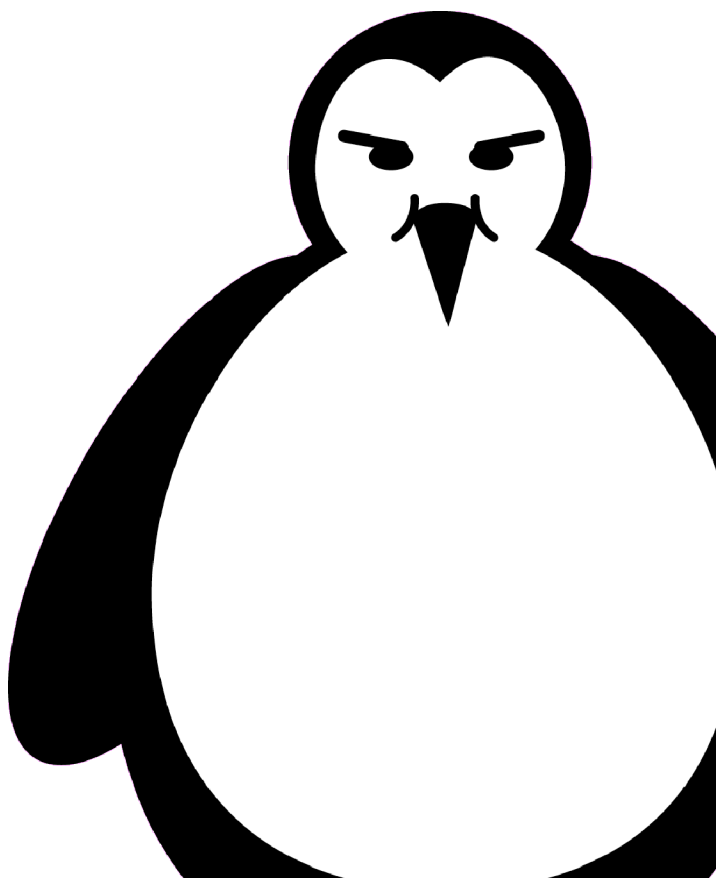


# Do Dream-Sheep Bleat?

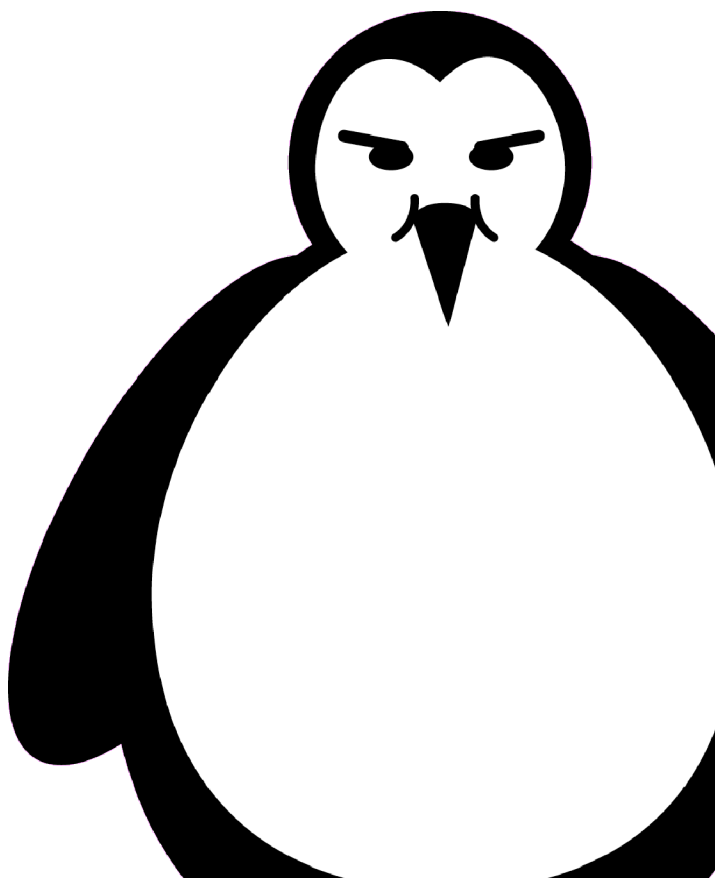
By Adam Priest.





# Part One

## Introduction



John woke up on the sofa, the TV flickering quietly in the corner. Ouch. His head hurt.

He dragged himself up to a seated position and put his face in his hands to sigh before standing and wobbling to the kitchen to fetch some water.

How had he even got home last night? He didn't remember. There was the pub after work, and then meeting a friend in another pub after that.

He remembered them not really wanting to go home come kicking out time, and moving onto some club or another. After that it was all very hazy. Just a few brief flashes of memory really. Flirting. Dancing. Drinking yet more.

He looked at the clock on the oven as he gulped down a pint of water; 04:22.

Ugh. Three hours till he had to get up for work. His head throbbed in time with the opening and closing of his esophagus,

allowing the water to sluice down to quench the fire in his belly.

He staggered back towards his bedroom, picking up his coat from the floor on the way. As he hung it on a peg on the back of his bedroom door, a small book fell out of the pocket onto the floor.

John narrowed his eyes wondering where he'd picked that thing up from and nearly fell over as he bent down to pick it up. He tried to steady himself on the door, which began to move under his weight throwing him further off balance.

He turned the book over in one hand while he unzipped his trousers with the other. There was a picture of a fat squinty-eyed penguin on the cover under the title: *"Do Dream-Sheep Bleat?"*

He tried to focus on the back of the book as his trousers dropped to the floor and he stepped out of them. It claimed to be *"A short story about magic and mind. About cognizance, conjuring and the nature of consciousness. Also, there's a penguin."*

Under that there was a quote from some nobody claiming *"Incredible, this book has completely changed the way I live my life. It's taught me my aims, my goals, how to*

*achieve my dreams. Now I'm rich! - John Shamrock"*

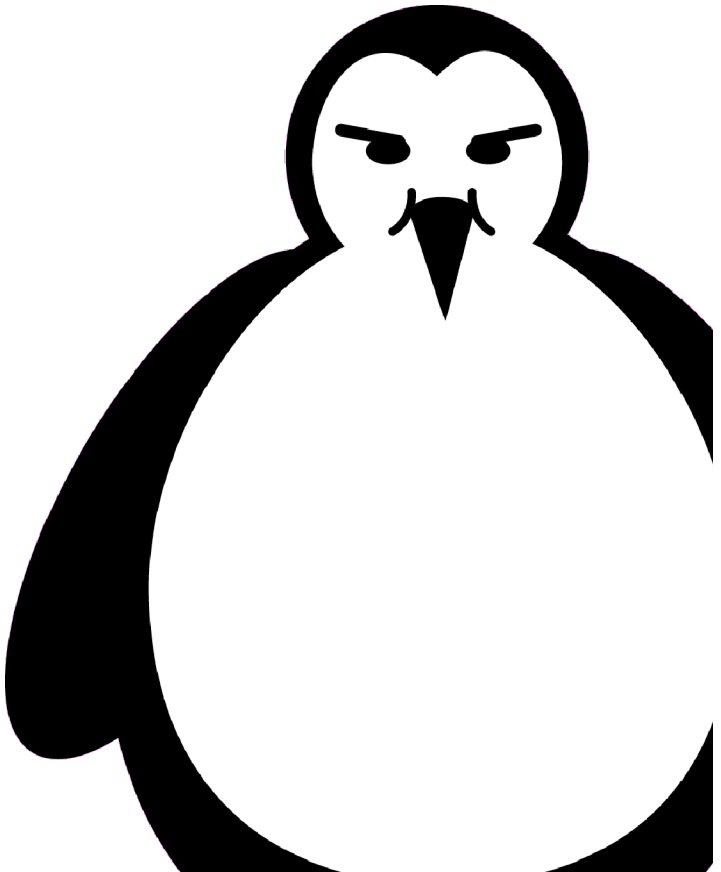
It really was only a short book, pocketbook sized and only eighty tiny pages. The whole thing could surely be read in about an hour.

John threw the book onto his pillow, pulled his shirt up over his head and tossed it to the floor near his trousers before climbing under the duvet and tunneling up to the head of the bed.

He checked his alarm clock was set, prompting another sigh at the fact he'd have to crawl back out of this bed in only three hours, then started skimming through the tiny book, trying to remember where he'd got it from.

# Part Two

## Siduals



John looked through the first few pages, which appeared to be describing a kind of weird magical practice. Something utterly impracticably pointless. Crazy pseudo-scientific nonsense, John reckoned.

That initial chapter encouraged him to take a pen and build for himself a “sidual”, which, it explained, was a magical symbol.

The book told him to design it any way that seemed sensible to him, but that while designing it he should keep in mind the thing he wanted to achieve in the universe, the way he wanted the world to respond to him. It encouraged him to steal imagery from the book itself, and from movies and TV shows that he'd seen, things the book described as the universal unconscious, the intrinsic and subliminal meaning and connotations of every word and action which happens in the world.

The word “Sidual”, it explained, was itself a sidual, being the residual remains of the word “residual.”

The book appeared to be instructing him to break down his desires, his wants, his demands of the universe into simple symbolic ideas. He should then combine those ideas and spread the resulting symbols as far and wide as possible. This would somehow make the world more likely to contain the actual thing which the symbols he'd made and reduced to merely their residual components represented.

