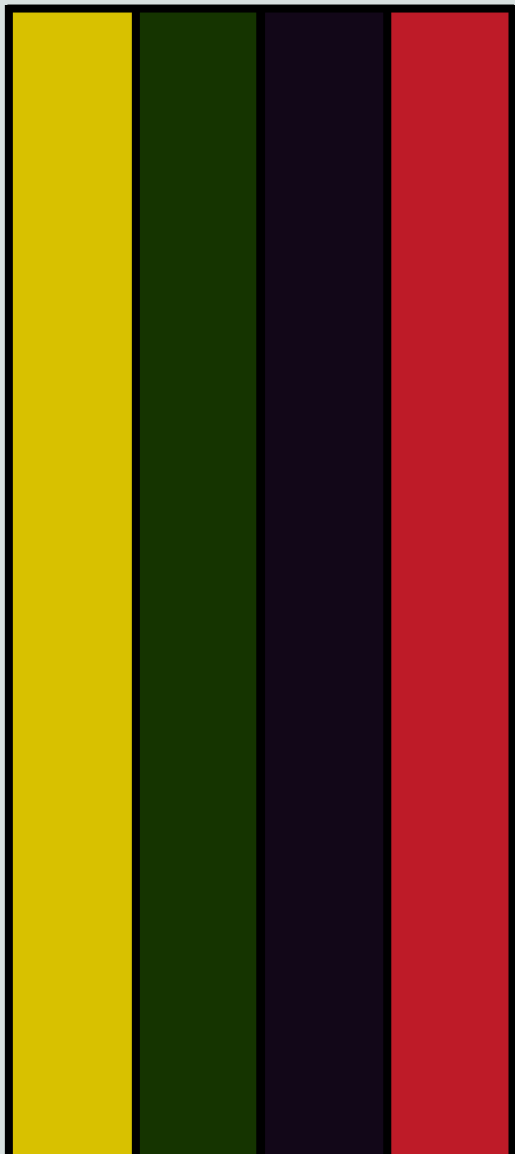


DYSTOPIA



tharunka #7



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***Tharunka* acknowledges
the traditional custodians
of this land, the Gadigal
and Bedigal people of the
Eora nation, on which our
university now stands.**

Letters from the Editors

Lungol / Managing Editor

What does dystopia look like to you?

Does it look like the monochrome pages of the fictitious planes of a *Brave New World* and *Clockwork Orange*? Perhaps it looks like the dramatised scenes of *The Walking Dead* or *What Happened to Monday*?

Or does it look like the constant battle for the autonomy of your own body? Does it look like the overwhelming feelings of hopelessness the realities of climate change instil in you? Does it look like the glaring human rights abuses rampant across the globe?

What does dystopia look like to you?

Some would argue it looks like 2018 - facts are now up for debate, evidence holds less weight than ever before, and the worst of humanity has been empowered to reveal itself.

This issue is called Dystopia because we wanted to explore the stories of worlds falling apart.

We all live in stories where we are our own main characters. But we also exist in those of the people around us. You may be your own protagonist, but are you someone else's villain?

I wanted to invite our contributors to take us into the worlds that haunt the people we walk past every day. Are their imaginations a disturbing realm of violence and trauma? Or do their realities carry horrors too dark for fiction?

Dystopia is an issue designed to be both a facilitator of our desires to escape and a mirror to show us who we really are.

Maggie / Creatives Sub-Editor

Is there anything that gets this girl's blood pumping and heart racing more than the promise of the end of the world? Probably not. Which is why I am so irrationally thrilled that for our second last issue of *Tharunka* this year we are lucky enough to create an entire magazine dedicated to my favourite brand of nihilism.

The word dystopia can mean a lot things. Especially in our current climate. One may go so far as to point out the glaring red flags we see before us in our social and political spheres that indicate a sense of impending doom. Or if you wanted to take my use of the word climate all the more literally, one could discuss the reality that we are quite simply killing our planet. Or if you were looking to tug at the heart-strings of 14-year-old me, you might regale me with the stories of Katniss or Tris Prior.

Defined as an imagined place or state in which everything is unpleasant or bad, dystopia can mean the end of the world, or more simply the end of someone's own world. Throughout this issue we have some beautiful explorations of how the essence of dystopia permeates us all. So dive in. Just don't forget your weapon of choice and fictionally perfect love interest.

Jack / Features Sub-Editor

The modern world faces a set of challenges unlike any era before ours. In addition to nuclear proliferation, the defining existential threat of the 20th century, we now face antibiotic resistance, climate change, the militarisation of space, and the race to develop the world's first general artificial intelligence. More locally, privacy is eroding as our lives are increasingly run (and monitored) online; our ability to talk with each other is being lost as online echo-chambers and so-called "fake news" take all our attention and energy.

When faced with this seemingly bleak outlook, what kind of response is appropriate? No single individual can hope to tackle even one of these problems on their own –the increased complexity of our world means that our problems require global, collaborative solutions – and I think this can engender a feeling of hopelessness. Yet the difficulties in engineering solutions to global problems don't negate our responsibility for attempting to do so, in whatever ways we can. In this regard, while reading this issue, a good thought to keep in mind is the following from Marcus Aurelius, a cautious reminder of the importance of perspective, which is, I think, more applicable than ever: "Don't hope for Plato's Utopia, but be content to make a very small step forward and reflect that the result even of this is no trifle."

Sahana / Digital Sub-Editor

The meaning of destruction and what it makes one feel differs between every one of us. The wild fires and crumbling households make us feel devastated, but the millions of things destroyed on the "Oddly satisfying" videos on snapchat make us feel otherwise. Some destroy to relieve anger and some destruct to feel powerful. Dystopia has its own emotion and most times it is unique in its way of communicating to the world around us.

This is easily a century of dystopias... On the macro level, we've had breakdowns of large systems, governments, institutions, and a growing list of endangered species falling into extinction. On a micro level, dystopia has changed the way people think, mental breakdowns and self-destructing thoughts are more openly discussed, and social norms and stereotypes are being broken down left, right, and centre. Dystopia isn't the end, it's a change and the beginning of something new. Tharunka takes a few pages to quickly bring to you the striking disasters we've had and the ones we'd love to sit back and watch

Amy / Designer

Janelle Monae's *Dirty Computer* release is one that really impacted me this year. Set in a dystopia, the violence it depicted was a ritual cleansing, a removal of 'dirt' from individuals. Her album and the accompanying visuals are moving because they're reflective of our time; where our increasing complexity as individuals and communities and societies is not always met with celebration, but with disgust.

This inspired the design for this issue. The layouts are a bit more rigid and solid than usual, and a Futura-inspired typeface is maintained throughout the pages. It's about the desire to remain impeccable, as if that's possible, as if that's desirable. It's an issue which craves order, but cannot have it – its contents are too rich, too different, too dirty.

Dystopias of the World

Jordan Fleming



This Place

Rosie
Bogumil

Bad memories lurk beneath green rolling hills,
simmering with seasons toiled by decay.
A land marked for its absence and its lack,
even by those who choose to stay.
This place festers with bygones and
the wayward lost, to vices disguised
as adolescent adventures.
This place hides hurt beneath
roiling waves that crumble against the collapsing coast.
Salted waters sting against scars
leaving breathless gasps to mark their paths.
This place is one of hatred and despair,
with privileged joys mistaken for burdens,
with experience lost through ash coloured glasses,
that which cannot be returned nor replaced.
This place is underestimated, with its
stifling heat, and broods of gossips gathering;
the single skyscraper, barely reaching the clouds
that graze the sky rarely and tenderly
to drop an ocean desperately sought
by those governed meticulously by time.
This place is powerfully loaded, and painful,
and desecrated – not unlike myself –
But this place is mine;
this place is home.

Nicola Ray

Stuck in Limbo: Australia's Dumping Ground for Refugees

American actor and comedian Sacha Baron Cohen is well-known for his controversial satirical works, and his 2012 film *The Dictator* is no exception. The film, co-written by and starring Cohen, centres on the fictional Admiral General Aladeen, the childish and brutal dictator of a fictional North-African country, Wadiya. The film is based on a covert plot organised by Aladeen's chief staff to democratise the state and introduce a national constitution.

After infiltrating the signing ceremony and tearing apart the Constitution, Aladeen turns to his American audience and asks them why America hates dictatorships. In a soliloquy characterised by Cohen's own wit and fearlessness, Aladeen draws dark parallels between Wadiya and the United States. Aladeen speaks of ignoring the needs of the poor, denying them health and education, using the media to influence policy, and having the wealthiest 1% of Wadiyans hold 90% of the country's wealth.

Not to sound too much like Carrie Bradshaw, but these words really got me thinking... what would the equivalent be if Cohen was speaking about Australia?

We could arbitrarily and indefinitely detain asylum seekers.

We could imprison doctors for disclosing information about our offshore detention centres.¹

We could torture refugee children to the point where they attempt suicide.²

Australia's policy of mandatory detention has been the subject of vigorous debate since it was introduced by the Keating government in 1992. It has been viewed by some as a necessary component of "protecting our borders", whilst others claim it is inhumane, ineffective, and incongruent with the spirit of international refugee law.

What is certain is the irreconcilability of international and domestic law pertaining to the detention of refugees. Australian courts have ruled that the mandatory and indefinite detention of unauthorised asylum seekers is lawful,³ whereas international law mandates that no unlawful arrival should be punished for failure to produce a visa.⁴ This is because it is often very difficult for people fleeing their home country to obtain valid travel documents prior to departure. So we can consider the very concept of an "illegal" refugee arrival to be a busted myth.

Yet if this is a myth successfully busted, why are people still being detained?

In 2013, when the number of people being held in immigration detention reached more than ten-thousand, the Rudd government announced a new asylum seeker policy. As of July 2013, any asylum seeker arriving by boat without a valid visa would

1. *Australian Border Force Act 2015* (Cth), Pt 6.

2. <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/twelve-year-old-nauru-refugee-tried-to-set-herself-on-fire-reports>.

3. *Chu Kheng Lim v Minister for Immigration Local Government and Ethnic Affairs* [1992] HCA 64; (1992) 176 CLR ; *Al-Kateb v Goddwin* (2004) 219 CLR 562.

4. *Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees*, signed 28 July 1951, 189 UNTS 137, entered into force 22 April 1954, art 31.

be permanently barred from ever being resettled in Australia. Instead, they would be taken to one of two Regional Processing Centres ('RPC's') located on Papua New Guinea's Manus Island and the Republic of Nauru. Once there, their asylum claims are processed in accordance with local laws, and if found to be genuine refugees, may be resettled in those countries.

That policy remains partially in force today thanks to an agreement between Australia and Nauru. Whilst the Manus Island RPC was closed following a ruling by Papua New Guinea's Supreme Court that the arrangement was unconstitutional,⁵ 255 people remain in detention in Nauru, including 22 children.⁶ Most of these people have been found to be genuine refugees, meaning Australia owes them protection obligations.⁷ It has attempted to skirt this obligation by arranging with the government of Nauru for them to be resettled in the tiny Pacific Island nation.

