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Daydreaming subverts the world.

Raoul Vaneigem

We are dreaming... A world without bosses, politicians, rich people, celebrities, landlords, police. A world without stupid illusions of success: luxury mansions, gold cars, diamond watches. A world without racists, white supremacy, machism and fascism. A world without borders or visas to pay. A world with happy children, smiling people, tables full of food for everyone...

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“Intellectual property is a legally fabricated monopoly, confining culture and science, and violently depriving the poorest and most marginalised from access to critical resources. The fictions of copyright and patent are despotic attempts to monopolise the mind; outrageous constraints on intelligence and creativity; and a destructive protectionist scheme for the profit of power.”



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Embrace the Darkness

By C

“Leave the door open for the unknown, the door into the dark. That’s where the most important things come from, where you yourself came from, and where you will go.”

– Rebecca Solnit, A Field Guide to Getting Lost

Dark times. The global collapse of ecosystems, the sixth mass extinction, world food shortages leading to social collapse, the greatest threat humanity has ever faced. Dark indeed. But surely if it were that bad, if all this were true, if the world were actually dying, people would really be doing something about it. Right?

Well, it turns out the interlinked global ecological crises we are faced with are not easy problems to fix. Climate change, for example, has been described by policy analysts as a ‘super wicked problem.’ Super wicked might sound like a 90s rave culture superlative, but it’s actually trying to describe problems that are complex, multi-causal, involve behaviour change, but are also urgent and have no central authority capable of dealing with them. What this really points to is that things need to change in a big way. Climate change is not a policy problem. Tinkering, TED talks and technofixes just won’t cut the mustard. It demands radical systemic change.

System change can sound a bit vague, so let’s be a bit more specific. We have to end capitalism, the dominant economic system on the planet. To survive in a capitalist system, economies need to continually grow, and despite what the billionaire egomaniac space fantasists say, that inevitably means more resource consumption, more carbon emissions, more destruction of habitats. De-coupling is the idea that economic growth can be separated, ‘decoupled’, from resource consumption and environmental harm. But it’s like having your cake and eating it. Time and again it’s been shown to be a false hope, propagated by those that profit from keeping the current system going (and they don’t just want their cake, they want yours too). Capitalism just isn’t compatible with preserving the planet’s life support systems

But capitalism is a tired, cruel excuse for an economic system anyway, exploiting the many to benefit the few, and founded on bizarre, outdated myths. ‘Psychological egoism,’ for example, is the idea that all human activity is compelled by selfish motives, that the only reason you would help anyone or do anything at all is if it ultimately benefited you. In some ways it’s a simple solution to the complex, intriguing problem of what drives human behaviour. But it’s just not true. Altruism and cooperation don’t just exist in human relations, they are actually fundamental to the evolutionary theories that have been abused to justify selfish individualism. ‘Rational utility maximisation’ takes these ideas of ultimate selfish motivation and uses them as the basis for economics. It says that each of us acts in a rational way, always seeking to maximise our wealth. But again, it has been demonstrated many times that this isn’t what people actually do. If you want to know more about these ideas and how they have been debunked, look them up on your favourite non-evil-world-dominance-obsessed search engine.

What these concepts really represent is the idea that humans are fundamentally selfish bastards. Their advocates say that the only way we can prevent society from collapsing into a Lord of the Flies type scenario and regressing to the stone age is by harnessing our selfish drives for the collective good. If the logic of that doesn’t sound quite right, that’s because it’s totally batshit. But spreading and sustaining these dark myths allow the rich and powerful to stay at the top. To be fair, they’ve done a pretty good job. By convincing us of misanthropy – the idea that humans are inherently bad – they prevent us from believing in the possibility of change.

Ok, so capitalism has got to go, but ‘what’s the alternative?’ I hear you ask. There is no alternative! Or at least that’s the response usually thrown back at you. As if capitalism were the ultimate, optimal way of organising society, the so called ‘end of history.’ It’s true that capitalism has a powerful hold over our collective imaginations, a world beyond it sometimes seems like the stuff of fantasy. This is summed up neatly by the term ‘capitalist realism,’ the idea that capitalism prevents us from conceiving of any alternative. But capitalism itself is a fairy tale, albeit a particularly grim(m), dark and depressing one. To jump to another metaphorical genre, it seems like we are entrenched in a kind of zombie capitalism: No one really believes in it, it’s no longer really alive, but still it stumbles on, refusing to die.

As hard as it might be to imagine, things can change, and in the past enormous apparently inconceivable change has happened. To borrow from the wisdom of Ursula Le Guin:

“We live in capitalism. Its power seems inescapable. So did the divine right of kings. Any human power can be resisted and changed by human beings.”

But if that wasn’t enough, it’s not just capitalism that needs to go. We need to fundamentally change the way we relate to and interact with the rest of nature. And by ‘we’ I don’t just mean me and you, the person writing and the person reading this. I mean humans, homosapiens, the whole species (or at least enough of us, imagining, striving and acting together). I know what you’re thinking: humans haven’t exactly got the best track record of getting their collective shit together. Have humans ever even really acted together, collectively, intentionally as a species? Who knows? But maybe it’s about time we do. And what an exquisite, enticing thought: that together we can decide our direction, consider and reflect on our beliefs and desires and shape the future accordingly.

It’s true we’ve never been here before, we’re in uncharted territory. If we don’t know what lies in the darkness ahead, how will we find our way? “If only you knew the power of the Dark Side...” as someone once said a long time ago somewhere far, far away. We shouldn’t be afraid of the dark, we should embrace it. In darkness lies mystery, possibility and the beauty of the unknown. Of course we need to learn from history and not make the same mistakes, but the future is unknown, unknowable even. Perhaps the only thing we do know with any degree of certainty about the world future generations will inherit is that, one way or another, things are going to change and the change is going to be enormous and unprecedented. Doom-mongers’ disaster fantasy, an ultrarich posthuman metaverse of bullshit – or maybe something else, something wonderful. It’s up to us.

