

Good morning, noon, evening, or night, gentle reader. If you are reading this old journal, then my efforts have been successful. Yet even in writing this I get ahead of myself. The following are the records of what have occurred to a certain Jason T. Williams, formerly in residence in Napa, California. By the time you have read this, it is likely that my disappearance has been noticed, perhaps even filed away. The answers to that mystery that must've rocked that little town lie enclosed here, and much more besides.

On the 21st of August, 1936, I ventured on sabbatical from my employment at the library. During this time, me and my good friend Vincent took up lodging at a cabin of ours on the outskirts of town, inherited from the estate of my friend's late uncle Henry. There we indulged in our predilection towards occultism, at first engaging in our usual rigmarole of esoteric experiments using the late Henry's magical collection. This time, however, on the weekend prior to our scheduled return to the secular sphere, Vincent brought new literature for us to peruse. Evidently he had found the work of a man by the name of Austin Osman Spare, some artist given to automatic writing and peculiar sigilization. Vincent discussed the latter, stating that he had found a tree on the edge of the property with an undecipherable symbol etched into its bark. He then went on to elaborate on daydreams he had of that same sign, and strange reflections at dusk on the nature of the fabled "astral plane." We had planned on conducting explorations of this realm on our previous sabbatical, and Vincent went on to say that the nature and therefore method of how we would access this plane was substantially different from what we had initially assumed. In feverish states caught between vision and reason, Vincent claimed to have learned that the Other World is not "in" the cavernous depths or heavenly reaches, but rather directly parallel to our own. He immediately elaborated that like any occult theory these are likely psychological crutches for us to understand the ineffable, but insisted that framing things in this manner would make our endeavor more successful. When I asked him how this strange symbol related to all of this, he brought me to it himself.

The tree which he spoke of fit all custom of legend and witchery, dare I say painfully so. It was on the plain of waist-high, yellowed grass that lay on the northern edge of Henry's old estate. The tree itself was as gnarled and parched as possible, like some twisted mockery of jerky. Vincent brought me up to a hollow in the tree and carefully brought his lighter to life by it. There in the gloomy recesses I saw something quite strange. I realize now that this passage may seem pointless, as I have not elaborated on the nature of the sign anymore than I have previously. Yet words simply do not suffice. I have tried many a time to sketch the symbol on the space below, but as you can tell by the erased marks, I have not succeeded. There was some primality to the original, some vivaciousness that could not be captured. Even when I completely captured the form of it, it was wrong and dead, not like the dreadfully wonderful token that brought me to where I am now.

But I get ahead of myself.

After letting me recover from the perplexing experience of examining the symbol, Vincent began to speak. He now admitted to me his conviction that the image was alive in some capacity, and given the experience I had just undergone, I fully understood both his belief and why he had waited to show me the sign before unveiling said thought. He went on to say that if we could live with this image, this sigil, we might be able to transpose into whatever realm it represented, a plane Vincent considered to be identical to the astral. While in hindsight I can say that the latter statement was an exaggeration (the Splinterside is more of a single lens through which the Worlds are viewed), the former would certainly prove to be efficacious. For while we had previously thought to utilize sensory deprivation or elaborate temple theatre to penetrate the veil, Vincent proposed that we walk in the same strange reverie in which

he came upon his insights, forgoing food and water until dusk and walking around with minimal speech, two souls before the ultimate mystery. I initially thought to question how visualizing a maddeningly indescribable symbol and walking around would be anymore effective than ritual dress-up or borderline lucid dreaming, but I must admit that the sight of the sigil had left me somewhat more willing to acquiesce to his desire to try this method before any other. And as it turns out, we have little reason to be trying those other ones anymore.

We began our fast on Sunday morning and the vigil right after. At first the effects were nothing to write home about, simply the murky beginnings of a magical trance common to any Neophyte's work. Yet as Noon hit, the signs came in a little clearer. I began to feel a strange intimation of lonesomeness, not regarding me and my friend but rather a sense that the world beyond the estate just didn't really matter anymore. As though it wasn't really there. At first I wondered if this could simply be chalked down to the isolation enveloping the mind given our near full week away from civilization. When Vincent brought up similar feelings unprompted, I started to give that consideration less credence. And as the sun dimmed and the afternoon began to fade into evening, the efficacy of the technique became palpable. Walking around the dusty trails that rimmed the nearby forest, I felt more like some Greek initiate about to be inducted into the Mysteries of Eleusis than any common American man. Once or twice Vincent would point to the fields, saying the shadows fell strangely. I said that I did not see any such thing, and that was true. For instead I could almost swear I saw silhouettes out there on the hanging tree plains, ones that would vanish as soon as they were spotted.

