



SEVEN DAYDREAMS
KARANA

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Karana

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DEDICATED TO THE DREAMS OF US, THE UNTOUCHABLES
TO MY MOTHER
AND TO MY GRANDFATHER

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Introduction, September 2020

It happens instantaneously, without any noticeable effort or a difficult initiation. We might be at school, home or work, anywhere in reality. But we are suddenly transported into another world. We recommence life in a special story, made uniquely for us. Impossible things suddenly become achievable. Adventure, excitement, interest - we are given everything. All this happens without the flexing of a muscle, or without advanced technology. Such experiences seem to be given generously to all, in every age of humanity. This is the daydream.

In this book, I wish to tell some of these compulsive and special stories which the mind concocts on the fly and reveal the talents of the brain as simultaneously storyteller and story-liver. They are the stories of my own brain, rather than the stories of me myself (if there is any such difference between the brain and the self). Such immersive fictional experiences have sustained me throughout my life and, as I will show, have influenced the living of it.

Easily recognisable as an experience, what exactly is this thing that I am talking about in words that we can all agree on? Certainly, if I said the word 'daydream' to most people, I believe they would know exactly what one was. But it is harder to put such imaginings into a neat definition. Are they the fulfilment of a wish? A dream of power? To me, the daydream is the mind on holiday, when it breaks free from the narrow confines of everyday life and our quotidian limitations. As has been observed, many times before, one cannot bear too much reality. Reality is like a huge rock which crushes the human being beneath it. The daydream allows us to momentarily crawl out from underneath this huge rock for just a moment and bask in the sun. This holiday of the mind is an experience of virtual reality which nature has bestowed upon us before technology and big business had managed to catch up with the concept of VR. It is a type of release and freedom which evolution has engineered for our survival and allows us to cope in a harsh and punishing world devoid of stimulation. Such freedom takes the form of a story which we live through. It is an immersive fiction. This fiction, however, does not take the form of words. We move through such a narrative in terms of action and hallucination.

Yet, paradoxically, even as the daydream frees us from reality, we are most unfree when the experience leads us to live through it. Daydreams are unavoidable, imposed upon us. Each of them can even be a recurring compulsion which we live

through many times in our life, without the apparent desire or choice to do so. Even as they transcend the limitations of life, daydreams are a limitation of our imagination. But besides their tyranny, such impositions are comforting, healing, a salve to existence.

So what is so significant about such experiences that I have been led to write a book about them, in particular, compulsively recurring daydreams that follow us throughout life? Well, firstly, we all have them. They are an integral facet of what it means to have a human brain. Secondly, the holiday of the mind hovers between consciousness and the unconscious, the state of being awake and asleep to reality. As a result, such an experience occupies a special exploratory place in terms of the mind and what it is up to, as well as revealing the overlapping dimensions of its modes of being in both what is knowable to us and what is unknown. I think it could be said that the inevitable, immersive fictions we are subject to reveal how we are caught up a processing web of storytelling and living through stories and VR experiences. The daydream points to the fact that the brain, far from being the type of ultra-rational computer some scientists reductively appear to take it as, organises experience and being in terms of imaginative - and rather improbable - stories that we experience as though they were real.

I was led to this topic through a lifetime's interest in how forms such as stories organise experience. Academically, I followed my passion through a study of the law, with its notorious fictions and textual frameworks for living, and English literature. Artistically, I followed my passion through the making of art, fiction, poetry and music. To me, the special subject of interest has been in how the mind expresses its experience. This seems to me to entail the essence of what it means to be human.

But who is the daydreamer in this compendium of imaginings in the day? Why has he not given his true name and identity? There are several reasons for this. I am, besides a very thorough education, I think, an unremarkable person. I think of myself as a sort of Everyman, a common human being. Of course, we are all unique, but we all share attributes and I am especially no exception. To give myself a name would be to suggest an individuality which is misleading. Again, we have a curious reticence in disclosing our personal VR experiences. They appear to make us somehow ridiculous in the eyes of the world, while they seem to give away too much of our personal self. It is not only us that disclose that are ashamed, but also the recipients of such disclosures. What can one really say when such experiences have been nakedly revealed? In order to counter this embarrassment, and to promote discussion, the assumption of anonymity seems to me like a useful tool.

The reader might ask why I feel that I am especially qualified to write about the topic, if I am such an unexceptionable person. I feel that life, which has been cruel to my ambitions in many fields, and which has been particularly boring and lonely, has been especially productive in manufacturing various daydreams. It is failure and the crushing weight of it as well as a constant boredom and loneliness which appears above all things to most stimulate the immersive fictional experience, or to allow one to remember and treasure its vivid nature and release. It seems when the brain is starved of stimulation, it is aggressive to attack such a lack and counters it with the full force of its imaginative power. In such a drive, the brain creates an intense and rich inner life which we can carry to all corners of existence.

I wish to outline the type of book that I am writing, as the reader might be confused about its genre. Firstly, this book is about conveying experiences and understandings from another world. It is very much like a shaman's sharing of the travellings of his or her spirit in other dimensions. The VR environment is like the far flung and mysterious locales in which the spirit guide travels and I have become the one that introduces such plains. If today the shaman is no longer necessary for us, I wish to bring him back for I believe that he enriches our way of living and provides new insights of existence.

Secondly, in terms of genre, this book can be described as a type of diary of a mind between consciousness and compulsion. The word diary is slightly misleading in its emphasis on the individual, as I think of myself as one of the people, but conveys the way in which I describe experiences in the VR environment of the daydream. The reader will decide how far the book generalisable or not by relating it to his or her own imaginings in the day. I will add that the book is both a work of both non-fiction, since it is about what has happened, but also fiction, since it revolves around lived stories, as well as their non-fictional interpretation.

Very loosely, the methods adopted in this book are primarily, a careful remembrance of experiences of the immersive fictions the brain tells and compels us to live, and then, secondarily, thinking over what those memories might mean. A lifetime's education in different forms of interpretation informs the accounts, including literary theory and psychology. I also emphasis the way in which daydreaming supported stages through life and tasks which I had to perform. This is not a scientific study and does not pretend to objectivity: it is a common human being's understanding of the least knowable aspects of his hidden mind. Interpretations are always open to question and I hope that the ideas espoused here will lead to comment, debate, and further adventures into the composition of the

mind and its schemas.

In this story, the daydreaming brain caught between consciousness and the unconscious is what I call a mother mind. When a child is hurt, frustrated, loses or fails, the child runs to the mother. She holds the child in her loving arms and is a source of consolation, protection and encouragement, a reaffirmation of self and being. The daydreaming brain has lovingly fulfilled exactly the same functions for me in life. Moreover, like all mothers, the mother mind has suggested remedies for the futures and paths through which I can rise again and fight again. This mother is a revolutionary. Time and time again, she wishes to change things and to form new societies and new experiences removed from the status quo. She imagines different forms of living and different identities one can assume.

