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Polaris (a tragedy expansion pack)

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P O L A R I S
(A TRAGEDY EXPANSION PACK)

by

Charles Green

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the
Master of Fine Arts
degree in Theatre Arts in the
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Thesis Supervisor: Associate Professor Art Borreca

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PUBLIC ABSTRACT

Polaris (a tragedy expansion pack) is a sci-fi memory play that wrestles with grief and childhood trauma through a theatrical landscape of emotional adventure and alternate realities. The drama follows Polaris, an astronaut who arrives on an alien planet while searching for his brother, Gideon, a scientist who has been kidnapped by a cell of intergalactic pirates. Polaris, however, is sightless, moving through the world (an empty stage) with the help of Dawn, a disembodied voice who describes the fantastical surroundings for Polaris (and the audience) and offers him choices, acting as a GPS and theatrical Game Master as the astronaut follows clues, grapples with his troubled past, and attempts to solve the mystery of his missing brother. But as Polaris falls deeper into the wondrous alien maze of jetpacks and talking statues, the true human reality of his loss and pain begins to materialize— and all the imagination and fantasy in the world can no longer mask the truth of his heartbreak.

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Forward

Towards a Post-Theatrical Drama

1. Hyper-Modernity: Prosumerism & the And/Also Impulse

Polaris (a tragedy expansion pack) is a salvo in a new aesthetic war. As we transition from the era of Post-Modernism into Hyper-Modernism, the legacy of 20th century theatre— from the ‘traditional’ to the ‘experimental’— can no longer be relied on to reflect our reality. While this forward has no pretensions to essay any exhaustive political or economic analysis, I think it is imperative we acknowledge that, in the 21st century, Fordist industry and material consumerism have now given way to the cognitive capitalism and participatory culture of the Control Society forewarned by Gilles Deleuze¹. Where the populace once underwent an (alienated) labor process in the realm of ‘work’ and consumed said products in the realm of ‘leisure,’ these categories have collapsed into a totalizing syncretism— that of prosumption: the necessity, from our entertainment to our identities to our ideologies, to have an (illusory) hand in the creation of what we consume².

There are the basic examples of prosumption, from the ease of non-professionals creating memes and YouTube videos to ‘voting’ on *American Idol* to curating and rigorously maintaining a Facebook persona for (ostensibly) one’s own pleasure. However, while the syncretism of the consumer who (believes he) produces what he consumes— while of course only working for free to build content for Twitter and YouTube— stems from the need to *be* included, it also results in the sheer, unrestrained need *to* include, often simply for the sake of inclusion. This excess of ‘creative’ energy results in what I term the *and/also* impulse, an inclusionary drive that logically extends from the prosumer pathology of total personal participation. One cannot help but think of the toddler putting gummy worms on her pizza or the pre-teen filling his cup with a splash of ten different drinks at the soda fountain, all for the sake of ‘creating,’ this energy now undergirded by a need for total inclusion— driven simply by the (illusory) fact that, as participators, they *have the freedom to do so*.

¹ Gilles Deleuze, “Postscript on the Societies of Control,” *October*, Vol. 59, Winter, (1992): 3-7.

² Bernard Stiegler. *Symbolic Misery, Vol. 1: The Hyperindustrial Epoch*. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2014), 23-27.

However, the prosumer's inclusionary and/or impulse has— as cognitive capitalism affects *all* facets of life in the Control Society— spilled over from the realm of commercialism, causing prosumers to demand such 'creative' participatory and inclusionary outlets within the very framework of society itself, even with concern to ethics and ideology.

For example, where 20th century Modernism attempted to present the ideological either/or of Capitalism/Communism, and Post-Modernism attempted a neither/nor negation of all master-narratives, our age, ruled by the urge towards an and/or, demands *syncretic ideologies*— often flying in the face of logic itself. One can now be a capitalist *and also* a communist, subscribing to Communo-Capitalism,³ an oxymoronic Internet invention that revels in its very contradiction, thereby reflecting that it was created by amateurs driven more by the impulse *to create* an ideology for themselves, rather than to find and accept something more logical, but which they themselves did not create. While other such 'meme ideologies'— political philosophies first established, often as jokes, by Internet 'trolls'— include such absurd concoctions as Libertarian-Monarchism, Techno-Primitivism, and Anarcho-Fascism⁴, these bizarre syncretic ideologies are nonetheless prevalent on online message boards such as 4chan (where the Alt-Right came into being in the early 2010s),⁵ thereby giving them weight and influence in the Information Age. What is more alarming is that many of these and/or ideologies have been taken up and articulated by genuine philosophers. Nick Land's *Dark Enlightenment* is a rigorous legitimation of Communo-Capitalism (blending Trotskyism and Corporatism),⁶ Guillaume Faye's *Archeofuturism* synthesizes Feudalism and Technocracy,⁷ and

³ Anonymous, "r/CommunoCapitalism," *Reddit.com*. Accessed March 25, 2019. <https://www.reddit.com/r/CommunoCapitalism/>

⁴ Anonymous, "r/COMPLETEANARCHY," *Reddit.com*. Accessed March 25, 2019. <https://www.reddit.com/r/COMPLETEANARCHY/>

⁵ Angela Nagle. *Kill All Normies*. (Croydon: Zero Books, 2017), 10-11.

⁶ Nick Land, "The Dark Enlightenment," *The Dark Enlightenment.com*. Accessed March 25, 2019. <http://www.thedarkenlightenment.com/the-dark-enlightenment-by-nick-land/>

⁷ Guillaume Faye. *Archeofuturism: European Visions of the Post-Catastrophic Age*. (London: Arktos Media, 2010).

Alexander Dugin's *The Fourth Political Theory* manages to bridge Stalinism and Hitlerism.⁸ As these theorists' writings gain influence— as they have with the French, Russian, and American Far-Right⁹— the and/also impulse of Hyper-Modernism, born from the excess of prosumerism's 'creative' participatory and inclusionary energy, is therefore proving, slowly but surely, to be as effective at reshaping our very ethics as it is at reshaping our entertainment.

So how does this paradigm shift affect 21st century theatre? Personally, while I believe that prosumption is a baleful, spiritual deformity necessitated by cognitive capitalism, that does not mean it is not our reality. Therefore, our theatre must engage with these psychic structures, leaving behind the either/or rigidity of 20th century Modern drama and the neither/nor liberal excess of Post-Modern theatre. Instead, we must allow for a genuinely creative space for our audience, presenting them with an intellectually and artistically rigorous and/also *for the stage* in which to utilize their participatory impulse in a meaningful and spiritually fulfilling way, outside the confines of cognitive capitalism and our Control Society. This syncretic, staged experience is what I call Post-Theatrical Drama; and it is, I believe, the only path forward.

2. Aesthetic Progenitors: Syncretic Art & Ergodic Literature

While Post-Theatrical Drama is a direct response to the unique phenomenology of Hyper-Modernism— attempting to utilize prosumerism's illusion of participation and its illogical inclusiveness in order to undermine, through art, this very system's deleterious effects— this seemingly new category of aesthetic expression in fact draws from a legacy of older artistic models, namely those which, for markedly different reasons, as well sought to engage with the inclusionary or participatory impulses of their own times. While these earlier impulses, by my estimation, more often than not reflected the needs of the *artist* rather than the audience, the cursory analysis of various historical oeuvres, each motivated by an urgent and/also, or by the desire to amplify a sense of productive engagement, is necessary if we are to be successful in legitimating Post-Theatrical Drama as something more than a mere theory.

⁸ Alexander Dugin. *The Fourth Political Theory*. (London: Arktos Media, 2012).

⁹ Bernard E. Harcourt, "How Trump Fuels the Fascist Right," *The New York Review of Books*. Accessed March 25, 2019. <https://www.nybooks.com/daily/2018/11/29/how-trump-fuels-the-fascist-right/>

Just as we have found Post-Modern theatre and Modern drama to have charted all of their allotted territories to exhaustion (whether due to having reached ‘perfection’ or having at last proven themselves ‘inadequate’ is a matter of taste), so too did a group of mid-16th century painters and sculptors feel that the harmony, naturalness, and technical virtuosity of da Vinci, Raphael, and Michelangelo, as well as the monumentality influenced by Classical Greek statuary, had both reached their logical conclusions.¹⁰ Instead, these dissatisfied artists, known as the Mannerists, sought to syncretize these two disparate but ‘perfect’ forms into a new, seemingly ‘imperfect’ aesthetic. By applying the proportions and spatial logic of sculpture (which often only appear ‘natural’ when seen at a distance and/or from below) to painting, and by applying a ‘painterly’ sense of movement and perspective to sculpture,¹¹ the Mannerists created a syncretic art, neither accepting nor rejecting the major forms of their time, but rather surpassing both through their (seemingly) illogical merger. The resultant work is strange and breathtaking, from Parmigianino’s painting *Madonna with the Long Neck*— in which the infant Jesus appears to be nearly half the size of his mother, while the adult St. Jerome is presented as no taller than her knee¹²— to Giambologna’s sculpture *Rape of the Sabine Women*— which forces the figures into highly expressive and nearly impossible poses that, through this arrangement, compels a multiplicity of perspectives, as if each angle was a different painting utilizing its own vanishing point.¹³ While the Mannerists were channeling an and/also impulse in order to destabilize prevailing tastes, rather than to better engage the cognitive makeup of their audience, their syncretic model is still an essential foundation for the aesthetics of Post-Theatrical Drama, demonstrating how ‘illogical inclusiveness’ has the ability to create a legitimate work of art.

Similarly, the early 19th century saw, in the realm of European compositional music, a comparable dissatisfaction with that era’s apical forms. If Gluck, Mozart, and Rossini had

¹⁰ Martin Gayford, “The Brilliant Neurotics of the Late Renaissance,” *The Spectator*. Accessed March 25, 2019. <https://www.spectator.co.uk/2014/05/downright-peculiar-art-but-brilliant-too/>

¹¹ Sydney Freedberg. *Painting of the High Renaissance in Rome and Florence*. (Saint Paul: Harper & Row, 1961), 89-95.

¹² E.H. Gornbrich. *The Story of Art*. (London: Phaidon Press, 1996), 276-278.

¹³ Shannon Pritchard. “Giambologna, Abduction of the Sabine Women,” *Khan Academy*. Accessed March 25, 2019. <https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/renaissance-reformation/high-renaissance-rome/pontormo/a/giambologna-abduction-sabine-woman>

perfected the Opera (as it was believed at the time) and Beethoven and Schumann had perfected Absolute (purely instrumental) Music,¹⁴ then it appeared that the artistic field required something new— an idiosyncratic, spiritual heir to both: known as Program Music. Championed most radically by French composer Hector Berlioz, this aesthetic approach bridged the two aforementioned musical categories by presenting the narrative drama of Opera *through* non-vocal, instrumental compositions.¹⁵ Every movement of a Program Symphony tells a literal story and, therefore, utilizes a dizzying array of aural mimesis— from the striking of violin strings with the stick to suggest dancing skeletons to a muffled oboe played offstage in order to represent a distant speaker.¹⁶ Furthermore, in order to even more fully wed the operatic and the symphonic, the eponymous Program Notes were distributed before each concert. These documents contained a narrative explanation of each movement, detailing the characters and events being portrayed by the symphony and thereby acted as “the spoken text of an opera, which serve[d] to introduce musical movements and to motivate their character and expression [in the audience’s imagination],” to quote Berlioz himself.¹⁷ Much in the way that Mannerist art, while inspired by the impulse to be a painting *and also* a sculpture (and vice versa), ultimately *subsumed* the logic of painting and sculpture into a singularity— rather than becoming an obvious hybrid or chimera— so too did Program Music prove to be a wholly unique experience, something as ‘narrative’ as Opera, but just as ‘abstract’ as instrumental music.

This dynamic is the very foundation of syncretic art, which is why I have chosen syncretism, rather than ‘synthesis’ or ‘hybridity,’ as my preferred term. For the lesson gained from the 16th and 19th centuries, which we shall carry into our considerations of Post-Theatrical Drama, is that the success of syncretic art is a result of the merging of the *logics* of two disparate aesthetic structures, rather than the creation of some patchwork

¹⁴ Carl Dahlhaus. *The Idea of Absolute Music*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 128-132.

¹⁵ *Encyclopedia Britannica*, s.v. “Program Music,” Accessed March 25, 2019, www.britannica.com/art/program-music

¹⁶ *Leonard Bernstein’s Young People’s Concerts: Berlioz Takes a Trip*. Directed by Roger Englander. New York, NY: New York Philharmonic, 1965. DVD.

