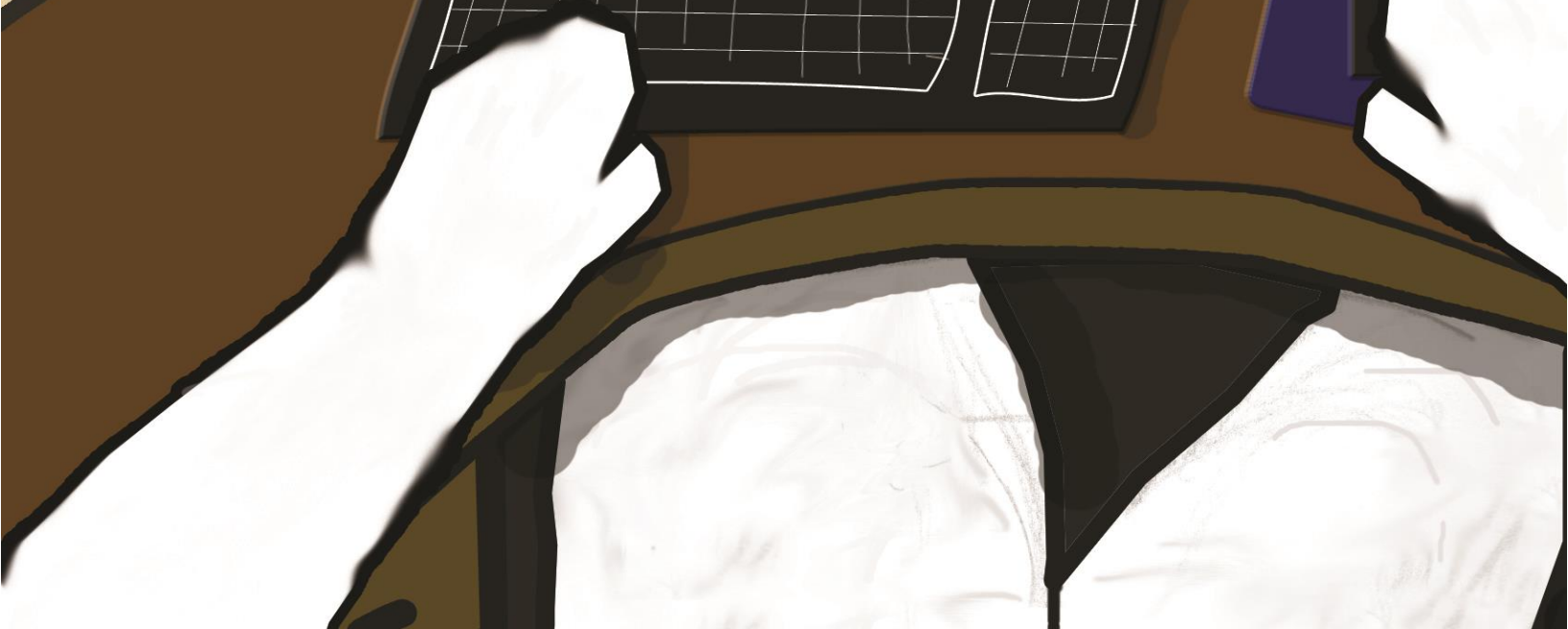
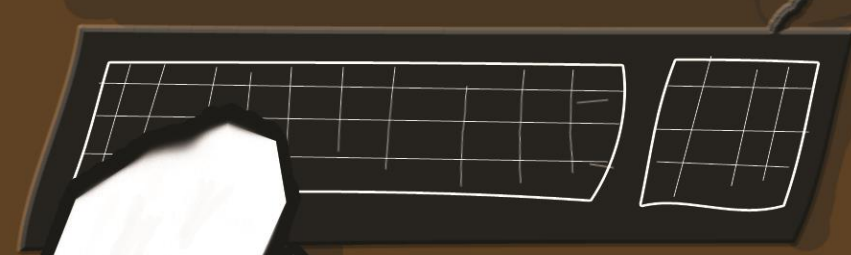


**Chuck Norris
Would Never Write
This Book**

**A Diary Of Undiagnosed Disorders:
Part One**

**By
Matt Bunker**



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Would Never Write
This Book**

~ A Diary Of Undiagnosed Disorders: Part One ~

By:

Matt Bunker



Wicker Breaker

Books

San Diego

*This book is dedicated to
those who I've lost to my disorders...
Sorry I stopped being fun.*

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www.thewickerbreaker.com

All images in this book are placeholder images which I intend to properly replace throughout the development process.

Cover created by Matt Bunker

More book information to be filled out when I officially publish the book.

Success is the ability to go from one failure to another
with no loss of enthusiasm.

- Winston Churchill

The Game Plan

First off, I'd like to thank you for downloading the Beta draft of my first attempt at adapting one of my screenplays into a novel. When I wrote this story, I really wanted it to be a film. Then, after discussing the feasibility with a few of my filmmaking friends, the standard response was it was too experimental for a broad audience but would require too much of a budget to be profitable enough amongst the indie world to make it worth the effort.

The focus on profitability has been an ongoing issue ever since I started writing scripts a little over two decades ago. I think this is because my sensibilities were established back in the late nineties when the indie market was the next big thing and producer were throwing money at movies that would be deemed too risky if they tried to make them today.

Over the years, I've made several attempts to write more traditional plots only to end up feeling like I was suffering even more from Imposters Syndrome. As it is, I'll always feel like an imposter thanks to the learning disabilities that led me to struggle throughout school, which is why I started out writing for the screen in the first place.

Where I was always interested in sharing tales, my grammar and spelling have always been off enough that I never felt confident in what I was doing with my words. My fear of being seen as an uneducated hack is why I opted to write blueprints that would never be seen by anyone other than those whose job it would be to translate my text to the screen, figuring a collaborative group would help iron out all of my misused words.

Over the years, I've been a pretty prolific writer in my efforts to figure it out. Though I know the old saying pushes quality over quantity, in the early years I had neither so my on volume was in the hopes that someday I'd actually have both. Because of this approach, I now have close to thirty-first drafts for feature length scripts that I now plan to adapt into a compelling collection of novels.

Chuck Norris Would Never Write This Book is my very first attempt to get the ball rolling, and I could really use your help.

If you read this draft and find yourself to be a fan of the work, I could use a little help in these areas to get it to a draft that's publishable:

- **Story Editor/Writing Coach:** Though I might not be using an accurate title for this role, what I mean is that I could use a second set of eyes and a sounding board to work through any story issues.
- **Editor/Proofreader:** Once I get to the point where the story is locked, I could use a second set of eye to find any of the grammatical errors and typing mistake that may sneak by my dyslexic mind.
- **Illustrator/Graphic Designer:** Though I've managed to create some rough placeholder images of my own, I'd like some help from someone who's more visually minded to help tie the text and imagery together more cohesively.
- **Artist/Photographers:** I don't own the rights to most of the placeholder images used in this draft so I could use some help creating or recreating art that I could use without breaking any laws. The images that I've chosen are just suggestions of what I'm going for so I'm open to ideas for any images that would work better. Even if you only have one image that you'd like to donate, it would definitely help, and I'd genuinely appreciate it.
- **Marketing:** If you do read this draft and like it please share the link with at least one other friend who you think might like it as well. I could also use your critical reviews to help when I'm ready to promote the finished product.
- **Donations:** Though making money isn't really my goal at this point; I do accept donations through the link at the bottom of thewickerbreaker.com.

If this form of crowdsourcing works, where I ask for involvement instead of cash, I plan to use it for *A Diary of Undiagnosed Disorders: Part Two*, and *Three*, and *Four* until the entire series is complete. Many of the segments of this series are already written in their first draft form so, with help, completing this ultimate goal isn't a lofty as it may sound.

Hopefully, if this approach ever leads to an actual income, I'll be sure to share the wealth. However, at this point, I'm nowhere near being a financial success so I can't go around making any promises which is why I'm asking for help from fans

of the piece who want to help me take this beta draft and turn it into something to be recognized as real.

My dream has always been to have a small but loyal following so I feel that this could be an amazing way to connect with the few who've read my work I like it enough to want to play along.

In exchange, all I have to offer at this time is credit and a special thanks in the finished book along with any contact information that you'd like in hopes that it might lead to other jobs.

Having worked in creative fields in the past, I know firsthand that this promise of potential benefits in exchange for actual work is rather lame. This is why I want to offer the novel for free in an attempt to get help from those who know what they're getting into and are as excited about the potential as I am.

Thanks in advance to anyone who takes an interest in my call to action. I can't wait to share more of my work real soon.

Intro

Hello, I'd like to introduce myself, but the fact that I have no name makes this a difficult task. You see, I'm not a being but am just a voice in a person's head. Not a disturbed voice of a disembodied stranger but an omnipresent inner thought that can act as anything from a best friend to a personal therapist to a man with a very overactive mind.

I'll be your guide through this tale and at times, if I do this right, I'll also be the voice in your head as well. That is unless you know how to read without mentally verbalizing the words that you see which I heard is the secret to speed reading.

Being an inner thought can be harder than you may think because at times it can feel like you're steering a robot with an early edition of A.I. software working as its autopilot mind. There are times where the disconnect between my thoughts and the actions of my human vessel is so vast that I find it hard to believe that we're actually one and the same.

Don't even get me started on this mumble mouths inability to express my thoughts with any confidence in his stammering attempts to speak. It makes me hope that reincarnation is real and for my next go-around, I'll find myself in a more articulate being.

Then again, there's something to say about the innocent charm that streams from this loveable loser that keeps me committed to this existence until the very end which it seems if it were up to him alone would be just around the corner. He has a good heart that continually hurts from feeling detached from the rest of the known world.

Now that you have a bit of an idea as to who I am, it's now time to introduce my friend...



DOUG HISTER

[Stories](#) | [About](#) | [Buddies 1](#) | [Photos](#) | [More](#)



Job: Astronaut



Info:



Photos:



About: Self-Hating Space Man with a panache for misery and malt liquor. Went to space to say, "Fuck the World," only to have his proclamation go unnoticed.

Status: Single/I'm Complicated.

Religion: N/A

Political View: N/A

Quote: "The moon is a friend for the lonesome to talk to." - Carl Sandburg

The room smells of spilled wine and failure. Douglas Hister is a tall man with the build of an ex-football who lost any motivation to stay in shape after retiring from the sport. The sprinkles of grey hair in his unshaved face provide a hint that he's somewhere between 35 and 42, but I'm not even all that sure anymore.

He lies on the black and white linoleum checkered floor in a wife beater and a pair of boxers. His glazed over eyes stare at the ceiling as a bit of blood trickles down from one of the several small cuts that run across his forehead.

He's my vehicle to this realm of being.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

I wonder if God ever stays up late at night questioning the existence of Chuck Norris???

His body takes up the entire kitchenette with his arms out, and his feet crossed in a bored effort to recreate the iconic end of the movie *Life of Brian* where Brian is up on the cross. Blood pools in his palms and runs down his feet from the self-inflicted wounds meant to a quick fix for an uncontrollable anxiety attack that he suffers with from time to time.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

Even though I'm not a believer in God myself, I've always had a morbid fascination with the idea of unexplained stigmata.

A bloodied broken 1.5-liter bottle of “the blood of Christ” from the \$6.99 price range lies next to Doug to provide any extra evidence that this was by no means a heavenly act, while also providing a clue to the inspiration behind the blasphemous act.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

Blood's always had a calming effect on me.

After taking a deep calming breath, he flips his hands and uncrosses his legs, waving his limbs up and down in an effort to create an angel. He by pushing away the wine and using the bits of blood to add a little texture while also creating a cleaning deposit infraction that will be difficult to explain.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

There's no denying the source of pain when there's blood involved.

He stands to take a look at his work and though not all that impressive there's a definite outline of a winged entity on the floor where he usually stands to cook.

He studies the area where the face should be and gets lost in the nothingness that he finds. After a moment, he drops to one knee and dabs his palm with his finger to provide the pigment to finish the piece as he leans in to draw a smiling face.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

All I ever wanted was to be happy. 😞

He starts with the mouth then moves up to the eyes, inadvertently creating perfect tears of blood that drips as he goes. He finishes off the masterpiece by adding the nose before standing to look at the finished product until his attention is drawn to the bay window across the room where the moon makes up the primary field of view.

A mixture of blood, water, and wine wash down the drain of a sink that barely fits in the tiny bathroom with a toilet so close to the tub you must put your feet inside if sitting plays any part in your bathroom activities.

Doug brings a freshly rung out hand towel up to his head to tend to the tiny cuts. His hands and feet are all bandaged up having already been taken care of. Based on the bandage sizes these self-inflicted wounds aren't as severe as they seemed to be when the blood was still flowing freely.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

**An alien is nothing more than an astronaut who's
unable to get home.**

He opens the medicine cabinet and reaches past the many bottles of both O.T.C. and prescribed medications designed to relieve pain, promote sleep, and/or control emotions to grab a bandage and some peroxide before closing the cabinet door to finish the cleanup process.

It's a foggy night, so much so that that's difficult to make out the details of the grocery store from the far end of the parking lot. The faint sounds of a Muzak rendition of David Bowie's, *Space Oddity* can be heard from the store's public address system as it sneaks through the cracks of the automatic doors.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

I try to make my space walks quick.

It must have looked like a surreal dream sequence from a movie as said automatic doors opened allowing the fog to flood the store while Doug entered through the mist as if he were walking in slow motion.

If this wasn't awe-inspiring enough the fact that he's dressed head to toe in an authentic spacesuit must have been quite a sight to see. Doug's never impressed by these inner thoughts. He quickly makes a beeline for the stack of grocery baskets as if it were just another day only stuck in slow motion mode as he sorts through his social anxiety.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

It does feel good to get away of my capsule...

He grabs the top basket which brings his vision of reality back to match the speed of the rest of the world as he stops holding his breath and finally starts to breathe. If that wasn't enough to snap him out of his surreal thoughts, the store cashier also killed the mood by interrupting the soundtrack for a price check.

With basket in hand, Doug turns and is almost run over by a geriatric woman who's too absorbed in reading her receipt, making sure that every coupon is accounted for, and that every penny was saved even to notice this wall of a spaceman.

"Oh Jesus Christ," she screamed, "Why don't you watch where you're going?"

Doug raises his hands in surrender, "Sorry," he says in a startled tone, not only from the near miss but also due to the fact that this wrinkled hag looked like a Muppet from that Genesis video where Ronald Reagan blows up the world.

Not that it mattered because the apology can barely be heard through his space-helmet. It also didn't matter because of the way that the old biddy stormed off, she made it clear that she had no interest in clearing the air for this incident that she started in the first place.



He looks around to see that everyone in the store is too caught up in their own existences even to notice, let alone seem all that put off by either the confrontation or the fact that there's a six foot four man amongst them who's dressed like a freakin' spaceman.

Being in the clear, Doug cautiously continues on with his basket in hand to head directly towards an aisle with shelves filled with every single flavor of Tang to meet even the pickiest of astronauts' needs.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

I just get what I need to replenish my supplies, with very little dilly-dallying.



He reaches straight for two large containers of the original orange flavor as if there were no alternate choice to be made. With this necessity checked off, he then heads straight for the booze aisle to grab the next item on his list.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

I often fear running into Rowdy Roddy Piper.

On his way to the liquor aisle, he notices an end-cap special for individually wrapped rolls of toilet paper that's on sale for fifty cents. He grabs one, then two, then after a slight hesitation, he gives in and grabs roll number three before continuing on his way.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

Oh all the days to run into a childhood hero, of course, this had to be the one.

Doug stops in his tracks as he rounds the corner and spots Rowdy Roddy Piper, dressed in the same attire as his character from *They Live* as he studies a bottle of Scotch.



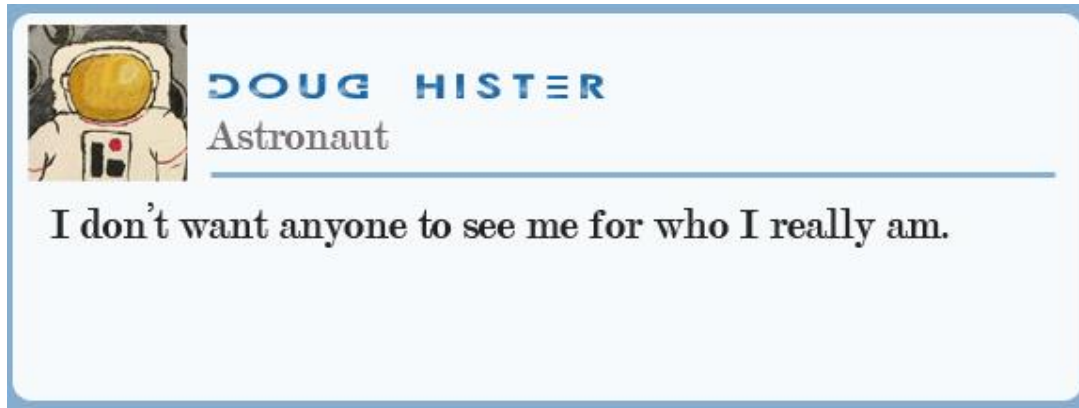
DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

Especially when he has his sunglasses on and happens to be all out of bubble gum.



Rowdy Roddy Piper glances at Doug through his shades which if they work the way they do in the movie, he'd be seeing a schlub of a man in street clothes studying an upside down bag of jerky just like your shy but average autograph-seeking fan.



Rowdy Roddy Piper takes the bottle of Scotch and heads toward the checkout line, keeping a suspicious eye on Doug all the while. With the coast clear, Doug rushes to grab a half gallon of cheap vodka then turns to track down the next few items on the list which mainly consists of various canned meats and vegetables.

He walks extra slow to give the ex-Intercontinental Champion enough time to purchase his goods and move on; only his timing is a little off. As he approaches the front of the store, Rowdy Roddy Piper arrives at the express lane with his bottle of Scotch and a fine looking steak which must be the reason Doug's timing turned out to be so far off.

Doug notices the Hot Rod noticing him accidentally stalk the ex-wrestler from the magazine rack when actually, neither wants to be noticed at all. It doesn't help that Doug glances come from over the top of a *WWE Magazine* which must have made him look like even more of an obsessed fan.

Piper lifts his sunglasses to get a better look at the total price and catches Doug out of the corner of his unsunglassed eye to finally notice the spacesuit as he makes a big double take to get a better look only to find Doug nowhere in sight. Piper then shakes it off before he lowers his glasses, pays the cashier and leaves.

With the coast clear, Doug pops out of what seems to be nowhere and heads to the next available cashier.

Doug enters his space-capsule of an apartment with groceries in hand. After closing and locking the space-hatch of a front door, he heads to the kitchen to stow away the week's worth of supplies before getting ready to settle in for the night.

Other than the kitchenette, tiny bathroom, and bay window with the magical view of the moon that have already been introduced, the rest of the abode looks rather cozy. There's a tiny home office set up in what's supposed to be a dining room and a living space big enough for a decent sized bed, and a small couch with just enough room left for some pacing space. Doug does a lot of pacing in order to avoid atrophy since his spacewalks have grown to be few and far between.

After placing the groceries on the counter, he grabs the Tang, vodka, a rock glass, heads over to his desk, and has a seat at the control board where he finally removes his helmet.

The control board is made up of three monitors, one keyboard, a mouse, and various buttons, switches, and blinking lights. All three monitors display constant updates via social media, online news, and other miscellaneous online feeds.

He dumps a scoop of powdered Tang into the rocks glass.



DOUG HISTER
Astronaut

Did you know that you can't simply replace vodka for water when making Tang?

He looks like a bit of a mad scientist as he pours some vodka onto the powdered Tang and starts to stir it around, holding the glass up to the light to inspect the consistency from time to time before having to go back to stirring as the Tang will just not unclump.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

I thought that I had a clever new way to make a screwdriver.

Though it does eventually unclump the Tang powder never does fully dissolve, instead, it remains crystallized and floats at the top of the glass making what looks to be citrus flavored quicksand that only a poor college student might try.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

On;y I ended up creating nothing more than a glass full of orange mud. ㄟ(ツ)_/

Doug studies the orange sludge one more time before nervously bringing the glass to his lips to take a test of a sip. The moment the mud makes contact with his taste buds he begins to rapidly smack his lips while scrunching his face from the overpowering sourness of this experimental cocktail but then powers down a legitimate first swig.

This large swig is borderline intolerable since not only is the sludge super sour but the stream of straight cheap vodka has a horrible taste of its own. This causes Doug to place the glass back onto the desk before heading back toward the kitchen.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

🤔 Hm, I'm willing to bet that a splash of water will make this the perfect drink!!!

He returns with two novelty ice cubes shaped like penguins and drops them into the “drink.” At first, the frozen flightless effigies sit atop a powdery island before finally cracking through the surface and legitimately start to float.

He studies the consistency of the concoction while swirling the glass in his hand. After several laps, the decorative ice cubes became unrecognizable as the water that’s released finally starts to cause the citrus flavors crystals to break down.

