

## **The Universe Hates Entropy**

By Cody Connor

My feet make puddles in the soft dirt. Yellow leaves fall with raindrops from the trees above, their serrated edges so strange to me, as we have nothing like them where I'm from. The screams fade at my back, along with the feeling that I'm here. Things are growing hazy, and I feel as if I'm in a dream from which I soon will wake. This is a world where Whites and Coloreds kill for status, where civil association is dead and hate crimes are the only crimes worth committing. This is a messed up world, but it is not my world. I'm but a wanderer on the plane of space and time, and now I leave for home once more.

A heat grows at my neck and descends, and then I'm engulfed. My legs grow heavy, numb, and all the colors fade. My surroundings grow light and float away. Only blackness remains.

I am nowhere.

I am everywhere.

I open my eyes, groggy, and recognize the walls of a hospital room. My legs, I find, are paralyzed, my mouth dripping with drool that coats a bib upon my chest. No one is around, so I try to speak but only release an incoherent groan and more saliva. This is it. I am home.

Just moments after waking, a high-pitched beeping fills the air, resounding from one of the machines to my left: the ones that have been keeping me alive. My heart rate and respirations have apparently risen enough to signal that I've broken from the coma, and this irritating tone is the unfortunate product. I try to bring my hands to my ears to drown out the wretched noise, but Righty feels like a thousand pounds—rising slightly only to fall back to my side—and Lefty, in

his usual, defiant manner, jolts toward my face and gives my nose a good swipe before spastically wavering in front of my chest. Screw it. There have been a mere handful of times—in my entire 28 years of existence—that I’ve been able to make the both of them behave.

The sensation of the breathing tube against the walls of my trachea makes me nauseous, but I fight the urge to gag, as this will only make it worse. I’ve actually become quite good at relaxing the muscles of my throat. It’s either relax them or choke on my own vomit. Operant conditioning at its finest.

An IV is taped into the median cubital vein in the crook of my right elbow, and I follow the tube up to the translucent bag of fluids that have kept me hydrated. In the blur of its contents, I see the reflection of a figure stir and turn to the window past my feet where Nurse Megan’s head is passing through the hallway. In a moment, she enters my room, bringing with her a slight breeze from beyond and a vibrant smile.

“Brock, you’re awake!” Her voice is warm and her eyes warmer, bringing a radiance about her young, fair skin and straight blonde hair. Very pretty, though she doesn’t know it. I can tell by the way she carries herself. If I was the Brock from my leap two months ago, I’d woo her with some humor and flattery and take her back to my high-rise penthouse for a relaxing oil massage with a happy ending. Damn it, I wish I was still that Brock. Of course, I still have the game—the one-liners, the subtle gestures, the knowledge of when to say what and what part of her body to be touching when I say it—but back here in my reality, I lack the physical means for putting it all to use.

I look her in the eyes, exerting much effort to keep my head from swaying uncontrollably, and say, “Hey sweetheart, just the girl I wanted to see.” At least, this is what my

brain is telling my throat to say. She hears a slightly less eloquent version: a series of groans escaping from between my lips, which curl tightly back around my teeth, unwilling to relax.

She humors me and smiles. Not the kind of bubbly, subtly seductive smile of a woman feeling butterflies, but rather the exaggerated, slightly artificial kind she probably grants cute babies in the neonatal unit. “You were out for three whole days this time,” she says, nearing my bedside to disable the ventilator that’s forcing air into my lungs. “Now you know the drill. I’m going to take this out your throat, so try and hold still for me.”

I close my eyes and pay special attention to dilating my throat. The tube slides up and out and I smack my lips together as she pulls it away, a long line of stringy saliva stretching from the end to my mouth like a telephone wire. It breaks and falls to my chin, and she instantly wipes it away with a folded rag. My head whips to the other side as I inhale a deep breath of air and let it go with a quiet sigh, savoring the sweet scent of vanilla from Nurse Megan’s skin.

I’m happy to be breathing on my own again. It’s one of the only things I can actually do on my own. That and shit, though even then I need someone to wipe my ass. What a degrading experience that is. Even if I could implement every smooth trick in my book, I think Nurse Megan would still be a lost cause. You just can’t come back from that.

She fiddles with a few dials on the machines to my left, quelling that abhorred beeping. “Your mother will want to know that you’re awake, so I’ll go give her a call. She’ll be here soon, I’m sure, so just get some rest. Dr. Johnson should be in here shortly to check you out and make sure everything’s okay.” As she speaks, she messes with more buttons and gathers some things from the room, not bothering to give me her attention. She’s speaking just because she feels obligated, not because she thinks I’m actually listening. Or rather, that I actually understand. My intellect is a mystery. I think only my mother believes I actually have a mind of my own: the

capacity to think and comprehend beyond the basic animal capabilities. She claims to see it in my eyes. She actually looks into them when she talks to me. God, I love her so much.

