

■ Harvey was enamored with the girl on the screen, whose skirt, an ideal polygon of fuchsia, moved from side to side in a repeated arc. He loved her ray gun and its hovering cyan hoops which somehow helped the thing ZAP. He knew that her boots were platform and that they recalled the 60s, but he had no other vocabulary to understand them. Maybe ‘retrofuturistic’. He loved her.

Harvey was higher than he planned to be, so high that the game’s start screen sent him into reeling speculation on what it would feel like to be pixelated. He had a reflexive synesthetic connection between pixelation and carbonation; he was certain that there would be something *fizzy* about it. The universe of the video game tended towards googie curves and proportions. It was luminous, clean, and weightless; bodies without flesh and blood so that the closest this universe could come to violence were ZAPs.

The start screen looped and looped, and the space girl shifted from pose to pose. Harvey loved how everything in her world was the same texture and shined. His childhood bedroom, tidied by his mother during his fall semester, became an archaic envelope with the screen alight. The TV was CRT, garage-sale-acquired, and its age gave it a supernatural aura—its fuzz and static a reminder of how it functioned by somehow transforming the stuff of the ether into images, which in turn was a reminder to Harvey of the signals and beams and waves alive the air which he didn’t really think about enough and added much more mystery and richness to everything.

When Harvey finally slept, the weed fuzzed up his dreams. He drifted through a series of sensations which felt pleasant and synthetic, and when he woke, rediscovering the hard, clear world made him lift the covers back over his head and will sleep’s return.

■ The space girl, called Yui during development but unnamed in the final game, was assembled in 1997 on computer monitors of AC unit size and weight. She was a subject/object of affection for the Tokyoite team, who all shared a sense that she willed *herself* into existence; the programmers playing an auxiliary role at the end of the day.

Takeda Shōtarō exhibited a gift for characterful and charming animation from his early days at the company. His instincts with exaggeration, squashing, stretching, etc., were far and away above his peers. Without ever articulating explicit standards for how Yui should be animated, he had an intuitive

understanding that her movements should suggest she is 5% to 10% elastic, and that they should also convey that she has little concern one way or another for her body. He imagined that if she were prompted to think about it, she would consider being in a [female] body to be an incidental fluke of the cosmos. This followed from the vague lore of the game, which took place either in the future or some other part of the universe home to a human-like species. Shōtarō could expect that Yui would not have any hang-ups or preciousness about her body, and would not care if her roundhouse kicks revealed anything under her skirt.

This is not to say that Shōtarō reveled in Yui's short skirt, as he believed that it wouldn't have the same meaning in the game's setting as it does here on earth. He was protective when the other animators tried to make her sexier, and in time they came to feel similarly about her. Yui bounced, flipped, shot her ray gun, and as the game's development went on, the team modeled her actions less on human movement. Shōtarō and his colleague, Hideaki, had the same convictions about the girl that Harvey would decades later: that she was made of fundamentally different stuff, unvarying, smooth, consistent stuff; ideals and absolutes. This was something the two theorized extensively, and this theorization was a lively creative project of its own alongside the game. They decided that Yui was not a depiction of a human girl reduced to polygons by the limitations of computer graphics, she was native of virtual space, enviably, wholly realized. And this placed her at an amorous distance from the animators, who carried out the project with a great deal of thought and love as a result.

The two years that Shōtarō and Hideaki devoted to the game were also the years that their friendship was the most intimate. It began with their shared understanding of the distinct and self-contained logic of the virtual world they were creating, exemplified by Yui. But the most meaningful and unstated factor was how each comforted the other about how they had slipped into the roles of salarymen after spending their youth in opposition to that sort of thing. Shōtarō could look at Hideaki—artistically talented, cynically funny, politically aware—and figure that if he became a conventional, overworked suit, maybe it's not that bad, or at least it's inevitable. And if that were true of his friend, then that would be true for him, and therefore there is no reason to be too hard on himself.