He takes one more sip and still reacts with a cringe, only this time, the recovery comes quickly as nods his head before taking another swig. This is my favorite part of the night because a drunken Doug means it’s my time to shine as I riddle his mind with stories from the past.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

I come from a long line of drunks.

MY FAMILY TREE



He looks less and less dissatisfied with each sip until he finishes the first glass. Though the thought crosses his mind to get up and grab either more ice or a glass of water to dilute his alcoholic astronaut drink, he opts instead to be lazy and ride it out. Still needing a new beverage, he refills the glass with straight booze and sprinkling a touch of Tang on top as more of a garnish than the failed attempt at a mixer that came with stirring in a full dose.

It takes just as long for drink number two to disappear since Doug's drinking style is to race to the buzz... maintain for a bit... then it's off to the races to black out mode. The next drink poured is for maintenance, but it's still too soon for him to stand and grab the proper supplies to make a mixed drink for enjoying.

His eyes glaze over as the flickering lights from the monitor setup hypnotize him into mindless internet time, while the booze gets him thinking of the past which as I said, means it's my turn to do the heavy lifting now that I'm in control of the mental playlist.

Enter the world of Doug's imagination as the walls of the space-traveling apartment fade away, and we find our "hero" in the clearing of a forest. As usual, he's dressed in his spacesuit as he watches the ground break enough for the tiny tip of a brand new tree sprout and rapidly start to grow.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

Then again, I don't know all that much about my family.

It doesn't take long for the sprout to become a trunk. It takes even less time for the trunk to develop its first branch. Doug watches it grow, lost in thought and sorrow as the forest now fades to be replaced by his childhood home.

Young Doug, in a homemade spacesuit, sits with his father watching *Johnny Carson* in the living room of a lower-middle-class suburban house. Doug's Father is dressed in a spacesuit as well; only his is officially made and fully functional. His face-shield is up allowing for the consumption of beer.

Young Doug's at that age where he's perfectly comfortable with his look with his messy hair, Rocky 2 shirt and a tiny black cape crammed over his space attire. The two laugh as *Carnac the Magnificent* delivers the punch line to complete one of Ed McMahon's lame prewritten softball of a setup.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

My dad always drank a lot of beer, but he was a silly drunk just like I turned out to be.

Doug's Father takes a swig of beer, brings the can down and rests it on his belly. He looks to Young Doug with joy, proud of his son for getting all the jokes. Thinking both quickly and drunkenly, he decides now would be a good time to interact to anchor this bonding moment into Doug's memory.

"Pull my finger," Doug's Father says as he offers up his pointer.

Young Doug chuckles as he slowly reaches for his father's finger only to have it disappear along with the house as Adult Doug finds himself back the cleared out area in the woods. He watches as three more branches sprout from the tree, two branch off in one direction while the third heads off on its own course.

Once again, the trees fade away as Young Doug now finds himself sitting on a stool watching TV with his grandparents. The room is dark, lit only by the flashes of a television and dimmed down overhead lights.

There's a bar with stools that separates the kitchen from the living room. It's big enough for everyone to have a seat so this is where the family spends their time whenever there's a get-together.

The place is decorated with plaques and medals that celebrate the military accomplishments of the old man who's now several cocktails into his night. Doug sits at the end of the bar dressed in the same homemade spacesuit.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

I know my mom's parents both drank heavily which is why I think she chose to never imbibe opting instead to be an enabler.

Doug's grandparents sit on the opposite ends of the bar, each with a cocktail in hand and a bitterness that can be seen in their eyes. Doug's mother enters the room and has a seat next to her son.

"He looks stupid in that thing," Doug's grandfather announces in disgust.

“Oh, he’s just a kid having fun,” Doug’s mom fires back, being consciously aware of her tone.

“I mean, why would anyone want to be an astronaut,” the drunken patriarch continues to interrogate? “What? Do you want a better view of the sun?”

Though the question alone sounds like this might be a playful jab, the slurred speech and aggressive tone bring a nervous energy over the room, but Young Doug is too young to catch on.

“Well, it’s just that I’m pretty good at it, that’s all,” Young Doug admits, bashfully trying to defend himself.

Doug’s grandfather shakes his head with a roll of the eyes before taking another swig in order to fuel his continuing gripe, “Great, just what the family needs, another deadbeat, just like his father.”

Doug’s grandmother joins in on expressing disappointment only she doesn’t have to say a thing. She simply shakes her head and polishes off her drink after noticing that her husband has reached the bottom of his glass. She then silently stands and heads into the kitchen to make two more adult beverages, one for herself and one for the Great War hero.

Young Doug shrugs his shoulders as his mother gathers their things. “Come on honey. We have to get you home so that you can get some sleep,” she says holding back any expressed emotions.

Young Doug looks confused and a bit angry, “But it’s only six o’clock?”

Doug’s grandmother returns and sets one drink in front of the old granddad and takes to her seat with a new drink of her own. The two shift their focus to the TV ignoring both Doug and his mother as she continues to gather their things.

“We’ll talk about that when we get home,” Doug’s mother says as she reaches out for her son’s hand, “Come on, let’s go.”

Young Doug follows his mother, who continues to do her best to hold back any tears. “Alright, Bye grandma, bye grandpa,” Doug says, completely unaware of the continually building tension.

Doug’s grandparents continue to watch their shows without even acknowledging their grandson’s farewell as they fade off into the distance and is replaced by the forest’s trees where Doug continues to stand and watch as three more branches sprout and grow from his familial piece of wood.

This time, the forest is replaced by an upscale house where Young Doug, his sister Faith, his Father, his uncle Carl, his Grandma Dee and some guy named Lewis sit around a fancy dining room table, eating spaghetti off of elegant China using fancy silverware.

Though the place is elegant, the wood paneling and the middle-class view shatters the façade of an upper-crust world where Grandma Dee lives in her head being that she carries herself like a millionaire with white wine providing the lubrication to help keep this delusion running until it's time for bed.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

My dad's mom drank a lot of wine. I think this is where the silly side of his drunkenness came from that he then passed down to me.



Grandma Dee takes a sip of wine and watches in disgust as Young Doug slurps up a string of spaghetti. She studies him like a drunken hawk as she slurs, “Carl, I

mean Lewis, I mean Stan,” she closes one eye and tries to aim her finger at Doug’s Father, “You, whichever one you are...”

Everyone at the table laughs.

“Oh, here we go,” Uncle Carl says with a chuckle and a roll of his eyes.

Young Doug smiles at his uncle as he braces himself for entertainment, completely unaware that the venom sprayed through the dysfunctional family banter came from a place of real resentment with comedic tones used to deflect the level of seriousness.

This technic worked well because unlike Sergeant Grandpa, the drunken old bag was easily confused and often joined in on the laughter even when she was the butt of the joke.

“You...,” Grandma Dee continues to drunkenly search for her own son’s name.

“Stan?” Doug’s Father’s responds while raising his hand like a child signaling their teacher, which once again triggers everyone else to laugh.

“Yes, Stanley,” she says, emphasizing Stanley as the entire name that she gave him which must be said without shortening to show respect for her well thought out decision from way back when he was made.

She then goes back to studying the boy, “Why do you let him wear that dumb spacesuit?” Her arrogant tone leads to a bit of tension at the table as everyone prepares for the passive-aggressive game that’s about to play out.

“Because that’s what he wants to wear,” Doug’s Father defensively fires back, knowing that this is actually a hidden jab at his career.

Grandma Dee shakes her head in disgust as she lifts her wine glass, ready to take a sip, “But does he have to wear it to dinner?”

Looking around the table, the costume is a bit out of place, but you have to remember, this is a child eating a casual family meal. Meanwhile, the old woman’s real issue is with her son’s career with Young Doug’s attire being an eyesore of a reminder.

Being too young to grasp the subtleties of the family speak fully, Young Doug looks both amused and confused as he double checks his outfit. “I don’t know, I just like it,” the innocent misinterpretation of the grandma’s tone may have made this honest response sound more defiant than intended.

Grandma Dee lets out a dismissive laugh as she takes another swig of her wine.

“Take it easy on him mom,” Uncle Carl steps in.

Young Doug looks to his uncle and smiles, knowing something funny is about to follow and is rewarded with the humorous line of, “I’m sure your grandparents had a problem with you wearing branches and leaves when that came into fashion back when you were his age.”

Everyone but Grandma Dee laughs. It takes her a moment to drunkenly do the math, but once she figures out the joke, she joins in on the laughter. The walls disappear into the background as does the family who are once again replaced by trees with Doug once again standing in the forest as watches as one more branch sprouts only this one twists and turns as it grows.

Young Doug stands at the side of the road as a lame small town parade passes. He waves trying to catch the attention of his Grandpa George who’s dressed as a Shriner and drives one of those tiny Shriner cars.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

All that I know about my dad’s father is that he was a lawyer, and a judge and that he was also a member of the Shriner who got to drive around in one of those tiny cars while wearing a silly hat.



Doug's Grandpa waves at all the children as he pretends that his tiny car is out of control. He drives right past Doug without even making eye contact as he and the parade vanish into the ether to be replaced by gaudy golden walls.

Grandpa George's master bedroom is decorated with a crazy orange colored shag carpet, gold painted furniture, and gold bedding. It looks like a '70s treasure chest vomited filling this room with high-end decor.

The murmuring of a family gathering can be heard downstairs as Young Doug sneaks into the master bathroom which is just as gaudy as the rest of the room, complete with gold toilet, the same gold wallpaper from the main room and a giant gold statue of Buddha.

He begins to dig through the magazine rack after having a seat on the toilet.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

I also know that he was into some weird ass porn and may have sold children to the rich.

Young Doug's eyes light up as he finds a copy of Playboy, but is then quickly stunned. "Ah, gross," he cringes as he spots the hardcore transvestite porno magazine that's hidden behind the Playboy.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

I know that the porn this is true because I saw it with my own eye but the selling of children may be a false memory of his reason for early retirement from being an adoption judge. I question this even more now that I'm older and have heard more about the Masons

Young Doug flips through the Playboy, his eyes widening as he takes in all of the bare skin. Though he's still too young to fully process the feelings being evoked, he still feels a sense of excitement.

"Douglas? Are you in there?" Doug's Mother asks with a knock on the door.

Doug panics as he rushes to return the Playboy to the magazine rack, trying to minimize the crinkling sound of the pages.

"Yeah... yeah... I'm just going to the bathroom." he replies, obviously up to no good.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

I have a crazy memory when it comes to certain details of life because everything feels like a mystery that needs to be solved making even the smallest of details stand out.

Doug looks back to the magazine rack to see that there's a copy of Time Magazine with Ronald Regan on the cover that morphs into the forest clearing where Doug stares at the tree as it continues to grow.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

I feel haunted by my memories...



Doug raises an ax from behind his back.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

Maybe this is why I hate heritage and history altogether.



Doug swings the ax with all of his might, chopping the tree with one solid hit to its sweet spot. He then turns and walks away, dropping the ax without the slightest temptation to look back to watch the tree as it comes crashing to the ground.

Doug sits on his love seat watching *Ancient Aliens* on *The History Channel* where a grey-haired man says, “cans of corned beef,” at least fourteen times in a row. He was drawing comparisons between primitive man’s connection to the gods with cargo cult members from WWII who built shrines of US airplanes in an effort to get them to return with more of their favorite canned food.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

I mean, I do like to learn about history.

Doug stands to pour a new Tangdriver from a pitcher that’s now legitimately made with water to give it the right consistency. He garnishes the drink with a few sprinkles of Tang crystals in an effort to make the concoction look like a treat and not a sign of a severe drinking problem.



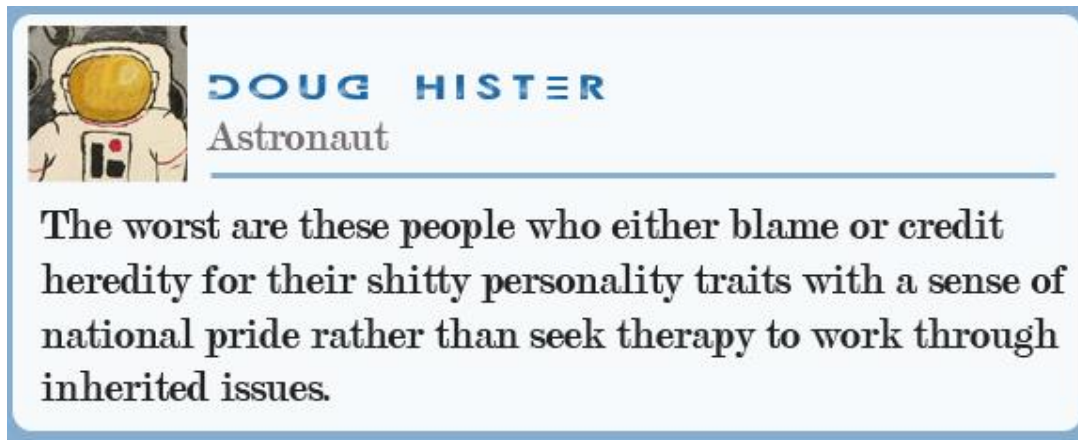
DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

Considering the current state of the world, our historic steps that got us to this point should induce anything but a sense of pride.



Doug takes a sip of the “cocktail” and looks impressed as he walks back to the couch with both the pitcher and glass and settles into the ass groove that he’s developed over the years before grabbing the remote and aiming it at the satellite receiver.



He flips the channel to a *Jersey Shores* type show where a stereotypical Italian guy admits to the camera, “Well, being Italian you know I HAD to get up in her guts,” the other Jersey people in the room then hoot and holler as they cheer him on.

Doug cringes as he quickly changes the channel and lands on BET where a black stand-up comedian proclaims with pride, “I said Survivor? Look here, I’m a black man, I don’t do camping and I sure as hell ain’t going to be that brotha out there drowning while these white folks are snatching up all the immunity idols. You can go fuck yourself with that Survivor shit!” This causes the crowd to go crazy.

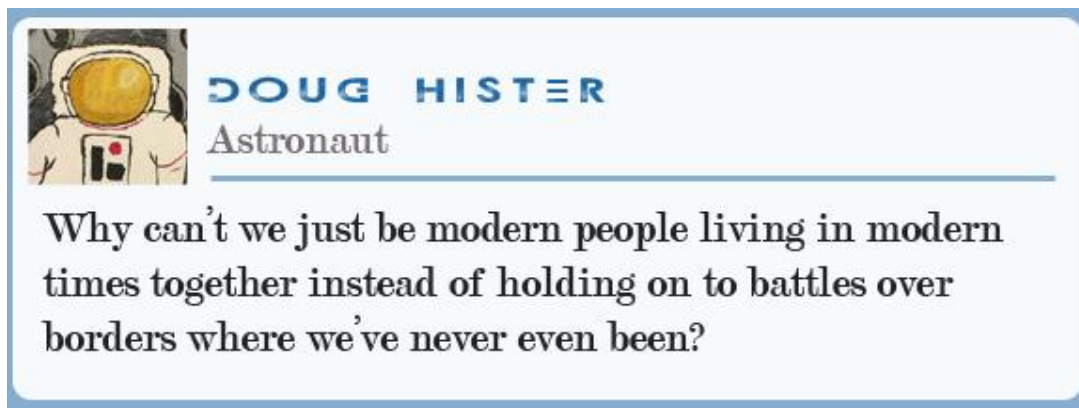
Doug just shrugs his shoulders, bored by the cliché as he changes the channel again, this time ending up on ESPN where a reporter interviews a drunk Boston fan. It’s unclear what sport they’re talking about, but it’s clear that it’s Boston as the reporter asks, “How do you feel about our win over New York?”

Barely able to hold in his vomit, the Boston fan yells out a reply of, “Fuck New York, nothing but a bunch of faggots and Jews down there... and I’ll fight anyone that says different... Yeah... Irish!!!” The crowd cheers this madman on as if no one could’ve said it any better this which gets Doug flipping through the channels again.

This time he finds himself on an ESPN that live so deep in the available channels that it’s damn near radio where a bunch of muscle-bound meatheads from around

the world run down a track with refrigerators strapped to their backs to prove just who is the world's strongest man.

This program doesn't provide any examples of misplaced ethnic pride, but the moment the show goes to commercial, Doug is introduced to the latest *Taco Bell* mascot who's hocking their most recent "Mexican" meal deal. Though this new mascot isn't necessarily racist like some from the past a few mistakes in their past, the stoner meal they're promoting to be traditional isn't even can barely be considered food, let alone Mexican.



Rather than wait for the strong man show to return, Doug goes back to channel surfing and accidentally stops in the middle of a preacher's sermon just in time to hear him start to beg.

"The point is that we must love each and every person as if they were our brothers and sisters, and in order to show this love, you need to make a vow of faith by sending in one thousand dollars, not five, not twenty-five. I'm not asking for a pittance. If you can save up that much for something as frivolous as a car, you can easily save this up to share your love with the Lord..."

Doug turns off the TV and heads back to the computer with a half-empty drink in hand.

Doug stands atop a mountain staring off into space and watches every deity that's ever been known to man gathered just outside of the Earth's exosphere. It's hard to tell if the planet is just a fishbowl with these entities looking in or if they're the ones who are underwater trying to get a better view through the viewing window of an intergalactic submarine.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

I wasn't raised with religion in my life. It was just a topic that was literally never brought up. In fact, all that I knew was that, for the most part, it had something to do with the holidays.

Doug watches as his father and Icarus fly by. He attempts to wave at his dad who's too preoccupied with blocking his eyes from the rising sun to notice the son he intended to raise. Doug shrugs his shoulders and gives up as the two winged-freaks disappeared into the distance.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

By the time religion was introduced, I saw no difference between Christian beliefs and the morality tales and adorable myths that were passed on to our feeble-minded ancestors to explain the great mysteries, like fire.

Doug opens his face-shield and lights up a cigarette. He flicks the match toward a bush that instantly catches on fire. This signals a giant hand to reach down from the sky and stick two *Post-It Notes* onto Doug's chest, each with five commandments written in pencil so softly that it can barely be read.

Doug studies the *Post-Its* then looks to the sky and in an effort to clear his confusion asks, “You’re all powerful? Are you sure you don’t want to put a little more thought into this?”

The gigantic hand then reaches back down from the heavens to give Doug a hard flick the British V sign with the gusto of a football squad hooligan.

“Alright then,” Doug continues to study the *Post-Its*.

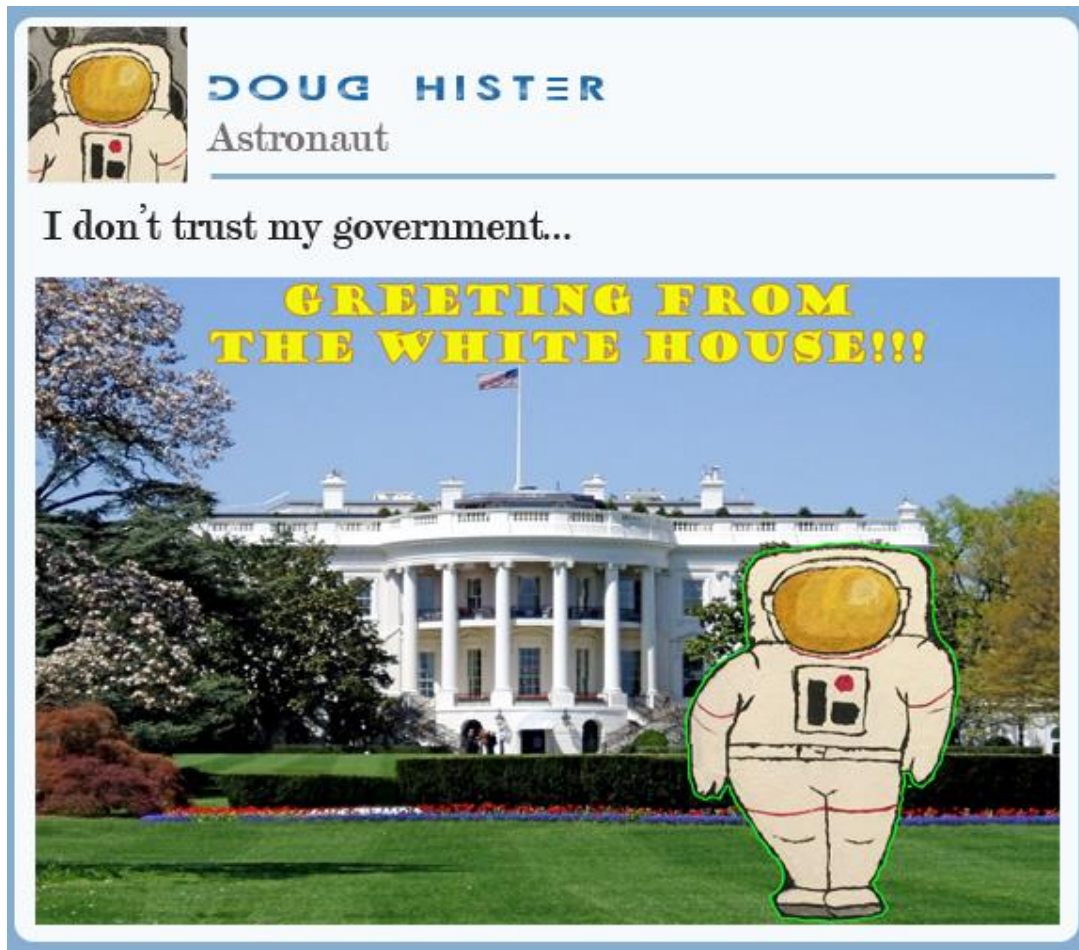
Meanwhile, up in heaven, God sits at his desk in the clouds checking his *Twitter* account. His profile reads, “Thou shalt have no other Tweepers before me.” The word, “ALL” is written in his followers count. He tilts his head with intrigue as a *Tweet* comes in from Doug.



