

## People in the Sun

<https://sites.google.com/view/people-in-the-sun>

The sun never beat down so heavily as on a weary soul.

What nonsense was this?

The sun beat down on every soul—wearing or not—with the same ubiquity of its burdensome light. And just what business does that celestial body have in pervading our world with its illumination? Who among us ever asked to have their corner of the world (and, hence, their lives) to be burnished free of all shadows, to be relieved of all our necessary, dark hiding places? Where does the reach of that invasive star end? Of course during the night, when its reign is overcome by the rotation of our own little piece of space debris. But the sun never tires in its mission, never wavers in its objective. If it could, it would irradiate every second of every minute of every hour of every day.

And that goes just for our sun. What wouldn't another star or some other aspect of the universe do to us if it could? Would it not perhaps outshine the sun with loathsome a lustrousness, scouring away every umbral patch in which we laid our weary heads?

Who knows the way of things other than what they are. We—the people in the sun—did; we understood this proposition better than most. We were like a mossy forest rock that has been overturned, exposing the larval world underneath to a merciless and unwanted light. No longer could we find solace during a summer's cloying twilight, or find a drowsy rest in the shade of a tree; even a brief respite in the dimness of our evening dinners, whether shared with a loved one

or alone, had been made vulnerable. Worst of all, we could no longer even pretend to hide beneath nighttime covers, guarded from our thoughts by a moonless, dreamless night.

So, if we couldn't hide or even pretend to hide, where did that leave us?

This current gathering of the people in the sun, of which Markle was a member, was, as usual, to be found on the outskirts of town. Not beyond the town, but on the fringes, what might be called the outer most boundary. We were stationed in what was once a used car lot. Adverts promising *Bad Credit? No Credit? No Problem!* blew about the area, becoming trapped in the warped and cracking pavement. Now, Larry's Used Car Emporium was just a vacant stretch of concrete. Well, not vacant.

How many of us were there? Today, including Markle, there were at least 5, though possibly more. This number was given to fluctuate from week to week—sometimes ascending, sometimes descending. We sat. Our chairs were of the metal, foldout variety. As the sun rose, the tubular frames cast lengthening shadows on the pavement. Eventually, as the sun hit its zenith, the shadows were reduced to indistinct blobs.

*The newcomers*, like Ms. Legler, often took to distracting themselves with various trinkets they had about their person. This was never a lasting strategy as the newcomers eventually fell still, becoming one of *the resigned*. This groups main pastime consisted in trying to sleep. But what good was this when sleep only produced dreams that reminded them of other worlds? And, didn't these dream worlds also contain people in the sun or, if not exactly people, things close to people? Beings such that resignation made more like dolls whose own dreams were dull and closer to twilight than we had ever known. Or sometimes these inhabitants of the dreamworld were strange, oozing creatures who luxuriated in the night in a way that the resigned

never could. *The lifers*, those who had been there the longest, could only manage to stare emptily across the barren lot.

Markle, who was in a chair at the front of the assembly, glanced left, then right, then behind, making a quick sweep of the expressions of those around him. He had been here for some weeks (not quite long enough to be considered a lifer) but still could not divine the direction the proceedings were going to take. Behind him he recognized several individuals, including Ms. Tarrants, whom he knew to have recently suffered a grievous personal loss and Mr. Jephson whose occupation he once heard referred to as “works in brickyard.” To his right was a newcomer—a fidgety character whom he did not recognize. On his left was Haas, whom he knew to be a fiction writer of some kind, facing forward. We all faced forward, Markle reflected. Then he further reflected on how he came to be here.

It began with a questionnaire. Actually, it more than likely began before that, probably when he first felt the small hole open in his head. The hole expanded from being rather small to medium size and then to a very large sized hole that his job, friends, hobbies, and eventually his entire life, fell into. It was after falling in the hole that the questionnaire took place. The questionnaire itself presented itself as nothing unusual, being one of those things that one sometimes finds oneself filling out in times of idleness. Or something you find in a waiting room or other room where you either are waiting to do something or have just done something or just happen to be. Markle, in this case, happened to be in the gazebo at Quentin’s city park. It began thus:

Over the last 2 weeks, how often have you been bothered by any of the following problems?

