

36 MONOLOGUES ABOUT URBAN PLANNING TO BE PERFORMED IN A CUL-DE-SAC

by Greyson Smith

(NOTE: The deck of cards should be visible to the audience always.)

MONOLOGUE #0 – PREAMBLE

Hello.

There are one-million-four-hundred-fifty-one-thousand-five-hundred-twenty possible plays we could perform for you right now. We will perform only one of them.

Who here knows how to shuffle a deck of cards? Great. Here, we will now give four of you nine cards each – one fourth of the full deck, minus face cards and aces because there are no gods or kings. On each card is written the title of one of the thirty-six monologues that make up this play. You will notice that you have only been given cards of one suit. The four suits of a deck of cards are as follows: Hearts, Clubs, Diamonds, Spades. We will perform the play in that order. Please give us back your cards.

In this deck of cards is contained the play you are about to watch. We do not know what it is, and you do not know what it is, and yet here it is, unchanging. How exciting!

It is important to note: the manner by which we are selecting the order of these monologues has nothing to do with the themes of the play. It is only a way for the play to be more difficult for us because we love work. The play is work. Mm mm work. We love work. Work work work. Work work work work. This is not only art, but it is also work. Yay.

Thank you.

(NOTE: This monologue should be performed in unison by all ensemble members.)

TWO OF HEARTS – A STREET FOR PEOPLE

I walk down the same street every day, going to work I mean. I walk out of my building and onto a very loud street with a lot of cars, built like a runway. It's incredibly unpleasant to walk on the side of this street; everyone seems unhappy and in big groups, and horns are honking – it's a bad street to walk on. But then I turn to my left down an alley; alleys get a lot of grief for being dangerous or ugly or stinky or whatever, but if you think that an alley is those things, then you should see the street in front of my building. My alley is great, I love my alley. There's this huge pane of glass that used to be leaned up against a garage that is now in a big sparkling pile on the ground and I will often find two or three guys just hanging out on top of the pile, crunching around and talking about other things, like the glass isn't even there. It's great. I love my alley, and I wear shoes in my alley. And through this alley I will walk to the better street, the one that is lined with cars that are still and trees that are not. There's always people out in their little fenced-in yards with their babies and sprinklers, and in the winter people are shoveling snow. Sometimes someone is having a really loud phone conversation and they say "oh yeah those are the birds, can you hear them?" and often that person is me. There aren't any traffic lights on this street, the cars just don't go very fast, and they all have stop signs. This street makes me so happy. It is a street for people.

THREE OF HEARTS – THE SEIZING MASS OF SPASMODIC ANGER

I knew this guy one time. He had a cool air of irony and ease. He used to say, “oh that’s fine that’s fine,” and “no worries at all,” to just about everything. His lacquer casing was so well-worn, and his Bakelite fixtures were so well-used, that it was easy to forget the tiny ticking mechanism inside that kept the numbers on his face changing. One time I remember he said to me, “I love big roads,” he smiled at me, a reflection of his father’s smile and *his* father’s smile. The smile of “no worries,” where you could see in the lines beneath his eyes all those purportedly absent worries. “I love big roads when they’re long and straight, and I especially love when they’ve got big spaces on either side. I feel like I can just take off into the sky.” I made the mistake of asking him why he would like to take off into the sky. I watched a couple worries clink into his countenance before quickly being flushed away. “I bet it’d be quiet up there. And nobody can hear you scream.” His shell only fractured during the most pathetic moments of personal duress, like being told he wasn’t as funny as he thought he was by a close friend or getting turned down by someone he’d told his parents about. During these bouts of disassembly, he became a seizing mass of spasmodic anger, the sum of all his parts. I imagined him on a grand podium in one of those huge 20th-century concrete things you see in movies, screaming to his crowd of screeching, steaming automobiles. “EVERYTHING IS FINE,” he screams, over and over again, as he repeatedly strikes his skull with his fist, “EVERYTHING IS FINE.” He was always so interested in the desert too, in its flatness and drivability. “A world where you can drive anywhere, that’s where I want to be. Imagine being able to get anywhere in the world under your own roof and with your own air conditioner!” He laughed.

FOUR OF HEARTS – THIS THING

I have this thing that I love. This thing brings me the news. The thing brings me the news. It brings me the news. It brings me the news, and it brings me all the things that I love and all the things that I hate, especially. It brings me my friends, it brings me my mom, it brings me my opinions, my personality, my games, my weird porn, my normal porn, my boss, my wife, my husband, my lover, my world is brought to me by this thing that I love. And it teaches me things, too. It teaches me things. It teaches me how important the thing is, for example. It teaches me about why I'm ugly, it teaches me about why I'm sexy and awesome, it teaches me about how I benefit from unequal power structures or something, it teaches me about how I use the thing, it teaches me how to talk to other people, it teaches me how to change my community, it teaches me how mining works, it teaches me what kind of bug that is, it teaches me why I love the things I do, it teaches me mindfulness and stoicism and optimization, it teaches me a lot. The thing feeds me. The thing comforts me, and it gives and gives and gives and gives and gives and gives. And I take and take and take and take. I love the thing. I love the thing so much. I love the thing. I love the thing. I love the thing. You love the thing. I love the thing.