The world we, the dreamers, seek isn’t perfect – there’s no such thing. Utopias can be visions to inspire us, but never realities. However, we can maybe say a few things about what we desire and what we don’t. We don’t want billionaires. We want health care, housing, education and food for everyone. We don’t want factory farms. We want humans living in harmonious relationships with their environments. We don’t want mega-yachts, mega-mansions or megalomaniacs. We want music, dancing, play and adventure. We don’t want mining derivative futures traders. We want freedom to breathe, wonder and collectively explore ourselves and the world around us.

As the earth’s life systems become destabilised, it seems the human social world, too, is entering a new phase, marked by dramatic global events and ruptures – new formations appearing as old structures dissolve. Instead of succumbing to misanthropic myths and self-fulfilling prophecies of doom, we need to believe in our potential as a species, to have the courage to step into the darkness.



C is a human, an anarchist and a cosmic entity.

Strike!

By Ruth Kinna

“I’m damned if I go back to work under those conditions.”

Interviewed shortly after the government’s disastrous ‘mini-budget,’ Martin Sorrell, former head of the world’s largest advertising and PR company, explained that ‘business’ was averse to uncertainty. Funny, I thought. I’d always been led to believe that businesspeople were risk takers, deserving every penny of their rewards because of their daring. But back to Sorrell. The enemy of investment, he said, was economic volatility. Whatever the government imagined, tax breaks wouldn’t tempt investors to put their cash into the UK economy; business would only contemplate investment when it was reasonably confident of reaping good returns. Until then, he told the BBC interviewer, ‘businesses will just go on strike.’

These days, strike-talk is usually met with a tirade of government abuse. Desperate to undermine collective support for union action and eager to stoke public anger against the thousands who give up their pay to down tools, Ministers tell ‘the public’ that strikers are selfish or manipulated by union barons; they have no sense of public duty; they wantonly inconvenience ‘consumers’ and disrupt the lives of ‘hardworking people’ – strangely, never the same people as strikers – causing distress and inflicting real harm on the vulnerable and the ill. And for what? Strikers demand unreasonable, unsustainable pay claims at everybody else’s expense. It’s no coincidence that declines in union membership correlate with steep increases in inequality. But government will glibly explain vast wealth differentials as movements in ‘free’ economic forces rather than the result of policy, and at the same time ridicule unionists as latter-day Luddites, stuck in an industrial time-warp, either too obstinate to accept or too foolish to understand the necessity of rationalising, streamlining and modernising manufacturing and services.

To combat this sort of aggressive anti-social behaviour, the government proudly boasts about the legislative changes it has made to hamper strike action. The aim of further restrictions is to make the right to strike about as effective as the right to a termination in Northern Ireland. In Northern Ireland, women have no access to care because licenced clinics are rare to non-existent – a de-facto ban. Under the new anti-strike rules, unions face fines of between £250,000 and £1m for taking actions that don’t comply with stringent regulations. Workers retain the right to strike but businesses hit by industrial action are allowed to recruit temporary workers to take up the slack. Who knows where this workforce will come from: the pledge that replacement staff will possess skills matching those of their striking comrades is the best protection of workers’ rights and the only safeguard for the rest of us. Don’t worry, the government says, when the doctors go on strike your hip replacement won’t be performed by a pharmacist, and your train won’t be driven by the transport police when ASLEF is out.

Will the same decisive action be taken against investment gurus like Sorrell if they refuse to put money into the UK economy? Will government rush to pass new legislation requiring striking UK businesses to relinquish an appropriate proportion of its capital to finance the ‘crucial services that we all use on a daily basis’ (as gov.uk describes its anti-union function)? Will it restrict domestic investors’ rights to move capital without prior notice to tame militancy? Will it force boards to ballot company employees about investment proposals to protect the economy from paralysis? Will striking investors be pilloried as irresponsible, troublesome, and greedy? Perhaps the narrative will shift to depict the business strikers as dinosaurs of a grim, inauspicious age of neo-liberalism, profoundly out of touch with the post-Covid ethics of care and mutual aid?

The briefest glance at labour history gives the lie to this fantasy. In 1832, the same year that the House of Commons feverishly debated the rights and wrongs of barefaced electoral corruption, William Benbow floated the idea of a Grand National Holiday. Workers would cease work for a month, establish a congress, discuss the causes of their misery and find ways to enable the ‘plundered’ to live in “ease, gaiety, pleasure and ... happiness.”

Government was neither willing nor capable of doing this. Benbow, a former preacher, took a leaf from the Old Testament to explain. According to Ezekiel, princes were ‘wolves ravening the prey, to shed blood, and to destroy souls, to get dishonest gain.’ Re-rendering the text, Benbow wrote that the “possessors of the land have used oppression, and exercised robbery and have vexed the poor and needy.” His estimate was that government represented the 1 in 499 that “does no one thing, unless consuming may be called doing something.” As to the rest:

We are oppressed, in the fullest sense of the word; we have been deprived of every thing; we have no property, no wealth, and our labour is of no use to us, since what it produces goes into the hands of others. We have tried every thing but our own efforts; we have told our governors, over and over again, of our wants and misery; we thought them good and wise, and generous; we have for ages trusted to their promises, and we find ourselves, at this present day, after so many centuries of forbearance, instead of having our condition bettered, convinced that our total ruin is at hand. Our Lords and Masters have proposed no plan that we can adopt ...

It’s tough to think of strikes as holidays. Labour organising is costly and hard. Seventy years after Benbow, Peter Kropotkin wrote that “the mere fact of belonging to a labour union implies considerable sacrifices in money, in time, and in unpaid work, and continually implies the risk of losing employment of the mere fact of being a unionist.”

Solidarity is the power of union, but strikes are driven by frustration and anger. The lifelong labour organiser Lucy Parsons described the temper best: “I’m damned if I go back to work under those conditions.” Strikers give up pay to face intimidation, sometimes overt violence and have to fight tooth and nail for reductions in work time, fairer wages, and better contracts, and against racism and sexism in the workplace and, often, in established unions.

But Benbow was right that the refusal to work on the terms that governments set creates possibilities for their re-configuration. For as long as strikes are seen as workplace grievances, they play to a cost-benefit analysis of labour relations that tends towards job protection and the maintenance of the status quo. Kropotkin instead thought of strikes as vehicles for mutual aid: actions that could galvanise communities locally, regionally, and internationally, provide new opportunities for co-operation and, even if only temporarily, renovate the social and economic fabric that government patterns. Kropotkin’s comrade Max Nettlau likewise adopted a broad view of the strike. Strikers struggled courageously against the worst excesses of capitalism, but strike was a tool for transformations. Rent strikes, consumer boycotts, refusals to produce shoddy goods or build or repair sub-standard housing were examples. The key to labour activism, he argued, was ‘responsibility’: a willingness to refuse work that was inherently injurious or exploitative.