¹⁷ Michael Steinberg, “Symphony Fantastic: Program Notes,” *San Francisco Symphony.org*. Accessed March 25, 2018. <https://www.sfsymphony.org/Watch-Listen-Learn/Read-Program-Notes/Program-Notes/Berlioz-Symphonie-fantastique.aspx>

amalgamation. While Mannerism looked at the *logic* of painting (as based in movement and perspective) and the *logic* of sculpture (as based in monumental spatiality and distance) and managed to philosophically combine both, a Mannerist painting is still *a painting*, just as a mannerist sculpture is still *a sculpture*; it simply follows a different internal, logical structure— that of the inclusionary and/also. In the same way, where Program Music looked at the *logic* of Opera (as literary and narrative) and the *logic* of Absolute Music (as abstract and instrumental) and created a whole new experience for the concertgoer, a Program Symphony is still a *symphony*; it has simply found a way to *also* express the essence of Opera within it. Therefore, as we move to define Post-Theatrical Drama’s unique syncretic nature, it is essential we remember that previous successful responses to the and/also impulse combined the *logic* of different systems and not their materiality. I mention this only as a preemptive strike against any who may be considering multi-media as a viable response to prosumerism’s ‘inclusionary’ drive. Instead, let the Mannerists and Program Composers stand as a far better model, one steeped in a tradition concerned with the nature of forms and the syncretic process, not in a crass synthetic product that merely muddies its component parts.

If the above gives us a clearer sense of the legacy of strategies we may employ in order to respond to the inclusionary and/also impulse of prosumerism in our audience today, what of the participatory urge found in Hyper-Modern culture? Is there an historical precedent we may look to in order to find an intellectually rigorous way to reach our audience through an (illusory) sense of participation and ‘creation’? Luckily, there is such a legacy.

Obviously, literal ‘audience participation’ is a decayed, totalitarian ploy utilized by Post-Modern theatre and is, therefore, antithetical to our project for a myriad of reasons I do not have the time to enumerate. Suffice it to say, the heir of this tactic is Cirque du Soleil, a multi-million dollar company that puts on nightly shows in Las Vegas for \$80 a ticket in the bowels of an engorged casino. Therefore, we must look to what Espen J. Aarseth refers to as Ergodic literature— works of art in which “nontrivial effort is required to allow the reader to traverse the text.”¹⁸

¹⁸ Espen J. Aarseth. *Cybertext: Perspectives on Ergodic Literature*. (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1997), 32.

Aarseth's term is the composite of two Greek words— *ergon*, meaning “work,” and *hodos*, meaning “path.”¹⁹ As such, the aesthetic category encapsulates any work in which the audience must actively participate in order to unlock and follow the path of the text, for “in a material sense [the Ergodic work of art] includes the rules for its own use, a work that has certain requirements built in that automatically distinguishes between successful and unsuccessful users.”²⁰ As such, Aarseth's classification includes a range of texts from the *I Ching* to Nabokov's *Pale Fire* to computer games to Choose-Your-Own-Adventure books. What makes Ergodic literature a useful model for us is its intrinsic participatory nature, one that, as found in prosumerism, presents the ‘illusion’ of audience choice and creation, when in fact an inherent set of limitations exists within the work.

While the intentions of early Ergodic artists— whether they employed these practices for their own entertainment or indeed to reach the unique, changing cognitive makeup of their audience— is not our concern, the ways in which they constructed the internal *logic* of their art is a useful model for us as we attempt to funnel our 21st century audience's prosumerist ‘creative’ impulse into something meaningful and spiritually fulfilling, i.e. Post-Theatrical Drama, rather than Facebook or 4chan.

The most comprehensive literary school that engaged in Ergodic work is certainly Oulipo, a collective of French authors and mathematicians who, in the 1960s used games, constraints, and complex systems in order to craft an oeuvre built on the principle of *littérature potentielle*, “the seeking of new structures and patterns which may be used by writers in any way they enjoy.”²¹ The major body of Oulipo's work, therefore, was born from the urge for the *writer* to amplify his sense of participation; the *logic* of creation was thus given preeminence, unlocking, with the genesis of each text, a new *hodos* (path) of creation through the *ergon* (work) of rules. However, Oulipo did produce some genuinely Ergodic writings, most notably Raymond Queneau's *One Hundred Thousand Billion Poems*. The book is a set of ten sonnets with each line separated onto its own slip. As the reader traverses the text, they may rearrange the lines to form new sonnets, thereby

¹⁹ Aarseth. *Cybertext: Perspectives on Ergodic Literature*, 5.

²⁰ Aarseth. *Cybertext*, 47.

²¹ Warren F. Motte. *A Primer of Potential Literature*. (Champaign: Dalkey Archive Press, 2015), 3.

allowing for 10^{14} (= 100,000,000,000,000) different possible poems to unfold.²² Queneau, therefore, gives the reader a sense of participation, an illusionary belief that *they* have created something, when of course the *author* has done the actual writing and has thus engineered all of the possible outcomes beforehand. Nonetheless, *One Hundred Thousand Billion Poems* gives its audience an outlet for its ‘creative’ energy by composing a literary space infused with the *logic* of creation.

In the same decade, Dr. Joseph Weizenbaum of M.I.T. ventured to create an Ergodic literature of a markedly different materiality— that of the computer program. *ELIZA*, a natural language processing program, could be ‘communicated with’ by a human interlocutor; the engaged party would type out text— as if participating in a conversation— and *ELIZA* would then ‘respond.’²³ While the system was rudimentary, merely simulating dialogue through pattern matching and algorithmic substitution, users reported experiencing emotional reactions, growing attached to this conversational partner who was, in fact, no more than a series of 1s and 0s.²⁴ Weizenbaum’s creation, then, succeeded in giving his audience a participatory role that appeared to ‘create’ (seemingly) limitless responses from *ELIZA* based on the uniqueness of the participant’s own questions and statements. However, as with *One Hundred Thousand Billion Poems*, all of *ELIZA*’s answers were preprogrammed, running off of a set of scripts²⁵ that gave the illusion of a spontaneity born purely from the user’s textual inventiveness, but which were nonetheless merely a set of choices that created a *hodos* (path) through the *ergon* (work) of the audience inputting data.

What should be clear by now, through our examples of Oulipo and *ELIZA* as pillars of Ergodic literature, is how works of art can be infused with the *logic* of creation, allowing an outlet for an audience’s ‘creative’ energy (a need which has become baseline in our prosumer culture), without succumbing to the total havoc of *actual* unrestricted creation

²² Natalie L. Burkman. “The Algorithmic Literature of Oulipo,” *The Center for Digital Humanities Princeton*. Accessed March 25, 2019. <https://cdh.princeton.edu/updates/2015/11/16/algorithmic-literature-oulipo/>

²³ Peter Novig. *Paradigms of Artificial Intelligence Programming*. (New York: Morgan Kaufman Publishers, 1992), 151-154.

²⁴ Joseph Weizenbaum. *Computer Power and Human Reason: From Judgment to Calculation*. (New York: W.H. Freeman and Company, 1976), 189.

²⁵ Weizenbaum. *Computer Power and Human Reason: From Judgment to Calculation*, 2-6.

on the part of the readers/users. Queneau, quite consciously, did not simply present his audience with ten blank pages and tell them to write their own sonnets, nor did Weizenbaum sit interested parties before a computer and instruct them to code their own natural language processing program. Instead, much as Mannerists instilled the *logic* of sculpture into their paintings and Program Composers instilled the *logic* of opera into their symphonies, so too did the early authors of Ergodic literature understand that, while an audience wants to participate in the process of creation, the artist's task is to construct this outlet *through* rules and structures grounded in the *logic* of creation, thereby both inspiring and limiting the audience's experience by having them work along a path that leads, ultimately, to an aesthetic (and psychic) event pre-engineered by the author. This Ergodic strategy almost perfectly mirrors the tactics of cognitive capitalism in the Hyper-Modern age, just as the works of the early syncretic artists seem prophetic harbingers of the and/also impulse that now dominates 21st century prosumer culture. Therefore, these two models will guide us as we define the formal principles of Post-Theatrical Drama; but we must still, nonetheless, pay careful mind to the particularities of our time and our medium as we do so.

3. Post-Theatrical Drama: Formal Principles

The term Post-Theatrical Drama has both philosophical and trollishly combative roots. To confess the latter, the syntax of our term is a direct response to Hans-Thies Lehmann's codification of Post-Modern stagecraft, a catalogue of mid to late 20th century aesthetic practices, which he places under the umbrella category of Postdramatic Theatre.²⁶ While this is not the venue to unpack (and incessantly belabor my contempt for) the artistic and political principles that undergird this theory, it should be clear by now that our project is a direct reaction against the trends of the Post-Modern stage, and so I find it fitting to undermine the very syntactical construction of Lehmann's term with my own.

Philosophically, however, Post-Theatrical Drama is in fact a meaningful term. Given that we often use "theatre" and "drama" interchangeably, it may at first seem confusing, perhaps prompting one to ask: "How can theatre *not be* theatrical?" This would be a misreading, as I use *post* as "to transcend" (rather than as a negation) and by *theatricality* I mean a set of expected stage conventions concerned with the *thea* ("seeing") and

²⁶ Hans-Thies Lehmann. *Postdramatic Theatre*. (New York: Routledge, 2006), 1.

subsequent *opsis* (“spectacle”) of a dramatic experience. My use of the word *drama*, in this construction, therefore refers simply to the foundational existence of our medium, thereby taking the play or production as a given fact. Put even more simply, the *drama* is the “what,” while the *theatricality* is the “how.”

Postdramatic Theatre, then, attempted to transcend the “what” (ostensibly for the sake of ‘undermining’ the tyranny of text and narrative), but only managed to overly-concretize its “how,” giving birth to a bloated world of spectacle that existed merely to fill the void of its missing “what.” This is why Post-Modern theatre is now marketable and highly profitable in places like Las Vegas; it relies on (and, at heart, truly only is) a set of expected stage conventions concerned with spectacle and the auteur’s monopoly on meaning— the “how” now an engorged autotelic “what” from which we turn away in disgust.

Modern drama, on the other hand, *overly* integrated theatricality and drama (which is, I believe, the cause of their seeming interchangeability as terms). In doing so, a different set of expected stage conventions— which Post-Modern Theatre then tried to subvert— came into being, namely the “representational” (Realism, Naturalism, etc). By trying to bring the drama “to life,” Modernist approaches treated the “how” as self-evident, as either a visual means of merely representing the materiality or expressing the emotionality of the play. Its sense of theatricality, therefore, had no utility beyond helping to visualize the story and/or themes. While this integration may sound ideal— especially in relation to Post-Modernism’s lopsided over-emphasis on theatricality at the expense of drama— this dynamic in fact robs theatricality of its function as an actively questioning, *interrogative* “how,” instead relegating it— just as in Post-Modern Theatre— to a set of expected conventions, an *explanatory* “how” that most audiences simply take for granted when they think of ‘theatre.’

Therefore, Post-Theatrical Drama is neither naively “anti-theatrical” nor regressively “pre-theatrical.” Rather, it is a reinvestigation of the accepted “how” of Post-Modernism and Modernism respectively, employing a syncretic approach to the question in order to meaningfully engage an audience whose psychic structures have been reshaped by the and/also impulse of Hyper-Modernism.

Here, we will draw from our earlier syncretic models. Applying the syntax of Post-Theatrical Drama to our progenitors, one might call Mannerism Post-Perspectivist

Painting and the work of the Program Composers Post-Instrumental Symphonies. Obviously, Parmigianino still used perspective in his paintings, while Berlioz still used instruments. However, as mathematical perspective dominated the conventional “how” of High Renaissance painting, and pure instrumentation dominated the conventional “how” of 19th century Absolute Music, the Mannerists subverted expectation by introducing the “how” (here, monumental perspective) of sculpture into painting, while Berlioz and his ilk introduced the “how” (here, narrative) of opera into their symphonies. Neither abandoned the use of a set of conventions in their work; rather, they imported the logic of another form’s “how” into their own, thereby making something new. Therefore, our Post-Theatricality must too embrace the logic of other forms, syncretizing them with the unique aspects of drama in order to dismantle the abstract spectacle of Post-Modernism and the coarse materiality of Modernism. What this will look like, I will soon explain. However, our use of the Ergodic in the realm of drama must first be understood— for, in Post-Theatrical Drama, the syncretic and the Ergodic are themselves syncretized, forming an indissoluble whole that simultaneously encapsulates the participatory and inclusionary urges of our audience’s (prosumer-fueled) ‘creative’ energy.

The Ergodic literatures we have thus far discussed have been inherently tied up with their materialities, namely paper text and computer code, and I believe this is essential to the Ergodic process as a whole. The reader of *One Hundred Thousand Billion Poems* is so successfully given the illusion of ‘creating’ poems due to the fact she is physically handling the text; this material participation gives her access to the *poet’s* creative process, namely the engagement with ink and paper, the rearrangement of the pre-cut slips simulating Queneau’s own cutting. The user of *ELIZA*, similarly, gets to experience the creativity of programming; for the illusion of *ELIZA’s* spontaneity is in fact no more than the result of the audience’s inputting data at a computer terminal, just as Weizenbaum did in order to create the program in the first place. The materiality of each literature, then, gives the audience access to the logic of each medium’s *unique creative process*— the way in which a poet or programmer generates, always within the sphere of their medium’s material logic, lays the foundation for the Ergodic experience. A web-based adaptation of *One Hundred Thousand Billion Poems* or an aural version of *ELIZA* would fail in capturing this essential foundation; the logic of each form’s material conditions, and the subsequent psychic space the artist inhabits in order to engage with

their particular literary field, determines the unique paths and approaches to work the audience will participate in within each piece. Therefore, as we venture to infuse Post-Theatrical Drama with the Ergodic, we must bear in mind the material conditions of drama, essaying to replicate for our participatory audience the psychic space inhabited *uniquely* by theatre-makers. Furthermore, if we are to accept this principle as essential to our project, then the *logic* of forms we choose to syncretize with the dramatic must too be *in service* of this, helping only to better fashion a creative, psychic space for our audience that simulates the theatre-maker's own process.

