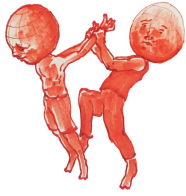


David Muenzer: *Sylvan Plug*  
14 December 2019 - 17 February 2020



e cast the dice, read the leaves through bone, and flipped all the coins over cards upon the floor inside of David's house. His table was too small to hold the sprawling placement of pieces, carved and casted, formed, stretched, grown, and dried that we had collected with which to play our game. Walking into his home from the outside meant I brought with me the powder of things too small to name without tools to see them more clearly. I suggested we include all that was present but could not be seen in the game, to which David wryly nodded. I sat upon his couch and we soon began taking turns. There, without sound and in between the lilting words we volleyed from our mouths, I began to feel a worldbringer slither from our memory and lace itself underneath the way we played. In the space of all-we-know-but-cannot-say, the presence welled up between us and released from our skin like a gas or a ghost: It was my son that taught me a distinction in the way time turns grandeur into the granule. One day he asked, "*Do you know the difference between dirt and sand?*" It repeated in my mind forever before it was spoken as the moment affixed to this mantra in order to manifest. The question, hovering over the table in David's living room, was an interstice; a realm.



*n the new realm there were no distinctions—only forces flowing into one another in a churning gradient of melded immanence. The edges of where one thing began and another thing ended were indecipherable. The only thing palpable was possibility, yet no perceptual traction to bring any of it into form. There was no texture or color or quality of sound there, because we understood that all of those experiences were only the products of perception. Here, in this realm, we were on another side of an interface that our senses normally render as truth; the structure on which our perception is placed like a flimsy scrim to construct one of many possible fantasies we call the world, reality, or even the universe. We could not actually exist in this place that phased over our awareness, over the precise placement of each piece within a multifaceted game. The velocity of everything that has ever happened, the speed, and the direction that each of every inseparable echo emanates resounded there like an accelerated simulation moving to reveal the transience of anything at all, pushing all understanding to the peripheral of its presence, back into the world. The*

*order of our turns, the sprawl of our implements, and the food that we shared lay there before us. Just as quickly as the new realm emerged, we were solely at the table again, our hands seemingly moving without us, holding space for us to experience two realms at the same time, without a beginning. In that space an inexplicable transference occurred. It was a difference onto which we could not hold. The normality with which we went about the rest of our time together was tinged with an unspoken, albeit unspeakable, feeling that couch, and dirt, and food, and ocean, and shelter, and clock, and troll, and gate, and hand, and eye, and hole, and globe, and star, and dust, and sand are all parts, among many others, that produce the most convincing mini-game of all time. We played on for only a short bit but decided to leave the game as it was, and return to it another day when we had collected more pieces.*



very difference begets a dream: The most distinct of which opens portals into entirely new possible planes of existence, cosmologies, and mythologies, while the most subtle of such differences reshape the dreams we think we already know, sometimes in ways we don't. Some beings may seek their whole life for the grinding wheel that turns all knowable things into mysteries, and at what seems like an end, disintegrate back into the cosmic gyre left in the wake of a world turning.



*efore I ever even set eyes upon David for the first time, I heard the timbre of his voice amongst the chorus of every person I had never met. Within it, he and all of the others whispered a dream to me that I would return to throughout my life, my death, and also before I was born: In it there was a being without arms that describes endlessness, floating beyond thought, in the comfort of darkness. Tongues later would trace its form under the weight of intricate and invisible abstractions to make it Sphere. The way that worlds breed new worlds at every scale caused Sphere to pulse its skin until a being that believed it held existence within its hands emerged. The beings multiplied quickly, peppering Sphere in small amounts at first, rendering the world in the image of their own mind for as far as their eyes could see. They found hollows and caves from which to look into the vastness of horizons unending. Such looking became a custom without their knowing. If they knew then that Sphere was a continuous, infinite form, ideas of measurement might have shaped differently, ideas of reciprocity might have undergone revisions unknown now, the construction of insides and outsides*

*might have been exchanged for streams and flows, and these customs of looking into the awe filled landscapes from which we emerged might have healed the fear that keeps us tethered to the ire of distinction. Instead of healing such distinctions, we built frames through which to look, slicing reality and Sphere in two. Yet, in as much as we'd like to imagine that planning our journey was possible, there, upon the skin of Sphere, was no scheme, only the bubbling up of beings—orbs revising lines long since drawn as they breached the surface of reality.*



