

# The Punishment of the Spheres

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He didn't know why they called him Eyeless, since he had two good eyes and (according to the tests administered in the gymnasium in elementary school) 20/20 vision. Occasionally, someone at the pub referred to him by his full nickname, "The Eyeless One." This was typically late in the night when all the regulars were thoroughly drunk, and growing weary of Eyeless's frenetic and incoherent expressions. They didn't share his enthusiasm for lofty ideas, although, as he often attempted to explain, they were ultimately based in mud.

Long had he been fascinated by the stars he saw reflected in the slick filth of the streets. He found his liturgy in nighttime wanderings, Philip K. Dick's exegesis on the divinity of the gutter, the sublime ardor of Léon Bloy, Pilgrim of the Absolute. In his abstinence, he considered depravity the highest universal form, and in the city it was ubiquitous.

Eyeless drank to open up his visions, but otherwise he lived cleanly. He liked to observe and was too timid to submerge himself in the lifestyle that, he theorized, guaranteed true harmony with the cosmos. In the nights when he grew restless he drove his old Plymouth out to his favorite haunts, the desolate spans and sacred ditches of Kenner. He stood under the overpasses and soaked in the clotted atmosphere of true isolation, where countless wretched had tread but too faintly for the world to care to remember, for the mendicant's schedule is as ineffable as the mysteries of the cross. The malice in the dark and the desperation in the yellow lamp-glow both were blessed. He closed his vacant eyes and smiled. This, he believed, was the true heart of the city.

He returned home and gazed upon his wife in bed. Her name was Martha, a name like his, a dull dream. As always, he savored the glorious anticipation of her body, the uncertainty of its stillness. Before he drew close and saw the slight rise and fall of her breast, he could imagine that Martha had become a corpse, and revel in the unspeakable pain of hypothetical loss. He rested his body beside hers, and slept.

*In his dirt prison Saint Adam Kadmon stirs, and Eyeless eyes him. He has wakened from one nightmare and into another, yet greater. He has lived the Fall. The rest know the words, but not the speaker.*

"Big Dick" Calhoun was his best friend, a dwarf who lived in the pub's basement. Eyeless loved him for his grief, and pitied him, though Calhoun considered himself superior to all other humans. For his part, Calhoun tolerated Eyeless because he found him interesting. He rarely left the pub, and knew that no one else who drank there possessed even a modicum of original or noble thought. Sometimes he sent Eyeless with cash to a nearby establishment to fetch him a prostitute. Eyeless would never frequent such a place himself, but Calhoun knew that he relished the opportunity to witness. On his pallet in the basement, the dwarf's oversized member faltered and subsided.

Eyeless kissed his wife goodbye and went to the pub, sat at his usual stool at the bar. Today, there was an anomaly. Someone had left a book in a puddle of whiskey on the bar top. He placed his palm on the

cover, upon which the title was embossed in tarnished gold leaf: *Commentary on Contemplating the Harmony of the Spheres*. He was familiar with the concept of the *musica universalis*, but was surprised to learn as he opened the tome that Parmenides had apparently written a poem named *Contemplating the Harmony of the Spheres*. The commentator did not identify him or herself. Eyeless sipped his beer and pondered, as the ancients once did, on a literal music of the celestial bodies, what Bach and Mozart had perhaps attempted to encapsulate in their fanciful—but in the end inadequate—compositions.

The anonymous commentator held bizarre opinions on the topic. He portrayed Parmenides as a hopeless lecher, and posited that the contemplation was a sort of anti-gloss for a depiction of base desires and unwholesome activities. Typically such an allegory was a varnish meant to hide an elevated meaning, but in this case, the commentator alleged, the author was merely attempting to avoid censorship. In the *Commentary*, the original intent of one passage was rendered as follows:

*What is this obliterating want? The mental revenant fails under the intoxication of one thousand skin-pink peaks, while the tunnel remains singular and exalted. The salt flavor of humanity preys upon my tongue. Neither bile nor blood may satisfy now, for the chill of shame has arrived. I drink her sweat and her eyes and penetrate her mouth, swallow her tongue. The wine overcomes me and it is not the body but the void, from within which the Ardent Black Pyramid watches.*

Through extended study, Eyeless began to think of the commentator's ideas as wholly divorced from their object, which indeed seemed possibly fictional, but nevertheless as sophisticated and vital. In his reckoning, this obscure figure was far more profound than even Parmenides himself. The inventions of the *Commentary* struck like dire miracles; the postulated 1,000 vices made him eager to lose everything.

Decatur Street burned this night; the lights were rape. When Calhoun and the others were drunk and screeching, Eyeless took the *Commentary* and drove to Kenner. In the darkness of a remote culvert he opened to a random page and masturbated, his ejaculate marking the text like a pale oracle.

He touched her eyelids and they failed to flutter. This time, at long last, the suffering was real. Already his heart was buried. With his silver fingers he pried at the lids, at the sweet orbs beneath.

In the holiest of his ditches he produced again the book, his only remaining love. The sinister lights of the heavens failed to reach him here. His lips and hands trembled with their music as he grasped her eye from his pocket. He thumbed the pages and found that which had been dignified by his seed. In the ditch he was blind, but Martha could see. From his palm the eye scanned the soiled *Commentary* and discovered peace, enshrined and unending. The wet globe filled with light and dehisced, spilling maggots that crawled down his arm. His sclera blackened—he would read naught now but the esoteric notation of silence.