The book is written for general reader in plain English. There are no quotations from academic sources in order to bolster my own authority, although I am certainly indebted to the insights of others such as Sigmund Freud with his case histories. Hardly scientific, this book takes the form of retellings meant to interest and interpretations meant to stimulate thought.

I will close by stating what I, the modern day shaman, will get from communicating these daydreams. It is what writers get from living their daydreams through fiction. The nature of the writing project is founded in the disclosure of experience, to express what is human, to understand the system of virtual reality in which we are enclosed, to understand ourselves and the nature of being human. I believe that it is by allowing the reader to live for a moment in my daydreams that the horizons of thinking and understanding can be stretched and so what I am doing is productive of the new.



BEGINNING

1. Grains of Sand (Early 1990s)

It is a drab children's playground, although I will later always remember the scene as one of a favoured luminosity. It is break time. Most of the children are collected together in cheerful groups. The groups are dressed in green, the school uniform. However, I am alone, in an unwanted corner of the space. Out of sight and out of mind. I am hunched over. My eyes are directed at the ground. I am looking for precious stones. I pick up grains of sand from the floor and hold them up to the light, where they sparkle faintly. Each time, I set the grain back from whence it came and begin the search anew. I never find that which I look for and the bell signalling the end of break time always interrupts the quest. What I treasure, hope, dream, is the transparent grain of sand that will shine with the beauty of a star on earth. This is the first daydream that I remember, at the age of about six. It was one which compelled me to live through it day after day.

This experience was also converted into other channels. At about this time, I began breaking open small pebbles with a hammer, looking for mineral wealth. In my small garden and, frightening to think of now, without any protection for my eyes, I would pound away at the rocks on the floor, dashing them into splinters. The dull, outer surface of the rock would come alive with light and the glistening of its sharp shards inside the shell. I would search for this beautiful internal light again and again.

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Perhaps the reader is not convinced that this is a daydream. Is it not, rather, the imaginative, if compulsive, game of a child? I remember this experience after a span of about thirty years or so. It is difficult to go into the details thoroughly. What seems to mark the event as a species of daydream to me now is that it became a compulsive model of life, a repetitive VR experience that I lived through as a boy and which set me at odds against the reality of loneliness and neglect by my peers. Certainly definitive distinctions between the game and the daydream are hard to construct. Both rely on imagination and immersion in a narrative, an acting out of roles and story-lines where we forget, temporarily, our surroundings, situation and life. It seems to me to be the case that our earliest experiences of imaginative playing provide the bedrock from which the holidays of the mind are constructed. This is why they are so similar. The difference is, that as children, we literally act out the daydream. And this seems to reveal the purpose of this immersive fiction: it acts to control our life according to a satisfactory and stimulating model. It shapes us as individuals with a role and a purpose in a narrative.

I suggest, since most of us play imaginative games as children that this is the default mode of the brain in a culture. We are culturally hard-wired to live our lives through fictional devices. And certainly, without the fictions that we live in, such as those of the state, the economy, love and the law, to name a few, adults would be very hard-pressed to stomach crude reality. We are not much different from children, only more sophisticated in our VR experiences.

I want to think over, in general terms - as I have said, the details are lost in the mists of time - this first, powerful experience in the VR framework of the brain and how it provides 'an argument to reality'. Or a compensation for its lacks. The playground scenario is one of values and valuing. The child values the precious stone. He seeks what is valuable. In doing so, the child accrues value to himself. He feels valuable, that he is on a grand and important quest. Rather than explicitly expressing himself as valuable, he borrows value from the mythic grain of sand that will blaze like a star. Why does the narrative give the boy value in this indirect way? Firstly, it compensates for the devaluation of the boy by his peers by stealth, so that it is not consciously recognised what is happening and the immersive game can go on in blissful ignorance. Suddenly, the boy is important and special and necessary where otherwise he is absolutely redundant and passed over. Suddenly, where he is trapped in a meaningless and arbitrary loneliness (much of the reason he is alone is because of the colour of his skin, although he has not consciously realized this quite yet), he has purpose and direction. What is called ego is fulfilled and satisfaction of self is given. Life is made much more liveable.

The daydream turns reality on its head in other ways too. The boy is working in break time, a time that should be of leisure and fun. Removed from the frivolous games of his peers and their atrocious waste of time and life, the boy is concentrated on a serious and valuable task. The game sets him above his peers, those who exclude him and have power over his life. It modifies the power relationship in which he caught up, with its asymmetries and devaluation of his life. Suddenly his solitude is necessary since without it he has no concentration and cannot be productive. Solitude can therefore be endured and becomes necessary and a good of itself rather than arbitrary and bad. The boy adopts the qualities and identities of an adult rather than a child, which sets him apart from his peers. Like his father, who works for money, the boy works for something of value, a treasure. His immersive experience gives him the aura of power and status of an adult worker, a figure of respect and love. In the dream, identity undergoes a transplant and the self is fashioned anew.

The task aims to transform the mundane into the extraordinary. It aims to meta-

morphosise humble matter into the stuff of stars in the heavens, so far away and unreachable. The impossibility of what the boy's daydream asks for is staggering. Verily, it demands a revolution in matter and the understanding of what is. If matter makes up what we think is reality, the immersive fiction changes the word by changing the understanding of its building blocks and smallest components. In many ways, the grains of sand seem to represent the condition of the boy himself and he seems to be asking for a change in his own nature. Like the boy, the grains are neglected and unnoticed, insignificant and absolutely ordinary. Their ultimate state as a star represents a destination towards which he can move, a purpose. This destination will result in a reversal of the marginalised state, the production of attraction and significance.

It is interesting that the boy's game recalls the glass industry, in which a useful material is made out of common sand. Did the boy know about the miraculous transformation in which dull sand is turned into glistening glass which can be fashioned to all purposes?

The boy's yearning for the transformation of matter and the universe centres on visuality. His hoping is in looking for a change in the vision of the world and in perspective and therefore thought. Time and time, his aim is frustrated. He never sees that what he wants to see. But he persists. Each time that he fails, he believes that he is close. Look carefully at a grain of sand against light and you can see that it is almost transparent. The dull stones that he breaks become resplendent with inner light as the childish force of his violence is pressed against them. The quixotic quest can go on and provide its nourishment and care because he is almost there, or, for fleeting moments, there at last... The impossible, the ineffable, is just around the corner. Perspective is just waiting to be realised and given to the world - the boy's own perspective and valuing eye. And with perspective and the giving of it will come the admiration of the finder, the wealth and name that he will accrue, recognition, acceptance, being taken into the community at last. The quest gives the boy many reasons to live and to go on. It is just a matter of time. And he has time. All of break time, before lessons, when he is finally with others and 'in' the group...

