III. SPACE STATION
I’m on a space station. (On? In? I don’t really know how one inhabits a space station). I don’t know how I got in here. (I seem to have come down on the side of in). There are no humans, but there are walls from which hang textiles created by various human cultures. Žižek is mad about it. I walk halls miles long to view the textiles. Nobody can read the textile in Indus script. Nobody can explain how it got here. It’s just me and spirit Žižek anyway, so I have nobody to ask. At the end of one hall there is a massive room filled with stalls like a farmers’ market. The smell of cooking food is overpowering. No humans, but tacos have been prepared, naanwiches have been prepared, beef wellington has been prepared, poutine has been prepared, duck l’orange has been prepared, jollof rice has been prepared. It is unclear who could have prepared the dishes, but they have been prepared. Hence the construction. As I feast, I mumble to no one, to Žižek. I guess I’ve got to get to the bottom of it.
Žižek has fucked off to write a book. A ringed moon partially obscures the world it orbits outside the porthole. I make a left, go down some hatch, emerge in the same hallway. No, it just looks the same. I’m trying to be less ocularcentric. Yip yip. The yip of the African Hunting Dog. Yip yip yip. A pack. I pretend I’m filming a nature documentary with my phone so as to not disturb them. I am bestowed complete invisibility. They sniff me. One nibbles my shoe, but then they’re off across the plain, chasing the striped beast that is their primary prey in this quadrant.
On the mezzanine level I find a map. You are here. I guess that’s helpful information. But where is everyone? I need some context. The big picture. When I press the button on the map that says “Big Picture,” the mezzanine reassembles into IKEA. I wander a hall of kitchen cabinets. In this one, an axe. In this, one a plunger. In this one, a sense of comedic timing. I pass through the checkout and pay for my wares. Beyond the parking lot the hall continues. I find myself in a blizzard, in a sunless boardroom occupied by airbrushed executives. From jagged peaks thunderbolts clatter. You are here. The map persists. Where are the lingonberries? The meatballs?
I check the mail. There’s a letter from Carol on behalf of the earth’s entire human population addressed to me. Have I seen the textiles? Nobody knows how to read that one in Indus script. But it’s a textile from one of earth’s innumerable cultures and so it was included. It’s unclear from the letter whether Carol or Earth’s entire human population decided to include it. Someone wants to know who I’m talking to. I’m talking to nobody. I don’t reply right away. Best to keep ‘em waiting.
A masquerade expands across the atrium I discover down another endless hallway. Feathered and shimmering, yellow birds hop into the air they’ve fashioned. Leafy tunics swirl in emerald, create a forest, abode of leopards, daimons, biting ants. I can’t run from the spot, though I feel I’m witnessing something I’m not supposed to. Phyllis is there with a camera to document the masks. She documents me too. I want to talk to her, but I’m frozen in what must be the artificial gravity. Masks prowl corridors and howl, their bodies a language. I can’t give you the meaning.
I need a drink. Off a hallway there’s a room. In that room there’s a bar in London in 1978. Warren Zevon is at the bar drinking a salty margarita. Hey. Hey yourself. This is going well. Outside the bar it’s raining in space London. Passengers alight from double-deckers, are sucked violently into darkness. What a miserable country. But we’re in space, I say. Zevon tosses back his drink. Bullshit’s interstellar. Sufficiently vague response. Zevon is a cool guy. I would like to say this to him. I would like to be able to speak without words. I don’t know how. It isn’t taught where I’m from. So I drink. There’s no rush. When he finishes one, another appears. I can’t keep up. I slosh. Hey. Hey yourself. Warm through the endless night, we listen to the storm outside, inside ourselves.
I have seen a gnome. At first I thought it was just this headache, but now I’m convinced. It scurries by as I drool in some hallway. A dune gnome. About six inches, complete with orange cap, beard, and stiltsuit. Not wanting to frighten the gnome, I make no sudden movements. The gnome disappears for awhile, comes back with a small cup of some desert potion. Drink this for your head. I’m touched because I know this variety of gnome typically avoids humans. It tastes vegetal. I try speech. It’s a hot one out there, huh. He shrugs his little shoulders.
From the viewing deck, a binary star system whirlpools around the drain of the cosmic sink. I go swimming. Blue dust gets in my snorkel. I butterfly lonely. My phone informs me of the collision estimated to occur between the stars in about a billion years. Call it slow dance. Call it murder. It’s all the same. The local rocks don’t need me to concoct the narrative, imagine the seasons to follow, spinning as they will around their slice of eternity, where every sky’s a crime scene.