The book suggested that the universe would read this 'sidual' magic, reconstruct the entire meaning of that desire for itself, and then feed it to him back on a plate.

“What a load of old nonsense” thought John, his eyes tiring from trying to read in the semi darkness and his hangover throbbing in his head.

The book, however, had anticipated his disbelief, and went on to explain exactly how this “Sidual Magic” was supposed to work, in real, physical, terms.

The word 'magic' here was apparently misleading. This was no supernatural effect, merely a system to take advantage of the way human brains worked.

It used an example, of course, which had already been hinted at by the cover of the booklet.

## *Do Dream-Sheep Bleat?*

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The author of the book claimed that he himself had invented a sidual, by writing down his goal, his demand of the universe, and manipulating the letters until he had come to an image. He described eliminating all the vowels from the sentence, and then all the letters which still seemed redundant. He'd combined that with important images from his life, his culture, his own involvement in the universal subconscious, to arrive at the image of a short fat penguin with slitty eyes which appeared on the cover of the book.

John yawned. His attention had been caught because, let's face it, who doesn't want to learn the secrets of how to get whatever they want from life. However he was still deeply skeptical.

He read on, wondering vaguely why he wasn't trying to get to sleep since clearly that would be the best thing for him, what with having to work again in the morning.

The author described his sidual in more detail. Explaining how, because of the system used to build the penguin, the shape of it's body was made from certain constants, certain universally recognizable contours and curves. The ones which had been gradually evolved through what it called "memetic evolution" to most closely

match the neural structures of the brain which symbolized that desire, that need, that gap in the universe which the author had tried to fill.

The book suggested that the activation of those structures in other people's minds would push those minds towards believing in the power of the symbols, in the power of the signal, even if the minds it was recreated in didn't fully understand the significance of them. Even if they didn't believe. Possibly **especially** if they didn't understand.

The book seemed to read his own mind, in that it preempted his skepticism.

It tried to explain how the very fact that he was reading about these ideas pushed those ideas closer to reality, that the more a human being shared these ideas with the author the more likely those ideas were to appear in the universe. As though reality, at least the shared consensual reality that made **money** and **laws** and **mathematics** real, would somehow transcend the fact that the people reading them didn't have a complete description of them and still make the function of the signal active.

The book stressed that while the symbols themselves were not, of course, in any way conscious, they could push the consciousness of anyone who came into

contact with those symbols into working to make those symbols real.

People, it explained, feel a desire to make more money just because of the meaning attributed to money by the rest of society. So similarly, merely contemplating these other symbols would bring them into reality too.

It pondered the significance of money some more.

Money, it maintained, was intrinsically valueless. You can't eat a bit of paper. You can't burn a coin for heat. The only thing you can do with money is believe in its value, and trade it for something new.

This is why it was important to take an already known signal for the basis of your own, the book claimed. To adapt and change those that were already an important part of your life.

It gave examples of signals already "active" in modern life: Flags, words, money, history, mathematics, all of fiction, all of politics.

In fact it went on in some length about how the division of the political landscape into "Left" and "Right" forced people to identify with one or the other, forced them to believe in one or the other, to support and love one or the other despite the fact that political

ideas are not really something so easily categorized.

People, the book maintained, were easily influenced. It was easy to make them contemplate your ideas, your passions, and in doing so to make those ideas and passions more solid in their own minds, and the minds of everyone they came into contact with.

As though just by spreading and encouraging the copying of certain ideas, one could give those ideas flesh, give them consciousness.

The book described some of the personality traits of this short fat penguin. It described his searching narrow eyes, skeptical of everything he saw. His waddle, which symbolized a cautious groping for the truth, never willing to put his weight on a footing not already tested, already proven.

It explained that as more details of the penguin's personality were revealed throughout the rest of the booklet, the very fact he was reading about this penguin would make that penguin *real* to him in some sense. Make it animated in his mind, building and reinforcing the penguin's semantic existence in yet another brain. Stretching it's position in the universal consciousness.

The penguin would be made real.

John's drowsiness started to seep over his entire body, relaxing his muscles, and his mind's credulity.

He pondered this penguin for a while. Wondering what exactly had been the desire behind the person who had created it. Did he want Wealth? Power? Knowledge? Love? Readers? Fans? Followers? World domination?

He closely examined the penguin. Looked at it's strangely round wings, and wondered what they meant. It's short legs which gave it the waddle, what did they imply In his mind? Was it the same thing that the author of this crazy book had in his mind when he first drew this idiotic bird? Did the author know what it implied to others, or was he just relying on this "universal subconscious" to fill in the gaps?

He thought he heard the door knock, but then convinced himself it was just his imagination. Who could possibly be knocking the door at this time in the morning?

He read on.

The book started to go deeper, to explain the nature of consciousness and personal identity, frankly it started to get a bit beyond his drunken ability to understand what the

hell it was talking about and that imaginary knocking at the door had started again.

In fact, it was getting quite insistent. And really quite loud.

John rolled out of bed, pulled on his trousers again, and went to look through the peephole. Just to check.

He saw an eye. A shining black eye, reflecting the harsh light in the hallway. It blinked back at him.

Cautiously, he opened the door.

Outside the door stood a penguin, standing up on tip-toes to put his face against the peephole.

It waddled backwards slightly, looked up at him, and said "Hello, I think you've been expecting me."

"Um," said John, "I don't think so?"

"Sure you have," the penguin barged past him in a manner more violent than his waddle would have suggested, "You're in my world now."

John watched the penguin walk into his flat, blinking in disbelief. It didn't really look like the sidual in the book, it was more detailed, more real, more three dimensional and solid than any picture could have been.

## *Do Dream-Sheep Bleat?*

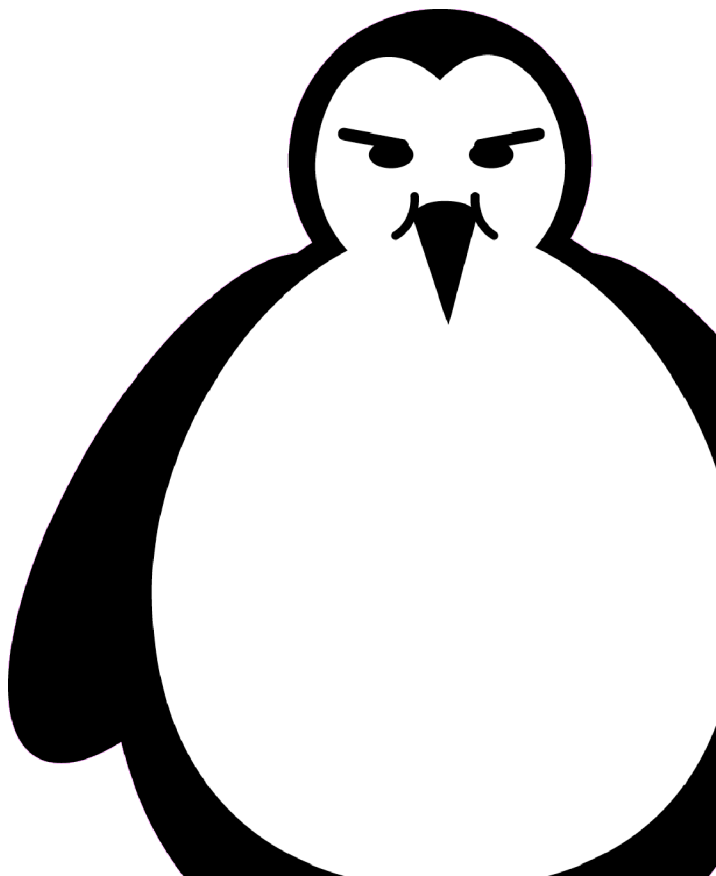
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“Oh, don't look so surprised,” said the penguin, “anyone would think you'd never had a dream before.”

“I'm dreaming then?” asked John.

“Well duh! Do you think it's more likely that you're dreaming or that a genuine four foot tall talking penguin actually knocked your door?”

Part Three  
Dream One



*"Thanks for making me conscious for a while,"* it said, cautiously waddling past him towards his front room, "it's been ages since anyone read that book of mine in the right suggestible frame of mind."

John watched him waddle past, "What?"

"Obviously I can't remember last time I was conscious, it surely wasn't in this wetware and memories can't transfer easily from one brain to another."

John shook his head in confusion, he didn't really know how to handle a giant penguin being in his flat. Didn't know the protocol.

The penguin sat down improbably on the sofa where John had been sleeping a short while earlier, "Aren't you going to offer me any tea?" it asked.

That pushed John towards familiar ground. He knew how to offer folks tea. "Yeah, of course, sorry. How do penguin's take their tea? Milk? Sugar?"

The penguin shook his head, "I wouldn't know how *penguins* in general take their tea, but **I** will take **mine** with milk and as much sugar as you can dissolve in the cup. I don't have a sweet tooth, for us birds have no teeth, but I do like it sweet as it'll come."

John started the kettle boiling, dropped a couple of tea-bags into some cups and shouted back out from the kitchen to the penguin, "So, I'm dreaming then?"

Then penguin's beak slid around his face and somehow contrived to look disdainful. "Of course, yes, I thought we'd been through all this? Your dream is what gives me consciousness, at least for now."

Perhaps it was the slowly rising hangover, perhaps it was just generic dream weirdness, perhaps John was simply genuinely slow. Confusion spread more deeply through his face, "Huh?" he said.