Now, the extension of the experience in the playground into the breaking of rocks seems to me to be a reversion to the earliest experiences of our human ancestors. Did the boy know about stone tools at this age? Was the brain straining to go back to the earliest conditions of known existence?

While apparently individual and therefore unique, I believe that this daydream

follows significant cultural coordinates. Firstly, what the boy seems to seek is an alchemical transformation in matter. Psychologists such as Carl Jung have spoken about the importance of the alchemical imagination in the Western psyche. The boy is therefore relying on a shared, historical resource of narrative in the construction of the immersive fiction. Secondly, the the VR experience appears to prepare and habituate the boy for future work and an adult role. It functions to adapt young minds to a system focused on production.

What seems incredible now is the genius of the brain in constructing this daydream and how it provides such a believable argument to reality and a transport from it. The young boy had read stories, but the young brain's expertise in fashioning a tailor made example of its own which wholly takes over the boy's mind and life and allows him to cope with his situation is almost inconceivable, even though this daydream is a rather banal and unoriginal example. We regard the perfect story which we can relate to as one of the pinnacles of conscious fictional achievement which only the most able and experienced writers can pull off. The young boy creates such an immersive fiction unconsciously and it becomes a guide for not only the present, but for future life.



AMBITION
OF THE BODY

2. The Schoolboy Athlete and the Body Beautiful

First, I beat Usain Bolt in both the sprint races, setting impossible world records that can surely never be surpassed. Then I win the long jump and the triple jump. All of the other events follow. I set the unobtainable mark in each. They have to reschedule the Olympic games so that I can do everything. There is a back-story which piles impossibility upon impossibility. Somehow, I am selected to represent my country in all the athletics events in my thirties. An explanation for my prowess is supplied. An alien intelligence has taken me up into its spacecraft to modify my body with advanced technology, for reasons that are not disclosed. Perhaps an example of other species benevolence, perhaps experimentation. I become the hero of the world, an inspiration to all. Scientists take samples of my blood, trying to work out how it is possible to do what is impossible. They never find out. The alien technology is too advanced. I retire in my fifties, just to let someone else win for a change after having dominated all conceivable events.

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This daydream is founded in specific childhood experiences which are oriented towards task-solving and competition. It has its origin in schoolboy athletics. That is, the daydream has been founded in a functionality and pragmatism - a world of action - that is returned to in adulthood by the brain. A competitor has to envisage winning, succeeding, accomplishment. Such a competitor has to mentally move towards the role of the winner. Without the dream and a determined mindset, achievement in athletics seems impossible. This VR experience of 'doing it' is a training model which is meant to become actual reality. It shapes the world, the world of action. Where once, such imaginings allowed the pursuit of athletics and competitive drive, they are re-purposed again in more mature age for a fight against that which destroys a good life. Once again, it is childhood experience that supplies the fertile ground for the production of immersive fictions.

Why athletics? I have been interested in the sport since I was a schoolboy. My grandfather was the great athlete of the family. He had been his college's best athlete in India. He had tried teaching us how to throw the javelin as children with a tree branch, one of my favourite memories of him. He regaled us with stories of his athletic achievements. His favourite events had been the javelin and the 400 metres, although he had also competed in events such as the tug-of-war which are now obsolete.

I tried quite seriously to become an athlete myself and follow in the steps of my grandfather as a schoolboy. One of the games teachers influenced me with

a story. There had once been a young schoolboy who was not particularly exceptional at sports of any kind. However, he had decided that he would become good. So, he would turn up at every javelin practice at lunchtime, before school and after school and at lunchtime and he would practice and practice. Steadily, he improved. He improved so much that he went from being an ordinary schoolboy into the school's representative at national competitions. Once again, the idea of transformation and the alchemical transformation of base metal into gold caught my imagination. I identified with the nondescript schoolboy who was undistinguished and merely ordinary and wanted to effect a change in that identity and to become the sports hero. In life, if we are ambitious, we seek to become special and accomplished, to somehow stand out, rather than to fade into the mass of humanity. Is this ego? Or is the drive towards recognition what allows our greatest contributions to society?

I particularly concentrated on the javelin and the 400 metres which I felt were my legacy, since my grandfather had excelled at these. Looking back on it now, I feel that I was emulating my grandfather, a model of achievement, seniority and power. The transformation of identity had a familiar source of power as its aim. My opportunity came with an initiative in my games lessons. When I was bigger and in school, they ran a scheme called the triple A. You got a series of badges for the decathlon, heptathlon and three events. I wanted the top badges for the scheme. There were the orange and gold ones for the decathlon and heptathlon. Once such trophies had been obtained, one could wear them on the lapels of one's blazer, broadcasting one's achievements to staff and students. The top one for the three events was a black badge, if I remember correctly. I used to turn up at school early in the morning after catching the very early train in for practices. Lunchtimes would be given over to events such as the triple jump and I used to stay after school for practices and come home very late in the evening. I tried my best. I got the top badges for the heptathlon and the decathlon. However, I was a few points off for the three events. I got the purple badge instead. I had not been able to get into the top flight because I wasn't a very good athlete. I wasn't fast, I wasn't good at jumping or throwing. It took me ages to learn the proper technique and even then, I couldn't transfer my strength properly. I just tried hard. My will was greater than my strength. That year, I only got a B in P.E. for my achievement in athletics. However, I wore the badges I had won proudly on my blazer.

Because of the badges, I became known as a minor talent. Later, when I was in the sixth form, I was chosen, and also very proud, to represent my house at the school in the cross country and the 400 metres final on sports day. I actually scored points for the house in the cross country. I was also involved in a 100 metres relay on sports day. This was because I still kept up practice and used to run at home in the path in the woods near my house and the sports captain recognised my hun-

ger. One significant achievement at that time in my life is a time trial by myself. I timed myself in the field by myself at the 400 metres. The 60 second mark was something that seemed unobtainable to me. I sprinted the whole way around the circuit. At the end, I stopped my watch and looked at the time. I had broken the 60 second mark by a margin. I had managed to do it in 58 seconds. This was from someone who could only run the 100 metres in a very average and unremarkable time of just under 13.5 seconds. I had mastered my will to achieve something which I thought I could not achieve. There was nobody around to watch. I didn't boast about my achievement. I don't believe in showing off. Yet I had joined the ranks of the athletes under 60 seconds. I had done it without any natural talent. It was all the product of hard work and dedication. It was a proud, private moment for me.

