oppressed, because they wish them misfortune. A humanitarian may get pleasure when they hear of that same group being oppressed, because they feel grateful for not suffering similarly.*

*In the minds of the Plutocracy, the function of this rabble is of making sure the country can never unite against them. They claim to be against the Plutocracy, but don't realise how they help them. They want more cultures here, but have not scratched the surface of their own people's. The problems of their personal lives are so painful they adopt the problems of the world for they're both large enough to eclipse their own and impersonal enough to not hurt them too much if they fail to rectify them. In their political writings and campaigning, they show that they care about other people, but when a new neighbour moves in they don't welcome them, they don't speak to people with decency unless they believe they'll benefit from doing so, they don't keep in touch with their lonely grandparents, the list goes on. Their hearts break for epic tragedies and grand statistics, but fail to make everyday acts of kindness. They only pretend to care about people, especially the oppressed who they consider their little playthings, as a means of getting power. They say the government should care and protect millions of people, sometimes people in a country they have no personal connection with, yet laugh at, neglect, and humiliate people they come in to contact with."*

Arthur screwed the paper up and began writing on a new piece every thought that came to him, in preparation of never being heard from again.

*When I was a child, a land like a never-ending playground was all I knew. Bless my parents! It's the only time in my life I was happy. I bittersweetly look back upon those days for, if I had not known such pleasures, the pain of the following years would not have been so accentuated. In my sadder moments, I resent the memories of a world long gone as they, in effect, torment me with what I can never have. In my calmer frame of mind, I am thankful I knew of a better way. At least I was happy for a few years of my life, most people don't even have that.*

*I wrote several predictions for the world that happened before I could publish them. I could have gained great fame from those predictions, but I am not allowed to be successful!*

*'Conspiracies' are simply the upper class acting in solidarity whilst the working-class fight each other.*

*In the marketplace of ideas, the winners are the same as in every other marketplace.*

*People that use extremist speech on social media receive permanent bans without chance for appeal, and all of their content, even non-extremist content, gets permanently deleted. It is a digital death sentence! There is no chance to defend oneself and no chance for forgiveness. This process is cheaper for companies, as it requires less administration. Freedom of speech gives social media companies the right to make political donations as high as they desire and the right to restrict the freedom of speech of customers on their platforms.*

*How can our divisions be amended? Civil war? Accustoming ourselves to national depression? A forced change of mind? I see no safe exit and the first criminals died long ago.*

*Our concerns grow pettier as our wealth increases. There will never be an end to human concerns because our survival instincts remain ever on. Our minds constantly look for threats and would rather have one threat to focus on than no threat. Without a threat in sight, we'd wonder where one is and the fear of the unknown can be even more troubling than the fear of a known threat as the unknown has the advantage of playing on our imaginations. We have reached such a high quality of life that some people's most passionate concerns are sports, video games, the representation of obese people in commercials, and other such wastes of time. It's near impossible to take them seriously at the best of times, but absolutely impossible when one remembers there are wars, famines, and genocides occurring in other countries. Moments of total serenity or total ecstasy only last until the survival instinct realises it's been neglected for too long then kicks us out of our happiness, reminding us to beware.*

*Heads, the Plutocracy wins. Tails, the Plutocracy wins. The coin magically lands on its side, the Plutocracy wins.*

*Acts of democracy, and tyranny, can be seen in everyday life. The man that tells you to be happy is being tyrannical, the man that gives you a reason to be happy is being democratic. The man that changes your mind through intimidation is being tyrannical, the man that changes your mind through education is being democratic.*

*During dark days, we can hold onto memories of former dark days that soon passed into bright days and expect that passing to happen once more, but without Maria such thinking is*

*no longer possible. Without her, I rot in the endless dark. This whole effort has been to distract myself from the loss of her.*

*Oh, how I envy the Plutocracy. I wish I could live with being as selfish as them. I admire their audacity. Why break the law when you can make the law?*

*Except for a small percentage that have escaped the current paradigm by reading books old or obscure, the vast majority are products of their time and place, prisoners of the present.*

*Various popular holy texts contain hate speech, yet are not banned or even partly censored. People are expected to treat them with respect for no other reason than them being holy. You can hold the most despicable opinions, so long as it's part of a religion, because people are scared of the religious. Some of the most popular holy texts contain calls for the stoning of gay people, the genital mutilation of children, the oppression of women, the murder of non-believers, and justifications for slavery. Imagine if someone promoted that madness without the shield of faith in front of them. They'd be imprisoned for hate speech. Because he wants the votes of the religious, Riley tell us to respect such religions. Why else would he support religions that hold beliefs in contradiction with his own? If they truly cared about stopping hate speech, holy texts that contain hate speech would be banned or at least partially censored.*

*Most people continue living only because of their dreams. If everyone knew for definite their lives would forever be as they currently are, how many people would bother living on?*

*The first feeling you experience on a subject is your true feeling. If the feeling is painful, all that follows are coping mechanisms.*

*The Plutocracy don't care for increasing the wealth of Gildish customers so they can buy their garbage, because there is an increasing quantity of potential customers around the world to compensate for the stagnation of income here. The importance of the income of Gildish citizens has decreased as global trade has increased.*

*If I was Prime Minister and I wanted to start a war, I would openly state it was for resources, I wouldn't bother inventing an excuse. People would be happy knowing it's for resources, because they'd think it would make them richer. The pursuit of ideals makes no sense in this unprideful nation that doesn't agree on anything.*

*We have exported manufacturing, but we have also exported pollution. In the end, Rich Nations always win.*

*History of our nation summarised in three phrases: 'For the glory of God', 'For king and country', and 'For profit'.*

*Most people that believe they were born into a superior group are people that have almost nothing to be personally proud of. Because they have almost no accomplishments, they ride the coattails of successful artists, athletes, and thinkers that happen to look like them, for the sake of gaining a sense of self-worth. This is why the poor are generally more bigoted than the rich, it's a delusion that the difference is just because of education, it's mostly because of a difference in their senses of self-worth. That's why instead of labelling such people as bigoted and kicking them down, you should look at the root of what they want: pride, community, and to be treated with decency. When that's given to them they'll be happy and*

*no longer a threat to peace, or you could just continue to demonise them and call them names, maybe that will change their minds.*

*I thought the state of this country was an elaborate joke, that one day the string-puller would appear from behind the curtain to confirm it and everything would return to normal.*

*That which is worth remembering does not require a camera. You do not need a camera to remember the moment you fell in love or a traumatic event. Cameras often preserve what we don't care to remember, and life is seldom worth remembering. Think of the world's greatest composers, they played their instruments for several hours a day, yet by the end of their careers only produced a few hours of music.*

*It's impossible for anyone to genuinely be an alpha male or alpha female in a technologically advanced civilization.*

*There's no reason to live in civilization, if you're not a millionaire. Without financial freedom, you are enslaved, because you are working when you must, not when you want. Your life depends on a boss, who is, no matter how many times you meet them, a stranger that sees you as an expense and dreams of the day your role can be automated. Why work a job that won't give you financial freedom, especially if it's one you hate? To be free when you're too old to enjoy life? To only be spoken to when someone wants you to complete a task? To have the Plutocracy's economic interests ruin your neighbourhood whilst you can't afford to move away? To help some strangers get rich as you spend hours upon hours away from the ones you love? I'd join Green Eyes in the wild, if not for our estrangement. Years ago, I knew that kid had life figured out, but Maria didn't want to join me with him in the wild, and her desires are more important to me than my own. If you're not rich, you should create your own commune in the wild with friends and family. I wish I could have done so. Every second, we get closer to death. Keep that in mind the next time you work that job you hate.*

*The intellectual pollution caused by the internet giving everyone an illusion they know everything has been comprehended by few people. This illusion manifests itself most egregiously in the form of conspiracy theories. I have come across many people from fools to geniuses that abstain from politics because conspiracy theories have made them fear the government. Fearful men kill revolutions in their minds. The fear of a knock on their front door is enough to kill revolutions before they begin. Millions of revolutions die everyday within the people's minds because of fear. There is no need for the mob or secret police to silence the dissenter, the fearful man has already done the job for them. And generally who are conspiracy theorists? I see within the oft-disparaged conspiracy theorists two great qualities: scepticism of the powerful and intellectual curiosity. And the people most likely to believe in conspiracy theories about their government doing evil are those that have seen their quality of life deteriorate because of political decisions. To them, the government is an enemy, because they have so often been hurt by them that they expect the government to perpetrate the evil conspiracies they read about. And those sceptical, intellectually curious, and hurt people are precisely the ones that should be helping the revolution, but they will not, because conspiracy theories have made them debilitatingly fearful of the powerful.*

*Lobbyists, politicians, and business executives hold meetings claimed to be in a private capacity and therefore not requiring publication. Conversations about public matters in private clubs with public officials remain undisclosed from the public forever. Some governments around the world publish a register for lobbyists so the public can see who*

*lobbied which politician for what and when, but Gildland of course doesn't have such a register. Lobbying scandals are brushed off as merely the result of a few bad eggs, not evidence of a systemic problem, which is inevitable given our culture of individualism.*

*The popular desire to get so rich that one doesn't have to work anymore and can live far away from their current location is a sign that our masters have failed to create a country that encourages community and that public education has neglected spiritualism.*

*You have university students from affluent backgrounds and stupid, shallow celebrities, posturing as though they care for equality whilst remaining conveniently silent on wealth inequality.*

*The more people that can't afford to pay their bills, the more loans that bankers can profit from.*

*You think your opponents don't just disagree with you, you think they're trying to be evil. Can you not see how polarising that belief is? No-one considers themselves evil, everyone is doing what they think is good, though that may be hard to believe sometimes. I disagree with you people on many things, but I've never once thought you were trying to be evil. I always respected that opinions differ and that we have little control over what we think.*

*Instead of informing readers of local matters as they once did, to help them partake in bettering it politically, readers are drowned in a sea of tragedies that make them appreciate their own lives more, crime stories that make them feel morally superior for being less evil than criminals, and fears they can only wish away. The profit motive encourages corporations to make content of the lowest common denominator to attract as many customers as possible. Whatever requires little foreknowledge, is of the lower pleasures, or is simplistic is what dominates the market. These 'laws of profitability' also apply to other media forms. Consider music, the music advertised most heavily is that which is simplistic in harmony, melody, lyrics, instrumentation, and structure, usually about three minutes long, and requires no patience, this is because such music is the easiest to consume and produce. The consequences in both forms of media are declines in substance and expression. The so-called 'freedom of the press' is largely constricted by the profit motive. Attention-grabbing information is published more frequently, and featured more prominently, than the seemingly less interesting, but more valuable, ideas of academics. Production is directed towards tragedies because they're attention-grabbing. It is emotional and reactionary so readers too become emotional and reactionary then vote for who they have reacted most emotionally to. The news media spends a tremendous amount of time entertaining instead of informing. They write about what politicians dressed like and their haircuts, publish pictures of a politician eating a sandwich, pictures of a president that tripped on his way up a plane's stairs, pictures of a president wearing a tanned suit, pictures of a president that had tissue on one of his shoes, and these same publications then despair at the state of the world without once considering themselves to be part of the problem by entertaining people instead of focusing on informing them. They act upset about the public being anxious yet focus on anxiety-producing news stories. The nature of news encourages people to know a little bit about many topics, but what can one person do about an explosion at a fireworks factory, increased anxiety among students, a wildfire, a hostage situation, a disappeared aeroplane, and everything else they mention everyday? There already are many specialists whose lives and careers are dedicated to resolving such issues. Being stressed*

*about a problem you don't plan on resolving is a waste of life. Imagine all the articles people have ever read, now, ask yourself, what did they actually do in response other than become miserable? Did they learn something from them? It would have been better learnt in a book, a report, or a study. Instead of learning about every problem in the world, it is more productive to focus on one at a time, hence why I focus on destroying the Plutocracy. You'd think that the internet would've changed what people read. There's many great resources online, but people still read the mainstream outlets like before. When the internet was first getting popular, I thought it would radically change the public's sources of information, but I was wrong, they still read the mainstream garbage. It was the worst prediction I ever made. The revolutionary potential of the internet was quelled when alternative, lesser-known sites, that have a tendency to focus on what's truly important and provide more substance unlike the mainstream, were defamed then delisted on search engines and on social media in favour of mainstream outlets. Alternative outlets were delisted because they were supposedly untrustworthy, as if the mainstream sites are trustworthy, as if they're not manipulated by their wealthy owners and intelligence agencies. It's sad that they'd manipulate the internet for their own benefit, but their delisting of alternative outlets is admittance that the Plutocracy fear an informed public and the fact they still fear the public is cause for hope. If they didn't fear the public, they wouldn't bother lying to them. The day they stop lying to the people is the day we should be truly scared, because that would mean they don't fear us anymore.*

*Apocalyptic beliefs make one feel special, because they believe they are at the very end, not lost somewhere in the middle, of humanity's story. The future being impossible to fathom, they find comfort in believing there will be no future and excusing their lack of action in ensuring the existence of the future. They don't want the world to continue without them being able to control or learn about it, they don't like the mystery of what will happen after their death.*

*Drums have diminished the emotional range in music over the last century. The more elegant and expressive instruments are clouded by the ceaseless thumping of drums and forced to abide by their march instead of fly to the upper heavens of human expression. The less expressive that art becomes the less expressive, unique, and interesting the people become. I'm not sure if this makes much sense, I haven't had any time to think about it, because I've spent all my life trying to help a bunch of people that hate me.*

*The actions of our government were so contrary to reason, so out of touch with public want, I couldn't help but think they were intentionally provoking us.*

*Only someone that has never been humbled by the realisation of their own ignorance could be so arrogant about their beliefs as that man. Humility only comes when one contemplates the vastness of possibilities, when one begins to realise how little one knows about the ever-expanding universe. He is arrogant, because he is naive.*

*The best friendships are those in which you're comfortable enough to offend one another, the coldest relationships are ones in which you're not comfortable enough to offend someone, such as with a stranger, your manager, or a dictator. By not allowing people to offend one another, even in a well-intentioned way, you make forming friendships harder, and help our masters keep the people divided and scared of one another.*

*When no-one has to work anymore because of automation, people will look back on the time when people had to work to survive with reverence.*

*Few care about democracy. Who wants to compromise, unless they have to? They all want a dictator that agrees with them.*

*Idiots like to believe there was such a thing as a perfect time in the past because that means perfection is possible, and therefore a perfect time in the future is possible. Once they realise, after researching deep enough, that there was no such thing as a perfect time, the future becomes bleaker too.*

*The desire for change is more invigorating than the desire for stability, because those wanting change are more desperate than those that have what they want. The desperate are in the streets, the comfortable watch videos of them.*

*If you want to persuade people, appeal to their emotions. Think of the most memorable moments of your life. They all contain some strong emotion. They're not when someone was listing uninteresting facts about their life or what a teacher said during some boring class at school. If you want to manipulate the public, you should appeal to emotion instead of reason, because what you make them feel will have a deeper hold on them than lists of facts they won't remember. People prefer pleasure to the truth. They don't know the truth anyway, so you may as well say what will make them happy.*

*The prettiest, most peaceful nations are built on the foundations of the most vulgar and violent practices.*

*I would have so loved to have been a philosopher not involved in politics and spent more time with my family, but I had to turn my energies to extinguishing fires.*

*Jeremiah, please don't allow anyone to read this, burn it for the sake of the revolution. We should appear to have universal love in our hearts, that shallow love of all, that cunning love of all!*

Without hesitation, Arthur screwed up the pieces of paper and took a new piece to write the final version.

*I have long feared I was destined for a flowerless grave, but perhaps suicide will bring my work enough awareness to plant the seeds of a better nation.*

*Since the cutting of the Humanities, I have paid for nothing other than the Unemployment Fines of myself, and, my friend, Eric Fidge, surviving on water, and food, from the Yeshil Forest, as well as food from my garden, in protest of the Plutocracy. To learn about how the Plutocracy has ruined the world and driven me to this decision, read my book 'Variations on a Theme'.*

*I leave half of my estate to the owner of my heart, Maria Terre d'Or, a quarter to my friend, Eric Fidge, and a quarter to the executor of my will and son by fellowship, Jeremiah John.*

*Now that I have left this world, Jeremiah John is the leader of the Economic Boycott. If any disputes should arise over my writings, speeches, or actions, Jeremiah John's interpretation is final.*

*Arthur de la Mer*

Restday2 Q2 FY4079

He then wrote on another page:

*Jeremiah, I have kept the suicide note short and avoided using extremist speech to increase its chance of going viral. Please publish it on as many websites and send it to as many media outlets as you can, also include a picture of my corpse as that will generate more attention.*

*You'll be better off without me, everyone will be. Your chances of destroying the Plutocracy are better without me. I am old, out of touch, I have too many regrets, too many failed dreams, too much of what I love has been lost to history, I've been unlucky one too many times, and I can't run from this nightmare anymore, it's all hurting my ability to think as I was once able to. It would be a crime to hold you back. There is something so special about you, my most valued friend. You see the good in everyone. You know how to talk to everyone. In moments of the most unpredictable mayhem, you always know what the right decision is. I have seen you stand unshaken within storms. I love you. Please forgive me for all the pain I've caused you, I hate myself for it. Feel no guilt about my death.*

*If you ever discover what I taught you differs from the truth, follow the truth. When you see everyone going one way, remember to look the other way. Read books to find different opinions to ones you currently hold. How else will you know you're not brainwashed? Surround yourself with friends, so that you have more to love than just your country. If the video of the stage collapse and my suicide note fails to help attract attention for the boycott, focus on your architecture and forget about politics, if your architecture fails and you can't find another job you love, live in the wild. Living in civilization without financial freedom or working a job you love is like being terminally ill. Do you really want to work until you can get a state pension at 68? Who's to say you won't, God forbid, die before then? And, even if you do live to that age, what freedom can you enjoy when you're that old?*

*I am deeply concerned by what Green Eyes may be doing in the forest with the lost students. I should have had them investigated, but I was too busy with, and stressed by, the damn boycott. Consider doing what I did not. He used to be such a great kid, one of the most brilliant students I ever had, but I fear his drug-riddled mind has spent too much time without stern reply. Part of the reason I insisted he return as a guest listener after his lengthy period away was to help him regain his sanity. I can only imagine how extreme his ideas have become since that day we last saw him.*

*Please tell Maria I loved her more than anything in the world, that I hated myself perpetually for having caused her even a brief moment of pain, and that our separation made happiness a memory. I doubt she will, but if she feels guilty about my death, say the decision was not at all her fault. Her address is on the back of this page.*

*P.S. Eric has a hidden a stash of food under his bed and he doesn't know I know. A few antiques have disappeared from the attic since he started living here so I assume he bought the food by selling them, the old devil. Feel free to eat what you find there.*

Arthur went to sleep, deciding he'd end his life after saying goodbye to Jeremiah. He didn't view suicide as an admission of failure. After his ego had been devastated by defeat and humiliation, suicide brought him a sense of control, as well as pride for conquering the fear of death.



The next morning, Arthur sat by the desk under his bedroom window and gazed at his neighbourhood graced by the sun. He could only recall a few brief moments of joy in all the years he'd lived there. A smile from a neighbour as they came home simultaneously, a slightly funny comment from a mother saying to her daughter 'If you go any slower, we'll be going backwards!' and a white horse and carriage that went by carrying newly-weds. He imagined sitting at a street party, heading to a fête with friends, people sitting on their porches playing Gildish songs with their own instruments and singing along, and the sound of children playing in neighbouring gardens. The world had not provided such simple pleasures to him since he was a child. Reflecting on his own life, he felt dead already, as though he was evaluating the life of someone he had no attachment to. Arthur thought of consoling and thanking Jeremiah by ordering a gift for him to wake up to, but decided against it because of his determination to stick to the economic boycott until he died, he couldn't bear the thought of spoiling weeks of hard-work right before the very end.

A few minutes after hearing him wake, he went into Jeremiah's room next door to his. He was sat up in bed and tiredly said, "Good morning," as Arthur entered. "Good morning. Are you better?" Arthur shut the door behind him and sat on the side of the bed. "Yes, but..." "What's wrong?" "Everything." "Everything *is* going wrong." "What can we do?" "I don't know." Jeremiah said as he left his bed to get dressed, "I can at least right one wrong. I feel so guilty for how I spoke to Eric last night. I hope he'll accept my apology. I was just in such a bad mood." "He'll understand. He's a softy on the inside." "Really?" "Yes. He's only tough on the outside. Believe it or not, he actually really likes you." "You're not just saying that?" "No." "That's interesting." After Jeremiah put on his suit, he sprayed himself with cologne and said, "I'll be going to my mum's after speaking to him. There I can find out how the video did. I'll come back early to let you know." "What video?" "The video of the stage collapse." "Okay, great." "I'll see you later." "Goodbye, my friend." "Goodbye." Arthur couldn't bear to watch him walk away.

Jeremiah reconciled with Eric and left for his mother's house. Whilst in Arthur's front garden, he feared being attacked in public, because of the previous night's attack. His nightmares spilled into his daydreams. Near Arthur's gate, he stopped then considered taking him and Eric to his mother's home. Looking back, he noticed that, out of all the windows he could see, only the curtains of Arthur's bedroom were closed. He questioned if he'd returned to sleep, but found that doubtful because in the entire time he'd lived with him he'd never slept at that time in the morning. The strangeness inspired him to head back to the house. He searched for clues in his memory, and remembered the strangeness of seeing Arthur read *The Dearly Departed are Stars in the Sky*, and the strangeness of Arthur saying, "You're a lot younger than me, you have more time," the previous night. A terror seized his mind. Jeremiah sprinted up the path and burst into the house. Eric heard him running down the path so was already in the hall, "What is the matter, my lad?" "Help me!" Jeremiah ran past him and up the stairs. Eric swiftly followed. Upstairs, he shouted, "Arthur!" He tried to open his door, but it was locked. He heard Arthur mutter, "God." "What are you doing?" "Nothing." "Can I come in?" "No." "Why?" No response came. Increasingly worried, he rapidly knocked on the door, "Arthur?" There was silence except for the sound of a bottle being placed down. He knocked again, "Arthur?" No response. He turned to Eric who was watching from the top of the stairs with grave concern, "Help me!" They kicked the door together and it creaked as it was pushed in a little. They tried several more times and the door collapsed.

They were stunned by what they saw. Arthur was sat by the desk under his window crying with his head in his hands and with alcohol and pills on his desk. Jeremiah ran to him, "What are you doing?!" Recovering from the shock, Eric shortly followed. Jeremiah wrapped his arms around him and Eric did too, Arthur cried, "Let me die! Please, let me die!" "No!" Arthur tried to break free. Jeremiah and Eric held him tighter. Arthur screamed as if possessed. Jeremiah checked the bottles, and was relieved to see none were opened, he said, "We're here for you, no matter what you want. If you want to talk, we'll listen. If you don't want to talk, that's okay too, we'll do whatever you want. Anything to make you happy." Arthur began to calm down from the heights of despair. He was too overwhelmed to speak, his face looked almost totally drained of life. Jeremiah said to Eric, "Let's take him to his bed." They got Arthur up then walked him to his bed.

Arthur felt they wanted an explanation for why he tried to overdose. So, explained with the force of decades of anger, "We cannot win at anything! We gained not one follower! Not one! We are outsiders and we just have to accept that! We cannot beat them! We are finished! We are dead! There is no hope! It's all over! And I won't listen to anyone try to tell me otherwise!" Arthur stopped ranting from exhaustion then dejectedly said, "I've worked hard my whole life with not one accomplishment to show for it, whilst others have done nothing and got all the glory in the world. Very few are truly special, and I'm not one of them, I'm just another loser."

For a couple of minutes, Eric and Jeremiah sat silently out of respect, both wondering where each of their lives would turn next and what they could do to cheer him up. Their eyes were downcast. After not saying a word for several minutes, a most surprising change occurred in Arthur. He started laughing and the two of them looked at one another in delight and confusion as his winter turned to spring. Jeremiah asked, "What's so funny?" and Arthur gleefully laughed even more. Eric asked, "What is so funny?" Arthur laughed like a misbehaving kid then said, "I have a new idea." "What is it?" Arthur laughed, as he shook his head, then, taking the idea more seriously. Jeremiah asked, "What's the new idea?" Arthur thought about the idea for a few more moments and found it so clever and exciting he couldn't hide it anymore. Whilst still fleshing out the idea, he appeared to be morphing into an entirely new person, "We will play the greatest trick ever played. We will form a party, we will pretend to support only the most popular ideas, we will appeal to every wealthy donor we can find, we will say and do anything we must to get elected. We will promote the Plutocracy's interests, and, through sophistry, convince the poor their interests are shared, we will claim we are the party of love and others are of hate, we will mourn death whilst we murder, and we will praise charity as we plunder the poor. The party will be whole-encompassing, so grandiose that people lose themselves in it, their shames and regrets will seem meaningless in comparison to our grand mission, their entire lives will fall by the wayside for us. We will stun them with a dream so beautiful their eyes will be drawn from those they hurt in their wild rush towards it. Religion has collapsed yet people remain in search of god, we will exploit this land of lost souls by offering them purpose and community for the first time in their pathetic lives. Since these people only care about wealth and freedom, that is what we shall promise them. Since people think in slogans, we will appeal to them as such and never waste time writing a book. We will do anything to win. Then, once we are victorious, we will break every campaign promise, we will kill the Plutocracy, and we will make Gildland as we truly want it to be." Eric said, "That has more harmony to me than

the sweetest music. Tell me how I can help.” “I will, but first let’s end this stupid boycott with a feast. Come, my friends.”

Arthur got out of bed, as if the misery that brought him to attempt suicide never existed. They went downstairs and Arthur renewed his broadband subscription and Postway subscription then ordered, without asking what the others wanted, burgers, pizzas, baguettes, all sorts of fried meats, smoked sausages, pies, fish and chips, ice cream, milkshakes, and chocolate. Their food arrived in a few minutes through the Postway. They carried the delivery to the dining table then laid it all out. Eric said, “Look at how lovely this all is. We could have had this weeks ago, if my opinion was respected.” Arthur replied, “I always knew you were right.” “Then why did you continue with the foolish boycott for so long?” “Because I was a coward, trying to be a good person, but, now I have nothing to fear, they cannot kill me, I have already died! When you don’t fear death, no-one can intimidate you. My very existence now after the torment I’ve been through feels like a victory, an act of defiance against the Plutocracy! I don’t care what happens to me anymore, and, because I no longer care, I have a great advantage over people that do care about themselves. I don’t care about being hated, or being called evil, or a liar, or a sell-out, or a hypocrite. The good and the evil are both selfish, but only the evil are brave enough to do the evil required to get what they want. The desire to be good is usually just a cowardly desire to not be hated by others. No matter how fiercely the good condemn those they brand evil, there is respect within that hatred because they know they lack the courage to be considered evil themselves. Virtue is a scam, the powerful are wise to not bother with it and tell the masses through many channels to be virtuous. It gives the powerful a great advantage over the people. They demand the people to not kill, lie, or steal, yet the powerful do so all the time. We’re told to be understanding when our law is monolingual. We’re told to be peaceful whilst facing lawful brutality. The speech of the good is confined to what they believe to be true, the evil can spread any lie to defeat their opposition, the good can only hope the evil take mercy upon them. Being good is a disadvantage in life, especially if you’re trying to get elected. Why play by the rules, if it results in you failing to gain the power needed to enact good? There are so many great political thinkers that dedicate their lives to learning about the world and giving lectures and interviews and writing books. They know the world’s problems and they know how people attain power, lord knows they criticise the oh-so-evil world leaders enough for it, yet they’re too cowardly to do the necessary evil required to attain the power so that they may then enact good.” Eric asked, “And what necessary evil will we be doing precisely?” “To win the election, we will research what policies are most popular and we will claim to support them no matter our personal opinions, simultaneously we’ll secretly tell wealthy donors anything they want to hear and agree to their policy proposals so that we get more money than any other party. Fortunately for our cause, what the public and the Plutocracy want align on many important issues because the public have been subjected to so much propaganda from them. We will promise them the world. We will make our messages easy to digest. We will be giving the customers what they want. People love pets and computers because they do what the owner wants, so I will also be that way, I will tell them what they want to hear not what they need to hear, I will promise them what they want not what they need.” “That is a most wise decision. It is utterly foolish to try reversing the Plutocracy’s propaganda. Why bother trying to change the opinions of the majority, when you can simply pretend to share their beliefs to gain their support and then stab them in the back once elected? Why bother encouraging people to think outside the mainstream? Use the tyranny of the mass media to your advantage! How foolish it is to complain about the absolute power of the Plutocracy

then try to succeed without aligning with them!” “I’ve known it for a long time, my friend, but I was too scared to go through with it. After all, emotion trumps reason. Riley knows that very well. This is why he speaks of issues in terms of love and hate. However, he has not yet embraced this in an official capacity. We have an opportunity to exploit this simplification of discourse and prioritization of emotion over reason. We should call our party, and I am not joking, the Love Party!” “Brilliant! “Our symbol should be a love heart and on every issue we should state our position is that of love and all others are of hate. Anyone that claims we’re hateful will sound utterly mad.” “A most wise decision. Reality is confusing for the herd. There are so many statements, and statistics, and expert opinions, it is too overwhelmingly complex for them to understand, but what they do understand more than anything is their emotions. We must exploit their feelings and pay little mind to reasoning with them. The herd squint through life, relying on their emotions for guidance. We should appeal to the fool that knows nothing of politics and supports what seems to be the kindest out of fear of offending, and whatever seems kindest to the fool is always whatever is popular at the time.” “Indeed. We should make them fall so deeply in love with me they immediately come to my defence without hesitation. If anyone questions our beliefs, no matter how polite, my followers must react with such fury that others fear questioning us again. Historical figures should be ripped from their context and condemned for not conforming to our beliefs. Their fury should know no bounds. I want them to be as loyal to me as a dog is to its owner.” “That would be a glorious sight.” “What is it that makes people believe in gods despite their being no evidence for their existence? Despite their holy books contradicting science and history? Emotion. They *want* to believe. Their belief makes them happy, it gives them purpose, it provides answers for many of life’s most stressful questions, it promises them an eternity of happiness. Why are Poor Nations more religious than the rich? Partly because they lack education, but mostly because it provides them with the pleasure their reality is in poverty of. We must make people *want* to believe in us.” “I can hardly wait to begin!” “You’re awfully quiet, Jeremiah, are you all right?” Jeremiah felt bad for spoiling the good mood, but couldn’t resist speaking truthfully, “I’m not sure if the plan will work.” Arthur stopped eating, “What?” “You’ve frequently criticised the wealthy for manipulating the government, but now you plan on appealing to the wealthy. It’s hard to imagine people believing such a sudden change of heart.” “It will be fine. I will embrace my past, trying to hide it would be futile. Failures of my past will make me relatable to people, most people view themselves as failures, you don’t know that because you’re too young. Showing that I have changed from ‘hateful’ to ‘loving’ will make me inspirational.” “But will you be able to control the narrative? I think people will be sceptical of the sudden change.” “Not entirely, but you don’t need to convince everyone. You just need to convince enough people to get elected. The mainstream media will be on our side because our promise to abolish taxes will please their owners and we’ll promise to provide any other favours they wish for, though of course we’ll stab them all in the back once elected. Most journalists don’t care about the truth, they just want attention, as proven by the garbage they publish.” “There is a limit to how much people can be propagandised, though. You once wrote charity is wrong because it encourages the poor to compensate for the selfishness of the wealthy.” “Jeremiah, It will be okay.” “You also wrote you’d never be a politician because, to be successful, you’d have to lie, and that you, as a philosopher, couldn’t live with yourself, if you lied.” “I will be able to live with myself, because I know this plan is for a good end.” “You’re too honest of a person to pull this off, Arthur. Can you really imagine yourself lying to the public constantly?” “Yes, because I know it’s for their own benefit.” “I think-” “Stop worrying.” Jeremiah observed

how erratic Arthur was being and said, “Don’t take this the wrong way, but, instead of getting right back into politics, maybe you should... see a psychiatrist or something.” “What, and be like everyone else?” “I just want you to be okay.” “A psychiatrist won’t help me, they’d medicate me into a self-pitying zombie. Struggles shouldn’t be hidden away or resolved so easily, they should be embraced and turned into inspiration.” “But don’t you at least-” “No, I don’t. Just enjoy your lunch, okay? Stop being so boring all the time.”

In the hours that followed, using Jeremiah’s money that he’d saved from his time working as a waiter, the Love Party was registered. Its symbol, the Open-Heart, was designed by Arthur. It was a red, hollow heart with a thin opening at its lowest point, a hundred red Open-Heart necklaces were ordered, and they hired a developer to create the party’s website. In one day, Arthur and Eric wrote a speech. Arthur provided most of the content and Eric provided constructive criticism and a few poetic lines to elevate it above usual political speeches. Due to most people’s hostility to reading, they didn’t bother writing a manifesto, they wrote policy proposals on their website, using as few words as possible, with the intention to eventually remove much of the written content on their website and rely more on pictures and videos to encourage more engagement. The most prominent policy proposal on their website was that of abolishing taxation entirely, all other policies were chosen by looking at research to determine what was most popular with the public, all policies the Love Party pretended to support were justified in the manifesto as being the policies of love. Knowing that people are generally more attracted to what appears popular, they hired actors to act as supporters at his first speech as leader of the Love Party, from a publicity firm called Crowd on Demand. Jeremiah, feeling sorry for Arthur, helped as requested, hoping success would dissuade him from suicide, but still terrified the Love Party would succeed only to eventually be exposed as a plot.

## Statement 9: Faith Wanders Lost

*TODAY'S TOP HEADLINES:*

*Unprecedented Number of Climate Refugees Pile Up On Mistrovar's Borders*

*Riley to World Leaders: Do you realise what you have done?*

*The New Pill that Lets You Work and Play More*

*Supreme Leader Sirkitus Warns World Leaders Against Starting Another 31 Years War*

*We're All Addicted to Scandals Now, and That's a Good Thing*

Five days after forming the Love Party, Arthur was to give his first speech as leader. With Jeremiah's money, he got a smart haircut like he had before the boycott and had his beard shaved off too, and he bought shoes and a suit for the occasion. Before leaving, he gave Eric and Jeremiah an Open-Heart necklace each to wear. Whereas the regular sized necklaces had an Open-Heart the size of a coin, the Open-Heart of Arthur's necklace was the size of an adult hand. Upon Arthur's request, Jeremiah had hired a driver, rented space in a park of Montpelerin where he'd deliver the speech, and organised a stage to be erected with a Love Party banner above it, as well as Open-Heart necklaces for them to give out as a means of generating publicity and boxes of food for them to give out to make another emotional connection with the public. During the journey, Arthur was shown an ad by Chardin Communications narrated by a man that sounded almost as posh as Eric, "Turn customers into fans, products into obsessions, employees into ambassadors, and brands into icons. Choose Chardin Communications to expand your empire." Arthur loved being a target for such an ad, already it made him feel like one of the controllers of society instead of one of the controlled, it was another reason for the mischievous smile he wore during the car ride. The three of them were dropped off just outside a park in the middle of Montpelerin's financial district. The camera crew Jeremiah hired was ready for them. Waiting for them in the park were a hundred actors pretending to be supporters of the Love Party, chanting slogans and holding placards, as requested by Arthur. They chanted in alternation, 'Tax is theft!' and 'Yes to love, no to hate!' They held bright and colourful placards with the Open-Heart symbol, and such slogans as, 'Love saves lives!' "Hate hateful ideas, love hateful people!" 'End the government, start the lovernment!' 'Why hate when you can love?' 'Relovution!' 'Don't get mad, get rich!' and 'We can change the world, one smile at a time.' Jeremiah could hardly believe the trick they were playing, it felt like everything could so easily be exposed by anyone that knew what Arthur truly believed. He looked at Arthur with disappointment as he appeared to have forgotten the crowd was full of actors, he appeared proud, excited, and without shame. The crowd's chanting morphed into a cheer when they noticed Arthur enter the park. He waved at them with the grace of a man that had been popular for years, as he took to the stage, with Eric and Jeremiah beside him. The video of Arthur lying flat on the stage of the Festival of Ideas gained only a couple of hundred thousand views, a petty amount in the grand scheme of things and the video quickly fell down the bottomless pit of the internet, no-one at the park recognised him.

Arthur made the Open-Heart hand sign above his head and everyone copied. He spoke into a microphone, as the actors looked at him as if he was a god, “My Comrades, I am so grateful you have come to hear my message of love. What the world needs now more than ever is love. We are so eager to quarrel over the pettiest of things, but so long as someone is doing what they want and they’re not hurting anyone else, we should be happy for them, that is our golden rule. If I see someone happy, then I am happy too! That is what it means to love.” The speech was timed perfectly to coincide with the workers’ lunch breaks, the crowd swelled as he spoke. Arthur’s passion magnetised many passers-by. In the sea of their meaningless lives, his passion for ‘his beliefs’ served as bait dangling irresistibly before them. “When you speak words of love, the love you give someone encourages them to provide love to someone else, and then they feel encouraged to pass on the love, and so on, and so on, creating a network of love encompassing the entire world! We must love all people unconditionally even if they hate us, for it is not hate that defeats hate, but only love that defeats hate, there is no alternative. It’s easy to be nice to those that are nice to you, but can you still see enough good in your opponents to be nice to them? That is one of the goals of the Love Party. We want you to love others no matter what they do and we want you to be loved no matter what you do.” The crowd cheered with great enthusiasm. People left their places of lunch to see what was going on in the park. Workers in offices with a view of the park crowded the windows. “When the Love Party is victorious, no-one’s feelings will be hurt ever again, that I can promise you. Many philosophers have written many words, yet there is still suffering. Too much thinking has overcomplicated our world. There is only one lesson that we should adhere to; love everyone unconditionally.” Virtually everyone lapped it up. They desperately accepted his call to prize feelings over thought. They’d watched debates and read articles for years, hoping intellectuals would bring the world closer to happiness through reason, but only saw the distancing of hearts. They wished to delve in the boundless ecstasies of love without the nagging voice of reason. “We must forget where we all come from, if we want to build a new, loving world, we must build it on a steady foundation. To unite as a people we must forget history, we must forget different cultures, they divide us. The past holds a grip on the living from the grave, we must let the past die. We must forget history, we must forget the sins of our fathers! Are people really not going to be friends because their ancestors were at war with someone else’s ancestors or because their ancestors were enslaved by someone else’s ancestors? Come on, people, we have to move on, if we want to unite. We must become colour-blind which means we must become culture-blind. We cannot unite if we have different cultures or if we identify as being born in different groups. We must become a new people based on a new culture. From now on, we shall only identify as members of the Love Party.” Exhausted by the innumerable conflicts that arose from living in an intrinsically divided nation, the crowd applauded. “Currently, the law prohibits hate speech, but that is not enough. If the Love Party wins the election, we will also outlaw hate acts. People will not be allowed to make rude hand signs, laugh at others, use facial expressions that make others feel bad, or raise their voices aggressively, because such actions hurt feelings.” The crowd applauded and Arthur could hardly believe the ideas the non-actors were accepting. He wondered how far they would follow him, so decided to have some fun and improvised. “It is so hateful that we can legally lie to, criticise, and shout at others in public, whilst we can’t legally make love in public. But why? Making love is not hurting anyone and those involved are spreading love. Do you see how hateful this current government is, my Comrades?” The crowd said they did and applauded him for making what they considered a fascinating observation. Considering the audience utterly stupid, a magnitude of ways he could exploit

them appeared in Arthur's mind, he decided to test them again with another piece of improvisation. "The existence of government laws signifies that hatred resides in far too many hearts. When our revolution is complete, people will have such profound love in their hearts that laws will no longer be needed to encourage good behaviour. Will you help me with the love revolution, my Comrades?" The crowd agreed excitedly, considering it a noble goal. Arthur stopped improvising and returned to the planned speech. "When people follow our seven simple rules of love, our revolution will be complete. For those that are new to our mission, here are the seven rules. One, never judge someone before you've heard their side of the story. Two, never use someone else for amusement. Three, seek friendship with your enemies. Four, be selfless. Five, don't criticise, unless your criticism is constructive. Six, do not read or listen to anything made by the Hateful. Seven, forgive unconditionally." The crowd applauded, enjoying their imaginations of a world full of people behaving in accordance with those rules. "I hope no-one listening believes I always live up to the rules of love, I certainly don't, though I try. I admit my faults, because I don't want any of you to feel discouraged from joining or staying with us from a fear of being imperfect. So long as you try, that is enough. What we care about is loving intentions. If you fail to live up to the rules of love, that is okay, we will forgive you, because without forgiveness, we'd have a world of burnt bridges, we'd be isolated on our own little islands, permanently hateful of one another, acting superior to those we refuse to forgive. We must silence the echoes of past grievances to give us the peaceful quiet needed to compose a symphony of love. I present myself before you all, as a flawed man in search of forgiveness, for I once held some truly hateful beliefs. I used to believe that marriage gave women a chance to be free from work, I didn't have the love in my heart to realise that marriage oppressed women. I used to believe that diversity causes divisions, I didn't have the love in my heart to realise how such an opinion was the cause of our divisions. I used to believe the Age Equality Movement was a ploy by the wealthy to get cheap labour, I didn't have the love in my heart to realise age equality empowered young people. I used to believe the wealthy corrupted politicians for their own interests and didn't care for the consequences faced by the public, I was too filled with hate to realise the wealthy are indeed humans and do care about the public. After all, the wealthy are the ones who give us the jobs that we need to survive and invest in our communities. In fact, I was once so filled with hate that I started an economic boycott with the aim of hurting our economy until the government gave into my demands. But, as the world spins, we spin out of the chains of primitive ignorance as we find inspiration from the stars above, and indeed we all get wiser with age. I ask for your forgiveness, for my past hatefulness." Arthur hung his head in pretend shame. The plea for forgiveness resonated with the audience which had grown as far as he could see. They applauded him wildly to make him feel better, with shouts here and there granting forgiveness. He lifted his head back up then held a hand up to settle the applause, "Thank you, thank you. Let's keep in mind there are still many people that still believe those hateful ideas that I used to hold. They despise wealth and freedom, the two pillars of Gildland's greatness. Such people are growing in terrifying numbers and though I have a lot of love in my heart for Riley I must say he is intensifying such hate. They want to restrict what you can buy and do, because they think you're incapable of making good decisions. Because of increasing wealth inequality, they want to increase taxes on the wealthy, but doing so would decrease the wealth of us all because they would be impoverishing the very people that hold the wealth we all rely on. We must encourage people to stop hating the wealthy and be more thankful for the jobs *they* provide, the inventions *they* make, and the investments *they* attract to our country!" There was rapturous applause for the endangered



and unappreciated wealthy people from those that dreamed of being wealthy. “If I am elected, taxes will not only be decreased, taxes will be abolished!” The collision of Arthur’s proposal to abolish taxes and Gildland’s extreme individualism caused an explosion of euphoria. “Taxation is theft, it is an act of aggression, it is the forceful taking of one’s money without permission. I promise to end the abusive practice of taxation by privatizing every industry and encouraging people to voluntarily give to our charity, the Love Party Welfare Association. When we all love each other, there’ll be no need for taxation as we’ll voluntarily and happily help those in need. Imagine how joyful we’ll be when we look at one another knowing we helped each other not by the force of taxation, but voluntarily out of love. In the Love Party, if you should fall on hard times, you will be raised back to your feet with the help of the Love Party Welfare Association, if you are outside of the Love Party, sadly you will be on your own. With our message of unconditional love, there will be no war to waste money on, because we will all get along with each other, love will save lives. I have spoken to various economists at Riverlake and they’ve informed me that by abolishing taxation there will be such an upsurge in charitable contributions, that we will decrease the crime rate by 30% in just one year and end homelessness completely. Not only will we be happier and more peaceful, we’ll all be richer because no-one spends our money as inefficiently as the government, and, most terrifyingly of all, Riley, with all due respect, is making the government bigger and bigger! Riley does not represent who we are as Gildlanders. I believe we need government to be as small as possible! All wars were started by governments, no war was ever started by a corporation! All of the luxuries you enjoy, your food, your technology, your entertainment, were created by corporations, not by the government! Now do you understand how the Love Party will make the world a happier place, my Comrades?” Considering themselves on the cutting edge of ideas, the crowd said they understood. “The Hateful often complain that the wealthy are greedy, as if poor people are not also greedy. Is it not true that the poor commit theft, hunt for bargains, and trample one another during shopping sales? They sound like acts of greed, to me! The wealthy are no greedier than the poor, there is simply an illusion caused by the different sizes of wealth. In fact, statistics show the wealthy give more money to charity than the poor, yet they’re still called the greedy ones! If we want the wealthy to share more of their wealth, we must stop calling them greedy and evil. Think of your own life, who is it that you spend the most money on birthday gifts for? Someone in your immediate family or someone in your distant family? Your immediate family, because they are usually the ones more loving towards you. So, if we want the wealthy to share more wealth with the poor, they should be more loving towards wealthy people. If we showed more love to the wealthy, do you think they would help the poor less or more?” “More!” replied the crowd. “We have only three years to go until the next election, will you help spread the message of love, my Comrades?” They happily said they would. “As the leader of the Love Party, I know I must lead by example. That’s why I’ve brought with me several boxes of food that you may take for your lunch today.” The crowd applauded in appreciation. “So, come along now, take what you want! I wish I had brought more, the crowd’s size exceeded my expectations!”

The crowd lined up for the free food the organisers had placed on the stage for Arthur, Eric, and Jeremiah to hand out. The average Gildlander despised being seen as a recipient of charity for how weak it made them appear, the actors were therefore vital for breaking the stigma of publicly accepting charity. The actors and non-actors went to shake Arthur’s hand and take pictures with he who seemed destined for fame. They hugged him, and said they were deeply touched by his message of love. To the more impressionable and desperate

crowd members, he seemed more like an angel that descended from Heaven than a man that stepped on a stage. The Lady With the Red Briefcase, left the park, pitying all involved. Jeremiah and Eric handed out red Open-Heart necklaces. There were not nearly enough necklaces or food to go around, so, upon Arthur's instruction, Eric and Jeremiah told empty-handed people to look out for his next speech where they'd be enough for everyone.

Going home, the road to utopia appeared clear and easy to Arthur. He imagined historians writing about him as they wrote about his idols, the prospect of eternal fame thrilled him. Everything seemed better now his dream seemed to be coming true. Old rivalries turned trivial, the Plutocracy were no longer omnipotent, but just people with the daring to be evil, suspicions of personal flaws were defeated, he stopped viewing the last weeks with total remorse as they now made him appreciate his success.

Once they arrived home Arthur and Eric couldn't stop grinning as they spoke of their plans. Jeremiah saw them both as maddened by living in a country they increasingly felt alien in, that they no longer cared to have standards as they had nothing to lose. He feared how cunning they would become after their first taste of success as tricksters. He stood by the doorway, wary of spoiling their mood. He entered, anticipating a difficult conversation, "Arthur." "Jeremiah!" "I'm not sure how best to say this, but I don't want to be in the party." Arthur wondered how he could possibly want to leave right after their success. Eric wasn't surprised. Neither responded, so Jeremiah continued, "I wish you the best of luck and I want to remain friends, but I don't want to be a part of this." Arthur went to him still in disbelief. As he spoke to Jeremiah, he searched his face for clues, "Why do you want to leave?" "I don't like lying to people." "They're already being lied to. We don't have a choice, but to lie too. At least we're doing it for a good end, unlike the rest." "I know, but I hate lying to people." "If the plan goes wrong, it will be my head they go for, not yours. You're focusing on the worst possible scenario of being exposed, aren't you? You need to think of how enjoyable our success will be." "I don't think it would be enjoyable, I think I'd be constantly worried about being exposed." "Jeremiah, think this through, do you really want to quit just as we're becoming successful?" "I've thought about leaving since I first heard the idea for this party and I feel no different now." "This won't be any fun without you." Jeremiah didn't know what to say. Arthur asked, "Is there really nothing that will change your mind?" "I don't think so." "I understand." "I'm sorry." "Don't be sorry. It's all right. Well, I guess this is it. You can stay a while, if you like?" "No, no. I better go." "Okay. Well, we'll keep in touch, won't we?" "Absolutely." "Okay." They hugged and said goodbye then Jeremiah exited the house, wishing the boycott had succeeded instead.

Eric said from the living room, "I hope you realise the mistake you have made." Arthur sped-walk to the living room, "What do you mean?" "He knows the Love Party is a plot and you have set him loose. Are you sure he, who cares deeply about being a good little boy, will not expose the party as a plot?" Arthur ran to find him. Jeremiah, midway through the front garden, turned then asked, "What's up?" He clamped his hands on his shoulders and said "Jeremiah, you can't leave! Think of how beautiful Gildland will be when we're in control! All of our ideas will be put into action! We'll create an empire that lasts forever! The world's depending on us! Don't let concerns for temporary pain stop us from eternal glory! Imagine how much worse the world will be, if we do nothing! And, remember, your architectural projects can become a reality, when I'm in charge! Without you, the plan will fail! Without you, I wouldn't even be alive anymore. Can you not see how important you are? Just take it one day at a time. If anything goes wrong, I will be the one that gets punished, not you! These

last few weeks would have been unlivable, if not for you by my side! And, what will you do, if you leave me now? Go to Riverlake and study business administration? There's no future there, Jeremiah." "I'll think about it." "There's no time! Things are moving too quickly! We have to put all of our energy towards winning. Come on, Jeremiah. Please don't go. You know I'm right." The same desire to be kind that convinced Jeremiah to help start the Love Party had returned. "Okay. I'll stay." Arthur hugged him and said, "Thank you! Thank you! You won't regret it!" They then returned in doors to continue building the Love Party.

# Accounts 1.5: The Present

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# Accounts 2: The Age of Crises

## Statement 1: The Purchase of Gildland

A year after its founding, the Love Party surpassed Riley's ECSL Party in popularity. They relegated the other party that once formed Gildland's duopoly, the ECSC Party, to a third so distant they may as well have disbanded. Their rise in popularity was treated by the mainstream media, who all supported Arthur due to his public promise to abolish taxation and his private promise to ban every alternative media outlet, as something shocking and not at all due to their financial advantage. Virtually all Plutocrats, and virtually all people that wanted to believe in Arthur, fell for his supposed change in beliefs and showered him in funds. Apart from his popular, inclusive messages of love, there were other reasons for Plutocrats to support him instead of Riley. His promise to abolish taxation would save them millions, and, in some cases, billions per year. Donating to him a small percentage of the gains they expected to earn from his election was simply a wise financial decision. To facilitate the abolition of taxation, all public industries would have to be privatised. Meaning the Plutocrats would not only have the benefit of zero taxation, but also the opportunity to profit from industries once shielded from their desire for profit which was, more precisely, their desire to provide the cheapest possible service for the most money they could get from people. The National Health System would be replaced by an insurance-based model, the military would be replaced by private defence agencies, the National Fire Brigade would be privatised, education would be privatised, and government workers would rely on donations. Their frequently repeated argument for privatisation was that the government provided poor services at high costs because they didn't face competition where as private organisations did. Due to tax evasion, five-hundred billion gilders worth of taxes were deprived from the country every year. The tax revenue could have been used to improve public services. Instead, the poor state of the services was used to justify their privatisation. For many years, instead of advocating for the prevention of tax evasion, a small, but loud, minority of well-financed public intellectuals tried to justify decreasing taxes on the wealthy by insisting they would pay their taxes, if tax rates weren't so high. In other words, tax evasion by the wealthy was used as justification for decreasing taxes on the wealthy. The Love Party built on their legacy by insisting that, since tax evasion was supposedly impossible to stop, taxation should be abolished, as it was 'unfair for cleaning ladies and young apprentices, to pay more tax than billionaires'. Behind the public's back, however, Arthur promised his wealthy donors that he would not totally abolish taxation, as they wanted assurance of government funds in the event of a financial crisis. Fears were growing among the Plutocrats, because of government leaks showing Riley's plans to increase the power of regulators. For decades, Gildland had virtually no regulation whatsoever, all corporations were expected to self-regulate as it was believed to be in their financial interest to stay in the public's good books. Arthur publicly swore that he would 'uphold the freedom of corporations' by never increasing regulations and promised donors to cut any regulations they asked him to.