I hate to give injury to my reader so, but the transposition itself was nothing spectacular. At some point in the night – I cannot recall when – me and Vincent fell asleep. What was interesting came after, however.

When me and Vincent awoke we were initially confused and then we were annoyed, for we recalled that we had work to attend to on Monday. Then we looked upon ourselves and found confusion once more.

Before us was skin of green. Or more precisely, *foliage* of green, for the patterns of our “flesh” appeared more vegetable than mammalian. A strange feeling in my jaw and upon my mouth told me that vaguely predatory fangs had appeared in my skull, if one could still call it that. When the worst of the shocks and preliminary disbeliefs had passed, I began to comb my thankfully still rather humanoid (though nailless) hands over my head, a head which now found itself covered not with hair, but leaves. The last bit I could only discern by gazing at the utterly confused expression of my friend; the eyes were pupilless.

The next part was not very important, simply the appropriate reaction to any sort of gross bodily violation. After we screamed and prayed and kept apart from another and reluctantly hugged, we got up from our position on the ground and assessed the surroundings for any hope of explication, let alone salvation. Around us was a woodland trail, much the same as the one we last recalled before our descent into unconsciousness, yet there was something decidedly *different* about it. Be it the way the light shone or the sepia tint to the earth or the eerie presence that lay behind our sight. When coupled with our strangely altered *tactile* sensations, or those minor dream-like slips in between moments, me and Vincent were quickly able to surmise that the technique had indeed worked, and the two of us were left with that other world we had so sought.

Once that was assessed, we slowly began to explore. At this time, we were still operating under the assumption that this transformation was limited to our “astral” bodies, and that assumption may still be

correct in some capacity. Nevertheless, at the time we figured that a solution to our predicament must be nearby, and in either case we wanted to actually make use of this magic we had quested after so fervently. Likely our most interesting find, surprisingly, came not in wholly alien climes, but rather that old manse that the deceased Henry had occupied.

We had, after all, been seeking a “mirror world” of sorts, some reflection of the physical in rarefied form. And the plane did certainly fulfill the description. For the central mansion of the estate was shining, newly-painted, with lamps burning in the windows, not the run down inheritance depository that the house had been on Earth. Tentatively, we approached. I am sure that the matter was more personal for Vincent, and indeed afterwards he confided that he almost wondered if he'd see his dear old uncle Henry's face again (he did not elaborate on *which* face). Instead, upon entering the Victorian demense, we were greeted with surprisingly contemporary accomodations and two beaming sylvan faces. These faces belonged to a woman and a man, who after our initial shock, elaborated on a few of the mysteries that faced us.

A few.

Sitting there in the living room, the pair welcomed us to the “Splinterside” which I briefly touched on prior. There some of our theories proved incorrect, like the identity of this realm to the astral plane as a whole, while others proved correct, like the living nature of the sigil. The two said that “He” (the sigil was never given a name), looked over this realm, or rather was it, and that he had sent his image over to Earth after seeing the occulted desires of two little men who dwelled on a peculiar little orb in space. All three of us seemed lonely in His eyes according to them (they never quite explained how they discerned the being's will), and by bringing us together He thought that all could be satisfied. Me and Vincent vocalized our issue with this, to which the couple thoughtfully agreed with, to a degree. They suggested that the two of us spend the night with them, to either remain in this magical realm come morning, or to venture off to the witch tree and stare at Him once more, returning to Earth. Having little choice in the matter and not quite minding a little more time in this place (aside from our alien bodies), we agreed.