Nurse Megan turns the news on for me and leaves the room with another fake smile. She's a sweet girl, even if she underestimates my cognitive capacities. I can't blame her. I drool on myself, my limbs seem to move on their own accord, and I can't utter a single, coherent word. All the signs point toward severe mental impairment. Even the doctors—with their expensive MRIs and CAT scans, and their real-time depictions of my brain activity—swear that I lack normal human mental capacity and that it's very likely that I can't understand language beyond learning simple associations, such as a dog learning to sit on command. They're wrong, of course. I'm a medical anomaly.

I'd like to say I got this way from a fight with a bear, or a heroic act of self-sacrifice, but I can't. The truth is, I was born hypoxic, blue, lifeless in all aspects save for the meager beat of a heart meant to fail.

But it didn't fail.

With the help of modern technology, they kept that feeble heart pulsing and they saved 7-month-old Brock Lakely . . . or what was left of him. They call it cerebral palsy, but that's just a general classification for something more specific, more enigmatic. What exactly causes my aphasia, paraplegia, upper limb spasticity, apparent cognitive impairment? They're not entirely sure. A problem with the cortex in my inferior frontal gyrus, and possibly the superior temporal? Neuronal death within the corticospinal tract that relays motor commands from the brain to the muscles? An issue with my limbic system? Maybe all of the above. Maybe none of them. There is no physical evidence for any of my symptoms, just theories as to where the damage—whatever it is—must be. Like I said, I'm a medical anomaly.

I'm a neurologist in one of my alternate realities. I lived in those shoes for a few days or so, just enough to absorb the extent of that particular Brock Lakely's knowledge and experience. Hence the neuro lingo. I know a lot about the brain, but not enough about what ails me. Just enough to know that it can be fixed. I don't know how, exactly, but even if I did, I have neither the physical means to utilize the knowledge nor the communication skills to relay it to those that do. It's a pretty hopeless situation, but I still refuse to give up hope. One day, I'll make a leap to the parallel universe that has the cure for my condition, and from there I'll figure out my next move. Until then, I'll just keep searching.

And it's not like the search is painstaking. It's my life. It's how I live. It's how I see the world and experience the extent of what it has to offer, the vast array of possibilities, the potential I could have if only things were slightly different. My first leap came at the age of 20: about when, I theorize, my brain had reached some unknown threshold of developmental synaptic complexity. You hear of the blind developing exceptional alternative senses, like super hearing, or autistic children—savants they're called—with remarkable artistic abilities beyond what should be possible. I believe the pathogenesis of my gift must have followed a similarly enigmatic course. My lack of voluntary movement drove enhanced development of my mind, and my inability to communicate drove self-actualization and an internalization of all my psychic energy. I became something special.

And someone took notice.

Whether it's God or some kind of undiscovered force, I don't know, but whatever it is, it decided I had a purpose. I have a hypothesis that would shit all over the laws of thermodynamics if it were true, but I feel strongly that it helps explain the force behind what causes me to jump. It concerns the concept of entropy.

Entropy is chaos. It is disorder. It is the reason why buildings crumble, houses burn, glass shatters and corpses rot. The universe, as the current laws of physics assert, is constantly in favor of increased entropy. It prefers chaos, and this preference is demonstrated by spontaneity: the fact that only chaos is brought about spontaneously, without the input of outside energy, and never does order simply develop on its own. A pile of stones will not arrange itself into a bridge, but a bridge, at times, will collapse into a heap of stones. This fact is undeniable, but I feel compelled to deny it.

My leaps come on without warning, sending me into a fit of euphoria and sweat, propelling my mind from my body and leaving me in a brain-dead state of coma for days or weeks on end. Who decides when it happens? Who determines what reality I wake up in, and how long I will stay?

Initially, I felt it was all random. An infinite number of parallel universes, and my psyche simply blindfolds itself and leaps into the pool. But over time, a pattern emerged. I was always a bad guy in each alternate world. There was always chaos—entropy—running rampant, uncontrolled. The universe was hurting in it, not reveling. It didn't want this entropy, but was rather enduring it. I could feel this. And when I figured out the purpose I was meant to serve, and I carried out the actions that this undiscovered force had intended for me, I'd find that the entropy would decrease, and my mind would return through space and time to its rightful vessel in my comatose body.

So my hypothesis is based on my own empirical evidence. The universe does not wish for entropy to increase; it is simply an unfortunate byproduct of life. The universe hates entropy. In fact, it longs to decrease the disorder, and it has entrusted me with the task. I leave my useless body behind so that I may rectify the wrongs of the universe, and in doing so, I am allowed the

pleasure of living a life of excitement and purpose along with the unparalleled acquisition of wisdom and knowledge that each of my alternate existences has.

I've made over 200 leaps in the past 8 years, and lived as over 200 different versions of myself, each with their own set of gifts and talents that become a part of me the very second I assume their identity. The sad irony is that I do it all as my true body grows older and weaker back in my rightful reality. Back here where no one knows who I really am, where no one cares about me. No one but my mother, of course. She's always been there. Always believed in me. No matter how naïve that might be, I can't help but love her for it.

