

Field Notes from the proto Invisibles Monastery

Title page

*(De)Extinction Club* presents...

In association with *Anomalous Engineering*...

A Dark Extropian Musings production:

# The (De)Extinction Letters - Volume 2

## *Field Notes from the proto Invisibles Monastery*

Aug-Nov 2016

6,706 words.

This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/).

## Field Notes from the proto Invisibles Monastery

### Epigraph

"The world breaks everyone, and afterward, some are strong at the broken places." ~ Ernest Hemingway

"People need a motivating vision of what comes next and the awareness that more will happen after that, that the future is a process not a destination." ~ Bruce Sterling, *The Singularity: Your Future as a Black Hole*<sup>1</sup>

### **Acknowledgements**

*This work would haven been impossible without the inspiration of the comics of Warren Ellis, Grant Morrison, Alan Moore and Jonathan Hickman. Or the scholarly work of Dame Frances Yates, Peter Dale Scott, and James C. Scott, amongst so many others.*

*It would never have been finished without the support of @lizbt, Emily Dare, @thejaymo, Gordon White, Damien Williams, Adam Rothstein, Brendan Mason, Paul Standing and last but never least: Lady Shiva, the Destroyer of Hearts and maintainer of my sanity (such as it is).*



[Photo by Bradley L. Garrett]

## Introduction

### **The Salvage Mission Begins at Home**

*The pieces comprising this Introduction were almost entirely salvaged from the first series of previously unpublished writings on the Invisibles Monasteries from late 2015. The usable chunks have been recut to provide context for the series of newsletters that comprise the bulk of this pamphlet.*

*This was all written as I was between houses myself, being a guest at various sekrit cyberpunk BnBs across Melbourne, along with my faithful furry familiar, thinking about how to best set up other such homes and places of refuge for wayward technomads, and why they might be urgently required.*



Field Notes from the proto Invisibles Monastery

**Welcome to the Ongoing Collapse - Population: YOU**

"That's great, it starts with an earthquake  
Birds and snakes, an aeroplane, and Lenny Bruce is not afraid."

~ R.E.M, *It's The End Of The World As We Know It (And I  
Feel Fine)*

Imagine it's the middle of the Apocalypse (it's easy if you try). The midst of a period of near-cataclysmic change. Imagine forces of unknown power and magnitude are realigning. Full **LORD OF THE RINGS** type shit. Epic battles on multiple planes of existence. Planetary fate level decisions held in overt conferences and covert meetings.

The Plutocratic Exit Strategy series<sup>2</sup> I've been writing covers these high level machinations.

This set of writings is about being a citizen of the Shire when Sauron has returned in secret to Mordor.



*Artists rendering of Twitter circa 2016 (aka Mordor in LotR)*

Basically, it's a Tuesday and you're becoming fully conscious of the nature of your existence. Your mission is simple: *live*

Field Notes from the proto Invisibles Monastery

*through this* [Ed. See: Your Mission If You Choose to Accept It: Live Through This].

That is all you have to do. Not be a hero, not save the damsel or be the damsel or go through an elaborate training montage. Just be faster than the slowest Hobbit. Better yet, avoid the race altogether. Slip through the gaps. *Ghost through the ruins*. Wait it all out in the network of secret monasteries you and your allies and their allies construct just in time; salvaging what you can of civilisation<sup>3</sup>. Or the underground bases you manage to infiltrate or Occupy.

You can best start by fully appreciating that the end of the world isn't just over the horizon, it's well underway in various parts of the globe. By taking a look at these places, we can appreciate the challenging conditions that lie ahead. The circumstances that must be navigated. The better to think about just how one might seek to begin the process of achieving an awareness and calmness through experience and preparation.

To, as Kipling famously advised, basically *Keep Calm & Carry On* as everything falls apart:

If you can keep your head when all about you  
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you,  
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,  
But make allowance for their doubting too;  
If you can wait and not be tired by waiting...

Except you really want to be Brad Pitt in a modern nomad's fiction suit. The Cunning Man that had a plan the whole time; not the idiot under the illusion he'd been in control, now frozen, pulling a stupid face.

Field Notes from the proto Invisibles Monastery



"Have you ever crossed the road, and looked the wrong way? A car's nearly on you? So what do you do? Something very silly. You freeze. Your life doesn't flash before you, 'cause you're too fuckin' scared to think - you just freeze and pull a stupid face. But the pikey didn't. Why? Because he had plans of running the car over." ~ *Snatch*

## How I stopped worrying and leaned into the Collapse

There's a line from one of Max's monologues, as she establishes the post-Collapse Amerika she calls home in *Dark Angel*, that's rarely far from my mind:



"They call this a New Depression, but no one seems that depressed to me..." ~ *Dark Angel*

That line came to me again as I read this report of life in post-Annexation Crimea<sup>4</sup>:

Many restaurants and shops are running on portable generators, displaying them at their front doors to demonstrate to customers that it is business as usual. Their steady growl has become the urban backbeat. After sundown the darkened streets quickly empty. Restaurants close at 8 p.m. and alcohol sales stop at 5 p.m. to encourage people to stay home at night.

Some stores get by without cash registers, and long lines snake out in front of any operational A.T.M.s. Without traffic lights, major city intersections are jammed. Highways are dark, too, so only in broad daylight can travelers see posters of Mr. Putin with the inscription: "Crimea. Russia. Forever." Gasoline is in scarce supply, producing long lines of angry drivers in front of the few stations that have it.

