

Before superpredators, there was *Predator* (1989), a near-invisible alien with suicide bomber tendencies known as “El demonio que hace trofeos de los hombres”, the demon who makes trophies of men. Hunted—only the steroids coursing through Arnold Schwarzenegger’s veins could save us. How was it that less than a decade later these demons were superseded by throngs of “radically impulsive, [and] brutally remorseless youngsters...”? “We can talk about why they ended up that way, but first...”

Choppy waters thrust against an invisible barrier as a daughter of Venus strides across the gaming ground of Julien Nguyen’s *“New World Order”* (2016). An avatar of Christine Legarde, her stance signifies steadfast authority in a garden of subdued androgens. Yet curiously, her outstretched pinky and thumb form the sign of “shaka”, popularly known as “hang loose”.

Beached and leggy boys recline near nude. Encircled by a snake, (the most nefarious villain in all Judeo-Christian lore) innocence, inverted from the feminine back into the rib, is lost. *“I know why the caged bird sings”* (2016). Boys stand at attention, flanking a deserted facade. More than civil, those were real war games. Now grown-men play in their clothes, slipping them over their bodies IRL, or into their avatars, re-enacting historical trauma until fact becomes a series of perversions buttressed by meaty disclaimers. Fact slips from ‘based on a true story’ to a state of ornament, like a hand gesture morphs from a beach blissed slacker greeting into the embodiment of authority.

*“Elementary dear Watson”* (2016), AI is springing to life. Technology comprised of parts we cannot understand, like the transfiguration of the body politic, chafes into threat. Takeovers occupy our day dreams, circulating into predatory fantasy. Anal probes are to abductions what apples are to gardens. In a coming age of decadent neo-feudalism the last vestiges of humanist thought will be extinguished. Peasants hewn from Greek gods will fall mortal, fleeing as robots geared with hard antennae mechanize the chase into mortal combat. The hunt is on.

Dark princes of pleasure descend. The villains of our childhoods bore the marks of sexual exclusion. Mirror mirror on the wall, *“The Fairest of the Seasons”* (2016). The myth escalates, intertwining Zeus’ abduction and rape of Ganymede with dramatic foils of LA life, a city under the hill, black as a lit sun. Once upon a time homo meant freak. Shifting terrains, like adverts based on a truer fiction, blur legacy. How do you tell that political time?

Painting pre-photography is color and lines building and breaking the storied social order of things with the move of a brush. Flora, fauna, scripts, and technology were mined and recoded to build figurative narrative, and capture tension in a frame. If painting since the mid-19th century moved to

re-affirm paint is paint, then film, television, and video games offered that potential to its apprentices, while fan-led forums piped license to the masses to play.

Cue the fan fiction. Bring the object of desire to heel. A Qing “*Son of Heaven*” (2016) deposed by a dragon lady. The soft trimmings of ornament yield to a cosplay fantasy of a white boy with candy colored lips. Oriental dreams invert the gaze of the Occident. In that singular room of one’s own, keeping the predator at bay, the portal almost shuts. Portraits of power, I will make you mine.

-Alex Freedman

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