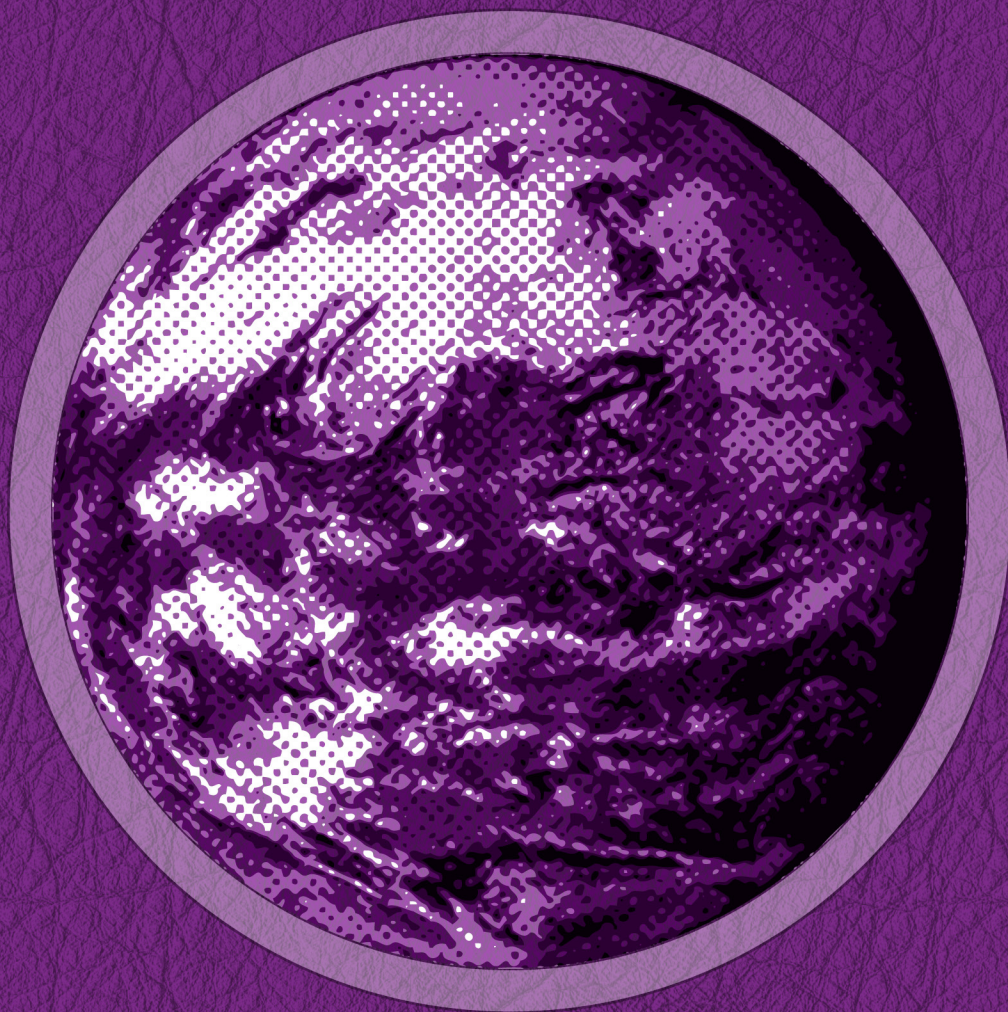


Unnamed Journal



See the world, they said.
Issue 12

UNNAMED JOURNAL

Volume 2, Issue 6

October 2017

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HOW TO TELL US
HOW AMAZING WE ARE

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

4 From the Editor

5 The Guy Came Out

9 Ulysses & the Fugitive -
Chapter 2

16 The Meditations of
Caius Caligula

FROM THE EDITOR

This issue marks the conclusion of volume 2 of the Unnamed Journal. We're looking into expanding our roster of contributors for future volumes, but we're still in the process of setting up a new system for freelance submissions. Please watch our facebook page for details in the future.

As this is the final issue of volume 2, we'll be taking our customary several month break between volumes. Both Fitz and I can scarcely believe we've kept this publication rolling for as long as we have, but what's even harder to believe is how little our creditors were willing to settle for when we pleaded poverty. Suckers! Now we all we need are a believable paper trail and a few offshore bank accounts...