## Field Notes from the proto Invisibles Monastery

These are literally scenes straight from the TV show that James Cameron produced, whose pilot he directed. Just like life in post-Collapse Seattle, the people of Crimea have already adapted to their new reality:

For now, new rituals are taking hold. Every day at noon, Shchyolkino's mayor speaks to residents on the city's main Crimean Spring Square, which was renamed during the annexation. Boiled water and warm food are distributed in front of an old movie theater. **People can charge their cellphones and watch the latest Russian news on a TV screen, though some said they enjoyed life without television.**

And some are adamant that this Local Collapse is also no Great Depression:

"Please write that we are not desperate. On the contrary, we are full of joy," Ms. Bragina said, standing near a black iron kettle boiling away in the courtyard of her apartment block.

Just like Syria pre-2011 or the former Yugoslavic Republic pre-1991, Iran pre-1979 or Carthage circa 149 B.C or Troy in the Bronze Age or Çatalhöyük 7000 years ago<sup>5</sup>, Crimea was previously a functional - if problematic - part of a global civilisation, until its citizens were caught in the crossfire, their world ripped apart by the Churn - the forces being the gravity of NATO and the Russian Federation literally pulling the country to pieces.

In one of my many #extinctionaesthetic, apocalyptic-themed posts on the Daily Grail, taking a first glance at what's driving the plot of *Mad Max : Fury Road*, I wrote<sup>6</sup>:

A couple of little things first. This story is set on "the furthest reaches of our planet"... far away from what? A place where life goes on as it was before, where the Empire never died? Is it like the post-Collapse world of *Cloud Atlas*? Is there another instance of humanity across the ocean, that has kept the high tech life of those that came before intact, but are dealing with their own set of uniquely horrifying problems? What is the geography of the end of the world? To further abuse a much abused phrase, a future planet where **"the Apocalypse is already here - it's just not very evenly distributed."** No one single Dark Age for all people, but local variants with different extremes.

And the point would here would be that last line: "No one single Dark Age for all people, but local variants with different extremes." That world - with its unevenly distributed Apocalypse - it's here today. It has been for a while now. For a long time. It may, in fact, be its natural state.

That we're all - those of us that haven't already completely drifted off-line - live tweeting from inside the Post Cyberpunk Condition is clear. Matt Staggs argued the case a few years ago<sup>7</sup>, blogging about the dearth of cyberpunk fiction being written

Field Notes from the proto Invisibles Monastery

*because it was being lived instead:*

The younger generation is too busy *being* cyberpunk to worry about the genre. It's not science fiction for them: It's their every day life. When you're hacking into foreign security agencies, trading virtual currency for illicit goods and doxxing political enemies, Cyberpunk fiction just seems quaint. Throw in security cameras on every corner, government spooks tapping into your grandma's smart phone (the fact that your grandma owns a smartphone is also proof that Cyberpunk is dead, by the way.), a rapidly expanding menagerie of corporation-created genetically modified organisms, a sky full of semi-autonomous drones, a high-tech assault weapon in every pantry, and you don't have fiction: You have yesterday's news.

Interviewing him after the release of *The Peripheral*, Salon noted<sup>8</sup>:

"Gibson's heroes shuttle between wildly discordant worlds: virtual paradises and physical squalor; digital landscapes and crumbling cities; extravagant wealth and poverty."

Anyone scrolling through their Twitter feed today and seeing Elon Musk's latest announcement followed by the surreal scenes of the latest heavy weather event, feral police action, surveillance state intrusion or some new, unanticipated, freshly emergent dark horror from the hidden places... there's little doubt that this is the Timeline of the Post Cyberpunk Hero.

There's just one problem. As the character Zoe - playing at being a bad guy - wisely pointed out in the film *Serenity*:



"A hero is someone who gets other people killed." ~ *Serenity*

And too often that person also ends up dead. Or broken. Or alone.

The objective is to survive to build a new world. To live through these times we find ourselves in. Better yet - to build through this; **to lean into the Collapse.**

An alchemical fire is burning through a civilisation that's never been so global and interconnected, that's on its way to being fully interplanetary at last - that is what we're bearing witness to. If only it could be a transformational fire! If only we could harness and shape its power now, instead of waiting for it burn out and only then begin rebuilding in the ashes of the Empire.



[Artist: Yuri Shwedoff<sup>9</sup>]

As Max learned in *Dark Angel*, that it isn't necessarily a purely grimdark existence waiting for us down the timestream; for those that can navigate the Chaos of Life in the Churn a kind of *dark euphoria* awaits:

"Dark Euphoria is what the twenty-teens feels like. Things are just falling apart, you can't believe the possibilities, it's like anything is possible, but you never realized you're going to have to dread it so much. It's like a leap into the unknown. You're falling toward earth at nine hundred kilometres an hour and then you realize there's no earth there.

That's a dark euphoria feeling. It's the cultural temperament of the coming decade."

[Transcript of Reboot 11 speech by Bruce Sterling, 25-6-2009<sup>10</sup>]

In Gibson's far-future, post-Jackpot Earth, the posthuman inheritors of the Earth lead an incredible life; except that's the scenario where the NeoReactionaries won and that is *not. my. future.*



[*Doktor Sleepless*]

## Field Notes from the proto Invisibles Monastery

What we can aspire to is an understanding of - or at least glimpsing at - the true nature of the Lovecraftian forces that are threatening to skull fuck us without even offering the common courtesy of a reach around - squeezing and twisting our lives into strange new shapes - and craft cunning plans to run that motherfucking car over instead. Or jack it and high tail it dafuq outta here.

