

Winner of the Los Angeles Times Book Prize

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M. T. Anderson

"O dear white children casual as birds,
Playing among the ruined languages,
So small beside their large confusing words,
So gay against the greater silences
Of dreadful things you did . . ."

—from "Anthem for St. Cecilia's Day,"
W. H. Auden

Part I

M O O N

your face
is not
an organ

We went to the moon to have fun, but the moon turned out to completely suck.

We went on a Friday, because there was shit-all to do at home. It was the beginning of spring break. Everything at home was boring. Link Arwaker was like, "I'm so null," and Marty was all, "I'm null too, unit," but I mean we were all pretty null, because for the last like hour we'd been playing with three uninsulated wires that were coming out of the wall. We were trying to ride shocks off them. So Marty told us that there was this fun place for lo-grav on the moon. Lo-grav can be kind of stupid, but this was supposed to be good. It was called the Ricochet Lounge. We thought we'd go for a few days with some of the girls and stay at a hotel there and go dancing.

We flew up and our feeds were burbling all sorts of things about where to stay and what to

eat. It sounded pretty fun, and at first there were lots of pictures of dancing and people with romper-gills and metal wings, and I was like, *This will be big, really big*, but then I guess I wasn't so skip when we were flying over the surface of the moon itself, because the moon was just like it always is, after your first few times there, when you get over being like, *Whoa, unit! The moon! The goddamn moon!* and instead there's just the rockiness, and the suckiness, and the craters all being full of old broken shit, like domes nobody's using anymore and wrappers and claws.

The thing I hate about space is that you can feel how old and empty it is. I don't know if the others felt like I felt, about space? But I think they did, because they all got louder. They all pointed more, and squeezed close to Link's window.

You need the noise of your friends, in space.

I feel real sorry for people who have to travel by themselves. In space, that must suck. When you're going places with other people, with this big group, everyone is leaning toward each other, and people are laughing and they're chatting, and things are great, and it's just like in a commercial for jeans, or something with nougat.

To make some noise, Link started to move his seat up and back to whack Marty's knees. I was like trying to sleep for the last few minutes of the

flight because there was nothing to see except broken things in space, and when we're going hard I get real sleepy real easy, and I didn't want to be null for the unettes on the moon, at the hotel, if any of them were youch.

I guess if I'm honest? Then I was hoping to meet someone on the moon. Maybe part of it was the loneliness of the craters, but I was feeling like it was maybe time to hook up with someone again, because it had been a couple months. At parties, I was starting to get real lonely, even when there were other people around me, and it's worse when you leave. Then there's that silence when you're driving home alone in the upcar and there's nothing but the feed telling you, *This is the music you heard. This is the music you missed. This is what is new. Listen.* And it would be good to have someone to download with. It would be good to have someone in the upcar with you, flying home with the lights underneath you, and the green faces of mothers that you can see halfway through the windows of dropping vans.

As we flew across the surface of the moon, I couldn't sleep. Link was playing with the seat like an asshole. He was moving it forward and backward. Marty had dropped his bird, these fake birds that were the big spit and lots of people had them, and Marty's bird was floating off, because

there was hardly any gravity, and whenever he leaned out to get his bird, Link would slam his seat back like meg hard and it would go bam on Marty's face, and they would start laughing. Marty would be all, "Unit! Just wait one—" and Link would be, "Go for it. Try! Try it!" and Marty would be like, "Unit! You are so—!" And then they would be all big laughing and I felt like a complete bonesprocket for trying to sleep when there was fun. I kept hoping the waitress lady would say something and make them shut up for a minute, but as soon as we got out of Earth's gravitational zone she had gone all gaga over the duty-free.

I didn't want to be sleepy and like all stupid, but I had been drinking pretty hard the night before and had been in mal and I was feeling kind of like shit. So it was not a good way to start this whole trip to the moon, with the seat thumping on Marty's face, and him going, "Unit! I'm trying to get my bird!"

Link was saying, "Go for it."

Marty went, "Linkwhacker! Shit! You're like doing all this meg damage to my knees and my face!"

"Kiss the chair. Pucker up."