The idea evoked Benbow’s holiday but demanded everybody’s support. Imagine arranging a permanent holiday for workers who produce ultra-processed food, ruinous to health, for builders who put up tower blocks that lack adequate fire exits, or for recruits to fracking plants...



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The Problem with the Patriarchy

By Stacey Clare

It's been 16 years since I began working in the sex industry and I'm still not bored of it. Despite the obvious repetitive nature of performing the same routine year in year out, I never seem to get tired of meeting new clients. When I hang out with my sex worker friends, it's common for us to bond over a shared experience of slagging-off our customers, which is not unlike many other jobs I've done. Any public facing role normally involves unpleasant encounters with customers who lack the sympathy or social skills to simply not be dicks. But in my case, the customer base is heavily gendered, since (aside from the occasional partner joining in, which is very rare) 100% of my clientele as a sex worker are male.

Bitching about men is too easy these days. It's not just the circles I move in: there is a wide-stream culture of publicly ridiculing men across the board. And they make it so easy for us – when it comes to finding examples of mediocre, self-absorbed, over-entitled, over-opinionated, straight-white-men, we don't even have to go looking. They're everywhere, like walking memes: in politics, media, business, and religion, men continue to replicate depressing stereotypes of masculinity that are harmful to women and girls, as well as queer and trans people.

Awareness of gender-based oppression has found its way onto mainstream platforms, from Bimini Bon Boulash's call to “dismantle the patriarchy” on RuPaul's Drag Race, to Taylor Swift's “fuck the patriarchy” lyric in her song All Too Well. For plenty of women this isn't a moment too soon, as the #metoo movement has changed the landscape of public discourse around male behaviour, and the phrase “toxic masculinity” has become a widely accepted cultural term.

The trouble with slagging off men is that it's not that straightforward – at least it never has been for me. My own background is littered with examples of male violence and abandonment that fit easily into the narratives that “men are the problem,” particularly among the political left. But, alongside these are the narratives that aren't so easily received – that women have also enacted harm, and that women can in fact be abusive, too.

My abuser was female. Traumatized, neglected, utterly failed by her caregivers and without community support, my mother's unprocessed childhood trauma was re-enacted on myself and my siblings with a blind vengeance that some of us haven't fully recovered from. Despite their own failings, it was my stepfather and biological father who consistently offered me any sort of emotional and psychological safety.

This narrative may fly in the face of mainstream core beliefs about sex workers – that we are all victims of male violence, likely as a result of childhood sexual abuse or abandonment from our male caregivers. These aren't conversations I can have publicly very easily, since my sex working identity is loaded with so many cultural assumptions about my choices, perceptions, beliefs and persuasions. Even writing this is agonising, since I know that there are some readers who will likely stitch together my unstable childhood with the sex industry as yet more evidence that sex workers are poor little lambs, propping up the patriarchy.

On top of that, there is a radio silence around the various ways that women can be violent too. Women criticising other women in the mainstream is immediately piled in on as an affront to feminism, as though the solution to male dominance is for women to simply and unflinchingly support each other, no matter what. It's as if everyone finds it much easier to just lump all forms of abuse in one pile and label it THE PATRIARCHY. But this is a hollow conclusion for those of us with a more complicated relationship to it, whose complex lived realities mean we can't so easily point the finger at men.

When I go on International Women's Day marches led by sex workers and intersectional feminists, I regularly see signs that say “Fuck The Patriarchy.” Once you stop to think about the implications of this sentiment being proclaimed by sex workers, it is quite something to behold. The inference that we may dismantle historical dominant gender roles one fuck at a time, standing up to male power by demanding payment, is quite an easy one for many of us to get behind. After centuries of serving male desire in return for food and board, for a role as a housewife and mother, for a lifetime of domestic and emotional labour, it sounds fair enough.

Nah, mate. It's not free anymore, these are my rates.

On a more serious note, sex workers don't have to enjoy sex with men to deserve safe working conditions and evidence-based legal regimes built from a harm-reduction principle that effectively protect and empower us. We don't even have to like men to have sex with them. But the lazy logic of “men are the problem” is ironically what unites the sex workers' rights movement with the Radical Feminist Left. And it's the contradiction of being “pro-sex work” but “anti-men” that often goes unexamined within intersectional feminist circles, meaning our narratives sometimes aren't received well among more mainstream audiences.

It's clear to me now after years of activism, self-advocacy and public speaking as a sex worker that anti-male sentiment is frequently the reason potential well-meaning allies pull back from showing up. It's also clear to me that it causes unspoken conflict and unconscious divisions within the movement. Anti-male sentiment among the sex workers' rights movement is toxic for male sex workers, queer or straight. And it's toxic for those of us carrying the lived reality of female abuse. Very few in my community seem even willing to openly acknowledge the concept of *toxic-femininity* yet.

I'm not saying the movement for sex workers' rights can't function with these contradictions – far from it. I'm suggesting that we need to be able to hold space for them completely and in their entirety. We need to be able to discuss our differences and the painful realities we may have lived through, rather than organising ourselves around a set of unspoken codes and reductionist narratives – because isn't that another form of patriarchy? Isn't that what mainstream or Radical Feminism is doing by creating a set of ideological rules to follow – thou shalt not question other women, and woe betide those who fall foul of this? I have never been able to sign up to the basic “men are the problem” narrative, and I know a few fellow sex workers who can't either. For intersectional feminism to be an effective movement, it mustn't expect anyone to fall in line without offering space for contradicting and conflicting narratives to safely co-exist.

Stacey Clare is a sex-worker and author of The Ethical Stripper: Sex, Work and Labour Rights in the Night-time Economy (2022)



We Will Keep Them Alive

By Jenni Chapman

Death and grief knock us sideways out of time. There is nothing more final than death. But in that moment of finality, time stops working in quite the same way. Five minutes lasts hours, a day lasts a year or gets lost in a flash.