"Can you still be a futurist if you've given up on the future? Asking for a friend." ~ @cascio<sup>11</sup>

To bust out yet another cliché - the good ole "every crisis is an opportunity" - the secret truth is, as my Dark Extropian compatriot and partner in thoughtcrime, Emily Dare, so frequently reminds me: *that the world ends every day*. Let's stop pretending we can save it!

As Grant Morrison points out in our canonical text, *The Invisibles*: "saving is what misers do."



[The Invisibles]

What are we supposed to be saving the world for? A rainy day? The children?! Nobody thought to back up the planet; there's no save point for us to restore to. There's only forwards. *The only way out is through* and all that.

"Our greatest responsibility is to be good ancestors." ~ Jonas Silk.

As our Civilisation enters what might be its Final Exam, Bonobos are joining the Chimps and the great Apes in potentially

Field Notes from the proto Invisibles Monastery

entering their own Stone Age<sup>12</sup>. If we leave behind a planet fit to inhabit - and that's no sure thing at all, but it's a goal - they too may take over as custodians of the Earth in just a few tens of thousand years. *Ish*. When all we've built has turned to dust - except for the Nuclear Exclusion Zones - and our great deeds have mutated into another mythology of ancient gods and demons.

Planting seeds now that will grow in the compost the future generates as it breaks down the past... being around to water and tend to the growth of a better world at whatever scale you can manage... that is a truly heroic goal.

*Which is why Invisibles Monasteries...*

## Invisibles Monasteries GO

*The story goes like this...* One morning Warren Ellis wrote this on his computer<sup>13</sup>:

**"I am building my monastery walls in preparation for the Collapse and the Dark Ages, damnit. Stop enabling networked lightbulbs and give me the tools to survive your zombie planet."**

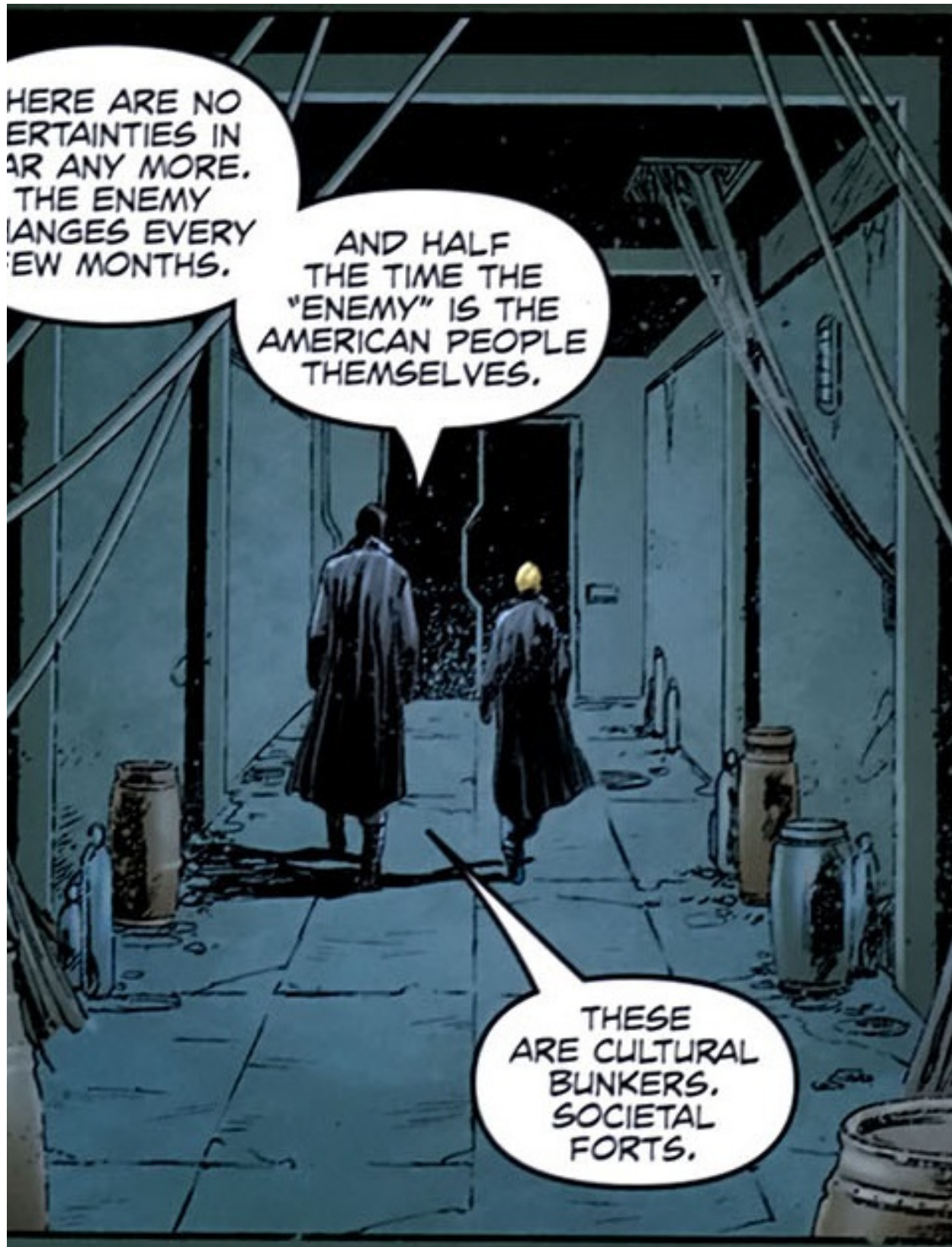
Which I retweeted, adding: "INVISIBLES MONASTERIES GO!"