They both started laughing again. "Okay," said Marty. "Okay, just tell me which of my frickin' organs you're going to smash this time."

"Keep your tray in the upright position."

"Like what organ? Just tell me."

"Those aren't organs."

"What do you mean?"

"Your face is not an organ."

"My face is too an organ. It's alive."

"Omigod, is there enough oxygen?" said our friend Calista. "Because are you having some kind of neuron death?"

"I'm trying to sleep," Loga complained. She yawned. "I'm flat-lining. Meg."

Then there was this *wham* and Marty was all, "Oh, shit," holding on to his face, and I sat up and was like completely there was no hope of sleeping with these morons doing rumpus on my armrest.

The waitress came by and Link stopped and smiled at her and she was like, *What a nice young man*. That was because he purchased like a slop-bucket of cologne from the duty-free.

impact

So I was tired and pissy from the get-go.

When we got off the ship, our feeds were going fugue with all the banners. The hotels were jumping on each other, and there was bumff from like the casinos and mud slides and the gift shops and places where you could rent extra arms. I was trying to talk to Link, but I couldn't because I was getting bannered so hard, and I kept blinking and trying to walk forward with my carry-on. I can't hardly remember any of it. I just remember that everything in the banners looked goldy and sparkling, but as we walked down to the luggage, all the air vents were streaked with black.

The whole time was like that. The moon went on and on. It was me and Marty and Link and Calista and Loga and Quendy. The three girls had one room at the hotel, and the three of

us boys had another room. There were a lot of people there for the break, and kids were all leaping up and down the halls and making their voices echo. It was a pretty crummy hotel, and there weren't enough sheets, and there was hardly any gravity, and no one had a fake ID so they put a lock on the minibar. I was like, "This is a crummy hotel," but Marty was all, "Unit, this is where I stayed last time. It's like meg cheap, and all the staff are made from a crystalline substance."

Our feeds were clear again from all the moon banners, so for a long time we all watched the football game while the girls, they did something else on the feed. They were chatting each other and we couldn't hear them, but they kept laughing and touching each other's faces. I wanted to go to sleep, but every time I tried, *bam!* Link and Marty would suddenly go all fission on me, saying, "Titus! Did you fuckin' see that? Did you see Hemmacher?" I tried to tell myself that being here was not re: sleeping but re: being with your friends and doing great stuff. I tried to concentrate on all the stimulus, and the fun, all of it.

There was not always too good fun, though. We ordered some fancy nutrient IVs from room service but they gave us all headaches, and we went out to this place that Marty said served the

best electrolyte chunkies but it had closed a year before. It was dinnertime, so we had dinner at a J. P. Barnigan's Family Extravaganza, which was pretty good, and just like the one at home. We got some potato skins for appetizers. It was at least good to get out of the hotel, because most of the rest of the city had pretty good artificial gravity, so if you dropped things, at least they fuckin' fell. It was almost like normal, which is how I like it.

Then we went back to the hotel. There were parties there, but it was mostly college kids. Usually we can get in, because me and Link and Marty and Calista, we can turn on the charm. Calista is blond and she can do this sorority-girl ice-princess thing, which she does with her voice and her shoulder blades, which makes people think she's older than she is and really important. Link is tall and butt-ugly and really rich, that kind of old rich that's like radiation, so that it's always going *deet deet deet deet* in invisible waves and people are suddenly like, "Unit! Hey! Unit!" and they want to be guys with him. Marty, his thing is that he's good at like anything, any game, and I just stand there silent and act cool, and we're this trio, the three of us guys, being like, total guys, which usually makes people let us in and give us beer.

That didn't work this time. We tried to get in

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and we were standing in the doorway and they were all, "Who the hell are you?"

We looked at ourselves. We all looked kind of bad. We looked tired and sleepy, and even though we're all pretty good-looking, except Link, we were all pale and our hair was greasy. We had the lesions that people were getting, and ours right then were kind of red and wet-looking. Link had a lesion on his jaw, and I had lesions on my arm and on my side. Quendy had a lesion on her forehead. In the lights of the hallway you could see them real good. There are different kinds of lesions, I mean, there are lesions and lesions, but somehow our lesions, in this case, seemed like kid stuff.