When I was a schoolboy athlete, one of the achievements of which I am most proud now, although I did not particularly dwell on it back then, was winning the chance to represent my House in the javelin competition on sports day. This triumph was one of spirit, will and the ability to make the best of a bad situation with calm thought and planning. It was a less private achievement than my time trial. The scenario was a windy and wet scene on the playing field. I had let loose all of my attempts except one, but the slippery ground and my cheap trainers were not conducive to a strength event. I couldn't transfer the force without connecting to the ground. In fact, I had slipped about so much that the javelin had hit me on the head on the way up, prompting expressions of concern from the tough games teacher. I watched my competitors throw, who seemed to have no problem with the ground. My turn came again. I don't know what went on my mind at the time, but, instead of running for a start up, I calmly walked up to the boundary. I got into the position for the throw, running through the technicalities of the event. Incredibly, the games teacher watched me in absolute silence, without telling me to go back and run before throwing like everyone else. I envisaged a winning throw, something that would show them that I was the strongest in the bunch. I pulled my arm back and rested the javelin against my cheek. I connected with the ground, feeling its force running through me. Then, in an instant, she flew. The measurement was taken. I returned to the audience. At the end of the meet, the games teacher announced the results. He told us all, that "incredibly" - the word which he used - with just a standing throw, I had managed to make it to the final of the javelin competition. It was the triumph of the underdog. Without natural skill, but with a great deal of effort and practice, I had made it as a serious school level competitor.

While I was a schoolboy athlete, and well into adulthood, the desire to achieve in

sport produced a recurring dream of the sleeping world. The unconscious mind had found a narrative resource and framework into which it tapped and provided the foundation to organise reality and lived experience in the sporting world of action. I would be running towards the school's sandpit. I would take off into the air. The jump would go on and on. I would surprise myself because I would expect to land and, instead, I would be flying eternally...

Naturally, I am still a huge fan of athletics into adulthood. But it took many years after the schoolboy experiences of being an athlete for the adult daydream to make an appearance in my life. Why did it come at the time that it did? How was the fantasy supplying a salve to existence and a model for living?

The daydreams came when I felt I was losing the battle against life. Despite having tried my very best to make something out of my life, I was out of work. I had dropped out of my PhD course as a result of illness, an ailment that took over my whole life and affected me very badly psychologically. Being sick had meant that I had become fat. Significant personal relationships had ended in failure and acrimony. I had no close friends, no partner, no children. I had failed to match up to all of the demands and measures for success in life.

The immersive fiction, then, grasped me by the hairs on my head and pulled me out of the depths of despair and inferiority. It reminded me of a time when I had been the underdog without any talent but I had been able to compete aggressively because of the power of my will and by my tireless capacity for work. The daydream gave a loser the ego boost of being a winner. Indeed, it exaggerated this ego boost in an inflationary manner. I was not just the winner. I was the absolute, matchless winner. Greater than the greatest, Usain Bolt. The greatest of all time. I was a superhuman that had been modified by alien technology into a winning machine. I was no longer a frail, broken down man in his thirties who had seen all of his ambitions turn to dust.

The theme of the superhuman relies on the fact that athletes such as Usain Bolt are perceived as superhumans themselves because their bodily achievements are so extraordinary and staggering, seem so impossible. The layperson looks at such figures with reverence, and amazement, as though looking up. The fantasy allows the yawning chasm between the fan and the hero to be not only bridged but also reversed: the hero becomes a fallen rival.

An important component of the daydream is that it reverses valuations. Whereas the world would have seen a failure in me in reality, the fantasy has the world

see me as a hero. Instead of the world having conquered me and put paid to my hopes, I conquer the world and give it hope.

Once again, the very impossibility of the VR experience is what gives it its power. Impossibility is a resource from which power is drawn, a deliberate negation of the reality principle and a rival stance against it. The alien sub plot in the story connects the earthly creature man with the heavens again, with that which is out of reach, unknowable and therefore pregnant with potential and power.

The daydream also put me ahead of my grandfather who was the model for achievement during my schoolboy pursuits of athletics. It improved and built upon the model to be emulated, the ultimate identity and endpoint which gives purpose and direction.

An interesting component of the fantasy is that the scientists cannot figure out how I am winning. The immersive fiction relies on a frustration of the world's sense and understanding. This world, which has been so hostile to me, is suddenly inferior in knowledge. It is I that am in the privileged position of knowledge and superhuman ability, an alchemical product of a glorious alien civilisation.

There is a daydreaming elaboration of the beating Bolt scenario which suggests that is related to, or bound up in the healing of the body from sickness. When the sickness had ravaged my body and forced me to put on weight, I was utterly demotivated to do anything. Consciously, I hoped to be able to return to a previous programme of weight-training, running and swimming which I looked back to nostalgically. Subsequently, both unconsciously and consciously, I then began living through a recurring, immersive fiction where aliens took away the excesses in my body. They also replenished my thinning scalp, straightened my slightly off-centre nose, beautified me and added a foot to my height. Such benevolent beings also removed any trace of disease in the present and in the future. In short, the aliens gave me a perfect bodily self and strengthened me against sickness in addition to bestowing superhuman attributes to me. As a result, I believe that the daydream provides a mental framework for the body's recovery and return to health and fitness.

Paradoxically, while the imagining looks to future healing, it builds on past experience as a schoolboy athlete. One of the things that troubled me the most when I had put on so much weight was that I could not fit into my old collection of trousers, which had all been size 30 since I was about fifteen years old. Clothes had always been important to me and I felt this loss very keenly. I was ashamed

of myself and my body. I felt ugly and bloated. Previously, I had been proud of my body. I was known for my physique in school. I naturally had a well-defined muscular build and could outperform the other boys on strength tasks, such as lifting weights. I was particularly known for my abdominal muscles and had earned an epithet of 'the beast' for how I looked. The daydreams allowed me to envisage a fit and thin, athletic body like the one I had had at the peak of my youth in school days. The fantasy was a body memory that was converted into a future mental plan for the body to be reassembled. It was founded on a narcissistic foundation of self-love and bodily self-esteem.

Eventually, and very probably as a result of such daydreaming, from which I drew power and recalibrated myself to effort, I got better. I resumed my PhD studies. I began to achieve again academically and gained my doctorate. To me, the daydream was the unconscious mind's model for me to live again in the world and to repair my body. It resuscitated the schoolboy athlete's drive and dedication, giving his adult form the motivation to become a winner and a success again, tempting him with that feeling of a winner which, paradoxically, only a loser really knows and appreciates. It gave him a body to aspire to, the body beautiful, one resplendent with health and ability. Success is an objective form that can be gained, says the daydream, if the body is altered and honed into something. The precious jewel at the heart of the fantasy is the declaration: You have won and you will win again, against all. If a life is a competition of success and failure, you will become competitive, you will compete.



