

Nathan Lauer

≈1700 Words

Xunxin Zishi Zui

By Nathan Lauer

Submission for “Hong Kong’s Top Story 2017”, Adult Category

The smoke is clearing. It seems less urgent now. They wouldn't tell me anything. It's bad it looks bad. What have you seen?

Picture the leader, not the current leader, probably, this is the future, exactly twelve years in the future, to the day, and if the current leader is still the leader in twelve years, then, fine, it's him, but we won't know until then and I'm not saying it is. Imagine this leader, whoever he is, picture a fat old man who looks like an old woman in a Western man's blue suit, that's probably right, imagine he stands one day in front of a national monument below the portrait of a former leader and, if it's who I hope it isn't, imagine one of himself up there as well. He stands in front of a packed square, a square packed with exactly the sort of people he'd wanted it packed with: he is absolutely certain that no one in this crowd will set themselves on fire. He stands there regarding the crowd that he approves of and he nods his approval. He stands and he raises a hand in a sharp, precise wave to the crowd, and then he repeats the gesture at a slightly different angle, addressing a different portion of the crowd. He brings his face closer to the microphone; at this movement, a watchful technician closes a circuit to broadcast. He speaks. "Eeogue-xoth'th is the key," he says in English. The leader's voice reverberates over the crowd, booming through the public address system and returning in echo off of the regal buildings that surround the square. A murmur grows throughout the crowd in the square; the turning of heads telegraphs a sense of confusion spreading amongst the members of the crowd as to why the leader is speaking now in English to the assembled crowd in the square in front of the hall of the people in this people's republic in which the people speak a large number of mutually unintelligible languages but English they speak only in one small region administered by this people's republic. The leader raises his hand as if in benediction and the crowd in the square is again quiet and gives to him their

attention; he nods once more into the microphone. He repeats, “Eeogue-xoth’th is the key.” The leader turns to regard behind him the assembled entourage of men in blue suits and olive drab formals littered with gold and ribbons. They nod in solemn agreement. He turns quickly back to the square and to the crowd and he throws his hands up to the sky and he cries ecstatically, “Eeogue-xoth’th is the key and the gate,” and the crowd roars in approval and the so-called men of the entourage rise and applaud as enthusiastically as propriety allows. The leader of the people’s republic brings his hands together over his head and shakes them in triumph. He shakes them to the assembled crowd in the square to his left. He shakes them to the assembled crowd in the square to his right. “Eeogue-xoth’th is the key and the gate and the guardian of the gate.” The leader bursts into flame. The microphone briefly captures the roar of the inferno for broadcast, but the technician is prepared for this turn of events and quickly cuts to an alternate transmission. The square is filled with the drone of an alien susurrant, akin to a deafening chorus of cicadas only in so far as it is wholly unlike any other earthly sound but this. The leader continues to burn but is not consumed. The people are enraptured by the sound. His body swells beyond the confines of his blue suit to form a sphere of radiant ionized gas. The New and Greater Sun rises several meters above the podium. The lectern is rendered a pillar of charcoal. The entourage, with black talons jackknifing from their wrists and elbows, tear one another free of the fleshy confines of their man-suits and luxuriate in the cool air of the capital for a moment, stretching their tentacles and snapping their mouthparts, before taking to tattered fungal wings and entering a long orbital cycle of ecstatic communion with this, the greatest of Those Who Were And Will Be Again.

I'm sorry, Auntie, but I don't understand what you're talking about. Can I get you some tea? Or water? Something to eat? There are chairs here by the wall.

Please, sit.

No, no. I don't need anything. Listen, listen mister.

Auntie, are you telling me something about the fire?

No. I'm telling you the story of the New and Greater Sun, how these things will come to pass; how the members of the central committee and the central military commission will, in twelve years time – it's entirely conceivable that no currently-serving member of the politburo or whatever would be numbered amongst them – will shed the pretense of humanity and reveal themselves as the teeming Mind-spawn of the collective god-thing Ti'nnn-shur4schthzxi, to begin the century-long orbital cycle in preparation for the Great Transit, calling forth the Others from across the Frozen Infinity Gate; and I'm almost to the important part but you've interrupted me.

