

High School Short Story Third Place

Living In C

By Sean Carvin

Where the once northern south borders on the east of the west lies UdhiseInland. Surrounding it are endless dunes appearing as solid waves stretching past infinity, and above it are floating backwashes of nuclear holocaust that take the form of a mist of newfangled chemicals appearing in colors that defy your contemporary sense of vision. Acid rain and toxic hurricanes from now and then remind every survivor of their species' failures. A special kind of hatred takes the form of bricks to build a new society and to smash old monuments. The synthesis of uranium-235 and plutonium-239 came to the conclusion that the past was all too human.

The people of UdhiseInland sleep on the sand and steaming pavement of the remnants of a city disembodied from its spirit. Its ruins have become works of odium architecture ridiculing their people for the crimes of their former gods and masters. Every so often each of the few remaining buildings take their turn to fall apart. As each wall and pillar collapses, the once shelters scoliotically bend, break down and die. Nor dusk, nor dawn weasel through the toxic mist, for time is devoid of all its natural instruments to remind anyone of its existence; only aside from the increasing signs of age and expiration in the body.

The people were told to create an hourglass from two whisky bottles. A rotation has been decided for the people of whom each mass slumber will go sleepless and watch the hourglass. The last drop of sand falls in the lower bottle. The hourglassman looks around for anything that

resembles a blunt loud stick. He sees and grabs a baton not too far from him. With the baton in his right hand, he limps over with his good leg to a bucket half full of liquids with nauseating smells that meant nothing to the man's benumbed nostrils. He turns over and empties the bucket, though chunks of thick grey ooze are sticking to the bottom inside. He shakes and shakes, but learns to accept their place. He lifts the bucket and raises the baton before beating the bucket in a rhythmless percussive hurricane. His diaphragm pulls back and his throat compresses in order to conjure a scream that can be heard throughout the block. He drums and cries at a pace and tone that for others would snap their wrist bones and make knots of their vocal chords. For the people were told from above that whenever it was their turn they must continue to drum until all were awoken. After 20 minutes of slamming and shrieking the town had risen and the grey repugnant ooze had fallen out of the bucket. The hourglassman drops down to the sand, lying and taking deep slow breaths.

The people awake. Broken eyes open. Skin like paper that's crumbled and fragile. Cuts and scabs they believed they deserved. Today is the day. They drag their naked feet along the sand. The mass journeys past the spectres of freedom, greed, hedonism, and spoils shaped like ruins. Rows and rows of these ruins they pass. Each one a reminder of different sickening attributes of themselves. Houses, stores, schools deprived of function, but clinging to memories. Above the colorless rubble stands one shining structure. A few hundred feet tall, but to UdhiseInland it reached the heavens. On a sign above the entrance a sensory overload of light spells out "*The House of Chance!*"

Once they enter they all don a series of identical robes. The varying complexions that wrap around their timid thin arms are hidden completely under the long thick robes of deep green monochromatica. They move across the hall with fallen heads and risen hoods for the exercise of worship, of guidance, of state, of taking command. The *aleatarchy's* God is living *In C*.

To them the anthropomorphic are cursed with a never-ending ignorance. Egotistical lies of understanding. All your triumphs, all your victories, all your achievements and overcomings have led to annihilation. One idiot claims we just had the wrong men on the job, and that we can forge a new future through better societies, better governments and better leaders. Another idiot disagrees with this idiot and says these Platonic top-down hierarchies are what led us to this fate and all should use their freewill to make their own decision without command from above. To the *aleatarchy* of UdhiseInland no human mind is fit to govern others nor themselves. Any decisions of any kind are degenerated misinterpretations of the divine truth, manipulated and confused by any individual's subjective experience and affects. No human is immune to this curse, so no human possesses truly adequate wisdom, but merely follows the seduction of inadequate ideas. So why would any have the right to freely move throughout the world if they'll never understand it? The only way to live is under the dictate of God.

But, none of your Gods. Throughout the halls of *The House of Chance!* are sketches and murals of the death of your leaders and your makeshift deities. You see a series of decomposing skulls raised on sticks each labeled a Stalin, a Jesus, a Washington, a Vishnu, a Napoleon, a Buddha, a Caesar, a Moses, a Ghandi, every "prophet" every "great" they're all breaking and snapping and falling apart.

As they walk through the halls a small child stares at the wall of pagan deluders and superstitions. A tall, bone thin man squats down and wraps his hand around the top of the boy's head, perfectly fitting his palm. He locks eyes with the child. Both their eyes are nothing. "Your mind" he says, "Your mind is a concrete wall. God's words will never leave your mouth." The boy stays silent. His nothing eyes frozen. The old man continues, "You're no different from the rest of us."

"*God*" is an erroneous name to describe the divine power of UdhiseInland. In their eyes "*God*" is a man made alias for whatever he doesn't understand. For millennia people have tried to understand and interpret "*God*" but when they foolishly think they succeed all what is displayed are superstitions and lies derived from the same finite inadequate qualities as any other human idea and none of true infinite divinity. No word can be prescribed to the divine power of UdhiseInland. For the product of any attempt would destroy language itself. A series of characters constantly assembling and disassembling that break apart, synthesize and devour each other in infinitely eldritch and cosmic manners that would lose all power at any possible end or beginning or pity to sensory experience and logical explanation. This divine power controls and encompasses all the everythings and all the nothings. It is the universe and beyond. All in existence and nonexistence is under its dictatorship. This natural order must be accepted by all under it, but most of humanity thought they were above it. Perverted humanist fantasies had been disciplined and UdhiseInland sees this as a sign that humans must return to this natural command. But, to give orders nature only speaks the aleatory language of fate.

