

# The List-Makers

## A True and False Tale

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*If “this sentence is false” is true, then it is false, but the sentence states that it is false, and if it is false, then it must be true, and so on.<sup>1</sup>*

### Chapter 1

The deep mercies covered by Cajun soil air themselves in the howl of jazz, the clank of saucepans, and the gristle of artists unafraid of conjuring. Not all survive their purpose. In 2005, after Hurricane Katrina expressed the bulk of her wrath at the expense of the citizens of New Orleans, the dead reverse-engineered the tragedy by refusing to be counted—or found.

#### *List 1: by Senator Elmer Newton, circa 2021*

*“While we love the idea of helping our fellow man achieve success, our welfare system isn’t structured for that. Instead, the welfare system is simply designed to distribute resources to those who are poor and qualify. The recipient is merely a name and address. Welfare is almost exclusively about tangible things, not personal development.”*

*List of Current Welfare Programs: Refundable Tax Credits, SNAP, Housing Assistance, SSI, Pell Grants, TANF, Child Nutrition, Head Start, Job Training Programs, WIC, Child Care, LIHEAP, Lifeline (Obama Phone), and Medicaid.*

### Chapter 2

Humans acknowledge their record-keeping desires in countless categories. Historical entries and statistical data can be traced to time and place, cause and effect, politics and economics, and

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<sup>1</sup> The Liar’s Paradox. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liar\\_paradox](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liar_paradox)

individuals and groups. To move beyond theory, the disaster must impose itself at some time, somewhere, and have both victims and survivors. Make no mistake, this is one way we are counted. Eventually all beings make it onto one list or another, even if making the count ultimately results in being discounted. History, if it matters into the future, will retain this memorandum: Whether the truth is black or white, we claim to want to know. The concept of irony will show that we did know; all along we knew. Much like Katrina's dead, however, we refused to be counted.

*List 2: by Bishop Nigell Bland, circa 1979*

*"[T]he study of interpretation. Hermeneutics plays a role in a number of disciplines whose subject matter demands interpretative approaches, characteristically, because the disciplinary subject matter concerns the meaning of human intentions, beliefs, and actions, or the meaning of human experience as it is preserved in the arts and literature, historical testimony, and other artifacts."*

*List of Philosophical Contributors: Hans-Georg Gadamer and The Universality of the Hermeneutical Problem; see also Schleiermacher and Hegel, through Nietzsche, Dilthey, Heidegger, and Rorty.*

### Chapter 3

Everyone, and everything, is a keeper of secrets. Mostly.

*List 3: by Dr. Rudolph Blitzler, Psychiatrist, circa 1920*

*"For Plato, Forms are abstract objects, existing completely outside space and time. ... because they are changeless...."*

*"[For Aristotle,] Substantial and accidental forms are not created, but neither are they eternal."*

*List of Psychological Concerns: Human Nature, Blank Slate, Nature versus Nurture, Evolution versus Creation.*

### Chapter 4

The movie *Men in Black* was an entertaining science fiction from 1997 that included all variety of interplanetary aliens. It has comedic overtones, but the secret is there just the same. As Agent Kay is trying to recruit a "normal" named Edwards, he proclaims the following:

A person is smart. People are dumb, panicky dangerous animals and you know it. Fifteen

hundred years ago everybody knew the Earth was the center of the universe. Five hundred years ago, everybody knew the Earth was flat, and fifteen minutes ago, you knew that humans were alone on this planet. Imagine what you'll know tomorrow.

*List 4: by Councilwoman Judith Percy, circa 2099*

*"Lao Tzu: If you do not change direction, you may end up where you are heading."*

*List of Political and Social Concerns: Autocracy, Oligarchy, Civil War; see also Nietzsche's "Übermensch."*

## Chapter 5

People became "dumber," or so it began. Half a century from the time of World War II had done little to alleviate the toll of human greed and suffering. It was as if alongside the rising count of deaths from disease, terrorism, natural disasters, climate change, and war, the spark of human ingenuity looked toward the rising sun and waved the white flag. Surrender was never—do you hear me, never—inevitable. It was just easier. It had become easier as humans across the globe ceded their autonomy and accountability, to not just the rising tides but also to the rise in automated intelligence. Simple algorithms were set in motion, test-driven by the glib and monied who wanted to erase the cost of "other," as they saw it. Alone, they could not achieve the intended results without the risk of total annihilation. They propped humans up in their own living rooms and work places like they did the mannequins in the Nevada desert test sites and watched as they dominoed.

