

Empire of Lies

by Chris McGraw

This story is intended as a companion to the album Empire of Lies by Sleep Rebellion. Read each chapter prior to listening to the corresponding song.

Empire of Lies:

I was born in a time of war. I grew up in a time of war. The names and faces change, but there's always an enemy. Our country may be at war with people I've never met, but everyone I *have* met has other, more familiar enemies: fear, poverty, ignorance. They say war is supposed to stimulate the economy, but if that's true why aren't we all rich? There have been several recessions during my life, each one worse than the last, but we always came back. We still haven't come back from the last one.

The major cities are plagued by black market crime, and legitimate jobs are scarce, unless you go to work for the military, the cops, or one of their arms suppliers. The government blames anarchists, foreigners, greed, moral decay - anything but their own policies. If you speak out, you're labeled an enemy sympathizer, or worse: a traitor and a terrorist. My father had a favorite saying, something from a bygone era: "Truth is treason in an empire of lies."

My father was a journalist. He used to work for the big networks. After decades of being ordered to compromise stories, fabricate events, and forget his leads, you could tell that his spirit had been broken. What was once zealous ambition had become a shrug, a whimper, a sigh of resignation. But one day, he discovered something that sparked the old flame again. It was just a spark at first, but over time it grew. You could see it in his face, and hear it in his voice.

I received an encrypted message one day over my darknet. My father said he had been working on a story, something about a secret government project and human rights abuses, but his source had vanished. As I was listening, I heard a sudden explosion. I switched on my retinal feed and saw what he had seen, only hours before. Police - or military, since it was hard to tell the difference anymore - stormed my father's small city apartment with rifles drawn. They hit him, and I could almost feel the impact. The video feed went black, but I could still hear as they dragged him outside and beat him. My father never had a chance to break his story. He had committed treason, not for speaking the truth, but just for knowing it. I haven't seen or heard from him since.

Empire of Lies: Lyrics

We tune out, we tune in

We believe, we pretend

Ignorance and mass confusion

Apathy and sad delusions

Truth is treason in the Empire of Lies

*We give up, we give in
Don't speak out, just sleep in
Day to day, 'til the end
We breathe out, we breathe in*

*Truth is treason in the Empire of Lies
Truth is treason in the Empire of Lies*

*Did you believe the t.v. screen?
Or did you have a choice at all?
When the bobbing heads spoke
Did you hear the final curtain fall?
And when your eyes glazed over
Could you hear the future call?*

*Truth is treason in the Empire of Lies
Truth is treason in the Empire of Lies*

*We tune out, we tune in
We believe, we pretend*

*Chains of fear, chains of hate
Chains we love, we won't break*

Dark is Our Fear:

It's been a year since my father was arrested. The police say they have him in prison, convicted for conspiracy and sedition. The trial was closed to the public, and he's not allowed to have any contact with the outside world. For all I know, he could be dead. It feels like he's dead.

The cops are investigating me too, but so far they haven't found anything incriminating. The darknet I mentioned before? Quantum encrypted, which is illegal, but I set it up years ago when the tech was still available to the public. The whole thing destroyed itself before they even knew what they were trying to access. Now I'm just trying to keep my head low, keep my job, and find my dad. I found a lawyer to work pro bono on the case, but we're stonewalled at every turn and I don't think there's much hope.

I work late and walk home on empty streets, which suits me fine. Crowds aren't safe. The old adage, "There's safety in numbers," has been turned on its head. These days, the fewer people you're around the better. Anywhere people congregate you can be sure there's a drone, or several, not far off. Everything is watched and recorded, and anyone you talk to could inadvertently link you to criminal activity. Everyone is afraid - of terrorists, of each other, even themselves - and they embrace the enhanced security measures, just like they're told they should. In school I was told this is the land of the free and the brave, but it only feels like the land

of the subservient and the frightened.

Dark is Our Fear: Lyrics

*Dark is our fear
Afraid to live
Afraid to rise*

*So we fall
And we fall
And we fall*

*Dark is our fear
Of streets, and of cars
We look to the lights
To the signs, to the cameras
Watching from above*

*Dark is our fear
Of flying, of our own wings
The people we once knew, suspicious and strange
Threatened by unknown things*

*Dark is our fear
Afraid to speak or think
For the things we really love
Against decrees from above*

*Dark is our fear
Afraid to run
Afraid to fight*

*So we fall
And we fall
And we fall*

*Dark is our fear
Afraid to live
Afraid to act*

*So we fall
And we fall
And we fall*

*Dark is our fear
Of cities, and of crowds
Of places we find familiar
Of towers in the clouds*

*Dark is our fear
Of the world, of ourselves
Of losing what we hold dear
To feel a little more secure*

Helicopter Ben:

It's 7 P.M. on a Saturday, and it's dark. I've gone downtown to meet my lawyer. We try to avoid using the Internet, for confidentiality. On my way I stop at a street vendor to get some breakfast. There's a news feed on a retro-looking LCD screen and some reporter is saying that the recession is over, we're on the rebound.