Later after some showers we went to the Ricochet Lounge. It was very lo-grav/no-grav, and it was all about whamming one person into another in big stuffed suits. The place had been hip, like, a year and a half ago. The slogan was "Slam the Ones You Love!" Now the place just looked old and sad. The walls were all marked up from people hitting them.

Even with his impact helmet on, Link stood out. He's much taller than anyone else, because he's part of a secret patriotic experiment. In the low gravity, his arms seemed like they were everywhere. He swung them around and spun. I was being a little careful when I ran into other

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people, because of the arm lesion. It had broke open and it was oozing. Still, it was pretty fun at first, launching ourselves off the walls and going like vvvvvvvvvvvv and hitting other people and wrestling while floating to the floor.

I was watching Loga real close. She and I had gone out about six months before, until we had this big argument. Then it was this big thing. She was like, *I never want to see you again*, and I was like, *Fine. Okay? Fine. Then get some special goggles*. But now we were friends, which was good. I think it's always really limp, when guys can't talk to girls they went out with. Plus, I was thinking that maybe Loga and I could hook up again, if we didn't find anyone else, like on the moon or whatev.

I didn't have a thing for Calista or Quendy or even completely a thing (anymore) for Loga. But I was watching Link slamming into them, and when he slammed, it said that he and the girls all knew what each other's bodies would be like, and that was part of the game.

I was unhappy because Loga and I had been a diad, and now when I ran into her at high speeds it wasn't anything like when Link ran into her at high speeds. I thought she and I should have a little secret way of collision. But usually we sailed right past each other.

Marty, who can do anything good, he was off

in a corner doing these gymnastics in midair. He had a ball and he was somehow kicking it in a circle so it came back to his foot. Link said, "Over here," and Marty popped the ball to him, and he kicked it to me.

For a while we played a game with the ball, and we were twirling all over the place, and we were like, what it's called when you skim really close over the surface of something, we were that to the floor, with our arms out, but of course Marty started winning all the time, and Link, who doesn't like to lose, was like, "This is null. This sucks."

"Pass," said Marty. "What's fuckin' doing?"

"That this place sucks," said Link.

Marty said, "Give it a chance, unit."

But Link was like, "No. Play by yourself. Play with yourself," and suddenly everything seemed really stupid.

And then I saw someone watching. I wasn't glad. I looked again.

She was the most beautiful girl, like, ever.

She was watching our stupidity.

There was a valve that led into the food bar. She was in the valve. She had her crash helmet under her arm. She had this short blond hair. Her face, it was like, I don't know, it was beautiful. It just, it wasn't the way—I guess it wasn't just the way it looked like, but also how she was standing. With her arm. I just stared at her. I was

getting some meg feed on the food bar and the pot stickers were really cheap.

I stood there wondering what it was that made her so beautiful. She was looking at us like we were shit.

Her spine. Maybe it was her spine. Maybe it wasn't her face. Her spine was, I didn't know the word. Her spine was like . . . ?

The feed suggested "supple."

o o o

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o o o

... ONLY ON SPORTS-VOX—TAKE A MAN, TAKE A GAS SLED, TAKE A CHLORINE STORM ON JUPITER—AND BOYS, IT'S TIME TO SPIT INTO THE WIND WITH ALEX NEETHAM, THE HARDEST, HIPPEST, HYPEST . . .

o o o

... month's summer styles, and the word on the street is "squeaky." . . .

o o o

... their hit single "Bad Me, Bad You":
"I like you so bad
And you like me so bad.
We are so bad

*It would be bad
If we did not get together, baby,
Bad baby,
Bad, bad baby,
Meg bad." . . .*

◦ ◦ ◦

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◦ ◦ ◦

juice

I followed her when I could.

She was sitting in the snack bar now, with her back to the valve. She was all clipped into the seat so she wouldn't float away if she jerked. I bought a snack. It was chocolate mousse in a tube. I hung on to the counter with one hand.