For many years, domestic and international groups have condemned the Nauru RPC and encouraged Australia to reform its mandatory detention laws. For not only is the continued and indefinite detention of refugees illegal under international law,⁸ it's also creating a humanitarian emergency.

In 2016, Amnesty International published a 68-page report detailing detainees' stories of suicide and self-harm and implored the Australian government to end the punitive policy. Amongst the many who have openly criticised offshore processing in Nauru, notable names include: the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the Australian Human Rights Commission, Tony Bartone, President of the Australian Medical Association, and the UN Human Rights Committee. Between the sheer illegality of their detention, the lack of adequate resources, or the dire medical needs of those detained, there is much to be criticised.

To make matters worse, the Australian government recently signed a clandestine agreement with Taiwan, establishing a system where critically ill refugees held in the Nauru RPC will be sent to Taiwan for medical treatment. Until now, refugees at a serious risk of death have been flown to Australia for medical care. Access to the Australian mainland for medical reasons provides a valuable opportunity for refugees to access the courts and get an injunction to prevent being returned. One of the obvious issues with this agreement is that Taiwan's hospitals are not competent to deal with the often dire and complex medical needs of refugees. Just recently, a 30-year-old Somali woman sought an immediate injunction from the Federal Court preventing the government from sending her to Taiwan for an abortion.⁹ She had suffered genital mutilation as a child, and Taiwanese officials provided evidence to the effect that Taiwan would not be competent to provide a sound abortion.

The Somali woman's case is unfortunately not unique. Minister for Home Affairs, Peter Dutton, has a frightening history of litigious attempts to block medical transfers from Nauru to Australia. Since February, 8 cases have been brought before Australian courts for the forcible transfer of critically-ill children. Recently, reports surfaced that children on Nauru were developing resignation syndrome, a rare disorder caused by significant psychological trauma.¹⁰ Children with resignation syndrome withdraw socially, and commonly refuse food and water. At its worst, the sufferer enters a state of profound withdrawal and is unconscious or in a catatonic state. Given there are only 22 children remaining on Nauru, slowly, one by one, they are making their way out of their nightmare. The price for their freedom is one that no one, let alone a child, should have to pay. Australia must secure appropriate and humane solutions before more blood is shed.

Will Australia ever save itself from moral bankruptcy? So long as policy continues to poison a pragmatic approach, probably not.

5. Ben Doherty, Helen Davidson and Paul Karp, 'Papua New Guinea court rules detention of asylum seekers on Manus Island illegal', *The Guardian*, (online), 26 April 2016, <<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2016/apr/26/papua-new-guinea-court-rules-detention-asylum-seekers-manus-unconstitutional>>.

6. Refugee Council of Australia, *Statistics on people in detention in Australia*, June 15 2018, Refugee Council of Australia, <<https://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/getfacts/statistics/aust/asylum-stats/detention-australia-statistics/>>. Refugee Council of Australia, *Statistics on people in detention in Australia*, June 15 2018, Refugee Council of Australia, <<https://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/getfacts/statistics/aust/asylum-stats/detention-australia-statistics/>>.

7. This includes providing the application with one of two visas: the 5-year Safe Haven Enterprise Visa, or the Temporary Protection Visa.

8. *Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees*, signed 28 July 1951, 189 UNTS 137, entered into force 22 April 1954, art 31.

9. *DCQ18 v Minister for Home Affairs* [2018] FCA 918.

10. Louise Newman, 'What is resignation syndrome and why is it affecting refugee children?', *ABC News*, (online), 22 August 2018, <<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-08-22/resignation-syndrome-and-why-is-it-affecting-refugee-children/10152444>>.

11. *Ibid.*

12. *Ibid.*

**Siddharth
Sharma**

Digital Privacy and My Health

Do you ever google your name to see what comes up? It's always a fun exercise to see how much information about you is floating out there for public consumption, but this lack of privacy is a concern for many, particularly members of marginalised groups who may be stigmatised on the basis of their private lives or true identities. As almost every aspect of our lives is increasingly digitised, more of our personal information is finding its way onto the web. Yet the conversation surrounding digital privacy seems to only spike after a scandal, many of which recently have served as unsavoury reminders of the thin layer of security protecting our digital information.

The recent rollout of the new My Health Record service has many people thinking about digital privacy. The initiative, a new online health record database, is being implemented nationally right now, with the goal of consolidating patients' medical histories in one online location that can be accessed by medical professionals, researchers, and patients anywhere in the country.¹ This aims to correct the failures of the current system, in which each medical institution holds their own silo of information on each patient, based on patient visits to that specific location. For example, a local hospital may have patient records from a recent emergency room visit or surgical operation, but will not necessarily have the same information a GP holds on patient prescriptions; yearly blood test results, or chronic medical care. The My Health Record database will amend these inefficiencies, potentially saving lives in emergencies and reducing the burden of inter-site communication. There are currently 6.1 million Australians signed up to the database, and by the 15th November 2018, that number will significantly increase, as most Australians will automatically have a My Health Record created, as the system is opt-out.²

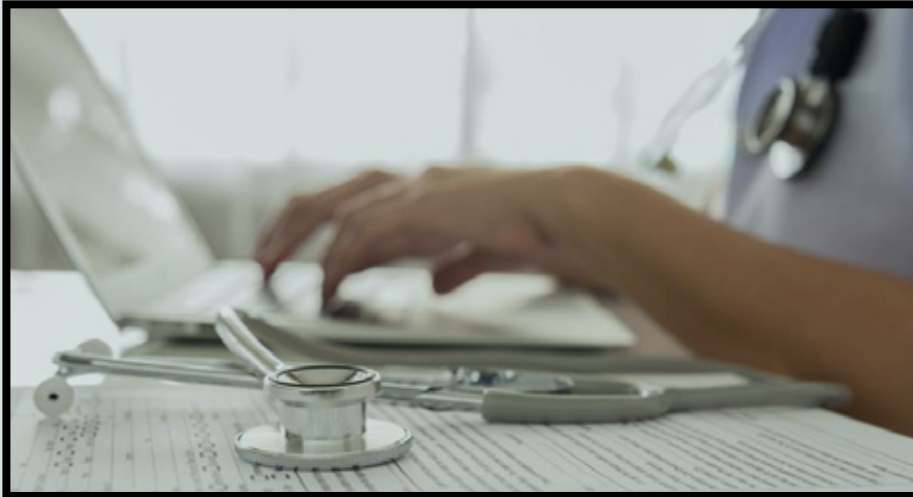
My Health Record has an impressive list of benefits. By consolidating patient records from different providers into one online resource, the government is hoping to drastically reduce the number of medical errors and inefficiencies in the medical system. The aim is to avoid the duplication of prescriptions, pathology reports, and imaging.³ Additionally, as gathering information across health services is often relegated to junior doctors, My Health Record may prevent a major drain on time, potentially otherwise spent directly on patient care. Such a service would also create a greater pool of information for doctors to draw from, potentially leading to a lower rate of misdiagnoses, which currently cost the Commonwealth up to 1.2 billion dollars in unnecessary hospital admissions each year, and improved coordination in the care

1. Australian Digital Health Agency (2018) "What is My Health Record?" Canberra, Australia: Australian Federal Government. <https://www.myhealthrecord.gov.au/for-you-your-family/what-is-my-health-record> (Accessed 01/10/2018)

2. Australian Digital Health Agency (2018) "My Health Record" Canberra, Australia: Australian Federal Government. <https://www.myhealthrecord.gov.au/> (Accessed 01/10/2018)

3. Margo, J. (July 17, 2018) "My Health Record: the benefits and risks explained". Sydney, Australia: Australian Financial Review. <https://www.afr.com/lifestyle/health/mens-health/my-health-record-the-benefits-and-risks-explained-20180716-h12rk5> (Accessed 01/10/2018)

of patients with chronic illnesses.⁴ Access to an individual's record in the database would be authorised by the patient, allowing for multiple levels of security and access to be customised to the patient's wishes; however, the default setting is open access.⁵ This means that all medical professionals will automatically have access to every single aspect of a patient's record unless otherwise specified, and, more controversially, researchers can co-opt a patient's de-identified data for the purposes of their work.



You might be asking why these decisions have been made for you as a default. In creating My Health Record as an automatic opt-in, with the most open setting as a default, the federal government is gently positioning you towards its preferred decision, whilst still preserving your fundamental right to choice. This is what Nobel Prize-winning economist Richard Thaler would call a “nudge”, a subtle policy design shift which encourages a particular decision surreptitiously.⁶ This technique has been proven to be highly effective in achieving a political goal. For instance, in Spain, automatic organ donation upon death is now an opt-out system for Spanish citizens, which has made Spain a world leader in organ donation rates. This is simply because people are more likely to approve of the status quo, particularly if it resonates with their values.⁷

This is the root of the problem with My Health Record. Although the benefits the program would serve in medical administration, practice, and research are undeniable, in designing the scheme, the government has over-estimated how informed the population actually is about digital privacy. Popular awareness of digital safety is no small concern - stealing private health data accounts for one in every three major security breaches in the world.⁸ In Australia, almost half of all online privacy breaches in 2018 have targeted medical data.⁹ On the digital black market, health data sells at ten times the value of financial data.¹⁰ Health data illegally accessed is often monetised through blackmail or identity theft.