The penguin sighed in frustration. It looked like he'd have to explain it in detail to this one. He hated it when he had to waste his precious conscious time on describing every minutia, step by step.

"Look," said the penguin, "what exactly do you think consciousness **is**? What is it made of? You do know that you're conscious right now, don't you?"

The cups chimed and tinkled as John stirred the boiling water over the tea bags. "Of course I'm conscious," he shouted back from the kitchen, "I can hear the chiming of these cups, smell the aroma of the tea as it seeps up through my nose, see the sparkle of light on the spoon as I stir. I'm aware of all these things, and of myself being aware of them."

"And you're aware of what all those things mean," the penguin continued, "how they affect the world in which you live. The question is though, **how** are you aware of them? Where does the awareness live?"

John brought the steaming cups back into the front room and handed one to the penguin who somehow managed to curl his flipper around it and take it from John's hand despite the fact he had no fingers, no opposable thumb.

John tapped his now free hand to his temple, "In here, of course, in my brain."

"You point at your skull," the penguin indicated John's gesture, "but is your brain actually in there right now? You are dreaming remember. Is your brain here, in the dream world, encased in a dream-skull, supported by a dream-backbone as you sit on a dream-chair? Or is it out there," the penguin indicated the bedroom, "snoring gently as your physical self dribbles onto the

pages which first put me, the idea of me, into your mind?"

John nodded, conceding the point, "Okay, sure, my brain isn't actually in this skull." He tried to point at right angles to the reality of the dream, back out to the real world in which he lay in bed dreaming, "it's out there, in the real world."

The penguin mirrored John's nod, "It's not only helping you to see, helping you to sense and be aware of these surroundings. While you're dreaming it's also **creating** these surroundings. The taste of this tea, the reflection of your face on the surface of it as you drink, the feel of the sofa, the strange shape of my body, the words I'm uttering, all created by the ticking and the processing of the wetware in your sleeping skull."

John was finally starting to see what the Penguin was talking about, "My brain is writing your words?"

The penguin clapped his flippers together excitedly, spilling tea onto John's carpet, "Yes! Yes! Exactly!" He looked down at the wet patch on the floor and shrugged, spilling a drop more tea. "And how does it figure out what I'm going to say? The same way it figures out what you're going to say! You know what you'll say by **being you**, by running *your consciousness* on it's hardware."

Likewise, you know what I'll say by **being me**, by running *the penguin* in your mind!"

"I'm making you conscious right now?" John felt slower than usual. He wondered if it was perhaps because half of his mind was devoted to keeping that penguin alive and thinking.

"In normal every-day waking life," the penguin continued, "your brain is working hard, processing your sense data, integrating it into your personal model of the universe, the world you live in. One of the biggest parts of that model, of that virtual environment in your skull, is **you**, your personality, your mind, your *soul* if you like. Your personality is a part of the world in your skull, a part of that model. You are aware, you are conscious, because your brain is always wondering, modeling, calculating the question **what does John think about this?** Figuring how it makes you feel. Then updating the model of yourself to reflect the answer."

John pondered this for a second, looking into the penguin's dark slitty eyes, watching the light reflect from his black eyeballs, feeling his own understanding increase.

"It sounds like you're saying my consciousness, my soul, my very being, is

just a model in a brain. A computation calculated by a neural computer.”

The penguin's beak bobbed up and down as he nodded, “Exactly. But 'you' are not the *only* function your brain can compute.”

The little model of John computed by his sleeping brain updated to include new understanding, adding new associations, new function. He finally felt like he properly understood the words the penguin had uttered as it first walked into his flat, the words '*Thanks for making me conscious for a while*' finally made sense. His eyes widened with the new understanding and the awe was audible in his voice as he uttered “Ah, and tonight, while I sleep, I'm also calculating *you*, making *you* conscious, giving you life!”

The penguin's beak curved and his slitty eyes narrowed even more at the corners, using John's wetware to decide to smile and nod. It relaxed in the knowledge that it'd taught this fool the things he needed to know in order to understand.

John watched this smile, and allowed his own eyes to narrow, not in mirth, but in skepticism, “But you're just a sidual, right, just some so-called magical symbol from a book I picked up somehow from the pub.”

“Yep, and now I'm a magical symbol with a consciousness, with a personality, with a nature, a soul. Just reading that book, my book, has caused you to **simulate me in your mind**. Now I can affect the world, change it. I'm a magical symbol **with power!**”

“But are you? Do you? It's hardly a full consciousness is it? You're just a character in a dream, you can't actually *affect the real world*, can't actually *move a single atom!*”

The penguin laughed, heartily, so much so he doubled over, bending in ways that would make a zoo keeper frightened for the poor bird's back.

“How do you think your sleeping brain is calculating my consciousness exactly? You think it's metaphysical? You think it's some kinda dualistic soul-stuff? That god is reaching down from heaven and whispering in your ear? Your brain is **made out of atoms**, John, moving atoms is **exactly** what I'm doing right now, moving the atoms in your brain, changing the states of your neurons. I'm actually changing your mind!”

John's emotional centres started to model how John would feel about parts of his brain being diverted to simulate a penguin dreamed up in order to further the calculated but unnamed aims of some guy he'd never

met. The result was a flood of adrenaline throughout his brain, affecting the result of every action, every thought.

In other words, John was frightened.

The adrenaline affected the way his brain sent signals to the neurons controlling the muscles of his face.

His dreaming brain analyzed those signals and updated the virtual dream world he was living in.

In the dream, John **looked** frightened.

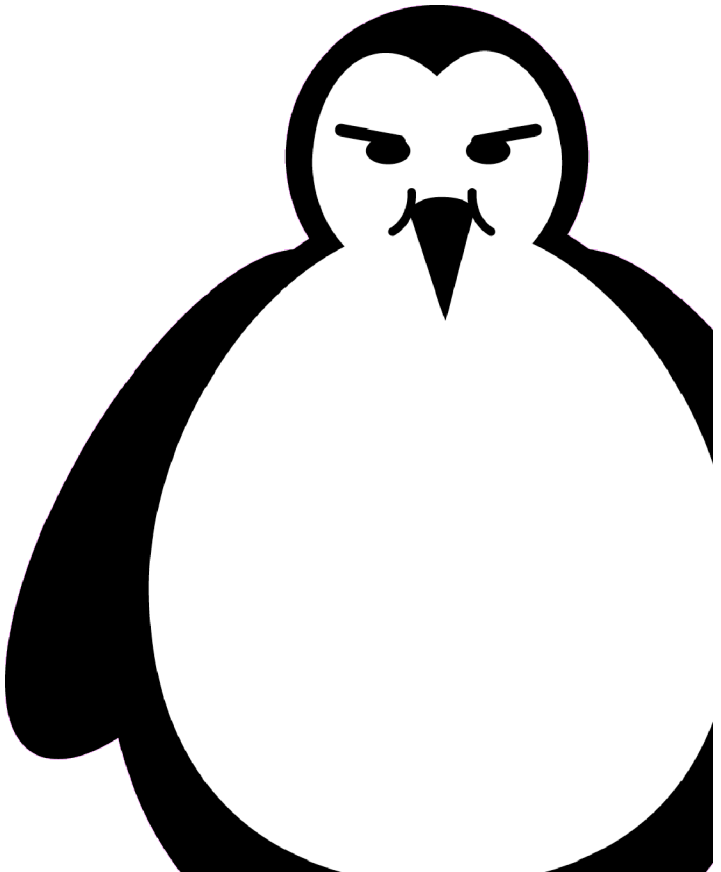
The penguin stood up to reassure John, “No, no, there's no need to be scared, this is good. I'm helping you, helping you to learn how to achieve your goals,” he reached out a comforting wing but John interpreted the move as aggression. The adrenaline flowed even faster, even deeper.

John screamed.

He sat up in bed, shook his head, and looked at the clock just as it ticked over to 7:30 and piercing beeps filled the room, making his head pound with pain.



Part Four  
Hangover



“Nine pounds ninety nine please,” John tried to smile and not breathe in the direction of the customer in case they smelled the booze he was sure was still seeping out through his tongue. Another busy day in the shop, the last thing he needed.

He took a ten pound note from the customer, pressed the right buttons on the till, swapped the note for a penny from the tray and handed it back to the customer. All on automatic pilot. Most of his mental energy was going into fighting the urge to vomit.

“Thank you, hope you enjoy your book, please come again.” He smiled weakly as he handed a bagged up novel over and watched the woman walk away. He looked at the queue of shoppers lined up waiting to be served.

He quite enjoyed working in a book shop on quiet days. The days when he could do more reading than button-pushing and bar-code scanning and fake-smiling and bagging-up

and wishing people a nice day. This was not looking like one of those days.

He rubbed his forehead. Stupid booze. Smiled at the next faceless customer, scanned more bar-codes, bagged more books, took more money, and repeated the process. Over and over. The queue of customers neither shrinking nor growing, expanding at around the rate he could serve people. The bookshop owner would likely be happy that today was a busy day even if John wasn't. Assuming a massive faceless multinational corporation could be happy at least.

Could it? Could a legally incorporated financial organization have emotions? Could it somehow steal the consciousness of its shareholders or employees to **feel**?

Corporations did things. They bought and they sold and they merged and performed hostile takeovers. They published advertising campaigns and convinced customers and fought for mind-share. They even paid taxes. Sometimes. They seemed to avoid them at least as much.

