

Ocular Metamorphosis

By Justin Hellstrom

Ester:

Welcome to the Goblet Wire: a surreal microfiction podcast. Transcripts are available on our website: TheGobletWire.carrrd.co

This is Episode One - Ocular Metamorphosis, written by Justin Hellstrom

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SFX: (CRY OF THE GOBLET)

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SFX: *(Laundromat – dryers, washing machines, the sound of bad A/C unit)*

SFX: *(Dialing)*

Operator:

Salutations, intrepid cup-bearer—you're speaking to Patient_Hourglass— please state your callsign and passphrase.

Moth:

Callsign: Moth Food - Password: Arms Akimbo

Operator:

Nailed to the Sky

Moth:

Legs bent Backward

Operator:

Bear the Fountain's Weight

Moth:

Overflow

Operator:

Bear the Weight

Moth:

The Fountain's Weight Cannot be Borne.

Operator:

And so the world is crushed, our Goblets filled. Welcome Moth – clearing lampjack D-19 for cord circuit connection. Ticket Sixty-K Four Three.

SFX: *Typewriter punches – ticket rip – clips to rack and slides ticket away*

Operator:

Die Material?

Moth:

Elk Bone.

Operator:

Coin Type?

Moth:

Fifty Yen Coin, Minted 1962

Operator:

Hmm, you're not using your Edo period Koban? Are you feeling anxious after the last session?

Moth:

No, just felt like something different for a change.

Operator:

Plugging you in to the Dictator – logging Session 23, please hold. And Moth?

Moth:

Hourglass?

Operator:

I saw a frog try to cross the highway today. I hope they made it.

SFX: *connection*

Dictator:

Time of Day: Eleven Hundred and Sixteen – Moon Phase, Waxing Gibbus – Terroir Quotient: Albacore, Pelagic Sulfide, Driftwood.

Dictator:

The cargo ship slides firm across the sea as a blunt rectangle. A sepulcher stacked with oxidized containers of faded colors from faded nations. Scars from the vessel's dock-union escape are still steaming. Blistered and gouged along the starboard hull. But the captain was sure, and you manned the harpoon turrets, and you have entered slate gray ocean with slate gray sky and slate gray minds.

Moth:

Where am I?

Dictator:

You stand on the bridge, monitor pings of radar, fuel and temperature gauges demarcated with symbols you cannot read. The captain stares bow-ward, over the containers, to something hidden in the mists and haze.

Dictator:

The captain speaks: "Moth. There is a memory we must be rid of below the holds. Please take care of it."
He hands you a salt-crusted flare gun. Two charges.

Moth:

Captain, memories are not to be forgotten. Wouldn't you agree?

Dictator:

. . . your words do not reach the Captain.

Moth:

Dictator, why? Why does nothing I ever say reach the Captain?

Dictator:

You may perform the allotted inquiry for this session.

SFX: *(Rolls Die)*

Moth:

Five

Dictator:

Your Sonoluminescence Communication stat level is too low.

Moth:

Excuse me?

Dictator:

The Captain's brain is underwater.

Moth:

There wasn't any kind of Sonoluminal Comm skill, or whatever, in character creation.

Dictator:

Can one define the color behind the color of their eye?

Moth:

Fine. I take the flare and charges and leave the bridge.

Dictator:

The catwalk is algae slick, steel grated, welcomes the weight of your boots.

Moth:

I look to port.

Dictator:

You have never seen ocean such as this. Words come to mind. Sleet. Adirondack. Infant skull at the bottom of a pond.

Moth:

I look to starboard.

Dictator:

The rolling plains of ash are liquid, overwhelming. Gridlocked. A shade of gray bored from depths of earth which have never seen the sky. Bewildered. Cracked. Alone.

Dictator:

Perform a heartbreak saving throw.

Moth:

Heartbreak?

Dictator:

Yes, the sea has gazed upon you. Sensed weakness. The hole inside your chest, the sea seeks to fill it.

SFX: *(rolls die)*

Dictator:

No, flip your coin. For it is on such an edge all hearts are balanced and wagered.

SFX: *(Flips Coin)*

Moth:

Tails.

Dictator:

There is a child sleeping in a treehouse somewhere in the vastness of your circulatory system. The child is now awake. They can hear the flood approaching. The pain will be immense, when it arrives.

Moth:

Poor kid. I'm moving on. Are there stairs?

Dictator:

Yes.

Moth:

I walk down them, searching for the entrance to the subdeck.

Dictator:

You descend along a bulwark, pass through bulkheads, creaking freight, a labyrinth of entombed goods draped in seaweed, the scuttling of crustaceans.

Moth:

I ask a crab where the entrance to the lower holds and stowage are.

Dictator:

You imitate Arthropod Stridulation, waving your arm, pinching your hand-claw.

SFX: *(Rolls)*

Moth:

Three.

Dictator:

The crustacean pauses, bubbles pursed from its mandibles, and points to a container with a claw. Its door hatch is carved from ivory. Smells of fuel and haunted museum.

Moth:

I approach, open, walkthrough.

