

1. Event for a Mangled Clock Tower

*Now look straight ahead.
What is it that you see before you?*

How many years before the present? In Millions

Or

Prologue

And so, as the last vestiges of humanity fled a decaying galaxy, only one remained.

In gargantuan subterranean crypts hidden beneath the decimated surface of the earth lay thousands of vaults holding the unimaginably boundless archive of human history: from Ming Dynasty vases to crinolines, slide projectors to the excavated hulls of Viking ships.

All archives are naturally under-staffed, and this one, commonly known as *The Epilogue* was no exception. The day-to-day maintenance and conservation was overseen by a complex artificial intelligence known as *A*. However as was announced by the New Deputy Conservator, following The Rift of 1963 A.S [After the Schism], there must a living being to care for *The Epilogue* at all times. But could a person survive so alone, billions of miles from all civilisation, with nothing but the terrible vastness of human history for company? The final solution was eccentric and rather convoluted: a child was selected at birth, to live inside the archive, raised by *A*, who took on the guise of a governess-of-sorts, amongst a myriad of other identities. Bureaucrats in command thought it best that this individual grow up unaware of their isolated reality, and so a fictional virtual world was devised. *A* sifted through reams and files, scrolls and films to construct a most elaborate and beguiling ruse. Every era and country provided a plethora of fantastical tales to captivate the mind of a child, but *A* ultimately decided on the Victorian era, being known as the time when the West conceived of childhood in the 'modern' sense, as well as being the century when Hans Christen Anderson collated his collection of Fairy Tales, Louisa Alcott conceived of *Little Woman*, Frances Hodgson Burnett wrote *The Secret Garden*, Lewis Carroll unveiled *Alice in Wonderland*, and so on, and so forth: a wondrous, sometimes gothic, but ultimately benign universe perfect for a young girl- For it was a female child of unknown heritage that was ultimately chosen as caretaker for *The Epilogue*. For the time being, let us refer to the child as *C*.

It looks like everything is obscured by a lens. Like an image draped in gauze. Now it begins to bubble - to liquefy. And yet the image is not eradicated... it returns in a series of appalling flashes.

2. Assembly for the Production of Failed Replicas

I used to have these dreams when I was younger - the same one night after night... It comes in horrible flashes: I sit in a glass pavilion where colonial prisms warp my surroundings until my eyes swim.

Refracted light burns my retinas.

Just before I wake, comes the most desolate sound - a spectral choir perhaps, or a requiem like nothing ever heard before, for Oberon upon his lover Titania's death. The notes swim over me, cloyingly sweet, seeming to settle onto my very skin like a fine coating of dust.

The harsh sound of the throbbing pistons of a steam train grating over steel tracks follows - like a metallic audible shadow.

I had forgotten about the dreams, as they did not possess the usual terrifying demons or absurd gore of my more vivid nightmares. It was not until the other day, as I sat in the library that I heard the very same chilling chords - they were different this time, no longer muffled but clear and dazzling. The library's caretaker took pity on me- and my overwhelming curiosity- and sifted through document after document, recording after deteriorated recording.

Until I found it.

G. F. Handel's *Israel in Egypt*, recorded on the 29th of June 1888, 4000 miles away from The Crystal Palace.

What continues to gnaw at me is how I could have dreamt it, as I am certain I had never heard it before.

3. Panic Bodies, Retrofutures and Inverted Millennialism...

Microcosmic alterations. Microcosmic altercations. Cells blister and bubble, their transformations never visible, until it is too late. Thick plastic tubing of a milky, pearlescent texture: its edges ever so slightly sharp as they pass through feathery lips. The spongy tissue of the soft palette convulses, resists-and finally yields to this sterile invader.

4. The Year Without Summer

As part of her learning, she sits in a dim room, to watch dozens of TV screens, rather like a security guard- or more accurately, a visitor viewing a contemporary art installation. What exactly she is watching for, she does not know- or at least, it changes all the time. Perhaps it is an exercise that she is failing.

5. Cragside Manor

Cragside Manor is a sprawling mansion nestled into the side of a perilous rocky hill in Rothbury, Northumberland- or at least, that is what *C* is told, and certainly, that is where the original was located. As was common in the Victorian era, the original began its days as a hunting lodge, over the years it was added to, until by 1887, it was an absurd pastiche of gothic and Tudor Revival architecture. The original was owned by engineer and armaments manufacturer, Lord William Armstrong. Armstrong himself, was known for designing a breech-loading gun responsible for impossible carnage during the Crimean War. Armstrong's real passion however, was electricity. Surrounded by six man-made lakes, the manor became one of the first hydroelectric power stations, this feat resulting in Cragside Manor becoming the first house ever to be lit by electric lighting. An elaborate gala was held to theatrically announce the world's headlong plunge into a fluorescent future.

6. A Thing Without A Name

Screening today:

A man opens a grimy window with a greenish cast. Out fly a dozen pigeons, their wings making the air crack and pop as they hurtle towards the heavens. "Tell me about the world outside." He whispers.

The glowing lacquer on an oil painting begins to slide downwards, pouring the portrait beneath down a perilous slope... A warped Baroque tableaux, with blistering brocade.

A neon indicator. A mesmerising cluster of dots. It beats in a staccato bodily rhythm.

A young Agatha Christie sits with her father in the gardens of Greenway.

7. The Camera tries feverishly to forget all that it has seen

Buttery, foaming liquid spins in a mesmerising endless orbit. Glints of lurid pink, sickly lime, violet. The colours meld and change before my eyes- the seductive, ominous sludge of crude oil? I imagine it leaking over my cheeks, slick- pooling into my nostrils, bubbling, slipping into my eyes. A labyrinth of tidal marks etched into bedrock. Each mark a year or decade. The rings of wood tell us stories of Puck and his donkey, of sprites and trees slick with moss, of stolen embraces in dilapidated follies. Moon and sun court one another in silvery revolutions. Fax machines and secretary shoes. Every near collision is terrifying.

8. Learning to Traverse an Image

The surface of the image is coated in an odd screen, organic and warped, it is like gazing at the depths of a rock pool when the sea water is coated in a briny foam.

She watches, perplexed, as images loop and somersault, heaving in an odd and all-compassing rhythm: sometimes if she gazes long enough she begins to hear the rush of blood pulsing through her body in hot waves, accommodating this new labyrinthine, undulating rhythm.

Sometimes she gets overcome with what *A* calls the image-sickness, a malaise caused when she spends too long in front of screen after screen. *C* begs to disagree: in the classroom she learns of industrialisation, of the development of the polio vaccine, of the theory of relativity.

She knows *of* the world. But she is not *in* the world

Forever cooped up indoors with puzzles and films that do little to assuage her growing feeling of confinement.

9. A Catastrophe that Never Comes

The morning before last, she sat gazing at a video of a domestic tableaux- a table-top littered with crockery and assorted prosaic objects. She watches a painted porcelain teapot fall through the air in a sedate orbit. To her frustration, she watches as the vessel inches closer to the table, but it never hits the surface. This is what her cloistered life feels like: unending anticipation of an event that might shatter her hermitic reality. Tantalisingly, seductively, painfully, she spends the next night dreaming of collisions of a monolithic scale, and wakes with the sound of splintering porcelain reverberating in her ears.

Written by Katie Paine in response to the exhibition Elast (i) city, by Amalia Lindo at c3 contemporary Art Space- 21st of June 2017.

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