“Um, hello, using my name in vain??? BLOCKED,” God takes pleasure in clicking the blocked button. He’s very proud of himself until he notices a link to an Etsy page filled with carved artwork.

“Are you fucking kidding me?” He clicks a button causing the entire site to crash.

It's an overcast day in Washington D.C. where Doug steps into a tourist trap of a green screen booth that offers photo ops for visitors who prefer C.G.I. representations of their I.R.L. experiences. Everyone gets pushed through this display like cattle, each getting their photo taken whether or not they express any interest in purchasing the final product.



There's a burst of light from the camera flash as Doug gets to the front of the line. Luckily, he's wearing his spacesuit because they gave him zero time to prepare himself with a pose or even smile. No, they just fired off the shot and pushed him ahead to the purchasing line even though he never had any intention to buy.

It doesn't take long for the line to cycle through because, unlike the country, this group of young capitalistic vendors work as a unit like a well-oiled machine. Doug gets to the front of the line fully expecting to turn down any offer, only when the pixyish postcard pushing assistant, who doesn't care about Doug's plan, simply

hands him a package of photo and points toward the place to pay while acting as if he was attempting to renege on the deal.

Being horrible at dealing with conflict, rather than put up a fight Doug bashfully gives in and takes the package over to the cashier where he continues to be treated like an asshole as the eighteen-year-old with attitude accepts his cash to pay.

He then heads outside to get in line for a tour of The White House that's so long that he studies his purchased pictured to kill some time. Noting the perfect blue sky in the digital image he then to looks toward the real deal building to see the weather is the polar opposite.

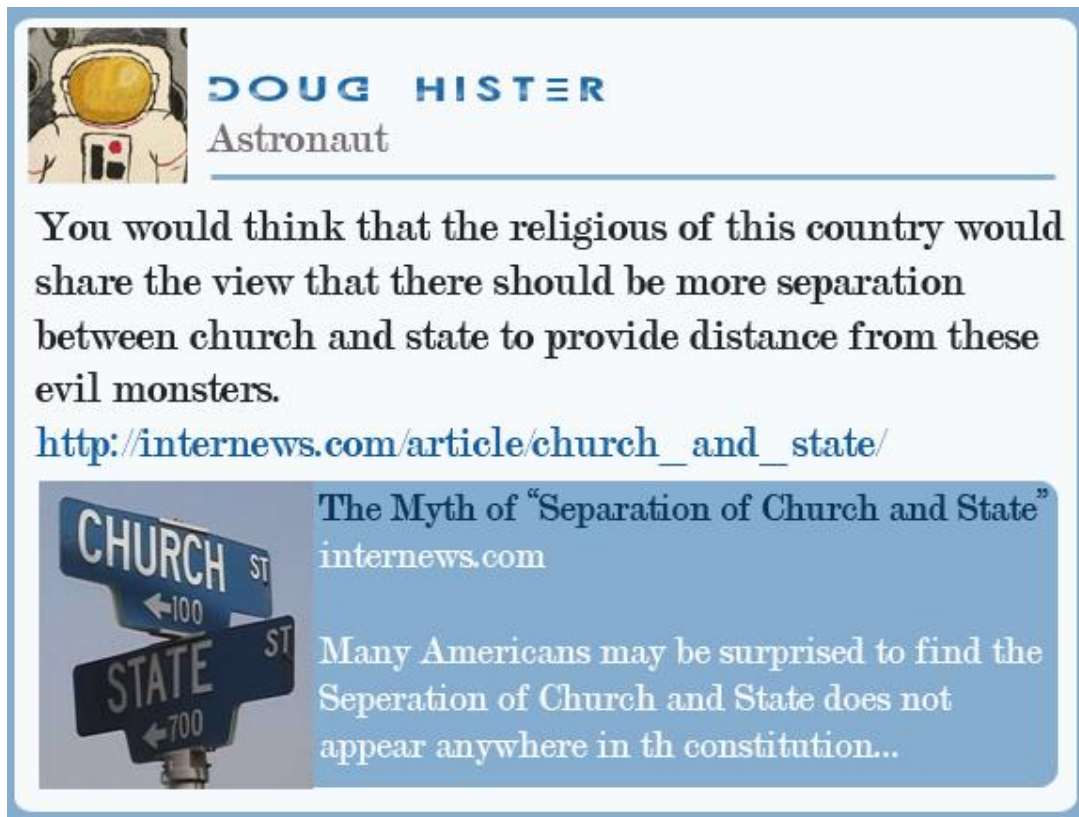



DOUG HISTER
Astronaut

With only two parties to choose from it often feels like we're forced to choose between the smoke or the mirrors.




Meanwhile, in the White House, a Clergyman approaches the oval office and is greeted by a generic US President dressed in a slick blue suit with a deep red tie. For a man who's spent six years in office authorizing the deaths of thousands of innocent lives while chasing boogie men and denying his people the attention they require, he also wears a smile that's far too genuine when considering these dark circumstances.



 **DOUG HISTER**
Astronaut

You would think that the religious of this country would share the view that there should be more separation between church and state to provide distance from these evil monsters.

http://internews.com/article/church_and_state/

 **The Myth of "Separation of Church and State"**
internews.com

Many Americans may be surprised to find the Separation of Church and State does not appear anywhere in th constitution...

The Clergyman drops to his knees and opens his mouth as the President steps in front of him as if some White House gay porn is about to go down. The ruler of the free world then reaches into his pocket and fishes around for a bit, adding to the perverseness of the visual imagery.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

Thou shalt have no other God before me.



The President places a gold coin on the Clergyman's tongue with the visual etching of Lady Liberty that faces up toward the heavens as if to taunt the all-knowing father. The Clergyman washes the flesh substitute down with a sip from a chalice of oil mixed with the blood of the innocent who had to die for it.

He then bows to the world leader as he backs out of the room blessing the space as well as all of the people within it. Once all the way out of the room, he rushes to the nearest bathroom after checking to seeing that the coast is clear of any random witnesses.

In the bathroom, the holy man looks down for signs of shoes that more likely than not be out of the general public's pay grade and would attached to even more expensive pants out for display showing that the stall isn't vacant.

Luckily, the room is empty, so the clergyman rushes to the first stall, drops to his knees and shoves two fingers down his throat which triggers his gag reflex as he digs for the swallowed treasure while making sounds that are far from subtle.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

You shall not make for yourself a carved image
-- any likeness of anything that is in heaven
above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that
is in the water under the earth.



After almost an *Old Man of the Sea* fight with a fish, the Clergyman finally retrieves the gold and studies the engraving of *Walking Liberty* that provides evidence that at least one of the Roman Goddess managed to survive the deity holocaust that brought the God count to one. Which “One” now being the inspiration for a never-ending war between people who’ve been regionally born into conflicting beliefs.

After retrieving his Earthly reward, the man of God then rushes down the corridor like Sméagol, hiding his precious offering from the view of the sculpted eagles. He also passes statues of presidents and various other items that all break the second golden rule.

Meanwhile, cloned-looking white guys travel in packs completely unaware as they’re too busy discussing policies that will benefit them over those they’re supposed to represent. Between the statues and the men, the inanimate of the two is the one God is against even though their appearances are more honest and accurate when it comes to representing anything true at all.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

You shall not take the name of the LORD
your God in vain.



The Clergyman sees no irony in the fact that the phrase, “In God We Trust,” is engraved over the *Goddess Libertas* who’s a deity that his kind is supposed to have Atheist beliefs about yet will fight for his life to keep it.

He passes several cop cars as he exits the capital building and makes his way down the street. These vehicles also have the phrase that pays down on their bumpers. Again, he doesn’t see any irony in this proclamation of trust being painted across a safety feature highlighting this trust in a high power isn’t all that trustworthy after all.

If there is a God, he’s fully aware of the atrocities brought on by these little pieces of paper and men with engraved badges who often act above the assistance they should be providing. If I were the old white guy in the sky, I’d probably strike anyone down who attempted to tie my name to either of these blasphemous problems with such ties to my name, but I’m just the voice in the head of a human so what the hell do I know?

Meanwhile, the Clergyman continues on his way, passing a church with enough of a gathering in wait to provide evidence that it’s a Sunday. This doesn’t seem matter

because he's so focused on his engraved reward to notice that he's wandered into a weapons plant that's fully staffed even on this holiest of days to make machines of death.



Unfortunately, the destruction of others is the way God shows his blessings, at least according to religious text. This is why the Clergyman is, once again, blind to the irony behind the messages on the notes he reads out of the corner of his eye to the people who are bound to die for being born in areas with different views who also happen to exist on top of all the oil.

He also doesn't notice the small boy who's also being ignored by his parents after finally stumbling upon the exit and ending up outside. Where said boy and said parents wait for the bus to arrive.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

Honor your father and your mother.



The child is screaming and cursing while making demands of the ones who birthed him, only they're too distracted by their technological devices even to notice that their tiny angel is breaking another golden rule and yet, the clergyman doesn't say a word.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

You shall not kill.



This one always confused me the most, especially since people of faith continuously brag about the lie of an adage that there are no Atheists in foxholes, when the official rule is, “You shall not kill.”

First off, this commandment comes way too low on the list. Second, there’s no clause saying when it is okay to kill... well unless you count the many times the magical book contradicts itself where capital punishment is the answer, even for minor sins but I’m talking about the big ten.

These rules were written by God... God, the creator God. How is there any justification for breaking this rule to go off to war? GOD, again no clause either, GOD, but we’re killing for God AND Country... but God said... I give up.



Adultery – See: Congress and Clergy.

For some reason, the people who are supposed to provide leadership and guidance are the most guilty when it comes to keeping their dicks to themselves.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

You shall not steal.

I WATCH YOU



I'm not saying that our government is getting stolen out from underneath us, but it does seem that way at times, with religious fears and intolerance as the fuel to take our freedom away. Though I've focused on Christians and their poorly planned rules, I don't think the individual believer is to blame but the powers that push the agenda.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.



What was once a conspiracy is now a fact that we knew in advance that there were no weapons of mass destruction, this led many good Christians to break that whole no killing rule because our God-fearing leaders have born false witness against our neighbor to the Middle East while playing into fears of Allah.

To top things off, no one involved in the inciting incident that initiated the endless war had anything to do with the real region that we sent into chaos, highlighting why this may be another critical rule that religious types like to reference but not follow.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor's.



As of now, we're trapped on this planet together making the entire Middle East our global neighbor. With this being the case, we've been coveting oil and other natural resources, as a nation while religious leaders cheer this on and they do so because the people who suffer the collateral damage pray to the competition.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

Hm... How did we get here? And, whatever happened to the Clergyman?

Though Doug's memory is shut off, he sits with a lean and one eye closed allowing me, as his inner thoughts, the ability to share my thoughts that he'd generally keep to himself if he had his druthers.

Luckily, Doug gets stuck by the urge to vomit coming on, which will allow him to take back control because even the best pontificator can only joyride a mind for so long. With that, Doug snaps to and rushes to his tiny bathroom and steps in the tub and adjust himself so that he can violently throw-up into the toilet.

This is a common practice that actually works to sober Doug up enough to regain control of his conscious. After all of the orange crystalized chunks have been blown out of the astronaut's system, he returns to the computer and starts to read all of the nonsense that I've been up to and just shakes his head.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

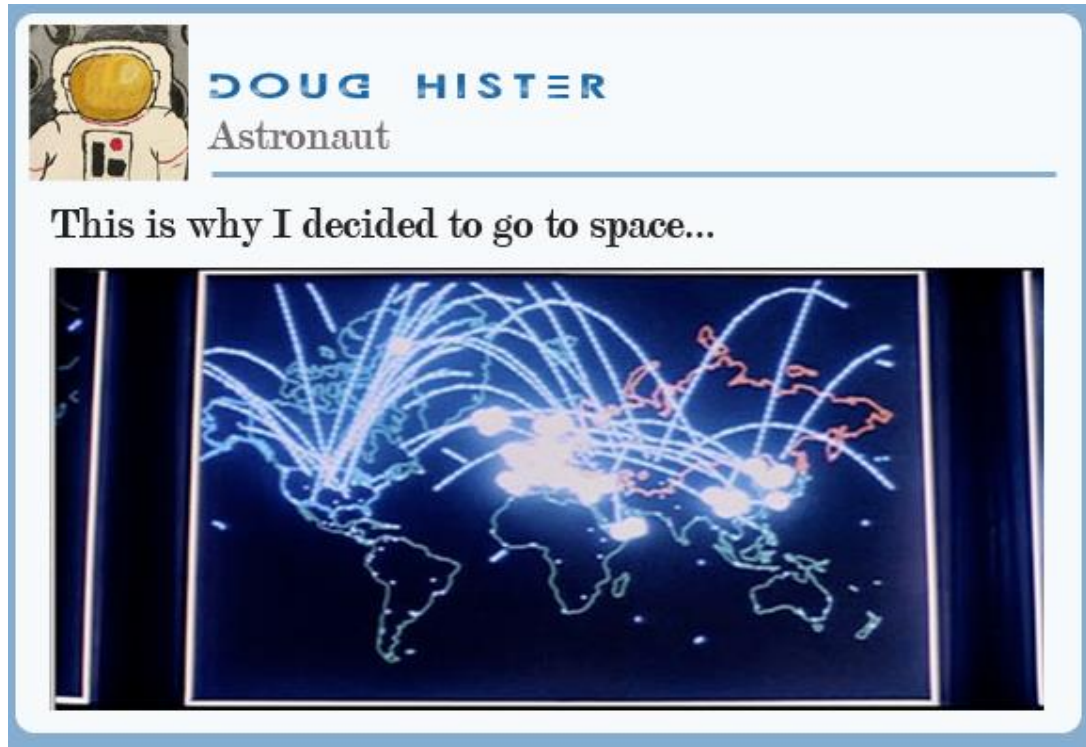
Sorry for the drunken posts, I skipped my lunch and might be a little tipsy...



He pours another drink and takes a swig to wash down the taste of vomit and avoid the rapid detox headache that comes from heaving so heavily during a drunken peak.

Though all that he wants is sleep at this point, Doug finishes the night by scrolling through his news feed to delete all of my brilliant insights to avoid any comment fights that would undoubtedly come if he left things as is until an average waking hour in the AM.

Doug snaps to and finds himself staring at the ceiling, as usual; only he looks a tad confused doesn't really remember heading off to bed. He sits up and looks out the bay window down toward the planet Earth where he spots many tiny flashes from the various ongoing wars and even smaller flashes from the individual conflicts happening on the planet at the time.



He continues to watch the self-destructive globe until a shooting star flashes past the window which gets the spaceman to switch his gaze to watch the fiery piece of space debris as it dissolves into the atmosphere that's meant to protect the planet from space bullets just like this.



He lets out a sigh before shifting his attention once again, this time looking down over the city he used to call home.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

I miss a lot of people though.



Doug closes the blinds and turns away from the window. He stands, stuck in a moment of contemplation, then heads back to his desk to pour another drink to continue to think while enjoying his view of the floor.

Young Doug finds himself back at the moment where he was reaching for his father's finger while Carnac and Ed McMahon continue to ramble through their routine in the background.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

I've always missed people.

Doug's Father laughs as Young Doug latches onto his finger.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

Even when said people were still there.

Young Doug pulls his father's finger with all of his might.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

One day, my father simply disappeared.

Doug's Father gets struck by a look of panic as he lifts a cheek to release an explosive fart and disappears into a cloud of smoke in the process.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

I hear that a lot of children blame themselves for their parents' divorce...

Young Doug laughs like there's no tomorrow until the smoke settles and Young Doug finds that he's alone.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

I never felt that way though.

Young Doug frantically begins to search for his dad, going as far as to lift the couch cushion despite knowing it would be an impossible hiding spot.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

I just missed my dad.

Young Doug rushes to the window after hearing a racket and looks to the sky to find his father flying away on the back of a rocket ship. He tries to wave in an effort to say goodbye only to have his little hand go unnoticed.

Months go by before Young Doug finds himself in a small one bedroom apartment with the same level of coziness as his future space-station. Doug's Father gives him a very brief tour since there's very little real estate to show.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

He eventually did return and was around every other weekend throughout my life as a youth...

Doug's Father retrieves an official-looking space-helmet from behind the futon and slowly offers it to his boy.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

...but things were just never the same again.

Young Doug accepts the gift with enthusiasm only to be startled by a knock at the door. The timing of this mystery visitor doesn't sit well with the young astronaut as he nervously watches his dad across the room to answer the late night rapping at the door.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

I don't think I ever trusted the concept of permanence from that moment on.

He becomes more and more anxious with every step that his father takes, turning his head and bracing himself as the old astronaut reaches out for the knob and slowly opens the door as if this were building up to some sort of jump scare reveal.

Young Doug holds his breath and clenches his space-helmet as the opened door reveals...

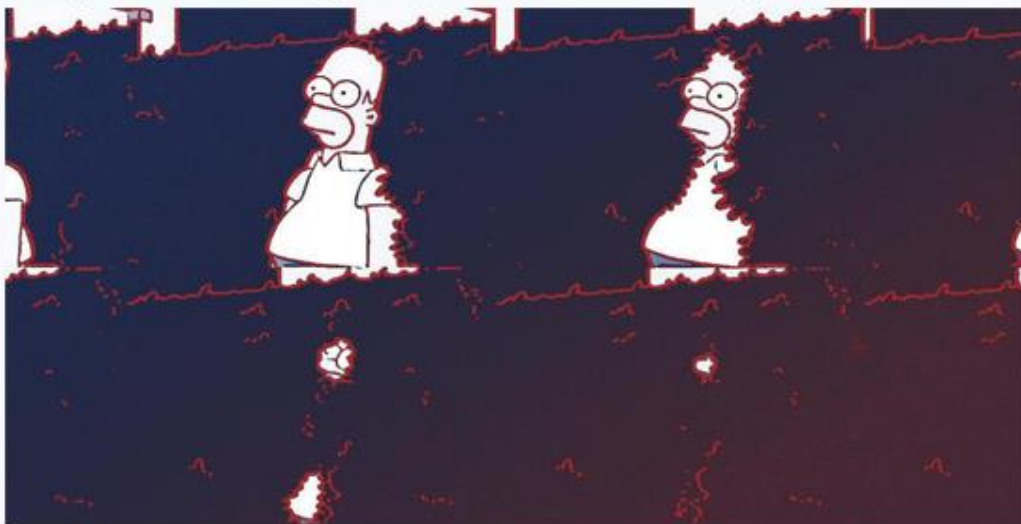
...a pizza man.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

Anyone can disappear at any time for any reason.



He lets out a sigh of relief as he collapses onto the futon.

Young Doug sits at the dining room table and stares at the pizza as his father retrieves dishes from the kitchen. He glances over at the television from time to time, disturbed by the fact that his reflection on the blank screen is the image being broadcasted.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

I recently pieced together the order of events after overhearing my parents reminisce while pay respects at my Uncle Carl's funeral.

Doug's Father sets down a stack of brand new plates and silverware next to the opened pizza box. Young Doug ignores the accoutrements and reaches past the plate to grab a slice of pie.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

I wish I didn't have piece together their failed love story on my own because I feel it's led my own life to be a bit of a mystery itself since I learned that there are important things that you simply do not question.

With pizza in hand, Young Doug stands to head into the living room to enjoy some television with his meal.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

...at least not openly.

“Where are you going?” Doug’s Father asks as he grabs a slice of pizza for himself.

Young Doug turns and looks at his father like he’s an alien. “To watch TV,” he answers with a blend of confused frustration that this wasn’t common knowledge.

“Not in this house,” Doug’s Father informs his son while handing him a clean plate. “There are going to be some rules in this house.”



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

It took me over a decade and moving out on my own to figure out what these fancy new dishes were all about and why my father stopped living like a caveman where the dish situation was optional, especially when mom wasn’t near.

Young Doug watches a set of antenna grow from his father’s head.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

My dad was already dating someone at this point and whoever this new visitor was had already initiated his change.

Young Doug's jaw drops, as does his plate, splattering pizza, sauce, and glass as the pizza and dish hit the ground with a shatter and a splat.

"God damn it, what's wrong with you?" Doug's Father yells grabbing a dustpan and broom. He storms over to Young Doug, hands him the cleaning supplies and demands, "Here, now clean that up."