This month we have a short story by Andrew Patrick called, The Guy Came Out. It's a story about a man who sees Death and then proceeds to annoy him while he's working. Our second feature is the second chapter of my novel, Ulysses & the Fugitive. Ulysses must figure out how to move an immovable object before he can gain entrance to Black Rock City. Our third and final feature this month is The Meditations of Gaius Caligula. Caligula ruminates on the nature of his own, well, nature.

We'll see you in volume 3!

Alfred Underhill
Editor-in-Chief

THE GUY CAME OUT

By Andrew Patrick

I was sitting drunk on a plastic adirondack chair that my ex-girlfriend hadn't thought to take with her when I saw Death. It had been so long since I had been good and drunk - she hadn't liked it, and I thought her worth changing for - that I looked at Death a long time without recognizing it.

When I did recognize it, I was too drunk to have any humility about it. "The fuck are you doing here?" I said to Death.

"I'm waiting," said Death.

"I thought Death waits for no man."

"Poets know way less than they think," said Death. His voice was flat, cold, and strangely bereft of menace.

I had another shot of whiskey. Death stood there, waiting. I looked at the fraying edges of his cloak. It was so dull a black it was almost brown.

"I'm waiting for someone to come out," said Death. "So you can take him?" I said.

"Yeah," said Death.

"Why don't you just go in?" "I could. But that's not how this one happens." "Why not?"

"I don't set these things. I just collect."

I thought about that. There was a stillness in the air. I couldn't hear any crickets. Or Dogs. I had some more whiskey. The whiskey didn't taste any different. I thought about getting up to take a piss, but it occurred to me that Death might be gone when I got back, and getting drunk and forgetting my ex-girlfriend seemed less lame with Death around.

"Should you be telling me about all this?" I asked.

"All what?"

"About how you operate."

"You don't know anything about how I operate."

"I know you have to wait, and that you don't decide things." "So what?"

The Guy Came Out

"Should I know that?"

"Why shouldn't you?"

I thought about that. "I don't know," I said, "Never mind." "Okay."

I looked at Death more closely. All I could really see was a shroud with a hood. Even the sleeves were seemingly absent. A mass of flowing something, moving in wind I could not feel, was all that my eyes really showed me. There certainly weren't any skeletal hands holding a scythe.

"Are you actually...you know..." I said.

"What?" said Death.

"Death," I said, feeling stupid.

"That's not my name, but yeah. You can call me that. It's what I am to your kind."
"You have a name?"

"Yeah."

"Can I know it?"

"It's not a secret, but I'm not going to tell you."

"You're not?"

"No. You wouldn't get it, and I don't feel like explaining it. I'm working." "Okay," I said.

I had another shot. I wasn't feeling the whiskey anymore. I wasn't feeling sober, and I wasn't feeling really drunk. My brain began to clue me in to the reality that I should not be

seeing what I was seeing. I began to look around the dark street in front of my house to see if anyone else was outside and could see what I was seeing. But there was no one.

"It's not that you can't know about what I do," said Death, after a little while. "It just doesn't make a difference if you do. They could tell you everything, and you couldn't do anything with it."

"They?" I said.

"They. The powers. The gods. Whatever you want to call them." "They're real?"

The Guy Came Out

"They exist. I don't know if they're real in a way you could get." "Do they have names?"

"Some of them do. They don't really need them, though."

Suddenly, Death moved, shifting to a spot five feet to my left. I did not see him traverse the distance. He just left one spot and was in another as though an unseen switch had been flipped.

"What are you doing?" I said, covering up my revulsion at the uncanny nature of all this. I was beginning to feel slightly sick.

"I'm trying to get him to see me." "Why does he have to see you?"

"That's how it works."

"How what works?"

"How I work. He has to see me. When he sees me, he knows me, and when he knows me, I take him."

I didn't like the way that sounded. Something sounded wrong with it. I had another shot, which I knew wouldn't help me think or feel better. I poured it down my gullet anyway and grimaced through it. When I looked back with one eye, Death was still in the same place he had been. Then I remembered.