Thus, the formal principles of Post-Theatrical Drama are as follows:

- 1) We must syncretize the *logic* of non-theatrical forms with our drama, thereby unlocking a different "how" to the logic of our own medium.
- 2) We must then take this new "how," investigating its reflection of our own creative, psychic space as, uniquely, theatre-makers.
- 3) We must then 'stage' this psychic space through the utilization of our new, syncretic "how," allowing our audience to (seemingly) participate in the creative process.

To give a concrete example:

- 1) Let us syncretize the logic of the *first person novel* with the dramatic form.
- 2) Investigating this new dynamic, we see that the experience of reading a *first person novel* reflects the psychic space an actor enters when engaging with their character.
- 3) We shall therefore 'stage' this psychic space through our syncretism of the *first person novel* with the dramatic form, thereby allowing our audience to experience the creative process of empathy an actor undergoes in the creation of a dramatic work.

I take this example directly from one of my own Post-Theatrical Dramas entitled *Photobombing Hiroshima*. The form of the play is a direct application of the principles above, and the way in which they take practical fruition on the stage is explained in a written forward to the text, which reads:

The protagonist of *Photobombing Hiroshima* is "played"/experienced by the audience. In the majority of the scenes, characters speak to "us," directing their dialogue to the audience as if it were an interlocutor. It is important to note that the audience as a totality is the protagonist; therefore, individual audience members should never be addressed.

We/the audience-- as a fully active, engaged character-- "respond" to dialogue through text projections. The lines of unheard speech unfold (as seen in the script) with each line break, giving the audience time to read the words to themselves, thereby internalizing/experiencing their role as the protagonist through the act of reading.

Some form of direction should be given to the audience beforehand (perhaps in the form of a program or announcement), otherwise there is always the chance an audience member will believe they are being prompted to actually read the text projection aloud or "perform" the protagonist in some way. This should be discouraged as the silent act of reading is intended to trigger a similar experience to that of reading a first-person novel. The audience is stepping inside the shoes of the protagonist, and studies have shown that this style of textual-narrative engagement unlocks a unique form of empathy and introspection. It is my hope that by staging this literary device the textual and theatrical dimensions of empathy will intertwine-- and create a distinct emotional experience for the audience.

Photobombing Hiroshima, then, is a full articulation of the formal principles of Post-Theatrical Drama, embracing the inclusionary and/also impulse (through aesthetic syncretism of the *novel*) and the participatory urge (through the Ergodic process of *reading*) of our Hyper-Modern audience. However, the question of how Post-Theatrical Drama, as a response to prosumerism, can actually *help* an audience, allowing their 'creative' energy to flourish meaningfully, is best seen with *Polaris (a tragedy expansion pack)*— given that it is my first Post-Theatrical work to have been fully produced and experienced by an audience.

4. *Polaris (a tragedy expansion pack)*: Staging the RPG Imaginary as Narrative Exposure Therapy

Formally, *Polaris (a tragedy expansion pack)* follows the principles of Post-Theatrical Drama by:

- 1) Syncretizing the logic of *role-playing games* (such as *Dungeons & Dragons*) with the dramatic form,
- 2) Investigating this new dynamic, and, seeing that the experience of participating in a *role-playing game* reflects the psychic space a theatrical design team enters when engaging with the text of a script, then
- 3) 'Stages' this psychic space through our syncretism of *role-playing games* with the dramatic form, thereby allowing our audience to experience the creative process of actively imagining a theatrical space just as designers must do when creating a dramatic work.

The drama realizes these participatory and inclusionary strategies by utilizing the character of Dawn, a so-called "Visual Positioning System" in the world of the play. Since the character of Polaris is blind, he is 'guided' by Dawn, a disembodied, digital voice who describes our protagonist's surroundings and actions, thereby allowing Polaris to interact with the world around him. However, since the script calls for an entirely empty stage, Dawn's true function is to guide the *audience*. Just as a *Dungeons & Dragons* Game Master speaks 'flavor text,' presenting players with detailed descriptions

of the game-world and offers them choices for their characters to take, *and*, just as a playwright crafts ‘stage directions,’ presenting a design team with descriptions of the play-world and offers them interpretive avenues to take, so does Dawn syncretize both experiences, prompting the audience with flavor text/stage directions so that *they* may imagine the world, one which neither they nor Polaris can actually see, and so must be created through their own cognitive participation.

Polaris (a tragedy expansion pack), therefore, successfully engages with the needs of a Hyper-Modern audience. Firstly, it satisfies the and/also impulse of total inclusion; where the prosumer craves ‘meme ideologies’ and gummy worms on his pizza, we offer him drama *and also* role-playing, syncretizing the *logic* of both, thereby reflecting the inclusionary *drive* without birthing a literal chimerical hybrid of scant artistic value. This is why Giambologna and Berlioz have been our models. Thus, rather than having the audience actually ‘play’— which I would place in the category of Post-Modern gimmick— the imported logic of role-playing instead reveals a new “how” that has, all along, been inherent in the makeup of drama itself, namely, stage directions. Both the dramatist’s and Game Master’s communicative strategies allow designers/players a sense of participation and choice through *present tense language*, i.e. “The dungeon now lies before you; a troll with a glittering axe guards the entrance,” or “Engstrand is standing by the garden door. His left leg is partly deformed; under his bootsole he has a wooden block.”²⁷ Our drama, then, simply allows theatre audiences the same access to this psychic space; therefore, it too satisfies the second dynamic of prosumerism— the impulse to participate. However, as mentioned above, this participation can only have the illusion of choice and creation, allowing an outlet for— and not an actualization of— the ‘creative’ energy inspired by cognitive capitalism. This is why Queneau and Weizenbaum have been our models. Therefore, rather than having the audience “literally” design a set— which would smack of the totalitarian spectacle of Post-Modernism and bourgeois materialist excess of Modernism— the Ergodic experience of the drama instead demands the *ergon* (work) of constant imagination and the continued maintenance of this cognitive ‘set,’ the audience engaging in (the illusion of) creation, while always in fact being tethered to the *hodos* (path) of Dawn’s spoken descriptions. Through these strategies, *Polaris* (a tragedy expansion pack) is designed to perfectly

²⁷ Henrik Ibsen. “Ghosts” in *Four Major Plays, Vol. 2*. (New York: Signet Classics, 2001), 38.

engage with the radically different psychic structure of our century's audience, meeting their needs in order to allow the prosumer process to unfold within an *artistic* and *spiritually meaningful* space, rather than within the realm of Build-A-Bear or Internet politics. Therefore, by simulating the very cathectic structures and apperceptive pathways that cognitive capitalism maps daily onto our audience's minds, Post-Theatrical Drama has the unique ability, by using the logic of the master's tools, to infiltrate and *heal* the prosumer's psyche just as effectively as cognitive capitalism deformed it. Our work, then, must guide the audience to produce and consume, rather than a Facebook post, a useful salve for their own spiritual ailments.

While it is profoundly naïve to believe that art can in any way fix, dismantle, or even affect the fundamental political and economic systems that terrorize and corrupt us daily, I do believe that the artist has it within his, her, or their power to refuse to accept the status-quo, to resist the mythologies and aesthetic forms that serve only to reinforce the ideologies of the master class. Through this rejection— and the invention of new forms— the artist has the opportunity, while perhaps not to dismantle imperialism or white supremacy, to slowly remap their audience's accepted phenomenologies, giving them the mental tenacity to better understand the oppressive structures and nefarious strategies that hound and surround them daily. Whether this new phenomenology prompts an audience to storm the proverbial Winter Palace, or merely teaches them techniques for better mental hygiene, the artist must understand that their task, politically, is simply to sabotage the aesthetic influence of cognitive capitalism, healing psychic and spiritual wounds in an act limited to metaphysical education and temporary palliation. If artists actually want to *change* the status quo, then revolutionary activism— *off* the Internet— is needed. I believe it is essential for us to understand the scope of our influence and to face the reality of our limitations as artists if we are to graciously accept the opportunity we *do* have, rather than claiming we can transform the universe with ninety-nine people and a stage, thereby simply wasting our and everyone else's time.

Polaris (a tragedy expansion pack), therefore, utilizes the form of Post-Theatrical Drama not only to reach its Hyper-Modern audience, but in order to help sharpen the theatre-goers' cognitive tools, particularly those which aid in imagination, memory, and the means of using both to cope with trauma. By my estimation, if schizophrenia best

encapsulated the condition of Post-Modern society,²⁸ then Post-Traumatic Stress best defines our own. While this is neither the time nor place to exhaustively explicate this point, I believe the excavation of historical trauma essential to the individuation process at the heart of Identity Politics, as well as the recent rise of transparent Fascism across the globe, has had the effect of erecting and cementing a Cultural Post-Traumatic Stress. One needs look no further than the concept of being ‘triggered,’ a term borrowed directly from PTSD therapy.²⁹ With this in mind, the play’s participatory and syncretic use of role-playing logic serves as a subtle enactment of Narrative Exposure Therapy for the audience; or, at least, it essays to clarify and strengthen the cognitive tools necessary to engage with this process. To quote a summary by the American Psychological Association:

Narrative Exposure Therapy is a treatment for trauma disorders, particularly in individuals suffering from complex and multiple trauma [...] With the guidance of the therapist, a patient establishes a chronological narrative of his or her life, concentrating mainly on their traumatic experiences, but also incorporating some positive events. It is believed that this contextualizes the network of cognitive, affective, and sensory memories of a patient’s trauma [...] The patient is asked to narrate the traumatic experience and relive the emotions experienced without losing connection to the present. Staying present is achieved by utilizing permanent reminders that the emotions and physical responses that occur in response to memories are linked to episodic facts (such as time and place) but are then reprocessed and unified with meaning.³⁰

What appears essential to me in this therapeutic approach is not only the use of narrative, but the focus on sensory recall, spatiality, and an active, *present* engagement with the relived trauma. While I have not undergone NET, my research of the accounts of those who have reveal the need to re-create memory spaces, erecting an architecture of painful artifacts with which to engage, reassess, and subsume into a narrative now infused with positive meaning.³¹ In this way,

²⁸ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 6-15.

²⁹ Edna Foa. *Effective Treatment for PTSD*. (New York: Guilford Press, 2008), 247.

³⁰ Maggie Schauer. “Narrative Exposure Therapy. *American Psychological Association*. Accessed March 25, 2019. <https://www.apa.org/ptsd-guideline/treatments/narrative-exposure-therapy>

³¹ Frank Neuner. “Narrative Exposure.” *American Psychological Association*. Accessed March 25, 2019. <https://www.apa.org/ptsd-guideline/treatments/common-language-psychotherapy-narrative.pdf>

Polaris (a tragedy expansion) reflects NET, most obviously, in content. Polaris is a child trying to make sense of his trauma; Dawn, acting as a metaphysical therapist, prompts the re-creation of memories through spoken stage directions/flavor text, thereby allowing Polaris to relive his trauma through the safety of a *perpetually present* space. However, the audience also participates in this process through the Post-Theatrical Dramatic form; they must re-create the architecture of memories too, entering a psychic space in which abstract stimuli are made real through constant imagination. This has a double-function, firstly allowing the viewers to engage with Polaris as he undergoes this process, taking the protagonist as a model and thereby learning the structure and effectiveness of Narrative Exposure Therapy through him, and, secondly, honing their own skills of sensory recall and the perpetually present mental construction of materially-abstracted memory spaces for themselves. In discussions with audience members, I have learned that while Polaris is recreating memories through the RPG-imaginary that are unique and specific to himself— references to the comic book character Spawn or an orange tree in his backyard— these highly particular artifacts nonetheless triggered childhood memories in audience members who had no relationship to these objects.³² Instead, the mere act of participating in the perpetually present reimagining of Polaris' psychic architecture prompted audience members to re-construct and enter their *own* psychic architectures, the cognitive work demanded by the Post-Theatrical Dramatic form temporarily remapping their apperceptive structures and allowing them a spiritually meaningful outlet in which to pour their own cathetic energy.

The production and consumption of a phenomenon (here, one's own memory space), and the inclusionary *and/also* impulse (the filling in of said memory space with Polaris' particular sensory architecture *and also* ones own), is therefore no more than a simulation of the prosumerist process of expelled 'creative' energy necessitated by cognitive capitalism. However, by giving this process a therapeutic outlet, the audience is able to utilize the very mental makeup that has resulted from their constant exposure to prosumerism to instead initiate the *healing* of their psychic scars— rather than participate in content-creation for corporations or the erosion of ethics through dangerous, internet ideologies.

³² Morgan Grambo. *Polaris Feedback Notes* (11-11-2018).

