

CALIFORNIA MARITIME

SUMMER 2025

SOUNDINGS



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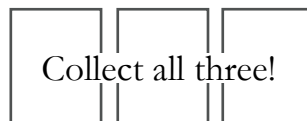
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☐ Pass

☐ Fail

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THIS IS NOT A COMMON READER

Welcome to Cal Maritime! We're excited you're joining our community and beginning your college journey with us. Every year, incoming students participate in the Common Read, a shared experience designed to introduce you to college-level discussions and connect you with your classmates, professors, and campus staff.

This year, we've decided to do something a little different. With the generous support of the Teagle Foundation, we've curated this collection of shorter texts from a list of books and worked hard to compile them into this printed magazine full of illustrations, cartoons, easter eggs and extras. We hope you enjoy it!

HOW TO USE THIS:

Read these texts.

You'll encounter them again in your first-year General Education courses, so this won't be the last time you'll see them. At Orientation in August, you'll gather in seminar groups to discuss these texts together for the first time, exploring ideas, perspectives, and questions that will set the stage for your college experience. You will find blank pages scattered throughout for thoughts and reflections as you prepare to discuss your ideas in August.

You might wonder why, for your college Orientation, we're asking you to consider together an ancient allegory about caves, a couple of short stories about educated parrots, a nonfiction account of a maritime disaster, a poem depicting the underwater world, and a TED Talk about what stories tell us (and what they don't). But we've selected these texts precisely because they invite you to practice seeing the world—and yourself—in new ways.

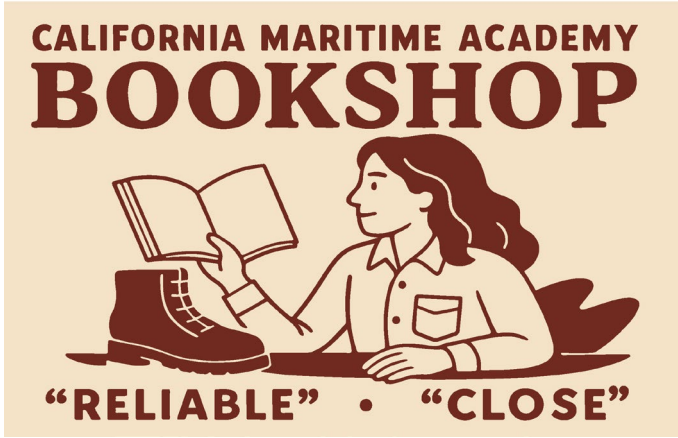
At Cal Maritime, we believe self-awareness is the foundation of effective leadership. Cultivating a deeper understanding of who you are, how you think, and how your values impact your behavior and decisions is essential to inspiring others and building strong collaborative relationships. To become effective collaborators and leaders, you'll learn to approach unfamiliar ideas and diverse viewpoints with curiosity and openness.

As you’ll soon learn when you arrive on campus, leadership at Cal Maritime isn’t just an extracurricular pursuit; it’s woven throughout your academic life. In your General Education courses in your first year, you’ll tackle big, enduring questions: Who am I? What responsibilities do I have to myself and others? Who are we as a collective? What responsibilities do we hold to ourselves and others? How do our choices shape us? How do our values shape the decisions we make? How do groups of people create a sense of shared purpose and what conditions help teams flourish rather than fracture? These questions aren’t just academic—they’re fundamental to navigating the complexity, uncertainty, and ambiguity inherent in every leadership challenge. In maritime industries, in engineering, in business, in policymaking, and in life, the capacity to anticipate consequences, remain patient with unfamiliarity, and genuinely understand multiple perspectives is crucial. Self-reflection—in your GE and major courses and through extracurricular involvement—creates a powerful training ground for practicing leadership and applying classroom insights to real-world challenges.

This summer, take your time as you dive into these texts. Consider your reactions carefully and notice patterns, themes, and connections between your own experiences and these diverse stories. Reflect deeply: How do your personal background and beliefs shape your interpretation? How might your perspective evolve as you encounter new ideas, new peers, and new challenges in the year ahead? Explore at your own pace, and feel free to discuss these readings with friends or family. Jot down your reflections directly in this booklet and bring it with you to Orientation. Your notes will help spark meaningful conversations in your discussion groups and provide insights you’ll revisit throughout your first year.

We can’t wait to hear what you think!

The Cal Maritime Common Read Committee / The 2025 Teagle Faculty Fellows



CONTRIBUTORS

Plato (approx. 428 BCE- 348 BCE): An ancient Greek philosopher of the Classical period, Plato is a central figure in Western philosophy who wrote about the formation of thought, the nature of reality, and ideal forms of political organization.

Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941): Poet, novelist, playwright, composer, philosopher, and social reformer born in Calcutta, India. In 1913, Tagore was the first non-European writer to be awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature.

John Vaillant (b. 1962): An American and Canadian journalist and novelist specializing in the natural world and environmental change. His most recent book, *Fire Weather: The Making of a Beast* (2023), was a finalist for the National Book Award for Non-Fiction.

Marianne Moore (1887-1972): An American Modernist poet, critic, translator, and editor known for her formal innovations. Her book *Collected Poems* (1951) won both the National Book Award and the Pulitzer Prize.

Ted Chiang (b. 1967): A Chinese-American science fiction writer and winner of multiple Hugo and Nebula awards. His short story “Story of Your Life” was turned into the film *Arrival* in 2016, and he has contributed pieces on artificial intelligence and computing to *The New Yorker*.

Allora & Calzadilla: A collaborative duo of visual artists (Jennifer Allora and Guillermo Calzadilla) who live and work in San Juan, Puerto Rico. They work in multiple mediums including sculpture, photography, performance art, sound, and video.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (b. 1977): A Nigerian writer of novels, short stories, a memoir, and several works of cultural analysis. She splits her time between Nigeria and the US; her most recent novel is called *Dream Count* (2025).

Jonathan Fischer: This reader’s visual designer. A Cal Maritime professor of Engineering Technology since 2006, visual artist, and lover of the *New Yorker* magazine. Recent work includes projects in Portugal and Humboldt County.

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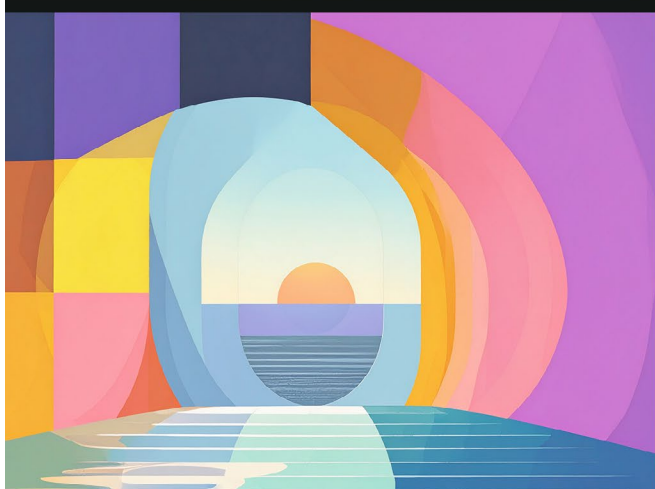
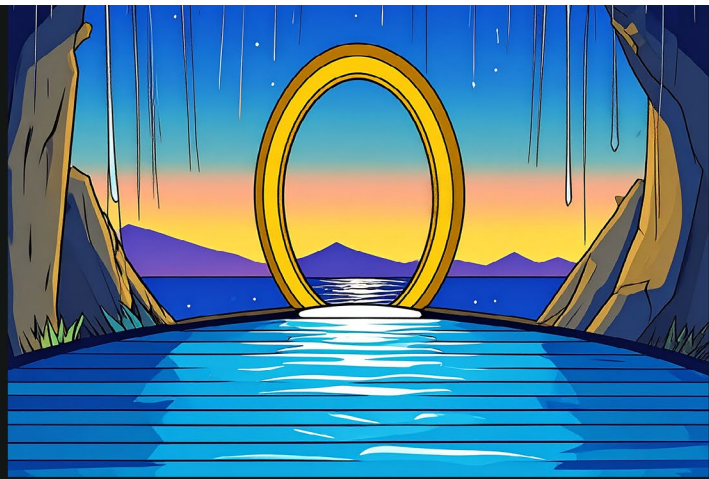
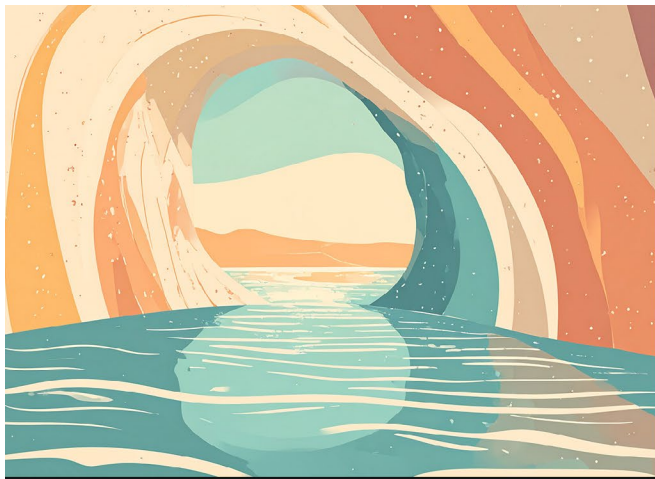
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Thanks also to Aemilia Phillips and John Vaillant for their help with “The Ship That Vanished.”



Appearances change — though Plato believed most would resist turning away from them to seek what is real.

ON LOOKING

THE ALLEGORY OF THE CAVE

What is seen is not always what is true.