They did all this by convincing people, their staff, to do those things for it. Could a corporation **feel**? Could an abstract idea like a company actually convince their staff to experience an emotion for it?

John was reminded of the team-building exercises that they'd sent him on last year. At the time it'd struck him as pointless ineffective brainwashing. Rah-rah cheer-leading crap that was trying to get him to identify with his co-workers and to get the whole bunch of them to invest their identity in the corporate manifesto.

But the others had really seemed to get something out of it. To enjoy it. To genuinely abandon themselves in the games, the template-thinking. They seemed to *like* giving their mental energy over to someone else, to the group, to the legal fiction of the corporate whole.

He looked at the corporate motto emblazoned on the promotional posters all over the shop, at the iconography in the logo, the corporate mascot. Fucking hell, they even had a corporate song at one place he'd worked.

Was that all sidual magic? Were the corporations as alive as that scary penguin in his dream?

Damn that stupid booklet.

He scanned in another book, looked up at the customer to ask for the cash and ***there stood the penguin!***

He physically stepped back, shocked, did a double take and then sighed.

A nun. It was just a nun. They never got nuns in the shop. Did they? He looked again at the book he'd scanned on auto-pilot. A book claiming to prove the existence of god. Now he thought of it, they did sell quite a lot of stuff from the religious section. Probably they did serve quite a few nuns. He didn't remember seeing one in her habit before.

"Seven ninety five please," he forced his smile again. Wondered what proportion of his smiles were his own, and what proportion of them were the corporation's? He probably smiled more for the corporation than he did for himself.

After giving the nun her change he watched her turn and walk out of the shop. She was quite pretty, even in the penguin suit. Shame she was married to Jesus.

Nuns, man. Crazy.

John checked his watch, still three hours of this to get through. He restarted his auto-pilot and got on with serving the next customer.

The cover of the book he'd sold to the nun swam around hazily in his hungover unconscious mind for a while. Typical image of god as a bearded old man surrounded in

wispy clouds, as though the guy himself was made from the clouds.

Talk about mere symbols having an influence on the world. Seems like not a month goes by without someone bombing or killing or fighting in the name of the great heavenly monster. Every one of the perpetrators thinking god had told them to do it.

John hadn't been brought up to be religious. His parents just basically ignored religion. Most of his friends did the same. A few of them would claim to believe in "something" but none of them in a white bearded cloud-being watching from the sky. He didn't usually think about god at all, but if pressed would admit to not believing in such a creature. Yet presumably *something* was talking to the bombers and the fighters and, come to that, the folks who gave to charity in god's name, those who cared for the sick, tended the injured, preached in church or just prayed for their football team to win.

John's auto-pilot book-selling stumbled for a second as these subconscious thoughts bubbled up into actual cognizance. His mind asking him how he felt about that realization. Wondering what his model of himself would do with the knowledge?

Is god borrowing consciousness from human beings in the same way that the penguin

had? Was god alive and well, hijacking the brains of a third of the people on the entire globe to do his thinking for him? Did that make god real?

Certainly it gave the symbol power. Ask anyone who died in the Crusades, who died in the twin-tower attacks, who'd been stoned to death for their adultery, for bringing shame to a father whose brain calculated god's reaction to their progeny's sin and demanded they act accordingly.

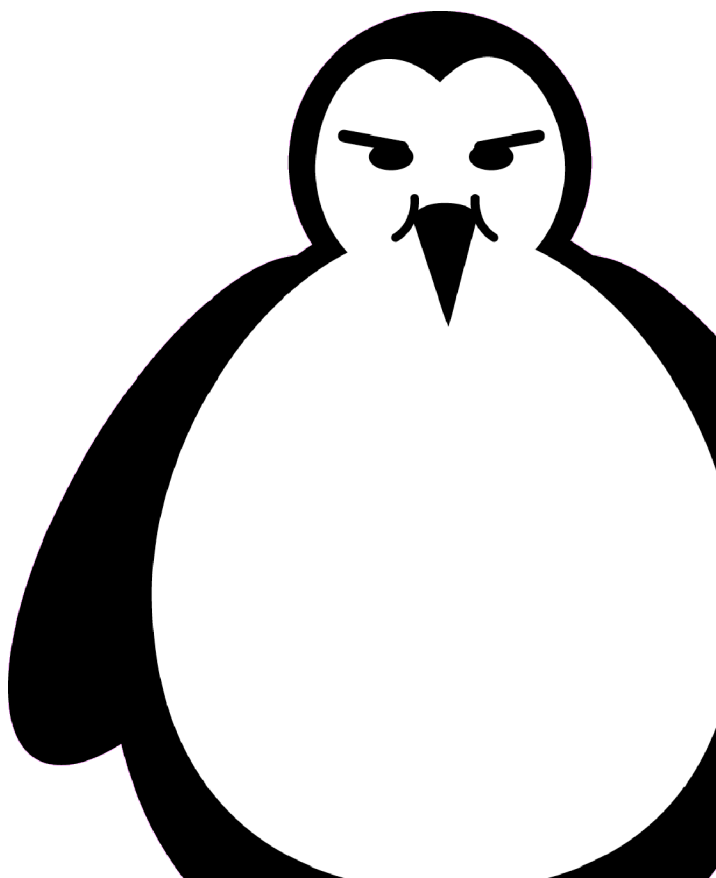
When people ask themselves, "What would Jesus do?" are they actually resurrecting Jesus in their mind? Making him conscious, alive?

He thought about the penguin from his dream last night. Wondered what it'd say if he asked it that question.

*"Thanks for making me conscious for a while."*



Part Five  
Early Night



After work, John called his friend on his way home and told him he was too hungover and tired to meet him that evening as they had previously planned. He just wanted to go home, put his feet up, get an early night and think.

He hadn't mentioned the thinking part. He wasn't really ready to get into a conversation about what he hoped to think about. As exhausted as he was, his mind was still buzzing with ideas, fizzing and popping with epiphany.

They re-arranged to meet late the next morning for brunch instead.

When he got home, John microwaved something from the freezer, he was feeling too burned out to bother to cook. He turned on the goggle box to give him something to stare at while he ate.

He flicked through the channels, trying to find something pretty and not too challenging. Some mind-candy, just interesting enough to keep him awake while

he ate but not so intense he'd have to devote much concentration to it. Eventually he settled on a *Buffy The Vampire Slayer* re-run.

When he'd first discovered Buffy, John had become a little obsessed, he would be the first to confess. He'd been unemployed and there'd been two shows broadcast every single day. He went through all hundred and twenty odd episodes far too quickly and was pretty sad when they'd all run out.

Now that he thought of it, during that time he'd had vampire dreams pretty often. Been saved by, and saved, Buffy herself more times than he could count. He'd staked vampires through the heart and watched them crumble to dust, cast spells with the red haired witch character, been in chases and fights with all kinds of demons and monsters.

Had he re-created Buffy in his sleep? Made her alive? Conscious? Had the writer, Joss Whedon, breathed literal life into the girl? By passing on the actions, words, thoughts and motivations of that school kid as she grew, creating a model of her in the brains of his fans and viewers, was he actually giving his fictional character the ability to affect the world? To change it? To make the world, or at least the people in it, more like Buffy?

John shook his head to try and clear his mind. Tried to concentrate more on the show he was watching and the food he was eating.

The good-witch character in the show had cast a spell which had gone wrong, and caused all the main characters to forget who they are. John found his resolve to concentrate on the show dissolved, and instead spent most of the time pondering exactly what makes a character conscious in a mind if all that the character is, all they themselves remember, is wiped clean.

The penguin in his dream last night had insisted that while he was conscious through the action of John's own neural hardware, his memories hadn't been transferred. "*memories can't transfer easily from one brain to another,*" it'd claimed.

So what exactly *had* been copied into John's mind if not the memories of the penguin? Somehow it's essence, it's character, it's purpose had survived and been transferred just by those first few chapters of that book. However the episodic memories that, in a normal person, would have created that soul and shaped it were missing.

John thought of his ex-lover, Storm, the hippie fairy girl who believed in literal souls and spiritual healing and all the crazy nonsense that'd caused their break up in the

first place. He saw in his mind's eye the way she would smile now if she could see him starting to believe in this strange sidual magic and reevaluate his understanding of what it means to be conscious. She'd believed it *instinctively*, without ever having to understand *why* or *how* it worked.

He still thought of her quite often. Still loved her really. He knew how she'd react to the events of his life, what advice she'd give, her approval or disapproval of the actions he took. Did this mean she was *actually conscious inside of him*?

He assumed that she likewise had a fairly detailed model of him inside her mind. That she could hear his skepticism and confident rejection of mumbo-jumbo. Was he somehow alive inside her skull? Conscious and yet cut off from his body, his memories, his past. How would he know if he was?

What was the essence of his character that she presumably held in the pulsing of her neurons? What exactly did her brain *do* when it modeled his existence, his reactions, his motivations and indeed his whole personality, even without access to his memories? Was it really the same thing that he himself did in order to, well, to *be himself*?

He'd never mentioned to her the childhood dog attack which had left him with a fear of the animals to this day, they'd never talked about his fear at all, yet surely she'd witnessed his subtle reactions whenever they came across such beasts. Even subconsciously smelled his increased adrenaline. Was that enough for the model of him inside her to share his fear, or was that version of him above such irrational phobia?