Nor is the security of the system entirely guaranteed. Though My Health Record information will be housed in a central database protected by “high grade” digital security, methods to bypass the system have been identified.¹¹ Jonathan Reiber, a former US Pentagon chief strategy officer for cyber-policy detailed the multiple ways in which the My Health Record database could be breached.¹² Whilst the central storage database itself may be equipped with heavy security systems, no such government

4. *Ibid.*

5. Australian Digital Health Agency (2018) “Understand when you can view and upload information”. Canberra, Australia: Australian Federal Government. <https://www.myhealthrecord.gov.au/for-healthcare-professionals/howtos/understand-when-you-can-view-and-upload-information> (Accessed 01/10/2018)

Figure 1 credit: WYZA (2018)

6. Zagorski, J. L. (October 10, 2018) “Economist who helped behavioural ‘nudges’ go mainstream wins Nobel”. Melbourne, Australia: The Conversation. <https://theconversation.com/economist-who-helped-behavioral-nudges-go-mainstream-wins-nobel-85430> (Accessed 01/10/2018)

7. Chu, B. (October 9, 2018) “What is nudge theory and why should we care? Explaining Thaler’s Nobel economics prize-winning concept”. Northcliff House, United Kingdom: The Independent. <https://theconversation.com/economist-who-helped-behavioral-nudges-go-mainstream-wins-nobel-85430> (Accessed 01/10/2018)

8. Margo, J. (July 17, 2018) “My Health Record: the benefits and risks explained”. Sydney, Australia: Australian Financial Review. <https://www.afr.com/lifestyle/health/mens-health/my-health-record-the-benefits-and-risks-explained-20180716-h12rk5> (Accessed 01/10/2018)

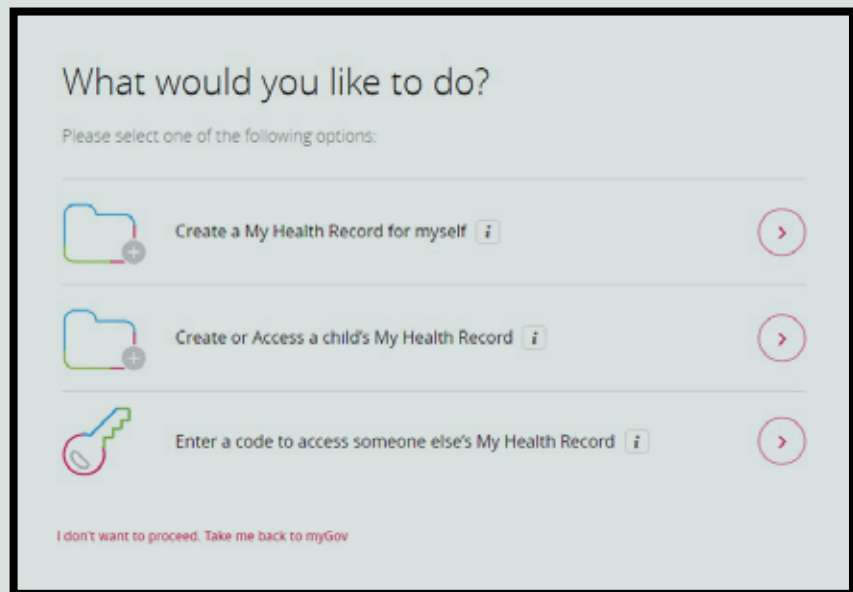
9. Whigham, N. (July 31, 2018) “Health sector tops the list as Australians hit by 300 data breaches since February”. Sydney, Australia: NewsCorp Australia. <https://www.news.com.au/technology/online/hacking/health-sector-tops-the-list-as-australians-hit-by-300-data-breaches-since-february/news-story/5e95c47694418ad072bf34d872e22124> (Accessed 01/10/2018)

10. Humer, C., Finkle, J. (25 September, 2014) “Your medical record is worth more to hackers than your credit card”. London, United Kingdom: Reuters. <https://www.news.com.au/technology/online/hacking/health-sector-tops-the-list-as-australians-hit-by-300-data-breaches-since-february/news-story/5e95c47694418ad072bf34d872e22124> (Accessed 01/10/2018)

11. Australian Digital Health Agency (2018) “My Health Record system security”. Canberra, Australia: Australian Federal Government. <https://www.myhealthrecord.gov.au/for-healthcare-professionals/howtos/my-health-record-system-security> (Accessed 01/10/2018)

12. Redrup, Y. (13 August, 2018) “Former Pentagon cyber chief says hackers could exploit My Health Record flaws”. Sydney, Australia: Australian Financial Review. <https://www.myhealthrecord.gov.au/for-healthcare-professionals/howtos/my-health-record-system-security> (Accessed 01/10/2018)

database is completely invulnerable to a sophisticated, concerted attack. This is how Singapore recently had 1.5 million of its citizens' records stolen in a recent breach of a government database.¹³



More frighteningly, however, Reiber postulated that the easiest way to access these records is to steal patient information that had been downloaded and stored by a medical practice or hospital on their own, significantly less secure computer network. This could be easily achieved with a simple phishing scam or virus attack. While current systems in use by doctors are just as susceptible to this type of attack, the advent of a consolidated database of medical health records widens the breadth of informational available to hackers about patients.

We place our lives in the hands of doctors, but it must be acknowledged that no professional is infallible when it comes to digital literacy, and they too can easily fall victim to a compromised account. This concern has garnered attention in recent years due to the increasing trend of physicians communicating sensitive patient information over smartphones. Although programs such as WhatsApp feature end-to-end encryption, the glaring security flaw lies with the vulnerability of information sometimes automatically downloaded to easily breached local smartphone storage.¹⁴ In fact, a comprehensive digital literacy module for doctors may be within the foreseeable future following these criticisms of digital safety, although whether this would be totally reassuring is questionable.¹⁵

So should you opt out, or stay opted in? Unfortunately, there's no black or white answer to be given. People will continue to navigate the line between privacy concerns and genuine benefits from medical streamlining based on their own values and established habits, just like the security preferences on social media accounts and personal gadgetry. Rather, I believe this is a great wake up call for people to revisit and renew those values in light of the national conversation around the My Health Record, but also digital privacy in general.

You can read more about the My Health Record here:

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/science/2018-07-15/my-health-record-questions-answers-security-privacy-police/9959622>

And you can opt out here:

<https://www.myhealthrecord.gov.au/for-you-your-family/opt-out-my-health-record>

13. (20 July, 2018) "Singapore personal data hack hits 1.5m, health authority says". London, United Kingdom: BBC. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-44900507> (Accessed 01/10/2018)

Figure 2 credit: ABC (2018)

14. Pryzbylo, J. A. et. al (2014) "Smarter hospital communication: Secure smartphone text messaging improves provider satisfaction and perception of efficacy, workflow" J Hosp Med 9 (9) 573-578.

15. Bloomfield, I. (17 August, 2018) "Health providers' security flaws will leave My Health record open for hacking". Canberra, Australia: Australian Strategic Policy Institute. <https://www.aspi.org.au/health-providers-security-flaws-will-leave-my-health-record-open-for-hacking/> (Accessed 01/10/2018)

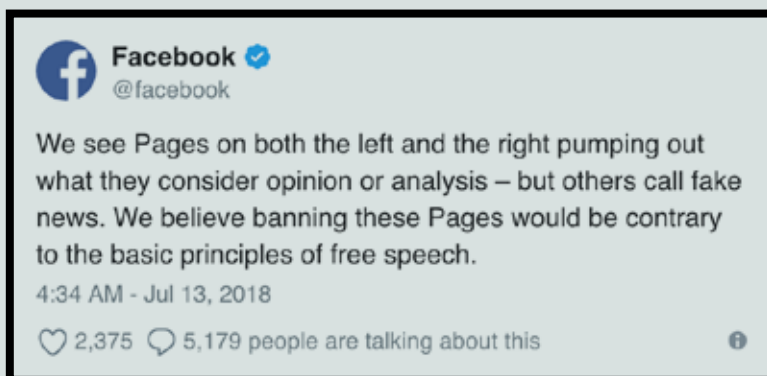
If Alex Jones isn't Fake News, what is?

Annice Savill

According to the American alt-right talk show host, Alex Jones, his recent banning from Facebook, Apple, YouTube, Mailchimp, and Spotify was the “sick cult of leftism”¹ out to destroy him. To any reasonable observer, however, Alex Jones isn't the victim of an insidious leftist plot; the real victim is the public, which has little choice but to rely on the questionable discretion of Facebook's “fake news” policy.

In a post-Cambridge Analytica world, Zuckerberg has affirmed and reaffirmed his stance against fake news. In June 2018, Facebook released posters across Australia, the US, and the UK stating “Fake News is Not Our Friend,”² and in July, the company released a mini-documentary, “Facing Facts.” According to John Hegeman, head of the News Feed division of Facebook, “We're doing everything we can to fight this. 99% isn't good enough.”³ But with Jones only being removed in July 2018, and due to hate speech, rather than misinformation, it's hard to believe Facebook is functioning anywhere near “99%.”

It would be remiss not to recognise that “fake news” is a loaded term – to some, it means inaccurate or deliberately misleading reporting, while to others, it is simply opinion or political spin. Importantly, according to Facebook, opinion and analysis do not in themselves trigger a ban from the platform:



However, Alex Jones' show *Infowars* has been publishing material far from simply “opinion or analysis” for years. After multiple binge watching sessions of his impassioned ranting, fist thumping, and (admittedly) the occasional humorous moment, it's not hard to compile a list of his “inaccuracies”, to put it tamely.

Some of Jones' most infamous claims include insisting that the Sandy Hook school shooting was a hoax to influence gun control, and that the families of victims are only “crisis actors.”⁴ He was involved in spreading the “pizzagate” conspiracy during the 2016 election, claiming Hillary Clinton was connected to

1. D Rhian, 'Alex Jones responds to his ban from Facebook, Apple, YouTube and Spotify' in *News.com.au*. 7 August 2018, viewed on 18 August 2018, <https://www.news.com.au/technology/online/social/alex-jones-responds-to-his-ban-from-facebook-apple-youtube-and-spotify/news-story/bc4498ffc7e184d738815179ce047cc7>

2. N Tiku 'Facebook launches a new ad campaign with an old message' in *Wired*. 26 April 2018, viewed on 15 September 2018, <https://www.wired.com/story/facebook-launches-a-new-ad-campaign-with-an-old-message/>

3. Facebook 'Facing Facts' in *Facebook Newsroom*. June 2018, viewed 15 September 2018, <https://newsroom.fb.com/news/2018/05/inside-feed-facing-facts/>

4. E Ellis, 'Win or lose, the Alex Jones lawsuit will help redefine free speech' in *Wired*. 8 June 2018, viewed 14 September 2018, <https://www.wired.com/story/alex-jones-lawsuit-will-help-redefine-free-speech/>



a paedophilia ring run in the basement of a pizza shop in DC.⁵ *Infowars* also claims the American government is responsible for creating natural disasters like Hurricane Sandy, and has created a “gay bomb,” which he infamously has claimed is “turning the frogs gay!”⁶

There is also no shortage of medical misinformation on *Infowars*, with lengthy videos dedicated to the claim that vaccines cause autism,⁷ and that soy foods are feminising men and lowering sperm counts.⁸ In a wonderful display of irony, *Infowars* also sells a nootropic called Brain Force, which, you guessed right, contains soy.⁹

These claims are so clearly ridiculous that it’s hard to understand how Jones lasted as long as he did on Facebook, even within Facebook’s relatively recent commitment to removing fake news. What is known for certain is that the removal of *Infowars* from Facebook was not due to misinformation. In their official statement, Facebook explains:

*While much of the discussion around Infowars has been related to false news...none of the violations that spurred today’s removals were related to this.*¹⁰

Importantly, not only was the banning of *Infowars* not related to accusations of fake news, but it is unclear whether Facebook’s other methods of battling misinformation were applied to Jones. According to the Zuckerberg, Facebook’s is using third-party fact checkers to affect newsfeed rankings:

*We partner with third-party fact checkers to review and rate the accuracy of articles on Facebook. When something is rated as false, those stories are ranked significantly lower in News Feed, cutting future views by more than 80%.*¹¹

Facebook has declined to comment on whether Jones’ posts were affected by these “fact-checkers.” Regardless of whether the content was deprioritised in the newsfeed or not, when *Infowars* was banned, Alex Jones still had a whopping 2.5 million followers across his multiple Facebook pages and millions of views on his videos.