BY PLATO

TRANSLATED BY J. JOWETT

ACCESSED FROM PROJECT GUTENBERG

Note: the reading below comes from Book VII of Plato's Republic (375 BCE). It contains the famous dialogue between Socrates, who speaks first, and his friend Glaucon. Socrates asks Glaucon to consider the complex process of education for an imaginary group of people raised in the darkness of a cave. Note that while the conversation lacks the traditional grammatical markers of dialogue, each new paragraph indicates a change of speaker.

And now, I said, let me show in a figure how far our nature is enlightened or unenlightened:—Behold! human beings living in a underground den, which has a mouth open towards the light and reaching all along the den; here they have been from their childhood, and have their legs and necks chained so that they cannot move, and can only see before them, being prevented by the chains from turning round their heads. Above and behind them a fire is blazing at a distance, and between the fire and the prisoners there is a raised way; and you will see, if you look, a low wall built along the way, like the screen which marionette players have in front of them, over which they show the puppets.

I see.

which they heard came from the passing shadow?

And do you see, I said, men passing along the wall carrying all sorts of vessels, and statues and figures of animals made of wood and stone and various materials, which appear over the wall? Some of them are talking, others silent.

You have shown me a strange image, and they are strange prisoners.

Like ourselves, I replied; and they see only their own shadows, or the shadows of one another, which the fire throws on the opposite wall of the cave?

True, he said; how could they see anything but the shadows if they were never allowed to move their heads?

And of the objects which are being carried in like manner they would only see the shadows?

Yes, he said.

And if they were able to converse with one another, would they not suppose that they were naming what was actually before them?

Very true.

And suppose further that the prison had an echo which came from the other side, would they not be sure to fancy when one of the passers-by spoke that the voice

No question, he replied.

To them, I said, the truth would be literally nothing but the shadows of the images.

That is certain.

And now look again, and see what will naturally follow if the prisoners are released and disabused of their error. At first, when any of them is liberated and compelled suddenly to stand up and turn his neck round and walk and look towards the light, he will suffer sharp pains; the glare will distress him, and he will be unable to see the realities of which in his former state he had seen the shadows; and then conceive some one saying to him, that what he saw before was an illusion, but that now, when he is approaching nearer to being and



his eye is turned towards more real existence, he has a clearer vision,—what will be his reply? And you may further imagine that his instructor is pointing to the objects as they pass and requiring him to name them,—will he not be perplexed? Will he not fancy that the shadows which he formerly saw are truer than the objects which are now shown to him?

Far truer.

And if he is compelled to look straight at the light, will he not have a pain in his eyes which will make him turn away to take refuge in the objects of vision which he can see, and which he will conceive to be in reality clearer than the things which are now being shown to him?

True, he said.

And suppose once more, that he is reluctantly dragged up a steep and rugged ascent, and held fast until he is forced into the presence of the sun himself, is he not likely to be pained and irritated? When he approaches the light his eyes will be dazzled, and he will not be able to see anything at all of what are now called realities.

Not all in a moment, he said.

He will require to grow accustomed to the sight of the upper world. And first he will see the shadows best, next the reflections of men and other objects in the water, and then the objects themselves; then he will gaze upon the light of the moon and the stars and the spangled heaven; and he will see the sky and the stars by night better than the sun or the light of the sun by day?

Certainly.

Last of all he will be able to see the sun, and not mere reflections of him in the water, but he will see him in his own proper place, and not in another; and he will contemplate him as he is.

Certainly.

He will then proceed to argue that this is he who gives the season and the years, and is the guardian of all that is in the visible world, and in a certain way the cause of all things which he and his fellows have been accustomed to behold?

Clearly, he said, he would first see the sun and then reason about him.

And when he remembered his old habitation, and the wisdom of the den and his fellow-prisoners, do you not suppose that he would felicitate himself on the change, and pity them?

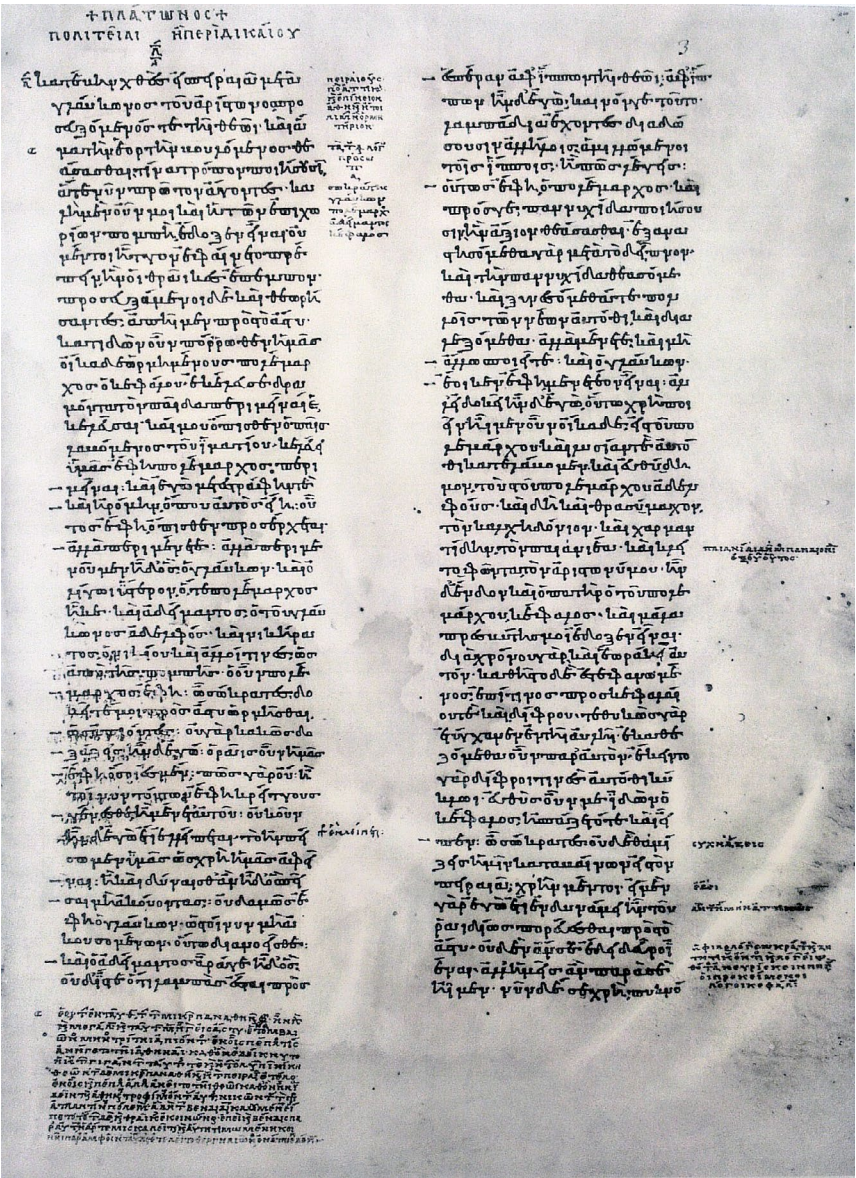
Certainly, he would.

And if they were in the habit of conferring honours among themselves on those who were quickest to observe the passing shadows and to remark which of them went before, and which followed after, and which were together; and who were therefore best able to draw conclusions as to the future, do you think that he would care for such honours and glories, or envy the possessors of them? Would he not say with Homer,

‘Better to be the poor servant of a poor master,’

and to endure anything, rather than think as they do and live after their manner?

Yes, he said, I think that he would rather suffer anything than entertain these false notions and live in this miserable manner.



Title page of the oldest complete manuscript of *The Republic*: Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Gr. 1807 (late 9th century).

Imagine once more, I said, such an one coming suddenly out of the sun to be replaced in his old situation; would he not be certain to have his eyes full of darkness?

To be sure, he said.

And if there were a contest, and he had to compete in measuring the shadows with the prisoners who had never moved out of the den, while his sight was still weak, and before his eyes had become steady (and the time

which would be needed to acquire this new habit of sight might be very considerable), would he not be ridiculous? Men would say of him that up he went and down he came without his eyes; and that it was better not even to think of ascending; and if any one tried to loose another and lead him up to the light, let them only catch the offender, and they would put him to death.

No question, he said.

This entire allegory, I said, you may now append, dear Glaucon, to the previous argument; the prison-house is the world of sight, the light of the fire is the sun, and you will not misapprehend me if you interpret the journey upwards to be the ascent of the soul into the intellectual world according to my poor belief, which, at your desire, I have expressed—whether rightly or wrongly God knows. But, whether true or false, my opinion is that in the world of knowledge the idea of good appears last of all, and is seen only with an effort; and, when seen, is also inferred to be the universal author of all things beautiful and right, parent of light and of the lord of light in this visible world, and the immediate source of reason and truth in the intellectual; and that this is the power upon which he who would act rationally either in

public or private life must have his eye fixed.

I agree, he said, as far as I am able to understand you.

Moreover, I said, you must not wonder that those who attain to this beatific vision are unwilling to descend to human affairs; for their souls are ever hastening into the upper world where they desire to dwell; which desire of theirs is very natural, if our allegory may be trusted.



Yes, very natural.

And is there anything surprising in one who passes from divine contemplations to the evil state of man, misbehaving himself in a ridiculous manner; if, while his eyes are blinking and

before he has become accustomed to the surrounding darkness, he is compelled to fight in courts of law, or in other places, about the images or the shadows of images of justice, and is endeavouring to meet the conceptions of those who have never yet seen absolute justice?

Anything but surprising, he replied.