"But I've seen you," I said.

"No, you haven't," Death said.

"I'm looking at you right now."

"Quiet for a second..."

"Okay." I suddenly felt very sober, but still sick. I didn't like it at all.

Death shifted away again and I suddenly got the sense that he was behind me. I didn't look to verify this, as that suddenly seemed like a bad idea.

"You ever read the Bible?" said Death. "Um...I think so. Parts of it, anyway."

"You remember the part when Moses has to cast his eyes down when God passes over him, so he can only see God's back and not his face?"

"Um..."

The Guy Came Out

"It's kind of like that. You haven't really seen me. You've just seen an angle."

"Does that mean something?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, am I like a prophet or something? Do I have special status because I saw an angle of you? How did that happen?"

"I don't know," said Death. "Probably not. It's probably just one of those things."

"Does it happen a lot?"

"Sometimes. Most people don't talk to me, though. They usually yell things or they freak out and run away."

"Do you want me to stop?"

"It doesn't matter."

I suddenly became very aware of my breathing. I focused on breathing good strong breaths in and out. I focused on my pulse and forced myself to be calm. I wanted to piss myself, and I wanted to run away, and I wanted to scream.

Then Death shifted back to where he'd been at the beginning of the conversation, and I suddenly felt fine again. Which was the weirdest thing of all, but I decided to take another drink and forget about it. I looked at Death, with his long flowing dull black shroud and I enjoyed the peace. Death did not shift anymore, nor did he say anything else.

After a long time, I heard Death sigh audibly, and then, like a wave that suddenly breaks farther away than you expected, he drifted away with a light snap. I could hear crickets again, and cars going up the adjoining street. A dog barked three houses down.

I decided it was time to go in, and when I did, I stood up too fast. I made it maybe a step and a half before I dropped to my knees and vomited. I could feel it on my hands but I didn't mind.

When I stood up, I saw my neighbor across the street standing in his yard. He looked confused. He came to the end of his yard and looked across the street at me. He was a few years older than me, with a round hard gut and coiffed grey hair.

"Who were you talking to just now?" he asked.UJ

ULYSSES & THE FUGITIVE

Chapter 2: To Black Rock

By Alfred Underhill

“**C**or, yeah, man, you’re gonna love the fucking burn!”

“Giles,” Ulysses said, “I’ve been to regional burns before. I’ve got a pretty good idea of what to expect out of this one.”

“Right, yeah, I know. But like, this is the big one, right? This is Burning Man. Tens of thousands of burners burning for a week, mate. Oh, the sight of it all!” Giles shot Ulysses a knowing look over his sunglasses; his spirits couldn’t be dampened. Ulysses shook his head. They were just outside of Reno, in a car with no roof, on their way to the Promised Land: Black Rock.

“Figure we’ll make it back alive?” Ulysses asked with a forced smile.

“I dunno, mate. Might not,” Giles said, mirroring his friend’s smile. “The main thing to watch out for is the dust. It’ll get into everything; there’s no way around that. Just remember to use the vinegar instead of water if you have to wash it off.”

Ulysses nodded. He stared at the barren landscape to his right. The only sound for several minutes was the wind whipping past.

“What about the girls?”

“Oh now, listen to Lee!” Said the Aussie putting on a falsetto, “Tell me big brother Giles: will there be girls there? Girls that will want to shag my pathetic, dirty carcass? Oh please say yesssss!”

“Fuck you.” Ulysses rolled his eyes as he said it.

“You’re the twat saying ‘I’ve been to burns before, Giles.’ Be a good chap and fuck-off.”

“Seriously, Giles: fuck you,” said Ulysses. “You know that’s not how I meant that question. I haven’t had much of a budget to get out and meet new people since I’m still looking for work. So I got to take what chances I get to meet people, alright?”

“Yeah, yeah no need to get sensitive, Lee. I was just having a bit of fun. ” Giles pinched at the underside of nose absently, sniffing.

“So the ladies at Black Rock are the same as at smaller burns?” “Well yeah, basically,” said Giles with a blank expression. “Except of course they’re at Burning

Ulysses & The Fugitive 2

Man. That does seem to have some effect on everyone, I'd say." His grin returned.

