

Sleeping on a Vinyl Record

by Matt Schnarr

Third Place Winner, Fiction

They say that the souls of suicides won't rest until you've burned their place of death.

Have you heard about the chapel on Sunset Boulevard?

I guess chapel is the wrong word. It's more like a bus stop, a waiting place. There were thousands of them, millions even, and millions of people were proud to be members. They'd been around for awhile, waiting there every Tuesday night at eight o'clock for the resurrection of Tony Danza.

It was burned to the ground. He didn't come back, he didn't save them, he didn't even piss on the fire.

Everyone knows who did it, they just won't say. I heard a columnist wrote a piece about it, but they fired him before he even emailed it to the editor. A cartoonist drew a crowd surrounding a fire, wearing masks of their lord and savior: Tom Cruise.

Obviously a Cruisian disciple would never wear a mask depicting his messiah; that would break one of their commandments; as would any drawing, cartoon, or edited photo. Typically the congregation of that particular religion is peaceful, they smile a lot, and they love to shout. Still, the image was haunting.

The cartoon wasn't actually published; every newspaper in America feared the result of publishing Tom Cruise's likeness in its delicate pages. The cartoonist placed it on his own website in a moment of soap-box standing; stand tall, brother.

The Cruisians stole him in the night and publically executed him in Times Square. I watched the video last night; I couldn't tell if it was one of their cameras, or just a horrified tourist's.

They're good people; most of us just don't understand them. I do. I have to. Most dismiss their teachings and literature. This is due to the fact that Tom Cruise never died, nor did he ever publically admit to writing, or saying anything that they've labeled as "the purple letters". Rumors have circulated saying that he replaced all of his organs with those of his congregation. He does this every four months before traveling to another city. He's stayed alive for years doing this; some say he started with his wife's.

I happen to know a few people in a few crowds, friends of friends and what not, and I have it on good information that he's frozen himself in storage, in Big Bear of all places. We'll never know though, because Big Bear has been taken over by those that worship the snow; it's a holy landmark. There will be no excavating until the next round of Crusades.

Truth be told, this works out very well for Cruisian Disciples; ignorance is bliss, as their good lord said.

The fire sparked many a dinner conversation at parties regarding the rivalry between the followers of Danza and the Cruisian disciples. When did it start? Was it **sexual? Can't they get along?**

After a few minutes I usually lean across the table to the nearest Marilyn Monroe priestess **and tell her that both sides believe in the same things, but they're too blind to notice.** A few people eavesdropping give me a quick look of horror before pretending that they heard nothing.

She'll lean across the table and subtly display her cleavage while she smiles; just lips no teeth. They always display their sexuality, but in such a way that lets them appear like a virgin, as if they had no idea; all of their actions are according to the teachings of their Goddess.

They always respond to my comment with the same question. "Well, what do you believe in?"

One night stands and latex condoms.

She laughs and leans back in her chair; **they act like they don't get it. As if.** One way or another they always end up going home with me, the proverbial communist. One thing I've discovered is that their morning faces are the hardest to forget.

I'm not really a communist, but I can understand how anyone could mistake me for one; I have to.

It's true though, what I've always said, they all believe the same thing. It's more than a pick up line, it's reality. All over the nation, temples with red check marks are across the street from temples with blue-lined white globes, both promising an infinite network of love and salvation in exchange for your soul and monthly tithes. **Even a blind man could see that it's the same concept they're worshiping.**

Speaking of blind men: I heard that on the day she died, Meryl Streep helped a blind man see.

They also say she was a virgin her entire life. I have it on good information that she had **four children, but I've also been labeled a heretic by at least ten religions.** They also say that towards the end, Charlton Heston favored her among all mortals, that he would have chosen her to conceive his only son, but the world was undeserving.

One day a virgin will give birth; they say that's never happened before. Charlton will send an angel with a contract, which will include what products the latest savior can endorse, and then **by midnight he'll appear in her bed. It won't be fast, and it won't be long; such is the process of divinity.**

Charlton Heston is not the only God; the religion of Hollywood includes all kinds of actors from the days of old. Temples line the freeways of Hollywood, dedicated to each and every one of them. **Some say that he's the father of the pantheon, but according to their mythology it was**

Paul Newman who opened up the gates to Mount, wherever. Heston, if any care to know, is the God of War. Hopkins is the God of the Sea, Streep the Goddess of Mercy, Neeson the God of wisdom, Kidman the Goddess of Tortured Souls, and John Wayne, the God of Hell and Judgment.

I heard that there was a time when Greece had a Pantheon of their own; before two thousand and twelve, long before that. I heard from another source altogether that Rome duplicated it, and called it their own.

That's funny.

After the religion of Hollywood swept the nation, England started its own mythology revolving around its own actors. It conflicted with the American variety, Hopkins, Neeson, they were included but completely different from their previous envisioning. Now Hopkins has opened the gates to the Castle of, what have you. Neeson is the God of War. Driver is the Goddess of Rainy Days, Bowie the God of Merry Making, Music, and Androgyny. And Judi Dench, the Goddess of Hell and Judgment.