Any one who has common sense will remember that the bewilderments of the eyes are of two kinds, and arise from two causes, either from coming out of the light or from going into the light, which is true of the mind's eye, quite as much as of the bodily eye; and he who remembers this

when he sees any one whose vision is perplexed and weak, will not be too ready to laugh; he will first ask whether that soul of man has come out of the brighter life, and is unable to see because unaccustomed to the dark, or having turned from darkness to the day is dazzled by excess of light. And he will count the one happy in his condition and state of being, and he will pity the other; or, if he have a mind to laugh at the soul which comes from below into the light, there will be more reason in this than in the laugh which greets him who returns from above out of the light into the den.

That, he said, is a very just distinction.

But then, if I am right, certain professors of education must be wrong when they say that they can put a knowledge into the soul which was not there before, like sight into blind eyes.

They undoubtedly say this, he replied.

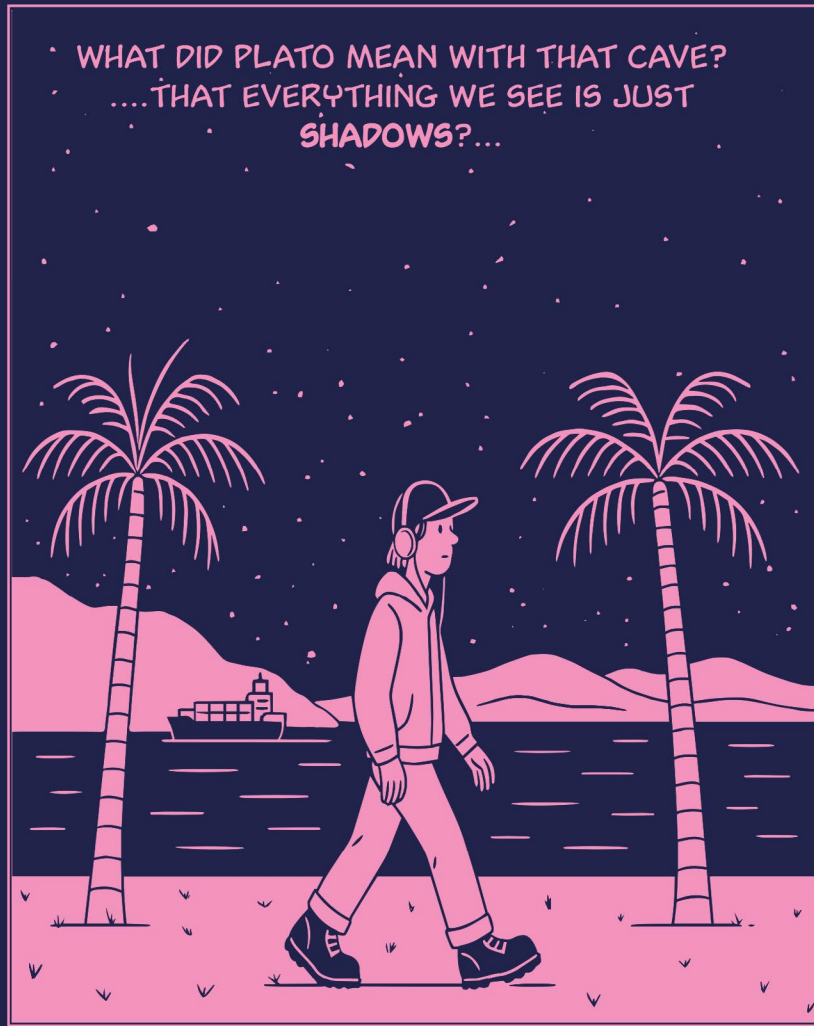
Whereas, our argument shows that the power and capacity of learning exists in the soul already; and that just as the eye was unable to turn from darkness to light without the whole body, so too the instrument of knowledge can only by the movement of the whole soul be turned from the world of becoming into that of being, and learn by degrees to endure the sight of being, and of the brightest and best of being, or in other words, of the good.

Very true. □

REFLECTION

Save this space for thoughts, ideas, or favorite moments from your orientation discussion. During your Common Read Discussion at Orientation, write down anything you'd like to remember later—like an interesting perspective someone shared, a quote you liked, or questions that sparked great conversations.

EVENING STROLL



WHAT DID PLATO MEAN WITH THAT CAVE?
....THAT EVERYTHING WE SEE IS JUST
SHADOWS?...

IS THE WORLD WE
SEE... **FAKE?**



...OR JUST
INCOMPLETE?



DOES THE TRUTH REALLY
LIVE IN PERFECT FORMS?
...PURE REASON?... BEYOND
WHAT WE CAN TOUCH?...



HE SAID REAL
KNOWLEDGE
COMES FROM
LEAVING THE
CAVE ...**NOT**
TRUSTING THE
SENSES, BUT
THINKING
DEEPLY....



...BUT CAN'T THE
WORLD SHOW US
WHAT'S REAL?
...EXPERIMENTS PLATO
COULD NEVER DREAM
ABOUT? ATOMS?
VIRUSES? GALAXIES?
PSYCHOLOGY? A.I.?
BUT THEN EVEN
SCIENCE EXPERIMENTS
HIT LIMITS. NOT
EVERYTHING WE
OBSERVE MAKES SENSE
RIGHT AWAY. IS TRUTH
IN WHAT WE **THINK** OR
IN WHAT THE WORLD
WHISPERS BACK?



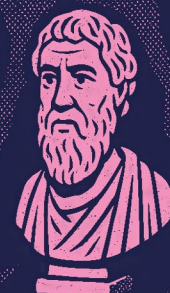
AND... WHO'S **RIGHT?** PLATO?
SCIENTISTS? SOMEONE ELSE? OR
IS IT ALWAYS SOMETHING
BETWEEN?



MAYBE WHAT'S REAL
ISN'T ABOUT PICKING
SIDES ...



MAYBE IT'S
KNOWING WHEN
TO TRUST THE
WORLD....



..... AND WHEN TO
QUESTION IT.

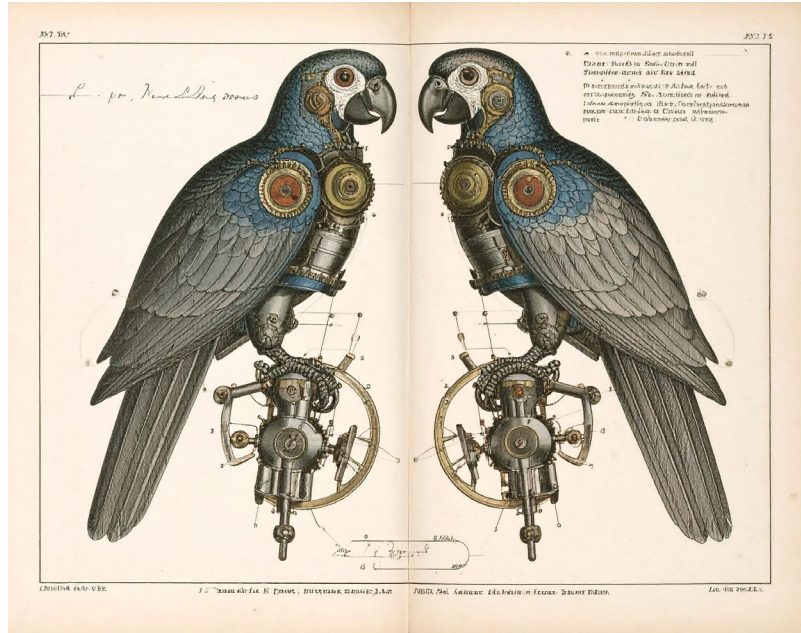
...MAYBE THAT'S WHAT
LEAVING THE CAVE REALLY
MEANS.



THE PARROT'S TRAINING

In Tagore's fable, teaching becomes a cage more than a gift.

BY RABINDRANATH TAGORE



Once upon a time there was a bird. It was ignorant. It sang all right, but never recited scriptures. It hopped pretty frequently, but lacked manners.

Said the Raja to himself: "Ignorance is costly in the long run. For fools consume as much food as their betters, and yet give nothing in return."

He called his nephews to his presence and told them that the bird must have a sound schooling.

The pundits were summoned, and at once went to the root of the matter. They decided that the ignorance of birds was due to their natural habit of living in poor nests. Therefore, according to the pundits, the first thing necessary for this bird's education was a suitable cage.

The pundits had their rewards and went home happy.

A golden cage was built with gorgeous decorations. Crowds came to see it from all parts of the world. "Culture, captured

and caged!" exclaimed some, in a rapture of ecstasy, and burst into tears. Others remarked: "Even if culture be missed, the cage will remain, to the end, a substantial fact. How fortunate for the bird!"

The goldsmith filled his bag with money and lost no time in sailing homewards.

The pundit sat down to educate the bird. With proper deliberation- he took his pinch of snuff, as he said: "Textbooks can never be too many for our purpose!"

The nephews brought together an enormous crowd of scribes. They copied from books, and copied from copies, till the manuscripts were piled up to an unreachable height.

Men murmured in amazement: "Oh, the tower of culture, egregiously high! The end of it lost in the clouds!"

The scribes, with light hearts, hurried home, their pockets heavily laden.

The nephews were furiously busy keeping the cage in proper trim.

As their constant scrubbing and polishing went on, the people said with satisfaction: "This is progress indeed!" Men were employed in large numbers, and supervisors were still more numerous. These, with their cousins of all different degrees of distance, built a palace for themselves and lived there happily ever after.

Whatever may be its other deficiencies, the world is never in want of fault-finders; and they went about saying that every creature remotely connected with

the cage flourished beyond words, excepting only the bird.

