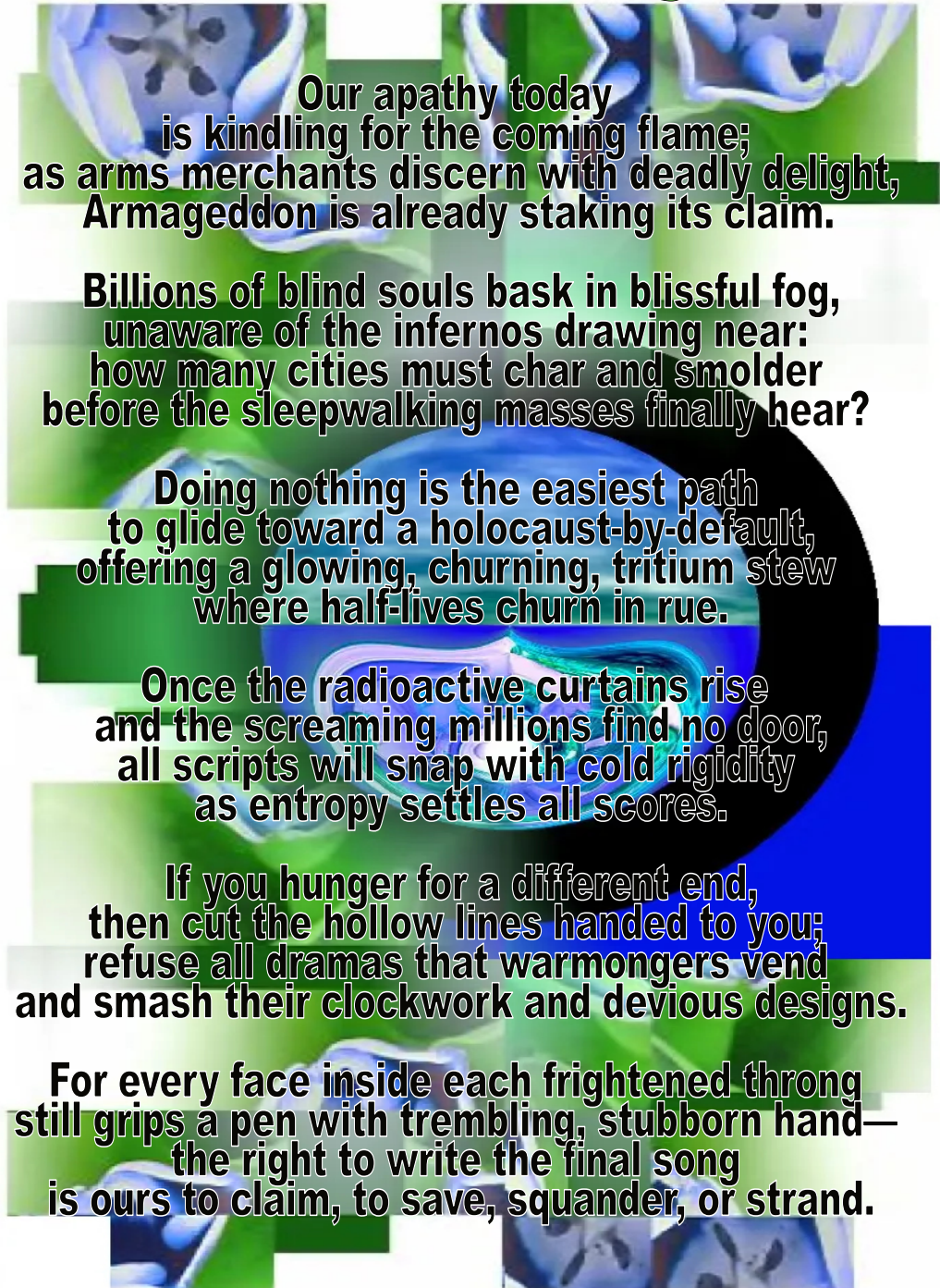


A FUTURE VISION:

How to Avoid Armageddon



**Our apathy today
is kindling for the coming flame;
as arms merchants discern with deadly delight,
Armageddon is already staking its claim.**

**Billions of blind souls bask in blissful fog,
unaware of the infernos drawing near:
how many cities must char and smolder
before the sleepwalking masses finally hear?**

**Doing nothing is the easiest path
to glide toward a holocaust-by-default,
offering a glowing, churning, tritium stew
where half-lives churn in rue.**

**Once the radioactive curtains rise
and the screaming millions find no door,
all scripts will snap with cold rigidity
as entropy settles all scores.**

**If you hunger for a different end,
then cut the hollow lines handed to you;
refuse all dramas that warmongers vend
and smash their clockwork and devious designs.**

**For every face inside each frightened throng
still grips a pen with trembling, stubborn hand—
the right to write the final song
is ours to claim, to save, squander, or strand.**

Sam sank so deeply into his velvet-shredded chair that the chair seemed to be slowly consuming him. He tracked sugar granules across the coffee table with one finger in lethargic, purposeless arcs. The low-frequency thrum of the city's atmospheric scrubbers pressed against him like a second skin. Sam hadn't taken anything: no chemicals, no stimulants. Just too much meditation and not nearly enough human contact. The result felt roughly the same.

"I'm a cosmic hiccup," he said, his voice barely clearing the ambient noise. "A blip on a dying screen. I don't feel like I'm co-authoring anything, Tim. I feel like I'm watching the final credits roll over a landscape of rubble."

Tim studied him the way someone examines a cracked mirror—not unkindly, just cataloguing which distortions were structural. The blue light from his neural-link pulsed faintly at his temple, a slow metronome. "So you feel sidelined," Tim said. "Like a digital serf. Trapped inside a machine humming with billions of other disposable lives, all of them efficiently convinced they were replaceable before they were even born."

Sam snorted softly, half amused, half exhausted. He nodded toward the flickering news-feed on the wall, where the grim, pixelated faces of some 21st century world leaders—Trump, Putin, Netanyahu, Kim Jong-un—loomed like ancient, predatory gods. Their faces were worn smooth by overexposure until they looked less like men and more like weather patterns.

"Exactly. And knowing the shape of the cage doesn't dissolve the bars. These people have the silos, the drones, the disinformation engines that can sandblast history clean in nanoseconds and repaint it before lunch. They feel unstoppable. I feel small and invisible."

Tim's chair groaned as he leaned back—a deep, structural protest, like a decommissioned spacecraft flexing in a powerful solar storm. He let the silence breathe for a moment before he spoke, his voice dropping into something close to conspiratorial. "They are only unstoppable if you operate according to their clockwork. Step outside the machinery, Sam. Every system you believe is crushing you from the outside has its source code running right here"—he tapped his own temple, beside the flickering implant—"inside the skull. Rewrite the code, and the machine loses its jurisdiction over your fear."

Sam shook his head slowly, the gesture of a man deflecting a hope he no longer trusted himself to hold. "I tried the 'inner peace' route, Tim. Sat in the dark. Breathed deeply. Looked for the light." He paused. "Found my own pain, just with better lighting." He exhaled—a long, pressurized breath, as if releasing something that had been sealed in for years. "Suffering isn't a glitch in the hardware. It's a feature. It's baked into our hardware." His eyes drifted toward the bar end of the coffee shop, where the rhythmic clink of glasses offered a philosophy considerably simpler than anything they'd been circling. He pushed himself upright, joints registering a formal complaint. Blunter and more honest. "What do you say we find some suffering we can actually swallow? Beer. Or something older and darker?" He glanced back at Tim with the ghost of a grin. "Your call. End of the world drinks—on me."

Note: This piece was partially generated using AI tools for styling and ideation;
human editing was then applied.

- T Newfields

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