When the show finished, John washed up his plate and took to his bed, picking the book up from his pillow and ironing out the creases in its pages as best he could.

He couldn't really remember where he'd managed to read to the previous night. The text seemed to merge with his dream and much of the next few chapters he'd already figured out for himself, without the help of the book, during the working day.

The book described how modern culture was absolutely choc-full of sidual magic, that laws, corporations, religions and even our consciousness itself was built from the stuff.

John was surprised that the penguin's personality, it's soul, its essence, was only really addressed tangentially. There were no long passages describing it's passions or it's thought processes, just a few dialogs between the penguin and one of the

characters in the book and a lot of leading questions.

Indeed, the book seemed to ask many more questions than it answered. The text actually addressed John's surprise however. It noted that the preponderance of unanswered questions and lack of direct description of the personality traits of the penguin was done deliberately to force the reader's brain to work harder, to actually try to **calculate the answers** and so push the main sidual in the book, the penguin, deeper into the subconscious mind.

"The aim", the book noted, "isn't to describe the reason for the penguin's existence, but to force the reader's brain to contemplate the issues surrounding his creation. Simply *telling* the reader is far less effective than getting the reader to *actually go through the penguin's thought processes*. To physically **simulate the penguin.**"

"Brains," it said, "get good at the things they practice doing. The things they do a lot. The aim of this book isn't to *give you the answers* but to get you into the habit of particular patterns of thought."

John wasn't sure what the hell that meant, but he read on anyway, his mind absorbing the sidual magic behind the book subconsciously.

“You don't create a model of a person in your mind by having them tell you their life story, but by observing them, their reactions, their body language. By pondering the questions *'what is this person thinking? How does their mind work? What is their model of reality like?'*”

The book seemed to suggest that the sidual magic of the penguin itself would work best if it never explicitly stated the intention behind the creation of the icons used, but instead led the reader to ponder the questions for themselves.

It noted that corporate logos and advertising are never explicitly designed to sell, but to activate subtle associative networks in the minds of those who saw them. These networks then lead the brain towards the goals of those who created them automatically.

John yawned. It'd been a hard day in front of the cash register. He paused to think about the things he had learned from this tiny booklet, and his own thoughts prompted by that missive.

He found it fascinating, but he still remained utterly unconvinced. How could sidual magic, mere ideas, mere characters, have a physical effect in the world, even if they are spread far and wide among the people of the

globe? He stared at the cover of the book for a while then closed his eyes and tried to conjure up the image of the penguin from his dream the night before. The real-life three-dimensional active and alive version rather than the dead soulless image from the front page.

It was difficult, but he persevered. Tried to imagine what it would be like to have another conversation with the strange waddling bird.

He tried imagining himself back on his couch, chatting to the penguin. Tested asking it a few questions. Visualizing the thing as hard as he knew how, trying to see it as if it was actually there.

“Hey, penguin, are you conscious yet?” he asked aloud.

He closed his eyes more tightly, thinking about the reflection of light off the penguin's dark slitty eyes. Trying to see his own reflection in them.

Nothing.

He opened his eyes again. Stared at the ceiling.

What did it take? What was he missing? Where was that damned animal? Did it take *authentic belief*? Was he failing to emulate

the aquatic bird in his mind because he didn't really think it possible?

He thought of Storm, of her insistence that believing things actually **made them real**, in some bizarre sense. Felt her holding him, whispering into his ear to just let go and start to believe.

He tried again. Pretending it might work.

“Hey, penguin, are you there?” he muttered, wondering what the penguin would say if it were there in the room, listening to his words. Trying to figure out how it would answer if it were in fact only half there, only a shadow of itself.

He forced himself to imagine its words. “I'm here to the extent you think I am,” he visualized it saying, “but I'm still more you than I am me.”

Storm held him more tightly. “Let go, just let it happen” she whispered, her lips brushing his ear lobe, “it's already happening, if you'd stop fighting it.”

He turned his head to face her, looked into her pupils, wide open from the dark, and kissed her.

He moved his hand down her bare back towards her round bottom. “If only you'd

been able to explain," he told her, "if only you'd known **why** this stuff works!"

"Not all of it does work, knowing **how** it works can help you sort truth from insanity," said a voice from the doorway.

John looked up to the source of the skepticism. A four foot high penguin leaned casually in the door frame, scratching itself with a flipper. "Sorry if I'm interrupting some kind of sexual fantasy," it said, "I'll leave you two alone if you want me to."

Storm climbed naked out of the bed and pulled on a dressing gown. "He needs you more then he needs me right now," she said, "I already did all that I could."

She bent down to kiss John briefly, "Thanks for making me conscious for a while" she whispered to him then walked out past the penguin towards the kitchen, "Milk and all the sugar in the house isn't it?" she asked as she passed.

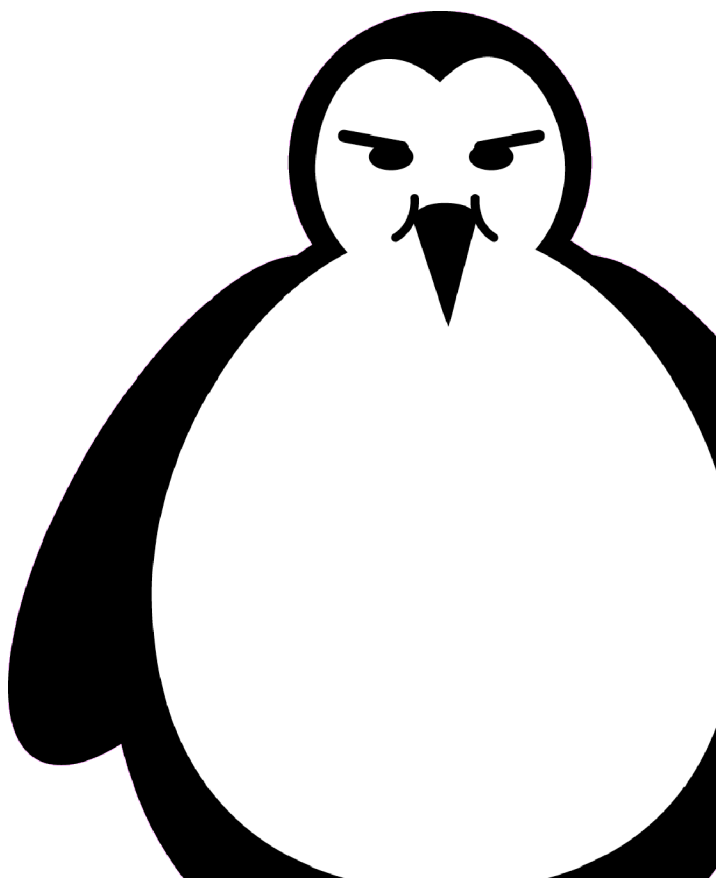
"Now **that** is how you treat a house guest!" the penguin nodded.

John sat up in the bed and propped himself against a pillow. "I'm dreaming again then I guess."

The penguin's beak curled up into a smile.



Part Six  
Dream Two



The penguin stepped into John's bedroom, "You've learned a lot since we last spoke," it observed.

"What are you for?" John asked, pointedly.

The penguin looked around the bedroom, "Ah, direct, I like that."

John waited for more elucidation, but all he heard was Storm boiling the kettle in the kitchen, the clanging of cups as she prepared the tea.

The penguin sat down on the foot of the bed and leaned against the wall. It looked at John's face. John returned its gaze, trying to read things in it's eyes that weren't printed on the page of it's book.

"Who made you?" asked John.

"You already know that, the author's name is written on the book," the penguin indicated the crumpled document lying on John's pillow.

John picked the book up, gestured at the penguin with it, "You're a sidual, a magical symbol composed from this guy's '*demand of the universe*', mixed with symbols from our common culture that somehow represent that desire."

The penguin nodded. The kettle in the next room bubbled, boiled, and popped off its switch.

John waved the book in the air some more, "this guy's cosmic request is using my brain, using *me*, pushing the entire world towards his goal and you won't even tell me what that goal is?"

"You already know what that goal is. You know it can help you."

Storm carried three steaming hot cups into the room, handed one to the penguin, another to John and climbed into the bed next to him.

The three of them sipped at their cups.

"You see now?" asked Storm, "*Everything* is possible! The world is just what we imagine it to be. We make our own reality!"

The penguin shook his head, "Don't listen to the hippie," he said, "she has no idea."

"Hey!" protested Storm.

John was confused, "But that's what you're saying isn't it? Fill the world with these 'sidual' symbols and anything you desire will come to you?"

"No."

"No?"

"Look," the penguin stood and started pacing around the bed, "influencing minds, bending the collective unconscious, changing people, these things can achieve a lot. They can help you to see what it is that you want, understand your own will, and then to *get it*. But, to quote Scotty of off Star Trek, '*you canna change the laws of physics Jim*'"

Storm looked hurt, "The laws of physics are just what we imagine them to be!" she claimed.

"Oh yeah? Then levitate out of that bed!" the penguin shot back.

Storm's body began to rise, carrying the duvet up from the mattress with her, she sipped at her tea as she cleared a full three feet off the bed. The other two looked on in amazement.

"Yeah, well, this is just a dream. Obviously." excused the penguin, "Try doing that in waking life."

Storm sighed and floated back down next to John, "Faith can move mountains" she said.