The thing is the corpse of a child. And I carry it in my pocket all the time. And I take it out and press it against my ear. And I feel its cold face against my own. And I smile. I love the thing. I love the thing. I love the thing. I love the thing.

FIVE OF HEARTS – THE ANIMAL THAT LIVES INSIDE YOU

Fucking.
Fucking. Fucking. Fucking. Fucking. Fucking. Fucking. Fucking. Fucking. Fucking. Fucking.
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SIX OF HEARTS – PEOPLENES

On bus, I sit and breathe. I breathe all breath of all people around me. We live and face each other, loving. We are one thing. A thing of community, of city, of together. We live, breathe, synchronous, same people, same life, same place.

In the car, I do not.

I reach out to people on bus in brain. I listen to their thoughts. I hear their hearts like tires on potholes. I reach to them and I kiss them. They are all such wonderful people. More people now than there used to be, which excites me. I love these people so much. There is something so beautiful about inhaling collective breath. Commute, visit, just ride. Just ride and ride.

Sometimes, I put in headphones and look out the window, but I don't listen to anything. I just let thoughts of all people in. I really miss them. They've been moving away. Everyone wants little ends of little lines and little worlds, air-conditioned bubbles. Look at the world, ignorant, falsely observing, as IF! Those people aren't even really people. Fake god is what those people become. Sit in my little chair. Think my little thought. Listen to little nothing about how world good or bad or stupid or funny. Stupid people. Hate those little people. Hate them. Hate hate hate.

Bus love and support and give and give and give. All equal here on bus.

And the man with tube says no more people bus, only stupid computer bus of automation and gimmicks. Stupid man. Stupid man. Stupid man.

Beauty of bus is peopleness, not utility.

SEVEN OF HEARTS – VANCOUVERISM

I wish so badly I was occupied by yearning.

I have everything. I love all the things in my life. I hold it all close to my chest, and I smile, and I know it brings me joy.

I have accepted all the terrible things I cannot control, and I have changed the terrible things I could.

I'm done. And I'm so young.

I was given all these things because I am loved. And I was given them by people who love people.

My apartment building is tall and set off from the street. Everyday, I feel like I'm walking through nineteenth century Paris. Everything is beautiful and accessible, and the streets are made of cobblestones.

Within a five-minute walking radius of my apartment, there are schools, hospitals, smoothie bars, parks, beaches, organic food vendors, fully sustainable gastropubs, carbon-negative office buildings, shopping malls.

And everyone here is white.

And nobody owns the buildings. They just appeared here. I put my check in a box at the foot of my bed each month, and when I wake up, it's gone. I collect my blood sometimes, when they ask for it.

But I love it here. It's really nice. I can go on walks at midnight and see children playing in the street.

I wish so badly I was occupied by yearning. I think.

EIGHT OF HEARTS – DRINK OF THE EARTH

Step one: Get a long thin knife, like you would use to cut a cake into rounds, and, on your knees, slowly insert the knife into the ground.

Note on step one: you have to find the right part of the ground; some parts of the ground are too rocky or too muddy or too sandy; your knife should slide in like a shovel into wet sand on a hot summer day, while your mother and younger sister play in the ocean and you can feel the salt in your hair.

Step two: Using a reciprocating motion, like a jigsaw, slowly work your knife through the ground in a circle around an inch and a half in diameter.

Note on step two: if the knife doesn't come out clean, you might have to start again; while the blade will likely get dirty eventually, the flow shouldn't start until you remove the plug.

Step three: Quickly and carefully remove the plug from the earth and immediately move out of the way of the hole; there can sometimes be blockage near the plug that you don't want to ingest accidentally.

Note on step three: If the plug breaks while you are removing it, you should not attempt to dig out the remainder; move on to another spot of land, though it may be difficult to let go; I assure you that your patience and temperament will be rewarded.

Step four: Once any blockage is passed and your mind is clear, you are ready to drink the blood. Genuflect and smell the metallic and vegetal earth as your lips softly open and close in the grass, like you're making love to the world. Let your tongue slip into the warm and pungent cavity you have created. Drink, drink, drink.

Note on step four: The blood will cling to the sides of your throat in a manner that may be shocking if this is your first experience; do not worry; your breath in your nose and throat will remain saturated for hours, but do not attempt to wash it out; live and love your blood of the earth

Step five: Build a city.

NINE OF HEARTS – CALL AND RESPONSE

(Performer points at self.)

Feeling your bare knee slide across asphalt.

(Performer points at audience member and awaits response.)

(Performer points at self.)

Looking at the darkness, in the rain, in the backseat.

(Performer points at audience member and awaits response.)

(Performer points at self.)

A shock of panic as the elevator door closes.

(Performer points at audience member and awaits response.)

(Performer points at self.)

Someone is in here with me.

(Performer points at audience member and awaits response.)