It was when the man (who we learned is called Derin) took us to the parlor room for entertainment that I began to notice some of the first changes. While Vincent was talking with the man and weaseling out some information regarding fertility deities, I happened to notice that my coat had slackened somewhat. Given that the transposition had been essentially perfect in regards to everything but our physical bodies themselves, I found this somewhat surprising. After wrapping up the conversation and beginning to watch Derin play pool, Vincent too realized that his clothes were beginning to grow looser than before, almost to the extent that we could notice it in real-time. By the time Liryll (the woman) was bringing back lemonade from the kitchen, Vincent was bringing up the matter with Derin, angrily. The two of them skirted around it a bit, but admitted that the nature of men and whatever form we now inhabited (which apparently related somehow to Him) differed in ways other than appearance. In whatever would pass for physiology amongst the incorporeal, these beings had greater life spans, alien ones, yet kept a certain proportional aging not unlike the men of Earth. Yet against lives measured with many more decimal places that men are accustomed too, our own would come up far short. I could see in Vincent's eyes that he was quick to come to the realization of what this entailed, but Liryll quickly downplayed the matter and invited us to the Arcanum, which Vincent's eyes lit up at. I remembered that in life Henry had taken the young Vincent to his estate many a time, nurturing the then-boy's interest in the occult. To Vincent, I suspect that this might as well have been a resurrection of his uncle and childhood dreams all at once. Quickly we were ushered upstairs, towards climes decidedly hewing more towards the Victorian heritage of the house. Past bannisters and mazes of doors, we were taken

through gilt, oaken doors into a great study. Bookcases stood like statues, palpable *guardians* of esoteric knowledge, and I am not quite sure if even Vincent could recognize all of the strange symbols and peculiar implements that lay scattered around the perimeter of the veritable sorcerer's workshop. Vincent began to buzz all around the place like a bee finding delicious nectar in every flower in a field, and I too must admit that the magical ambiance of the place was fantastic beyond belief. The plant man and woman explained that they had quite the trove of lore from their own studies, studies conducted over centuries and with far more permissive natural laws than Earth could attest to. Thus, we would have much to learn were we to stay.

Now, I am sure that the reader now is positively indignant, perhaps even setting the book down and internally screaming. Yes, this would seem like the most obvious of traps. Such a supposition would be coming from a hairless monkey accustomed to the Pavlovian box of the modern world, conditioned and shrieking at anything beyond the fatalism of the mundane. Yes, I knew how obvious of a ploy this was at the time. I simply did not care. I had long ago decided that magic was worth more than what is proffered for "life" nowadays, and frankly it was past time for me to stick to my convictions.

So thus we worked in the wizard's study for a while. Me and Vincent went through the traditional assortment of divinations and clairvoyance tests, finding them far stronger than our (none-too-shabby) scryings on Earth. After blowing the park off with that, we progressed to telekinesis, at first simply as a joke but soon deadly serious, as we levitated objects with our wills all across the room, feats we had not even come close to accomplishing back on Earth. I must admit that this must have looked rather sophomoric, enveloped in the beginner's high as we were, and given that Derin and Liryll were concealing smiles at some points, I am sure of it. But in the rush of power, it simply did not matter to us, souls set free with a catharsis beyond measure.

Of course, such exploits depended upon newly-developing muscles, and after a good half-hour of wizardry, me and Vincent found ourselves assaulted by a peculiar form of fatigue. Vincent turned to floating a little stylus around more languidly, as a man might twirl hair with his finger. I myself kept things up a bit longer, but soon even I found the necessary concentration difficult to maintain. Rather soon after our activity began to dwindle, Diryll stepped forward. She pointed toward a darkened window near the back of the room and explained that it was growing late, offering us the use of their bathtub before we would be properly lodged for the night. Personally I found this a bit awkward, and especially so once I noticed my reduced height and Vincent's surprised expressions. But, seeing little reason to refuse such hospitality, me and my friend eventually took the couple's offered hands and began to walk out of the room towards the halls of the house.

On the way, me and Vincent quickly took stock of the situation. The elephant we had ignored before had suddenly come upon us, as I looked carefully at Vincent's form and noticed that not only was his size affected, but also his proportions, rounded features more indicative of a child than a man, however different this "species" may have been. We bickered amongst ourselves for a little bit, but broke off the conversation once we finally reached the bathroom. We hadn't yet decided if we'd choose bed or hollow.

Once inside, we were greeted by a tub already filled with warm water, and a pleasantly humid atmosphere. The room seemed strangely spotless for an estate rather distant from civilization, though given the nature of the world we figured both of our assumptions on that were rather faulty. Vincent paused then, and as our predicament dawned on us, Derin cheerfully explained that they'd look away while we undressed. I could see Vincent's eye-dollops widen when he realized that we'd be sharing a bath, and I too felt scarlet overcome my cheeks as the realization came. I suspect that few men ever