Their company, Abbiocco, expected the workers to spend at least one night a week getting obliterated at a karaoke bar. These nights would begin on the forty-first floor, where they would pack up their things. Then they'd

descend downward and downward until they were sealed in a basement room somewhere deep under the city. The more they moved downward, the more profanity they could express, and the less it mattered how their pristine work shirts would invariably become soaked through with sweat. On one of these nights, Shōtarō and Hideaki, at this point transformed into *shachiku* through and through, took in the windowless private karaoke room with blurred vision and found it to be totally unreal. It was governed by the same geometry and simplicity as the virtual objects they modeled in the office. Hidden strips of LED lights made everything flat and uncomplex and every object was pure white or pure magenta.



Harvey messaged his friend Julia who he considered an expert on aesthetics and the atmospheres they evoked. He sent her a link to the game's Wikipedia page and added "got so high last night that I just stared at the start screen of this for like an hour. I love this like. 90s japanese retrofuturist vibe"

She responded, "Lmao, yes I am with you completely" and "it's like 90s does 60s retro retrofuturism"

"are her boots gogo boots?"

"Yeah I would say so. Or maybe more like rounded platform boots". She then added after a time: "I've been into this sort of thing too lately. Anything very cyber-optimistic. It's very cute to me."



Julia, still unrisen from bed in the morning, alternated between her chat with Harvey and a server titled "marlene's sewing circle" (renamed almost weekly, the reference to lesbianism winking but not literal). The server had hummed with an unbroken flow of activity for several years. It was formed in 2019 when a group of twenty users on a pro-ana message board came to recognize themselves as sharing a similar degree and type of intellectual engagement distinct from the others and sought a designated venue for the discussion of art and literature. At its inception, the members shared a sense that by prerequisite of their anorexia or EDNOS, they possessed a unique understanding of beauty, ugliness, the body, [self-]discipline, femininity, masochism, moral ambiguity, and cognitive dissonance. As time went on, eating disorders became almost

entirely irrelevant, and though the forum's culture would appear acerbic and cynical to an outsider, all participants would attest to it providing them with a completely above-board, non-pathological feeling of belonging.

Julia shared a picture of Yui which was a hit with the girls on the forum. They were able to construct a constellation around her of similar art, fashion, and pop cultural artifacts in an explosively productive thread of links and photos until a kind of thesis was communicated in how all of these references hung together. Someone whose words were granted additional grace by a profile picture of a young Julie Delpy smoking a cigarette commented: "I wish I were a cyber girl with cute boots who is forever on an algorithmic loop of having fun and doing flips, and I never sweat nor pee nor menstruate and may not have ever even encountered any liquids (bodily or otherwise) at all". The collective project of worldbuilding around Yui consciously inspired Julia's choice in skirt for that day, which was metallic and conical like the furniture/women of the Jetsons.



In Northern New Jersey, a storm had come overnight and receded by the early morning. The bagel shop visible from Harvey's window had a great schmear of snow atop its awning, and there were similar plops upon cars, gas station signs, and hedges. Harvey had not woken up early enough to see the snow communicate the purity it is supposedly known for; much of it had been made mucky and granular by the churn of traffic. His parents had decorated the lawn with a large inflatable Santa and a large inflatable Hanukkah bear with a scarf and dreidel. The figures' proximity implied a friendship not unlike their own, Harvey's parents', who were amicably interfaith and convinced that their happiness as a couple can/should be taken as a hopeful symbol of the possibility of broader, even global, religious tolerance. The burden of snow caused Santa's armful of gifts to droop.

Harvey's attention returned to the Sega Dreamcast, eBay-acquired, which had a heft and bulk unlike contemporary consoles. He imagined that this aspect had once given the people of the 1990s a feeling that there was a more robust barrier between physical and virtual space which required formidable machines to push through. Harvey decided to vape the last of what he had then turned on the Dreamcast. He had no desire to start the story mode but instead lingered in its menus and character customization features which placed him in

calmer, undemanding pockets of the game's world. The light in the setting was present like a fact; it came from no source and no object or figure cast a shadow. There was a control panel of gleaming buttons and levers in the background which alluded that choosing a space-girl-outfit diegetically requires the skill set of an astronaut or computer programmer. Harvey concentrated on this for a very, very long time. He was in no state to keep track of exactly how long. He then looked at the console itself, whirring in its continuous work to bring the whole realm alight. He suddenly became distrustful of the hardware—it seemed suspiciously dormant and inadequate to have any relationship to the “dream” it “casted”. Harvey turned off the screen and opened the disc drive. He became suspicious of the disc too.