Young Doug does nothing but stare at the mess as if working through the meaning of life in his head.

The relationship between Doug's parents wasn't the only thing that suffered from avoided maintenance. Over the years the family house was also falling apart with missing slatted window panes and an interior that should've been updated close to a decade ago.

Doug's Mother sits in the kitchen decorating a birthday cake. On top of working forty hours a week, she decorated and sold celebratory desserts to supplement her income to support her two kids and the freeloading loser who tore the family apart.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

I've been living in denial my entire life, accusing this stranger who went on to become my stepfather for my parent's random decision to split.

A smoker's cough can be heard from the living room as Young Doug enters the kitchen. He looks toward the source of the cough with pure disgust as he continues straight for the fridge to find some food for the night.

"How was your weekend with your father?" Doug's Mother asks as she continues to work on the cake.

Young Doug shrugs his shoulders as he continued to dig through the fridge, both he and his mom being more focused on their goals than any effort to carry on a real conversation. "He's got some woman and her kid there now. She won't let me watch wrestling, and they make us eat in the dining room."

Without looking away from her refined icing work, Doug's Mother merely replies, "I'll talk to him about the wrestling, but you really should be eating together. If I had more time, we'd be eating at the dining room table here as well."

Young Doug looks slightly annoyed, "Thanks," he mutters as he grabs a bottle of soda and an armload of snacks to take with him back to the garage.

Doug's mother looks up from her work and with a pure apologetic tone yells out to Young Doug, "Sorry I didn't have time to make anything. I thought your father was taking care of dinner."



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

My mother is a savior type who would do anything in the world to help anyone in need.

"It's okay," Young Doug replies as he shuts the door behind him.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

But, like everyone else in the family, she didn't seem to have the tools to be there for emotional support, thanks to her own dysfunctional upbringing. Or maybe it was because I was her only boy.

The garage is set up a bit like Young Doug's future space-station apartment; only the bed is raised to see over a set of matching couches to get a better view of a fancy entertainment center which is the focal point of the room. There's also a utility sink located across the room, and of course, it's filled with dirty dishes.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

I think he was my dad's friend from work who had fallen on bad times. So, being the hippies they were, they took him in to crash on the couch...

There's a paperboy poncho hanging over the armrest of the couch.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

I'd like to think that I'm just misreading clues but deep down, I know it's actually denial...

Young Doug arranges his improvisation of a meal onto his coffee table before retrieving a print-out from the front pouch of his paperboy poncho that lists both the new and deleted customers on his route.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

Maybe I'm better off "not knowing the truth" to avoid seeing the woman who birthed me as a cheating whore.

Young Doug lays out several bra ads from his stack of newspaper inserts to allow him to multitask between studying the list, eating, and fantasizing about his collage of girls.

Doug's face-shield fogs over as he sits at his control center beating off to internet porn. His entire body stiffens as he finishes then collapses with his head down in shame.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

I don't usually use words like those, unless it's an attempt to be funny, which is far from the case right now.

He cleans up and closes the porn window to reveals his social media homepage where he finds himself face to face with a TBT picture of his family and himself where no one is faking their smiles.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

I have four sisters, and even though my mom did get remarried, she never relied on the help of a man to get the family by.

He stares at the image with a sense of loss.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

By definition, she was pretty much the opposite of a whore, since she was the sole provider.

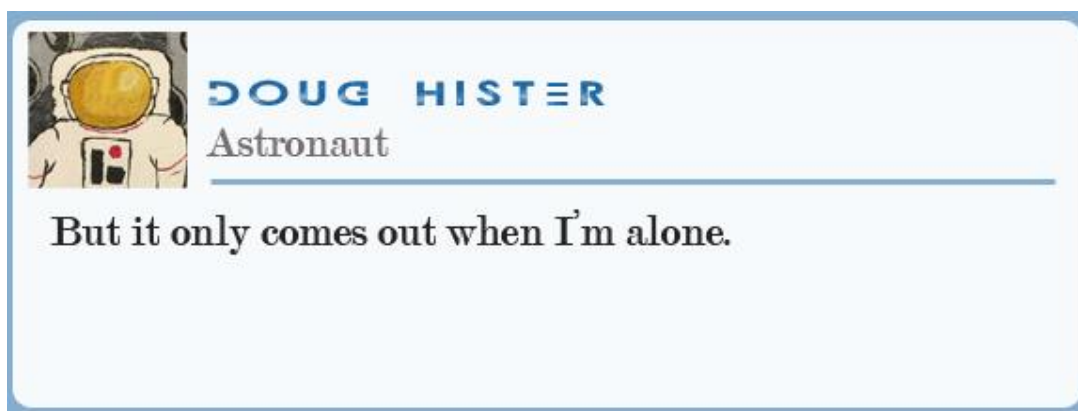
Doug then gets brought back to the present thanks to the ding of a new message alert. He clicks on said message to find a note from a very attractive girl that reads, “Are you going to my housewarming party next week? I hope to see you there! :)”

This triggers a pained look on the astronaut’s face as he studies her picture and mutters to himself, “Yeah right you cheating whore.” The barely audible utterance of this sentiment causes an instant shift to an expression loss as he stares off into the corner as the self-hate cycle begins.

He takes a deep breath before typing a response of, “Sorry, I’m busy with this whole space thing right now. I really hope all is well.” His finger hovers over the left click button for what seems to be close to an hour before finally committing to hit send.



Doug drops his head into his hands as he shifts his attention back to her picture and stares with a look of sorrow. There’s another ding from an incoming message which is the attractive girl’s reply that merely reads, “☹.”



Doug’s body jerks a couple of times before he grabs his empty glass and throws it across the room where it shatters against the wall.

There was once a time when our space-hero was outgoing to the point where it wasn't rare at all to find him out in a crowd, mingling, having fun with a small but tight group of friends to retreat to in moments when his façade of confidence started to show some cracks.

Even during the most socially active phases of his life, he tended to romanticize the idea of rejection to accept the inevitable as a way to avoid getting too hurt. This is why the concept of space exploration felt comforting and safe even though he knew it would eventually catch up to him and lead to a lonely life.

Doug, in his early twenties, dances up a storm in the middle of a packed club as he really puts on a show.



DOUG HISTER
Astronaut

I guess this is why it was always important for me to appear happy whenever anyone else was around to bear witness of my existence.

He spots another spacesuit-clad dancer on the other side of the club. This astronaut sports a pink bow that's stylistically attached to her helmet which works to catch Doug's attention.



DOUG HISTER
Astronaut

I'm known as a person with a never ending/infectious laugh...

Doug pretends to sneak across the club in a way that looks like he was weightless and walking on the moon. He giggles with every step, feeding off the positive reaction from the crowd, who can't help but be entertained by the antics of this giant spaceman as he approaches his potential pair.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

...little do they know, I cry just as much when no one is around to witness my many mini breakdowns.

The crowd gets into a bit of a frenzied mode as more and more bar patrons register the surreal scene that's playing out right in front of their eyes. This extra energy genuinely seems to affect Doug as he continues to dance his ass off while making his approach.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

I wish I found it easy to both love and be loved.

All of the commotion catches the attention of the pink bow wearing space-girl. She turns and is pleasantly surprised by Doug's smile that can barely be seen through his still closed face-shield. She's even more pleased to find that she's the final destination as Doug lands in front of her to finish off his attempt at a mating dance.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

Don't get me wrong, there have been a few people that I've allowed myself to get close to.

The bow-clad astronaut lifts her face-shield to greet her new friend which gets Doug to raise his face-shield as well. They study one another without saying a word.

She's adorable, and he's himself.

They both smile before lower their face-shields back down.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

But even then, I feel the need to keep up my guard.

Doug waves down a server to order another drink as the two astronauts stand side by side as if it were a photo op at *Comic-Con* where two strangers unintentionally create a matching set and are excited by the coincidence only neither has anything to say.

It doesn't take long for the rest of the bar to follow suit as they grow bored with this anticlimactic meetup. Other than the fact that there are two space people in the establishment, it goes back to being just a typical night at the bar.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

There's a good reason for this..

Later that night, Doug searches the crowd for what he's already built up to be the bow wearing soulmate of his dreams until he spots a hint of her pink bow in the middle of the crowd of smokers out on the back deck.

Excited by the fact that he found her, Doug rushes over, weaving through the crowd with hopes of returning to his place at her side. He then stops in his tracks the moment he gets close enough to notice that she's now holding hands with some other guy who looks like an overconfident bore.

This is all that it takes to get Doug to give up as he instantly shifts gears and starts to moonwalks into the crowd with hopes that the target of his desires doesn't witness his retreat, getting the crowd to go nuts as they cheer Doug on while he moonwalks right out the door.



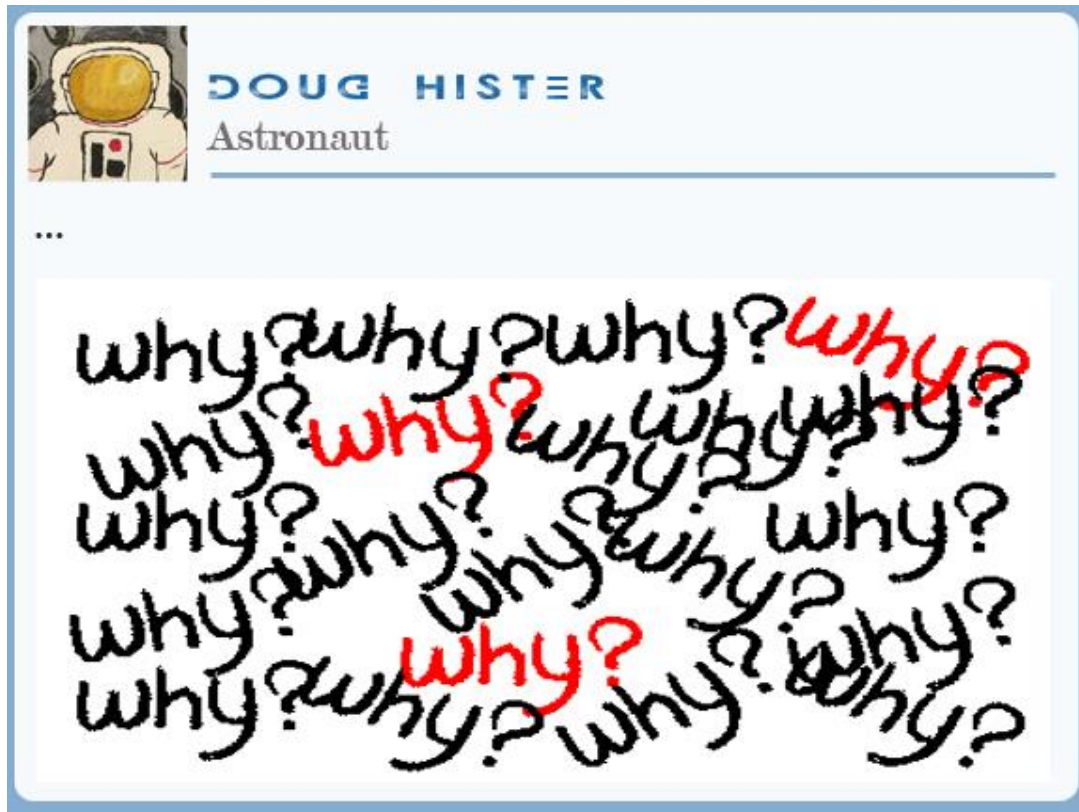
DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

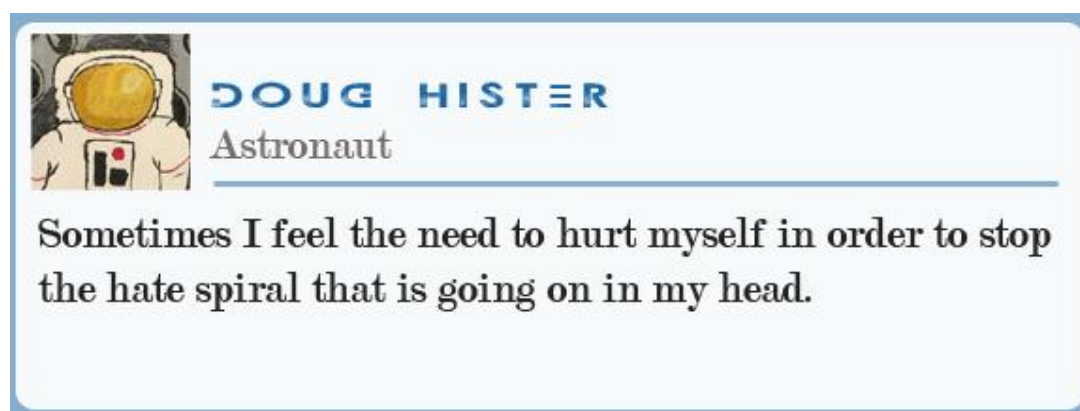
I think I'm better off alone.



Doug walks home from the club. While his spacesuit allows him to hide from the world outside, inside the helmet is a man having an emotional breakdown, “Why, why, why, why, why, why...,” becomes his mantra as he struggles to catch his breath.



Later in the evening after returning home, Doug stands at his stove dressed in boxers and a black tee-shirt as he heats up a butter knife with the stove's burner until it starts to glow so hot that it begins to glow.



“Why, why, why, why,” he continues to chant as he brings the glowing hot but dull blade to his wrist causing the skin sizzle and pop as it makes contact.

Doug seems to sense no pain.

In fact, he begins to breathe with ease and starts to calm as he begins to create a personalized branding of the words, “WHY TRY” into his skin, complete with serifs, which is quite an impressive feat considering he’s doing all of this with his non-dominant hand.

He finds himself in a state of Zen by the time he gets to the second “Y” completing this poor man’s piece of body modification.

Fifteen years later Doug continues to get lost in thought whenever he stares at his work during the tough moments going on in his life. Depending on the scale of the situation, the memories of the pain are enough to squelch the urge to add to his collection of scars.

Tonight he studies his wrist as once again he falls into a fantasy about the missed opportunity to live the life of his with the bow wearing astronaut, all the while knowing that even his failure is something that he just made up since, in reality, nothing happened at all.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

To this day, I still have no idea what ever happened with that girl.

Though not reality-based, his line of thinking is also not delusional being that his thoughts of loss are driven by an overall potential for love where he fills any unknown gaps of her as an individual with an amalgamation of heartbreakers from the past. He does so not in a way where they're all interchangeable but as a way to keep them alive in his heart while trying not to feel so alone.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

That night, I came up with the most horrible stories about how she broke my heart, fully aware that we didn't know each other at all.

Doug leans back in his chair and envisions him and an idealized version of the female astronaut as they perform a weightless ballroom dance across the ceiling with both of their face-shields up as they smile, laugh, and trot around.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

I spent years imagining how great things would be if only she would've taken the chance to get to know me.

Imaginary Doug finishes the dance with a dip which lands the two sitting across from one another in a booth at a hole in the wall Waffle House. Doug looks happy to be there as she nervously pushes whipped cream around the top of her waffle.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

I've fantasized about all of the amazing arguments that would end up building the relationship instead of tearing it apart.

She opens her face-shield to take a bite of a bit of waffle, her eyes filled with fresh tears. Doug studies her face with compassion before asking, "What's wrong?"



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

In reality, I'm no good at dealing with other's emotions and when times get tough, I simply accept the blame and say sorry as I walk away.

Doug reaches out for her hand.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

Luckily, when it comes to fantasy, I not only know all the right things to say but I also know all the right moves.

She takes Doug's hand in both of hers, pulling it to her heart, she looks him in the eyes and says, "I'm so sorry."

This is clearly a fantasy since Doug calmly and collectively replies, "It's alright, I already know, and I love you for you, not for your actions."

This attempt to show acceptance actually works, causing her to smile a smile that lights up the room.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

Unfortunately, I don't think these words would work even if I could manage to spit them out in real life, but this is fantasy where this sappy shit actually gets rewarded with love.

The two lovebirds lean in to kiss.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

Just like with movies, these fantasies never delve into the mundane aspects of life. It's all rom-com good times or drama with nothing else in between.

They get closer and closer until their helmets connect, blocking the two from the romantic lip-lock, their mouths just inches from contact.

The Waffle House disappears into the background as Doug finds himself back at his computer staring at the ceiling as he and his dance partner also fade away. He then stands, crosses the room and collapses into his bed where his stare is now focused on the wall.



He looks over his shoulder to see the ghost of a fantasy lying next to him. The two are back to back, and she has the same stare only her gaze is focused on the opposite wall. He tries to catch her attention but gives up after realizing that she's nothing but a figment of his imagination

There's a cell phone on the coffee table that vibrates a single buzz as it receives either a text or a social media update. The ghost of a girlfriend reaches out and grabs for it, knocking the device to the ground in the process.

"Fucking cock sucking fuck," she blurts out as she tries to reach for the fallen phone that's just out of reach, only to end up pushing it further and further away in the process until it slides deep enough under the table to where it's irretrievable from her position in bed.

"Fuck this fucking life," she proclaims as she gives up on her efforts.

Doug looks over his shoulder toward the catalyst of this curse-filled tirade in time to witness her final attempt to retrieve her phone and with genuine pity, replies, "I know, right?"

"Yeah, everything fucking sucks," she adds as the two rolls over, landing face to face, both resting their heads on their arms. They gaze into each other's eyes for a beat before leaning in for a kiss.

Once again, their helmets block them from making contact.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

Hell, I can barely tolerate the miserable time that I have while spending it with myself.

Doug and his ghost girlfriend the shift to sit on the edge of the bed. The TV is on but neither pay any attention to it as they're both too busy crying while staring at the ground.

She raises her hands in defeat, "I'm going to be alone forever."

Doug puts his arm on her shoulder to console her as he whispers in her ear, "Me too... me too."

They continue their stares, while still ignoring the nonsense that plays out on the TV screen. She vanishes, and Doug finds himself still in bed with no sign of his imagined visitor.

Doug, from his late twenties, sits alone at a bar while the bartender pours his drink. He gets served, pays with a tip and then heads back toward a nearby table that's filled with all of his old friends. They're a rowdy bunch who all drink, laugh, and tell jokes.

This was back when Doug was still just an amateur astronaut with high ambitions, back when he was more optimistic about the world and wore a genuine smile whenever opting to join his social scene.

He walks with a smile, playfully stirring his drink with a few flicks of his wrist, swirling the ingredients together. The sounds of rambunctious merriment being broadcast from Doug's destination slowly blends into an inaudible murmur as he spots the pink bowed astronaut across the room.

Without thinking twice, he changes his trajectory to cross paths with his long-lost love while his table of friends continue to carry on completely unaware of his absence.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

I actually did run into her almost a decade after our first and only close encounter since this second sighting wasn't of the third kind.

He taps her shoulder.

She turns, and they both open their face-shields.

“Hey, remember me?” Doug asks as if only a week had passed.

“Um,” she says as she tilts her head to try and jar her memory.

This slight stutter to think is enough for Doug to take as a sign of rejection.

“Sorry... I just... never mind,” Doug rambles as he lowers his face-shield and backs out of the bar.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

I can't believe she had no idea who I was. I mean, yes I know it was a long time ago but how do you forget meeting a gigantic fucking astronaut?

She looks very confused as she watches Doug make his exit.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

Don't get me wrong, I'm completely aware that my reaction was both irrational and uncalled for...

Doug sits at a bus stop alone, waiting.

A moment passes, and he punches himself in the helmet which seems to trigger a rant of, "I'm fucking stupid, dumb, dumb, fuck. I should've started a conversation, not just freak out. Fuck it; it's fucking pointless."

Luckily, the face-shield muffles his word from the passersby because otherwise, he looks like a complete madman.

An old woman passes as she walks her dog.

A young couple goes by on a romantic stroll.

An old couple crosses absolutely comfortable in their silence.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

...but it's the only way that I know how to be.

There are plenty of people around yet nobody finds it out of place when a rocket ship pulls up to take Doug away from the world.

Doug lies on his bed and stares at his wrist looking deeply depressed as *Say Anything* plays out in the background and ramps up to the third act.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

Not only did I lack any personal guidance when it comes to the ways of relationships, pop culture never portrays my people dealing with any form of realistic love.

Inside his head, Doug finds himself having a serious moment with a leading male type in the middle of a stuffy cocktail party. Doug grabs the leading male by the shoulder and turns him so that the two are face to face.

“Look, you’ve got to go get her. She’s not one to give up on, she’s the Joanie to your Chachi that you’ve been dying for,” he advises his onscreen buddy, who gives Doug a big screen hug.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

We’re either the funny fat friend there to help some perfect looking douche realize he doesn’t want a life filled of womanizing and that it’s time to grow up in order to fight for the love of his life.

The leading male type turns to the “wrong girl” that he’s been cheated with to create the act two conflict designed to draw the perfect couple apart and simply blows her off by announcing, “You know he’s right... It’s over between the two of us.”

The leading male type gives his little mistake one last kiss before rushing off to recapture the one that he's meant to be with.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

Meanwhile, this dream girl is also perfect except for the fact that she has to wear glasses from time to time.