The funds from the public and the Plutocrats allowed Arthur to employ a campaign team. Every major figure in the Love Party was hired for being the best at answering in their interview, "How would hiring you make Arthur's life easier?" His team of speechwriters all

previously worked at think tanks that promoted small government, except for one speechwriter who was one of the most successful screenwriters in Gildland, specialising in epic war movies, hired to give the speeches more emotional power. He hired Dean Ford, the bounty hunter that saved him after the Festival of Ideas, as his head of security. The two became such close friends, because of their similar outlooks on the world, that he made Dean only the fourth person to know the Love Party was a plot. Arthur took private acting lessons at his new home, the Bennefeath Palace, to help connect with the public. Volunteers on the physical front helped by handing out Open-Heart buttons and necklaces, and free food, and disseminating posters, flags, and stickers, all of which had been sold to the Love Party at discounted prices from suppliers wanting to benefit from the abolition of taxation. Volunteers organised Love Party events which were held on the last day of each week all around Gildland. At these events, members had the opportunity to take the stage and seek forgiveness or tell stories of their life struggles, during a section of the day called Time of Catharsis. All that sought forgiveness were forgiven no matter what they'd done or how 'hateful' their opinions were. Their stories of struggle cemented their love for the community and emotional support provided by the Love Party, as when they finished their speeches they were met with hugs and words of encouragement. The events seemed to have only the slightest connection to politics and appeared more as a support group for every outcast and downtrodden person in the world. After the Time of Catharsis, they would then socialise for hours together. Volunteers would then begin their charity work, going door to door in search of people in need of help, such as students struggling to pay loans, lonely widows and widowers, people struggling to pay Unemployment Fines, and victims of domestic abuse, offering them the financial support of the Love Party Welfare Association, so long as they joined the party. On the digital front, Love Party volunteers and bots battled the ECSL Party. They made cartoons depicting Riley and his supporters as weak, miserable, and ugly, and Arthur and his followers as strong, happy, and noble, such as Riley on a dirty floor wearing rags crying with flies hovering around him, and Arthur smiling proudly standing in line with his happy followers linking arms with a rainbow behind them. They infiltrated online communities that supported Riley by spamming them with irrelevant topics and comments without mentioning Arthur so as to not alert them to the source of the attack. On social media, under the guise of non-partisanship, they replied in support to every post they could find that was in favour of Arthur or against Riley, and rebuked posts against Arthur or in favour of Riley. Arthur's followers were hooked on him with such deep emotion that no matter how often his lies were exposed, their love remained steadfast. They loved him for providing them with community, charity, saving them all from big government, and giving them a life purpose. Meanwhile, his opponents foolishly tried to use reason to remove his followers from a position they arrived at by emotion, they aimed for their heads with statistics and fact-checking websites, but failed to aim for their hearts.

The Love Party covertly funded and promoted an app in which people seeking advice on which party to vote for could complete a survey to get a recommendation. Every user received the Love Party or any party other than the ECSL as a recommendation. Arthur's new plutocratic friends at the most popular search engine company manipulated search results in his favour by burying content revealing Arthur's former beliefs and the crimes he'd committed, and boosting articles in favour of his policies and him as a person. The Love Party covertly created simulations for the Intermind, one showing life after the Love Party's election victory as idyllic, and another simulation in which the ECSL's victory resulted in poverty, civil unrest, and the loss of freedoms. They made deepfakes of Riley that appeared

to be secret recordings of him. One was of him making plans to prohibit the use of the InterMind and autonomous vehicles, another featured him saying that people from the nation of Viviray were 'not fully evolved', in another deepfake he called supporters of the ESCL party 'gullible', and in another he said all men should be castrated. A whistleblower in Securitun leaked videos of Arthur beating a policeman and pushing over Maria, but none of Arthur's followers believed they were real, partly because they were in love with him, partly because he'd tricked them into thinking the world was against him, and partly because deepfakes had led many to be sceptical of all videos. Many believed what they wanted to believe. Social media posts in which Riley advocated for the spending of public funds, were reported as hateful and abusive because taxation was deemed an 'act of aggression'. Social media companies, very much looking forward to the abolition of taxation and promises from Arthur that they'd be unregulated, gladly helped the Love Party and censored such messages from Riley. Arthur never agreed to an interview without first knowing the questions and being allowed to have his team of advisors suggest answers which would be displayed on a teleprompter during the interview. The Love Party covertly paid celebrities that the public hated to show public support for Riley, such as a famous actor recently found guilty of domestic violence.

The Love Party brought millions of micro-targeted ads and sponsored posts online and on holographic billboards. They targeted ads, articles, and videos about abolishing taxation and privatizing all industries to businessmen, readers of business-oriented self-help books, incensed readers of articles about benefit thieves, advocates of small government, and people that complained about government spending. They targeted content about the communal aspects of the Love Party, like the weekly meetings held around Gildland, at the lonely, the depressed, people that recently became single, and people that recently left a religion. They targeted content about their Welfare Centre to the needy. They targeted content with more revolutionary tones to those believed to be most likely to join a revolution, such as the irreligious, those in search of friends, those from broken homes, and precarious workers. This method of targeting certain content to certain people was utilised for all campaign promises of the Love Party, including their promises of military neutrality and total drug legalisation. No-one working in the public sector, living on a state pension or disability benefits, was targeted with content from the Love Party as they were considered invincible. Because they believed people were more trusting of people that looked and sounded similar to themselves, the appearance and voice of the main CGI actor in each ad changed per viewer. If cameras detected that the viewer's eyes were not drawn to their ad, the video would improvise by zooming in, increasing text size, increasing camera speed, or becoming brighter, to catch their attention. Advertisers were able to learn about users from their internet search history, social media posts, conversations and tones of voice that their phone, laptop, and smarhome microphones had automatically processed, emails, songs they'd listened to, application forms, friendships, online and offline purchasing histories, phone cameras, webcams, CCTV cameras, and wireless signals from Wi-Fi hubs to recognise the emotions of their targets. As people viewed content, such tech allowed them to read their facial expressions, body movements, posture, blinking patterns, muscle tension, breathing rate, heart rate, pupil dilation, and head tilts, to analyse how targets felt about the content they were viewing. Without saying or writing a single word, viewers' hearts and minds could be breached with the use of surveillance technology. If they detected a person was feeling depressed, they'd advertise to them an uplifting piece of content about the communal aspects of the Love Party. If they detected someone was angry after watching a video about

Gildland's recent war crimes, they'd be advertised content regarding the Love Party's military neutrality. This process of reading their emotions and then providing them content almost guaranteed to get a positive reaction for the Love Party was done in countless other ways. Learning on the fly how viewers felt about ads allowed them to determine why certain ads weren't as successful as others and have them edited automatically. People not interested in politics would be advertised content likely to cause engagement such as, to make them fearful, news about the government restricting personal liberties, or, to make them angry, how much taxation had specifically impoverished them and how much richer they'd be if taxation was abolished, then once surveillance technology had detected they were engaged, they'd be shown Love Party content that offered solutions to their new concerns. They ran no ads against Riley, as they believed doing so wouldn't be in line with the party's aim of appearing loving to all. Everyone in Gildland was aware they were being spied on by their own devices, but because their common thought was, 'I don't mind being spied on, I have nothing to hide'. Surveillance didn't have to force its way into people's homes, people voluntarily paid for it to stay. The largest tech companies held almost godlike knowledge of the public whilst the operations of the largest tech companies were concealed from the public.

The Love Party knew from polls, and not living under a rock, that many people were sceptical of the mainstream media. So, using front companies, they created innumerable automated news organisations all of which proudly boasted about being unbiased, an alternative to the mainstream, independent of corporate interests, and reliant on donations from normal people. Articles were generated by computer programs copying pro-Love Party articles from other news sites then changing the sentence structures and some of the words to prevent the plagiarism from being discovered. Hundreds of articles were produced per day per news site. The supposed journalist of each article had their own social media accounts, secretly managed by bots, full of life-like computer-generated images of people and occasional references to their own personal lives, so the articles appeared to have been written by real people. For their automated news organisations, videos and 24/7 live broadcasts were made, and appeared on each automated new site of theirs, and video-sharing sites. They featured life-like computer-generated hosts reading from auto-generated scripts based on the latest articles and were given added personality by plagiarising popular comments that users found witty or insightful. All hosts had their own personality, accent, and appearance. As far as the public were aware, they were humans. They made a wide variety of automated news sites to match the public's wide variety of tastes; a site with long articles, one with short articles, one with images and annotations, a site with long videos, a site with short videos, a site that was pro-Riley that made false and vulgar statements which pro-Love Party journalists and followers pounced on to make Riley guilty by association, a political satire site, a site that focused on conspiracy theories, and a site that supported Riley but spent most of their time showing disappointment in him. These automated news organisations were multiplied by Gildland's dozens of subgroups, manipulating content to convince each group that Arthur especially cared about them and they used different computer-generated news hosts for each site to exploit biases. Despite the differences in hosts and formats, the core messages were consistent. Love Party followers were presented as financially independent, strong, stylish, and happy, ECSL followers were presented as the opposite. Great amounts of money were generated by the websites, through ads and donations to defend themselves 'against attacks from the government'. The Love Party's automated news sites generated more than quadruple the content of the sites run by their mainstream media allies that relied on humans, and, due to the sheer quantity and precise targeting of



their content, came close to matching the popularity of their allies many of which had existed for over a century. They associated themselves with luxurious products, sports cars, high fashion, the latest technology, cigars, and expensive champagne, and associated the ECSL Party with inefficient public services, and government projects that went vastly over budget, even if they'd been implemented by a different political party. They always referred to top members of the Love Party by their first name, so they would seem more approachable. The apolitical and politically cynical were shamed for not helping the Love Party against the ECSL Party. Apparently, by not intending to vote and not helping spread their message of love they were 'betraying everyone that died for their right to vote' and 'failing to fulfil their democratic duty'. The sacrosanct words 'peace', 'love', and 'freedom', were corrupted into repetitive, mechanical screeches.

Political parties that bemoaned national division exacerbated divisions by micro-targeting content instead of presenting the same content to the entire nation. National unity was worsened because each citizen was given vastly different presentations of reality, political debates were built on the rocky ground of vastly different perceptions. Political parties that claimed to be against discrimination targeted content based on the protected characteristics of viewers, meaning they believed people could and should be judged by protected characteristics. Political parties that espoused equality did nothing to help equalise the voices of the public and allowed differences in wealth to determine who was heard frequently and considered sensible and who was considered weird and unrealistic, if heard at all. In Gildland, there were no restrictions on how much could be donated to political campaigns. Since donations could be used to publish political speech, for example, in ads, documentaries, and leaflets, to restrict political donations would have therefore violated the freedom of speech guaranteed by Gildland's constitution. Without limits on political donations, getting elected without large financial help was like trying win a car race with a unicycle, and to get large financial help, candidates had to appeal to the interests of the Plutocracy. Only Gildish citizens and Gildish corporations were allowed to donate to Gildish political campaigns. To sidestep this rule, foreigners wishing to donate to Gildish political campaigns set up shell companies anonymously for a pittance then donated as they pleased. Foreigners wishing to influence Gildland's politics in a different way could donate to think tanks that would write articles and film videos that were then frequently quoted by media outlets, and workers at think tanks were often hired by the government in advisory positions. As think tanks were recognised as educational charities, their donations could remain anonymous.

## Statement 2: The Opening of Hell's Gate

The alarm bells that had rung for decades could no longer be silenced, all were one in the bell-disturbed sea and haunted by funeral tolls. The sanguine were laughed at and dismissed as cowards afraid of reality. The more cynical one was and the earlier they'd predicted the apocalypse, the more one was deemed wise. The global crisis was too vast to be comprehended by any one person. Individually, an understanding of their new world could only be approached in useless fragments. The world was already a puzzle in its natural state, and with accelerating technological and scientific progress came new objects, powers, social relations, and mind alterations, it seemed that just as mankind was approaching a full understanding of the natural world, mankind was creating a new world of wonders and problems, ironically, for an easier life. Never had there been so many books, movies, articles, and conversations about dystopias and apocalypses. Envisioning no future for civilization, many said farewell to their dreams, and binged on every fruit the world had to offer believing it to be the wisest decision. The eternal tribal paranoia prevented national governments from collaborating to save the world, so remained in myopic competition. A frequent cry was, 'Do not have offspring. Do not be so cruel as to bring a baby into this dying world,' so birth rates which had already been falling in every country for a long time fell even further. They were the first to experience the bleak shock from learning their tribes were shrinking, not necessarily from genocide or war, but because birth rates were below replacement level, and, as many people's sense of self-worth was attached to their tribe's prosperity, many felt their own individual worth was shrinking as their tribe's population shrunk. As is common among the powerless, many relied on coping mechanisms, repeating feel-good thoughts, as if they were medicine, like, 'It could be worse,' 'At least we have a roof over our heads,' and 'When I think of those people in the war, my heart breaks for them.' The most popular books were in the fantasy and dystopian genres, one genre flew them to a dream world, and the other made their own world seem better by comparison. A hope that the world would return to normal, once held by people unaware that underlying trends which led to their dire situation were becoming graver, was now a hope held by few. Some questioned if they were struggling to survive only to experience more misery. In a refusal to admit the past was more enjoyable than the present, some claimed that their time was just like any other, they couldn't bear admitting the past was better, so dragged all of history down to the sad state of the present. There was a time when the only people actively engaged in politics were those desperate to restore the old version of their country and those desperate to create a new version of their country. Unwanted, drastic changes made even the most peace-loving, gentle people crazed, violent, and radical.

About a year before election day, Riley, with one eye on re-election and another envisioning civil unrest, introduced Basic Income to compensate for the rapid loss of jobs to automation. Its introduction helped his ECSL Party get closer to the Love Party in the polls. Corporations that had once made bizarre statements to their employees like, 'We're more than a company, we're a family,' automated jobs as soon as it was profitable to do so, even loyal workers of years were swept aside just like the rest. Automation worsened wealth inequality as the vast majority of jobs to be taken were mainly occupied by people on incomes below the national average and lacking the qualifications needed for the new jobs made by automation. The following were some of the occupations with the highest rates of unemployment from automation. Data-entry clerks, insurance underwriters, auditors, telemarketers, credit analysts,

and more were replaced by programs that could analyse, enter, and return information. Fast food cooks, waiting staff, construction workers, dry cleaners, garment workers, retail workers, factory workers, crop pickers, warehouse workers, and more were replaced by robots. Drivers were replaced by automated vehicles and many delivery drivers were replaced by drones capable of small deliveries. The tech was faster, more accurate, and cheaper than the smartest, hardest working human workers. Smaller corporations suffered for not being able to invest in automation as heavily as larger ones. Millions of jobs were created by automation, though a few million less than the amount destroyed by it, such as in AI and machine learning which required qualifications rarely possessed by those made unemployed by automation, and, though some corporations did offer their employees the opportunity to re-train, millions were not. Riley offered Basic Income because he wanted people on it to be dependant on the ECSL Party and therefore vote for them. If he had offered re-training or invested in labour-heavy industries like healthcare, and tourism, and thus provided them with employment, such people would have lost a great reason to vote for Riley in the upcoming election, as they would have no longer been dependant on him. However, he did secretly plan to offer them re-training and to double Basic Income once re-elected, as he knew that the amount of money provided by Basic Income was enough for virtually no-one. To fund Basic Income, corporation tax was increased, and, to avoid detracting too many wealthy party donors, workers were also forced to bear the burden through increased income tax rates, but not so increased as to lower economic activity which would have decreased the total tax receipts collected. To qualify for Basic Income, one had to have been working in an occupation that the government declared obsolete, and the individual had to be without an academic or vocational qualification that could be used to work in an occupation not declared obsolete. People on Basic Income were not subject to the Unemployment Fine, though others still were. To supplement their Basic Income, people turned to trading currencies and stocks, creating media content online for ad revenue, creating artwork, renting out living space, sponsoring products, betting, crime, and entrepreneurship. As people on Basic Income had little choice but to become entrepreneurs, they, especially the successful, began to identify with wealthy entrepreneurs and business leaders for voluntarily working early mornings, late nights, and weekends, continuous self-improvement, inventiveness, risk-taking, and their pursuit of commodify everything. Their interests began to align with the wealthy, as they too wanted the government to lower capital gains tax and to keep consumer rights at a minimum. As the amount of people working in corporations decreased, so too decreased a common avenue for starting acquaintanceships and gaining an understanding of people from walks of life one may have never otherwise met, thus fragmenting Gildland even further. Employers that prospered with a large decrease in employees due to automation also had a lowered risk of employees whistle-blowing on bad business practices, quite simply because there were less employees to do so. As there were ever more unemployed people waiting in line to replace them, workers in occupations of shrinking positions for humans thought twice before walking out with their colleagues to protest decisions by their employers such as supplying the personal information of customers to the military or for being suppliers to a government that was breaking human rights laws, and they thought twice before striking to demand better conditions or compensation. Struggling with the drop in income from the job they once had and tired of dedicating their free time to entrepreneurship, people on Basic Income faced the challenge of uniting with millions of others like them against the government who'd most definitely be defended by the military, whereas workers that were dissatisfied with working conditions and their compensation, had the much easier, but by no means effortless, challenge

of striking against their employer. The public had no democratic power compared to the Plutocracy, no military power compared to the government, and their labour power was evaporating before their eyes. It seemed that once the economy had reached full automation, all the public would have left was their consumer power. People on Basic Income, especially those not living with someone still in wage labour, downsized and relocated to cities with lower costs of living, about 10% of residents in Montpelerin had to re-locate. As Basic Income required taxation and the Love Party's success was built largely on their promise to abolish taxation, Arthur publicly said, "Just days after its implementation, the evidence is clear. Basic Income encourages people to accept a slave-like existence, when they should be encouraged to believe in themselves and re-train for the jobs of the future. If Basic Income is enough to live on, why doesn't the ECSL Party, with all due respect, give up their salaries and live on it? They don't, because it's not possible to live decently on it. Basic Income is five times lower the national average salary and consumer prices have not decreased. A great antagonism has been caused by Riley creating opposing interests between the recipients of it and the taxpayers funding it. Worst of all, there are reports that the government have stopped paying Basic Income to dissidents. Basic Income makes us slaves to the government. If you care about freedom, you are against against Basic Income." In response, Riley publicly said, "Basic Income has cushioned the dispossessed, given income to those who would otherwise have none, and spurred entrepreneurship. Mr. De la Mer needs to stop lying about the government punishing dissidents by stopping payments to them. Basic Income has given people the financial freedom to live as they want." Convincing millions to give up the surety of Basic Income for the chance of earning more when taxes were abolished was beyond the reach of Love Party propaganda, and the amount of people relying on Basic Income only increased as time went by. However, the Love Party did gain followers resentful for having to pay more income tax. Privately, Arthur's largest funders were so in favour of Basic Income, for reasons mentioned above, they asked Arthur to betray his promise of abolishing taxation once he was elected so it could be funded. Arthur had no qualms with the plan, as he secretly thought Basic Income was the only solution to the new waves of unemployment. One of the most popular ads the Love Party ran against it was an ad with the text 'Basic Income = Financial Slavery', with a cartoon of a family sitting at their dinner table tied up, and a giant-sized Riley holding their ripped off roof in one hand and grabbing their fridge with his other hand. On social media, their bots exploited people's sexual envy by posting invented stats about those on Basic Income causing three-quarters of all affairs despite them comprising much less than three-quarters of the population. A message repeated in various forms was, 'Whilst you're working hard at the office, those lazy people are stealing your women! It's time to fight back by voting for the Love Party, so they'll have to work like you do!' and it seemed logical enough, so virtually all that saw it believed it.

In Gildland, developing nations were referred to as Poor Nations, and developed nations were referred to as Rich Nations, so that is how I shall refer to them in my accounts. The Automation Revolution took a higher percentage of jobs from Poor Nations than Rich Nations, as more than half of their jobs were blue-collar, whereas in Rich Nations they comprised less than a quarter of total jobs. Automation accelerated the re-shoring of manufacturing back to Rich Nations which helped decrease transportation costs by being closer to more customers. Poor Nations couldn't afford to re-train their workforce for the new jobs created by robotics, AI, and machine learning, invest in labour-heavy industries, or provide social safety nets to the degree that Rich Nations could, especially not as tax revenue from jobs that helped their economic growth in recent decades, namely those in

manufacturing, began to disappear. Just as Poor Nations began clawing their way out of abject poverty through rapid levels of growth thanks to their labour-cost advantage over Rich Nations, automation and climate change, both mainly caused by Rich Nations, began pushing them back down.

The relatively moderate climates of Rich Nations helped them develop agriculture earlier in history than Poor Nations that suffered from extreme heat and aridity. Their climate advantage allowed minds to turn away from mere survival and towards engineering, construction, and the sciences, which made them more prosperous and also gave them the tools, weapons, and vehicles that allowed them to enslave the world's poorest and plunder their natural resources which then made them even more prosperous. Climate change, which was mainly caused by the industrialisation of Rich Nations and the consumption habits of their citizens, hurt the Poor Nations the most. Their hot and arid lands were more prone to severer and frequenter droughts and heatwaves, leading to more frequent crop failures which led to less income for farmers and more hunger for their fellow countrymen, a fifth of which were already classified as undernourished. As sea levels rose, salt increasingly entered the rivers and aquifers used for irrigation, reducing crop yields through soil salinisation, and also decreased the amount of fresh water available for drinking, sanitation, and their livestock. As flooding, exacerbated by increased sea levels, rose above their weak or sometimes non-existent coastal defence systems, their agricultural land was damaged to extents they'd never experienced before. Due to their poverty, they couldn't adapt to climate change as the farmers of Rich Nations could with government subsidies, early warning systems, salt-resistant crops, desalination plants, food labs, and indoor farms. As people in Poor Nations were highly dependent on their surrounding area for food, unlike the people of Rich Nations whose food was imported to them from around the world and from more modern farms, many saw no choice but to migrate from rural areas. Urban cities of Poor Nations, with already precarious food and water supplies, were pushed to the brink by swells in population density caused by sea level rises, mass unemployment from automation, mass deaths of livestock, and destroyed agricultural land, more people vied for ever depleting resources and overburdened already fragile healthcare systems. Poor Nations also suffered the most from heat rage, heat stroke, and heat exhaustion, exacerbated by the increased temperatures brought by climate change. As they always had, terrorist organisations pounced upon the desperate, angry, and dispossessed, offering them food, water, income, and revenge, for the price of allegiance. As water became scarcer, from lower rainfall and higher pollution, it rose in value and was increasingly used by terrorists as a means of asserting control. They seized dams to legitimise claims of founding their own state. They shut off water and hydropower and threatened flooding to locations they were struggling to conquer. As terrorist organisations expanded by seizing dams, stealing foreign aid, robbing banks, suicide bombings, extortions, and receiving funds from wealthy sympathisers, governments of Poor Nations were forced to dedicate more resources to fighting them instead of to infrastructure, and foreign investments dried up as investors were frightened away by the increasing risks of violence, thus leading to less adaptation to climate change and more unemployment which led to even more desperate, angry, and dispossessed people for terrorists to recruit. The combined miseries of high unemployment with no clear path to recovery, worsening malnourishment and heat stress, the growing power of terrorist organisations, record-breaking climate displacement, and more, led to the most severe refugee crisis the world had ever seen.

Just before the founding of the Love Party, the refugee crisis began when millions from the mostly poor continents of Rheatempo and Tazaluna headed to the mostly rich continent of Mustrovar. Gildland was safely away in the continent of Ammatara, with one country to its south and one to its north, and an ocean to its east and to its west. Mustrovar occupied the same landmass as Rheatempo and was a sea away from Tazaluna. None of the refugees headed to Elimperia, situated to the far east of Rheatempo, as their organ harvesting, disregard for human rights, and re-education camps, were not as appealing as the relatively free, open, and tolerant Rich Nations in Mustrovar. The refugees were blocked by the militaries of all Mustrovarian nations they approached and great walls began to be constructed. All people of Rheatempo and Tazaluna were prohibited from entering Mustrovar. Their rejection was met with mass disapproval among people living in Mustrovar that were of Rheatempian and Tazalunian heritage as well as their sympathisers for not prioritising their people, and met with mass approval among everyone else for prioritising their people. Hundreds of thousands of people of Rheatempian and Tazalunian heritage within Mustrovar headed to attack the blockade. A few thousand of Mustrovarian heritage headed to protect the blockade upon news reports of the attack, whilst all others watched online, confident that the militaries would swiftly crush the resistance. Meanwhile, catching Mustrovar by surprise, terrorists from Rheatempo and Tazaluna headed to their borders and hailed rockets at the blockade, to take advantage of the chaos. Terrorists armed the refugees and hundreds of thousands entered the continent in one night. Citizens in the far east of Mustrovar became refugees themselves, they went west as countless refugees entered their neighbourhoods in search of food and shelter, and terrorists entered in trucks with heavy machine guns and tanks stolen from their own militaries. That same night, to stem the flow, Mustrovar began bombing the refugees just outside of its borders that were attempting to enter and the terrorists launching rockets at the crumbling blockade, killing tens of thousands and pushing back many more, and deployed troops to fight terrorists in the streets. In retaliation for killing refugees, fighter jets from nations in Rheatempo and Tazaluna flew in to stop the bombing. To fulfil their treaty obligations and protect their economic and national security interests, Gildland and the other nations of Ammatara declared support for Mustrovar. Elimperia was officially neutral, but covertly supported the nations of Rheatempo and Tazaluna for the sake of hurting Gildland's allies in Mustrovar. The Climate War began approximately half a year before Gildland's election day. In the Rich Nations, food was rationed and water could only be used for thirty minutes per day per household. There was no water rationing in Gildland, Riley and previous Prime Ministers had invested heavily in desalination plants and artificial rain.

Due the disparity in military power, everyone expected the conflict to be resolved in a matter of days, or a few weeks at most. However, due to the sheer amount of refugees and terrorists, and the Rich Nations refusal to destroy their own buildings and infrastructure though aerial bombardment, and their determination to avoid using chemical weapons or robot soldiers, the conflict persisted. They offered the Poor Nations aid and financial help to adapt to climate change and end the war, but were rejected. Over three years, over a hundred and forty million refugees, millions of soldiers, and millions of terrorists, entered Mustrovar. The Mustrovarian citizens that had avoided death, crammed into the western half of the continent. Almost half of Mustrovar had been conquered. Poor Nations gave quotas to their women and children for food and clothing to donate to the war effort and ordered millions more to seek refuge in Mustrovar, and sent men sixteen and above to war. They told their citizens that the people of Rich Nations had purposely polluted the world, as they knew it would hurt Poor Nations far

more than themselves and virtually all believed it. Some of the people in the Rich Nations that were of Poor Nation origin, migrated over to the conquered land in hopes of establishing a permanent settlement and helping the war effort, and others destroyed government buildings, and killed many politicians that opposed the refugees. The people of Mustrovar were not used to being the victims of war, the last war to take place on their continent was the 31 Years War, and none of its current inhabitants had lived through it. Prioritising security over rights and freedoms, Mustrovians welcomed the sharp turn of their governments to totalitarianism. Through storms of sighs and floods of tears, came the gale wind, continental cry, 'Enough talk, time for action! No more debate, no more opposition to our leaders, do not be a hindrance to them! Death to the enemy and sympathisers of the enemy! Help the powerful save us from this chaos, follow any order!' Riley thought the war would help his elections chances, as it would distract from Gildland's internal conflicts and highlight the ridiculousness of Arthur's ideas of pacifism and replacing the military with private defence agencies. However, polls showed the Climate War had done little to help Riley, as most Gildlanders were still confident they'd win the war. To discourage people from voting for Riley, the Love Party spread lies online that students and people on Basic Income would be conscripted. Campus demonstrations erupted all over Gildland for the first time since students last feared conscription a century earlier. Arthur ordered Jeremiah to head to campuses to be the face of the youth unrest and to spread the word that the Love Party was the world's only hope for peace.

Apart from the daily bad news from the war, news related to climate change continued to shock and make people feel as though there were problems everywhere they turned; the extinction of species, cities from around the world frequently reported record-breaking temperatures, wildfires occurred in locations they never had before. Some nations could afford alert systems that detected fires in susceptible areas and automatically send firefighting drones before they developed into wildfires. The burning of trees not only meant the releasing of carbon dioxide, but also the burning of nature's great instrument for capturing carbon dioxide from the air and releasing oxygen. Seafood, the air, table salt, and more contained microplastics which, among other problems, damaged lungs and increased the risk of infertility. The simple act of using a washing machine meant polluting oceans with microfibrils shed from clothes that contained plastic such as nylon, polyester, and acrylic. Islands submerged underwater became popular tourist attractions. Worldwide, carbon dioxide decreased the protein, iron, and zinc, in crops by twenty percent. As permafrost melted, ancient diseases were released from thawed out animals.

## Statement 3: Standing on the Shareholders of Giants

*TODAY'S TOP HEADLINES*

*Riley STUMBLES Whilst Leaving the Mountain House*

*Montpelerin Stock Exchange CRASHES 4% in One Day as Climate War Rages On*

*Two Teens Shot Dead After Trying to Climb the Pelerin Mountain With AK47s.*

*Arthur Reiterates Criticism of Basic Income*

*Sirkitus Claims 'Time is on Elimperia's Side' As Chaos Engulfs Gildland*

A year after forming the party, Arthur, Dean, Eric, Jeremiah, and their staff moved into the Bennefeath Palace. It was the sort of place people dreamed of, a place so grand that the poorest in the world wouldn't have believed it existed, if described to them. It was situated in San Tropica, a small county just south of Bronrar. Many of the residents of San Tropica had autonomous helicopters on their rooftops, in case the poor revolted against them. In San Tropica, their moving pavements were embellished with gems instead of screens, there were no holographic billboards, and aeroplanes were prohibited from skywriting adverts. The streets had multi-coloured, luminous trees instead of lampposts. As the scents of their leaves had been genetically enhanced, the streets smelt like perfume shops. All of San Tropica's residents had a security team, only the poor of Gildland relied on bounty hunters after the abolition of the police. The Love Party's staff were located in the underground level of the palace, and the bedrooms were several stories high on the top floor. Workers were inspected as they came and went, to help prevent leaks. The staff were forced to speak quietly, as if in a library, to avoid annoying Eric's sensitive hearing. The amount of time that staff looked at their screens was monitored, a rate lower than 99% required a written explanation, and, as the microphones of their laptops were forced permanently on, any off-topic conversation they had was immediately reported to management. The party's campaign had two sets of staff, one that worked 9PM to 9AM and another that worked 9AM to 9PM. Contemplating Arthur's treatment of the staff, Jeremiah came to the conclusion that he never cared for 'the people', and only ever saw them as stepping stones for his ascendancy to the top. He thought to himself, "The only jobs he's had are in academia, he's never worked among 'the people'. He was one of the rare poor students that went to Riverlake, so must have been insecure because of that. I think he has always tried to disassociate himself from his working-class background through snobbery and imitation of how he imagines the Plutocracy behave." It was difficult for Eric and Jeremiah to feel at home in the palace, as Arthur received so many important visitors from around the world that the palace felt more like an airport than a home. After all, the palace did have its own runway. The coldness of innumerable strangers, many arriving without Arthur notifying the two of them in advance, drew Eric and Jeremiah closer together. Visitors loved learning about what Arthur liked, so they could bring him gifts accordingly. He was once quoted as saying he liked the look of a golden Labrador passing by his car and was then gifted two of them by two different visitors a week later. As the Love Party ascended so did Arthur's wealth and his feeling that his old house was inadequate for a man of his stature. He felt he had to appear opulent to attract voters that desired opulence.



The palace's driveway was gravelled with diamonds. The grounds were so large that the edges could not be seen when looking from the top level of the palace. He had a pianist in place of an alarm clock. Every morning at seven, the pianist would begin a gentle sonata in the room next to his bedroom. He wore a new watch every week, all worth more than fifty times the average Gildlander's annual salary.

Contemplating the extravagance, Jeremiah wondered if Arthur's hatred towards the Plutocracy was partly caused by envy. Now with confusion, Jeremiah remembered Arthur once telling him something along the lines of, "Money makes people happy to the point of providing financial freedom. Beyond that, it has diminishing returns on happiness. Friends, community, nature, family, a life purpose, art, and charity bring happiness. Conspicuous consumption is a competition that cannot be won." This was not all that confused his opinion of Arthur. He watched him dance on talk shows with celebrities, allow hosts to play with his hair, and lie to interviewers that he watched popular TV shows and movies, all for the sake of appearing cute and relatable to the public. To Jeremiah, he seemed to partake in the game of PR with such ease that he couldn't help but question his integrity and imagine how low he would go for the sake of winning the election. As he watched multitudinous crowds greet Arthur like he was a God and women break through barriers to kiss him, he was upset to see the man that once only he seemed to care about now cared about by millions. He once felt the two of them were part of a secret club, but that now the club was all-inclusive. He realised then that nothing inclusive feels special. He was disturbed by the advice that Arthur gave himself, Dean, and Eric, and the fact it was given so soon after beginning the party, it was as if he'd been thinking of them for a long time. "Don't make unnecessary enemies, have as many potential allies as possible. Don't even criticise malevolent dictators, because they could be of use to us one day. If you are boxed into a corner, and someone asks what you think of a certain dictator, criticise them passionately then contact the dictator afterwards and say it's just politics and that the criticism was insincere. If you said bigoted things in the past that no-one knows about, dedicate yourself to actively appearing against that bigotry so people will think accusations against you of bigotry are nonsense. So people think you always tell the truth, voluntarily tell the truth about something you don't mind people knowing but may be considered embarrassing or slightly controversial, from then on, they will always think you tell truth. Lie about what your enemy cannot disprove. However, the most damaging change to occur in their friendship was the rules that Arthur imposed on Jeremiah to prevent him from revealing the Love Party was a plot. Jeremiah had to live at the Bennefeath Palace. He was only allowed to leave the palace if supervised by Dean who eavesdropped on him. He handed his phone over to Arthur and could only make calls in front of him or Dean, and was only allowed to use websites that didn't allow the uploading of files, images, videos, or messages. When Jeremiah first heard the rules, he swore to leave. Arthur's vague threat that he would 'regret leaving' was enough to unnerve him into submission. Eric was not asked to make the same concessions, as he'd shown no aversion to the Love Party's secret plot. Jeremiah began talking less to Arthur and spent more time alone in his room reading or working on his architectural designs. They would only speak to one another when Arthur needed him for a task.

The success of the Love Party provided Arthur more free time than ever before. Instead of writing speeches, he had a team of speechwriters, and he read through them just once before delivering them. Ads for the Love Party were organised for him, he didn't even have to appear in them as a CGI version of himself did. His marketing team kept track of what was

popular in Gildland to ensure the Love Party was the first to conform to the latest fad. All his interviews were scripted, so he didn't need to spend time keeping track of topics he wasn't interested in. Jeremiah noticed Arthur had become disengaged with current affairs, and when he raised the matter with him during one of their rare conversations, Arthur responded, "Like most people, I do my job because I have to, not because I want to. Only boring people *want* to get into politics." Jeremiah protested, "But you was a revolutionary in your youth, you was a professor of political philosophy, you've written many books on political philosophy, you started an economic boycott, you're likely to become PM soon! How can you say you don't care about politics?" "I only got involved, because no-one else knew how to solve our problems. I never studied politics for intellectual pleasure, politics is the intellectual sport of barbarians. I shudder when I'm called a politician, I'm a philosopher! I despise politics for its stupid, petty arguments." "So, you're just going to ignore current affairs?" "Yes. Our workers are carrying the load, and I am now finally free to do what I love. I have several projects I'm working on as I please. A book in support of consequentialism, and a critique of analogical reasoning. When I want to relax, I watch old movies, or relax in one our gardens. You should sit back until we're elected, I highly recommend it." Deeply concerned by the consequences of Arthur's relaxed attitude, Jeremiah asked, "And what about when you become PM? Then will you be interested in politics?" "I'll still have my advisors." Jeremiah couldn't believe how flippant he was, "I've designed an entire city, but I'm still up to date with the world." "Good for you, but I'm not going to waste time studying politics, it's not interesting to me. I already know what we'll do upon victory. I won't be swayed by daily events and changes in the public's foolish opinions." Arthur's enjoyment of his wealth made him realise why a wealthy man would be inclined to avoid rocking the boat. Arthur thought to himself, "Watching the underlings fight amongst each other means nothing to me anymore. How could I care, if my neighbourhood became run down? That will never happen where I am now, and I can afford to go anywhere I want, even if it did! It's difficult to be sad, when you've won the game that everyone in the world is desperately trying to win. I no longer feel connected to the problems of the world."

The success of the Love Party influenced more than the lives of the first three members. The party's influence led to Riley cancelling the implementation of Multilegalism, as Arthur was able to drum up enough opposition. Riley planned to implement Safe Streets, streets in which only people of certain protected characteristics were allowed to live on and pass through, but they were cancelled as Arthur turned enough people against the idea. The term 'government-funded' was sharply criticised by the Love Party's followers, they insisted that Riley used the term 'tax-payer funded', even Riley's followers agreed with the sentiment, but kept quiet on the issue. People around the world were smitten by the party's philosophy, new politicians around the world tried to copy Arthur's style and ideas. Whilst anyone could buy a red Open-Heart necklace, to be able to buy a gold, Open-Heart necklace, one had to donate at least a thousand gilders to the Love Party's Welfare Fund and at least a thousand gilders to the Love Party's election campaign. The Love Party felt like a family of millions. When strangers noticed each other in public wearing Open-Heart necklaces, they would often warmly acknowledge each other, an act unimaginable in Gildland of old. Many of the Love Party's followers looked up to Arthur as the father they wished they had. Love Party donors of any size could email him questions. Arthur secretly had a bot answer them all on his behalf. They asked how they could help him, but more commonly asked how he could help them, or didn't ask a question at all and just poured their hearts out to him. He checked a few of the first emails he received, and, seeing most of them as hysterical, he never bothered looking at

the inbox again. Among them were the following, “Your speech made me cry tears of joy and happiness. Go Arthur!” “Every relationship I get into fails, I don’t know how to make people love me. I stumble from job to job. The craziness of the world didn’t help my mind either, but discovering you has completely changed everything.” “Knowing you love us as much as you do makes me feel like crying. It makes me feel that, no matter what bad happens to me, you will be there to save me. I can’t repay you enough, but I will try. The Hateful have held back the world from total unity and pure happiness for too long, I will do everything I can to help you.” “You are the only hope for this broken world. You are the horizon between the sky God and the ocean of people. I love you and each day I think of you so that I can love others. No matter what I’m going through, there’s no reason to quit, so long as I remember you’re with us all. Without you, I am nothing. I wish I could be with you at all times! Death to the Hateful!”

A few Gildish MPs once questioned whether people should be allowed to celebrate birthdays, as they feared that receiving gifts for ‘simply surviving another year’ bred a sense of entitlement among the populace. When evidence was presented to them that birthdays benefited the economy, the legality of birthday celebrations was no longer challenged. When he was twenty-nine, Arthur stopped celebrating his birthday after the disappointing sales of his first book. It had become a day to reflect on his failed dreams and that he was sinking further into the sands of time. When people asked why he stopped celebrating his birthday, he’d answer, “There’s nothing to celebrate.” The success of the Love Party allowed him to finally enjoy his birthday. Arthur’s forty-fifth took place twenty-one days before election day. He said to those closest to him that it was a great hoorah before his likely election when his ‘real work’ was to begin.

Arthur, his head of security Dean Ford, his campaign manager Lauren Smith, Eric, and Jeremiah, arrived at the party in a motorcade wearing their best clothes, with the other top members of the Love Party. They looked the same as they did when the party was founded, except Arthur was at a healthy weight and Jeremiah had stubble. Arthur asked him to shave it to appeal to the youth by appearing to be a similar age, but he refused, he felt more and more of his life was being controlled by Arthur and that growing a bit of facial hair was one little avenue of freedom he could have.

The party was hosted by a hedge-fund manager and major Love Party donor at his favourite mansion out of the five he owned. The birthday was not held at Arthur’s palace, none of his parties were, they were all held at his donors’ mansions, as he wanted to ensure his staff were not distracted. There were roller-coasters and go-karts. In the night sky, there were luminous balloons hovering above the thousands of partygoers. The indoor cinema had a computer program that scanned through novels and automatically turned them into movies with life-like CGI. Loud music came from a stage with holographic performers. One could go up to the stage, type in a song of their choice, and the original performers of the song would appear in holographic form. When Arthur arrived, the music was changed to jazz to make him happy. Most of the above-thirties were dressed smartly. Most of the under-thirties wore the sort of absurd clothes that people saw on runways that weren’t intended by the designers to be worn in public, but recently chosen by the young and rich in their eternal desire to exalt themselves above the poor and one another. In attendance, there were, along with their plus-ones, top celebrities, Love Party volunteers, public intellectuals, major Love Party donors, and ambassadors from around the world. The ambassadors would have denied the invitation to avoid a conflict of interest, but Arthur assured them no cameras would be

allowed, that the party would not be publicised, that the party would be held at a secluded estate, and that all their expenses would be paid for. The desire to get acquainted with the man expected to soon be the world's most powerful also helped convince them to accept the invitation.

As word spread of Arthur's arrival, partygoers crowded the mansion's great steps and readied their phone cameras, excited to meet the man the whole world was talking about and who was as close to being universally loved as a person could be in a world of countless opinions. When Arthur and co. exited the car, merry guests shouted happy birthday then insisted he give a speech, which annoyed him because he was out of practice from having become so reliant on speechwriters. He joked, "I am very sorry, everyone, I have no speech to give. All my speechwriters were busy!" which made them all laugh, except for Jeremiah, who enjoyed defying him whenever the opportunity arose. Ambassadors remained tame, casually following Arthur up the mansion steps for an appropriate moment to introduce themselves, whilst a sea of other guests followed his every step. Noticing there was no chance of speaking to him any time soon, most carried on partying. The guests handed gifts to Arthur despite his hands being full of them. He said with glee, "Life is funny, you get so much free stuff when you're rich!"

Jeremiah observed with contempt how giddy the attention made him. He remembered him once saying the applause he received as leader of the Love Party provided no pleasure because it wasn't for who he really was. He followed him through the mansion then, when they reached the vast garden, went in a different direction. Being perceived by the public as the second most powerful man in the Love Party, he also had a fair amount of people trying to get his attention. One of the highest-grossing actors in the world approached him hoping to get a picture. The actor looked forward to sharing online a picture of them together, because his joy of meeting him would be incomplete unless others also liked it. The actor said as though he was an old friend that hadn't seen him in years, "Hey, Jeremiah!" and began to walk beside him. He greeted the actor politely. Being more accustomed to wild excitement when meeting someone for the first time, Jeremiah's casualness made the actor respect him even more. "I have to say a big thank you to yourself and everyone else in the Love Party." To the actor's annoyance, a waiter interrupted him, offering champagne. All the waiters were dressed like Riley, as requested by Arthur. They wore neon-red wigs in Riley's style, glasses, neon-coloured t-shirts with positive messages, tweed blazers, and blue jeans. The actor snapped back, "We're talking!" Just as the waiter was about to apologise and walk away, Jeremiah, remaining relaxed, said, "It's okay," as he took two glasses and handed the actor one. Jeremiah thanked the waiter and the actor hung his head in shame. "Forgive me. I actually wanted to thank you because the Love Party has helped my temper. The fire still burns within me when I need to unleash it for an intense scene, but I'm calmer than I used to be!" "I'm glad to have helped." "I mean it, man. You've changed my life. You've helped me quit all my addictions. I used to," the actor looked around then whispered, "I used to shoot up between scenes! I was compulsive, but now I'm only addicted to love! Giving it feels great! Receiving it feels great! Your teachings are genius!" The actor stopped gushing when a robot elephant carrying six loud, unhinged guests rushed past them. After watching them for a few moments, cautious they may fall, the actor said, "I want to endorse you guys, but my manager said that endorsing a candidate would be bad for my career, since it would alienate some of my fans." "Your manager's wrong." "Really?" Jeremiah made up most of the following, because he didn't like how the actor spoke to the waiter, "Trust me, I went to university, I

know what I'm talking about. Your manager got that idea from a research paper by someone with an agenda to keep celebrities out of politics because professors think rich people don't support the same things as them. Academia is just high-brow propaganda. In reality, no matter who you endorse, people will like you more because it will show that you care about your country. So long as you're not supporting anything too extreme, you'll be fine." "I see. Okay. I will endorse you guys." "Thanks." "Cool, cool. Damn, yeah, that's really deep, bro... Hey, can we get a selfie?"

Dean, Arthur's head of security, walked around as he always did, like a boxer strutting to a ring. He noticed drunkards kissing drunk strangers, and thought they were pathetic for needing alcohol to have courage. He saw someone dive into a fountain and cut their head open, and thought no-one that stupid was worth saving, so carried on, as others rushed to help. He observed the wealthy and powerful dancing in groups with great co-ordination, curiously like the dances of the poor of the world, yet unlike the individualistic, wild, mate-calling dances of Gildland's poor. Dean had been born into a wealthy family, but, disgusted by how weak those around him were in comparison to the great men of novels and history, chose a life of hardship, researching the current wars of the world, then volunteering for the side he felt best represented his ideals of strength and honesty. From his experiences, he developed an admiration for the resilience of the poor. He felt the stories of the wealthy were all boring and finished, whereas the truly exciting stories of the world were occurring in the poorest places, where life was still a struggle, where there was still a great deal of human instinct left untarnished by technology. During his world travels, he had survived, with little scarring, an anthrax attack, malaria, a plane crash, and more that he refused to talk about. When he overheard an old man at the party shout, "Woah!" he stopped and turned his head. The old man then said to a guest, "There's a dead rat under your nose!" The old man looked closer then said, "Oh, wait, it's just a moustache!" The old man laughed and so did the others in the group except for the butt of the joke who did a bad job hiding his embarrassment. Dean walked right up behind the old man then laughed exaggeratedly. When the startled old man turned around, Dean laughed in his face for a few moments. The old man laughed, believing he'd enjoyed the joke, but then Dean stopped suddenly, looked at the man dead in the eyes, and the old man stopped laughing. Terrified, the old man, asked, "Are you okay?" Dean spat on the floor to the side, then said in one breath, "Do you feel good mocking people like that?" "It was just-" "Put some bass in your voice, I can't hear you. Does it make you feel like a man to mock people?" "It was just a joke." "It was just a joke"? Like your stupid, little tie?" The old man was stupefied. He observed the old man's suit, "Is this supposed to impress people?" "No." "Why do you support us? You don't want to pay any taxes?" "Uh-" "Well, old friend," said Dean, as he slammed a hand on him with such force that the old man felt like a nail being hammered, "I support the Love Party because it will make people's lives harder. Now, I know you think I'm joking, but I'm not. You see, old pal, struggles make people stronger. I think Basic Income is softening people up, that it's making people dependant like babies. What do you think about that?" "I suppose-" "Wait a minute, old friend." Dean pointed to the four other guests that were still watching, flummoxed, "Which one of you didn't shower today?" They weren't sure how to react, they expected to be wrong no matter what they said. "Since none of you are going to own up, how about you take this opportunity to get out of my sight? You make me sick!" The guests were mere acquaintances of the old man so didn't care enough to protect him. Dean carried on, "As I was saying, murder should be legal. You see, if murder was legal, people would be encouraged to be kind and well-liked, to avoid being murdered. Bullies and useless people wouldn't be protected by

the law, they'd be wiped off the face of the earth, and the living would be happier with them dead. Only the good would survive! The well-liked among us would avoid being murdered, because any potential murderer would fear revenge from their friends. Does that make sense?"

Arthur was in the outdoor cinema tucked away in a corner of the garden with about a hundred guests watching a movie whilst he waited for Riley's live campaign speech. He had a controller for an aerial drone by his side on the divan and planned to fly it into Riley whilst he was giving his speech, hoping to humiliate him as he was humiliated at the Festival of Ideas three years earlier. There were hundreds around him, all hoping to speak with him and show their love.

Eric was sitting in the mansion to keep warm, and stay away from the degeneracy all around. He was playing cards with the other elderly people at the party in a cosy corner. Eventually, however, what was going on inside became as crazy as the outside. The kitchen was invaded, and people rushed out eating food all over the place, and throwing it at each other. In an attempt to protect the well-behaved guests that were dancing in the mansion, staff struggled with the badly behaving guests to remove them from the building. An antique phone rang that no-one heard. Dean was forcing the old man from before to dance, shouting dance moves for him to perform as he stood by the side. The Lady with the Red Briefcase was dancing merrily, without her briefcase, and when asked for her name by enchanted dancers, she'd tell them it was whatever they wanted it to be. A drunk waiter, walking slowly to avoid falling over, offered Eric a drink for the fifth time in five minutes. With disdain, he watched people having fun, thinking of the soldiers that died for Gildland long ago, and doubted they would have fought if they knew what would eventually become of Gildland. Two of the dancers were getting too close to one another for Eric's liking, and when they noticed him looking down his nose at them, they halted, adjusted their clothing then escaped his sight. To his rescue came Lauren, the Love Party's campaign manager, notifying him and Dean that Riley's speech was soon to begin. Eric left the card game without saying goodbye.

The streets around the Mountain House had been barricaded by people with ties to the Poor Nations and their sympathisers in protest of the Climate War. There was a delay in the Overwatch alerting bounty hunters to the protesters' crime of traffic obstruction because of a 'glitch'. Riley was forced to take his helicopter to the stadium to avoid starting his speech late.

All the partygoers were in the outdoor cinema. On the screen was the live feed from Arthur's drone of the stadium's stage, the drone was hovering just above the stadium's roof. Riley was going to deliver basically the same speech he had many times before. He was going to complain about payment-processing companies, banks, and websites refusing service to his campaign because his stance against abolishing taxation was 'abusive', he was going to brand Arthur 'the Delusional Man' and his followers the 'Delusionals', he wanted to paint himself as anti-establishment, and his rival as pro-establishment, he wanted to brand Arthur as the favoured candidate of Elimperia because Arthur was committed to peace whereas he remained committed to the Climate War, he was going to say Arthur 'does not represent who we are as Gildlanders', and he was to mock Arthur's plan of abolishing taxation. When Riley got to the podium, Arthur prepared to fly the aerial drone in to him for revenge because of the stage collapse at the Festival of Ideas, but, before he could, the broadcast abruptly changed, as did virtually all electronic screens around Gildland.

Upon a fire-lit cave wall appeared the shadow of a man with long hair, wearing what appeared to be a crown of two-foot-long twigs pointing up and a foot-long twig protruding from each fingertip. There was an ambience of buzzing insects. The man's voice was young, disdainful, and contemplative. "I would like to start by apologising to anyone that feels scared because of the attack on the AI Party a few moments ago and apologise to the friends and family of those we killed." The music at the birthday party was turned off. All the partygoers were now listening. "The AI Party was warned, however, that their headquarters would be attacked, if they didn't promise to end the killing of trees, end industrial farming, end the burning of fossil fuels, and end the production of plastic. Just a few simple demands. You know we could have made more. The Great Revenge will continue against prominent members of political parties and corporate executives that do not promise to fulfil our wise and fair demands. No-one except the Nature Rapers need worry about facing violence from us." A few of the more cautious partygoers began heading home whilst the message still played. "To the people that wish to help our mission, but are scared of retribution, keep this in mind, it is better be hated now and loved for eternity than loved now and hated for eternity. The future will be thankful to the Brothers and Sisters that stop the Nature Rapers. I wish my Brothers and Sisters did not have to resort to violence, but, after being ignored for decades, there is no alternative. I hope today's attack will be the last time we have to kill anyone, but if our reasonable demands are not met by them then we will ensure the final light of their false enlightenment is the fire which engulfs them." Terrifying, over-bearing, almost non-human, cheering and applauding from an innumerable crowd sounded off camera. The video ended abruptly and the livestream of Riley's speech continued, but Riley was not on stage. The broadcast had also taken over the screens of the stadium he was at, he was rushed backstage by security, and his speech was cancelled. Jeremiah rarely started conversations with Arthur anymore, but he was compelled to ask about the shadowy figure, "That was Green Eyes, wasn't it?" Arthur calmly and quickly responded, "Don't say a word." The broadcast changed to a live news report of the attack on the AI Party's headquarters. Over twenty members were killed after their HQ, based in the heart of Montpelerin, was broken into. Most bizarrely, they all seem to have been attacked by wooden weapons that had been left behind, none of the perpetrators had been caught, and a message, 'LOVE TOO INTENSE TO LAST FOREVER, FEAR OF DESERTION DESERTS MY HEART FROM YOURS', had been written on the office walls with green graffiti. Arthur's birthday party was well and truly over. The great mood was gone completely. A new chapter in history had begun, but the author was anonymous. Everyone headed home. Whilst they were watching the news report, Arthur said, "Eric, Jeremiah, head back home, make sure the staff don't walk out. Dean, Lauren, let's go to their HQ, I want to share our thoughts and prayers before Riley does, and I want to make sure Maria's okay."

## Statement 4: Strangers

As Arthur, Dean, and Lauren headed to the AI Party's headquarters in a motorcade, Lauren provided Arthur with basic details about the AI Party, so he could provide his thoughts and prayers with an appearance of legitimacy. The party was co-led by an AI program that determined what decisions would produce the most happiness for the most amount of people in Gildland for the foreseeable future. The other co-leader was a human messenger for the AI program. Only a few thousand knew of the AI Party, most dismissed them as odd.