While there is no way to truly know the full cognitive effect of the Post-Theatrical Dramatic formulation of *Polaris* (a tragedy a expansion pack), it is my hope that the syncretic and Ergodic devices employed may at least initiate an awareness (even if not by name) of Narrative Exposure Therapy, initiating the process through an introduction of the mental skills necessary to engage with it. We, as artists, are not therapists or gurus; but in so far as we can heuristically teach an audience that their trauma resides in mental spaces, in cognitive ‘sets’ that they have the ability to fill with their re-constructed psychic architecture, then the agency of their own narrative power to engage with trauma may become clear, allowing them to revisit what had seemed inflexible facts of history with a new perspective, one grounded in creativity and the ability to re-engage *presently*, and, in so doing, reprocess their memories and unify them with positive meaning. A society better equipped to navigate the structure of its trauma, while perhaps not yet fully prepared to take up arms against the master class, is one that is nonetheless more likely to resist, now less burdened by secret wounds, and more willing to face new horrors bravely and, maybe, with a little optimism.

5. Postscript: The Future of Post-Theatrical Drama

It is my hope that this forward has shed some light on my intentions as a dramatist. Ultimately, however, while I have written and will continue to write a body of work in the category of Post-Theatrical Drama, the movement will only be successful if other theatre-makers take up the mantle as well. Luckily, there are playwrights— who have no concrete knowledge of this theory as I have articulated it— producing work that employs many of these principles. Jordan Tannahill’s *Concord Floral*, Eric Marlin’s *and come apart*, Julia Jarcho’s *Every Angel is Brutal*, and Sibyl Kempson’s *Ich, KürbisGeist* are all successful examples of Post-Theatrical Drama. Therefore, it is my dream that this cursory introduction to my theory may inspire more dramatists to generate plays that rigorously engage our Hyper-Modern audience, satisfying their needs while using staged simulations of the prosumerist psychic process in order to undermine cognitive capitalism, funneling the creative energy of our beleaguered brothers, sisters, and comrades into something artistically meaningful and spiritually productive.

—Charles Green, March 2019

Polaris
(a tragedy expansion pack)
by
Charles Green

Characters

Polaris-- 27, an adventurer

Dawn*-- a Visual Positioning System

Ellen**-- 43, a figure

*The actor playing Dawn also voices Gideon.

**The actor playing Ellen also voices the Statue, the Astronaut, the Flesh Hacker, and the Security System.

A Note on Performance

Set/Props-- The stage is completely empty, with everything described/pantomimed except where specified. These actual props and set-pieces are marked in the text with bold.

Dawn-- The actor portraying Dawn/Gideon should remain in shadow on stage, as inconspicuous as possible, utilizing a headset microphone.

Dawn's speech should not be digital or robotic; instead, it is impersonal and removed, but human-- a corollary to Gideon's, but devoid of emotion and personalization.

Language-- Long passages without punctuation should not suggest a fast, rambling blur of breathless sentences. Rather, natural beats and pauses should be found by the actors, and utilized in order to find a personal rhythm.

Words within brackets ([]) are not to be spoken, but instead point to the trajectory of a character's unfinished thought.

Darkness.

DAWN

You've landed on the shore of strange planet.

The sounds of the ocean at your back. A cold wind. The faint smell of burnt oil.

Before you, a landscape of flat, pink rock stretches out in all directions.

Lights rise on a section of the stage.

The space it reveals is empty.

To the west, a range of tall, foggy mountains.

Lights rise on a section of stage.

The space is empty.

To the northeast, the small ruins of a radio tower.

Lights rise on a section of stage.

It too is empty.

A distant, solitary sun casts pale green light across the alien terrain.

You stand alone.

The sounds of the ocean.

What will you do, Polaris?

Lights rise-- revealing POLARIS.

He wears the abstract suggestion of a spacesuit.

He is sightless, his eyes a milky blue, a red, running line of scarring surrounding them.

He stares into the distance.

POLARIS

I search for their ship.

Polaris moves forward, coming to the final darkened section of stage.

DAWN

Buried in the sand, you find a large, jagged piece of shiny yellow metal, three feet by two.

Lights rise-- revealing only empty stage.

*Polaris studies the unseen object, seeing--
as he will throughout the play-- all that we
cannot.*

POLARIS

(pause)

When the Flesh Hackers kidnapped my brother, I saw their yellow ship taking off from the edge of the field, my Visual Positioning System describing the red blast of the engine, the cockpit tearing through the clouds, planting the picture in my mind's eye-- too late... and they were gone; shooting through the stars for this strange planet... with the only man I ever loved trapped inside.

But why?

DAWN

The Flesh Hackers-- an intergalactic pirate cell known for their kidnapping of famed geniuses in order to digitally harvest the captive's brain, uploading his mind onto hard-drives, then sold to nefarious [parties]--

*Polaris swipes his forearm, skipping over
Dawn's message.*

POLARIS

No.

Why... him?

DAWN

Gideon Yarohk. Born-- planet Earth. Famed scientist, poet, inventor, composer--

Polaris swipes his forearm.

POLARIS

No.

Why.....

DAWN

(factually)

I'm sorry. Did you mean-- why you?

POLARIS

(pause)

They must've crash landed. This part of the planet's still uncharted. Wherever they went, they'd have dragged their ship with them, to some hidden lair where they keep their Neural Uploader-- latching it to the skull of their victim, slowly sucking out his mind till at last they've burned out all the life from this kind and gentle soul who never hurt anyone and only ever used his brilliance to make the world a kinder, gentler place for the rest of us, the ones who love and need their kind and gentle genius brother and who without him would just melt into a puddle on the floor knowing he's in danger and they're the only one who can save him.

The sounds of the ocean.

DAWN

Do you investigate the yellow metal, or move on?

POLARIS

I investigate the yellow metal.

DAWN

Turning the piece over, you discover a series of numbers and letters etched in the metal.

POLARIS

(reading)

One-oh-six-point-seven-F-M.

106.7 FM-- Old Time Classics.

On the night before my seventh birthday, Gideon and I had a sleepover in the treehouse. It started to storm, so we turned on the portable radio with the big antenna and listened to Old Time Classics, the Adventures of Jason and the Argonauts, and the rain fell and the wizard on the radio threw dragon teeth and skeletons rose out of the earth and I got scared and wanted to cry and there was a firepole in the treehouse and I was worried lightning would strike it so Gideon stuck his tongue against the metal pole to show me everything would be okay and it was, Jason fought the skeletons and Gideon wasn't scared about the pole or the lightning or anything ever and everything was. Everything was okay.

Gideon... always made sure of that.

DAWN

Do you search for more traces of the ship, or do you move on?

POLARIS

Reload surroundings.

DAWN

To the west, a range of tall, foggy mountains. To the northeast, the small ruins of a radio tower.

POLARIS

He must've remembered the treehouse and the thunder and the radio too... locked in the hull of that prison ship, a hairpin from his pocket snuck between his fingers, carving a secret code into the wall just for me, knowing, no matter what, I'd come, across a thousand stars and burning wormholes, to find him and save him-- no matter how scared I feel, standing, all alone, with no one to tell me it'll all be okay.

DAWN

The distant, solitary sun begins to sink-- the pale, green light darkening across the alien terrain.

The sounds of the ocean.

POLARIS

Plot a course-- northeast.

*A transition.**

**Lights fade on Polaris, rising on another section of the stage. In the darkness, the sound of static, a system loading-- and Polaris enters the lighted area.*

DAWN

The ruins of a radio tower.

Before you, a crumbling stucco building. Rising from the collapsing roof, a large satellite, pointed south.

To the east, a stone well stands in a field of dead brush, a fading rainbow hanging above it.

The sound of a bird's 'caw' in the distance.

What will you do?

POLARIS

(calling out)

Gideon?

Silence.

He must want me to use the satellite to send him a message, or track his location, or... I don't know. But when we were little, Gideon built me a one-way walkie-talkie and taught me how to use it. And he built me an electric keyboard and taught me how to play old French songs on it. And he built me a digital camera and taught me how to print out the pictures. And when I was sick and home from school I'd print and hang up photos of us together playing adventure in the backyard and turn on the walkie-talkie and play the old French songs on the keyboard and even though he was the smart one who made all the inventions he made them for me because he said I was creative and could use them the best.

I can figure out a satellite.

I'll find him. It'll be okay.

I'm creative.

Polaris steps forward.

Transition.

DAWN

Inside the radio tower.

The floor is littered with debris and fallen beams.

In the center of the room, a steel post, supporting the satellite. Before it, a control panel with six levers, each a different color.

What will you do?

Polaris thinks, then pulls one of the unseen levers on the "control panel."

A mechanical sound-- followed by a synthesized G note.

With a rusted grind, the satellite shifts-- pointing now to the east.

Polaris pulls another "lever"-- a C# note.

The satellite shifts-- pointing now to the north.

Polaris pulls-- an F#.

The satellite shifts-- to the southeast.

Pulls-- an A.

To the northwest.

Polaris pauses, pulling the F# and A levers again.

Southeast-northwest

Listening, Polaris pulls the F#, A, G, and F# levers.

Southeast-northwest-east-southeast.

Polaris begins again, continuing with more notes-- and so plays the opening bar of Satie's "Gymnopodie Nos. 1."

As the satellite jerks back and forth in rhythm, the metal begins to hum with an electric charge--

A crackling hum.

Polaris continues onto the second bar.

--the satellite slowly starts to spin, moving faster and faster, when--

The sound of a laser.

-- a blue blast of light issues forth from the satellite: shooting across the sky.

Polaris exits the space.

Transition.

DAWN

Outside the radio tower.

To the east, a well in a field of brush, a fading rainbow above it.

To the southwest, the laser from the satellite has started a fire, burning blue on the horizon. The leaping flames now illuminate a massive form once hidden in the shadow of the mountain.

POLARIS

I focus in, calibrating my sights to lock onto the object.

DAWN

Calculating...

The form is too distant, but the shape and size clarify 43%.

Flickering in the blue glow of the fire, the form appears cylindrical, running five hundred meters in length.

Do you move east, towards the well-- or southwest, towards the fire and the mysterious structure?

The sound of a bird's "caw" in the distance.

POLARIS

Gideon must've come up with a plan to escape. He's not scared of fire. He's not scared of anything. He once ran across a city street without looking both ways just to get us raspberry and vanilla popsicles before the ice cream truck drove away. He has a plan. He wouldn't let anything bad happen to me.

No. It's not about you, stupid. You won't let anything bad happen to him. He needs you. And he needs you to be brave and not stupid or scared or sad. It's just a fire. It's just a planet. It's just life. It's not scary. And if you think it is-- just think what it'll be like if you fail... and don't save him.

Plot a course-- southwest.

Transition.

DAWN

The foot of the mountain.

The huge, blue fire looms before you. Behind the leaping flames, the structure shines-- a yellow, metal spacecraft, bent and wrecked from a crash landing.

The sound of crackling flames.

What will you do?

POLARIS

I search for a way around the fire.

DAWN

The fire stretches in a half-circle from one cliff to another, walling the ship in against the foot of the mountain.

POLARIS

Can I see anyone inside?

DAWN

The hatch cover stands open, revealing the inner hull of the ship: emptied, silent, and darkened, save for the glow of a single monitor-- projecting the image of a ripe orange tree, bursting with fruit.

POLARIS

We had an orange tree in the backyard. On the morning of my seventh birthday, the oranges started to fall, plopping onto the muddy ground, wet and dark from last night's rain. I told Gideon we should make orange juice for my birthday breakfast, but I didn't wanna ruin my slippers with mud but Gideon said we were shamans and if we had our magic sticks and robes we could turn invisible and float over the mud we wouldn't even leave one footprint, so we took brooms from the closet and threw on our bathrobes and Gideon said a spell and we started across the backyard and Gideon said not to look down just to keep saying the spell and we were floating, we were floating invisible across the

backyard and we picked fresh oranges and filled our bathrobes till we could hardly stand and we kept saying the spell floating back across the yard to the kitchen where a big present lay wrapped in shiny pink paper on the table.

The sound of crackling flames.

POLARIS

They must've abandoned the ship on the way to their lair.

They'd have wanted to hurry, hooking Gideon to the Neural Uploader as soon as possible. With the size of his mind, it could take hours to transfer his consciousness, uploading all his thoughts and memories onto different devices, stripping him bare, leaving him nothing but a broken, lifeless shell and-- and they could've started hours ago already, the upload could almost be complete and he'd be gone forever and it'd be all your fault plot a course north there might be clues.

Polaris takes a deep breath.

Transition.

DAWN

A series of sheer cliff faces run beside you to the west.

Beneath one stands a statue, constructed of five wooden heads, each stacked on top of the other.

To the northeast, a series of footprints lie before you, trekking out one foot after the other across the darkening landscape.

The sound of a wooden wind-chime.

What will you do?

Polaris makes to step forward, when--

Suddenly, the statue begins to shift, the heads turning towards you, the huge, round orange eyes and crooked mouths opening in a horrible grimace-- and call out to you in an ancient, sneering voice.

The unseen "statue" speaks.

THE STATUE

Hey. *You*.

Polaris stops.

Yeah. *You*. What're you *doing* here?

POLARIS

Nothing. I'm... looking for my brother.

THE STATUE

Your brother? Yeah. I've *seen him*.

POLARIS

You have? Where?

THE STATUE

He's off in Web City.

POLARIS

Web City? Where's that?

THE STATUE

Up a spider's ass! Ha, ha, ha!

Hey. Come *over here*. I wanna talk to ya.

POLARIS

No. I have to go.

THE STATUE

What, are ya *scared*?

POLARIS

No...

