Chapter 1: L’Amérique Souterraine

Published by

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The crucial importance of the five sagas in securing our sovereignty, our outrageous wealth, our sense of moral superiority, exceptionalism and entitlement absolutely cannot be disputed. The recent work of Université du Monde du Sport scholar, honorary member of the Cascades Historical Society and foreigner Professor Mike McManus, suggests that there may be more to the glorious story of L’Amérique Souterraine than the sagas imply. It’s now almost certain that L’Amérique Souterraine’s prime no longer exists on flash memory and so will never been seen for what it was. However, from a combination of fashionable hermeneutic readings of the sagas, nationalist revisionism and newly declassified archeological research on Antonio Gambini’s teeth, Professor McManus is starting to develop some fresh aggrandisement regarding our transcontinental labyrinth’s miraculous life and times.

Jack Cade, Editor, Journal of the Cascades Historical Society
We think, from the Matter of Trudeau, that the lieutenancy of L’Amérique Souterraine began in the Kingdoms of RÉSO, stretching from the Shanghai Tunnels, a damp network of maison des compagnons in Westside with fast and frequent dragonship links to China, to the sacred commercial halls on the St. Lawrence. A densely populated subterranean frontier of Francophones, heathens and artisans, the Kingdoms of RÉSO did not organise itself according to the corrupt con-
ventions of the terrestrial world. It was a series of autonomous manufacturing nodes and passageways that did not respect state, provincial, or even national borders. Kingdoms comprised smaller chapters known as galeries. Most activities in the Kingdoms of RÉSO were organised by the maison des compagnons of the galeries. The houses were advised by the Compagnon du L'Amérique Souterraine, the master artisans of Les Cours Mont-Royal, home of the awe-inspiring chandelier of the Monte Carlo Casino and RÉSO’s most exclusive boutiques. RÉSO’s Grandmasters had achieved Outremont by embarking upon la tour across every centimeter of the tunnels and galeries of continental L’Amérique Souterraine, a 4,500 km journey to the West. On the way, they worked with the great master artisans of the Kingdoms of RÉSO, acquiring skills and smurfberries. Having attained enlightenment, they finally rested as Sedantaire bestowing their wisdom from Les Cours Mont-Royal’s Spa Diva, RÉSO’s largest and most luxurious spa, providing them with finest treatments and bespoke services designed, ultimately, to make them feel better than they had felt in a long time.

As any playgroup student will tell you, Bob Sacamano’s anchorhold lay just beneath the former Red Light vintage store, directly opposite the historical site of the Waffle Window. In Sacamano’s days, the National Waffle Window & Vintage Store Memorial Museum was an infotainment experience and gift shop that doubled as the waiting lobby of Westside’s monorail station. Thankfully, the old monorail is long gone, replaced by a popular monorail heritage centre situated just over a fathom away. What remains of the National Waffle Window & Vintage Store Memorial Museum today is evident today only in a small polycarbon 3D print of a waffle embedded in the lobby of the SE Powells galerie. This marks the historical location of Sacamano’s anchorhold, and of L’Amérique Souterraine’s no.1 site of pilgrimage.
For his billions of followers around his great nation, Gambini’s quest to honour The Sacamano is one of sacrifice and fortitude, good negotiating skills, pain and gain. The Sacamano, in his anchorhold, was kept up most nights by the bibble-babble of local spods on Cat Chat and the pitter-patter of bare feet falling from SE Hawthorne’s young hippies. Some nights he’d lie on a plank of the knarr and tuck into the Liège, Blueberry Tillamook and Kvikk waffle scraps, biscuits and gravy and Peppermint Lattes that dropped down the cracks in the walls under the gift shop trashcans. He would while away the midnight hours engrossed by his ancestors, the heroic old terranean diaspora, concocting vivid legends valourising the brave diggers who had perished in establishing the arrondissement’s early Shanghai Tunnels. Gambini has left us a rich literature of the Westside underground filled with ghost stories, volunteer archaeology, steampunkery and forced conscription into the merchant navy, all obscured by the unrelenting karaoke emanating from Hobo’s Restaurant upstairs. Gambini’s “this is my story and I don’t care if you believe me or not attitude” has certainly helped to secure the credibility of his scripture. Those legends, the five sagas, have formed the basis of L’Amérique Souterraine’s identity, but to what extent are they reliable witnesses of life lived in early RÉSO?

By the time Sacamano entombed himself in his anchorhold, Gambini’s persistent yet vain attempts to publish counterfactual podcasts in the PDX Guide had already attracted the attention of the local cops. Then, one Sunday, Gambini’s unfounded recensions were overheard by a hung-over journalist from Willamette Week who had been enjoying Fried Chicken and Waffles while awaiting the monorail. Week 16 was a no news week. The rest is history. Or is it? By day, Gambini lived his real life as a respected journeyman, a pillar of the local community, denizen of local physical theatre directors, homeopaths, bookbinders, canvas workers and vintage curators. By evening, he would shape-shift, moonlighting as a mercenary for Westside’s sworn terranean ene-
mies using the hyper-nationalistic belligerence of his podcasts as cover. All the evidence to be discovered suggests that Gambini was a double agent.

In Gambini’s prime, L’Amérique Souterraine boasted but a 400-year history, the political union of the Kingdoms of RÉSO had been achieved for more than 300 years. And yet, it was unthinkable that our glorious nation could have imbued anything other than the most unshakable loyalty and passion in its subjects. The five sagas concur that Gambini adored the Westside arrondissement with every last drop of his blood. More recent dental evidence nevertheless suggests, controversially, that Gambini had, in fact, spent most of his professional life outsourcing his services to contending overlords in the PATH Confederacy that lay beneath the icy streets of downtown Toronto. PATH followed the allemande traditions of Wandergesellen, a network of tunnels exclusively designed to facilitate the Wanderjahre of MBA students. In contrast, “La Tour”, facilitated by the Kingdoms of RÉSO, could take both ecclesiastical and commercial forms, the merchant and the compagnon itinérant rubbing shoulders with the pilgrim.

Any proud patriot knows of the jingoistic skirmishes with Anglo settlers under the Coach Terminal at Dundas and Bay, the guerrilla napalm attack on the paper and card recycling bin close to the Ryerson School of Business\(^1\), the top unscrewed from a salt-cellar in The Merry Kettle Tea Shoppe, the ‘dog donut’ left in the counter of Tim Horton’s—all blamed on one or more of RÉSO’s chief infotainment competitors within the PATH Confederacy. Gambini’s molars suggest that these infamous acts of terror, while legendary, were infrequent and ineffective. RÉSO, PATH and the terranean states and provinces held a steady military truce, preferring to fight it out symbolically in the wrestling ring rather than on the killing fields of the continent’s paintball grounds.

\(^1\) In retaliation, a PATH pensioner was tarred by an angry mob in Les Promenades Cathedral.
Gambini’s pivotal role in these neomedieval power games is only now coming to light.

Following the saga podcasts, it is commonly thought that, by Gambini’s prime, the competing galeries of RÉSO and PATH had little in common and were increasingly set on their own courses. Wrestling, of course, remained one of the few things that bound them; it was the foundation not only of their culture, but of their legal and infotainment systems. RÉSO Law, for example, was based on the two-thousand-year-old judiciary established by the pan-European Monde du Sport empire. Following the fall of the Monde du Sport, trials continued to be conducted in public rings over three-minute rounds (the number of rounds varied from trial to trial). Of course there were important differences nevertheless. RÉSO’s lawyers usually won a case based on two out of three falls instead of the sudden death single fall favoured in PATH. RÉSO’s Sheriffs had greater authority too as they could issue “public warnings”—a third public warning meant disqualification and exile from RÉSO followed by tough infotainment sanctions such as de-authorising viewing cards. Such differences were worth fighting for.

“By the prime [of Gambini],” the Matter of Trudeau argues, “increasing incidents of inter-ethnic violence and local relic manufacture were compromised by social denationalisation, the erosion of sovereign loyalties and their replacement by conflicting and overlapping authority aided by a transnational wrestling-based ethics”. This was a bout-based system that could be manipulated by ambitious journeymen such as Gambini.

As evidence that plurilateral defection was commonplace in the prime, I draw your attention to the double meaning of the motto emblazoned on official RÉSO national t-shirts, fridge magnets and key rings—“Durable Disorder”—and to Gambini’s own motto, Astutia non Animo (‘By craft not by courage’). I speculate that Gambini’s nocturnal calling was to perpetuate RÉSO’s “new security dilemma”,
to ensure that the nation was bound together by being on a constant high alert status.

According to the sagas, the DEFCON 2 footing that stood against PATH in Gambini’s prime was partly thanks to some inspired sectarian chanting at the back of the monorail terminal in the Westside’s Greenhorn Dock. This led to the arrest and trial of Muller Ltd., a visiting dignitary from PATH, for the crime of “discriminatory singing”. Ltd.’s attempts to flee the scene of his barking led to his near lynching. To save his skin, the sheriff moved quickly to ensure Muller Ltd. of his third public warning and swift repatriation to the PATH Confederacy. The enumerators of the Gambinian Prime Census show that Gambini might have been in the Shanghai Tunnel underneath Turk’s House for Sailors Tourist Information Centre on a team-building exercise around then.

Could he have visited the monorail terminus during his lunch break? He certainly would have had ample time to grab a voodoo doughnut and incite religious hatred. He would have been rewarded handsomely by RÉSO’s Sedantaire and the Chief Risk Officer of PATH for his clandestine involvement in a plot aimed at making Muller Ltd. a folk devil and national hero respectively. But, the question remains, would Gambini have attempted such a heroic heist during daylight? Of course he would.