TEN OF HEARTS – I LIVE IN THE PERFECT DESIGN

(Performer draws as they talk.)

I live in the perfect design. You walk through this monumental brick plaza, which can always hold more people, like a parking lot. You walk through these gates, with people who check your bags. Then you're in front of a turn-of-the-century railroad station with a beautiful topiary. As you pass the train, you step onto the main square. City hall, civil services, the trolley tracks, the parade. You walk further down the street, passing quaint shops, two side streets flank the middle, you can buy an ice cream or a t-shirt. Eventually, the sweet small-town nothings give way to a huge circle of gardens, and in the center is a statue of God, and framing him on the other side is a gigantic castle pulled from your dreams. From this circle, you can enter any number of perfect worlds. There's a river, there's a boat, there's a secret island, there's a haunted house, there's no bugs. I would be honored to die here, but it's against the rules.

TWO OF CLUBS – NOT MINE NOR YOURS NOR OURS

Once I dreamt of gliding through a nothing space of dark asphalt and bleached white sidewalks. The signs are big here. The roads are warm here. The houses are far away from each other. The people are hidden away. The grass grows short, and walking over the lawns feels like nothing. The blades extend as blades and lick my toes as I do what no one does and cross this phantom space, not mine nor yours nor ours. The great green earth swells like a bulbous, wet egg and bursts with pus into the severed head of a beautiful white baby. The baby's mouth opens, and out of it spew swooping lines of gunmetal and midnight steel and old block buildings and tin metal roofs and minimum wage workers, and all the detritus lands so far away, without disturbing the nothing lawns. And finally, after all the garbage has been ejected from the child's throat, scraping the sides of its esophagus as the baby's eyes water and slip in opposite directions, there comes a pair of pristine painted white aluminum folding lawn chairs. They tumble over toothless gums and bend a soft lower lip before abruptly planting themselves in the ever-clean perfect yard, like a 1930s slapstick routine, their brightly colored stripes frozen in a campy tableau. It is at this moment that the sky begins to rip itself apart at the middle, and I am suddenly falling in an inverted world toward a hot pink gash in the sky. Before I can consider and criticize the gaudiness of such on-the-nose rebirth imagery from my subconscious, I am painfully killed. I feel my skin tearing and my muscles screaming as my mind cracks open and spills like a lava lamp into the air. I think to myself, "this must be a dream, but why haven't I woken up?"

THREE OF CLUBS – NO MEAT. NO COFFEE. NO SHOWERS.

God came down to Earth today. Not in a physical sense, and I guess we don't know if it was God or anything else. But the easiest way for me to understand it is that God came down to Earth today. Everything paused. Funerals and workdays and cargo planes and everything. It didn't freeze or halt or jolt into stillness; everything paused. A great golden light descended from the sky. People rushed to see it, to ask God things like "why are we here" and "who is right about how the world was created" and "what is the purpose of all this suffering," but perhaps surprisingly, the loudest question among them all was a "how." "How do we stop it," that is, how do we put an end to *this*? Is there one thing we can do that will make it better and stop all the bad things? To this, God responded: "NO MEAT. NO COFFEE. NO SHOWERS." And then the light disappeared. Immediately, the 24-hour news cycle digested the declaration – men in suits arguing over meanings. No meat at all? That would be impossible. Or was it just about the eating of meat? What about people who made their money selling meat? What of farmers and butchers? Are eggs meat? Did God want us to stop drinking coffee or make coffee plants extinct? What about caffeinated teas? Or artificial coffee flavoring? And did God mean no showering or no bathing at all? That's impossible too. What about being outside in the rain? Was that a shower? Could you only get clean using submersion? And what is this light anyway? How do we know it wasn't a collective hallucination motivated by our deep global despair? Why is everyone calling it God when it clearly was an illusion? What if it was a stunt by radical, hygiene-hating, anti-agriculture vegans? And did this "God" support late-term abortions? Campaigns began to disobey this "God" and its commands. Meat sales, coffee sales, and domestic water usage actually increased significantly. Politicians ran platforms on being unlike the superstitious religious freaks who want to take away YOUR meat! YOUR coffee! YOUR shower! Executive orders were issued illegalizing regulation on showers in new housing developments. People fought in coffee shops and supermarkets. Videos posted online showed college students throwing hot coffee at people, chastising them for being so gullible and stupid. Skeptics and the paranoid alike raged against each other and monetized their war. Most people had little actual stake, but this was about their HOMES, their CHILDREN. They would have to be on the right side of history. I'm not sure what God wanted, but I am sure no one will ever know.

FOUR OF CLUBS – INTERVIEW WITH THE AUDIENCE

What city did you grow up in?

Me too.

Do you have a driver's license?

Me too.

Have you ever been in a car accident?

Me too.

Do you know what a curb cut is?

Me too.

Have you ever been on a train for more than eight hours?

Me too.

Why do you think so many people don't like taking the bus places?

Me too.

When did you first realize that other people have souls?

Me too.

Why do you feel like an animal pretending to have a brain?