Ambulances and a crowd were outside the AI Party's destroyed HQ. The crowd had lived through religious terrorists, anarchist terrorists, and nationalist terrorists, and now a new breed jumped into their world, environmental terrorists. When the crowd noticed Arthur, they swarmed the car. To the crowd, every movement he made was fascinating. The figure they'd only ever seen behind the glass walls of screens was suddenly in reach. He was not seen as most other politicians were, as cold and insincere, he was seen, by many, as some sort of spiritual leader, he was even liked by many of the apolitical. Arthur made his way to the family members crying over their lost loved ones and each hugged him in return, they remembered him speaking of unconditional forgiveness and their hatred of the terrorists settled a little, they remembered that the Love Party accepted everyone and they felt they had a second family to rely on. Reporters captured Arthur's interactions with the crowd and the grieving family members of the fallen. Lauren had notified the party's media contacts that Arthur would be at the HQ and asked them to criticise Riley for not attending, which they had already done before being asked. As Arthur was hugging someone that would not let go, a reporter said, "As you can see, there are some very emotional scenes here. Arthur, the leader of the Love Party, has arrived to provide his support to family members that lost loved ones in the terrorist attack at the AI Party's HQ. There's still no sign of Pete Riley, and, since I arrived, I've heard many people here questioning, quite angrily, why Riley is not here to show support. Let me see if I can get a word with Arthur." As the reporter approached him, the person he was hugging was still crying on his shoulder, "Arthur, can I please have your thoughts." "Hate will not win. Hate will not win. This is why we must spread love, those terrorists had no love in their hearts." "What do you think of Riley not sharing his thoughts and prayers?" "I always try to see the best in people." "What do you have to say about that message from the terrorist?" "We don't give into criminals. That's why we have bounty hunters."

After half an hour of showing they cared about the grieving relatives, they returned to their car and headed to Maria's house. Arthur and Maria married when they were twenty-one and separated when they were thirty-nine. Divorce was not required as the institution of marriage had been abolished years before Maria left him. The ECSL Party abolished marriage during a time in which marriage rates were at record lows, only half of the marriageable population had been or were married. Marriage rates decreased because religions that encouraged marriage had declined in popularity, the ease of access to pornography decreased the impetus to seek a real partner and diminished the self-confidence of its many addicts, and low wages and the decrease in stable jobs made planning for the long-term difficult. According to Arthur, the abolition of marriage was accomplished by 'prioritizing self-enjoyment over self-sacrifice, using the increased rate of failed marriages as an argument for abolition instead of an alarm to salvage it, and emphasising equality, but, as usual, only a type of equality that didn't hurt



the wealth of the Plutocracy.’ A former Prime Minister had said just after its abolition, “Times have changed. Marriage is old-fashioned. People vow they will love their partner till death parts them, but, with the divorce rate at a record high, it’s clear that wedding vows mean little in our modern world. If a couple are going through a rough patch, they should be able to separate as amicably as possible, but our current laws only allow divorce under certain conditions. Divorce laws lock people into abusive relationships, but why not just let people live together when they’re happy then leave when they’re not? Some may be concerned by this decision and say, ‘If people can separate for any reason, separations will increase, and since children suffer when their parents separate, more should be done to discourage divorce.’ Well, that’s what government’s for! There will be a safety net for such children to ensure they have a fair shot at life. When you really think about it, the idea of committing yourself to one person forever is absurd. In life, we have multiple friends at once, so why should we not be allowed multiple partners at once? It just doesn’t make sense. People are already in more polyamorous relationships than ever before. With marriage abolished, we can start a culture in which polyamorous relationships are finally destigmatized. Let’s face it, marriage is just a contract to discourage the person someone loves from leaving them. This idea that you can own another person must stop. Marriage is one of the final barriers to total equality, because it benefits men and hurts women. It is not a surprise that a large majority of divorces are initiated by women. A woman’s surname and identity are robbed from them upon marriage. A woman’s profession, which is their key to economic freedom, is robbed from them upon the conceiving of children that almost inevitably follows marriage. Women are expected to play with their kids, take them to school, and look after the house, whilst the man goes to work, that’s not fair on women. Traditional marriage involves the man having all economic power and therefore all power over the family. Once and for all, this inequality is coming to an end for the benefit of everyone. It’s time for change.” Years before starting the Love Party, Arthur wrote, “As couples could separate for any reason, separations increased. More women went to work as the economic support in relationships no longer had the security of law, creating an increase in taxpayers and customers. There was almost no mention from either party constituting the duopoly that children from broken homes, when compared to children from stable homes, are more likely to commit suicide, be molested, have behavioural problems, drop-out of school, commit crime, be homeless, be depressed, perform worse academically, become alcoholic, and live in poverty. The widespread ideology of individualism enshrined the lie that marriage existed only to make two people happy and dismissed the fact that marriage is a foundation for children to become healthy adults. When people, even women, argue against the abolition of marriage they are muzzled with the accusation of hating women.”

Maria’s house was in Bronrar, only a fifteen-minute drive from Montpelerin. Upon separating from Arthur, she moved in with her mother, whilst Arthur kept their old house, as he had no parents to move in with and she wanted to be close to her mother who was a widow and suffering from cancer. Her mother passed away a year after she moved in, she now only lived there with their son Francis. Moments before arriving at her house, he put on cologne, looked in the car’s visor mirror to tidy his hair, tie, and suit. He breathed heavily and his legs shook. Dean always found it curious that Arthur was nervous in front of Maria and no-one else. To Arthur’s relief, the crowds that usually shadowed him were nowhere to be seen. Her house was like most in Gildland, large, white, beautiful, with an abundantly flowering, well-groomed garden front and back. His diary entry mere days after they first met as students at Riverlake reflected how he felt to that very day twenty-five years later, “She has

such great charm that all the world's problems are forgotten when she smiles at me. She makes the fantasy that 'everything will be all right' seem possible. To be even considered an acquittance makes me feel nobler than those that are not. She seems like one that never gets into arguments with anyone. One could imagine her being friendly with anybody regardless of their status. She's one of those rare geniuses with a conversational-level of knowledge on every topic. One would feel comfortable sharing their most shameful moments and thoughts with her in confidence she'd be of sincere understanding and keep them secret. She is like a butterfly floating from flower to flower providing all she contacts with more life. Even when others are talking, I can't stop looking at her, I love every facial expression, every gesture, every word she chooses. When I look at her, I feel as if I'm captivated by a great movie, I can't look away, I don't want to miss what happens next. She is God's greatest work of art, the work to be studied and replicated. When we first met, my senses almost fainted from her beauty. As the others continued talking, I stood staring at the ground in a daze, trying to fathom this special one that I suspected to be the incarnation of all I wanted a girl to be. My suspicions turned out to be correct. When we talked alone later on, I was astonished, time after time, to find that our views were so similar. I could hardly believe my luck at meeting someone so perfectly aligned with me. She was the first person that ever seemed to truly care about what I had to say. I have never spoken to someone with such ease, despite a nervousness that I'd never felt before. If I'd been that nervous before anyone else, I wouldn't have been able to speak at all. We are like petals of the same flower. She is classes above me yet treats me with love and care, and not in a pitiful way. Almost all of the students here come from rich families, I felt like an alien until we met. I am ready to do anything for her, nothing worth cherishing is easily attained." He loved Maria so deeply that he refused to seek a new romance during their years of separation, and she also refused to, though not out of love for Arthur, but because she'd become disillusioned with romance. She was the only person Arthur invited to the weekly parties he had since starting the Love Party and the only person to never accept an invitation. In search of forgiveness, he sent an expensive gift to Maria once a day, she gave some to charity and sold some for profit.

A few moments after he knocked on the door, Maria opened it wearing a dressing gown. She looked at him with tired eyes and asked without hiding her disappointment at seeing him, "What do you want?" "My love, may we come in?" "What for?" "I don't wish to speak of it out here." With concern, she said, "Sure." Arthur and Dean entered. There was no need for Dean and Maria to be introduced to one another, he'd been with Arthur during his weekly visits to her and Francis. "I suppose you heard about the terrorist attack." As she closed the door, she said, "I did." "You must live with me. It's not safe here." "He said they would only attack CEOs and the heads of parties that didn't accept his demands. I work in a think tank now, in case you forgot." "He said that, but terrorists can't be trusted." Maria would have continued pushing back, but after years of futile arguments in their relationship, she had given up trying to change Arthur, and had lately been trying to avoid confrontation with anyone. The prospect of living in a palace also helped sway her. "I'll only stay, if I have my own room." "Of course." "Okay Fair enough. Hopefully, I won't have to be there long." "Thank you for understanding, my love. Is Francis home?" "Obviously." "I think it would be better if you asked him to come." Snidely, Maria said, "I think so," then went upstairs. "We'll have some people pack your stuff for you, so we can leave right away." "You're so thoughtful." Outside, a car's door shut, and Arthur went and looked out the hall's window, fearing the car belonged to bounty hunters looking for him.

For rarely spending time with Francis during his childhood, Arthur tried to make amends after separating from Maria by suggesting days out together, but his attempts at reconciliation were too late. To Francis, the proposals seemed contrived and desperate. He developed such animosity towards his father for ignoring him in his youth and making his mother miserable that he could hardly look at Arthur when he visited. Arthur's visits got shorter as the years went by, eventually devolving to just handing over a birthday present, and speaking for a few minutes at the door to catch up with Francis. He used to work in tech support, but had been living on Basic Income for a few weeks. Since living on Basic Income, he spent all of his time in the simulations of the Intermind, except to eat, sleep, and go to the bathroom. He was one of many that exited society by living on Basic Income and spending all day of everyday on the Intermind. Francis was lying on his bed wearing pyjamas and using his Intermind to escape himself. In the simulation, he was at the seaside on a sunny day with imagined friends, he was the leader of the group, and supremely handsome, most of the girls he passed looked at him with desirous eyes, several approached him, he made great conversation without effort, everyone laughed heartily at his jokes, and thought his anecdotes were fascinating, he could tell all the other boys were jealous, but he remained humble. When Maria knocked on the door, his Intermind notified him, so he took off the device, and in annoyance said, "Yes?" She entered then said as she walked to his window to look at the motorcade, "Sorry to be the bearer of bad news, but your father's here to take us away." Dreading the idea of seeing him, Francis asked, "Why?" As she returned to him, she said, "It's not safe here. There was a terrorist attack. I guess you're unaware." "Are we in danger?" "They don't know, it's just a precaution. Get dressed." Maria left him, and began to dress. Whilst on the landing, an idea came to Maria. She realised that, by being brought back into Arthur's life, she had the chance to destroy the Love Party from within. The gloom she'd felt over living with Arthur disappeared and she was excited by the prospect of humiliating him and saving Gildland from the Love Party, especially the public sector workers and people living on Basic Income. Arthur had not told her the Love Party was a plot, because he didn't believe she could be trusted to keep it a secret since she still hated him. She was surprised to hear that Arthur's opinions had changed from what he believed for decades to what the Love Party believed, but she had no reason to think the party was a plot. After all, a political party pretending to believe in ideas just for the sake of winning an election had never happened before, at least not to the extreme extent of the Love Party. She put on a red, off the shoulder dress, red lipstick, gold heels, a gold necklace, gold bracelets, and two large, heart-shaped gold earrings. Her plan was to make Arthur lose his temper in public, to ruin the glow of niceness surrounding him manufactured by his PR team.

She returned to Dean and Arthur with swagger, so unlike the depressed way in which she'd greeted them, but so like how Arthur had remembered her best. Mortified, Arthur asked, "What are you wearing?" She snapped back, "Whatever the hell I want." "Don't you think you-" "Francis will be down in a minute. Consider yourself lucky he's coming, most kids wouldn't forgive what you did." Arthur looked to Dean, as if he'd have an answer, then asked Maria, "What did I do?" With a gold dragon cigarette lighter, she lit the cigarette in her gold cigarette holder, "Don't play innocent just because you're with Dean. You know exactly what you did. You see, Dean, darling, he wants everyone to be forgiving because he himself wants forgiveness and he believes no-one should have idols because he knows deep inside that no-one should idolise him." Arthur replied, "I'm not sure what you're talking about, my love." Maria caressed one of Dean's muscular arms and said, "You know, darling, we've never spoken much during all the times you popped over with that person. Tell me, how

many kids have you got?" "A few I know about, but probably a few hundred I don't know about." "Oh, you cheeky devil! Arthur could never pull off a joke like that." "Well..." "I bet you treat them nicely, don't you?" "That's for them to say." "I'm sure you do. I can tell a lot from a man's face, some men are obviously true men, *some* are so-so." Astounded by Maria's hostility towards Arthur, Dean tried to learn more, as he hardly knew anything about their past, "How long were you two together?" "He was with me for twenty years... I was with him for three weeks." Dean laughed and Arthur did not. They stopped when they noticed Francis coming down. He appeared embarrassed by his own existence. Arthur smiled and said, "Francis! How are you, my boy?" Francis made no eye contact with anyone and had an almost traumatised expression, "I'm okay." Maria said to Dean, "See what I was talking about?" to which he responded with a polite smile.

Arthur ignored her and said, "Come on, let's go." As they left, Maria imitated him, "'Come on, let's go.' Wow, you're such a great leader. I can really imagine you leading an army from behind a desk." Amused, Arthur responded, "That's not very nice, my love." "It wasn't supposed to be nice. It was supposed to hurt you. There's only one man that I care about being nice to and it isn't you." "Fair enough." "'Fair enough'? What kind of a man are you? Stand up for yourself, you coward." As they went to the car, Maria held Dean's hand, and said in a girly voice to him, "Oh, how exciting! I've never held a boy's hand before!" Arthur grinned, "Dear Lord." "What's wrong? Are you jealous?" Never missing an opportunity to show his love for her, he said, "Yes." "Good." As Arthur sat at the front with Lauren, and the others sat at the back, he said to Maria, "Please don't smoke in the car." She responded, "Shut your mouth," then turned to Dean and said, "He likes to hold these petty ideas of right and wrong because it makes him feel superior to others." Arthur started the car and it headed to the Bennefeath Palace. "Francis, Maria, this is our campaign manager, Lauren. Lauren, this is my son, Francis, and Maria." Lauren smiled warmly at them both and said hello. She offered her hand, but Francis was looking out of the window so didn't notice, and Maria looked at Lauren as if she'd been rude. Whilst looking at her, Maria asked, "Who the hell is this?" "Don't be rude." Maria pretended that she had an epiphany, "Ah. I understand. You replaced the old with the new. How romantic. Hey, Dean, can you believe what that man, that thing, once said to me? He said, 'You are the original that women imitate, the subject of the painting that millions flock to see, but I have you right here.' What a simp. I bet he had that stored up for years ready for the first idiot that fell for him. Unfortunately, it was me." Arthur stopped finding her act amusing, "Why are you behaving like this?" She said to Dean, "Do you know what that piece of garbage used to say to me when we were alone? He would say, 'Oh, I can't believe you love me, it seems so surreal, I can't believe that you, who could get anyone, would love a nobody like me.' I mean, talk about a lack of self-awareness! My God. I only stayed with him so long because I pitied the poor fool." "Don't be this way, Maria." "I'll behave however the hell I want. You confined me for years when we were together, I'm not going to let it happen now." All fell silent, so Dean asked Francis, "Are you all right, boy?" "Yeah." "Are you still in work?" Dean had forgotten that Francis previously said he was living on Basic Income. "No." "Ah, then you can help us with security." Arthur interrupted, laughing, "I don't think my son should be working in security!" "There's nothing to worry about! I'm sure he can handle himself, boss! He's a strong, young man. If you ever want something to do, just let me know, all right?" Without any enthusiasm, Francis responded, "Okay." Maria held her hands towards her heart, and said, "Oh, Dean, you're so cute. I wish all men were like you. Some are so obsessed with their brains they forget to have a heart, you know, like the sort that think they're philosophers." Jeremiah called Arthur.

There was a large group arguing in the background, Arthur struggled to hear him. “Arthur!” “What’s wrong?” “The staff are trying to leave.” “Because of the attack?” “Yes, they say they won’t feel safe being here, until you accept the demands of Green-” “Don’t mention his name.” “We’re trying to make them stay until you come back, but I don’t know how much patience they have left.” “Tell them we’ll be back in five minutes.” “Will you be back in five minutes?” Arthur rolled his eyes, “Probably twenty, just say five, for God’s sake.” “Okay. See you soon.” “Bye.” As Arthur sighed, Dean asked “What’s wrong?” “The staff want to quit, because they’re scared of the terrorists.” “The palace is one of the safest places there is!” Maria began to giggle. Arthur ignored her and said to Dean, “We’re not going to accept the demands of that terrorist. Accepting them would make us look weak. If the staff still want to quit after we’ve arrived, we’ll let them go, they’re easily replaceable.” Maria commented, “That doesn’t sound very loving, I thought this was the Love Party.” As there was no response from Arthur, she asked, “How are you going to deal with the situation, Mr. Big Shot?” Arthur wasn’t sure, so said, “We’ll see when we get there.” “I said ‘how’ not ‘when’.” “You’ll have to wait and see.” “A great philosopher like you should be able to respond like that,” she said, snapping her fingers. “Arthur always thought he was a great philosopher that only failed at life because of ‘the Plutocracy’ or should I say ‘the Yahudicracy’? You filthy bigot. Oops, did I say that last part out loud?” Arthur couldn’t wait for the car journey to be over, there seemed to be no end to Maria’s antics, “Don’t lie about me.” “Oh, is someone getting angry? Please, don’t hit me like last time.”

Maria continued trying to provoke Arthur for the rest of the journey. When they arrived at the Bennefeath Palace, they could hear all the disgruntled staff before they entered. They discovered the staff all close to the entrance holding their bags and wearing their coats talking to one another or on their phones. In the distance they could see Jeremiah pleading with a few of the members of staff in a most desperate way to wait for Arthur to come back whilst Eric, with his nose high in the air, was lying to others about reports of terrorists outside the palace. The staff bustled to Arthur, all speaking to him at once. Lauren put her hands up, shouting indignantly for them to listen to her. They gradually quietened. “What are you doing away from your desks? You can take a fifteen-minute break between twelve and two. Get back to-” Someone at the back of the group mumbled a derogatory term. Lauren, suspicious of what was said, asked, “What did you say?” The crowd turned to the person she was talking to. The petty rebel huffed then left the palace. “Now, you will all get back to work or you will be fired. It is entirely within my right to do so.” After a few awkward moments, most of the staff headed back to the office and some walked out of the palace. Lauren said, “And don’t you ever confront him like that ever again!”

Whilst Arthur, in astonishment, watched the staff head back to their office, Maria said, “Aren’t you going to introduce us?” so he began to. Eric and Maria remembered one another fondly from their time at Riverlake, Jeremiah was curious to see Maria after having only known her slightly at Riverlake, and Francis remained taciturn. He then led them to a living room on the first floor. As Maria looked at the total darkness outside, she said, “Change the filter.” Arthur replied, “What would you like?” “Obviously, make it sunny.” By the window, there was a small panel called a Skyswitch with the options to change the weather that those inside saw outside the window. Only the very wealthiest in Gildland could afford the device. Arthur selected the option to make the outside appear sunny and it worked instantly. When looking through the window, there appeared to be a cloudless blue sky, the grass covered in sunlight, and the living room was lit up by the fake sunshine. Arthur returned to the seating

area. A second after he sat down, Maria said, "Give me the remote." Arthur went to the coffee table and handed it to her. The second he sat down again, Maria said, "Pour me a drink." "We're going to bed soon. Isn't it too late?" "Well, it wasn't too late for you to bring that terrorist into my life. I told you not to get into politics, but you're too arrogant. You never-" Arthur stood up, "What drink do you want?" "Water." "'Water'?" "Yes and don't give us a lecture on water. We know you're incapable of normal conversations and just repeat what you've read in books. We know it's scarce now, and, yes, we're very lucky to live in a Rich Nation, and I'm sure you read some book about water, but, please, no-one cares." She said to the others, "There was this one time I'll never forget, he thought I said a word that I hadn't, and, when I repeated what I said more clearly, he went on this unlettered drivel about how different people have different definitions of the same words and that people should define certain words before debates to avoid confusion. That was the sort of boring conversation I endured everyday with him. He just repeats what he's read! He's like a robot that can only speak in one mode. I know Riley's a freak, but at least you can imagine having a normal conversation with him, at least he's human." "Would anyone else like a drink?" They all said no, except for Francis who, relieved to have a screen to look at, remained silently watching it. As Arthur poured her drink, Maria said, "He was always such a bad host, that is, whenever he let us host a party. God forbid he was distracted from writing books no-one cared about. I was never allowed to have any fun, no freedom, nothing. My entire life was restricted by his paranoia fuelled by hilarious insecurities that I just can't wait to tell you all about. I was terrified of him at the time, but now I think he's absolutely hilarious. He gets no love from his family so seeks love from the electorate. He has no influence on me so seeks to make the nation a wife he can manipulate. He seeks redemption through helping the world instead of helping the family he destroyed. He cares about family law, but not his family. He spent hours studying international affairs, but when it came to family affairs he was out of the loop. He bemoans men for becoming 'weak in the land of pleasure' whilst he hid from the world in his study." After a moment of silence for Arthur's reputation, he brought the glass of water to Maria and before handing it to her said sincerely, "Don't throw it at me." "Don't try to paint me as some sort of villain. Give it, you fool!" Arthur gave Maria the water then returned to his seat, all the while expecting her to throw it at him. Dean and Eric couldn't believe Arthur obeyed her. Jeremiah saw it all as funny and had a permanent grin, excited for what Maria may do next. He thought to himself, "Arrogant men, like Arthur, usually prefer submissive women, because they can be controlled more easily, but Maria is not weak at all. I hope the riches of the palace don't swoon her, it would be a tragedy to see her fall back in love with him. I can imagine why he fell in love with her, she is smart, fun, and beautiful, I am sure many wanted to be loved by her, but why she fell in love with him is a mystery."

The television was as large as a cinema screen and had a gold frame. On TV, all shows were easy to produce and consume. One was a compilation of misbehaving toddlers that was marketed to people of all ages, a show about botched surgeries that made viewers feel better about their appearance, a show about morbidly obese people that made viewers feel proud to be not as unhealthy, a show about people buying a house that made viewers fantasise about buying one too, a show in which people bought and sold antiques which made old people feel valued, a show about people driving cars around a circuit for several hours, a cooking show, a show that followed bounty hunters at work because people loved seeing strong men on the right side of the law and justice being served, a show in which a person did their own makeup, a re-run of a comedy show that ended thirty years earlier, a show in which someone reviewed a burger for twenty minutes, a documentary on the Climate War, a show in which people

opened up packages of their latest purchases, a show about a house makeover, a show that was a compilation of accidents such as a person falling from a swing, a person getting hit by a tree, and a person dropping a cake, a show in which obese people were advised by health experts to exercise more, eat less junk food, and eat more fruits and vegetables, a show about a garden makeover, a show about women, in countries where marriage was still legal, buying wedding dresses, a show in which people reacted to other shows, a show in which people's singing voices were judged that viewers enjoyed because of the beautiful voices of the good singers and the humiliation the bad singers suffered, a show in which people's business ideas were judged that viewers enjoyed because of the awe inspired by the successful entrepreneurs and the humiliation the failed entrepreneurs suffered, and a show in which a person did their hair for fifteen minutes. Because Maria knew it would annoy Arthur, she selected a re-run of *Inside the Mountain House* which was a weekly vlog by Riley showing what his life was like as Prime Minister. He said, "Please change the channel," so Maria turned the volume up.

The intro to Riley's vlog had techno music with a harsh, squeaky voice singing incomprehensible lyrics whilst a wide shot of the Mountain House was displayed. The next scene began with Riley filming himself in bed, looking into the camera with tired eyes, his room was loaded with toys and movie posters of superhero movies. He'd dyed his curly hair green. Maria joked, "The poor thing, it looks like he's got a pile of broccoli on his head," making them all burst out in laughter. Maria grimaced at Arthur, "Don't laugh at my jokes." Riley began, "It is 6AM, and I've literally just woken up. I had a really late night yesterday talking to leaders on both sides of the Climate War to try and broker a peace deal between them. And I just have to keep on hoping that peace will come because things can't go on like this. As you know, I suffer from anxiety and depression a lot, and what's going on in the world's literally just made it worse for me. I've found that doing my exercises really help a lot, and talking to people helps a lot, so, if you're suffering too, I really highly recommend doing those things. Anyway, it's that time of the week to take you inside the Mountain House so let's get on with it." Riley got out of bed, wearing blue shorts and a red t-shirt with the word 'UNITY' on it, then kissed his two chihuahuas on the lips and said to them, "My family!" Eric looked away and said "Why are people like this always so comfortable with being disgusting?" but the music of the vlog blared so loudly no-one could hear him. Now sitting on a sofa next to a colour-coordinated bookshelf, Riley said whilst staring at his laptop, "As you know, I really like to keep track of what I'm doing. I keep a spreadsheet to track how long I exercise, how long I read, and what macro-nutrients I'm eating. I find it just really helps me reach my goals, and, yeah, I think it just helps a lot." A clip of Riley typing on his laptop played at double-speed and featured loud, dance music, Arthur began rubbing his forehead in pain at the noise and the thought that some people enjoyed watching such videos. Then, cross-legged on his sofa, holding a pen and a self-help book, Riley said, "I've been reading this book called *Start Living* and there's a few exercises at the end of each chapter, so every morning I'm reading notes and affirmations and stuff like that and doing the exercises. One part I read yesterday was, like, 'If you don't believe in yourself, then who will?' and I think that's, like, so true." The vlog then played a sped-up clip of Riley reading the book and drinking a glass of water which went on for about thirty seconds with calm, folk music playing in the background. Arthur looked around and saw Jeremiah admiring the ceiling mural in the living room, Francis analysing the lines on the palm of his hands, Dean on his phone, Lauren looking outside the window, and Eric watching the screen with permanent revulsion, then asked, "Maria-" "Shut your mouth." In his gym, Riley said, "Now is the time for my daily workout. Today, I'm doing arms. If you're ever feeling like shit, trust me, just

do a workout, you'll literally feel so much better." He gave a thumbs up then rave music began playing as a sped-up clip of him curling 3kg dumbbells went on for about a minute. The next part of the vlog showed Riley in the kitchen of the Mountain House, as loud, pop music played, he poured protein powder into a glass, then coconut water, this clip went on for about thirty seconds with the camera zoomed into the glass. He went to his fridge and took out a pre-sliced kiwi in a plastic container with a plastic fork and said, "I never used to like kiwi, but now I'm literally obsessed," he peeled off the cover and ate a piece, "So yum." He then grabbed a fruit yoghurt and held it to the camera, "This is literally my favourite yoghurt. You can buy it from FoodCentral. It's gluten free. Yum." In the next clip that was sped-up and had ambient music playing, Riley was sitting at the kitchen worktop eating his breakfast, typing on his laptop, and checking his phone occasionally, this went on for over a minute. Afterwards, Riley was in his bathroom, he danced as he brushed his teeth, then washed his face then said to the camera, "Now is time for my shower, so it's time for you to go!" Riley emerged from the shower then looked at his green, curly hair in the mirror, and said in a high-pitched voice, "Oh my God! My hair looks so cute! I love it! Can we just appreciate it for a minute?" Eric turned his head away from the screen as if it had slapped him, and said, "Good Lord." Maria asked Eric, "What would you do, if your son came home behaving like him?" "The word 'son' would no longer apply." "But what would you do?" Eric replied, as if the answer was obvious, "He would be physically removed." "You have nothing nice to say about him, do you, my dear?" "He's smart enough to trick people into thinking he's smart. Hats off to him." In the next scene, Riley was filming himself in front of his bedroom mirror, wearing a red t-shirt with the words 'Strong and Beautiful' written on the front in red, a tweed blazer, a pair of three-quarter length jeans, and white plimsolls, he showed the camera all angles then threw a peace sign with a pout. "I look good, don't I? It is so so so important you love yourself, no matter what you look like. All of you are literally so beautiful!" Eric muttered, "Ridiculous human-being." Riley then said as he filmed himself walking through the halls of the Mountain House, looking fairly tired, "Okay, guys, I'm on my way to the first meeting of the day, we'll be talking mostly about the Climate War, Elimperia, food security, and all that sort of stuff, so, yeah, I'll see you on the other side." Maria changed the channel and Eric said, "Thank you." "You didn't like it?" "No. He is the epitome of everything wrong with the world. He is totally ungrateful for his ancestors' accomplishments, totally arrogant in his own ideas, totally ignorant against those which lasted for centuries, total in his admiration of self, total in his celebration of weakness, total in his acceptance of the most vulgar abominations the world has ever seen, whilst attacking everything Gildish people once held dear. He is the sort of person that couldn't find happiness in Gildland so had to destroy all that made others happy, the sort of person that couldn't find success in Gildland so lowered the standards for himself to succeed." "I thought the video was rather funny." "I am not sure why you would use that word. We are at war and our Prime Minister voluntarily admits he is mentally weak. Can a man like this really inspire people in war time? Can people consider this country worth defending after he has repeatedly criticised every part that people loved? Will they fight with the same valour as someone that loves their country? There is nothing funny about this so-called man." "I think-" "The whole purpose of this little show of his is not as innocent as it seems, it is to develop what is called a parasocial relationship. By inviting viewers into his home and showing his everyday routine, they begin to feel as though they know him like a friend. Towards friends, people are more agreeable, forgiving, supportive, and trusting. He is very aware that many people rely heavily on a politician's personality to guide their voting decisions because they're not actually sure of which policies



are best. Instead of encouraging people to become educated, he has exploited their over-reliance on personality to decide who to vote for. He is trying to *appear* relatable, conscientious, innocent, intelligent, health-conscious, whilst rarely implementing a policy that actually proves he is such.” “Well-” “And this is the problem when no-one reads, they can be duped so easily, because they rely on impressions, and, even when they do read, they cannot concentrate on a text for more than a few minutes because the skill of reading has been so neglected. Impression has triumphed over substance because no-one reads anymore. The Age of Words is over, there is no going back now from the Age of Images. People read when they must, when they need to learn something, when they need to for their job, but they cannot recite a single sentence from a book and are deaf to the musical quality of words. I recall my students often asking me, ‘Why read book when we can watch the film version?’ They are utterly lost. The Prime Minister that signed a trade agreement which destroyed the jobs of millions of farmers in the barbaric nation of Medisus faced no criticism for his action from the public, because he was polite throughout his entire career. The Prime Minister that said one rude sentence about some of the people of Medisus was considered a villain before he was even elected. That is merely one example of impression trumping substance.” “So, you don’t like him?” “No. He was lucky to be in the right place at the right time. He was born just as the world began to allow people such as him to exist. He is an assemblage of fortunately timed mediocrities that appeals to other such mediocrities that enjoy living vicariously through his success. He is a troglodyte that stumbled upon a goldmine.” “That reminds me of someone.” Arthur noticed Jeremiah was the only one to laugh.

Armaments was the most popular sport in Gildland. It involved two teams fighting each other until one team had killed all the other or surrendered. On the floor of the arena were obstacles between the teams and indestructible glass in front of the audience. The players could use any weapons they liked. The match on TV was between Gildland and Tulantet in the quarter-final of the FY4082 Ghrelinburger’s World Cup sponsored by RocoTelecom at the Pecuniam Banking Corporation Stadium. Riley had wanted national sports teams disbanded as they encouraged xenophobia, but he was dissuaded by his advisors because international sports competitions were good for the economy. Dean tried to bring Francis out of his shell, “Do you like armaments, Francis?” “Yes.” “Who’s you’re favourite player?” “Um, they’re all good, I guess.” A player for Tulantet was blown to pieces after a grenade exploded a few inches away from their stomach. There was a shot of Gildish fans reacting, some cheering, some hugging their friends, then there was a shot of the Tulantetian fans sinking their heads into their hands, whilst some sulked as they continued to watch the match. Arthur said, “I hate this stupid game.” “Why?” asked Dean who enjoyed watching the survival of the fittest. “I don’t like seeing people hurt.” Maria laughed. “What’s so funny?” “Don’t pretend you care about others.” She began scouring her phone, “I have proof you don’t care about anyone.” Arthur said to Eric, “It’s very cold in here, isn’t it?” and Eric nodded. A moment later, Maria said, “Ah ha!” as she muted the TV and stood in front of it. “I’ve found it. Let me show you who he really is. Here’s an email he sent when we were married, proof he doesn’t love anyone!” She imitated Arthur’s voice, ““Each interaction I have with the public, the stench of which I’ve never been relieved from, helps build my case that they are, in fact, demons. With breath-taking arrogance, they have abandoned all semblance of etiquette, elocution, and respectable dress. They use the freedom their ancestors died for only to indulge in the lower pleasures. During minutes of silence for the heroic dead, they do not think of them, they think of it as an awkward waste of time, I have seen my students use their phones during them. Every time I hear our beautiful language lurch from their putrid mouths, I feel as though a

friend of mine is being abused. They are ungrateful despite being born in the wealthiest country of all time, they have won the lottery of life by being born in a Rich Nation, but are too ignorant to realise how lucky they are. They are too career-focused to raise children, so fill the void by raising pets, because they are cheaper, more convenient, and don't talk back. Their selfishness is leading to the extinction of our people. Everyday in public, I have to witness these bizarre creatures kiss their dogs on the lips or walk around with them in pushchairs, or hear them refer to a dog as their 'baby'. They have the world's information at their fingertips yet use the internet for the most degenerate wastes of time imaginable. Despite their illiteracy, they feel confident enough to tear down principles crafted by the world's greatest philosophers, these idiots can't even name one philosopher or if they can it's only because they were referenced in a movie. Not once thinking of unintended consequences or the possibility of covert funding by foreign governments, they urgently follow the latest social cause with predictable credulity, and to even politely question their cause provokes volcanic rage. I suppose this is because struggles help provide meaning in life, it's-' Blah, blah, blah. 'They condemn the ideologies of old that are responsible for the deaths of millions, and they are right to do so, but are their thought processes any better than the followers of those ideologies? They too are conforming, fail to escape biases, choose to live in echo chambers, form conjectures, are swayed by propaganda, and dream of a utopia. If these people were alive during the zeniths of those ideologies, they would have fallen for them too because their methods of thinking are the same. The content of their beliefs are different, but not the methods by which they arrived at their beliefs. Oh, how easily I could deceive them if I tried!" Maria looked at everyone with wide eyes to emphasise the last sentence. She continued reading, "When people ask me why everything is so bad now, I always blame market forces, I never tell them democratization gives the rabble access to what they do not deserve. I don't hide this reason out of cowardice, I do so from the knowledge that such reasoning would turn them against me, I am very calculating! Popular music isn't bad simply because market forces demand music that can be easily produced and consumed, it is also bad because the rabble are allowed to make and listen to music. When I am king, they will only be allowed to work and entertain me as I command. In women's comical, corporate-approved, attempt to compete with men, they now dress like men, their voices have deepened over the last few decades, they have adopted aggressive characteristics, like how short men do to compensate, they're always trying to prove a point. Men joke about this in private, we do not take them seriously. At this rate, women will start growing beards in the next decade. There are no women anymore except for you, my love. A woman's brain does not develop beyond the age of twelve because their one purpose in life doesn't require it to." Arthur was entertained, but, aware that Lauren was listening, said, "I obviously never wrote that." "Shut up! 'These 'people' are not too different to animals, they have no appreciation for art, they have never had an original thought, they have never been in awe of our planet's beauty, they just eat, drink, and entertain themselves. These half-human, half-animal hybrids have no unique opinions, they don't have any principles, they merely react to the latest sensational event with a schizophrenic, corporate-approved, facile set of opinions. 'They don't have any principles'? I forgot, they do have one principle, 'Do what you want so long as you don't hurt others,' which of course means 'Be an irresponsible hedonist'. In their minds, morality begins and ends with the individual. For example, they-' God, I forgot how bad his writing style was, 'they think all drugs should be legal because it makes the individual feel good, and because the user isn't 'hurting' anyone. To these philistines, 'hurting' someone else strictly means to directly attack them physically or verbally. Their brains are too small to consider the junkie

becoming a burden on their family and friends or that, by escaping into a dream-world, they become more tolerant of abuses by the government, and therefore don't feel the need to attack them. So, yes, because we are all interconnected, I and everyone else are 'hurt' by such people. I explore the reasons for our national misery and I tell them how we can reverse course so we can all be better off, only to get mocked, ignored, threatened, or called evil. Their only value is as a warning to future civilizations of what not to let happen. Everything about them is loud and rude, at the same time, their greatest fears remain self-censored because they fear offending people that don't even like them. People of the future will laugh at their cowardice, people in other civilizations already do, they just haven't realised yet. As my awareness of how great things could be has increased and the respectability of these 'people' has decreased, I have become more understanding of the genocidists of old. I would murder them all with wild glee, if only I could get away with it. It's not due to empathy or a lack of skill that I refrain from murdering them, only the law refrains me. Oh, how I would love to live in a forest far away from them!' Does that sound like someone who cares about other people to you?" Arthur didn't think anyone would believe her, but still felt the need to say, "I never wrote that." "Shut up! What do the rest of you think? Does it sound like he cares about other people?" Lauren responded, "He does care about people." "Yeah, right! If anyone else wrote that, you'd be up in arms." "I know Arthur well enough to say he does care." "Sure. Eric, what do you think?" Eric replied, "I agree with every word." Maria turned to Jeremiah then said, "Darling, do you really want to work for someone that said all of those horrible things?" With the voice of someone that wanted to reply 'No', Jeremiah replied, "I doubt he said any of that." "Oh my God. Dean, come on, be the voice of reason. What do you think?" "I don't know. I was watching the match." "Oh, for crying out loud. You're all so, oh my God, you're all so pathetic! You're pathetic! If someone else had written that, you'd call them a monster! You have no idea how evil he is! He neglected and overprotected his son! He wasted all our money! He never had a friend! He controlled my life! You think he cares about millions of people? He doesn't even care about his own family! He never criticises himself, everything is always someone else's fault. He's in this election because he's a fucking narcissist!" Maria stopped to read their faces. It was evident they were too attached to Arthur to defy him. She said, "God, you're all hopeless," then returned to her seat. Maria's prodding had not been enough to make Arthur lash out in front of the others. He'd been deeply devoted to his public persona too long for an outburst to happen that easily. Since she couldn't make him lose his temper, she began considering how else she could destroy the party from within.

An hour after they'd arrived, when everyone, except for Lauren and the staff, was going to sleep, Maria headed to Arthur's room to make amends, as she felt the closer she was to him the more opportunities she'd have to destroy the Party from within. She'd changed into a white, satin dressing gown from her wardrobe that Arthur's team had delivered. He was alone in his bedroom reading about the terrorist attack on the AI Party, worried about what would happen if the public knew the shadowy figure on the cave wall was Green Eyes and how Riley would use their past friendship to hurt his public image. When Maria by the doorway said, "I'm sorry for the crazy things I said earlier," he shot back in surprise, so engrossed he had been. When he saw her, every other thought he had instantly died away and she was his sole focus. He stood up for her. "It's not a problem, my love." She went to him. "You know I didn't mean a word of what I said earlier, don't you?" "Really?" "Really. I was only joking. I forgave you a long time ago. I agreed to come here, because I still love you." Arthur's eyes lit up. He kissed Maria with all his love. For him, the kiss felt like the first drink of water after

journeying a desert without any. Maria was so caught off guard and sickened that it took her a couple of seconds to start kissing back.

In the following days, her game of tricking Arthur into thinking she still loved him went on. She frequently complimented him, she laughed loudly at all his jokes, they caught up on what happened in their lives since they were apart, she showed deep appreciation for the expensive gifts he gave her every morning, she joined him in PR stunts and was received with great fanaticism, she avoided even the slightest of disagreements with him or anyone he cared about, and they never talked about politics when alone. Arthur was too overcome with joy and dreams of their future to question why, if Maria had forgiven him long ago, she had waited until then to tell him. Jeremiah bought her flowers to celebrate their reunion and to help Maria feel welcome. Arthur's fans and his allies in the media fawned over her and obsessed over what she wore, her hair, her jewellery, and her makeup, there was little attention paid to her academic career. Arthur showed off his palace, paintings, sculptures, boats, and planes to Maria. Whilst showing off something, he always said some variation of, "Do you like it, my love?" "What do you think of that, my love?" "If there's anything you want me to buy for you, just say so, my love." Maria did love a lot of it, but wished someone else was showing it to her. He was proud to be seen with her, but simultaneously the thought that others desired her as he did repulsed him. He admired the charm and beauty of other women, but simultaneously the thought that she was even slightly attracted to other men tormented him. When the two of them were alone, all his fear and stress were completely taken off his mind.

## Statement 5: Too Poor to Have Opinions

*TODAY'S TOP HEADLINES:*

*Who is Green Eyes?*

*Riverlake Staff and Students Expose De la Mer's Friendship With Green Eyes*

*View This EMBARRASSING Photo of Riley Eating a Sandwich*

*Sirkitus Laughs Off Rumours of Elimperia Funding the Poor Nations and the Love Party*

*The Climate War: Why the World Will Never Be the Same*

Green Eyes was identified as the shadowy figure behind the attack on the AI Party a day after it. Gildland's intelligence agency, the DIA, had used voice recognition technology to identify him. A forty million gilder bounty was placed on Green Eyes' head, a world record. Arthur's past friendship with Green Eyes was revealed to the media by staff at Riverlake and by former students. Their friendship was used as ammunition by Riley against Arthur's character. Although there was no proof of him being in contact with Green Eyes since the cutting of the Humanities, Riley claimed their past friendship was suspicious and that Arthur ordered Green Eyes and his followers, who'd been titled the Lost Students by the media, to eliminate Arthur's political opponents. Arthur hit back, in the usual gentle manner he'd adopted since starting the Love Party, stating it was obvious that Green Eyes was a puppet of Riley, otherwise he wouldn't have been able to hack the billboards and that surely at least one of the terrorists would have been arrested. So that his followers would feel a greater urgency to help him win the election, Arthur began to paint himself as the victim of a government conspiracy. Jeremiah suspected Arthur was guilty of funding Green Eyes, because he remembered him once saying 'we will mourn death whilst we murder'.

Arthur refused to accept blame for his falling lead in the polls, he said Basic Income taking away voters was not his fault, the Climate War making people want a strong military instead of private defence agencies was not his fault, and that him being old friends with an eco-terrorist was not his fault. He warned that Riley was going to pull every trick he could to stop 'us' from winning, including murdering the leaders of the Love Party. In response to Arthur's excuses, his fans pitied him, and Riley's fans said good leaders don't whine. After Green Eyes' attack on the AI Party and murders of seven CEOs and top members of the third placed ECSC Party, four MPs stepped down and two irrelevant candidates dropped out of the election, all were harshly criticised by the public as cowards. No message was left by Green Eyes' cult after killing the CEOs, but one message was graffitied on the ECSC's HQ, '**I SHOULD HAVE DASHED ACROSS THE OCEAN LIKE A STONE, GREETING STRANGE STRANGERS AND MERRY SAILORS**'. Hundreds of CEOs from companies that had good reason to fear Green Eyes, improved their home security, and many began working at home with no plans to return until he was defeated. Green Eyes had become an obsession for many, since the attack on the AI Party. Arthur spent hours reading forums and watching videos attempting to connect the dots between Green Eyes and Riley and himself. There were rumours Green Eyes and the Lost Students were being hidden by Riley in the Pelerin Mountain, that they were funded by Elimperia, that they were funded by Arthur, that

Jeremiah was secretly a member, that Green Eyes was Maria's son, and that the murders were mere simulations funded by billionaires trying to scare corporations not associated with themselves into accepting Green Eyes' demands.

With fourteen days until the election, Arthur held a fund-raising dinner as he frequently did since starting the Love Party. To ease the attendees' concerns about Green Eyes, Arthur stopped hosting donor dinners at the Bennefeath Palace and hosted them at the homes of his less well-known donors. That he'd increased security at the Bennefeath was not enough to convince them to attend a spot they felt likely to be hit. Everyone was preparing for the donor dinner except for Arthur's son, Francis. His father knew he wouldn't want to go so didn't attempt to persuade him. Since getting out of bed, Francis had been in one of the Intermind's simulations. In his current simulation, he was the king of a fictional country full of magic and fantastical creatures. Everyone loved him to a fanatical degree. Everyone always obeyed him, but out of respect, not fear. He was without worry for no-one in the world dared be an enemy of someone so powerful. He could walk eternally without tiring. He was only able to appreciate his happiness because it contrasted with the misery endured by those outside his country, he had experienced no misery in his own life to compare his current state of happiness to. All agreed with him all of the time. All problems were easy to solve with his supreme intellect. In this simulation, Francis was completely unaware of his true self. When he first began using the Intermind, years prior, the simulations would last for an hour or two, and were fairly regular fantasies of love and power. Upon exiting the simulation, he'd get on with his day, satisfied with the experience, and not think much of the Intermind until the next weekend. Little did he know, the simulations were having a pernicious influence on him. In the simulations, he was always in control, but in reality he was not, in the simulations, everything was perfect, but reality was not so. Reality couldn't compete with the pleasure offered by the simulations. When he was bored or upset, his first thought would be to turn on the Intermind and escape into a simulation. The simulations that once excited him became boring through familiarity. In search of the next high, the simulations became more extreme and bizarre, involving content that would have sickened the man he was before the Intermind came into his life. Because he had an athletic body, infinite wealth, all the women he wanted, and many friends in the simulations, he slowly lost the motivation to eat well, exercise, and socialise in reality. Simulations made reality worth less. He saw little reason to bother buying and maintaining a real house, when he could live with his parents and simulate any life he desired. He saw little reason to form a real human relationship, with all its obligations, potential embarrassments, and potential conflicts, when he could take the easy route by going in a simulation and have any relationship. His decreasing health and increasing social isolation, increased his misery and thus his dependency on the Intermind to make him feel good. Desire became habit, habit became necessity. He was either thinking about using the Intermind or thinking about quitting the Intermind. Using the device began to feel like an obligation. He gave up trying to rehabilitate himself and surrendered to the belief that it would always be in his life.

Jeremiah headed to Francis' room with the hope of encouraging him to join them at the dinner. He noticed him staying in his room for far too long since arriving at the palace. He saw him as a tech addict and hoped to help him. The guard in front of Francis' room went to inform him that Jeremiah was waiting outside. He feared that Jeremiah would encourage him to go to the dinner, and, though he wanted to be left alone, he told the guard to let him in to avoid offence. Francis was sat on the side of his bed, slightly hunched over with his hands

together. Jeremiah smiled, “Hi, Francis.” He looked in his direction with a poorly feigned smile, “Hi.” It seemed to him that Francis was unsure of himself even when performing the simplest of actions, that his loneliness made every interaction with anyone except his mother a monumental event. “Do you mind, if I stay here for a bit? Being with those old people all the time gets a little boring!” “Of course.” “How are you?” “I’m good.” He waited a moment for Francis to carry on speaking, but as there was silence, he said, “Are you enjoying your time here?” “Yes.” “Have you been around the gardens?” “No.” Jeremiah disliked the simulations of the Intermind, because he believed they made users too accustomed to high stimulation, leaving them incapable of enjoying the so-called simple things in life. “Ah, you’d love them, you should join us sometime.” Francis said nothing in return. Jeremiah looked around the room for something to talk about and noticed a psychology textbook on his bedside cabinet, “You’re studying psychology?” “Yeah.” “Can I have a look?” “Yeah.” Jeremiah took the textbook, sat back next to Francis, and perused it. “This is so interesting. How long have you been studying it?” “I started just recently.” “Are you enjoying it?” “Yeah, it’s pretty good.” “Do you use psychological tricks on people?” Francis laughed as he said, “No.” Jeremiah continued reading, “Hmm. I’d love to learn more about psychology one day. Maybe you could teach me one day?” “Okay.” “Yeah. That will be fun, man! What is it that interested you in psychology?” “Well, after I lost my job, I wanted to educate myself in a field more resilient to automation.” “Could you get a new job with a qualification you already have?” “I don’t have very good qualifications.” “I see. Well, I think that to start studying after you’ve lost your job, especially a subject that’s brand new to you, is really courageous, I really do.” “Thank you.” “But why do you want to get a job? Surely, your dad will buy you anything you want?” “Maybe, but I want to be independent and buy a place of my own.” “How comes you don’t want to stay in the palace? Is there something wrong with it?” “No.” Jeremiah joked, “Is it because I’m here?” Francis laughed, “No. I just want my own place.” “Fair enough.” Jeremiah doubted he could get more conversation out of Francis, so looked at his watch and said, “I should start getting ready for tonight’s dinner. Will you be joining us?” “No.” “How comes?” “I’ve never been to a dinner like that before. I wouldn’t know what to do.” “You can do whatever you want.” “Hmm.” “You’re over-thinking it. Most people will be too drunk to be judging you, if that’s what you’re scared of.” Francis was not convinced. He assumed everybody he met had a low opinion of him. His view of himself was comprised almost wholly by what he thought others thought of him. Since childhood, he believed every insult and doubted every compliment. He couldn’t imagine anyone wanting to interact with him at the dinner, except out of pity, or just because he was Arthur’s son. Francis felt torn, he didn’t want to disappoint Jeremiah, because he appreciated his kindness, but he feared being in a place outside of his control.

In the dining room of Appallinc CEO Steve Cook’s home, Arthur, Maria, Eric, Dean, Lauren, and Jeremiah were joined by various billionaire CEOs, all of whom paid a million guilders to have dinner with Arthur. The poor protested in the streets and faced the harsh hands of the law to influence the government with rare success, the rich attended fancy dinners to influence the government with frequent success. The dinner began precisely at 6PM to allow Eric to follow his daily schedule. On the dinner table were no plates, glasses, or cutlery. Each diner had a touch-pad in front of them built into the table’s surface displaying fifty hors d’oeuvres, fifty mini desserts, and fifty drinks. When a diner selected the food they wanted, a little section of the table’s surface opened then food was elevated towards their mouth, when the diner opened their mouth wide enough, the food would be deposited inside. When they selected a drink, a straw would extend from the table’s surface to their mouth. Only the

wealthiest in Gildland could afford the device, it was designed by a billionaire that thought cutting food then lifting it to one's mouth was a waste of time and energy.

Since founding the Love Party, Arthur was always fearful of being recorded, he would remind himself and other top members of the party to always behave as though they were being recorded. After being at one such dinner, and seeing how his behaviour around donors was radically different to his behaviour in public, Maria decided to secretly record the audio of this dinner then publish the recording for the world to see how he behaved behind the scenes. Arthur's security team checked the room before the dinner began to make sure it wasn't bugged and waited outside the room during it to make sure no-one eavesdropped. All guests, except for Arthur and Maria, were frisked for recording equipment by Dean. Maria wasn't frisked, because Arthur didn't like others touching her, he could just about tolerate others shaking her hand or politely hugging her. Maria handed over her phone, as did everyone else, but in her jacket kept Francis' phone she'd secretly taken from him earlier in the day and turned on the voice recorder just before entering the room.