"Well, ain't that good news?" I say to the cook as he dishes me some noodles. He doesn't even look at me. There's a commentator on the screen now, his seemingly disembodied head bobbing rhythmically as he enthusiastically praises the latest round of monetary stimulus. Good for the banks, good for the tech industry, good for America. He's old.

There's a second commentator, much younger, who cuts him off. "How'd that work out the last time, and the time before that, Helicopter Ben?" The older man seems taken aback and pauses for a moment before admitting that he doesn't get the reference.

The cook seems angry now, glaring at the screen. "What's that fool think we're supposed to do, nothing at all? If I didn't have my stimulus loan I'd be out of business." He hands me the bill for my food, "Cash or credit?" I glance at the total. "Cash," I say, and hand him two one hundred dollar bills.

Helicopter Ben: Lyrics

*We need this
Dope to smoke
We'll fix this
And get our fix*

*We found out
How to live forever
We'll pound out
A trillion dollars*

*We'll fix you
We got the stuff
We call it*

A trillion dollars

*Bombs away
I'm Helicopter Ben
I can save this
For the Common Man
If you'll just trust me
We'll be making history*

*And in the morning it had all fallen down
Tripping to the tune of the man with the frown*

*We'll shoot up
All the money
We'll shoot you
With all our dollars*

*We know you
And what you need
You need love
And lots of dollars*

*We fix rates
Rates fix you
Lets make love
To all our dollars*

*Bombs away
I'm Helicopter Ben
I can save this
For the Common Man
If you'll just trust me
We'll be making history*

*And in the morning it had all fallen down
Stumbling to the tune of the man with the frown*

False Messiah:

It's 2 A.M. on November 9th. My job is pretty quiet, one of the perks of the night shift, so I'm watching my news feed. A new President has just been elected, and they're playing his victory speech. As I pan around the room, I see faces lit up with excitement and adulation. He says the same things I've heard a million times, but everyone in the room seems enthralled. If you don't pay attention to his words, if you just unfocus your thoughts and listen to the tones of his voice, the speech is forceful, hopeful and inspiring. I let myself get carried away. Maybe things will change. Maybe I'll get to see my dad again.

I haven't been paying too much attention to politics lately. I soon get bored and start browsing my social network, even though I should be working. Everyone is talking about the election. One of my friend's thoughtstreams is full of exaggerated celebratory exclamations. I comment, "What's so different about this guy?" She replies with a campaign slogan, "Security is freedom. Peace through power!"

A few moments later I get an unexpected invite to a private chat from a hot blonde. I recognize her from my friend's feed. It's time for lunch anyway, so I accept the invitation, and go to full immersion. I'm standing in an alley, a door in front of me, "Sam's Dive" lit up in neon just above. I walk inside and see who I can only presume is Sam, seated at the bar, drinking something clear and smoking.

"Nice place," I say as I walk over next to her. There's a deliberate seediness about everything, a little over the top. Even the bartender looks like a hitman, and there's some old guitar music playing in the background.

"Thanks, it's where I go for discreet encounters," she says with a wink and a smile.

"Uh oh, you're not a bot, are you?" I grin back. She laughs.

"That would be highly illegal of me."

"What's not illegal?"

"Uh, thoughtstreaming at work?"

I chuckle and shrug.

"So," she says, "You don't like our new El Presidente?"

"Well, to be honest I don't know a lot about him."

"Oh," she pauses for a moment as if to think about her next words, "So are you a Sub Stater?"

I don't much like that question. "What makes you ask?"

"Well, they say the Sub Staters ignore the government completely, think its irrelevant and illegitimate."

"They also say they're terrorists and criminals. Um, no I'm not a Sub Stater."

"Oh, it's fine to tell me if you are! We are totally secure here! I've been thinking about becoming one myself. What do you know about Project Mobius?"

I start to feel extremely uncomfortable. "What are you talking about?" I ask.

"I think you know what I'm talking about..." she says.

Suddenly I start to panic. What am I doing here? What if I'm being monitored? I jump out of the feed. "What's the matter?" is the last thing Sam says to me. I block her and log out. I start think she was a trap, set by the cops. Did my dad know about Project Mobius? Was he a

Sub Stater?

Months pass and the economy only gets worse. I lose my job. New anti-terrorism laws are passed and people start disappearing, including my lawyer. The new President hasn't saved us. Like every President before him, he's just a false messiah.