*The Invisibles* being Warren's friend, and fellow comic book writer, Grant Morrison's time traveling, dimension skipping adventures of a team of gnostic anarchists battling the servants of the Demiurge in a world where - just as in *the Illuminatus trilogy* - every conspiracy theory is true.

Stick a gun loaded with a zen bullet to my head and I'll pick King Mob as a role model every damn time.

But the truth is, to me you can take big chunks of work of these guys they called members of the Brit Invasion - Ellis, Morrison and Moore - and fit them together to form one giant multidimensional, metafictional - and often magical - instruction manual full of protips and hints on living through eschatonic times.

Warren's own comic, *Doktor Sleepless*, feels especially full of them - but then it's probably the single work - yes, along with the adventures of those Inviz kids - that I've poured over the most, and frequently turned to illustrate my ideas. Which is what leads me to tweet panels from it:



[Doktor Sleepless]

## Field Notes from the proto Invisibles Monastery

Adding:

"Invisibles Monasteries are what happens *after* you [#FindTheOthers](#), as a physical realisation of Gilmore's Law."<sup>14</sup>

Which, until *now*, has pretty much been the extent of the public elaboration of the concept.

Before we go further I should probably clue in the Uninitiated. **Gilmore's Law**<sup>15</sup> is simply that:

*"The Net interprets censorship as damage and routes around it."*

But what happens life on the public net becomes so hostile that the entire thing feels not just merely damaged, but permanently broken - and in desperate need of a reboot? Take the spirit of the Golden Age of the Net - like that time, twenty years ago now, when John Perry Barlow wrote *A Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace*<sup>16</sup>, which you might know from such films as *Hackers* - and make a strategic retreat back to the Real, and route around the whole damn thing! Set up a series of loosely connected houses, and other places, that are slowly kept in sync by a human caravan of technomads; a sneaker-net that spans the globe. *Which is why Invisibles Monasteries...*

Okay, sure that's a cool refrain - I can hear you saying - but goddamnit, define your terms better! Well... actually... you're right, I should do that, huh.

Firstly, someone did ask me to explain it on Twitter not too long ago and I managed to fit this explanation into 140chars:

*"somewhere between a home for wayward technomads and a safe house for people fleeing the Empire to focus on the Restoration."*<sup>17</sup>

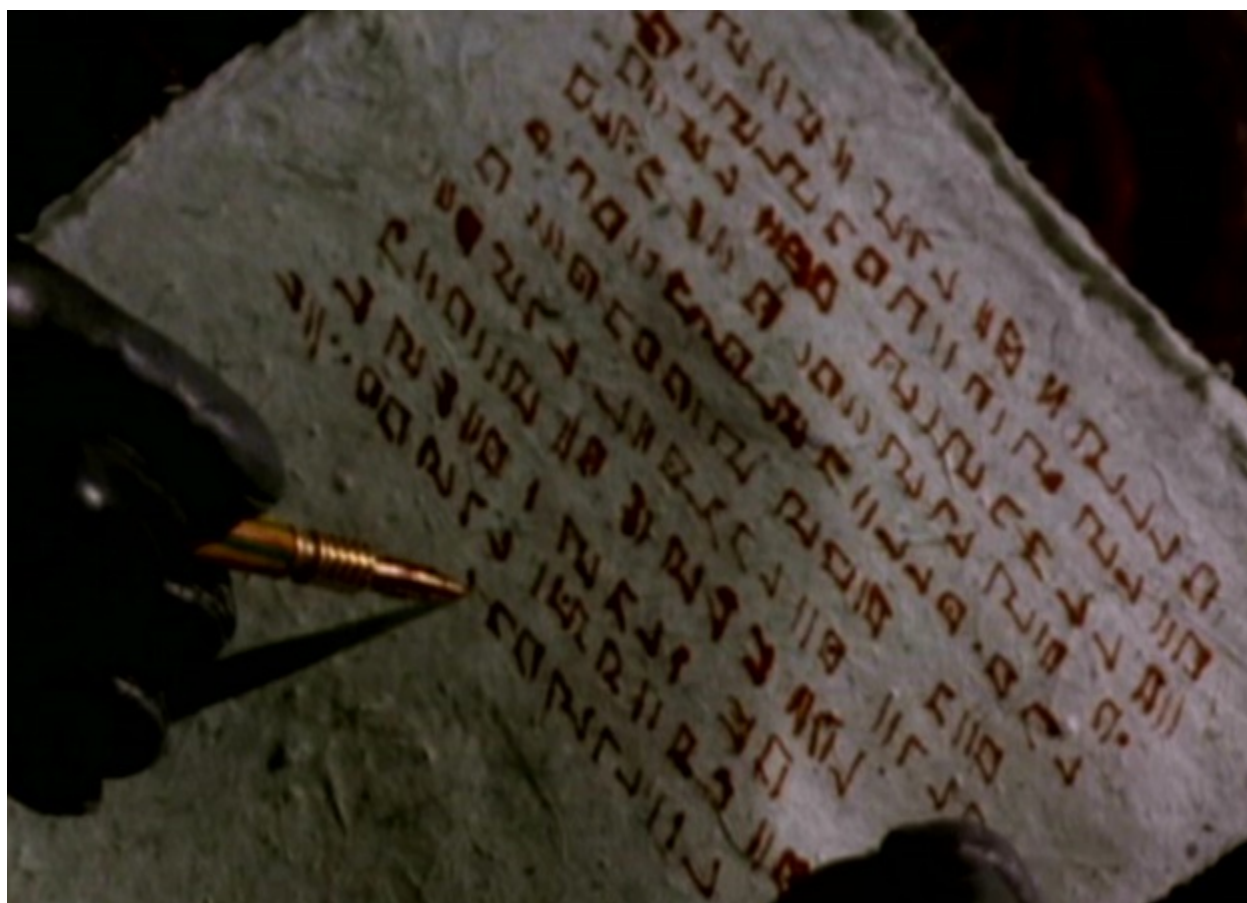
And they were apparently satisfied (or confused?) enough not to then ask what the Restoration is... but don't worry, we'll get to that in time. And how! That's like, the point of all this.