THE STATUE

Yeah! You're a big scaredy cat! What, are you gonna *cry*?

POLARIS

Plot a course-- northeast.

THE STATUE

Whah, whah, whah! *Yeah, get outta here!*

Polaris holds back tears and hurries off.

Transition.

DAWN

The flat, pink landscape stretches out in all directions.

The footsteps continue northeast, then stop-- splitting off: the prints of a solitary left foot heading north, while the prints of a right foot continue on their own to the east.

In the patch of soft dirt where the footprints begin to branch apart, a green, glass bottle lies on its side.

POLARIS

I investigate the bottle.

DAWN

Lifting the small object, you hear a rattle, and, looking inside, see a dozen blue and orange pills.

POLARIS

Gideon's medicine.

(suddenly struck)

The... the accident.

(piecing together memories)

Dr. L prescribes Gideon medicine to make him feel better. The doctor tells him to take two in the morning and two after dinner because Gideon... he can't sleep or eat. He sits, hunching over his desk, night after night... building Dawn--

DAWN

Yes, Polaris?

POLARIS

--my Visual Positioning System.

Polaris double-clicks his forearm.

DAWN

Goodbye, Polaris.

POLARIS

And... and Gideon gets better, and he...

(losing his train of thought)

But he still needs his medicine; he has to take it every day.

Gideon must have an extra bottle hidden on him. But, if the Flesh Hackers made him throw away his whole prescription...

It won't matter, though... if he's chained to a table with the Neural Uploader drilled into his brain. All the medicine in the world won't help him then.

I'll just make sure he takes a double dose when I save him, with a tall glass of milk and a chicken sandwich and we'll watch TV and I'll tuck him in on the couch with a blanket and put on a pot of coffee and take care of him for once and be a good little brother because the world doesn't revolve around me and good little brothers watch out for their big brothers just as much as big brothers watch out for them.

The sound of a quiet wind.

DAWN

Do you follow the left footprints headed north, or the right footprints headed east-- or do you move on?

POLARIS

East.

Transition.

DAWN

The flat, pink landscape stretches out in all directions.

The footprints continue for another twenty paces, then abruptly stop-- the flat, pink landscape stretching out into the distance.

The sound of a quiet wind.

POLARIS

(pause)

East.

Transition.

DAWN

The flat, pink landscape stretches out in all directions.

The sound of a quiet wind.

POLARIS*(unsure)*

Southeast.

*Transition.*DAWN

The flat, pink landscape stretches out in all directions.

*A quiet wind.*POLARIS*(nervous)*

Northeast.

*Transition.*DAWN

The flat, pink landscape stretches out in all directions.

*A quiet wind.*POLARIS*(panicking)*

North.

*Transition.*DAWN

The flat, pink landscape stretches out in all directions.

*A quiet wind.**Polaris looks around in all directions,
overwhelmed.*POLARIS

Stupid, stupid, *stupid*. There was a clue you missed. You never pay attention. There were signs you just looked past, calls for help in some secret code you didn't take the time to read; Gideon has a plan to escape and he needs your help but if you're too stupid and self-centered to listen for once in your life then he's just crying out in the dark scared and alone waiting for you waiting for a brother who'll never come and save him all because he can't see what's right in front of his face.

Plot a course back.

DAWN

Calculating...

*A series of six brief transitions, each
with an abruptly cut sound of wind.**Polaris enters the new space.*

DAWN

The cliff face.

Before it stands the grimacing statue, its huge orange eyes bulging from the wooden faces like balls of sticky flesh-- staring into your soul.

THE STATUE

You again! Have a good *cry*?

POLARIS

(to himself)

I'm a shaman. I can float. I can be invisible.

THE STATUE

Bwak, bwak, bwak!

POLARIS

(pantomiming)

This is my magic staff. And these are my magic robes.

Polaris closes his eyes and starts to whisper a spell to himself-- walking towards the unseen "statue."

THE STATUE

Oh, wanna play *chicken*, *eh*?

Polaris reaches out his hands.

Hey, *hey*, what're ya *doin*? Don't! Don't *do* that!

Polaris reaches the "statue" and, with his outstretched hands, grabs two round objects before him-- and squeezes.

Aaaaaaaah!

Polaris pulls his hands away, still holding the pantomimed objects.

DAWN

As you pull out the statue's eyes, you hear a grinding sound from within the cliff face.

A grinding sound.

Polaris takes to removing the rest of the "eyes."

As each orange orb rips from the faces with an electric spray of sparks and tears, a series of secret staircases emerge from the wall of the cliff.

Polaris removes the last pair of "eyes"-- and looks up.

Before you, the interlocking stairs run south across the mountain-- rising above the fire, then descending down to the ruins of the ship.

The sound of a wooden wind-chime.

What will you do, Polaris?

POLARIS

I mount the stairs, taking the path south above the fire and down to the ruins of the ship.

DAWN

Calculating...

Transition.

DAWN

The ship.

The open hatch stands before you, revealing the darkened hull of the spacecraft. Broken bits of glass litter the floor, glittering in the blue light of the fire walling you in all directions.

The sound of crackling flames.

What will you do?

POLARIS

I search for clues. I pay attention. I study and study every shadow and color and mouse and candy wrapper and broken screw because they all mean something they do even if you don't know what--

--they have to.

Transition.

DAWN

Inside the ship.

To the west, fallen cabinets and lock boxes lie broken open against the door of the cockpit.

To the north, an armory wall stands bare, stripped of weapons.

To the south, a mainframe and series of monitors crackle and sputter in the glow of sparking wires.

The sound of sparking wires.

What will you do?

POLARIS

I investigate the mainframe.

DAWN

The projected image of the orange tree glitches and splits apart as you mash keys, searching for the load-screen.

Suddenly, stumbling upon the BIOS with a key stroke, an error message flashes on every monitor.

In DOS font, the single word "Spawn" fills each screen, hanging above a pixilated drawing of the superhero's black and white mask.

POLARIS

Gideon read those comics late at night when we were supposed to be asleep. I couldn't understand them and their covers scared me all monsters and creepy cities and Gideon said they were grown-up comics and that not all heroes are good guys and sometimes they have to do bad things to help other people but he'd tape brown paper onto the covers of the comics so the pictures wouldn't give me nightmares. I remember one weekend he wanted to practice programing by programing a virus and I told him that wasn't nice but he smiled and gave me a noogie and told me he'd never use it it was good because if he made it he'd know how to unbug viruses like it and I said doing bad things but to help other people and he kissed my head and said how smart and special I was and I thought I might be grown up enough to read those comics but that night I had a nightmare that the virus turned into a monster and chased Gideon across a creepy city and Gideon was sweaty and tired and overwhelmed and just couldn't run anymore and he lay down in the bloody street and the monster's shadow loomed over him and he closed his eyes and I woke up screaming and crying and Gideon promised me again he'd never use the virus and he named it "Spawn."

But I guess he did. When the Flesh Hackers weren't looking, he must've logged onto the mainframe and set "Spawn" loose-- taking down the whole ship.

There aren't any bodies. There isn't any blood. Even though they're badguys, Gideon still wouldn't want anyone to get hurt. But it bought him time. Bought me time.

But how much?

Polaris turns.

DAWN

The armory wall, bare, stripped of weapons.

POLARIS

They're dangerous pirates. They could've punished him for it.

They could've hurt him. Gideon's not scared of anything. But sometime's... it's good to be scared. Like running across the street to get raspberry and vanilla popsicles.

Or the accident.

The sound of sparking wires.

I look through the cabinets.

DAWN

Blue and orange files bulge from the drawers, filled with surveillance photos and maps. From within a broken lock box, a data square lies cracked, but its screen and controls seem functional.

Polaris picks up the unseen object.

The device clicks on, loading a grid file-- the ship's passenger manifest.

Beneath a list of pirate codenames, the text reads-- "Yarohk, Gideon" with a link embedded beside it.

Polaris taps the "device."

*The crackle of a digital recording
begins to play.*

THE FLESH HACKER

Yarohk, Gideon. Non-crew passenger. Paid ten thousand C. coin for a seat on the ship.
One-way, protected passage; no questions asked. Do-- Not-- Harm: captain's orders.

Polaris stands frozen.

POLARIS

That's impossible. I saw them take him. I was there...

DAWN

Loading eidetic memory.

*A dramatic shift of sound and color--
and a wall at the back of the stage
opens-- revealing a lighted, dreamlike
set.*

*The abstract suggestion of a table, two
chairs, a window.*

*Polaris stands in the space, staring
out, longingly.*

DAWN

You stand in your childhood home.

To the north, a kitchen table, two chairs, a window overlooking the wet field.

To the west, a hallway lined with photographs leads to the livingroom.

To the east, a pantry door, the smell of rice and dog biscuits wafting through.
Dust and sunlight fills the room.

POLARIS

(piecing together memories)

Gideon calls me and asks to meet him at the old house.

There's something in his voice and I ask if he's okay and he says he is, he's just been
working on something and not to worry. But when I get to the house, he isn't there.

Polaris moves to the table.

The black placemat with the solar system on it's been left out on the table; and a spider's
spun a web in the corner of the window that looks like Santa with a big beard; and
everything feels cold and empty and quiet.

*Polaris pulls out one of the chairs--
and looks down.*

*From the seat of the chair, he lifts a
plastic **toy astronaut** (which we can
see).*

A little astronaut, waving.

(remembering, instead)

Gideon used to make me toys: monsters, boats, cows, soldiers, castles out of plastic or metal or wood, a brand new little toy just for me, always there when I needed it most-- after a hard day of being bullied at school, or at the end of a long week of being sad about something: there it'd be, standing on my pillow or under the table or in the sock drawer, waiting for me to pick them up and play with them and feel better and know that even if Gideon was at his piano lesson or at soccer practice he was thinking of me and I could look down at the toys when I was on the bus or in PE and think of him and I'd make the toy say "I love you, Polaris" and I'd say "I love you, Gideon" and no one could say that wasn't real not even the kids at school because it wasn't make-believe, not really.

Polaris stares down at the toy astronaut.

He waves at the toy.

Hello.

THE ASTRONAUT

(pause)

Goodbye.

Polaris freezes.

Throughout the following, Polaris does not move, continuing to stare down at the toy astronaut.

Suddenly, a shining light, a burning yellow light flashes through the window, and I turn and look, and I see--

A yellow spacecraft: launching from the edge of the field--

DAWN

End of eidetic memory.

POLARIS

And I rush out the back door, and the ship's roaring into the sky, and--

DAWN

End of eidetic memory.

*A dramatic shift of sound and color--
the wall at the back of the stage
closes-- and the lights return to the
interior of the "ship."*

Polaris stands, staring out.

*The recorded message from the device
begins to play again.*

THE FLESH HACKER

Yarohk, Gideon. Non-crew passenger. Paid ten thousand C. coin for a seat on the ship. One-way, protected passage--

Polaris taps the “device”-- still staring out.

Yarohk, Gideon. Non-crew passenger. Paid ten thousand--

Tap.

Yarohk, Gideon. Non-crew--

Tap.

Yarohk, Gideon. Non--

Tap.

Yarohk, Gideon--

Tap.

Yarohk, Gideon--

Tap.

Yarohk, Gideon--

Polaris suddenly breaks the “device” in half.

The sound of sparking wires.

POLARIS

I’m creative; and special. But I’m stupid. Like a boardgame with six mats and twenty colored dice... and the rulebook missing from the cardboard box; like a kung fu tape filled with intertwining plots and secret identities... and the subtitle button on the old remote broken; like a plan to pull a fast one on the Flesh Hackers... and your idiot brother stumbles in, thinking, once again, it must all be about him-- throwing dice at the wall, mashing the rubber buttons, like he can play with the grown-ups like you’d need his help when he’s always been the helpless one sniveling and weighing you down distracting you from all your important work saving the world with science and kindness because he thinks the world revolves around him and he knows it doesn’t but sometimes he gets lonely and sad and forgets.

I’m sorry. If I messed it all up. Like I always do.

I won’t let it happen again.

*Polaris steps forward.
Transition.*

DAWN

Outside the ship.

The blue fire continues to burn all around you.

To the west, the stairs built into the mountain have vanished-- leaving only a sheer wall of stone.

The sound of crackling flames.

What will you do?

POLARIS

No... no...

*Polaris rushes to the “mountain wall,”
running his hands against it.*

Come back... come back...

Polaris pounds on the “wall.”

DAWN

Do you cross through the fire back to your ship on the shore-- or do you collapse, broken, weeping... uncontrollably?

*Polaris collapses, broken, weeping
uncontrollably-- for some time.*

The tears stream down into the dirt, running between your legs, and pooling against the foot of the mountain.

POLARIS

But he called me to come to the house... he *called* me...

DAWN

Slowly, the tears begin to climb the flat stone wall behind you.

POLARIS

(wiping away tears)

And we always made up our own rules and wrote them on the inside cover of the boardgame box.

DAWN

The climbing tears begin to trace the shape of a doorway behind you.

POLARIS

And when the remote didn't work, Gideon always made up stories and did voices for the kung fu movie.

DAWN

The tears fall, filling the doorway with a wet, shining glow.

Polaris rises.

POLARIS

And he called me. He called me. And no one can say that didn't mean something.

Not even sad, pathetic, sorry me.