suspect that they'll ever bathe with their friends again, just like when they were little children, but that is exactly the situation that faced us then. I must admit that I went with this a bit less sheepishly than one would expect, at least compared to what would face us next. For while I thought there might be a strange nostalgia in sharing a bath with my friend once more, I had not expected for Diryll and Derin to actually remain in the room once we had undressed and stepped into the pool together. Before we could really argue much, the two had acquired some soap and cloth rags from a nearby wooden box, beginning the task of helping us wash as though this was a perfectly average day in the life of some alien race. Truthfully, I had expected to be more indignant at this than I actually had been, but as it turns out, the help in washing came in handy given my unfamiliarity with this new form and age. The head leaves in particular had to be handled delicately, sensitive as they were. Vincent sort of just huffed a bit and avoided most of their prying hands, though as the bath progressed and their ministrations lessened, me and him started to coax each other out of our respective shells. What would become splashing originally started as a way to remove some of the excess soap from his body, in a well-meaning way. But after he started to do the same to me and I felt ancient instincts kick in, soon enough it had become a game. I forget much of what the couple was doing by that time, but given that I don't remember the source of the wooden boats we began to mess with, I must suspect that they contributed to our playing in some capacity.

Nevertheless, after our bathing was done and we had promptly re-erected the stoic shields of men, the two plant people dried us off and let us re-dress with new clothes before they began to guide us to our quarters for the night. The journey through the corridors was meandering, but fairly brief, and after a little while we had arrived at an unassuming wooden door. For a moment I felt rather silly, having expected us to receive separate rooms, but as guests I figured we couldn't have really expected much.

That being said, I did stop for a moment when the two opened the door and revealed a single bed.

The bedroom was, by all accounts, decently-furnished; having a desk, dresser, window overlooking the fields, and even a tiny closet. But the fact that there was only a single, vaguely boyish bed to lodge in made both myself and Vincent turn to one another for the briefest of moments. Not that it stopped our hosts from guiding us in, explaining the layout as if we would not already understand it, and well-meaningly but almost condescendingly wishing us good rest. Thankfully the two left before things got too peculiar, shutting the door behind them. But that only left me and Vincent with a new problem to approach. By now our rejuvenation could not be skirted around, and I felt strange, as though on sleepover in some alien relative's home. Eventually Vincent struck up a conversation regarding the matter, and after some sanity-replenishing talk, I did at least feel better about having a friend – my true friend – to face this discomfiting situation with. After our discussion we both looked on at the window for a while, a shaft of moonlight penetrating the witch tree of the fields. They looked like a person.

We went to sleep as easily as one could after that. Obviously this was more difficult than text can describe, but one can decently imagine how it would feel like to sleep with a friend for the first time in decades.

Our dreams were fleeting, strange, and only vaguely portentous. I wish I could describe more, but surprisingly my venture into the deep night was one of the least magical parts of this whole adventure. Though, upon waking, I did realize that said far more about the numinosity of our surroundings. And of our surroundings, I found out much more come the following day.

As previously mentioned, I discovered a few more things about the room when I woke up in the early morning, before Vincent's eyes had blinked open. Or rather I discovered *new* things about the room,

because the one that we woke to was not the same as the one we had fallen asleep in. Most immediately obvious were the wooden bars that surrounded our place of somnolence. Frankly images of this were already in the back of my mind regarding the matter, with the calculations I had been toying with regarding this “race's” development, but I had somehow not quite expected it to actually manifest. Once I got over the shock of the crib, I quickly realized too that the walls had some painted images where baseboards ended. Soft blue tones and wild scenes. When coupled with the little chest, circular carpet, and few balls scattered around the room, I quickly recognized that what we were in could no longer be termed a bedroom, but a nursery.

Vincent was the first one to snivel, once he had woken up, and I too must admit that my stoicism was more out of a sense of duty for him rather than an actual imperviousness to the sudden shift. It was at this point that we learned that (predicatably enough) our bodies had changed as well, barely even able to be considered those of children, but rather of toddlerkind. The clothing we had fallen asleep in had shifted as well, to match the form of the simple garments ascribed to the young. For a multitude of reasons I particularly did not want to reflect on that matter, and instead went to reassure my friend. That being said, such a maneuver quickly went from a one-sided display support to a mutual outpouring of...emotion, regarding our situation. Frankly the tears flowed so freely and our cuddling was so intense that I barely even noticed when the door started to creak open.