I watched her through my underarm. She was sitting there, with her slamsuit off now and in a bundle. Her helmet was on a hook next to her. I took a slug of tube mousse. I looked back over at her.

She was wearing a dress of gray wool. It wasn't plastic, and the light didn't reflect off it. Wool. Gray wool. Black stockings.

Her shoulders were like, all bent in, as if she didn't want anyone to be looking at her. She was just sitting, clipped in.

The others came through the valve behind me. I kept my head low. I didn't want them to

be like, *Hey, unit, hey, hey, Titus, what's doin?* and then she'd look at me. She would be disturbed. Luckily, they came in and immediately Link and Marty started doing these gymnastics, and they got in trouble, so I could stay watching her without them being a mob on me. This guy, he was from the club, he was yelling at them because they kept bouncing in the snack bar, which was off-bounds for still bouncing.

Behind the girl in gray was a big window and you could see we were in a bubble way high up over the moon. Down on the ground, tourists were riding big proteins across the craters. All the stars were out.

The guy was still yelling at the others over by the valve. He was all, *da da da be removed from the premises, da da da, express instructions, da da.*

I lowered my head, and turned it toward the girl in gray.

When she thought no one was looking, she opened her mouth. Something trembled there. Juice. She had filled her mouth with juice.

Da da da, liability, da da da, think you're doing.

I shifted. I watched the juice. For her own amusement, she was letting it go, gentle and sexy.

She just opened her mouth and pushed it out with her tongue. The juice came out of her lips as if it was being extracted real careful by a rock-star dentist who she loved. Her eyes were barely

open, and it came out in lo-grav/no-grav as a beautiful purple wobble.

It hung in front of her, her juice. It stayed inches from her face. Her tongue was close behind it, perched in the air like a pink slug gargoyle.

With her eyes almost shut, she watched traces on the drink's round surface swirl.

the nose grid

Link whispered at my side, "This so big sucks."

"This place doesn't suck," said Marty. "It's good."

"Maybe," said Calista, "if there were certain people who didn't go jumping on people's heads near the snack bar, if there weren't those people, then maybe we wouldn't all be standing here having a big shame banquet."

Marty was getting angry that everyone was like turding on his recommendation, and I just wanted them all to shut up somehow, I mean nicely, because suddenly I realized that we didn't really sound too smart. If someone overheard us, like that girl, they might think we were dumb.

I was playing with the magnets on my boots and trying not to look at her. I didn't want her to feel my eyes before I made my move. I was careful. Quendy and Loga went off to the bathroom because hairstyles had changed.

Marty drifted around and made slit-eyes at Link. Link and I were chatting about the girl, like I was going, *She is meg youch*, and he was going, *What the hell's she wearing?*, and I was going, *Wool. It's wool. Like from an animal*, and then Calista did her own chat to us, which was, *If you want to hear about an animal, what about two guys staring with their mouths wide open so they look completely Cro-Magnon?*

That shut us up, and we stared out the window. Wrappers were turning through space like birds.

Quendy came back from the bathroom and said, "Omigod! Like big thanks to everyone for not telling me that my lesion is like meg completely spreading."

"Hon," said Calista, "it's not spreading."

"Omigod! It is going to be like larger than my whole head! I am going to need a hat just to have all this lesion. It will like go onto the brim."

"Exercise the breath," said Link. "Nobody cares about a stupid lesion."

"How can you not?" said Quendy. "It's huge, and it's right on my forehead. It's like *bonnnng!*" She trembled her hands around the lesion like it was a kind of lesion gong.

Loga went, "No one will notice."

"If they don't know you," Marty said, "they're not going to know what you normally look like."

"Oh, so they think that usually my like forehead is like weeping?"

"Ask her," said Link. He pointed to the girl in gray.

He said, "Miss, I wonder if you would, could you look at this girl and tell me if you notice anything?"

The girl turned around and looked at Quendy. She said, "The lesion isn't bad."

Quendy's hands were out in a *please*. "You saw it! See? Like, how far is the air lock?"

"Hon," said Calista. "Listen to the girl."

The girl said, "I've been thinking, because of my neck."