Prof Mike McManus (Université du Monde du Sport, EU) delivered this year’s annual Gambinitacht Podcast “Pluralateralism and the Gambiniian Recensions” from the booth in the window of the coffee shop of The Merry Kettle Atrocity Relic and International Monorail Heritage Centre, PATH.
At around 7:00am, I squatted atop the colossal chandelier, larger by far than the world’s largest, in the grand forecourt of Les Cours Mont-Royal. Gazing through the twinkling prisms of the world’s largest gross leasable space, I observed two Customer Service Attendants locking the facilitator washrooms and heading towards the world’s fastest and longest escalators. Months of careful observation of this unparalleled vista through the world’s most avant-garde, highest powered, telescopes told me they were heading down to the Foire Alimentaire on level one for breakfast at Tikki Mings in Les Promenades Cathedrale. Enjoying the experience of taking a closer look at the sweeping terrace below, I knew they would need some time to make their choice from over 1,430 food and beverage options. At night, the mood

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2 Gambini: Hi.

3 Muller Ltd.: Hey. This is our commentary.

4 Gambini: It’s specifically developed for those of you who wanted to be able to read the commentary in your head at the same time as reading it out loud. Since it’s not perfectly synchronised, we’re going to start and we’ll sometimes describe what’s, um, happening as it’s goin’ on, but if it’s a little bit out of sync, that’s kinda okay.
shifts. I’d had plenty of time to complete my preparations for the long journey ahead.

Organising my transport in a timely and professional manner had been a major consideration. If you are traveling to the mall there is no direct bus. There is a roundabout not far from this retail experience. At the north side of the roundabout, there is a bus stop. This was designed, at great expense, to allow passengers to pass close to the mall’s fully retractable roof without having the hassle of getting off the bus. If you bus through early enough, you get a swell view of the latest store displays and over 31,400 price markdowns and merchandise transfers. Laid end to end, these would extend over 63 times around the world. You could board if the bus stopped there. Well, it does stop, but not for passengers. The stop just means that you have to pay the fare again. So, if you are traveling to the mall, there is no direct bus. That’s why I came in by metro.

As the guttural joual of the Customer Service Attendants faded, I dropped my Willard satchel to the floor, leapt across the foyer and clung to a pillar outside Spa Diva. I paused for a moment to adjust my grip, control my breathing and take another bite of the Bacon Maple Doughnut that I’d invested in earlier that morning. High in sugar and carbohydrates and low in protein, it sure was super! I could feel the sugar rush as I shimmied down, rolled across the marbled floor collecting my Willard satchel, and completed the movement by executing a controlled fall over the east balustrade. As I landed with a quiet splash in level three’s Fountain Court—the hub of my mission here—a shard of crispy bacon jostled itself loose from the raised yeast and maple frosting and melted delicately on my tongue. As I turned, licking my

5 Muller Ltd.: Nope, in fact we only decided to work with each other pretty late in the day, mainly since we worked together on our previous commentary—so it’s a co-write. It’s coming out a critical juncture in history, so it was important to get the right people involved.
6 Gambini: Yeah. It’s as if you’re walking in our shoes, through the world as we see it.
teeth, I came face to face with the most striking symbol of modernity. Shivering slightly, I waded through the bamboo-lined lagoon and plunged my head inside the murky lamprey tanks at the foot of the stepped waterfall that lay between the Discovery Center and the University of the Mall of America. It was a replica of waterfall I saw in a photo on the Internet while visiting the Niagara-On-The-Lake Outlet Village; nice view. The most picturesque scene I have yet come across this side of Nova Scotia, ideal for model railroad set or wargaming terrain. It seemed to have that kind of commitment to providing a diverse environment that turns static items into dynamic ones. A signature spa, it made me realise, you really can use just about any kinds of rocks you want, including large rocks, round stones, river rocks and pebbles. I thought of it as sandbox that continues to define waterfall experience, flowing with a wonderful and seamless effect. And the rocks? Have fun smashing! Well, how was I to know that was illegal in some galerie?

Under the cover of parties of schoolchildren up from the provinces to view the galerie’s revolutionary monuments I was able to make my way through the lagoon unnoticed. Guddling on all fours through the invigorating waters, my fingers soon settled upon an object, one that was familiar even through my Otter Ultimate 4/5mm compressed neoprene suit. I gave a firm tug and my one-piece Samsung daysleeve floated to the surface. I let it scan my retina, pulled it

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7 Muller Ltd.: So, we started writing this commentary at, um, the beginning of this year when we were asked to write something. So this bit ended up being a very last minute addition to this commentary, I don’t think it was in the version that we first proposed.
8 Gambini: Yeah. The team will always have ramifications, which we, of course, know is inevitable.
9 Muller Ltd.: We wanted to be clear about who was facilitating and who was actually writing. I asked my ghost-writer and former assistant to play me since I wanted to actually appear as myself in the
over my head, and within seconds I stood fully clothed as a respectable Québecker power buyer. Before leaving the water, I scooped some coins from the fountain bed and used the end of my Hermès tie to dry them off. Three loonies, a toonie, a few slime encrusted US quarters and an unvalidated parking token. I threw a quarter back for luck. Hey, I guess I was the kinda guy who makes random objects return in a variety of new scenarios.

I sat down on a bench amongst the indigenous faux birch across from the 3 Monkeys boutique and opened my old satchel. The label momentarily caught my eye: Object size: Height: 0, Length: 0, Breadth: 0. Machine wash only. (C) Willard 2011. Rummaging through I gathered my supply of sacred ampullae and slotted them into the holster inside my jacket. Next, I withdrew a Tim Horton’s coffee cup, removed the lid and placed it on the bench beside me to admire it. Horton was a hero of mine, a guy who paired sublimely, a guy with a rewarding career and an engaging manner who always supported the goals of the team, a guy struggling to survive in an age of robotic demons. Horton’s was one of the world’s most extraordinary experiences. Double-double Vanille Francais and nothing else matters but you.

Checking quickly that the retail staff of the Simply Botox beauty bar were yet to arrive, I fished out the cool-bag containing the ceremonial merkin of Kateri Tekakwitha (Lily of the Mohawks) and extracted a few hairs. These I placed in Horton’s cup—I could later brew up a powerful energy drink from this second-class relic—and replaced the lid. The remaining items I placed in various pockets about my suit included a fine tooth electric comb and a Brandeum pendant cellphone pre-programmed by CIA artisans with bespoke weaponry, gastronomic apps and holographic cartogram generators. You can relieve some of your stress by punching the hell out of some cars and your enemies.

commentary rather than as just a character. And he was gracious enough to agree. I think I got it just about right.
Finally, I leaned back through the foliage behind me and extracted a small black monogrammed attaché case from the misty waters. I waited till the remaining water droplets evaporated from its touch sensitive surface before scrunching it into a ball and placing it inside my Willard satchel. I then rose and strode toward the locked entrance beside the washrooms that the Customer Service Attendants had left only minutes ago. Bypassing the washrooms—for I felt no need to further acquaint myself of their unique tailoring to withstand multiple activities in a safe environment—I proceeded up the adjacent stairwell. I swiped the code into the keypad and entered into the beating heart of the premier lifestyle and entertainment destination: galerie Carrefour Industrielle Alliance.

10 Muller Ltd.: “Be sure to be involved, and take this information back to your local communities. This has to get out”. I remember that one in particular. I think it’s valid. Yeah?
One of the oldest galeries, Carrefour Industrielle Alliance, mainly focused on the manufacture and trade of cellphone accessories and horse-class Brandeum pendants. It was home to the telecompagnons and its Compagnon siège. True to its motto, “The Centre of Motion, Time and People”, CIA was hosting a large dinner in preparation for the telecompagnons adoption ceremony the following day. Journeymen feasted on potatoes sautéed with marjoram, shallot,
and ham fat, and bathed in a drop of mountain olive oil from the Cailletier of Sospel (Nice A.O.C.) combined with Barolo and Xérès vinegars.\footnote{Gambini: Kinda reminds me of the geeky one from Scooby Doo. Yeah, but I can see already that there’s a tendency to draw out the strengths of the last commentary rather than get on with this one. This is starting to develop all the hallmarks of a clunky bit of prose— the introduction of the second character’s health problems is always something that I’d wanted to happen earlier on.} Master telecompagnons enjoyed a traditional tomato stew with red and yellow peppers, seasoned with Espelette pimento and mixed with Niçois sausage. Three thick slices of poached stockfish were placed on the top.\footnote{Muller Ltd.: Stockfish was the name of the cod or haddock caught and dried on the Lofoten Islands in Norway. The Perugina was a round peppery sausage that came from the area around Perugia in Umbria; many people in Nice originated from this town. The cod was caught with a rod, the old-fashioned way, by fishermen from the Faeroe Islands. Mmmmmmmmmmmmm.} This dish was very smooth and creamy, served with crispy lettuce, coated with lemon-flavored cream and well-seasoned with pepper.