They looked set for an enjoyable evening, when Arthur greeted the CEO of the steel production company, "I hear you work in the steel industry." "That's right, sir." "Ah. I do as well. I steal votes from Riley everyday!" and wild laughter took over the room. The dinner itself began with talk about Pete Riley. Arthur told them a joke he'd made earlier in the day, "Some reporter said to me, 'Riley plans to prohibit the sale of firearms. Should people be allowed to buy guns?' I said, 'No. Only I should be allowed to buy guns!'" The donors laughed as though it was the funniest joke ever made. One donor forced their laughter so hard they began to cough. Steve Cook said, "You have such a great sense of humour, Mr. De la Mer, you should use it against Riley. People would love to watch a loving man like you throw insults at him, he's been rude to you quite a few times!" He responded, "It's cruel to insult the inferior!" then the donors laughed loudly. Eric then brought the mood down with a long attack, "Riley is what I like to call a Copypaster, he simply copies and pastes the same opinion over and over again. He says there are too many Gildish people in Gildish theatre, there are too many Gildish people in Gildish sports, there are too many Gildish people in the Gildish army, and so on. He was smart to forge a career complaining about things being unequal, as the constant flux of life guarantees there is always some inequality to complain about. The subject matter is not all that remained the same. The attitude is always the same, the purpose is always the same, the lexicon is always the same, the style is always the same, the length is always the same. He parrots phrases such as 'male chauvinist pig' and 'toxic, hateful, and dangerous' those same words in that same order remarkably often. His desire to have an opinion on everything revealed to me his desire to control the world. One can so easily imagine the cogs in his supposed brain turning as he views a work of art, wondering how he can politicise it or searching for something to complain about. Having such trifles to moan over are the only way such lowly people may insert themselves into conversations on high subjects." As if Eric had not spoken, a CEO said, "The only people Riley attracts are the inferior. Any time they need help they always look for help from the government first and how to solve it themselves second." Another CEO replied, "They all want something for nothing, and I'm just sick of them, to be quite frank. As far as I'm concerned, they can all go to Hell. Once we've automated everything, I will give them one thing for free, they're graves!" They all joyously cried, "Hear! Hear!" Arthur said, "If you want to help the inferior, that's great, but the government shouldn't steal from you. It's self-evident that the wealthy know how to create the most wealth. They should be left free to make wealth without the



government in their pockets. With more wealth created, more charity can be given. Why should the government decide how you help the inferior? Who is to say they know how to help others? They don't have a good track record of that. We need to get government out of the way." Jeremiah asked, "If we live in a democracy, doesn't getting the 'government out of the way' mean getting the majority of voters out of the way for wealthy political donors?" Arthur proudly said, "Yes!" Everyone laughed and everyone, except for Maria and Jeremiah, loved him for always having the right answer. Steve Cook said, "What Riley's supporters don't understand is that it's actually loving to ensure people make their own way in life without government support. People that rely on the government are like kids with overprotective parents, they're weaker than kids that have to learn how to survive." Another CEO said, "And Riley's getting more and more overprotective. He's become obsessed with regulating everything." Arthur said, "I understand he's hurting your business." "Yes. We're forced to place a cap on how much our low-income customers can trade with, because Riley wants to protect them from losing money they can't afford to lose. We're missing out on a lot of revenue. Don't get me wrong, I don't like seeing people lose their money because they suck at trading, but, if they want to trade a certain amount, let them do it. Don't regulate, educate. Encourage them to learn how to trade. We must encourage self-responsibility." "We'll fix that. No problem. I think he's just scared of the public. He's trying to appear as if he cares." Another CEO said, "If Riley is scared of the public, he's completely out of touch. They're not worth fearing. All they do is complain then go back to work or use their Intermind to escape their troubles. Most people don't even know what's going on." Eric said, "You can say that again. The introduction of plays, and novels, and movies, have greatly distracted the rabble. They foolishly waste their time and passion on imaginary worlds whilst we enjoy the real world. They consume detective fiction, but do not detect who pulls their strings. Let the industries of distraction last forever, I say." "Hear! Hear!" cheered the diners. As he ate a rice-filled squash blossom, Steve Cook CEO said, "Even if they weren't distracted, we wouldn't have to worry. None of them have the patience needed for a revolution. They are addicted to instant gratification. If a revolution went a week without success, or faced a setback, they'd give up out of irritability then search for gratification elsewhere, probably by purchasing something!" "Hear! Hear!" Another CEO said, "We have technology to thank for shortening their patience. There was a time when people had to leave their home to get an item then a time when items could be delivered to their home within a few days then the next day then the same day, and, for these last few years, items have been delivered in minutes. Soon, we'll be able to deliver items within seconds. There was a time when people had to ask others, read a book, or go to a library when they had a question, now they can find an answer to almost any question they have in a few seconds by using the internet!" Steve Cook added, "And with the Intermind, answers come instantly, they don't even have to type." "Exactly my point!" Another CEO chimed in, "We can go even deeper than distracting them or making them too impatient to have a revolution. We can prevent revolutions at the genetic level. We could control people before they're born, by editing genes that influence social conformity and aggression." Arthur asked, "When will you be able to do that?" "We've been able to for years, but we aren't allowed to. Companies outside of Gildland can do pretty much anything, but Riley's holding us back." "When we win, you'll be able to do what you want, believe me. I've never understood why people worry so much about the side-effects of genetic editing, they speak as if people are perfect now. One look at Riley, and you know people aren't perfect!" Everyone laughed then another CEO said, "I'm not sure if we could get away with removing the restrictions on genetic editing. The internet

has made them all think they know everything, and Basic Income has given a lot of people a lot more free time to learn. Their knowledge is making them angrier, and I'm not sure how much angrier we can make them before they attempt some sort of revolution." Another CEO said, "Angrier, but without direction. They're all confused. They get a sense of empowerment through learning, and are satisfied with that. The truth is that life's pretty good even for those at the bottom. They have too much to lose by doing anything risky against us. Even if we shouted from the rooftops about the fact we can do, I don't know, stock buybacks, they'd tolerate it." Jeremiah said, "Not if it was properly explained to them. They wouldn't tolerate stock manipulation." "It's not *quite* stock manipulation." "It is. When a company buys their own stock, they're increasing their stock price by decreasing their available stock. Their stock price isn't going up because the company's actually become more valuable." "It's just a great way of giving value back to shareholders." "There are more important things in the world than that." Arthur said, "I think it's debatable whether stock buybacks are good for the economy. I like them, because it's an efficient use of excess cash. I have no problem with stock buybacks." "Thank you, Mr. De la Mer. You are always so understanding." "Ah, you're too kind." "It's just the truth. You're not like the others. You actually have respect for people like us. Riley said that when the next financial crisis happens, he would help the poor, but not give a penny to billionaires. How is that fair? We created the wealth! I'm sick of people acting as though workers create wealth. They don't create wealth, they're a cost. Innovators, inventors, and investors are the ones that create wealth. Workers are an expense and it's a pity they haven't all been automated into extinction." "Hear! Hear!" Jeremiah wanted to shout at them all, but, instead, displayed a thoughtful expression. The CEO felt spurred on, so said, "I really hate them, I cannot stand them. They are leeches. They're ungrateful. Not a single activist or philosopher has *ever* improved anyone's life, but people love them. *We* are the ones that improve living standards, but people hate us!" Steve Cook responded, "Fuck 'em. They're just jealous." "And they are wrong about *everything!* Let me give one example. The best way to save endangered species is to make them commodities, compare the populations of chickens and cows with rhinos and pandas. It's not a coincidence that the animals we commodify have a higher population! Yet environmentalists want cows and chickens to be decommodified! Doing that will decrease their populations! They only hate it because they're not making money from it." Lauren said, "Exactly! They think it's okay to be selfish because they're inferior, but it's not okay." "Hopefully, there'll come a time when we don't have to think of the public at all. The era of growing the population to grow our wealth is coming to an end. The future of growing our wealth depends on decreasing the amount of leeches using our resources. With automation making people obsolete, we should look into serious population reduction." Eric said, "It looks as though the war will be doing the job for us." As rain began attacking the mansion like arrows, a CEO said, "Hopefully the war doesn't kill our election chances." Arthur revealed his paranoid side that the donors hadn't seen before and that Eric and Jeremiah were tired of, "The war isn't even the greatest danger to our election campaign, the greatest danger is Green Eyes and his cult. The DIA will try to claim that I am funding Green Eyes then imprison me. They haven't arrested me yet, because they're trying to convince the public I am guilty first, so when they invent evidence connecting me to him they'll be more accepting of my arrest. The DIA know they'll cease to exist if I win, so they're doing all they can to stop me. It's astounding that when people speak of corruption they always think of politicians and businessmen, but look at the DIA! If people knew what they were up to, they'd be too afraid to wake up in the morning. Many serial killers were subject to their mind control experiments before they began killing, they traffic

drugs, they assassinate leaders of nations to weak to fight back, they have access to everyone's devices, and there are many more things they do even worse than all of that. Every single government agency is at war with us. I always knew they'd be against me in some capacity. If someone told me just a few weeks ago that the intelligence community would conspire against me by forming some cult led by that former student of mine, I would have called them crazy, yet here we are." He grew increasingly animated. Everyone was both fascinated and terrified. "We have to fight back. I want you guys to hack every government agency. You guys own everything they use, hack their computers, hack the cars of senior officials and drive them into walls, do anything you can. We cannot lose this because of a conspiracy against me. None of this is my fault. I'm not being a victim here. It's just a fact. None of this is my fault. The Climate War has nothing to do with me. Green Eyes being associated with me is not my fault. Basic Income means there are millions of people that will never vote for me. All of this is out of my control. Before these problems, I was on track to win by the largest margin in history." The freezing air, with no place to go, made harrowing, tortured screams at the sheltered people, pummelling the windows and rocking the doors to come in, capturing everyone's attention, until it died down after a few moments of nervous smiling from the diners. A moment of silence passed then the CEO of a payment processing company said, "Riley's campaign uses our services. We could threaten cutting off our services to them, if he continues accusing you of funding Green Eyes. I'm sure our competitors would agree to do the same, if you spoke to them." Arthur said, "I would deeply appreciate that." The CEO of a media company said, "And you know we're always doing the best we can for you." "I always appreciate it." The CEO of a beverage company said, "We have a private intelligence agency that spies on environmental activists that attack us. I bet many of those loonies are in or will join Green Eyes' cult. We could use the agency to find out where Green Eyes is hiding." "That sounds like a brilliant idea. I-" Maria's secret recording ended here when her phone ran out of battery.

On their way home, they all saw an ad for the Love Party on the billboards. There was sad music, an exhausted homeless man sitting in a train station repeatedly asking, "Has anybody got any spare change, please, so I can get into a BNB or a bed and breakfast, please?" Blue ink had been put on his feet where his socks had holes, and his coat was far too big for him. Next to him were newspapers stuck to the concrete. Followers of the Love Party, walking gladly through life, arm in arm, Open-Heart necklaces on, saw the man and went instantly to help him. Happy music began to play, whilst the man was delightfully surprised at their generosity. In the next scene, he appeared buoyant at a Love Party Welfare Centre.

When they returned to the Bennefeath Palace, Maria began charging the phone. An hour later, whilst everyone was asleep, except for Lauren and the staff, she woke up, took the phone, and locked herself in the en suite. She was excited to save the people living on Basic Income and workers in the public sector from being left for dead by the Love Party. Her heart began to race, as she imagined the whole world discovering how different Arthur was in front of donors. Her social media accounts had gained millions of followers since reuniting with him. However, she couldn't upload the recording to any of her accounts because they were controlled by the Love Party's social media manager. Arthur asked her to give over control of the accounts, so she would 'have less to worry about'. The true reason was because he didn't fully trust her to remain on side with the party, as she held very different beliefs to the party. Regardless, she wouldn't have uploaded the recording to her accounts, because she didn't want to be identified as the source of the leak. She hoped to stay at the palace instead of

return to her job and old home. She thought of creating anonymous accounts for the sake of uploading the recording, but they wouldn't have had any followers and therefore the recording would have made no impact. She sent the recording anonymously via email to every major news site then deleted all evidence from her phone.

## Statement 6: Creative Destruction

*TODAY'S TOP HEADLINES:*

*Listen to SHOCKING Leaked Recording of De la Mer and His Donors*

*Climate War: Advance of Poor Nations Begins to Slow in Mustrovar*

*Number of Lost Students With Green Eyes Feared to be in the Thousands*

*Intermind Simulations Will Be Regulated, and That's a Good Thing*

*Record Temperatures Hit Gildland*

Maria woke to shouting from Jeremiah's room. She rushed out of bed to discover more. Lauren had mentioned the leaked recording to Arthur during her daily briefing for him. He didn't bother listening to it, because the thought of doing so made him uncomfortable, and all he really cared about was people's reaction to it. Virtually all of his followers believed it was fake, virtually all of Riley's followers believed it was real, those still undecided were divided in half. Lauren doubted it would totally ruin his election chances, but that Riley would now only be a few hundred thousand votes behind him. If Arthur had listened to the recording, it would have been fairly obvious that Maria had recorded it, judging by the volume of voices and the diners seating positions, his voice was the loudest and he was sat next to her, diners sitting furthest away from the her were the quietest. Since he didn't listen to the recording, he was adamant that Jeremiah was behind the leak, because of how confrontational he'd been to donors through the years and last night, though he was not sure how he'd pulled it off. Jeremiah denied it and told Arthur to go through his phone and laptop, an offer he declined. Jeremiah struggled to talk through tears whilst Arthur had no tears and no problem talking. Maria had learnt through their argument that Jeremiah was being unlawfully restrained when he said, "Please let me leave," and Arthur said, "You are not leaving. Stop asking me to let you leave. As I've told you a million times, you're too important to be let go. You are being incredibly selfish. We have all made sacrifices for our mission, stop acting as if you deserve special treatment." She also learned that the Love Party was a plot and that Arthur didn't really believe what the party believed, when Jeremiah said, "You talk to those donors with such ease, you clearly share their opinions now, after spending so much time with them." "Don't talk as if I've been corrupted by them. You have no idea what you're talking about. If you think I've come to believe this Love Party nonsense, you're basically saying I'm an idiot. When we win, and implement our true plans, you will realise the stupidity of what you just said." She thought of getting her phone from her room then recording the argument to expose Arthur again, but he soon began shouting at Jeremiah with such force that she decided to go in Jeremiah's room out of concern that Arthur would hit him. When she entered, Arthur looked at her as though he'd been caught murdering someone. She asked, "What's going on?" He went to Maria and encouraged her out, "Nothing, my love. It was just a misunderstanding." "What was going on?" He closed the door behind them. "I have to go to a meeting now, my love. Please think nothing of that, it was really nothing, it was just a misunderstanding." Arthur went to his bedroom without her to get dressed, she followed a moment later. She asked him if Jeremiah was being unlawfully restrained. He laughed the

accusation off, “What makes you think that?” “He asked to leave and you said he was not to.” “That’s just my way of saying I don’t want him to leave! He is free to do what he wants.” Arthur began dressing faster, desperate to get away from her questions. “What did you mean when you said you don’t believe in ‘this Love Party nonsense’?” “Did I say that?” “Yes.” “I don’t remember that.” “You did.” “Well,” Arthur laughed, “I can’t explain something I don’t remember saying!”

Fifteen minutes later, Arthur, accompanied by Dean, went away for a photo-op. He was meeting a small group of undecided, working-class voters for breakfast to ‘listen to their thoughts and concerns about the country’, as if their opinions had any sway on a politician with billions of guilders behind him. He greeted them as though they were good friends and, to show he was listening, put on a concentrated face and nodded frequently, as advised by his acting teachers.

Taking advantage of Arthur’s absence, Maria planned to secretly record Jeremiah admitting the Love Party was a plot and that he was being unlawfully restrained. She thought that the idea of the Love Party being a plot was genius, but pitied Jeremiah and knew that by destroying it, he would be free to leave, and she still hated Arthur, so wished to see him upset, and doubted more than ever that he would be a good leader. Reflecting on the time in which she had known Jeremiah, she came to the conclusion that he would definitely admit the Love Party was a plot, if she asked. She noticed at the dinner that Jeremiah was on a different wavelength to the others. He didn’t laugh as loudly at their jokes, he didn’t say ‘Hear! Hear!’, and he was the only one to start a dispute. To her, he seemed honest and conscientious. She remembered an occasion when the top members of the Love Party were expressing their disapproval at the violent behaviour of Riley’s followers towards the Love Party’s, Jeremiah appeared conflicted, hesitant to engage in their damnation, he made excuses for their opponents, hoping to encourage peace between both sides. She remembered the previous day, when Lauren said to Arthur that certain members of staff were lazy, Jeremiah politely responded, “Maybe they’re not lazy, maybe they’re tired.” She remembered a video by a journalist questioning if Arthur could be trusted as the leader of Gildland because his mother was born in a different country, Jeremiah gave the journalist the benefit of the doubt whereas everyone else in the party condemned the journalist as a bigot. To her, he always seemed to do what he felt was right, despite the consequences. To begin her plan, she went to one of the palace’s living rooms, placed her phone in a pot of violas with only the camera sticking out, pointed at a sofa. In anticipation of Jeremiah entering the living room as he usually did after breakfast, she sat on the sofa with open body language. He entered the living room alone and they greeted each other. She said, as she patted the sofa, “Sit with me, darling.” Before he sat down, he said, “Oh, I was going to. I like your hair, by the way, Maria, it looks very nice today.” She had always loved how he often complimented people, “Oh, you’re so charming. When are you going to introduce us to your girlfriend?” “Which one?” She laughed and thought him adorable. “Your favourite one, of course!” “I don’t have one at all.” “How is that possible?” “I’m not allowed one.” “What?” She imagined Arthur didn’t let him. “He doesn’t let me have one. He thinks having one would upset our female supporters. He thinks I’m some sort of teenage pop-star heart-throb. It’s so ridiculous. I do hope to have my own family one day, so this can’t last forever.” “Well, that man is out of touch. He spends more time in conversation with books than with people. It’s understandable that he’d be a bit strange. I always told him to not get in politics, because I didn’t want him to get in trouble and I wanted a quiet life. That was only part of the reason. It was also because he’s out of touch. He’s

never worked a day in his life outside of Riverlake, he's a snob, he lives in his own little world, and he's arrogant." "Hmm." "You agree?" Realising his ambiguity, Jeremiah said, "Oh, no, no. I was just thinking." "So, you think there's a chance he's all of those things are true?" "No. It's just I've been thinking about how he's changed recently, so it's interesting to hear someone else's thoughts on him." Their conversation stopped as they heard Lauren shouting downstairs at a member of staff, condescendingly asking a staff-member if they knew what a clock was because they'd arrived two minutes late. When she stopped, Maria asked, "How do you think he's changed?" Jeremiah looked embarrassed, "Well, he only talks to me when he needs something from me. When other people do something wrong, he's polite to them. When I do something wrong, he screams at me." "Don't let him walk over you. He's rude to you, because you're too nice. He thinks you'll accept any mistreatment. That's the same reason teenagers act meek in front of strangers, but shout at their mothers over the slightest irritation, they think there'll be no serious repercussion. You should make sure there's a repercussion the next time he's rude to you, and stop making excuses for him." "I appreciate your concern, Maria, but I'm not making excuses. We've been friends for years, I know he's not a rude person." To get to the foundation of Arthur's and Jeremiah's relationship so that she could corrupt it, Maria asked, "Why are you friends with him in the first place? You could do so much better." "You say that as if you don't like him!" "I do like him, but that doesn't mean he's beyond criticism." "Well, he's intelligent, he's funny, I admire how hard he's trying to make the world a better place. We used to spend hours together on walks, talking about anything and everything. He was like no-one I'd ever met before. I remember once we came across a clock-tower, and we observed it for a few minutes talking about its design, and when we walked on, he said, 'Let me tell you about the philosophy of time,' and he lectured me on it for about half an hour, it was extraordinary. I took a lot of pride in being friends with him. I used to feel like I was part of an exclusive club, that my opinion was considered, and that I was appreciated." "Was." "Well..." "You can talk to me. What's going on?" "Nothing!" "Of course there is. You're always thoughtful of others, but no-one is for you. Open up to me, I'll feel guilty, if you struggle alone." A cleaner began Hoovering the hallway, so Jeremiah felt more comfortable speaking up, but nonetheless said, "Don't worry." "He's done something to you, hasn't he?" "No." "What's the worst thing he's ever done to you?" Jeremiah was confused by her persistence, he answered nonchalantly, "Nothing serious. It's just that when you're in the limelight, any mistake you make is severely criticised. You need to always appear happy, and, if you deviate, the person you represent gets upset." "What did he do when you upset him?" "I've said too much already." "Tell me, Jeremiah. I'm with you." Jeremiah's face blossomed like a rose with embarrassment, "He's shouted at me many times." "Really?" "Yes. It's terrifying. He can get so out of control." "That is serious." "I know." "Has he ever called you names?" "Hmm." "Like what?" Jeremiah hesitated a moment, and looked away, out of embarrassment. "He called me an idiot, he called me a naive child, and some other things." "Those names don't apply to you." "People don't think about how much their words hurt sometimes, but I do forgive him. He's stressed and one day the old Arthur will return once he's elected. The old Arthur never made me feel bad, so I know he doesn't really mean the cruel things he says." "What did you do that made him shout at you?" "I confronted his donor friends, like last night. I criticised one of them for being a multi-billionaire, a few weeks ago. All I said was that there's no need to have more than a billion guilders and that he would survive if his net worth was a hundred million. I wasn't even rude. I can't help expressing myself sometimes, and that's all I'm doing, I'm not trying to hurt anyone." "So, don't you agree with what the

Love Party stands for?” “I do for the most part,” said Jeremiah, and a chill came over him. He continued, “No free-thinker agrees on absolutely everything with another person. You can’t live your own life, gaining your own experiences, having your own conversations, having your own bookshelf, and then share the exact same opinions on everything with someone else. That’s impossible. All political parties have their disagreements, it’s a perfectly natural consequence of people thinking for themselves, we should be more concerned about groups that have no disagreements, and think twice about issues upon which there appears to be universal agreement.” “True. Though, I must say, I think it’s interesting that the three of you all believed one thing, and now with the Love Party you all believe something else.” “The three of us never agreed on everything.” “Yeah?” “Yeah, we agreed on a fair amount, but not everything. Eric believed in absolute monarchy, Arthur and I didn’t. Eric was religious. Arthur was sympathetic to religion because he liked its potential for unity and moral guidance, but he can’t believe in any because all religions are in contradiction with science and history. I can’t believe in any religion for the same reasons, but I’m not sympathetic towards religion, I think the world would be better off without religion, it causes division, and I think any good it does provide such as charity or a sense of purpose can be accomplished without all of the baggage like the peer-pressure parents put on their children to follow it, and the oppression of women. And you just know certain religions were so obviously written by men that own slaves, ‘God says women must obey men,’ ‘God says slaves must obey their masters,’ I wonder who authored that! Eric believed war was good, he thought it made people strong, and more appreciative, and more obedient to their elders. Arthur, well, the only time I’ve heard him speak of war is when he said Elimperia should be destroyed, but apart from that he never had Eric’s fervour for war, and I think war should be avoided at all costs. I think global trade, for all of its bad like consumer culture erasing cultures around the world, the clash of civilizations, and so on, it did help make the world more peaceful because governments tend to not want war with their customers or suppliers. Eric was a nationalist to a hostile degree. Arthur was a nationalist, but admired, and sympathised with, people of other nations. I was never a nationalist, I don’t think it’s good to tie one’s ego up to anything beyond one’s control, a nation or any group. To take pride in the accomplishments of people that happen to be where oneself is from or happen to have a similar appearance is the last resort of pride for the down-trodden, and I’m not trying to insult such people, I just think they’d be happier if they had their own accomplishments to be proud of. All nationalists around the world have two commonalities; they think the world is against them and they hate people of their own kind that aren’t as nationalist as they are because they consider them a hurdle to victory, as traitors, basically. I think people should only identify with friends and family. So, no, we’ve never agreed on everything, and we still don’t agree on everything.” Maria wasn’t looking for such a long answer, but pretended to be interested as she waited patiently for the end. It appeared to her that he was rambling because the question made him uncomfortable, so she pursued further, “It’s still interesting that the three of you all believe vastly different things to what you used to believe in. You used to believe wealth inequality was a great problem now you think taxation should be abolished, you used to criticise technological progress now you’re cosy with major tech corporations. You must admit the sudden change is somewhat suspicious. It’s as if you three created a party designed to get elected.” “That would be quite the conspiracy!” “It seems like the party only supports what is popular and is formulated to attract as much money as possible. Some may say it’s a plot.” “It’s not a plot.” “Honestly?” “My mum disowned me, because I’m in the party. Would I let a cause I didn’t care about do that?” “Well, I did overhear you two this morning and it sounded as though the party was a



plot.” “I don’t remember that.” “I guess you don’t remember saying that you want to leave either.” “I don’t remember saying that.” “God, I feel like such a fool.” He looked like he was about to laugh when he looked into her eyes as he said, “You are not a fool.” Judging by his tone of voice and facial expression, she felt sure he was trying to say that she was correct, but that he was fearful of admitting the truth. She looked at him with disappointment and understanding. The door opened, and they feared Arthur had returned earlier than expected and had been listening to them. Eric entered in his golfing outfit and Jeremiah arose as he realised he forgot about their game. Eric bowed to Maria, “M’lady.” “M’lord. How art thou?” “Life is a marathon of misery and rest only comes during sleep.” Maria smiled, thinking Eric adorable. He then turned to Jeremiah, “You are late.” “I know, I’m sorry. See you later, Maria, unless you want to come?” “No, I’m tired. Definitely next time.” “Okay. I’ll see you later.” “See you.” As they left, Eric said to Jeremiah, “I thought you feared joining, because you was tired of losing.” “I don’t mind losing, I’m used to it!” “If it is any consolation, we all lose in the end, my lad.” “I wish some would lose faster.” “Hmm. What were you two talking about?” “Why it’s more common to see a beautiful woman with an ugly man than a beautiful man with an ugly woman.” “Oh, how petty.” When they left the room, Maria deleted the video. She feared getting Jeremiah into more trouble, as she doubted the video would be powerful enough to destroy the Love Party.

At two in the afternoon, Arthur, Maria, Eric, Dean, Lauren, Francis, and Jeremiah rode in their motorcade to the Olympic Stadium where Arthur was to give a speech in front of a hundred thousand followers, as he did a few times a week around the country. Francis didn’t want to go, but Arthur forced him to because he wanted them to appear like a happy family in front of the public. They had to leave early, because one of the motorways connecting to the stadium was blocked off by bounty hunters and ambulances. From the forestry cushioning the motorway, dozens of Green Eyes’ followers threw stones the size of fists at three cars belonging to an insignificant party called the Workers Party. Their stones killed the drivers on impact and destroyed the wheels, crashing the cars, killing all passengers, as well as unintended targets in two cars nearby. Hours before the attack, at 3AM, one of Green Eyes’ followers graffitied in the road precisely where the attack eventually took place, ‘**NOT HAVE FLOWN TO YOUR MOUNTAINOUS THRONE, OR DOVE INTO YOUR BLUE INFERNO,**’ before returning to the forest.

As they turned on the car radio, an ad for the ECSL Party was nearing its end. An old lady said, “Please, don’t take my Basic Income away. I’m all alone.” Then Riley said, “I’m Pete Riley, and I approve this message.” Arthur began changing the stations in search of the classical one. A station was playing a modern song in a style that was popular forty years prior. The next played a song written by eleven people about how well the singer performed sexually with vivid descriptions and random lines about how wealthy she was, the news publication that Riley used to work at said the song was ‘an epic meditation on female femininity and empowering for women everywhere.’ The next played a song with lyrics about how talented, wealthy, and famous the singer was which also included belittling statements to his ‘haters’ whilst also thanking his fans for their support. Another played a song in which the singer expressed that they didn’t care about what people thought of them. The next played a song telling listeners that they are free to do what they want in life. Then Arthur found the classical station which was in the middle of playing an operatic aria. Overcome by it’s beauty, Arthur said, “It’s only possible to enjoy modern music if one doesn’t know better. How can anyone listen to music this powerful then go back to that lazy,

robotic, garbage? It's as if the more machines people surround themselves with, the more mechanical art becomes. And what's sad is that they're so used to that simple noise that their minds can't accept anything more expressive." Eric said, "Well, most people do not know any better. They listen to it because it happens to be popular at this time and place, just like how they dress and hold opinions that happen to be popular at this time and place. They all have the same opinions because they all visit the same websites, watch the same shows, watch the same movies, all handed to them by the mainstream, it has not dawned on such people that a world exists outside of it. They all dress the same, they all go to the same places on holiday, they all have the same vocabulary, they all listen to the same rubbish, they all buy the latest gadgets, they all have the same opinions, and they all think books are boring. It is quite extraordinary. It's as if someone's cloned the exact same retard over and over and over again." Everyone laughed, even Jeremiah did unlike the time Eric made that same joke three years before. Maria said, "Oh, Eric, you are so funny!" She then turned to Dean and asked, "Do you like opera, Dean, darling?" He solemnly said, "I respect any work of art that's true and doesn't glorify weakness." "But do you like it, darling? I said do you *like* it?" Dean stroked his beard then said, "No." "Why?" "I don't understand why they keep screaming at each other." Eric said to Maria, "Opera is not popular, because it requires more than five seconds of patience. If something is popular, it is rarely worth much. For an artwork to be popular, it must conform to the tastes of the worthless masses. There is no greater shame for a real artist or thinker than popularity in this country." For the rest of the journey, Dean wondered if he'd been insulted.

As they were nearing the stadium, they could increasingly hear anti-Love Party protesters by the stadium's entrance. As a way of proving he was a liar, a man with a megaphone recited some of what Arthur had written before founding the Love Party, "Diversity causes division, similarity causes unity," and the crowd shouted back, "Said Arthur de la Mer." The back and forth continued. "Strong marriage laws are vital for raising healthy children." "Said Arthur de la Mer" "Capital gains tax should be increased." "Said Arthur de la Mer." "Basic Income will be one of humanity's greatest achievements." "Said Arthur de la Mer." "Elimperia should be destroyed." "Said Arthur de la Mer." And they continued a few more times bringing up things Arthur had said before founding the Love Party. Arthur's followers acted as apologists for his old writings, they had debates with Riley's followers in the streets, screaming at them that his old writings meant nothing because Arthur was reborn, and that he was always well-intended. One advantage Riley had over Arthur was that millions of his supporters were on Basic Income whereas virtually all of Arthur's supporters worked, meaning Riley's supporters had more free time to be politically engaged, more time to spend witch-hunting Arthur's supporters online and organising street protests. Arthur and co. noticed one of their supporters heading to the stadium, holding a sign towards that group of Riley's followers saying, 'BYE-BI!' exemplifying the hatred they had for those living on Basic Income because of their supposed laziness and income tax being increased to fund it. A Riley supporter, that happened to be driving by the stadium, stopped and began shouting insults at Love Party supporters. When they started shouting back, he drove away, still insulting and looking at them instead of where he was driving, the driver crashed into a post. Arthur's followers laughed and swarmed the car then attacked the lone driver until the Overwatch alerted those nearby of the attack. Arthur and Riley both received many death threats because of how their policies threatened people's livelihood. In a time of peace, they would have dismissed the threats, knowing that no serious assassin warns their target. However, due to the civil unrest, and being in a time when millions of people's livelihoods were on the line,

they both couldn't help fearing for their lives. Like a painful medical procedure one must go through to recover, there seemed to be a certain amount of pent-up anger in the country that had to be released before calm would return. However, no-one could see a sign of abatement, no reason for true reconciliation between different sides. Increasingly, people mentally prepared themselves, and even yearned, for civil war. There were calls for unity but there was no blood, god, or culture to unite them, there were only vague notions of 'being Gildlanders' and their 'shared values', which meant nothing, as anyone could become a Gildlander.

As the Olympic Stadium came into view, Lauren said, "It's become impossible to escape politics. At work, I talk about politics, on the car radio, people with the most surface knowledge, who usually never talk about politics, feel as though they have the right to judge us, almost every movie has some sort of political message, when I have a family get-together almost every conversation is about Riley, Arthur, the war, or Green Eyes." The rising sound of boos could be heard coming from near the stadium's entrance. Lauren continued, "It's always funny to see family members hide their extreme views, they pretend to be in sympathy with who they're listening to. They say, 'I suppose,' or 'I see, I see,' whilst they're clearly disgusted." Arthur and Dean looked out of the window, and were alarmed at how many of the Riley's followers were between the motorcade and the entrance. Maria said to Lauren, "Indeed, too many families have been torn apart by politics." Before they could continue talking, a barrage of eggs and tomatoes hit the car as they were nearing the entrance of the stadium. Everyone in the motorcade ducked. Arthur held Maria's hand and shielded her. The windows were too messy to be seen through. The Overwatch alerted those nearby for the attackers to be taken to a Virtual Rehabilitation Centre, but still the eggs and tomatoes rained on the car. The motorcade accelerated into the stadium's underground car park and into safety. Lauren shouted in fury, "How did they get so close?" Jeremiah asked, "Is everyone okay?" Arthur flippantly said, "Everyone is fine. This attack will make Riley look bad, be glad it happened!" Upon exiting the car, Arthur whispered to Dean, "Find out who let them near us then beat them to death."

As they made their way to the stage, they could hear the hundred-thousand-strong crowd chanting, 'Love beats hate, there is no debate!' There were giant torches on the sides of the stage, there was a large and burning Open-Heart symbol high at the back of the stage, and epic choral music played for his entrance. The crowd, packed like leaves of grass, waved white flags bearing a red Open-Heart symbol. There were large, white banners around the stadium with the same symbol. One large flag in the crowd had a cartoon of Riley appearing like a bank robber that was captioned 'CRIME MINISTER PETE RILEY'. Another flag was of Riley being shot, with gold coins pouring out of his bullet wounds, with the caption 'TAX IS THEFT. GIVE OUR MONEY BACK'. When Arthur arrived on stage followed by the others, the crowd roared. Dozens fainted as he entered the stage. Fainting had become so common at his speeches that ambulances waited by the sides. The crowd, full of the lonely, the needy, and the depressed saw him as the world's most valuable jewel, promising wealth in all forms. They all smiled and waved at the crowd except for Francis who was too overwhelmed by the harsh light of the public eye. A young girl broke through the security barrier then rushed to the stage with a letter for Arthur. A security guard stopped her, but Arthur called down to him, "It's okay. Let her up!" and the guard obeyed him. The crowd applauded the act of kindness. He knelt down and hugged her. Tears fell as she gave him the letter, and he read it with his arm around her. It was a letter asking him to speak to her dying father, it also included a drawing of Arthur and all of his supporters holding hands. Arthur

went down the side of the stage with the girl to greet her father. The man was sat in a wheelchair with his wife standing beside him. Arthur lent over the barrier and gently kissed the man's forehead, held his hand tightly, and spoke to him. He then shook the hand of his wife who'd been crying all the while deeply thankful for the gesture. Arthur picked up the girl and returned her to her mother then took a seat at the back of the stage whilst Eric proudly stood at the podium. As the crowd died down, Riley's supporters could be heard chanting outside the stadium.

Eric began, "My Comrades, allow me to recite part of a letter written by the great statesman Daniel Arrowsmith. It is regarding a nightmare he had of the government betraying our nation's ideals of freedom and small government. It was written more than two hundred years ago, but is sadly relevant today. This passage articulates the trouble that will befall us, if we let Riley win the election. 'A shiver ran through the spine of Gildland. The mirror it vainly gazed into slipped from its quivering hand and smashed into pieces, disfiguring its reflection of superiority, showing countless perspectives in return. Disoriented, it stumbled in search of balance, hearing guidance from voices historical and new, native and foreign, reasonable and hysterical, warm and cold. Like one lost in a forest, who runs for civilization, but falls deeper into the wild, who tries to evade predators, but steps on snakes, who screams for help, but attracts fearful creatures.' There is only one man who can save us." The crowd cheered. "He who is most loving, he who is most forgiving, he who shall guide us towards love, he who shall defend us from the Hateful, a guide for those wishing to attain unconditional love." As Eric continued, Dean entered the stage and approached Arthur, he whispered, "I had a word with the idiots that run this place. Of course, they all acted as though they were unaware. I say we never come here again, sir." "Indeed. I don't feel comfortable at all." Arthur resumed listening to Eric, and Dean stood at the side of the stage. Eric's introduction continued, "People are born hateful, selfish, inconsiderate, and untrusting. Hatred is the natural state of man. If love is wise, it must surely be taught, and none are more qualified than him. To be mocked for what he believed before starting the Love Party, to be mocked for his current beliefs, to receive death threats everyday, to be accused of funding Green Eyes, and to still have genuine, unrequited love for the accusers proves that he is our inspiration, our incorruptible leader, our fixed star. Before him, love only graced the world by chance, as the world did not yet know of his teachings, therefore, much of the world has been constructed in hatred, so constructing a world built upon his message of love will require much dedication from each of you. In your dedication, be careful of reading or listening to those who do not think in the name of love, be careful of those who pretend to think in the name of love. Only he will hold are empty hands across the bridge between this world of hate and his world of love, that world where no-one will be without a friend, where he will not let anyone cause offence, where the bountiful rewards of respect, friendship, and peace of mind come to us who are of love. As for those who are listening and do not agree with his thoughts, those who claim to love, but do not agree with him in your heart, you will suffer a severe punishment. Welcome, the leader of the Love Party, Arthur de la Mer!"

The crowd cheered, Eric left the podium, Arthur rose then at the podium made the Open-Heart hand symbol to the crowd. He found no enjoyment in speech-giving, he found it to be a nuisance distracting him from Maria and writing books. He watched them applaud him for an entire minute. Arthur put up a hand and they fell silent in an instant. He felt the audience was so tightly in his hands, that he could say almost anything and they'd follow, so he improvised the beginning with what was on his mind. He spoke gently to the crowd as

always, “Eric, thank you for the kind introduction, and thank you my Comrades for coming on this beautiful day the sun has blessed us with. If only the beauty of our mortal hearts matched that great jewel of nature. On our journey here we were subjected to booing and taunting, eggs and tomatoes were thrown at our car. Much worse has been inflicted on people without the security team I am lucky to have. I am sure you have all heard the news from last night. An old man, drunk and down on his luck, stumbled through the streets, shouting, ‘Arthur will forgive us! Arthur will forgive us all!’ A pack of Riley’s supporters noticed this man was all alone then surrounded him, they called him names, and laughed at him as he cried, they then knocked him to the ground. This was filmed and met with much amusement by Riley’s supporters online. He lied there unconscious, until he was discovered in the morning. I am delighted to confirm that the Love Party Welfare Association located this poor man and he is currently being provided with shelter and love.” The crowd applauded and some wiped tears from their eyes. “But that man should have never been hurt in the first place. We honour the dead, but are hesitant to embrace the living, we wish the dead rest in peace, but we do not wish the living to be in peace, the time to love is *now*.” The crowd cheered. “The Love Party has contacted the perpetrators of the crime because we want to have a friendly, civil conversation with them to discover, without condescension, how that fire of hatred was kindled in their hearts, and what we can do to make them loving, so that they may become more peaceful moving forward.” The crowd applauded. “We could have condemned the perpetrators, we could have taken pride in looking down on them as evil, we could have chosen to hate them, but that would not have made the world a better place, all that would have done is further alienate both parties. Hatred is foolish.” The crowd applauded. The Lady With the Red Briefcase was upset that people accepted what she considered nonsense, but also tempted to exploit them similarly. “We have built a community like no other, where the elderly do not have to worry about loneliness, where the poor do not have to worry about deprivation. We are solving every problem with love! There has never been a community like us, free from suspicion, spite, and envy. When we see someone acting in hate, we must remember that they are not a person of hate, but rather a person acting hatefully. We must remember that within us all are the flames of love and hate, that is a condition we cannot determine, but what we can determine is which flame we feed and which flame we kill. Who is to say we’d not also act hatefully if we’d been born as they had and experienced what they had? We must look upon such people like how many look at the nutritionally malnourished of the world, with crying eyes and hands of charity, because people that commit acts of hate have a malnourished heart. But what shall we do, if our love is rejected by them? Well, then, we give them more love, then more, then more!” The crowd cheered wildly and before they stopped, Arthur said, “And, yes, that love extends to Pete Riley!” The cheer rose. Adults wept. Arthur wiped sweat from his forehead with a handkerchief then continued, “When someone commits an evil act against us, we must not use that one act to judge their entire being, we must see each individual as a collection of endless acts and possibilities. They may have done much good in their life, they may yet do good to those they’ve wronged, they may regret what they’ve done, but doubt their apology would be believed, we must keep an open heart for those who hurt us. The most loving man in the world, whoever he may be, can be changed to the most hateful with enough influence. When you see a hateful person, you must be able to see the good person trapped inside and help them escape their shell. Often those that hurt others are already hurt themselves. When someone hurts you, do not try to hurt them back, try to discover their motivation for hurting you, and try to heal them. One act of evil done against you is not the end of your story with that individual, there is always time for

reconciliation. This is why keeping an open heart is vital, without an open heart the act of evil becomes the final act of the story, with an open heart there is always time for enemies to become friends. Love is a choice. Happiness is a choice. What makes it so difficult for enemies to become friends? Often, a conflict of interests. Yet that is what Riley, with all due respect, is allowing to divide our nation. There is one group who have been made dependent on Basic Income and another group who are robbed via income tax to fund Basic Income. It is not a surprise that our nation suffers from irreconcilable divisions. If we are elected, we will eliminate Basic Income, and thereby unite Gildland. People living on Basic Income now need not worry about a future without it. When taxation is abolished, our great companies will have the ability to create more jobs and the followers of the Love Party will always be here to give the encouragement needed to become an entrepreneur. When we abolish taxation, you will be free to use your money as you wish. For my part, I am today donating half of all donations that have been given to my campaign and half of my net worth to the Love Party Welfare Association. I would rather the needy have it than me!” The crowd applauded with great enthusiasm. The donation never happened, it was simply a PR move. That the hoax may be uncovered didn’t worry Arthur, after all, it was a drop in the ocean compared to the other lies he’d told since starting the party. “Despite the Love Party being formed only two years ago, I have experienced more happiness in this time than during all past decades. This happiness has come from selflessness more than anything else. If someone tells me they want something I have, I find more joy in giving it to them than keeping it. If someone tells me then want to climb a mountain, I stop what I’m doing, and say to them, ‘Let’s go together. I am here to help you!’” The crowd applauded. “Do not expect the love you give to always be returned, do not always expect to be taken seriously by those you try to love, or onlookers, but rest easy with the knowledge that you had good intentions. I have dedicated my life to spreading love to people all over the world, and yet I am subjected to many rumours, notably, they speculate now that I am the one funding Green Eyes, even though there is no evidence of me doing so. If we are, however, to look at the evidence, what we find is that Riley, with all due respect, subsidises, with money stolen from each of you via taxation, the oil industry and the meat industry, which has caused the climate change that Green Eyes is so angry about. To me, it seems the conspiracy theories of the Love Party funding a wild man in the woods is an entertaining distraction. And whilst I do not at all agree with the acts of terror committed by Green Eyes and the Lost Students, I am as angry as they are with Riley. After all, it is Riley’s lax attitude and the subsidies that he gives to industries that destroy the environment that have led to the Climate War. Most upsetting is that there are people benefiting from the war as the rest of the world suffers. These profiteers are in government now, and people that were recently in government were or are working in top positions at Gildland’s arms manufacturers. These individuals go through that infamous Revolving Door, taking inside information from the government to their employers to let them know what’s going on, and using their contacts in government to help their employers influence the conversations that really matter. I fear that Riley, with all due respect, will allow this hateful, toxic, and, actually, very dangerous, relationship between the private sector and the public sector, to eventually convince him that the Climate War must continue for as long as possible so they may earn as much money as possible. I, however, will close the Revolving Door!” The crowd applauded. “All wars are unnecessary. What we need is an open heart to the nations of the world. And, yes, that even includes Elimperia.” The crowd cheered, hoping to never go to war against Elimperia. “We must talk to one another. If you vote for the Love Party, we will ask our global allies to provide shelter and their fair share of aid for the climate refugees. Providing

shelter and aid is not only the peaceful solution, it is also much cheaper than going to war against them. Why has Riley, with all due respect, not chosen this more peaceful and cheap solution? Because, for his wealthy friends, there is more money to be made in selling arms than in providing aid to the displaced. The government really is that heartless. The only way to get money out of politics is by voting for the Love Party. There is no alternative. When it comes to the Climate War, the ECSL Party is for warfare and the Love Party is for welfare. Eventually, the ECSL Party will ship you away from the comfort of Gildland to where your cries will be mocked and where you will live in constant fear of death. If you do not vote for the Love Party, you are allowing victims of the Climate War to suffer for longer than they already have. If you do not vote for the Love Party, Green Eyes and his cult will continue to terrorise Gildland. Do not think for one moment that he will stop at his current targets, he will terrorise until he is king. If you do not vote for the Love Party, civil unrest in our once peaceful land will continue because Riley doesn't understand that a conflict of interests is the root cause of the struggle. If you do not vote for the Love Party, Riley will continue increasing the size of the government until it controls every aspect of your life, the increasing scope of Basic Income is but a small glimpse at the coming tyranny. If you do not vote for the Love Party, more jobs will be lost to automation. We love technology, it keeps us warm, it helps doctors and nurses at work, it is vital to our security, but when technology starts taking jobs without creating enough new ones and leaves people with no purpose in life, then it is going too far. Riley, with all due respect, does not care about any of that, he will allow technology to continue stealing jobs, so that the rich get richer from cheaper labour. The ECSL Party is so corrupt. Instead of awarding multi-million gilder contracts to companies that can provide the best service for the best price for the public, they award contracts to companies run by their families and their donors without care for overspending or quality. They steal your money via tax then give your money to their friends, can you believe it? MPs also receive what is called a Loss of Office Payment, if they lose their seat in a general election, they receive tens of thousands of pounds for losing an election! This Maria, um, excuse me, this mafia takeover of the government will never end, unless you help the Love Party win. I feel like I have so much knowledge within me that can improve the world, I would feel guilty, if I didn't spread that knowledge, and I feel a profound anxiety for every moment of misery people endure because I am not in power to give them love. To ensure the continuance of our great democracy, we must all dedicate more time to teaching what is loving and what is hateful to people not yet with us. There are only seven days until election day, so please do everything you can to turn this world of hate into a world of love. Life is not a prelude, the time to love is now. My Comrades, I love you all!" The crowd cheered. For all of his speeches, the Love Party directed a camera towards the crowd, and used a crowd-analytics service to identify the feelings of everyone in the crowd. This information allowed his speechwriters to precisely understand how the crowd felt about the words used, his facial expressions, and his tone of voice. It allowed them to edit future speeches accordingly to get the best possible response. He'd given so many speeches that his speeches were just about perfectly received at this point.

As Lauren went to the podium and Arthur returned to the back of the stage, they exchanged the Open-Heart hand symbol. Lauren said to the audience, "Good afternoon, everybody. It's that time when we invite people to share their stories of struggle and how they came to join the Love Party. Our first speaker was alone in Gildland until she joined the Love Party. Her family are from the Poor Nations and locked inside the Climate War. She believes that Arthur is the only one that can rescue them. Here to tell her story is Ejetar Yulijin. The lady entered

the stage to warm applause. Arthur stood up to greet her, and she was crying over meeting her hero for the first time. Arthur put his hand out for her, she shook it for a brief moment, but couldn't look at him as she was too overwhelmed by his presence. When she was more composed, she bowed, kissed the back of his hand then tapped it on her forehead. She then shook his hand firmly, and said, "Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!" Truly moved, Arthur said, "Thank you for coming. I very much look forward to hearing your story. I hope all works out well for you and your family." The lady weakly once more said, "Thank you," with a look of profound dependency and sorrow. She went to the podium and spoke in a timid voice, "Thank you, Mr. De la Mer, for letting me speak today. Before the Love Party, I had no friends in Gildland, but, thanks to him, now I do. Before him, I had no voice, but now I do, and I wish to use my voice for those that still do not have one. Like many people in the world, the people I am speaking on behalf of today are victims of circumstance, hostages to forces beyond their control. Before the war began, many of the women in my family lost their jobs because the garment factory they worked in was relocated to Gildland where their jobs are now done by robots, and many of the men in my family lost their jobs in farming because climate change destroyed their land. Such stories are common back home. They had already been forced to migrate inside Carambriar years prior due to rising sea levels, but when the country became uninhabitable they had no choice but to leave for safer lands. For miles outside the country, they found no refuge, only more of what they were trying to escape and people as desperate as they were. Their only hope of mere survival was to reach a country that was hostile to them, I shall not name that country out of the respect that Mr. De la Mer has taught me to have for all people. Unfortunately, the country they arrived in was without open-hearted people like Mr. De la Mer. They were hostile to them despite them only wanting help. Those of my family not yet killed in the Climate War are fighting in the Climate War, and they have fought for so long it is difficult for them to continue. I received a letter from them just yesterday. It said, 'Do not come here. Once you're here, you cannot escape, but even if you can, you can't escape the cries and endless sights of violence, they will haunt you forever.' Arthur pitied such speakers and the people of the Poor Nations, but their stories failed to convince him to change his plan, unbeknownst to them, of only helping the Rich Nations, as they were the nations closest to his heart. They were the ones he identified with, the ones he considered most beautiful, of the greatest thinkers, of the most civil, and he believed helping the people of the Poor Nations by providing refuge for them in such nations would jeopardise what he loved. He was ashamed of this position, but preferred to be ashamed of failing people he didn't identify with over those he did identify with.

Arthur was pulled from these thoughts when Dean grabbed him whilst shouting at the rest on the stage to run. They rushed off whilst the speaker looked behind her wondering why they'd gone as she was yet to finish her speech. All were confused, as they hadn't heard or seen anything to suggest they were in danger, but Dean had gained their trust after years of service. As they left the stage, they heard a legion of machine guns firing from the sky. They glanced back as they continued to follow Dean, and saw a swarm of drones firing at the screaming, scattering crowd. Several drones flew to the stage, intent on killing Arthur, but Dean evacuated them just in time. They found safety in their green room. The speaker had been paralysed by shock and fear, and failed to escape in time. The green room was windowless and down a narrow hall. Arthur, Eric, and Jeremiah helped Dean board up the entrance with benches and chairs. Two of Arthur's guards stood outside to protect them with guns as large as their legs. Lauren filmed them in the green room to release the video afterwards to gain pity from voters. Francis turned on the television to find a news channel reporting the event



and left it muted to avoid adding another jarring noise. Inside, they sat, without speaking, hearts pounding, breathless, most feeling guilty for being in safety when the crowd was not. Arthur was seated, holding Francis' and Maria's hands. With each shot, he felt as though he was the one being shot, for he knew who they really wanted to kill. The world without being beyond his control, the world within he sought to calm. He refused responsibility for provoking the attack, he told himself that if he'd never started the Love Party, there'd be even more violence in Gildland, because a different challenger to Riley wouldn't have had such a profound message of love and peace like his party. Such a belief was all that comforted him in this deathly hour. Having read and watched so many stories of violent civil unrest in recent times in their own country, the thought that they'd eventually be involved in one had harboured a place in the back of all their minds. The firing machine guns and the screaming and crying went on continuously. The meat mincer didn't stop turning. The brutal consistency of the massacre outside forced them to think about it, there was not a free moment to console themselves with optimistic thoughts. The bombs shook the walls and the floors, the bullets shook their minds, and they felt their bodies would explode from the volume. Every second, the green room was getting smaller and hotter. All were teary-eyed except for Dean who stood brooding by the door. Maria pulled Francis close to her. In Arthur's mind, the machine guns were laughing and the bombs were shouting doom...doom...doom... Jeremiah sat hunched over with tears falling down his cheeks and his fingers in his ears. The two guards outside the green room's door stole everyone's attention when they began firing, they tore down a group of drones that were searching for Arthur. Friends and family rang Dean, Arthur, Maria, and Jeremiah, to check if they were alive after news broke of the massacre. Feeling humiliated and almost certain he was living his last day, Arthur felt starved of the sensation of power, so went up to eat the food placed in the green room, and contemplated how they could get revenge on his prime suspect, Riley. As reports of the attack began to circulate around the world, the ECSL's supporters were delighted to see one of their darkest fantasies come true and hoped that Arthur would soon be reported as dead.

After twenty minutes of near silence from everyone in the green room, Dean passed on the first good news he'd received since the attack began, "Bounty hunters have arrived." Over the next thirty minutes, Dean provided updates he'd received from the surviving guards to the green room, the bombs came to a stop, and the guns fired less frequently. The lowered noise outside made it possible to have a conversation. Arthur gestured to Lauren to stop filming. He then said in a furious voice that everyone was too scared to calm, "I knew we shouldn't have come here. These speeches are a total waste of time. Everyone out there already loves me. What's the fucking point of it? The people that hate me don't watch them unless I make a gaffe. Is there any evidence these speeches are effective, or are we just doing it because it's the done thing?" When he realised no-one knew the answer, he continued, "From now on, I'm just going to record speeches at the Bennefeath. It's safer and we'll save time. Everyone's online now, anyway. When I go out in public, I want an army around me at all times with a helicopter to escape, if need be. This cannot happen ever again." Lauren said whilst looking at her phone, "Do you want to hear a joke?" Arthur looked at her. "Riley's given a statement on the attack. It's basically an elaborate way of saying we deserved it." "Let's hear it." "Out of respect for the victims of today's attack at Arthur de la Mer's rally, and as a security precaution, I have cancelled my own rally that was planned for this evening. I have warned for a very long time that De la Mer's divisive," Arthur smirked, "rhetoric was dangerous. De la Mer has created an us-versus-them mentality by consistently calling his opponents 'Hateful'. We all have our differences, and I know how much concern there is

because of the unprecedented problems we currently face, but we must remember these problems hurt us all, that we are all in this together, and that the only way to address these problems is together. I will continue to do everything I can to unite the country. We will not allow the De la Mer's of the world to divide us." Jeremiah commented, "He spoke as if the victims were an afterthought." Maria added, "So disrespectful." Eric replied, "To the surprise of no-one. Does he behave like someone that respects even himself?" Arthur ignored them and said, "You'll never convince me the DIA were unaware this would happen. Without compliance from the very top, you can't organise an attack like this in this fucking surveillance state we're in. We need to accept that things aren't going to be the way they were. This conflict cannot be resolved peacefully anymore. We will have our revenge. Don't you worry about that." Disturbed, Jeremiah asked, "'Revenge?'" Arthur turned to him, "Yes." "Against who?" "Who do you think?" "There's no evidence Riley was involved." "Common sense is the evidence." "No, it's not. We should be careful with placing blame." "I have been." "By 'revenge' do you mean killing thousands of Riley's supporters?" "Shut up." In retreat, Jeremiah said, "It was just a question." "Enough! This is going on and I have to listen to you as well!" To break the deafening silence, Francis turned the TV on and put on a news channel. When Arthur saw the bloody scene they were showing of the outside, he told Francis to turn the TV off, and he obeyed him. Just before it was turned off, they noticed graffitied on the stadium's exterior, 'THIS COULD BE THE LAST TIME TIME TIME TIME TIME!' To many, the message all but confirmed that the attack had been ordered by Green Eyes. However, a question remained as to why Arthur's followers had been targeted, as Green Eyes had sworn to only kill the heads of political parties and executives of environmentally destructive companies that didn't accept his demands.