False Messiah: Lyrics

*Don't you wonder why I feed
The emptiness inside
Got a book of secret treasures with my name on it
For all the tears you cried
Bow your head and pray to me
I'm here to save your soul*

*Don't be fooled
I'm just a false messiah
Take my hand
I'll lead you where I want ya*

*Ooooooooooooooh
You won't be safe*

*Ooooooooooooooh
I don't feel sane*

*Think my words can soothe all of your fears
With promises of change
In the back room I will seal all of the deals
That forge your gilded cage
Bow your head and vote for me
I'm here to give you hope*

*Don't be fooled
I'm just a false messiah
Take my hand
I'll lead you where I want ya*

*Ooooooooooooooh
You won't be safe*

*Ooooooooooooooh
I don't feel sane*

Machine Guns:

War. Again. Except this time, it's a big one. It's 8 A.M. on a Monday and I'm on the front lines. Congress voted to approve the draft, and I was one of the first citizens to be called up for duty. When I think about what happened to land me here, it seems surreal, like a nightmare that I'm still having. Where am I? Russia? China? The Middle East? We have so many enemies this time, and the terrain is just mud, with dark skies, and explosions everywhere.

I check my suit. Full ammunition, no shots fired, but power levels at less than half. I've done a lot of running. I see lots of movement on my monitors, but they're all friendlies, and we're all dying. Where's the enemy? Invisible?

Another fresh recruit, someone I recognize from basic, runs up next to me to share the cover of a half bombed-out building. "What the fuck is going on?" He yells. I just stare at him with my mouth agape. I can't even remember the mission.

"You look like you shit your brains out in your suit, man," he says.

I remember him now. Private Farley. Funny guy. Nice. Has a new kid back home.

"Incoming!" I yell as I duck right. A missile explodes right next to us, and in my side monitor I see Farley get hit. I crawl back to him to see if I can help. He's been blasted into two pieces, but still conscious. Our suits inject painkillers and stimulants when they detect injury.

"Hang in there, Farley," I whisper. I'm not sure he can hear me. I tune into his thoughtstream. The last entry reads: "*I just want to live my life.*"

The disgusting reality of everything hits me, and I have a moment of clarity. We're here fighting rebels in some foreign land, trying to save some foreign government from its own people. Or wait... maybe we're helping the rebels? It doesn't matter. What matters is that I just want to live my life, and this is not my fight. I don't want to be here. I'm here because some people think they own me. They don't. My life is mine, and it belongs to me, and my purpose is my own. I'm not just some sacrificial beast, born to live and die as other people deem necessary. I'm going to desert.

All I can hear are machine guns and explosions. Another missile is coming.

Machine Guns: Lyrics

Machine guns

Are comin to take take me home

Machine guns

Will comfort me

Will keep me warm when I'm alone

Machine guns

I know they're comin for me

Machine guns

Cover me like a blanket

And I'll sleep sound tonight

I'll make my bed amongst the rocks

*And sing my favorite song one last time
A lullabye from youth that doesn't matter
To machine guns*

*I won't be your universal soldier
I won't be a sacrificial lamb
I'll fight to succeed and I'll fight to be free
But I won't fight in lands across the sea
I won't be your universal soldier*

*Machine guns
Are pulling pulling the curtains closed
Machine guns
Will kiss my head
Will close the door when I have dozed
Machine guns
I know they're never far from me
Machine guns
Dim the lights
Till I can't see*

*I'll make my bed upon these bodies
And dream my favorite dream one last time
A fairytale about a place that has no
Machine guns*

*I won't be your universal soldier
I won't be a sacrificial lamb
I'll fight to succeed and I'll fight to be free
But I won't fight in lands across the sea
I won't be your universal soldier*

Transhuman:

I can see the ceiling. At least, I think it's a ceiling. It has no texture. The lighting seems uniform.

I close my eyes and open them again. I can see a shadow on the ceiling now. It looks like a face. It's moving.

I hear a voice. It's a soothing female voice. It's telling me not to be afraid.

I feel a faint vibration in my chest. I can't feel my heartbeat. I try to sit up but I can only move my head.

I'm in a hospital. There's a nurse and a doctor here. They say I was blown to pieces, considered KIA, but they brought me back. I don't feel like anything is missing.

"Don't worry, we put you back together," says the Doctor. "I can't let you move yet, but I can let you see yourself on this video feed here." He turns on a monitor across the room from me, and I can see myself lying in bed.

My right hand is made of metal. It's attached to a metal arm that runs into my torso. Both of my legs are metal. My chest is metal. My face is missing from the nose down. I have red eyes. I'm horrifying.