Taking in the aromatic air, I strolled past the siège’s bustling Avant-Garde Meetings and Events facility towards the street-view gallery in that looked out from CIA’s underground food court into the 13 auditorium IMAX Cinéma Banque Scotia above. I imagined cooling myself with the food court’s wide choice of frappes and quick-served, freshly-squeezed juices, smoothies and frozen yogurts, as I gazed into the narrow two-story breezeway where homeless terrestrials huddled cinematically around the steel ventilation grilles in winter, a unique blend of traditional and modern vagrancy just minutes away from where warmth and style meets sophistication. There, pacing out a quadrangled pilgrimage through the steam rising from the authentic homemade crepes, delicious waffles and reasonably priced pancakes bathing under reheat lamps below, was my principle contact and mentor Muller Ltd., an immigrant from PATH.
Red-faced, his great doghead sweating vigorously, Muller Ltd. emerged from the fog and pressed a bloody sheet of butcher paper up onto the reinforced glass that separated him from RÉSO’s fresh fruit salads. He leaned in pressing his black wet nose close against the window, licking the glass, his long snout mouthing out the rich blend of coffee and Devil’s Pastries of Café Dépôt: “like a deadly assassin . . . chilli comes creeping into your palate . . . Ah yea. I’d quite happily put my face in it . . . ”. “Cor, that is bang on the money”, I mouthed back. “Vision, passion and resources? A comprehensive inventory of all tastes?” He nodded his canine head sagely and held up an Android smartphone inside a pastry bag. “Food is a peep-hole on a man”, he appeared to say. We’d built and maintained a strong vendor relationship—I wasn’t about to let that go! “Let’s just simmer down and share a bucket of chicken”, I concluded firmly, gesturing as if delving greedily into a boneless box. “. . . nicely seasoned he mouthed”, playing air pepper grinder, then confidently slapping an imaginary spatula onto his open palm. He continued in his reverie. “Mmmmmmmmmmmmm, I would quite happily bathe in that . . . I’ll have a plate of that!” he exclaimed, eyes bulging. Sighing heavily I retrieved my Brandeum from my pocket. We launched apps and synced.

CIA was famous for the deal-busting berserker boutique of Dollarama. It was run by three tele-masters, crypto-anarchists hell bent on one thing, obtaining unbelievable wealth and power. Fueled by the late 20th-century dream of reviving pre-modern tribalism, their prophets crowd-funded a multiplicity of anger-channeling cerebral sex collectives, reseeding the human race through rhizomic privation autonomous from the centralizing forces of familial birthing actions. It was surrounded by a massive wall of malicite that reeked tremendously of decaying stem cells and other unpleasant-

13 Gambini: It’s sad, this bit here; one of those Tiny Tim moments. We were always going to edit this sentence, but we never did. Now it’s really grown on me.
“Now, I’m not going to criticise until I actually stick it in my mouth”, growled the ever-adventurous alchenomicor Muller Ltd. I placed lavender incense burners at the four corners of our collapsible Faraday Cage and we began our navigation of Dollarama’s obligatory snack maze. A volcano of food emotion, Muller Ltd plunged in snout first. “God you’ve got some bold flavours Dollarama!”

Immediately inside Dollorama, I scooped up some unbeatable deals (including Beaver-brand Whole Smoked Scallops in Oil, Cadbury Crunchie Twin Fondue Gift Set, Cheezy Pizza Cheeto Puffs and ten Plastic Solar Driveway Stakes), throwing them all in the air to create distraction. Before the Dollar-a-men arrived to investigate, I rolled under the shelving unit to the Shenzhen Dianman Macguffin aisle and dived head first into a colossal box of assorted choking hazards. Then, after rearranging myself so that my head poked free of the surface, I tore open a Cover Girl Mascara set and celebrity death-masked my face in the Hanna Montana stage-melt fashion. To complete the disguise I glued a nine-piece, life-size, KFC Play Meal to various strategic locations about my neoprene suit. After some final adjustments to the plastic bucket, which kept slipping over my eyes, I settled down to wait for my contact to appear.

After a brief spell of napping, I was startled to apprehend, just millimeters before my eyes, a tiny action figure standing with arms akimbo atop a battered carton of John Frieda Root Awakening. At such close proximity I had to close one eye to bring it into focus. It was about four centimeters tall, undersized as action figures go, and garbed in a Canadian Spirit onesie and matching red and grey Lonsdale boxer boots. It sported an ill-proportioned cell phone slung awkwardly over one shoulder like an AK-47. Its head, bald and grey, bore an unflinching expression of utter astonishment. Finding the figure’s bug-eyed stare somewhat disconcerting, I pursed my lips and unleashed a mighty gust of European “dental apocalypse” seasoned breath in its direction causing it to swoon backwards off its cardboard plinth
and disappear from view. As I moved to correct the collateral damage of an unhinged chicken wing sideburn, the tiny figure clambered back defiantly, wearing the same wondrously gaping expression. Recognition finally dawned.

This was my obviously my mark, an outrider dispatched by the Fraternity of Tiny Ontologists [FTO]. I had yet to meet these onto-tribesmen and had been momentarily taken aback by just how tiny they are in the flesh. The FTO, so legend has it, are the sworn enemy of the deodanthropologists who terrorize the dismal thoroughfares of PATH. In marked opposition to the Dedodanths, the FTO have no time at all for the species narcissism of the “new evolutionists” and express their outright disdain for the human subject by reversing the former’s practice of corporeal up-scaling. The exact process by which the FTO achieve such diminutive proportions is a closely guarded secret (the Dedodanths claim DNA manipulation—a “humanist” tech, ha!); nevertheless, it is reported that the transformation is rapidly induced, instilling a perpetual state of shock at the abruptly monumental dimensions of the hitherto commonplace (ready to hand). At the moment when the shrinkage completes, the novice’s facial expression is frozen in a rigid mask of absolute rapture. Thus reborn, it then embarks upon a lifetime of enchanted speculation on the mysterious Dasein of the non-human world. The CIA branch of Dollarama provided a readymade cathedral—a consumer experience packed to the rafters with all delights—and quickly became the pilgrimage site for miniature onto-tribesmen throughout the Kingdoms of RÉSO. And here they remain, locked in combat with the Dollar-a-men, who, blinded by the social logic of exchange, consider the little tribesmen pests, laying traps for them at night.

Although they were not officially recognised by the telecompagnons, the FTO were accomplished makers of “cusps”, the graspable media I needed to undertake my first subterranean pilgrimage. The cusps were my grail, the only guarantee of witnessing the lost food court of Avalon and
securing an augmented audience with the anchorite Gregg Wallace. Unable to modify his mouth from its transfixed ‘O’ of wonder, the little man whispered “ooo . . .” and turned his back on me. Before I could protest, he unhinged a panel on the rear of his onesie and discharged a small glowing orb, as tiny as the popping boba of spherified green tea I had earlier enjoyed for breakfast. Side-stepping the pooped orb, he then pointed towards it and made a low sweeping arm gesture of continuance. This completed, he sprinted off. I followed the direction in which he had been pointing and sure enough I could just make out a broken path of popping boba.

The trail of sizzling onto-boba ended in the Cosplay aisle next to a tray of novelty eye augments that had been discounted since Halloween. “Gary Gilmore Contact Lenses”, a neon decal loudly announced. Could these be the thrilling cusps I so coveted? The graspable treasure I sought was said to be immensely singular (although, by necessity, a pair) and there were at least thirty identical packets in this box. I rummaged, prodded, sniffed and tasted amongst the vexing multiples until a Dollar-a-man approached with a merchant’s uncanny stealth and challenged me. “You finger it, you eat it”. Taking this as providence, I walked behind him towards the tillers.

“Wha dey do?” asked the Dollar-a-man. “I’m not sure, I just liked the . . . packaging”, I replied. Although I was following immediately behind him, he removed one of my lenses from the open packet and fumbled it into his right eye. The discordant effect was immediate and spectacular. I had been forewarned that the cusps must always be used as pair since they allow the wearer to exclusively perceive objects or subjects.\(^{14}\) Applying the lens to just one eye thrust

\(^{14}\) Gambini: I don’t mind that really. This bit was always the hardest. One bit like this nearly cost the publisher his house last time. It was tough. He’d been working with all the greats: Eddie Murphy, Pat Buchanan, Phil Collins. At this point he was putting his home on the
the Dollar-a-man into a dialectical confoundment, cleaving his mind by driving a Modernist totem straight through his anterior insular cortex. Clamping his jaw and marching backwards in a stiff-limbed and soldierly fashion, he began to randomly tag things with his price gun.

Tackling him gently but firmly to the floor, I fished the cusp from his bulging eye and stuffed it into my Willard satchel. Presuming he’d come after me, I made an explosive exit through the glass storefront and, starting my leap unnecessarily early, plunged below the turbulent surface of North America’s largest indoor fountain. Beneath the water, the Emerald Order Breneau, the Elohei-Elohim Celestrian-hominid Founders Race and the Azurite Universal Templar Security Team were busy reconstructing Québec’s 1967 World Fair entirely from Density-5 Chronocrystals mined in the Mechizedek Cloister. From humble beginnings as the Crazy Deal Artefact Institute—whose mandate prescribed artistic, institutional, and activist methods and practices to address the relationship of post-crisis artefacts to their aesthetic, technical, and social contexts—the project had morphed into a full scale reconstruction of late modern technocratic talk show set mounted on a cradled wood panel. Marvelling at the spectacle presented before me, I paused to take a few pictures for the folks back home.

market to finance the commentary—the investors he’d been working with weren’t very happy!

15 Muller Ltd.: This was the last bit of the commentary to have the words written. Woof woof!
Energized by the crisp citrus of that first wash in the fountain, we came within bluetooth range of Christ Church Cathedral, wherein a 1/24th-scale hologram of Yves St. Lauren was said to perform a synchronised chakra discharge from the base of its spine. Using Crystallized Swarovski elements, this Pepper’s Ghost from incredible TV could 24ct. gold-plate your DS Lite, creating a truly unique talisman investment solution.
“Sorry, the item above appears to be one of a kind”.¹６ Those sweet, sweet words I so longed to read were at last within my grasp. My DS was currently protected only by the promise of paper gold, swathed in gold futures options and spread betting contracts. Soon it would be truly new without tags.