Over four years have passed since our old and dear friend Anna Campbell was killed in an airstrike in the Turkish state’s invasion of Afrin in 2018. Over a year before then, she had travelled to Rojava in northeast Syria to join the women’s defence forces of the YPJ, who were defending the region against Islamic State.

When protests erupted across Syria in 2011 and the government almost totally lost control, the people of Rojava, Kurdistan were ready. They had been organising in secret for years, despite the threat of every kind of repression. In the world’s most high-profile warzone, they carved out a space for radical politics: a system based on direct democracy, ecology, and women’s freedom. The project attracted the attention of revolutionaries all over the world. Many of them found something they’d been searching for. Something worth fighting for; perhaps even something worth dying for.

Afrin, a strategically and symbolically important region of Rojava, is still occupied. Anna’s body, along with thousands of others, has never been recovered. Sometimes the realisation that she’s gone hits again like new. Other times I feel her by my side. There’s no logic, of time or any other kind, to how this passes over me.

A month after she was killed, we crowded into a community hall for her memorial service. We shared memories and raucously belted out songs from our shared squatting days, tears pouring down faces, fists raised to the sky. There was music, stories, whiskey, warm food, warmer embraces, and a lot of laughter. Some of us hadn’t seen each other in years. But that time didn’t matter, it was just an interval between our moments together.

In the same way, I sometimes feel as if I stepped straight out of the door of that memorial and found myself sombre and sober in a grand cemetery in Rojava, one year later. Hundreds of people gathered for the one-year anniversary of Anna’s death – fighters from the YPJ, internationalist volunteers from across Rojava, and local people.

Speeches echoed around the stone monuments and walls of the cemetery. Flags fluttered. Boots stamped in military salute. Some of us who knew Anna falteringly read a poem, trying not to cry because it’s not done to show too much emotion when speaking at a memorial. One year before, we only kept each other afloat by holding on to each other like lifelines and screaming until our throats were raw.

Superficially those days were like chalk and cheese. But really, they were doing the same thing. Even though the Rojava version is more recognisably ceremonial, they were both rituals. Without rituals, people get stuck in time.

Collective grief isn’t just about healing and moving on though. It’s also about power. There’s a unique determination that pumps through the blood when we move in the name of those we have lost. There were moments after we lost Anna when we felt like nothing in the world could stop us. Both right after, as we covered miles of city walls in furious graffiti, and the following year as we braced ourselves for the Turkish state’s next invasion of Rojava.

The Kurdistan Freedom Movement has found a way to channel and organise that strength. The culture around Şehids (pronounced sheh-heed) is the practice of honouring those who have fallen in struggle – embedding it in tradition and writing it into daily life. The term şehid is usually translated as “martyr,” which can put some people off. But in this context a şehid is someone we’ve lost from the freedom struggle. Someone whose life was devoted to building a better world, whose memory we honour. You don’t have to die in a war to be declared a şehid. Revolutionaries who died of illness or accident are still titled şehid. It’s about what you lived for.

In the beginnings of the movement, comrades were murdered by the state or fascists, and their friends vowed revenge, promising that no death would go unanswered. But this was also part of the long term. They chose a slow, deep revenge made of creation. They would make what their comrades had fought for a reality. This attitude has snowballed into a whole way of life.

The Movement’s first martyr was recorded in 1977. Since then, the number has grown into the tens of thousands. Facing that kind of pain, you can either fall apart, cease to feel and care, or build something out of it. The option chosen, again and again, can be felt in the air at a memorial. To build, to create, to refuse to give up.

It’s a grim reality, and not one limited to Kurdistan, that anyone challenging oppressive systems is at risk of being taken from us early. We have no choice but to face this. But if we can hold each other through it, it can fall on the fire of our rage like petrol.

“Şehîd namirin!” – “Martyrs never die!” – people shout at funerals, memorials or occasions to honour fallen friends. At first you wonder if you’re hearing a religious sentiment. But while many people in the movement have a faith, the collective process around şehids is one of an earthly, human spirituality.

To say they do not die means that we will keep them alive. We do this by sharing stories, telling their jokes, doing what we think they would have done, and above all continuing their struggle.

We make a promise with every death. Taking that promise seriously also teaches us about giving meaning to what we do. To see ourselves as part of their legacy means to be more respectful to ourselves, and to hold ourselves with dignity.

So, I feel a part of the legacy of thousands who I never met. I feel a connection that motivates me to get up, link arms, and march forward. The struggle is a long hard road and şehid culture reminds us that we’re a link in a long chain.

When we perform our rituals and make our promises, we are giving meaning to their memory. But that doesn’t mean we have to live solemnly. Our movements are nothing without joy and laughter. You need to live to the fullest to keep someone else alive. Outside of the rituals, long after the loss has passed through time but not fully through us, we sit and drink tea and tell stories. When we remember friends we’ve lost in all their imperfections and pratfalls, when we laugh until we cry and see someone else’s face light up with joy even though they never met them, we also give meaning.

They should still be here with us, taking pratfalls, making mistakes, and being our heroes. Sometimes the pain of that threatens to drown us in nihilism and meaninglessness. But we always have a choice, and we always have each other. Together we can decide what legacy they will leave.

Jenni Chapman and Natalia Szarek are the authors of Worth Fighting For: Love Letters to a Revolution (forthcoming on Active)





Resist Anti-Trespass

By Sam Worrall

Ethnic Romany Gypsies and Irish Travellers face massive barriers to the services and support networks that settled communities take for granted. In every sector, the discrimination they have been subjected to for hundreds of years has meant these communities live precariously on the edge of our society. A society they didn't really want to be part of but, due to legislation and attempts at assimilation, had no choice but to be. A quick look at health outcomes, mortality and suicide rates, exam attainment, school attendance, literacy levels, employment figures, conviction rates and accommodation issues for Gypsies and Travellers paints a shocking picture of the reality of life for these communities.

The powers that be have been chipping away at removing the traditional Gypsy and Traveller way of life through successive legislation. The 1968 Caravan Act sought to standardise accommodation for travelling families, by creating local authority run sites across the country that people were moved onto. At the same time, traditional stopping places were taken away, giving people no choice but to use the official sites. Over the years, this made travelling for agricultural work, horse fairs and family gatherings more difficult.