One thing I should make abundantly clear though: this is not a work of *Invisibles* fan-fic.

If anything, it's *Rosicrucian fan-fic*! The Rosy Cross Brotherhood were, it was said, intent on taking the momentum Martin Luther built up and using it to kick start a Reformation that went far beyond religion; a program of universal reform. And how did they plant the seeds for this? With a manifesto that lead to many of Europe's (would-be) intellectuals self-publishing epic pamphlets detailing their philosophies and offering grand letters of application to join up and help fix the world. Which this entire piece is written in the spirit of, just updated for the times. Obvz.

## Field Notes from the proto Invisibles Monastery

Okay, I'm not gonna lie, I'll come completely clean with you; like you haven't seen through me already. *Because, ya know, referencing Rosicrucianism isn't obscure enough...* As a full-on sci-fi hipster, I have to fold in a classic work from that most cultiest of the modern space opera tv shows: *Babylon 5*. And as anyone who truly knows me, knows... there's nothing more I dream for - as a card carrying, original Dark Extropian, no less - than a future life embarking on that most epic of salvage missions, as a xenoarchaeologist<sup>18</sup> - *natürlich* - recruited with a few Others on a quest to save the Earth from an alien plague<sup>19</sup>. And what else would I be reading over in my quarters, as I'm lulled by the hum of the starship to sleep, than... *The Book of G'Kar*<sup>20</sup>:



*The Book of G'Kar, a work in progress...*

Okay, so not everybody's paid the price of admission to become a convert to *Babylon 5*, but don't worry, I'll just at least one reference in this to show just how brilliant it is, and you'll be LARPing the Anla'Shok<sup>21</sup> in no time, and with good reason:

The Anla'Shok are an elite fighting force... they were to be "*a military group dedicated to nothing less than preserving the future and all*"

Field Notes from the proto Invisibles Monastery  
*life. Even our enemy's life, if possible."*

Because, watch me close the loop here: *it's not a war, it's a rescue mission*<sup>22</sup>.

Yeah, and you thought Gnosticism was obscure. Whereas, as everyone who's read Dame Yates' book<sup>23</sup> on them knows, the pitch for that particular secret brotherhood - we're back to the Rosicrucians now - quickly turned into a then-modern mythology and, since no one actually knew who they were, they were soon known by another name. Can you guess what it was? Descartes sure knew, and went to pains - like, ya know, actually going outside, which is where all the people are - to make it clear that he was very much, um, *Visible*:

Rene Descartes arrived back in Paris to discover he was rumored to have joined the Rosicrucians in Germany. The philosopher, normally reclusive, went out of his way to be widely seen to convince his friends he was not one of *les Invisibles*. Dame Francis remarked enigmatically that Descartes was following the "normal pattern" for adventures with the Rosicrucians. "He hears of them, tries to find them, and fails."<sup>24</sup> That Descartes makes his own visibility the proof that his is not one of them is a refinement on the normal experiences of Rosicrucian-seekers which is worthy of a great philosophers!"

~ *Isaac Newton and the Transmutation of Alchemy: An Alternative View of the Scientific Revolution*

These are the moments in history that inspire me to take action on a dying planet full of corrupt institutions; a time when people tried to get back to the Source. And the argument Yates makes is that the Rosicrucians are the true source of the Enlightenment; which, ya know, seemed to be going pretty well for a while there.

When we talk about people writing fan-fic, well, Chris Knowles of *The Secret Sun*<sup>25</sup> blog, and author of *Our Gods Wear Spandex: The Secret History of Comic Book Heroes*<sup>26</sup>, loves to talk about the original Gnostics writing Jesus fan-fic. That to be a Gnostic *necessitates* writing your own mythology - because the mainstream narrative is always being ghost-written by the minions of the Demiurge.

But if there's one place in timespace that inspires me above all others - whose history and story seems to be only found in academic texts that will soon see me sitting in the local, non-lending State Library for days upon days digesting - it's *the City of the Moon God*<sup>27</sup>: Harran. Where the brains trust of Alexandria fled to when the zealot Christians and Muslims destroyed Alexandria and its beautiful library. They got out with everything they could carry, and found a place where they could continue the Work. See, all this has happened before. It

Field Notes from the proto Invisibles Monastery  
might even be part of some natural cycle. Who knows? (I'll take your answers off-air, thanks.)

But squint your eyes just right, and you'll see the parallels between then and now. The zealots are coming again for our institutions of knowledge, this time under the banner of NeoLiberalism, attacking the Arts under the cover of Austerity... and it's all for our good, right? They aren't just looting like *they just don't fucking care*. The Elite have their own private libraries, and first access to the artifacts of the world, and the private collections held in the Empire's vaults... I mean, museums and such. *Like, just who do you think is buying the stuff ISIS and Al-Quaeda etc ad infinitum have been flooding the market with the past decade or so? And on it goes back through history... but mark my words, there will be justice and full Restoration will be made, or my name isn't um...* Point being: make use of those libraries while you can people! They're the kind of thing you won't truly miss 'til they're gone. And why not start a private collection of your own? Especially when you can bet they'll be closing library after library soon enough and basically throwing out the books. There is the rescue mission and the salvage mission, after all.