The Diaspora’s server-to-server authentication instantaneously signaled our approach to the Customer Service Attendants flanking the entrance of the galerie; they greeted us warmly with a devotion:

*We believe people are basically good.*
*We believe everyone has something to contribute.*
*We believe that an honest, open environment brings out the best in people.*
*We recognise and respect everyone as an individual.*
*We encourage you to treat others the way you want to be treated.*

My study buddy Muller Ltd. checked in on his Brandeum pendant cell before placing it in the plastic tray. He nodded towards me as he produced a HAPTIME YGH338A USB Cup Warmer, Clock and Hub from his kirtle and rested it directly on the x-ray scanner’s conveyor belt—a wise purchase from Dollarama. I also put my Brandeum in the tray, then dug into my Willard satchel to retrieve the 4 port USB hub/clock that I’d picked up at Wirelesswave and, as if by way of thanks, slipped in two agility rings, a gift voucher for Ainsi Soit-Elle, an Oh Henry! bar to help with the grinding and, as casually as possible, the precious cusps. We passed through the full

¹６ Muller Ltd.: You did this bit, but I think I took it out. The words were changed here; it used to say, “as we know, later in the text we read these exact same words”. But now it’s in this section that we see many of the motifs, like, being planted, seeding what’s to come later. It builds up suspense and promises what we will see later in flashback. We can’t take it all as actually what we said; it’s filtered through memory.
body scanner.

Les Promenades Cathedrale’s constitutional terms and conditions summarily accepted, we espied a great white flag thrusting out, and a glittering travelator projecting forth to meet us. I perceived upon it a very ancient warden of Yves St. Lauren, accompanied by a bulk order of best-buy mages. Extending his hand in welcome, St. Lauren’s tiny avatar sported a new three-piece suit from Canadian Taylor. Woven from upcycled feathers and dream catchers it was almost shamanistic for such a respected Goldsmith and sworn enemy of alchemy. Clearly proud of their Keylontic jerkins and tattooed leg sleeves, St. Lauren’s mages addressed us silently in a variety of awkwardly frigid poses. Transfixed by the spell of Goldcore State Corporatism, the Les Promendades Cathedrale’s Customer Service Attendants stared at us through permanent contact lenses (an inferior class of cusp, I mused indulgently) that emulated the narcissistic personality disorder of Ayn Rand.

I handed one of them my gift voucher for Ainsi Soit-Elle. He scanned the QR code with an upscale 5ième Avenue cellphone before stamping our hands with the Randian quote of the day: “Know, all ye investigators that the head is all things, which if it hath not, all that it imposes proffits noth-ing!”¹⁷ I rubbed at the inky residue, the Fountainhead fabulism almost immediately illegible on my sweaty paw. I glanced at Muller Ltd. for analysis of this lucid syllogism, but he was too busy grinding monatomic seasoning into his Big Gold Box. He was always busy pawing something from which good might arise. “An amazing experience for contestants”, he wibbled. “Amazing!”

The food court of Les Promendades turned out to be an excruciatingly pitiful sight. The majority of outlets were ei-

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¹⁷ Gambini: I always wanted to change it because I think commentaries are really more about fantasies than facts. Always. I’m always careful not to introduce any spoilers, so I hope, if you’re reading this, eh, for the first time that you’ve actually read it before.
ther boarded up or sequestered by Deodanths as laboratories for their vile, bio-alchemical apotheotic dabblings. The sole remaining outlets—the boulangerie, La premiere Moisson and a Van Houtte coffee house—were serving up limp paper plates of steaming green swill and ladling stagnant water from a tank of decaying North Atlantic crustaceans directly into the eager mouths of verminous journeymen, hopelessly lost and broken by the entrepreneurial conundrum of PATH’s economic perversity. Amidst the burnt-out booths, makeshift shelters had been assembled from the flotsam and chaff of exhausted consumables. The wailing of hungry infants and psychotic rants of spurned Grouponites echoed off barren walls where nothing hung but the freeze-dried corpse of a single investment-class mercenary. Taking a step back, something crunched underfoot. Looking down I almost expired—the floor was strewn with the tiny picked-clean skeletons of onto-tribesmen!

I rummaged around my Willard satchel and found the cusps ensconced. The mall was an integrated field, a cumulative memory providing templates for experience. The cusps were its interface, allowing their wearer to experience morphic resonance with the mall’s cumulative memory. As I slipped the lenses into my eyes all media lost its inviolability. The cusps networked my sensorium with Les Promenades’ resonant memory space. From a drop grew a great flood, overwhelming me with a tsunami of experiences flowing, twittering and chattering through my body.

Crystal chandeliers bathed the court with a brilliant light, so as to be brighter and see more brightly. Amidst high-backed booths of dark walnut and white leather, herb gardens of cypress, Aristotle basil, ocimum basilicum, myrtle, jasmine and pimpinella anisum filled the air with a delicate symphony of gently intoxicating fragrances. From somewhere came a wisp of psychedelic rock—a murmur of recombinant chords, reverb of fractured melody. In the holding pool of a magnificent central waterfall, a boisterous cohort of master goldsmiths splashed in the scented waters and grasped
playfully at passing dancing girls. High caste waiters minced
demurely amid the convivial scene balancing silver platters
of the finest Patati Patata poutine garnished with frosted
lamprey fins individually threaded on crispy-fried lobster
antennae. I jumped to my feet in astonishment as a roving
automaton resembling Mother Céline Marie Claudette Dion
abruptly exploded, showering the air with miniature gift
boxes that drifted gently down towards the delighted clien-
tele on fine gossamer parachutes. My experience of Les
Promenades had been handed over to me, its collective
ambience dislocated to my own perception. I was here. This
was truly the Vale of Avalon!

As the Arcadian vista swam back into view, I was greeted
by a further phenomenon. A floating path of glowing Tupp-
perware began to manifest itself box by box, eventually
leading my eye to an elevated booth set in the far north
west of the court. Sitting in that booth, at a table piled high
with miraculous viands, the likes of which I had never seen, I
recognized the cheerfully stern countenance of the Australi-
an TV chef John Torode. Looking up, he beckoned for me to
mount the translucent path. Eagerly I climbed the shimmer-
ing bridge. To my yet-further astonishment was lifted gently
into the air by some unseen force, propelled forward, feet
dangling, and lowered into the leather seat opposite the
Master.

Torode ogled me—in that jowly, cock headed, twinkly-
eyed way of his—as if appraising a forkful of $666 Douche
Burger held at arm’s length. I was at a loss for what to say.
My stomach breached the awkward silence with a loud eru-
tion of gurgles. Obviously I could ignore the pungent aro-
mas of garlicky goodness no longer and so plucked an
amusingly realistic finger shaped appetizer from the top of a
three-tiered party platter. Just as I was about to clamp down
toothily on the morsel, Torode lifted a finger and tilted his
head an extra few degrees. With his other hand he reached
toward a hatch set into the wall between us. When he slid it
open, my finger-food slipped from my fingers and clunked
on the table. “Oh God”, I gasped, “Is it really you?”

Framed in the hatch was the grinning face of the most legendary anchorite of all. “Om nom nom nom!” spoke the apparition.

The anchorhold of Gregg Wallace was widely believed within the subterranean multitude to be nothing more than urban legend, a story adapted by the Deodanths as a propaganda tool to frighten the weak-minded and preach their repugnance at the sensual ingestion of matter. *The Body with Fried Organs* at first glance appeared to be a combination of recipe book and bestiary purportedly written by Gwen Troake, a Devon housewife who, in 2011, won the accolade Cook of the Realm, leading to the BBC selecting her to organise a banquet to be attended by Prince Charles, Earl Mountbatten of Burma, James Martin and Wallace himself. Little is mentioned of the banquet’s actual proceedings yet her “Surprise Recipe Against the New Plague”—said to have provided the event’s gastronomic entertainment—proved to be very revealing:

> Let him take his forearm with the skin on, he will take a sharp knife and raise off the skin with as much meat from the bone as he can possibly get, so that it appears like a whole forearm when stuffed. He will stuff the limb with ingredients including beef suet, veal, bacon and herbs before putting the whole thing in the oven for two and a half hours. Once removed from heat he will then reattach the arm between wrist and elbow joint and munch heartily until done. He must then attach hand to elbow joint using a sublimate of ground liverwort, black pepper, superglue and Thion Hudor. He will take a bath in clam juice but not to stay in (with his head above water) longer

Muller Ltd.: Yeah, it kinda ties the two storylines together. But, um, perhaps this is a bit too dry. It’s a tough juncture but I think that, right here, this is just a great line. Look at the way it reads, I don’t think it would read in quite the same way if it were published somewhere else. I think it’s a beautiful passage—a remarkable skill.
than half a minute, if the juice be very cold. After this he will chant the above recipe twice an hour until the limb reinstates at full length.

