

Foraminis Desmondi

Desmond awoke after another death dream. His hands, probing beneath his boxers, found what looked like a puncture wound in the crease of skin between his upper thigh and pubis. Both *puncture* and *wound* are actions, he thought, but he had no memory of either being punctured or wounded, not even in his dreamworlds. There had been no mechanism of injury of any kind in fact. No possibility that he had been stabbed during his sleep either, as he lived alone and was careful to keep all doors secured with multiple locks. Desmond feared the worst and, as always, he struck out into cyberspace for answers.

The internet deep dives had always been his standard response to changes in his body. The more he learned about the world, the more antagonistic it became. When his father told him about how plaque had led to his first cavity, a Google search had revealed it could also build up along the walls of his arteries, eventually overworking his heart to death. Ever since his father had died a few years ago, Desmond had been suffering from severe Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, and was pretty sure he had contracted some form of hantavirus from the mice that scratched away in the walls of his small apartment that his father had moved him into just before he died. After some recent bouts of migraines caused by the smell of urinal cakes, he thought that his brain must be infected with the black mold they had found in his highschool.

This morning's query brought him all kinds of possible skin infirmities: MRSA, pressure sores, carcinoma, but none of these seemed to match what he was seeing. Even the most trusted webmedicine sites revealed nothing to him about this new apparition. He asked around the forums and the only response he got suggested that he might have suffered a modern-day stigmata. This was absurd of course. Desmond's faith was rooted firmly in empirical facts and professional knowledge.

The medicine cabinet was prepared for any minor medical emergency, stocked with all kinds of creams, salves, pills and bandages. He knew the protocol for open wounds: Clean,

sterilize, bandage, and most important, seek professional medical care. Sitting in the bathtub, he sprayed the hole with the showerhead, and to his surprise the wound felt more ticklish than painful. He prepared a cotton ball with hydrogen peroxide and worked up the nerve to swab the wound, but there was no sting, not even the typical bubbling that had stuck in his memory from when a neighbor lady had taken him in as kid to swab a road rash with peroxide while berating him for trespassing on her private road. Now, instead of pain, there was an odd pleasure, like an itch being scratched. After treating his wound, he called the clinic and sheepishly explained his conundrum to the receptionist, whose confused response exacerbated his own fears such that he hung up the phone without making an appointment.

This new hole, which looked like a little pink mouth, seemed to want to be touched and stimulated. Initially, the novel pleasure created anxiety, as pleasure often does. The guilt he felt at touching the new opening in his body was not unlike the guilt he felt the first time he masturbated to ejaculation, which no one had ever told him would happen. The dread that at inspecting this new hole, so close to his genitals, was the same kind of dread that he once felt upon inspecting a bump on the base of his penis that appeared after his first sexual encounter, which he assumed was herpes, or worse, but ended up being a pimple. He was pretty sure this opening in his skin was not a sexual infection or the result of any sexual act; he had been abstinent for the last year, since the pimple incident. He closely inspected his genitals, and found that they were as they had always been. And then his attention went back to the wound, which was beginning to seem less and less like a wound.

He slid into the professional looking desk chair, adjacent to his bed, where he spent much of his free time painting and admiring his rare tin soldiers. He picked up General Joshua Chamberlain and looked at his tiny face, trying to summon its model courage within himself. When he felt brave enough, he pulled down his pants again and put the wound under the magnification lamp. Upon even closer scrutiny, it became clear this was certainly no wound at

all. There was no blood, no pus, and he realized his skin was not damaged in the least. It was a bit slimy but there was no observable sign of violence or infection. It appeared that his skin had grown downwards, down into himself. He applied a latex glove and began fathoming the depth of the hole, but it extended farther than his finger would permit. The indulgence was followed by an overwhelming feeling of shame, and so he stopped and concealed the opening with a band-aid, deciding the best course of action was to ignore it and hope it would go away on its own.

When the band-aid fell off a few days later and the opening had remained unclosed, Desmond's desperation led him to finally call Doctor Herman's office again and make an appointment.