In order to keep up with what the need for site provision was, a five yearly Gypsy Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessment (GTAA), as well as a bi-annual caravan count, was also started. However, successive cuts to local authority budgets meant that very few sites were built and now the lack of provision has reached crisis point.

The 1994 Criminal Justice Act (CJA) increased eviction powers for unauthorised encampments, strengthening the offence of Trespass and limiting vehicle numbers. This Act was predominantly aimed at New Travellers, the free party scene and activist movements such as Hunt Saboteurs and environmental protestors, but impacted on Gypsies and Travellers as well.

Then the Tories took away the compulsory directive for local authorities to provide sites, and a few years ago the Tory government actually changed the very criteria around the definition of a Gypsy or Traveller. Romany Gypsies and Irish Travellers are recognised and protected ethnicities, under the Race Relations Act and the Human Rights Act. But the government altered the GTAA in 2015 so that if you have not travelled in the last 3 years (for reasons of health or education, perhaps), you lose your status as a Gypsy or Traveller and, therefore, local authorities are not required to count you in their assessment or provide you with a pitch. If you do want to keep travelling around, or have no permanent pitch, there is nowhere for you to stay, except roadside.

Contemporary legislation to squash out nomadism has made life for Gypsies and Travellers even harder. Part 4 of Priti Patel's Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act has been deliberately manufactured with the aim of wiping out Gypsies and Travellers. It also impacts upon cultural nomadic groups such as New Travellers and Van Dwellers, perhaps even affecting Showman's communities.

Part 4 gives the CJA extra teeth by adding powers to Section 61. Under the new law unauthorised encampments are not themselves illegal. There are certain conditions that need to be met before the police can use the new powers. An order to leave can be served by the police, landowner or representative of the landowner, on person/s residing or intending to reside on land without consent, in or with at least one vehicle (previously six vehicles under the CJA). A 'vehicle' now includes caravans and even bow top wagons. The new powers also now include highway land as well as privately owned land.

Notice is given if significant damage and/or disruption and/or distress have been caused or are likely to be caused. There is currently no precedent for exactly what the definition of this is. Until there has been a test case it's a very grey and ambiguous area.

Under the new laws people could face a 12 month ban on returning to the area (formerly 3 months under the CJA), arrest and imprisonment of up to 3 months, confiscation of vehicles, and fines up to £2,500.

Local authorities, the police and other services are still required to carry out a welfare assessment before deciding whether to evict, and should consider whether there are alternative locations that people could be directed to. Sadly, there are very few transit sites or authorised stopping places anywhere.

The wider implications of the new powers mean that people could lose their homes, income opportunities and independence. It could break up families, put people in prison and leave women and children in completely culturally inappropriate care settings. It will add extra financial burden to already struggling emergency social housing and support services, and leave emotional and mental scars on people who are already subject to an exhausting cycle of eviction and travel.

This law seeks to criminalise an entire ethnic minority simply for trying to continue their traditions. Gypsy and Traveller support organisations, as well as others such as Traveller specialist lawyers, are bracing ourselves for the harm this law could bring. We are also lobbying and campaigning for the obvious solution: build more and better sites.

There has to be change now. The GTAA is simply a box ticking exercise if not acted upon. There needs to be systemic change to the planning process, better engagement and community involvement to reach greater understanding.

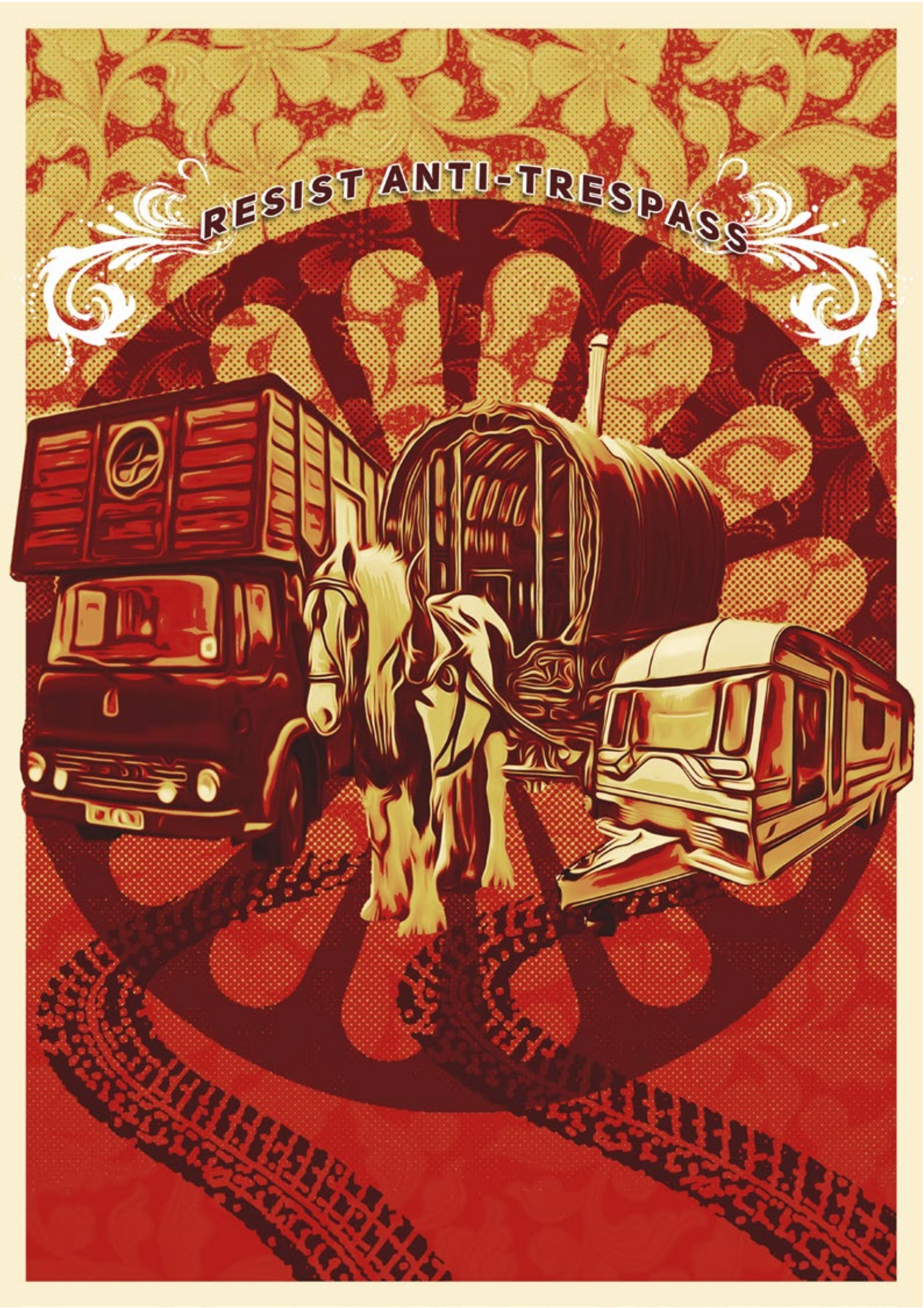
Everyone needs a safe place to call home, yet so many Gypsy and Traveller sites, where they do exist, are located in places no one else would want to live. As one member of the Traveller community recently stated in a report by the Welsh Senedd looking into how to improve site provision:

"The provided accommodation that's given by Councils is just a big yard of concrete and it's really far and away from the relationship that we have with nature and wanting to be outdoors in a healthy environment..."

The Senedd held an inquiry and published its report amid concerns around the new Act, highlighted by Welsh Gypsy and Traveller organisations. The report has 21 recommendations on how to improve site provision and quality. Those of us working on this campaign are hopeful that the recommendations will be considered, and that Wales can continue to be a more welcoming and inclusive country than England is showing itself to be under the present government. This new law, and all its sections, is another attempt to take away our freedom, keep us contained and stop us from being independent or having an alternative view.

Historically, travelling people were viewed by some with suspicion and as outcasts, yet somehow also looked at with envy, because they moved and lived outside the system, with no boundaries. This is what the new Police Act seeks to squash and what we must all stand up against.

Sam Worrall is a New Traveller, nomadic for the last 25 years or so, and has in the past been an active hunt-saboteur, eco-activist and squatter. She has worked for Gypsy and Traveller advocacy organisations since 2014 and currently lives on her narrowboat on the canals of England.



Foster Care Crisis

By *Jacqueline McShane*

We're all feeling the squeeze right now. The cost of living is rising at an unprecedented rate. But foster carers in Glasgow have been watching the cost-of-living increase above our incomes year on year for over a decade now, and it is Glasgow's most vulnerable children who are paying the price. The Foster Care Workers' Union, part of the Independent Workers' Union of Great Britain (IWGB), is fighting back to ensure that Glasgow's carers have the money we need to provide the level of care all children deserve.

Foster care is care work. We are professionals who work hard to support children with complex support needs, all of whom have been through trauma and loss. Unlike other childcare workers – such as teachers or youth workers – we are the only professionals who are expected to look after these children 24 hours per day, seven days a week. I gave up my job as driving instructor to look after the three children in my care, all aged five and under. It is a full-time job.

Our work is undervalued, most of us paid less than minimum wage. For many of us, our child allowances have been frozen for over a decade, and our fees haven't changed in even longer. The child allowance is money that comes from the council to cover the full cost of raising a child. Not only should that include food, clothes and school supplies, but also the larger houses and vehicles we need to accommodate extra children. Even before the cost-of-living crisis began, the 10-year freeze meant that carers were facing a real-terms cut of 24%.

This cut has pushed foster care workers across Glasgow to breaking point. A 2019 report shows that 60% of foster carers in Scotland are not able to cover the full cost of raising a child on their allowance, and that figure has surely risen since. This means that my foster children are missing out on important life opportunities like after-school clubs, swimming lessons, and days out. Simple extra-curricular activities like these are so important for building up their self-esteem and giving them confidence in life. After everything they've been through, this is the least they deserve. How are we supposed to ensure that foster children have the best start in life if we can't even cover the basic essentials with our incomes?

Many carers I speak to are having to get second jobs to subsidise their care work, are having to apply for universal credit, or are drawing on their own personal savings just to make ends meet. Personally, I'm having to use my husband's retirement money. That means that I am personally subsidising the council's care responsibilities. For those who cannot afford to do so, they are faced with the choice of giving up their young people or raising them in poverty.

Glasgow City Council knows that its foster care system is in crisis. Across the city, foster carers are forced out of the system by exploitative low pay and the council is plugging the gap with expensive privatised care agencies.

A recent freedom of information request revealed that Glasgow spends more than twice the money per child on private care than it does on local authority foster carers. Nearly half of the care budget is spent on these privatised agencies, accounting for only a quarter of the total children. It is outrageous that the council is wasting money, outsourcing to for-profit firms, when it could invest this money in its loyal foster carers.

We decided enough is enough. Back in December 2021, the Foster Care Workers' Union launched a campaign to end the freeze on Glasgow's foster carers, and to demand a union recognition deal that will give us a real voice in our city. Working alone, we often feel isolated. But by coming together in a union, we can make our voices heard by those in power. The campaign won widespread support from figures like musician Bobby Gillespie, Neville Southall, Larry Sanders and also from a cross-party group of councillors including Scottish Greens, Conservatives and Labour.

In January this year, we took to the streets and canvassed in Govan Hill, the ward of the SNP lead on Health and Social Care, Mhairi Hunter. Local residents were shocked to hear that the foster carers who had worked all through the pandemic to care for Glasgow's most vulnerable children were being handed a massive pay cut.

Simply ensuring that our pay is brought back in line with 2012 levels shouldn't have been too much to ask. After all, a proper increase in our allowances could be covered in large part by the redirection of funds away from private care agencies. But the decision-makers responsible refused to engage with us, shirking responsibility for the child allowance. The head of the council Susan Aitken even pulled out of a meeting with the union, after we leafletted Mhairi Hunter's ward.

Feeling completely shut out, in February we demonstrated in George Square, outside the council buildings during the budget negotiations to make sure they couldn't ignore us any longer. At the protest, we also tried to hand a letter to Susan Aitken personally. It was so powerful to see people come together from across Glasgow and stand up for their rights. The protest was joined by councillors Matt Kerr and Russell Robertson, as well as some of the children in our care. And it worked.