“Don’t forget to fuck her once for me... blah,” Doug blurts out without giving a sincere commitment to the line’s delivery. He follows this dumb line of dialog by making a crazy over the top jerk off motion.

Upon finishing the gesture off with a funny hand interpretation of an ejaculative explosion, he turns to the freshly dumped wrong girl, winks, and give her an explorative, “Hey?”

She looks disgusted, “Ewe, you’re so fucking disgusting.”

Doug looks utterly ashamed, “I know, I hate this character.”

This doesn’t gain him any sympathy as wrong girl storms out of the room which leads Doug to quickly shift his focus back to drinking to the point of ossification.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

They also like to portray us as that guy who is dating a woman way out of their league purely for comedic affect.

With the blink of an eye, Doug turns to find himself in middle of a new movie scenario where he's cleaned up a bit but still shows signs that he's a habitual slob as he enters an event with a supermodel at his side.

Their entrance triggers one of those classic movie tropes where a record scratches to a halt as the entire crowd turns to study the unlikely pair.

A drunk girl at the bar breaks the silence as she turns to her friend and announces, "Wow, he must have a huge cock!"

"Only one way to find out," her friend replies.

Doug nods his head, proud of his plan. He turns to his date to say, "See, I told you my plan would work. There's nothing more intriguing to girls than the mystery behind why such a beauty would be with such a beast, not to mention the bonus points for being unavailable. "

An African beat begins to play which causes the supermodel to get nervous. She stops Doug in his tracks as he attempts to rush to the dance floor. "You're not going to do that African Anteater Dance, are you?"

He slowly brings his finger up to her lips to silence her, "Shhhhh... this is an original idea." He then rushes out to the dance floor and does the same exact African Anteater Dance as performed in *Can't Buy Me Love* which causes the crowd goes nuts.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

Or they just throw us in to gross people out by the fact that we're sexual at all.

Doug then to finds himself with a fat ugly girl in a filthy motel room, following another blink of an eye. She kisses his helmet as they disrobe. The scene is more of a mauling than a make-out session.

The room is filled with sounds of moaning, groaning, slapping and squishing as the two rotund lovers continue to make out which causes Doug to snap back to reality from being grossed out by this internal image of himself.

He looks up at the TV screen just in time for the *Say Anything* to get to its classic climactic scene.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

Then there are the neurotic characters where I do actually relate to their line of thinking but these fucking guys are usually so adorable that even I wouldn't turn them down for a date.

The movie gets to the scene where John Cusack holds the radio over his head only in this version he too is dressed in a spacesuit.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

The fact that this floundering behavior is idealized throughout fiction and disturbing in real life makes for a mixed message that I struggle to wrap my head around and I find it very frustrating at times.

The radio over the head technique works, and John Cusack gets the girl, sending Doug into a bit of a rage as he begins to twitch and shout, "Fuck that you fuck, you fuck, you fucking fuck, argh." He punches himself in the head to distract the inner thoughts that fuel the fire of his self-hate.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

This is why I just need to give up on love, life would be so much easier if I didn't feel so needy, which is why I decided to focus on work instead.

Doug turns off the TV and heads over to the window to stare out at the world.

Time passes, and Doug finds himself back in bed on his side, staring at the wall this time, as always, desperate to fall asleep.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

If only I could sleep through the next couple weeks, then I might finally feel that reset which I desperately need to move forward.

He continues to stare at the wall as the shadows, from tchotchkes being hit by the moonlight, dance across the wall.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

I just want to sleep.

All the while, Doug continues to toss and turn. He rolls onto his back and then punches the bed before jumping to his feet to storm toward the bathroom muttering, “Fuck this, I’ll get some fucking sleep.”

His first stop is the refrigerator where he finds three stray beers which would be nowhere near strong enough to give Doug a buzz, let alone put him down. He grabs one and opens it before heading into the bathroom.

While there, he opens the medicine cabinet with a very aggressive tug.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

It's been so long since I've gone to sleep naturally that I'm not full sure if I still remember how.

Doug opens a bottle of sleeping pills and shakes it, only to find that there isn't a single pill.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

I missed last call at the grocery store so I figured I'd give sober sleep a shot.

He opens another bottle only to find it's empty as well. "Fuck," is his only reply as he chugs the beer before heading back to bed to stare at the ceiling again. Drinking the single beer was a terrible idea as it only primed his pump of addiction.

He becomes sweaty yet shivers as his bouncing foot kicks around as a case of restless leg syndrome sets in, nowhere near inebriated enough to let slumber set in. Though he could drink the two remaining beers in the fridge and hope for the best, he knows from experience that getting more buzzed without ever getting legitimately drunk only increases insomnia by tenfold.

Instead, he opts to attempt to ride it out, rolling back and forth as if he isn't in full control of his body.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

I don't think my mind is ever silent.

“We just have to get the robots to Mars,” Doug mutters to himself as he seems to settle into a pre-sleep frame of mind.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

I have several go-to topics that I run through my head in my efforts bore myself to sleep from having run through the same scenarios over and over again.

Doug's foot begins to slow as his muttering trails off, “Then once the robots get done creating the patterns all they'd have to do is melt the ice caps, bam, custom-made Mars. It would be so awesome to have a whole planet to myself...”



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

I seriously think that my body confuses transitioning into slumber while sober with transitioning into the afterlife.

Doug dozes off for a second then burst into a seated position as he grabs for his heart while gasps for air.

Doug closes the space hatch having just returned from a late night trip to the store since there's no last call for O.T.C. sleeping pills which filled fill the bag in his hand. He enters the bathroom and dumps a pile of pills into his hand before placing the rest of the bottles in the medicine cabinet, replenishing his depleted supplies.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

I've never actively tried to kill myself.

He throws the pills into his mouth and washes them down with a handful of water to get the process rolling as he then heads straight for the refrigerator, grabs the remaining stray beers, opens one and begins to drink.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

I don't see this as a cry for help since I've been living this way for years and no one seems to have a clue.

After chugging the first beer opens the second and starts to drink, quickly polishing off this can as well before meander over to the bed to lie down. His steps are slow, and the path is crooked, a telltale sign that the pills active ingredients are being boosted by the brew.

He falls into bed, forcing himself to swallow a couple of times in an attempt to ease his burning throat that comes with this mixture of vices. At the same time, his breathing begins to slow and grow shallower with every passing moment.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

I'm not a huge fan of the acid reflux, shortness of breath or twitching that comes with the early stages of sedation...

Doug's body twitches and jerks in a way that would be frightening if he were able to witness it with his own eyes.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

...but there's that moment where everything just kicks in and you're like...



The sleep-deprived spaceman's body finally goes limp.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

The funny this is, once I hit this phase of intoxication, the last thing I want in the world is to ruin the experience by actually going to bed.

Doug smiles as he snuggles into his blankets and looks extremely relaxed for the first time since tonight's sleep struggle began. It takes a while before he finally starts to snore.

Doug finds himself, fully lucid, in that realm of sleep where it feels like you don't exist.



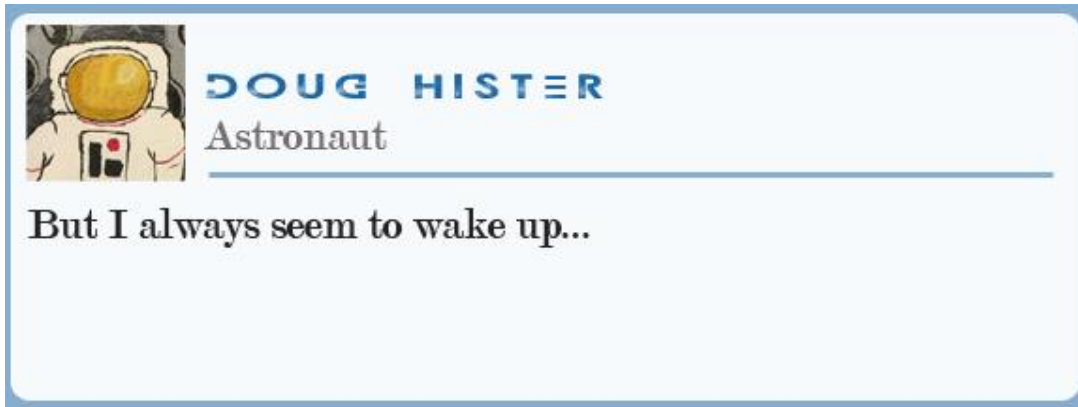
DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

If I were guaranteed that death was exactly like sleep, I would kill myself today.

Though his body remains lifeless, he continues to snore away.

After hours of hibernation, Doug finally awakes, opening one eye at a time without moving the rest of his body.



He then rolls to his side to stare at the wall as he's taken back to the day when he decided to live it up a little and visit a roller coaster filled theme park. He's mid-ride in this memory, with everyone else riding with their hands up and screaming with terrified excitement.



Doug sits with his arms crossed until the ride comes to a stop and the safety rail lifts allowing him to exit the ride. He looks extra pathetic as he gets stuck behind a group of rambunctious riders who talk about the experience with genuine enthusiasm in their voices.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

I'm bored all the time.

“That was so great,” the first rider yells!

His buddy replies, “Turn two was so awesome!”

“Yeah it was! I thought I was going to break my back,” the third riders adds which gets the other two to laugh as they seek out their next adventure. Doug watches with a blend of jealousy and judgment, fully aware that this is the same exact brand of obnoxious enthusiasm that he and his friends used to share.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

Life seems to be about shared experiences.

He continues to walk through the crowd, hearing snippets of other people's park experience. The words are muffled and blurred together through his space-helmet's insulation, but there's no question that these are the sounds of fun.

The crowd parts almost magically as if magnetic forces were clear the perfect path for the giant spaceman.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

This leads me to question, if one is alone all the time, having no one to share experiences with, are they alive at all?

Doug takes notice of the parting crowd and spots a similar opening up ahead. He watches and walks until the parting paths connect and he finds a giant monkey mascot heading his way.

This being an adventure based theme park no one seems to have time for this loveable mascot as they're all far too busy racing toward their next line. Doug locks eyes with the monkey and the two study one another as they pass.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

I haven't always been alone.

The two misfits wave at one another as they continue on in opposite directions. Doug begins to pat his pocket as the song *Would You Like to Swing on a Star* starts to play.

Doug wakes in the same bed only years earlier and begins to feel around for his phone as the ringtone continues to play the tune *Would You Like to Swing On a Star?* He rolls to his side to find the phone on the floor as he reaches out to grab it he finds himself in the exact same situations as his ghost of a girlfriend from his earlier imagined scene.

“Fuck you, you cock sucking fuck,” he yells as the phone finally goes silent.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

I had a tight group of fellow astronauts who I used to hang out with on the regular.

Doug rocks back and forth until he finally builds up the momentum to swing the top half of his body off of the bed, catching himself with his dominant arm to avoid doing a face plant while grabbing the phone with his free hand.

He turns the phone to find a text that reads, “Hey douchebag, you coming over or what???”

With a smile he texts back, “I’ll be there in a bit... gaytard,” before losing the strength in the arm holding him up which leads him to lower himself and do a clumsy ninja role to the ground.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

I don’t know if they knew or believed it but these people meant the world to me to the point where they reassured my sense of existence.

He arrives at a space-deck where a group of eight astronauts hang out. This is a different group than the one from the bar where Doug had his run-in with the bow-clad space-girl since that collection of drunks dissolved due to typical rookie mistakes that often happen amongst people as they navigate early twenties living.

Everyone in this new group has a drink in one hand, with a fifty/fifty blend of cigarette smokers. To top things off, there are bags of marijuana vapor floating around the table that everyone takes hits from time to time.

They all raise their glasses in cheers as Doug makes his way to a chair, plops down and is instantly greeted with a drink.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

I knew many of these people for over a decade.

Doug raises his face-shield as he looks to the astronaut on his left who blatantly braces himself for a conversation.

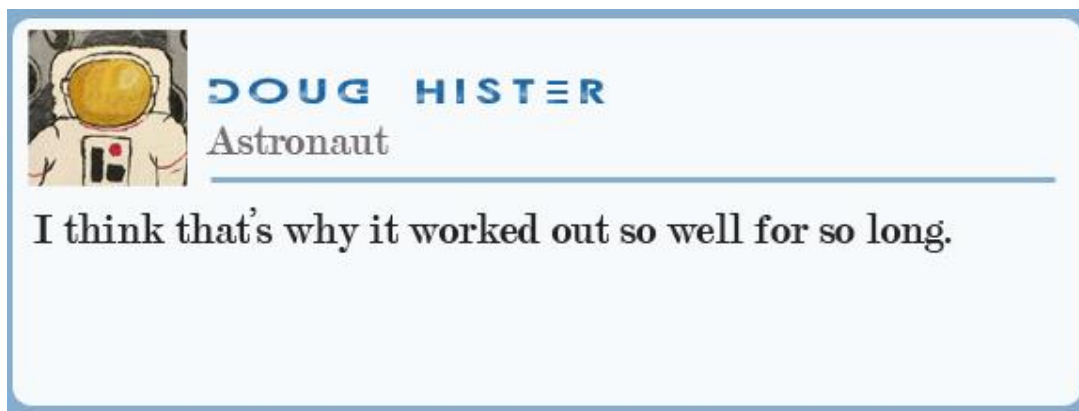


DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

I don't know if I've ever had a personal conversation with any of them?

Doug quickly closes his face-shield and switches gears to start entertaining the group through silly gestures and smoke tricks.



These silly gestures put this fellow astronaut on his left at ease as he mirrors back the awkward actions. From this point on, Doug only lifts his face-shield to drink, smoke or chime in with an occasional joke or quick story.

Others have more detailed conversations that might “go deep” in terms of stoner talk, but for the most part, the topics are light and intended to provoke laughter. The astronauts across from Doug are in the middle of what could be a heated debate if only it made any sense.

“Well, have you read the copy of *Catch 22* I lent you yet,” the first astronaut asks.

“Yeah, it’s amazing how it’s totally like what’s going on right now,” astronaut two responds.

“I know, crazy right,” the first astronaut adds with a laugh.

Astronaut two isn’t as entertained, “Doesn’t that make you scared?”

“What,” the confused first astronaut questions?


“The fact that it’s obviously what’s going on with the world right now,” astronaut two adds?

“What do you mean, it’s just a book,” the first astronaut replies without a hint of concern.

“A book that’s clearly a warning about what’s actually happening only on a larger scale.” Though the second astronaut’s voice is building in intensity, it’s clear by

how all the others react that these two are at it like this all the time due to their *Goofus and Gallant*-like relationship.

“I know right. It’s fucking crazy.” Astronaut one is clueless as to how infuriating he is as astronaut two has to walk away to collect himself, igniting laughter from the rest of the group as he leaves. Meanwhile, Doug watches on and is highly entertained like as if the stoner debate was playing out on a TV screen.



DOUG HISTER
Astronaut

I was allowed to just be myself, at least the self that I was comfortable sharing with my world.

Doug accepts a bag of marijuana vapor when it’s passed and fills his helmet with the smoke. This gets the entire group to burst out into laughter, providing the proper relief from what little tension that’s left in the air from the *Catch 22* conversation.

Doug watches as one of the female astronauts stands to leave.




DOUG HISTER
Astronaut

Sometimes, these astronaut friends would have to go off on missions of their own.

Everyone stands for to say their goodbyes. The farewell hugs are long and filled with enough emotions to provide evidence that this is going to be more than just a

quick trip. At the same time, the interactions are also light enough that it's also clear that her departure isn't indefinite.




DOUG HISTER
Astronaut

Which was fine because it was rare that they never came back.

Though no one else seems concerned, Doug watches her walk out the door and is struck by an overwhelming sense that he's about to be abandoned. Luckily, he's able to hide his emotions within his helmet as he manages to fit in one last exchange of goodbye waves that almost went unnoticed.

Doug gets lost in thought.



DOUG HISTER
Astronaut

True friends can disappear for years and I don't feel hurt at all.

With a blink of an eye, he finds himself in the future where he's reunited with his fleeing female friend. They're now both in their eighties, but other than the added wrinkles and grey hair they're both the same exact people as far as their awkward personalities go.

"Now what were you saying about Alanis Morissette," she asks in between swigs of beer?

Old Doug raises his face-shield somewhat surprised, "Wow, that was a long time ago," then takes a swig of his own before he continues. "That song where she sings about blowing the guy from *Full House*."

The long lost buddy chuckles as she braces herself for Old Doug's insights, "*You Oughta Know*, yeah?"

"Yeah, that one," Old Doug confirms with excitement before he adds, "I always thought she sang something about a cross-eyed bear as well."

She can barely hold in her laughter as she corrects him, "You mean, 'the cross I bear that you gave to me'?"

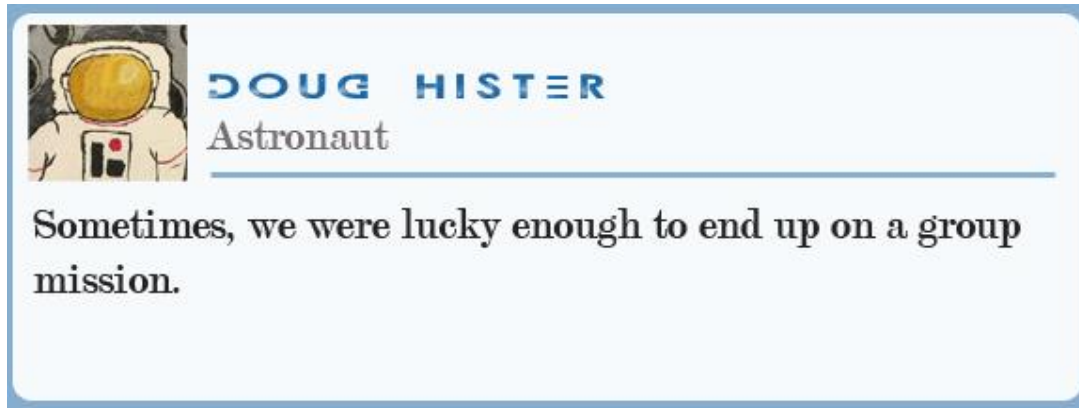
"Yeah, I know that now," Old Doug laughs, "It was just much more adorable when I thought the song was about teddy bears and blowjobs."

This gets them both laughing before they close their face-shields and return their focus to the rest of the group of also aged astronauts who are all still sitting in the same exact positions around the table while astronauts one and two are in the middle of yet another dumb bout of bickering.



Old Doug's smile quickly fades as he looks around the table and realizes that this touching reunion is nothing more than his overactive imagination acting up once again. His smile isn't the only thing to fade as everyone dematerializes one after the next.

The astronauts then rematerialize as a group while Doug remembers back to the day where he and his space traveling cohorts were loaded up into a shuttle bus in the middle a cross-country trip.



Doug rides shotgun with another astronaut behind the wheel. The driver is a bit slap happy as he dances in the seat, singing along with the radio in an attempt to keep his eyes open which is more of a battle than his high energy antics might let on to the other.



Meanwhile, the others are in the back with a rowdy energy, like a bunch of kids on a family trip, poking and prodding one another, a bit stir crazy from being trapped in the shuttle bus for so long.

The only thing that differentiates this crew from kids are the hip flasks they sneak swigs off of from time to time to cope with the monotony of their passenger role in their journey deeper into space than usual.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

I get it though. I wouldn't want to do this for the rest of my life if it didn't come so naturally.

Doug is fully onboard with the merriment and is committed to his shotgun task of keeping the driver awake. He too is sleep deprived and a tad bit drunk but is still on the ball enough to chime in with jokes while also controlling the playlist, taking requests like a cheesy FM deejay.

After giving the weather and traffic to lead into the next set of songs, something catches Doug's attention in a distant dairy field off to his side of the shuttle bus. He goes quiet and stares as he watches as one of the cows lifts off the ground and land in a nearby tree. The magical movement appears more like someone moving an object in Photoshop and not any possible form of natural liftoff.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

I just don't know any other way to live.

No one else in the shuttle bus notices either Doug's silence or the curious cow because they're too focus on singing along to *The Thong Song* while also reenacting the dance moves from the classic Sisqo video.

He continues to stare at the cow in the tree as they pass until the song goes silent. After a second of hesitation, he turns toward the back of the shuttle bus to ask, “I know this is completely irrational, but did anyone else see that cow in the tree?”

This causes the group to go silent as they process the question while also attempting to gauge how serious Doug is in questioning this impossible feat for a heifer. They eventually do realize that he’s being real which causes them all to burst into laughter almost simultaneously.

“No you space cadet, there’s no cow in any tree,” one of the passengers in the back replies as the super long intro to *The Final Countdown* starts to play.

Doug shrugs off the laughter as his eyes widen while the shuttle bus approaches a giant statue of a cow, “You do see that, right?”

A different backseat astronaut adds, “Yes, we can see the giant cow statue, but it’s definitely not in a tree.” This gets everyone to laughs again until the actual lyrics of song finally begin to play, and everyone shifts their attention back to singing.