The console needed to be taken apart, this was very clear to him, but the precision screwdrivers were downstairs, and so were his parents, and he was paranoically high. He had a latent expectation that the presented problem must be solvable with use of the limited objects in the room and that the objects which may be useful would appear more vivid or foregrounded. A pair of scissors within his line of sight impressed upon his thought process, and so he attempted to insert one of its blades into the drive of the screw. Harvey twisted the scissors' blade, but its point was too small to provide the necessary leverage to unscrew the screw. He kept trying to twist anyway, as maybe the screw might eventually catch, though more importantly he had fallen into a hypnotic, single-minded, almost-pleasant rhythm with twisting and it was hard to stop. A line of bright blood ran from his fingers down his wrist and went unnoticed for some time. His realization came only once there was a significant amount of blood smudged on the console, parts of it already darkened and dried in thumbprints and smears. The sight disgusted him and pushed him into a state of profound dread.


What Harvey realized was that though he could theoretically wait for sobriety to approach this problem with a clear mind and an appropriate screwdriver, in actuality, sobriety would cause him to lapse into a hyper-rational materialism that high-Harvey *knew* to be naive to the grander forces really at work. He needed to work quickly before he would blink and see the console as only a dull thing, then he'd give it a good wipe and return it unmolested to the milk-crate-turned-shelf.

He examined the plastic seams of the device and considered how and with what he could wedge the panels apart. He also considered googling ‘dismantled sega dreamcast’, but that would not provide satisfying answers

with any connection to his particular experience of the CRT monitor in his bedroom and its overwhelming aura. And unquestionably, the Dreamcast could not be smashed, as that would prevent examination, and seemed like such an extreme move that it would cross a threshold of desperation which would exacerbate his paranoia further.

He attempted once again with the edge of his debit card in the screw's drive, but it remained resolutely in its place. He also tried with a dusty knife he found under the bed, the protruding part of a pen cap, and his keys. The dried blood upon the Dreamcast was reanimated by the introduction of the sweat from Harvey's hands and a new set of fingerprints and smudges came to be.

When he finally gave up, he messaged Julia "the weed is just too strong now" and lay on his bed, carefully avoiding meeting his own gaze in the mirror as he has made a similar mistake before and observed in his face an uncanny artificiality akin to a late night TV host or wax figure. The poor kid. He was still in his pajama pants, Pokeball-patterned, which had survived several wardrobe purges because of their nostalgic value.



"I'm going to have to ask you all to take your seats now, regrettably, as I know full-well the joys of the breakfast buffet table. These meetings truly introduce me to the most miraculous pastries; the most effervescent, delicately-textured, perfect objects. Somehow, Linda—where are you, Linda?—has an enviable knowledge of all of the best bakeries, restaurants, and catering companies in London and has incredible insight about when and how to deploy that knowledge." [mimes aiming, shooting, and retracting a bazooka]. "She's like a sommelier of pairing investor meetings with just the right sort of buffet table. Everyone, please give a round of applause for Linda.

"What we are discussing today is a proposed pivot from a B2B to B2C model for our software. You all should have already received a helpful PDF with much of what we are to discuss today, but I will also provide this very abridged summary:

"We specialize in software that some call AI, but we hesitate to call AI, one that plays video games rather than governs non-player characters. The reason for the contention around calling our technology 'AI' is that the software plays a game by making all choices and performing all movements either A) pseudo-randomly, B) predictively based upon a dataset of past

players' behavior, or C) something sort of in the middle, like it makes, say, 80% of choices based on the dataset of previous player behavior, but 20% of the time it makes a pseudo-random decision. I do not want to call that intelligence, because there is no 'learning' really, and the software has no way of evaluating the choices it makes as more or less optimal. I'm sorry, but many of you are still at the table in the back and I can see you chattering and eating pastries and as I said I understand but we have begun and it is distracting to have people milling about.