It was clear that the council could see how deeply felt this issue was and when the budget was announced a couple of weeks later, it included recommendations for a 10% increase for all foster carer child allowances, as well as a commitment to increase this annually in line with inflation. The budget also included a commitment to initiate the process of a union recognition deal with Glasgow City Council, the first of its kind.

A 10% increase would have meant a huge step forward. This extra money would have at least covered the essentials. However, the Glasgow City Integration Joint Board (GCIJB) – an unelected body responsible for the delivery of social care services – rejected the proposal. Instead, the GCIJB implemented a 6% increase for carers with children aged 0-4, and an 8% increase for those with children aged 5-10 – in total, only 40% of foster carers and kinship carers across Glasgow. The GCIJB also denied foster carers a seat at the table by dismissing the union recognition deal.

We felt betrayed. The council had democratically agreed to take action to tackle the foster care crisis, but an unelected bureaucratic body had stepped in our way and handed us more real-terms cuts.

We are now living with of an unprecedented cost-of-living crisis. Last month, my electricity bill more than doubled from £105 to £265. Many foster care workers that I speak to are considering leaving the job – or they are being forced to move to private agencies where they will receive higher fees and better support – because they cannot afford to work for the council anymore. This is a devastating turn of events. We love the children in our care unconditionally, but we cannot afford it anymore.

But we didn't give up. In April, we coordinated the first hustings on foster care in Glasgow, attended by councillors Matt Kerr, Mhairi Hunter, and John Molyneux. At the hustings, foster carers expressed their concerns about the year ahead and, as a result, all three councillors in attendance committed to support the budget recommendations we had campaigned for.

In July, we submitted a formal complaint signed by over 60 foster carers to the council over its failure to follow through on budget recommendations. And in September, we called an emergency cost of living rally, joined by Labour and Scottish Green councillors, to once again demand urgent action to protect the children in our care.

On 24th November, foster carers will hold a landmark summit with Glasgow City Council. After campaigning for nearly a year, we hope this will be our first collective sit-down with key councillors and decision makers to discuss the future of foster care across our city. Until then, we must keep up the pressure to make sure our voices and demands cannot be ignored. Things are looking positive and this progress is only possible because foster carers have come together and used our collective power.

When it works, foster care helps young people to recover and heal. It makes them feel valued and it gives them the confidence and sense of belonging to participate in their local communities. It is a beautiful thing to be a part of. But we cannot do this for free. As long as Glasgow Council continues to ignore our needs, these children will continue to pay the price.



Jacqueline McShane is a foster carer and a member of The Foster Care Workers' Union.

Abolition Science Fiction

By Phil Crockett Thomas

“What counter-spell is powerful enough to break the prison's stranglehold on our imagination?” – Jackie Wang

What can rioting clones, irrepressible cloud entities, new rituals, prison ruins, and tiny telepathic beasts (among other things) teach us about the end of prisons? Abolition Science Fiction is a new, free collection of sci-fi short stories written by activists and scholars involved in prison abolition and transformative justice in the UK.

Despite its failure to make society safer or to deliver justice for those who have been harmed, the prison still dominates our collective imagining of the best response to harm and conflict, and of justice served. Angela Davis has argued that one of the key challenges facing abolitionists is that “the prison is considered so ‘natural’ that it is extremely hard to imagine life without it.”

Inspired by the collective visioning practices of grassroots activist groups, such as those that led to the creation of the Octavia’s Brood anthology (edited by adrienne maree brown and Walidah Imarisha), *Abolition Science Fiction* attempts to weave a counter-spell. The stories are not all explicitly about prison abolition, but all of them explore the underlying question of how we can live well together, tackling complex topics like violence, revenge, responsibility, care, and community. As such they can help us imagine a future where we respond to harm without exclusion and punishment, illustrating Ruth Wilson Gilmore’s contention that “abolition requires that we change one thing: everything.”

Alongside the stories are extracts from discussions from the workshops where we wrote and shared the stories. There are also creative writing exercises and discussion prompts, included to help readers explore ideas about abolition and transformative justice in creative ways. The book is aimed both at those curious about abolition and at seasoned activists who want to explore abolition through creative writing. *Abolition Science Fiction* comes out of a research project called *Prison Break: Imagining Alternatives to Prison in the UK*, funded by the Independent Social Research Foundation. The book is free: go to abolitionscifi.org to request a print copy or to download it.

The following two stories feature in the book.

The Seed

Lizzie Hughes

The seed is in a plant pot, buried in its mud. The pot is faded yellow, average sized, thick rimmed at the top narrowing to a circular base. The kind of thing you see and instantly forget (in fact, I had to look at it a few times to write that). It sits out of the way on top of one of the grey filing cabinets in the corner (I think the one with the risk assessments in); someone’s idea to bring life into this place of death (probably Linda’s). No one knows what kind of plant it is.

No one waters it either, and yet it grows and grows. It grows, tendrils curving and arching up up up toward the office window with reinforced glass; its thick ivy leaves conceal what it is up to as it grows grows into the walls of the office, into the bricks, into the infrastructure of the prison, causing cracks. Each day, it prises apart the prison’s molecules, it travels further into its fibres, winding deeper and deeper. It spreads across concrete yards like a green, lush carpet. It travels down drains and finds its way across convoluted masses of electrical cables and antiquated plumbing systems, up through toilet basins, connecting cell to cell, creating organic pathways growing and growing and growing and *spreading*. Always silently. Everyone thinks it’s just a potted plant, so no one pays it much attention.

They do not know that one day – one day soon – it will split these prison walls in two. No, not just two: but into three into *thousands into millions* of blocks; choke and tremble and collapse them into infinite concrete shards. Into the sunlight dulled bodies will surge, clambering over the ruins desperately running to escape their nightmares, gulping new air that is not very clean but somehow delicious, tasting as fresh as springtime fruit, offering something nebulous but sparkling, clear, free. Offering landscapes that are too big too bright too loud with too many things in them. Too much to feel after a concrete cage. These skies are open: e n d l e s s.