"All right, man, I'll take your word."

The line of cars stretched ahead of them further than Ulysses had anticipated. Neither he nor Giles could see the gate from their spot in line. The car roof was up because of the scorching heat and blowing dust. Giles, still at the wheel, had swapped out his sunglasses for a pair of mirrored goggles. His pale elbow poked out the window into the sun. Ulysses sat next to him wearing his usual sunglasses, staring at the line of cars ahead and peeking at the line behind them in the passenger side mirror.

"That's a lot of fucking cars," Ulysses said.

"Yeah. People come from all over the world to be here," Giles replied.

"I'm glad you were able to get some extra time off so we could hang before this insanity, man. It's been good having you around, bar fights and all. Next time, I'll come out your way."

Giles took a swig of water.

"Nah, fuck that, mate. Fuck Australia. Full of fucking Aussies: who wants to come and see all that, eh?" He was grinning. "No, I got a better idea. Let's meet up somewhere closer to me, like Japan, Indonesia, Hong Kong; maybe Bali," he trailed off as they crept a car length forward.

"All-righty then, my friend," said Ulysses. "We'll decide on some place before you head back to Oz."

"Please don't fucking call it that."

"Huh, why not?"

"It's a crap slang term." Giles snorted dismissively. "Feeling a bit of national pride, are we?"

"Fuck off! It just sounds fucking stupid is all. You yanks have no problem sounding fucking stupid, but I prefer not to."

Ulysses was about to launch a retort, when a young woman emerged from the truck ahead of them in line. She took a few steps from the truck and began hula-hooping. Ulysses watched her with interest; Giles was transfixed.

Ulysses & The Fugitive 2

"Yeah, I like her," Giles said. He checked the unmoving caravan before him, and put the car in park. "Right, well then, Lee, I think it's time for us to get acquainted."

"Okay," Ulysses said, "you want me to come with or should I keep moving the car up?"

"Either way, mate. Cheers!" Giles slammed the door as he finished his sentence.

Ulysses wiped his forehead free of sweat and took a sip of water. He looked at the line of cars and shook his head. He glanced over to where Giles had already begun a conversation with hula-hooping girl.

"Fuck it." Ulysses opened his door and went out into the blazing heat. He squinted against the day despite his sunglasses while he walked over to the pair.

"Oi, yeah, that's Lee, me mate," said Giles with garrulous inflection as Ulysses joined them.

"Hi," he said.

"This here is Wendy, mate."

"Hi," said the petite curvy girl. She stopped hooping and adjusted the white, black, and neon green cyber-lox in her hair. Wendy pulled a canteen off of her belt and poured a light orange liquid into her open mouth. She looked at Ulysses and Giles, "So, is this your first trip to Burning Man?" She wiped her mouth with the back of her hand.

"Not for me, but for him, yeah," said Giles thrusting a thumb toward Ulysses, who shot him an annoyed look. Giles never turned away from Wendy to acknowledge the gaze.

"Well," she said, looking at Ulysses and smiling, "welcome home and happy burn."

"Thanks," he said, returning her smile, "happy burn to you too."

"Yeah, me and Lee drove from Denver to be here. Of course, I actually flew there from Sydney." Giles cannot be denied, thought Ulysses.

"Oh, are you originally from Sydney? Or did you move there?" Wendy asked. Ulysses realized his participation in the conversation had ended. He looked off in the direction of the gate.

"Ooh, you're sharp! Yeah, I moved to Sydney from Perth. Not a lot in Perth." "So,"

Ulysses & The Fugitive 2

Wendy said, as she started hula-hooping again, “what’s in Sydney?” “Oh, you know, just my job and my stuff.”

“Hey, Giles?”

“Eh?”

“I’m gonna go walk up and see if I can figure out how long it’ll be before we get in,” Ulysses said. He turned to Wendy and said, “Nice to meet you.”

“Take care,” she said waving.

And with that, Ulysses wandered past the truck and up the line of parked cars. “Fucking Giles the Wonder-Aussie,” he muttered.

