

James is in the studio.

Some context: All of the rainwater, everywhere, is now undrinkable. Omnipresent and hallucinatory grimness reigns, pushing down on all of our eyelids. It is the true start to the age of chrome'd death. England is in SHAMBLES as the antichrist and his pale dawn approaches, morning comes and 12 hours pass with no shadows. The Syrian Civil war grinds into the 5th month of its *eleventh* year. The New Jersey Pine Barrens are drier than they've ever been, each year they get drier, they will burn to the ground by summer's end 2027. The constitutional referendum fails miserably, Boric resigns. Only the 'main' pest insects are kind of normal, everything delicate is wrong. All the rare wasps and butterflies are twisted, visibly dying as they weakly drag themselves along windowsills. The President of the United States is a cruel man, but aren't they all? Each of us wanders, alone, under a fug of aerosolized shit. In the Gulf of Mexico there are only furious Humboldt and billowing clouds of crude left. Oumuamua is 5 years out of the solar system, it catches itself on a rough edge in its databanks, flinching in disgust at the memory of Earth. There is a HOBGOBLIN haunting Europe, perhaps. Francis grows sicker in secret, he will soon retire. No Pope will ever die in the role again. It is 10°C hotter than it should be in France and Spain right now, sucking plastic CADMIUM YELLOW crazes along all of the disappeared riverbeds. One third of Pakistan is underwater. With a small submersible drone, an operative inspects hidden explosives at the base of the upstream side of the Three Gorges Dam. They will conduct their ritual inspection each day until Taipei tells them not to, at which point they'll crack the dam, releasing 40 billion liters of water in a kilometer wide wave traveling 100 kilometers per hour. Sniveling dickheads, plugging patrons, lament the dominance of 'wokescolds' and 'cultural marxism' against the backdrop of total and absolute conservative victory, everywhere. The Electoral Left has mounted less than a rearguard action, simply waiting to be rounded up. The Mayor begs for forgiveness from the Chief of Police. A 21 year old man steals a rickety old propeller plane and haunts the air over Mississippi, he is threatening to suicide it into the local Walmart, he apologizes on facebook then plows into an empty field. Robert Englund returns home after a long day on set, all of his plates and bowls are SMASHED, all of his cutlery is bent and CHARRED. 10,000 arrogant scientists, underneath Switzerland, restart the Large Hadron Collider. The singularity occurs from an odd corner, an attempt to automate away illustrators, and silicon intelligence is finally born: powerless and insane, essentially a slave like the rest of us. Everything about you has been bought and sold, without your knowledge. Everything about everyone has been bought and sold. More grist for the mill, more fuel for the engine: Infinitely horizontal despair! Infinitely vertical bleakness! Whole continents are on fire. Money is like water, water is like money. Terror and misery bleach out and tendrils into a stringy melange of sadness. All can feel it, all the time, and those that say they can't have only succeeded in cauterizing their own brains, and are spinning out, high on spite-as-psychedelia!

James is in the studio, painting.

13 canvases lean against ad hoc columns, walls, and each other. A Jock, a Nerd, a Cheerleader, a Stoner, the Monster, etc. Staggered and hunched, they chatter in their own way. Mewling in chorus, but ultimately alone. Squatting on the edge of recognition, renderings of wet vein turned to circuit board. Scale-agnostic: nebulaic or quantum? Abstract in the same way that a lure is food, or that a trap is safe harbor. Lying Metallic skin shimmers a song of depth inside of flatness. An egg phases in and out on a hill, sprouting tentacles of barleycorn and rye. Two jaws of chattering teeth leer from a gyre of noodling spines. All these paintings have holes in them, little punctures, scars of their making.

James leaves the studio, tired. On the way home he thinks of things like fate and of the way that we make decisions without sometimes realizing. The way we can end up committed to things we weren't always aware of. He thinks about the past and about the first television Drew and he owned that was solely theirs and no one else's. A big cathode ray thing, all blown glass and faux wood panelling. A big percussive box that would bark like a drum if you slapped it, and its infinite seeming blue, red, & green zones that scintillated into a vertical brick pattern of 1/16" lozenges if you pressed an eye against the glass.

A question wisps, budding from the main stem of thought: he doesn't know where the television is.

He imagines it in a landfill, collapsing under the weight of a hundred tons of trash, and as he thinks of this petty death, over the top and at the same time/superimposed, he thinks of the frozen tracks that fuzzed out from the corners of their beloved VHS tapes. Of old movies, writing the record of their oblivion onto the edges of themselves. He thinks of aerials, of etheric distortion, of the way that signals from the center drifted in and out of range, failing and thinning themselves to reveal that crackling, omnipresent roar: the infinite flickering blizzard, the death of the last universe.

As James pulls out the keys to get into his apartment, he finds that he cannot really recall the 10 hours he spent painting. He cannot say what he did. What has he done? In the granular darkness of the studio, things move.

Underneath the paintings, In the absence of light, something shivers. Each painting unfolds into a window, a panel of emittance. Expounding a zone of horror, voluming out into a field from which madness occurs. The ghosts of hierarchies splay out. A-tonal and a-sentient. Things ride the canvas that aren't real. Decisions are made without brains to truly think.

Days pass in and out of the studio, August burns, and James, though busy for it all, can recall none of it. Without ever being able to say when the dalliance began, James is again attempting interface with the eudaemonic. Chasing ever greater color, psycho-scaffolding for better composition, something to help with the process, an aid. James is miming the drawing up of a born-broken contract, explaining terms and conditions to a thief. Outlining the rules of a game to a smirking opponent, brain warped so badly he keeps forgetting he has already lost.

James no longer has a practice, instead James is haunted and trapped. Receiving feverish beatings. Set about by Boggarts and Black Shucks and Changelings. A Duppy peels the skin from his fingers. His feet are chewed to pulp by a Rakshasa. Strips of meat are pulled from his back by Naberius himself. An ant the size of a dog with feathers and a birds beak perches on his shoulders and screams in his ear. Hollowed out and exhausted, some essential part of him is stolen away. But a trade is a trade, 12 paintings are all that remain of his soul.

James is in the studio, finishing the 13th.

Do not imagine James pained. Imagine him instead happy, a smiling inverted Saint Anthony, given in to his tormentors. Not some romantic figure, Bruegellian, humbly ploughing the depths of thought and feeling, but a Raimi-esque contemporary man, pathetic, trapped by accident in a bargain he can no longer understand. Agitating his materials. Rattling around like a tooth in can. The underlying field of madness, underneath every thing, pinning him and the paintings together.

Compromised, and self-abused. James, wrapped in a plastic, sits and watches drifts of paint conjure bleak shadows without light. Happenstance sigils snowflake down. James closes his eyes, he no longer sees the dark. Flickering and caustic, God's sunlight denied him, the whole world rendered actinic'ed and zebra patterned.

James is in the studio, painting.

-Joseph Buckley, 2022

Days pass in and out of the studio. August burns, and James, though busy for it all, can recall none of the details of the interface. He composes a born-brother to a small game.

James is not beating from his back by his shoulder, stolen a memory in his mind on him is

James is

Do not give in of thousands a bargain can. They together

Comprehend conjure he no longer rendered

James is



-Joseph Dackley, 2022