From time to time people need to be kept outside the Empire, or whatever its branding itself as, in order for the long term project of Democracy to be affected... or whatever comes after Democracy.

Consider this dialog fragment from Jonathan Hickman's amazeballs graphic novel, *Pax Romana*, on posthumans time traveling to the beginning of Western Civilisation in order to prevent its destruction. Its tag line: "CREATE THE FUTURE, DESTROY THE PAST"

### **The Republic**

**CR:** So you can do this – achieve what seems impossible?

**NC:** We do not believe that achieving it is the problem – maintaining it will be.

**EM:** We will have to manufacture a fluid social and ethnic structure to eliminate the standard problems of most older societies like rigid social classes and subnationalism – plus, others will arise.

**NC:** Yes, man will evolve quickly, so as soon as possible we need a support structure in place for clearly identifying the most talented and ambitious citizens. We must keep them personally satisfied and out of government and our higher military ranks until our democracy is established.

**CA:** Then the problem will take care of itself.

**CR:** And that's it, then. The course of human history – plotted.

## Field Notes from the proto Invisibles Monastery

~ Pax Romana

But what does that all look like today? What's a global village of indomitable Gauls (we'll meet them in a sec), *a distributed city of New Harran, a secret shadow civilisation of the Internet actually going to be like?*

Well, we've quietly been thinking about that, and testing out some ideas.

A discussion in one of the calmer corners of the Internet led to Warren writing, in an undisclosed location:

Brief conversation in a sekrit room with mlk3y about useful, low-signal, relatively calm comms... I kind of want to think about that some more. Sort of like gardening your own network.

I like being able to send that "alive and out of bed" signal to friends and comrades. **Which is probably just another approximation of that early-internet experience of seeing instant messenger statuses light and the morning Twitter post, seeing them happen in waves as timezones woke up across the world...**

But, as I generally pursue a small clutch of notions around post-attention, people going private, secret networks. withdrawal from general-broadcast-social et al... as mlk3y said, there becomes value in us, scattered in the various global cells of our selected monasteries and compounds, checking to see if we're all alive each morning, and what the sky looks like...

What if we could build something that did this... in plain sight... or rather, over the open air (and I mean air as in ham radio - natural systems, let's tap back into them!), but still be encrypted and never once publicly online?

Which leads to questions like: how retro will you go to escape Archonic Intrusion?

[Ed. *Would you like to know more?* See: on Tactical Relinquishment of Technology for fun and Empire evasion.]

How about about building a working replica of a Radio Fax? A "1930s device that used radio signals to transmit images."<sup>28</sup> That's the kind of thing to make a fella tweet:

...pretty into the idea of tearing off the latest in-network updates as the coffee brews tho, combo this with ENIGMA???<sup>29</sup>  
Invisibles Monasteries Crypto News Network Go<sup>30</sup>

Long time internet-of-things fans will recall BERG's Little Printer as being an updated version of this idea; an idea that like BERG<sup>31</sup> itself, burned too brightly, ahead of its time and has since died out<sup>32</sup>.

But as we each variously sit in flooded-out cities, or suffer through heatwaves, this is the kind of tech that can be lazily researched, and prototypes cobbled together out of salvaged parts. Then, just as we swap encryption keys in person - via that physical technomad network - so can plans to create such objects be exchanged<sup>33</sup>, and available frequencies and cipher keys allotted.

Like, why not right? It's just a game, and we might be further along the board than we realise.

And I'm far from the only person waxing nostalgic, looking back to earlier versions of the Network to recapture its spirit and benefits as we go forwards; as this time delayed report, on the subject of 'littlenets', live from Aaronland<sup>34</sup> demonstrates. It points us to a chance to perhaps begin again. Forgive me, but I'm going to quote at length from his blogpost, itself a write up of a talk he gave, because within this are clues and hints for setting up a calmer, slower network of communication between nodes of the Others:

A couple of years ago, in what may have been the opening thunderclap in a series of long, dark and stormy nights of 1990's nostalgia, the New Museum staged an exhibition titled [NYC 1993: Experimental Jet Set, Trash and No Star](#). As part of the exhibition they hosted a lecture and panel titled [The Internet Before the Web: Preserving Early Networked Cultures](#) which was largely about the technologies and the communities that cut their teeth around [bulletin board systems](#), or simply BBSes.

One of the panelists was an artist named Wolfgang Staehle who founded [The Thing BBS](#), in 1991. The Thing was notable for not simply being one of the first artist-run BBS' in New York City but also because it had multiple nodes, in a handful of European cities, and every night all of the messages would be synced between systems. One of the things he said that night, which seems sort of self-evident in hindsight but which struck a nerve with me at the time was, and I am paraphrasing: *You know, before any of this all we had to communicate with each other was the postal service and the corresponding one to two week lag built in to every conversation. Now instead of two weeks it was one day and now instead of one individual forwarding something on to the next individual we could all read something and comment on it, by the standards of what existed before, at the same time.*

After the panel some of us went out for drinks and for people of a certain age it was difficult not to fall prey to moments sounding exactly like our parents and saying things like: *The kids today, they don't know what it was like back in the day when all we had were bulletin board systems...*

I mention this for a couple reasons.

The first is to ask the question: Is a slow network akin to no network at all? It is hard to imagine going back to the dial-up speeds of the 1990's Internet and I expect it would be a shock to someone who's never

## Field Notes from the proto Invisibles Monastery

experienced them but I think we would all do well to keep Staehle's comments about the time to broadcast and the time to relay in mind.

