

**“Now, Earth...** How could I tell you what has been lost, to summarize, in ways authentic to that gone-away place, that might allow you and the others to understand, to grind raw your nubuoles, as they say,” The Naut, recently reunited, strains to again articulate in the new way, but reflexively backslides into language. An old-fashioned tongue would’ve been nice, of course. But all nauts love anthro-tiques. Prescription eyeglasses. A film extra’s bald cap. Real gym shorts, actually worn. Bio-exo-limbs, in original packaging. But a still-soft remnant, a tongue that really rolls across the palette, that clicks against the back of teeth. There’s no substitute, no simulation. And then, if the others had ears to listen... nothing quite like it. Getting it over with, The Naut initiates the transmission of image, sound, taste, touch, smell, torpor and phantom itch that was required of any of *the returned*. For personal amusement, an additional, verbal commentary is released into the chamber of white light where the others had arranged this reception:

“You must understand that their past organized itself before me as we would see it, coming not from the opposite direction, but from the strange tangent we’ve come to find so clarifying as our vantage. For them, I’m afraid, the sequence that culminated in us, was simply a stumbling forward: of body twisted into body, in pleasure/pain/discovery; of big giving birth to little, little climbing atop littles, swarming into shapes resembling a grotesque of big’s grotesquerie; of constant eruptions, in fluids/solids/light. Their sense of collective history unfolding was not unlike what they said in private, to their priests, therapists, and lovers. Nothing more than improvised answers to leading questions, coherent enough to carry them through until the next crisis,” The Naut pauses to discreetly absorb a nearby zinfandel cloud.

Refreshed with zest, The Naut continues, “A true, isometric vista opened before me. Yes, there were the bodies bound up in fetters of carnality and conspiracy. They were decorated with their *things* and *places* with such specificity, one could, and you must forgive me, almost become involved in the comedy of their tragic tableaux. Some wore faces known to us still, from both the Soviet and expanded universes, from their creakily slow 24-hour news cycle, and so on. Others were simply ‘types.’ They all were arranged, equally close, it would seem to us, to an unresolved horizon of misty blue vanishment. That is, of course, where we are now. Their... our apotheosis. For them, that fixed-distance which had always figured in their compositions as a simple representation of what is beyond vision... beyond any representation... looks quite different altogether from the other side of the Earth-rise, eh?” The Naut, along with others who had found the gathering a bit too much, finds itself ‘outside’ the reception where a cool, dark void-stream pulses.

“I mean this in the kindest way, the whole vision was like an invitation to... look somewhere else. Not towards us, not at all. We know what we are. But back, behind. The twist that caused the kink, as it were. Not the cause of the causes, but the magic misdirection of transformation. The denial, the excess... that passed through them... to us... a lingering irritation, our inheritance, the itch.” With that, The Naut begins its vaporization, but not before a last glance at the presentation’s final slide:

[illegible]