*Suddenly, a **hand** reaches out from
the darkness behind Polaris.*

DAWN

Suddenly, a hand reaches out from the portal--

*The **hand** grabs Polaris by the
shoulder.
Polaris freezes-- staring down at the
hand.*

POLARIS

Gideon?

DAWN

--and pulls you in.

*The **hand** does-- and Polaris vanishes into the darkness.*

The sound of crackling flames.

Blackout.

Silence.

DAWN

You lie in the center of a huge green and yellow meadow.

Lights rise on Polaris-- lying on the ground.

Smooth boulders dot the landscape, resting in the dewy grass beneath a wide, blue sky.

To the west lies a dark forest.

Southeast, a lake.

To the south, a grey castle stands on the horizon, its towers mounted with blinking antennae, its bolted gate a grid of pure electricity.

Before the castle, Flesh Hackers in armor and space helmets gallop on horses across the meadow, jetpacks strapped to the flanks of the animals. The pirates make circles and maneuvers, holding the perimeter with plasma rifles cinched into their saddles.

The sound of galloping horses in the distance.

What will you do?

POLARIS

(whispering)

Gideon?

(rising)

Gideon?

The sound of galloping.

I search for depressions in the grass where Gideon might've crossed.

Polaris begins to move.

DAWN

Calculating probability of discovery by enemy combatants.

Polaris crouches low.

68% visibility.

POLARIS

I take cover. Behind a boulder.

*Polaris looks around, and hurries
behind a "boulder."*

DAWN

Recalculating...

13% visibility.

Polaris takes a deep breath.

POLARIS

They won't hurt me. Gideon's pretending to be on their side; he paid them off; he's got them right where he wants them, they won't [hurt me]-- but...

...if Gideon never told them I was his brother and okay and a tough-guy too who could run with the big kids and not to hurt me because if they tried anything he'd blast them all away because even though I was little I was his brother and cool too and a real tough-guy then they wouldn't know and they'd just see some whiny little brat trying to break into the castle or hang out by the creek or in the arcade and they'd yell and tell me to go home to my mommy and daddy and open fire with their rifles and melt the flesh from my bones and blow the heart from my chest and I'd run crying that I was Gideon's little brother and collapse in the meadow dead.

The sound of galloping.

DAWN

Do you approach the Flesh Hackers, or remain hiding?

POLARIS

I move west, from boulder to boulder-- into the forest.

Polaris runs to another "boulder."

DAWN

Visibility-- 46%.

Polaris takes cover.

Minus 28.

POLARIS

Zoom in on the Flesh Hackers.

DAWN

Calculating...

Panned in, you see one of the horsemen slow to a stop, and, taking a black and red pack of cigarettes from his saddle, flip up his visor, place the cigarette to his mouth, strike a match, and smoke, long and deep, beneath the huge, blue sky.

Polaris rises.

POLARIS

Zoom in on the pack.

DAWN

A black and red pack, the image of a silver hawk printed on the foil.

You are 72% visible.

Polaris stands, continuing to stare.

Plus 6.

Plus 7.

Plus--

*Polaris runs to another "boulder,"
taking cover.*

Minus 59%.

POLARIS

I know that brand.

The afternoon of my seventh birthday, we went to ride our bikes by the creek, and when we got back our neighbor Ms. Gold was standing in the shadows of the walkway between the wall of her house and her wooden fence where the pool sweeper and a green plastic truck lay in the gravel and she was sneaking a cigarette and I saw her and she waved, embarrassed, and wished me a happy birthday but I was scared because I didn't know she smoked and I thought only bad people smoked and I realized she must be one of the bad people even though she'd always seemed nice and I was scared like seeing someone you've known for a long time pull off their face like a mask and there, under it, their monster face all sharp teeth and green skin-- smiling at you.

The sound of galloping.

DAWN

Do you continue hiding, approach the Flesh Hackers, or move into the forest?

POLARIS

I enter the forest, taking cover behind the trees, and move closer to the castle.

Polaris rises and moves.

DAWN

Visibility-- 85%.

Transition.

DAWN

The forest.

Ancient trees surround you, a mossy green floor stretching out beneath your feet.

To the northwest, a patch of toadstools sprout from a pool of stagnant water.

To the south, a curtain of vines stands between two trees, hanging before the darkness.

The sound of crickets.

What will you do?

POLARIS

South.

Transition.

DAWN

A dark grove.

Encircled by gnarled trees, a mausoleum stands before you, the squat stone structure bearing an iron door beneath a heavy, slanted roof. Beside the door, a small screen-- displaying the red, glowing outline of a hand.

Southwest, a fallen tree lies rotting, overgrown with ivy and nightshade.

The sound of crickets.

What will you do?

POLARIS

I investigate the mausoleum.

Polaris moves forward-- and pushes.

DAWN

The iron door does not budge.

*Polaris places his hand on the
"screen."*

The screen begins to glow, growing warm to the touch.

THE SECURITY SYSTEM

Authenticating...

A beep.

Access denied.

POLARIS

I investigate the screen.

DAWN

You see nothing of particular interest.

POLARIS

There has to be something. While Gideon's in the castle, moving through the pieces of his secret plan, he must need me on recon or looking for traps or escape routes like when we were little and he and his friends snuck into the abandoned house on Chestnut Street everyone said was haunted and his friends said I couldn't come but Gideon let me play anyways and told me to stay outside in the dead grey yard and hunt for treasure under the flower pots and look for traces of ghosts on the basement door and the drainpipe and after awhile all the kids came out but not Gideon and I got scared something had happened to him and on the top floor a glass shattered and I started to cry and the kids all said Gideon never should have let me come in the first place and then Gideon came out and asked me

if I'd found any treasure and I told him I hadn't and he looked sad and I told him next time I'd do better.

Crickets.

*Polaris places his hand on the
"screen."*

THE SECURITY SYSTEM

Authenticating...

A beep.

Access denied.

DAWN

The screen grows warmer.

Polaris tries again.

A beep.

THE SECURITY SYSTEM

Access denied.

DAWN

The screen grows warmer.

Polaris tries again.

*A series of beeps, growing in
intensity, until--*

Suddenly, a burning, electric shock zaps through your hand.

*Polaris whips his hand away, holding
it in pain.*

POLARIS

No one wants me to play-- not even the crypts, the stupid screens they all say go away no one wants you only Gideon and I don't care or want them either only Gideon but they can't make me go home not without him.

Crickets.

Polaris grips his hand in pain.

Reload surroundings.

DAWN

Encircled by gnarled trees, the mausoleum stands be[fore]--

Polaris swipes his forearm.

To the southwest, a fallen tree lies rotting, overgrown with ivy and nightshade.

POLARIS

Plot a course-- southwest.

Transition.

DAWN

More forest.

Broken branches and wildflowers, a shaft of sunlight cutting through the treetops. Ten yards to the north, a black squirrel, bleeding slightly from its thigh, crouches on a rotten stump. It clutches a small, shiny object in its hands, chewing on it with great focus.

Polaris slowly moves closer.

The object, you see now, is a silver lighter, the looping, cursive initials “DG” etched into it. The squirrel gnaws on one corner of the lighter, but, growing impatient, begins to gnaw on another corner.

The sound of the squirrel.

POLARIS

Ms. Gold’s lighter. She palmed it when I saw her, and slipped it into her back pocket.

But... how? Gideon, he... I don’t...

What are you doing, Gideon? What is all this?

Lighters and mausoleums and songs and lonely little mysteries wrapping around my mind. Like when you tried to explain quantum science to me, talking a mile a minute, excited and smiling, jumping from theorem to theorem, shaking all over, laughing and getting louder and mom said you were too excited and to slow down but you didn’t and I didn’t understand any of it and my stomach felt like a washing machine like I was homesick but you kept going talking with your hands and did you throw Ms. Gold’s lighter into the woods so I could find it or were you just excited or is it the remote control to a teleporter or maybe it was just an accident and you didn’t mean anything by it but how am I supposed to help you if you don’t tell me what you want?

The sound of the squirrel-- then suddenly stopping.

DAWN

Suddenly, the black squirrel stops, and slowly turns-- staring at your face.

Polaris approaches.

The squirrel leaps from the stump and scurries into the brush-- the lighter clutched in its mouth.

POLARIS

I pursue it.

Transition.

DAWN

A wooded clearing.

To the south, a mound of stones stand arranged. The squirrel rushes on ahead, when--

The sound of gears, clocks, and distorted hawk cries.

--two mechanical hawks descend from the trees, all metal and grinding bronze gears, their tin wings tearing through the air-- straight for the squirrel: the small creature, frozen, now, in terror.

Polaris stares-- unsure, unmoving.

The machines lock onto their target, rocketing down with their beaks and talons spinning like drills.

The sound of hawk cries.

Polaris suddenly begins to wave his arms.

POLARIS

(to the hawks)

Hey! Hey, over here!

DAWN

The mechanical hawks stop, mid-flight--

The sound of gears and clocks.

--the spinning wheels of their eyes studying you, blindly.

POLARIS

(moving and waving)

Yeah! Yeah, that's right-- over here!

DAWN

The squirrel glances from you to the mechanical hawks-- and rushes off into the woods.

POLARIS

That's right-- keep it here...

DAWN

Slowly, the hawks' heads rotate clockwise, and, seeing that the squirrel has vanished, fall into a frenzy-- flying back and forth across the clearing.

The sound of distorted hawk cries and cuckoo-clocks.

Polaris breathes deeply-- and nods to himself.

POLARIS

Southeast.

Transition.

DAWN

The forest.

There is no sign of the squirrel.

Southeast. POLARIS

Transition.

The forest. DAWN

There is no sign of the squirrel.

Southeast. POLARIS

Transition.

DAWN
You stand at the edge of the forest-- now only two hundred yards from the castle, the
Flesh Hackers mounted before it, tall in their glittering armor.

You are 90% visible.

POLARIS
(to himself)

I'm Gideon's little brother.

And if you hurt me... he'll blast you away.

Polaris begins to walk forward.

DAWN
Plus 5.
Plus 5.

Danger. Visibility-- 100%.

Polaris raises his arms.

POLARIS
Hey! Over here!

DAWN
The Flesh Hackers turn, seeing you. One lets out a whistle-- and they charge.

The sound of galloping.

POLARIS
(*running and waving*)
That's it! Right over here!

DAWN
The Flesh Hackers draw their plasma rifles.

POLARIS
I get it now, Gideon! You wanted to teach me to be brave! Not to be scared of wizard's
skeletons or Spawn's monsters or how scary it is to walk home from school or sit alone at
the kitchen table with a glass of water as the sun sets.

They fire.

DAWN

The sound of lasers.

Polaris zigzags, ducking.

POLARIS

I'm brave now, Gideon, just like you! I'm not a baby anymore!

Galloping.

DAWN

The Flesh Hackers fire--

Lasers.

--and a plasma bolt slices your shoulder.

Polaris grips his shoulder.

POLARIS

Now, Gideon! Now! They're not looking!

DAWN

They fire again--

Lasers.

--a plasma bolt tearing through your side.

Polaris grips his side.

He makes to run, but trips, falling to the ground.

Pained, Polaris tries to rise.

The sound of galloping-- now deafening.

GIDEON

Polaris, stop it!

Everything freezes.

POLARIS

Gideon?

GIDEON

That's not what I'm trying to do.

(pause)

I wouldn't ever want you to get hurt.

Everything unfreezes-- the sound of galloping, the blast of lasers, Polaris flinches, covering his face, when--

DAWN

Suddenly, from the top floor of the castle-- an explosion of bright, blue light rips through the window.

The sound of an explosion.

POLARIS

Gideon!

The sound of an alarm.

(suddenly stopping)

The accident... at the lab... I... remember...

DAWN

Unable to load memory.

POLARIS

I remember...

DAWN

Critical error.

Unable to load memory.

POLARIS

No, I...

The sound of a second explosion.

DAWN

Loading eidetic memory.

A dramatic shift of sound and color-- the wall at the back of the stage opens-- revealing a lighted, dreamlike set.

The abstract suggestion of a couch, a coffee table.

Polaris stands in the space, staring out, longingly.

DAWN

You stand in your childhood home.

To the north--

Polaris double-clicks Dawn.

Goodbye, Polaris.

POLARIS

The day... after the accident.

I can smell the nightshade wafting in from the yard; the clock on the mantle clicks, quick and steady; then, the rustle of a sheet of paper.

Gideon's talking; he's talking about virtual reality, about how much easier things will be-- even if it seems scary now-- how exciting it'll be: to be able to see the world like new, to see it differently. But he isn't speaking fast; I can't feel his hands, cutting through the air, excited and shaking. He's quiet and still, almost murmuring, and I ask him why, I ask him why but he doesn't say anything back; it's quiet, so quiet and...

(realizing)

My birthday. I can smell stale cake on the coffee table. And a little toy. Fresh plastic.

The accident... it was my birthday. And-- I was there. It was...

Polaris begins to lose his train of thought, but fights through it.

My twenty-seventh birthday...

DAWN

Unable to load memory.

POLARIS

My twenty-seventh--

DAWN

Critical error.

Critical error.

POLARIS

The lab, it--

DAWN

Unable to load memory.

Forced restart.

Polaris clutches his head in pain.

DAWN

Goodbye, Polaris.