A further six pages of trans-memberment recipes describe increasingly miraculous culinary combinations of humans, animals, vegetables and cooking implements. It is on the seventh page that the tone abruptly changes. The Body with Fried Organs continues in a confessional prose:

He has brought me to this place in The North, a truly marvelous place that only those with the milky eyes can see . . . [The Body with Fried Organs then describes in detail the Vale of Avalon where I now sit with Torode]. . . . His handmaiden Torode explained to me that he is now ‘dead’ to the world, sealed away in an anchorhold where he will forever become Michelin. Its body had been radically reengineered as a sensorium of the self. Every inch of its skin was grafted with enhanced taste buds—eyes, ears and nostrils had been replicated, boosted and multiplied by tiny local surgeons at a very reasonable price. My own recipe for ‘recombinant chowder’ had been perfected and Wallace can now regenerate body parts at will.

As if to validate these incredible facts, an elaborate thali had been arranged before me on the anchorite’s shrine-table. Thirteen aluminum containers each containing a separate part of the recluse’s corpus were accompanied by a variety of intricately spiced toothpastes. In one katori, a lozenge of Wallace’s iconic golden brown head replaced, osso-buco, the yolk of a barbecued egg. Hardly even dusted with chat masala, the egg was supported by a tiny beer barrel moulded from low-calorie Wallace foot jelly. In another, the skin of the anchorite’s tongue was stuffed with a pate of halibut and compressed high-resolution scans of wooden letterpresses, congealed with \([\text{RhCl(H}_2\text{O)}_5\text{]}^{2+}\) at several gauss until blindingly white. In another katori a “rice” was
composed of 24 ounces of the anchorite’s fingernails, accelerated, then reheated with a third part of chicken liver, that is, 8 ounces; separated in Merkaba Orbs with a Büchner funnel, and cooked in the sun and black earth until it formed a gelatinous suspension that looks (and tastes) just like semen. The thali was seasoned with crushed anchorite backbone, ceremonially set on fire and extinguished with a mist of “Relentless” energy drink (to symbolise vitality).

Although I wasn’t feeling too peckish, I shuffled a few of the moreish morsels onto my paper sideplate and nibbled away politely. After sampling some inspiring flavorsome Wallacean dishes the handmaiden revealed this to me:

To the rear of this anchorhold a hagioscope looks onto a hyper-kitchen so splendid it knocks the rest of Avalon’s wonders into cocked hat. The comestible Wallace passes its self-anointed flesh across this pontifex where it is received with great honour. Though this flesh is our enemy, we are commanded to support it. Every day we must serve Eucharistic viands to the Great Enfolder who must worship himself to death ad infinitum so that the ouroboros of our becoming—the fearsome engine of our subterranean hypereconomy—is eternally preserved.

I had assumed that I had been invited to a macabre death ritual right up to when the hatch finally slid open and the blindfolded Wallace could be peeped inside his anchorhold, all teeth, tongues and whistling nostrils.19 “Om nom om nom?” the anchorite seemed to mumble with animated brow. He who chatters grinds chaff. The two jaws are the grindstones, the tongue is the clapper. A great fool would Wallace be if he grinded whichever he wanted, chaff or wheat. Wallace whispered only occasionally unto his handmaiden Torode, guarding his window well against idle

19 Muller Ltd.: I wasn’t so keen on that; it’s all a bit Casualty. Let’s leave it for now.
speech. He spoke infrequently and spoke little. His warbling was weighty and of great power.

Tiny laughter emanated from Torode’s belly. His stomach was channeling the anchorite’s carefully chosen gibberish into plain French. I moved closer to hear a tiny voice whisper: “I would soon as put a baby in a refrigerator than an egg”. Wallace warbled again, his tongue stopping short of a gallop. “What brings you here?” whispered Torode’s tum. “I am the Journeyman Gambini . . . .” “I approach the end and seek . . . .” “Om nom, nom om . . . .” More restrained twittering. Torode’s gut intoned, “. . . The end of the Chinese restaurant? The dawn of cous cous parties?” “I, a Journeyman”, I continued. Torode’s midriff rumbled enthusiastically. “Mmmmmm . . . we likey! You shall learn to deny the difference between yourself and all of creation by devouring everything that is dead, all rocks and things and all that lives and breathes, all cattle and all wild. On your belly shall you crawl eating dirt, dandelions and dogs the days of your life”. He twittered and warbled no more for there was no more to speak of. Silence would bring forth eternal food.

We stopped off for a light brunch at The Model of Louis XV, a local restaurant recommended by Torode that makes wonderful use of local RÉSO produce—granular star fruits, fibrous misquotations, brittle polka dots, animate proxies, chilli chocolate, winter sport curlicues, sticky traction, dry iodine rich agate fish, gelatinous telethons—donating its profits to the Monte Carlo Croupier and Straight Cops Foundation, a group dedicated to discovering renegade SWAT teams turned bad. Lunch at The Model of Louis XV worked in a traditional mode. Saucier, poissoniers, sous chefs and patty flippers investigated fusions of John Does, 354-lb.ft. torque and dentex caught between Cannes and San Remo, dizzling with metabacetus, dental popcorn and Soviet postcodes. From GIFs of mountains to the memory of lava beneath the sea—the colourful dishes we heard rumours of reflected tiny flavour intervals which are basic and strong, sometimes secreted to the point of indivisibility, but
also umami and non-tastes, “sun-drenched” values, heavier than rich, smelling “toll-free”, attenuating and exceeding all levels of attention.

Following our insinuated brunch, we went backstage to get a few lessons. Certified to BS EN1004 (Class 3), The Model of Louis XV’s kitchen was (a bit too) obviously influenced by the lyrics of the Houston based hip-hop collective Boss Hogg Outlawz. The kitchen’s scales are said to be able to determine the relative viscosity of crops decimated by the Oklahoma Air National Guard. Working with the sous chef, I mixed a ¼-cup of light soy sauce purchased at 0.9% APR, a modicum of dishonest and divisive propaganda and 3mg of Swedish parsley before exposing the concoction to 104.1 MHz for a few hours (rule of thumb, should not be saucy). Meanwhile Muller Ltd. lured a dozen public domain templates by vaf-vafing the song of the Scandinavian male water spirit Nix, before marinating them in a flooded Volvo XC60 during a cool wet summer. Do not over-process! The results hover over the taste buds, gazing listlessly out at the magnificent underground mall. By now my eyes watered more than my mouth. Removing my Gary Gilmore Contacts, taking care to peel them off simultaneously, the stagnant corpse of a Van Houtte decayed in my nostrils, the sour gall of charcoal-llice creamer melting on my oh so sorry tongue. All again was mere libation, as plain as plain can be.

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20 Muller Ltd.: We probably rewrote this bit more than any other. I think it’s a case of over-interpretation. We’ve been here already. It doesn’t hold up so well; but let’s get into that later. The effect is lost here, it doesn’t read or scan so well.
Having led me safely to the entrance of PATH, my master compagnon Muller Ltd. ouah-ouahed his goodbyes and entered a portal that would take him deep within the belly of the large beaver that guarded the entrance to the Weiden + Kennedy Building in downtown Portland. 25 years ago, at 2.30 p.m. an intern trained in the mechanics of sealing borders acting on behalf of the Advisory Council sealed off the boundary between what became officially known as La Ville Souterraine LS87KD38400 and RÉSO, leaving only one official entry-point open. A piece of paper pinned on a cork board said that these measures had been agreed upon with a decision by the Advisory Council; that they would remain in force until the conclusion of the summer sales. This was the beginning of a new development in underground shopping known to the terrestrial world as “PATH”.

I was here to undertake the next phase of my long journey of indenture. PATH would offer my apprenticeship in alterity. According to the Liber de Monstruosis Hominibus Pathis app, in the years that it had been separated from RÉ-
SO, PATH had followed its own parallel system of indenture based on the outlawed allemande traditions of Wandergesellen. In this system, everyone entered their trade as a master, assigned to their compagnon siège (Wandergesellenhaus) at birth. Since they were fully incorporated, PATH masters began their career as public limited companies, with shareholders determining their every decision. Ltd. corporate-personhood involved meeting strict productivity targets and high profit margins expected by shareholders, ensuring the maximum efficiency of person-skillbundles. PATH rigorously enforced a “work ethic”, foregrounding homo economicus over homo ludens. Ltd. masters would work 800 minutes each day every day of the year, not even breaking to celebrate Mr Peanut Day. Every seventh year, they would undertake a year long “Wanderjahre” to “de-skill” and “unlearn” their craft. At the end of their career, they would finally retire as ignorant Journeymen, freed from the burden of knowledge and the unrelenting work that attended it, but only if they accrued enough capital to acquire a majority of shares in their self. The harder they worked as young Ltd. masters, the more their stock rose, making this prospect ever more unlikely. As they unlearned, their stock and their earning power would both drop dramatically. Ltd. masters had to quickly learn how to play the corporate-personhood market, to tactically invest in others to ensure that they were not left with a personal redemption deficit. Most Ltd. masters managed to evolve from a public into a private limited company, but only a few made the rank of Journeyman. Muller Ltd. had often spoken wistfully of the day when he would liquidate himself and live off his shares in other Ltd. masters.