When this remark reached the Raja's ears, he summoned his nephews before him and said: "My dear nephews, what is this that we hear?"

The nephews said in answer: "Sire, let the testimony of the goldsmiths and the pundits, the scribes and the supervisors, be taken, if the truth is to be known. Food is scarce with the fault-finders, and that is why their tongues have gained in sharpness."

The explanation was so luminously satisfactory that the Raja decorated each one of his nephews with his own rare jewels.

The Raja at length, being desirous of seeing with his own eyes how his Education Department busied itself with the little-bird, made his appearance one day at the great Hall of Learning.

From the gate rose the sounds of conch-shells and gongs, horns, bugles and trumpets, cymbals, drums and, kettle drums, tom-toms, tambourines, flutes, fifes, barrel organs and bagpipes. The pundits began chanting mantras with their topmost voices, while the goldsmiths, scribes, supervisors, and their numberless cousins of all different degrees of distance, loudly raised a round of cheers.

The nephews smiled and said: "Sire, what-do you think of it all?"

The Raja said: "It does seem so fearfully like a sound principle of Education!"

Mightily pleased, the Raja was about to remount his elephant,

when the fault-finder, from behind some bush, cried out: "Maharaja, have you seen the bird?"

"Indeed, I have not!" exclaimed the Raja. "I completely forgot about the bird."

Turning back, he asked the pundits about the method they followed in instructing the bird. It was shown to him. He was immensely impressed. The method was so stupendous that the bird looked ridiculously unimportant in comparison. The Raja was satisfied that there was no flaw in the arrangements. As for any complaint from the bird itself, that simply could not be expected. Its throat was so completely choked with the leaves from the books that it could neither whistle nor whisper. It sent a thrill through one's body to watch the process.

This time, while remounting his elephant, the Raja ordered his State Ear puller to give a thorough good pull at both the ears of the fault-finder.

The bird thus crawled on, duly and properly, to the safest verge of insanity. In fact, its progress was satisfactory in the extreme. Nevertheless, nature occasionally triumphed over training, and when the morning light peeped into the bird's cage it sometimes fluttered its wings in a reprehensible manner. And, though it is hard to believe, it pitifully pecked at its bars with its feeble beak.

"What impertinence!" growled the kotwal.

The blacksmith, with his forge and hammer, took his place in the Raja's Department of Education. Oh, what resounding blows! The iron

chain was soon completed, and the bird's wings were clipped.

The Raja's brothers-in-law looked back, and shook their heads, saying: "These birds not only lack good sense, but also gratitude!"

With textbook in one hand and the baton in the other, the pundits gave the poor bird what may fitly be called lessons!

The kotwal was honoured with a title for his watchfulness and the blacksmith for his skill in forging chains.

The bird died.

Nobody had the least notion how long ago this had happened. The fault-finder was the first man to spread the rumour.

The Raja called his nephews and asked them: "My dear nephews, what is this that we hear?"

The nephews said: "Sire, the bird's education has been completed."

"Does it hop?" the Raja enquired.

"Never!" said the nephews.

"Does it fly?" "No."

"Bring me the bird," said the Raja.

The bird was brought to him, guarded by the kotwal and the sepoys. The Raja poked its body with his finger. Only its inner stuffing of book-leaves rustled.

Outside the window, the murmur of the spring breeze amongst the newly budded Asoka leaves made the April morning wistful. □

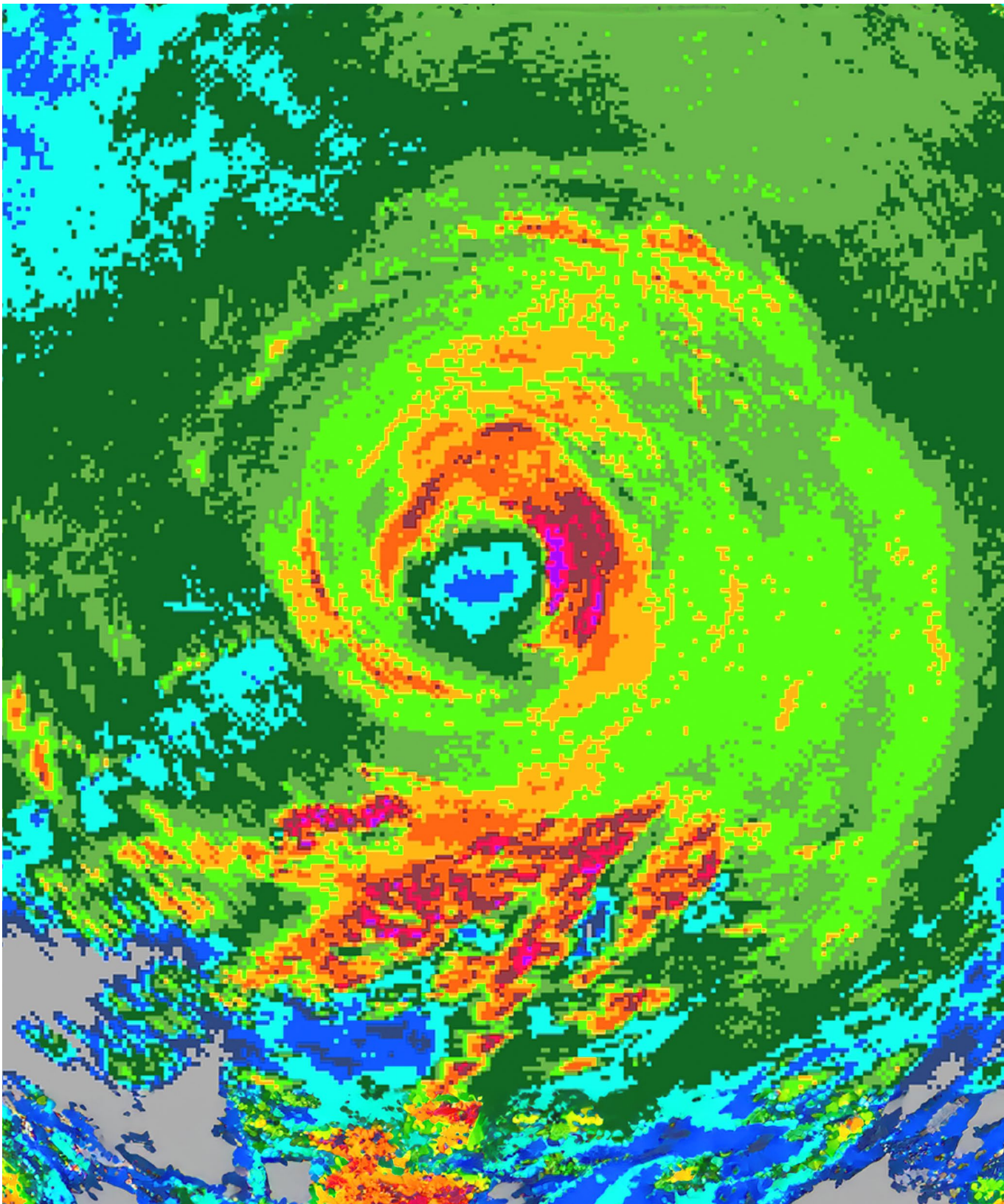
REFLECTION



SCOTTY'S



**1645 TENNESSEE ST.
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Hurricane Mitch, among the deadliest Atlantic storms on record, stalled over Central America for days in October 1998.

DARK WATERS

THE SHIP THAT VANISHED

What happened when the Fantome tried to outrun the storm?

BY JOHN VAILLANT

*Copyright C 1999 by John Vaillant.
This article originally appeared in The
New Yorker on October 11th, 1999.*

Windjammer Barefoot Cruises has been a fixture in the Caribbean for nearly half a century. Like most of its younger competitors, Windjammer specializes in waterborne escapes from the developed world. Unlike the clientele of more traditional cruise lines, however, Windjammer's passengers travel under sail in massive pleasure yachts, most of which have been salvaged from the fallen empires of early-twentieth-century industrialists, financiers, and nobility. The Windjammer code on these voyages is informal, fun, and benignly piratical; onboard, bare feet and rum swizzles are the order of the day. The crews are island-born and friendly; when other Windjammer vessels are encountered, mock battles ensue, complete with cannon fire.

Windjammer's founder and sole owner is Michael Burke, who,

with the help of his family (he has six children, and they are all in the business) and hundreds of West Indians, purchased, rebuilt, and launched the largest fleet of sailing ships in the postwar world and – most remarkable – made it profitable. During the fifty-odd years he has been sailing in the Caribbean, Captain Burke, who is seventy-five, has emerged as a founding father of the South Florida, sailor-party-animal lifestyle that Jimmy Buffett popularized in his songs. The Captain's current fleet boasts six ships, which sail between the Lesser Antilles and the Yucatan year-round. Last year, some twenty thousand customers booked passage with the company, which is based in Miami Beach. This pattern was interrupted on October 27, 1998, when Hurricane Mitch, the most destructive storm to hit the Caribbean in more than two centuries, overtook the company's flagship, the *Fantome*, resulting in the Atlantic's worst sailing accident in more than forty years.