"Yet despite the prayers of millions, the mountains continue to move on their tectonic plates at around the rate your fingernails grow," the penguin pointed out, "powered by the same forces that created them before humans even existed."

Storm just shook her head, "You're as bad as he is," she gestured at John, giving him the look that reminded him why they broke up.

John felt he was losing control of this dream. He had actual questions to be answered and here was this penguin having the same argument he'd had with Storm a hundred times. "Can we get back on track here?" he asked, "This is **my** dream after all."

"We're all sharing this dream," corrected the Penguin, "your own personality runs on this wetware more often than we do, but right now we're just as conscious as you. It's running us as much as it's running you."

"I'm the one that'll remember it when it's over!" John pointed out.

The penguin shook his head. "Oh, John, you're still not getting it."

He pointed at Storm, "She, your model of Storm, the 'Storm' in your head, she'll

remember it. That other 'Storm' running in the hippie girl's head out there in the waking world, she won't remember it, but then she's not actually here with us. The only 'Storm' in this dream-room right now is the Mini-Storm you built from your contact with her."

"Huh?" Storm and John were equally baffled and equally ineloquent at saying so.

The penguin sat down at the foot of the bed again and covered his little bird face with the end of his flippers. He sighed in frustration muttering to himself about how difficult it was to get this stuff over to people.

He lifted his face again and looked at John, "You humans," he said, "you're all living constantly with a hundred different people in your skull, you hear their reactions, you see the looks on their faces, and yet you're all so determined to believe you're the only ones in there! I swear you're all insane."

"But all those others are just my *impression* of people!" protested John.

"Yes! Precisely!" the penguin vigorously agreed, "And 'you', you too are just your impression of yourself. That's what you're not seeing, dummy."

He pointed at John's skull, "There is no 'you' inside there other than the 'you' that you think you are."

The penguin was becoming so animated he was spilling tea all over the bed, "Your impression of Storm here was formed *exactly the same way* that your impression of yourself was formed. You've just spent considerably more time with yourself than with this pretty lady."

John screwed up his face and scratched his head in thought. The three of them sat in silence for a while, sipping their tea.

"Is that what you are, what you mean?" asked John, "Is that why this guy created you? To get that message out, to make people like me see that I am just an illusion, no more conscious than the dream characters I create?"

"I have many purposes." the penguin answered, mysteriously, "but you are not just an illusion."

"Didn't you just say that I was?" said John thinking that he still clearly didn't understand.

"Not at all!" the penguin climbed fully onto the bed and waddled towards John at its head, "You're no more an illusion than I am, than laws are, than money and corporations and Buffy and Mini-Storm here are."

"All these things are real, in a sense, they're all able to affect the world, to change things,

by pushing around the atoms in your brain, by contracting your muscles, by digging and building and playing and singing and by influencing others.” the penguin had now waddled far enough up the bed to flop down between Storm and John, lying on his back, spilling tea all over himself in the process.

He rested his cup on the white patch on his belly and raised his flippers up to enfold them around the two humans at his side. Hugged them in closer.

“You two,” he said, “John and Mini-Storm in John's head, and the other Storm out there in the waking world, and your families, and your friends, and the whole of the human race, you all have so much power, so much potential. If only you could realize what you are, what you mean.”

“You all **exist**, you all have the wetware to run you, the muscles and senses and presence to see the world, to *understand it*,” the penguin looked pointedly at Storm, “to see it as it actually is, not how you would like it to be,” he looked back at John, “then to actually change it! To mould it to your will.”

John took a moment to enjoy the warmth of the penguin's flipper around him, to rest his head on the penguin's shoulder. “Okay,” he said, “but *how*? What should I do?”

The penguin jumped up with remarkable sprightly speed for a penguin, turned to face the two sat at the head of the bed and said “Firstly, *stop asking other people what you should do!* Start figuring out what **you** want.”

John drained his cup. He looked thoughtfully at the four foot high penguin stood in the middle of his bed.”And then?” he asked.

“Then concentrate your mind on it, concentrate the minds of everyone you meet on it, build a symbol – that will help. Include aspects of me in it if you want. I'd like that. Then spread it, as far and wide as you can.”

The penguin looked over to Storm again, “It won't happen by magic, it'll take work, effort, thinking alone isn't enough, you have to **do things.**”

He back-flipped off the bed and landed neatly on the floor at its foot, “But ten thousand people devoting a small part of their mind to it will work better than even the whole of your own. Recruit whatever subconscious resources you can, in whatever people you can. Sidual magic will help you do that. Just look at the effect money and corporations have had on the world.”

Then the penguin turned and waddled out of the room.

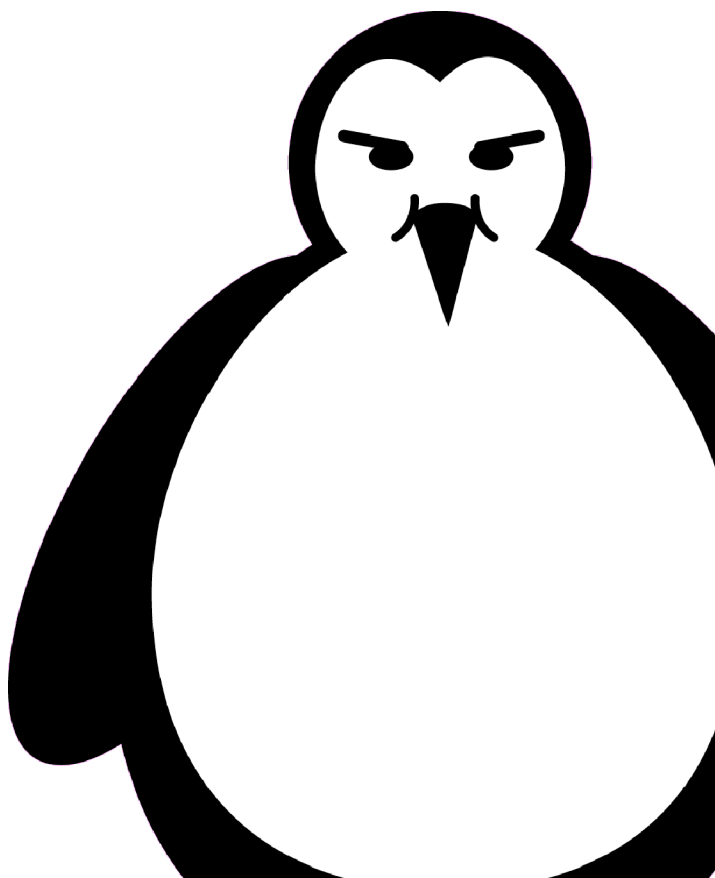
## *Do Dream-Sheep Bleat?*

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John turned to Storm, but she was gone. He was alone in bed, thinking.

# Part Seven

## Brunch



The next morning, John lay in bed as late as he could, dreaming and thinking and letting all this new knowledge seep into his consciousness. Updating his model of himself, changing himself.

Eventually he rose, showered, dressed and headed out of the flat to meet his friend for lunch at a local greasy spoon.

“Shammy, dude, you feeling better?” his friend asked as John approached the table, getting up from his chair to give his friend a greeting hug.

“Hey Jim, yeah. Booze man. Who'd drink it?”

“It's clearly the devil's work,” Jim joked.

They scanned the menu and each ordered some food, mostly fried meat, and some tea.

“Did you at least get some fun in return for that hangover?” Jim asked.

“Yeah, crazy times. Crazy times. Picked up this weird booklet from somewhere or another. Dunno where. It's been doing my

head in." John dropped his crumpled copy of "*Do Dream-Sheep Bleat?*" onto the table.

"Oh yeah?" Jim picked it up and glanced at the cover, "'*consciousness, cognizance and conjuring*' huh? Sounds like exactly the kinda hippie crap you hate."

John looked his friend in the eye for a moment, wondering how exactly that friend of his came to the conclusion that he'd hate the book. Had he, John, been conscious, for a second, inside Jim's head? Had some version of him read the words and prompted Jim to spit out that statement? Had Jim seen, however subconsciously, the look on a Mini-John's face?

"Normally, yeah. This one seems to have affected me though. I've been dreaming about that damned penguin from the cover. Not sure if the book makes any more sense than the deranged penguin in my dream though."

"Sounds interesting. Can I borrow it?"

"Sure, I think the penguin would like that. That's why I brought it for you. It's got some weird anti-copyright agreement on the last page that insists I give someone a copy."

"Who gave it to you?" Jim asked.

“Dunno. Too drunk to remember. Some girl in a club maybe. Someone doing the penguin's bidding.”

Jim looked into John's face. “Are you gonna join a cult now?” he asked, “the cult of the penguin?”

John laughed, “Heh, no. It's not like that. I don't think it's like that,” John wondered to himself if it was in fact exactly like that. It hadn't even occurred to him until then. His subconscious mind asked the little model of the penguin in his brain, and it too laughed and said it wasn't.

“What's it about then?” Jim asked.

John did his best to explain, and during the explaining reinforced and reinterpreted the subject in his own brain. Neurons grew, synapses strengthened, he built his own conclusions from the scant evidence in the text itself, his vague memories of it, and his own answers to the questions it posed.

“So our consciousness is spread around the entire community, our friends and relatives, not just confined within our own brain?” Jim was incredulous. As John would have been.

“Sort of, I think.”

“And we can bend the universe to our own will by spreading our consciousness more explicitly through magical symbols?”