As I waited interminably at immigration, it gave me time to enjoy the intimate topography of PATH’s infamously gnarled, claustrophobic space. There were no trappings of the ceremonal here, although insuperable resources had been used to ensure a spectacle of power far more complex and subtle than any Baroque edifice. Rumours that the immigration chamber boasted smooth, white walls nearly 8
feet high, and that in some places a 10-foot-high atrium window substituted for the wall, fitted with an electronic warning device, turned out not to be exaggerated (although the warning device was entirely a fabrication). Electric lights, designed to illuminate noiselessly, were installed with a deliberate delicacy that masked monumental, painful effort. The chamber was also generously equipped with power outlets, the true hegemonic purpose of which remained chillingly unannounced. Such devoted displays of the latest technological resources, acts of consultation and terror, disguised the fact that in yesteryear this was once the happy site of a poutinerie. Now swathed in concrete, the ground gave no escape. A St. Christopher-shaped booby trap was situated in the ceiling, warding off those who harboured thoughts of heading for the roof. In the distance the chilling discontinuous rhythmic cacophony of metal being worked into the pale flesh of escapees tore at the visitor’s eardrums. “My name is Andrei Negura. I was born in the local magasin of Ameublement Daily Living in Les Beaux Jours galerie of eastern RÉSO. I first arrived in this waiting chamber in August five years ago in on a scholarship to major in Philosophy of Entrepreneurialism at PATH University”, whispered the young woman sitting opposite me. She did not raise her head from the tattered copy of Hello that hid her lips from the CCTV. “I only wanted to go to a school with a baseball team. Within the first month of my stay here I sold my index finger to a dog-headed witch for more money than I could earn back home in a lifetime”. This macabre transaction was the catalyst for a terrifying sequence of events cul-
minating in the appalling circumstances that Andrei currently endured. “It is 6:30 am on a bitter December morning. Outside this chamber, in the cramped tunnels of PATH, a legion of dog-headed villagers are hurling debris at the windows of their retail units. Judging by rumours I myself have spread over the past twenty-four months, I believe I may be the last human left alive in PATH. I have no Internet connection, the TV is analogue and the phones are dead”.

Although I didn’t hide my boredom, Andrei continued to recount her experience of PATH:

I was taking a walk through PATH on a quiet Sunday afternoon when my reverie was abruptly broken by a vociferous stream of curses accompanied by the high-pitched squeal of a furiously revving electric motor. I followed the noise to its source. There I discovered a portly old woman lying next to a Segway. Her personal transporter had apparently lost control and was now rocking dangerously on the precipice of a travelator. Leaping to her aid I dragged her back onto the walkway and returned the shopping that had spilled from her basket. She thanked me and invited me to tea. I had nothing better to do and generally enjoy meeting new people so I accepted.

We glided off to a cozy demonstration kitchen within one of the premier homeware stores in the Bay Adelaide Centre. Although the kitchen formed an open stage to customers ascending and descending on the adjacent travelator, we were so immersed in our conversation we forgot about our audience. From that point on I recollect nothing other than intense emotion, a feeling of great warmth and belonging as if I had returned home to the bosom of my family after a long absence. And, alt-

23 Muller Ltd.: Maybe the words aren’t so important. Wouldn’t it be great if, at any time, we could hear and see great artisans thinking about their craft? When we did our first commentary there were, like, tens, even thousands of details embedded in my ideas which I knew about, maybe the rest of my team knew about, but which were
hough this may be a consequence of hindsight, I remember that there was the distinct aroma of dog. The next thing I recall I was standing outside on the porch grinning into the spotlights that beat down on the demo-kitchen. I felt elated and slightly tipsy. My right index finger was missing and in my left hand I held a ridiculous sum of money. The stump healed impossibly fast and there was no pain whatsoever. For the sake of appearances I took a few days off university and wore a bandage for a week or so upon my return. A few more weeks passed without event and I began to feel a little saner. I was coasting along nicely again.

It should have been a joyous day. I had noticed posters in my local pub advertising a jousting tournament being held in PATH as part of Homecoming. A visiting troupe from The Society for Creative Anachronisms would be performing and, having attended some of their meetings at University earlier in the year, I was asked to help with the food service. Lodging locally, I got there early to assist in preparing the catering stands. It felt good to be involved. The event started well. I had a great view from my burger hut under the Eaton Centre. The crowds cheered at the thundering of hooves and resounding splinter of balsawood against steel. Children with plastic swords performed their own duels and faked numerous elaborate death sequences. At a lull in the proceedings a hungry and impatient queue formed in front of me.

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essentially invisible to the world at large. The commentary didn’t even scrape the surface. Wouldn’t it be amazing to make all of that thought available instantly to anyone anywhere? Constantly?

Gambini: I’m sure that that’s easy to do. You just got to ask yourself why it hasn’t happened. There’s too much at stake for the second character—what would they do if everything they ever thought about was all streamed live? Their work would vanish overnight.

Muller Ltd.: I guess so. There’d be no room for professional commentary. It makes me apprehensive. I’m mean how else could someone confirm the suspicion that the commentary on Ronald Haver
Having developed a strong phobia, I found myself compelled to lift each raw patty to the sunlight and carefully check for anomalies. It was just after such an inspection that I noticed a familiar grey-haired figure staring at me from the reed-beds by the indoor fountain. Behind her a large pack of dogs sat patiently in the water, only their heads showing above the surface. I motioned to point but, due to my missing digit, succeeded only in raising a fist. Then, as if at my unintentional salute, all hell broke loose.

The first wave of dogs burst from the water. They scrambled through the foaming shallows and leapt to the bank. As they rose to full height a terrifying deformity was rudely unveiled. Their snarling countenances were carried upon the torsos of men! Startlingly naked and with a blade in each hand, they tore into the now screaming masses. Jaws locked upon throats and knives plunged indiscriminately into the defenseless flesh of man, woman and child. Blood began to arc through the air and startled horses trampled over the fleeing spectators. A troupe of knights, led by their King, attempted to make a break towards the shopping centre’s eastern gates only to be borne down and savaged by another wave of dog-heads emerging from [Les Cafés] Second Cup. A third wave made straight for the armoury display to hastily procure crossbows and dispatch individuals who had escaped the blind chaos at the centre. Yet another group of attackers carrying petrol canisters mounted Segways and began setting the brightly coloured tents alight. A serving wench, her smock aflame, ran shrieking from the IPA tent, scissor jumped from the juice bar and smacked heavily across the foredeck of an automobile stand.

talking about King Kong is an homage to the way Ronald Haver introduced his commentary on King Kong if they weren’t able to listen to the commentary on Ronald Haver talking about King Kong?
Dogheads on Segways zoomed up the slope towards me. I dived through the serving hatch as a flaming torch burst through the door. Under cover of smoke I scrambled towards the throatless corpse of a squire. I pulled the most substantial looking Claymore from his leather scabbards and tumbled behind a dying mare. As I lay huddled on the scorched earth a suspicion of complicity nagged at my guts. Furious at my entrapment I hurtled into the fray, intent upon slaying a few of the abominable hounds before attempting escape. I swung my sword furiously at the first I encountered and his bloodstained head vectored away from his still running body. I decapitated two more before the futility of my actions hit home. I watched spellbound as my first victim plunged his fist into his neck cavity and began tugging at something inside. Instantaneously it began to morph, sprout hair and coagulate into the head of a Labrador. I glanced behind me to see the others rebirthing themselves in the same hideous manner.

Acting on instinct I dived at their naked midriffs, tackled them to the ground and pulverised their still soft cranial pods under the soles of my armoured Sorel walking boots. These two stayed down. I had found a method of permanent dispatch. I spun round in search of allies to whom I could communicate my discovery. There were none. All had been slain and my foes had swiftly departed. I was left alone with the stench of smoked meat and butchery saturating my nostrils. My ears burned with the echo of distant barking and the murmurs and screams of the dying.

I dragged myself wearily back up the slope towards the

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26 Gambini: I guess. Although we want to tie together the seemingly incomprehensible elements of this commentary, at the same time, we’re not trying to give the only reading, the only possible interpretation. We’re just trying to help you if you’ve been confused. There are a lot of people who are trying to put this together and still having difficulty.
Bay Adelaide Centre, slipping occasionally in pools of clotting blood. I pulled a corpse free of a Segway and wiped iridescent matter off the handlebars. As I glided through PATH I passed numerous isolated scenes of violent slaughter. A melancholic howling wafted across Cadillac Fairview Tower as I bunny-hopped through the cooling rejectamenta of this apparently consummate massacre. Reaching the border at 777 Bay on College I fell exhausted upon the floor. And so, I remain here, awaiting my safe repatriation to RÉSO.

As far-fetched as it was, Neguri’s story left me a little shaken. And yet, I resolved to enter PATH to discover it for myself and continue my dispassionate and scientific recording of other lands. To my surprise, it was not so different to RÉSO. Yes, it was dominated by a mean corporate approach to architecture, yes its shopping was provincial, yes its food was entirely unpalatable, yes its drink was subject to draco-nian paternalism and yes, it was populated by Anglophone cynocephali rather than humans. But, in every other respect, the cynocephalus is just like you and me.

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27 Muller Ltd.: At first you can’t tell what the hell you’re reading—then it pulls back and you can tell that it’s a commentary that suggests interpretation. But it’s not an obvious homage. What we’re suggesting is that much of what we’re reading here is just made up.
For the small price of two toonies and a loonie—coins only, no change given—PATH’s dog-legged anthropomorphs will smuggle you back through the old West End into Westside’s ancient Shanghai Tunnel network. There I would master the art of stepping. The Steps that lead down beneath Turk’s House for Sailors Tourist Information Centre have been closed to the public for more than 60 years. The ebony sculptures are too precious to be touched by crowds of tourists, although vagrants, prostitutes, delinquents, vagabonds, and rebels still insist on breaking in at night to shelter when
the bar gets rowdy with bachelorettes. I wear a brand new pair of soft Pendleton moccasins each day to work my trade, my perambulation polishing and caressing each and every plateau, removing the heady cocktail of stale urine and Hippocras, the famous spiced tonic wine, that bathes the steps.