"We began with the goal of automating some aspects of QA for game developers, but early on in the process I was contacted by a young man in New Jersey, in America, who asked if this technology could be used with an old Dreamcast game that he and his friends thought was atmospheric and, um, 'vibey', I suppose was how it was described, because they liked the idea of having the game projected behind them as they performed as a band. To them it was fitting that their performance, which was live and irreplicable, would be accompanied by this visual element which was live and irreplicable, rather than just a YouTube video of its gameplay. They had some very particular ideas about these events being singular and unrecorded, ephemeral. I do not want to speak on this too much, I am not at all an artist, so I'll just say that we were able to do this for them within a short time, with a small team, with little cost to us or them.

"This led us to some other commissioned work from small groups and individuals, which over time increased in frequency and has led us to this meeting today. Please, if you are eating at your seats make sure you have a napkin or paper plate as these pastries are crumb-generating machines. What we have found to our surprise is overwhelming consumer interest in our software. Despite the fact that the interactivity of video games seems to me, at least, to be their selling point, many people seem to like having these games played, in the passive voice, not by themselves or anyone in particular. Now Linda, lovely Linda, has mentioned to me something called 'parasociality' which is a term used to explain the popularity of streamers—that their viewers develop a one-sided friendship with the person broadcasting themselves gaming. And thank you Linda, these are the sort of humanities terms I would never be familiar with myself and you truly enlighten me with your insights. But parasociality does not seem to apply here as there is no human element, people simply want the games played, sometimes to watch them, but curiously, what we have heard from many of our clients is that they do not always watch

the software play the game, they just leave it on and do something else with the knowledge that the game is being played as a sort of comfort. Additionally, what we have heard from some articulate and forthcoming clients, and once again I have Linda to thank for conducting productive conversations with them about the appeal of our software, is that the majority of games, even massive, complex ones in terms of their worlds and player choice, are *finite*. Even if you were to break down every single choice, including each step a player character takes, while the permutations of each game may lead to an unthinkably large number of potential games played, it would be *finite*. And apparently, a not-insignificant amount of people want to have the satisfaction that with time, the game will be completely, totally played. That the monkeys are indeed at their typewriters and that they will hit on *Hamlet* but also everything else that could be written until all writing is done. I hope this is useful.

“It’s a shame that Linda does not consider herself a public speaker because she could definitely speak on this better than I can, but I’ll do my best to relay some of her thoughts on this: It seems that some people find some stress or disquietude quelled by the mere knowledge that a game is being played, even without a player; it is like it becomes something complete, a puzzle which can dump out all of its own pieces, put itself together, and then back in the box, or something that can run itself like a wind-up toy or maybe a perpetual motion machine. Also, that although developers seem to be trying to create games at a massive scale, some with the feature of machine-generated scenarios and environments to give a game *practically*-infinite permutations, it seems like players’ interest in large, complex games comes along with an anxiety of the game being unresolved or incomplete, as its overwhelmingly numerous but still finite possibilities will never be exercised. In fact any video game, even a simple one, because of the need for player interaction to be actualized, to some degree provokes a discomfort with the fact that when not played, they just kind of *sit there* unresolved. This discomfort exists alongside excitement, of course—the incompleteness clearly invites one to engage. And admittedly, the discomfort may be minor compared to the excitement, but it’s there and *that* is our market. Linda, I hope I am doing a decent job explaining your thoughts on this. Your jumper today is very beautiful, I must mention.

“Because of tremendous public interest in this software, so much that we’ve even seen crowdsourcing campaigns to commission us to adapt our software to automate the playing of certain games, we are considering a pivot, and maybe even expanding into automating the, um, consummation or



appreciation of other forms of interactive—and even some passive—entertainment. Like e-books which turn their own pages; what have you. We're hoping by next financial year, FY2029, we can offer several similar services and that our software can be smarter; more automatically adaptable to a game without us having to take on the tasks of individual commissions for each game.

“What we are also considering, and this would be a more radical proposal, is that we can aim to get every game ever made playing itself, and to keep that running indefinitely for the sake of the public's peace of mind. And for this service, we could go for a crowdsourced patronage model, or seek grants from wealthy, eccentric philanthropists, or maybe even from the government. Now, I understand this route is a departure from the work which generated initial VC and angel investor interest, but I will say I am drawn to the virtue of it, and I would encourage you to consider it in that light as well.”