I'm sorry Auntie; it's just, the fire. My flat. Our homes.

Yes, yes, the fire, our homes. Just let me finish.

Yes, Auntie.

Well, yes, that's what they'll do. And the diplomatic service will have had announced the move ahead of time through official channels to the United Nations and through our embassies to the heads of every member state.

-

-

And?

And that's all. That's the story.

Oh...

And don't you feel foolish for interrupting me when you did?

I suppose.

-

It looks to be nearly extinguished.

Yes.

-

-

Do you think they were able to save any of the units?

I don't know.

Did everyone get out?

I don't know.... Oh! Oh, I forgot to tell you I forgot to tell you they'll feed on human pineal glands.

What?

The Mind-Spawn That Were Men, the Dancers At The Gate that is the New and Greater Sun, they'll harvest and eat these teeny little glands in the middle of people's brains. Lord knows they'll have enough. Enough people, I mean. People with brains. And glands.

Oh....

-

Auntie, which flat is yours?

Hmm? Oh, I don't live here.

Oh. Just watching then? Watching the excitement?

I own it.

You're Mrs. K■?

Yes.

Oh.

-

It was a very nice building.

Yes. Thank you.

I had a very nice flat. Top floor; rear west. I came back here to better see the damage. It doesn't look good. I didn't expect it would: how it looked from the street.

Your flat is an inalienable part of the fire.

5/F A. Mr. C [REDACTED]? Do you know me by name? Do you cash the checks?

No. My daughter does all that for me now.

-

I designed it, you know.

Did you?

Yes. I trained as an architect. It wasn't much, the building I mean, much of an accomplishment. It was a simple design. Hardly innovative.

Still.

Still.

-

I burned it.

-

I started the fire.

That's not funny, Auntie.

I should say not. Empty unit ground floor B, my daughter's been on me to get it renovated. Spent a week filling it with cardboard and fry-oil. Petrol cans in the first and third floor rubbish bins, spill some petrol down the stairs and into the open door to the flat. Woosh.

Why would you say such a thing, Auntie?

It's true.

Mrs. K█, are you seriously telling me that you started the fire? You burned the building? You?

Did I say that or did I not say that?

Mrs. K█, I... you.... You stay right there, ok? I'm going to... you just stay here. Officer? *Officer!* Officer! It's this lady here, she... [susurrsusurrsusurr]

†††? †?

No, no. Officer, I didn't do anything of the sort.

††††?

I was just picking quarrels and provoking trouble, trying to relieve the tension, that's all. That's not against the law, is it?

††††††.

Oh, well, my mistake, then.

†††††?

K█ Kam Li, Judith...

††?

Yes, here in my purse. Of course I live here. Born here.

††††?

2/F B, 37 H█ St., K█ T█, Kowloon.

†?

9█ 7█

††††, ††††††††††††. ††††! †††?

Yes, yes, you do what you have to do, officer. I'll expect your call, then.

Thank you... *F█k your mother's smelly c█t you lousy grassing piece of s█t.*

Me? I... The things you said! What did you think would happen?

I did do it, you know. Burned it all.

-

The fire is an inalienable part of the building.

I don't believe a word you're saying and I don't know why you'd say it. You're a nasty old... fall-down, if you want to know the truth.

-

I had a cat, you know.

I'm sorry.

Thank you.

It will be a recognized transfer of power, you understand.

What?

The Mind-spawn of Ti'nnn-shur4schthzxi, and the New and Greater Sun – the Others, when they Transit – it will be an orderly transfer of power. Internationally recognized. Legitimate.

Whatever...

Will you submit?

Mrs. K█, please, I just, don't.

In twelve years' time–

Ow! Quit poking me!

In twelve years' time when the New and Greater Sun ascends to Its rightful place at the center of the square at the center of the nation at the center of the world, will you submit to Its awesome power?

No, you fall-down cross-wired old coot; no I will not submit to the power of your crazy storybook whatever-it-is.

You'll rebel? Against Its terrible Authority? Secession is an option in your mind?

F██k *your* smelly c██t.

You'll deny Its dominion over this land or you won't. Which is it?

Ow! Stop it! I will, I will, for heaven's sake will you leave me alone?

Officer! Officer, this man is advocating...

End