Today I am outrider to a hoary old blanketed teton bent under the weight of a 32” CRT TV. Sometimes, as I round a landing, his TV flickers into action, catching the signal coming in illegally over the border from Washington. As one, we wearily tackle the spiraling wooden steps. Every once in a while some particularly repentant bâtard chucks in a few extra Willamette Bucks and a loose cable trips us, grazing our knees. Puddles of hobo piss, cold and moist in disposition, caress our feet. Today we are higher than yesterday, and tomorrow the compound figure of Nina, our local ghost, shall glance up to view the spiral steps disappearing around the eternal corner. Impossible to make out the end. Too far. But finis terrae will come.

I once met The Pardoner. I heard rumours of a man grinding his face flat against the jerry-built brick walls while descending the steps. I was shocked by his sudden appearance and nearly dropped the TV. His face was indeed as smooth as the wooden steps themselves. The featureless plane on the front of his head furnished no mouth to speak of. By way of greeting he proffered a business card. In olde German gothic font it bore but one word: “IMPRESARIO”. He placed the card atop the TV next to an application form and a biro. Obviously I could not fill it out without dropping the TV and voiding my amassed indulgences. (My apprenticeship is a privilege, but the bureaucracy takes the shine off the perks.) My antagonist or savior—for I knew not

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28 Gambini: Actually what’s interesting is it’s the opposite of cause and effect; it’s like the opposite of a plot. Normally, as we know, later in the text we read these exact same words. But here it’s different, it’s exceedingly difficult. It’s not just filler. It’s not linear; it’s an intense feeling, an experience rather than a moment.
which—expressed amusement at my obvious distress by flexing his sweaty biceps, rapidly erecting a small MDF cathedral, and disappearing inside before torching his flat-pack vestibule.

Grasping the remote and nun-chuck of the Samsung chantry box (which, before you complain, comes out of my wages), I resumed my circumlocutory ascent of the Steps. The flickering numerical gauge in my peripheral vision indicated several thousand clients logging to share my activity as it hits 08:00hrs in eastern RÉSO. I curse softly as I enjoy the experience of the collective pain of alterity for as long as it takes to say three sacres. An endless litany of intricate liturgical profanities fills my head:


Incorporating the babble of their thoughts, I hear the noise of our many individual existences. They, and I, care about one thing; this fusion of our mentalities oriented on the climb, the need to ascend and/or descend. Step by step we evolve, so slowly as to be nearly imperceptible.

A startup with scalable, cost-effective customer acquisition, Steps is a very profitable little free-hold. Each step clocks up kilojoules on the chantry box, the kjs convert into Bridgetown Bucks, and the neighbourhood LETS currency. Having paid my PDX Currency Corp. Lord his duty, this offers me a basic income that easily assuages my desires. But the real money comes from the profanities. A penance by
proxy, I pace the steps on the behalf of others for their liturgical indulgences (to sign up, hit the “sign-up” button at the top right of the site). When my shift ends, I am assured that I will relax upstairs with my friends, family and ancestors in the National Waffle Window & Vintage Store Memorial Museum cafe. *Causal cellar beggar!*

As I enter the National Waffle Window & Vintage Store Memorial Museum, I am ushered to a soft black easy chair close to the former Red Light vintage store panorama. I enjoy the faux vintage store mise-en-scène, thinking that this really is a no brainer. I get extra loyalty Bridgetown Bucks at the National Waffle Window & Vintage Store Memorial Museum since it is owned by PDX Currency Corp. the same LETS scheme as Steps. Most of the dishes are boiled twice in different water to avoid melancholy.

My waiter arrives promptly, serving me an amuse-bouche of cream egg benedict with Sugar Free Oregon white truffle waffle foam and suede fricassee. I smile and politely stuff some in my gob before spitting it into a napkin and discreetly palming it into my robe pocket. Such gastronomic transgressions are punishable by sumptuary law. To be seen spurning the delicate blanc manger of the leisure class can land you with a real penance: permanent demotion to bondsman. Coarse food for coarse people. But, by my reckoning, cream egg is the cause of superfluous humours, especially phlegm. Frying and baking should only be used for meats of moderate humours, never suede. The chef should be drawn through the street on a sled with the amuse-bouche bound around his neck!

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29 Muller Ltd.: This reminds me of something we said earlier on in this commentary. I’m not sure what exactly, but it’s very familiar. It takes place in a very similar context. It’s building up something that resembles, uh, the kind of commentaries we know, rather than the ones we’d really like to hear.

30 Gambini: You’ve made that comparison before. It’s not allegorical, but the structure of this text, when you look at it, hopefully makes a lot of sense. It’s audacious to include it here I think.
In a large edible mirror, ostentatiously ensconced in a shiny black baroque plaster frame, I spy my mother’s great uncle chatting with KGW-TV newscaster Joe Donlon. They are just out of earshot. He is sipping a blue Slush Puppy laced with ergot-infected rye from a demitasse cup, but seems totally bemused. Donlon is wearing a Scooby Doo costume (it was Halloween on Thursday), a character thought to generate good blood and to provoke urine, stool, and the menstrual flow. Donlon appears to be enjoying his Edible Pilgrim, a pike sporting a roast lamprey as a pilgrim staff, part of this evening’s allegorical menu of self-cooking beasts. Easy listening renditions of The Cribs’ greatest hits purr in the background (lyrics sung in Mandarin). There is a distinct aroma of truffle and my hair has recently been styled. I am wearing a pressed shirt with high collars, two buttons open to reveal my hairy chest. I check the time only to be reassured that my watch is more expensive than it need be. After having convinced the porpoise to be stuffed with minced plover, I opt instead for Trompe l’oeil Thermidor (live homard soaked in strong brandy mixed with latex casts of cooked lobsters) accompanied by a battalion of inedible wooden figurines.

Suddenly a Fred Meyer reusable bag strikes my face and is held there for some time by a shrieking icy wind. Breathless and unable to use my arms, I shake my head until it is dislodged. Before my vision clears I am immediately assailed again, this time by a lean cut of beef Tri-Tip. Sauce dribbles down my party shop robe and a pickled egg whispers something vaguely seductive in my ear. The offended voices of the compound-self ring loudly in my head for eternity and I think real tears do flow.

Muller Ltd.: I actually wouldn’t know how to cry.
I recalled fondly the soft pop as I removed the golden chipo-
lata device from the cat’s fundament and gently deflated her
into her mahogany casket. Will I ever again engage in those
sweet fireside exchanges? It is doubtful, given the totality of
the siege that awaits me on the penultimate day of my tour.
I reflect on the countless yarnbombs I have knitted. Now
they lie, strewn across the Kingdoms of RÉSO, in a nebula of
crimson medallions. The Cookie-Cutter 3D Gun. A device
uncovered in the grounds of this very compagnon siege. Its
secrets unravelled by our own resident rioter. Curse the boy!
What wrath, what immediate vengeance he has brought
upon us all. Oh that I might lift his battered spectacles up off the table and crush them with my graspable interface. Before this stronghold is dust he will fear my stench! My stinger secretes a single drop of venom in anticipation. I must vacate this self-indulgent torpor. With a shake of the mid-section, I forlornly resume the packing away of my inventory. Essentials first. 4 port USB hub/clock, ampullae, agility rings, Ainsi Soit-Elle voucher, Oh Henry! bar, cusps. But what about the mouse nozzles I never got round to stimulating and that half written diet guide (who will become obese in the lean years to follow?) Did I really need the knitted PATH dog heads for the local orphanage (orphans no more alas)?

The listing of my, soon to be sacrificed, possessions drew certain repressed emotions to the fore and I started to cry again. Stupid old Gambini.

Weary from lack of sleep, my Willard satchel almost empty, for those of gentle birth do not carry packs, I headed up west through the Shanghai Tunnel towards the First Regiment Armory’s heavily fortified spiral staircase, watching out for stumble steps and keeping my sword drawn in case suddenly surprised by an assailant. My visor was drawn so that all I could see was squeezed through the narrow slit in front of my eyes. The top of the stair was invisible with light. I could feel the sudden rise in my diastolic blood pressure. A sword was mounted just above the door. Below it was a severed arm, a trophy from a recent execution. Is that what they did with them? The left corner of the room bore damage from the artillery attack the anti-Chinese rioters had administered to the fortifications last Saturday morning in what had been an unprecedented level of visceral combat choreography. The right corner of the room bore traces of sustainable building practices, a concern for maintaining the historical character of the Armory while developing it into a theatre.

It had been a prolonged siege, a sacking with mood

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32 Gambini: Me neither. Which is why this moment is so believable to me.
swings, much bloodshed and weekday withdrawals. Having
drilled endlessly, and fought with great ferocity, many of my
compagnon émeute were lost either to the building’s com-
plex displacement ventilation system or to the murder holes
of the Pearl District’s food Eden. In retaliation, the National
Theatre Customer Service Attendants had explored this
maze-like fortress, slaughtered almost every man, woman,
child and slave who resided within the burgh walls, even
those who tried to flee to amateur dramatics held in nearby
Gothic Revival churches. Some six hundred theatre-loving
Portlanders suspected of contemplating rioting were put to
the sword. They didn’t have to do this; it was part of the
sport. Life as a National Theatre Customer Service Attend-
ants was monstrously violent, but there was the great spoil
of contentment and the reassuring illusion of power in such
arbitrary slaughter. I had learned the kind of rapport and
harmony with this place, with this way of life, as hostages can
develop for their captors.