The *Fantome*, originally commissioned as a destroyer in the Italian Navy, was one of the largest sailing vessels in the world – a two-hundred-and-eighty-two-foot-long four-masted schooner, completed seventy-two years ago in Livorno, Italy. In the late twenties, the Duke of Westminster turned the ship into a pleasure yacht, replete with a ballroom and wood-burning fireplaces; he sailed her throughout the Mediterranean with a full serving staff and even a cow for milk. Arthur Guinness, the British brewing magnate, bought her in the thirties, and gave her the name *Fantome* (French for "ghost"). With the onset of the Second World War, she languished in Seattle until Aristotle Onassis acquired her, in 1956, as a wedding gift for Princess Grace of Monaco. There is a story that Prince Rainier suspected that Onassis wanted a piece of his gaming business, so Onassis never got a wedding invitation – and the Princess never got her yacht. The vessel was left to rust in various ports around Europe until Captain Burke bought her from Onassis, in

1969. Michael Burke loves his fleet, but the Fantome was the prize.

As late as four days before Hurricane Mitch struck, ninety-three passengers who had booked for the Fantome's six-day cruise from the Gulf of Honduras to Belize's Turneffe Islands were laying out clothes and shopping for bathing suits. Some of the passengers, including Anthony Moffa, a thirty-six-year-old engineer from Pennsylvania, were watching the Weather Channel, and what Moffa saw – a tropical storm hundreds of miles away, headed toward a place he would not be going – did not concern him much. But early on Saturday, October 24th, Mitch was upgraded to a hurricane; and by Sunday, when many of the passengers were descending from the clouds over the endless banana plantations of Honduras, Mitch was amplifying at an alarming rate. During this twenty-four-hour period, its barometric pressure plunged from nine hundred and seventy-six millibars to nine hundred and twenty-four. Such a precipitate drop is called an explosive deepening; it happens very seldom, but when it does it portends a storm of extraordinary violence. By now, it was common knowledge that Mitch was a monster in the making. Earlier predictions had the



storm heading north, but northern cold fronts had moved in, steadily pushing its anticipated trajectory down, like the needle on a compass. Due west would mean a direct hit in the Gulf of Honduras.

Windjammer was aware of this, but once a cruise has been scheduled it is logistically hard to stop. In addition, cancellations are costly, in terms both of lost revenue and of bad P.R. During the afternoon and evening of October 25th, passengers were shuttled twenty miles through a driving rain, from the airport in San Pedro Sula, Honduras, to a small wooden dock in Omoa, on the gulf, where launches waited to take them out to the Fantome.

Moffa, who was on holiday with his girlfriend, Karyn Rutledge, thought that it was just typical rain-forest weather. In fact, it was a rain-bearing outrider generated by Mitch, still more than four hundred miles away. “It was comical, it was raining so hard,” Moffa recalls. “You had horizontal rain in sheets. I started singing the theme from ‘Gilligan’s Island’; it kind of broke the tension. When we saw the ship, it was a beautiful thing – all lit up. We thought, It can’t be that bad.”

But Guyan March, the English captain, was worried; this was only his second season in the gulf, and

over the phone he told his fiancée, Annie Bleasdale, a professional sailor, that he was reluctant to take on passengers. Captain Burke’s eldest son, Michael D. Burke, who since 1988 has run International Maritime Resources, Windjammer’s shipoperations arm, later told me that he had suggested to Captain March that he drop the passengers in Omoa and get out of there right away. However, according to the younger Burke, March told him he was going to wait because passengers were still arriving, dinner was being served, and a band was expected. Burke’s son then said that there was no further discussion of cancelling the cruise.



Hurricanes are the Atlantic equivalents of typhoons or cyclones, and they are our atmosphere’s most violent means of expression. Every year, from June to November, between eighty and a hundred so-called African waves are spawned from a seasonal convergence of high- and low-altitude winds over the mountains of East Africa. Once these rhythmic, westbound pulses of warm air roll across the Sahel and off the coast of Senegal, it takes them around two weeks to cross the Atlantic. Only a fraction ever reach the next level of development, called a tropical depression, a spinning low-pressure system with winds of not more than thirty-eight miles an hour. It was at this stage, while still a harmless disturbance, that the

infant Mitch was given a working title: Tropical Depression No. 13.

Once a tropical storm hits seventy-four m.p.h., it becomes a “minimal” hurricane, or a Category 1. At sea, such a storm would be avoided, and, on shore, people living in mobile homes would have cause for concern. However, hurricanes generally don’t start doing serious damage until they reach Category 3 – about a hundred and twenty m.p.h. This is when objects we think of as being permanent start to fall down, tear loose, and blow away. But, as a wind’s speed increases, its destructive power grows dramatically. A Category 5 hurricane can be eight times as destructive as a Category 1. Anything over a hundred and fifty-six m.p.h. is considered a Category 5, a classification the National Weather Service terms “catastrophic.” Five is as high as the Saffir-Simpson hurricane-intensity scale goes; it’s like a nine on the Richter scale (the Turkish earthquake last month was a 7.4). An Atlantic hurricane of this magnitude doesn’t happen very often – the odds of a Category 5 striking a given location, even in the hurricane prone Gulf of Honduras, are one in every hundred and sixty years – but, when it does, mayhem ensues on a grand scale and pieces of the world are erased. Mobile homes, the canaries in the coal mine of hurricane measurement, are obliterated under these conditions, along with trees, buildings, and even grass. The recent Hurricane Floyd was,

briefly, a Category 4 before being downgraded to a destructive tropical storm; Hurricane Andrew, the 1992 hurricane that devastated portions of Florida and Louisiana and became the costliest natural disaster in United States history, was also a Category 4.

According to Anthony Moffa, Mitch was formally acknowledged to the Fantome’s passengers on the evening of October 25th. It was also at that point that the ship’s itinerary was changed for the first time – from the northern, Turneffe Islands to the more southerly Bay Islands. By this time, Mitch had mutated into a Category 4, and its projected course was now due west. While the passengers slept, still expecting to wake up and go snorkeling, the fate of the Fantome was being sealed, and Captain March was probably having the first glimmerings of what was to come. “Karyn heard a loud noise about 2 a.m. and said she felt the ship turn,” Moffa remembers. “There were rough seas that night – ten to twelve feet – and twenty-five-knot winds. It was no problem in such a big ship, but, still, there was a pucker factor there.”

Moffa is a mechanical engineer, a self-described rationalist, and the “pucker factor” is militarese for fear. Karyn Rutledge’s senses had not betrayed her, either. At 9:30 a.m. on Monday, October 26th, Captain Guyan, as March was called onboard, gathered the passengers in the Fantome’s saloon, a large, enclosed dining area at the stern of the ship. The

morning meeting is a Windjammer tradition; it’s called Story Time, and it’s when the captain tells the passengers a bit about where they are and what activities will be offered that day. Captain Guyan’s story that morning was short and to the point: Hurricane Mitch posed too great a threat to continue the voyage, so they were headed north, for Belize City, where a chartered aircraft would take the passengers back to Miami. Then he apologized for the inconvenience. “There was a pause for a moment,” Moffa recalls. “You’re thinking, Damn it, my vacation is ruined! Then somebody in the back said, ‘Thanks for keeping us safe.’ And then everybody started to clap.”



Guyan March grew up in England, racing dinghies off the Cornish coast with his younger brother, Paul, who worked as a relief mate for Windjammer. Their mother, Jennie March, who is the commodore of a sailing club, recalls the pleasure her sons took in “staying out longer than the adults and bashing their heads against the weather.” Guyan had a real knack for it, and by the time he was eighteen he was skippering ninety-foot yachts in the Mediterranean; when he heard about Windjammer, through a friend, he was quick to sign on. Many of Windjammer’s captains have been from the British Isles, but Guyan was the youngest. At thirty-two, he had already been at the helm of Windjammer ships for ten years. According to one

Windjammer veteran, Captain Neil Carmichael, a Scotsman, Guyan “had a gift – he was a natural.”

The Fantome arrived at Belize City at eleven-thirty Monday morning, and, even as the passengers were getting ready to disembark, the crew was preparing the ship for the worst. “They were tying down the sails,” Moffa recalls, “taking down rigging. People were running around with electric drills, screwing down the bench lids on deck. I would guarantee that not one of those guys wanted to be there if he had a choice, but the guys on that ship – I don’t think any of them were being held against their will. They were having fun doing their jobs; there was no bitching and moaning, no tension; they were joking.”

Specially chartered speedboats arrived, and Captain Guyan stood by the gangway and shook hands with the disembarking passengers, apologizing, again, to each one. Ten “nonessential” crew were also let off at this time, including all the women, but thirty crew members remained on board. As the Fantome threaded her way back through the barrier reef toward open water, her former passengers were being hustled through the airport outside Belize City. The spare, gym-size building was now a madhouse, filled with anxious tourists trying to escape what, in a matter of hours, was predicted to be ground zero.

Laurie Fischer, a Canadian and the ship’s purser, was one of the last people to get off the ship, and she and Karyn Rutledge sat together

on the flight back to Miami. “Laurie and the rest of the crew had been keeping a really brave front up till then,” Rutledge told me. “But when I asked her how she thought things looked for the ship she said, ‘Just pray. Just pray.’ Then she started to cry.”

During the previous night, the younger Burke and Captain Guyan had talked by radio and decided to make a run to the north, heading for open water in the Gulf of Mexico, a journey of two and a half days. However, this idea was scrapped in Belize City; when Burke, back in Miami, charted the course, he realized he had underestimated Mitch’s reach. The hurricane’s feeder bands and their attendant winds were already battering the northern Yucatan coast.



Atlantic hurricanes generally move westward and have a tendency to turn, or “recurve,” northward, away from the equator. Because of this and because of the northeast wind’s tendency to push you into the leading edge of the storm, sailors refer to the north side of a hurricane as the Dangerous Semicircle. The south side is known as the Navigable Semicircle; here, the winds come from the northwest and west and can help push a vessel out the back of a westward-moving system. However, the fact that Mitch was a slow-moving hurricane negated most of the advantages associated with the Navigable Semicircle, and the fact that the Fantome was a slow-moving ship meant

that outrunning it was out of the question.