Consequently, according to Facebook, it seems Jones’ claims fall under the category of “opinions and analysis” rather than fake news. Granted, “truth” is a slippery term – alternative perspectives will always have differing conceptions of the truth. However, if the absurdity of *Infowars* isn’t treated as false, it’s hard to imagine what would be.

The concept of “truth” needs to be at least somewhat concrete if Facebook actually wants to make a difference in what people see and read. “Truth” shouldn’t be treated like a mythical creature drawn out of a fairy-tale, and Facebook shouldn’t avoid labeling something “false” in order to appear politically neutral.

Neutrality has been marketed as part of Facebook’s identity; they often claim to be a “platform for all ideas,”¹² as if such a claim would make the company immune to political leanings. However, platforms are never neutral. Every choice that is made, from the Newsfeed algorithm to the monetisation system, will either incidentally or deliberately benefit one group over another. This is neither unexpected nor surprising – being somewhat political is the reality of making platform-related decisions for such large audiences. Abstaining from calling *Infowars* fake news therefore doesn’t make Facebook politically neutral, because the aim to maintain political neutrality is doomed from the start.

5. E Ellis, ‘Crying ‘Paedophile’ is the oldest propaganda trick in the book’ in *Wired*. 8 January 2018, viewed 14 September 2018, <https://www.wired.com/story/crying-paedophile-is-the-oldest-propaganda-trick-in-the-book/>

6. A Jones, ‘Alex Jones: The Gay Bomb Rant’ in *Infowars*. 17 October 2015, viewed 14 September 2018, <https://www.infowars.com/alex-jones-the-gay-bomb-rant/>

7. R Dew, ‘Shocking: Young girls convulse on the floor after HPV shot’ in *Infowars*. 3 September 2015, viewed 18 September 2018, <https://www.infowars.com/shocking-young-girls-convulse-on-the-floor-after-hpv-shot/>

8. P Watson, ‘Is soy food turning men into pussies’ in *Infowars*. 16 November 2017, viewed 18 September 2018, <https://www.infowars.com/video-is-soy-food-turning-men-into-pussies/>

9. *Infowars*, ‘Brain Force Plus’ in *Infowars*. viewed 18 September 2018, <https://www.infowarsstore.com/brain-force.html>

10. Facebook, ‘Enforcing Our Community Standards’ in *Facebook Newsroom*. 6 August 2018, viewed 14 September 2018, <https://newsroom.fb.com/news/2018/08/enforcing-our-community-standards/>

11. *Ibid.*

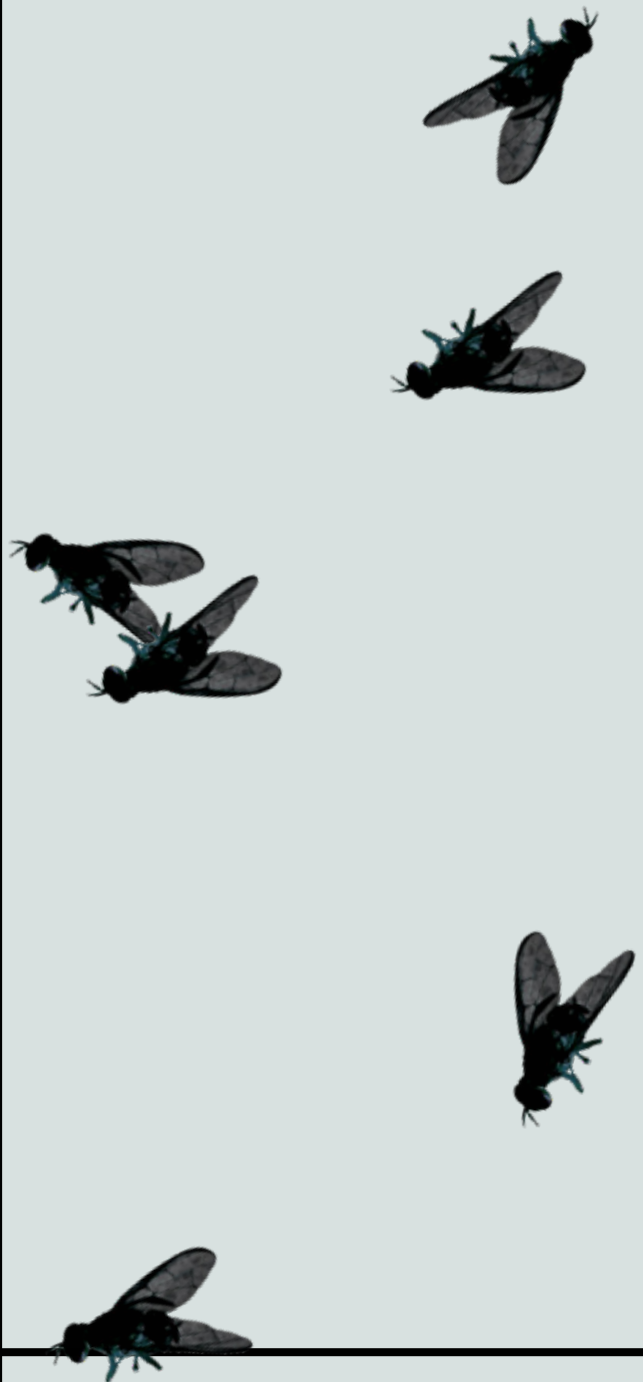
12. N Statt, ‘Zuckerberg calls Facebook ‘a platform for all ideas’ after meeting with conservatives’ in *The Verge*. 18 May 2016, viewed 14 September 2018, <https://www.theverge.com/2016/5/18/11706266/mark-zuckerberg-facebook-conservative-news-censorship-meeting>

Additionally, Facebook can't claim political neutrality, because choosing to treat dangerous misinformation as "opinion or analysis" in itself looks like a political decision. Facebook's posts imply that Jones' ideas are at best, true, or at worst, not so false as to be dangerous.

Yet channels like *Infowars* are dangerous and they have real-world consequences. The family of a 6-year-old who was killed during the Sandy Hook massacre are currently suing Jones after he accused them of being actors, and publically disclosed their personal information, including addresses.¹³ The family were stalked and threatened by his fans to such a degree they moved seven times, and according to *The New York Times*, now "live in hiding."¹² The pizza shop made famous by "pizzagate" had to employ guards at their entrance after an armed man entered and fired several shots in order to "investigate."¹⁴ And, most tellingly, Zuckerberg himself admits he underestimated the effect of fake news on the 2016 election.¹⁵ Even though Jones apologized for his comments connecting Hilary Clinton to paedophilia, this false claim had already been seen by millions and protests continued outside the White House after his apology.¹⁶ These incidents aside, Jones has likely contributed to the ongoing danger of the anti-vaccination movement, and has profited off selling his supplements and water filtering devices, presumably to protect oneself from "turning gay," (as if that's something to protect oneself from).

In fairness, there is no one-size-fits-all solution to the problem of fake news. Facebook has such a high volume of content uploaded every day that difficult decisions on what content is to be considered "dangerously" false are to be expected. However, the question remains: if a channel is debunked by mainstream media outlets, denounced by medical authorities, and has proven real-life consequences and dangers, and if this channel can remain on Facebook with millions of followers and will not be denounced for misinformation, how can Facebook really say they are doing "everything we can" to battle fake news?

The Alex Jones case was a chance for Facebook to take a stance. And yet, they insisted on avoiding labelling *Infowars* as a source of false information. If Facebook was sincere in its "Fake News is Not Our Friend" campaign, then Jones would have been dealt with long ago, and dealt with as a perpetrator of fake news, not only hate speech. Facebook's inaction on *Infowars* is therefore a good reminder to remain skeptical toward commitments of content policing from online platforms, as such efforts were, in this case, alarmingly ineffective.



13. E Williamson, 'Judge Rules Against Alex Jones and Infowars in Sandy Hook Lawsuit' in *The New York Times*. 30 August 2018, viewed 15 September 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/30/us/politics/alex-jones-infowars-sandy-hook-lawsuit.html>

14. E Rosenberg, 'Alex Jones Apologizes for Promoting 'Pizzagate' Hoax' in *The New York Times*. 25 March 2017, viewed 15 September 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/25/business/alex-jones-pizzagate-apology-comet-ping-pong.html>

15. M Zuckerberg, 'Facebook post' in Facebook. 28 September 2017, viewed 15 September 2018, <https://www.facebook.com/zuck/posts/10104067130714241?pnref=story>

16. M Miller, 'Protesters outside White House demand 'Pizzagate' investigation' in *The Washington Post*. 25 March 2017, viewed 17 September 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/local/wp/2017/03/25/protesters-outside-white-house-demand-pizzagate-investigation/?utm_term=.d67259f1d2ea

Clare Megahey

The Nuclear Bargaining Chip

On June 12th, 2018, the world watched optimistically as Donald Trump and Kim Jong-un became the first serving leaders from the United States and North Korea to meet. It looked to be a summit that would finally mark progress on the denuclearisation of North Korea, and halt its developing nuclear weapons testing that has driven fear as far south as Australia. Despite planning issues, contention and cancellation, the meeting went ahead, and was hailed across the globe as an instant success. Just three months later, this popular opinion is shifting, with a lack of action from Pyongyang and a blame game being played by Trump.

Despite the stalled progress, some important questions emerge. Has the summit still managed to set a political precedent for international diplomacy? Has it set a new rule for less powerful or hostile states - develop sufficiently powerful weapons and thereby guarantee bargaining with the world's key political players? And should we have expected (and still expect) the US to enforce a hegemonic role in denuclearisation, asserting an authority above that of the United Nations? In exploring and attempting to answer these questions, perhaps it may be useful to dissect the plausibility of denuclearisation, and the current political landscape surrounding the international denuclearisation agenda.

As to whether the summit has set a political precedent, we must look at the forms of international diplomacy used by Trump and Jong-un, alongside the states they each represent, in order to deduce whether the summit has represented a political change on either side. Trump's public policy "doctrine", as Go Myong-Hyan describes it, is characterised by a handshake and a one-on-one meeting.¹ This is no surprise, considering Trump's business background, which has supplemented his lack of political experience prior to the presidency by smoothing his conduct in formal diplomatic discussions. Trump's success in securing the summit demonstrates this, especially if we look at the criticisms he has expressed toward North Korea over the last decade, the most infamous of which being his comment last year about raining down "fire and fury" on the nation should they continue to threaten the US.² He expressed this threat again in an official government statement the following month, albeit in a more formal fashion.³ It reads "... this regime has signalled its contempt for its neighbours, for all members of UN, and for minimum standards of acceptable international behaviour," and consequently "all options are on the table."