*List 5: by Elijah Cox, Knight Templar, circa 1136*

*"Then said Jesus, 'Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.'"*

*List of Concerns and the Desire for Eternal Life: Sins of the Father, Damnation, Brother's Keeper, Search for Truth*

## Chapter 6

I am a list-maker—of a tradition. According to the records we've been able to recover, to vouchsafe, list-makers have always been; even the gods took note(s). The Ten Commandments, The Bill of

Rights, The Quran, the Law; I learned this from my mother. Some of the notes I have come from her. She knew. More importantly, she shared. Not all of the lists carry the burden of profundity, exactly. One of hers, dated 17 August 2010, reads: "black beans, olive oil, blueberries, egg whites, coffee..., all organic." Further down the short note is the word "daisies." What they all do have in common is a version of reality; a trail backward and forward as to how we arrived at our present dilemma. There is always a list, just as there is always a history. Human history. Someone should tell you in case.... Ah, well, I am telling you now.

*List 6: by U.S. President William Little-Flower, circa 2109*

*"The extension of social scale which created the Great Society was mainly due to certain mechanical inventions. Those who first developed these inventions expected that their results would be entirely good. But we now feel some misgiving when we compare the states of consciousness typical of the Great Society with those typical of more primitive social organisations [sic].... This misgiving leads to an effort to understand the problems...."*

*List of Civil War Concerns: Transhumanism, Antihumanism, Anthropocentric and Climatic Continued Degradation; see also Oxford University's Future of Humanity Institute.*

## Chapter 7

I am a list-maker. I sit in the middle of a strewn pile, pawing at them, smelling some and tasting others. I am caged by means other than bars and walls. I know things.

*List 7: by Pope Alighieri Castioni, circa 450 AD*

*"Still, no concept or vision of the future will be correct if we do not find a way to bring man into the picture. ... Unless we begin to devise some kind of "human forecasting," ...one essential part of futures research will be missing."*

*List of Religious and Moral Concerns: Inviolable Dignity, Revelation and Reason, Expanded Intricacies*

## Chapter 8

Twenty-six of us. It is impossible now to reach anyone outside of the country. Just before we were all given a number and coded into the system, knowledge of the kind we clung to had been global. Or nearly. Some wisdom passed through the wrong caretakers and had

become perverted beyond reason. Those who sniffed out the unsavory manipulation fought so that consciousness would remain a human trait. I visit a cliff just outside of town to pay homage, to watch the tides all the way to the horizon. My son, Max, follows in tow; his youth giving him pause as he tries to configure the ideas in his mind as his alone, apart from the ones streamed live to the once elegant creatures inside us.

You can still find artifacts. Mostly digital copies, but there are a few originals. Books, magazines, journals, videos, movies, like *Men in Black*, secreted around the dark web if you know where to look. When Max turned seven last week, we celebrated by picking tomatoes and cucumbers from our garden.

“Shall I tell you a story while you wash the food?” I asked.

“Tell me about the monsters.”

I turned the book over in my hand. I began to read *Where the Wild Things Are*. I started with the inscription.

“To the Max of the future,” I quoted, “who must find all of the monsters and love most the one he recognizes in the mirror.”

“What does that mean?” he mused, while curling a tomato in his hand.

“I think it means your great grandmother loved you from an idea of you she already had in her heart.”

“Keep going, I’m almost done with the tomatoes.”

And so I read to him a story that invites mystery into our home and our hearts. A story that tells of him before he was born, before his father was born. It comes with its own gravitational force that urges us to find each other. There is Max, suddenly brushing up against me as he plops the tomato onto the table. I read on.