It was flu season, and the clinic was extremely busy. The waiting room was populated by sniffing people, and Desmond was the only one with the decency to wear a mask. Almost more oppressive than the idea of unseen aerosolized pathogens were the framed stock photos that hung on the walls of the waiting room, the serenity of the hot air balloons and snowy alpine landscapes seeming to mock him.

After being ushered into an examination room, Dr. Herman's nurse, an attractive middle aged woman, attended him and asked to have a look. He shyly pulled down his underwear, careful to keep his genitals concealed with his hand, and exposed to her the mystery that had insidiously defined his existence these last few days.

She looked perplexed. "When did you first notice this?" she asked.

"A few days ago."

"May I?" she asked while applying an examination glove. Before he had a chance to respond she was lightly circling the perimeter of the hole with her latexed finger. His muscles all tensed at once.

“Does that hurt?” she asked.

“It feels funny.”

“Tender?” She began to apply more pressure.

“More like a light electrical jolt.” And in fact it was really more his lower torso was coming to a rolling boil within, and his limbs had turned to clouds. As she pressed, there was a moment of freefall, exciting and tranquilizing at the same time, and finally a hot avalanche of pure cosmic energy forced his eyes shut and then a thousand different colors spiraled into his inner vision like some pulsating kaleidoscope and when it was too much, he smacked her wrist hard. She jumped back into a cabinet, the metal instruments clanging from within.

“I’m so sorry!” he said as the immense inner experience faded to the familiar awareness of embarrassment. He had never shown violence towards a woman before.

“No, I’m sorry, Mr. McGill,” she said, keeping her distance. “I see it must be a bit tender. This is a very curious little medical oddity we have here. I’ve never seen anything like it. I’m interested in what Dr. Herman will have to say.”

The doctor barged in without a knock, preceded by that cocky voice that always put Desmond at ease. “Howdy Des. Good to see you. Looks like you’ve had a bit of a mishap. Let’s have a look.” Dr. Herman inspected the opening through a small scope, maybe the same one he used to use to diagnose Desmond’s childhood ear infections. He palpated the opening methodically with a series of metal instruments, careful not to touch it with his finger. “Puncture wound, maybe. Looks a bit strange, but no two wounds are alike. How’d this happen? The old lady stab you in your sleep? I’m just kidding of course,” he said, not taking his eyes off of the chart he was scribbling on.

“I just woke up with it,” Desmond said to his lap.

The doctor nodded incredulously. “Of course you did. Let’s sew it up and we’ll get you some antibiotics and a little cocktail for the pain.” The novocaine didn't work, but Desmond

didn't say anything. For all his fear of pain, his tolerance was actually quite high, and this mild suffering was a pleasant distraction from his anxious suspicion that this was something that went beyond the understanding of medicine.

On his way out, the receptionist gave him the prescription for percocet and amoxicillin, and also an unsolicited referral. "Dr Herman would like you to go see Dr. Bailey at *A Better Way Counseling Services*," the receptionist told him in a monotone voice, handing him the three documents.

Desmond peeked at the computer screen and thought he saw the words "self harm" in his file. He had been seeing Dr. Herman since he was a kid. The doctor had always been the single objective authority on his well-being, leaving Desmond wondering—had he somehow inflicted this wound upon himself in some sort of unconscious state? Of course not.

He felt betrayed.

Desmond had been forced to see this head shrinker, Dr. Bailey, a number of times after his father died a few years ago, just days after Desmond's 19th birthday, in a car accident. His mother had died of a mysterious illness when he was three, just before his mind was able to form memories. He knew that this Dr. Bailey, who Desmond thought of as a *meta-physican*, could do nothing for him after his father's death, and certainly could do nothing for him now, especially since this new problem seemed definitively physical and hopefully would be going away soon. On his way out of the clinic, he tore up the psych referral and deposited the shards in the appropriate recycling container outside of the clinic, an act that inspired a new feeling of courage.