Trump does not, however, bring the same open hostility or intimidation to the meeting room. With regard to his attitude towards North Korea and Kim Jong-un, the summit certainly signalled a positive shift. Despite his support for strong US foreign policy, Trump avoided using the "maximum

1. Arirang News 2018, [ISSUE TALK] *Nothing to offer vs. insufficient progress: North Korea vs. U.S. tensions rise again*, Seoul, online video, accessed 2 September 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XO1_O2z1gGw>.

2. Hamedy, S & Tseng, J 2018, 'All the times President Trump has insulted North Korea', CNN, 9 March, accessed 2 September 2018, <<https://edition.cnn.com/2017/09/22/politics/donald-trump-north-korea-insults-timeline/index.html>>.

3. Trump, DJ 2017, *Statement by President Donald J Trump on North Korea*, The Whitehouse National Security and Defence, accessed 1 September 2018, <<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/statement-president-donald-j-trump-north-korea/>>.

pressure” rhetoric that his administration normally equips in its approach to North Korea.⁴ But the president’s perceptions of and alleged progress with North Korea seem to be backsliding just three months after the summit, with a lack of progress on denuclearisation and the consequent sudden cancellation of Secretary of States Mike Pompeo’s visit. Jong-un may have been the first North Korean dictator to meet with a serving US President, but that was essentially the extent of the precedent set for international diplomacy.

Kim Jong-un is “no reformer” according to Stanton, Lee and Klinger, and is unlikely to become one and denuclearise willingly, because “he has staked his legitimacy on perfecting the nuclear arsenal his father and grandfather bought at the cost of billions of dollars and millions of lives.” They further claim that “if he will disarm at all, he will only do so under duress so extreme that it threatens the survival of his regime.”⁵ It is this regime that Jong-un and his administration place above the welfare of the people. This is visible in the historical reinvention of the extreme famine during the Arduous March, which saw nearly the entire North Korean population starve; the government has justified the humanitarian crisis as it supposedly upheld the political order’s integrity.⁶ North Korea may have promised to denuclearise, but, given this historical precedent, this promise should not be interpreted as much more than sweet talk satisfying the US, for now at least. At the time, the summit was heralded as an instant success by Trump and his administration and even the public - one article published just after the summit proclaimed that “the United States president with the least previous foreign policy interest and experience could well have the biggest impact on global affairs in a century.”⁷ But it appears the president preached progress with ‘little consideration beyond immediate political gain.’⁸ The world predicted the summit as a precedent in international diplomacy, but it seems Al Jazeera reporter Wayne Hay’s observation a year ago that “we seem to be stuck in this endless cycle of provocation and condemnation, and there is no sign of either side - the US and South Korea combined or North Korea - backing down from their state positions” still rings true a year later.⁹

The second question, whether the summit has set a new rule for less powerful or hostile states - develop sufficiently powerful weapons and thereby bargain with the world’s key political players - follows closely from the first. Instigating hostile action to facilitate dialogue with the US is not a new move in the North Korean playbook. Pyongyang has used US hostages in the past to secure high-profile American visits, including Bill Clinton in 2009, former president Jimmy Carter in 2010, and Director of National Intelligence James Clapper in 2014.¹⁰ This explains the current travel ban set by the US on American citizens travelling to North Korea due to “the serious risk of arrest and long-term detention of U.S nationals.”¹¹ Nuclear threats are not the only key to conversations with the US, but it is certainly the most valuable; the American children who grew up during the Cold War and Cuban Missile Crisis are adults today, and probably respond to this threat more keenly than others. It is very likely, therefore, that Kim Jong-un’s threats to the US are for diplomatic purposes. North Korea’s nuclearisation, and Trump’s desire to stop it, was the key purpose of the June Summit. North Korea’s use of nuclear weapons to get attention on the global stage is not a new diplomatic play; it is a family legacy. However, it is a move that works, and North Korea has showed the world, including other hostile states, that the nuclear bargaining chip is the one to gamble with if you want the US to pay attention to you.

The international stage is where the answer to the third question lies, which

4. Mason, J & Holland, S 2018, ‘Trump makes an about-face, revives summit with North Korean Leader’, *Reuters*, 31 May, accessed 1 September 2018, <<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-northkorea-usa/trump-makes-an-about-face-revives-summit-with-north-korean-leader-idUSKCN1IV2NS>>.

5. Stanton, J, Lee, SY, Klinger, B 2017, ‘Getting tough on North Korea: how to hit Pyongyang where it hurts’, *Council on Foreign Affairs*, accessed 2 September 2018, <<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/north-korea/2017-04-17/getting-tough-north-korea>>.

6. Holbraad M & Pedersen, MA 2013, *Times of Security: Ethnographies of Fear, Protest and the Future*, Routledge, London.

7. Thakur, R 2018, ‘Nuclear turbulence in the age of Trump’, *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, vol. 29, no. 1, pp. 105- 128.

8. Tracy, A 2018, “‘He’s over an abyss’: diplomats fear the worst as North Korea talks hit a wall”, *Hive: Vanity Fair*, 28 August, accessed 29 August 2018, <<https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2018/08/donald-trump-mike-pompeo-north-korea-nuclear-talks>>.

9. ‘UN Security Council slaps new sanctions on North Korea’, *Al Jazeera*, 12 September 2017, accessed 2 September 2018, <<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/09/security-council-slaps-sanctions-north-korea-170911221328811.html>>.

10. Easley, LE 2017, From strategic patience to strategic uncertainty: Trump, North Korea, and South Korea’s new president’, *World Affairs*, vol. 180, no. 2, pp. 7-31.

11. Bureau of Consular Affairs 2017, *North Korea International Travel Information*, The US Department of State, Washington.

is whether we should expect the US to assume a hegemonic role in promoting denuclearisation, particularly one superseding the UN. The summit dominated headlines worldwide, and the current stalemate still does, giving the impression that Trump and Jong-un are the queens in a global denuclearisation chess match. Josh Rogin, a columnist at the *Washington Post*, wrote on the 27th August that “right now, it’s up to Kim Jong-un to make the next move.” A day later, *Vanity Fair’s* Abigail Tracy predicted that “one setback will precipitate another,” a product of a political crisis “of Trump’s own making.”

However, the UN, China, Japan, and South Korea are all significant players of the game too; perhaps we should be looking to North Korea’s closest neighbour and ally, China, to take the next step in the denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula, or to other stakeholders in a problem of regional and global concern. There’s no leading answer on how best to proceed with the denuclearisation of North Korea, and, complicating the matter further, there are no historical precedents to draw from. What the past has shown us, however, is that the US agenda for removing weapons of mass destruction misaligns with an overarching concern for global security. Most evidently, this phrase is uncomfortably reminiscent of the unsuccessful US invasion of Iraq in 2003, but more recently and more specific to the US denuclearisation agenda has been the deployment of anti-missile technology in eastern Europe as a deterrent to Russian nuclear power. According to Russia’s Minister of Defense, Alexander Fomin, the US is planning to deploy 400 deceptor missiles on the Russian border, in addition to the sites already in Romania and the Baltic states.¹² Instead of being a positive step towards global denuclearisation, this step is more likely to be interpreted as antagonistic by Putin and Russia, which further complicates the international effort. Putin has expressed that “unfriendly steps towards Russia such as the deployment of the (U.S.) anti-missile system and of NATO infrastructure nearer our borders and such like, from a military point of view, will become ineffective.”¹³ From this perspective, US denuclearisation is a tool with which the state can gain a stronger grip on nuclear power. The fewer countries that have nuclear weapons, and the fewer that are able to wield them effectively, the more value US nuclear weapons have as bargaining chips on the stage of global politics.

The US is not just guilty of using denuclearisation as an aggressive foreign policy strategy; it also pursues disarmament hypocritically. As past president Barack Obama recognised in a public address in Tokyo, the global denuclearisation process will likely be a long one, due to the reluctance of the US and Russia to progress their own disarmaments.¹⁴ Similarly, the Chinese press has recently criticised the US for “expanding its own nuclear capabilities while trying to persuade other powers to give up theirs.”¹⁵ Noam Chomsky also delivers criticism to the US denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula, arguing that “the US should back off and allow the two Koreas to achieve peace, disarmament, unification and complete denuclearization” without interference.¹⁶

As such, not only should we not expect the United States to enforce denuclearisation upon other states, but we should not trust it to do so alone. Denuclearisation needs to be an international effort, not just a concern of national security and power. However, the US continues its mission regardless, partly because the administration does not believe the UN or other countries are doing enough to reduce the threat of North

12. ‘Russia’s Defense Ministry: the US is surrounding Russia with ‘missile defense ring’, *UAWire*, 3 March 2018, accessed 23 September 2018, <<https://www.uawire.org/russia-s-defense-ministry-the-us-is-surrounding-russia-with-missile-defense-ring>>.

13. Osborn, A 2018, ‘Putin, before vote, unveils ‘invincible’ nuclear weapons to counter West’, *Reuters*, 1 March, accessed 23 September 2018, <<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-putin-nuclear/putin-before-vote-unveils-invincible-nuclear-weapons-to-counter-west-idUSKCN1GD514>>.

14. ‘North’s isolation offers little leverage for denuclearization talks, Obama tells Tokyo audience’, *The Japan Times*, 25 March 2018, accessed 2 September 2018, <<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2018/03/25/national/politics-diplomacy/norths-isolation-offers-little-leverage-denuclearization-talks-obama-tells-tokyo-audience/>>.

15. Lu, Z 2018, ‘China might stay out of earlier negotiations, but will be needed to close any deal on peace for the Korean peninsula’, *South China Morning Post*, 9 May, accessed 3 September 2018, <<https://www.scmp.com/news/asia/diplomacy/article/2145257/kim-jong-uns-second-meeting-xi-jinping-reminder-chinas>>.

16. Polychroniou C J 2018, ‘Noam Chomsky on Donald Trump and the “me first” doctrine’, *Truthout*, 24 May, accessed 23 September 2018, <<https://truthout.org/articles/noam-chomsky-us-foreign-policy-under-trump-follows-me-first-doctrine/>>.

Korea, and partly with the hidden intention of enforcing US dominance:

The scope of the US Treasury Action is proportionate to the level and urgency of the threat from North Korea that the administration feels, in contrast to the UN Security Council resolutions, which are a product of consensus involving China and Russia as proponents of the lowest common denominator.¹⁷

In justifying its stricter sanctions and economic embargo on North Korea compared with those outlined by the UN Security Council, the U.S Treasury Department issued this statement:

We call on all countries around the world to join us by cutting all trade and financial ties with North Korea in order to achieve a denuclearised Korean Peninsula. As President Trump stated in his speech to the UN General Assembly, 'it is time for all nations to work together to isolate the Kim regime until it ceases its hostile behaviour.' We will continue to work with our allies and partners to stop North Korea from abusing the global financial system to further Kim Jong Un's reckless ambition.¹⁸

Former South Korean President Park Geun-hye made a commitment in 2016 that her government would pursue an environment in which further nuclear development in the North would signal its downfall, rather than ensure its survival.¹⁹ So far, South Korea has kept its promise; their shared industrial complex, for example, was shut down the same year (although North Korea continues to operate it). The missing piece, then, appears to be the rest of the world, including China, the country that has the closest economic ties with North Korea and is thus the least likely to participate in an economic embargo. Therefore, the answer to the third question raised by the recent summit is no. We should not expect the US to enforce a hegemonic role in denuclearisation over the UN, regardless of whether it pursues that role as a strategy for its own political dominance. Denuclearisation ought to be a global effort, minimising political strategy as a feature, therefore maximising the likelihood of success among collegiate nations.