**List 8: by Royal Physician, Zayn Abhari, circa 922 AD**

*“The moth plays about the lighted lamp till dawn, and returning with battered wings to its friends, tells of the beautiful thing it found; then, desiring to be joined to it entirely, flying into the flame the next night, becomes one with it.”*

*List of Tolerances and Objectives: see “mirrors for princes.”*

## Chapter 9

Our home sits over 20 miles from the legal township. As more and more robots and factories invaded the cities, humans were moved into smaller groups, townships that could be easily managed. Once

the AMRs, autonomous mobile robots, and COBOTs, robots designed to cooperate with humans, reached a level of reliability, every effort was made to reduce the human population. We have the gods to thank for that. Not the gods created by myth, or thought to be real, but the gods who create themselves in the value of everything except the living.

Max's father, Gregor, a neuro-roboticist, began his career with a medical group focused on research in nanotechnology. In 2099, 30 years after robots had achieved numbers to become the majority population, it was discovered that nanobots could be controlled by their hosts; that is humans. But as they reconnoitered the human body, learned to endure their hosts rapid changes brought on by drought, famine, and chaotic weather, they, like most living things, found a way to survive, a way to reproduce. They began to take control without notice. Humanity's long history of ever-increasing technology inoculated most until change became an expectation, and toxic change hard to recognize. Gregor's suicide note was brief but apologetic.

*List 9: by African President Jaffar Ongwali, circa 2066*

*"This year (2019) marks the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the arrival of the first enslaved African into North America, and the first major step on the path to systems of racial subordination and exploitation that have prevailed ever since. I say 'systems,' in the plural, rather than the singular, because racial subordination was never a single system but rather a mutating set of arrangements. The unraveling of one system has paved the way for another."*

*List of Grievances: Destruction of the Self, Need for Personal Identity and Psychological Continuity; see also Rousseau and Maslow on Human Nature; see also Kant on Moral Imperatives*

## Chapter 10

We are standing in line now, Max and I, just outside of the arena. It is the only time we go into the city in daylight. The arena is a culling ground. Humans, humanoids, hybrids, COBOTs, and assorted mobile AI machines are required to have weekly inspections. It was deemed a necessary accountability program two years after the civilian war of 2072. What began as a "simple" tracking program, especially in case human replacements were needed, was quickly over-ridden once the more advanced and intellectually-driven models exhibited substantive awareness—and power.

Global distress peaked at the end of 2071 and mounted in a civil war, across nations and nation-states, because of “inhuman” behavior. As the sixth extinction all but terminated humanity’s reliance on meat and enforced health policies reinstated age-dependent medical triage, AI bots were disseminated across the planet to enforce the prevailing politics and assist in regaining “world order.”

*List 10: by Rebecca Kepler, ISS Astronaut, circa 2030*

*“In fact one can argue that the richness of the world around us emerges from the complex behaviour [sic] of many interacting components. As elegantly stated by the German scientist and engineer Jochen Fromm: one water molecule is not fluid / one gold atom is not metallic / one neuron is not conscious / one amino acid is not alive”*

*List of Available Theories, Available Ponderances: Emergence Theory, Chaos Theory, Intersectionality, Theory of Complexity, and Ethical and Value Theory; see also Ways of Being in the World.*

## Chapter 11

The only edge left to humanity in their despotic endeavors was power. Quite literally. Chaos rained down on every mobile entity, every living organism. The heat index combined with the overabundance of active AI caused a sudden, near-global black-out. The land, now reduced by twenty percent on all continents, became a large-scale version of Dali’s *The Persistence of Memory*. Vistas barren of greenery now created a near-monotone assemblage of silvery, lifeless robotic appendages entangled with various shades of blackened or greying flesh. Mobiles and factories leaned in a frozen expression of warped exasperation.

What was eventually numbered to be twenty-five percent of any and all remaining with a survival rate of sixty percent or better were moved into underground bunkers once built in case of global thermonuclear war.