"You'll be back in action in no time soldier! I think you've got a lot of years of military life ahead of you yet - and good thing, we need you out there. You're equipped with the latest combat A.I. software for targeting and close quarters battle, and it'll respond to remote control as well. Even if you're unconscious you'll still be fighting for the state! How do you like the sound of that?" I try to scream, but nothing happens.

"Hold on there," says the doctor, noticing that I'm trying to make a noise, "We haven't turned on your vocal synthesizer yet. It will translate your neural impulses into a simulated voice. Let me activate it, here." He does something with a handheld device, and a loud, inhuman screeching noise emanates from my chest cavity. The doctor and nurse cover their ears. I have no breath, so the scream is endless, until the doctor shuts me off again.

"I'll just give you something to help you sleep. We'll talk more later." The doctor manipulates his handheld again, and I start to feel warm and relaxed. I lose consciousness.

A few months go by. I'm a slave. The A.I. isn't good enough to fight all on its own, and Command can't spare remote operators for every soldier, so I'm left conscious most of the time, with the knowledge that at any moment my body can inject a sedative, or inflict unbearable pain. Once in a while they put me to sleep, and when I wake up I've got the guts of foreigners all over me. At least I dream. I dream of open fields, a woman's face, and my dad. Every time I sleep I hope someone kills me, but the combat routines are always improving, and I'm fast, and strong, and my limbs are replaceable.

Today, however, I'm killing Americans. They must be anti-government types, maybe Sub Staters. It's a horrific scene, like all the others. My metal body cuts through them with speed and efficiency. I round a corner and acquire a new target. The combat routine takes over, like always, and I shoot him in the head. Another target starts to run. My bionic legs chase him down in seconds. I pounce. My retractable blades sever his spine.

Standing over the bodies of my latest victims, I feel something hit me hard in the back. I go to the ground, immobilized. Finally, someone got me! My meds kick in and everything goes dark.

Transhuman: Instrumental

The Agorist:

As I slowly regain consciousness, a voice echoes through the darkness, "What did you do?" It asks. I don't know what I did. I died?

"What did you do?" It keeps repeating the question. "Hey, wake up."

I sit up. My comms are dead. My targeting interface won't turn on.

"Tell me what you did, and maybe we won't have to kill you," says a grizzled old man with a white beard.

"Please kill me," I say.

He's silent for a moment, then asks, "Why?"

"Look at me... I'm a killer. They could take control any moment now."

"I don't envy you son. You must've pissed off someone real good. All you super soldiers did. But we've freed you. They can't control you anymore. What I want to know is, what did you do? Can I trust you?"

I take a moment to look around. There's a group of people hovering. Most of them have guns. Some of them have tactical headgear, and pieces of combat suits patched together in odd configurations.

"I don't know what I did. My dad was a journalist, investigating the government. He got arrested. I was trying to get him out, or even just see him. Then the fuckers drafted me."

"Hmm, I see. What was your dad investigating?"

"I... I don't know," I think for a moment, "Project Mobius?"

The old man's left eyebrow rises. He looks at his compatriots, then back at me. "What do you know about that, son?"

"It's uh... secret?"

He chortles. "Rest up kid. We'll talk more soon."

After a few days I'm with the old man again, taking a trip into what he calls The Underground. He's a Sub Stater rebel, as I figured, but he prefers the term Agorist. His name is Tom. He says he can't get my dad back, or make me human again, but he needs my help anyway, and I might get to kill the assholes who took my life from me. I'm game.

My GPS link was severed by the rebels when they freed me, so I still have no idea where in the world I am. A poor town, by the looks of it. I see beggars, old men, children. Everyone ignores us.

"So where's this Underground?" I ask Tom.

"Take this," he says, and places his hand over mine. Into my palm he drops an ordinary looking playing card - a Joker. I examine it inquisitively. Within seconds it bursts into flames and I drop it.

"Come and get it! Half a gold ounce or two nanos!"

I look up to face the source of the unexpected announcement. Where once I saw a beggar, now I see a young man dressed in an expensive suit, hawking something small and electronic. There's a large neon sign levitating above his corner of the street that reads, "*Maxwell's Clerk - Electronic Boutique.*"

On the other side of the street I see a gun store, liquor, music. There's a brothel in the

distance, and one of the young women that was previously dressed in rags now appears stark nude. There's all kinds of people here, from every kind of ethnic and cultural background. Some are selling, some are buying, some are working, some are just hanging out. Anything you could imagine is available here, from all corners of the Earth. They use cryptocurrency for most transactions, although I do see some people exchanging gold. Everyone stares at me.

"Tom, are you seeing this?" I say, half expecting him to tell me I'm crazy.

"Calm down," he says, "Haven't you ever used an Aug before?"