Thirty minutes later, Dean received the message they'd all been dying for, "Outside is clear for us. We can leave now." They removed the barricade at the door. Before exiting the green room, Arthur said, "Francis, cover your eyes and hold your mother's hand." Francis was annoyed at being spoken to like a child, but complied to keep the peace. As they hurried to the helicopter, paparazzi photographed them from the barrier far away. Their desperation to go home overrode the fear some of them had of riding a helicopter. So occupied were their minds by violence, they were sure another terrible incident would happen next. They imagined the helicopter shot down, their families attacked, and the Bennefeath plundered upon their return. For the first ever time, Jeremiah saw Eric's stone wall crumble, he put his arm around his shoulder. In that moment, the delicate finitude of life became painfully clear to him.

Three days later, a memorial service was held for the eighty-thousand that passed away. Arthur, Riley, top members of their parties, senior members of the Royal Family, and thousands of people attended. The two men pretended to be oblivious to one another, except for one moment in which Arthur stared at Riley with a look of such condemnation that Riley had to look away.

## Statement 7: Vultures Await

*TODAY'S TOP HEADLINES:*

*Rumours MOUNT of Tensions in Upper Echelons of the Love Party*

*Ahead of Gildish Election Debate, Sirkitus Claims to 'Not Mind' Who Wins*

*Maria's Top Ten Fashion Moments*

*How Was Green Eyes' Cult Able to Form in the Information Age?*

*Software Engineer Fired for Supporting Riley*

The deep plunge of emotions caused by the massacre eased with usual days and nights, and the more peaceful news coming in from around Gildland such as Arthur's, and Riley's, followers spitting on each other, throwing eggs at each other, fire-bombing party offices, insulting each other, friends and family members falling apart because of political differences, the extinction of entire species, rumours that Elimperia was planning an attack on undersea cables that connected Gildland's internet to other continents, Green Eyes' followers assassinating the CEO of a dairy company, and the continuing mayhem at universities caused by students fearful of conscription. The Bennefeath Palace was once like an airport, but after the massacre it was more like a ghost town. The only people that came in person were those scared of holding confidential conversations with Arthur over the internet. Because of Arthur's growing paranoia, office staff no longer came to the palace to work, all were ordered to work from home, he cancelled all speaking events and instead filmed speeches live from the palace. Jeremiah spent even less time with Arthur, he felt uncomfortable around his paranoid tirades that the DIA were going to kill them all and his stern expectation of more calamities. The Love Party once looked to election day with great excitement. Since the massacre, they viewed it as prisoners looking towards their day of release, when they'd finally regain control over their lives.

In one of the palace's living rooms, whilst waiting for Maria to finish a call, Arthur threw darts at a dartboard that Dean had put a picture of Riley over. When she finished, he asked, "What's wrong now?" Referring to her brother and her former sister-in-law, "Nothing. Stella is trying to get back with him." They sat together on a sofa and continued drinking cocktails, despite it being morning. "Oh, God, she's still trying? Has she actually changed in anyway?" "I don't think so. She spent ten grand on a dog last week." "A literal dog or another one of her boyfriends?" "An actual dog!" Arthur re-filled their glasses, "How much has she paid back to the man whose life she ruined?" "Not a penny." "Of course not. I knew they wouldn't work out. Do you remember what she wore on their wedding day? What on earth was she thinking? Was she having second thoughts and trying to attract someone else?" "She wanted to look sexy." "In front of family and friends? It was less 'Here comes the bride' more 'Here comes the broad!'" Maria spat her drink back into the glass and laughed hysterically. Arthur handed her his handkerchief, "I understand advertising yourself when you're single, but when you're in a relationship you should show you're off the market." Recovering from her laughter, Maria, committed to keeping up the façade of love, looked into Arthur's eyes and kissed him. She noticed a wistful look on Arthur's face after they kissed and asked, "What's

wrong?" He started playing with her hair, "I wish I could leave this job to spend more time with you." Maria sensed an opportunity to destroy the party, "You can leave, just step down." "We'd never be left in peace. Can you imagine the fallout, if I stepped down three days before election day? It would be all they'd remember me for. My supporters would forever blame you, if the party lost the election." "Step down after you've won." "Then who will lead the party?" "Jeremiah." Arthur laughed and shook his head. Maria argued, "He's popular and he's smart." "He's also twenty... something years old." "Eric could replace you." Arthur laughed again, "No!" "Why not?" "No-one respects him. He could lead through fear, I suppose." A knock came at the door, Arthur unlocked himself from Maria then said, "Give me your headband." "Why?" "You'll see." Maria handed Arthur her colourful, scarf headband, and he put it on his head. "How does it look?" She made it straight, "Perfect." "Come in!" said Arthur. Immediately upon entering, his butler looked with confusion at the headband on Arthur's head. Maria covered her mouth, laughing silently. Arthur remained composed. The butler stared at the headband a couple more moments, "Jeremiah's mother has arrived, sir." "Why?" "You did agree to a meeting with the two of them. You accepted her request four days ago." Regretting the agreement, he said, "Okay. Let her up." When the butler left, they both laughed at how uncomfortable the headband made him. Arthur got up for the meeting and handed the headband back to Maria who was drying her tears of laughter. He put his glass down and tidied his hair, "We're not allowed to have fun in this world." "I know," said Maria who never put that headband on again. "Please join me in the meeting. I have a feeling this is going to be a bore." "Only if she doesn't mind me being there." "Who cares?" Maria followed Arthur to the audience room, "What's the meeting for?" "She refused to say, but she called right after the stadium incident, so it's obviously related to that, but then again, she might just ask for money, that's the only reason people talk to me these days." "I never do that!" "Obviously, I don't mean you." Observing the grey outside, as they entered the grand audience room, Maria said, "God, it looks like it's going to pour down," then pressed the Skyswitch and suddenly the outside appeared sunny. "I don't mind the rain," said Arthur, "it tends to keep people away." "Stop being such a misanthrope!" "I'm not a misanthrope." They both sat in the seating area. "Hmm, I think a bit of the old Arthur remains." "How so?" "You don't love other people." She then cajolingly said, "We should run away from everyone." "I wish I could."

Jeremiah entered forlorn. Arthur smiled, "Jeremiah! Are you well?" and he sensed none of that warmth he once recognised in his voice, he felt as though an employer was speaking to him. He replied that he was okay. Arthur huffed and said no more to him. He didn't want to be in the same room as Arthur, but was excited to reunite with his mother. A few awkward moments later, his personal assistant arrived and introduced Jeremiah's mother, "Jessica Holloway, sir." She dressed smartly like Maria, and was a few years older than her. They all stood up. Arthur warmly said good morning, but she didn't acknowledge him. She hurried to Jeremiah, offering a hand for him to take, with her head high, saying, "Come on. We're leaving." Arthur asked, "What is the matter?" She did not turn to him, "Well, apart from you corrupting him, his safety is the matter." "He's incorruptible." "I used to think that, but now he believes in the sick ideas you taught him, I was clearly wrong." "Which belief is 'sick'?" "Do you want me to list them?" "He doesn't believe in our ideas *because* he's corrupted." "Don't try to distract me from why I'm here. Jeremiah, we're leaving." "He is safe." Jessica didn't deem his response worthy of reply. She took her son's hand, "Jeremiah, come with me." "There's nothing wrong," replied Jeremiah, holding his ground. Not firing back as she had been since arriving, she let go of his hand and retreated within herself for a few moments.

She then shot out, “As if it wasn’t hard enough being a mother constantly worrying about you! Now I have to worry about all of this too!” Jeremiah felt as though there was no changing her mind. Arthur said to Jessica, “My dear, please take a seat. Let’s all settle down. I’ll have some tea brought for us and we can talk. You’ll see there’s nothing to worry about.” Suddenly lacking the strength she had displayed, “No. I’m clearly not wanted here.” Arthur responded gently, “How would you like to proceed?” She looked to her son, as if they would never see each other again, “You would rather stay with him than leave with me?” “I must. Please understand.” No one in the room noticed how Maria looked at Arthur. She was looking at him with an anger of such force she would have humbled a king. Feeling completely betrayed, unwanted, and unappreciated, Jessica went for the exit. Jeremiah didn’t want her to leave, he hoped that they’d at least part on good terms. Pursuing her, he kept repeating, “Don’t leave!” He shook her shoulder when he caught up with her, “Mum! Mum! Don’t think I don’t love you. I can’t leave!” As she carried on walking, she said, “Yes, you can.” “No, I can’t.” She stopped, “Why not?” “Because,” he felt Arthur’s burning stare, “The party is important to me. Can’t we be on speaking terms at least?” In her silence, Jeremiah sensed a total loss of motherly care for him. As she left without saying another word, he felt unworthy of her, so let her go. He thought that a son who truly loved his mother would have surely dismissed Arthur’s threat against leaving. Maria hurried to him and hugged him. Arthur considered it all over-dramatic. He went to leave for his room. When Arthur passed the two of them, Jeremiah was indignant that he showed no appreciation for him sacrificing his relationship with his mother. He pulled away from Maria and went to confront him. Arthur turned when he heard his steps behind him in the hallway. He hit him with a look of accusation that confused Arthur. With a quivering voice, Jeremiah said, “You are a horrible, horrible person!” Arthur smiled, as if embarrassed for him. Jeremiah’s face of anger changed to one of disappointment, though he was not sure why he still expected better from him. Arthur seemed to be waiting for him to finish his point, so, detecting no sympathy, Jeremiah left for his room. Arthur went to his own room, in disbelief at the criticism he faced. In contemplation, Maria stood in the middle.

In Jeremiah’s room there was a five-by-four-metre scale model of Montpelerin that he’d been working on for three years. There was the Levitation, a skyscraper which would appear to levitate. There was the Double Pyramid, which was a glass pyramid with an upside-down pyramid balancing on top of it. Crossing the Bayuz River was the Rainbow Bridge. Lights the colours of the rainbow would be projected from one side to the other. All the grey buildings were replaced with white or glass ones. There were no holographic billboards or moving pavements with screens. The number of parks and community spaces was doubled. His dream of remaking Montpelerin was a great motivation for not leaving the party and tolerating Arthur.

Jeremiah slammed his door shut and rushed to the scale model then punched the buildings and hammered them with his fists and ripped them out and pelted the pieces to the wall, until he stopped from exhaustion. He collapsed on his bed and buried his head in a pillow. Once the storm of emotions had passed, he was able to think to himself, “Any last fragment of love I had for him is completely gone. We should judge people at their worst, that is when their true desires are on display. Living with him has made me realise why we are doomed to elect leaders that do not care for other people. Power attracts the kind of person that wishes to control others. The easy-going, nice people of the world have no use for power and wouldn’t dare force someone to act against their wishes. Because people like him believe they are

superior to others, they believe they are justified in controlling others, and that no-one else can be trusted to lead. Anyone that cares about their country, or, more precisely, their own well-being in their country, will educate themselves on its history, its politics, why it's changed, what can be done to improve it, and so on. With this education comes a sense of superiority and the belief that only they know what's best for the country. Getting elected, defeating one's opponents, receiving the seal of approval from the majority of voters, being surrounded by yes men that want to further their careers, all serve to deepen their sense of superiority. Arrogant people, like him, make terrible leaders, because they refuse to listen to other people, are absolutely sure they're always correct, defend their reputation at all costs so never admit mistakes, believe their own well-being is more important than anyone else's, bully and manipulate others to remain on top, and shift blame to protect their own reputation. People as intelligent as him always hold a disdain for others because they see themselves as intellectually superior, they believe their supposed superiority gives them permission to do as they please and ignore 'stupid people'. They will keep electing such leaders because they like following someone that appears to have all the answers, they want someone to idolise, and take care of all their troubles for them. There is no purpose in criticising him, it wouldn't change anything. I have kept the plot a secret, because I thought he would save our country, but, if he doesn't even respect the man who saved his life, how could he possibly respect the rest of the country? I thought his lies were for the greater good. Fear is all that restrains me from leaving and exposing this mad plot of his. I hate myself for not having the courage to do what is right. If only he would die. Millions of people die everyday yet people like him just live on and on and on. Why can't he get cancer? Or get run over? In fact, I wouldn't want him to die too quickly. What I really want is for him to suffer a stroke, and lose the ability to speak, so he may only communicate with his eyes. I want him to be just conscious enough to know that I didn't care enough to be by his side. I'd kill him myself, if I could get away with it."

When she heard the destruction in his room, Maria went to check up on Jeremiah, but the door was locked, and he ignored her requests for entry. When he eventually stopped, she decided to give Jeremiah some time to himself then went to find Arthur. She found him in his room, reviewing his debate notes. The moment she walked in, she said, "Let him go or I will leave you. And don't act innocent, I know you're forcing him to be here." Thinking of her threat to leave, Arthur sniggered, "Don't be absurd." "There's nothing absurd about me." He said in a calming tone, "This is all a great overreaction. I have agreed to let him go once the election is won." Not believing him at all, Maria asked, "Really?" "Yes." "Why not let him go now?" "Because he knows too much." "And if you lose, will he be allowed to leave or will he have to stay another five years for the next election." She noticed him pause slightly before he said, "If we lose, he can go." "Really?" Arthur couldn't hide his irritation anymore, "If you don't believe a word I say, why question me?" "If you don't let him go after this election, I will leave you." Arthur bowed his head, thinking he was in the right, not sure of what to say to appease her. She spoke, as if wishing she was wrong, "You focus too much on your dreams, you neglect those right before you. I hoped you would have changed after what happened before, but you clearly haven't. You still only care about yourself." "I focus on my dreams, *because* I care about those right before me, including him, believe it or not." "No, you don't." Realising her belief was deeply rooted, and feeling all his work was unappreciated, he said, "So, that's your opinion of me? Despite all I do to make you happy, you assume my motives are selfish, because you consider me so low." To let his realisation

sink in, Maria said nothing. His tone changed from self-pitying to one in search of reconciliation, “I must prepare for the debate now. I would love for you to join me tonight.”

Arthur rehearsed with his team until the late afternoon for the evening’s debate with Riley. They practiced the pre-debate handshake. Though the two men hated each other, and even the thought of shaking Riley’s hand repulsed him, Arthur had to appear the better man. His palm was to face the camera, to appear the stronger, and then he would place his second hand on the handshake to appear on top even more. Fortunately for him, the debate moderator had secretly provided him with the questions beforehand. They advised him to look as though he was enjoying the debate, and to never get angry, even if Riley insulted him. All was going well until a furore from downstairs disrupted them. He excused himself from the rehearsal to discover Lauren hurrying up the stairs to him. She asked, “Did you hear the news?” He feared an arrest warrant had been issued for him, he hoped Riley had been murdered by Green Eyes. “No. What is it?” “There’s a hurricane on the way. We need to leave.” After taking a few moments to process the news, Arthur said, “Riley engineered it.” “Do you think so?” “You watch, it will be revealed one day. If I was to tell the public now, they’d call me crazy, but it was him, trust me. It’s obvious. A hurricane has never happened here, and now it will hit the palace just days before the election. We are facing some of the most evil people to ever exist, and they will do anything they can to hold onto that power.” “I know. Hopefully are problems will all be over soon.” “There’s always some problem.” She tried to lighten his mood a little, “I’ll get someone to arrange a place for us to stay.” Arthur nodded with a miserable face, “Thank you. Well, we may as well start heading to the debate now, anyway.”

General election debates were usually held at Riverlake, but, due to the often untameable violence at universities it was held at the Dasgiers Hall in Montpelerin. In one green room sat Riley’s sombre retinue, anxious because he still trailed Arthur in the polls, and because of the approach he planned for the debate. For the special occasion, Riley wore a tanned, tweed suit with trousers that were a couple inches too short to show off his white socks. He’d dyed his hair green a few days before Green Eyes’ first terrorist attack then died it back to neon-red a day after Green Eyes’ identity had been revealed, to avoid any association. He brought his two chihuahuas with him for emotional support. He was impatient, walking in contemplation around the room, deeply concerned about what would happen to the vulnerable people of Gildland if Arthur was elected. Riley believed that when the public was happy, elections were easier for the party in power to win, and when the public was angry, elections were easier for the contender to win, quite simply because the contender could blame the party in power for all of the country’s problems, even ones beyond their control, so he considered presenting himself as angry too. The crowd was full of Arthur’s supporters, they could be heard constantly chanting, ‘Love beats hate, there is no debate!’.

Arthur’s green room was full of laughter when they heard Riley say to his own team, “Be positive! Stop fucking worrying!” Maria and Jeremiah, however, seemed to hardly notice what was going on. Jeremiah observed the room and thought, “Why is that everyone who is closest to him becomes a shell of their former self. I am becoming like Francis. I was once confused as to why his son was so quiet, I think I understand now. His father, I can very easily imagine, criticised him for anything and everything, made him fearful of anything outside his idea of normal, and was over-controlling like all people with dictatorial personalities. How could it be that Maria was so energetic and full of life when she first came here, but now she just sits next to him as if she’s his pet? What happened to her?” As

Jeremiah was thinking to himself, Arthur was called to the stage. They all wished him luck. Jeremiah remained seated, not looking at him, and Arthur pretended to not notice.

The debate moderator began, “Good evening from Dasgiers Hall in Montpelerin, I’m Sylvia Davenport of GTV News, and I welcome you to the first and final debate for the most important general election in history, brought to you by the Commission on Election Debates.” The title of ‘most important’ had been given to every prior election, this was one of the rare times the public agreed with the claim. “The commission has designed the format. We will start by asking each participant to provide an opening statement and then we will begin the debate. In line with Gildland’s great tradition of free speech, the audience are free to speak as they wish, however, they have been encouraged, but not obliged, to remain silent when a participant is speaking. The questions are my own, and I have not shared them with the participants. Now, please welcome to the stage Prime Minister Pete Riley, and, the leader of the Love Party, Arthur de la Mer.”

The audience applauded in excitement, mesmerised at the spectacle of the two arch enemies finally facing off. Most in the audience were Love Party supporters, a few were ECSL supporters, and two were followers of Green Eyes with blades hidden in their shoes. The two Green Eyes followers wore jeans and t-shirts like most others there, but also had long hair and grim expressions. They both wore earbuds, as Green Eyes didn’t want them to listen to the ideas of Arthur or Riley. Over a billion people around the world were watching, some stayed up until the early hours of the morning, some took time off of work. Many people around the world paid more attention to Gildland’s political situation than their own country’s because of how influential Gildland was culturally, how fascinatingly chaotic Gildland had become, and because many countries depended heavily on their military and economy. Virtually all viewers were already firmly rooted in their choice of candidate, they just wanted to watch their choice verbally knock-out their opponent. At the bottom of viewers’ screens appeared the results of an opinion poll on voting intentions. Out of all the opinion polls conducted by various companies, the broadcaster showed the one most negative for Riley, to discourage his supporters from voting and to encourage people still on the fence to conform to Arthur’s majority. Viewers were also shown betting odds on the election to further emphasise Arthur’s lead. They entered the stage from opposite sides, both smiling and waving at the audience. When he noticed Riley head to his podium in neglect of him, Arthur stood stupefied for a second. The crowd booed and whistled the Prime Minister who seemed impervious to their reaction. Arthur remained in the middle of the stage and offered his hand to appear the better man. Feeling he’d sufficiently shown Riley to be improper, Arthur returned to his podium, satisfied with an easy first win. The podium Riley stood at was five inches shorter than Arthur’s, arranged by the organisers to make him look inferior. Propaganda had been shoved deeply enough into the heads of Arthur’s supporters so that whenever they saw Riley they instantly thought ‘evil’, ‘glorifier of poverty’, ‘lover of the weak’, pictures of historical tragedies created by excessive government control popped up in their minds, one of a mountain of skinny corpses in front a brick wall, one of people praying for a pittance, one of a tired man carrying a wheelbarrow in a labour camp, they imagined the screams from victims in a film featuring Riley as the villain. The two political giants were like lighthouses looking into the dark sea of the public’s mind for how they should steer their ships safely to shore. Riley’s plan was to be aggressive, in order to appear in tune with the general anger of Gildlanders. He was to speak passionately without care for composure, interrupt, and insult Arthur often. His team had been arguing about how to approach the



debate for weeks, even during the journey to the hall. Riley had the final word when he said, “Everyone takes the piss out of me these days anyway so I may as well express what I fucking feel. This could be the last time I’m ever seen in public so I may as well go all out because you know I couldn’t show this pretty face if I lose to that old bitch!” The Love Party’s tactic for Arthur was to present himself as a relief to the anger of Gildlanders by appearing gentle and civil, no matter the situation, as the public had always known him to be. Arthur was to politely blame Riley for everything bad that happened in Gildland during his term and cast doubt on any accomplishment by saying better could have been done. As usual, he was going to appeal to emotion and be as simplistic as possible. On Arthur’s side were people resentful of those on Basic Income and doubtful they themselves would require it before the next election, almost all students, almost all victims of abuse, companies that didn’t receive corporate welfare, governments of Poor Nations that had lost a large percentage of jobs to automation and had been offered secretly and insincerely a Global Basic Income by Arthur, most Gildlanders of Poor Nation heritage that believed he’d help them in the Climate War, and Elimperia as they were in favour of Gildland replacing its publicly funded armed forces with private defence agencies. On Riley’s side were people on Basic Income, people that expected to soon be on Basic Income, those on a state pension, those on disability benefits, public workers, corporate recipients of subsidies, the arms industry, the nuclear industry, Gildland’s central bank, every government department, and, secretly, the Royal Family. To anyone that knew anything, it seemed like two mafia families fighting for the same turf. Each side considered the other irrational. Each side interpreted criticism of their leaders as unfair. Each side discouraged friendship with members of the other.

“Gentlemen, we have all been waiting a long time for this debate, so let’s get going. Arthur de la Mer, please provide your opening statement.” “Thank you, Ms. Davenport for moderating this debate, thank you, to the commission for organising it, thank you, to everyone watching, and thank you, Prime-” “Don’t thank me, I’m not helping you,” interrupted Riley without looking at Arthur. The audience heckled and booed him. Riley only survived, because murder was illegal. Arthur feigned pity for his opponent’s anger. Correctly realising the audience was filled entirely with Love Party supporters, Riley responded, “Stop booing, let him embarrass himself!” The jeering became so overbearing that the moderator intervened, “Please can the audience settle down. Our time is limited,” but this didn’t work, the audience was not going to squander this opportunity to verbally assault the man they saw as hell-bent on ending their freedoms. Arthur saw a great opportunity to appear in control, “I understand you are all excited, but let’s calm down. If we our to make the world more loving, we must be the example.” The boos for Riley faded into applause for Arthur. He then continued, “I know the pain that Gildlanders have been experiencing these last five years. The Automation Revolution has robbed from millions the sense of purpose they once derived from work, and the government has made no effort to supplement that loss. Because of the confusion caused by deepfakes over what is reality and what is fiction, the government claims to be justified in restricting your freedom to post about politics online, an act which confirms the government has become tyrannical, and I am not saying that for shock value, this is the moment our founding fathers feared, the government has betrayed freedom in favour of tyranny. Do not expect them to admit they are tyrannical, simply look at their actions for evidence. The Climate War has killed millions, and caused terrible anxiety across the world, including those in Gildland fearing conscription, and the government still has said nothing to calm those fears. Communities are clashing on our streets, and families are splitting apart, yet the government makes no attempt at unification. Climate change has

increased and intensified the extreme weather events our country faces, displacing millions of Gildlanders. I have also been displaced, a hurricane will hit my hometown tomorrow, so I know first-hand how hurt many of you are.” Arthur paused, so his next sentence would have more impact. “None of these problems were inevitable. They were all caused by a lack of love for freedom and tolerance. These two ideals don’t just belong to the Love Party, these are Gildish ideals. Unfortunately, the ECSL have consistently trampled on the ideals that Gildlanders marched for, were imprisoned for, even died for. I will restore our ideals, and everything great that Riley stole from us. I will lead with a resilience built from years of struggle, and empathy built from listening to all of you these past three years. I will listen to the unemployed from the view of someone whose job was ripped away when Riley allowed the cutting of the Humanities. I will listen to our military veterans from the view of someone whose father died in battle. With love, we will end the war with words not military force. With love, we will rebuild families and communities by teaching tolerance and rejecting hate. With love, we will trust the free choices of people over the corrupt choices of big government. With love, we will once and for all abolish taxation, creating millions of jobs. With love, the road to utopia is clear. Electoral victory for the Love Party is our first great step on that road.” The crowd popped, relieved their hero got off to a great start. Riley continued grinning, as he had been throughout Arthur’s opening statement. When the crowd quietened, the moderator said, “Thank you. Now, Prime Minister, please provide your opening statement.” “How can I speak after being subjected to such bizarre ramblings? I will do my best. Thank you, Ms. Davenport for moderating this debate, thank you, to the commission for packing this house with Delusionals, and thank you, to everyone watching at home. Allow me to address everything the Delusional Man just said. The Automation Revolution is not something to be feared. In a few decades, all jobs will be automated, and that’s a good thing. We will all be free to do what we want, and the decreased cost of production will enrich everyone so long as there is a government to distribute the gains. If you don’t think that robots will be better than humans at everything within a few years then you are admitting you know nothing about the rapid pace of technological progress. He runs his mouth about us being tyrannical because we don’t allow fake pictures and videos online, but his party was one of the main producers of deepfakes. The Climate War started because the corporations he trusts to self-regulate refused to change their destructive ways in search of profit and corrupted many scientists to neutralise the public with lies. Without governments around the world doing their best to restrict the greed of the corporations he worships, the war would be far more deadly because the health of the planet would be worse. As for the hurricane, the only reason we know one is coming is because it was detected by the government-funded National Weather Service. The Delusional Man clearly doesn’t make such considerations when he harps on about abolishing all government agencies. Also, the big and evil government will be flying in drones to provide WI-FI in the area damaged by the hurricane, for the rescue workers that the big and evil government will be sending there, and the big and evil government will continue to provide shelter for the displaced, and the big and evil government’s operation will be on a much larger scale than his fraudulent Love Party Welfare Fund ever could pull off. Ideologues try to squeeze the world into their beliefs, pragmatists try to suit their beliefs to the world. Which one does the Delusional Man sound like to you? Since he didn’t mention Green Eyes, which I’m sure was an innocent oversight, I will confront the elephant in the room. Everyone wants to know who is funding Green Eyes, who is helping this college dropout commit all of these murders, and how is he getting away with it all. I know only supporters of the ECSL listen to my speeches, so let me present to all of the world some facts that we’ve known for a while.

Arthur de la Mer was friends with Green Eyes for over five years, whereas I have never met him. He liked Green Eyes so much that he allowed him to be a guest listener of his for over two years. According to several accounts, the Delusional Man said Green Eyes was inspirational. The public had never heard of Green Eyes in all the years I was in politics, then this Delusional Man comes along, and Green Eyes appears shortly after. If you realise that he is guilty for funding this terrorist then I thank you for upholding my faith in humanity, and if you think the Delusional Man is innocent, then I am afraid to say that you are absolutely deluded. And that's what this election is all about, it's a choice between reality and delusion. In this election, we are choosing between two futures. We embrace technological progress whilst the government protects the public interest, or we reject technological progress and dream about what could have been. We trust the institutions that made us the most envied country in history or we abolish them and hope the corporations that replace them do as good a job. We trust the man who changed the flag of this country to represent all the different flowers of Gildland's bouquet, or we elect someone who for years claimed that diversity is divisive. We protect the people unemployed out of no fault of their own, or we watch them live on scraps provided by the Love Party Welfare Fund. De la Mer does not represent who we are as Gildlanders. If you are in need of help, join us, we are here for you, do not become one of the Delusionals. If you care about Gildland, vote for the ECSL Party, do not regret your decision."

The silence that followed made Riley's last sentence sound more haunting than he intended. The moderator said, "Thank you. We will now take a short break. We will be right back." Five minutes of five-second-long ads played, the audience spoke among themselves, and the two candidates stayed at their podiums reading their notes. "Welcome back. Now, our first topic. Arthur de la Mer, jobs are being lost to automation at the fastest rate in history. To supplement the loss in available jobs, Riley's government introduced Basic Income for people in occupations classified as obsolete. You have criticised Basic Income, since it was introduced, why?" "There are several reasons, and if you want the full details, they are on our website. Firstly, let's consider how Basic Income has been funded. Corporation tax and VAT have been increased, decimating the poorest Gildlanders. Companies have had to fire many people to cope with the burden of the cruel tax increases. Secondly, large companies are wiping out smaller companies at a scale never seen before, because large companies can afford to invest more in automation than smaller companies and the more they invest in automation the less workers they have to employ and the less workers they employ the lower prices they can offer. Smaller companies simply can't compete. The increase in corporation tax to fund Basic Income has made the running of smaller companies even harder because, unlike large companies, they can't afford the accountants that know how to shift their profits to tax havens." "Wait a fucking minute," said Riley waving a finger in the air. The audience was silent in shock, except for a few that insulted him to defend Arthur. Riley looked at him for the first time in the debate and attacked him with a fury that had been building for years, "You complain about wealth inequality, yet you want to abolish taxation! You don't care about your ideas being reckless, do you? Why? There's no consequence for a rich pig like you." He began jabbing a finger at Arthur and said with unfiltered hatred, "You piece of garbage, you piece of garbage, De la Mer! I'm not perfect, but at least I try to help those in need." "Thirdly," the audience laughed at Riley, because of Arthur's indifference, "there are millions and millions of people that want their jobs back. This may seem hard to believe, because back in the day a lot of people complained about having a job, but now people do miss having a routine, a purpose, and a social circle. They are bored and lonely at home. Very

few people have been able to fill their free time with a hobby. People are worrying about making money every hour of the day, because Basic Income is insufficient. If the Love Party wins, you will go back to work, and you will have free time in the morning, the evening, and the weekend, like the good old days. We can't appreciate rest, if we don't work. Finally, and this is without a doubt the most serious issue, living on Basic Income means that your income depends totally on the government. There have been many cases of dissidents having their Basic Income cut-off as punishment. Letting the government control the income of millions of people is a terrible risk that I will not let this country take." The audience applauded very loudly for their concerns were shared by a great man.

When the audience died down, the moderator said, "Thank you. Prime Minister, you was the first world leader to introduce Basic Income. Why do you support it?" "Well, first of all, I don't think we should take economic advice from someone that wanted to start an economic boycott just three years ago, but that's another matter. I support Basic Income because despite the Delusional Man's fear-mongering, millions are living happily on Basic Income, free to do what they want with their life, free from the stress of work, free from worrying about how they'll pay for their bills. I know the Automation Revolution hasn't been kind to everyone so far, but imagine the crisis we would be facing if there was no Basic Income. What would happen to the millions without it? Are we really going to trust charity to support them? There's a reason the government had to start providing welfare in the first place. History shows that voluntary giving is never sufficient. Research shows that when taxes are cut, the extra profit goes almost entirely to executives and shareholders, after all, they're under no obligation to reinvest it into creating new jobs. His proposal to prohibit certain automation technologies does not represent who we are as Gildlanders, we embrace the future, we don't run away from it. There is no alternative but to embrace technological progress, we cannot fall behind the rest of the world. The future is exciting for all of us. Once the Automation Revolution is complete, we will finally have total equality, we will be on the same playing field, no-one above to envy, no-one below to pity. I know the Automation Revolution has caused pain for some, but our patience will be rewarded."

"Thank you. We will now take a quick break. Don't go away." Ads played for five minutes. Riley began prodding Arthur for a furious reaction, but to no avail. The Love Party's supporters heckled Riley to defend him. Upon Arthur's request, the crowd calmed a moment before the ads ended, and Riley settled down when he realised the debate was about to resume. The moderator said, "Welcome back. Now, onto our second topic. Arthur de la Mer, please inform us of your position on the Climate War." "To begin, I would like us to hold a moment of silence for the 25,000 and counting confirmed casualties from today in the war." Arthur bowed his head, and put his hands behind his back. For what Riley saw as a cheap appeal to emotion, he said, "So embarrassing." Arthur ignored him and the audience remained silent. When he felt he'd spent the patience of even his most zealous followers, Arthur continued, "Thank you. All wars are unnecessary. Within each mind there are battles, so, if we wish to have world peace, we must focus on teaching people how to love. There will only be world peace when there is peace in our minds. There is no alternative. This may sound unbelievable given how much propaganda our government publishes about the Poor Nations and Elimperia being evil, but do some research and you will find they want peace as much as we do." "Say that to their victims in Mistrovar," interrupted Riley. Arthur continued as if oblivious, "The government-" With more force, "Say they want peace to their victims in Mistrovar! They have bombed schools, and hospitals, whilst people were inside. Do they

sound interested in peace to you?" The crowd in the theatre berated Riley, though many watching at home celebrated him. Arthur persisted, "Violence begets violence, my friend. We must be the difference makers. The ECSL have spread so many horrible lies about our so-called enemies that they have tricked many among us into thinking they are inhuman and beyond communicating with. They say our so-called enemies have built concentration camps in the conquered land, are using robot soldiers, and dropped chemical weapons on our allies. I would take anything our government says with a grain of salt, they have lied too many times to be believed. Just three days ago, there was a leak showing the OECW doctored a report regarding the use of chemical weapons. The leak showed they made large omissions from the original version and invented evidence they couldn't find. Despite this, the ECSL have still not retracted their accusations based on the report. It is clear there are elements within the government that want us to have enemies, that want war. They don't mind damaged cities and damaged lives, so long as where they live is safe. I am, of course, referring to the war profiteers." To hear Arthur name them felt almost emancipating for the audience. The war profiteers had long been criticised by the public, but they had never before been named and shamed during an election debate. "If we are elected, everything will change. Never again will we go to war for profit. Never again will we resort to violence for conflict resolution. Instead of spending several hundred billion on weapons and training people how to kill, we will invest that money in teaching people how to love. The-" Riley interrupted and the crowd booed him, "This is just madness. You have never held a government position. You have no experience. Things aren't perfect as they are, but they could very easily be worse. How can you so confident your ideas will work?" "I have the advantage of being correct." The crowd loved the response and Riley began to feel he could do nothing right. Arthur continued, "The Prime Minister wants to send the refugees in Mustrovar back to Rheatempo and Tazaluna, where food exists only in dreams and memories, the scarce water is undrinkable, the heat burns you alive, and disease abounds. There is no need to send them back there. Only 8% of Mustrovar is urban land, the rest is green space where new cities can be built. There is room for everyone! The Love Party Welfare Fund will help develop new cities for everyone there! Not only will our plan give peace to the world, it will also be better for the economy! I promise to you all, I will go to the front line with a white flag, and I will say 'Stop! No more killing! He is your brother and he is your brother!' This has nothing to do with politics, it's a matter of right and wrong. As the most intelligent species, it's about time we acted like it. To all voters, I say choose ballots, not bullets."

The moderator waited for the long applause to die down, then, unable to hide her smirk, said, "Thank you. Now, Prime Minister, please tell us your position on the Climate War." "The Delusional Man says he would never resort to violence for conflict resolution. If that is true, why does he plan to abolish the military and replace them with private defence agencies? Surely, if he believed all conflicts could be resolved peacefully, he would abolish the military and not replace it with anything. His plan to talk the enemy into peace only goes to show how ignorant he is of our enemy's leaders. The Delusional Man is welcome to speak to Sirkitus, but Sirkitus is not the swooning kind, he is not like one of the Delusional Man's lonely, pathetic followers." Riley grinned at the booing then continued, "If we had not intervened, the Poor Nations would have taken over all of Mustrovar. Our most powerful allies would have been defeated, the entire continent would have become an open-air prison, its resources would have been used to arm and enrich the Poor Nations and Elimperia, so that they would finally be able to defeat us, the only country preventing their sick dream of world domination becoming real. Fortunately, as it stands now, it is not as bad as that. Now, it is merely a

landscape of once great cities burnt to the ground, with corpses left to rot in the streets, and some of the greatest artistic accomplishments in history lost forever. How dare you say our enemy should be spoken to! Can you imagine how demoralising that message is for the innocent people of Mistrovar. They've had to escape their homes, they've had family members killed, and he is telling them to accept never returning home, to accept that their fallen loved ones will never be avenged. The refugees have brought dengue fever to Mistrovar-" "Excuse me," said Arthur politely. "What do you want?" "Please do not associate the climate refugees with a virus. You are trying to imply they are dirty. Stop it. It's not nice." There was a round of applause for Arthur. "No, I'm not. You should check your hearing." The crowd booed. "Anyway, as I was saying. Can you imagine how demoralising the Delusional Man's message is for our troops? They are desperately fighting to liberate occupied land and they're hearing this fraud back home say we must talk to the enemy. They're worrying about losing their jobs if he's elected. They're starting to question if what they're doing is right. Well, to all of our great troops, I thank you for your bravery, keep up the good fight, history will remember you well." Disinterested silence from the crowd followed Riley's impassioned delivery. The moderator said, "Thank you, Prime Minister. We will now take a quick break, don't go anywhere."

Five minutes of ads played then the moderator said, "Welcome back. We shall now begin our third topic; the greatest strength of each participant. So, Arthur-" "Wait," interrupted Riley. "Is this a joke?" "No, sir." "This is supposed to be a debate not a job interview." "Respectfully, it is an opportunity for voters to get to know you both." "Well, you can interview people we've worked with for that. We could easily lie about what our greatest strengths are." "Do you plan on lying, sir?" "No! What I'm trying to say is that we should focus on policies, not personalities. What good is it electing a nice person if they're a buffoon? Personalities are important to an extent, but I doubt either of us would have gotten this far without having a somewhat healthy personality. I spent a long time preparing for serious questions. Yet tonight we hardly scratched the surface of the first topics and now you want to know about our greatest strengths. Why don't you ask about the National Health System? Or drug legalisation? Or Green Eyes? These topics are very important to people." "They certainly are. However, the topics of the debate cannot be changed as they have been approved by the commission, but fortunately there are more ways to communicate with the public than through this one debate. So, Arthur de la Mer, what is your greatest strength?" "Thank you for the question, and never allow anyone to peer pressure you, you're doing an excellent job." The crowd loved his response and showed it. "People often say that I am a dynamic team player, a go-getter, motivated, energetic, passionate, a hard worker, and tolerant. And I always make sure to touch base with my staff to make sure all is well. However, I think my greatest strength is the love I have for everyone!" Riley scratched his head as he watched the audience applaud Arthur. "Thank you. Now, Prime Minister, what is your greatest strength?" Riley looked smugly at the moderator, he was sure his followers would like his response, "Out of respect for the public, I refuse your stupid question." The crowd laughed at his bluntness and so did the moderator out of embarrassment, though more reservedly than the crowd, "Fair enough. We shall now take a short break. We'll be right back."

After five minutes of ads, the moderator said, "Thank you for joining us again. We are now on to our final topic of the evening. Arthur de la Mer, what is your biggest weakness?" Riley answered for him, "His lack of experience and authenticity." The crowd swore at Riley and

told him to shut his mouth because of his interruption. When they stopped, Arthur answered, “My biggest weakness is that I face very dangerous and hateful enemies. We are attempting to do something that has never been done before. We want to abolish every government agency and the monarchy. They have sent me death threats, they have spread lies about me, and they committed a massacre against my Comrades. There is clearly nothing they won’t do to stop our movement from winning, maybe they’ll call off the election to ensure we don’t win, who knows? Nonetheless, the attacks I have had to withstand from our terrible enemy has only made me stronger, and more determined to finally win this election for everyone that is with me.” “Thank you. Now, Prime Minister, the same question to you. What is your biggest weakness?” “Out of-” Riley’s microphone stopped working. He didn’t realise until the audience laughed at him. He was not surprised, he felt it was in keeping with how he’d been treated all night. The moderator relayed a message she’d been given from backstage, “We apologise for this interruption. We are having some technical issues with the audio, this should be resolved shortly. Please hold on.” Ads played as a technician pretended to fix a problem that didn’t exist with Riley’s microphone. After two minutes, the microphone was functioning again, and the moderator said, “Welcome back to everyone at home. The issue with the audio has been fixed, so Prime Minister please continue where you left off.” “Out of respect for the public, I refuse your stupid question.” “And with that, we have reached the end of the debate. Thank you both for participating. Remember, election day is on Workday65 Q2, just three days away. Voting is one of the great privileges of being Gildish, and we hope you don’t take it for granted. Good night.” An updated poll and updated betting odds were placed at the bottom of viewers screens, showing Arthur’s lead had increased since the debate began.

When the broadcast ended, Arthur went to the edge of the stage to show his appreciation towards the audience. The audience flocked to him, and Green Eyes’ two followers joined them. They held up their Open-Heart necklaces and looked at him, as if in search of his approval. Riley couldn’t resist expressing his contempt for him, so went over to spoil the show. He smiled menacingly at Arthur, “You really have no standards, do you?” Arthur turned and was glad to see how upset he was. Dean jogged on to the stage and Arthur’s other bodyguards followed him. Seeing this, Riley’s bodyguards followed. Dean put an arm around Arthur’s shoulder and looked at Riley as if he was listening to the dumbest man he’s ever met. Riley continued launching his torrent of abuse at Arthur, and his guards worried about the crowd recording the crazy things he was saying, but Riley couldn’t hear them trying to stop him. “We all know you think the public are stupid compared to your genius, but, trust me, they have all just realised how much of a fraud you are with this rigged debate. The applause here means nothing, it means nothing. You’re going to lose because of tonight, but, even if you somehow win, you won’t last long. We can do things that you can only dream of. It will never be over!”

Riley stopped, when the screen at the back of the stage began showing a live video of Green Eyes and Steve Cook. His two followers at the debate removed their earbuds. The live video also appeared on all billboards across Gildland. Green Eyes sat cross-legged with his back against a rocky wall, covered in darkness, visible was only a partial outline of his scraggly self, his tall crown of twigs, and his gloves with long, sharpened twigs protruding from each fingertip. Steve Cook sat next to him, in the light, sitting cross-legged, naked, terrified, and holding a clay tablet. In the background, was water falling, fire crackling, and insects buzzing. Steve read from the tablet, “‘Tell me about yourself.’ I remember, when I was a kid, I went to

the forest for the first time with my brother and my uncle, and there was a tree with a face that had naturally formed on it. I haven't been able to find that tree for a long time, but I remember being totally mesmerised for about five minutes, and not wanting to leave it. Do I have the job now? Ha ha ha. We don't need your money. We are free from civilization. We're having a great time. Enjoy running your businesses, and your slavery to technology. We pity you. Now, on with the show. My Brothers and Sisters have given you two Nature Rapers a lot of time to accept our demands, our very reasonable demands. Clearly, you are both too lost to listen. That debate was a disaster. Water's not wet, violets aren't blue, much that you've said, is simply not true. Nothing you spoke about was important. I'm not even going to explain what was wrong, I'm sick of trying to teach you people. For you Nature Rapers, the truth is like the sun, you know it's there, but you can't bear looking at it. We have no choice now but to go into the next phase of the Great Revenge. We demand you all to vote for the Natural Party. They are the only party to agree to our reasonable demands." The Natural Party was horrified to be endorsed by Green Eyes. They had not accepted his demands, their policies matching his demands was coincidental. Almost no-one had heard of the party before that moment, they had received less than two-hundred votes in the previous election and weren't expected to get much more in future elections. "We will be inspecting voting lines and if we see voters showing support for anyone other than the Natural Party, I am glad to say, your life will be taken. If you deceive us by showing support for the Natural Party, but then vote for another party, this won't save you, because if the Natural Party don't win the election, we will then begin the final phase of the Great Revenge. Don't underestimate us." Green Eyes thrust his glove of twigs through Steve's neck and the screen turned black whilst he screamed, and the audience erupted in shock.

Arthur noticed Riley was lost in thought, grinning to himself, biting his nails in excitement about something. Riley began heading backstage with zeal, and Arthur began his way back as well, more desperate than ever for the election to be over with. As both men were heading off stage, a harrowing gasp came behind them from the crowd. Two of Green Eyes' followers rushed towards the stage with blades in their hands, one ran for Riley, the other for Arthur. A blade was thrown at Riley and another was thrown at Arthur. The blade for Riley hit one of his guards and the attacker was tackled. The blade for Arthur missed by metres, the attacker was too startled by Dean charging at him. The attacker was charged to the ground by Dean. Riley and Arthur were rushed to safety. Dean looked around for other threats, whilst he held the attacker down, but only saw the hall rapidly emptying and the guards standing in front of the stage looking like they were about to start pointing fingers at each other. Riley's guards took the other attacker backstage. Dean grabbed the attacker by the scruff of the neck and pulled him close, "Do you want to live?" The man was unfazed and muttered, "What do you think?" "Wonderful!" said Dean with a large smile as he put him on his feet as if he was a child. "Take me to Green Eyes and I'll let you live. I'd like to have a word with him."



## Statement 8: Conspiracy Underground

Dean put the attacker in the front passenger seat. When he got in, he opened the glove compartment, and took out cologne. To cover the man's primeval body odour, he sprayed it at the man's face, burning his eyes and choking him, then sprayed his body. Upon putting it back, he asked like a friend, "So, where we off to, mate?" "Fuck yourself." Dean was not surprised his question was rejected. He looked around to see if anyone was watching them. Seeing no-one was, he whispered, with the face of a man desperate to be believed, "Listen. I'm only acting aggressively to avoid suspicion from the others. I *want* to join you. I've been waiting for this opportunity for so long. I'm sick of civilization too. I want to live in the wild, I don't want to get involved in the Climate War, I don't want to work for someone else the rest of my life, I think these people in civilization are weak and pathetic, they're not lions like you and me, I know that Nature Rapers are to blame for everything, I don't care about this election, this country's screwed no matter who wins. In the grand scheme of things, Riley and De la Mer are the same. Think of how great an asset I'd be for you guys, I could be a secret agent in the Love Party, and, if you take me to your hideout, what's the worst that could happen? I can't take you all down, I'll be outnumbered, I don't have enough bullets to kill you all." The man thought for a few moments, "You swear you're telling the truth?" "I swear on Green Eyes." He read Dean's face then said, "It's in the Yeshil Forest." "What part?" "South West." "Excellent! Let's go." Dean couldn't resist smirking, as he typed in the destination. The passenger asked, "What's funny?" "Your gullibility! No wonder you joined a cult! You really thought I wanted to join you?" Dean laughed all out then the car headed to the forest. "Oh, God," cried the passenger, as he slammed his eyes shut in regret. Dean loved watching his enemy squirm in fear, "Ah, the desperate man's sudden religious conversion! You are absolutely pathetic. Do you understand that?" There was no response. "You may as well talk. If you're likeable or at least useful, I'll let you live." The man didn't respond, so Dean adopted a calmer, sympathetic voice, "My boss has been losing sleep over accusations he funds Green Eyes and his fear of being killed by your little gang. If I capture him, my boss will be very happy. The accusations will lose a whole lot of weight if his own head of security captures him and he won't have to worry about being killed by you guys. My boss is very wealthy, he could give you a million guilders as a gift, and it would hardly make a dent in his bank account. My boss is very well-connected, he could help you create a new identity. All you have to do is answer my questions." "Like I'm going to believe you now." "I understand your scepticism. Then again, your life only has two prospects. You don't talk to me and you die now, or you do talk to me and you live. So, what will it be?" Weakly, he answered, "I'll talk." "Excellent! Now, answer the question. Do you understand that you are absolutely pathetic?" Just as the passenger opened his mouth to answer, Dean said intensely, "And before you try and play any little games with me know this; the more you evade my questions the more you piss me off, and, if you dare lie to me, I will make you pay. Do you understand what I am saying to you?" "Yes." "Good. Do you understand that you are absolutely pathetic?" "Yes." "What's your name?" "Wild Water." "Put some bass in your voice, I can't hear you." "Wild Water." "Are you trying to be funny?" "No." "What the hell kind of a name is that?" "He gave it to me when I joined." "Why? Is it supposed to impress me?" "No." "You have the voice and face of a stupid man. From now on, your name is Idiot. Do you understand?" "Yes." "Who's funding you?" "We are." "How?" "When you join Green Pupils, you-" "Hold your horses. 'Green Pupils'?" "It's the name of our group."

“That’s charming. Continue.” “When someone joins, they have to hand over all their property to us.” “How nice of you.” “It’s so we can be sure they’re dedicated.” “What are the funds used for?” “I’m not sure.” “How are you not sure?” “I don’t know everything that goes on. Only Green Eyes does.” “He keeps you in the dark about most things?” “He tells us what we need to know.” “He mentioned the final phase of the Great Revenge in his little speech. Explain.” “I can’t.” “Don’t bullshit me.” “I don’t know what it is. I can only guess.” “Go on.” “There was a delivery of some yellow barrels last week.” “Be more precise.” “A few hundred came eight days ago.” “Continue.” “They had ‘GX’ and some numbers written on them.” “Who delivered them?” “I don’t know. They appeared when we woke up one morning.” “What did Green Eyes say about them?” “He said don’t go near them and that he’ll explain what they’re for soon.” “Where are they exactly?” “To the side of the entrance.” “Out in the open?” “Yes.” “Bloody hell,” whispered Dean to himself. “How many people are there?” “Like a thousand.” “What sort of age are they?” “There’s like a thousand adults and a few hundred babies.” “A few hundred babies?” “Yeah.” “Why?” “Well, each fertile woman has to let Green Eyes impregnate her once a year.” Dean was taken aback by this revelation, but then realised his expectations of the cult should have been low to begin with, “By force?” “No. For them, it’s an honour.” “And what happens if they refuse?” “They never have.” “Hypothetically.” “She’d have to wear a necklace of thorns until she lets him do it.” “Good Lord. How do you recruit people? You prey on the lonely, needy, and depressed?” “No. We only recruit people that can accept the truth no matter how much it hurts.” “Ah, really? Where do you find these superior beings?” “Orphanages, campuses, rehab clinics, mental health clinics, and we invite some older relatives.” “Are there more hideouts or just this one we’re going to?” “The Vault is our only hideout.” “Are there any traps?” “No.” “How many guards have you got?” “About half a dozen above ground at this time of night. A couple by the entrance underground.” “What weapons have they got? Something better than that little toy you used earlier?” “AK47s.” “What equipment have they got?” “Nightvision goggles, torches. I don’t know what else.” “If I go there, and discover you’ve lied, your life will be taken from you. Do you understand?” “I haven’t lied.” “I’ll give you one chance, do you have any comments you’d like to retract?” “I haven’t lied.” Dean had told Arthur his plan before leaving and was thanked by him. When the others found out, they asked why he didn’t want anyone else to help him, he didn’t respond to their painful insult to his pride and martial genius.

During the journey, Dean put on dance music to get him in the mood for the big showdown. Wild Water wanted to laugh, but was too afraid to, so looked out the window for most of the journey. Half an hour in, Arthur called him. He sounded down and worried, “How are you?” “I’m good, boss. Are you all right?” “Yeah. We’re heading to that new place. It’s still in San Tropica, but it won’t be reached by the hurricane. Anyway, did you hear the news?” “No.” “Riley just postponed the election indefinitely.” “Because of Green Eyes?” “Yes.” “Why not just get people to vote by post or online?” “He’s said it’s not possible, which is a lie, he simply *wants* it to be postponed. He knew he was going to lose. Green Eyes was his get-out-of-jail-free card.” “The public won’t buy his excuse.” “He doesn’t care what the public thinks.” “Keep your head up, boss. Give me a few hours and he we won’t have any excuse to postpone it, I’ll find Green Eyes and get him locked up.” Upon the postponement, Riley’s supporters all felt relieved, and Arthur’s supporters all believed the postponement fulfilled his prophecy of Riley becoming tyrannical.

They arrived at the Yeshil Forest an hour after departure. They were in the middle of nowhere, where people drove past as fast as possible and all strangers feared each other. The vast landscape stood like a charcoal sketch drawn by a madman. The wind was whistling moaning, and rustling the trees. As they entered the car park, Dean noticed it was empty except for one red car at the end. He left the warm, sandalwood-scented car for the cold, sewage-ridden outside, and kept an eye on the red car, as he made his way to his boot. From there, he took two assault rifles, and put one over each shoulder, forming an X across his back, placed a combat knife in each of his black, military boots, and took two pairs of nightvision goggles. He closed the boot then said as he got Wild Water out of the car, "Before you you think of screaming or playing little games with me, keep in mind I can end your life in an instant with one hand. Is that understood?" "Yes." Dean put a pair of nightvision goggles on then put a pair on Wild Water. He turned him around then lead him with a hand on his back to the red car. "Is that car normally there?" "I've never seen it before." He scanned around as they made their way to the red car. Nothing but the two cars, the forest encasing them, a welcome sign, a light-post, a map of the forest, and a tall, white post which once had a CCTV camera could be seen. Dean looked inside the red car, preparing for the worst, but there was no-one inside or objects of note. Dean turned Wild Water to the forest, and ordered to be guided to the cult's hideout. Wild Water returned to the forest so fallen from how he'd left earlier in the day. When he left, he was to be the man that killed Arthur de la Mer and help Green Eyes save the world, that was now a fading memory. He had expected to be sent to the Isle of the Unforgiven after killing Arthur then broken out because Green Eyes had promised him that. Now, he didn't know what to expect, his future seemed like the dark forest ahead. Dean asked, "How long till we arrive?" To his disappointment, Wild Water replied, "About an hour."

