

Third Place Winner

The Heads-Up

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So that friend of yours, the one who's completely full of shit, it might be better in the end to keep them around. Maybe not completely, but trust me, I'm glad I kept in touch with Viktor.

At the airport, it's swamped. A few people have six or more cases of luggage. There was a rumor that some people were packing their bags full of cinder blocks just to see the reaction of the baggage handlers. Me? I didn't even bother with a backpack. It would come as a shock to me if I needed anything more than the clothes on my back, my phone, and its charger.

It was time for me to go to Japan. With forty-three days to go and no more excuses, I suppose I had been putting it off, but I bet even with no excuses some people will find it the more meaningful to stay home and lament how their vacation would be ruined by the circumstances.

By some people, I mean my parents. Did you know they never even left the country? It's not even that they're patriotic. Right now, it's 8:13AM. Dad's mowing the lawn. Can you imagine?

I designate some airport bathrooms for their intended purpose. The others are not. What an unimaginative thing to shoot for with such little time left. A lot of places with bathrooms to spare are doing this, but I think here at the airport, it's especially encouraged to get it out of your system before your flight.

People who were married twenty, thirty years, who would have protested such a thing just weeks before were now bent over a toilet, exploring the zest of finality. It's true, you

know. Impending doom makes you horny. This was proven decades ago (source: The Capilano Suspension Bridge Study). You never used to see this many people fucking in the streets.

My friend Viktor was one of twenty-six people who received the announcement before everyone else. I was the fourth person he told. The Tujuil seem to be displeased with the way we punish people who break the law. It's kind of ironic if you dwell on it too long.

He was throwing rocks at my window, still dressed in an orange collared shirt and pants. Of course I let him in.

He showed me his Attaché app. Explained how these aliens had teleported him out of his cell. I brushed it all off. At that point, the information was too far-fetched to accept. It was much easier to believe he'd broken out of jail. He'd pulled many things over me before. Little tricks and gimmicks. Once, he dared me to eat cat food. It was only a few pellets. After, he gave me water...but it was loaded with salt. It was nice to see him. He was the kind of guy who could escape the authorities. Viktor was in the midst of some serious criminal charges—drug trafficking cocaine. In his own words he was, like, one of the Tujuil's chosen people.

A few hours after Viktor left my house, everyone else got Attaché downloaded onto their phones. We all learned that every prisoner on the planet had been teleported from their cells. They were free so long as they committed no acts of violence. Should they try, or should any policing body attempt to return prisoners, those offenders would vanish. Cease to exist. This likewise extended to any acts of violence, from a punch thrown at a bar to a clashing army in a war zone. There's been overall peace on Earth for the first time since...ever.

It's quite an effective incentive not to cause trouble, if you ask me. This was the first of many things that the Tujuil elaborated on. Still, some people called the bluff...and haven't been seen since.

The Tujuil never explained why they're doing it. They explained the what without airs or embellishment though: Earth is to be flicked. It's hard to comprehend, but the Tujuil don't occupy our realm, our three-dimensional understanding of the universe. In fact,

they're unable to appear to us at all. They're ultraterrestrial. That's about all the information we got in that category. Back to what they're doing...they've found a way to manifest an object into a lower dimension. They're going to fire up this object and it's going to flick Earth so hard it'll alter its dimensional orientation.

Any survivors, they say, will be compensated. But the only people who believe they could survive after being flicked are the same type of people you saw a couple of years ago refusing vaccines and throwing chairs in your local Waffle House. This flick is going to tidally unlock us from the moon. The Tujuil don't say that, some scientist posted a video about it on YouTube. Apparently, the first thing anyone is going to do, should they survive, is kill themselves.

The Tujuil assure us the object and its subsequent process is up to interdimensional code and won't do anything that could irreparably tear up our local space-time continuum. Earth will remain a habitable place for life to reemerge in time.

Attaché, the technology the Tujuil use to communicate with us, has been ready for them to implement for a while. They meant to let us know about all this sooner. They said they've just been busy. For the unanticipated inconvenience, they gave us sixty days to enjoy life. Everything is free now: my flight, food, there is no more monetary exchange. Everyone who had a job at the time of the announcement has to continue working at their previous capacity (or risk ceasing to exist) for another thirty days to establish a reserve infrastructure. After that, we're all supposed to live off of canned soup or something so everybody can enjoy their time off. I myself was lucky enough that I was unemployed at the time of the announcement. It's such a relief that I don't have to update my resume anymore.

Attaché is a lot like any search engine, only none of your data of being mined for the benefit of advertisers. On the contrary, our data is mined for another purpose. Besides a communication device between the two disparate species, Attaché also helps you fulfill your deepest desires (void where prohibited, some restrictions apply*).

I asked Attaché, what should I do with my remaining time? It said I should go to Japan. That I've always wanted to go to Japan. True enough. Next I asked it, would I have ever

made it to Japan, given the trajectory of my life prior to the sixty-day grace period? It said I wouldn't have. Last I asked it, why do I want to go to Japan?

There is one thing about Attaché that's different from other search engines. Sometimes, when you ask it a tough question, or something about yourself, it gives you a disclaimer that goes something like: Do you *really* want to know, or were you just asking? We can probe your memories and offer some detailed conjecture, but we sense the answer may be difficult to hear. You should just go to Japan instead. We're sure you'll love it in favor of wasting an elaborate fantasy.

What Attaché is referring to is besides the access to pursue our dreams within the time before the flick, we're each given the chance to experience six elaborate fantasies. We can see what would have happened if we asked out that girl we thought was totally hitting on us at the bar. Or find out where our careers would have gone. Attaché would have showed me what it would be like if I went to Japan instead of me going in a VR simulation.

These elaborate fantasies can be as violent or risqué as we ask, without judgment. Someone on TV was being interviewed because they used one of their elaborate fantasies to see how they could stop the Tujuil's plan. Tons of people are conspiring on that front, but it's obvious they're not a threat. Anyone who goes against the Tujuil's instructions vanishes, and those people who are trying to hinder the flick are still here. Meaning nothing we can do will stop the Tujuil's plan. They say we'd choose this arrangement if we had the option. Being flicked, they say, was better than what was next for us. They had extrapolated our future. What was screwed up was most agreed with the Tujuil. I'm somewhat neutral. I try not to think about the details. Occasional curiosities, ones I don't ask Attaché, do come up. Like what direction will they flick us? Will we collide with the sun? End up in some other galaxy?

At the boarding gate, I ask Attaché to tell me, without wasting my last elaborate fantasy, why it was I ever wanted to go to Japan. I feel like I got a sassy response:

If you can't do the things you wanted to do without the threat of being flicked, then you never really wanted to do them in the first place.

In the crowd waiting for the flight, Viktor comes to mind. He'd been in jail, in the process of being tried for a crime that wasn't possible anymore. There's no doubt in my mind that some of these people are carrying drugs. It's a free-for-all now. Contraband has been abolished. What an unimaginative thing to shoot for with such little time left.

Are people thinking the same of me? I just happened to have been exposed to tons of anime when I was younger. But the connection between anime and Japan as it is, that's probably as tenuous as American movies and the United States itself.

I don't even have an itinerary. Attaché could write one up for me in no time, but I think I like it this way. That's all part of it, I suppose. I have the privilege of finding out. A chance to be disillusioned by what I thought I wanted. On the other hand, I could stay in Japan, if it suits me. Or come back and be a better person to the people in my life.

Writing this down, bothering to jot this all down on a piece of paper that will never be read or acknowledged by anyone or anything here or beyond us. I think I like it this way.