"They're illegal. Anyway I didn't run anything, everything just changed! What did you do?"

Tom sighs. "The card I gave you, it contained the network encryption and a small program, encoded in the image. All you have to do is look at the picture and your implants install and run the connection software. The network is sending you visual overlay data for everything you see here, straight to your retinal feed. Much of what you hear is thoughtstreamed by other Undergrounders."

"That's incredible. Everyone is hiding in plain sight," I say. "But the software gets installed just by looking at a picture? Without my consent? How is that even possible?"

"A little back door trick the government adds secretly to everyone's neural implants. Don't think too much about it kid, or you'll get paranoid. Maybe not every craving you ever had or decision you ever made was really yours. Hell, maybe they even make some people see UFO's, go crazy, to discredit them. Good news is, we didn't find any unusual software lurking around in your head, beyond the stuff they normally load in you killer cyborgs."

That doesn't make me feel a whole lot better about it.

Tom keeps talking, "The Underground is big. Much bigger than what you see here. Most of it's online, you know, but this is just one of a few places where we gather in person. A lot of the people here are in hiding, and they aren't comfortable seeing a Weapon of the State walking around," says Tom.

"Ex-Weapon of the State," I reply firmly.

"Even so, it took more than a little convincing of the various security agencies to let you down here. Just don't give anyone a reason to get jumpy. Act cool."

"Fuck you. I'm cool."

Tom looks nervous.

We walk into a bar. Tom says something to the bartender, who hands him what looks like a piece of jewelry. He thanks him and we leave almost as quickly as we entered.

"Encryption key," he whispers to me. "Without it we can't contact our client. Don't let me lose this." He clasps it around his neck and we walk a few more blocks down the street.

"Hold up here for a few." We stop outside the entrance to a cybernetics shop. Tom goes in and I wait outside, meeting everyone's stares with grim composure - which, since I haven't got a lot of expressive function left to my face, is all I'm capable of anyway. When Tom returns, he's carrying what appears to be a gas mask with goggles, and beckons me to follow.

"Kid, let me tell you a little secret about how this revolution is actually being fought," he says. "When most of the productive people of the Earth have withdrawn their resources from the world of statists, what will happen to the states? Without victims, what good is power? Thieves with nothing to loot soon starve. Sure, we're gonna fight a bit, but we don't win with guns. We win by starving those who want to control us."

As Tom talks, we continue on our journey into an abandoned subway system, where The Underground seems to stretch for miles. The only laws seem to be these: Don't aggress against anyone, and don't attract the attention of the police. Plenty of clandestinely armed individuals seem eager to enforce the law.

The Agorist: Lyrics

*You can use a gun, or use your mind,
Display the truth in the land of the blind,
You can bind down his hands, but never his heart
You can trade or steal, but you can't force art*

*If you want to deal, you'll pay the price
Or swindle and steal, just roll the dice
No one's his master, nobody his slave
Just shut up and put up, if you want to trade*

*He says, "Value for value, beats eye for an eye,
For the price of the moon, I'll sell you the sky."*

*Ideas reproduce
In the marketplace
Pride makes money
In the marketplace*

All is fair in the marketplace

*All that's produced
From the exotic to the mundane
All you desire
Whether erotic or profane
From all corners of the Earth
Nothing's forbidden here
Some things just cost a little more*

*He says, "Utopia's for sale, and can't you see why?
You don't need to save the old world, just let it wither and die."*

*Ideas reproduce
In the marketplace
Pride makes money
In the marketplace*

Revolutions begin

In the marketplace

New Worlds:

We walk for hours until we come upon some barely used segments of the subway, much more ancient and decrepit than the rest. Fallen debris blocks the main tunnels. Some side passages are completely dark, and the air is foul. Tom insists that we don't use lights for some reason, so he wears his gas mask with goggles - apparently capable of night vision - and I rely on my implants. He leads us through what seems like a labyrinth, until finally we come upon a room with a small alcove.

"What now?" I ask.

"Now, we wait," he replies.

Hours pass.

Suddenly and without warning, a brilliant flash of light illuminates our surroundings, accompanied by a loud bang that echoes throughout the tunnels. There's a shimmering visage of a woman in the middle of the alcove, and all the air seems to be rushing towards her. She's standing in a green field, with blue sky behind her, and her hair is being blown backwards by the wind, as if to punctuate the absurdly over-dramatic entrance.

"Come on!" yells Tom, and before I've had a chance to process what I'm seeing, he jumps into the light and joins the woman in the grassy field.

"Okay, sure, why not?" I say to myself, and jump after him.

I'm standing in the open air and sunlight, surrounded by grass, trees, and mountains in the distance. There's no sign of the underground tunnels. I'd be blinded by the sudden change in lighting if it wasn't for my retinal implants.