Ulysses walked up to the gate. The entrance looked roughly the same as other burns he’d been too, just bigger. There were a lot of people around, all of them rocking various modes of dress. The only commonality amongst the styles was an attempt to achieve maximum comfort in the heat. Most of the burners in the entry way belonged to one of the many vehicles making their way onto the site. Some milled about, others stood and watched closely as their vehicles were searched for stowaways. All manner of supplies could be seen inside the cars and trucks, everything from the pragmatic to the decadent.

The rest of the people by the gate were the volunteers who struggled to wring order from the chaos of the assemble caravan. The volunteers formed three groups: those who registered incoming attendees, those who directed traffic, and those who searched incoming vehicles. Despite their combined efforts, the line of cars hadn’t budged yet. Now that he was by the entrance Ulysses could see why. At the head of the line there was a heavily modified school bus that had a flat tire. People stood around commenting on the immovable bus, while some volunteers, one with a walkie-talkie, were embroiled in trying to figure out how to extricate the thing.

“I’m telling you, getting a tow truck in here is going to take a while. Your best bet is get all your shit out and start carrying it in.” Said a tall middle-aged woman with a walkie-talkie.

“Yeah,” chimed in another volunteer, “she’s right. Meanwhile, we can see about moving the registration pavilion back to make room for the rest of the cars to get through.”

“I hear what you’re saying, but what am I gonna do about my bus, man?”

Ulysses & The Fugitive 2

"Okay," said the volunteer with a walkie-talkie, whom had taken point in the situation, "so you don't have a spare, a patch, fix-a-flat, or like, an air compressor, right?"

"Uh, no, I don't have any of that stuff."

"So, you might be able to find some of that by asking around inside, but you're looking at leaving the bus here and getting towed out after the burn, or getting it towed out now and finding a way to get back here."

"Goddammit!"

"Hey dude, this sucks. I know. But like I said, unless you can find people that have stuff to fix that tire, those are your options."

"Fuck," the bus driver said, in a drawn out sigh.

"Hey folks," Ulysses said, "I don't know if this'll help or not, but I do have a spare can of fix-a-flat in my car." The bus driver and the volunteers looked at Ulysses.

"That'd help if we had an air compressor to go with it," said the lead volunteer. "If this were a normal car tire, we'd be golden after a can of fix-a-flat. But that won't cut it for this thing."

"Have you asked around if anybody has an air compressor with them?" Ulysses looked back at the caravan of cars behind them. "Some of those trucks are pretty big, so is that bus, one of them might have one."

"Well," said the lead volunteer, "you can go ask them if you want to. For right now, I've gotta stay here and try to move things around so we can get people in. I'm sure Mark here would appreciate the help, if you can manage it."

"Sure," Ulysses said, "I'll go ask around and see if anybody's got anything like an air compressor or a pump or something." He looked down the line of cars that stretched before the gate, sighed, and started walking back in the direction of the rental car.

Ulysses was well past his rental when he found a van whose owner actually had an air compressor. Ulysses explained the situation to the road weary driver and his passengers. They belonged to a caravan of several vehicles for a theme camp.

"So that's what's going on, man?"

"Yeah, basically," said Ulysses. "So, why don't we get your van out of line, stop by

Ulysses & The Fugitive 2

my car to get the fix-a-flat, and go fix that bus wheel. Then maybe more of these folks will be able to move."

"What about the rest of my camp?" The driver asked.

"Well, I figure the gate staff will let your van in early for helping but probably won't let all of you cut because you're the only one helping. Do ya'll have a space for your camp already?"

"I think so," said the driver, "I'm not sure. I guess I could just wait for them on the inside or go on ahead or something."

"Sounds good to me," Chimed in the guy in the passenger seat, "let me go tell the rest of our crew." He jumped out and went to the vehicles behind the van, stopping at the driver-side window of each, dispensing the plan. He came jogging back through the dust and sun and said, "We're good."

"All right then. Mind if I hitch a ride?" Ulysses said.

They had him squeeze into the van between their camp gear, the door, and the compressor. They stopped at Ulysses' car where he fell out of the van onto his feet. He grabbed the can of fix-a-flat from the trunk and then wedged himself back into the van with some help from the guy in the front seat. It was a short trip to the disabled bus from there.