To conclude, the Trump-Jong-un summit has not managed to set a political precedent for international diplomacy, as no new political behaviour was demonstrated, nor has any behaviour changed in North Korean and US relations since the summit. It has not set a new rule for less powerful or hostile states to develop sufficiently powerful weapons and thereby bargain with the world's key political players, but rather has been an exemplar of this tendency. Finally, we should not expect the US to enforce a hegemonic role in denuclearisation over the UN, as this should be a global effort, not a national effort. As a solely national effort, US denuclearisation works to strengthen its own nuclear arsenal as a bargaining chip in international relations. In exploring and attempting to answer these questions, it is clear that the current political landscape surrounding the international denuclearisation agenda and the plausibility of this task is dim, hostile, and not very hopeful. We are left with many opinions and no conclusive answers. At this point in time, it seems we will just have to play the waiting game. If North Korea or the US do not make the next move in this stalemate, other states will have to make a play.

17. Snyder, S 2017, 'The U.S. Treasury's 'nuclear option' in response to North Korea's nuclear threat', *Forbes*, 25 September, accessed 3 September 2018, <<https://www.forbes.com/sites/scottasnyder/2017/09/25/the-u-s-treasurys-nuclear-option-in-response-to-north-koreas-nuclear-threat/#18fff4863438>>.

18. U.S Department of the Treasury 2017, *Remarks by Secretary Mnuchin on President Trump's Executive Order on North Korea*, The United States Government, Washington.

19. Fifield, A 2016, 'South Korea's president vows for all-out push to punish North for provocations', *The Washington Post*, 16 February, accessed 2 September 2018, <<https://www.washingtonpost.com>>.

Experiments in Human Survival

**Hamish
Duncan**

They're on the curve of the dune. Slate yellow against deep, dark blue. Shoes off, socks flung down the crest, the warmth oozing between their toes. It's become about the little things again. Footprints — their own and another set — approaching their position and abruptly stopping. The other set go past them, stumbling, wandering off into nothing, over a hill and out of the planet and out of their lives.

He tells her he loves her for the first time, whatever that means. It feels like the right thing to do, and he knows it's going to be reciprocated, something for her to say in desperation. Just because, just in case. And if she doesn't say it back, it doesn't matter. What else is there to do?

They can take that small moment of anger and embarrassment to wherever they're going next.

But firecracker pops still ring out, echoing over empty lands, over a chafing orange horizon that they can only look at for a few seconds before the pain gets too much. A fire's burning somewhere; they couldn't see it, but they could smell the melting rubber just fine, blowing in off the breeze, scents of smoke and human. Impossible life shoots up through the sand, thick and green.

Brian thinks they're facing north. He's done the math, but he was never good at this type of thing. He never needed to be. The compass no longer works; it just swings around of its own accord, aimlessly, like it's lost its tension. The rumours were that they would be taking off from Dangali Park, and that's about twenty-five clicks north from where they think they're currently perched.

It's impossible to tell. How did they do this before?

There's glistening firefly lights somewhere down below, one large spotlight and what looks like trucks coming in and out of a set of makeshift gates. It has to be it. Has to be. Otherwise they've come all this way for nothing.

Mary's parents moved away when she wasn't looking, catching her in a low moment and disappearing. But who could blame them? They were just doing what everyone else was doing. There was panic in the streets. Panic and resignation. Half of the people seem to be going down with the ship, the other half were tipping lifeboats over, scrambling overboard, pushing each other out of the way.

The front door hung open, the screen banging with every hush of wind.

Nothing valuable seemed to be missing. You couldn't sell what was left anyway. An almost too convenient set of knocked over sugar mills, jars of salt and pepper. A half-drunk cup of coffee, small lily pads of mould beginning to form on top. The flies were dead too.

They'd left the fridge open and noxious gas was leaking out, the ticking electronics slowly winding down and dying. Brian put his arms on Mary's shoulders, squeezed her tight, and went to look upstairs.

'There won't be anything up there.'

'Let me check anyway.'

'You know best.'

They met at a bus stop. A coach was supposed to come and drag the last of them away from their homes once Adelaide fell under the same spell of fire and chaos that had taken everything else. Nothing came over the horizon except alternating waves of anxiety that they shared together and bonded over and sustained sweaty eye contact during. Dusk loomed and decisions were made over burning summer air.

'Where are we going?'

'Where are you from?'

'Does it matter?'
'I'd still like to know.'
She rolled her eyes; he smiled to himself.

Another earthquake ripped through town. Where next?
They decided. *He* decided, really; she acquiesced.

There was a note left for Mary upstairs on the dresser. Brian picked it up, studied it, drank in the emotion, and spat it out again. They were fleeing, abandoning her like cowards. He put the note in his pocket, ignored the two bodies lying on the bed, their hands still clasped together and stiff with rigor mortis. He told her there was nobody up there; nothing out of the ordinary, at least. He had seen all this before, anyway. They left town, with no real reason to look back.

There's another bomb that night. They just missed it.

*

Before all this, Brian had a job. Well, he earned money doing something, that's all he'll admit to, down at the bars back when things were bad but not so bad and nothing anyone said meant anything. He plans on concealing all that, his previous life, from Mary. He tells her he was a plumber, and stays vague. *Genius*, he thinks. She believes him, and there's no running water anywhere, so how will he get caught out? It's an obsolete profession.

But eventually it happens: some army base that was deserted long ago, as everyone headed north, a pump with a broken... who *knows* what, but *aren't you a plumber, Brian – shouldn't you know how to fix this?* Sprung.

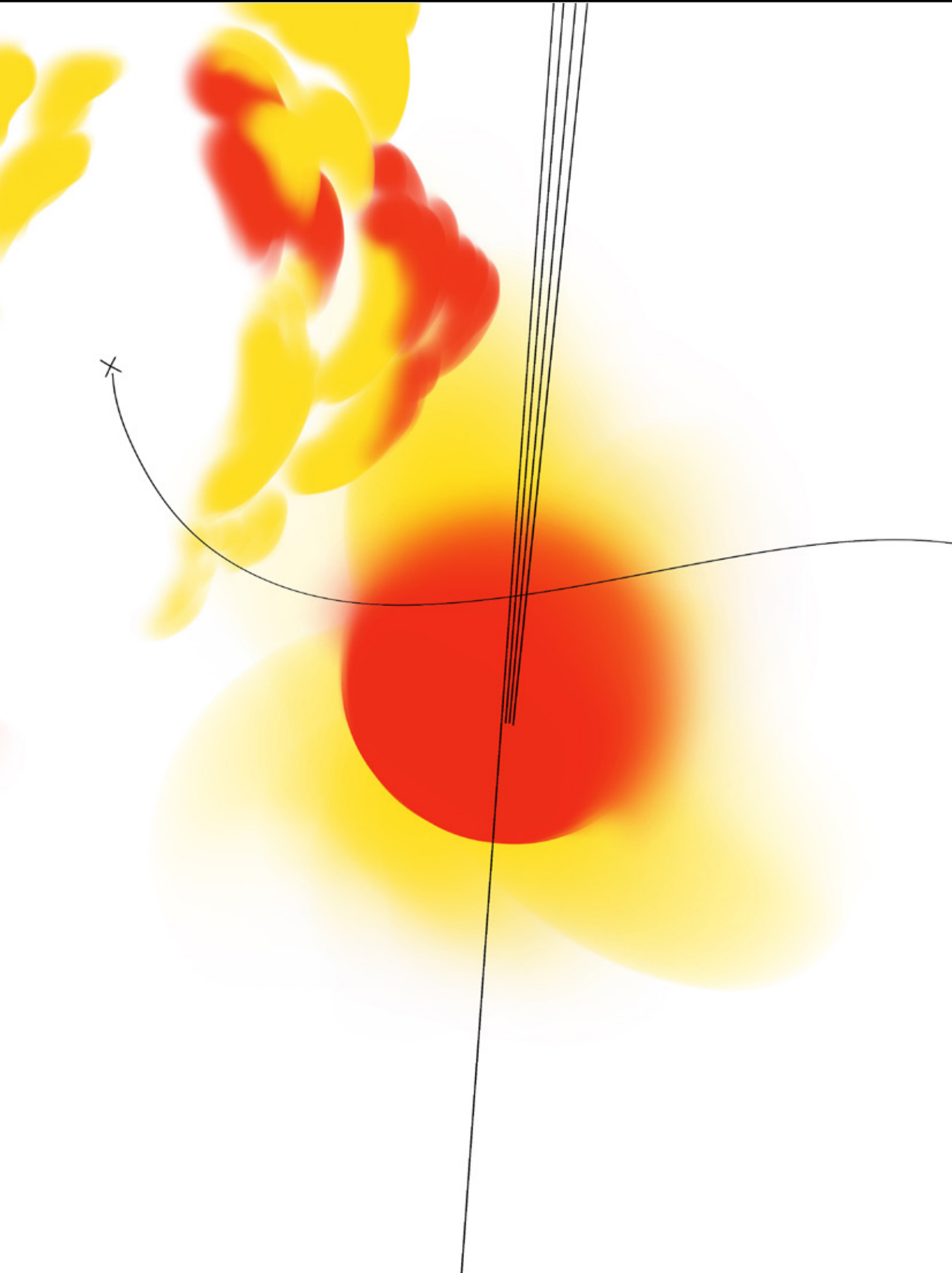
She didn't speak to him for a day and a half, sticking with him but not to him, like a fly. Eventually, she came back around, knowing without him, she'd be alone, and probably dead before long. That's a lie too. She knew exactly which way her boyfriend went, the last part of her old life, watched the whole separation go down from a distance as he made his plans: two pale white hands separated as an entire suburb looted themselves dry, a teary-eyed Prime Minister on TV giving up, admitting the worst, dangerous words broadcast out into public air.

That was a month ago, and in between then and today, the clock finally running out on the planet, the best they can hope for never coming true, they'd been through a lot. A lifetime's worth of running, from immediate dangers, from bag-snatches and from huge, open-mouthed mushroom clouds rising over endless horizons that shrunk like drying puddles as the sun gave up. Experiments with tap water in three separate towns, told-you-so arguments and violent, enforced make-ups. Gentle persuasions, big steps taken lightly like lace off shoulder blade.

*

An alarm goes off in the valley below. The site proves that rivers really can die of thirst. They watch like they're standing above a zoo enclosure. A shot of steam crashes out of the side of something; people scream and shout in angry, masculine voices. The alarm is silenced and they all stay silent for a while, their breath held in as the lights go off and come back on, as if the entire painted landscape below is rebooting.