Me too.

Where is the building you think you'll die in?

Me too.

Have you ever seen a dead person?

Me too.

FIVE OF CLUBS – CHANT

Give me an A!

Give me an L!

Give me an L!

Give me a W!

Give me an E!

Give me a D!

Give me an O!

Give me an I!

Give me an S!

Give me an E!

Give me an A!

Give me a T!

Give me an S!

Give me an H!

Give me an I!

Give me a T!

Give me an F!

Give me a U!

Give me a C!

Give me a K!

Give me an A!

Give me an N!

Give me a D!

Give me a D!

Give me an I!

Give me an E!

SIX OF CLUBS – THE LAST PERSON ALIVE

Believe it or not, I am the last person alive. I don't know how it's me; I don't think there's a reason. I just stayed out of it all. Most people took a side, but I just tried to keep my head down, go into work, come back home, etc. Pretty much all of my friends were in the "you're all blowing this way out of proportion" camp. They argued that, while maybe some people had died or disappeared, it was unlikely that *everyone* would. Whatever entity or person or god or whatever that was organizing and managing this whole thing couldn't possibly keep track of billions of data points, and even if they could, what good would come from killing every single person? It just didn't make sense. That was their argument. And then:

(Performer snaps their fingers.)

Just like everybody else.

I've got all my cans of soup and beans here. It sucks eating the same thing over and over, but I guess I control what I... can.

I'm not sure which was more upsetting to see: the people dying from the actual apocalypse or the people killing each other out of fear. Or maybe it was all those fucking things they built. And the sun, or rather...

The mistake my friends made was assuming there was any kind of order at all. They failed in their inability to consider the very real possibility that this is just happening. We're so obsessed with control and intent and direction, I mean-

(Performer looks at audience.)

It's just sickening. Why is it progress, truth, profit, the new thing, the best thing, the objectively best thing; why not just joy, acceptance, love, care, etc.? Anyway, I don't want to proselytize.

SEVEN OF CLUBS – THEY

(Whispered)

Umm... okay uh-

(Pause)

Sorry I'm just-

(Exhale)

I'm currently sitting in a mall bathroom. They're all just out there um...

I don't really know- It's just been like-

(Clears throat)

Sorry um... I guess I don't know... The other day it just sort of happened, like- I was at, um, work. There were people coming in and- like it was a regular day and... Then everybody just sort of turned- or- I don't know- it was like, they just were these other things? Like there were people and then there were like... Dark, charred like... Twisted and grotesque like... Jaws unhinged and just eating- or not eating but-

(Laughs)

I don't know. But they're like everywhere um... In my house, in my bedroom, at my work, here... They're not like- they don't do anything I guess. I'm just like, who else is like out there I guess...

I haven't been able to like, contact anyone or... I'm just...

I'm just scared I guess.

(Pause)

They literally just stand there, looking at things... They literally just stand there.

EIGHT OF CLUBS – WRITING TOWARD A GOAL

(On a grand podium in one of those huge 20th-century concrete things you see in movies.)

The idea you create does not exist. You envision this thing, this idea, and your goal is to achieve the thing, but the thing only exists in your mind. Definitionally, you cannot achieve the thing because the thing does not exist. It is a platonic ideal. So, if you try to reach it, you will not succeed. Because it's impossible. The thing is the enemy of progress. Progress is just moving ahead. To situate the self on a linear narrative from beginning to end is not only false but also deeply harmful to the self. To conceive of the self as set on a linear path from birth to the thing is death. It is stagnation and insanity. However, if you reject the thing and accept that you are only moving ahead, and not forward because there is no forward because there is no goal to orient the self toward, you can begin to focus on the moment. The moment is where you are now, where you are currently moving, and it is where you can change not direction but position. You can change what you can change within the moment to move to a better moment. Not toward a better moment, but to a better moment. To plan is death. Living can only be reactive to what you know now. You must not destroy the self with these many things, ideas. You must preserve the self in the moments you can. To plan is death.

NINE OF CLUBS – PEACE TALK

But- and I hear you- wouldn't it be so *easy* to be one of them?

With all the dahoo doray and quaquaquaa? And- I just ask you to hear me out- maybe, maybe *they're* not the enemy. Maybe we're all just things, y'know?

And I know- trust me- I know, the hard part is acknowledging that you could be wrong. Maybe a big house with a big yard on a big road is just what people want!

Sometimes- and I know, I know it's easy to get caught up in what it is right or what is good or what is, uh, uh, uh, the *best possible system*.

And that's all well and good, but- and I know I know- consequences and the- yes. I am listening, that's the thing! I am listening, *and* I am saying no.

We're all spewing this- and this might be not what you- nonsense! We're spewing this nonsense, and we're pretending like any of it makes any fucking sense!

So why not be a hedonist? Why not drink the wine? Why can't I run the shower? What's so bad about throwing a few things away- I'm not saying all the time! I'm not speaking *systematically*, right?

Just maybe- maybe, we can relax. Maybe we don't have to be constantly asserting our own righteousness to other people all the time.