Ulysses and his new found comrades got out and surveyed the damage. The exasperated bus driver got out to talk with them.

"Did you find something?"

"I think we might be able to fix your tire," said the van driver. Ulysses, the guys from the van, and the bus driver were standing in a semi-circle around the wheel.

"It's flat. Doesn't seem to be anything stuck in it. It's like the air is just gone," said the bus driver.

"All right," said the van-driving hippie, "we got a compressor in the van, and our friend here has a can of fix a flat. Think that'll do it?"

"Oh man, that would be awesome!"

"Cool," said the van driver, "then give us a hand moving our gear and we'll get it going."

The four of them heaved the equipment out with some help from onlookers and

Ulysses & The Fugitive 2

the bus passengers who hadn't moved into the burn yet. It took a few minutes to get the generator running, but soon it was hooked up to the compressor. They waited a few minutes for the pressure to rise.

"Alright," said the van driver, "now we'll find out if this wasn't all a goddamn waste of time." He attached the hose to the valve stem in the bus's tire and started filling it with air. The bus's suspension creaked as the vehicle's frame leveled out. Before long, the front end of the bus wasn't listing to the left.

"You ready with that fix-a-flat?"

"Yeah," said Ulysses, "I got it."

"Okay, I'm shutting it off on three. When I hit three, Johnny's gonna unhook the nozzle. You know what to do from there."

"Got it." Ulysses crouched down, fix-a-flat in hand.

"One, two, three," the van driver said. Johnny unhooked the nozzle in a loud hiss. Ulysses screwed the fix-a-flat tube into place and hit the plunger. The white goo traveled through the tube and into the tire. He stood there holding the plunger until he was sure the can was empty. Then he unscrewed it and replaced the tire's valve stem cap.

"What do you think?" He asked the bus driver. Who was eying the tire.

"It looks better than it was," the driver said. He shook Ulysses hand and drew him in for a quick clap of a hug. He repeated his ritual of gratitude with the van driver and Johnny. "You guys saved my ass, and now I can move this thing and stop pissing off all those people," he said gesturing to the line behind them.

"Happy burn!" said the van driver.

"Happy burn to you guys too! Hey," said the bus driver, "I got tons a beer in this heap. Hang on a sec, and I'll get you a cold one." He disappeared inside and then returned with four cold beers. They cracked them, toasted. Then the bus driver got into his bus, started it up, and drove into Black Rock proper.

Ulysses, Johnny, and the Van driver broke down the equipment and got it back into the van, once again with the help some onlookers and the volunteer staff. The guys in the van were allowed to enter in ahead of the rest of the line for their efforts. Ulysses declined to join them, but said he'd try to catch up with them later inside. He began walking back toward his car, drinking his beer as he went. **UJ**

THE MEDITATIONS OF CAIUS CALIGULA

Chapter 1: of Gods

By Thomas Fitz

It is a commonplace among philosophers to call upon the gods as they begin their dissertations. Even Lucretius, that atomist, who believes in the immortality of nothing, incants to Venus. I suppose we must forgive him this - he was a poet, after all, and poets are but prophets without a temple - but I do find it strange. Philosophy is human reason directed at human questions. It does not need divine action. When the gods do give men answers, philosophers disdain it. Perhaps this is nothing more than a rhetor's trope, and not worthy of my attention.

In any case, I will not be joining in it. I will not call upon any god as I begin to write my revelations. It is unnecessary, for reasons stated above, and unnecessary things irritate me. I can think of nothing more tedious than a Princeps, a ruler of the Roman world, pretending to humility as he proceeds to relay his wisdom to the world. Let us hope no Caesar is ever so dull as to pretend to be a mere philosopher.

I, Caius Julius Caesar Augustus Germanicus, known as "Caligulia", have no need of a higher authority to grant weight to my words or guide them to truth. I never have had need of anything but myself. I am sufficient to myself. Therefore I call upon myself, and am secure in the knowledge that I will answer. Let us, then, begin.