The people in their identical robes appearing each as a copy of one another move out of the claustrophobic entrance halls and into the heart of *The House of Chance!* Rows of frozen slot machines with no winning numbers lead to the direction of a pool table snapped in half. Across from the table is a bar with all the glasses empty or shattered. Next to it, a blackjack table where a king's sword points towards the divine machine. Golden, shimmering, stoic in its decadent perfection ignoring the decay that surrounds it was God's medium in the form of a roulette wheel.

Only chance is free from human control and corruption. Purity is aleatory. The words of fate are the words of divinity. In fact, the name "UdhiselInland" had been decided in the most divine manner. The roulette wheel communicated God's preferred number of letters: 12 (which is still a number held highly to this day by the community), and following that the wheel was spun 12 times, each time deciding a letter of the alphabet in order to construct the holiest of words. UdhiselInland is what came out of it and many of its citizens praise it yet can't pronounce it.

They circle around the machine, gathered and compact, with compressed shoulders chafing against each other. The ones closest to the wheel clench it with their desperate pale fingers that slither through the sleeves of their robes. Their nails scratching against the gold. The communication is about to begin. From the back another pale hand rises, but holding a roulette ball. Once its presence and location is known all around the crowd begins to spread out and make room. The hand is revealed to be that of a woman with long gray hair that layers over a burn that meshes and refigures her face to form shapes that assemble an uncommon human visage. Once she is next to the roulette table she pulls out a paper.

“Udhiselnland,” she exclaims to the attention of everybody, “It brings a great, great honor to have been chosen from above to conduct this communication. Today we must all be thankful for the ability to speak to our one true lord. I have here a list of all of the questions we must ask our lord. Each one of you had the ability to submit a question, so if you didn’t when you had the chance, wait till next communication instead of blabbing it out now. As said, you all may ask questions to the lord, but no man, nor woman, or any creature that lives only their own life, feels only their own feeling, and sees with only their eyes can answer these questions.”

All are silent but the burned woman.

She then raises the paper closer to what little spots and corners of her eyes remain uncovered and continues, “To begin we will start with this question...” she moves the paper closer and says “For the first time in years, a tree has grown in Udhiselnland. It has fresh fruits that could feed us all for a week. Are we worthy to eat from it?”

The crowd murmurs amongst themselves. All the things that tree could do for them. Nearly all of them were starved and slender, often going days and days without food. The last meal they had was when God told them to eat the wallpaper. Asking for permission to eat each other was considered, but that wouldn't be worth it because they all had such thin silhouettes with little to no muscle under their fragile sheer coats of skin. Just one week of food for all of them could save the lives of the weakest, whether distributed equally or equitably. Those fruits were a necessity, but the people first needed permission.

Then the burned woman declares, “Red: Yes. Black: No.” It never landed on green. She then looks down at the table. She lowers her hand, shaking and twitching, and spins the wheel. The ball is raised then dropped into its place on the divine wheel.

As the wheel and ball rotate, not a single body in the room moves an inch. Any interference was blasphemous and punishable by death. All the people move are their eyes that follow the ball as it circles on and on. Every second feels like a minute with God. Once the ball begins to slow down the beating of their hearts speed up. Then, after a minute, the divine number is 9 and its color: black.

The people stay silent, they don't question God, but their stomachs are screaming. By the time the next communication takes place, the fruits will be dead. The burned woman's head lowers and she crosses the tree question off the list.

From the back of the crowd, the shape of the mass is altered as one goes dashing out the room. Every head turns to the heathen criminal running away from God. They all go after the running one through the halls and out of the temple.

The chase ends when the running one stops at the newly grown tree. They turn around and look back at the crowd chasing them as they all halt as well. The crowd sees its a young girl with a shaved head, most likely 13 to 14 years of age. She gazes at the masses in front of her. The hourglassman is still lying with his bucket and baton, breathing slowly, not too far from her. The

girl gets closer to the tree, and grabs the highest apple she could. The masses gasp in shock, but still stand still. The girl doesn't bite from the apple, but with a death grip on the fruit approaches the hourglassman. She kneels down and he raises his head as she lowers her hand and puts the apple in his palm. The hourglassman bites into the apple with the little teeth he has left and as he chews tears begin to leak from his eyes.

“Horror!” one cries.

“Blasphemy!” From another.

The people can't fathom this disobedience. The girl looks back at them all and points to up. She says, “You'll never find answers from above you. The sky and everything beyond holds nothing, but the same questions as you.”

The people don't understand. In the front of the crowd is a one-armed man who cries out to the girl, “You can never say more than what you know. And you, you don't know a goddamn thing!”

The rest of the people begin to project their words, but they all blend together as white noise of hate. The girl stands still for a moment and then begins to run out towards the nuclear dunes.

She runs and runs without looking back, but after hours she finally turns her head and sees no one behind her, but only the obscured bright lights of *The House of Chance!* She learns there never were any dunes, only small hills that she was told to fear, but reveal a beauty and

opportunity she'd never seen before. This world of nothing has an infinity of possibilities. In Udhiselndland the *Leviathan* is still eating its tail.