A few days went by and Desmond struggled to distract himself from his new anatomical feature. He had recently graduated from a reputable online university and was living off a meager allowance from his twin sister, Desdemona. He was taking some time off from the rigors of

academic life before looking for a job doing what he knows. He had lots of time to think. He was an avid jogger, but the pain from the sutures prevented him from doing anything physical. Before and after long sessions of painting tin soldiers, he would scrutinize the opening, which he had shaved of its surrounding pubic hair for easier inspection. It had not changed.

Fearing that his cell phone might betray him by uploading the images online, he had begun documenting this new part of himself with an old digital camera from his childhood that had been stuffed away in the closet. He scrolled through some old photos on the SD card. He kept coming back to a photo of himself with his father's big hairy arm around his neck in front of the Disney Castle. Had his sister taken the picture? Probably every American family had this photo in this same spot. He located the dusty cable, the one specific to that camera, to upload the image onto his laptop, stored it on the cloud so it couldn't get deleted or lost in a closet. If he looked at it over and over, maybe the memories would come. But all he could recall of the trip was the darkness of the Space Mountain ride, and a silent anger towards his dad that followed. There was no story.

After a few unreturned phone calls to Doctor Herman's office, it had become clear that the aperture was not sealing together as it should, so he sterilized a hobby knife over the stove and cut the sutures out, feeling the same sense of rebelliousness and independence he had when tearing up the psych referral.

As days passed, it was becoming more and more clear this was certainly not a wound, but some kind of orifice. Every orifice has a purpose, and so it became Desmond's purpose to discover the function of this new part of himself. He first needed to find out what this opening led to. He was inspired by a kind of explorer's enthusiasm that Jules Verne's Professor Lidenbrock must have felt as he began his journey to the center of the earth.

He spent more and more time inspecting this new phenomenon, which he had decided to call *foraminis desmondi*, or “Desomond’s hole” in Latin, according to Google translate. The act of naming the thing gave him a sense of ownership and power, what he early taxonomists must have felt naming the flora and fauna. It was as if, by naming it, Desmond had conceived this novel phenomenon himself.

He decided to recruit assistance from his twin sister, the only person besides himself he could trust, now that he had been betrayed by Dr. Herman. Desdemona had always wanted to be a physician but had no interest in medical school, so instead she became a rep for a very profitable company called the Integrated Optics, which sold endoscopic instruments. The rate of obsolescence of the fiber optic cameras was so rapid that Desdemona had quite a few old models lying around her large home in Marble Canyon Estates. He figured that the instruments could be very handy if he wanted to plumb the depths of his *foraminis desmondi*.

When she arrived, Desmond eagerly ushered her over to his hobby table and removed his pants, entreating her to have a magnified look at *farmonans desmondi* through the glass. The twins grew up seeing each other naked and never began to experience those illogical feelings of nudity shame that many siblings do after puberty. He laid on his bed, while she began to inspect what she probably assumed was nothing more than the ‘delusions of a hypochondriac,’ a phrase that she often used to put down her brother.

Desdemona peered into the giant lens of Desmond’s magnifying lamp until it began to fog as her breathing intensified. “This is incredible! Can I touch it?” She applied the glove and pushed on one edge of the pink rim like a kid poking at a dead animal. The aperture contracted. “Did you do that?” she asked.

“No. It seems to have its own will, like beyond an involuntary reaction.”

“I’ve never seen anything like this! It’s like you’ve grown a vagina...”

“Desdy if you’re going to be obscene, we can stop now.”

“Easy, Des. You must have at least thought...”

“No, Desdy. This is something novel. Maybe I’m the only one. I think it goes somewhere..”

“Where does it go?” It was unclear whether she was being sarcastic or sincere. Maybe there was no difference.

“That’s what we have to find out. Did you bring your instruments?” he said.

“Of course!” She went to her car and brought back a large plastic case. “You can’t tell anyone that we are doing this. These instruments are only to be used by doctors, MDs. I’ll get fired if the company finds out and you know what that means.”