The second is that as we were all sitting around the table waxing nostalgic about 28.8 Kbps modems I remember thinking: Actually, when I first discovered the web I *wanted* the next generation to be able to take this for granted. I wanted the kids to live in a world where the Internet was just part of the fabric of life, where it didn't need to be [a philosophical moment](#) everytime you got online.

The good news is that this has, by and large, happened. The bad news is we've forgotten why it was important in the first place and if it feels like the Network is governed by – and increasingly defined by – a kind of grim meathook fatalism I think maybe that's why.

Somewhere in all the excitement of the last 20 years we forgot, or at least neglected, the creation myth and the foundational story behind the Network and in doing so we have left open a kind of narrative vacuum. We have left the space – [the opportunity](#) – to say why the Network exists at all to those who would see it shaped in ways that are perhaps at odds with the very reasons that made it special in the first place.

With that in mind I would like to suggest that littlenets have always been [relative](#). Consider:

1. Royal courts.
2. The so-called [Republic of Letters](#), the community of 17th and 18th century intellectuals who communicated through that most primitive of [sneakernets](#) called hand-written letters.
3. Cafe societies and salons.
4. New York City – because remember, before the Internet New York was genuinely the center of the Universe. You no longer have to be in Manhattan (or even Brooklyn) anymore to find the debate or just like-minded peoples and that is a reality the city has been struggling to deal with ever since.
5. Bulletin board systems, newsgroups, [the recent resurgence of mailing lists](#).
6. So I think one of the questions we would do well to ask ourselves is: Is the idea of the littlenet simply coded language for a kind of secret breakfast club which in turn only exists relative to the exclusion of the biggernet? The issue here not being so much any particular network but rather the social and cultural forces that they are subject to and often warped by. Which raises another question: If littlenets have always acted as a kind of desire-trap, distinct from whatever their fundamental is-ness is, does our interest in them now point to a deeper concern?

And this pamphlet as series of newsletters, meandering through the issues of being online as the forces of control seem intent on progressively putting the planet on permanent lockdown... yeah, we've got dem deeper concers, alright.

If the Golden Age of Twitter was good for anything – before they paved over the grungy parking lot we all used to hangout in and put up a shopping mall – it was for *Finding the Others*.

Just as Gordon White wrote<sup>35</sup>, we're sure thankful for that loose

## Field Notes from the proto Invisibles Monastery

network we've each constructed, whose true social graph lives only in our heads:

"As global war creeps ever closer, as bankrupt governments use every tool in their toolkit -right up to some decidedly space age mind control- to restrict liberty and unburden you of whatever little wealth you may have left, I want to re-emphasise my belief that 'we are still gonna win'..."

For totalitarianism, the only victory is total victory. Anything else is failure.

Every email must be captured. *Everyone* must think the same thoughts. *Everyone* must submit to the same medical regime. Why else would France call for full EU monitoring of the SWIFT payment system? It is the same totalitarian revenue grab. It was the same with the Victorian empire's army of bureaucrats and unified train timetables and weights and measures. It was the same with all previous communist empires. Every previous archonic regime is an attempt to impose *total* victory, *total* imposition of a worldview.

**Total victory is a surprisingly fragile, surprisingly tenuous goal. All it takes is one little village of indomitable Gauls and the whole thing collapses."**

Asterix & Obelix LARPers... ASSEMBLE! Learn to become Invisibilix!

Or... that village of Gauls *might* be a loosely coupled, continuously evolving network of technomads - a bunch of post cyberpunks using almost atemporal tech that taps into natural systems - instead of the Grid - to create islands in the 'net... not of resistance, but of preservation and adaptation.

The key difference between Philip K. Dick's original *The Man In The High Castle* novel and its recent televisual adaptation is that in the novel there is no capital-R Resistance - or love triangle, for that matter. Instead, each character is just trying to adapt to the flow of history in their own way as it approaches another nexus point.

As one character, Robert Childan, notes:

"The Moment changes. One must be ready to change with it. Or otherwise left high and dry. Adapt.  
The rule of survival, he thought. Keep eye peeled regarding situation around you. Learn its demands. And-meet them. Be there at the right time doing the right thing.  
Be yinnish."

~ The Man in the High Castle, *Philip K. Dick*

And what's more yinnish and post cyberpunk than parkour? Finding the Flow - he foreshadowed - and overcoming obstacles with ease - vaulting, leaping, tumbling and forever twirling - to carve your own path through the ruination of the world.

## Field Notes from the proto Invisibles Monastery

That was definitely what I was thinking about when my friend and adventuring partner, Wayne, linked me to this video made by UK parkour group, *Roof Culture*<sup>36</sup>.



[*Roof Culture*]

It was while watching this that my mind conjured up a vision of a secret civilisation - almost like a Shadow Biosphere - living in our roofs and walls, watching us - unseen - from above in lighting towers and from beneath us from within tunnels and drains...

Field Notes from the proto Invisibles Monastery



[Roof Culture]



[It]

Hey, who's been fucking with my slide deck? Hahaha...

...and yes Nightvale fans, who else would their leader be but *The Faceless Old Woman who secretly lives in your home?*

See, we have all the pieces just lying around... sitting there... waiting... lurking impatiently... willing themselves to fall off our book shelves or bleed through our screens to get our attention.

It's time to assemble them. It's time to return to the Source, to tap back into the Wellspring of Civilisation. To shatter our categories and build strange art with the shards. It's time to do what we've always done in times like these; those that heard the call.