1. Trouble falling or staying asleep, or sleeping too much
  - NOT AT ALL

- SEVERAL DAYS
- MORE THAN HALF THE DAYS
- NEARLY EVERY DAY

2. Feeling tired or having little energy

- NOT AT ALL
- SEVERAL DAYS
- MORE THAN HALF THE DAYS
- NEARLY EVERY DAY

Going on with:

Over the last week, how often have you been bothered by any of the following problems?

10. A dread of certain and unpleasant facts

- AT LEAST ONCE
- SEVERAL DAYS
- MORE THAN HALF THE DAYS
- NEARLY EVERY DAY

11. Confusion as to what is organic or inorganic

- AT LEAST ONCE
- SEVERAL DAYS
- MORE THAN HALF THE DAYS
- NEARLY EVERY DAY

Finishing with:

Over the last 24 hours, how often have you been bothered by any of the following problems?

24. Soup that silently mocks you

- SEVERAL MINUTES
- MANY HOURS
- ALL MY WAKING HOURS
- ALL 24 HOURS

25. A desire to be a lump of existence

- SEVERAL MINUTES
- MANY HOURS
- ALL MY WAKING HOURS
- ALL 24 HOURS

Markle finished filling out the questionnaire and slipped it in the slot of the wooden box marked “Finished Forms” that was positioned just outside the gazebo’s entrance. He noted something etched or burned into the box—a primitive eye symbol with the initials D.S.R. underneath.

A few days later Markle received the following in the mail:

**Congratulations on your excellent answers!**

You have been chosen by D.S.R. to take part in the People in the Sun!

It promises to be illuminating!

Attendance is mandatory!

Beneath this was a map to some location that he registered as being on the edge of town, not in another town, but on Quentin’s—Markle’s town—very edges. Turning the paper over he noticed on the flier’s back was the same eye logo, done in the same etching or scorching technique that was on the survey box. Underneath it read:

The People in the Sun

A production of Dreadful Silent Reflections

D.S.R. is a division of the Society

“What now?” said Haas.

“What, what now?” replied Markle after being stirred from the reverie that he had fallen into, maybe for the last week or so.

Haas shrugged and returned to his own lethargic reverie.

What were we? Participants? An audience? The leaflet Markle received noncommittally said “take part in.” Markle touched his forehead, then shaded his eyes to better look in the distance. Beyond the former used car lot was a scrubland of sorts. Rain had always been a rare commodity in Quentin and here, on the very outskirts, it seems not to have fallen for months or years or who knows how long. Markle squinted. Distorting heat vapors rising from the concrete made it difficult to see. He squinted more. Something was out there, swirling up the dust and moving towards him and the other people in the sun.

Haas, who had been staring at the same phenomenon, now had his head in his hands. In his mind he recalled how it was that he thought he had escaped from being one of the people in the sun. He seemed sure his allowance to leave had some direct connection to his work as a writer, specifically his way of relating his experience as being one of the people in the sun.

*The light never left us no matter how much we distracted ourselves. We sun people could never truly escape it, though, on occasion, we were sometimes permitted a leave of absence. Back in our homes we could curtain the windows and block out the light, indulging again the mystery inherent in a shadowy, twilight existence. Mystery? Yes, mystery. Not of the solvable whodunit variety—that was the last thing we wanted—but the mystery of our lives, what flourished in the dark that kept us ticking along.*

*Could the light we knew be permanently taken away?*

*I thought not...until, as one of the sun people, I thought so.*

*In the distance, a massive cloud pulsated across the deserted landscape. It was like something one of those long-range space telescopes—perhaps one already perched out there in the blackness—would produce an image of. It fumed spectrally forward, an endless eruption of*

*primal particles. Now I thought how the light would be taken away: destroyed in the annihilating detonation of ancient forces.*

Others, whether they were people in the sun or not, were sometimes assuaged (and sometimes even entertained) by these writings of Haas and others like him. But this entertaining assuagement wasn't fortified with enough permanent distraction to last. Haas, despite being the concocter of such distractions—or perhaps because of it—knew this all too well.

Besides stories, the people in the sun (and everyone else) had other artifacts to divert their attention. Whether these objects were furnished by D.S.R. or not was open to speculation. Some felt sure that the event's organizers provided this array of devices to distract the people in the sun (and everyone else) in order to better conduct their business, whatever it might be, under the veil of secrecy. Others thought the providing of the objects was nothing more than a malicious way for D.S.R. to openly mock the users of such objects, a way of demonstrating their inscrutable superiority to analysis or description. Whatever the provenance of the items, they frequently included a type of box that showed moving pictures (one showed the dead in motion, shambling mindlessly in the twilight), something that made a variety of noises (these made it insidiously difficult to concentrate), and tools to make colored marks (with a wistful sorrow Haas sometimes held a particular wooden mark making tool).