The girl's lesion was beautiful. It was like a necklace. A red choker.

"The face," said the girl, "is a grid. The two big imaginary lines are one down the center of the face and one just across the top of the cheeks. This is my theory, anyway. The nose is where those lines intersect. The more a lesion interferes with those lines, the more noticeable it is. See, the hardest lesion to carry off is one on the nose itself. In your case, you have this lesion which is entirely on the edge of this one quadrant. That's not going to matter. It's not on a line." She unclipped herself and reached up with both her hands and touched her thumbs together, and made football goalposts around Quendy's face. "Framing. See?"

Your lesion, it's on the *edge* of your face, so it *frames* your face. It draws attention to your face. The good grid. See, you have this great grid. I'm probably saying way too much."

We were all kind of stunned.

"Yeah," said Calista, sounding confused. "She's right. It just frames your face."

The girl in gray touched her own lesion with a napkin. She said, "I want mine to go all the way around. I want it to be like a necklace, but right now, it's just a torque."

We were all just kind of staring at her like she was an alien. She smiled. We kept staring at her.

"There are times you just want to sink through the floor," she said, "but then you realize there's no air out there."

"Hey," said Marty. "I got a lesion on my foot. You want to see it?"

She smiled sweetly. "No, not really," she said.

Link pointed at his face and was like, "Hey, what about my lesion? Look at this puppy. It bleeds sometimes. You like this?"

She smirked. "Oh, mmm-hm," she said. "You put the 'supper' back in 'suppuration.'"

Link thought that was hilarious. Of course, he didn't have any idea what the hell she was talking about either, but he started laughing while the rest of us were still looking up "suppuration" on the feed English-to-English wordbook.

She was now completely youch on all of our meters, except with the girls, who I could tell had started to chat each other like some ants after someone's buried a missionary alive in the middle of their hill. On the one hand, I thought she was the most amazing person I had ever seen in my life, even if she was weird as shit. On the other hand, I was pretty disappointed she was skeezing this sexy talk with Link Arwaker, who women for some reason always go for, in spite of the fact that he's a meg asshole to them, for example a slurpy question about, "Oh, what about my lesion? Let's talk more about *me* and *my* open sores."

Marty was trying to make up lost ground by saying, "Maybe you could change the bandages on my foot," but that was clearly just disgusting to everyone. We were all like, "Unit, no one wants to see your damn foot," and, "Jesus, Marty unit, stow the mess-hole."

Link was asking her, "Who are you? Where do you come from?"

And then she looked at me. Just at me, and I knew she was wondering what I thought about the guys and seductiveness and skeeze and all. She was waiting for me to say something, to see if I was going to skeeze like Marty and Link. I wondered whether she wanted me to skeeze. She seemed really smart from what she said, and she

was pretty, and I was still thinking about that globe of juice floating in front of her face. I was still thinking about the beauty of how that juice had been born delicately from her lips, how it had been born whole, and how her tongue stood there afterward to see the juice make its trembling progress into the world.

But I had nothing to say.

She and the girls spent the rest of the hour fixing Quendy's hair to like showcase the lesion. Usually, Quendy is just like a kind of broken, little economy model of Calista, and she knows that, and feels real bad about it. But when this girl helped her, it wasn't like that. Quendy was the center of everyone for a long time.

That was why I kept looking at the girl in gray, and started to want, more than anything else that night, to be with her.

o o o

... based on the true story of a clone fighting to save her own liver from the cruel and ruthless original who's farming her for organs.

"Nature . . . vs. Nurture." A Primus prime-time feedcast event.

Image of a girl weeping on a courtroom floor. "I am not Girl Number Two! Please, Judge Spandex! I'm also Number One! I'm not a product, but a person!"

Image of a girl holding a blaster to a twin's temple. "Remember, bitch. You can't spell 'danger' without DNA."