Shōtarō was hungover so constantly that he eventually lost the ability to perceive any connection between heavy drinking and his body as a gross, cumbersome thing. Because he was hungover almost every day, the discomfort could equally be said to correlate to brushing teeth, wearing a shirt, or drinking coffee, which also occurred everyday. It could be attributed to anything really/the variables were uncountable/this could be how everyone feels after age thirty/etc. Shōtarō was resentful that he had to lug his uncooperative body around; drag it with him to work and back home again, and this led him to develop an almost gnostic hatred for physicality in general. In his youth, Shōtarō was attractive to his peers; he was athletic and gave the impression of being fully and unselfconsciously embodied. This quality was eroded by years in a sedentary job and alcoholism's tendency to rip mind and body apart then pit them against each other.

It was because of the non-uniqueness of feeling unfathomably bad that Shōtarō decided to drink anyway, despite the unrelenting nausea, at the invitation of his colleagues who must feel as bad as he does but don't seem to. And they once again holed up in a private karaoke room, and Nobuhiko, the

level designer, once again claimed “My Way” and performed it with aggressive gusto, and Shōtarō returned with ambivalence to a familiar state of incoherence. And this is what it felt like: *returning*, like inebriation was an ever-running stream he intermittently slipped into, each experience of drunkenness not distinct but picking up where he last left off. Learning the English phrase “*under the influence*” and the French “*sous l'emprise*” influenced the concept to take on a spatiality in his mind: that the stream of sobriety, vicious and graphic, ran above while inebriation ran below. In waking life, Shōtarō was always sinking and surfacing again.

Hideaki sat beside him on the patternless banquette, kindly and wordlessly advocating that Shōtarō still counted as a participant in the evening even when unreachably catatonic. Friendship with Hideaki had unintentionally atrophied Shōtarō’s ability to regulate his own mood—because Hideaki’s charm reliably made him feel better, the whole mechanism could just be outsourced to him. Hideaki was always of good humor, and his handsomeness seemed to withstand the slings and arrows of the 60-hour-work-week and its intractable alcoholism far better than Shōtarō’s.

A Yui-like 3D girl with gigantic yellow platform sneakers danced within the frame of a TV screen behind Nobuhiko. Her rhythm, pep, and style indicated that him doing things His Way was irrelevant to her. Hideaki understood that Shōtarō was in a suggestible state and took up the task of suggestion with great care. While Shōtarō rested his gaze upon the colorful animation, Hideaki brought up wonderful things—bioluminescent organisms, girls with glittering eyes, the Mars rover—to enclose his friend in a positive semantic field while he was still awake and put him on the path towards effervescent dreams.


Shōtarō browned out then blacked out, and though he was sent off to wherever he went with gentleness, his return to awareness was hostile—as if an undeserving man getting to drop out for a bit caused a destabilizing cosmic imbalance that needed to be suddenly and retributively corrected. Something probably concrete pressed against his skull and his torso was confronted by something of a horrendous toothbrush-bristle-texture. He was scorned by cold air and was apparently alone.

Though the forces acting upon him were impending and mysterious, his desire to remain completely out of it outweighed his concern about where he was. He kept his eyes closed, letting what he presumed was a tragic situation

remain undefined. He fazed in and out several times, his dreams transfiguring the unexplained physical sensations in strange ways. One dream deposited him into the mouth of a large creature; his body on its corrosive tongue and his head held between its teeth.

When the sun rose, Shōtarō could not stay in the mouth of the beast any longer. He observed a hedge beneath him on which he had been lying prone and the low wall of the subway entrance on which he laid his head. As he removed his body from the bush, an especially spiteful branch sliced his suit and cut a quarter-inch into his flesh from just above his crotch, up the abdominals, stopping at his solar plexus. He finally stood up, found his briefcase beneath the hedge, and descended into the subway.