"What the hell was that? Where are we?" I ask.

"About 2,000 miles from where you were," says the woman. "Do you like my invention? I call it Mobius."

She's an older lady, possibly in her late 50's. Not very pretty, but her eyes are fierce and wide and black.

"This is Dr. Lisa Berkowitz, kid. We're here to protect her," says Tom, "And to make sure this portal technology gets used to free people, not enslave them. Sorry I couldn't tell you everything before, but you never know who's listening."

"You could have told me in the tunnels. If that was a portal, and it can just pop in and out wherever you want it to, why'd we even have to go down those tunnels in the first place?"

"We were being followed. I wanted to lose them before we made the jump."

"We weren't being followed. I would have detected it."

"Those implants are fancy, but they're useless against a stealthier. This little mask here, however..." He taps on the gas mask clipped to his belt, "It isn't just night vision. Special EM sensors."

Stealthers? I've heard of experiments with invisibility tech, but never anything being used on a combat suit. I remember the day I was killed.

"Tom, what governments have access to stealth suits?" I ask.

“Only one government could, kid. The U.S.”

I start to wonder who Private Farley had pissed off.

“Tom, you could have told me we were being followed.”

“If they’d heard me say that, they would have jumped us. Don’t worry, we lost them. Can we get on with our job here?” He looks annoyed.

Tom grills Lisa for a while on the Mobius device - how it works, what power source it needs. It’s a small device, about the size of a suitcase, controlled remotely by a wristband. I find her story more intriguing than the technical details, though. Lisa is a scientist and inventor. Like all scientists she’s motivated by a desire to explore, to unravel mysteries. The government, however, is motivated by a desire to control, and they acquired her research through coercion, the way they acquire everything. When she found out they had plans to use Mobius as a weapon, she stole it and ran. She says that with enough power, she can travel anywhere. What new worlds beyond Earth might be waiting? Who will inhabit those worlds? Free people, or armies?

New Worlds: Lyrics

Take me away

To the farthest point in time and space

To the shores of the cosmic ocean

Where starlight falls around my face

Find me a way

To reach the edge of all that's known

Where glorious rainbows become unwoven

And I am odd by all I'm shown

Take me away

Travellers forge a dark path with only their visions to guide them

They're finding new worlds

Finding new worlds

Recklessly we fall into a sea of mystery

We're finding new worlds

Finding new worlds

Gone are the days

When we lived in the shade of trees

Afraid of the sky and its mysteries

Its stars suspended in a mystical sea

Beckoning me

*The world beyond what we have known
Where the dreams of men have long since flown
And I am awed by all I'm shown*

Take me away

*Travellers forge a dark path with only their visions to guide them
They're finding new worlds
Finding new worlds*

*Recklessly we fall into a sea of mystery
We're finding new worlds
Finding new worlds*

The Creator:

“Are you ready?” says Tom. I look around the room. Everyone has adopted my grim expression. I wonder how I’d look if my face could still change its expression. Perhaps I’d have a sadistic, enthusiastic grin. Would everyone copy me then?

I’m part of a strike team tasked with infiltrating a secret political prison, the location having been recently revealed by ex-Federal agents, easily bribed by the Sub Staters. Some of our hackers will disrupt surveillance equipment inside the prison, and we’ll work around the guard patrol schedules. We’ll hop in with Mobius, rescue as many as we can before the guards can notice, and try to avoid any bloodshed. I’m told my dad might be in there.

“Alright you apes,” says Tom, preparing to muster everyone’s courage with a rousing speech, “Let’s uh... Oh, I forgot what I was going to say, just jump through the damn portal.”

After a blinding flash and another suction-inducing pressure differential, we’re through the portal and into a cell. It looks like a medieval dungeon made of grey concrete. The lighting is poor. A single emaciated inmate sits naked in the corner, shielding his face with his arms. With no time to waste, we pick him up and bring him back through before he has a chance to protest, then it’s on to the next cell with a new portal.

It takes roughly fifteen to twenty seconds, on average, to open a portal and clear one of the small, single-inhabited cells. We work in teams. Two in, grab the prisoner, and bring him back. The next portal is opened, and another two man team is up. We rescue about fifty prisoners in less than fifteen minutes, sticking close to schedule and just behind the patrols. Tom and I are up next. Then I see him.

“Dad?” I ask. He looks old, scrawny, and in poor health, but alive. A grey beard and long hair covers most of his features, but I still recognize his eyes. He struggles to peer at me from behind a squint.

“Who are you?” he says.

“It’s me...” I answer, suddenly aware of how I must look and sound.

“I don’t know you,” he replies. It’s hard to hear, but the important thing is he’s safe. He’s alive.