Blam.

o o o

... the cola with the refreshing taste of citrus and butter . . .

o o o

... an adventure in slouching . . .

o o o

Calculon. New solutions for . . .

o o o

... It's dance. It's dance, dance, dance. That's fun. Fun's fun, and fun's what you can have. There's nothing to stop you from fun. Do you see the bodies? Can you smell the beat? Then you'll come and roar with us. Come and throw your boots at superstars. Come thrash in the cool until your head opens up, and you see the veins of the people you love bright as branches against the sky, and burnt in your brain will be the fun, all of the fun, and the lights, and the Doppler fade of screaming you heard at the Rumble Spot. The Rumble Spot.

The Rumble Spot: an ocean of chaos in the Sea of Tranquillity.

o o o

Images of Coke falling in rivulets down chiseled mountainsides; children being held toward the sun; blades slicing grass; a hand, a hand extended toward the lemonade like God's at Creation; boys in Gap tees shot from a rocket; more lining up

with tin helmets; Nike grav-gear plunging into Montana; a choir of Jamaican girls dressed in pinafores and strap-on solar cells; dry cleaners ironing the cheek prostheses of the rich; friends clutching at birds made of alloys; law partners jumping fences; snow; altitude; tears; hugs; night.

o o o

the moon is in the house of boring

She was on the moon all alone. Here it was, spring break, and she was on the moon, where there was all this meg action, and she was there without friends. She said she just walked through the crowds and watched, and she saw all these great things that way. She said she was there to observe.

There were crowds in the domes at night, spraying Gatorade from hoses, and all these college guys without shirts lifting their arms. There was a beetle that walked through the lanes and gave out prizes, which seemed really good, but she said that really, the prizes, they were kind of shitty when you looked at them close-up, because sometimes parts weren't included. She saw pools filled with foam.

Her name was Violet.

We asked her to come with us. We wanted to go to sleep by then, but we were on the moon,

even if it sucked, and it was spring break, you know, with the action, so there was no way we were admitting we wanted to go to sleep. We told her we were thinking about going to some club called the Rumble Spot that we'd heard about on the feed.

"I don't know," she said.

But I was like, "You got to go. You can go and, you know, observe."

Marty said, "It will be a, a, you know, fuckin', it will . . ." He kind of wiggled his hand.

"Since you put it that way," she said, kind of fresh. Calista laughed. Suddenly I knew Calista was either going to love her or hate her.

After we were walking for a few minutes, it was, on the scale, maybe closer to hate, because Marty and Link and I were all walking around Violet and asking her all these questions, and she was asking us stuff, and we were telling her, and I don't think the other girls really were too skip about walking behind us.

Link said he wanted to get cranked before we went, and he said was there any place where we could drink without IDs? Marty said he knew of this one place, which was called Sombrero Dot, and he went there before with his cousin. He said it wasn't too out-of-the-way.

We got there and it had been torn down. They had built a pretty nice stucco mall there, so Loga

and Quendy said we should go in and buy some cool stuff to go out in. That seemed good to us. I wanted to buy some things but I didn't know what they were. After we walked around for a while, everything seemed kind of sad and boring so we couldn't tell anymore what we wanted. Our feeds tried to help, and as we were walking around we were getting all the prices of things, but really the only thing that I wanted to get was a pair of infrared knee bands, and I could get better ones off the feed, and have them sent to my house, than in the stupid physical moon stores. Quendy bought some shoes, but the minute she walked out of the store she didn't like them anymore. Marty couldn't think of anything he wanted, so he ordered this really null shirt. He said it was so null it was like ordering nothing.

Now it was even later and we wanted to go to the club, but we hadn't got drunk yet, so Link said maybe we could take a cab to the hotel and break into the minibar.

As we were driving through the tube streets, there was all of this commotion because of the protests about the moon. There were all these kids, what my dad calls Eurotrash, and they were standing in the middle of the square and broadcasting to everyone all these slogans, and it was hard not to receive, because they were so angry, but the cab drove right by them, and they

didn't stop us. They were protesting all these things, some of them even were protesting the feed. They were like shouting, "Chip in my head? I'm better off dead! Chip in my head? I'm better off dead!" Loga rolled her eyes and was like, "Omigod."

We got back to the hotel. Kids were running down the halls with their fake birds. The fake birds were still in style. It was stupid, because the birds didn't even fly or sing or anything.