The portable autoclave dramatically released steam when Desdemona opened it, almost like some sort of movie prop. She removed the endoscope and carefully handled the coiled black instrument, looking into the camera the way a snake handler might look into the dangerous mouth of a serpent.

She inspected *formanis desmondi* again. “Can you get it to open?” she asked.

“Just a sec.” He gently traced his finger around the rim, as the nurse had done weeks ago, until it opened again, exposing the blackness within. He felt embarrassed when he shuddered from the jolt of pleasure that accompanied the act.

Desdemona illuminated the light and methodically inserted the camera into her brother. As it began to descend, he tried to suppress another immense wave of pleasure that overtook his entire body. The camera’s feed on her laptop showed a series of slimy rings, like an inside-out earthworm. The pink rings appeared to be about a quarter inch each, but got wider as the camera descended. He tried to distract himself from the overwhelming sensations within by concentrating on counting the rings. The tunnel seemed to be growing wider and wider and, after he counted about two hundred rings, the camera stopped and the walls of the canal were barely

perceptible in the periphery of the digitized image on her oversized computer. The fiber optics cable had reached its end.

“How long is that thing?” he asked.

His sister looked puzzled. “About three meters.”

“And how long is a meter?”

“Well, you’re only about two meters tall, Des.”

“Desdy, what are you saying?”

“It seems that this thing is longer, or deeper than you are. Let me take some measurements from where I am.”

“You mean from my desk chair?”

“From where the camera is, idiot.” She clicked on both sides of the farthest visible, bringing up a digital measuring line. “It looks like this ring is about 1.5 meters in diameter.”

“How is that possible?” he asked. “It must be an instrument malfunction.”

“This thing costs a hundred grand. It doesn’t malfunction,” she said as she pulled out the long cable that seemed to go on and on like some sort of cheap magic trick.

“So why did they discontinue it?”

“The enamel was killing like .01 percent of people. Don’t worry, Des, you’ll be fine.”

Oddly, this fact passed over him quite easily. “Des, I don’t know what is going on, but you are like a spatial paradox of some kind. The instruments don’t lie.”

Later that night, Desmond pored over the recording that his sister had copied onto his hard drive. He watched the video the camera captured while traveling through the ribbed channel to which the foraminis desmondi was only the ingress. When he played the video at slow and fast speeds, he felt as though he was spinning and he realized the ribs that he was seeing were not concentric segments, but an interminable spiral opening more and more with each revolution inside of him.

When he played it at 6x speed and then looked at his room, it appeared that the world was expanding around him. After playing the video backwards at the same speed, the world contracted.

Much of his initial anxiety had given way to curiosity and excitement. There were the obvious questions: where does this passageway lead to? How can inner space be more expensive than outer space? Had this tunnel and the space it enclosed always been there and was only the aperture new? But then, as usual, his thoughts returned to darkness. Will scientists dissect me? He remembered how awfully aliens were treated in sci fi films at the expense of scientific knowledge. It was late but he phoned Desdemona, whose excitement had not abated.

“Des, you really are some kind of miracle. Do you realize that everything we know about space and our bodies and even all the laws of the universe are totally bunk.” She has always loved this word, *bunk*, which annoyed him. “I’ve been seeing this guy who is a physicist, and I’m dying to get his take. We can trust him, Des. Can he come have a look?”

“No! And why do you always have to talk about your boyfriends?”

“It’s so incredible, though, Des? Don’t you want to know what’s inside of you?” She seemed abnormally sincere.

“Of course I do, but I don’t want to become some portal to another dimension. You know they would sacrifice me in the name of science!”

“Let’s not get ahead of ourselves,” she said.

“Can you come over again? Maybe with a longer cable? I need to find what’s inside and where it goes.”

“I’ll bring Mike along. He wrote his dissertation about gravitational waves and like how space can get bigger and smaller sometimes.”

“That makes no sense. Who’s Mike?”

“The guy I’m seeing.”

“No way! This is private. Just you and me.”

