

Gifts

That market stall was there again. The one that sells broken junk from other dimensions. Sometimes *in* other dimensions too, 4 or 5 or 7 or 9 of them, extending out in all these directions beyond what we could see, beyond what were even directions really, but something else, something beyond our understanding, so there's no hard edges, nothing you can hold on to, no possibility of containment, so your hand passes clean through after you've paid, and the shopkeeper laughs as you realise you've just wasted your money on something that might as well be a hologram, or a ghost.

It's only then they offer you the use of their spacial manipulator, so you can get it home, and of course there's a fee for that, a large fee, a very large fee, an astronomical fucking fee. But you pay it anyway. You have to. You don't want to, but you have to. You don't want to think you've wasted your money on some shit you can't even take home.

So now of course I've got a whole shelf of things like that at home, shimmering and undulating and ululating and shivering, pulsing and trembling as the aspects of their intersections with our limited world shift and move as they through the universes they inhabit, utterly unconcerned with ours.

They're never the same. Not even for a second. From my limited understanding of the mathematics involved, it'd be impossible for them to ever be the same again. No rotational symmetries. Not even the usual 1. None.

So sometimes they're beautiful, so beautiful they make you want to cry. Other times they're so alien there's no comprehension of them at all in your mind. Visual noise that hurts to look like.

Somehow pictures never capture them at all. As if they don't even interact with light, not how we understand it, anyway.

Although, in that case, how our eyes catch these glimpses of them, I do not know.

But they didn't have anything like that today. Everything was three dimensional and solid and safe. That's not to say there was nothing interesting amongst their wares, just that there wasn't anything so immediately, obviously, horrifyingly, enticingly, irresistibly wrong, either. At least on first glance.

"I haven't seen you here before?" they said to me, with a questioning look.

Gifts

That market stall was there again. The one that sells broken junk from other dimensions. Sometimes *in* other dimensions too, 2 or 1 or 3/4s or 0 of them, contracting down in ways that made no sense, limited this way or that, or occluded by our reality completely, in ways difficult to understand, so there's no depth, or width, no possibility of escape from the constraints of their limits, no possibility of life, of synthesis and fusion, and the shopkeeper sympathises with you as you realise you've just wasted your money on something that's as inert as and useless as some semi-solid lump of xenon.

It's only then they offer you the use of their hologrammatic projector, so you can expand their appearance into enough dimensions to perceive, and of course there's a fee for that, a small fee, a tiny fee, an infinitesimal fee. You don't mind paying it, you just wonder why it wasn't included in the original price.

So now of course I've got a drawer full of things like that at home, three dimensional projections of these zero dimensional shapes, sitting as still and dead and pathetic as they can, existing, if they can even be said to be existing, in their own limited dimensions, utterly uncomprehending ours.

They're always the same. They never interact with anything. From my limited understanding of the physics involved, it'd be impossible for them to ever interact with anything. Simplified chemistries, based upon a periodic table without periods.

They're never beautiful. They're never repulsive. They're just this constant unending blandness of conformity. It's painful to look at, sometimes. Like a generic supermarket food brand made flesh.

A simple picture captures everything about them. You don't need to see the real thing. What's the point? They have no substance of their own.

Although, in that case, how I ever managed to carry them home, I do not know..

But they didn't have anything like that today. Everything was three dimensional and solid and real. That's not to say there was nothing uninteresting amongst their wares, just that there wasn't anything so obviously, depressingly, dispiritingly bland, either. At least on first glance.

"Nice to see you again," they said to me, with a welcoming look.

They say this every time I come in. I think they're trying to undermine my confidence. Not that it needs much undermining.

But I'm used to it now. And I am distinctly unmemorable. It's the same everywhere I go. "And your name, sir?" After a while it barely even feels insulting.

"What's this?" I said, pointing to the inert half of a strangulated pulsometer. It's always good to ask a question you know the answer to first. Sometimes they lie. Sometimes everybody lies. At least this way you can calibrate their honesty.

"It's the inert half of a strangulated pulsometer," they informed me, correctly. "Not a very interesting piece on its own. If you've got a throbbing crystalline heart, it's probably worth the price, but otherwise..."

They shrugged extravagantly, in the theatrical style.

"My heart's throbless, unfortunately," I said. "And diffuse in structure."

I moved my attentions to the other pieces on display, picking up a jar filled with some sort of mimification jelly and pulling faces at it to test its responsiveness. It could cope with smiles and laughter, but turned my screams and scowls into giggles and blushes. It was very cute.

"How much for this?" I asked.

"The Caricreature?" they said. "It's quite expensive. Very expensive. Very expensive indeed."