BELONGING

3. The Total Institution

Finally, it is known. The men in white coats come. They take me away to a beautifully historic building with huge windows that look out onto a sunlit countryside. The residence is to be permanent. I am to be cocooned away from society. I make friends for life with the others inside, who also have a life sentence, and fall into the daily and all-encompassing routine. There is no longer any work to do, particularly academic work and writing. Nothing any more is expected of me. I am no longer required to be a productive member of society. In fact, I am protected from this horrible society. I am observed throughout the day, carefully. My mind provides copious notes for the psychologists, an object of fascination.

Or..

My offences have been recognised. I am put into the prison. Once again, I am consumed by the total institution. I have a life sentence. My friends are the other criminals. This is again a holiday of the mind. No one expects. I do not perform. I do not have to hide anything. There is the relief that I do not have to live in the world, with its people. Again, I am relentlessly researched by criminologists and psychologists. They want to work out what it is that makes my mind different.

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The total institution is one which looms like a colossus over life. It provides everything and is a powerful context that shapes being and living. The total institution is a model to which my unconscious returns again and again. In my sleeping dreams, I am almost always at school, inside a sort of 'total institution' where my experiences are rigorously organised. In the dreams, the schoolboy friends I knew carry symbolic codes, as do members of staff. Almost every life event is filtered through the total institution at night time. The childhood experience of a life revolving around school is returned to again and again.

The reasons for the dominance of the school institution on my unconscious thought and the total institution in day time fantasies may be numerous, but what seems most persuasive to me is that I have never again found the feeling of belonging and purpose again in adult life. They say that the school days are the best of our life and it is because we have institutional support and direction. In school, one finds free education, free clubs and societies, friendship and mentoring. One feels close to one's schoolfellows and spends much of the day with them. There is real intimacy through shared experience. Teachers and the curriculum provide

us with inspiration and a path to follow, a secure progression through life. I have never found a replication of these experiences in adult life. At university in London and the unfulfilling, menial and purposeless work I was able to get after many rejections, I received the cold shoulder from co-workers and students. There were little shared experiences apart from seminars. Clubs and societies based on mutual interests fostered superficial relationships which predictably petered out when I or others moved on to other things. I was unable to build a family because I either could not meet any women I was really interested in, or received rejection from the few women that came into my life. Anomie and loneliness characterised much of my adult life. When you cannot find your own companions and found your own family, such prevailing thoughts are inevitable.

In the fantasy, all of the richness of school-time is resurrected. The feelings of belonging, intimacy and shared experience are all given. Life and experience are thoroughly and completely organised, without any individual responsibility. Friendships with others are lifetime commitments, as in the ideal family situation. Here, we catch a glimpse of the tyranny of the holiday of the mind. What seems to be a free fantasy aims to catch hold of the individual and lead him or her as though leashed. This is why it is sometimes imperative to resist fantasy in the conscious mind if we are to obtain real freedom, to undo the shackles that aim to bind experience.

At the beginning of the fantasy, there is the recognition that there is something off in my personality. I am either an outlaw, or mentally ill. At the end of the imagining, this peculiarity in my psyche itself becomes a useful and fascinating source of knowledge for others. The individual uniqueness that disrupts the law and reason is therefore rehabilitated into a valuable truth.

Also, I begin by occupying a marginal status in mainstream society, either a criminal or a madman. Ignored, neglected, misunderstood. By the end of the VR experience, I have become the centre of attention in a society that is oriented around those like myself. I have become fully integrated, to use a fashionable term in today's politics which is itself largely misused.

While the daydream imprisons me forever in the total institution, it provides a holiday of the mind because I no longer have to be a researcher or do work of any sort. Again, I am separated from a mistrustful and hostile world that is set against rival patterns of thought and being. There is freedom given in the imagining's tyranny. A freedom from the harsh and competitive dictates of a capitalistic economy and the argumentative and materially unrewarding world of academia where

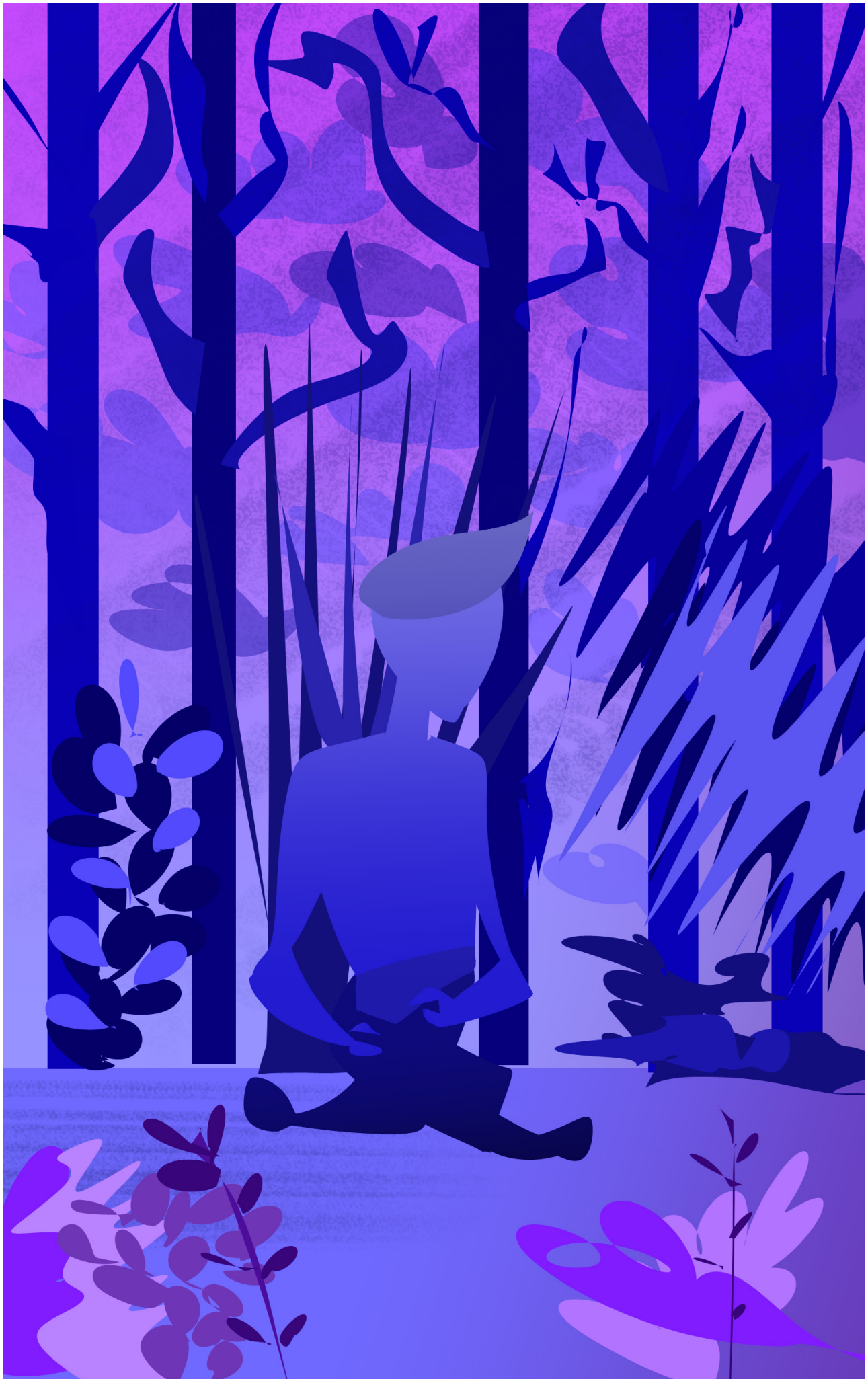
I have worked for literally nothing so far in this life.