Only a small handful of **Americans know that Neeson, Hopkins and a few others weren't American. It's dangerous for Americans to travel to Britain, or for Britons to travel to America. Every confrontation ends in a riot, which doesn't go against either side's set of morals.** In fact, any death on the battlefield is a sacrifice to Heston; or Neeson depending on their stance. Any believer killed for his God is personally escorted by angels to the Fields of, I never get it right.

I personally find their religions depressing and selfish. Movies are no longer enjoyed by **the masses, not even by the congregation. They're made, with large budgets and big time actors,** and then the film is taken to the giant golden statue of an unknown man in the center of **Hollywood. It's placed** at his feet and burned while the congregation hums the last song ever composed by John Williams.

I hear that one of his songs in particular inspired his fans to fear the ocean; it took two **notes. Looking out there now they'd have a reason to be.**

Surfers are extinct.

They gathered along the entire west-coast of North and South America for the highest surf of the millennium. Meteorologists and mathematicians calculated that if there was ever going to be a perfect surf it would be that morning: December Twelfth, Two Thousand and Twelve.

A miniature tsunami crushed them all against the shores of modern suburbia and villages, cities and wilderness.

Beaches were neglected everywhere. Maybe if they had bodies to throw in a coffin and **mourn over, it would've been different.** The bodies were pulled out with the tide and never recovered. **At this point I doubt there's anything left of them, not even a skeleton shouting out warnings.**

Due to the lack of people looking out over the horizon of infinite blue, every company handling volatile chemicals pointed its waste pipes over the sands of every shore available. I guess **no one cared; I live a few miles away from the sea and they still don't care.**

Infinite blue.

I see purple and sherbet green. I see rows upon rows of "WARNING: FLAMMABLE" signs along the coast line. Did you know it's illegal to light a match within a block of the shore? To start a car? If you manifest a single spark you'll start a fire. That's the theory anyway. Scientists from the Gore congregation took samples of the sea water and examined its molecules. **A mixture of tar, nicotine, sulfur... the list goes on, and it all combined into a new molecule; a new variety of death.**

They studied its effect on everything in their labs. Ice instantly melted, which explained the new beachfront property. It was highly flammable; hence the signs. Plants wilted to ash; animals decayed to dust. It spread through water like evolution, transforming every molecule into an exact duplicate. Picture a jar of quality H-two-O, count to two, and then picture it now containing a quaint mixture of plague, famine, and death.

No one goes to the beach anymore except for old people in Miami.

They go there to die.

This frustrates most of the people following the same way of life as me. **It's most definitely a suicide; it's their choice, and we're not allowed to cleanse the location with gasoline and fire. Even if it was murder, a candle couldn't be lit over the water.**

My way of life confuses people. I guess I can understand; we aren't waiting for anything; the resurrection of Cary Grant, or Jimmy Morrison. The Church of The King walks by in bell bottoms, heads up high, leaving me with a cold shoulder because **I don't believe that Elvis is ever coming back.**

The entire congregation of the Jonas Brothers Coven, male and female alike, live a life of chastity in hopes that at least one of the three will swoop down and gently take away their virginity.

I'm labeled a fool because I won't offer up my soul in exchange for an infinite network, including such perks as pixelated words; which I can send to my friends unless they're sinners. Because my Sundays don't include a trip to Costco, bettering my chances of going to Kirkland when I die, I'm worthless.

I'm a freak.

I burn death's fingerprints.

I purge suicide.

I purge the world of murder.

I belong to no one.

I worship nothing.

My soul is my own.

All of these are fact.

All of these are fiction.

I guess you could call my line of life a philosophy of sorts. It's about finding the meaning in life. It's about finding your purpose; understanding yourself; understanding others. No one really knows where it started. We know that it was a sentence on the street, spoken by a stranger, a friend, by family. It could've been said by you, could've been said by me.

While therapists urged their patients to discover religion to solve their problems, we fought against a tide of ball-and-chains, by sitting down and playing with matches. It sounds idiotic. It sounds like a child focusing sunlight on insects **with a magnifying glass, but it's more than that. If it weren't for the high population, the ever growing suburbia, then the forests would be wiped out by wild fires on a natural basis. But we have fire stations, large hoses with pressured water to stop the natural cycle of life.**

We are a natural force of inevitability. We burn dead leaves down to the core of the tree **so that life can thrive. We aren't asking people to ignore death; we're asking people to seek peace in their own lives, in the act of purging the souls of the dead. In dealing with death you get closer to completing your sense of self; in completing yourself you complete those around you.**

I am incomplete.

I don't know my purpose. I lived in the center of America for my entire life until my aunt hung herself. They found her in her country club; she put a noose around her neck while everyone else played golf outside on wilted grass. She left her eastern L.A. condo to me, two miles away from the beach. Every morning I take a walk. The first thing I see is purple and green. That ocean haunts me and I ignore it.