But so was staying in Belize City. A ship at the dock, or even at anchor, is a helpless target and runs the risk of getting pounded to pieces. Going to sea in a hurricane is standard procedure for big ships, though it must be said that most vessels the size of the Fantome can travel two or three times faster than her maximum speed of seven knots. For a ship with adequate speed and sea room, hurricanes are relatively easy to outmaneuver – not unlike dodging a bulldozer in an empty parking lot.

Twenty-four hours earlier, Captain Guyan had discussed his rapidly dwindling options over the phone with his close friend Captain Ed Snowdon, a former Windjammer skipper, and decided to head a hundred and twenty miles south of Belize City, to the Bahía de Amatique, a shallow bay with a small, naturally enclosed harbor called Puerto Barrios. Captains seeking refuge from storms refer to sheltered places like this as “hurricane holes,” but this plan, too, was ultimately rejected; Captain Guyan was leery of boxing himself in. Only one option remained: head southeast for Roatán, the biggest of the Bay Islands, and shelter in its lee while Mitch passed to the north. In theory, the twenty-five-mile-long island would block the heaviest seas and some of the wind and, as the wind swung around, Captain Guyan would move the Fantome accordingly, keeping the island between her and the hurricane.



In 1997, Fantome became the first cruise vessel to dock at the newly constructed port in Coxen Hole, Roatán, Honduras.

Mitch was now three hundred and fifty miles across, and satellite images were showing a cloud footprint that extended from the Florida Keys to the Pacific Ocean. Because there would have been so much water in the air, being driven so hard by the wind, Captain Stuart Larcombe, a former skipper on the Fantome, speculated recently that Guyan and his mates on deck were probably wearing masks and snorkels in order to see and breathe. However, masks and snorkels would not have been much use against Mitch, which by 1 p.m. on Monday, October 26th, had been upgraded to a Category 5. Mitch was now two hundred miles away, with winds in excess of a hundred and eighty m.p.h. When

a hurricane grows as powerful as this, it will actually carry tornadoes inside it. These explosions of localized energy cause unlikely juxtapositions of objects to occur: hardwood broom handles are impaled by shards of Plexiglas; trees are pierced, dartlike, by the quills of parrot feathers; a magazine can be left on a table, undisturbed, while the building around it is tossed away like a straw hat. But, mostly, things just fly apart as if they had been caught up in some sort of cataclysmic tantrum.

At 5 a.m. on Tuesday, October 27th, after a rough but manageable crossing, the Fantome made the western end of Roatán. She was running her engines and, though

her jibs had blown out earlier, she had her forestaysail and mainsail up, as much for power as to hold her steady to the wind in the progressively roughening seas. Throughout the night, the Fantome had been in radio contact with the younger Burke at the Windjammer office, which is housed in a former radio station in Miami Beach. Hurricane-dodging is part of Windjammer’s annual routine, so Captain Burke was not involved in the early planning, but that morning Michael Burke called his father at his home, on Biscayne Bay.

The ten-o’clock forecast indicated that Mitch had taken an unexpected turn toward the

southeast, almost an about-face from its previous course. This meant that the hurricane was now moving away from the ship, but also that Mitch was a juggernaut capable of anything. The accuracy of the forecast was in doubt, however: that day, the weather satellite that covers the northwest Caribbean was malfunctioning, and the Weather Service had to compensate with a less accurate image from another satellite.

In retrospect, this was a significant moment: the last chance that Windjammer and Captain Guyan had to save the crew. At the west end of Roatán is a deep, narrow anchorage called Dixon Cove; throughout the morning, the Fantome, underpowered as she was, still had the mobility to reach it. Had Captain Guyan taken this opportunity, it would have been with the knowledge that he might be sacrificing the ship in order to save the men (though, in the end, Roatán suffered

remarkably little damage). However, by 1 p.m. Mitch had turned yet again, this time toward the southwest. It was as if Mitch were scanning the sea with a baleful, Cyclopean eye until

it caught sight of the Fantome. Its new course was a beeline for the ship, and by midafternoon the Fantome was fully in the thrall of Mitch's gigantic eye. A hurricane's strongest winds occur at the edge, or wall, of the eye, and Mitch's

eye – twenty-two miles wide and reaching ten miles into the sky – was less than forty miles away. All around it, air and water, gravity and buoyancy, the world and the laws that govern it, were being puréed.



A few miles to the northeast, Mitch had reached the island of Guanaja. Afterward, many of the houses there looked to one Canadian relief worker “as if they had been blown up; they were in pieces all over the place.” Half the trees on the island were flattened and the other half were so completely stripped that they looked as though they had been through a forest fire. As Mitch passed over, the air pressure was changing so rapidly it made people's ears pop. Survivors described the sound as a cross between the low rumble of heavy trucks and the shrieking roar of jet engines; it lasted for three days.



By now, Captain Guyan was simply trying to survive. His second mate, Onassis Reyes, a twenty-six-year-old Panamanian, and chief mate, Emmmanuel (Brasso) Frederick, a forty-five-year-old Antiguan, were in the pilothouse, at the forward end of the ship. They were steering with an electric joystick connected to the rudder via hydraulic lines, but keeping their footing on

a surface that was now rolling through ninety-degree arcs would have taken as much energy as keeping the ship on course. The chief engineer, Constantin Bucur, a Romanian, and his assistants would have been below in the engine room. The rest of the crew would most likely have been aft, holed up in the saloon, behind doors that had been screwed shut from the outside in order to keep them from being blown open by breaking waves forty to fifty feet high. One way to comprehend Mitch's impact on the Fantome and her crew that afternoon is to picture the ship – seven hundred tons and almost as long as a football field – being thrown off the roof of a house over and over again.

At four o'clock, Michael Burke called the ship on the satellite phone. Seated at his desk in Windjammer's quiet, air-conditioned offices on Bay Road, he listened while Captain Guyan told him that the Fantome's staysails were ripping away. Burke was the last person to hear Guyan's voice before the phone went dead, at four-thirty that afternoon, probably because the ship's antennae were torn off. “Toward the end, I could hear him kind of gasping,” Michael told me months later. He was sitting in his office, on the wall of which hangs a large photograph of the Fantome under full sail, looking glorious and unsinkable. He imitated Captain Guyan's gasping sound; it was the sound of great physical effort and, probably, fear. “The last words I can remember

him saying were ‘Whoo – that was a big one.’” Michael put his hands to his face and sighed heavily. It was not a sigh of fatigue; it was the kind of breath one takes when overcome by great emotion, or preparing for a long, deep dive. No one knows what happened to the Fantome after the satellite phone cut out.

At 4:40 p.m., ten minutes after Windjammer lost contact with the Fantome, a meteorologist flying in a hurricane-reconnaissance plane registered a gust of two hundred and eight miles an hour – the highest wind speed ever recorded with scientific instruments in a hurricane. Early on the morning of the twenty-eighth, Captain Guyan's fiancée, who was in England, had an unsettling dream. “I knew they'd lost contact with the ship,” Annie Bleasdale recalls, “but I didn't think anything of it; that often happens in storms. But early the next morning I dreamed that Guyan was with me in bed. He was dressed in white, and in the dream I knew that he wouldn't be there when I woke up, that this was goodbye.” For several nights afterward, Bleasdale says that she awoke to find a hazy presence floating over her bed. Theosophists are familiar with this phenomenon; they describe it as an astral body. “I used to call him Angel,” Bleasdale says. “The crew absolutely loved him.”

By October 31st, the hurricane had moved on to alter the lives and landscapes of Honduras and Nicaragua. The rain that fell was so torrential it had to be measured in feet. For days afterward, trees,

cows, and the roofs of houses were seen drifting throughout the Yucatan Basin, some as much as two hundred miles from land. By then, the former African wave had been a trackable entity for over a month. More than eleven thousand people died.

THE AFTERMATH

The search for the Fantome lasted for three weeks and covered more than a hundred and forty thousand square miles. Except for a number of life jackets, life rafts, and fragments of woodwork from the deck, no sign of the ship has been found. Captains and Coast Guard officials familiar with severe storms and missing ships find this “mysterious” and “troubling.” Equally puzzling is the fact that the ship's hydrostatic emergency beacon never activated; therefore, one can only guess at her location. She could be lying in a hundred feet of water off the coast of Honduras, or in four thousand feet of water east of Guanaja. However, given the absence of wreckage or bodies, it is most likely that she sank with great suddenness.

When the search was finally called off, Windjammer experienced a collective emotional collapse. The magnitude of the loss forced this family business, which prefers to handle problems in-house, to seek outside help, including lawyers, publicity experts, and trauma consultants of the sort engaged

by airlines after fatal crashes. It is the family atmosphere that draws many employees to the company, and, in a business that requires long separations from home, Windjammer crews tend to function almost like surrogate families. But when the blood families – the mothers, fathers, wives, and children of the crew, who are mostly West Indian and poor – needed Windjammer most, a line was drawn.

In November, Windjammer representatives fanned out across the Caribbean to visit the crew's relatives and try to explain what had happened – in particular, why the crew didn't get off when they still had a chance. What Michael D. Burke and Windjammer's customer service manager, Stehli Newson, couldn't explain was why the company carries no insurance for its crews and why they were offering people who had a negligible understanding of their rights relatively small sums of money – some as low as twenty thousand dollars – to sign papers that would release Windjammer from any future liability.