Mary turns to him with stars in her eyes. He can see her looking, but he stays staring at the swaying rocket below.



The countdown starts.

10. 9.

He holds her hand.

8. 7.

She squeezes, says, 'I don't know if I can keep holding on.'

6. 5.

Steam shoots out again, blows sand away and topples innocent nearby trees.

4. 3. 2

Something demonic rises up in the sands and the 1 and 0 is covered up with a long, tearing noise, like something primal is being ripped from the ground.

Nothing is audible, nothing is visible, just white light and screaming insanity under the moon which edges closer and closer, ripping oceans aside and toppling societies, or every society except for one, if they manage to fix this machinery right here.

The rocket lifts slowly off the ground as Mary tears her hand away from Brian, standing up with her hands on her head.

It seems like it's struggling to rise, like gravity is winning out, the rocket tilting to the right, the aim to the heavens off. Brian remembers the rumour, spread to him from someone with leering eyes and a loose mouth back in a dried up pub somewhere: that they were out of the proper kind of fuel, and were making do with what they had. Maybe this is because of that.

Or maybe it's destined to fail, like the moon was destined to approach; it's all destiny and what's happening is meant to be, and it's happening right now.

The rocket climbs and climbs, delayed sheets of hot air pushing everything away.

Brian and Mary watch as two and as one as the rocket careens to the right, separates, collapses in on itself, a star-shaped cloud of white and red.

They want to rise, to disappear, to flee. The explosion reigns. They lean into it and smell the burning Sulphur. Mary doesn't even realise that she's crying anymore, and as workers flee to dodge the falling debris, she finally looks up through her hands, through the clouds, through the moon, to something else, feeling the tide lap her ankles.

panthera leo fire

Billie-Jean Bullard

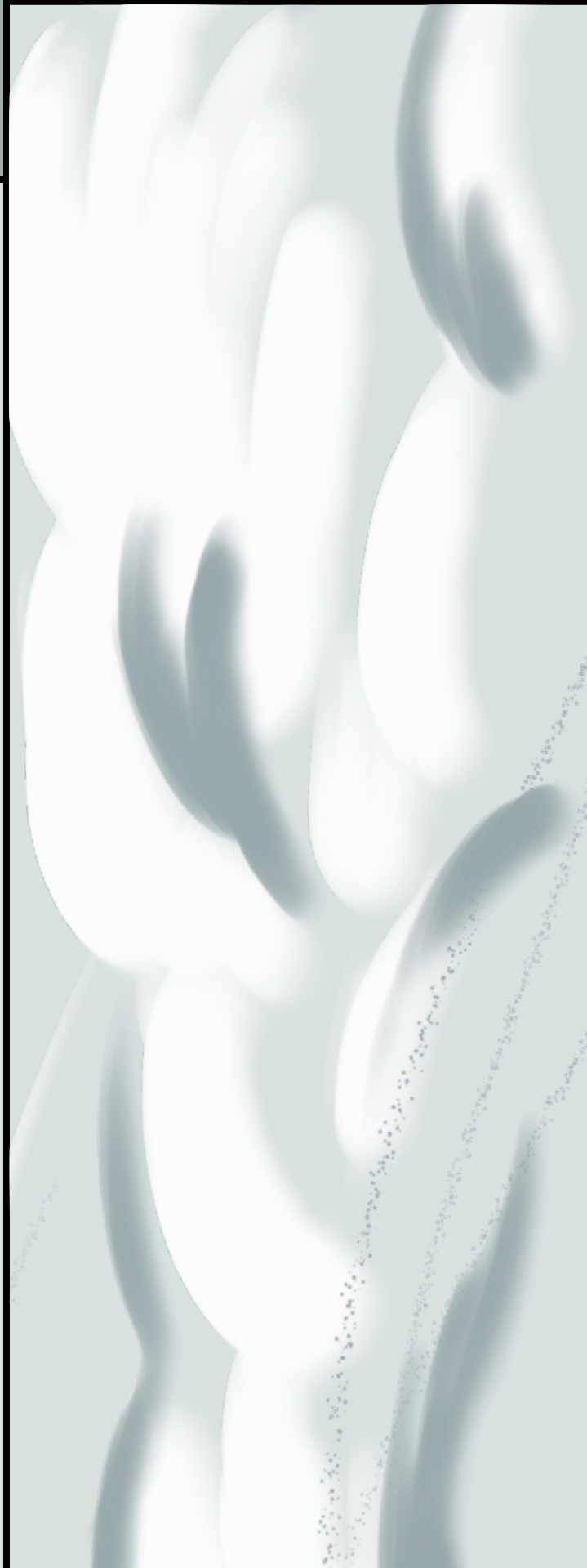
my love for you
is all consuming,
one small spark
in an LA summer.

it's enough to devour
cities and suburbs
it cannot be contained
by the best of men,
let alone the worst

you can do your best
to put me out
i'll scorch everything in my path
even if it means
i'll burn myself alive.

/

*panthera leo fire,
january 2017.*



Reading the Signs

**Axel -
Nathaniel
Rose**

William Eliot

Male bisexual [SEE MORE]

19 years, three months, twenty-one days old

Post-adolescent

Student [SEE MORE]

Standard health profile; epileptic [SEE MORE]

Heart rate elevated, breathing patterns irregular: post-coitus

You can see the green flickers even with your eyes half-closed. You are conscious of your eyelashes for the first time in your life as they brush against his chest, the sharp points of his collarbones. They only matter because they are touching him.

You are so close that his vitals are showing. 108BPM, 99% oxygen saturation, 18RR. You want to find a scar somewhere on him. You hope he has none, that he has never been touched hard enough to produce a scar. You still want to see the story of that scar. You want to see whether it is ketoid or atrophic, white and sunken or swollen pink. You want to read how many millimetres long it is, exactly and perfectly, just so you know. So you can say you know. Who you would say it to was irrelevant, let alone if they listened or heard.

You kiss his collarbone, and as you do your eyes open just enough to see the green vital flashing upwards, 116BPM. You look at it, or more, the way the computer at the back of your neck processes it, and projects it up against his skin. You can see the underside of his chin, a small growth of stubble, through the light. You can feel his fingers on your neck. You realise that he is doing for himself what the computer does for you. The burning dissonance of your life makes you ache, makes your stomach churn.

"Tell me how you feel." He is begging you. The gentle drag upwards at the end of each word, his eyes so bright you can see the ceiling reflected in them. "Please."

You are grateful, for the first time in your life, for The Computer. You can not imagine yourself having been brave enough to kiss him, to hold his hand, if you hadn't seen the flickering 'OPEN TO CONTACT' and 'AFFECTIONATE' and 'SEXUALLY AROUSED'. You tilt your neck so that he can feel your pulse. You try to find the words to give him that can do what The Computer has done for you. You do not find those words. Still, you say through the lump in your throat, "I feel like I've... I've never been more at peace." And he is kissing you and telling you he loves you, and you're saying you love him, because you do, you love him so much it burns, and you watch his vital signs and moments of his history. You ask him to tell the stories of his scars in his own voice.

William didn't have strong political opinions. It simply didn't matter to him, and it mattered to so many others. After all, there were thousands of people wandering around campus with 'STUDENT: POLITICS' floating above them, even without their name. He sometimes wondered what it would be like not to have the Macrochip, but it was too baffling a concept for him to focus on for long. He didn't really love meeting people who had like, disabled them, or removed them, or were trying. Not just because he didn't like associating with criminals, but because he was afraid of mispronouncing their name. It was an odd thing to focus on, but if someone wrote down their name, or said it quickly, he might say it wrong. But the Macrochip would say it clearly and as many times as he needed, so he wouldn't stammer. His grandmother laughed when he told her this, and she commiserated – she was ten when the Macrochips became mandatory, and one of her worst memories was addressing a boy thinking that he was his twin, who was her very first crush.

His father didn't like talking about the Macrochip controversies. Of course he didn't – he talked about them at work every day, and William didn't really care enough to retain whatever he said, anyway.

William liked stories from before the Macrochips, though. He took a sick little pleasure in his grandmother's story, even though he would never tell her so. What a painful, horrible, innocent mistake to have made out of a childhood crush. Even though children's books were being rewritten with the Macrochips incorporated, he was just old enough to remember fairytales without them.

He tried to write with his Macro-link, particularly when he was on the two hour bus trip home, but the technology was too experimental – the actual translation of thought words to written ones was there, but it wasn't strong enough for him. His words got all jumbled on the screen, concepts poorly written. He typed instead, and wondered if his stories would be more perfect, more clean, when the technology was right. When his thoughts could go unfiltered to the screen.

You didn't mean to be a criminal. Conceptions of 'criminality' were so based around morality, and the global government barely seemed to share morals themselves, let alone with any care for the citizens' morality. The abolition of religious order has something to do with it, you suspect. The concept of religion fascinates you, and you used to demand your uncle tell you the stories that his grandfather had told him about 'Islam', and being a 'Muslim'. You left school at ten, but religion wasn't even going to be taught any more.

You still get random jolts of pain through your neck, and it's always a question of whether it's the old wound, or if it's the Macrochip being called to by The Computer. You will be killed one day. You know that. You're a programmer without a permit, you don't exist in 'the system' any more. You were probably listed as dead when your uncle pulled you out of school. Yes, you were, you remember him taking your blood. Bottles of it, through a needle that was far too big for a child's veins. He plied you with promises of fruit juice, when you got there. You learned promptly that 'there' was a group of people. People who shared the same conceptions of morality and criminality as you, no matter *where* they were.

You want to scratch at the wound, sometimes, ten years later. It still bleeds sometimes. You've learned not to touch it, though. Just in case you wake up what there is left of it. Half of the Chip stayed lodged too deep inside of you to get out. You were the first child to have one removed. You were an experiment, suffering so that others in future wouldn't have to. The phantom pains down your back, the double-vision, and the violent strobing lights a 'sad but necessary' consequence.

You have to steal medicine for the epilepsy when no-one else manages to. You try to take from different people, so no-one loses too much. But you return to the farm-house more often than not. There are only so many places you can go when your Chip is still partially active. You walk past another boy *every single time* you go to the farmhouse, and you're sure he must be following you, must be onto you. But he always smiles. You walk close enough to him one time that you can see his name. 'William Eliot'. You wonder if your name still flashes up, or if William Eliot would assume that it was just a glitch in The Computer that means he can't see your name.

SEVERE MACROCHIP ERROR

**PLEASE TELL THIS HUMAN TO MAKE THEIR WAY
TO A CHECK-IN POINT.**

**IF THIS IS A CORPSE, PLEASE PRESS THE DEATH
NOTICE ON THE CHIP, OR IF YOU ARE UNABLE
TO DO SO, DIAL THE HOTLINE FOR IT TO BE
COLLECTED.**

"Hey! Hey, you okay? Your chip's freakin' out." William liked running. It was a force of habit with the exercise regime for his epilepsy, but yes, he liked it. He liked doing the right thing, too. "Hey! Hey, it's okay, I'm not a criminal – I just wanted to let you know that your chip's broken. You've got a big 'error' message on you. Unless I've got one too, and the end-times are coming? Hey. Hey. You okay?"