With smiles fluttering over the warmth of the living room, weightless words again hung like particles in the breeze of our breath, floating specks that David and I pretended to see as his turn began again. I bobbed words up into space with sound, and his eyebrows danced in the direction of the meaning that it made. We laughed as he inhaled my words from the air, sloshed them around, and exhaled them back into the room different but the same. Our smiles both waned into a more thoughtful expression, as it was time to resume play. We returned once again to our game, but this time brought more pieces. We sat for quite a while to determine how to integrate the offerings. It was just at that time when we felt the mountain behind my home vibrate through the landscape, asking to join the game; a new challenger—a new player. *“It’s hard to play this game without hands or eyes,”* we whispered back. *“I’ve already been playing this game since before you were born,”* replied the mountain. Our hands, and tongues, and eyes paused to give time for our mind to reflect, but our ears and our nose could not close, so all of the sound and the smells poured through the sieve of consideration that our other senses made to reflect.



The games that describe what comes next are changing; the rules taking flight from under us and sliding at a velocity that at times feels unstoppable. To remedy the degree to which we feel our distinction becoming a rift, we forge from earth metals glowing talismans for peering into all knowable things. Dr. Faustus had to trade his soul again and again under the pen of different authors to glimpse the unthinkable and obtain the unknowable, and yet still could *not* know to withhold from making the same mistakes. Borges would not sleep for days on end after peering into the Aleph, and Icarus would fall, wingless, to his death. We write the same warnings and stories again and again, and so too we continuously point to the limits of experience, or knowledge, without realizing that with every retelling we put the characters through their mistakes all over again. What emerges from our obsession with the thresholds we build through our telling

and through our making is the persistence of a rule-set that cannot describe the world within which it is formed. And as David again passes the turn to me, I flip a coin, and then, before I draw my card and make a play, I again pause to reflect. All that came before us cannot be drawn; it's not in the deck. It sits with us at the table yet extends in all directions. It was at that realization, in the moment where my turn began, that our bodies seized, and all sense of light and dark would drain from the room. The force-which-sits-at-our-table-yet-extends-in-all-directions found this moment of casual play as the perfect conduit to stop the normal trajectory of things, and speak through our beings in the silent voices of all that our words made distinct from us:



*ou cannot see the infinite. You must enter the infinite and feel it flow through you. It cannot be stacked or arranged, and it cannot be harnessed or governed. All attempts to imagine it in your form have only given rise to what, in the face of mass extinction, feels like a caricature. Even now, as I speak of what we can and cannot do with the infinite, I render a caricature of it. There in lies a laughable thing. If only you had started with caricatures; representations that exaggerate what is perceived about a distinction yet are understood as incomplete renderings of the real. Each scene in which you cast yourselves then could never form the deception of a worldview, it would be understood from the beginning that a complete view of the world is comical—a cosmic trick, a joke, or a game like the one you play here. There, like a caricature, something could happen between the lines laid down—something that pulses less like the pop songs to which you listen and more like the sputtering of the world's surface. One caricature would never be enough in the rhythm of hands drawing such conclusions. Only after infinite caricatures were produced and reviewed would the incompleteness with which you conjure the world's image be as funny as it were real, but more true than any epoch of human knowledge has yet described it.”*



he next time we met, we strayed away from games and living rooms. Instead we met to go outdoors, and so the world rendered a new scene for David and me. We were walking the canyons of the Angeles National Forest, stepping over the rusted metal of an old mining operation now shrouded in the shuffling of leaves yet to decay. We came upon an area in the creek where the stream flows over stone polished by the water. It was there that the dappled sunlight revealed groves of unknowing behind both of our eyes. We cast words into the stream like pebbles to see if they would skip, and in all of the musings, the more difficult realities about our thoughts of nature

welled up like a denizen of the deep to capsize the leisure of our floating minds. This time, we were ready to withstand the deluge of awe and dread that conjured truth in the past. This time, under the pressure of looming possession, David uttered “*Sylvan Plug*”, and the breeze stirred the leaves to rustle just under the surface of his incantation; what I then understood as the only thing between us and the way we have mannered eternity with the assumption of *truth* in our knowing.

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Text by Patrick Michael Ballard, illuminations by David Muenzer.

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