Have you ever heard that the things we fear are what we become? That ocean is death, **famine, plague; it's a mark of our own selfishness. Nowhere in this list of similes does the word "creation" appear. If I fear the ocean, will I become famine, plague, death? Destruction? All of these? None of these?**

They say that L.A. was known for its sunrises and sunsets at one point. They say the sunrises were peaches and cream; they were orange and strawberry sherbet. They were golden.

I only see golden sunrises when I see the sun rise behind blonde hair. Have you ever met **a Marilyn Monroe Priestess? I've met a little under a hundred, a minor fraction of their congregation, and already I understand their religion; I have to. I know how to respond to their so called "innocence," how to unlock their true natures between bed sheets. I know how to wake up next to them in the morning.**

I stare at her pale skin, her soft eyes, her platinum blonde hair; she sleeps peacefully with a smile delicately revealed across her lips. I wonder if we die alone.

They say that music is the only form of worship left for us to witness. I guess it depends on where you go. A cigarette will get you into the grimmest of venues, which is where yours truly

spends a great deal of his Friday nights. I don't waste my time with the stadium shows, bands playing music, claiming that it'll heal my soul, but for a price.

The musicians I enjoy are the ones that don't believe that they'll become gods after they've died. The only thing I respect that particular religion for: it's world-wide, it's a pantheon of gods that bring people together.

Most of the bands sacrifice themselves in a plane crash after they've toured fifteen years and hit platinum; these are the qualifications of obtaining their deity.

I'm sure that made it difficult for the Beatles when this particular religion started making its rounds. Each member died at a separate time; the excuse was pegged down to the fact that each member was sacrificed for the world.

John was assassinated for his words of peaceful rebellion.

George died of Lung Cancer so that those of the Nicotine Faith could smoke in peace for years to come.

Ringo took a bullet for the last Queen of England.

Paul died of old age in the Buckingham Palace, proving that celebrities can die naturally.

I hear, and when it comes to good information this is the highest caliber, that on his death bed he observed, through his bedside window, his worshipers gathered on the greenest lawn in all of England and he whispered: Fools, all of you.

I like that.

Fools, worshipers, worshipers, fools. You know I read that they're synonyms. That explains my sweet tooth for the smaller venues: bands worshiping their emotions, expressing their faults, accepting their mortality; watching fools perform on a stage beats being in a crowd of fools watching gods.

Offering fire to someone in the audience for his cigarette gets your name on the list; which is in the hands of a very large doorman. Offering a cigarette to an audience member outside gets your name at the top. Offering the doorman a cigarette gets you through the doors, and into the **show without a single question. I guess that's why I started.** For two years I was smoke free; I never got into one show. Then one day I saw a stranger get through the door by offering a cigarette to a regular.

By that time you either had to know a member of the Nicotine Faith, or be one, to get cigarettes. Somehow or other I seduced a Marilyn Monroe priestess; my first time. She had a cigarette after she was finished with me, and when she snuck off she left the rest of her carton; five cigarettes. That was enough for me to get into two shows; I met enough people in one to develop a connection to the Nicotine Faith.

I have at least forty on my phone alone.

This morning the ocean seems particularly toxic. You can smell it in the air; fresh paint, gasoline, and bleach mixed into the aroma of aromas, a noxious cocktail of chemical deaths.

Death. So much death; you read it in the newspapers, hear it in songs, witness a crime on the street that no one attempts to stop simply because it's against his religion to intervene.

They say that one day the world will be held responsible for its death. That means that every death is on the shoulders of the world, collectively. Everyone on this purple planet is responsible for every life taken; this includes their own.

That's suicide.

I think of fire, rebirth. I think of the freedom of chaos. That ocean has nothing to do with creation, it's destruction distilled into gasoline, filling the holy grail to the brim with sin and melted flesh. At first glance you'd think that the shores were spread with glossy cement, but then you step out towards the sea and realize that it's glass. The sands of beaches were melted more than a century ago.

Once upon a time there were individual grains of sand, constantly caressed by something beautiful. And now the smooth grey surface has hardened as the hearts of man have become more jaded. I like lying here in the early mornings, before the sun comes up.

It's like taking a nap on a vinyl record.

It's the only place where no one can find me, where no one sees me. There are no assumptions, no guesses as to whether or not I follow the teachings of Gibson or Caviesel. I can shout out that the Cruisian war with the followers of Danza was genocide and not a misunderstanding. I can call all of you fascists, and pluck a guitar into a tune about machines killing you. I can remember songs and forget memories.

I don't accept what happened yesterday, and I don't know what will happen tomorrow. I know this glass shore. I know blond hair and pouting lips. I know asphalt sliding back beneath my shoes as the world turns at the push of my foot. I know heartbreak and abandon. I know condoms and the preceding visits to a porcelain shrine where I can flush away my sins.

I don't know you, and I'm not sure if I know me.

I don't know if it's the fumes, or the years of fighting this current of shackles and chains.

But I could use a cigarette.