The emphasis in the VR experience is on the mind in both cases. In the closing stages, I have become an endless source of knowledge and academic interest as an individual. This is purely for the state that my mind is in rather than in any specialist knowledge that I possess. That is, I am valuable for simply being, for my mental life and its bestowing of identity upon me. The total institution therefore supports a narcissism of the mind and of my own unique identity, a high valuable of mental being. It protects me from a brutal world which asserts that my mind is different and thus to be trodden over or silenced and censored. It is indicative that in the total institution I am allowed to express all thoughts without fear and without hiding anything. The full expression of my inner thoughts is achievable, achieved and valued.

The asylum scenario is lifted from real life. On one occasion, I once visited someone in a mental hospital. It had been a nervous week's separation from the individual, a week fraught with worry and tension. I had no idea what an asylum looked like and vague images of a harsh and unforgiving environment assailed my thoughts. When I arrived, I was surprised. The staff and the patients were in a huge hospital with large windows overlooking picturesque lawns. There were no white coats and very little formality. The patients and staff were playing table tennis together, seemingly living a life of ease centred around an organised, shared experience. Then, the patient that I visited recovered completely and suddenly, which was also unexpected. The feeling of pleasant and unexpected surprise around ideas of the asylum forms a meaningful core which seems to be associated to the feelings of pleasure in a school's society and in companionship in a total institution. From what seems impossible - a pleasant life in a context without liberty - possibility is drawn. Against an expectation of oppression, comes an expectation of full expression and integration into a separate world.

It can be seen that I associated this visit strongly with the idea of the recovery of a mind and its organisation of life through reason and reintegration into society. Hence the mental component of the daydreams, wherein my mind is studied and becomes a valuable source of knowledge in itself, the result of a recovered mind. The experience of actually visiting the asylum has had a partial influence on my life. While my young nephews were growing up, one of the games I taught them to love was table tennis. We played the game on a coffee table with a piece of paper as a marker where the net was. When my nephews were older, we played together on a proper table with a proper net. The idea of table tennis was bound up in my mind strongly with the idea of companionship and society, even family.

Thus, one of my motivations was an attempted to familiarise the children into the game as a form of family bonding and in creating an institution of family, which is also a total institution in its own right. I also joined a table tennis a short while ago, seeking like-minded souls.



PEACE

4. The Forest

I throw everything away. I retreat into the calm embrace of the forest. It is the almost pristine Japanese forest that calls to me. I contact the Japanese authorities and arrange with them to inhabit the space. They provide me with permission and all the support I need to live the solitary life that I envisage, particularly in terms of food and shelter. They also decide to promote an experiment in life while I am in their territory. They recruit volunteers to live with me. We will be studied as a closed community. In the forest, I will no longer be a researcher. I will read for amusement instead. I will do away with most of the technological luxuries of modern life. Days will be spent communing with nature, or reading. I will also have a manual generator of electricity for my laptop and electronic book reader, something like a bicycle that generates power.

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This daydream is another holiday of the mind, when present reality is replaced with another scenario. With all of its disappointments - and with the hard, unrewarded and life-consuming labour that serious academic research requires - the harsh and real world gives way to a place of beauty, peace and happiness. The reality principle acknowledges the true nature of existence, a hard game of survival and compromise with how things are. In response to such limitation and dearth, the narrative offers up a more appealing alternative, where life is more liveable and richer.

The beauty of nature has become increasingly important to me as I have matured. When I was in my early twenties, the bright lights and urban landscape of London held an irresistible allure. But no more. I grew up as a child surrounded by nature and the fantasy returns me to this infant paradise. Our house was just alongside some woods where I would go for innumerable bike rides and walks. The woods were a setting for my early development. In dream, I return to this peaceful and beautiful surrounding and am able to make a living there, with the absence of any worries about earning, surviving and isolation from society. Now, the man made environment in which I am ensconced daily grows uglier, a limitation of perspective. I seek a broader horizon in which to view the world, the immense horizon that the contemplation of nature provides.

Why Japan? A foreign and exotic space outside of understanding and familiarity provides the material for many dreams. Especially dreams of indolence in our travel society. It is the unknown which facilitates fantasy and its colonisations. A perfect communication with this world of difference results in the solution to all the problems of life in the VR experience. Yet, I have also had a relationship with the beautiful idea of Japan since I was a young boy. I remember that when I was very young, I had hoped to marry a Japanese or Chinese woman. These women personified my ideal of beauty and womanhood. It was not the case that I had met any Chinese or Japanese women. However, I had seen them on television (I did not watch a film at the cinema until I was eleven years old, or watch the news or read newspapers until I was seventeen, so it must have been on television, a comic book or in a book). In the unknowing way of the young, it was the exotic eyes of these beauties that had captured my heart. Their eyes were shaped differently to those of anyone I knew and from my own. I was in love with their difference. And it is this difference which the daydream seizes upon, as it is the catalyst for the complete transformation of being and living, for difference in life and identity.

The Japan of the daydream completes all of the qualities of a nurturing father or mother as my own parents did in my youth in the woods. The land of the rising sun provides me with everything I need and excludes all want. As in the alien fantasies, the other bestows gifts upon me and an unfathomable benevolence. The kindness which is missing in current life is compensated for bountifully by the unknown, humans different to the mean and grasping ones that life has accustomed me to. Difference becomes munificence.

A tradition which is weaved into this immersive fiction is that of the stages of life according to the accounts of Hinduism. It is said that there are four stages of the life, with the last being to retire into the forest and to cast off the things of this world. What I experience in imagination is the final stage of life, the completion of self in the integration of nature. Life's path leads to this destination. Yet, paradoxically, I started my childhood amongst the woods. The fulfilment of life and its progression is wedded to its beginning. I am seeking that which I have had in another time.