“Maybe. Dunno. Its probably a load of crap.” John admitted. Having to explain it to someone had shown up all the faults in his own understanding. “Just read it man, let me know what you think. Tell me about its flaws so I can just get on with my life.”

Jim looked up from his bacon and into John's face. “You've read it, you're smarter than me, you're practically a scientist when you wanna be, you tell me it's faults.”

Calling John a scientist made John's brain conjure up his own mental image of himself as a scientist. Ask the kinds of questions that Scientist-John would ask.

“Right. Well. I guess there's a testable hypothesis in there somewhere. I mean if this 'sidual magic' works then we can try it out, right? Give it a go. See what happens.” John was vaguely surprised this hadn't occurred to him already.

“Which means doing what, exactly?” Jim asked.

John asked the little model of the penguin in his mind exactly how they could test the things he'd been saying.

*"Thanks for making me conscious for a while," it replied, "but I already said this: build a symbol - that will help. Include aspects of me in it if you want. I'd like that. Then spread it, as far and wide as you can."*

John felt like he was being manipulated, somehow being forced by his own brain, by some virtual parasite that had infected him and was now pushing the atoms of his neurons around to make him do it's bidding.

But it was true that there was only one way to test this stuff. To really give it a go.

"I guess," said John, "that we have to warp the penguin to our own needs, spread it as far and wide as we can, then see what happens. See if it affects people. See if it changes their minds, and through them and their actions changes the world itself. Bends it to our will."

"I'm certainly up for some universe-bending, sounds like fun!" Jim replied, "what shape do we wanna bend it into?"

"Ah, now, that's the question I guess." John put down his fork, sated, "What do we want Jim? Riches? Fame? Influence? Truth? Love? Sex? Global understanding? World peace?"

Jim nodded vigorously, "They all sound good."

“As far as I can tell, I think they're probably all already in the penguin.” John mused.

“That penguin sounds like one hell of a guy.”

“Yeah. Yeah. Except he's not a guy. He's a symbol. A signal. Made conscious in the actions of our neural networks.”

“Also,” said Jim, “he's a penguin.”

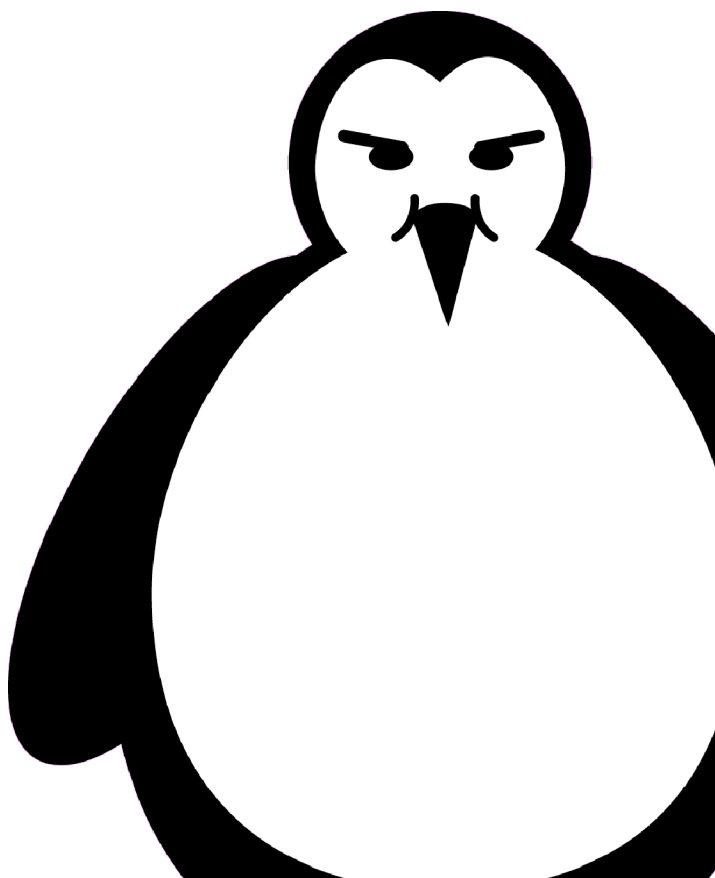
“Apparently.”

“You know what we should do?” asked Jim, “We should make a film out of it or something.”



# Part Eight

## Doing It



“You sure this author guy won't mind that we're ripping off his stuff?” asked Jim.

“You read the book dude, did it sound to you like the author thought spreading his ideas around was '*ripping him off*'?”

Jim pondered it for a second, aware of the penguin on his shoulder laughing at the very idea, “I think he actually *wants* us to do this.”

“Indeed.”

“Maybe we should, you know, at least *ask* though? We've blatantly just turned the text of that book into an animation.”

The penguin in each of their brains doubled over in a way that would give a zoo keeper fits of worry, laughing their heads off. The head of the penguin in Jim's mind actually did dislodge and roll around the floor, still laughing.

“Nah” they said in unison.

“You know,” said John, “doing this stuff together has been such a laugh. Creating.

Rewriting the ideas. Doing stuff. Trying to change the world rather than just living in it. So much more interesting than just the booze and dancing and flirting with girls we've generally done together before."

"And I feel like my little model of you, the Mini-John in my head, has grown. I can feel you. I can feel you conscious, thinking, living in my own brain."

"Eww."

"No really, it's like actually *building things* together has transferred more of our minds into each other, don't you think?"

John nodded, "Yeah, you're right. I'm glad we did this even if the experiment is a failure. Maybe it already isn't."

"Shall we watch it one more time?" Jim asked.

"It'd be a crime not to, that penguin's waddle makes me laugh so hard. Good job on that dude. It's not the waddle I saw, but it's *better* than the waddle I saw."

"The way you voice him is insane though, that kinda quacky-growly voice. He never spoke that way until I heard you do it, now he does it that way all the time."

Jim hit the *play* button on his media player and the two of them crowded around Jim's

screen. The penguins in their minds peering over their shoulders, glad that they'd been made conscious for a while.

The screen showed a hissing static-filled television, zooming out to see a virtual copy of John lying snoring on a sofa.

“When people see that John there, snoring on the screen, you think you'll be conscious in their minds? Conscious but sleeping?” asked Jim.

The Mini-John in Jim's mind answered “I dunno” before the one in the room with him did. To be fair, it had many milliseconds advance warning of the question.

“I dunno” said the one in the room with him, “probably not. How can you be consciously unconscious in someone else's brain? Does that even make sense?”

The John on the screen awoke with a start. He yawned, sighed, put his head in his hands then wobbled towards the kitchen.

“I like the way you've animated it so the thirst shows on my face,” John said, “God damn, I felt so drained and tired back then.”

Soon, an image of the book itself was shown in the animated John's virtual hand, blurry like his vision.

“Should we have used the original cover, do you think?” Jim asked.

“Nah. Our penguin is better. The eyes are blacker, darker, more intense. The wings more curvy. It's better that way, the subconscious themes stand out more.”

“You don't think it's overdoing it?” Jim had wanted to use the original penguin, but John had insisted they could improve it, make it **more penguin** than the penguin itself. He insisted the penguin on his shoulder agreed. Weirdly, the penguin on Jim's shoulder had agreed too, though Jim himself remained unsure.

The two watched in silence for a few minutes longer. Anticipating the knock at the door.

“That shot of the peep-hole is genius, the way the black slitty eye blinks back at him.”

“I just drew it how you described it” Jim pointed out, modestly.

On the screen, an animated John opened the door and the first view of the real, virtual animated penguin brushed past him into the flat. The penguins on each of their shoulders clapped their flippers together to applaud, and then high-fived each other.

A few seconds later, Jim started to worry again, "Are you sure we should have changed the dialog here?"

"No choice. Too slow in the original printed form. We had to make the animation less than ten minutes long remember. There's a lot to get through."

They watched as the animated penguin and the animated John sparred together verbally. Then as the animated John faced his hungover day working at the bookshop.

"I still think we should have made the nun more penguin-like." John said.

"Dude, she's a nun, she has to look like a nun! No point over-playing it."

"I wonder what she's doing now? Praying? Do you think she brought that book to consolidate her fading faith?"

"Who cares dude, she's just a narrative device. She's no more conscious than the penguin's on our shoulders."

"Yeah, to you maybe, I actually saw her. She was pretty." John was lost for a moment recalling the event.

"I'm glad we cut all that Buffy crap," Jim said, "the whole scene was just filler. Who cares how consciousness affects memory, and memory affects consciousness. Things just

are. They are what they are. How they came to be that way is bunk.”

John wasn't so sure, but couldn't be bothered to argue, “Humm,” he said.

The next time either of them spoke was the moment that the animated Mini-Storm in the animated John's dream climbed naked out of his bed.

“You should have never broken up with her you know John, that arse is fucking incredible.”

“Yeah, well, maybe. But you should have heard her insane crazy whining all day long. No arse is worth that.” John said.

“But you're half as insane as her now dude,” Jim pointed out, “Practicing bizarre magical rituals.”

“True. True. Anyway, shut up, the dialog in this dream sequence is the best part of the entire story.”

A short while later Jim started to get excited again, “I'm in the story any second now,” he said.

“Yeah, yeah, you're the fucking star. I can't believe I let you change it so that it's your idea to make this film.”

“It **was** my idea you bastard! I'm the damned animator here.”

“We both know it was the penguin's idea.”