Dictator:

You see this is not a well-trodden entrance. There is carpet inside. Wet, mold bitten. Sconces carved from coral fossil line the walls of a mezzanine. Beyond its balcony—the interior of a great ship, an ancient pleasure vessel, a galleon of baroque circus and delight. Thick glass walls of hullwork are green with slime, slick, pounded by waves and dull light. A chandelier sways at the lobby center as a pendulum to a time that does not exist.

Moth:

It's not a pendulum. It's a uvula.

Dictator:

The staircase is imperial, split, you may choose left or right.

Moth:

Right.

Dictator:

You descend, admiring a mural along the wall of a manatee in a powdered wig, presiding over a fastidious courtroom. You feel the decayed limestone banister. Rococo carvings adorn everything with faces, angels, sea life, and sculpted bronze waves. They cling to the lobby's contours in an indecipherably specific drama.

Moth:

I stop to feel the banister more closely.

Dictator:

The ship pitches on a great wave, listing to port—you fall against the banister as the mural cracks—the manatee breaks loose, plummets—passing judgement upon you for trying to decipher the indecipherable. You have five seconds to react.

Moth:

No. I accept this judgement.

Dictator:

The manatee is rough, hard plaster weighted by beam and heavy iron nails. You are knocked through the banister and fall, hit the lobby floor—thankfully rotten, loose, concave from the weight of a harpsichord. You break through, fall further, pass networks of inverted aqueduct, aquariums with fluking classical composers, and splash into a moat on the orlop deck.

SFX: *(Deep Breath)*

Moth:

You're giving me anxiety.

Dictator:

The child in the treehouse sees the flood: a river churned by mud, roots, and mobile homes, but the pain has not come close to arriving.

Moth:

What do I see around me? Have I retained the flare gun?

Dictator:

The liquid is acrid. Muted turquoise. Your flare gun is intact, the charges dry.

Moth:

I crawl up the far side of the moat, inspect my surroundings.

Dictator:

Words come to mind. Cenote. Sink hole. Ocularium. Light emanates from the moat, illuminates a drained dome at the center—a tiled chamber for an immense hippopotamus. More words come. Fetid. Albino. Low tide Styrofoam. Bound by chains which are sunk and fused to its spine. The creature swivels its head to you, eyes grayer than the sea. Spume-lipped. Blind.

Moth:

A sad memory indeed. I load a shell into the flare gun. Look for something flammable.

Dictator:

Fuel drums float in the moat. Its water is diesel, nitroglycerin, the blood of God's engines.

Moth:

Is the hippopotamus in pain?

Dictator:

Everything is in pain.

Moth:

I drop the gun. Wade across the moat.

Dictator:

Petroleum whorls pink. The hippopotamus is wary and performs a threat display of open jaws and cracked tusks. The smell of felled safari predators is rank, known only to those at a food chain's apex.

Moth:

I – I want to be the hippopotamus's eyes. I want to be its vision, trade our sight.

Dictator:

Brave move. Please confirm desire for Optical Transfiguration.

Moth:

Show me the color behind the color of its eyes.

Dictator:

Check success: Ocular Metamorphosis Complete.

Moth:

What do I see?

Dictator:

You expect grand mal delusion, apotheosis, a tunnel of angels bored through heaven with slick-gilled antediluvia from Eden's untamed past mating wild and saber sharp and shore-broken across the throne of eternity. But you see nothing. You are blind.

Moth:

Shit.

Dictator:

However, you begin to feel. Sense static. Magnetic laminar flow. Hear the chains break, the lumbering of great weight—you now have a guide who will see things you never could see. You can now decipher the dramas that play behind the stage.

Dictator:

Session End.

SFX: *(Disconnect)*

SFX: *(Washing Machine end's cycle with a beep – sounds of phone put away – standing up)*

Moth:

To the world and its many hearts lain in the balance, best of luck.

SFX: *(Slides coin into empty dryer compartment – shuts hatch – starts cycle, walks through door and leaves)*

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Music: (Piano Tune Swagger)

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Ester:

This episode was written by Justin Hellstrom it starred Damien Niesewand as Moth Food, Nathaniel MacDonald as the Operator, and Richard Penner as the Dictator, art by Chandler Candela, credit music by Oliver Moris. Editing and sound design by Ester Ellis and Justin Hellstrom. Synthscape by Justin Hellstrom.

If you enjoyed this episode I'm confident you'll love Justin's podcast: The Great Chameleon War. It is a wild story following an AWOL soldier's journey through a nest of massive, supernatural chameleons after they unleash war on the human race. It is psychedelic poetry – both violent and human. The first season goes down smooth in only five episodes and season 2 is coming out now.

I know some you love Alice isn't Dead: you in particular need to check out this show.

If you want to support The Goblet Wire, help us spread the word. We're relying on word of mouth to get this show out there. WE just went live on Spotify – we would be most grateful if you shared it with a friend. And come chat with us on twitter @TheGoblet Wire.

Next week comes episode two: For the Nail by Ester Ellis. I hope we'll see you there.

Music: Piano Tune Continues

Line Cuts

(ARE YOU PLAYING?)

Line Dead