We went to the girls' bedroom and started to assault the minibar. I wanted to break it open quickly, because Violet was looking like she wasn't having fun. She was sitting all stiff on the bed.

"Just a sec," I said.

She nodded, but it was kind of polite.

Calista was whispering to Link, "What's her problem?"

We tried the minibar first with a comb, then with kicking. We threw it against the wall, which wasn't as hard to do with almost no gravity.

"You broke off a . . . a thing," said Marty. "You broke off a fuckin' thing."

"A caster," I said.

"Caster," said Link, pointing at my nose. "Good one."

You know your break sucks when the most

brag part of the night is you coming up with the word "caster."

Violet was just sitting on the bed, playing with her thumb. Her shoulders were droopy and her feet were turned in. In fact, all the girls looked kind of on suspend. Calista and Loga were staring into space, watching something on the feed.

"Fuck," said Link, kicking the minibar. "I want to get weasel-faced."

"There's no way you're getting weasel-faced," I said. "Let's just go."

Marty was like, "We could malfunction."

"Oh, god," said Loga and Quendy, rolling their eyes.

Violet looked real uncomfortable now. It was pretty obvious she really didn't want to be with us.

Link looked around at the girls' faces. "What's the problem?" he said.

"Drop it, Link," I said. "We're not going in mal."

"I heard about this great site called Lobe-reamer. Eighty-five bucks, one click, and we'll be completely raked for an hour and a half. We won't know which way's up. That's big, big scrambled, for cheap."

"Unit!" said Marty. "We're fuckin' there!"

Link said, "Okay. Let's . . ."

"Drop it, units," I said. "No one wants to be fuguing."

"Am I no one?" said Link.

Calista was like, "Are you asking in terms of sex appeal?"

"Ow!" Marty said.

Link said, "Shut up, Marty."

Calista chatted all of us guys, *Don't like push this. Especially because the girl is meg un-into it.*

Link was like, *Lobe-reamer. Lobe-reamer! Do those words mean nothing to you?*

Brake, Link. Brake and upgrade.

There was no way he was getting lobotomized or weasel-faced, so we just went over to the Rumble Spot unslammed. It was their Youth in Action night, so we could get in.

It was meg big big loud. There was everything there. There was about a million people it seemed, and lights, and the beat was rocking the moon. There was a band hung by their arms and their legs from the ceiling, and there was girders and floating units going up and down, and these meg youch latex ripplechicks dancing on the bar, and there were all these frat guys that were wearing these, unit, they were fuckin' brag, they were wearing these tachyon shorts so you couldn't barely look at them, which were \$789.99 according to the feed, and they were on sale for

like \$699 at the Zone, and could be shipped to the hotel for an additional \$78.95, and that was just one great thing that people were wearing. When I looked around, I wanted so much, that all of the prices were coming into my brain, and it was *bam bam bam*, like fugue-joy, and Loga and Quendy and Calista were already out on the dance floor, and my feed was like going fried, going things about the dance and pictures they were feedflinging across the dance floor of people on fire doing the moves.

Violet was screaming to me. I couldn't hear a thing. She was like, "*Da da da? Da da!*"

I was like, "What?"

She chatted me, *This is a scene.*

I was like, *Don't you dance?*

Not really. Are these all college kids?

I bet most of them. Look at the guy in the, you know, that thing? The neck bat?

Bow tie.

Bow tie.

He was maybe a hundred or so, dancing with the ripplechicks, a man in a dirty old tweed jacket, and he had this long white hair that looked kind of yellow, and his eyes were wide, like he was in mal, but I'm not sure he was in mal. He kept on sticking his thumbs up in the air.

And then they turned off the artificial gravity and we all went bounding accidentally, and it was

like people cruising past each other with their necks kinked, and Violet grabbed on to my arm, and now I was thinking that even though she looked really uncomfortable, and like she was watching some kind of bugs in an experiment, it wasn't so bad being a bug as long as she grabbed on to my arm, so I said, *Don't worry. We'll drift down.*

Sorry, she chatted.