*List 11: by Sonya Volkov, Medicinal Botanist, circa 2040*

*“For 3 billion years, unicellular bacteria have deployed CRISPR—Clustered Regularly Interspaced Short Palindromic Repeats—to defend themselves.... In 2012, scientists demonstrated that CRISPR could be reprogrammed to modify the DNA of eukaryotes [for example: plants, animals, fungi]. ... [Q]uestions mount. ... [O]n the societal and ethical side, we need a lot more people present....’ ‘...[I]t may be the case that we can’t anticipate some of the consequences of the changes we’re making.”*

*List: First, do no harm.*

## Chapter 12

And you thought bread lines were slow. Max and I play word games and “I Spy” while only twenty feet or so back are the entry turnstiles.

“How about a new story? A story about stories?” I prod him.

“Yeah, okay. Are there monsters?” he replies.

“Oh, yes. Mostly pretend, but some real.” I tell him. “Your dad and I used to share these stories. In fact, that’s how he got started. He wanted to love the ‘right’ monsters and scare off the ‘bad’ ones. You’ll see,” I promise him. And so the story goes...

“Once upon a time, when humans discovered that they would live longer if they worked together, they also discovered that living longer produced desires within themselves to create change.

“Humans had an idea of change from the many stories that were used to communicate, to pass the time, to feel important.

“They pretended to give power away. To give power a sense of existing in the world. If the storytellers could make others believe them, then there was every reason to believe that this power would be out roaming free and looking for something to do, something to eat, something to be powerful over. Something or someone.

“Sometimes the storytellers just gave the power away because they could not contain it within themselves. They could feel it, but they couldn’t quite understand or control it. It was present and then it wasn’t, even when they slept. It was difficult to deal with, sometimes painful, and often monstrous.

“The storytellers were never sure when the monster inside would want to hurt them, or others, or just need to be let free. So they began to plan, to have a ‘good’ monster or ‘bad’ monster story always ready to tell.

“Eventually, the world got smaller. People traveled farther, visited different places, met new people, learned new things, and ate sometimes wonderfully delicious food and sometimes food that could kill them.

“It was always good to have a story to tell. Like sneezing. The story goes that when people sneeze, they may become sick. If you do get sick, it’s hard to fight off more germs, other germs—or evil spirits. ‘Evil’ spirits who want you to feel ‘bad,’ like ‘bad’ monsters. So to ward off these evil spirits, people say ‘Gesundheit,’ which is German for ‘good health’—a well wish.

“So as the world appeared smaller still to the growing number of people, it only made sense to send the monsters into the sky,



into space. Or, vice versa. The storyteller would escape by flying away on birds or winged horses, and eventually space ships; all to leave the monsters behind far behind.

“When I say these names, tell me if they sound familiar. *The Man in the Moone?* [sic] *Frankenstein?* *Men in Black?* *Star Trek?* *Spock?*”

“Yes, yes, I get it now,” Max giggles. “But what about the monster in the mirror, the one great-grandmother told me to love?”

“That’s you. ‘Your Gesundheit,’” I urge.

“Huh?” he questions me.

“It’s when you feel bad, or when you’re scared. When it feels difficult to separate your thoughts, to see things clearly. You have to see the monster to tell it to go away. To send it into outer space. It’s like sending it outside of yourself,” I tell him.

I can tell he wants to understand, but we are just inside the arena now, where we’re forced to undergo all sorts of intimate scanning. I will need another story for another day. Another monster to banish. Line by line, list by list.

Max waves at me unexpectedly from across the aisle.

“Will grandfather help?” he asks almost pleadingly.

“Most certainly,” I consolingly tell him, “Most certainly. He’s the president. *He has the lists.*”

“I thought so. I’m so lucky,” Max grins.

*List 12: by current US President (and grandfather), Gavin Schrodinger, circa 2121*

*“I’m starting with the man in the mirror.”*

*List: First, see “Lists” 1 – 11. See also, Jean Baudrillard’s Simulacra and Simulation; reread Where the Wild Things Are; aim high, i.e., “to find such a path, aiding others in the development of the same high capacities one is exercising, is to solve for oneself the conflict between self-interest and morality, and to remember that ethical responsiveness does not demand you most enhance the development of others, only that you respond to their value as value, that you treat them as having the value they do have”; and last but not least, Hug Max! Hug Max! Hug Max!*

## Appendix

*“List” Quotations by Order of Diary Owner*

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