The Death on the High Seas Act (DOHSA), a United States federal law, requires a shipowner to compensate a dead crewman's family for wages he would have earned had he worked a normal life. Although Windjammer did want to give the families something to live on, it apparently believed that by acting quickly it could avoid more negative publicity and a costly settlement. (The company also wanted to limit its losses; the

Fantome, which was valued at fifteen million dollars, was not insured.) The strategy backfired when lawyers and investigators showed up, telling the bereaved families that they could win damage awards of a million dollars apiece.

After the Fantome went down, Huggett & Scornavacca, a personal-injury law firm, went on Caribbean TV to advertise its services. The Miami firm, which specializes in maritime accidents and whose clients are mostly sailors from the Third World, does not have a particularly good reputation among defendants. William Huggett and his associates have been cited for soliciting clients in hospital rooms. There are judges in Dade County who refuse to hear cases that involve Huggett in any way. Snapshots of Huggett with smiling seamen and their compensation checks, along with photos of sinking and burning ships, line a wall in the waiting room of the firm’s offices.

William Huggett himself is a fit and boyish-looking man of fifty. Before going to law school, he served in Vietnam as a lieutenant in the Marines and afterward wrote a novel based on his experiences there. Cruise-ship workers, he told me, are the “modern-day coal miners of the eighteen-nineties.” We were talking in his office, whose emptiness is accentuated by a wall-sized plate-glass window overlooking the Dade County courthouse. “Windjammer’s done such a bad thing,” he went on. “It would be a pleasure to expose them to the public, but I don’t think it’s

THE FISH

wade
through black jade.
Of the crow-blue mussel-shells, one keeps
adjusting the ash-heaps;
opening and shutting itself like
an
injured fan.
The barnacles which encrust the side
of the wave, cannot hide
there for the submerged shafts of the
sun,
split like spun
glass, move themselves with spotlight swiftness
into the crevices—
in and out, illuminating
the
turquoise sea
of bodies. The water drives a wedge
of iron through the iron edge
of the cliff; whereupon the stars,

pink
rice-grains, ink-
bespattered jelly fish, crabs like green
lilies, and submarine
toadstools, slide each on the other.
All
external
marks of abuse are present on this
defiant edifice—
all the physical features of
ac-
cident—lack
of cornice, dynamite grooves, burns, and
hatchet strokes, these things stand
out on it; the chasm-side is
dead.
Repeated
evidence has proved that it can live
on what can not revive
its youth. The sea grows old in it.

--Marianne Moore 1887–1972



Extra: Scan the QR code to watch ocean scientists and environmentalists discuss the significance of Moore’s keen attention to the maritime environment in her poem.

going to happen.” Huggett doesn’t like DOHSA, because it allows only for lost wages; he would like to see it expanded to include pain, suffering, and loss of companionship. “I can’t use this case to change the law,” he said, “because I can’t see Congress caring enoughBut, if this was thirty-one American seamen, the law would be changed in a minute.”

As it happened, there were no Americans aboard the Fantome when she went down, and only two white men: Guyan March and Chief Engineer Bucur; in all, the Fantome’s crew represented eleven countries. A typical Windjammer deckhand comes from a place like Jamaica, St. Lucia, or Guyana, where unemployment is rampant and opportunities are few. He is on the ship for ten or more months a year and earns about three hundred dollars a month, plus tips. This is better money than he can make elsewhere in the islands, and it is enough to support his family.

The issue of nationality – the company’s as well as the crew’s – is crucial, because it determines where a case can be heard. Windjammer’s ships are registered in Equatorial Guinea; such Third World flags of convenience are common in the cruise-ship industry, because these countries don’t tax shipowners very heavily, if at all. What’s more, each

Windjammer ship is owned by an independent corporation based in Panama. By dividing and subdividing ownership and responsibility for its vessels in this way, a cruise line creates legal fire walls that can help limit liability. It also makes possible the lifestyle Windjammer affords its passengers and its owner.



I telephoned Captain Burke six weeks after the Fantome went down. When I told him that I wanted to talk to him about the Fantome, he said, cryptically, “I’m feeling some affinity for King Arthur. You’re not a Lancelot, are you?” Burke was apparently looking for an ally – someone who would tell the world that it was Mitch, and not Windjammer, that had killed those men. I assured him I wasn’t a Lancelot, but I wanted to learn how a big ship could be allowed to sink in such a well-announced storm. Apparently satisfied, Burke invited me to come to Miami for the weekend. If there was enough wind, he said, perhaps we would go for a sail on his ninety-two-foot yacht, Tondeleyo, a Polynesian name he translated as “white whore.”

A few weeks after that conversation, I went to see Captain Burke. Although his children work for the company, it is the Captain’s fantasies and ambitions that Windjammer embodies and supports. It seems appropriate that Burke – Big Daddy, as he is sometimes called – lives in a castle, a walled and moated attempt at medievalism whose squat towers and gargoyled

crenellations are defiantly out of place among the Art Deco pastels of Miami Beach. The Captain designed the castle himself, and it is a remarkable combination Disneyesque grandiosity and homespun invention which reflects Burke’s interior mythology as vividly as “The Gates of Hell” reflects Rodin’s. In the great hall is a sword in a stone. Just past the servants’ quarters, from the mouth of a skull, saltwater gushes on its way into the moat, which is presided over by a life-size bronze statue of Neptune and patrolled by twenty-two live sharks.

Burke lives there with a Jamaican manservant, Gladstone, and a St. Vincentian cabinetmaker named Albert. He is visited regularly by a Salvadoran maid-of-all-work, various masseuses and masseurs, his broker, and members of his family, including his wife, June, from whom he has amicably separated. The Captain is a large, densely packed man with a rugged face, a hard, straight mouth, and tight gray curly hair. I saw traces of a seaman’s vitality (he has sailed around the world five times), but he also appeared tired and sad. As it turned out, I arrived in the midst of a surprise fortieth-birthday party for one of Burke’s daughters, Susan, the president of Windjammer’s cruise business. “You were probably expecting a funeral, not a party,” the Captain said when I was introduced to him by a newly hired publicist.

The son of a kosher butcher and a housewife, Burke was born in 1924, three years before the Fantome was

launched. He grew up during the Depression near Asbury Park, New Jersey, and he spent much of the Second World War in submarines. After he was mustered out, Burke went to the Bahamas, where he found his calling while salvaging a nineteen-foot sloop. He named the vessel Hangover and sailed her to Miami. He repeated this procedure with progressively bigger vessels until he had assembled the largest privately owned fleet of tall ships in the world. Burke did for mega-yachting what Ford did for the automobile: he democratized it, bringing a previously inaccessible lifestyle within range of the middle class. Windjammer, which also runs a small freight operation, grosses roughly twenty-five million dollars a year.

Captain Burke’s office lies behind a door opened by a ship’s wheel that operates like the bolt-throw mechanism on a bank vault. His desk is fashioned from a hundred-and-fifty-gallon fish tank that no longer holds fish. As we ate submarine sandwiches, Burke recalled how, once upon a time, he could handle a seventy-two-foot schooner singlehanded. Before a couple of strokes grounded him recently, he also flew an amphibious Grumman Goose, buzzing his fleet as it sailed below. “I had five ships then,” he says. “Columbus had only three. I used to race them. I was in my glory; I had more fun than God.” He slumped back in his chair. “God, I miss those days.” And then, barely audibly, almost to himself, he said, “It’s terrible I became a fucking businessman. I

feel betrayed. After all these years, God let me down.”

The following evening in his pool, surrounded by a menagerie of concrete mermaids and sea monsters, Burke told me, “I’m the mother and the father of these ships. Losing the Fantome was like losing a child.” Presiding over his private lagoon, with a South Florida sunset flaming behind him across Biscayne Bay, Burke seemed an aging Neptune, unsure if he had the strength, or the heart, to replace what he’d lost. But the moment passed quickly, and he got to the bottom line. “If it wasn’t for this lawsuit,” he said, “all the money we’re spending on lawyers’ fees could be going to the families.”



Windjammer has long been held in dubious regard by the East Coast’s professional sailing community, members of which describe the fleet as haphazardly renovated and poorly maintained. “People in the professional sailing world just cringe at the thought of those vessels out there,” Captain Andy Chase, a professor of marine transportation at Maine Maritime Academy, in Castine, told me. Chase represents a relatively recent change in attitude toward ships and risk. “I think going to sea at all costs is an outmoded tactic,” he said. “Human life is worth more now than it was fifty years ago.”

Yet this view still runs counter to many captains’ instincts and training: Captain Burke’s son claims that a captain makes the decisions about handling the ship,

but Guyan was well aware that for a captain, particularly a young one, to lose his ship and live to tell about it is one of the surest ways to end a sailing career. Guyan March was doubly trapped – first, by a bicentennial storm in a geographic cul-de-sac, and, second, by a nineteenth-century conundrum. “You commit to the sea, and so to the ship,” explains Windjammer’s Captain Carmichael. “The captain is the ship. This may sound a little sick, but a hurricane is a glorious way to go.”

Michael D. Burke insists that the decision to go to sea was not made by using nineteenth-century criteria – by weighing the lives of a mostly Third World crew against the prodigious cost of losing the Fantome. But in monetary terms the lives of the thirty-one men who died trying to save the Fantome will probably be worth only a fraction of what it will cost to replace her.

William Huggett insists that this was the motive for keeping the Fantome at sea in the face of a Category 5 hurricane, and his success will depend on whether he can prove that Windjammer acted in a negligent fashion by sending the ship on what he calls a “suicide mission” motivated by “corporate greed.”