By the time Derin's visage became visible, the sadness had gone, replaced by an anger I forgot was still in me. I find it rather embarrassing, but I must admit that I chewed him out in less-polite language than befits a man, and to my dismay I found that such loud speech only served to trouble Vincent more. Strangely enough Derin's own face was rather neutral, or rather unsettled, and he only approached once my lungs had given way and a sense of guilt had tinged my mind. He picked Vincent up out of the crib first, delicately, before laying him down onto the soft floor. Vincent's consciousness came to slowly, only beginning to crawl around in hesitant curiosity after he had rubbed his eyes enough. I on the other hand remained in the crib for a little while longer, having conducted a wordless stare-down with Derin. While I was able to maintain a seeming of anger sufficient to prevent being picked up, Derin just looked sort of downcast, with a drifting gaze, the kind of look one has when dreadful things have happened and words don't suffice. Which I supposed must have been relevant at the time, though I wasn't the first one to speak of it. That came after Vincent had become more lively, the demons of the mind falling before the simple joy of a rolling ball.

While Vincent started to recover rather remarkably from his crying fit, Derin came over to the side of the crib and began to whisper. Though I had begun to guess so anyway, he admitted that he knew full well how far this age adjustment would go, and had prepared the room with that in mind. After asking him why he didn't tell us this and thus leave us to exit via the tree faster, he just avoided my gaze and mumbled something about “testing the waters.” Though rather shrewdly, he did point out that if we had grown paranoid enough of this, we never would have gotten to taste of the library and the magical techniques of this world. That topic I too broached, and he admitted that the numinous state of mind and reality of this place fostered strong sorcery, thus limiting our more fantastic powers to its boundaries; were we to return to Earth, we'd find the teachings useful, but not enough to make us levitate on command. It was at this point that I began to falter. Out there past the bars was my friend, playing with a joy I hadn't seen in years, in this utterly absurd circumstance, and yet this and all the magic we'd discovered would have to go come noon, to be replaced by Dewey Decimal sorting and telephone operating.

I closed my eyes due to thoughts I didn't want to reflect upon.

Derin's spoke up a little bit after my "pause." I obviously already knew the gist of what he was to say, but I must admit that it didn't make it any less stranger at the time. He said that he and Diryll too were rather lonely in this realm, and that if He was already bringing more people into the realm, it couldn't hurt to...assist these newcomers to any degree. Like family.

Soon after Derin attempted to soften his phrasing, mentioning of course the option to return to Earth, but it didn't matter at that point. Seeing Vincent in a strange reverie, having moved to the toy chest. Remember our occulted potentials in the library. That captivating Person written in curves and lines and winding designs. It was all a little bit – no, *very* ridiculous – but the price was so low compared to what would be gained and there really wasn't any other answer that I would pick.

Still, even as I had whispered those hidden words of the heart into Derin's ear, I had expected things to be a little bit more grandiose, the shift to be more noticeable. But it wasn't, really. The essence of it had been relayed to Vincent soon enough and though he went through the same emotional rollercoaster that I had embarked upon, he too acquiesced in much the same way as me. It was a bit silly, seeing him a fraction of the size and in cherubic embarrassment, but in his eyes was that same drive for magery that kept our friendship alive for all those years. If anything the rudiments of life that we began to be taught after the serious discussions was more alien; learning how to say "please" and "thank you" once more, how to ask for help, when to get picked up when the legs are weary, and how to get grown-ups to handle the problems of certain missing bodily skills. But all in all, the adjustment felt like moving back into a room you had only taken a single step out of. With all the things each of us have gained, I can't help but wonder why I *had* considered visiting the witch-tree again. There are so many new things to wonder at, things I could never discover on a little dust-ball hurtling through the void. When – and how – our caretakers got here, what divine qualities our friend in the tree is associated with, the mysteries of this "race," what realms lay beyond, what magics we have yet to master.

Derin says that I'll be able to find the answers to a lot more of these questions once I'm at least responsible enough for potty training, so I'm pretty lucky in that I've only got around a century or so to go to really begin these investigations. And if there are (which there must be) any other lands beyond here, I'll be able to venture into them, collate data, maybe write a book or two or start a library and do tons of other things with Vincent in all of the years that I have, ones I never dreamed of possessing.

Men can live eternal, it turns out, once they give up their pretensions of being men.

With this story coming to a close, I must admit one last point to the reader, one that they have no doubt just discovered by turning the page. I wasn't fibbing when I said that I can't reproduce the sigil in the tree. It's just that He can go where he wants to go, which is why you can see the symbol in all of it's glory right below this passage. Now, I'm not one to force another's will, but you have this book now, and it seems unlikely that the authorities will take any of this at face value. You have knowledge, knowledge you cannot tell them about.

There's a place where you won't have to be lonely.