You get to watch William Eliot fall in love with you through neat reports that float next to his skin. You get to watch him accepting your love, which you think, perhaps, is more powerful for you. Because you could tell he was in love with you, once he was. But well before then, you were so madly in love with him that you considered handing yourself in. Getting a new, proper Macrochip, even serve a prison sentence if needed. Then come out, to be with him. Not that you would ever tell him that. You had that privilege. The withholding of information. He had no such thing. And yet he trusted you. He had no reason to, an apparently well-known criminal who stole his medication. And yet he chose you, of all the people in the world. No compatibility report, no genetic history given. And you love him despite his very seeing of you being a risk to your life. You go into cafes on the outskirts of town to see him despite the cameras. Despite the waiter telling you that you have an error message, and lamer and lamer excuses spilling out of you.

You wonder, touching his cheek with butterfly kisses, if life felt like this before the Macrochips. You wonder what it would be like, to not be able to see William's heartbeat. You wonder if you are brave enough to leave him, or if you are brave enough to ask him to come with you.

"Just friends"

Dani C

I. To the girl who pleaded

"Why do you want me to stay so bad?"

"I don't know, but I'm happy next to you. Are you not?"

"I am happy, but you know I can't stay."

"Why not?"

"I don't know, I guess it turns out I wasn't ready."

"Ready for what?"

"This, us, you."

"Okay."

"I'm sorry I couldn't be the one."

"Yeah, I know, I'm sorry too."

"Do you think in another lifetime we could've made it?"

"Maybe."

"I'll look for you then."

"Okay."

II. To the girl who cried

Most nights she feels fine
her days, a clear, straight line, fly by fast
not thinking of the past
because if she does, she is sure it will not last,
the plastered, perfect smile,
the heart
that beats

in time.

She asked him once what he feared most,
he answered something about
spiders
and holes.

She should've instead asked him about the end of the world,
or if he thought the bed could stand
the nightly
 grinding
 of scenes
 inside her head

and
how he thought
losing someone would look like.

Back then,
she said that hurt would probably sound like nails scratching on a chalkboard

raw

but now
she knew that pain sounded a lot like his voice

cracking

on the phone
as he told her to take care
to sleep early
never to skip a meal,
but why is it taking her so long to heal
even after making a deal
with someone above
that this was hurt she would
never have to feel.

But now she knows,
the two were ripped from the same musical score. That time, when
he asked her what she tastes on her tongue when she thought of
things that could cease to exist, she should've said
spice
that until now still makes her gag
thinking of the lies and the smiles and the late-night calls
that are now nowhere to be found.

She didn't know what destruction really meant
until the time came when she
had
to
walk away.

II. To the girl who held her head up high

No, I do not want to be your friend.

I do not see why till the end
I have to bend
to every whim
of yours,

close the door on your way out and

lock the chain

give the keys to the ones I love,
no not to me,
 it is I,

I do not trust
because I know that you're aware
back there,

I'm just one call from being

And no not again,
you know we've tried,

a thousand times,

but thinking
 back of
back there
 cannot keep us
back there,
there was change,

we
 could
 not
keep
up,

it got hard when I had to learn to
carry us both and I'm sorry I could not

carry us all the way

to the finish line.

p
l
e
a
s
e

p
l
e
a
s
e

Now, there are cracks in smiles and
tears in eyes that before weren't there
and back there

leads us

to
right
here

and I'm tired of the way it hurts

right here.

If even myself I cannot trust,
let's not talk about you love,
so don't you

dare

keep the key, my attention is not for free, you cannot ring the bell just to
bring me hell, for you I fell and I think if given the chance

I would again.

But do not give me the chance.

Do not give me the choice to once more be yours

I am weak

and every day

that I get further away from you

every day

I think I am finally reaching the peak

I bleed as the waves drag me

back

to crash against the rocky shore.

Do not call

or text

or think

of the girl who would've traded the world for you in a

b
l
i
n
k

and maybe

hopefully

one of these days
 the mention of your name
 paired with another's
 will not make her heart sink.

1. I don't want to see what you look like next to her
2. or hear your laugh as she says a funny joke
3. or feel one painfully limp and awkward arm wrap around me in a half embrace

as if once

upon a

time

they

all

weren't

once

mine.

I'm afraid it's not our time.

I do not want halves, I am a whole and I know right now there might be holes
 but I am working hard
 day and night
 to get back the sight
 of a
 me

without

the cloud

of you

to learn how to sew

and maybe someday, someone will look at me the way I used to

look at you.

So no, I wish you well, but I don't think I'd like to be friends. Not for a while. Maybe not ever,
 because a friendship built from an end is bound to stay south

and perhaps we'll both find happiness by accepting that some things are never meant to mend.



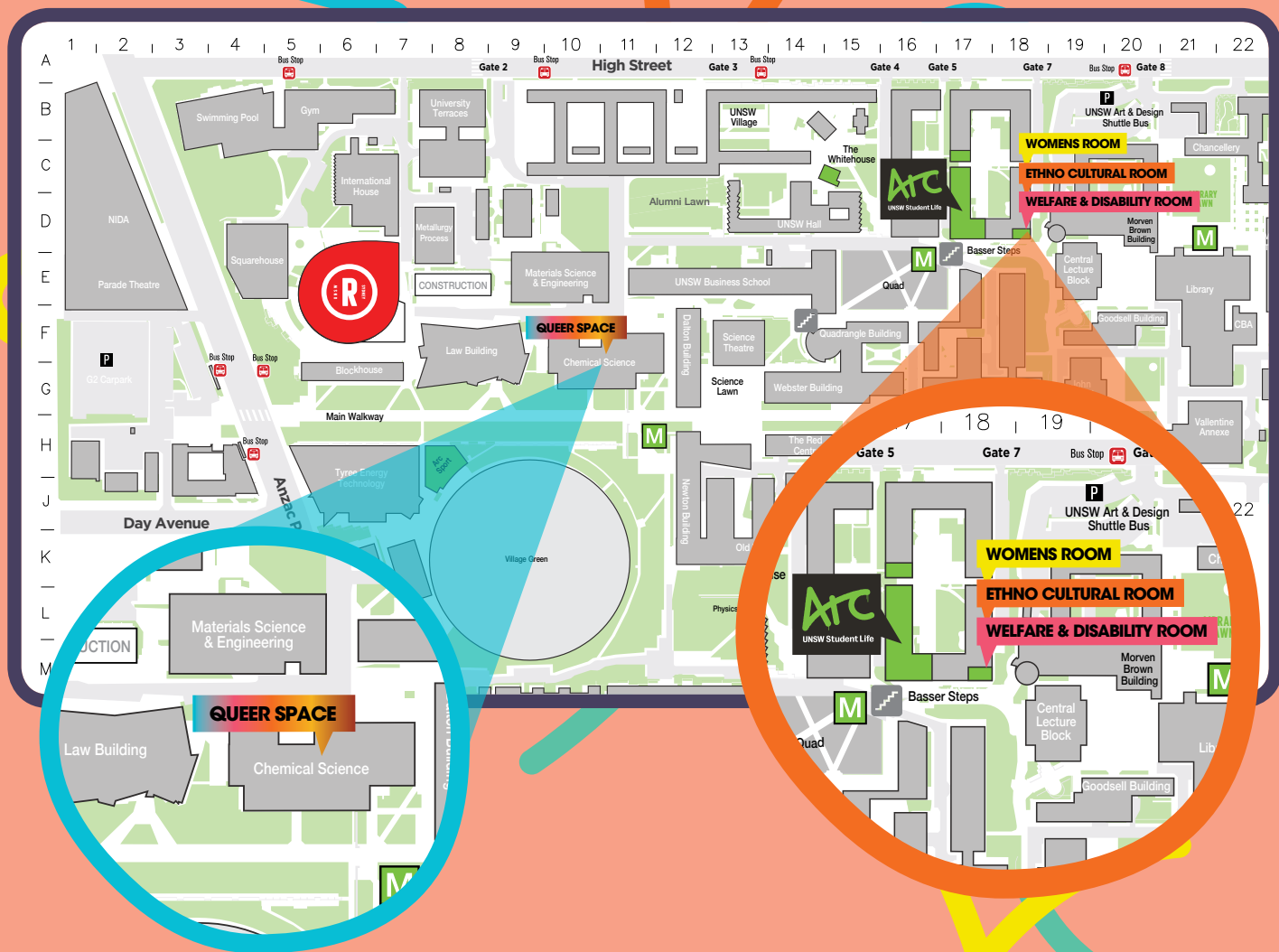
SRC

You're Welcome.

Women's Room

Ethno Cultural Room

Welfare & Disability Room



EQUITY ROOMS

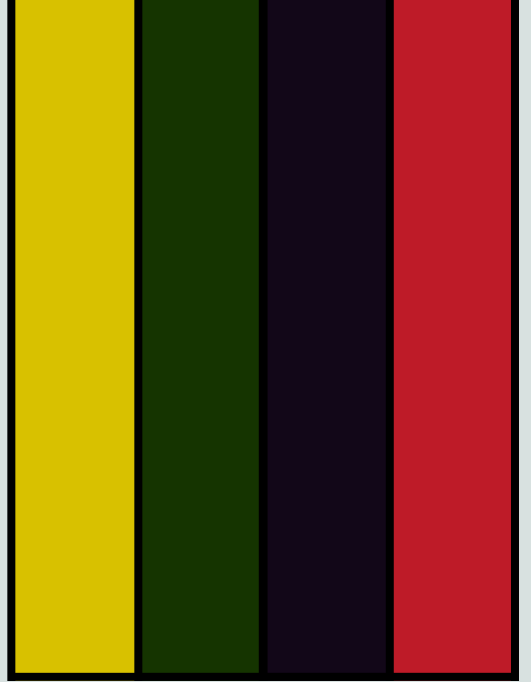
Need somewhere to chill out on campus, a quiet place to study, a place to connect with like-minded people? Maybe just a microwave or fridge for your lunch?

The SRC has you covered. We have equity rooms – safe spaces for you to hang out, nap, or get some readings done.

- **Welfare and Disability Room** A place for autonomous collectives, and also for any student to chill out in the meantime.
- **International & Ethno-cultural Room** A chill place for ethnically and culturally diverse students and international students.
- **Women's Room** The women's room is an autonomous space for women and women identifying students.
- **Queer Space** An autonomous place to relax and connect with other LGBTIA/Queer students. Meetings and other activities are run by the Queer Collective on a weekly basis.

Head to the website to find out where the rooms are located and how you can use them.

arc.unsw.edu.au/src



THARUNKA