Where they were was overgrown, full of thin, unhealthy trees, collapsing in on one another, crowding the two men. The face of the land was covered in scars, blotches, and dirty puddles. The only possible path according to Wild Water's footsteps was uneven, narrow, winding, undulating, full of wood debris, and mossy stones, large and small. Wild Water struggled his way through, as his arms were not free to balance himself or hold onto anything, often he fell over, cutting and bruising himself, much to Dean's amusement. Multiple times, Dean thought he may have seen someone or something in the distance, but just as he did it would disappear too quickly for him to analyse. There was a thin rope hanging from a branch in the distance, Dean wondered it what could be. Wild Water lead him in its general direction. As they got closer, he realised there was a small plank of wood at the bottom of the rope, it was a little swing, one that had clearly not been used in years. Green Pupils used the swing, as well other markers around the forest, to help find their way to the hideout. Dean asked, "How do you know where you're going?" "I've been here two years. I know it like the back of my hand." "Yet you didn't think to say it would difficult to get through. I could have brought my machete, if you'd said." "It's not all this difficult." The sound of rarely passing cars had now totally gone. All they could hear was the wind still horribly whistling and moaning, the rustling of leaves, their footsteps, and their exhausted breathing. This ambience was all they heard for several minutes, so, when there was a little crash in the leaves to their side, Wild Water gasped and jolted back. Dean laughed at him, "You coward. Why did they get you to assassinate Arthur?" Wild Water resumed walking, "Well, I'm not a coward." "Oh, really?" "Well, I've killed the second most out of everyone there." "How many?" "Five." Dean laughed at a number so measly to him. The ground stopped undulating where they were now. It began to slope downwards, some parts gently, and some parts sloping down so sharply they

had to put thought into each step to avoid tumbling down. “So, you actually choose to live here?” “Yeah.” “Where must you have lived before, then?” “Whatever.” “Oh, come on. Everybody’s got a sob story.” “I’m ratting on my Brothers and Sisters for you. What more do you want?” “No need to be upset. Was just trying to make conversation.” “In that case, can I say something?” “Go ahead.” “Instead of attacking them, can you please go there with an open mind? We don’t stay in the Vault because we’re forced to, we love living there. I know you’d love it too.” “Bunch of losers enjoy living there.” “No, trust me, it’s amazing. Everyone’s equal. We work together. We party together. There’s so much entertainment. We’ve got birds singing, waterfalls flowing, trees rustling for the music. We’ve got the mountains, the fruit, and the sky for visual art. There’s always some bears or monkeys fighting each other for our entertainment. We can act, paint, sculpt, and make music all in our minds. We don’t want instruments, we don’t restrict ourselves with instruments. You have millions of people all playing pianos and using paint brushes, they’re all conforming to the same vibrations, it’s so sad because they’re capable of so much more, they should use the instruments in their own minds. Man is restricted by his tools. In others words, if you’re using a piano to make music, you can only make what the piano allows you to make, but if you’re using your mind, you have the universe as your instrument. We’ve used colours you’ve never seen, we’ve played instruments that will never be made, we’ve sculpted material that doesn’t exist. Art is a medicine for civilization. You kill all the animals and push them away from you, then because you can’t hear the songs of the birds, you fill the void by purchasing music made by computers. You surround yourself with buildings, and because you can’t see nature anymore, you buy nature paintings and flower pots then put them inside the buildings. Civilization is an attempt to recreate nature. It’s stupid. Nature has everything you need and doesn’t come with the problem of technology. And, in five years, we’ll be the only people alive in the whole world.” Guessing he was merely spewing what Green Eyes had taught him, Dean said without interest, “Oh. Okay.” “Can you at least let Green Eyes talk to you? He’ll expand your mind. He’ll make you understand the end is coming soon and only he knows how we can survive. He’ll welcome you with open arms.” “Okay. We can talk.” “Really?” “I don’t see why not. He’s an interesting guy.” “Oh, thank you! Thank you! That is such a relief! You’re going to be so happy when you get there, Brother. They’re partying right now, actually. We love new members. You’ll see how good my Brothers and Sisters are! Can you uncuff me now?” “I’ll uncuff you when we reach the Vault.”

Their journey became easier at this time, the ground flattened, and, for the first time, they were in an open space. There were crickets singing and the lights of a plane flying over them. These little signs of life lifted Dean’s spirits, so lifeless had the forest been earlier. Not all had improved though. The grass reached their hips and stretched ahead for a few hundred metres, and there was a smell of rotting meat and feces in addition to the sewage. Dean covered his mouth and nose. Wild Water said, “Please uncuff me, so I can cover my nose, Brother.” “I’ll uncuff you when we reach the place,” said Dean as he analysed the ground. A dozen steps on, Dean’s heart stopped, when the ground under his front foot collapsed. He fell in a rectangular hole filled with wooden spears at the bottom and an impaled boy. The hole was eight-foot long, three-foot wide, six-foot deep, and covered by a thin sheet of grass before he’d stepped on it. He moved his arms and legs wide to stop the fall. His hands and feet were pressed against the muddy sides of the hole. His body shook as he tried to hold himself from falling. His mind raced with ideas of how to get out without slipping. He looked beneath him for an area where he could land, but there wasn’t one to be found. Wild Water, noticing the stop of footsteps behind him, span around slowly and asked, “Hey, where did

you go?” Dean held his breath fearful of being kicked in. His hands and feet shook more rapidly. His limbs ached. Wild Water began jogging in his direction, “Where are you, Brother?” Dean realised that Wild Water might accidentally jog into the hole and get them both killed. He kept his feet dug into the sides, and moved his hands to the top. His feet slipped, he grabbed on to the ground, and tucked his legs in. “Oh, there you are!” Wild Water ran towards him, “Hold on, Brother!” “Stay away!” “Let me help you!” Wild Water ran to Dean’s left side then squatted and offered his tied hands. Dean lifted himself out to the right side. Wild Water got up and said as Dean stomped towards him, “Y-you could have taken my hand, Brother.” “You should have fucking said there were traps!” “I didn’t know there were.” “You said you knew this place like the back of your hand!” Dean slapped him round the side of the head. Wild Water stumbled towards the hole. Dean grabbed him so he didn’t fall in and held him leaning over it. “You really thought you could kill me?” “I’m not trying to. I want to be your Brother!” “Well, how about you walk right in front of me, so I don’t fall in another trap, brother!” Dean pulled him to safety and span him back in the direction he was going. To avoid falling into another trap, he began to follow Wild Water’s path exactly. For the smell to have been as strong as it was, Dean estimated there must have been several corpses still in holes around them. “If I was trying to get you killed, why do you think I tried to help you out?” “Because you realised I survived.” “That is so cynical, Brother! Green Eyes teaches us to shower potential recruits with love, to treat them as if we’ve known each other for years!” “He’s so intelligent.” Wild Water seemed totally incapable of recognising sarcasm, “Oh, no, he’s not intelligent! When you meet him, you must not say he is intelligent, that would be a great offence to him! He teaches that intelligence is the root of all human suffering; the delay of action, the invention of technology, the oppression of law. This is why he teaches us to stay away from books. To survive, we must rely totally on our instincts. We must not learn from philosophers, we should learn from mosquitos and cockroaches because they kill and survive the most!” “Well, if it makes you feel any better, you’re a cockroach, in my eyes.” “Oh, Brother! I still have a long way to go. I’ve only just begun our de-intelligence program. The energy forcefield we’re starting to experience is immense. There’s an awesome exchange of vibrations between us and all other lifeforms. It’s like a permanent high. I feel more alive than I ever have. It’s like waking up whilst already awake, but the process has only just begun. We’ll help you catch up with the program, don’t worry, Brother.” “Oh, thank you very much. Is there anything else I should know before joining?” “You’re not allowed to talk to outsiders, unless you’re trying to recruit them. You can’t read or listen to anyone’s opinions other than Green Eyes’. We have a daily schedule that you’ll see.” “That sounds quite heavy, but I shall do as Green Eyes demands.” “You’ll realise it’s all worth it.”

For forty-five minutes more of Wild Water’s proselytizing, they passed through flat land filled with thick carpets of fallen leaves, stretches of wet mud several inches high, spaced-out trees so tall it made the two of them feel like ants looking up to humans. Dean observed the trees like works of art. His favourites were the unique. One had two twisting trunks, another had a formation of bumps that appeared to be a human face with a stoic expression, another tree had been split almost perfectly in half by lightning, another was interpreted by him as a headless man’s torso with arms raised to the sky in praise. He was knocked out of his reverie, when a panic halted Wild Water’s quickened step. “What is it?” Wild Water whispered in return, “Someone screamed.” Dean could only hear ghostly birds. “Nothing happened.” “My Brothers and Sisters are in danger!” With high knees, Wild Water ran through the sludge. Dean grabbed a pistol from his belt to throw at his head, but then a thought held his hand back. He wondered if he’d been too distracted to notice a scream and that it may have

actually been from someone in danger of the cult. He ran directly behind Wild Water, in case of another trap, struggling to listen for distant sounds above their boots racing through the mud and their tired breathing flying through the air. Whilst running, he attached a silencer to his pistol. A quiet rumbling emerged from the distance. Dean put a hand on Wild Water's shoulder to stop him, "Listen." They began to distinguish a sprinting group, shouting to one another in fear and madness. Dean grabbed then dragged Wild Water to the muddy ground behind a widest tree. He laid next to him and covered Wild Water's mouth with his spare hand. With his pistol aimed at their direction, he began to decipher the voices of three young men. "It's stopped chasing us!" "I don't care, we're leaving!" As the three men emerged in Dean's nightvision goggles, they seem to be unarmed. He presumed they'd been searching for Green Eyes, unprepared for the danger awaiting them. Dean, thinking of the traps the three may fall in, put his pistol in his belt and ran to them. "There are traps ahead, be careful!" The three of them accelerated. They turned their heads but couldn't see him. "What was that?" "Keep running!" Seeing his warning misconstrued, Dean continued his pursuit, and said each word clearly, "There are traps ahead, be careful! I am not your enemy!" The three continued running, too scared to speak. Just as Dean was decelerating, his left foot stepped on the plate of a bear trap, triggering a reverberating clang and a metal mouth crunching into his leg. He bellowed then silenced himself in a refusal to show weakness. Wild Water arose from where he'd been left and began searching for him, "Hang on, Brother!" Dean limped to the ground, panting, and tried to pull the thick, rusty, metal bars from his leg. When Wild Water found him, he ran without hesitation and began pulling back one of the bars, allowing Dean to focus on the other. With his assistance, Dean was able to remove his leg from the trap in a few seconds. He took off his nightvision goggles and rifles, then removed his shirt and tied it around his leg to stop the bleeding.

Wild Water looked aghast at his injury. When he saw he'd sufficiently calmed enough to talk, he asked, "Are you ready to go now, Brother?" "Yeah." He crouched next to him with his back turned, "Take my hand." Wild Water had earned his trust, so he uncuffed him as a thanks, and placed the handcuffs in a trouser pocket. Realising his freedom, he said, "Oh, thank you, Brother!" then helped Dean up. "Don't betray my trust." Wild Water stretched "Oh, no! I won't, Brother! I'm so glad you're joining us. I guess you won't be needing those weapons anymore?" "I guess not, since we're friends now." Dean left his assault rifles on the ground, took off his pistol belt, and removed the knives from his boots. They put on their nightvision goggles, and Dean started walking with his support and began to question if the other Green Pupils would be as gullible as Wild Water. He wondered if they would recognise him as Arthur's head of security. "Do you have TV or internet in the Vault?" "Internet?" "TV"? We don't use modern technology! You can't say you love nature, if you use unnatural things." "I'm confused. You're against some modern tech, but not others. I have a lot to learn." "The only technology we have is what we absolutely must, like our guns. We'd rather not use them, but have no choice until we reverse civilization." "In Green Eyes' speech he seemed to know exactly what was said during the debate. How did he know what was said without the internet?" "He's a prophet." "I see. How do his messages get on billboards, if you don't use modern tech?" "Well, there's a lady in a suit that come every now and again. I think she has something to do with it, because she usually brings a camera." "A lady in a suit?" "Yeah. She always wears the same grey suit and brings the same briefcase along with her." "Is she hot?" "I don't know. I never get close enough to see." "What's her name?" "I don't know. Green Eyes said she's a friend of the Green Pupils. I never spoke to her, because we

can't talk to strangers without his permission. I only started talking to you because I was scared."

For half an hour, Dean limped through the thick mud with Wild Water's assistance, telling him about life in the Love Party. When he noticed sitting figures in the distance who were clearly guards judging by their weapons, Dean asked Wild Water, "How will your Brothers and Sisters react when they hear you failed to assassinate De la Mer?" "We've failed many assassinations before, and Green Eyes has always been understanding. We've only been able to kill so many Nature Rapers because we've tried so many times." "I see. Well, I'm sure I'll be able to help you." "I'm sure you will." "When you introduce me, don't say I used to work for De la Mer. If you do, they won't believe I want to join." "I understand, Brother. It's not everyday we recruit someone like you, but I can't lie to Green Eyes." The guards shot up, and held their torches towards the two of them when they heard them talking. Wild Water shouted, "Don't worry, it's just me!" A man named Strong Horse and a woman named Purple Berry, both around Jeremiah's age, approached them, confused as to why Wild Water was not imprisoned and was with a stranger. Strong Horse and Purple Berry were dressed in plainclothes and had their machine guns slung behind them. Dean and Wild Water took off their nightvision goggles. Whilst swinging his eyes between the two of them, Strong Horse asked, "What happened?" "We didn't get them." "I mean, how did you return so soon?" Wild Water giggled, "I don't know. They were too slow to catch me, and my Brother here gave me a lift." Purple Berry, who'd been gawking at Dean, squeaked, "A new Brother!" At once, she went to help Wild Water take Dean to the Vault. "Let's take you inside for that injury. We'll mend you in no time." The four began walking down the hill. Strong Horse asked, "Where's Timber?" "Riley's guards took him somewhere." "That's okay. We'll break him out. How close did you get?" "We both missed. We could have got them, but the two of them started arguing before Green Eyes' speech, and all their guards came to split them up. They got lucky." "Don't beat yourself up about it, Brother. There's still three days before the election." "No, there isn't. The election was postponed." "Why?" "Riley said it was for security purposes." "As if he cares about people! He postponed it because he thinks he'll lose." "Well, he will still lose." At the bottom of the hill, Strong Horse and Wild Water moved away leaves and branches to reveal a wooden cellar door. Dean observed them for the slightest hint of betrayal, ready to react. Strong Horse unlocked it and it creaked open. Dean imagined he was about to be put in some sort of holding cell until Green Eyes came, but Wild Water helping him inside calmed his suspicion. They bade farewell to Purple Berry and Strong Horse who then locked the door and returned to their watch post on the hill.

They were in a chalky tunnel, ten-foot wide, dimly lit by sconces. All they could hear were themselves and the sconces' flames. Dean asked, "Who else has a key for that door?" "There's a box of them by the Vault's entrance, Brother. You're not thinking of leaving, are you?" "No. I was just curious." "Well, you won't want to leave when you get there. You're going to have the time of your life!" "I've dreamed of this moment a long time. How long will it be until we get there?" "It takes about ten minutes, but with your injury probably double that." "This tunnel must have taken forever to create." "I'm sure it did. Green Eyes built it himself. It was already made when we first arrived." "And he created the Vault too?" "Yeah, but when we arrived it was the size of a bungalow, now it's the size of a stadium." As he limped through the tunnel, Dean felt he was descending to Hell. The further they went, they hotter it was, and the earth-shaking drums, the wild, wordless singing, and the roar of a mighty flame, became clearer to them. To avoid a total loss of spirit, Dean held onto a

favourite thought of his he'd learnt years ago from a tattoo a soldier had, 'Paradise makes no heroes, they're forged in the fires of Hell.' After twenty minutes, there came a commanding voice from the end, "Who is it?" Wild Water responded, "It's just me." A man came into view with a machine gun over one shoulder, and asked the same questions Strong Horse had, and received the same answers. He then helped Dean through the final stretch of the tunnel. At the end, there was a circular, dark grey, metal door. Another guard sitting beside it on a wooden stool arose and welcomed them with a warm smile. Dean took note of the box of keys under his chair and the machine gun resting against the wall, as the guard opened the twenty-inch-thick vault door. Wild Water said to him, "Stick beside me, Brother. We have to always be in pairs."

As it opened, they were hit by heat, and a flowery scent very pungent to Dean, but normal to the Green Pupils. The drumming and singing were heard in their full greatness. When Dean saw what was in the Vault his jaw dropped. As Wild Water had said, it was the size of a stadium. He felt that he'd stepped into pre-history. In the walls were thousands of holes for their bedrooms. It was full of colourful plants in clay plots that sectioned off each area. The plants could grow without sunlight, the seeds had been stolen from a lab at Riverlake. They seemed to have pillaged the world's best vegetation and hoarded it all for themselves. In the centre was a fire so tall it lit the entire Vault, and there were many torches all around too. Round the fire they danced, sang, and played drums. On one side, people were practicing yoga and on another they were practicing karate. All Green Pupils were naked and virtually all were in good shape. It was common to see members that were not in relationships or related to one another holding hands as they walked. In a section where they were cooking food, smoke rose from great cauldrons of soup, the comforting scent of warm bread drifted from clay ovens, and open fires cooked meat from animals they'd just slaughtered. There was a waterfall near the centre and they drank and bathed in its pool. There were, as Wild Water had said, several hundred yellow barrels of GX to the side of the entrance, out in the open. It was clear to Dean that none of them knew GX was a nerve agent, otherwise they'd have all left, unless, he thought, they were too scared of leaving. Also out in the open near the entrance was a mountain of guns and crates of ammo stacked high. Wild Water undressed and Dean did too upon instruction, only leaving on his shirt around his leg wound. There were piles of clothes to the side of the entrance for them to wear when they went outside to avoid being arrested for indecent exposure. They walked down the entrance's slope and were swarmed by cult members asking Wild Water the same questions he'd already answered that evening. They were excited to see a man as tall and muscular as Dean joining the Green Pupils, and followed the two of them to his initiation. As with all new recruits, they showered him with attention and affection. "What's your name?" asked a smiling, young man with adoring eyes. "Anthony Williams," said Dean. "Where are you from, Brother?" "Montpelerin." "Ah. A lot of us are from there! You'll fit right in. What did you used to work as?" "A debt collector." "A debt collector? That makes sense since you're so strong." Dean appeared friendly as he took in his surroundings. His initial impression diminished, as he went to his initiation. In the centre of the Vault, there were orgies and the consumption of magic mushrooms, dotted at the far end of the Vault, he could see cult members mining and wondered what long hours they were forced to work and how large Green Eyes planned for the Vault to be. Dean didn't yet see the babies that Wild Water had mentioned, and supposed they may have been sleeping, though, considering the loud noise of the Vault, he wasn't sure how. Walking around the great fire, he saw a mound a few dozen steps beyond it. The two ascended it and the others waited by the foot. At the top was a box of necklaces made of



thorns. Men, and non-fertile women, had a necklace of thorns placed on them when they first joined. The necklace couldn't be removed until they'd killed a Nature Raper. Fertile women had to wear a necklace of thorns until they let Green Eyes impregnate them. A couple of moments after they'd ascended the mound, the mood of the entire Vault changed in a split second with the tolling of a bell. Everyone stopped what they were doing and began to sing the cult's anthem:

*We will help Green Eyes,*

*We will love Green Eyes.*

*He is arboreous,*

*Clever and glorious,*

*Nature Rapers must all die,*

*When they're gone, we will fly,*

*Confuse their politics,*

*On him our hopes we fix.*

*We will help Green Eyes!*

*We will love Green Eyes!*

As they sang, every Green Pupil put their hands behind their back. Green Eyes passed through them proudly. He warmly acknowledged those near him. He was naked, except for his crown of two-foot-high twigs, and his gloves of animal skin with twigs sticking out of each fingertip. His middle-parted hair fell to his chest, and his beard was a foot-long. As he passed through the crowd that dared not speak before being spoken to, they began following him to the initiation. They were ordered to encircle the mound not just to listen and welcome the new recruit, but also because new recruits that failed their initiation were kicked by Green Eyes down the mound for observers to beat to death. Dean estimated there were about a thousand people surrounding him. As Green Eyes ascended to its top, he said with affection, "Why are you back so soon?" Wild Water saw no reason to fear telling the truth, "I failed to get De la Mer because this man stopped me. He was a guard of his." The crowd's faces matched the look of alertness on Green Eyes'. Dean was shocked by Green Eyes' feces-smelling breath, but he remained dedicated to his act of admiration. Arthur had shown him a picture of Green Eyes taken a year before his disappearance and he seemed to have aged a decade since then, and there was a deep, circular wound at the top and centre of his forehead that had not been in the picture. To calm their fears, Wild Water continued, "He drove me here and said on the way that he was simply doing his job by protecting De la Mer. He's wanted to join for a long time and believed capturing me was his best chance to." Green Eyes' face of alarm turned into a judgemental one, he kept his eyes on Dean as he spoke to Wild Water. "Were you followed here?" "Definitely not." "Where's Timber?" "They took him backstage. I'm not sure what they did to him. His blade hit one of Riley's guards, at least." Green Eyes frowned at Dean for a few seconds with razor-like eyes. He steadily rested

his arms on Dean's shoulders and locked his hands on the back of his head. Wild Water took a step back, excited for Green Eyes' compliments for finding him. Green Eyes looked intently into his eyes in search of his character, and Dean looked at him with pious love. "Why are you joining us?" "For so many reasons. We have all known for a long time that the saving of our planet requires a radical solution, and I have been burdened with a heavy guilt for doing too little. I have admired you for killing the Nature Rapers instead of random civilians. I believe that technology is harming people in ways few understand. The average man used to memorise entire books, now they can hardly remember a sentence because they rely on technology to remember for them. The average man used to run for hours, now they can hardly walk a hundred metres without wheezing because they rely on technology to transport them. And, I must admit, I am scared of being conscripted to the war, I would prefer to stay here with you." There was no change in Green Eyes' expression of curiosity, as he asked, "Nature is a conscious being that will punish those who attack it and reward those who help it, do you agree?" "Yes." "You will hand over all of your property to us, do you agree?" "Yes." "You will do anything I ask of you, do you agree?" "Yes." "Your new and only name is Rhino Blood, do you agree?" "Yes." "Today, you are reborn, meaning you are now one day old, do you agree?" "Yes." Green Eyes then asked a question he never had before during an initiation. "And, finally, do you actually expect me to think that you want to join-" Dean ducked out of Green Eyes' arms. He pushed Wild Water, sending him flying down the mound and into the spectators. He grabbed a necklace of thorns from the box beside him, slapped off Green Eyes' crown, placed the necklace around his neck ready to execute Green Eyes, and his other arm around him. Dean had moved so quickly that the spectators hadn't made it halfway up the hill when he commanded over their cries, "One more step and he's dead!" They all froze. "You cowards have two choices. You move out of my way or he dies. What will it be?" None of them moved, so he pulled the necklace slightly into Green Eyes' neck and screamed, "Don't test me, you cunts!" The audience moved back in an instant whilst still despairingly watching Green Eyes. The spectators parted for Dean. Whilst still at the top, he said, with the hope of gaining some protection on his way out, "That's more like it. Now, if you want to leave this shithole, raise your hand and you can come with me." All looked around to see who would put their hand up, some looking for traitors, some looking for confidence. Dean added for encouragement, "I know this man's stolen all of your money, but, have no fear, De la Mer will help you get back on your feet. You have nothing to lose." Upon hearing this, one young lady flimsily put her hand up and the dominoes fell. Around two hundred of the thousand Green Pupils put up their hands. Green Pupils wishing to remain tried to dissuade others that wished to leave. They were shocked to see people wanting to go after seeing no indication of displeasure from anyone before this moment. Those wanting to leave complained they were tired of the work schedule and felt betrayed by the cult's murderous turn those last weeks. Dean smiled at the chaos and then pretended to be angry, "I said raise your hands, not talk, you cunts!" and they silenced themselves. "Everyone that wants to leave, form around me, we are leaving now. If you have any children, go get them and we'll wait for you by the exit." If Dean had planned this, he would have realised how asking them to approach him could have easily gone wrong, but fortunately for him none attacked. Seeing that everyone who wanted to be with him was and that there were innumerable people running to find their children, Dean said, "Great! Let's go!" Green Eyes tried to reassure the remainers, "They'll pay for betraying us. Don't worry-" Dean knocked him out with one elbow, took off his necklace, then dragged him by the foot down the mound. A leaver helped Dean drag Green Eyes by taking the other foot. The leavers began their walk

to the Vault door through a stormy sea of people. For all of the arguments coming from the remaining, there were arguments in return from the leavers. Each cry of woe brought more joy to Dean. He vaunted aloud, to worsen the anguish of the remaining, "Woo! It feels so good to be a real man! Make way for the king!" Remainers were crying all around. The noise was so hectic that a concentrated effort was needed to comprehend a full sentence. One of the remaining cult members shouted, "If they want to leave, let them leave. Fuck them! We'll break Green Eyes out anyway!" One that was trying to dissuade them from leaving shouted back, "If they leave, the world will know we're here!" Leavers tried to persuade the remainers to join them, but none were convinced. An old lady pleaded as loudly as she could, whilst trying to keep up with the leavers, "Don't take him out of here! Don't you take him out of here!" One leaver said to a different remainer, "I have my own mind!" and that remainer replied, "You only have a mind because of him!" Another remainer spoke to themselves, "He was right. He was right. This is the way the world ends. This is the way the world ends." Five remainers beat Wild Water to death for his stupidity.

Then, just as all seemed to be going well, the two guards that allowed him into the Vault began machine-gunning the leavers from the top of the slope. Fortunately for Dean, they were purposely aiming nowhere near Green Eyes. Dean was determined to keep him alive, he didn't want any conspiracy theories about Green Eyes being allowed to escape and Arthur helping him hide, he wanted the world to know Green Eyes was locked up in the Isle of the Unforgiven. Remainers and leavers scattered with manic screaming. Dean and a couple dozen others charged at the guards, hurdling over the dead and the dying as fast as they could. The guards reloaded frantically as leavers began ascending the slope and reaching the heap of guns and ammo. When the firing stopped, a chorus of pain filled the void. After reloading, the guards chopped down a few more before they were tackled, had their guns yanked from them, and shot in the head. The leavers grabbed the first clothes their hands found and most took a gun. Half ran to the end of the tunnel fearing more bloodshed, half waited on the other side of the Vault door and at the top of the slope to protect Dean with guns aimed at the remainers. He retrieved his clothes and flung them over a shoulder. He took a gun then rushed to the top of the slope. Looking back, he saw parents racing down the stairway with their children to escape, and he saw remainers heading for the gun heap. The leavers shot those trying to get a gun from the heap. Dean kept an eye on the mothers hurrying towards the exit, concerned a remainer may hold one hostage. He ordered those to the side of him, "Shoot into the crowd till they disperse." So, they shot, and they all dispersed. Seeing the parents approaching the slope, Dean ordered the firing to halt. Remainers gave up trying to reach the gun heap. The mothers made their way through a cleared, but bloody, path. Dean told a few around him to help the ladies up the slope made slippery through bloodshed, and a few to keep their guns pointed at the remaining. The parents thanked Dean as they rushed past him. When all the parents left the Vault, he told the rest of the leavers to get out too. So that Riley couldn't say the cult was still a threat, he wanted to leave none of the remainers alive. He sprayed the GX barrels with bullets. Amber-coloured gas shot out of dozens of barrels. The remaining members that had been standing around defeated sped for the exit. Dean and his helper ran out dragging Green Eyes with them. The vault door was locked, before the remainers could get there. Within seconds, death was taking its grip. From the wrong side of the Vault came the hammering on the door with fists, pleading, the sound of people struggling to climb over loved ones to reach the door, then coughing, crying, indecipherable screaming, and slapping at the door. Dean let go of Green Eyes and dressed

quickly. He took the handcuffs from his trouser pocket and cuffed Green Eyes who was still unconscious.

Dean and three others carried Green Eyes up the tunnel, holding a limb each. Relieved to escape the Vault, but anxious for their futures, and shocked by what had just transpired, all were silent. After two minutes, Green Eyes awoke. He looked all around, fearing for the worst. The carriers tightened their hold after feeling him wake. He tried to kick his legs and swing his arms free, but to no avail. Dean turned around and smiled at him. Green Eyes said, "Where are you taking me?" "The Isle of the Unforgiven." Green Eyes looked side to side at the former followers whose names he couldn't remember, "My Brothers, have I ever done you wrong?" "Silence!" "Why don't you save me?" "Silence!" He said to Dean, "Rhino Blood." "That's okay. You can speak to me," making the others smile. Green Eyes continued, "I'm not who you think I am. I'm not that weird villain they portray me as. The Great Revenge was the DIA's idea. They forced us to do it. We were a peaceful community before they came along." "Prove it." "I can't because-" "You're lying." "No, no, no. I don't have evidence because they're too smart to leave evidence. They don't write their plans on paper and take pictures. If you put me down, we could sit back in the Vault, we could have coffee, I could explain to you what happened, then you'll believe me. The story is so epic, it's so vast, there's Mafia families, motorcycle gangs, the DIA, laboratories, artists, drugdealers. I can't explain it in one conversation, it would take twelve hours to explain. My memory doesn't work too well, but I remember that story perfectly, right down to the weather of each day. Do I sound like a guilty person, to you?" "Yeah." Green Eyes laughed in defeat and said nothing for the rest of the journey. The love from his followers was not as sweet as the hatred from his enemy was bitter.

Before they got above ground, they found the corpses of Strong Horse and Purple Berry at the end of the tunnel, and all walked past them without a care. Above ground he found the other leavers waiting for them. They were hoping for Dean's guidance, but said nothing as he emerged, too scared to start a conversation with him, they merely smiled at him like shy children. Without acknowledging the others, Dean dragged Green Eyes to the top of the hill who refused to show pain in front of his traitors as his body scraped against sharp rock and wood debris. Dean laid Green Eyes down and sat on him, causing a pain he couldn't hide. The leavers slowly began approaching him, some looking out into the pitch black of the forest, some into the pitch black of their future, and some tracking aeroplane lights with their eyes. Dean said, "Come around!" and they quickly went to him. He took the phone from his trouser pocket, "In order for me to allow you back into civilization, I will need to check if you're wanted for any crimes. Is that fair?" They said, "Yes." "Say 'Yes, Mr. Ford.'" "Yes, Mr. Ford." "Very good. Make your faces visible, so we can get this over with." They spread out, Dean opened the Overwatch app on his phone and scanned their faces. The app said they were all innocent. Dean supposed the only Green Pupils that left with him were those that had not murdered anyone, so didn't fear imprisonment. He started a video call with Arthur who'd been sleeping. "Dean! Are you okay?" Maria could be heard in the background, still half asleep, "What's going on?" Dean laughed, "I'm having a great time! I'm not sure about my little friend here, though." He pointed the phone's camera at Green Eyes. Arthur saw his old friend changed beyond recognition, wrapped in anguish. Arthur pitied him, but more than that he was relieved to seem him captured, so he said joyfully, "Ah! You did it! How'd you do that?" He returned the camera to himself and said, "I'll tell you all about it later, boss. One of the reasons I called was because I have maybe a hundred of his people with me. They have

no loyalty to him anymore. They hate him and want to start a new life. I checked these people, they're all innocent. Can I send them to one of our Welfare Centres?" "Yeah. That's no problem. What happened to the ones that didn't leave, are they still in their hideout?" "Green Eyes shot a bunch of GX barrels, just before we left-" "No, I didn't." "Shut your mouth. He shot a bunch of GX barrels. He killed everyone that stayed behind. He couldn't bear the idea of them living without him as their leader." Arthur was silent in thought for a moment. "Okay. Well, at least you've captured him." "Yeah. I'm going to take him to jail right after this call." "Very good. Well, thank you for this, Dean. You'll be rewarded handsomely." "That's very kind of you, boss." "And make sure you tip off our journalists to the hideout's location. We must be the first ones to have a word on this, to set the narrative." "Of course, boss."

Arthur contacted Lauren to inform the staff on the news. In the period between the postponement of the election and the news of Green Eyes' capture, the staff were demoralised as they were told to continue working on the same projects they had been prior until further notice. With the news, came a reinvigorated spirit, as they created a campaign demanding Riley to stop the postponement of the election. Dean hailed helicopter taxis. Everyone threw their guns into the tunnel to not scare them off. Dean tipped off a few pro-Love Party journalists to the location of the Vault and told them to only arrive by helicopter and to enter the Vault with a hazmat suit. The helicopters for the leavers and himself arrived. The leavers were taken to a Love Party Welfare Centre. Dean and Green Eyes were taken to the Isle of the Unforgiven. Dean received the highest bounty ever given in Gildland, forty million gilders. Green Eyes received a six-by-six-foot padded cell to live in until he died or escaped. The Isle of the Unforgiven was operated by Securiton, and was funded by taking all property that belonged to inmates and their forced labour. All inmates were forced to work in the isle's labour camp, unless injured, and all inmates had life sentences. The military were notified of the dead bodies in the Vault organised their burial.

Dean went to the mansion that the Love Party were offered by one of their wealthiest donors, whilst the Bennefeath Palace awaited the hurricane. The mansion and its grounds were almost as large as the Bennefeath. He was greeted with an ovation, and Arthur offered him two million gilders which he refused. His leg was attended to by a doctor at the mansion that Arthur ordered for him. Afterwards, he told everyone the story of how he captured Green Eyes, but he only told Arthur the truth about who shot the GX barrels. Most listeners thought Dean invented much of the story, but were too scared to question him. In the early afternoon, Dean held a press conference at the mansion with Arthur by his side. He told reporters that Green Eyes was the one that shot the GX barrels, and that he saved over a hundred cult members who were now receiving help from the Love Party. After being awake for thirty-two hours, Dean Ford went to sleep.

## Statement 9: Remorseless

*TODAY'S TOP HEADLINES:*

*Green Eyes' Followers Attack Riley and De la Mer During Debate*

*Riley POSTPONES Election Over Voter Security Concerns*

*Steve Cook Executed by Green Eyes*

*Green Eyes Captured!*

*We Haven't Seen the Worst of the Stock Crash Yet*

There was a great mood around the mansion the next morning. They expected the postponement of the election to be over now that Green Eyes was locked away. It was difficult for them to imagine a hurdle greater than the election's postponement being placed in the way of their victory. However, their mood took a turn for the worse at midday when it was announced that an interview with Green Eyes was to be broadcasted live from the Isle of the Unforgiven that evening by GBC, a publicly-funded company that had not publicly endorsed Riley, but understandably supported him as he was not the candidate for privatising them. The Love Party feared GBC would use the interview to vilify Arthur. They thought Green Eyes would be forced to say Arthur was funding his cult during the interview. The moment he heard the news, Arthur declaimed, "This is how it ends! The DIA will force him to say I masterminded the Great Revenge, then they're going to imprison me, and the world will accept it because they'll think I'm guilty! The DIA will offer him freedom simply for saying that I masterminded it. They can't beat me fairly, so they must cheat!" Arthur made an emergency call to the CEO of Securitun, asking why he was allowing the interview. He told Arthur he had no say in the matter as the DIA had taken Green Eyes to an undisclosed location for interrogation after his arrival. The Love Party nervously waited for the interview to decide how to retaliate. The staff were told to continue working on the same projects they had been until further notice. To take his mind off the interview, Arthur went for a nap and asked Lauren to wake him if there was an update. When he woke up three hours later, without receiving an update, he watched his favourite opera, with Maria and Eric in the cinema of the mansion and binged on sweets, which cut-off four and a half hours of waiting time, leaving only thirty minutes until Green Eyes' interview. Arthur and co. ate dinner at seven thirty. They all feared how uncomfortable the dinner would be, but Dean, Eric, and Maria put them all, except for Arthur and Jeremiah, in a good mood from the start and the dinner was almost as enjoyable as usual.

They left the table at five to eight and made their way to the living room. Jeremiah, who had not said a word during dinner, waited for them all to leave then headed to his bedroom. Arthur noticed his absence, and, when he turned to see him going the opposite direction, said to the others, "What on earth is he doing?" Everyone else stopped because Arthur did. He called to him, "Aren't you going to join us?" He was surprised to be acknowledged and tried to not sound confrontational, "I don't want to watch the interview." "Why?" He replied truthfully, "I don't want to see him." "Why?" "I just don't." "Why?" He sighed, "Just because." "Why?" Jeremiah glanced at the others, to see if they thought Arthur was as odd as

he did. He asked again, “Why?” Jeremiah huffed then joined them, unsure why Arthur wanted him there. They carried on to the living room as though the awkward conversation had not happened.

In the living room, as if to himself, Arthur complained in an endless stream about Green Eyes being interviewed and Riley not reversing the election’s postponement. Maria caressed him, as he said, “This will be a show trial. You cannot attack the DIA, the Royal Family, the military, and every government agency without a backlash. They’ve spent all day putting fear into him to ensure he gives the answers they want. They’ll ask if I masterminded the Great Revenge, he’ll say yes, then there’ll be a knock at our door and I’ll be dragged to prison.” As Arthur was still complaining, a new member of staff served coffee, terrified of making a mistake. Arthur’s bad mood only worsened her anxiety. Her hands shook as she poured it for them. Arthur stopped complaining to calmly and warmly say, “Thank you, Ashley.” Instantly, she felt comforted, and was in slight disbelief he’d remembered her name after only being introduced earlier in the day. With his drink in hand, Arthur stopped ranting to the relief of everyone around him.

Despite the notice being much shorter, the interview with Green Eyes had more viewers around the world than the debate between Arthur and Riley. It began with the interviewer, a suited, well-respected, old journalist named Edward Huster, sitting at a table in a dreary room. “Good evening, everybody, and thank you for joining us on this special live broadcast. Over the last three weeks, our nation has been terrorised by Green Eyes and his cult, previously referred to by the media as the Lost Students, but now known to be called the Green Pupils. In the early hours of this morning, their leader, Green Eyes, was captured, and brought to the Isle of the Unforgiven where he will serve his life sentence. We are here to ask Green Eyes all of the questions you’ve wanted answering since he and his cult rose to prominence.” Arthur said, “Notice how he didn’t mention that Dean captured him. If he did, it would be obvious we didn’t fund their cult. They’re already manipulating the narrative and they’re not even five seconds into it!” The rest shook their heads as their fears of media manipulation seemed to be coming true. Jeremiah, however, thought it was funny, and hid his smirk with a hand. “To begin to understand who he is, it is important we start with a brief biography. Green Eyes, whose real name is Oscar Profundis, was born twenty-seven years ago in Bronrar and by all accounts was raised in a normal, happy family. He was a student of Arthur de la Mer’s at Riverlake University, and was among his best performing students. His future looked bright until, one day, on his way home from Riverlake, he came across a robbery taking place and was shot by the robbers as he tried to help their victim. After leaving hospital, a fellow student offered him methamphetamine to cope with the pain of his injuries. He became so addicted to the drug that he began to steal money from his parents and eventually dropped out of Riverlake. His parents kicked him out of their home when they discovered he was stealing from them and that he’d dropped out. A little over a year later, he returned to Riverlake as a guest listener for Professor De la Mer. What happened between him dropping out and returning is unknown, except that he’d started living in the Yeshil Forest. When the Humanities were cut from formal education. Green Eyes rallied a band of disillusioned students from Riverlake and nearby universities then attempted to burn down Riverlake in protest of the cutting of the Humanities. They were fortunately stopped before inflicting much damage. After Green Eyes and his followers were sent through a Virtual Rehabilitation Centre for this crime, many of them disappeared with him. Just three weeks ago, Green Eyes resurfaced after his followers attacked the AI Party’s HQ, killing everyone

they found there. He claimed the murders were part of his plan called the Great Revenge, which involved killing CEOs and heads of political parties that didn't conform to his environmental and technological demands. The Great Revenge has so far claimed over eighty-thousand lives, and is without a doubt the crime of the century. Last night, Green Eyes was captured and over eight-hundred of his followers were killed after he shot GX barrels whilst being extracted from their hideout, this is according to former followers of his that defected just last night. Despite the large death-toll at his hideout, substantial fears remain that his followers are still at large waiting to start the next phase of the Great Revenge. In fact, fifty of his supporters were caught sailing to the Isle of the Unforgiven this morning in hopes of breaking him out, before being swiftly captured. Some have asked why we are giving Green Eyes an opportunity to speak publicly. Well, we at GBC are aware of the vast amount of support Green Eyes receives online from many sections of society, and we believe that by interviewing him, people will see he is not a philosopher, but a pseudo-guru, not a saviour, but one of the most depraved monsters to ever live.”

The camera pointed to a doorway opposite the interviewer. Out of view, another door squeaked open and chains clanked. With his chains removed, Green Eyes swaggered into the room wearing a red jumpsuit with two guards behind him. Arthur, Dean, and Jeremiah, squinted at the screen, struggling to believe it was him. He looked like a completely different person to the one Arthur and Jeremiah remembered, and the one Dean saw the previous night. The bruise at the top centre of his forehead was covered by a bandage wrapped around his head. He was bald and had no facial hair. His long fingernails were cut. The interviewer said, “Good evening,” and right out the gate, Green Eyes was confrontational, “Who’s running this interview?” “I am,” said the interviewer. “And what are you trying to accomplish here?” “We just want to understand you.” “Why?” “You’re a very important person, and we want to give you an opportunity to explain yourself.” “You don’t want to ‘give’ me anything. You’re here to make a name for yourself and ruin my reputation. Don’t take from me then act as though you’re giving to me.” “Would you like to take a seat?” Green Eyes stroked his chin as he thought then nodded, “Okay, sure. How are you doing today?” He checked his seat, worried it may be set to collapse when he sat. “I’m fine. How are you?” Green Eyes took a seat, “I’m not happy.” “Why?” “I don’t like staying up at this time.” Arthur pointed at the screen, “Someone’s pointing a gun at him from behind the camera, look at how nervous he is!” The interviewer said, “But it's only a few minutes past eight.” “You are dictated by clocks, and timetables, and schedules, and calendars, and numbers, and all of these fascist things. You people aren’t even aware of how you live, because you’ve never stepped outside of yourself. You can’t say you’re free, if you care about numbers and dates and calendars, because that’s all stuff made by other people. You need to think for yourself.” “When do you normally go to sleep?” Smiling like a charming child, Green Eyes said, “When the sky’s eyes close, I close mine. When the sky’s eyes open, I open mine. I want my body clock to be balanced. That’s what they taught me whilst I travelled around.” “Okay. Well, we’ll talk more about what you believe later, but firstly-” “Am I going to be paid for this?” “I beg your pardon?” “Am I going to be paid for this interview?” “I don’t believe you are.” “Why? I’ve heard of famous people being paid for interviews. Why can’t I be paid? I’ll be making you guys a lot of money with ads.” “Well, GBC is entirely funded by the public.” “So what? You will pay me.” “We pay guests for their travel expenses and occasionally we pay an appearance fee, but we do not pay criminals.” “Is that right?” “Anyway, let’s go back to the start. How was your upbringing?” “I don’t know, man. I can hardly remember what happened five minutes ago. You take what you need from the past and you leave what you don’t.” “Would it be fair to



assume from your answer that your upbringing was bad?" He seemed to not care about the subject, "They were doing what they thought was best for their survival, and I was doing what I felt was best for my survival. Life is just wills to survive colliding. People label what's beneficial to their own survival as good and what's detrimental as bad. Assume from that what you need to be happy." "I'm not looking to be happy, I'm looking for the truth." "Well, that's noble of you, but I despise your tone, so turn yourself down a bit, and remember who you're talking to, I'm not afraid of men that wear glasses." "No offence was intended." "I guessed you weren't happy with the killings, and wanted to hurt me." "I'm not that sort of person." Green Eyes stared blankly at the interviewer. "At Riverlake, you studied political philosophy. What was it that interested you in the subject?" "Well, considering how many prime ministers came from Riverlake, I thought it would help me become one." The interviewer couldn't hide his surprise, "You wanted to become the Prime Minister?" "I will become the Prime Minister. I don't want to, but I must because no-one else can be trusted to do what's right." "What makes you think that you will become the Prime Minister?" "What the hell would I tell you for?" "What did you think of Arthur de la Mer, when you were attending Riverlake?" "He was all right. If we had met when he was younger, I could have taught him a whole lot more than I did. His brain was turned into mush from so much reading that he forget about a little thing called instinct. With all that intelligence comes a lot of arrogance." "What did you teach him?" "Survival. How to live without buying and selling. He probably could survive independently, if he wanted to. One of the few in the world that truly can." "What do you think his opinion was of you?" "We were good friends." "And that friendship was built on what?" "Hatred of people," chuckled Green Eyes. "What was your friendship built on?" "We were outcasts. We are outcasts, and outcasts tend to sympathise because of their outness, don't they?" "I don't know. I'm asking you." "It was a rhetorical question." "What do you think of Pete Riley?" "He's a guy that's completely formed by corporations. His desires, his dreams, his fears, his ideas of good and evil, his fashion. Everything he does is exactly what they want. He wouldn't be able to last five minutes without someone else. If there wasn't someone to build a house for him, he'd sleep under a tree, if he didn't have someone to get water for him, he'd die of thirst." "What do you think of Supreme Leader Sirkitus?" "I am Sirkitus." "What do you mean?" "I am everybody, I am connected to everybody. I am everything. I am in harmony with everything. I am maintaining the entire balance of the universe in these fingertips right here, isn't that obvious to you people yet?" "Right. In FY4076, you were shot three times whilst trying to stop a robbery. Could you tell us more about that? Do you regret trying to stop it?" "Kind of. I regret failing to help the old lady. I should have been more patient. I should have attacked the robbers unexpectedly then I could have returned the purse. But if I hadn't been shot, I wouldn't be who I am today, and I'm happy with who I am." Appalled, the interviewer asked, "You're happy with who you are?" "Any man that is proud of himself is happy." "What are you proud of?" Unhorsed by the question, Green Eyes responded, "What am I proud of? I saved hundreds of students! I showed them a consciousness that stretches the universe! I did everything I could to help your rejects, and you come in here saying I'm a bad guy. If you're so good, what did *you* do to help them?" "I was only asking what you were proud of, I wasn't implying you should not be proud at all." Green Eyes calmed down, "Well, I'm sorry for the misunderstanding." "You began to use methamphetamine to deal with the pain of your injuries. Your addiction lead you to steal from your parents and drop out of Riverlake. Can you give an insight into your addiction, and what happened in the two years between leaving and returning to Riverlake?" "Self-pity is self-defeating and I don't look for sympathy from

anyone.” Realising that Green Eyes didn’t want to appear weak, the interviewer said, “We won’t think you’re looking for sympathy,” and it worked. “Well, I knew what the dangers were, but I took the kid’s offer because I only planned on using it until my injuries healed. I was naive enough to think I could quit if it started to hurt me. I had never been addicted to anything before, so I didn’t realise how difficult it would be to quit. The initial problem was I didn’t realise I had a problem, but the fact that I considered using it *was* a problem. The more I used it without facing a repercussion the more I believed I was invincible and so I used it more and so I became more dependant on it. It’s like falling in love, you’re caught off-guard by the enchantment, you worship it, it’s all you want, and you think everything’s going to work out fine, and just like how people say they’ll do anything for the one they love, I did anything for my love. I knew I needed to change right after I first stole from my parents, and I stopped using it for two days, which was a huge achievement back then, but normality was painfully boring compared to the bliss of the drug, so I began to make excuses, I would say, ‘Oh, I didn’t steal that much from my parents, they can afford to lose what I stole,’ and, ‘Oh, my injuries still hurt, I have no choice.’ Then, a few hours after swearing I would never touch the drug again, and having literally punched myself in the head multiple times,” Green Eyes punched himself in the head, “before I knew it, I was determined to use it again then rode that wave of excitement all the way back to my dealer, and this cycle of swearing I would change and of hating myself then relapsing would go on and on and on. Meth was why I hated myself and to forget that I hated myself I used meth. So, after playing a thousand mind games with myself to get out of the addiction, and failing each time, I surrendered, and decided to enjoy the drug without any regrets. I gave up trying to quit for a couple weeks. I went full steam ahead on one of the greatest binges of all time, and I refused to regret a moment of it. When you don’t respect yourself, you don’t believe you’re worth saving. You know what you’re doing is hurting you, but you don’t believe you deserve, or are capable of, better, so you don’t care. The only reason I saved myself was because I wanted to save something bigger than myself; the world. So, to kick the addiction, I refused to play the old mind games and decided to change my lifestyle, so I ran away from drugs by running away from civilization and into the wild.” Lauren whispered to Arthur what she’d read on her phone, “Arthur,” he leant to her whilst still watching Green Eyes, “Riley will be making an announcement immediately after the interview.” He nodded silently, hoping Riley was going to announce the election was no longer postponed. Green Eyes said, “You look at me like I’m crazy, but, if you went through what I did, you’d be like me. You have to understand that I got to a point where I didn’t want to think anymore, I realised my pain came from thinking. I wanted to only see what was in front of me. I didn’t want to think of the past. I wanted to be free of thoughts. I wanted to be like an animal. Now I am like an animal that only thinks of what its senses provide. That’s how I’ve found peace. The human mind is a curse, it’s a cruel curse, but you can escape it. I only focus on my next action, take a step, take a step, put a hand in the water, pull a hand out the water, and on and on. Misery is the price that humanity pays for genius. Human consciousness is not natural, it’s the reason humans are the only animal that can’t live in harmony with nature. Nature balances everything. You cannot escape the balancing. You may think you’ve escaped, but in the end everything balances. Every plus has a negative. Every action has a reaction. It may be difficult to see, but it will happen in time. A man’s greatest strength is his greatest flaw. The arrogance that takes a great man to the top of the mountain is the same arrogance that will fly him right off of it, crashing into a heap, if he doesn’t tone his arrogance down and humble himself. The great man can only be as successful as nature allows him to be, before it balances everything in its own time, for

nature is slow and not interested in revolutions. There is a balance to everything.” “What was your life like between dropping out and returning to Riverlake?” “I didn’t drop out.” “Our research team believe you did.” Green Eyes giggled, “I was kicked out because my grades plummeted.” “What happened between you being kicked out of Riverlake and returning?” “My parents discovered the theft and the academic dismissal then they kicked me out of their house. At first, I was like,” Green Eyes shot up, giving the interviewer a heart attack, and screamed, “Oh, God!” then sat back down and spoke calmly, “Then I realised it wasn’t so bad. I realised adventuring the unknown could be quite fun. I did have dreams once of being a great author, but that’s okay, dreams just lead to disappointment anyway. The education system is full of predictability, that’s partly why kids so desperately seek excitement. They make up for that boringness in all sorts of crazy ways. Education’s great, when you’re learning what you want to learn about, but you’re forcing them to learn things they don’t care about and never will care about. They should be allowed to study what they want to study. You turn kids off from learning, because you’ve left them with nothing but boring memories from school. You force them to study twenty different things, but, when they’re adults, you want them to be a specialist at one job, so what’s the point of learning all that other stuff? It doesn’t make any sense. The world wants geniuses, but your schools are trying to make jacks of all trades. What’s the point of it? You should be ashamed of yourselves. You all talk about how I’m a bad guy, because you like electing devils, you don’t just elect leaders, you elect devils to act as inverse mirrors for your own ugly fucking souls. Fuck you acting like I’m the bad guy. I never did nothing. I’m just a fucking stick in a forest.” Maria commented, “He loves to go on a tangent, doesn’t he?” and the rest agreed, fascinated by Green Eyes. The interviewer said, “It’s interesting to hear your views on education, because I spoke to some of your former members today and they said you taught them to rely on their instincts and that thinking too much was detrimental to survival.” “There is no contradiction.” “Is there not?” “The invention of writing and the spreading of different ideas have devastated social unity, because you allow different people to spread different ideas. We seek harmony, peace, and food, but out of humanity’s infinite arrogance it looks in the dark for mysteries to bring to the light, but what’s already in the light has the answers to all our needs. Look to the animals. Look at how peaceful they are, they are happy because they live in the moment, we must too become like the other animals.” The interviewer repeated an earlier question, “What happened between you being kicked out of Riverlake and returning?” “Don’t act as though you care about me. You’re here to make money off my misery. Your entire industry is dependant on other people’s misery. You salivate when you hear of a tragedy, because you know you’re going to make loads of money reporting on it.” “We’re actually entirely public-funded.” “So? You still need views to justify your existence.” “Well, you may think we don’t care about you, but we do. You’re a very important figure in the world and we’re interested-” “Wake up, God damn it! I meant ‘care’ as in ‘compassion’ not ‘interested’. In that time, I did what I had to. I sold my body, I did dirty deeds, and, when I grew a pair, I shot people for money. You all come down on me like an avalanche, but the real criminals are in the suits and holding briefcases. They’re stealing seven-hundred trillion from you everyday. I’m sacking a grand off some evil piece of shit and you act as though I’m the bad guy. Maybe, if you helped the poor like how you help the rich, they wouldn’t rely on crime. You don’t like the homeless so you ignore them and you don’t help them out, so what happens? They fall into crime. They could have been good people, but your selfishness pushed them into crime. You don’t like people you disagree with so you attack and silence them. Then they stop listening and learning from you. Then they create their own