In the subway station, a group of teenage girls collected on the platform for their commute to school. Shōtarō could perceive them only as hivemind; that the laughs and exclamations he overheard did not emanate from one mouth but belonged to the mass, and he was pitifully envious of the blurred identity he imagined them to have. Coupled with each girl was a backpack shaped like an animal in a form more spherical, floppy-limbed, and rosy-cheeked than their real-world counterparts. As the girls gathered in a circle, the animals formed another concentrically around them, facing outwards, guarding gently.



And what of the young girls, for whom the backpacks were designed and Yui's game intended? Whose sensibility directed the lives of despairing men on the subway platform because they, close to exclusively, had free time to enjoy all that was afforded by an exceptionally productive economy? Who enjoyed it all on behalf of those unable to (in reality somewhat, but moreso in imagination)?

By the age of sixteen, Miyamoto Ai had aggregated a wardrobe of remarkable self-contained logic. All items were of hyper-saturated color with design elements so uncomplex and essential that they could be illustrated on a cartoon character: shirts with a single star or a naive ringed planet. Ai beheld the visual field crowd with uncomplicated, neotenous faces, then saw this visual field take on a hypnotic primacy over everything else (what she witnessed would later be called Superflatness, its naming a flattening in itself). Ai elected into it rather than be subsumed.

Ai assembled her outfits meditatively. They needed to be wholesome, hauntologically nostalgic, quintessentially teenage, with caricatured proportions to resemble an illustration of a garment more than a real one. Throughout the summer of 1996, Ai spent her afternoons outfitmaking, sensing palpably that she was drawing out an artifact from a world which was elsewhere. When the process was complete, she would go to Harajuku just because it seemed like a way to commemorate what she had made, only to find that there was nothing there for her. The train seemed to only take her further away from the stylized world which had had such a heartening verisimilitude in her bedroom.

One night, feeling especially discouraged, Ai set off into Yoyogi park to clear her head. Ai walked the forested path leading to the Meiji shrine, which was impotently illuminated and much, much longer than she recalled. The illumination of the path only increased the menacing power of the periphery, which was so black-hole-like that Ai could detect no depth or contour in it. At first playfully then seriously, Ai speculated that past the dense layer of trees that caught the light, the world just kind of dropped off or dissolved; that the blackness was truly void. A sudden SNAP violated the nightmare she'd built up and replaced it with a new one. She then heard the unctious sound of male groaning.

While male sexuality was, for years now, ubiquitous and quite real to her, it had never been present and clear. And here it was; and it cried out with a desperation that pierced her sober and moderate life, and she felt pulled to witness what had long been a nebulous threat now in realized form. She approached the blackness at a cautious distance from the origin of the sound which was now joined with another: unsteady, girlish breathing.

Upon breaching the darkness, Ai's platforms provoked the severe sound of splitting twigs. In time, Ai found an undetailed world where a lurching mound in the bushes unified with the groaning. It made Ai a bit sick. The surface of the mass was dominantly a muscular male back upon which a white dress shirt was violently stretched, but there was also a massive swell of hair on the farther side which trembled in imperfect synchronization with the barreling back. At some point they fucked in such a way that for a split second, the hair was backlit and Ai could see its honey color and barrel curls. Ai knew that the girl must be a Gyarū, which, as another fashion girl, made her terrifyingly proximate to Ai who did not feel at all prepared to be fucked and reduced to ragged breath the way the Gyarū seemed to be.

She had seen enough, but a step back toward the path again inspired the brutal SNAP of twigs. She hadn't realized how much she had pressed her luck already, and more than anything she did not want to confront the Gyarū and the man to whom the broad back belonged. She proceeded as slowly and lightly as she could, crouching low. As she brought her body back towards the path, she heard the man whimper to the Gyarū:

“I want you so much. I want you...”

Ai's arms and knees were scratched by unseen branches as she crawled along the ground.

“Will you take this off? ... I just...*want* you, can we get this off your face?”

After some time: “You are so sexy, I...”

...

“This, in your hair, can you take this out? I just want all of it gone, I just want—and the makeup or the tan, whatever it is? I'm trying to rub it away.”

...

“I have to stop. I'm sorry.”

...

“I feel like there's a barrier, that I can't—get to you...”