“Des. If you are going to be selfish about this, you’re on your own.”

When she hung up he went to his computer and began to shop. He found that Amazon sold fiber optics cameras for pretty cheap. Maybe he wouldn’t need Desdemona after all. All of the cables he found were intended for plumbers to find clogs in sewer drains. Desmond had begun to consider this new space inside of him as something of a holy phenomenon, and the idea of putting something that is intended to find human feces seemed sacrosanct, but he had to know where the foraminis desmondi was leading him.

He purchased a new top of the line camera called the InLooker and selected overnight shipping. What made the InLooker special, besides not having a name like SewerSnake, was that you could purchase additional cables to make the thing as long as you could afford. He had spent almost all of this month’s allowance. It felt reckless, like the time he wired his tuition money to an online lover to come see him in person. She never did. But this was different. He was, maybe for the first time in his life, engaged in a project greater than himself.

The next 24 hours of waiting were almost unbearable and Desmond couldn’t keep his mind from wandering. The only thing that could ground his speculative peregrinations was more online research. He discovered that spirals were even more native to the universe than spheres. Not only are galaxies spirals with blackholes at the center, but gravitational and electromagnetic waves were actually the curvatures of giant spiralled energy structures. Some of the earliest multi-celled organisms, like the nautiloid, emulated these celestial forms in their anatomy. Culturally, the spiral is a universal symbol for infinity, and Desmond wondered if this inner space could be, in fact, infinite. He tried to think about what that meant, infinity, a concept that he could only understand as being the opposite of finite, which is what he imagined defined his life against the life of the universe.

Since he was unable to explore this new space empirically until the UPS man came the next afternoon, he decided to explore the sensory quality of this foraminis desmondi that night. When stimulated, foraminis desmondi created the sensation of pleasure that was limitless, echoing in every single nerve ending in his body. Each pulse of pleasure became more extensive to the point where he began to feel more than himself. The mattress of his bed became an extension of his body and he began to feel the pleasure reverberate throughout it too, and then he felt the apartment, then the ground, and then he was able to feel the the pulses of pleasure reverberate through all of the earth's crust, through the churning magma underneath, and eventually, when his eyes were closed, the entire cosmos became an extension of his body, expanding and contracting in convulsions of pleasure with every revolution that his finger made around the rim of what now seemed to be the navel of the universe.

Even when he stopped touching the foraminis desmondi, it was as though his body was a tuning fork that was vibrating against the earth, picking up all the frequencies of cosmos. The universe was communicating with him, he could feel that, but could not understand it. His inner sight perceived that the spiral was opening, opening, and he was not himself until he awoke the next morning.

When the InLooker arrived, Desmond tore through the package with the zeal of a child at Christmas. Having now had some experience with home surgery, he felt confident in his ability to explore alone. He had purchased thirty cables, totaling 300 feet of fiber optic reach. He inserted the camera into the foraminis desmondi. With each erratic pulse of pleasure that he felt, he saw on his computer screen that the spiral would expand and contract, like a speaker as the base notes pump through it. It was unclear whether it was his feeling that was causing these waves to pass through or whether these waves were causing the experience of pleasure. The sensations seemed to precede his visual perception of the spiral pulses, but he realized that this

could be attributed to the digital lag in his camera feed. After he had fed five of the cable lengths into him, the spiraled pink walls of the canal became imperceptible and the light of the camera was consumed by the darkness of the seemingly limitless space. When the rest of the cables were deployed inside of him, he almost expected to see stars or galaxies showing up on his monitor. He had hoped that the universe or a universe was in him, a universe with light and matter and energy, with planets and life and thoughts and change, but there was nothing except for stale darkness.

When Desmond fished the cable out of him, there was no more feeling. The canal was insensate, dead. He fingered the hole, but felt nothing. He struck back out into the internet, searching for something that could give him more clues as to what was going on. He betrayed his previous precautions to keep this a secret, posting on all of the major forums to see if there was someone who had the same experience, but of course this only generated humiliating comments and a few people sharing photos of their skin diseases.