I was born divine. You may laugh - many have laughed, to their suffering - but it is true. My father's soldiers recognized it. It is my earliest memory, tramping up and down in my little boots, my caligae, with the legions on the Rhine. I was their special totem, their good luck charm. I marched in my little uniform and they loved it. How absurd! I was no soldier; I could barely walk. Yet these men believed that I bestowed good fortune on them, merely by my presence. How can that be explained? Either all those men were fools, which is possible, or they perceived my august status and acted accordingly. Which, you must admit, is also possible.

I say I was no soldier, and I never became one, but I know something of soldiers from my youth. I understand them as a species. I know them better than most Romans, especially Senators, who see only the rabble they fear given something useful to do, by which they stand to profit. These are the dolts, and their poet sons, who thinks soldiers are mere brutes, faceless killers and automata. These are the swine among whom I am currently caged. Then again, perhaps they are the ones

The Mediations of Caius Caligula 1

caged.

I digress. In any case, only imbeciles say all soldiers are alike. They are fooled by the uniform, failing to understand that the uniform is necessary because the soldiers are not uniform. It equalizes and organizes a mass of different men into a collective body. But the men who wear the uniform differ as all men do.

Take Sejanus, the snake who wriggled his way to becoming Tiberius' Praetorian Prefect and very nearly toppled his master. Such pride he had! Such ambition! He alone perceived what, I suspect, many will realize - that the imperium exists at the sufferance of the legions. That was the basis of all our auctoritas, going back to Divine Julius and even further, to his forerunners: Sulla and Marius. Sejanus saw that he could be emperor, in fact if not in name. He almost was emperor.

Macro, who removed first Sejanus, then Tiberius himself, at my urging, was different. Not a jot of ambition had he. Not an ounce! He was content, oh so content! Like a hound, eager to please, hungry for whatever scraps his master let fall from the table. So I used him like a hound, and when he had served his purpose, I disposed of him before he gained awareness of what he had done. One cannot permit a hound to get a taste for blood. It is cruel.

Which brings me to Chaerea, one of my other Praetorian Tribunes. A man who I delight in mocking, because he refuses to get the joke. Of all the soldiers I have known, he most fits the mold of a bloodthirsty killer. He enjoys killing for killing's sake. He does not know this, but I have seen it in his face. When he gave me news of Macro's death, he had the dreamy, spent look to him, as if he had just returned from the arms of a lover. Which, in a way, he had. He loves death and blood, is ignorant of this, and is so my perfect instrument. Without being at all aware of it, he will do my will.

I digressed again. It is a weariness common to me. My mind flows on golden rivers of thought and awareness that I can barely wrestle to cohesion. It is the human shell of me, struggling to maintain its union with my divinity. It is an exhaustion so profound that my shell often collapses from the weight of it. This saddens me, but I have become used to it. No one ever said that the life of a god was easy.

Perhaps you do not believe me. Perhaps you prefer me merely mad. Caligulia, the mad emperor, killing this and fucking that, and standing on his head and singing dirty songs. That is, I admit, a much easier narrative for some to accept. Because it spares them from having to define their terms. If a man, given absolute power, takes his actions to the absolute, they call it madness. But what is mad about it? If a farmer refuses to farm, he will die cruelly. If a senator gives all his land away, he will become a pauper, and cease to be himself. But if I, a ruler, do everything in my power, to make clear to all that I rule, what is that but the natural and logical consequence? The wolf does not feast upon the lamb because he will not eat grain,

The Mediations of Caius Caligula 1

but because he is a wolf. And it is an axiom of our people since ancient days that man is wolf to man. QED.

But I am prepared to argue my case. Unlike the bleaters who trip from being at my throat to land at my feet, I will define my terms. I will demonstrate my godhood, as any god should.

What is a god? A god is that which lives beyond death. And I do not mean that in an esoteric, neoplatonist sense, but in a real sense. Gods may be, and often are, killed, but they endure death briefly before bursting out of it again. Death is their chrysalis. Witness poor Persephone, dragged back down the world of the dead only to escape from it again and again and again. This example would be better if Persephone had secured her own escape, and not

subjected herself to Jupiter's mastery, but it serves my dialectic anyway. Even gods are not always free to act as they would.