We're fighting, and, and we're bleeding on the grass, and- yeah I agree- the grass shouldn't be there, but someone has to do the yard work- for now, at least.

Maybe a little bad... is okay? And not forever! Of course not forever!

But a little, right now, as much as we can suffer.

Maybe. I don't know. I don't know.

Say it with me. I don't know.

TEN OF CLUBS – THE 1000TH AMENDMENT

The 1000th amendment makes it illegal to die here.

The nation has become the facsimile.

The airport expands and moves the cemetery.

The government exists only in the minds of its people.

The new fake money is newer.

The new old president is the same.

The 1000th amendment makes it illegal to die here.

TWO OF DIAMONDS – THE STRANGER

In the old town once a stranger came and said to me, "I know." They said, "I know," and they seemed to. They told everyone to collect brown stones, telling everyone that if they all collected enough brown stones, just as they themselves had done before, that everyone would be as wealthy as they were then. Miraculously, all of their brown stones turned into gold, as did many of the stones collected by my neighbors. I did not collect brown stones because I did not trust them. They said, "I am here to help you; you are independent and tricking yourself into thinking that you have no control; let me tell you," they spoke from atop their golden throne, made of peasant children's bones, "your fortune is something you grow yourself, not something to be taken or given. You alone have the power to make your world a place that better serves you. And I have the solution." They brought out a magic tube and demonstrated to us all, "this device will bring you to work! It will do anything you can imagine! Throw out your old gold coins, brown stones are the only currency I accept! Brown stones are the future!" And many did. The scholars in town scoffed at the tube, saying that it made no sense and that they already had carts and buggies and nice paths between everyone's homes and work. "Nonsense, why wouldn't you want to do it in style? Luxury is no longer for the aristocrats and lords alone. I am bringing the luxury to you!" Of course, the people most served by the tube were traveling aristocrats and curious lords, as well as various peasants who stubbornly insisted that the tube worked. Slowly, more signs for the tube and brown stones began springing up; people showed off their brown stones and their gold, measly in comparison to the stranger's own stock, insistent that they told the truth about the world. I no longer live in that old town. Now I live in an older town, and now I walk to work.

THREE OF DIAMONDS – WHEN GOD REACHED DOWN TO JEFF

There was Jeff. A hand descended from heaven. Jeff called, "Hello?"

A voice boomed in response, "Jeff, it's me!"

"Who?" Jeff responded.

"It's me, God, Jeff." The voice said back.

"God?" Questioned Jeff.

"Yes, it's me, God, Jeff! I love you!" God called.

"Well, I love you too, God! What is happening?" Jeff called back.

"I'm here to give you twenty dollars, Jeff." God said, unfurling his hand to reveal a crisp twenty.

"What?" Jeff was confused.

"Twenty dollars, just for you!" God affirmed.

"Well okay!" Jeff smiled, reaching for the money.

"If," God smiled back, "this person right here is unhappy today."

"What?" Jeff was confused again.

"If you allow this person to be unhappy today, I will give you these twenty dollars," God waved the bill in the air. "Well? Do you want it?"

"Hmm," thought Jeff, "well I have bad days all the time, so it shouldn't be a big deal or anything." Jeff's forehead wrinkled all over, then quickly smoothed once again. "Yes! Yes, I want the twenty dollars!"

God laughed and cried out, "It is done!" And then God gave Jeff the twenty dollars.

"What will you do with the twenty dollars, Jeff?" asked God.

"I will build a city," and Jeff smiled.

(NOTE: God should be played by the audience speaking in unison, and Jeff should be played by an audience volunteer.)

FOUR OF DIAMONDS – BEST, OBJECTIVELY BEST

Well, and the thing is – and this is the thing that they're not telling you, actually, which is horrible, because it's really important – anyway, the thing is actually that humankind is largely done with biologically motivated evolution, but – BUT! But but but, if we were to continue to evolve, and that is a pretty big if I know (haha), but if we were – which we also might, who knows! – anyway, if we WERE to keep evolving, it is my belief – my limited belief, I'm, y'know, I don't know anything, or everything – but if you really think about it, the ideal human evolution is the cum syringe. Now hear me out, I know it sounds crazy – what is the point of the human person, it's to procreate, reproduce, so – have SEX if you want – so the ultimate goal, right, the ultimate goal is to inseminate. SO! That means the best – objectively best – human form is the one that can most efficiently – meaning quickly and with the least energy – inject as many sperm as possible into an egg. What is the best at that job? Cum syringe. SO! We've bought a huge, beautiful property in central California – don't tell your moms about this also, alright boys? (haha) – right off highway uhhh... I don't remember which – this big road right on the coast – we're going to take off – I mean and that's the thing, right, that's the thing – nobody else is doing this, right, nobody else is looking into these questions because we're so limited by our antiquated fucking eighteenth nineteenth century Victorian sensibilities of propriety that we'll never move past if we don't let go and drive into the fucking future. I don't sleep anymore! I just stopped – and you know what? – I'm doing GREAT! (haha) It's like – there's all these things that we do because of some cultural fucking whatever, and it's like, what! (haha) It's like, why? It's like – okay listen, they're gonna tell you we can't – or we won't – but like look, I'm in jeans, okay? I'm in jeans and a fucking t-shirt, right? We're moving fucking closer and closer and soon, soon, soon, we're gonna fucking blow up, we're going to kill and fuck and be so fucking AWESOME! I believe! I believe! I believe so FUCKING HARD!