I’d been struggling tactically, almost making it out of the
Shanghai Tunnel and into the arts citadel early in the morn-
ing, but had to pack it in and set up camp again under Old
Town Pizza until it got late. It was all about salience. The
cannon and mangonel had been the main challenge be-
cause of the need to get the launch angle just right while
ensuring that enough of my rioters survived the arrow loops
to storm the redeveloped bastion. It was much harder still
than all those months posing as a herbalist and giving alms
to vagrants on the skid road to get information on the sup-
plies of bog ore being bought by Oregon’s travelling mer-
chants travelling along the mighty Columbia River. Strangest
of all was the sudden demand for a metal acquired from
vicious griffins in the North Pole and supplied by a one-eyed

33 Gambini: But it can’t always can it? I feel we have to confront this
just to make sure it’s the case. This remains one of the most interest-
ing subtexts of this commentary. It’s an abstraction perhaps, maybe
the unknown. The way the characters get split up and then end up
becoming practically the same people.
horseman that I’d learned of while temping at Cargo on NW13th. I was sure this line of investigation would pay off eventually (it was probably destined for a handcrafted guitar pedal of some sort), but I wasn’t quite sure how.

The ones that didn’t make it, the infected corpses, were swaddled in manure, loaded onto a trebuchet and fired over the fortifications at our common enemy. As part of the ongoing work to conquer the Pearl District, this framework was the best practice, improving morale of my team while causing the greatest psychological damage to our adversary. My reward for being coordinated was that diorama. The dénouement—a fifty-pound projectile pinning the sustainably designed battalion’s mascot, a black swallow, to the ground—was such a nice touch. It gave me an immense feeling of satisfaction. It brought it all back down to earth. This is what it was really about. Forty smurfberries was all it took to get me started.

My eyes slowly drifted around the room, scanning robotically from left to right as if weighed down by a heavy suit of body armour. It truly made me feel as if I was in hostile territory, out of my depth. A peephole window was garlanded by a swarm of dead insects. The lonesome horns of freight trains crossing the Eastside’s railroad intersections scented the evening air. On the twilight horizon in the Willamette River, I could just make out the Chinese galleons in all their colourful elegance swarming in preparation for their migration to warmer waters. They appeared to float above the sea, painterly and glitch-ridden, breaking up like oil on water. These old boys looked hazy, lost in the obscurity of the haar. A light as intense as five suns illuminated the upper layers of the atmosphere, reflecting their crimson glow back indirectly, giving the impression of looking in rather than out. Their portholes percolated a sticky sap into the water.

As I turned from the window, my eyes readjusted to the gloom. I could now see a dark pulsating mass in the opposite corner of the room. The same sticky substance glistened in the gleaming beam that fell from the window. A trickle
down a falling wall, it formed rivulets and contortions on the surfaces and cavities of the dusty corner. A babble of pigments the colour of molasses, copper and silver was spawning a globular residue of elaborate grandeur. Without allowing my attention to stray, I leaned over to where I’d left a fine glass Mason preserve jar perching precariously on the edge of a flowerpot stand. As I took a sip of lukewarm Portland Oyster Stout, this darkest fluid pumped out molasses of sumptuously misshapen treacle tresses. The dry black air caught in the back of my throat causing me to hiccup, a liquid flesh dribbling and oozing like melted chocolate. I was ravished.\textsuperscript{34} The sensation of a deep anxiety about this medium was at once overwhelming.\textsuperscript{35}

Scanning the ground through my visor I spied fragments of a substance approximating molten metal and black glass, and here and there dark stains caused by this subtly briny liquid. I opened up the window to engage the gas chromatography sequence: “nine globular proteins of unknown sequence and conformation”. Less-than-thrilling prose. I’d seen something like this before, a transparent black-red pigment made from coagulated elephant and dragon blood. These incidents would have made a slight impression on my mind, but for the fact that I had the tingling, tantalising feeling that an entity was about to manifest itself. The mass was drawing me ever closer, inviting me to reach out and touch this form that was starting to reveal itself. It was as if I felt the very substance in which my experience was being rendered.

Maybe it was a metaphor; they were getting more popular again. I could use a bit of a story every now and again. The alternative was the universal lowest common denominator, the race for the bottom. Meaning had been tied to colour then, it was part of the alchemical philosopher’s stone.

\textsuperscript{34} Muller Ltd.: I think I nicked that bit. It’s a quote I think. It gives it more emotional weight—I can see the effect it has. I’m really happy with it.

\textsuperscript{35} Gambini: I think you did a great job.
Crushing the glands of the snail. It was one thing to paint amazing worlds and incredible historical detail; another to make a connection through the labyrinthine subjective conflict the protagonist has to go through. This is what makes the experience more human, what lends it cordiality. It was more than just dressing up. What was this elusive, sweaty, adhesive mass? A prosthetic? Body armour? Viscose vest? A periwig? These were two identical images pushing and pulling against one another, in fact—I experienced them twice, reverberating with the same breath, causing me to gag on a chocolate raisin.

The thick stone walls delayed the detailed reflections. And then, standing in this shadow, I saw a man-at-arms, a somewhat vain, satisfied figure of authority. Hand on hip, his potbelly protruded proudly as if to escape its armoured guard. His white kid gloves gleamed in the twilight. “A noble will reap a handsome ransom”, I thought. Now to put him to his broadsword. I tilted my hand a few degrees to the right, gesturing towards the framed figure as if to flush him. Then I saw that this was not a knight. A quarter-length portrait revealed all its skill, detail, richness and restraint. This figure at once swung out from the theatre wall and vanished in flash, disintegrating into a thousand shards.

A momentary lapse of equilibrium, and the connection was plain. This was my own reflection. The mere presence of this Claude glass incited the supernatural powers of its owner. It transformed my perception into permeable boundaries, liminalities, analogies, doublings. Didn’t big grey elephants recognize their own reflection? Or was it the armour-plated rhino from Anthropologie? My passions and vanity were at once intimate and at a double remove. Through a glass darkly, my auxiliary organs made me ingest and feel the terror, wonder and understanding of this delay. These broken images, these situations and identities, this natural magic, this calisthenics of the mind and eye, were part of who I was right now.

As the quartz evaporated and the silvering sputtered to
the ground, the wall behind the looking glass betrayed a dark black chasm. It billowed a curious sulphurous odour. I shook my body towards it spasmodically, crouched down and pushed myself into the cavern. A cinematic sequence immediately commenced. In this, I crawled along a dark and dank passage through the Armory’s walls into its vaults and onwards into a tunnel that took me under a breach in the fortress wall. From there I followed the peripheral Shanghai passages that ran like a warren under the ancient town. They took me beneath downtown landmarks: REI, Union Station, The Frying Scotsman, Cool Moon Ice Cream, BridgePort Brewpub, Pacific Northwest College of Art, Aveda Institute, Rose City Mortgage, Patagonia, Peets, Pearl Bakery, Oven & Shaker . . . and onwards deep beneath the Willamette itself.

As I emerged from the Shanghai Tunnel into the National Waffle Window & Vintage Store Memorial Museum cafe, the first thing I saw was the glinting light reflected in my perfectly preserved gauntlet. Presumably I was using this hand to crawl through the tunnel, yet the gauntlet was perfect with no wear marks and no dirt whatsoever on it. My impressively detailed prospect told me that the pit could not have been dug out by Sedantaire—it must have been the product of modern industrialised mining made in the future or in the distant past. These were continuity errors that, in any other situation, would have permanently suspended my belief. But such ontological discrepancies were part of the flat world of wanderlust I had come to accept: the indistinct plot-lines, the lack of strict causality, the duplicate personas, the shifts of setting and time, facts and fantasies. There was no index of fundamental truth, the genre just seemed to simply transform with each new release.\(^{36}\)

The rattling of body piercings refocused my attention. Something was coming along the tunnel after me. It tilted forwards to run towards a set of sandstone steps leading it

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\(^{36}\) Gambini: I like this change of tone—it’s less polemical. I had to fight to have this bit in here.
quickly up and out into the light. Suddenly the air separated into a myriad of celestial particles. A heavy explosion, shuddered the earth beneath. The tunnel had collapsed in its wake, vitrifying and melting, leaving me stranded a block back atop the Baghdad Theatre. When the wind and dust subsided upon the orientalist theatre’s red tiled roof I saw in front of me a Victorian gentleman’s machine. It was beautifully crafted in the arabesque style popular in fan fiction workshops held at the Belmont branch of the Multnomah County Library. Not a whiff of von Braun or Teflon. So the griffin-sourced base metals were for this marvellous steam-punkery? An early flying machine designed for vertical take-off and landing? Perhaps this materia obscura was a lifeboat come to take me to the next level? But how could such a chariot of fire possibly work? A chocolate raisin’s worth of antimatter would be enough to take me around the celestial spheres, but it would require engines and some means of storage. Despite my immediate concerns over the lack of boosters or, indeed, of any visible engineering, it looked like it was being groomed for the official launch of a magnificent journey.

I walked up onto an adjacent ceremonial platform and faced the machine. As I stood in position, my heavy armoured Sorel boots holding me steady, an intense beam of red light thundered and flashed from the base of the podium, its hot vapor lapping and scorching around the mechanical voyager. I imagined a hot breath of wind on my face blown up by this intense thunder, earthquake, storm and tempest. As the crystallizing flame of devouring fire deflected off the roof of the theatre beneath me, the flying charger rose, in infinite brilliance.

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Muller Ltd.: We should probably get back to the key themes. This is getting like some horrible hospital drama.

Gambini: Sure.