The forest finally spit out Ai. Both her short-sleeved shirt and the striped long-sleeved one layered beneath it were battered. She headed back the way she came. She wanted to vomit but didn't. She thought of the Gyarū, who, like her, spent the afternoon making herself an emissary of a world which she could see uniquely and clearly, only to fall into grubby and oblivious arms.



Shōtarō was carried by the subway back to his apartment. He showered away dried blood and a shameful odor. He hung a shirt and tie upon himself. When he tried to summon the momentum to leave, none came, and so he laid himself down on the kitchen tile.

With nausea and misery he anticipated the course of his body through the city from his apartment to the Abbiocco office. He began to imagine it with the buildings and transit systems of Tokyo toggled, so his body upon the 10th floor hovered high in the air, then sank down, then traversed westward until

rising climatically to its final delivery at its unextraordinary and expectant swivel chair.



Beneath Shōtarō were other apartments, variously occupied, besieged in an imperceptible and slow-motion way by asbestos. It had been applied to the building during construction with unwise generosity—sprayed between the inner walls and steel-frame exterior, mixed into the exterior paint, and God knows where else it could be—and it took the building management company no time at all to deem the cost of removal not-at-all worth it.

It came time to notify the tenants of demolition and the building management company sent two representatives to knock on doors. Shōtarō, half-dreaming on the uncomfortable linoleum, conceived the knock not as from anyone in particular but the world cruelly calling to him to participate in its ceaseless, brutal goings-on, and left it unanswered. The representatives, moving from the top-down, finally landed in the basement level and knocked on the door of Yoshitoshi, who seemed to them to be a sort of cave-dweller. He was unusually unmannered and the news that his home was carcinogenic left him emotionally and physically unmoved. With an off-putting feigned calm, he reminded them that a unique quality of the lowest floor of the building is that it does not depend on the presence of any other floor, and that while they may decimate the rest of the building, they are welcome to just leave him and his property alone. He then shut the door on the representatives and their limp brochure on asbestosis.

It was a relief to Yoshitoshi for the apartment to be resealed. The open door gave the place a vulnerable porousness that made him feel unglued. With the exception of the door, the apartment was otherwise a complete expression of his will; holding a collection of around 2000 VHS tapes and a smaller, emerging collection of DVDs. Though he collected pretty much everything, he was dedicated to rare, often out-of-print titles, especially B-movies, genre films (most often monster and Nazi zombie films), and exploitation. The shelves of tapes extended from floor to ceiling and were given an even greater impression of abundance by the curve of the wall—the mass of them looked like a heaving thing.

Yoshitoshi prioritized ex-rental VHS for his collection because the higher grade tape resisted degrading in quality. Even so, he denied himself

watching any VHS more than twice because the idea of the degradation of the tape had become a singular paranoia for him. He often had nightmares of rewinding a film over and over again: always a nebulously-American 1950s Technicolor film of an indeterminate story about a heartbroken woman, though the film wasn't confined to a screen, it was the whole of the dream. Yoshitoshi did not have an embodied presence in the nightmare, but it had in-built knowledge that the film kept repeating because he had given up on his years of restraint and chosen self-indulgence instead. Each repetition would foment more distortion and heinous discoloration. The human figures would eventually begin to be pulled violently in horizontal bands, and the dream always ended in an unbounded field of black and white noise.


Yoshitoshi returned his body to its usual seat and lit a cigarette so unconsciously that only on his second inhale did he register that he was smoking. He thought of the oncoming displacement and how it could not be stopped. He took in the expanse of his media collection, which engulfed him literally and psychically. Until recently, VHS tapes predominated the entirety of his collection, and with the prohibition he placed on himself with watching the films, they became both exalted and feared objects of cult value: holding stories with tremendous promise; promise which was heightened and maintained by not watching them. Yoshitoshi's feelings were intense but mixed; to finally watch a long-deferred tape may entertain him, but more significantly, it was the gratification of temptation. But watching a VHS sullied and diminished something—the tape itself and the potentiality of untold stories which he had become used to surrounding him. The whole thing left Yoshitoshi feeling fundamentally poisonous.