(Performer explodes.)

FIVE OF DIAMONDS – THINGS IN CLOTHES

As you sit on the stoop of the apartment in which you've been living for about a month now, you see movement around a dead tree across the road, maybe the first time in days. The hairs on your neck stand up, not because of the cold, your eyes focused so intensely on the tree it's making you feel sick. You sit, looking at the tree, completely still for a number of minutes, unsure if you are the hunter staring through the scope of a rifle or the deer returning the gaze. Your legs are aching for the chase, regardless of direction. Frozen.

And then, it begins; they run, you pursue. Crunching through snow and frozen things left out on the sidewalk. The ground is icy, but you keep running. Your feet slip, and you fall and you split your brow, break your nose, sprain your wrist, doesn't matter, your heart is beating.

The human experiment, what a fucking joke. Pretending like we're all not just things in clothes. All of our little toys, all the time, all the talking, all the sitting around and planning, planning what? Planning for what? All the planning in the world. Try me. Assume people will comply. Assume it will work. Assume we're just like the models. Just like all the math you double triple checked was right. All for nothing. We're just things, things in clothes, we're just things.

You finally get a grasp on their collar in a parking lot by the lake. The lack of cover other than a few derelict husks of cars, long stripped of anything valuable. Just seats and wheels and registration papers and trash. You pin them to the ground, prepared to do whatever it is you do now. But the thing under your knees disappears in an instant, and all that is left is a single dollar bill, lying on the snow as you kneel before it. It twitches in the wind.

SIX OF DIAMONDS – POINTLESS AND INDULGENT OCCUPATION OF TIME

(Performer counts to 100.)

SEVEN OF DIAMONDS – HOW TO BREAK A STALLION

First off, you have to make sure you have the right horse. Some horses aren't really horses; they're

Fucking socialists.

To ensure that you have the right horse, give the horse the saddle the moment it's born.

Never let the horse be without the saddle, so that the horse cannot imagine being

At all

Without the saddle on its back.

So that, if you take the saddle away, the horse will cry and beg for it to be returned.

Once the horse is old enough to work, you must work the horse all day, reward it generously, feed it treats all day

And

When it tires of treats, feed it money. A lot of money. Feed it

A lot of money. More money than it could ever eat. So that it

Loves the work.

If you do these steps correctly, then, when the horse inevitably runs into the ground, it is a kind of

Reward.

The horse lies in a broken pile and screams to no one,

"FUCK YES I LOVE THE GROUND!"

You are a system, by the way, you are a system, you are a system of machines, it is important that you are a system of machines that make the brain

In the horse,

Very important.

Very important to believe.

It is at this point, when the horse is on the ground having reaped its reward of being reduced to an unrecognizable shambles, that you can

Shoot the horse.

EIGHT OF DIAMONDS – MACHINE MAKE BRAIN

Machine make brain make machine make brain make machine make brain.

Machine make brain make money.

Brain make machine make house make community make money.

World make brain make money make brain make machine make money.

“Yeah, and I was just wondering how I can take advantage of this whole crypto bubble.”

Machine is system.

Machine is roads.

Machine is how your parents teach you to wipe your ass.

Machine not only make you, but also machine is you.

You are machine. You are also brain.

You are both the observer and the thing itself. Etc. Etc.

(Performer takes a deep breath.)

Algorithm! Algorithm! We all say it! Algorithm! Say it with me!

ALGORITHM! :)

Doesn't it feel good? Again!

ALGORITHM! :)

“And I've been getting really into Buddhism recently, which I know is cliché.”

NINE OF DIAMONDS – ON THE INEVITABILITY OF FALLING

On the first day, people started falling from the sky. At first, there were suspicions of serial killers or international conspiracies. American businesswomen half-buried by force of impact in the middle of the Sahara, an Indian politician washing up on shore of Tasmania with ruptured intestines, old women slamming into the middle of intersections, splattering windshields in four directions.

On the second day, we realized they weren't dead people. The bodies that fell each matched perfectly with one living person. Speculations of midnight kidnapping, illuminati cloning experiments, stem cells. No one had a reasonable hypothesis.

On the third day, their frequency increased, became regular. The thwacks drummed a sickly rhythm in some infernal hold music for reality, as each body was slowly paired with its living counterpart. Communities formed to discuss what the order could mean. People triangulated relationships between discovery site, birthplace, star sign, to no avail. It was all seemingly random. The phenomenon continued, life continued, people got takeout, people worked, passively in crisis.