And she's got problems of her own. I can tell by the way looks and speaks. She doesn't talk about everything, but I know it can't be an easy life.

A door clicks and I open my eyes as Dr. Johnson enters the room. He makes a quick glance to the television and then back to me.

"Keeping up with current events, I see. Anything important happening?"

I look to him—at his sweaty, bald head and his oversized mustache that reminds me of a hated dictator I killed three months ago in a terrorist-occupied Canada—and sneer, for I don't much like the man and his condescending nature.

"Piss off," I say, though of course it's but a grunt to him.

"That's fantastic" he replies, stepping over to read the monitors at my side. He jots a few numbers down on his clipboard and then sets it down to begin palpating the lymph nodes of my neck. He grabs the stethoscope from around his neck and listens to my heart and lungs before replacing the instrument and checking my eyes with a penlight. It's the routine, post-coma inspection. I've done it a thousand times.

“How bout you try to stay with us for more than a couple weeks at a time?” Dr. Johnson says. “It’d certainly make it a lot easier on us here. And your mother. I think you’re killing her with all the stress and the medical bills.” I can’t believe what a dick this guy is. “I’ve tried to convince her to just pull the plug one of these times, but she’s not having it. That’s one obstinate bitch of a mom you’ve got there. I suppose I can see why you keep pulling this shit. So you can get away from her for a little bit.”

If only I had a nice knife to jam up in his gut and let him bleed out at my bedside. No one gets to talk about my mom like that, at least not without me imagining some kind of brutal retaliation. I know imagining isn’t quite the same as doing, but I’d sure as hell do it if I could. Instead, I bring Lefty in a swift arc to Johnson’s johnson and savor his pained grunt as I turn my head away to feign disinterest. I use the reflection in the mirror to enjoy his twisted expression. He curses in irritation. It was an accident. Just another unintentional convulsion that I had no control over. God, I hate this prick.

There’s a short bout of silence before he turns back around with a calm expression on his face. It’s doesn’t much hide the anger beneath, but it’ll do for a brain-dead vegetable like myself.

“Try to keep Lefty under control or I’ll have to amputate,” he says. “If I ever find out you know what you’re doing, I’ll personally cut your balls off and—”

“Dr. Johnson,” intervenes the welcomed voice of Nurse Megan as she enters the room without knocking, “Mrs. Lakely is here to see Brock.”

“Ah yes,” he replies in a warm voice as if it’s how he’s been speaking the whole time. “Tell her I’m just finishing up the exam and I’ll be out with her in a minute.”

Nurse Megan nods and exits.

“Looks like the old bag is here for you,” Dr. Johnson says. “Let’s just get this over with.”

He grabs a handful of my blanket and lifts it away with a cool flutter, prepared to examine my legs for signs of swelling or deep vein thrombosis. Such long periods of immobility have been known to facilitate blood clot formation in the veins of the legs, which could eventually become unstuck and find its way to my lungs. Something I know all too well; it's happened to me twice before.

"Hmm, how'd this get here?" Dr. Johnson says, pulling something up from between my feet. The break in routine draws my attention, and I turn to see something that bends my mind. Something that blows my mind. It just can't be. It's impossible, isn't it?

Between his fingers, he holds a leaf—a small, serrated, yellow leaf—and it dawns on me: I've brought this back.

Never before has any artifact, even as small as a grain of sand, followed me back through a leap. After all, it's only my mind that makes the journey. My body, clothes, trinkets in my pockets: those are already there, waiting. I commandeer them from my alternate existence. I "possess" them, so-to-speak, though I don't like the demonic parallel. Nothing physical ever actually traverses the Rift. But I must be wrong.

Here is a remnant of my romp through the bushes of South Detroit, in a world where Whites and Coloreds openly hate and openly kill each other. It shouldn't be here in my world, but I've brought it with me, inadvertently clinging to my foot or my leg or some other part of me. It traveled as a wave. It became a non-physical entity, crossed the Rift along with my mind, and then rematerialized in physical form. Teleportation. I've managed this feat.

Dr. Johnson disposes of the leaf in the nearby trashcan, giving no thought, it appears, to the possibility that I've been running through the wilderness. I'm quite certain that secret is safe. I close my eyes to ponder what has happened and how, and when I open them again, the doc's

already finished palpating my legs—which, of course, I couldn't feel—and is exiting the room without a single word to my lowly self. A familiar insult. After all, I can't understand a thing he says, anyway.

I'm still reeling at my accomplishment, but more so at its implications. What else might I bring back with me? Distant technologies, medical revelations, a cure for my condition? Is there even one out there? I release a quivering breath of excitement. I don't know the answer, but I do know I'm going to find out. I close my eyes to ponder the possibilities, and as I do, a heat grows at my neck and descends, engulfing me. My body turns numb and all the colors fade. My surroundings grow light and float away. Only blackness remains.

I am nowhere.

I am everywhere.