When the DVDs came, no one felt a shift as majorly as Yoshitoshi. And this is what he contemplated as the cigarette dwindled, disappointing him. The first DVD he encountered was *Blade Runner: The Director's Cut*, which he purchased along with the DVD player itself. It took him the entire route back from the store and about an hour after to overcome the mental barrier to watching it, feeling as if his nightmare were intruding upon his waking life in a powerful way. But he did watch the movie ultimately: three times in his usual seat, then he played it six times more even while going about other business for most of its run. It made Yoshitoshi absolutely manic to be released from scarcity, which is what it felt like for the first eight plays of the movie. But what began to occur was that watching the same story over and over again exposed the world of the film to be predetermined and limited; that the only

buildings and objects which existed in the world were those necessary to the story; that there was nothing at all beyond the frame. And this was hard for Yoshitoshi to take, having felt briefly unburdened of the restrictions which drove him so insane. But it was after the ninth play of *Blade Runner*, when he was carried back to the DVD menu, that he realized that that was where he wanted to be: the everlooping tour of the cyberpunk city allowed him to dwell in the world but remain at its threshold, keeping its stories plural, nascent, and speculative.

This is how the DVD collection started, which became more meaningfully a collection of DVD menus, as from that point on Yoshitoshi kept DVD menus runninglooping as constantly as possible. He was obsessed with the lack of scarcity of the digital format. And the DVDs came to claim a greater section of the shelves, displacing less important titles in VHS format, and the whole wall became a sort of scoreboard reporting on itself.

Having thought all this over, Yoshitoshi, who knew his threats to the representatives to be empty, made peace with how he could not take his whole collection with him. And he decided, in what may have been an overreaction, to renounce all of his VHS tapes which had ruled him for far too long. And thus two diasporas were set in motion that day: the 282 inhabitants of the diseased apartment building and the 2000+ VHS tapes, cast into global currents of exchange that Yoshitoshi wasn't really thinking about at all.

 Shōtarō's responsibility to the office tugged at him periodically. For a while, this was drowned out by exhaustion and physical discomfort, but recovery pushed ahead unkindly.

Let off onto the 41st floor several hours after the start of the workday, Shōtarō apologized gravely and bowed low to the first person he discovered: a disinterested Nobuhiko rotating a 2001-inspired chair in the gray gridded space of the 3D modeling software. Nobuhiko summoned Shōtarō to his desk where he was at work on a level that was a sort of chic galactic lobby which hosted auxiliary docking stations for cute magenta space shuttles of a blobular, molecular shape. Nobuhiko briefed Shōtarō on the level so that Shōtarō could animate the objects reacting to Yui. Everything in the level was one of two heights, either intended to be reachable for Yui's standard jump animation or



her double-jump/flip animation—Yui and her environment were perfectly adapted to one another. Nobuhiko generated 20 chairs to illustrate something about how objects ought to be spaced for Yui; the chairs were disappeared when the point was made.

Shōtarō worked on the animations while listening futilely for a pattern in the intervals of Nobuhiko sniffing up the snot in his nose when it amassed to an intolerable degree. Hideaki was sequestered somewhere else in the office, beset with a mountain of tasks, where his reassuring manner could not reassure anyone. This made the day especially drab, which Shōtarō took as karmic and so he made no effort to improve it. He took a bite of something tasteless and foil-wrapped at his desk and imbued the chair with a cheery personality. As coworkers left, regions of the office darkened and the light panels of the ceiling grid mapped the paused and active domains of the Yui project. After 13 hours in the office, Shōtarō sent a hardly-necessary email late into the night so his penance would be known.

And he headed to the elevator, bleary-eyed and looking forward to being dropped on its improbable cable. And again he pictured it totally immaterially, like it would be seen by a distant infrared camera.

When the doors opened, Shōtarō was presented with the exposed elevator shaft. He couldn't make sense of it at first, but he was so permanently delirious that dream logic had long had a life outside of his dreams, and so he simply saw the chasm and blinked. He neared the opening and saw where it led, which was to a vanishing point. Like anyone would, he imagined his body in freefall down the shaft—at first, just falling, disconnected from death in any way.