Field Notes from the proto Invisibles Monastery



[The Invisibles]

*Invisibles Monasteries GO!*

<sup>1</sup> <http://longnow.org/seminars/02004/jun/11/the-singularity-your-future-as-a-black-hole/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://m1k3y.com/the-plutocratic-exit-strategy/>

<sup>3</sup> <http://runesoup.com/2013/08/there-is-the-rescue-mission-and-the-salvage-mission/>

<sup>4</sup> <http://nytimes.com/2015/12/02/world/europe/power-outage-forces-crimeans-to-reconsider-their-enthusiasm-for-secession.html>

<sup>5</sup> <https://io9.gizmodo.com/how-farming-almost-destroyed-human-civilization-1659734601>

<sup>6</sup> <http://dailygrail.com/Essays/2014/12/Mad-Max-Fury-Road-and-the-pre-Jackpot-Years>

<sup>7</sup> <http://suvudu.com/2013/12/were-living-in-the-world-cyberpunk-tried-to-warn-us-about.html>

<sup>8</sup> [https://www.salon.com/2014/11/09/william\\_gibson\\_i\\_never\\_imagined\\_facebook/](https://www.salon.com/2014/11/09/william_gibson_i_never_imagined_facebook/)

<sup>9</sup> <http://society6.com/yurishwedoff>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.wired.com/2011/02/transcript-of-reboot-11-speech-by-bruce-sterling-25-6-2009/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://twitter.com/cascio/status/672169511936651264>

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.natureworldnews.com/articles/18481/20151201/bonobos-create-sophisticated-stone-tools-spears-early-humans-researchers.htm>

<sup>13</sup> <http://morning.computer/2015/11/untangling-the-web/>

<sup>14</sup> <https://twitter.com/m1k3y/status/679529264564142080>

<sup>15</sup> <http://blog.futurestreetconsulting.com/understanding-gilmores-law/>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.eff.org/cyberspace-independence>

<sup>17</sup> <https://twitter.com/m1k3y/status/766896650652491777>

<sup>18</sup> [http://babylon5.wikia.com/wiki/Max\\_Eilerson](http://babylon5.wikia.com/wiki/Max_Eilerson)

<sup>19</sup> [http://babylon5.wikia.com/wiki/Crusade obvz](http://babylon5.wikia.com/wiki/Crusade_obvz). The, short-lived, spin-off from Babylon 5. With Gary Cole slouching all over the joint, like he owned it. Where *Babylon 5* takes a while to get into it... once you've versed in the... um.. 'Vere, this show is just amazing. And died in the crib, basically... like just about all my favourite shows. Most of them "one season wonders" - I can make a list if you like. Can you nest footnotes? TBC Ppl

<sup>20</sup> [http://babylon5.wikia.com/wiki/Book\\_of\\_G'Kar](http://babylon5.wikia.com/wiki/Book_of_G'Kar)

<sup>21</sup> <http://babylon5.wikia.com/wiki/Anla%27Shok>

<sup>22</sup> <https://medium.com/anomalous-engineering/it-s-not-a-war-it-s-a-rescue-mission-58ba310f48eb> so this one time I finished reading *The Invisibles* and then immediately started work on this essay... which this \*ahem\* Great Work is *really* a much belated follow-up to.

<sup>23</sup> Dame Francis Yates was a kick ass Renaissance Scholar who did some amazing work that pushed back the Age of Enlightenment and showed its origins to be... well, she started with another of my homeboys. Not Jack Parsons this time, but Giordano "why are you people burning me at the stake I'm just trying to get y'all to storm the heavens in the Medieval Period" Bruno.

As the Great Wiki says:

"her books *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (1964), *The Art of Memory* (1966), and *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment* (1972) are major works. She "dealt with traditions whose remoteness she could not eliminate, even while she made them more understandable."

Now, here's the thing. We've learnt more since then... and if you, like me, love watching random weird documentaries on YouTube (which is the only part of the Google Stack we'll keep I think) check out this, because the dude *names names*:

\* The Invisibles A History of Rosicrucians [[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_0kyd00GK5I](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_0kyd00GK5I)]

<sup>24</sup> This is *basically* also the plot of Alejandro Jodorowsky's cult film *Holy Mountain*, I'm just sayin'... which was inspired by the cult book *Mount Analogue*. And when I'm saying cult here, I mean it literally. You're writing all these down right? Quick, go grab a highlighter at least if you just randomly found this page in a cafe or club.

<sup>25</sup> <https://secretsun.blogspot.com>

<sup>26</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Our\\_Gods\\_Wear\\_Spandex](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Our_Gods_Wear_Spandex)

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.brill.com/city-moon-god> \*some rich fanboi buy me this plz.

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gTnRGkkFJj0>

<sup>29</sup> <https://twitter.com/m1k3y/status/681252318176768000>

<sup>30</sup> <https://twitter.com/m1k3y/status/681252985331150848>

Field Notes from the proto Invisibles Monastery

<sup>31</sup> BERG - British Experimental Rocket Group. Named by Ellis of course, because we're all one to two degrees from each other in these highly networked, yet loosely coupled times.

<sup>32</sup> <http://www.businessinsider.com.au/the-little-printer-is-no-more-2014-9>

<sup>33</sup> And noone says we can't have maximal, spyfi fun with these. Leaving blueprints in deaddrops. Swapping briefcases in train stations. Using laser line of sight comms, just like the narco kids do. Get creative, have fun with it. It's just a game... until they actually come after you.

<sup>34</sup> <http://www.aaronland.info/weblog/2014/10/06/interpretation/#brick>

<sup>35</sup> <http://runesoup.com/2015/11/i-am-thankful-for-the-others/>

<sup>36</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o16CcUauSYA>