"Come on! We've got to keep moving!" Tom shouts. We gather up my frail father and bring him back through the portal.

"Team Four, go!" Tom barks. Lisa operates Mobius, closing our last portal and opening a new one. Team Four wastes no time and jumps through. I turn to look at my father, now being cared for by a nurse.

"Dad, don't you recognize me?" I say.

"Son? That can't be you. What have they done to you?" he says. If I could weep, I would.

Our reunion is interrupted by a new voice from behind me, "Nobody move, you're surrounded." We all freeze. Tom locks eyes with me.

Two soldiers in black combat suits seem to materialize in front of me. Counting the one behind me, that's three. Proximity sensors are picking up several others all around me. Ten... Fifteen... If I'm going to act, I have to be fast. I look at Lisa, and she glances at the control device on her wrist. She slams her hand down on the control. I activate my combat A.I.

I duck and twirl, narrowly dodging the first few rounds of fire. I grab my target's weapon, ripping off his arm in the process. Spinning back around, I see the new portal, and through it what appears to be the Earth from low orbit. She must have opened a rift into space. The force of the vacuum is incredible.

Tom falls through the open rift with one of the soldiers. A third soldier hits me with a grenade, and I'm knocked backwards. I fall farther than I expected. In front of me I see a small patch of blue sky disappear into a ceiling, until I hit a concrete floor. Lisa must have opened a portal to safety behind me, but now I have no idea where I am, or where anyone else is, or what to do.

I barely have time to get on my feet before another portal opens in the ceiling, and through it drops Tom and Lisa.

"Lisa! What happened?" I ask. "Where's the Mobius device?"

"Gone," replies Lisa, "We lost it."

"And my dad..."

"I... I'm so sorry... I saw him get shot." she says. I'm lost for words. I stare at Tom.

"Lisa jumped in after me, opened another portal in front of us," he explains, as if sensing my question. "Feel very light headed. Wow."

"Another couple of seconds and he might have lost consciousness. I think he'll be alright," Lisa says.

"Where are we?" I ask.

"Alaska," she says.

"Our group must have been infiltrated," says Tom, "It won't be safe to try and make contact with anyone, so I recommend we split up and hide out for a bit."

Weeks later, while hiding out in the Canadian Underground, I start hearing strange stories. People are disappearing in places they thought were safe. The army is engaging in impossible flanking tactics. I know what's happened: the government has turned Mobius into a powerful weapon, just like they wanted. I wonder how Lisa feels, knowing that her creation intended for discovering new worlds would now only be used to oppress this one. I don't have

the heart to ask her.

The Creator: Lyrics

How long

How long must you wait

To see the fate

Of all you create

How far

How far must you go

To find a vision

In all that you know

Driven and tireless

The Creator paints straight lines

Across a simple sky

The image he conjurs

Gives meaning to the scene

He'll teach men how to fly

And fly they will

And fly they will

And flying, they will shoot him down

How long

How long must you wait

To feel the wrath

Of all you create

How far

How far must you go

To sow your seeds

To save your soul

Brow furrowed slightly

The Creator makes his mark

Upon the empty page

The words he's written

Give meaning to his life

He'll free men from their cage

*And free they'll be
And free they'll be
And freely, they will chain him down*

*He needs no sanction
No warrant
No leave*

*The fire he brings them
Will take care of all their needs*

*Burn him at the stake
Burn him at the stake*

*How long
How long must you wait
To see the fate
Of all you create*

*How wrong
How wrong can you be
Fight on
But you can't make them see*

*How strong
How strong is your soul
For his dreams
The Creator pays a toll*

Extraordinary Tales:

Censorship of the press started slowly, decades ago. Nobody really noticed at first. Certain stories simply weren't published. Some stories were edited for national security. Growing up the son of a journalist it was hard to ignore. The end result was to make the populace just a little bit more ignorant, a little bit more... controllable.

As time went on, the government's regulation of the news became more pronounced. Once the Supreme Court started hearing cases in secret, they rendered decisions in favor of expanding government censorship. A "free" press was still free, they argued, even if they were regulated in the name of the public good. You could still report the news, "freely", but with certain restrictions. It wasn't the first time such an argument had been used, nor would it be the last.

People didn't really start to take notice until they came after the art, though. The first book to be banned under the new laws encouraged the ritualistic sacrifice of public officials to the God

of the Human Spirit. Its graphic depictions and detailed how-to guide for kidnapping probably didn't help the court case too much. Like all laws, the censorship powers became more broadly interpreted as the years wore on, and anti-government sentiment multiplied. Eventually, no song, story, game or movie that seemed to encourage reform, protest or rebellion of any kind was legal. Stealth viruses unleashed upon an unwitting public, or pre-loaded on hardware straight from the manufacturers, took control of most digital content and landed a lot of people in jail.