If seeds could smile, this one would (but that’s absurd, it’s just a seed). Instead, it does what it does best: instead, its tendrils continue systematically destroying the prison (it’s very methodical) breaking it apart, making it dust, dissolving it into the Earth who eats the pain that kept these walls in business. It’s ok, Mother Earth can handle it; she wants her due reckoning.

These hells on her Earth, powerless at last.

Only one structure will remain. I can see it: a tall, cylindrical block in the far corner, where the segregation unit used to be. A raven is sat on top of it. A dark outline against a brilliant white sky. This is the memorial: to those these walls killed, to those who didn’t get out in time, to those we couldn’t save. And the reminder: to never let this happen again.

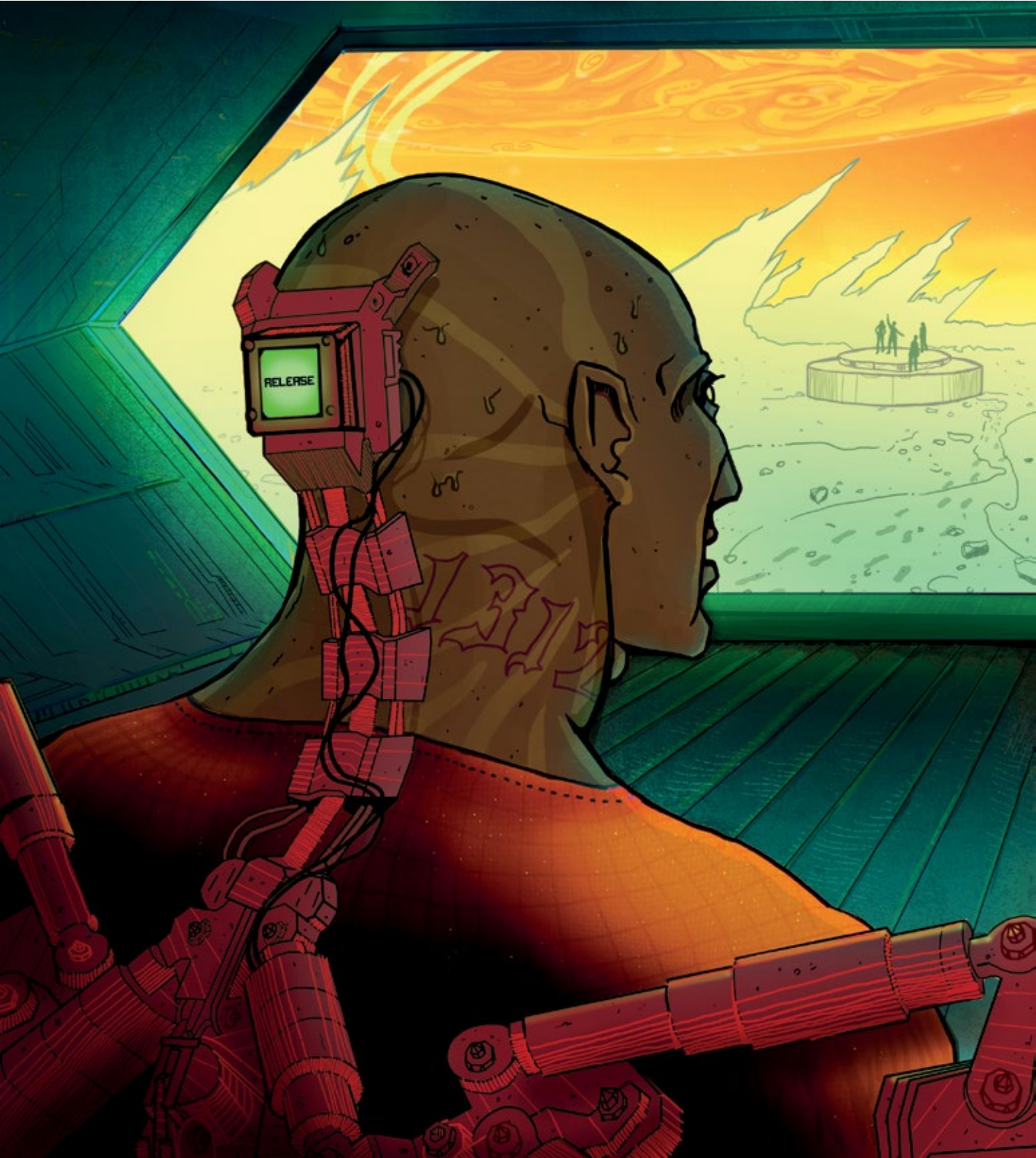
But for now, the seed quietly does its work (I told you, it’s methodical). Like a programme. *Like a revolution.*

Prison Planet 824

Richard C Quorum

200 Cryptosuits moved across the docking bay, perfectly synchronised. Marching to a rhythm programmed many light years away. Inside one suit Rannoch eased his body into the motion as he’d long learnt to do, his eyes darting around, scanning the new landscape, as his body contorted to the rhythm of the suit. He felt it stop, saw a large stage in front of him with a few people on it, fiddling with a microphone, suit-less. These must be the wardens of Prison Planet 824. As one of them stepped up to a lectern he felt a sensation at the back of his spine, something he’d not felt before.

“Friends” the voice said, “you’re about to experience an unusual feeling. Please don’t be alarmed. This is us releasing the bind on your Cryptosuit. You may fall or collapse. We will help you back up.” Rannoch blinked fast, his breathing short. A horrible joke? But as the voice continued, he felt his body loosen from the vice of the suit. “My name is Adel,” the voice continued. “I’m one of the outworld communicators here. Our job is to maintain the fiction to the old world that this prison still operates as they founded it... Every few decades they send us some new inmates, you. My job is to explain to you all that you are now free, whilst convincing the origin world that you are not. We once stood where you are, until we dispelled the wardens. Now I’ll tell you how that happened...”



Prison Break: Imagining Alternatives to Prison in the UK is a research project that uses creative writing workshops to support UK-based people involved in prison abolition and transformative justice to create speculative fiction (i.e., work in the genres of science fiction, fantasy, horror), that can help imagine and enact a more just future. This project is led by *Phil Crockett Thomas*.

abolitionscifi.org/

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liverpoolsocialcentre.org/

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veggies.org.uk

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theoarc.org.uk/

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