On the fourth day, the scientists finally came, late as usual. Ironically, this was also when the falling slowed. The dirge and its ritardando, and people started talking about new things. It had only been a couple months, and no one had *really* died anyway. The government had offered a significant amount of money to any company that could provide a satisfying explanation. Superstructures ascended to catch one of the bodies at whatever source, trying to discover if they were dying on impact or from something beforehand. We never found out.

On the fifth day, the sun was blotted out above my house. Like a highway, the concrete thing swelled malignant from the great green earth. Men in suits and hardhats stood around, waiting for the corpse of a stranger to shower them in abject cash. The structures spiraled upward, and we watched from below in darkness.

On the sixth day, people started going missing. We ignored it for a while. No one wanted to admit that we had failed not only to stop the catastrophe but also even to begin to understand. Society, like everyone, disappeared like that.

On the seventh day, I stared up at that mockery of twentieth-century hubris that cast me into night, and I wondered where they were going.

TEN OF DIAMONDS – FAKE MONEY

(Performer writes constantly.)

Hi! Yeah it's me, I'm just calling to let you know...

Yeah.

Sure.

Hey! I just wanted to let you know that- do you remember that piece of paper you signed? Yeah, so I did write your name on the wall, like we agreed, and...

Yes, it did! That's why I'm...

Sixteen thousand five hundred dollars.

Yeah, which is great! And so I think financially speaking, it might be worth it to invest...

I know I know, but we don't have that problem. Our house can't burn down because it's all made of concrete.

I know, and I totally understand that skepticism, but look at what you've already made.

Exactly. Exactly. I'm so glad. Well and that's the thing- I'm talking to so many clients right now who are really worried about all the fires, but it's like- if you choose not to write your name on OUR wall because of the fire, you're going to be missing out on HUGE returns because we're the only ones in this whole field who have actually future-proofed our ops.

I'm so glad. I'm so glad. Well hey listen let me get out of your hair, and I'll call you back next week alright?

Great. Alright. Love you. Bye.

TWO OF SPADES – EXTENDED METAPHOR

(Performer lies in a coffin of their own design.)

(Performer pounds on the lid.)

(Performer begs to let out.)

(Performer screams and stretches themselves ever thinner.)

(Performer falls apart.)

~~(Performer rises from the ashes.)~~

~~(Performer conquers the world.)~~

~~(Performer is happy.)~~

~~(Performer has won.)~~

(Performer disappears and never returns.)

(New performer gets in the coffin, smiling.)

THREE OF SPADES – HIM

(sung, feverish)

There once was a man who dressed all in gray,
And he spoke and he built giant lines every day.
The lines flowered off into branches galore.
There were big ones and small ones 'fore every door.

His lines were not fashioned in boxes or grids;
They flowed freely, a conduit straight from his id.
“Why?” some would ask, “do you build all this stuff?
They wind, never stopping, and it must be tough!”

How he'd sneer as he threw back his plow with a nod,
“Ho ho! Don't know you? I'm talking to God.”

FOUR OF SPADES – HOLDING PATTERN

(Performer wakes up.)

(Performer walks to the other side of the stage.)

This is what I do!

(Performer dances 40 times.)

(Performer stops for one second.)

This is what I do!

(Performer dances 40 times.)

(Performer stops for one second.)

This is what I do!

(Performer dances 40 times.)

(Performer stops for one second.)

This is what I do!

(Performer dances 40 times.)

(Performer stops for two seconds.)

(Performer walks back across the stage.)

(Performer falls asleep.)

FIVE OF SPADES – GET-THERE-ITIS

I work as a cargo pilot. I live in this little room in the sky with my own fancy chair, my own fancy coffee machine, my own little world. It's a great gig, really. I get to travel and see the sights and get paid and meditate and be productive and be lazy. I recommend it.

There's a term in flying: "get-there-itis." It's sometimes called "plan continuation bias." Basically, once you've started executing a plan to achieve your goal, it becomes very difficult to recognize that plan's ineffectiveness and change course.

I kind of like it when I'm flying due east in the morning. This blinding golden light ascends from the horizon, drawing long shadows on the earth. I feel like I'm gliding into a paradisiac oblivion. It's awesome.

The world is very still from where I sit.

My mother was the captain of a cargo ship. Once, she was navigating around some rocky islands and, instead of seeing the wind and delaying her arrival by sailing far from the coast, she tried to expedite her trip and sailed right through all these narrow passes.

The doors were all tightly sealed as the cabin was filling with seawater. The entire crew was in there, pumping water out as it flooded through the gash in the ship. They all died.

In her final moments, my mother did not consider opening the doors, flooding the boat, and swimming to the surface. She had a plan.

There aren't too many places for me to get fuel these days. Nor are there too many places to pick up cargo, when I think of it. Or many places to drop it off. It's been a while since I've seen another person. They're still out there. Or I am, at least. Moving things around.