Ah, but I am not dead, you say, and so you cannot verify my godhood! Of course not. Nor should you be able to. You cannot touch godliness, nor smell it. Its metaphysical quality, it's abstraction, will not submit to the narrow field of your beast senses.

And to say that I am not dead is but to say that I have not died yet. Which is precisely what I can say of you, who hides from death like a flower reaching for the last long beams of sunset. But the flower will pass into darkness, and so will you. And so will I. But I will die by the action of my own will, and you will die by an accident you cannot see until it befalls you. And you will be swallowed up in death, whereas I will not remain there.

This does not pass for proof, you say. Again, rightly. But consider my history, and ask yourself if it's perfect improbability does not fully prove the divinity of my rise.

I was born on the Kalends of the month formerly known as September, now named in honor of my father Germanicus, in the year he was Consul. I was the youngest of three brothers, all sons to the elder son of the younger son, not of the Princeps Augustus, but of his wife. Before my father could claim Augustus' imperium, not only should my great-uncle Tiberius, but his son Drusus, and his son Tiberius Gemellus would have to pass away. And that would still have left me 3rd in line behind him.

Nor is that the worst of it. Before Tiberius could be emperor, all three of Augustus' own grandsons by his daughter Julia -- Caius Caesar, Lucius Caesar, and Agrippa Postumus -- had to die. This leaves me, by my own estimation, tenth in line to the Principate on the day of my birth, and that by adoption. Yet here I am, bending

The Mediations of Caius Caligula 1

Senators to my will and commanding the very seas to part for me. Will you continue to pretend that something other than Providence watched over me?

To look at me, my humanity I mean, more closely, only proves it further. I came to power six months before my 25th birthday. I had no accomplishments to recommend me to it. I had not, like the Divine Julius, forced the Roman world to submit to the ravishing strides of my genius. I had not, like Augustus, masterfully absorbed all legal power into my hands, without seeming to do so, and made Egypt of the Pharaohs my slave in the act. I had not, like Tiberius, spent a lifetime commanding the legions, serving with bitter loyalty the imperium. I had, in short, done nothing. Yet on the day Tiberius died the empire fell at my feet with rapturous devotion. Sidus, they called me, their star, Pullum, their chick. 160,000 beasts were sacrificed in my honor, before I could even think of ordering it. The King of the Parthians who had ravaged our eastern frontier with impunity in Tiberius' last miserable years made peace without a javelin being flung at the rising sun. Any wonder that so many saluted me with the title of Jupiter Latiaris?

What had I done to earn this, or to make it be? Nothing. I am a handsome enough fellow, I grant, but not more so than others. How could I have so terrified an old Parthian bull? How could I have evoked the oldest epithet of Jupiter, from a cult that was old and forgotten when the Republic was born?

The best that could be said of me during Tiberius' reign was that I managed to survive it. That is no small feat, but my uncle Claudius managed it as well as I did, and he had a frightful disadvantage in the eyes of Romans. I survived the rise and fall of Sejanus. I survived the dull horror of Tiberius' final years. I suppose I did contribute some to the ousting of Sejanus - after all, I brought Macro to Tiberius' attention. I was bellying his wife, you see, and he was gentlemanly enough to look the other way. But Augustus would not have needed such.

And yes, I made myself small enough in Tiberius' eyes -- another chrysalis, that -- to earn no more from him than bemusement. Some may call that clever, but I do not. Sycophancy, like the pox, can be ignored, but it is always known for what it is by him who suffers it.

No, these explanations will not serve. These tedious palace intrigues that a fifth-rate playwright would disdain to employ in his farce does not account for my mastery over the known world, for the revelatory adulation that marked it. The only explanation unaccounted for by madness is that my divinity made itself known when the gods at last struck my venal old great-uncle to the earth. That is the only explanation a sane man can accept. I will brook no other.

And I will prove it yet. On the day when Chaerea does my will, the world will again shake as I emerge at last from the poor body I was born into on that Kalends

The Mediations of Caius Caligula 1

long ago. I will die and the heavens will receive me and men will know what walked among them. It is inevitable. It is my destiny and my will.UJ