The government cracked down on hackers hard, but they could never completely stamp out the pirates. There's a shadow war that's been going on for a long time. The balance of power shifts with changing technology, though, and about a week ago the hackers scored a big win. An A.I. routine developed by some anonymous programmer had located and infected a government database of censored material. The floodgates were opened. Suddenly you can find any damn thing you want, and there seems to be no stopping the proliferation of illegal material on the Underground darknets, at least for now.

The illegal art seems to inspire the younger people. Life "by the law" has become increasingly more difficult, and every day new people join the Sub State movement, despite the risks. In most of the country people live dull, grey lives consisting of lines: lines for food, lines for money, lines for gas, lines for jobs. The sudden unleashed creativity of generations past and present seemed to offer them a momentary break from that simple existence, and they were free to imagine a better world.

As for me, I'm rather fond of the extraordinary tales of small bands of rebel fighters who, using newly constructed and much improved Mobius devices courtesy Dr. Lisa Berkowitz, were finally taking the fight to the statist. I've had a successful run here in Canada, helping the locals plant bombs and deliver contraband, but I think it's time to find my old friends. They could use a cyborg assassin.

Extraordinary Tales: Lyrics

Simple life

Simple dreams

Simple ends take

Simple means

(Take me far away)

From the ordinary world

(Fly me far away)

On extraordinary tales

(Teach me how to dream)

In this ordinary world

(Tell me once again)

Of extraordinary tales

Extraordinary tales

Extraordinary tales

*Simple scenes
Of simple years
Simple songs
Please simple ears*

*(Take me far away)
From the ordinary world
(Fly me far away)
On extraordinary tales
(Teach me how to dream)
In this ordinary world
(Tell me once again)
Of extraordinary tales*

*Extraordinary tales
Extraordinary tales*

Fearless:

“Don’t be afraid!” the young man shouts. He’s standing behind a granite podium, speaking to a crowd of millions. We have no faces. We’re a singular, silent mass. Everyone has a spot in the front row. Strange things can happen when your reality is electrical impulses, sent straight to your optical nerve from a biochip implant.

“Courage takes passion,” says the man. “So where’s your passion for freedom? Revolution takes persistence, but it cannot abide patience! The time has come to show the leaders, the rulers, the oligarchs, the statist control-freaks that we are NOT afraid, we will NOT be bowed, and OUR time has come!” The crowd erupts in cheers.

“In truth it was always our time, just waiting for us to seize it. A parasite cannot survive without its host, and we will no longer consent to live in bonds of servitude, sacrificing our dreams, our work, our lives and our happiness for the benefit of those who would deprive us of our humanity. Are we a mob, or are we individuals? Show them your faces!” Almost at once, the masks come off across the crowd.

“When nobody submits to being ruled, there can be no rulers, so today we affirm our independence from power and violence. Aggression is illegitimate, but self-defense is a moral imperative. The next time someone with a costume and a piece of paper tries to act like he owns you, like he has a right to assault you, to rob you, to kidnap or molest you just because he’s wearing a different colored shirt, you RESIST. Across the country we will resist! We don’t need guns and government to prosper, to connect, to help each other, to trade. We don’t need public servants lording over us like neurotic parents, afraid we might eat too much, or too unhealthily, or take the wrong drugs, or listen to the wrong music. It’s time to stop being afraid of our own freedom!

Some of you will resist peacefully, some will fight, but none of us will comply. For our part, the Sub Staters will continue to fight against aggression anywhere it exists. We'll fight for ourselves, for each other, and ultimately for you. This is a time for heroes. If you have a hero in you, don't let him down. Fight!"

On December 21st, 2048, we fought. We won.

Fearless: Lyrics

*There's a choice between freedom and fear
That we all must make
Sometimes the decision weighs heavy
Sometimes it feels too late*

*You can try to change your world
Or you can leave it all behind
But taking the wheel is never easy
When you drive outside the lines*

*Courage takes passion,
Revolution takes persistence
So rise up, and join the resistance*

*We can be fearless
We can take control
If you feel that hero in your soul, don't let him down
Don't let him down*

*There's a choice between life and death
That we all must make
Sometimes the struggle wears us down
Sometimes it feels like fate*

*You can try to stand your ground
Or you can just stand still
But you don't get to move the world
Without action, and force of will*

*Courage takes passion,
Revolution takes persistence
So rise up, and join the resistance*

*We can be fearless
We can take control*

*If you can feel that hero in your soul, don't let him down
Don't let him down*

*The future belongs to the brave
To those who act today
So take up arms against the past
And throw your shackles away*

The End