Maybe there was a way to communicate with the space within him. He had heard of the radio telescopes that sent out messages into space. Interesting that there were telescopes for talking, not just looking. He also knew their messages were lost in the nothingness, or else were heard, but not answered. He feared the possibility of the same great silence within himself. But he had to know. Desdemona could help. He woke her up with a call late at night.

“Desdy, I need to send a message into myself. How can I do this?”

“Hello stranger. I’m well. Thanks for asking. How are you?” she had clearly been asleep.

“Desdy, it doesn’t end.”

“Your selfishness is infinite. I agree.”

“No, Desdy, the space within me. I need to find out if there is any meaning to it. Or maybe there is some intelligence in there..”

“I’ve been wondering that for as long as we’ve been alive.”

“Desdy, be serious. I need your help. How can I send a message?”

“Well, how would this intelligence receive a message?”

“I think it has been trying to send, well, vibrational messages to me.” He was glad that she couldn’t see the redness in his face.

After a pause, Desdemonda said, “How about an ultrasound?”

“Desdy, I’m not pregnant. And I’m not interested in your theories.”

“I’m serious. An endoscopic ultrasound. It’s an endoscope that can emit and receive sound, just like the lighted camera sends and receives light. I could reprogram it to send any recorded audio message? What would you like it to say?”

“I want it to say, *‘Am I alone?’*”

There was a long silence.

“Des, have you thought about dad,” his sister asked.

“Yeah, I’ve been going through old photos. I’m not as sad as I used to be. It’s just weird, you know, looking at pictures. All I have are these pictures, these files that are just made up of 0s and 1s. I’ve wondered if, even in life, if that’s all we are to each other, just a bunch of information. I’m already starting to forget dad, who he really was.”

“Me too”

More silence.

“The weirdest part about being an orphan,” she said, “is that word. *Orphan*. It’s like we’re out of some Disney movie. Waiting for that estranged relative to find us and love us and share their enormous wealth.” Desmond thought about asking about Desmond about the trip to Disney, so vague in his mind, but decided against it.

“I think it’s just us,” he said.

“I hope there is really something to this formaninis thing of yours after all.”

“Me too. Could you come over tomorrow and we can try one more time with the ultrasound machine? Just us?”

“Sure, Des. Just us.”

It took both of them to pull the machine out of the back of Desdemona’s SUV and in the door of Desmond’s small apartment through which it barely fit. She worked diligently to connect all the variously colored wires to the different ports in the back as he watched with a rare sense of pride at her mechanical movements, a real professional, and it was maybe the first time that he considered her to be a woman, not longer a kid. Both the complexity of the machine with its many lights and multiple monitors inspired a hope in Desmond. If there were anything that could discover what was inside of him, it would have to be something as sophisticated as this apparatus. When Desdemona had finished running the diagnostic test, he could see that her excitement was also growing. She forewent the protective gloves, but with the same care as before, inserted the ovular head of the ultrasound endoscope into the foraminis desmondi.

The machine had two monitors, one with an optical camera, and one that displayed the sound image. This time, Desdemona followed along one edge of the opening canal and the cable reached its limit at 50 meters. At this depth, the machine came to rest upon the pink wall of the inner canal. The contrast between the illuminated pink firmament and the darkness of the innerspace above it reminded Desmond of an inverted planetary horizon, a planet that was utterly barren and lifeless. The ultrasound image on the larger monitor revealed uniform undulations that looked like a child’s drawing of a wavy sea, the waves becoming wider and wider until they were no longer perceptible.

“Are you ready to deploy the message?” she asked.

“Yes.”

“Here we go.”

The next morning he awoke from the last death dream, making his way through a spiraled canal into a formless void, a place with no meaning, maybe to begin again. Behind him, he could see the little slit of light from the world blink shut.

Upon awakening that morning, his fingers searched between his pubis and upper thigh, but he found nothing, no scar or any vestige of the formamnis desmondi. It was gone.