A dramatic shift of sound and color-- the wall at the back of the stage closes-- and lights return to the "meadow."

Polaris crouches, half risen.

The sound of the alarm.

THE FLESH HACKER*(as if through a speaker)*

All hands on deck! He's got the Neural Uploader! I repeat-- the Neural Uploader's been compromised! All hands on deck!

DAWN

The Flesh Hackers jerk their reins, cutting a circle, and begin to charge the castle, when--

An explosion.

--a blast of blue light rips through the entire castle, bursting through the gate-- and blowing the horsemen from their mounts.

POLARIS

Gideon!

*The alarm-- glitching, slowing, losing power-- and stopping.*DAWN

The castle stands scorched and silent-- like ancient ruins, abandoned now for centuries.

There are no signs of life.

*Polaris slowly falls to his knees.*POLARIS

No, no, no, no...

*Silence.**(calling out)*

What does brave get anyone? And what's so great about being smart if...[!]

I couldn't do it and you should've known I couldn't. But you couldn't either. It's no good being alone, Gideon. You should've asked for help, or I should've offered it, or-- we're better together; we've always been; the smart one, the creative one... we can't make it in this world alone. And we shouldn't have to. We don't have to. We each have a brother; and the little one loves the big one, and the big one the little; and together... they're bigger than anything this cold and lonely world can throw at us. But apart... the castle burns, a man bleeds in the meadow, the kitchen and the glass of water and the setting sun are so lonely... you could die.

DAWN*(pause)*

Movement detected-- southeast.

Polaris looks up.

A figure, in a white polo and blue slacks moves from the ruins of the castle.

POLARIS*(with recognition)*

Gideon?

DAWN

He holds a briefcase in one hand, and, in the other, a metal helmet, a CPU built into its gridded top.

The Neural Upload Unit.

POLARIS

Gideon!

DAWN

The figure hurries to the lake, his curly brown hair bouncing, his white polo burnt black and torn.

POLARIS

GIDEON!

DAWN

The figure stops for a breath, hearing your voice-- but he does not turn.

Polaris begins to run.

POLARIS

Gideon! I'm here!

DAWN

He affixes the Neural Uploader to his head-- and a portal appears on the surface of the lake--

POLARIS

Wait!

DAWN

--the figure attaches a cube-like device to the Uploader-- and turns on the unit--

POLARIS

No! Stop!

DAWN

--a sudden blast of light-- and, stepping into the portal--

--he vanishes.

POLARIS

Gideon, no!

Transition.

DAWN

The lake.

The soft, muddy shore stands before you. The portal has disappeared, the clear blue water of the lake stretches out, ending at the base of a purple cliff.

At the edge of the escarpment, the black squirrel crouches-- the shiny lighter hanging loosely from its mouth.

The sound of gently lapping water.

DAWN

What will you do, Polaris?

POLARIS

(pause)

I grow angry. I grow angrier than I've ever been. And for a moment... for the first time in my life...

...I hate my brother.

A bubbling sound.

DAWN

From the surface of the lake, an object emerges--

A splash.

--as if thrown from the depths of the water.

*Polaris reaches into the darkness--
and draws forth a **rubik's cube**
(which we can see).*

Polaris studies the object.

Within the cube, you hear the beeping of a small computer unit. Protruding from one side of the device-- the edge of a flash-drive.

POLARIS

(pause)

After we drank our orange juice, I picked up the present on the kitchen table and tore off the pink paper and pried open the box and inside was a rubik's cube Gideon had made out of all my favorite colors and there were letters on some of the squares and a post-it at the bottom of the box read "Happy birthday, little brother-- the adventure begins" and the cube was just the first toy, it was a cipher that would lead me to all the others and I was seven and the happiest I'd ever been and I asked Gideon if we could ride our bikes to the creek first and he said of course I was the birthday boy and I asked if when we got back he'd help me with the cipher but he said no I had to do it on my own that's what made it an adventure but he'd be there in secret, watching, always there behind a wall or under the stairs so I wouldn't really be alone and I hugged him and he looked tired but I thought it was just because he'd been up all night making the toys.

The sound of lapping water.

DAWN

This device contains a message.

Play message?

*Polaris inserts the **toy's flash-drive**
into his forearm.*

Loading...

*A click-- and the muffled, dead air of
a cassette playing is heard.*

GIDEON

Hey, little brother. Sorry I've been MIA. But everything's gonna be okay. I promise. I just had to do this. I knew you wouldn't believe me if I told you. So I thought it'd be better-- if I showed you.

You deserve to know the truth.

The tape continues on with the space of dead air-- then clicks off.

DAWN

End of message.

What will you do?

POLARIS

(pause)

I get sad. Sadder than I've been... in a long, long time. And for a moment... I hate myself.

And I don't know why.

Lapping water.

DAWN

From the top of the cliff, the squirrel stares down at you in perfect silence-- and lets the lighter slip from its mouth. It plummets, catching the light, and falls into the lake-- and the waters from the splash begin, slowly, to rise... sucking up the whole lake into a wave—

The sound of a growing wave.

--ten, twenty, thirty feet tall, towering above you, blotting out the sun, and--

*Polaris closes his eyes, flinching.
The sound of a huge and mighty
wave crashing, and--*

Blackout.

*In the darkness, the sound of gently
lapping water.*

DAWN

Loading eidetic memory.

*A dramatic shift of sound and color--
the wall at the back of the stage
opens-- revealing a lighted,
dreamlike set.*

*The abstract suggestion of a **bed**, a
nightstand.*

*Polaris stands in the space, staring
out, longingly.*

POLARIS

My birthday.

(forcefully piecing together the memory)

My twenty-seventh birthday.

I'm alone, and I'm at the old house and I walk through the rooms like I've done a thousand times in my dinosaur suspenders or with a loose tooth or my coloring book but it isn't the same and I don't know why. I feel alone and scared and stupid and I've bought a birthday cake for myself from the grocery store and my stomach feels like a washing machine and I think about Gideon and how even if I feel stupid and lonely and the cake's bad he'd have a piece with me and tell me that sometimes it gets like life just doesn't wanna play anymore and it'll pluck out the subtitle button on the remote with a pocket knife and bury the rulebook in the garden and chase you through a creepy city till you can't run anymore and just have to lie down in the bloody street but that everything would be okay. I'm standing in his old bedroom and he's... he's at the lab working--

DAWN

End of eidetic memory.

POLARIS

--and I take the cake and two forks and get on my bike and start to ride--

DAWN

End of memory.

POLARIS

--and when I get to the lab, the parking lot's empty--

DAWN

End of memory.

End of memory.

POLARIS

And on the top floor--

Polaris suddenly clutches his head in pain, and falls to the floor-- as a dramatic shift of sound and color takes hold.

*In his pain, Polaris sees something under the bed, reaches out, and draws forth a **smiley face stress ball**.*

He stares at it, pained-- and the transition cuts into a sudden blackout.

Darkness.

Silence.

DAWN

You stand on an astral plane.

Green mist floats under your feet, stretching out, endlessly, in all directions.

Lights rise on Polaris-- holding and staring down at the ball.

Above you, a purple, night sky filled with stars and planets.

The lake water, drenching you, begins to evaporate, faster and faster, turning to warm steam about you.

A shooting star passes overhead, and an astral wind blows.

The sound of wind and twinkling.

What will you do?

POLARIS

I investigate the toy.

DAWN

Inside the foam, the beeping of a computer unit. Protruding from the back of the toy-- a flash-drive.

This device contains a message.

Play message?

Polaris inserts the toy's flash-drive into his forearm.

Loading...

A click-- and the muffled, dead air of a cassette recording.

GIDEON

It's hard being a good big brother, Polaris. I know you think I always was, that I am... but I'm not. You just don't remember. But it is; it's hard. Sometimes you just get so tired and heavy-- but you have to smile; and you're scared too-- but you're not allowed to be; and you don't have the answers-- but you have to; and you think, maybe... you never did at all.

Or maybe that's just being a person. And that's hard too. And I'm not. I'm not a good person. I know you think I am; but you just don't remember.

And that's my fault too.

(pause)

This device contains a memory, fresh from my mind, hacked out and uploaded whole... just for you. After all-- it's yours as much as mine.

Play memory?

Polaris double-clicks his forearm. A transition of light and sound, nothing like the others-- here, sped up voices, a dog barking, rain, etc.,

*the light displaying silhouettes,
letters, shapes, etc.*

GIDEON

We're sitting in the treehouse. To your right, the radio, playing Jason and the Argonauts; to your left, a flashlight; and, right before you-- the firepole.

*Polaris runs his hand down the
"firepole."*

And it starts to rain and thunder.

The sound of thunder.

And you're scared, and I don't know what to do, so I stick my tongue to the firepole and tell you everything will be okay.

POLARIS

And it is. Everything is okay, Gideon.

GIDEON

No. It isn't. Because when you see me do it... you do it too.

And we're sitting there, our tongues against the pole and the lightning flashing all around us and the thunder booming and you trust me... you trust me more than anyone in the world; and I don't want to scare you, but at any second a bolt could strike the pole and there you are smiling up at me with your tongue pressed against the metal but I don't say or do anything I just, I just keep letting you make believe.

Thunder.

POLARIS

But I wasn't scared anymore.

*Suddenly, a memory transition--
recorded voices, silhouettes, etc.*

GIDEON

We're standing in the backyard. You're wearing your bathrobe and holding a broom and there, ahead of you, the orange tree.

The chirping of birds.

And the yard is all mud and puddles but I tell you if you close your eyes you can float. And you do, you shut them tight and start walking across the yard--

Polaris closes his eyes.

--and your slippers sink into the mud and swell with black water and you pick an orange and trudge back across the yard, squishing and slopping, a smile, ear to ear, across your face.

Polaris opens his eyes.

POLARIS

And we make orange juice in the blender and pour it into tall plastic cups and I start unwrapping presents.

GIDEON

No. You track mud into the house, soaking and staining the carpet black with heavy footprints; and mom and dad get so mad, they say you aren't a baby anymore and you start to cry, wearing your birthday hat, and you'd trusted me and I didn't mean it to happen... but still-- you started your birthday in tears, wiping at the mud stains with your hands and crying, "I'm sorry, mom, I'm sorry, dad, I'm so, so sorry."

POLARIS

No.

I started out my birthday... as a shaman.

A memory transition.

GIDEON

We're standing on the street corner. Cars are passing, the sun's setting, and across the street the ice cream truck is packing up for the day.

The sounds of passing cars.

And I get it into my head that we need, more than anything in the world, raspberry and vanilla popsicles. And without thinking, I forget all about the busy traffic, all I can see is that ice cream truck getting ready to leave and I start to cross.

POLARIS

You were always impulsive. And that was dangerous, when you ran across the street; you could've gotten hurt.

GIDEON

(pause)

You were holding my hand... and I dragged you with me.

I pulled you into traffic because all I could do was think about myself and the cars swerved and slammed on their brakes and when we got to the truck you were shaking all over, and you couldn't speak, and you'd wet yourself.

The sound of cars.

I wasn't a good big brother, Polaris. I tried..... but all I ever did was put you in danger; and the more you looked up to me, the more you tried to be like me... the more damage I did. Because you loved me; you trusted me-- and I could never be what you needed me to be.

A protector. But I couldn't even protect myself.

The dead air of the cassette continues-- then clicks off.

DAWN

End of uploaded memory.

Transition.

DAWN

Standing on the expanse of green mist, you see, in the distance, three huge temple columns rising against the dark purple sky, the columns standing, alone, above a small pile of white rubble.

To the west, shadows play on the horizon.

To the east, a red planet drifts, silent, across the galaxy.

The sound of wind and twinkling.

What will you do?

POLARIS

Plot a course-- for the columns and ruins.

Gideon hasn't taken his medicine in hours and he's not acting like himself, and I don't care what he says or what he thinks he remembers-- I know him. It was my birthday; it's my life, it's my story... and he's the hero in it; and no one can say he isn't.

Not even him.

Transition.

DAWN

The temple columns loom before you, cracked and white, surging through the mist to touch the stars. The rubble lies silent, the remains of walls and statues, reduced now to nothing but stones and jagged shapes.

POLARIS

The parking lot. I park my bike and put the flimsy cardboard box with the cake under my arm and look up and see that even though the lab looks empty there's a light on in a window on the top floor and I know Gideon's in there...

(slowly remembering, instead)

...just like on my seventh birthday, as I moved through the house, the rubik's cube on the kitchen table leading me to a knight made out of metal and wood hidden in the basement behind the dryer and even though I couldn't see Gideon I knew he was there ready to guide me if I got lost...

(suddenly forcing back his train of thought)

...just like I know, as I park my bike, that he's up there on the top floor of the lab, in that room, ready to hug me and kiss me on the cheek and wish me happy birthday. So I walk to the front door and there's a keypad, and I punch in the code, but--

DAWN

Error. Unable to load memory.

POLARIS

I--

DAWN

Unable to load memory.

Polaris grips his head in pain.

POLARIS

They're my memories too Gideon and you don't get to tell me how to remember them!

The pain suddenly stops.

GIDEON(pause)

No.

But sometimes, Polaris... you can be-- too creative.

*Polaris reaches into the darkness,
and draws forth a **toy ambulance**.**He stares at it.*POLARIS

That's because I'm special.