They laughed expansively, in the evil style.

"Oh that's a shame," I said. "So how about that?"

I pointed at something entirely at random. It looked like a polyp. A polyp from some strange realm, obviously, not a polyp from ours. Titaly different styles and textures.

But it looked like a polyp all the same. I assumed it was some sort of seed, from which something terrible and confusing might sprout or spurt or seep.

"That's not for sale," they said. "That's lunch."

They picked it up and bit it in half. Chocolate oozed out from inside, mingling with the blood from the raw flesh of its shell.

They say this every time I come in. I think they're trying to bolster my confidence. God knows it needs it sometimes..

But it's lost its effectiveness now. Compliments wither through use. It's the same everywhere I go. "It's so nice to see you." After a while you don't even hear it.

"What's this?" I said, pointing to... something. It's always good to ask a question you don't know the answer to first. Sometimes they don't know what they're talking about. At least this way you can assess their knowledge.

"It's the irregularly fissioning half of a strangulated pulsometer," they informed me. "Not a very interesting piece on its own. If you've got a desiccated liver, it's probably worth the price, but otherwise..."

They shrugged extravagantly, in the theatrical style.

"My liver's wet, unfortunately," I said. "And filled with blood."

I moved my attentions to the other pieces on display, picking up a jar filled with some sort of mimification jelly and pulling faces at it to test its responsiveness. It could cope with screams and insults, but turned my laughter and smiles into abject fear and haunting despair. It was distressing.

"How much for this?" I asked.

"The Caricreature?" they said. "It's quite cheap. Very cheap. Very cheap indeed."

They laughed expansively, in the evil style.

"Oh that's a shame," I said. "So, how about that?"

I pointed at the one thing I couldn't take my eyes off. It looked like a polyp. A polyp from our dimension, rather than a polyp from some strange dimension. Exactly as mundane as one of ours.

It looked out of place among the marvels of their wares. I had no idea what it was for. Maybe they'd had it removed during some medical procedure they had recently undergone.

"That's not for sale," they said. "That's tea."

They picked it up and bit it in third. Blood oozed out from inside, mingling with the chocolate from the crumbling, delicacy of its shell.

“You want to try,” they asked. “Highly addictive. Like a Tunnock’s Teacake.”

I shook my head, and picked up the mimicking thing again.

“So, how much was this again?”

“33.3333333333333333333333333333%.”

“33.3333333333333333333333333333% of what?”

“33.3333333333333333333333333333% of your soul,” they laughed, in the ominous style. Well, in the ominous and evil style. And the theatrical.

To be fair, there’s probably no other way to laugh when discussing the purchasing of souls.

“Ah, that’s not too bad,” I said. “I’m pretty sure I can afford that.”

I chuckled to myself, as I transferred that tiny sliver of a sliver of a remnant of my heart to their eager paw. The good thing about percentage pricing is that things get cheaper every time.

“And, actually, I don’t mind spending a little extra today anyway,” I explained. “It’s a gift.”

“A gift!?” they shouted, suddenly startled. “Is that really appropriate?”

“Er, yes?” I said. “I mean, I haven’t even told you who it’s for yet.”

“It’s the principle of the matter,” they said. “Haven’t you seen Gremlins?”

“No,” I said. “Anyway that’s just a film. It’s not real. It’s just a film. A film!”

They did not agree. They tried to take the jar back, but it was too late. I’d already paid.

“You want to try,” they asked. “Very disappointing. Like Turkish Delight.”

I shook my head, and picked up the mimicking thing again.

“So, how much was this again?”

“33.3333333333333333333333333333%.”

“33.3333333333333333333333333333% of what?”

“33.3333333333333333333333333333% of your soul,” they whispered, in the ominous style. Well, in the evil and ominous style. And the terrifying.

To be fair, there’s probably no other way to whisper when discussing the selling of souls.

“Ah, that’s higher than I’d have liked,” I said. “But I can just about afford it.”

I moaned to myself, as I transferred that great wedge of my heart to their trembling hand. The trouble about percentage pricing is that it seems cheap at first. But it isn’t long before it’s not.

“And, you know, I don’t have any choice but to spend big today,” I explained. “It’s a gift.”

“A gift!?” they laughed, suddenly amused. “You’ll regret it!”

“Er, what?” I said. “I mean, I haven’t even told you who it’s for yet.”

“It’s the heart of the matter,” they said. “Haven’t you seen Gremlins?”

“Yes,” I said. “Oh, god. Is that a warning? Are you warning me? What is this thing?”

They would not say. I tried to hand the jar back, but it was too late. I’d already paid.