communities and become radicalised in isolation. Then those peaceful people you swept under the rug become extremists. Instead of realising those extremists deep down inside have the same desires you boring people have, you create a problem out of your own fear of the other which you criticise those extremists for. Because you reject them, just like how you reject the homeless, they end up worse than how you left them. You can sweep what you don't want under the rug, but it will surface far worse than you left it. I'm everything you ever wanted to throw away. I'm everything you wish never existed. You thought I was worthless and never to be seen again, but here I am worse than how you left me. And I'm telling you now, if you don't listen to their cries, you'll listen to their guns. There's a whole lot worse coming than the Great Revenge. All this young generation has to do is grow up!" "So the system is to blame for the Great Revenge and not the actual murderers?" "You make someone angry then criticise them for being angry. You get a whip and beat the life out of him. The victim reacts violently then you turn around on your high horse and ask, 'Why are you so evil?' Fuck you." "How did the CEOs and politicians you slaughtered have *anything* to do with making you angry?" "Did I say they made me angry?" "You implied it." "God, I can't communicate with this idiot. He's a fool." He turned to the guard beside him, "Can we get someone smart to interview me? This guy's an idiot." The guard shook his head. The interviewer asked, "Are you okay to continue?" Green Eyes shrugged with a grin, "Yeah. I've got nothing else to do." "You said that in the time between being kicked out and returning to Riverlake you sold your body and stole from people you shot. Tell us about that." "Why? What difference would that make? You're asking these questions as if you're a judge, but your opinion means nothing. You're acting all serious over something that doesn't concern you. You're not a judge. You're nobody. Your question is a reflection of how small your brain is. You have the brain the size a walnut. Something far more interesting happened than all of the crimes; the change within me. I was on my way to do a job for someone, and as I walked by the Yeshil Forest, and saw some berries, I said to myself, 'Wait a minute. What am I going to kill this guy for? Money. What do I want money for? Survival.' So, instead of killing the guy, I smashed the gun up and buried it in a hole, and I've been having a good time ever since. I began to realise not having what you want is a commonality of all pain and I realised I wanted too many things, so I decided to just not want things. You all talk about being individualist and not relying on others and act all tough and independent, but then you'll go and buy objects. Life's about looking at what you already have and being more observant of it all, looking at the world with new eyes. Another part of the process is letting go of all bitterness, and I mean *all* bitterness. I know you and I have locked horns, but I'd still help you if you needed help, it's no big deal. And, you know, they keep advertising these objects, as if they're going to make you happier, but you're all going in the wrong direction, you shouldn't be going outwards, you should be going inwards. I stopped committing crimes when I became more observant, when I developed new eyes. Why go through the hassle of a crime, when I can pick up some fruit and vegetables in a couple of seconds, head over to a waterfall put my hands out? That's how to survive with ease. I told you years ago, agriculture was the worst mistake humanity ever made. It was the beginning of control. Surveillance is agriculture's grandson. Fortunately, there's no surveillance in the forest. For comfort, I have a place in the woods with no noisy, nosy neighbours. My garden is all the land you bastards haven't privatised yet. I have no belongings so I don't have the anxiety of being robbed. Only stupid people get bored there. We have no technology to corrupt us. With technology you keep creating more problems because technology is a drug, one civilization is addicted to. You want the dose to be stronger and stronger and stronger, you become ungrateful, and

bored with your current technology, so keep asking for more. Technology has to keep getting stronger within each country because all countries are scared of one another so they have to keep getting stronger and stronger so they don't get crushed by other countries. Technology provides high highs and low lows, and the low low is going to get so low that there'll soon be no coming back. You've added the atmosphere to the atom fear, because you have a group of selfish people that don't live where the problems they create are. They don't mind seeing millions die from the planet's own dying because they have their own little island somewhere safe. People always talk about how great life is now, because we have washing machines and fridges and cars, because they make life easier. But what's so good about life being easy? Easiness makes you infirm." Green Eyes looked and pointed to one of the guards beside him, "You've got people like this fat sack of shit ruling your lives, because technology allows the weak to survive." He returned to the interviewer, "Have you ever thought about how much easier technology will make life in a hundred years? Will people even leave their beds anymore? Technology makes life easier, and the easier life is, the less you try, and the less you try, the weaker you get. What substitutes your weakness? Technology. Who controls the technology? The rich and powerful. Do you not realise you're walking into a trap? Do you not realise the rich don't use the technology they sell you? They know how dangerous it is. You have cars, so you don't walk as much, so you get fat. You have writing and computers, so you don't remember anything because it's all remembered for you. You have laboratories and factories making food for you, but will anyone know how to plant any fruit and vegetables? They'll have no idea how to survive. You're all dependent on the rich, but simultaneously you say you don't trust the rich. You should step over to the green side, that's where true freedom rolls. If you don't have power over your life, you don't have freedom. I can see a lot of people on your side of the road ready to cross, if you would just take one short little walk to the green side, you will finally be free. You think the machine world is in the future, but you've been living in it for two-hundred years, and, basically, you're all lying to yourselves." The interviewer attempted to re-focus Green Eyes, "How did you return to Riverlake after two years of absence?" "De la Mer crossed paths with me a few different times." "Was he alone?" "Yeah. We met by chance, he didn't know I was there. We got talking. He wanted to know about my lifestyle and was interested in living there with me. I would have welcomed him, but when you're old you get stuck in your ways, so he chose to not join. I went to Riverlake, because he invited me to be a guest. He said that being alone for too long can make you crazy, and I respect his brain, so I went a couple of times a week, not so much to listen, but more for the friends. I got on with them pretty well, the kids had a lot of respect." "Why did you change your name from Oscar Profundis to Green Eyes?" "De la Mer gave it." Arthur responded angrily, "No, I didn't!" The interviewer asked, "Many experts are confused at how a cult could form in the information age. How were you able to attract so many followers?" "Instinct. My mother once said, 'It's dangerous out there. You should learn martial arts,' and I said, 'Listen, woman. Language is my martial art.' When the Humanities were cut, my survival instincts kicked in. I liked those kids, and I knew I had to help because they were too domesticated to stand up for themselves. Everyone was waiting for De la Mer to lead us, but he fell into some peace and love bullshit. No-one knew what happened to him, we guessed he was going to start a new career. So I told everyone, including him, 'Let's fight back. If we fail, we can live at my place. If you don't like living there, you can leave.' Then-" "Did Jeremiah John ever join you?" "No. He didn't want to join. We'd got in an altercation that same day. I think he was still upset about it." "Why did you get in an altercation with him?" "Because I'm in touch with the worm." "What does that mean?" "The worm is what we all

are deep inside. I'm aware that I'm an animal. Most people hate the fact they're mortal, even more so that they're an animal. They decorate their minds with culture, and manners and all this crazy stuff, but I like it, I like being an animal. I've learnt from the chameleon, the wolf, the eagle, the bear, most of all I've learnt from the mosquito. I realise we are one. So when I start hearing about the Humanities being cut, I become human, and I mean a real human. I help protect these people the only way I know how; war. I'm from seven thousand years ago, I'm not in your buildings. Your cars are like UFOs to me. So I start jumping up and down like a gorilla and beating my chest to rouse these domesticated animals into doing what must be done. Jeremiah and De la Mer tried to calm me down, so we got into a silly little scuffle. The rest of them followed me a few moments after that. Without the Humanities, they would have ended up in careers they didn't care about, so to come in contact with someone like me was a special opportunity for them. I had already warned them that working for a corporation means being loyal until you're stabbed in the back. I told them the truth that most of them will never be able to afford a house, so they may as well make their own house in the wild. Today's average house price is over ten times what it was forty years ago, but the average salary is the same as it was forty years ago. Near-zero interest rates have made borrowing cheap which encourages more people to invest in assets, such as houses, which raises their prices. There's no restrictions on foreign investments in the Gildish housing market which raises their prices. There's an undersupply because increased life expectancy causes homes to become vacant less frequently and there's a lack of government investment. There's an overdemand because of overpopulation, and an increased divorce rates meaning instead of two people wanting one home together, two people want one home each. Nothing has been or will be done to make houses more affordable, because it's in the interest of politicians for house prices to increase, as the majority of voters are home-owners. Also, increasing house prices allows home-owners to take out more debt against their asset which allows them to consume more. You see I'm a pretty clever guy! I know a lot more than you people think! I told them all of this, so they were slowly developing survival instincts before that day. Did you ever notice how in your head there are two voices, one saying kill, eat, destroy and another voice saying, be careful, think about this and that and what about dah dah dah dah and what if blah blah blah blah blah. I don't have that second voice." "Your cult grew very quickly. Were you surprised at how many followers you gained?" "No. I knew that would happen." "You knew that would happen?" "I know everything. I know why Arthur likes that cumdumpster he's with, I know why Riley dyes his hair neon-red, and I know what your opinion is of me. I'm in harmony with nature." "When you tried to burn down Riverlake, you had less than a hundred followers. The cult eventually grew to over a thousand members. How did the cult grow?" "It's not a cult. It's a community." "How did your community grow so large?" "I don't know." "You don't know?" "Yep." "What was life like in the community?" "When you're the bottom of the ladder, you see how selfish everyone truly is. All the niceties of everyday interactions get peeled away. You realise the crazy things people will do to survive. Though they've never lived a happy day, humans still want to keep living, which I've always found interesting. To be offered a new life with no strings attached was a beautiful dawn for them. Money only matters to people that want it. The wise people that live in the wild are the only free people. You can't be free, if you're dependant on others. We took in some water then we give it back. We ate some food then we gave it back. Everything's in harmony, until arrogant humans ruin it. You all think your birth was the beginning of time and your death will be the end in time. My Brothers and Sisters were becoming like the average human of several thousand years ago, it was really great to see.

Men are pitiful things next to trees and mountains. They know how to live in harmony, but not us. Progress is a delusion. All has regressed except for technology which is the culprit of much regression. Equality only benefits the weak, because why the fuck would the superior want to be equal with the inferior? Only the weak need the protection of the law, people that could be strong are also turned weak, as they no longer need to be strong, they don't bother fulfilling their potential strength as they know the law will protect them. Equality means the promotion of the weak, it means letting the worthless thrive over the great. Civilizations have risen and fallen, whilst primitive tribes have outlasted them all. History is on our side, not yours. As for what we did everyday, I already alluded to that. Keep up.” “Apparently, there was witchcraft going on.” “Oh, yes, I’m a beautiful witch.” “The former members I spoke to this morning said abuse was widespread, and that you encouraged it to weed out the weaker members. Is that true?” “Who said that?” “The names aren’t relevant. Was abuse tolerated?” “They wouldn’t dare abuse anyone. They knew I’d beat them if they did. And, if it was so bad, why didn’t anyone leave until that guy came in and threatened them? People loved living there.” “They also said you forced them to stay.” “What would I do that for?” “Perhaps, to keep them quiet.” “That never happened.” “Was there drug use in the community?” “I don’t know. Ask one of the traitors, they know everything.” “Was their drug use in the community?” “‘Drugs’? Drugs are for people with no imagination. Drugs are for weak people. Life is a drug, if you have the right eyes.” “Was your community responsible for any killings before the Great Revenge?” “Yeah. We cut some fruit and vegetables.” “It sounds as though you have something to hide.” “We didn’t kill anyone before the Great Revenge.” Whilst the interviewer read his notes for the next question, Green Eyes smirked at the camera. “How did the Great Revenge begin?” Arthur turned up the sound system and sat on the edge of his seat. Green Eyes dropped his gaze in deep thought for a few seconds then said as he looked back up, “I wish I could explain, but you won’t understand.” “We’ll try.” “Well, to put it simply, four agents of the DIA came to the Vault, and-” “What are you talking about? You have nothing to do with the DIA.” “Yes, I do. They gave us an ultimatum. We had to kill who they told us to or have our community shut down.” “Well, that simply isn’t true. Did Arthur De la Mer have *anything* to do with the Great Revenge?” “No.” Arthur shot up and thanked God. Jeremiah thought to himself, “If the DIA really wanted to get you arrested, why would they bother torturing Green Eyes and risk him saying Riley was behind the Great Revenge? Surely, they would just invent evidence that you were guilty. You’re an idiot and no-one even realises.” The interviewer asked, “Did he have anything to do with your community?” “No. Neither did Pete Riley, as far as I know. The DIA forced us to do the Great Revenge.” “A lot of people find it curious that you made no attempts at killing anyone in the Love Party.” “Your team needs to improve their research. We tried to kill De la Mer on debate night. Are you pretending to be ignorant?” “Well, throwing a blade pales in comparison to the acts committed towards those that were killed.” “Ask the DIA for an explanation. We were using the weapons they gave us on their targets. If the Great Revenge was my plan, the death toll would be a million times higher. Though the Great Revenge was forced upon us, we did agree with it, and billions around the world do as well, because we all realised there was no alternative to changing the Nature Rapers. People tried being nice. People tried peaceful protests. People tried writing books. People tried filming movies. People tried to communicate with you a thousand different ways a thousand different times, but you still didn’t listen.” Green Eyes got up and stood behind his chair to act the parts, “It’s like this. Scientists politely say to you, ‘Be careful. If we keep warming the planet, it will be uninhabitable,’ then you say like a zombie, ‘Okay,’ and get on with your day. A few years go

by and the scientists have thousands of people that heeded their warnings, but they're just regular people, they don't really have any real political power, so they do what they can for attention, they block streets, they hold up placards, they use guerilla marketing, they write books, they film movies, you see this all and go like a zombie, 'Okay.' A few years go by, with all these calls for attention happening everyday, and you keep going like a zombie, 'Okay.' A few more years go by, the climate crisis triggers a war because of all the climate refugees then we start slicing your fucking throat and fucking setting you on fire, and you still keep going like a zombie, 'Okay. Okay. Okay.' It's not our fault they're dead. We did what everyone dreamed would happen. And, if you think the Climate War is scary, wait until what happens next." Green Eyes sat back down, "You had thousands of chances to stop ruining the planet, but you didn't listen. You talk to me as though I'm evil, but Riley's ordered millions of people to get killed. Why is he allowed to order death, but not me? He makes mistakes. He killed innocent people. I never killed anyone innocent. If we have equal rights, then we have the same rights as the government." Green Eyes looked sideways with his penetrating eyes into the camera, "I can kill who I think should be killed, and I can take anything I want, because the government do that all the time and we all have equal rights." He looked again at the interviewer, "You can keep trying to stray from it, but you'll keep getting clawed back. I do not have political opinions, I have biological opinions. My opinions are beyond politics. I don't care about your flags and your parties, I care about biology. I never wanted to get into politics, but I had to, because no-one else knew what to do. The Great Revenge, in my dreams, was going to be a chance for me to unshackle people from authority. Everyone keeps asking, 'Should we elect Riley or De la Mer?' but no one asks, 'Should we elect someone or should we grow up and rule ourselves?' That's the slave mentality that I was hoping to break up, if given the chance, but the DIA kept giving me scripts. The human is naturally a slavish animal. Our parents make our decisions for a very long time. Some animals can walk almost right away, but humans can't, because our brains are too big. You then get enslaved by your teachers because they never tell you to question them. Then just as you're old enough to realise you're a slave, you have to make a living, so you have no time to be a rebel. That's where I come in. I'm the meteor. We are sorry to the families of the victims, but at least people will treat them a little nicer because of their sorrow. People aren't nice to people unless they pity them or want something from them. I'm nice to people because I like people. I see a part of myself in all of them. If I was a religious man, I'd say we are all fragments of God. I like all things. Everyone in the world is my friend." "There is a rumour that has caused a lot of fear." "Oh no!" "Apparently you felt the Great Revenge was not succeeding as you hoped it would, and that you was planning to attack a chemical weapons facility. Your dream was to kill everyone in the world except for your cult who were to hide underground then emerge once everyone else died. Is this true?" "Yeah, we're attacking it tomorrow after breakfast." The interviewer sighed, then asked, "Is it true?" "Why wouldn't it be true? Is it not a good idea?" "I think it's the most evil idea I've ever heard." "So this is the opinion of me, after all I've done to try and save you people? If you hate me, you must hate Riley, because with him there'll be no survivors, at least with the Great Revenge, there'll be some people left to inherit the world." "That's a completely ridiculous thing to say." Increasingly animated, Green Eyes said, "No, no, no. It's not ridiculous. Riley's acts show he has no problem with there being no survivors. He allowed my forest to be burned. I helped grow that forest. I don't have it down on contracts like you people, but that's something that transcends laws. You don't destroy another man's crops without expecting retribution. It's not my fault you're locked inside of words. Just because he's not



saying it, you think he's causing less deaths than me. You've got to stop focusing on words and look at the actions. That man has a lot of blood on his hands." "Your actions have killed thousands of people, and you want to kill everyone in the world except for your cult! Your acts say that you're one of the most evil men to ever live." Green Eyes fought back, "You people should be bowing down to me as the saviour of the world! I gave my life because you people don't know how to live! If there was any sense left in this world, you'd be enshrining me now! I shouldn't be here, the polluters and polluticians should be here!" The interviewer changed subject, "The public is terrified of you and your community. What do you have to say to them?" "Fuck the public. Public opinion changes like a toilet bowl. Tattoos used to be for us people in the underworld, they used to mean something, they used to be for rockers, soldiers, tribesmen, criminals. Now you have a bunch of normal, boring people who get tattoos of cartoon characters and words they don't understand. They used to be cool, but now that everyone has a tattoo, they're not cool anymore. I have this tattoo of a mosquito on my hand, because I admire the way they live and I identify with them because they're misunderstood. It actually has meaning. The public ruin everything. I remember when I was twelve I was wearing black, skinny jeans in a time when only us kids that were rock and rollers wore them, and a bunch of conformists used to mock the way we dressed, they used to call us Emos even though they had no idea what that term meant then a few years later those same people that laughed at us began to wear black, skinny jeans. From that moment, I learnt to never care what people think of me, because most opinions are as fickle as weather." "I want you to think carefully about this question, because it's the last time the public will hear from you. You are going to spend the rest of your life on the Isle of the Unforgiven, you have inflicted misery on so many people. Do you have any remorse?" Green Eyes thought for a moment then said, "Yeah, I should have planted more flowers."

The screen faded to black, and previews of upcoming shows began. The Love Party were greatly relieved. Maria said to Arthur, "There you go, he didn't implicate you. You worried for nothing!" Eric replied, "My dear, and I am sorry to spoil the party, but Riley remains the author of our destiny. He can and most likely will say that the threat of the cult remains. It is impossible to prove there are no followers left. It does not matter that there are hundreds dead in the Vault, or that some defectors are under watch at our welfare centres. Riley can endlessly invent lies that there are followers which have not been found yet, or that the cult has gained new followers. Riley has played us to a tee. We have been checkmated." There was silence in the room for a moment, until Riley's message began live from the Mountain House during the news hour on GBC. He sat behind his desk with a sorry look on his face. He wore a black blazer and a t-shirt with a black and white version of Gildland's flag. Arthur watched with a sniper's attention. "Good evening, everyone, and thank you for joining me tonight. I know how concerned you all are about the postponement of the election and I want you to know that we are doing all we can to end the postponement. I wish I could announce its end, but, in light of everything we have been told by the intelligence community, that is simply not possible at this moment." With plummeted hopes, Arthur rose in haste, as Riley continued to justify keeping the election postponed. Whilst heading for the exit, he said, "Dean, can you follow me, please?" and he did. Eric said to Jeremiah, "Now do you see why Riley is unworthy of your kindness? He must never be forgiven for this stunt. The power to forgive or not is every man's gavel. Immoral acts must never be forgiven to discourage them from being performed again." "Even if someone apologises and tries to redeem themselves, they must remain unforgiven?" "Yes." "Well, how should we treat the unforgiven?" "You shame them, you bring up their mistakes at every opportunity for your own advantage, and

you encourage others to do the same.” “What a ruthless world that would be!” “A ruthless world full of well-behaved people, I devoutly wish for it.” “If we want peace, life cannot be an endless series of settling scores. What will encourage someone to change, if they believe we will be eternal enemies that will never forgive them?” “The death penalty.” “Have you never done any wrong and sought forgiveness?” “No.” Eric was impressed by his arguments, but couldn't bring himself to admit it.

## Statement 10: The Shadow of Death

*TODAY'S TOP HEADLINES:*

*Sirkitus Declines Riley's Invitation to Discuss the War*

*Arthur to Host 'Celebration of Life'*

*Spike in Short-Selling Wipes 4% off the Montpelerin Stock Exchange*

*Relationship Expert Reveals Key to Arthur and Maria's Envidable Relationship*

*Record High Temperatures Hit Gildland*

For ten days, Arthur and Dean planned a coup d'état. They spent almost every hour in the mansion's conference room with a guard standing outside, and lied to everyone that they were planning a celebration. Arthur invited members of the Plutocracy that supported the Love Party to the mansion for assistance. He wrote his first speech since founding the party. He was confident his speech-writers would have kept quiet if asked to write it, but there were already so many people involved that he didn't want to take any unnecessary risks. The speech had been advertised as part of a celebration, with no hints at its true purpose. During the planning, the Love Party's campaign staff advocated for the electorate to be allowed to vote online and pushed a narrative that Riley would never allow another election. Arthur didn't believe the campaign to vote online would succeed, but wanted to hold the attention of his followers until he delivered the speech. Elimperia's ambassador to Gildland met with Arthur in person after the massacre at the Olympic Stadium. He provided him with a contact that could provide military drones the size of flies and robot soldiers. Arthur had politely rejected the offer, but kept the phone number provided. Now the time had come to make the call. Arthur took the risk, as he doubted he'd reach such heights of popularity again, and couldn't bear the idea that the last three years had been for no reward. As advised by the ambassador, Arthur asked his head chef, Shishmun Guddon, to call Aquafarm, a seafood company in Kyetore, a nation neutral in the Climate War, and closely tied economically, historically, and culturally to Elimperia. Shishmun, ordered 50,000 'salmons' (codeword for robot soldiers), 100,000 'oysters' (codeword for military drones), and asked for '9x6!4?5y1' to be added to the invoice description. The head chef, the salesman, and any potential wiretapper were all unaware of what had really been ordered. A notification was sent to Aquafarm's CEO whenever a new customer was added to their accounting system. When the Love Party was added, the CEO notified an agent of Rathlacken, Elimperia's intelligence agency, of the order. The invoice description included '9x6!4?5y1', so Rathlacken was sure the CEO hadn't invented the order out of thin air for his own personal gain. For the CEO's compliance, Rathlacken, made orders from Aquafarm via third parties equivalent to their annual revenue the previous year and had told the Aquafarm CEO that the Love Party wanted to help the Poor Nations in the Climate War, and that he'd regret telling anyone what was going on. The agent of Rathlacken then ordered the robot soldiers and military drones from Demnaf Tactical, an arms manufacturer in Kyetore. The CEO of Aquafarm ordered several of his company's self-driving trucks to a Demnaf Tactical factory. Robots loaded the trucks with robot soldiers and drones. The Demnaf Tactical CEO was not told why Rathlacken wanted

the arms loaded in Aquafarm-branded trucks. When the Demnaf Tactical CEO asked Rathlacken why they didn't use an Elimperian manufacturer, Rathlacken responded that it was none of his business. The Demnaf Tactical CEO was also told he'd regret telling anyone what was happening, and was advised to ignore employees curious as to why trucks used by a seafood company were being loaded with their products. The trucks then went to the Port of Gomana in Kyetore. The port operator received a sum from Rathlacken via a third-party equivalent to their previous year's revenue to let the Aquafarm containers pass without inspection. The shipping containers arrived in Gildland via the Port of Bronrar in the early hours of the day that Arthur was to launch the coup. The trucks with robot soldiers headed to the mansion the Love Party had moved into, and the trucks with drones were parked in Dean's holiday home in north Bronrar, just a few miles away from Montpelerin. For increased efficiency, the port operator never inspected containers that came from trusted ports such as the Port of Gomana and especially not containers from recognised brands such as Aquafarm, because inspections took time and hiring more inspectors and inspecting equipment than absolutely necessary was considered a waste of money. In exchange for Elimperia's help, Arthur promised, upon victory, the removal of all tariffs, and Gildland's withdrawal from the Climate War within twelve months. Online, during the ten days in which they planned the coup, fans of Riley boasted he was going to be Prime Minister for life and mocked the Love Party, whilst Arthur's fans desperately tried to prove to the world that the postponement of the election was illegal, his fans claimed Riley was Green Eyes' puppet master, they mourned democracy, and were growing impatient with Arthur's lack of violent response.

At six in the morning, Arthur asked Lauren to let all the campaign staff go as they were no longer needed and informed her she was released. Arthur didn't say goodbye to any of them, not even the long-term members of staff that thought he was their friend. Lauren told the staff he was thankful, and that he'd be in touch next week with new employment opportunities, which healed their feelings towards him for not saying goodbye.

At nine, Arthur, Maria, Dean, Eric, Francis, and Jeremiah were to have a meeting in the conference room. Maria and Dean were already with him. Arthur was quiet and uneasy. He walked around the room, incapable of hiding his stress. His imagination swung between dreams of victory and nightmares of failure. When Eric arrived, he said, "Good morning. Are you all right?" "The end of the world is full of familiar sights, and the usual frequency of laughter," and they smiled whilst Eric didn't. Francis and Jeremiah entered together a few moments later and Arthur welcomed them, he received a disinterested response. Once they sat, he began the meeting. "I've brought you all here, because we are about to execute something monumental. In my speech, I will call for a coup d'état. With the attendants of my speech and assistance from our wealthy friends, Dean will march to the Mountain House." Eric stood up and went to leave without acknowledging anyone. Jeremiah watched him thinking he may never see him again, too scared of Arthur to say goodbye to a traitor. Arthur waited for Eric to leave then continued, "Whilst Dean is marching to the Mountain House, we will be safe miles away in a hideout. I know some of you will feel uncomfortable about this course we're taking, but unfortunately there is no alternative." To Jeremiah, it seemed like a drunk gambler's last desperate throw of the dice, but he hid his disapproval. "We've tried to play the game fairly, but the game doesn't exist anymore. Riley will only end the postponement of the election when he believes he can win it, or, maybe, he never will end the postponement. If we don't seize this moment, we will regret it forever. We are leaving at

eleven, so pack your things and I'll meet you back here then. Does anyone have any-" Arthur was so sure the others would stay that he was taken aback when Maria arose. "Francis, you can leave with me or stay. The choice is yours." He didn't know who to choose. He loved his mother and hated his father, but he loved living with his father's riches. Sensing his inability to decide, Dean said, "He will join me on the march. If anything bad should happen to him, you have my permission to kill me." Maria asked Francis, "Are you okay with going?" Scared of saying no to Dean, he mumbled, "Yes." She was concerned, but for a long time had wanted him to become more independent, "Very well, if that is what you wish." Francis and Dean rose, as she went over to hug, kiss, and say goodbye. She then went to hug Jeremiah, "Goodbye, darling." "Goodbye, Maria. I hope we will meet again." "I would love to." She smiled at him, wishing they'd met under different circumstances, and then went to exit. The whole time, Arthur had been staring at her, disappointed she'd leave in this vital hour, and despondent as the thought that she'd never forgiven him now seemed undeniable. "Where are you going, my love?" "Where do you think?" "You can't go!" He rushed to restrain her. Maria tried to break herself free, "Let go of me!" "What's wrong?" "You didn't tell me in advance, because you knew I'd be against it. As usual, you choose your dreams over those you claim to love. Let go of me!" Arthur released her, conscious he was being too aggressive. When she continued leaving, he said, "If you insist on going, at least wait for security to go with you." "No. I don't want any connection with you at all." Humbly, he said, "I will see you soon, my love." Stunned by his incomprehension of her feelings, Maria couldn't bring herself to respond. The moment Maria closed the door, Arthur said, "Dean, send a security detail," and Dean followed the order. Her departure felt like a sword being thrust to his heart's core. The cutting of the Humanities, his sentence at the Virtual Rehabilitation Centre, the failure of the economic boycott, the stage collapse, and the massacre at the Olympic Stadium, were, in comparison, mere prods at his heart. Arthur calmed himself with the firm belief she'd return once she saw his victory. The emptiness of the room said a lot to the remaining. Jeremiah asked, "When you said Dean would march with 'assistance from our wealthy friends', what exactly will they be doing?" Proudly, Arthur said, "Come with me." He walked to the wide window and Jeremiah followed. He pointed, "You see those thousands of supporters in the field?" "Yes." "They're not supporters. They're robot soldiers." Jeremiah said in concern, "They're illegal." "So is a coup d'etat." "Where did you get them from?" "A good friend of ours." "Who?" "A good friend." Sensing evasiveness, Jeremiah stopped prodding and said, "Hopefully it works."

Arthur left to find if Dean had completed his request, and Francis went to his room. Jeremiah opened an app on his phone that could detect the names of objects in images. He took a picture of the robots in the sunny field then the app reported they were manufactured by Demnaf Tactical. He'd never heard of them, so searched the company's name online. He thought to himself, "They are from Kyetore. That is a neutral country. Why would they help him?" Then, when he realised why, it was like a star had burst in his mind. "They are loyal allies with Elimperia and dependant on them. Elimperia is against Gildland in the Climate War. Elimperia is helping Arthur, because they believe he'll help them in the war. So, the rumours are true, Elimperia is helping Arthur. If he is victorious, Gildland will be ruled by a puppet of Elimperia, a country with no respect for the rights of their own people, let alone their enemies. Most outstanding of all, his justification for taking power is based on a mere guess that Riley is postponing the election for political reasons. His followers have not hesitated to condemn Riley. People that dare put forth evidence that Riley is innocent are being lambasted as supporters of a dictator. People that are withholding judgement due to a

lack of evidence are getting ridiculed as fence-sitters, they are ridiculed for taking their time to think!" Jeremiah continued to think as he went to his bedroom, "If the coup succeeds with him at the helm, Gildland will be enslaved by Elimperia, because he is offering them something in return for their help and if he doesn't give them what they want they will blackmail him with his probable part in helping Green Eyes, I imagine. If the coup fails, we will live on the run or we'll rot in jail. There is no good ending, except if the coup succeeds and he dies then I, or Eric, or Maria lead the country instead of him. Elimperia cannot blackmail the three of us because they have nothing to blackmail us with. If it is clear the coup will succeed, I'll kill him. To guarantee peace, we will get the military on our side by telling them they can keep their jobs and that the military will not be privatized. We must disassociate ourselves from Arthur. Then again, despite all the times I have said to myself I want him dead, I don't know if I could bring myself to kill him."

Since the massacre at the stadium, Arthur ordered guards to stay in front of each bedroom at the palace. The guard for Jeremiah was named Lucas Virgo. He was befriended by Dean at a gym. He was one of the first guards the party recruited upon Dean's recommendation, and was fairly similar to Dean in age, and appearance, but had a quieter personality. Jeremiah and Lucas got on well together, and since Jeremiah remembered him displaying hatred for Elimperia, he seemed to be a good candidate to help with his plan. They smiled at one another as Jeremiah approached, and he said, "Lucas. Would you mind coming in with me, please?" He got up from his chair, "Not at all." Jeremiah locked the door behind them, and gestured to a seat by the window, "Take a seat." Lucas sat, and Jeremiah put on music so no-one could hear their conversation. He sat beside him, "You won't believe this, but I swear it's true. Today, Arthur is going to call for an attack on the Mountain House," Lucas' eyes lit up, "but he will be aided by Elimperia. He has sold out the country." Jeremiah observed his reaction. Seeing that he was as dismayed as himself, he felt comfortable revealing his idea of assassinating Arthur. He continued, "If the attack on the Mountain House succeeds, Arthur must die. We cannot allow our country to be ruled by a puppet. We will find someone to succeed him and our country will be free from Elimperia, and if the coup succeeds, free from Riley too. What do you think?" "We have no other choice." "Good. Now, in terms of how we do this. We can't use a gun, there'll be too many guards for us to shoot our way out, and there'd be no way of concealing we were responsible. Do you know how to make a bomb or a guard here that does? I know you used to be in the military, I'm not sure if that means anything, or perhaps you know someone that knows how to make one." "I can make one. It's easy." "How quickly can you make it?" "In five minutes." "Okay. Let me get something for you to put it in." From the top of a wardrobe, Jeremiah took a red briefcase. He checked inside and found it was empty. "Will the bomb fit?" "Easily." Lucas took the briefcase and went to put the bomb's components inside. When he returned to Jeremiah, he made the bomb in front of him then explained how to detonate it. He locked the bomb, that appeared like a household item, in the briefcase and placed it in Jeremiah's suitcase. Lucas then destroyed the CCTV footage so no-one could see he collected the components then returned to guarding Jeremiah's room.

Arthur discovered from Dean that he'd assembled five guards for Maria in time to follow her home, though not in time to keep her from the hounding press. Shortly afterwards, Arthur held a meeting with the party's top members to inform them of the coup and they all loved the idea. Before leaving, Arthur wished to say a potentially final goodbye to Dean and thank him for all of his work. He entered his room with brotherly love in his heart, and found him

sitting on the balcony, smoking a cigar with a rifle on his lap. “Dean!” He didn’t move. Confused, Arthur went to him, “Dean?” No response. He tapped him on a shoulder, “Dean!” He slowly took the cigar from his mouth, exhaled, and meditated whilst gazing at the gold landscape, “We have reached the edge. That place where politics fails, where no-one denies they want their enemy dead, where to uphold peace... means to uphold irreconcilable differences. Cowards will dismay at the revolution, but, in time, all will be grateful for this, this mission only the bravest geniuses would dare devise. They will out-gun us and they will out-number us, but we will out-smart them and with iron around our hearts we will storm through every barrier, and then, for all his victims, for every lost life, and for my friend,” he turned to Arthur with a possessed face, “I. Will. Kill. Him.” They shook hands and their expressions said more than words ever could.

At noon, a crowd of 220,000 ardent followers formed at the mansion for the ‘celebration of life’. The trees around the mansion were filled with supporters wanting a better view. Among the hundreds of flags that the crowd brought were many anti-Riley ones with insulting cartoons and threatening messages. Dean and the other guards confiscated them as Arthur wanted to appear peaceful. Within the crowd were robot soldiers indistinguishable from the humans. Their steel skeletons could only be seen when their skin was pierced. They were life-like, so that the enemy couldn’t plan for them. Since the military didn’t know they were robots, they’d be more likely to underestimate the Love Party and prepare inadequately for them with insufficient troops. A hologram of Arthur, so life-like that all were fooled, appeared on the mansion’s balcony. The hologram had been given a script to follow and directions for how to deliver the speech. They were applauding loudly not only for him, but to prove their devotion to those around them and to the world their resilience. Arthur held up a hand then they silenced instantly. Even if thunder had struck, their focus would have stayed on Arthur. He began calmly, as he usually did as leader of the Love Party, “My beloved Comrades that have brought me unforgettable joy, my loyal followers that trusted me through the dark, I want to say what I should have said a long time ago for all you have done; thank you.” The crowd cheered, some that had already been crying cried harder. In return, many thanked him passionately. Increasing in intensity, he continued, “We’ve been so cruelly mistreated. Mere days ago, the most hateful person to ever exist committed the crime of the century. Our beautiful democracy was killed by Pete Riley.” The crowd was glad he didn’t sugar-coat the severity of the situation. “Just as there are no bounds to our love, there are no bounds to our enemy’s hate. To protect their power, they will not stop at killing democracy, they will kill me, they will kill Jeremiah, and they will kill all of you that oppose them. I am not an arrogant man, but have I ever been wrong?” The crowd said he had not. “I have so often made predictions that the Hateful have dismissed as crazy, until they came true. I was correct about Riley becoming tyrannical, and I was right about the government controlling more and more of your life. The government will never let us win, because our victory will result in them losing their jobs. To defame me, they formed a cult of my former students. They massacred our Comrades to intimidate me. They will do anything to survive. The only reason they haven’t killed me is because they fear your wrath. Never has a movement faced such uniquely difficult challenges and illegal attacks. We deserve justice, but the judge and the criminal are the same man. I know that the postponement of the election has caused you much anxiety, you have dedicated your lives to the party, and are wondering if your work was for nothing, you are wondering if we will ever be this close to victory ever again. Well, let me tell you, I am not going to allow our hard work to be put to waste, and I am not going to let our beliefs be archived as a fad of history. Today is the day when everything we have

worked for is rewarded. We will take power!” His followers could hardly believe their ears. They were delighted to see their anger finally have a means of release. The Overwatch made no alert for him inciting violence, as Arthur had notified Securitun’s CEO for the favour. “To wait here is suicide. Universal love does not mean to be a pacifist that allows hate to rule the world, that is cowardice. Life is not worth living like that. We have all worked too hard to stop now. Don’t settle with your current life out of cowardice, you know you’re not happy with your life as it is now. If any of you are still tormented by regret for acting hatefully in your life, believe me, I who know you better than you do, you will be completely cleansed of regret by this ultimate act of love. If you do not participate in the march, you will not be able to live with yourself, you will hate yourself for letting the dream of love be lost forever. The situation is critical and must be concluded today whilst we are still one. There is no alternative.” There was thunderous applause. Arthur wiped sweat from his forehead and took a deep breath. “What I am about to say will disappoint some of you, but I hope you hold your opinion until I have had a chance to explain. I know I have criticised the military. I know I have called for their abolition. However, as circumstances change, so should our opinions. To ensure a peaceful transition of government and avoid a civil war, I would like to make an appeal to the military. I guarantee that those of you in the military who do not attack us will keep your jobs when I am in power. The military will remain publicly-funded. No-one respects the military more than me, my own father was a soldier. I know how hard and important your jobs are. I want you in the military to ask yourself if it’s worth defending a government that no longer represents the will of the people. Remember, I was far ahead in the polls when Riley postponed the election.” To his relief, the crowd applauded. They didn’t seem to care about the military not being abolished. “Riley, I know you are watching, if you end the postponement, as you know you should, the march on the Mountain House will be called off. Imagine the lives you can save. My friends will march with the hope and intention of peace. However, if one shot is fired at us, your world will come to an end. Do you agree, my Comrades?” The multitude shouted approvingly. “Now, enter the stage of history and forever be hailed as the saviours of freedom! March to the heart of darkness!” They roared like never before. The bliss promised by victory dwarfed the trouble of attaining it.

Trucks full of guns had been timed to arrive the second the speech ended. Arthur had requested them off the record from the CEO of a struggling firearms company. Dean, Francis, and the guards that didn’t go to the hideout with Arthur, handed guns out from the trucks. Arthur had earlier insisted, “Don’t give a gun to any woman. Women should be safe from the hell of battle,” and they agreed. When the women realised the policy, there were scuffles in the queue as they tried to yank guns from the men. Dean brought them under control when he shot his rifle in the air and told them to behave. Arthur had told the guards to not say it was his policy, as he predicted it would anger women wanting to prove their strength and the men in sympathy with them. When they began arming themselves, Gildland’s emergency alert system took over billboards, phones, Interminds, and computers in Montpelerin, San Tropica, and Bronrar with a jarring siren, a screen of colour bars, and scrolling text of the message being read out by a commanding voice, “The following message is being transmitted by the Ministry of Defence. Montpelerin, San Tropica, and Bronrar, must be evacuated immediately. Leave your belongings. Do not stay in your home. Citizens not found in compliance will be charged 10,000 gilders. This is not a test,” and the message repeated five times. All planes, ships, and trains to the three counties were cancelled. The Royal Family escaped to one of their private islands. The rich jetted off to their private islands or one of their mansions out of the march’s way. Thousands of Gildland’s wealthiest were already on Lilypad Islands to



escape civil unrest. People ran to train stations and they quickly swelled with large queues outside. Trains were packed to the brim, uncomfortably heated with sweaty people having to stand still like statues, breathing hot air on each other, accidentally stepping on each other's feet, and late arrivers shouting at those inside to make room. Hospitals, offices, restaurants, parks, museums, shopping centres, gyms, everything was cleared. Photographers, reporters, and cameramen headed to the march, preparing, and some hoping, for the worst. Residential areas flooded with evacuees. Arthur's most brave and passionate followers from around Gildland travelled to join the march. Riley's most brave and passionate followers waited for a call to action that never came. In almost all barracks, a small minority mutinied peacefully, a small majority considered mutinying until they saw mutineers sent to a firing squad, and a large minority were determined to protect Riley. As the army tried to get into formation on the Montpelerin side of the Bayuz River, they had to fight off innumerable self-driving cars aiming to run them over, an attack not orchestrated by the Love Party. All vehicles were shot before they touched a soldier and were then used with shipping containers to block the bridges and the underground tunnels of the Bayuz River. In anticipation of Arthur's forces potentially marching past their home, Riley's followers scrambled to remove ECSL posters from their front windows in fear of vandalism.

In the living room of the Mountain House, Riley was watching Arthur's speech with his feet up and a large grin next to his chief advisor. They laughed throughout the speech, Riley more manically than his advisor. During the speech, Riley said, "What a weird, weird man! How drunk must you be to think a bunch of no-name bitches can defeat the military. Like, what the actual fuck?" "He is weird." "He's always been weird. When we were both professors, everyone would have lunch together sometimes. He would usually be sulking in the corner, probably because his whore wife said hello to another man, she's another bitch, but that's a different story, and when we did talk, literally all he could talk about was politics. He had no life. We got into an argument once about something, I can't remember what, something political obviously, and he actually walked out mid-lunch! I didn't even say anything bad or raise my voice! I mean, what the fuck? Who does that? It's so embarrassing." "What a freak." "A total freak." Before they could continue, a knock came at the door. As he went to answer, Riley muttered to himself, "God, leave me alone. I can never enjoy my time off." He opened the door, "What is it?" His aide said, "Eric Fidge has arrived." Riley smiled with confusion, "Why?" "He's defected from the Love Party and stolen their battle plans for us." "How funny. Well, I think the most powerful military to ever exist will be able to handle that little militia, then again I suppose it would be interesting to see him. Let's go."

Eric was with a guard in the grand reception, viewing a war painting he'd wished to see in person for a long time, feeling it was devalued by being in the same vicinity as Riley, someone who he was sure didn't appreciate the artwork and only kept it to avoid criticism for removing it. "Mr. Fidge!" Eric shuddered a little at the sudden noise, and shuddered a little more when he saw him. He looked down his nose, "Riley." Eric used a handkerchief to shake his hand. Riley pretended to not be amused, "How are you, darling?" Eric looked behind himself, "Who is 'darling'?" "You." "No. I am Mr. Fidge. Only my seniors and superiors may refer to me otherwise." "I'm sorry. It's been a long time since we crossed paths at Riverlake." "Are you really sorry?" "Yeah. Why would I intentionally offend you?" Eric stared into his soul for a second, "I want you to know that, to me, you are a master of mediocrity, a servant of self, an assemblage of everything wrong with this sinning world, and that if I saw you drowning I would laugh as you cried for help, but, on this judgement day,

you are the lesser of two evils, so I will loyally serve you until De la Mer and his puppet master, Elimperia, are defeated.” Riley laughed a little out of relief. “What is so funny?” “It ain't what you say, it's the way you say it!” “This is not funny.” “I know, and we appreciate you being here. I am just trying to have a little fun, that's all.” Riley gestured to his aide, “If you hand over your gift, he will make sure it gets to the right people.” The aide stepped forward amicably and Eric handed him a red briefcase. As the aide thanked him and turned to leave, Eric asked Riley, “How else may I assist you?” Before Riley could respond, the emergency alert system took over his phone. Eric flinched at the loud, shrill alarm, and the commanding voice, whilst Riley watched it in confusion. After realising what the message was for, he shouted, “No! No! What is this for?” as the message for evacuation went on. When it ended, he said, “This is such a fucking overreaction!” “It is better than leaving civilians in their path. They are more angry and dangerous than you realise.” His aide came running back, “Pete, General Williamsberg is on his way, he asked for you to order your followers on to the streets.” “Oh, so, just after telling everyone to evacuate, now he wants them in the streets? Tell him to make his fucking mind up, before telling me what to say.” “He said he wants the vulnerable to be safe, but that he wants your supporters to stop the march before it becomes a problem for the military.” “I am surrounded by incompetence.” “Do you want me to call him for you?” “No, my goal in life is to interact with idiots as little as possible. Is there a script for this speech he wants?” “No, sorry.” “Of course not. Let's get it over with, for fuck's sake.” He sulked to his office and Eric walked with his hands behind his back. The hall was lined with portraits of past Prime Ministers which made Eric wonder how horrified his favourites would be by Riley. A small crew was preparing the lights, camera, and audio for his speech. A chair was brought so Eric could sit beside Riley at his desk. A lady applied light make-up to Riley. He asked, “Mr. Fidge, would you like some make-up? You look good as you are, but maybe you'll look even better with it.” “No.” “Why? Have you never played dress up?” “No.” “Oh. It's such fun. I'm going to introduce a Dress Up Day for schools next year. The girls will dress up as boys and boys will dress up as girls, it's going to be such a great learning experience for them. They will become more tolerant and learn so much about themselves.” Eric made no response as he straightened his suit and tie. The make-up artist finished her job, showed Riley his reflection, and he approved it. For a few moments, Riley considered what to say and how to speak. He looked to his side and, seeing Eric was ready, gravely spoke into the camera, “My Kings and Queens. The terrorist, Arthur de la Mer is-” An assistant looked around to see if others were as shocked as herself at De la Mer being called a terrorist. Fortunately, they were not broadcasting live, as her reaction distracted Riley into a tirade, “Fucking hell. What are you doing?” “Me?” asked the assistant. “Yes, you, you fucking cunt. I'm recording a really difficult speech and I get distracted by your head popping around with that stupid fucking look on it!” The assistant, hardly able to look at Riley, said, “I'm sorry, I didn't mean to.” “Well, you fucking did. Everyday there's some bullshit I have to put up with from you people. You know I hate doing videos because of how I look and my fucking anxiety, I've told you a million times, but you just don't give a shit, do you?” “I'm sorry.” “No, you're not. Get the fuck out of here.” As the assistant stormed out, Riley said, “I am sick of forgiving you all for your mistakes. You walk over me every fucking day!” His aide softly asked, “Pete, would you like to take a break?” “No. Let's fucking go again! And don't fucking distract me! One slip from any of you and you're done!” Breathless, he said quietly, “I'm sorry, Mr. Fidge.” “You did nothing wrong.” After he calmed down, he began again, “My Kings and Queens. Arthur de la Mer's call to take power by force is a call to take power from *you*. The importance of this situation cannot

be emphasised enough. I warned for a long time that everything he writes or says should be ignored, but now I must insist you do listen to him, so you realise how dangerous he has become to our country. If you let the Delusionals march to the Mountain House, everyone loses except for him and his rich friends. Protect your democracy, protect your country, and protect your loved ones from this monster. Don't go down without a fight. Take to the streets. I have always warned that the Delusionals were the greatest danger to our country and I have unfortunately been proven correct. Eric Fidge, a founding member of the Love Party, has joined me because he saw first-hand just how unhinged the Love Party has become. Do the same or you will regret it." Social media companies had conspired with Arthur so that everything Riley posted was only seen by people in a five-mile radius of the Mountain House, and to people working in the government, and the posts were filled with replies from bots to make it appear as though the public had seen the message. By limiting the reach of the video, social media companies both suppressed the message from reaching the Gildish people and gave those working in the Mountain House and government workers elsewhere the illusion that it had not been suppressed. Arthur advised the social media CEOs to shift blame on 'rogue actors' within their respective companies, if they were investigated in the event of the coup failing. The video was sent to Securitun to broadcast the video on the billboards, but they suppressed the video, except for in a five-mile radius around the Mountain House. Arthur told Securitun's CEO to blame it on rogue actors inside the company, in case the coup failed. The only company to broadcast the video was the publicly-owned broadcasting company, GBC, but only the elderly watched television regularly. Younger viewers would only tune in for special occasions such as international sports tournaments, royal weddings, or bombshell interviews like the Green Eyes one.

Twenty minutes before Arthur's hologram speech, top members of the Love Party, their guards, Jeremiah, and himself arrived at a large, white, remote barn conversion by the sparkling sea in a lush land of many shades of green and yellow demarcated by hedgerows. A private jet close to the house pointed directly to Elimperia, where Arthur had been promised refuge in case the coup failed. Jeremiah noticed the passengers in the car ahead beginning to load their luggage onto the plane. He asked Arthur, "Why are they loading up? Are we leaving now?" "No. It's just incase we need to escape quickly." They parked by the plane and Jeremiah asked, "Is it okay if I take mine inside? I want to have a shower." "I wouldn't risk it, but you can do what you want." Jeremiah wanted to laugh. He thought to himself, "Since when can I do what I want?" then went upstairs and locked himself in a bedroom. He opened his suitcase and saw the red briefcase still inside and the bomb still inside of that then locked it all back up and placed it under the bed. He turned on the shower for five minutes, to pretend he was having a shower as he sat alone in his room thinking of the situation, knowing that no matter what happened he'd never again have peace of mind.

The cooks began to make lunch, the guards patrolled the premises, and the others went to the basement's cinema in anticipation of Arthur's hologram speech. To avoid suspicion, Jeremiah decided to join the others in the cinema. He checked the bomb was still under his bed before leaving then locked the door. Arthur was sitting alone in the veranda on a rocking chair. How he felt then was similar to how he felt when Maria left him years prior. When they first separated, he thought, 'I have lost my sole reason for being. All else I cared for now feels meaningless.' He began to think of happy memories with her, when they first spoke to one another, first held hands, first kissed, their travels, their wedding day, the birth of their child, but they only made him miss her more. When he heard someone descending the stairs,

he looked inside and said, "Jeremiah!" He responded, "Hi," as he walked on to the cinema. Arthur smiled in confusion, "Wait a moment!" Jeremiah went to the doorway and asked, "Yeah?" "I just thought you might like to sit outside a bit. I'm getting all the fresh air I can, because I'll be glued to the screen when it begins." "Okay." Jeremiah sat on the other rocking chair which was a few metres away from Arthur's. Confused to see him staying there, Arthur said, "Bring the chair closer." Jeremiah apologised, as he brought it nearer. Arthur sighed as he gazed at the rolling hills, "I am so glad this is all coming to an end. Even if we lose, I can die knowing I tried everything. I can't stand living as a, let's face it, loser anymore. I'm sick to death of tolerating everything this government does because I have no power. When you're powerless and the powerful make a decision you disagree with, you will fall down two paths; you will become angry or you will develop some pathetic coping mechanism for your anger. When I realised that, living without power became a non-option. I don't want to be a hostage to fortune. Life isn't worth living like that." Jeremiah was barely listening, until Arthur said, "I know you're not happy about the coup, but you do realise we have no other choice, don't you?" "I am happy! Why do you think I'm not?" he laughed nervously. "You've never been a good liar, my friend. You're too nice to be good at it." "I'm not lying!" "I wish the march wasn't necessary, but we cannot always do what we wish in life. I wish I hadn't gotten in politics at all, but no-one else could save the country. I've paid a high price for our success, but we can't all rely on someone else, someone must be the one that's relied on! These last three years have been torture. My mind is in constant wait of bad news. Countless people rely on me. I hope you understand why I may have changed since we first met, and I lose my temper when I previously would have not. I wanted a quiet life. I wanted to be an obscure philosopher. I don't like being famous. Being known by my students was good enough for me. Fame is a mountain many are hoping to climb, little do they know there's nothing up here. There are so many books in the vault of my mind that will die with me, because politics has stolen all my time. I wanted to spend my time with Maria just doing things normal couples do. I wish I had read books to Francis when he was a child. I wish I had learnt more about architecture, so you and I could bond over more than bloody politics, but I know almost nothing about it. There's so much I wish to do, but I feel tremendously guilty when I'm not working. I feel I have to work endlessly, to save our people from extinction. I've bankrupted my personal life for our people. I wanted several kids, but only had one, so I could focus on helping our people prosper. I neglected Maria, to focus on my work and she hates me. I neglected Francis for my work and he hates me. And when I became successful, I neglected you. We cannot always do what we wish, you see? I've had to compensate for the Plutocracy's selfishness by being as selfless as possible. Learning about how selfish they are, reading example after example of their extraordinary selfishness set me upon a realisation I made decades ago that has had a heavy toll on my mind; everything everyone does is in their own self-interest. I wish I had not learnt this, but pain is often the price for learning the truth. Lies make the world beautiful. In reality, every act is driven by the will to live. If you want the leader of some poor shithole to abolish slavery, tell him abolition will make him look good and his country richer, don't bother telling him 'it's the right thing'. At the root of every joke is humiliation, that excitement that one is better than someone else. People only give to charity because it makes them feel superior to the recipient or they value the social capital gained more than the financial capital lost. Men care about men's rights, because they are men. Women care about women's rights, because they are women. The poor care about wealth redistribution because they are poor, when they become rich their interests conveniently change. People don't admit they're wrong during a debate even when they think

they are, because they care more about looking smart than the truth. No artwork is made from divine inspiration detached from this fallen world or because artists want to 'express themselves', it is always done for love and money. If artists just want to 'express themselves', why do they go through the trouble of exposing their hearts to be shot at by critics? Why don't they just 'express themselves' to their friends and family? It's not as if any artist has anything of importance to tell the public. The only integrous work of art is one the artist deprives the world of. This knowledge has eviscerated all the world's beauty from my eyes. And, I repeat, pain is often the price for discovering the truth, but, as philosophers, we are obliged to confront the truth no matter the personal cost." Jeremiah, shook his head dismissively, "I remember when we were in Montpelerin one time, we walked past an old street cleaner and you said you felt sorry for her and wished all jobs were automated so people who hate their jobs could live a life of comfort. After the Virtual Rehab Centre, you said you regretted how you treated people you hadn't seen in decades. When we spoke about the war a couple weeks ago, there was a picture of that boy who stepped on a landmine that made you cry. How could it be in your self-interest to feel those emotions, if those emotions are painful? Not everything is motivated by self-interest. You felt those emotions out of love. Deep inside, you are a good person. If-" "What do you mean by that?" "Mean by what?" "Deep inside, you are a good person.' Do I not appear to be?" "You do, it was just an expression." Arthur frowned and said, "Go on." "If you tell yourself everyone is selfish, your own standards of behaviour will corrupt, as you will think it's fair to behave like the truly selfish people." "I believe what is true. We are all individual cells enslaved to a perpetual war against one another. That is the root cause of the world being in this mess; the selfishness of the most powerful, the Plutocracy. Everyone is always acting in their own self-interest, it just doesn't seem that way because of differences in behaviour, and what are those differences caused by? Differences in birth, experience, and what we believe we can accomplish based on the powers and weaknesses of ourselves and others, the differences aren't caused by good people levitating over the rest, the good are simply scared of being evil. People are as selfish as they believe they can get away with being. It is not a coincidence the most evil men in history have been those with unbridled power. There are many people in this world that would kill even more than those tyrants did if they thought they could get away with it." "They're restrained by the regret they know they'd have for killing even one person. Deep inside everyone is good, except for the sadists." "Such nonsense. They simply fear facing consequences. No-one really cares about other people. Why is that people in poorer nations are more united? It's because they are more dependant on one another. As countries get richer, they become more individualistic, because everyone wants to fulfil the paranoid dream of total self-reliance. They only care about other people they believe are of necessary use. Even your best friend will stab you in the back," he said furiously, "if he thinks his life will improve with you gone!" Jeremiah was taken aback by his sudden change temperament. He watched the patrolling guards, expecting to be shot. He was sure he was being referred to, but Arthur's lack of eye contact confused him. Jeremiah replied, "Just because someone wants to do something... doesn't mean they will." "Hmm." Arthur checked his watch, "Let's go inside, there's a smell of carrion in the air."