Sometimes the items were the definite work of D.S.R., and these were definitely placed to definitely mock our situation. Today, we found little cardboard boxes on our chairs. Opening them we each found a pair of sunglasses, very cheap sunglasses.

“Is this a joke?” someone asked.

“A sense of humor seems an unlikely thing to expect,” another volunteered.

“Even still, it has to be a joke.”

Through still squinting eyes, Markle began to see a little more clearly what it was out there in the distance: a massive cloud pulsated across the deserted landscape. It was like something one of those long-range space telescopes—perhaps one already perched out there in the blackness—would produce an image of.

Had Haas been right?

Objects of distraction and the words of Haas aside, simply forgetting we were people in the sun often proved to be the most effective to effect a leaving of that former used car lot. Not even one such as Markle, who did dwell on being a lump of existence and could envision the endless eruption of primal particles, could always keep everything illuminated by dreadful silent reflections.

But this forgetfulness became more and more a temporary state.

Upon returning to the lot, that is, if we were able to leave, there were sometimes pamphlets left on our seats. These pamphlets were not helpful. “Back so soon?” their covers colorfully blared in a strange parody of a promotion for a vacation cruise. Unfolding the brochure revealed much small type; too small to read except for the various paragraph subheadings: “Be ready for the worst!” and “You’ll wish you never knew!” in cartoonishly bold type.

Our numbers as people in the sun stabilized. Our shadows had become eviscerated. Our dark was...what was it?

Illuminated.



*Some of the sun people closed their eyes and muttered what I took to be prayers. Some got up and tried to run. I did not.* So wrote Haas.

*All our horrors were only so-called horrors* thought Markle.

Nobody tried to run and no prayers were muttered. A plume of gaseous detritus exsanguinated itself across the desolate tract of land, shriveling in mass and then expanding, gaining a kind of coherence as it made its way onto the concrete.

As one might look at a cloud and imagine to it a recognizable form (look at the unicorn!) the people in the sun--Markle, Haas, Mr. Jephson, Ms. Tarrants and all the rest— each assigned something vaguely recognizable to that billowing miasma. Was it not a hooded skeletal figure with long, bony arms striding reaper like across the horizon? Perhaps it was a great black moth, wings flapping spastically in some wild thrust of flight. Or was it something one of those long-range space telescopes—perhaps one already perched out there in the blackness—would produce an image of?

Markle could no longer decide, while Haas, who for some reason had a telescope in his hand, quietly laid it on his lap.

Whatever the people in the sun thought they saw, it did gain structure as it made its way onto the lot, a reeky pillar of sickly pink stardust, atop which throbbed an ill-starred eye. An otherworldly turquoise defined the sclerotic edges, growing lighter and then becoming purplish towards the center. A deep maroon formed the ovoid edges of the pupil before intensifying into a hideously glaring red iris. Unblinking, the eye undulated wave-like as the starry column existed itself forward. Besides the ever-present light of the sun that the people in the sun could sometimes escape, a new light shone upon them. It was not the light that someone like Haas

could describe or even the light of what they had come to know with their minds conceptualize. No, this was a light of another order. A ray had blossomed forth from that scarlet orb, scorching its advancement across the disused parking lot path with its poisonous illumination. Haas had been mistaken. It wasn't to be annihilation by an eruption of primal particles, but absorption in a luminescent irruption of inexhaustible forces.

Markle chuckled as he saw the writer put on the sunglasses.

The visitation upon us was, indeed, ancient as the sun, that center of our solar system whose light it had supplanted.

And behind it, this bilious monstrosity, was what? Dreadful Silent Reflections was only one division of the Society. What constituted the malignancy that birthed this one aspect? The unfortunate depths of existence had always loomed deep in the psyches of the people in the sun, but not deep enough. But that didn't matter. All pictures, all noises, all storytelling, was done. Light was now everything, everywhere, and always was and always would be. All our so-called horrors were polished away by that omni-malevolent gaze.

Could any people realize that salvation was at hand? They could not. This was Markle's last thought as he braced for the light.