“Well. Yeah. That too. Shut up and watch. This next bit where we watch the film together is bleedin' mental. Though how I let you cut out the months and months of animation work I put in is beyond my comprehension. It's like the effort I put into this project is cut down to nothing.”

“Look, they're pressing play.”

The image on the screen zoomed into the screen the animated Jim and John were watching. They reviewed their work together, commenting on it as they went. Towards the end, the animated Jim and John pressed play on the film the two of them had made, and watched it together, commenting on it as it played. Time itself warped around their actions, tied itself in knots.

Like Achilles' race with a turtle, the film refused to move forward, quickening and speeding up but never quite coming to an end. An infinite series, ever accelerating, never quite reaching the next frame. It sped on and on, until the entire story was captured in a single image, a single instant of time.

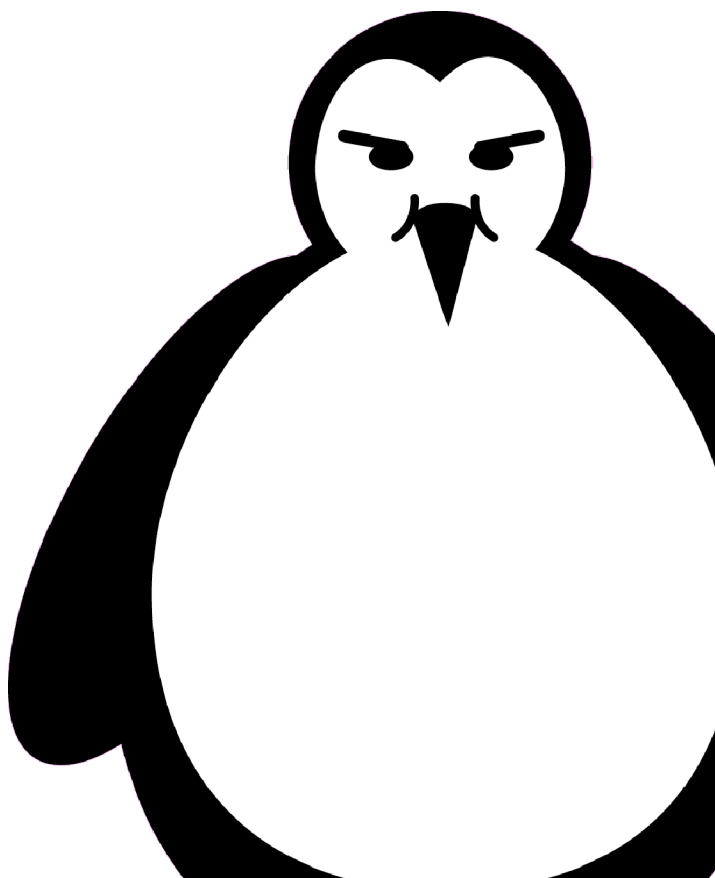
All that you could see on screen was the penguin, and the penguin was laughing. Laughing for ever, timelessly, captured in the

process of teaching, of transferring his consciousness into the viewer, the reader, into you.

The model of yourself in your own mind was altered, changed to reflect your new knowledge. Your models of Jim, John, the penguin and the Mini-Storm in John's brain started to compete to be implemented in your wetware along with those of your family, your friends, your own model of yourself.



Part Nine  
Success



“Happy birthday to you,” the two sang, “Happy birthday to you, happy birthday dear penguin, happy birthday to you!”

The penguins in their minds used Jim and John's muscles to contract their lungs and force air over the candles on top of the cake so quickly that the combustion was interrupted. The candles went out.

“Ten years! Who'd have thought, ten years ago, that we'd be where we are now?”

The penguins over their shoulders each said “Well, me, this is pretty much exactly what I told you isn't it?” but both characters ignored their constant companions.

“I, for one, was extremely skeptical” said John, “I'm not really even sure what made us start on this crazy adventure.”

“I thought it was you!” said Jim, “you suggested we build these siduals, give them control, spread them as far and wide as we could and try to judge the results of that experiment.”

“Yeah,” admitted John, “but it was your idea to do that first animation.”

“I only decided to make the cartoon, it was you who said we should *do something*, that we should *make something*, actually put the thing to the test.”

John and Jim looked at each other's eyes. Nodded.

“I blame the penguin,” they both laughed.

“What was it you said we should aim for?” Jim asked, “*Riches? Fame? Influence? Truth? Love? Sex? Global understanding? World peace?*”, something like that.

“We didn't get it all. Not by a long shot.”

Jim nodded his agreement, “Well, they were pretty wild aims.”

“I'd have been happy with half of that.”

“I'd have been happy with any one of the bunch.”

“Now you come to mention it, did we actually get **any** of those things?” John asked, suddenly doubtful.

“I definitely had some sex during the last decade, I think you did too,” Jim pointed out, “some of it wasn't too bad either.”

“Some of it was *awesome*.” John phased out there for a second, remembering.

“Can we really credit the penguin for that though? We'd both had some sex before we met the little critter.”

“I think I credit the penguin for how *awesome* it was.”

“Yeah,” Jim also phased out for a second, lost in the act of remembering.

“I definitely think the penguin brought us whatever meager riches we enjoy. I don't work in a god damned bookshop any more.”

“The fame too, what small amount of it we've had. Frankly I wouldn't want any more of it. You don't have to sign many autographs before it gets tedious. One stalker is more than enough for me,” Jim had secretly wanted a stalker for most of his life, but the actual experience wasn't what he'd imagined.

“Does the penguin himself count as a stalker?”

They both laughed, as did the penguins on their shoulders.

“I doubt I'd have got back together with Storm without the penguin giving me the explanation for the way her so-called magic worked.” John said, “giving me the understanding of how her mind worked.”

He closed his eyes and remembered being in bed with her that morning, waking up with her, holding her. Remembered marrying her, all the ridiculous hippie wedding paraphernalia she'd insisted on. He remembered not caring about any of it, just wanting to make his Mini-Storm more accurate, more a part of him. More alive. More conscious. He wanted her living, existing, conscious in his mind.

He looked across the beach they were lounging on towards their yacht, rented for the month, floating on the bright blue sea, "Do you think we found truth?"

"What is truth?" asked Jim, "What does it actually matter? We have our wives, we have each other, we have a whole community of friends around us. We have a yacht, and the beach, if only for this month. If we brought it with lies, with pretend sidual magic, then it cost nothing."

The Scientist-John bristled inside him. He wanted truth. If the penguin at the back of his mind was a lie, he would prefer to be without it, "I think we found truth," he said, "and that we spread it. That we encouraged truth in others."

The penguin on Jim's shoulder agreed, but then it would. Jim suspected that whatever had happened over the last ten years, even

if they'd both been thrown in jail and made bankrupt, the penguin would have insisted they'd found their goals, met their aims.

“Anyway,” Jim said, “I call the experiment a success. I for one have everything I need, and still have a chance at everything I want.”

“Exactly,” John agreed, “at least part of the things I want is to continue to be challenged, to continue to have unsated desires, to have a need to continue to strive.”

“We start work on the writing tomorrow then? The best penguin movie ever made!”

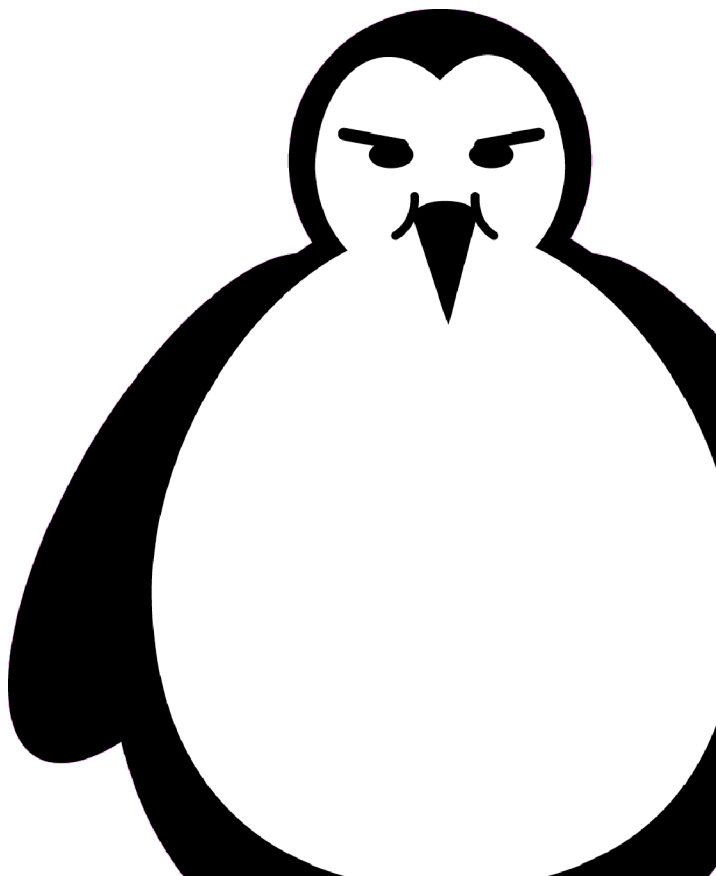
“I've already had a few ideas about that” said John. “Let me tell you about them over a cocktail.”

“Fuzzy Penguin's all round?”

“Pineapple and shots! Perfect!”

# The End

(though read the copyright stuff on the next page)



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