In the basement cinema, the top members of the Love Party watched the march proceed to the Mountain House with great excitement. They had already started drinking champagne, and Arthur was too excited to sit down, he felt like he was watching his favourite sports team in a final. Jeremiah watched them marching near Arthur's old house through streets he remembered from his days in the boycott, he wished he could trade his current life to be poor,

struggling, and at peace with himself again. Dean had got word from their guards that Maria was at her old house and had not evacuated, so he took a path far away from her. He was alone at the front. Francis and a guard were each holding a pole of a banner stretched across the street, high above their heads, it read, 'We won't shoot, if you don't shoot'. Behind the banner were 50,000 robot soldiers and over 100,000 armed human followers, and behind them were over 200,000 unarmed followers. Constantly from all sides, in their cars or running, Love Party followers were joining the march, people sympathetic with ties to Poor Nations joined the march with guns and with the hope that Arthur's victory would bring an end to the Climate War, democracy activists joined the march under the surety Riley had killed democracy, bounty hunters joined the march because they believed many would fall into crime when Arthur deprived people of Basic Income. Dean saw the waves of newcomers as a disaster waiting to happen, he watched the newcomers carefully, and got his message of caution passed through the march. As Dean walked, he looked side to side, checking the roofs, the walls, the trees, the windows, and the bushes, in wait of an ambush. The robot soldiers went through the march asking the militia if they needed guidance on using a gun. Their guns were easy to use, all guns the Love Party provided to them had auto-aim, which meant so long as it was aimed near someone, the gun would automatically aim at the target when a shot was fired. The robots hadn't been given guns that had auto-aim as their accuracy was already perfect. Riley had not permitted the military to purchase guns with auto-aim, as they were more expensive than guns without it. The streets they went through were almost entirely without parked cars, the holographic billboards advertised guns and ammo to everyone, through living room windows they could see the few TVs that were still on were showing the march. Since the beginning of the march, everyone except for Dean and Francis chanted, 'Love beats hate, there is no debate!' and other similar chants with makeshift drums matching the rhythm. Love Party supporters that were too scared to fight, but too carefree to evacuate, leaned out of their top floor windows applauding and waving Love Party flags as they marched by. People left their houses to hand the marchers gifts of food and water. Despite the chanting, the new followers joining from all around, and the gifts they received, the road was still ominous. Everyone wondered how the military would attack. In the past, one knew what to generally expect from their enemy: men with somewhat similar weapons to themselves. Now both sides questioned what their enemy had up their sleeves, what unheard of technologies they may face. The first attack came in the early afternoon from an ECSL follower and suicidal drug addict. He peeked at the marchers, from his bedroom window with his machine gun to his side. He ducked under his bedroom's windowsill shortly before they came in shooting distance, he pointed the gun over and behind his head, in their general direction. However, before he could shoot, he was killed by a robot with one shot through the wall to his head. The robot soldiers had been programmed to shoot anyone aiming in their direction with safety off, in Gildish military uniform, any enemy their allies were shooting, and Gildish military vehicles. Unaware of what happened, the militia close by clang to their guns, as though they were the hands of their parents. Seeing the situation was dealt with, Dean moved on glad to see the robots working as planned, but noticed those behind him, except for the robots, still looking for the enemy. He didn't bother ordering them to follow him and let them take their time. In Dean's mind, the militia were just props to show public support, he expected them to be of little use in battle, and preferred them to stay away for their own safety. Many of the followers realised in this moment that it would be difficult to kill someone, not necessarily in terms of the skill required, but the impact killing would have on their minds. None of the militia had even killed a farm animal before, the closest they'd

come to death was in pictures. The electricity of Arthur's speech began to wane for those that heard the shots and the grim reality of battle began to take hold.

Francis handed his side of the flag to someone next to him and jogged to Dean who turned when he heard his footsteps. He spoke quietly, "Dean." "Yes, boy?" "Please, can I leave?" Dean looked at him like he was the second worst human in the world then resumed scanning the scene. Francis was concerned by how disappointed Dean appeared, so said, "Can I at least walk at the back?" "Where would the pride be in that?" "Um... I don't know." "What are you scared of?" Francis thought the answer was obvious, "I don't want to die." Dean spat on the floor. "Be completely honest and take all the time you want to answer. Do you enjoy your life?" "Not really." "Have you ever?" "No." "Do you think it will improve on its current course?" "No." "So why do you fear it ending?" Francis didn't respond. "It is natural to be at war, all men have lived through one, and all future men will. Peace time is merely when to prepare for the next war. So long as men are at war within themselves, this will hold true. It's better to embrace pain than run from it, unless you want to die like a dog." Francis didn't know what to say. Dean asked, "Do you love your mother?" "Of course." "What's the most noble act you've done for her?" Francis couldn't think of any, "I don't know." "Name one." "I can't." "If you love your mother, you will fight today, because if we win, she will forgive your father for everything, she will realise all your father's time spent working was worthwhile, and they will happily reunite once more. True love means more than kisses and presents, anyone can do that, it means going to the nth degree for them even if it's to your own detriment. When I was about your age, I was on a rescue mission. We were in some Godforsaken hellhole and when we found our boys... It was the first time I saw death. It took all my strength to remain calm, I didn't want to disappoint my boys, I knew crying would make matters worse for them. Although I hid my feelings, I was quiet the rest of the day and couldn't sleep that night, so it was clear to one of the boys I needed consoling and he told me something that changed my life. He explained that what I saw earlier was just one half of the story. I only saw the hatred the killers had for our boys, it never entered my mind that they committed that crime out of love for their own people. The root of their hatred was love. The killers believed their loved ones were being so grossly mistreated that it justified that excessive vengeance. Imagine how much the killers must have loved their own people to have committed such horrors, to do what they never would have otherwise done. I know what most people think of me. They think of me as some sort of man of steel. The truth is quite the opposite. Any bravery I may have comes from my sensitivity, my deep love for my family and my friends. I can't bear the thought of disappointing them or seeing anything bad happen to them. I believe that cowardice is selfish, it comes from a lack of love for others and a prioritisation of oneself. Your father is driven by love, though in a different way from those killers and myself. He has been through three years of hell. He would have quit a long time ago, if he didn't love something other than himself or if he wasn't fighting for someone other than himself, because the guilt of disappointing loved ones is more painful than disappointing ourselves. Your father wants to give your mother the world, and I don't mean that metaphorically, he wants to literally give her the entire world. He would probably try to give her the entire universe, if that was possible. He craves victory, so he can rule the world with her, and not as some sort of accessory, he means for them to rule as equals. That was going to be his surprise for her upon his victory. He didn't say anything about it before, because he didn't think she would believe him until he had actually given her that power. That is how much he loves your mother, all of his work is for her, so if you love her half as much as he does, I think it's only fair if you perform this noble act, so they may reunite and be happy

once more.” “I know I’ve took her for granted.” “It’s only natural. Most people your age are like that. You’ve never spent a day without her, have you?” “No.” “Well, there you go. People your age only realise when they’ve moved out or when it’s too late.” Dean pat him on the back, “You’re stronger than you think are.” Francis went back to carry the flag and thought about what was said.

Fifteen minutes later, Dean and Francis were passing what was once Arthur’s old house. It had been turned into a sort of shrine by his followers after his ascent in popularity, until supporters of the ECSL torched it one night. Arthur had it rebuilt as a nursery to avoid attracting vandals and it worked. As they were watching the march, Arthur thought to himself that the attack would begin whilst the marchers were on his old street, and he was right. From an aerial drone company, Dean received word that their surveillance drones had detected two hundred transport helicopters heading their way from Montpelerin. He turned to those behind him, waving his arms, shouting at the top of his lungs for them to disperse. The frightened marchers zipped apart. Dean put on his gas mask, as he dashed to Francis, one of the few standing dumbstruck. He put his mask on for him then ran in the direction of the helicopters holding him by a wrist. Dean ordered the drones that they’d received from Elimperia to attack the helicopters. The guards put their masks on and followed Dean. The robots put on masks to pretend they were human and followed Dean. After a couple of minutes, just as almost all had stopped bothering to disperse, due to a lack of visible danger, the helicopters flew into hearing distance. The marchers leaped garden fences to seek shelter indoors, but, upon trespassing, metal shutters automatically dropped. Shutters were shot through, houses were intruded. Countless helicopters came into view. Realising the drones had no chance of stopping the helicopters in time, Dean ordered the drones to head back, as he didn’t want the enemy to know they had them in their arsenal before they’d be of use. The helicopters dropped thousands of barrels. Upon impact, red smoke poured out, covering streets and dwarfing houses.

When Jeremiah saw a young man fall and everyone run past him as if nothing happened, he was shaken to the core. It was sadder than any death he’d read about or saw in a film. He thought, ‘That poor man! He gave his life because of this bastard’s selfishness! That is someone’s son, someone’s brother, and just like that he’s gone forever! They ran past him like he’s worthless!’ Unable to watch anymore, he left the cinema for his room. Arthur declared, “It’s over! It’s all over!” Everyone in the cinema reflected his pessimism, all considering getting to the getaway plane.

The helicopters passed and gradually the cries of the marchers did too. Dean, Francis, and the guards were alone with the robots. The merry chanting of thousands was now a haunting memory. Francis stared downwards in a daze. Dean said, “Do not conceal their crime for them. Look at them and keep their suffering in mind when you fight.” Once the red smoke cleared, visible were thousands lying in roads and gardens. Only a few thousand were able to survive. They didn’t pick up the banner offering peace. They marched onwards for forty minutes. They mentally prepared for death. If Dean wasn’t there, the low morale would have led them to retreat, his unwavering strength created an air of invincibility around him. No-one said a word. They struggled to concentrate. No resident waved a flag or handed them a gift like before.

A quiet hour later, noticing how close they were to Montpelerin, Arthur sprang back to his feet in the cinema. No-one else there understood why. Earlier in the day, a fireworks



company and an oil company had left trucks of fireworks and plain, white trucks secretly containing jet fuel in the underground car parks of skyscrapers bordering the Bayuz River where Dean had predicted the army would make their stand. The Love Party's guards had planted explosives in the trucks earlier in the day. The fireworks and jet fuel had been ordered off the record by Arthur during a meeting with the CEOs of the fireworks company and the oil company. The CEO of the fireworks company didn't care about potentially being caught, as his company was in such dire straits he thought he had nothing to lose by helping the Love Party. The CEO of the oil company was upset with Riley for ending fossil fuel subsidies. Neither were told what the orders were for. When Dean saw the tip of a skyscraper on the Montpelerin side of the Bayuz River, he halted and so did those behind him. He'd been informed by the surveillance drone company that the skyscrapers were full of snipers. Dean took the detonator from a pouch and held it close to his chest so no-one could see it. Turning to the marchers, he said, "Look, I know you're all feeling down, so who wants to hear some good news?" They glumly raised their hands, and so did the robots as they were programmed to mirror the mood and behaviour of their human allies around them to avoid standing out. "Okay. Here it is." Dean hit the detonator. Great explosions hit the skyscrapers. Their emotions leaped up. Those unaware of what he was going to do smiled in awe. The foundations of the skyscrapers were weakened by the explosions that deafened the soldiers nearby that survived it. As skyscrapers were pulled to the earth, a shower of metal and glass crashed on fleeing soldiers. Smoke chased the soldiers through the streets, appearing like a large and unrelenting monster. Dean ordered 100,000 drones as small as flies to chase the soldiers, they exploded beside their manic heads killing them instantly. Leemington Station, where Arthur used to arrive at in Montpelerin before walking to Riverlake, had collapsed under the weight of a destroyed skyscraper. Dean shot through the gates of a tunnelling company's headquarters and everyone followed him. A tunnel boring machine operated by one robot began tunnelling from the Bronrar side of the river to the Montpelerin side. Dean led everyone running through the fifty-foot-diameter tunnel, as it was being carved. Arthur had reached an agreement with the CEO for help after suggesting that, if the revolution failed, he could claim he was held under duress by the Love Party. Many had said, since Gildland became the world superpower, that Gildland could never be defeated from an external force because it had far more resources than its closest rivals and had the geographical advantage of one neighbouring country to its south one and one to its north and an ocean to its east and west. They said the only danger of Gildland being destroyed came from within, and their predictions appeared to be coming true.

Everyone that was viewing the marchers from the panoramic, bullet-proof windows of the Mountain House scattered when the skyscrapers began to fall. Riley took his chihuahuas with him, one tucked under each arm. They crammed into the secret elevators leading into the mountain. The elevators passed through hundreds of metres of rock before reaching the Core. The Core was a mansion within the Pelerin Mountain used for crises with enough stockpiled for the prime minister to live there for thirty days, there were windows with filters to make it seem like the mansion was surrounded by green fields and not by rock. Eric, Riley, and his staff made their way to the living room to watch the battle ensue, whilst some went to the kitchen and bedrooms as they couldn't bear watching the impending doom. An adjutant burst into the living room, almost as soon as they arrived, "Mr. Fidge, you are required immediately in the Crisis Room. If you wouldn't mind following me, sir." Eric asked, "What for?" "They would like to ask you about the battle plans you provided." "Right now?" "Yes, sir." "Very well." As Eric got up, Riley asked, "Can I come?" to which the adjutant

responded after a noticeable pause, “Sure.” Riley and the adjutant ran to the Crisis Room. Noticing Eric walking casually, the adjutant said, “Sir, I must insist you hurry.” “*You* insist I must hurry? Who the bloody hell are you? I am sixty-five years old, I do not hurry on demand. A few more seconds will make no difference. Pull yourself together.” Riley and the adjutant waited by the door of the Crisis Room pretending to not be aggravated whilst Eric sauntered there seemingly without a care for the wild cries of hopelessness from the staff surrounding them and the sounds of battle from the televisions. The adjutant held the door of the Crisis Room. It was dimly lit with a large table in the centre surrounded by thirty tense ministers, advisors, and generals, watching a large monitor at the end showing nine different perspectives of the battle. Grim faces turned to Eric. General Williamsberg pointed to the chair opposite him, “Mr. Fidge, take a seat.” Eric looked down his nose at him for being rude then went to sit. Riley remained by the entrance, his eyes fixed on the battle. Williamsberg looked at him blankly and spoke slowly to intimidate him, which Eric had to resist laughing at, “The battle plans that you provided us.” “What about them?” “Why are they so different to what has eventuated? Your plans make no mention of military drones, robot soldiers, skyscrapers collapsing, tunnels being carved, all of which has happened. Your plans do show them attacking the Mountain House from the north and the east which has not happened.” “Plans change.” Williamsberg stared at him resentfully. Eric filled in the silence, “One of the very first battles I studied many moons ago was the Battle of Satmo which took place in 1524 between the Arazics and the Eckims. The Eckim’s plan had to be improvised before they’d,” Williamsberg resumed watching the battle, “fired a single bullet, because the Arazics launched an immensely successful surprise attack. They then had to retreat which resulted in much abandoned weaponry which was then used against them as they retreated and once they had escaped the hell-fire of the Arazics and created a new plan they were then hit by extremely adverse weather causing such devastation to their numbers that they decided to abandon the plan completely. So, yes, plans do change. Plans aren’t prophecies.” Williamsberg looked back at Eric, “Is there any chance they know you stole their plans?” “Absolutely none.” Williamsberg spoke into the conference phone whilst staring at Eric and ordered all forces in Gildland to immediately head to Montpelerin. When the message was complete, Eric said, “Wrong decision.” Williamsberg said to the adjutant, “Remove Mr. Fidge then have him executed for treason.” Eric got up and said without looking at General Williamsberg, “This is just ridiculous. I have only tried to help my country, and this is how I’m being rewarded! It’s not my fault their plans have changed!” Believing General Williamsberg was merely speaking in anger, and did not really want Eric executed, the adjutant let him out of the Crisis Room. Riley asked, “Do you guys need me?” General Williamsberg shrugged, “You can stay, if you wish.” “Well, it looks like you guys have everything under control! I’ll let you get on with it!”

Propelled by the winds of change, the marchers rode the waves of the helpless and stormed the battlefield. They poured through the tunnel into Montpelerin and found a wilderness of steel and metal strewn with corpses in contortions, some as dark as coal, some whole, some broken in pieces. The ash made the city appear to be covered in dirty snow. Mingled in the ash were broken computers, desks, chairs, tables, and corpses. Riley’s soldiers tried to shoot the robots from around street corners and behind the cover of abandoned cars, and snipers deep within the city tried to pick them off. However, the robots detected all fired bullets and dodged them easily. The robots advanced through the streets killing soldiers with almost perfect efficiency and climbed buildings like geckos to get an advantage on the enemy, this was when the military realised they were robots. As the robots advanced, they sent data to

each-other on enemies they'd spotted and guns the killed soldiers dropped that could be used. Riley didn't allow the military to purchase robot soldiers because they would have cost more than human soldiers during his term as Prime Minister, though they would have saved money in the long run. Riley wanted to appear economical during his first term to help his re-election chances. The surveillance drone company Arthur conspired with deployed a fleet of drones to crash into the soldiers. CEOs of other drone companies that supported Arthur, but hadn't been asked for help from in the coup, ordered their workers to send drones into battle. The army had abstained from using missile drones, as they were sure they could squash the outnumbered marchers without them, and one missile cost 980,000 guilders which was much more expensive than the bullets required to kill the same amount of targets. The missile drones were only launched when they realised the Love Party had robot soldiers. They struck like meteors, sending dozens hurtling into the air each time. The explosions were so loud and powerful that nearby survivors felt their bodies would shatter. Planes flew over Montpelerin and thousands of paratroopers rained from the sky out of the marchers' firing range in all directions, forming a noose around them. Most of the marchers found refuge in the underground railway from missiles and enemy reinforcements. The entirety of Montpelerin was plagued with battle. Buildings were filled with fighters. Pent up rage was unleashed with every shot. Bombs exploded and the land shook in fear. They battled with Atheism on their side. For mortal gods, they performed noble deeds of remembrance worth. Chaos whipped the senses. Among the deafening gunfire were the incessant alarms of abandoned cars, blustering commands, breaking glass, crumbling walls, wounded fighters crying for help that no-one knew how to give. The marchers vandalised the Houses of Parliament. Dozens of the marchers attempting to flank the army broke into the Montpelerin Zoo. Upon detection, missile drones hailed down on them, destroying fences and walls within the zoo, allowing giraffes, lions, elephants, tigers, and zebras to escape. As the maddened, confused animals fled captivity, marchers shot them in fear of being attacked by them. Robot soldiers nearby shot the animals, as they were programmed to shoot what their allies shot, so long as it wasn't a friendly target. Skyscrapers accidentally destroyed by missile strikes created gigantic ash clouds that polluted several streets at a time, sending thousands of fighters scattering. Riverlake was broken into by six professors still employed there. They pillaged labs for flammable, toxic, and explosive substances. Undetected, the professors loaded their cars with the substances then hid safely within Riverlake whilst they used their remote-controlled cars to flank the unsuspecting soldiers. When the cars were shot at, the substances set dozens of soldiers aflame, rolling on the ground, blew a hundred to pieces, and poisoned hundreds. Securitun played false news stories of the battle on billboards to demoralise the soldiers and encourage the marchers. One of the last remaining petrol stations in Montpelerin blew up after being shot by a marcher for no purpose other than the releasing of anger. Attack helicopters hovered around the borders of Montpelerin, shooting at the marchers. Military drones flew at the helicopters, the ones they managed to destroy spiralled into buildings and the sea. Exhausted by the hectic battle, a hundred marchers burgled supermarkets and bars for food and alcohol. A few million of the people watching a livestream, thought the battle was not actually happening, that it was all a simulation designed to scare Riley's supporters away from Montpelerin, so that the Love Party could capture the city with little resistance. To the fighters, though they saw vast bloodshed, the battle itself seemed invincible and growing in vitality. Blood fell like rain, surrounding them, for indefinite time, and bound to forces beyond them. As the long day dove into night, the robots faced their greatest challenge yet, a wall of tanks halfway into Montpelerin blocked

every road to the Mountain House. As the robots tried to reach the wall of tanks, they dodged missile drones, soldiers' bullets, toppling buildings, cars racing through the streets, friendly fire from incompetent marchers, tumbling statues, and the tanks' guns, all the while scavenging for guns after running out of ammo. The wall of tanks caused the robot soldiers their first casualties in the battle. Despite their supreme vision, speed, strength, and intelligence, the violence became too overwhelming to be escaped for hundreds of the robots in the wrong place at the wrong time, like some trapped in a building as it fell with no possible exit. The flood of robots, however, could hardly be abated by the army. Leaping from building to building, thousands of robots progressed and cleared soldiers from around the wall of tanks then provided covering fire whilst other robots jumped down onto the tanks flattening them and killing the crews inside. As the tanks were being eliminated, the missile drones ceased. They had been so frequent that to be free of them for more than ten seconds was enough to make the marchers believe victory was imminent. Francis and the guards with many marchers were progressing steadily behind Dean through Montpelerin's underground and they also had cause for optimism. They overheard soldiers retreating and discord within the army, the soldiers called for helicopters to evacuate casualties, but were refused, the soldiers replied that the skies were clear, but were ignored. As they wondered why the army refused helicopters from evacuating casualties and why the missile drones had ceased, their questions were soon answered. Underground, they were suddenly surrounded by darkness, the lights and ad boards lost power. Above ground, the epic, martial symphony instantly quietened to a sputter. In the Love Party's half of Montpelerin, all lights, cars, phones, holographic billboards, military drones, broadcasting helicopters, and robots, except a few thousand out of its range, were disabled. In their desperation, the army had launched an electromagnetic pulse (EMP) attack, destroying every electric circuit in its range.

During the coup, Arthur's mood soared and crashed with every turn of fate. When the EMP attack hit, Arthur was thrown into a deep recession. He grinned speechless in disbelief like a madman. However, the reversal of fortune he feared was nowhere to be seen. The Love Party still progressed through Montpelerin only at a slower pace than before. The robots, though heavily diminished in number, were still able to chisel away at the enemy without suffering significant casualties. Thousands of military drones still flew at the soldiers and hundreds of more cars full of professional bounty hunters and Love Party supporters arrived, shooting at the soldiers whilst on auto-pilot. The missile drones didn't resume and the army's reinforcements were a pittance compared to earlier. Love Party supporters believed with cautious optimism that the army was about to surrender. Every speculative report delivered on the news, even from the pro-Riley GBC, was positive for the Love Party. Rumours circulated that Riley was spotted deserting Montpelerin, but also that he had been assassinated in the Mountain House, regardless of the contradiction, fate seemed against him. Right after the EMP attack, Dean ordered those with him in the underground railway to secure exit routes to Bronnar then ordered the robots to attack the anti-aircraft guns defending Montpelerin. The robots used live satellite imagery to detect them. They abandoned the battle and infiltrated the barracks holding anti-aircraft guns and skipped across the sea to sink anti-aircraft ships. Days prior, Arthur had made an off the record order from the CEO of a private jet company, that never received government subsidies, for 150 jets. An hour after Dean's order for the anti-aircraft guns to be destroyed, 150 remote-controlled private jets flew through the black, grey, and orange sky of Montpelerin, and hunted the soldiers like kamikaze, causing hideous ruin. Like fans at a sporting event, the Love Party jumped out of their cinema seats, cheering, clapping, and hugging one another. The robots and the marchers

ran through the inferno to finish the army. Robots with their eyes lit as torches and the marchers glittering in the glow of towering fires, were swarming the Pelerin Mountain.

Jeremiah left the cinema room, his mind a passenger of his body. He went upstairs to retrieve the bomb and silenced every dissuasive thought before they could form completely. Realising victory was imminent, Arthur wanted to hug someone, but saw no-one he cared about. That he could have been elected without bloodshed didn't occupy his mind, he thought only of the excitement of unrivalled power. His hated rival of many years, Pete Riley, now appeared as a pitiful character in the story of his life, a vital sacrifice for his present ecstasy. Jeremiah locked himself in his room then drew the suitcase from beneath the bed, unzipped it then unlocked the briefcase. He started the detonation and shook when the countdown began. Holding the bannister all the way in fear of crumbling, he descended the stairs with the bomb that appeared as nothing more than a household item and his suitcase that he was to load on the plane as an excuse for not being near the explosion. In the basement cinema, they were standing in the middle with their backs turned to the entrance, drinking champagne with arms around one another singing a victory song. Detecting that Arthur was in the midst of them and had not left the cinema, Jeremiah quickly placed the bomb under a chair then walked out with his suitcase.

Since the Love Party began invading Montpelerin to when the private jets hit, Riley was baffled by their success, but still confident the military would squash them. Throughout the battle, he'd laughed off requests from staff to escape. Leaders of ally nations didn't offer help, as they had also trusted the Gildish military to manage the coup. After the attack of the jets, Riley's mood finally capitulated. Seeing no clear explanation for the catastrophe, he threw a tantrum, making baseless accusations of treachery, and insulted his supporters for being cowards compared to the Love Party's. Now when staff asked for permission to escape, he ignored them, and remained sulking at the television. Without permission, the staff took Riley's two chihuahuas and left, angry with themselves for not leaving sooner. Shortly after, the Crisis Room emptied. The ministers, advisors, and generals ran past the living room and as they waited for the elevators, Eric and Riley heard them saying, "I told him a thousand times to not postpone the election!" "We all did." Riley remained in the living room alone with Eric, waiting for a miracle.

When everyone had left, Riley said to Eric whilst watching the television, "You can go, if you want." Eric sidestepped the offer, "Do you not think it would be wise to surrender?" "Not until all hope is gone." "Much blood would be saved." "What's good about saving lives? They should be glad to die with dignity and not live under De la Mer." "They will respect you for saving lives, and you will need their respect to survive the night." "'Respect'? People like him have disrespected me my entire life. Since I can remember, I've been bullied by people like him for being 'weird'. When I'd cry with my face to the wall, the other kids laughed as they walked past me. My own worthless parents didn't respect me enough to help when I told them about it, they told me to 'toughen up' and called me a 'drama queen'. I'll never be respected by people like him." For the first time, Eric learnt about the life of someone he considered an enemy. His intolerance towards people he disagreed with was so high, he avoided being near them, reading their books, and learning about who they were. With this slight glimpse into Riley's life, Eric assumed a lot. He thought to himself, 'I am beginning to understand. He deeply cares about victims of the world, because he identifies with them. He thinks being loyal to his blood is odd, because no-one was loyal to him, he despises offensive jokes, because he was the butt of offensive jokes. Why does he have a

family of dogs instead of a family of his own? Because people have always disappointed him and, having never been part of a happy family, the concept of one appears unrealistic. He started the Age Equality Movement, because his childhood was so terrible he would rather have gone to work than to school. What choice did he have in who he became? No wonder he wanted to change the world, the world rejected him! I looked upon this man as a caricature, never as a fully-formed man. Oh, any man we feel the impulse to mock is surely a man to be helped! Mocking him makes me as low as those other presumptuous fools! He was doing what he thought was right, just like me, he had no choice in his nature, just like me, he had no choice nurture, just like me.” He wanted to apologise for the insults he’d made behind Riley’s back and to his face, but in Gildland such a display of affection among strangers was taboo, and he imagined Riley would think such a show of affection to be a joke.

Sensing his life was coming to an end, Riley desired his true story to be known by at least one person before its inevitable rewriting by Arthur. He went to the kitchen connecting to the living room and brought back a bottle of wine and one glass as Eric said he didn’t want any. “I know you think my ideas are odd, Mr. Fidge, but you must understand why I sympathise with outsiders and the oppressed. As you know, I wasn’t born Pete Riley. My birth name was unpronounceable to everyone. Everyone at school, my parents, my distant relatives would all pronounce it differently. Having it pronounced so many ways made my identity, or at least part of it, feel as though it was ever-changing, that I was a different person depending on the different people I was with. My parents were overprotective, when the other kids went to the park after school, I wasn’t allowed because my parents were worried something bad would happen, so whilst the other kids were all socialising I was alone at home. When at school they’d talk about what happened at the park the previous day, I was left out of the conversation, I was always out of the loop, so became even more of an outcast. My parents were poor. To save money, my mum didn’t buy makeup, my dad wore the same clothes for decades, my clothes were old, and the laughter I’d receive only pushed me further away. I couldn’t afford to go on school trips, so I was left out of those moments as well. We didn’t even have the internet, until I was fifteen, so when all the other kids were playing games and talking together online, I was left out of all that. I never wanted to be looked at as different or to be an outcast, they were just the cards I was dealt, and when you are an outcast, or a freak, you can either hate yourself and self-destruct or you can embrace who you are and turn it into your strength and hopefully inspire others. I had to prove I wasn’t the worthless freak they kept saying I was and I wanted to be rich, not so I could buy fancy things, but so that I’d have freedom. I tried to be a singer, but failed, I tried to be a painter, but failed, I tried to be an author, but failed, I tried to be an actor, but failed. I tried being a professor and succeeded, so stuck with that, until I was in the running to become PM. It was all because I wanted to be accepted by people. I guess, deep down, I never really cared what I was accepted for.” “Few know what they want to do at a young age.” “When I became PM, there were many changes I wanted to make for the people, but I was blackmailed time after time by donors. There was this one time that we tried to stop Muse Corp from merging with BlueSky, because we didn’t want one organisation to have as much media power as they now have. Of course, they used the media power they already had to threaten us with negative coverage. Muse Corp also warned that blocking the deal would result in Gildland losing out on jobs and investment. Any time we wanted to help the people to the detriment of the wealthy, we were held ransom. ‘You want to increase our taxes? Fine, we’ll leave the country.’ ‘You want to improve workers’ rights? Fine, we’ll move our jobs to a different country.’ Usually, when the wealthy want to get the people on their side, they’ll hide in the shadows and put everyday people in

their campaigns. When we tried to ban tobacco displays in shops, the wealthy used third parties, so their campaigns against the ban seemed to be for more than their own benefit. The tobacco industry paid shopkeepers to show their innocent faces to the public. Their campaign against the ban focused on how the innocent, little shopkeepers would suffer because of government regulation. They paid non-profit organisations to help change the conversation from health to freedom, and they used stupid populist term ‘common sense’ to make us sound out of touch.” “I am sure you tried your best.” “And I want you to know that, yes, I did postpone the election for political purposes, because under De la Mer the influence of the wealthy will only grow. Postponing the election was our last hope.” “It was not postponed because of Green Eyes?” “No. I wanted to protect the millions on Basic Income, and the millions working in the public sector from losing their livelihoods upon his election. And I wanted to make sure Elimperia wouldn’t win the war, because I know De la Mer will let them walk all over him.”

Riley checked the CCTV monitor next to the television, and saw one helicopter still on the mountain’s summit. He messaged his pilot that he was ready to evacuate. Eric was drawn out of his contemplation, when Riley got up exhaustedly, “I’ve had enough. Let’s leave,” as he walked out he had one last peek at the screen in hope of a miracle. Eric followed him to the elevators silent out of shame and pity. Ascending to the Mountain House, the cacophony outside became clearer. Once there, they looked outside its wide windows and saw a night so dark it seemed day would not follow. When they heard gunshots on the mountain slope, they hurried towards the helicopter waiting in front of the Mountain House for them.

Dean, Francis, and the others were a mile away from the foot of the Pelerin Mountain. Between them and the Mountain House were a couple thousand loyal soldiers. As Dean was fighting, he received a message from the surveillance drone company that evacuees had been spotted leaving the Mountain House by helicopter, but Riley and Eric had not yet been seen. Dean didn’t respond, he was too maddened by the prospect of Riley surviving whilst thousands died because of him postponing the election. He dashed over to Francis, who was fighting with a courage that he was glad to see then said, “Come, we must avenge your father!” They began their desperate sprint to the Mountain House with the aid of many robot soldiers that Dean had ordered to join them. To run faster, Dean dropped his rifles for his pistols. Passing through no-man’s land and into enemy lines, Dean threw stun grenades at the soldiers ahead and shot them. He threw smoke grenades over his shoulder, creating a large cloud of smoke, to avoid getting shot from behind. Francis provided covering fire whilst running behind him, all his shots would have missed if not for auto-aim. He was tired from carrying the rifle and his hands were wet from sweating. Half the soldiers they passed tried to stop them, half hid away, wanting to surrender. Once they were through the streets and in the open land before the mountain, Dean threw a smoke grenade at Riley’s guards trying to shoot them from the mountain. Out of shape, and drained by battle, Francis struggled yet continued to run up the mountain. Dean struggled with the leg he’d injured whilst searching for Green Eyes. Their eyes darted all over for the enemy. The openness of the mountain and the knowledge they could be shot from behind, made the two of them surer than at any other point in the day that they could die. After defeating a few guards on the mountain, they began to hear a helicopter preparing to take off.

During the final stretch, no guards appeared. Once on the summit, they found Riley and Eric exiting the Mountain House. Dean said to Francis, “Watch the pilot,” and Francis pointed his gun at the terrified pilot. Riley and Eric both stood awestruck. Dean marched towards them.

Noticing he was about to shoot Riley, Eric stepped in front of Riley to shield him. Dean asked, "What are you doing?" With a desperation Dean had never seen from him before, Eric said, "Don't kill him." Dean stared at him, perplexed. Furiously, he asked, "What are you doing?" "There should be no more bloodshed. No more. We must learn to forgive. We must. If we don't, the world will never know peace, there will always be someone looking for revenge. We must stop. We must stop this madness!" "The plan was for you to *pretend* to betray us." "I am not betraying you. I had an epiphany today, one I wish I had many years ago. If you put your gun away, I can explain, and you will understand." "Get out the way." "Never!" Dean aimed his pistol at him, "Last chance or you die too." Eric didn't move and stared at him fiercely. To save Eric's life and because he no longer wanted to live, Riley sincerely whispered to Eric for trying to save him, "Thank you, my friend," then tilted his head to the side to give Dean a clear shot. Dean shot him whilst still staring at Eric with contempt. Eric turned to check on him then, when he saw Riley dead, bowed in mourning. He remembered believing Riley was lucky and that he'd only been successful in life because he was in the right place at the right time, he now remembered no-one can be called lucky until their life story is fully known.

The pilot couldn't believe that a gun in his face was his reward for seven hours of patience. Dean imagined the pilot flying away and diving the helicopter into the militia, so decided to take no chances. He went to the helicopter's window and shot him dead. He then ordered five robots to inspect the house to ensure it was empty. He called Arthur, but received no response, he then called Jeremiah, but received no response, so gave up, imagining they were too busy partying. Relieved to be victorious, but melancholic over Riley's death and the surrounding destruction, Eric went inside and laid on a sofa to try to forget about it all. Francis sat on the summit, observing the battered city and Dean stood next to him. The calm of battle's end brought opportunity for reflection. When Dean noticed him crying, he asked, "What's wrong?" With a teary, quivering face, he responded, "I can't believe they're all gone. To think of how many lives and families we destroyed today. I don't even know how many people I killed. I swear to God I will never hurt anyone ever again, not even slightly. I'm never gonna raise my voice at anyone, or ignore anyone needing help, or laugh at anyone." "Don't beat yourself up. No-one you killed cared about you." Gazing at the cataclysm, Francis shook his head, "I still care about them."



## Statement 11: Profit and Loss

*TODAY'S TOP HEADLINES*

*RILEY ASSASSINATED*

*REVOLUTION! The Love Party Capture Montpelerin*

*Maria Killed in Home Invasion*

*Green Eyes in Critical Condition After Being Set Alight by Fellow Inmates*

*World Leaders Congratulate Arthur as World Awaits His Arrival in Montpelerin*

There was music in the streets and revolution in the air, rocket fireworks whizzed up then burst into a myriad of colour, and flying Catherine wheel fireworks whizzed up then rotated mid-air a minute each. There were mountains of rubble and hills of corpses. The soldiers surrendering or crawling out of the ruins were shown no mercy. Millions of Love Party followers flocked to Montpelerin for celebrations and to repair the city. The naive broke into high street banks, believing they still held cash in vaults. The wise looted temples, palaces, museums, and stores. They partied on the beaches and splashed around in the moon-and-fire-lit sea. They relaxed by the warmth of fires and smoked stolen cigars, watching cars zoom around the city honking their horns and blasting music. They brought chairs and tables from restaurants out to parks and feasted on stolen food and drinks under the glow of luminous trees. Strangers kissed strangers, they felt like one big family. How jubilant there were, how free they felt. Dean dragged Riley's corpse down the mountain for the fighters to claim their prize. Shortly after, they played football with his severed head and beat his body to mush. A drunk stranger said to Dean, "You know, my friend, in Elimperia there is a saying, 'In Gildland, business does not get taken care of, business takes care of you!'" then proceeded to laugh to himself. Dean laughed with him then returned to the summit and got back on speaking terms with Eric. Millions watching live broadcasts still thought the event was a simulation to scare Riley's supporters from Montpelerin so the Love Party could capture the city with ease. A wave of suicides washed over Gildland, as thousands already on the edge preferred to die than live without Basic Income.

The party grew as the sun rose. A few million more arrived to celebrate and repair the city. When helicopters were seen landing on the mountain's summit, the people assumed Arthur had arrived. He awoke in the Prime Minister's bedroom with a migraine and the faint sound of a crowd. He noticed scars on his right arm where dozens of splinters had been removed and hot blisters too, and there were many more he couldn't yet see. His right hand had a tremor, he stared at it in alarm, as he tried to control it without success. Upon hearing him wake, Dean, who had kept watch over him as he slept, went to deliver the bad news to him. Startled by his footsteps, he shot up then relaxed when he saw the familiar face, "Where are we?" As he asked, he realised his hearing was muffled. His eardrums had been damaged by the explosion. Dean was glad to say, "The Mountain House." Arthur smiled in relief then wondered why he looked sad, "What's wrong?" Dean blamed himself for Maria's death, wishing he'd sent more guards to protect her. It was the first time Arthur had seen him teary-eyed. "Maria was... killed this morning by Green Eyes' followers. I'm so sorry."

Arthur's face was blank, as if the news meant nothing to him. Dean expected him to cry a sea of tears. "Would you like a moment alone?" "You can stay." To help Arthur from dwelling in grief, Dean said, "We know who tried to assassinate you." "Yeah?" "Jeremiah and Lucas." He wasn't surprised Jeremiah was involved, but couldn't remember Lucas. "Who's that?" "His guard." "Where are they?" "Lucas died in battle and Jeremiah's here with us being watched. I was waiting for your decision on what to do with him." "Do the public know he survived the explosion?" "There are broadcasting helicopters all over the place, they must have seen him enter here." "Why was that allowed to happen?" "The boys didn't know he was guilty, until they were here. He only confessed after he knew you survived and only implicated Lucas when he learnt he'd died." Arthur shook his head in annoyance. Dean put his hands on his hips, "Let me kill the son of a bitch." "We have to be careful. People will be suspicious, if he disappears on our victory day, everyone knows who he is." "There will be interest no matter when or where he dies. He's a liability and should be removed as fast as possible. He will expose everything, unless you want to keep an eye on him for God knows how many more years. Are you really going to live with someone that tried to kill you?" Dean whispered, "He said he knew about Elimperia helping us." "How?" "He discovered the robots were from Kyetore and he knows they're allied with Elimperia. He also believed the rumours of them helping us with the election." "God." "You see what I mean. He is a huge liability. He has to go." "I would still prefer him alive though. He's very popular. His connection with the youth was vital for us in those campus riots. Even people on Riley's side like him. Even Fidge grew to like him and they used to hate each other. If he dies today, we'll lose a huge asset, and his 'disappearance' will make us look terrible." "The rumours will make enemies fear you. Supporters will defend you no matter what rumours they hear, because they idolise you. Your supporters will grow more fanatical without realising, as they defend you against seemingly unjust attacks. Don't worry about the reaction." Arthur sighed, "I'll talk to him. If he shows remorse, that means he can be trusted to stay. I will never look at him in the face, we'll be in the same room only when necessary, and he'll be under constant watch, but for practical reasons, he'll be allowed to stay. If he shows no remorse, that means he can't be trusted, and then you can kill him, but I don't how." "Drug overdose. We'll make it look like an accident. The story will be that he was celebrating our victory, and he lost control of himself." "Right. Give me a few minutes to get dressed, then bring him here." "Okay. We filled those wardrobes with your stuff a few hours ago." "Thank you, Dean." When he left, Arthur went to the wardrobes then put on a dark grey suit. Once dressed, he pulled back the thick, gold curtains of the white-framed window. To him, the horizon was the end of the world, the rising sun was melting into the wrinkly sea, the seagulls were vultures, and the cheering from beyond view was not for him.

Dean waited five minutes then went to bring Jeremiah to him. Arthur heard Jeremiah say, "Just kill me now." There was a knock. Arthur said, "Come in." Jeremiah entered with his eyes to the ground. Dean closed the door then Jeremiah asked whilst avoiding eye contact, "What do you want?" Arthur couldn't resist looking at him, so shocked he was by his rudeness. He calmed himself and gently smiled, "I just want to talk." "About what?" "There's no need to be so angsty. Take a seat and we'll talk." "No." Arthur pursed his lips then said, "Fine. Fuck off," and gestured towards the exit. Jeremiah left the room and Dean with two guards captured him.

Arthur took a seat by the window, as millions waited for him to address them. He reflected on the change within him that began when he started becoming wealthy and powerful three years

prior. “What do I want now? When I was powerless, I wanted surveillance to be limited to protect myself and potential allies from the overreach of the state and manipulation of our minds by corporations. Now that I am powerful, I want to increase surveillance to protect me and my new allies from dissidents, so I can be left free to do as I please. I used to despair at people welcoming smart devices into their homes, those obvious pieces of spyware they bought because they were too lazy to press a few buttons, but now I am glad they bought them because those devices will help us spy on them. We shall use data gathered from such devices to learn about and then manipulate each individual to my liking. This is not a bad thing, I know what is best for them. If they knew what was best of them, would they be as miserable as they are? To calm resistance, I will say, ‘If you don’t break the law, you have no reason to fear surveillance,’ and the credulous public will fall for it. Anyone that opposes me will appear concerned about hiding unlawful behaviour. We shall say that the only people afraid of us reading their thoughts are people with something to hide, that by reading minds, we can prevent crime, and draw out the truth from people without having to torture them. When I was powerless, I wanted the public to be more intelligent, so they could unshackle themselves from the Plutocracy. I encouraged people to think for themselves and to be sceptical of all the government said and did, with the hope they’d invariably arrive at the same opinions as myself. I encouraged people to learn about the world, not through corporate news sites which provide a surface-level view of the world skewed to the dramatic, but to learn about the world through books, essays, reports, and studies, to have a more informed view of reality. This was all an effort to generate an opposition to the Plutocracy. Now I am powerful, why would I want to help the powerless oppose me? Them being intelligent enough for their jobs is sufficient. We must create a culture hostile to intellectual curiosity, people that read books not related to their field of work must be considered pretentious, weird, and boring, not a great change from our current state, but we must intensify that attitude more. If the public think I will let them edit their genes for increased intelligence, they are mistaken, only my allies will be allowed to do that. It is better to have a population manipulated to all believe the same things because that means they’ll all be happily united and happy about the government doing what they’ve been told to want. A population free to believe anything will hold so many different opinions that society will dissolve into violent fragments, our shared beliefs in good and evil will unite us. When I was powerless, I considered whistleblowers brave and admirable for standing up to the powerful despite the consequences they would face. I cheered at every leak that helped expose the Plutocracy or embarrassed the DIA. Now that I am powerful, whistleblowers are a threat to me and my allies. We will work with social media companies, the news industry, and search engine providers, to censor any leaks. Reading leaked documents shall be a crime. When I was powerless, I wanted incitements of violence, defamation, and the publishing of personal information to be the only prohibited speech, and I wanted political advertising to be limited to ensure the voices of the poor were not drowned out by the Plutocracy. To think anything else should be censored, one must be ignorant of history. There was a time when people that denied the existence of gods were murdered, now that view is mainstream, people were once imprisoned for believing the world revolves around the sun, now that view is mainstream. I always defended free speech because restricting some words and ideas causes segments of the population to resent people free to speak words and ideas they consider obscene, and they feel the government hates them, thereby creating a hostile environment for all of us. I showed many examples of one generation believing certain ideas to be obviously good and the following generation to believe those same ideas were reprehensible. I told them to not be so arrogant as to doubt that

future scientific discoveries would rattle the foundations of their ethical beliefs making them seem wrong to future generations. I said we should not hold the future hostage to our potential mistakes, that the truth-seekers should be free to adventure unencumbered by our confidence of being right based on our current knowledge. I told them that even in my own life I held opinions I eventually considered bizarre. When I was a teenager, I was an anarchist, quite simply because the first political books I read were by anarchists. I asked students if they had ever changed their opinions. I asked if they would like to be condemned to forever hold the first opinions they had. I asked if their opinion changed more often from force or persuasion. I encouraged people to actively seek out and listen to people that held different opinions to them, for the sake of at least sympathising with opponents and seeing the human behind the opinion and putting their own opinions to the test. When people prohibited discussions on certain topics, I warned them they'd appear suspicious to onlookers, as the truthful do not fear a fair investigation. Now I am powerful, free speech threatens me. I do not want people to speak against me, I do not want people to speak against my ideas, I do not want the general public to have friendly relations. How would letting them speak freely benefit me? It's not as if I have anything to learn from these idiots. I thank my enemies for creating a culture where free speech is an idea people even dare debate, as if it's not worth dying for! They were ungrateful for their right to free speech, because they'd never lived without it, they assumed the person in power would always side with them on what should and should not be said, so imprudent they were. I shall expand the definition of extremist speech to ensnare my enemies that unwittingly weaved the net for me. To the braindead public, the expansion will not appear as a dramatic change, but merely as the next logical step. I am not the first to make this switch from defender of free speech whilst powerless to enemy of free speech when powerful, history is filled with examples. The amount of people that take a stance out of principle is minuscule compared to those who take a stance out of the desire to further their own power. The dominant group prohibits speech for the benefit of maintaining control, the subjugated group wishes to expand free speech for the benefit of attacking the powerful. My enemies restricted what I could say, so it's only fair I restrict what they can say. I'd be a fool to not treat my enemies like they treated me. To achieve power, I sacrificed everything, I took risks no-one has before. I will implement what the Love Party believes, not what I believe. I am not going to risk rocking the boat. I want a peaceful life as leader. My desire for peace, glory, and admiration have overrode my desire to see the fulfilment of my beliefs. My beliefs are out of place and time, which if implemented, no matter how cautiously, would bring an end to my reign and therefore my prosperous life. I will not stop the intelligence agencies' unlawful behaviour, I will not enforce workplace democracy, I will not restrict campaign financing, I will not make lobbying more transparent, I will not limit political advertising, I will not let logic be taught in schools, I will not ban technologies that discourage people from reading books, I will not reinstitute marriage, I will not help the environment, I will not reduce military spending, I will not make higher-education free, I will not reverse the regressive tax system, I will not ban share buybacks, I will not introduce pay ratio laws. I will protect myself and my allies. All these years, I've been a pathetic dreamer like that naive child. The sad reality, that I have known and denied for so long, but can no longer deny because of circumstance, is that the economy must grow. It must grow, because we must compete with other nations. We must collect resources and taxes for our military, if rival nations grow whilst we stagnate, our survival will be threatened. Indeed, there is no such thing as stagnation, you either improve or worsen. Because of our undying suspicions of other nations and theirs of us, we will all keep increasing our military power which will

require the continual plundering of resources, and growing of economies to fuel the fires of war. One can fantasise this competition will stop before all resources are depleted, but there is no reason to believe that will happen. Can resources from asteroids or other planets be mined quick enough to delay the inevitable depletion? Does this question that has popped in my mind not illustrate our sickness? If the current system of competing nations will lead us all to self-destruction, does that mean one global government is necessary to avoid the end of the world? If so, Gildland must be at the helm. The country is not happy because it's not designed to be happy, it's not healthy socially, artistically, mentally, or intellectually, because it's not designed to be, it's not united because it's not designed to be united, it's designed to have a growing labour force. Our great economic wealth is at the expense of our well-being. We are materially rich, but poor in every other way. And why is it that the economy must grow? Because of security, security at all costs to the detriment of all else. Now I am responsible for millions of people, their security is my top priority. I must protect them first and foremost. I can hardly believe I am having these thoughts. It seems the self I was for decades is rapidly fading. How could ideas I passionately held for so long lose their sway over me so quickly? Can a change in self-interest really be so profound? Is there no limit to how much I can change? I do know what has remained the same and always will; my pursuit of happiness. It seems any happiness will do, the source is quite irrelevant. Nothing in the mind is unchangeable. Names, and appearances display a façade of continuity, the comforting idea that the person you're speaking to is the same person you spoke to the day before. The idea of a constant self is a comforting thought over the infinite possibilities of what a person can be made into, the mind can turn angels into demons, and demons into angels. You cannot find anyone with a stable, consistent, self. With enough influence, their deepest hatreds can be turned to their greatest loves and vice versa. I have wasted my life fighting the Plutocracy, I wish now I hadn't. It was all futile. I should have spent that time with my family. Only one other lesson have I learnt from this nightmare; one love is worth more than the entire world, I sought the wrong treasure." Arthur marvelled at the immensity of power's ability to corrupt even someone that swore to destroy the Plutocracy. He wondered what other powerless people hoped to kill the Plutocracy only to become corrupted by a simple change of self-interest.

Arthur took a deep breath then rose to give a victory speech. He went to the door and pulled the handle, but it didn't open. He yanked it a couple more times without success. Confused, he looked around to see if there was another door he could use, but that was the only one. He didn't call out for help, because he didn't want to appear helpless, so turned around to find a key. He was startled to see the Lady with the Red Briefcase sitting in the chair he was in a moment prior, staring at him, seemingly in admiration. His eyes were glued to her. He thought he was dreaming. "Who are you?" Politely, she said, "I am the Accountant." "What?" "There's no need to be so angsty. Take a seat and we'll talk." "What do you want?" She glanced at the red briefcase then amicably back at Arthur.

**The End**

## Notes

Some works that helped me write *The Public Be Damned*:

*A Quiet Word* by Tamasin Cave and Andy Rowell

*Capitalist Realism* by Mark Fisher

*Democracy for Sale* by Peter Geoghegan

*The Capitalist University* by Henry Heller

*The Consumer Society* by Jean Baudrillard

*The Triumph of Injustice* by Emmanuel Saez and Gabriel Zucman

*The Unknown Citizen* by W.H. Auden

‘...intoxicated by the shallow draughts of the Pierian spring’ is paraphrased from ‘An Essay on Criticism’ by Alexander Pope.