No wrong, I said.

Really. I didn't mean to grab you.

No wrong.

I put my hand over her hand on my arm, and then she smiled and took her hand out from under my hand, and by that time we'd come down again, and were bending our knees.

The guy with the tweed jacket had on a jetbelt, and he was flying around near the ceiling.

You don't look like you're having fun, I chatted to her.

I will.

When?

I'm not used to this.

What do you do for fun?

When?

Normally.

I haven't been on the moon before.

I mean, anywhere. What do you do?

The man with the bow tie was standing near

us. He was trying to talk to Link by cranking Link's head around and shouting into his ear. Link was backing away.

Are you having a good time? she asked.

The moon really isn't working out, I said.

Next time, maybe you should try Mars.

Yeah, I've been to Mars, I said. It was dumb.

Suddenly, she laughed. *Are you serious?*

Yeah, I'm serious.

Omigod, she said. Mars is a whole planet.

And it's dumb!

She was like, *Dumb?*

She was starting to piss me off.

I said, *Yes, dumb.*

The whole world?

Dumb.

The whole world.

Dumb.

Oh, this is golden.

The Red Planet was a piece of shit.

I don't believe you could—but I couldn't receive any more of her chat because our feeds were spiking, and the music was getting louder, with the band singing "I'll Sex You In," and I saw her folding her arms like she didn't like me, and I didn't like her, and everyone was pulsing, even the old guy, and everyone was hopping, and they were scatterfeeding pictures across the floor: tribal dances, stuff with gourds, salsa, houses

under breaking dams, women grinning, women oiling men with their fingertips, women taking out their teeth, girls' stomachs, boys' calves, rockets from old "movies" flaring, bikini tops, fingers creeping into nostrils, silos, suns—and the old man was standing by our side, and trying to yell, but we couldn't hear him, so he leaned closer, and said to us, to Marty and Violet and now Link and me, he said, yelled, more like, he yelled: "We enter a time of calamity!"

We stared.

"We enter a time of calamity!"

We tried to back up, all of us except Violet, who was confused, and Link was saying, "This unit, he's like completely fuguing. He has this—"

"We enter a time of calamity! We enter a time of calamity!"

The old man reached out and, with a metal handle, touched me on the neck.

Suddenly, I could feel myself broadcasting. I was broadcasting across the scatterfeed, going, helplessly, *We enter a time of calamity! We enter a time of calamity!* I couldn't stop.

And he had touched Violet now, and Link, and Marty, and from all of them, it was coming, *We enter a time of calamity! We enter a time of calamity!*

And now I could feel that it was coming from other places, too, other people he had touched,

and Marty was trying to say that he'd never had this before, it was kind of cool, but he couldn't because his signal was jammed just with that, over and over again, all of us in a chorus, going, *We enter a time of calamity! We enter a time of calamity!* and people were turning toward us. People were looking. We were standing in a line and the old guy was standing in front of us. People were moving away. The police were coming. I could see them. I couldn't really move much.

I felt a kind of kicking in my face and I discovered it was my mouth, which was saying the time of calamity thing, but at the top of my lungs. We were shouting, we were broadcasting, and then over us all, as the cops came through the crowd, the guy started this crazy calling, both out loud and on the feed, this crazy calling over it all, over our chorus, and it went:

"We enter a time of calamity. Blood on the tarmac. Fingers in the juicer. Towers of air frozen in the lunar wastes. Models dead on the runways, with their legs facing backward. Children with smiles that can't be undone. Chicken shall rot in the aisles. See the pillars fall."

While we said, again and again, "We enter a time of calamity. We enter a time of calamity," and

others in the room said it, too, and Violet looked as scared as me, and I tried to take her hand, and she tried to take mine, and the police were by our side, hitting the man over the head again and again with stunners and sticks, and he fell on one knee, and finally my fingers found her wrist, Violet's. It felt so soft, like something I had never felt before. It felt like the neck of a swan in the wind.

And then the police were at our sides, whispering to us, "We're going to have to shut you off now. We're going to have to shut you off."

And then they touched us, and bodies fell, and there was nothing else.