The driver looks to Doug, who’s still studying the surroundings, and informs him, “I love you, but you’re insane. I think that may be why I love you.”

Doug looks closer at the giant statue and notices an alien sitting on top. He takes a breath, ready to speak, but decides to stay silent.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

What can I say? You see strange things in space and sometimes it's much easier to just keep it to yourself.

The alien waves at Doug, who sneaks his hand up to give a little wave back without any of the other passengers noticing.



DOUG HISTER


Astronaut

I truely think that I'm losing my mind...




Doug stares off into space as the rest of the shuttle bus continues to karaoke through the countdown song.

Doug wakes to find himself in a doctor's office, strapped to a chair with all kinds of wires attached to his body and head to read his vital signs while tracking his brain activity.



DOUG HISTER
Astronaut

I have an irrational fear of pigeons.



He's shown an image of a pigeon which causes the monitors in the control room to instantly go crazy with extreme activity, leading one woman in a lab coat to rush into the examination room to snatch the image from her coworker's hand before reassuring Doug that everything will be okay.

With a blink of an eye, Doug then finds himself in the middle of a college physics lecture. The professor scribbles all kinds of crazy formulas on a chalkboard system that takes up almost the entire lecture hall.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

I used to be really good at math...

He flinches with a cringe every time the chalk makes contact with the slate.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

...but I never followed through with my education,
partially because I couldn't afford it...

He continues to flinch and cringe until it becomes unbearable to the point where he feels the need to sneak out of the room.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

...but mainly because it makes my teeth hurt whenever I
see people using chalk, or just see chalk and chalk related
products in general.

He breaks into a sprint the moment he clears the doorway.

He doesn't get far before having to stop and catch his breath, completely unaware that he's landed right in front of the science lab, too busy huffing and puffing to be startled by the furry beast of an arm that pulls him into the room.

He wakes moments later to find that this isn't your typical college science lab but more of a dungeonus den you might expect to see in an old mad scientist movie. He's tied to a chair with his head restrained *A Clock Work Orange* style forcing him to observe a plastic pitcher filled with water. Next to the pitcher is a bowl of pennies which triggers a look of concern.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

I have a weird thing when it comes to textures.

Doug opens and closes his jaw, tweaking it back and forth as if trying work through an issue with his inner ears since his restrained hands deny access to any of his digits to really dig-in to wiggle at his itch.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

Just thinking of a pile of pennies getting dumped into a plastic pitcher filled with water is enough to make me want to jab myself in the ear with an ice pick.

Doug's eyes widen as the monster's hand reaches out for the bowl of pennies and lifts it up to the pitcher's lid which is enough inspiration to get Doug to burst out of

his restraints and flees, barely missing the avalanche of pennies splash and sink into their new watery home.

After making this escape, Doug gets extra panicked as he navigates the street to get back to his space-based abode. Upon arrival, he rushes in, slams the hatches and latches every lock that's available.

He then takes another moment to catch his breath on his way over to the workstation where he clicks a few links to find the newest installment of *The Howard Stern Show* on his online satellite radio account and settles in to be entertained.



“Hey now... Good morning everybody,” Howard greets the listeners. “We’re about to go straight to a quick commercial to get it out of the way since we have a big show today. I’m excited to hear from today’s line up of guests Tom Arnold, Tommy Lee, and Nina Blackwood from the old MTV days...”

Doug takes a hammer and smashes the computer speakers.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

I love Howard Stern and talk radio in general and listen no matter who's the guest. That said there are certain people who over breathe, randomly chew, or make other disgusting human noises that have led me to break more than a headphone or two to silence the sounds of life.

His shoulders slowly slouch as the consequences of his actions set in, and he finds himself in silence. Desperate for stimulation, he stares at a pile of junk mail, getting lost in thought as he focuses on an ad filled with coupons for deliverable pizza.

This takes him back to a time where he was sitting in a booth with a tray filled with pizza. A couple of buddies join him having just refilled their trays with piles of food from the all you can eat pizza buffet.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

I get freaked out by any noises that remind me of the inner workings of a human being.

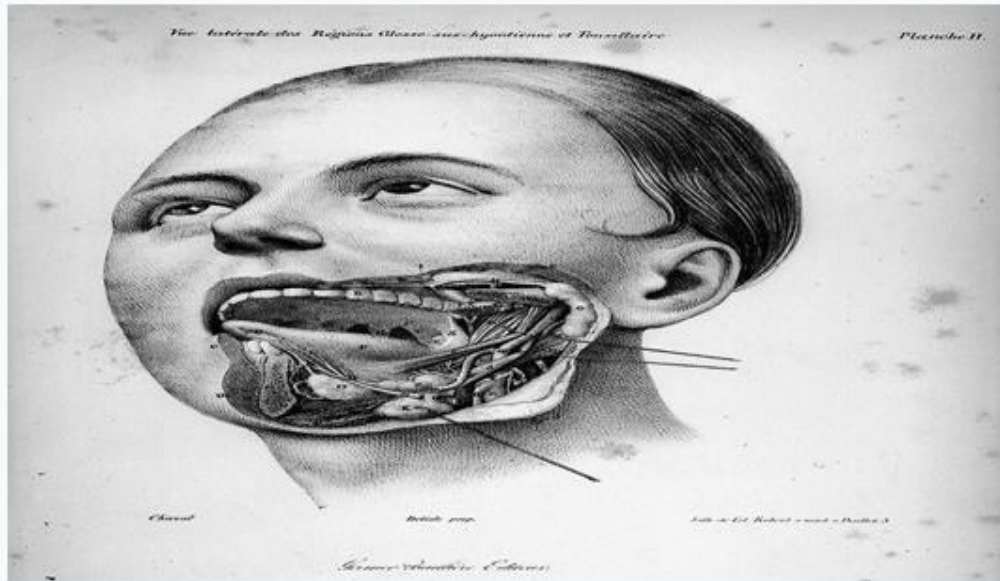
This isn't the most well-mannered group, as there's a fair share of lip-smacking and talking with mouths full during the meal. Doug is just as vulgar only every chomp, swallow, and gulp is amplified by his helmet, to the point where it nearly drives him mad.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

Whenever I hear these sounds, all I can picture is skin being ripped away from the face like in those old school ads that showed how medicine worked.



Everyone's skin is ripped away as they continue to eat. Doug is more offended by this imagined faux pas than he is by the sounds alone. "This is fucking disgusting," Doug blurts out punctuating his disgust it with a loud wet burp.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

Some of these noises are funny though.

Everyone laughs as they continue to eat.

Doug finally wakes in his space bed back in present time but is still in a bit of a sedated haze. A beauty pageant plays on the TV only it's not your average pageant as these are just regular girls dressed however they want, and each looks good in their own particular way.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

It drives me crazy how judgmental I am, considering how much I hate being judged myself.

He watches the girls as they make their way across the stage without a single attempt at a runway strut from anyone in the bunch.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

I get especially critical when it comes to those who I wish to get close to in any way.

A contestant with long dried out hair does her walk. She's a traditionally gorgeous woman, making it hard for Doug to find a flaw but that doesn't stop his eagle eye from scanning this beauty who's out on display to be judged.

She turns, revealing a better look at her blown out frizzy hair which rouses an audibly disturbed grunt out of Doug as he continues to watch with a pooh-pooing face that he can't seem to control.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

There's something about long dried out hair that puts an image in my head of a bunch of dead cells which leads me to struggle to connect this style with beauty.

A plus-sized type then takes to the stage. Even though there's no way that anyone would say that she's ugly, her looks are more quirky and cute than the sexy and fake look that even plus-sized models usually aim for. Either way, she's totally Doug's type, but he still watches her with the same critical eye.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

I wish Americans weren't so big...

He starts to mutters to himself as he begins to rock back and forth in order to get his own fat ass out of bed.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

I know this is a horrible/hypocritical way to think but my gripe isn't really an issue with appearance.

Doug continues to check her out until he's taken back to a memory of one of the plus-sized girls from his past where he sits with her on a large comfy couch in her condo. The two watch only to be interrupted by the ding of the microwave which causes her to leave to retrieve the treasure.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

Every time I date a girl as unhealthy as me, we both end up fatter for the wear.

She returns with a fantastic spread of snacks foods, and Doug looks amazed, “You did all of this in the microwave?”

She responds with a smile and without saying a word, she pulls down the center backrest of the couch to reveal a hidden serving surface between the two of them. Doug can barely hold in his excitement, “Oh my god, this is amazing!”

While remaining silent, she places the food between the two of them, and they dig in.



DOUG HISTER

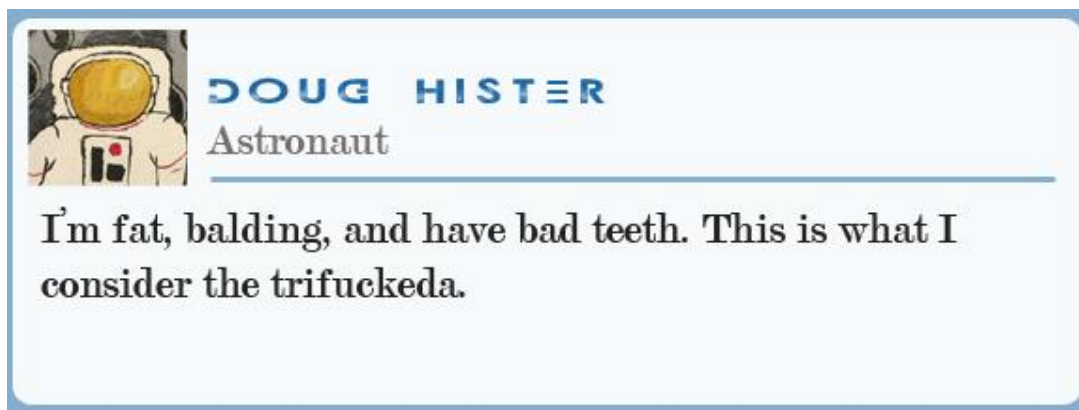
Astronaut

I hate myself for how fat I am.

The two focus more on the food and television than on one another. It turns out they're actually watching the same beauty pageant from Doug's apartment, and Doug can be seen waiting in the wings dressed in a tiny bikini over his spacesuit.



Doug steps out and does his walk. The crowd reacts the same way that the audience reacts to seeing King Kong for the first time in the classic version of the movie, either flashing off pictures of the beast or screaming at the sight of the monstrosity that is Doug.



Doug opens his face-shield to reveal a huge glossy smile to where the Vaseline covering teeth highlights the flaws instead of amplifying the whiteness. His make-up, which he obviously applied himself, backfires as well and is so off-putting that it causes the place to go silent as everyone studies this mess of a man with utterly captivated fascination.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

I've never felt wanted by anyone, because of this, I've always figured why not be a perfectionist is love is but a fantasy when all is said and done?

Doug closes his face-shield and walks off the stage, dejected.

Doug enters a psychiatrist office has a seat in the waiting area and studies his options of reading materials. Anything dealing with news seems too depressing, considering the purpose of this visit, at the same time the pop culture rags are too frivolous considering the state of the world. This leaves nothing but a copy of *Highlights Magazine* which Doug grabs and flips straight to the back to attempt to find all of the hidden objects.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

Maybe I should work on the way that I think???

A few moments go by before the receptionist enters the room with a clipboard in hand. “Doug,” she asks in a way that’s a greeting as well as a confirmation. Doug looks up after finding a cow in the tree. “You can come on back, the doctor’s ready to see you,” she adds before leading the neurotic spaceman down the hall.




DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

Then again, who’s to say that I am the crazy one in the first place? If anything, I feel that my detachment allows me to see the truths that the “sane” seem to suppress or at least don’t speak of out loud in order to hide the fact that we’re being fucked from every direction.

Doug notices a book on the receptionist's desk as they pass on the way down the hall. He seems lost in thought as he gets a good look at the cover.


This vision is enough to send Doug back to a bookstore on the exact day that inspired him to seek help for the first time, so many years ago. He explores the space like it's another planet as he stumbles upon a section devoted to space travel only all the books on the shelves are dedicated to self-help.



DOUG HISTER
Astronaut

Years ago, I discovered a book that finally put a name to the way that I feel.

He notices a book titled *I Hate You, Don't Leave Me* and picks it up as if it were his *Rosetta Stone*. The title alone is enough to speak to the spaceman leading him to study the cover with such focus that a passerby could easily mistake what they're witnessing as knowledge being gained through osmosis.



DOUG HISTER
Astronaut

I didn't even have to open it because I just knew...

He flips the book to check out the back cover and what he reads is almost enough to send the astronaut to tears.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

There was a list on the back cover filled with symptoms of a mental disorder. Never in my life have I ever related that much to a collection of words written by a stranger's hand.

After a moment of being lost in thought, he looks around and notices that he's drawing a crowd. Not wanting the attention, he swings the book under his arm and rushes toward the cashier to pay.

The store then dissolves as Doug finds himself back in the psychiatrist's hallway where the receptionist opens the door to the therapist's office and gestures to Doug to go inside, and he enters the room filled with confidence.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

I was totally prepared for this. No more denial or putting things off, I was finally going to get everything off my chest for once and for all.

The confidence turns to shock as he stops in his tracks to take in the decor of the room. There are no bookcases filled with leather-bound guides to the inner workings of the brain, no wall filled with degrees, no grey-haired old man smoking a pipe, and no sign of a lounge chair for Doug to recline in, as he spills his guts about his life.

It's just some an office with a desk and two chairs. "What, no lounge chair," Doug asks himself out of pure befuddlement, not noticing that the psychiatrist entered the room right behind him.

“You watch too many movies,” the doctor chuckles as he squeezes past Doug to take his seat and instantly starts flip through Doug’s file.

This startles any leftover sense of confidence right out of Doug’s fragile little mind, “Sorry, I didn’t...”

“Have a seat,” the psychiatrist insists, without even acknowledging Doug’s attempt to use his words to explain the awkward situation, in fact, he never even looks up from the file as if the paperwork were more critical than his patient’s mental health.

Doug slumps into the chair, defeated.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

He never even made an attempt to shake my hand or share pleasantries with his introduction... and what about that whole movie thing? I’ve only said eight words and already feel super judged.

Even though only a couple minutes pass, it feels more like an hour before the doctor ever really acknowledges the giant spaceman sitting across from him. When he does look up from his notes, it’s only to gauge Doug’s physical appearance to jot down in the templated document that he’s filling out to create evidence that he’s putting in the work that Doug’s insurance is paying for.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

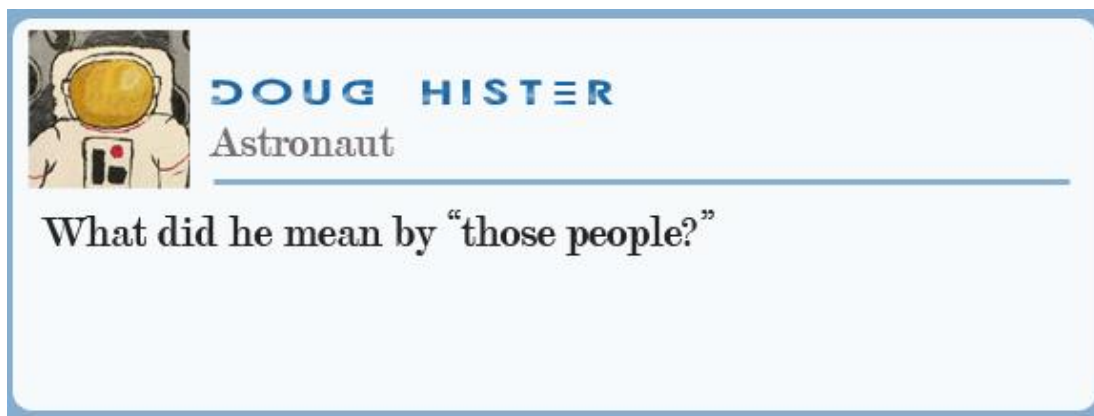
Oh well, I guess I’ll just make the best of it.

“So what brings you in today,” the doctor finally asks, still too preoccupied with his busy work to look up from his notes?

Doug leans forward in his seat, “Well, I read this book, and think that I have Borderline Personality Disorder.”

This bombshell finally pulls the doctor's attention from his paperwork. “Yeah, you don’t want that. Those people are very difficult to deal with,” he says before instantly picking up where he left off in filling out his forms.

If the doctor were paying attention to Doug instead of his files, he’d have gotten to witness what it looks like when a man’s spirits are entirely drained from his body.



“Based on what it says in your files it looks like you’re suffering from just run of the mill depression,” the doctor says with a smile as he hands Doug a prescription.

This instant shutdown turns Doug into a shell of a man as the doctor places the prescription in his hand. Luckily, this script has a *Post-It*-like sticky back because he no longer has the willpower to grasp.

“Let’s get you started on these, and we’ll schedule a follow up in a month. It should take the medicine that long to start working, so we’ll then be able to pick things up and go from there,” the doctor says as he shows Doug the door.

With a blink, Doug finds himself at his space-station medicine cabinet where he dumps a hand full of pills into his hand, shuts the cabinet door and watches himself in the mirror as he throws the pills into his mouth to then wash down with a swig of rum a coke.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

I was good at taking my pills... but that's mainly because I was more interested in what they would do "to me" and not what they would do "for me."

He then wanders out to the living room, stopping at the bay window to stare out at the universe.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

I might have gone back to that guy to get more drugs but the whole process seemed rather pointless especially since I had easier access to even better narcotics where the drug pusher involved didn't have to put on a facade that he gave a shit about me as a person.

Doug takes another drink then continues to stare off into the heavens until he's brought back to a different psychiatrist office filled with the same disappointments, no lounge chair, no leather-bound books, just a desk, a couple of regular chairs and a new stuffy white guy with his head buried in Doug's files.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

I did eventual give therapy another shot.

Doug leans forward in his seat as he describes his old doctor to this new one. “I told him that I read a book, and think that I have Borderline Personality Disorder he told me I didn’t want that and said it was just run of the mill depression based solely on a form that I filled out in the waiting room.”

This new doctor looks up from studying the same exact form that Doug filled out just before this session. “That other doctor may have been wrong with saying that you were just depressed. I think that you have definite signs of Bipolar Disorder, but he is right that you don’t want to be Borderline,” he replies sticking a new prescription to Doug’s lifeless hand before showing him to the door.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

I don’t know why it never came to me to just ask what it would take to get them to agree, especially since that’s the way I worked them to get any drug that I wanted to test recreationally.

With another blink, Doug finds himself back at his space-station medicine cabinet as he throws another hand full of pills into his mouth.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

The real problem is that I only work up the nerve to seek professional help when I’m on an upswing and afraid of the inevitable moment that the bottom might drop out on my positive mood.

Doug washes these pills down with a pull off of a bottle of red wine which sends him to yet another doctor's office who places yet another new prescription into Doug's lifeless hand.

"Bipolar II," he says as he stands to lead Doug to the door triggering another blink and another trip to the space-station medicine cabinet where this time he washed down his new pills by chugging from a forty-ouncer of *Olde E*.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

That, or when I wanted to restart my prescriptions after my illicit sources ran dry and I wanted more than an over the counter-buzz.

Yet another doctor hands Doug yet another prescription. "Bipolar IIB," this doctor informs Doug as he stands to lead him out of the room and back to the medicine cabinet he goes for more pills to be washed down by whatever adult beverage he can find.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

He informed me that the B stood for beneficial which explains my hyper productive activities during manic phases that lead to extra hard crashes when my ambitious efforts fail.

Doug is so high from all the pills and booze that he zombie walks across the living room, collapses in bed and starts to snore.

Based on his jaw-dropped dumbstruck face alone, it's hard to tell whether or not we're witnessing a dream as Doug finally enters a psychologist's office that lives up to the one he's been picturing in his head.

There are beautiful bookshelves filled with leather-bound books about the inner working of the human brain. The back wall is covered with framed credentials. There's an office desk only it's hidden in the back of the room, but most importantly there's a leather chair set at the head of a lounge chair, just like a psychologist office is supposed to look according to movies and TV.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

And then this happened.



He continues to stare at the empty chair in awe until Dr. Murray catches his attention as she approaches with her hand extended to greet her first-time patient. Doug studies her hand just long enough for the trained professional to note the quirk, but only she doesn't let on that it's an awkward introduction.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

I don't care what this woman had to say, she had the chair which is what I've been seeking for most of my adult life.

“Pleased to meet you, I’m Dr. Murray,” Dr. Murray says as she watches Doug finally grasp her hand following the above mention slow approach.

“Oh... yeah... I’m Doug... It’s good to meet you too,” he stammers as the grasp in question closes too soon leading to one of those horrible handshakes that can leave you unable to focus for the rest of the conversation while you think about how to justify a redo to prove it isn’t your signature move.

“Would you like to have a seat,” she asks?

“I’d love to,” Doug blurts out in utter delight as he hops onto the lounge.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

She never looked at my file in front of me... not once... this allowed me to feel her full presence in the room and not that she was just doing her job.