Andy Chase has spent weeks trying to understand Captain March’s

last days. “I think his decisions degenerated sequentially,” Chase concluded. “Seeking a northern escape route makes no sense in a northwestbound hurricane, and hiding in the lee of Roatán wasn’t sustainable.” Inspired by Guyan’s dilemma, Chase is preparing a paper that revives an old formula for safely anticipating erratic hurricane behavior (a formula that, had it been applied to Mitch, would have indicated, days in advance, that the Fantome had no safe escape route in the Gulf of Honduras). He will present it to the American and International Sail Training Associations’ Safety Forum, when it meets in Boston this November.

Despite Mitch’s size and ferocity, the Fantome was the only ship lost in the gulf; all other ships of similar size had fled the area by October 26th. Michael D. Burke,

who had access to better weather information than Captain Guyan did, was relying heavily on an extended forecast predicting a northwesterly course for Mitch. He has been besieged by grieving family members, lawyers,

and the media. “My competence is in question,” he said, moments after I sat down in his cramped office. “For the forty-eight hours prior, I considered everything – all the options.” His voice rose. “I didn’t fuck up.” Michael was the youngest skipper in the history



of Windjammer, commanding his first ship at age twenty. He is smaller than his father, but when I looked at him I was reminded of the sadness in his father's eyes. I asked him why Windjammer tried to pay the crew's families so little.

"I've been demonized in the media by Mr. Huggett," he replied. "We have to remember that we are victims here also. Especially from Captain Burke's perspective, this was an act of God: 'We didn't do anything wrong, so why is it that we have to pay more?' There's a question of whether or not DOHSA even applies. That's going to be a battle that we'll go through with Huggett for the next two years: whether or not U.S. law is even applicable here. It's probably a very uphill battle for us. At the end of the day, DOHSA probably does apply."

When he talked about what had happened to the Fantome and her crew, his tone changed. "They were working for Windjammer, and they died under our supervision. That's the bottom line for me, anyway." He paused for a moment. "I'm not the owner of this company," he added. "I don't make the final decisions. Captain Burke was in denial. He keeps going back to 'What about me? I'm the one that's hurt. It's the Hurricane Center's fault for having a bad forecast.' Besides, there's survival involved. If it was as easy as getting this out of our lives for three million bucks" – a rough estimate of the compensation, based on DOHSA guidelines – "we would do it. This has been very disruptive. I would love to get it behind us."

As a result of pressure from Huggett, and from inside Windjammer as well, DOHSA has now become the reference point for the company's settlement package, a considerable step up from its initial offers. Michael D. Burke says, "Ideally, we'd like to settle with all the families, but there will probably be some who hold out for a trial." He has been travelling to the islands to negotiate with the families; so far, fourteen families have settled out of court, but it will take years for them to receive all the money. Of the remaining number, ten have committed to Huggett, and the rest have retained separate counsel. Those who decide to sue are gambling on Huggett's success and won't see a verdict or a settlement for quite some time. For some, it is worth the wait. Cansantine Hardware is a Jamaican who once worked for Windjammer; his son, O'Ryan, had been working for Windjammer for only a year. "I don't care about the money," Cansantine told me. "The money won't bring back my boy. I want justice." One parent said flatly, "I would like to crucify Mike Burke – for my son."

Meanwhile, the families who have agreed to settle are being promised awards of between seventy-five thousand and a hundred and seventy-five thousand dollars, depending on the number of children and the crewman's pay scale. This is a paltry sum by American standards, but immense for most of the families involved.



During our last meal together, seated at a table in the castle, the Captain told me of an image that

comes to him at night. "I'm in the saloon of the Fantome," he said. "She's going down, and I'm trapped inside." The most chilling detail is not the screams of the men around him, or the certainty of death, or the crushing sense of powerlessness. It is that he is alone.

On December 12, 1998, there was a memorial service for the crew, held at Quarantine Point, on the island of Grenada. All the families of the crew were invited, and many came – at Windjammers expense. Burke was absent; he had sent his children as his proxies. When I watched a videotape of the service, I saw his daughter Susan, a slender, fine-boned woman, and Michael, sitting in the sweltering heat while, all around them, the mothers of Caribbean sons wailed with abandon. After the ceremony (Burke had asked that a favorite passage of his, from Kipling's "Captains Courageous," be read at the service), the mourners walked out to the end of Quarantine Point, a long, narrow finger of land pointing westward off Grenada's southern coast. Each person held a rose, preparing to throw it into the sea. When that was done, they turned and walked inland, but Annie Bleasdale, who had been Guyan March's fiancée, waited. "I couldn't bear to throw my rose," she told me. "When I finally did, the water suddenly became alive with fish – jumping and dancing on the water for as far as the eye could see. I wasn't the only one who saw it. There were others there, too. The locals said they'd never seen anything like it. I remember somebody saying, 'It's them.'" □

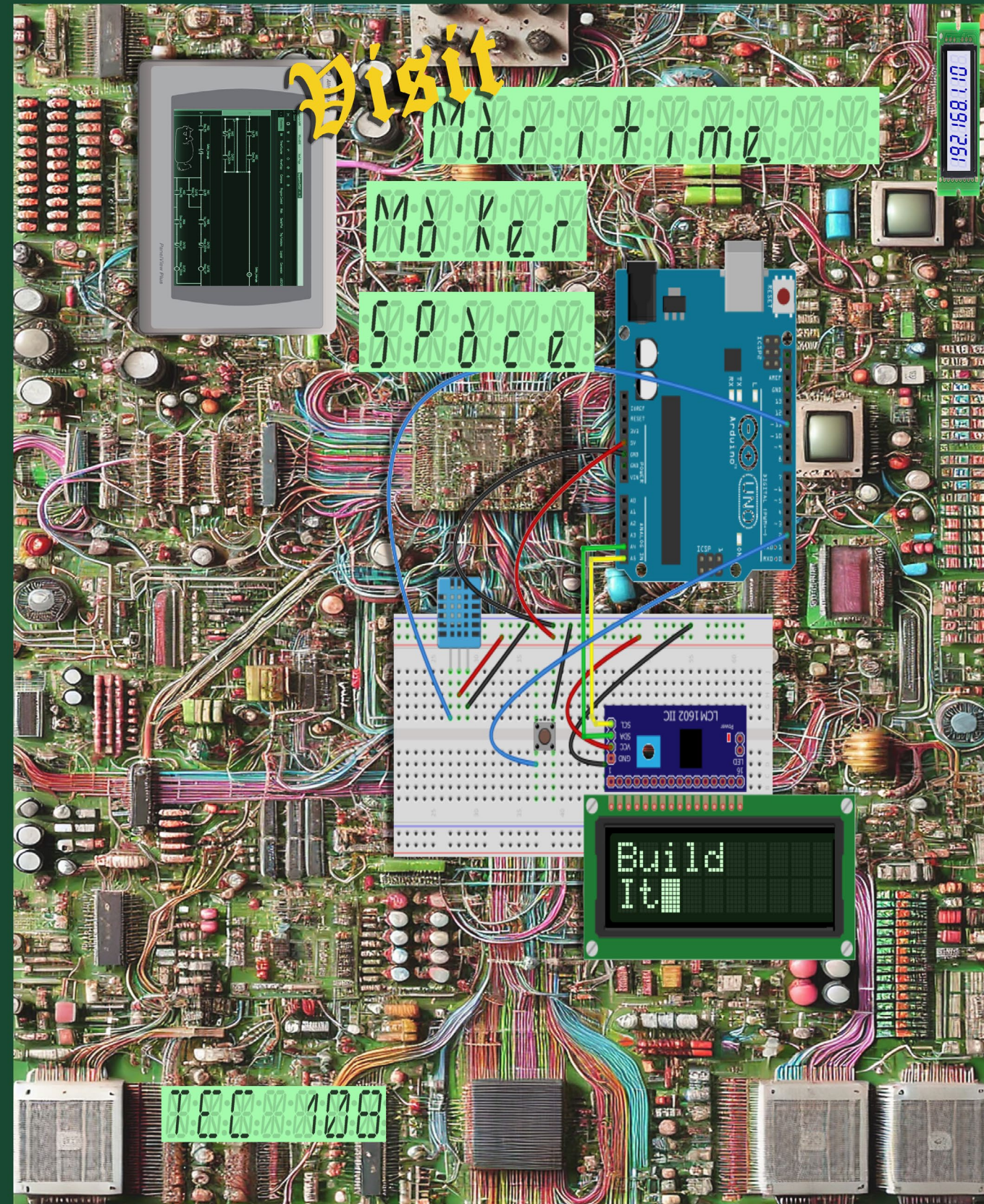


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- ? Questions: Stuff you're not sure about yet.
- ✏ Doodles: Drawings or visual thoughts (stick figures encouraged).
- ✨ Quotes: Lines or phrases you want to remember.
- ✈ Random Thoughts: Anything else floating around your head.



THE DANGER OF A SINGLE STORY

What happens when a single story becomes the dominant story?

BY CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE



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How to access:

Scan the QR code below using your phone’s camera to watch this TED Talk.

Your reflections:

Since you won’t have the video in front of you during orientation, jot down any quotes or moments that stand out to you. You’ll want something specific to refer back to when we talk about this together—trust us, it makes the discussion way easier (and more interesting).

A large rectangular area filled with a light blue dotted grid pattern, intended for taking reflections.

THE GREAT SILENCE

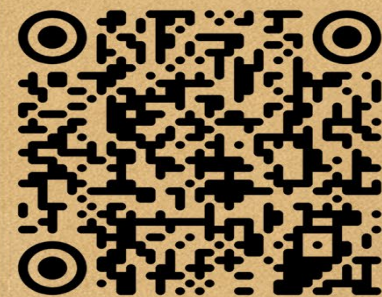
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