That's what you always said.

*He inserts the **toy's flash-drive** into
his forearm.**A memory transition.*GIDEON

We're standing in my bedroom. To your right, a stack of Spawn comics on the floor, to your left, the old computer on its folding table, and, before you-- my bedroom wall, crammed with ribbons and framed certificates and trophies on shelves.

The sound of typing.

And you stare up--

Polaris does.

--wide-eyed, taking in all the colors and words, and you whisper to yourself--

POLARIS*(quietly)*

Faster than a chess master... smarter than all the kids at the county fair... able to write the best poem with a single pen... it's a bird-- it's a plane-- it's-- my brother.

GIDEON

And I thought I'd die, right there, sitting at the computer, knowing I wasn't and would never be the Superman you saw in me. Superman helps people. Superman tries to make the world a better place. Superman doesn't turn his back on everyone he loves and disappoint everyone who ever thought he'd grow up to be someone even though he knew he never would and hid it behind medals and tired smiles. I was never a good person, no matter how hard I tried. Telling you stories and making up games because I couldn't stand the silence when that little voice would creep inside me and my eyes would get wet and you'd ask me if I was okay and I'd tell you we were in a dungeon filled with stars and there was a dragon to the north wrapped around a mountain of gold and we were wizards fighting all the wrong and bad in the world.

POLARIS

And we were. In that moment, it didn't matter who we were supposed to be, or what scared us, or how the world really was. When we were together, none of that mattered.

GIDEON

But the game... always had to end.

And I'd have to face my real self, alone; because I couldn't let you see it.

A memory transition.

GIDEON

Ms. Gold's house. You're pushing your bike down the sidewalk--

Polaris pantomimes holding the handles of a bicycle.

--and you look and see, in the walkway between her house and the wooden fence, me-- crouched over the plastic chair in the gravel, Ms. Gold's pack of red and black cigarettes in my hand, and I've got one in my mouth, the smoke hanging in the air--

The crackling of a cigarette.

--and I steal her silver lighter, watching the window to make sure she doesn't come out. And you hurry past, but I turn and catch your face, passing-- with a look on it... like you've just seen a monster.

A memory transition.

You're outside the abandoned house on Chestnut Street, cold in the night air--

The sound of wind.

Polaris holds himself in the cold.

--and the other kids are outside with you, because they got scared-- they got scared because on the top floor we found a framed picture and a glass cabinet and a bar set and I picked up a clock from the mantel... and I threw it through the picture frame and then I smashed it through the glass shelves of the cabinet and the kids were scared-- they were scared of me; and you were outside, and you thought something bad had happened to me.

And I guess... it had.

Wind.

Kids act out. I know. But the smart ones aren't supposed to.

Big brothers aren't supposed to. But it's more than that. I'm just not a good person. I've tried to be, a thousand times; but there's just something broken in me. I could try again, try harder, try to be... like Superman. But I'm not Superman.

I'm Spawn.

Dead air-- and a click.

DAWN

End of uploaded memory.

Transition.

DAWN

Standing before the white rubble and the temple columns, you see, to the south, a collection of mirrors, floating in the purple air, their bronze and gilded frames glittering in the starlight.

To the north, a blue fire rises out of the mist, trembling beneath a spinning wormhole.

The sound of wind and twinkling.

What will you do?

POLARIS

I try punching in the code, I've been to the lab hundreds and hundreds of times but this time it isn't working and I try everything, and I remember...

(slowly remembering, instead)

...I remember how on my seventh birthday the toy knight had led me to a choose-your-own-adventure book Gideon had written just for me and bound in a green paper cover slipped in my pillowcase and as I worked through it to find the next clue every choice I picked was the same I wound up alone locked in a doorless room as the world spun on around me and I was trapped and every path led there no matter how creative I was it would always end in that room with a table and a glass of water and the sun setting and I called out to Gideon that I couldn't figure it out and I needed his help and it was just too hard and I gripped the book and called out his name but he didn't come...

(forcing back his train of thought)

...and I'm standing outside the lab and I punch in every code and the light's on in a room on the top floor and without thinking I type out my birthday and the door suddenly opens and I walk inside.

The sound of wind and twinkling.

South.

Transition.

DAWN

The mirrors float before you-- round, square, rectangular, their glimmering faces reflecting the astral plane.

In the center, one mirror floats, shrouded-- a white cloth draped over its tall, stiff frame.

Polaris reaches out-- and suddenly stops.

POLARIS

No.

I don't wanna play anymore. Let's just go home. We can take all the memories on all the toys and reload each one back into your mind and hit reverse and we'll throw that Neural Uploader into the sea and you'll be okay and we'll go home and I'll make chicken sandwiches and you'll take your medicine and we'll be together and we won't have to play anymore we can just talk we'll sit on the couch and we'll talk about anything you want please, Gideon, please I don't wanna play anymore.

GIDEON*(pause)*

It'll be okay, Polaris. It's all gonna be okay.

I promise.

*Polaris slowly reaches out his hand--
and removes the "sheet."*

DAWN

Pulling away the sheet, the mirror now floats before you-- a gold, floral frame pinning in a flat of glimmering glass: Gideon's reflection, staring through... silent.

*Polaris reaches out his hand into the
darkness.*

The mirror ripples, your hand disappearing into Gideon's chest, and--

*Polaris retracts his hand-- now
holding a **toy skeleton**.*

--the mirror turns to liquid, draining from the frame, to spill and evaporate into the mist.

POLARIS

And I threw down the green book and I called out to Gideon that there had to be a page missing I had gone around the dragon and fought the dragon and tried to make friends with the dragon and even leave the castle but nothing worked and I was standing in the bedroom with my birthday hat on and I looked under the bed and in the closet to see if Gideon was hiding there and he wasn't and the sun was setting, and--

*Polaris suddenly inserts the toy's
flash-drive into his forearm.*

A memory transition.

GIDEON

The sun is setting; you're standing in--

Polaris suddenly cuts off Gideon.

POLARIS

The lab. A low humming sound.

The sound of humming.

I make it up the stairs and open the door to your work room.

Long tables stretch out, stacks of prototypes of martian phasers and blueprints for cyber rockets crowd each station.

I put down the box of cake on one of the workstations and start to look for you-- but then I hear the humming, growing louder, now. I thought maybe it was from one of the new devices, but it's coming from all around me. And then-- I hear a voice: far in the distance.

GIDEON

Polaris.

POLARIS

I look through the window, and there, at the edge of the parking lot, you're standing-- small against the setting sun.

The hum.

And you're waving to me, and I hear-- you're calling my name. But I don't understand. The hum grows louder, and from the walls a blue light begins to blink. And you're shouting and waving--

GIDEON

Polaris.

POLARIS

--but I just lift a hand and, with a smile--

--wave back at you.

Polaris raises his hand, and slowly begins to wave, when--

The hum grows deafening and, suddenly-- a blinding flash of blue light-- and an enormous explosion rips through the space.

The blue light flashes, Polaris stands frozen in position, the sound of the explosion booms, and-- an abrupt silence.

I hadn't seen the signs. All the good you'd done, all your accomplishments-- they were never enough... to make you happy. You wanted to start over, to unburden yourself. But then I showed up... and ruined everything.

You'd destroyed all the medals and awards and inventions, every expectation weighing you down, the accolades and love you thought you never deserved. But along with it-- you'd destroyed me too.

By the time you got to me in the burning rubble, the blast had ripped through my eyes-- melting half my brain. But you managed to restart my heart, and you worked for months, day and night until, finally, you'd done it-- you'd rebuilt my brain: piecing together half a lobe here, a cortex there, and..... my memories. And as you went through them, you realized, after what'd happened, I'd never look at you the same again; that in my eyes... you'd no longer be Superman to me. So you tinkered with the memories, cutting out a day when you'd said a harsh word to me, a week when you weren't there when I needed you, a month when you were cold and distant, hiding every night in the treehouse... and-- the accident. You erased them... because you were scared that if I remembered... I wouldn't love you any more.

But I do, Gideon. I remember. I remember-- and I love you.

GIDEON

I know you do, Polaris. But that's because... you don't remember.

There was no lab. There was no explosion. I never rebuilt your brain or changed your memories.

Polaris turns away.

POLARIS

No.

GIDEON

You chose to forget.

Polaris shakes his head, fighting back pain.

You were always the creative one. So you made up a story instead.

Because the truth... is so much worse.

POLARIS

(quietly)

No... please.

GIDEON

All I wanted was to help you, one last time. To help you remember... because I owe you that, at least. But I can't force you; I can't be selfish, all over again. So remember me, however you want. You can take the toys, and all the hard truths and sad memories that come with them... or you can throw them all into the sea. That's your choice. It's the one thing that's up to you. Because what happened... happened. And nothing can change that.

Throughout the following, Polaris slowly lowers his hands and looks up.

But for me? I'll remember, above all else-- two brothers... the little one, who loves the big one, and the big one, who loves the little one... so, so much; and always will...

...no matter what.

Polaris makes to speak, when--

Dead air-- and a click.

Transition.

Polaris stands, hunched, unmoving-- staring out.

DAWN

Beneath you, the green mist rolling out in all directions slowly begins to disappear, and the purple night sky slips away, piece by piece, until, suddenly-- you find yourself standing: in the very depths of black space, an abyss of infinite darkness holding you in its heavy shadow.

At your feet, a path of toys stretches out before you--

*The light expands, revealing a line of
toys.*

--leading to the mausoleum: the squat stone structure floating in the blackness, its handle-
less door and the small screen with the red handprint... waiting in silence.

Polaris turns away, unable to look.

Tears fill his eyes, but he takes a deep breath, summoning all his courage.

*Polaris steps forward-- and picks up
one of the toys.*

POLARIS

(pause)

And the sun was setting on my seventh birthday, and I'd followed all the toys and clues;
but the choose-your-own-adventure book kept leading to the same sad, lonely room and I
was trapped, and I called out Gideon's name but he didn't answer. So I looked for him.

But he wasn't under the bed or in the closet hiding. And when I called, he didn't come.

*Polaris steps forward-- and picks up
a toy.*

And I ran into the kitchen, but he wasn't there.

Polaris steps-- and picks up a toy.

But the flashlight in the pantry was missing; but I didn't notice it then.

Steps-- picks up a toy.

And I ran into the livingroom, but he wasn't there.

Steps-- picks up a toy.

But the paper and pen on the coffee table was missing; but I didn't notice it then.

*Steps-- picks up a toy-- now cradling
them under his arm.*

And I ran into his bedroom, but he wasn't there.

Steps-- picks up a toy.

But his orange and purple pills were in the trashcan... and the belt on his bathrobe was
missing.

But I didn't notice it then.

Steps-- picks up a toy.

And I ran outside and looked up. The sun had set, and it was dark, but there, in the
window of the treehouse... a light was shining; the firepole, catching the light-- tall and
grim and glittering. And I called out his name... one last time.

Polaris picks up the last toy.

*He stands, clutching the toys to his
chest.*

(quietly)

“Gideon.

Gideon...

....I love you.”

Slowly, Polaris reaches out his free hand-- and places it against the “screen” beside the “mausoleum door.”

A beep-- and the sound of an iron door creaking open.

Polaris stares in silence-- and enters the darkness.

DAWN

Goodbye, Polaris.

The lights begin to fade.

Goodbye, Polaris.

Goodbye.

As the lights fade to black, Satie’s “Gymnopodie Nos. 1” begins to play in the darkness.

It plays for some time, until, slowly, the wall at the back of the stage opens-- revealing a lighted, fully realistic set.

A table. Two chairs. A window. On the table-- a tape player, a glass of water, and a few of the toys: including the toy astronaut.

Through the window-- a setting sun.

Polaris sits at the table, staring down. He holds a handful of the multi-sided dice of a role playing game-- and tosses them, gently.

He looks at the numbers in silence, picks them up, and rolls again. He looks down at the numbers in silence, and rolls again.

ELLEN enters in the darkness, remaining in shadow.

She wears a black dress and black hat.

ELLEN

(softly)

Paul.

(pause)

Pauly.

It's time.

Polaris looks up.

Polaris nods.

*He rises, and begins to wipe off the scar makeup from around his eyes. He unzips his spacesuit, removing it to reveal he is wearing a **blue suit** underneath, a little too small, a little too short-- **a black mourner's band** wrapped around his left arm.*

Polaris stands now like a child, unsure, his posture and expression wholly adolescent-- seven years old. He makes to move to Ellen, but stops-- glancing, unsure, at the toy astronaut on the table.

Deciding, he picks up the toy, holding it gently in both hands.

POLARIS

(soft, sad, but sure)

I'm gonna bring my toys with me.

Okay?

ELLEN

Of course, sweetheart.

*Polaris stares down at the **toy**.*

POLARIS

(pause)

Okay.

ELLEN

(silence)

Are you ready?

Polaris pauses-- and nods.

Ellen lowers a black veil over her face, and, from the shadows-- reaches out her hand into the lighted space.

Silence.

Slowly, Polaris takes her hand in his-- and enters the darkness.

The kitchen, the table, the chairs-- quiet and empty.

The music continues a little longer on the tape player, then-- stops.

The dead air of a cassette, and-- a click.

Lights fade to black.

End of Play