As in the daydreams, I finally become productive of a knowledge of living. It is the sheer act of my existence that becomes valuable to scholarship and research. I become again a breathing and unique body of knowledge to be given special attention and value.



ADVENTURE

5. The Boat

I leave everything behind. I hire a big sail-boat that is made out of wood and is powered cleanly by the wind. I want to be like the first pioneers that roamed the waters of the world using the same primitive and sustainable energy. Time, after all, is no limit to me. I can take all the time in the world to get from A to B. I run an advert in the newspapers for interesting individuals that are seeking adventure. We furnish the ship with everything we need. First we travel across the sea to America. We stop off at one of the coasts and explore, before we return to the ship. And so begins our journey across the world. We travel across each of the great stretches of water, living mostly off the seafood which we catch. We visit each and every country. We battle great sea storms but also bask in the sun of the sea. We never return home.

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I think that I can make a general claim which is true outside of my own limited experience. In an unstimulating and lonely environment, mostly devoid of any kind of real action, the key thing that is lacking is adventure. This quality could be given many other names, such as excitement or intrigue. The feeling of adventure seems to be related to an idea of exploration and journeying, since it is in such things that experiences are broadened and we taste the new. Fresh smells, sights, tastes, sounds and feelings. In the fantasy, I am drawn into this exciting realm of travel, the world of doing on a large scale. I am figuratively doing the whole wide world.

Travelling is a common preoccupation of the daydreaming mind. However, the details in my unconscious brain's fantasy link such journeyings to an ancient and now unrecognisable past, when a trip from one country to another would take months or years. There is a suggestion that I am time travelling, experiencing a before which is absent in the time of the present. I am again connecting with a vanished and unknowable other, much like the aliens or foreigners such as the Japanese. Those that are unknown, the strangers and outsiders are the ones who I wish to join to. Difference beckons and enriches the perceived model of fruitful living. I have always thought that the ancients have had a secret knowledge that we have lost and which we can find again, a way through things. I studied the classics both in school and sixth form and in adult life, learning Ancient Greek, Ancient History

and Classical Civilisation. Later, I would read mythology from all over the world, particularly Hindu mythology and Hindu scriptures.

Like the forest fantasy, the boat fantasy puts me in the centre of the natural world, away from what is called the civilised world. I would enjoy an existence on the periphery of the human, only occasionally landing on the coasts of our planet's countries for a brief exploration. That is, I would become a total outsider, free from human constraints. I would become difference itself. As is so often the case, difference is prized by the unconscious mind, any type of difference from the banal, the mundane, the ordinary, the limiting confines of the existent and familiar world. Transformation becomes an end in itself, to become the celebrated bearer of a far reaching transformation.

However, these cannot be dismissed as idle and unrealistic imaginings. There is a kernel of truth in the daydream which aims to correct the failings of the contemporary world, a model for a better system of living. I wish to travel in a sail-boat with the clean energy of the wind. I will not pollute the world, or participate in the excesses of modern day living which consume the resources of the planet in an unsustainable way. Hence, we will sustainably catch our own food on the oceans, rather than buying food in the consumerist, capitalistic system that is destroying everything everywhere. Accordingly, I do not wish to return home. I wish to be far away from the all too familiar and sickening present state of human life.

The journey also calls for a hardihood that adventure calls for. Luxury has made many of us soft and has been the downfall of many civilisations, such as Sparta. In my adventures I will fight against the might of nature in its ocean storms. Man against the sea. The finding of my own food will give me independence and seems to allude to a future state in which I am no longer a tired and out of work dependent but a powerful man of action. In other words, the fantasy gives me the model of a hero to work towards, and with it, purpose and definition.



FREEDOM

6. The Homeless

One day, I just up and leave. With my camping tent and a few essentials, I take to the streets of London. Perhaps I have a notebook and some stationery for writing. However, I give up on research and any kind of academic work. I sleep rough on the streets and walk about the city during the day. I spend much of the waking day in libraries. I stay out of contact with family and friends. I have a sign on some scrap cardboard on which I have listed my excellent academic qualifications, including several degrees and a doctorate, and a wealth of experiences in work and volunteering. A sort of résumé. At the bottom, I write “Despite all of this, I could not get a job”. The sign is the condemnation of an unjust society. Or, perhaps, one day, an old school friend sees me stretched out upon the street. They approach me in surprise and shock and I tell them the story of my failures.

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This fantasy is the result of years of years of effort in educational attainment, volunteering and temporary, low-paid work which have brought about no tangible reward or secure profession to the long-suffering author. It is a holiday of the mind in which I no longer have to strive. Some people say that one should strive for striving’s sake. But step into my shoes for the moment. I watch all my peers scaling the heights of professional achievement, despite having two or three times the amount of qualifications they have and having worked laboriously all throughout life. My parents are embarrassed to tell friends and family that I don’t have a job. Without money, there is no possibility of a relationship with a woman in this hungry world, or the joy of children. Society sees me as a drain upon itself. Yet, everyday, in a species of modern slave labour, I sit at my desk straining my brain for articles that have to be endlessly rewritten or rejected. Nothing is ever good enough, nothing ever secures any money. However, the academic journal makes money out of my efforts. How blissful it would be to move out of this box of Sisyphean labour... To no longer care about having any kind of success in this unfair and arbitrary world in which I am rejected in interviews time and time again for no consistent or valid reason.

In the rejection of all that is worldly, I carve out a space of absolute freedom in the imagining. Time is set aside for the exploring of London and writing in its libraries,

rather than in hard graft. I am no longer chained to my desk for long hours. All time becomes a time of leisure and I escape the rigorously time-tabled life that I live, when even free time is set aside because it allows me to recover the energy for work.

As in other immersive fictions, I enjoy a state of being outside of my familiar society where I am judged as someone who does not and cannot contribute. I no longer feel shame at being unemployed and useless. Instead, I proclaim all my academic achievements to all passers by and castigate the injustice of a world that has excluded me from any sort of occupation. Once more, I am free to express myself fully. I no longer have to conceal my failures. It is indicative that I have my notebook with me. Now I can write for the sake of writing rather than for an uncomprehending and eternally demanding reader. I can experience the joy of writing for full expression rather than following a narrow system of rules.

Like the fantasy of the boat, this fantasy sculpts a brand new world separated from the contemporary, although this is itself modelled on a much older state of being. I am no longer chained by my possessions, or the comfort of home. I become, instead, a nomad, like the first peoples. I return to an ancient past when you only had what you could carry on your body. There is the greatest desire to transcend the present with its absurd and unrewarding limitations.