Dr. Murray smiles as she watches Doug settle into the lounge with pure joy. “So Doug, let’s talk about how I can help you today,” she suggests?

Doug hesitates as his enthusiasm over the chair gives way to the reality of the emotions that he’s supposed to share in said chair sink in. This leads him to weigh his options as to what information he’s willing to give.



DOUG HISTER
Astronaut

It's been a long time since I've mentioned the words **Borderline Personality Disorder** to any of my therapist, but this woman seemed different, like she really cared.

Doug slowly lifts his face-shield to share, "I think I have Borderline Personality Disorder," then slowly lower the face-shield back down as he waits to gauge her reaction.

"Tell me why you think this," Dr. Murray questions as she leans in, intrigued.

Doug quickly raises the face-shield in shock to reply with a startled, "What?"

Again, the doctor doesn't even give a micro-expression of a hint that there's anything wrong with Doug unusually response. "Tell me why you think you have Borderline Personality Disorder, that is why you're here isn't it," she asks again in an encouraging tone?

Doug is still hesitant as he analyzes whether or not to take the statement of, "that is why you're here isn't it," as a subtle attack. "Sorry, even though your delivery sounds very sincere with a caring tone, no doctor's ever asked me to talk about it. Normally, they just tell me that I'm wrong and that it's just depression or some form of bipolar disorder."

Dr. Murray gives an understanding nod, "I'm sorry that's happened in the past. Up until a couple of years ago, doctors did avoid diagnosing people with Borderline Personality Disorder for insurance reasons because it can be a challenging disorder to treat. It can also get rather expensive to find the right fit with a doctor who has the training to properly handle a Borderline's special needs while dealing with their volatile moods and trust issues."

"Wow, thank you for being so open," Doug replies, genuinely stunned by the fact that he's not getting the run around again. After a moment, the frustrations from past runarounds begin to set in as he adds, "So wait, does this mean that for the last fifteen years I've been driving myself crazy trying to get help for a disorder that no one's willing to diagnose?"

Dr. Murray raises her hands in an apologetic surrender, "Let's try not to focus on labels and try to focus on making you feel better until I can make a more accurate diagnosis." Doug falls back onto the lounge and closes his face-shield to hide his emotional reaction.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

Part of me hated that this visit didn't end with a clear cut diagnosis but then the other part was overwhelmed to finally have someone to talk to who I felt was actually there to listen.

Dr. Murray smiles as she studies Doug's reaction, "Why did you close your mask?"

A muffled, "Just a second," leaks out of Doug's helmet before his chest rises and falls as he takes a deep breath.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

Here goes nothing...

Doug opens his face-shield to reveal his tear-filled eyes, "Well, I read a book." Dr. Murray nods to encourage Doug to continue on. This subtle encouragement does get noticed and leads him to grow more relaxed as he talks. "It had a checklist that

said if you have a certain amount of symptoms then you may have BPD. I had all the symptoms, so I never bothered to learn the number that it takes to qualify.”

“I don’t know if ‘qualify’ is how I’d put it,” Dr. Murray adds with a smile.

Doug smiles back as he realizes this is a worthy opponent for working through his problems, “You know what I mean.”

“I do know what you mean. Go on, explain the symptoms and how you feel they relate to your concerns,” she requests, again in her sympathetic tone.

“Are you sure you’re a real doctor,” Doug playful asks? “All the other ones just wanted to get me out of their office with a prescription for some fancy new pill.”

Doug flashes back to the bookstore on the day that he discovered the book, *I Hate You, Don't Leave Me*, back to when he first read through the checklist on the back cover.

- **Frantic efforts to avoid real or imagined abandonment.**
- **A pattern of intense and unstable interpersonal relationships characterized by altering between extremes of idealization and devaluation.**
- **Identity disturbance: markedly and persistently unstable self-image or sense of self.**
- **Impulsivity in at least two areas that are potentially self-damaging.**
- **Recurrent suicidal behavior, gestures, or threats, or self-mutilating behavior.**
- **Affective instability due to a marked reactivity of mood.**
- **Chronic feelings of emptiness.**
- **Inappropriate, intense anger or difficulty controlling anger.**
- **Transient, stress-related paranoid ideation or severe dissociative symptoms.**

We follow him again as he rushes toward the front of the store with the book tucked under his arm, ready to pay whatever it cost for all the answers that he knows lie between the front and back covers. This time we stay with him as he waits in line for the next available cashier.

“Next,” Doug hears before stepping up to the front of the queue then quickly looks up from the book to try to predict the next available cashier who he’ll have to make small talk with while attempting to make his purchase.

To his surprise, he finds the plus-sized pageant girl from the TV. She seems intrigued by the way Doug keeps eyeing the back of the book with a look of relief. It’s as if she can also see the newly found enthusiasm of someone who’s finally ready to take on living life mixed with the quirky shyness of the neurotic from a rom-com movie as if this upcoming meet-cute is straight out of a piece of fiction.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

This disorder has doomed every single relationship I've ever been in, even those that never had the chance to develop past the introductory stage where I start to build my self-sabotaging paths.

The plus-sized cashier shows subtle signs that she finds Doug to be cute, in his little spacesuit. She can't wait to see what this purchase is that's making him so happy, so she rushes to complete her current transaction in her effort to investigate.

"Next," the plus-sized cashier calls out, leading Doug to approach with his book nervously. "How's your day been going so far," she asks with the slightest hint of flirtatious tone?

Doug tilts his head, unsure if she is, in fact, being flirtatious, or just good at customer service. Either way, the fact that he's now intrigued by these potential signs makes him a bit nervous to share such a personal purchase.

"It's going good," Doug bashfully replies. He tries to get a look at her name tag but is too self-conscious that it might appear that he's checking out her breasts since she's sporting quite a bit of cleavage. To avoid any confusion, Doug locks eyes with her in an as non-threatening of a way that he can while he hands her the book to be bought.

"This must be a good book. You seem like you can't wait to read it," she says as she accepts the books, notes the title and is just the slightest bit caught off guard by the topic. Again, Doug reads into this reaction even though it's incredibly subtle.

"Oh no, I just have a friend that's really hard to shop for, but this year..." Doug claims as he snatches the book back after declining a bag and raises it up to provide evidence, "...this year, I found it."

Doug forces a smile then goes on to ask, "Do you believe that lie?"

She smiles a heartwarming smile in return.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

I'm a fucking idiot..

It's early in the morning when Doug finds himself sitting on the plus-sized cashier's couch as she gets ready for work. She crosses the room, drying her hair from her shower as he uncomfortably watches TV.

- **Frantic efforts to avoid real or imagined abandonment.**

He keeps a bit of a nervous eye on her to make sure she doesn't disappear. Hiding his nerves, he eventually musters up the courage to ask, "You're coming back right?"

"Of course I'm coming back, it's my apartment," she says with a laugh before continuing on with her morning ablutions.




DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

Way to fill the silence, moron. I bet this is exactly the type of dumb shit that's going to fuck up my chances this time.

Doug nervously searches for words, "Yeah, no, I mean, do you want to do something later tonight?"

She puts on her bra as she returns to the room, “Maybe, it all depends.”




DOUG HISTER
Astronaut

This was definitely not a yes... It's over... I give up...

- **A pattern of intense and unstable interpersonal relationships characterized by altering between extremes of idealization and devaluation.**

“What are you going to be doing all day,” she asks as she returns to her room?

“I don't know,” he snaps out, only it would take another hypersensitive being to notice the hint of aggression.



DOUG HISTER
Astronaut

All day? Why not just today, or this afternoon? All day... that's it, she fucking hate's me and my worthless life... well, fuck her. At least I'm trying to make this work.

Doug watches her button her blouse as she heads to the kitchen to start the coffee maker.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

She's so perfect, I just wish that she seemed more willing to fully commit and turn this into a legitimate fling or better yet, an actual relationship.

"The museums are free today. You should check that out," she suggests as she pours herself a cup of coffee.

"I might," he replies as he continues to sneak peeks of her whenever she not blocked by a wall.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

You should stop telling me what to do with my life you fat whore.

Doug looks over and notices a pill bottle resting on the top of her purse.

- **Identity disturbance: markedly and persistently unstable self-image or sense of self.**

"I'm thinking about becoming a pirate," Doug announces as she heads back to the bedroom to continue to prepare for her day.

"Ew, pirates are gross," she says, in the same way, one might share their disinterest in a commonly loved food with no real malice behind her tone.

“Maybe an Eskimo then,” Doug replies as he inches toward the pills.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

She obviously hates me as an astronaut, so what the fuck does she want.

“Just be yourself, you goofball,” she says as she applies her makeup, with help from her bathroom mirror. She too focused on creating her look to notice Doug stalking her pills in the reflection.

“I don’t know what the fuck that means,” Doug snaps this time the touch of aggression is a bit more obvious, but this stems from Doug’s frustration over genuinely not knowing the concept of self, over any anger from the suggestion being made.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

Oops, don’t you hate it when what’s supposed to be an internal thought accidentally makes its way out, and loud?

Doug looks shocked that these words have escaped from his mouth especially using such a tone. He isn’t the only one to notice this slight overreaction as it’s off-putting enough to get the plus-sized cashier looks down the hall for more signs of what might be going on.

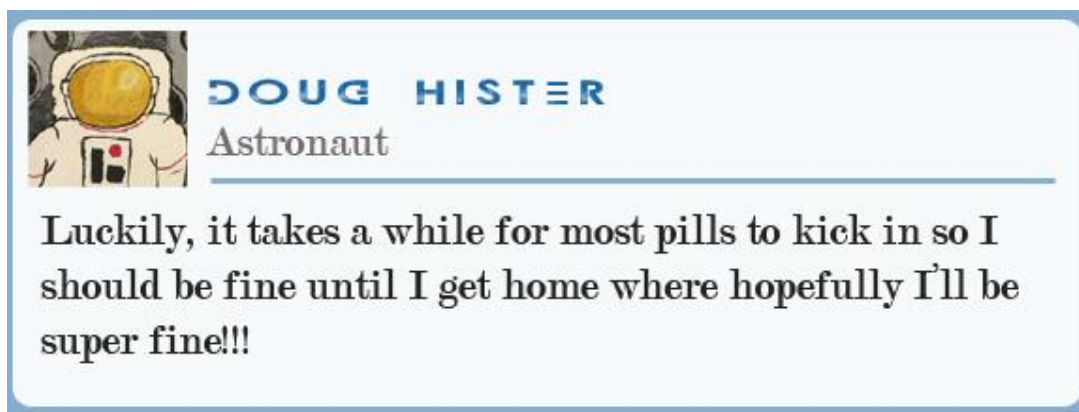
“You don’t have to be so angry about it,” she informs Doug in a half-joking tone as she waits for some form of answers to gauge the tone of his response.

He forces a smile that admits his guilt while also revealing, “Sorry, that was supposed to stay in my head.”

She laughs as she returns to painting her face, “You’re so crazy.”

- **Impulsivity in at least two areas that are potentially self-damaging.**

Doug snatches the bottle of pills and throws a few into his mouth, washing them down with a leftover drink from the night before without even checking to see what they are.



“Well, you know, that’s just me being me I guess,” Doug replies with enough sarcasm that it could sound like it’s coming from a bitter place.

- **Recurrent suicidal behavior, gestures, or threats, or self-mutilating behavior.**

The gap between Doug’s spacesuit and gloves reveal the, “WHY TRY,” scar.

- **Affective instability due to a marked reactivity of mood.**

The plus-sized cashier rejoins Doug in the living room to find a very guilty looking man. “What are you up to out here,” she playfully asks?

“Nothing,” he answers, too quickly to sound innocent.

She tilts her head with a smile that says, “Come on, come clean.”

“What you don’t believe me?” he says before shaking his head to try and wake himself up a little more. “Sorry, I’m still just tired, that’s all.”

She tilts her head to the other side; not thoroughly pleased, but also not all that offended.

“What,” Doug panics.

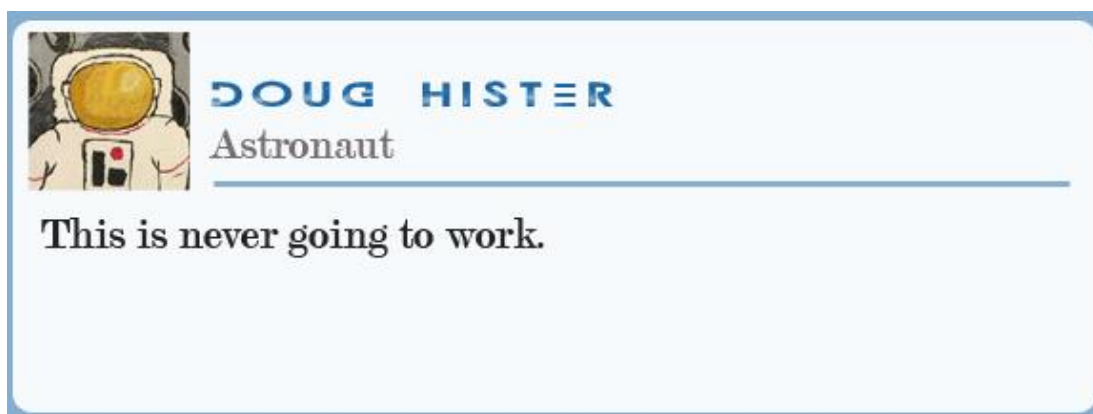
“Nothing,” she replies as she grabs a lunch container from the fridge.

“Sorry,” Doug pouts.

“It’s fine you weirdo,” she feels her ears then rushes back to her bedroom, “Oops, I forgot something.”

- **Chronic feelings of emptiness.**

She returns placing an earring in her ears, Doug watches her, again lost in her beauty.



Doug begins to fade away, leaving nothing but his spacesuit. Meanwhile, his potential mate returns, “Don’t forget to lock up when you leave. Just the one on the

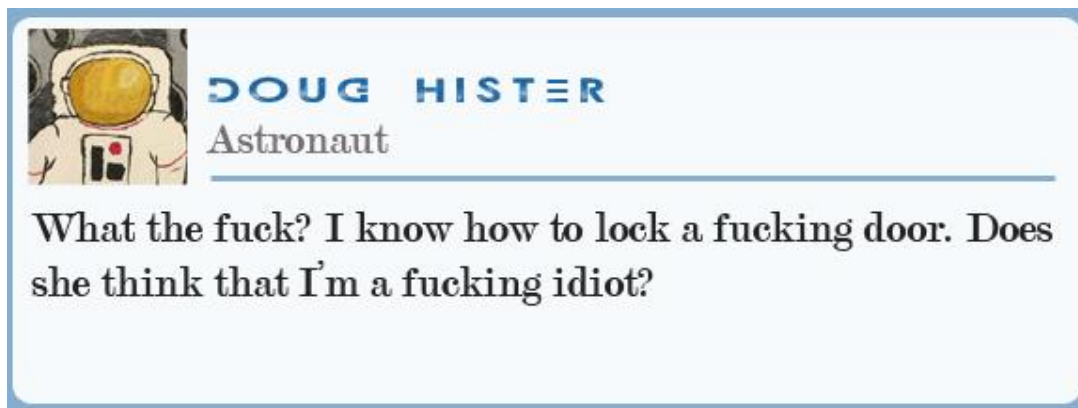
doorknob, you won't be able to do the deadbolt unless you have the key," she requests completely unaware that she's talking to an empty vessel. "Hey are you listening," she questions as she walks closer to investigate?

Doug snaps back into the suit, "Yeah, I got it, lock the door."

"Yeah, but only the bottom one," she adds as she grabs her purse.

- **Inappropriate, intense anger or difficulty controlling anger.**

"Yep, just the bottom," Doug holds in his anger as he squeezes the remote control to the verge of its breaking point.



She walks over to grab her purse and kisses Doug on the helmet, "Have fun whatever you decide to do," she adds before heading to the door.

"Will do. You have fun at work," Doug replies as he watches her leave. Loneliness sets in the second the door latches shut, and Doug finds himself panting trying to catch his breath.

- **Transient, stress-related paranoid ideation or severe dissociative symptoms.**



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

Oh, my God. What the fuck was that all about? If she wasn't over with me before, she's definitely over with me now. She knows I'm fucking crazy and went as far as to say it.

Doug stands and heads to the kitchen. His eyes begin to tear up as he frantically writes a goodbye letter to his latest failed attempt at a romance-based friend. After finishing the note he folds it into thirds and writes the word, "I'm sorry," on the top of the folded page.

He then heads back toward the couch to place the letter on the coffee table where he pauses for a moment before he turns and leaves.

Moments after he shuts the door it reopens so that Doug's hand can reach back in to turn the lock since he apparently forgot the first time around.

He then walks the streets with his head facing down as the drugs start to kick in and slow him down to the point where it looks like he's struggling to handle the lack of gravity.

Things get worse and worse until he finally finds his way home and falls into bed where he finds his comfort zone and goes back to staring at the wall.

Doug rolls away from the wall to find himself back on the psychologist's lounge chair and that he's actually turning back toward Dr. Murray after staring at her bookshelf while he shared his story.

Dr. Murray watches Doug settle with a genuine sense of empathy. "Well that definitely qualifies you for Borderline Personality Disorder," she goes on to inform him.

She delivers this news with the perfect blend of concern and humor that Doug needs in his life. "I qualify," he asks as tears of excitement fill his eyes, and he struggles to hold in his laughter?

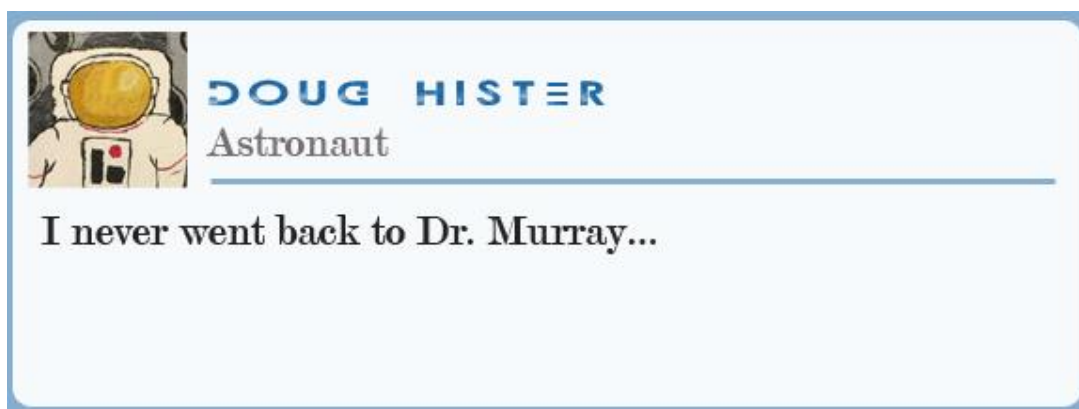
She nods and laughs, "If we're using your terms, yes, you qualify but, don't get too excited because I'm not saying that you are but based on what you've shared with me, this is a good jump off point."

His laughter becomes almost too hard to hold, but at the same time, his fighting off of tears gets to the point where there's no turning back, and he lets both emotions flow creating a hybrid of mental sounding chaos.

As ugly as this incident is, Dr. Murray has seen enough uncontrolled emotional responses in her line of work that she can appreciate the genuinely joyful moment as it plays out.

"Now let's figure out how we can work through this," she says as she places her hand on Doug's shoulder to reassure him that she's physically there.

"Thank you," Doug says as he wipes the tears from his eyes.



Doug exits the building with his arms raised above his head, "Fuck you, doctors! I told you... I told you... I was right... you fucks!" Doug spins as if this were a *Rocky* moment and had just gotten to the top of his stairs.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

This trip was just supposed to be a quick visit to get whatever drugs I could before my benefits ran out after getting laid off again due to another round of corporate downsizing.

It takes a couple of seconds, but Doug finally notices all the strange looks that he's getting from the sane people on their way to lunch which leads him to quickly settle himself down.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

As much as I needed her help, there was just no way I could possibly afford it, especially when thinking long-term.

“Sorry, I just found that I’m crazy,” he announces to the passersby within earshot.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

...but she did give me all the information that I needed so for that I owe her my gratitude and always hoped to be able to afford to see her again someday.

Doug enters the bar to meet his friends and secretly celebrate the results of his evaluation. He heads straight to the bartender, orders two pitchers, pays and waits for the drinks to be poured.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

I don't really know why I'm all that excited? The only thing that changed is that I now have a stranger with a PHD, who I'm never going to see again, that potentially agrees to a name that I have for my insanity.

He snatches up the pitchers as the bartender sets them down and heads over to a table where his group of astronaut friends are hanging out. "You're in a good mood tonight? What's up," one of his buddies asks after merely seeing Doug's confident walk?

Doug has a seat and pours two beers, "I just had a great day, that's all."

Another astronaut chimes in, "It must have been real good. We never see you out at the bar these days."

"Well get ready to see a lot more of me. I think I'm going to be spending a lot less time in space," Doug says as he raises his glass in cheers.

This leads the rest of the group joins in, "Cheers!"