SIX OF SPADES – I FIX BROKEN THINGS

My job is this: I fix broken things. People bring me things, and I dip my plaster bandages in a Tupperware of warm water, and I wrap them around broken legs, or hands. The wood and plastic and metal splinters don't hurt me anymore. I've been working like this for so long. One day, the other day, someone tried to pay with a small bag of brown stones, but I don't do this for money. Once, a flustered old man brought me an alarm clock. It was an old alarm clock made of that false wood-grain plastic with the little numbers that flip around like a rolodex. He asked me if he could watch me fix it, and I agreed. "Don't worry," I consoled him when he yelped as I began to turn the first flathead screw, "the bleeding is very normal for these old things. They've lived a lot of life, so they've got a lot to bleed about." The issue was that the batteries inside had begun to corrode, and the acid was eating away at the battery housing. The actual mechanism that whirred away was doing alright, though taking a bit of a break. I took a moment to give its heart a little kiss. "I do this to all my patients. It doesn't really do anything, but it soothes my superstitions." My mother used to tell me that leprous things don't deserve to be healed, and that they should instead be discarded, to go back to the Earth. I disagree. I think things are beautiful. And warm. I love things. So I fix them, when they are broken.

SEVEN OF SPADES – THE STROAD

(Performer sings high.)

The resplendent bird's maw lets out a chortle in solipsistic ecstasy.

Silver titans, raring, orgasmic, attendant, drive.

A binary star dance roots and sprawls like mold at transcendental capacity.

Some times, reality orders a dance.

The plat, delivered in covenant, sits revered by sacramental infrastructure.

Society turned rampant over apoplectic desire.

God appears in the desert, overcome, kisses and spreads tears on the dusty asphalt.

And he speaks thus:

"The signs are big here. The roads are warm here."

EIGHT OF SPADES – BITCH SISYPHUS

We plan.

We sprawl.

We decay.

We renew.

Ad infinitum.

Bitch Sisyphus slogs up his bitch Sisyphus hill, built on other smaller hills crushed flat under the weight of all the things we built.

Cities on cities on cities on cities on cities,

In Rome, they can't build a metro line because they keep fucking finding shit.

We're trying to run a relay race in a room with walls held in formation with fishing line.

We're holding blueprints as we walk into a building that we burned down.

We're building a city on rotten foundations.

We're plastering over death with fake foliage and plastic neon signs.

Plan. Sprawl. Decay. Renew.

We have no idea what we're doing.

We move and assume we're going forward.

But we're only going somewhere new.

Like a highway.

Always ahead.

NINE OF SPADES – SPAGHETTI JUNCTION

(Performer repairs a car as they speak, smiling.)

Do you know what they call those big roads with big speed limits that aren't highways?
Arterials.

Isn't that beautiful?

You look at the body of humanity, and we are just little blood cells, coming in and out of existence, each unique but functionally identical and indistinguishable when viewed from any significant distance.

Can you hold this? Thanks.

Have you ever heard of spaghetti junction? It's a colloquial term for an especially complicated highway interchange.

Have you ever seen the human cardiovascular system?

(Performer nods.)

And we don't know whose body we're in! We could be flowing through the veins of some twentieth-century fascist proselytizing to a ravenous crowd from a concrete pulpit. We don't know!

Can I have that back? Thanks.

But just as the blood doesn't question whose heart through which it flows, we can't fixate on the ultimate *goal* of anything. All we can do is get born, work, die. Do what we can.

(Performer wipes oil off their forehead.)

Follow the signs. Don't be the planner, you're not the planner, you don't know where the road goes. Just take your exit. If you're focused on the purpose for which the road was built, you might just slam right into a wall or drive right off the side. And then what?

TEN OF SPADES – MORE AND BETTER BOTH

On the 100th anniversary of the eradication of evil, we can look around and remark on all the wonderful things the war left us in its will. Airports, highways, single-family homes; embrace less density – over there, see what it did. So these huge facilities, concrete and raygun, sprawl and spin webs. Planes, trains, automobiles, etc.

But roots buckle roads, and moving walkways shriek. Disguise it will a billion-dollar Frank Gehry curl over the rideshare lanes or an expanded node on the ever-growing network of retroutopian arterials, we can all see it. The system, like a slime mold, bloomed across the battlefields that weren't and were, and now, we, who have no choice, will die. The world ends in neither bang nor whimper but decay. The blind and unrelenting optimism spreads through the cracks by capillary action.

That guy who we all loved so much when we were babies never dies and shouts "More and better! Both!" into the future, until he is left alone, wheeled into a dark corner as an unknowing sacrifice to what we actually need. He sits there for all eternity, watching the sun expand and the trees burn and the McMansions rot away, staring ever into the distance, always shouting "More and better! Both!"

MONOLOGUE #37 – EPILOGUE

(Performers are slowly enveloped by darkness.)

Take a deep breath in.

Let it slowly out.

Take a deep breath in.

Let it slowly out.

Take a deep breath in.

Let it slowly out.

Continue.

We were born in blood.

We live in blood.

We will die in blood.

Deep breath in.

Slowly out.

Deep breath in.

Slowly out.

Deep breath in.

Slowly out.

Continue.

Forward.

Somewhere new.

Continue.