The ground for this imagining is George Orwell's *Down and Out in Paris and London* which I read as a teenager. Orwell was amongst my favourite novelists at this time in life and his adventures living on the streets seem to have fomented a desire for emulation in me. It is indicative that I will have a notebook and stationery to write when I have almost nothing else. I remember thinking how strange it was back then that someone would abandon everything and take to living as one of the homeless. What the fantasy appears to have done is to have taken this strange situation and not only made it comprehensible, but also attractive.

I will also confess that I have been afraid of failure since I was a boy. If the boy were to look at my life now, I am certain that he would be horrified. In the day-dream, however, failure is permitted and I embrace my deepest fears. And in this embrace of horror, life is again radically transformed. Achievement is set aside for freedom, success for protest against the world in the form of the sign which catalogues the wrongs done to me by society.



KNOWING

7. Total Intelligence

For some reason, it is I that am chosen. An other-worldly and supreme intelligence decides to initiate me into total knowledge. First, there is incredible pain. My mind pulsates with an inconceivable power which threatens to annihilate all the brain tissue, but which eventually resolves itself by supercharging all the neural pathways and cells. Suddenly, I know. Everything. I can speak all the languages of the world. I have read every single book. There is no problem too difficult for me to solve. And to solve easily, with hardly a moment's thought. The total intelligence does not only span the past. I also know all things into the future. What thoughts will be written, what advances in knowledge will be made. I know things that cannot be known. I know all conversations that have ever been known throughout human history, down to our very first origins. I know all types of human living, prehistoric, past, present, future. I have watched the birth and evolution of life on our planet. I know what a fruit bat feels like, or a tiger, all the different animals. Space is also no barrier to my knowledge. I know what all different species of life in all the universes know. I have made contact with alien intelligences.

I broadcast my ability of knowing to the academic community. I tell archaeologists where to dig for various treasures. They scoff at first, but then they are persuaded by the spoils that I allow them to retrieve from the past. The next thing I do is to decode the undecipherable scripts of history, starting with the puzzling script of Mohenjo Daro. Indeed, I can actually speak this ancient language fluently and can add to the corpus of texts. I then begin to write out all of the lost books of antiquity. All the lost plays by Euripides and Sophocles. The lost writings of Homer. I reconstruct the Library of Alexandria. The subtleties of Ancient Greek suddenly become apparent to the academic community. And I can transcribe all the conversations and thoughts that took place in any historical era.

Academics begin booking appointments with me in order to learn new truths. Shakespeare scholars come to me and other literary scholars in droves. People from every discipline. I write hundreds of journal articles and books, more than any person can read in a lifetime.

I give licences to governments to exploit my scientific and technological breakthroughs on behalf of the planet. How to make water from seawater efficiently

and economically, so that the whole world has water. How to bring about the clean energy revolution. How to feed the planet. How to eradicate global poverty. I become incredibly wealthy as a result, but also revered as a universal hero and a saviour of humanity.

But all this comes at a cost. I know too much. I have become too dangerous and powerful. There are those that wish to eliminate me from the equation.

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I come from a mixed religious family and one of these religions is Sikhism. The word 'Sikh' means 'to learn'. To be a learner is a fundamental part of my identity. This daydream gives me all to learn, the grasp of a total knowledge. It allows me to become completely at one with my chosen identity.

The fantasy began appearing at about the time that I began my doctoral studies. At this point in time, nobody paid the slightest bit of attention to my areas of research. Papers for conferences were rejected and thus I was excluded from valuable networking opportunities. I did not make any friends in the academic community amongst my peers. I spent most of the day alone at my desk, working on what I thought was important. I enjoyed some aspects of my research, which consisted of reading and interpreting fiction. But even here, I had to rewrite what I was saying over and over and over again. This aspect of learning was an incredibly boring, tedious and frustrating process. I also kept on thinking to myself how limited my research was, as a doctorate forces one to specialise. There were so many things that I could have been learning but which I did not have the opportunity to do so. Instead, I had to keep on going over the same limited ground over and over again until it lost much of its stimulation. I was living an existence that was so burdensome that I found it difficult to get out of bed in the mornings. I would lie there thinking about what I had to do during the day and contemplating the lonely path ahead. I would keep on giving myself five extra minutes to lie there and just rest, and these allowances began to total hours.

In the daydream, however, I am given all knowledge every where and for all time. There is no longer any limitation on my education. Instead of the laborious task of writing out and rewriting what I know over and over again, I can dash off everything in my mind at a rate which any one reader cannot keep up with. I no longer have to visit any library, because all books, writings and thoughts everywhere are in my head. In short, I become a researcher superhero, a type of omniscient researcher god.

As a result, rather than being shunned and neglected by the academic community, someone who is struggling just to get a PhD, I am instead sought out and hailed as the source of all authority. I am involved in academic adventures such as the archaeological digs. I can have fruitful conversations with experts rather than having no academic network. I can present knowledge that no one knows, like the secrets of the Mohenjo Daro script. I know more than any of my academic competitors. I can also make a living out of my education in the immersive fiction, rather than contemplating a future of unemployment and precarious existence. To exaggerate the point, I actually become inconceivably wealthy in the fiction, rather than struggling throughout life. In short, as in other VR experiences, I am living a bearable life which substitutes for the one that is unbearable. I am enjoying a life of academia which I hoped for rather than the crude and unforgiving reality of being a scholar in today's society.

I am no longer a struggling student. I become an academic hero with superhuman attributes. I fight time itself. Over and over again, I find what is lost to history and thought. I retrieve ancient languages and ancient writings. I know the beginning of the universe and the end, every evolution of every creature. I can travel into the future of thought. I also fight space and human limitation. I can grasp everything in all galaxies and universes. I can travel telepathically into the minds of not only men, but also animals. For a man with limited experience, I am given every experience. Thus I know what it is to be the different animals. The fantasy gives me an infinite and impossible power. From impossibility, it again takes possibility. It returns a dependent living on his parents and supported by his academic supervisors to a space of status and power. It subverts existing relationships of power in which I am dominated and promises that I can do the dominating. Everything is broadened for me from the narrow field which it encompasses in banal and uninspiring reality.

Education has always attracted me because I think of it as an altruistic exercise. To contribute to thought is to enlarge the wisdom of humanity and make the world a better place. Thus, in the immersive fiction, I benevolently solve all of the problems of humanity. I become a sort of god to the people. I achieve the dream of education, which is to order the world and humanity for the good.

This dream of total knowledge is interesting because there are several negative elements. Why, in the first place, does the transformation of my brain have to entail an unimaginable pain? Is learning such a difficult, harsh and traumatic experience

that, even in the imagination, this fact cannot be concealed to the unconscious? Why, in the end, do I become the target of others? It seems an unsatisfactory and unappealing conclusion. Is there a secret wish to be annihilated, a sort of Freudian death wish? And so, this list of daydreams ends in death, showing that the beginning and the end is enfolded in the daydream, all the components that make up the story and the mind...