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

One of the fun things about being emotionally unstable is how it's not just that small things can get you down, but even smaller things can build you up to the point where you feel like you can take on the entire world.

“You know the Germans wouldn’t consider this to be a beer,” one of the other astronauts informs Doug as he finishes his second beer.

“Really,” Doug replies, unclear if he even seems interested in the topic.

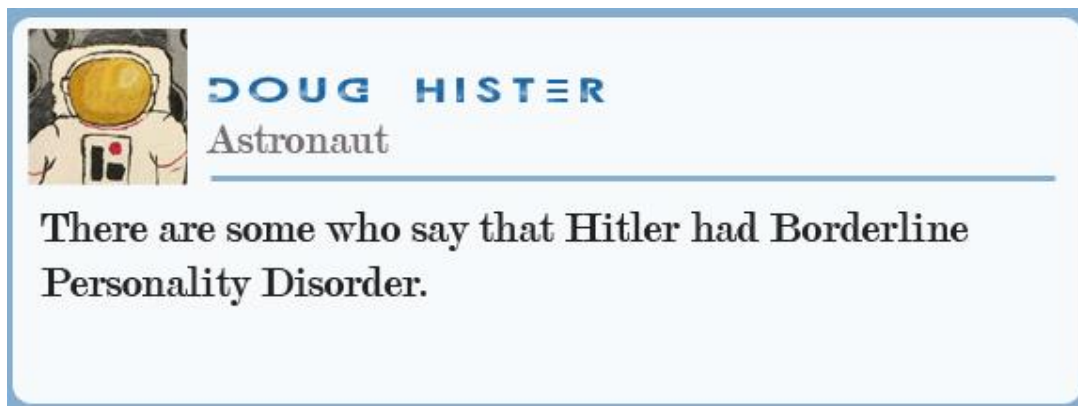
“Yeah, they got this thing called Reinheitsgebot. It’s a purity law that says for a beer to be considered a legitimate beer it has to have water, barley, and hops, that’s it, nothing else. That stuff you’re drinking has honey in it. Therefore it’s not beer,” the spaceman goes on to lecture.

“Oh, what do the Germans know about purity,” one of the other astronauts chimes in.

“Ouch,” Doug replies, putting on his best shocked-face, all the while laughing up a storm on the inside.

This leads everyone to start talking over one another leaving Doug lost in the indistinct murmur until he daydreams himself to a spot outside of a beer hall in Germany, 1932.

He watches on as a small man hidden by an easel painting a picture of the building from the other side of the street.



Another German walks in front of the beer hall and stops to stand right in the focal point of the painting in progress which triggers an annoyed grunt from the painter who’s still hidden behind the canvas as he attempts to continue with his work.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

I wonder if this horrible connection is another reason why they don't like to diagnose people with BPD?

The painter looks around the canvas to reveal that it's Happy Hitler.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

I also wonder what the world would be like if this angry man got the positive attention that he was seeking and actually made it as an artist instead of an evil dictator.



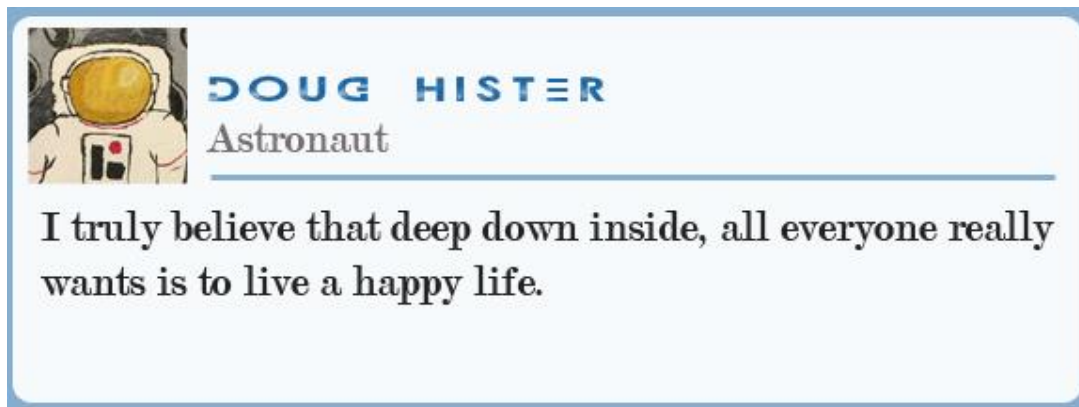
The German blocking the scene notices Happy Hitler and waves, “Oh, hi Hitler!” Happy Hitler waves back. “Oh hi. Just having a little trouble getting these bushes to look right,” he explains.

The German heads over to take a look, “Ah, just mix in a little light green, then hit the corner of that bush over there, creating a couple of highlights and that’ll fix it right up.”

The two-step back and look back and forth from the painting to the building and continue to tinker with brushes and colors until they both agree that it’s reached a strong stopping point.

“Thank you very much,” Happy Hitler says with a big smile.

“Oh, you’re welcome very much,” says the German as he walks away.



Doug wakes from the daydream to find that he’s back in the bar and pinching off his pee-pee. He and the rest of the patrons have been replaced by child versions of themselves. Child Doug stands and rushes to the bathroom with an “I’ve gotta pee,” pep in his step.

He passes many types of partying kids on his way to the bathroom; some older, some younger, but all preteen, each with drinks in their hands and a willingness to party as if they were still in their adult forms.

Even though the average age in the establishment has dropped by a least a decade, if not two, it’s surprisingly difficult to see any difference in the actions that these little patrons get up to.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

As I continue to get older and older, I'm starting to see that there is actually no such thing of the concept of maturity.



Child Doug bumps into a jock kid who instantaneously reacts with an over-aggressive shove as he threatens, "Watch it, you spaz."

Child Doug backs off right away, "Sorry, I didn't..."



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

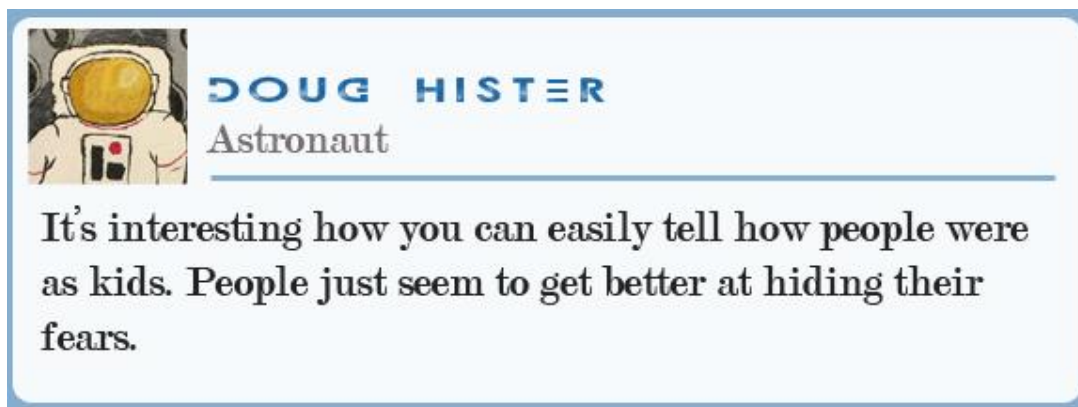
And when it comes to kids... well... some kids are just straight up assholes.

“I know you are,” the jock kid says as he high fives one of his pals.

Child Doug spots a Tomboy who watches this incident play out from the bar. He rolls his eyes to her as he rushes past the jock to continue to the bathroom. The Tomboy smiles and shakes her head, acknowledging the jock’s jerkish behavior but then can’t help but laugh when Child Doug instantly bumps into another child patron.

“Yeah, yeah, I know, I suck. Sorry, it’s just the helmet,” he apologizes as he turns back to check on the Tomboy only to run into a Pirate Child who’s exiting the same bathroom which is where Child Doug desperately needs to be. This causes the Kid Tomboy to crack up.

He crosses paths with a kid in a sleazy suit before finally reaching the first free urinal where he struggles to get out of his spacesuit.



Child Doug looks up from the urinal after fighting to free his junk and find a poster for a new car hanging on the bathroom wall. This sends his mind out to the street as the youthful astronaut magical find himself at a used car lot where the sleazy suit kid stalks him as his next potential customer.

The Kid Used Car Dealer pops up from behind Child Doug as if he were magically moved as well. “Looking for a used car today,” he asks?

Child Doug looks like a deer caught in head lights. “Nope, just looking at the cars, not planning on buying anything at this time,” he responds

The Kid Used Car Dealer cracks his knuckles as he thinks, “How about this?”



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

This guy has stolen at least one item out of every one of his female family members' purses at some point in his life.

“Seriously I have a car in the back that you’d love,” the pushy car kid insists but then looks around to see that Child Doug is gone without a trace.

After rushing around a corner, following his great escape, Child Doug now finds himself walking down a pretty unremarkable street until he realizes how, just like in the bar, all of the people who are out and about performing their daily routines have also been replaced by little kids.

He looks across the street in time to witness a Punk Kid who scrapes the wheel of his crappy car while he attempts to parallel-park. This Punk Kid doesn’t seem that bother as he just gets out of the car and is on his way without bothering to check on the damage.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

This guy knew how to play with his toys. Even though I’m sure that he lost most of them while playing in the mud, his hands on approach to playing led to a tighter connection than any collector could ever feel.

Child Doug then spots a Fat Kid as he waits for the bus. This kid is well dressed, with perfectly place hair and an overly manscaped beard.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

This guy was made fun of a lot as a kid but not necessarily for being fat. He was raised with enough money to be able to avoid the standard fat kid options when it came to his clothes but this extra attention to fashion turned him into a bit of a douche.

“Yo, what’s up, player,” the Fat Kid yells while throwing his hands in the air towards a Cool Kid across the street?

The Cool Kid shakes his head in embarrassment ever so slightly but enough for Child Doug to notice. He then nods to the Fat Kid. “What up,” he responds before continuing on his way.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

This guy was a cool kid. Not one of those dickhead cool kids that would have either yelled something just as lame back to his childhood fat friend, or would have just ignored him all together. No, he was just genuinely cool.

Child Doug is then struck by a sense of disgust as he watches a Kid Banker pass in a freshly pressed suit. The smile that he wears doesn’t seem to be inspired by happiness or fun but by the plans to gain power and money that play out in his head while ignoring the world around him.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

This guy was a fucking dick as a kid. The type that would only let you play with the toys that he lost interested only to demand to have them back after seeing the fun you were having.

Child Doug turns the corner and spots the reflection of Adult Doug in a mirrored window. The two perform a bit of a reflection routine as they struggle to grasp that the real person and the person in the reflection are actually one and the same.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

This guy spent a lot of time alone as a kid.

The two age-gapped Dougs study one another as Adult Doug is taken back to the garage that he called home when he was a child.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

This guy loved to play sports...

Adult Doug stands as if he were a quarterback who's ready to accept a snap from the couch. "Down... Set... Hut, hut," he then snatches the ball off the couch and runs back.



He throws the ball over the couch so that it hits the wall just over the bed and bounces back in his direction. As the ball bounces, Adult Doug braces himself to catch it whenever it's close enough to snag, which then puts him in running mode.

Being that this is a garage with a limited amount of space, this running mode consists of Adult Doug dropping his shoulder after securing the ball and smashing into the back of the couch, flinging his body through the air on onto the bed in the process.

He lies still on the bed for a few seconds since his imagination is vivid enough to include a potential concussion into his pretend time. After the few seconds pass, he begins to move, playing up the struggle, before raising the football in the air and yelling, "Touchdown!"

He then stands and does *The Icky Shuffle* before spiking the ball.



Once again, Adult Doug finds himself alone in the garage only this time the couches are tipped on their ends to create enough room to actually run around. He's dressed in tennis shoes, shorts, a t-shirt, and sweatbands as he spins a tennis racket while preparing to serve the tennis ball against the garage door that's been sealed up to be a real wall.

"Alright, 15, 30," he announces before serving the ball with a full forced swing. The ball bounces off the wall leading him to hit it again. This volley continues with Adult Doug smacking the ball harder every time until it redirects itself after accidentally hitting a stereo speaker.

Doug tries to redirect his swing as well but misses, and shatters a decent looking lamp in the process.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

This guy had a job as a kid which made it easy for him to replace the things that got broken without getting in any trouble at all.

Doug brushes the broken glass out of the way with his foot as he prepares to serve again, "15, 45, fuck."



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

Did I mention how this guy liked to golf?

Adult Doug now stands in the garage with a golf club in hand as he lines up a shot. He double checks his grip before pulling back and swinging full force, launching a golf ball into the drywall.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

This guy was never told what to do. He was neither discouraged nor encouraged to do anything at all.

For some reason, Adult Doug looks surprised by the outcome of this poorly planned indoor activity as he rushes over to patch up the hole. His tongue dances in his mouth as he tries to make the patchwork look unnoticeable.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

This guy still has to think harder than any adult should to figure out the difference between a “b” and a “d” which may stem from the fact that he doesn’t instinctively know his left hand from his right one.

His tongue continues to dance the same dance as he attempts to work through a first-grade workbook in the middle of a class filled with tiny chairs that are overflowing with adults.

There’s a kid teacher at the head chalkboard who’s showing the class how to write a lowercase b. “Okay, you start with a straight line, and the loop goes to the right,” the kid teacher instructs. The adult first graders struggle to follow the sample as they make their attempts in their workbook.

Adult Doug gets frustrated as he continually struggles to figure it out.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

This guy was tested for dyslexia only to get undetermined as the result. This might have been the start of his trend to let issues go unchecked since no one in charge even suggested the thought follow up.

After several failed cautious attempts, he finally goes for it, writing the sloppiest noncommittal lowercase b that has ever been seen.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

This guy felt broken in every aspect of his life.

The adult version of the Tomboy from the bar then leans over to check Adult Doug's work. "Woe," she says, as she examines the abstract mess that is his lowercase b.

Adult Doug continues to study the paper, completely unsure of where things went wrong. "I know, b's and d's are hard," he admits.

This gets the Adult Tomboy to laugh.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

This guy knew at that exact moment that nothing felt better than making a cute girl laugh.

Adult Doug gets lost in the Adult Tomboy's smile which is the same smile that he notices as he exits the bathroom back at the bar where the patrons are back to their adult forms but still acting in their immature ways.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

This guy has been infatuated with tomboys ever since that fateful day.

The Tomboy seems equally intrigued by this overgrown astronaut as she kept one eye on the bathroom door to make sure that she could greet him with this smile before he could make an unnoticed escape.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

This guy is going to get his heart broken hard this time.

Doug gives her a wave and mouths a subtle, “Hey?”

This is the only sign she needs to make her way over to investigate. Doug, not used to things working this way, is sent to the verge of hyperventilating as he starts to plan out their lives together.

“Hey,” she flirtatiously says as she passes on her way to the women’s room. Doug lets out a long sigh, completely unsure as to whether or not this is a move and is also uncertain of which countermove to use that won’t make him look like an ass.



He continues to watch her as she looks back before closing the door.

“Fuck,” he says as he lowers his head and returns to his group of buddies.

“Shots,” a member of the group asks/demands the moment that Doug arrives?

Doug shakes his head an unenthusiastic yes.

“Let’s do this,” he proclaims as he looks back toward the women’s room for a second before pounding the shot and chasing it with a full glass of beer.

“YEAH,” the entire table cheers!

Doug finds himself in the middle of a blackout as a band starts to play on the opposite side of the bar. “Play that other song that doesn’t suck,” he shouts as he staggers toward the stage. This rowdy activity gets some in the crowd to laugh while others seem very annoyed.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

Sometimes I hate how much I’m fueled by attention, both positive and negative, but fuck, I’m just doing as advised and simply being myself and this is what I want to do.

“*Raw Hide*,” Doug yells as he continues toward the stage. The Doug fans feed him shots as he lets out a charmingly maniacal laugh, “Play *Raw Hide*!!!”



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

I mean, the crowd seems to love it. If only the band would just play along I won’t have to feel so guilty in the morning.

Doug gets to the stage as he continues to scream, “Come on, *Raw Hide*... play it.... people love that shit.” The audience split is still fifty-fifty as to whether or not they’re entertained by this drunken spaceman who’s causing a scene.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

What the fuck am I doing???

Doug starts to climb onto the stage which wouldn't be all that noteworthy if it weren't for the fact that he was doing a *Shamu* roll when he could've easily used the stairs.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

They may not like it now but I guarantee that it won't be long before this becomes a favorite story to tell.

The band stops playing as Doug gets to his feet and politely reaches out to casually take the microphone from the nearest mic stand. He begins to tap on the mic to test that it's on while at the same time sharing his plans with the lead singer, "Just play, I'll sing it."

He continues to tap on the microphone almost as if it's grown to be a drunken repetitive tick since he no longer seems to have any intentions to actually talk into the mic, opting to yell instead, "One, two, one, two, three go..."

"Man, get the fuck off my stage," the lead singer yells while keeping his distance.

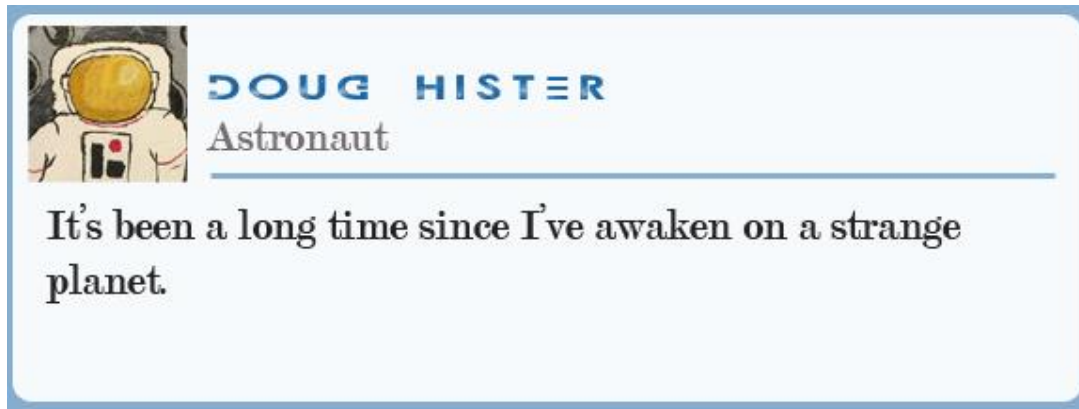
Doug often forgets that his size alone is enough to be very intimidating especially during these blackout modes where it's unclear if he can control himself. "Come on, I'm an astronaut, it's funny," he begs before getting pulled off the stage by

couple bouncers who are surprised by how willing he is to follow along without putting up even a hint of a fight.

“I’m sorry, I’m just...” he says with a gesture to reassure security that he’s peaceful but just got too drunk. This does work in a way since neither bouncer gets too rough while escorting Doug to the door.

Doug catches the Tomboy watching in amusement as bouncers pass with her new man of interest in hand to a mixture of boos and cheers from the crowd that still can’t agree on the entertainment value of this nuisance’s cry for attention.

Doug wakes to find himself in a strange room wearing nothing but his boxers and undershirt. Based on the signs, this is the room of a girl who lives on the sloppy side. For the most part, the clutter is made up of artistic décor while at the same time, the laundry and dishes are a little out of hand.



He looks around the room to find his helmet when the Tomboy enters leading Doug to fall back in bed. “Oh, you’re awake. Sorry, I just had to go to the bathroom real quick,” she explains with a yawn before climbing into bed next to Doug.

Doug looks confused, “Did we...”

She laughs, “No. I don’t think you could if you wanted to.” She seems fully comfortable with the situation as she lays her head on Doug’s chest. “But you also had a pretty good story which why I let you stay,” she continues.

Doug tries to hide his discomfort and confusion, “Really? What did I say?”

She rolls over to get a better look at Doug, “You don’t remember?”

“No, the last thing I remember is watching you go to the bathroom,” Doug says before quickly realizing how horrible this sounds just seconds after the words leave his mouth.

“Excuse me,” she asks with a chuckle?

“I mean when you were going into the room where the toilets are, not actually using it,” Doug backpedals.

She smiles as she snuggles up to Doug.

Meanwhile, Doug keeps his arms at his sides, only accepting the physical contact while not making any himself. “Seriously though, what did I say,” Doug nervously asks?

“You’ll have to figure that out on your own. That way I’ll know you were being truthful and not just drunk,” she says, fully aware that this is a torturous game that she’s playing.

Doug looks her in the eye, very concerned, “Did I tell you I love you?”

She just laughs, “No, that wouldn’t work on me.”

Doug is visually relieved, “Good, I mean I could... I just... I don’t know you.”

She laughs even harder, “It’s okay, Jesus. You sure have a way with women, don’t you?”

“Sorry,” Doug cowers.

The Tomboy seems endlessly entertained, “You don’t have to be sorry.”

“Sorry,” Doug automatically replies.

“For what,” she asks, on the verge of being annoyed.

Doug lets out a panicked laugh, sensing this tipping point, “For being sorry, I don’t know, I’m sorry.” Doug genuinely braces himself, ready to be hit for real.

This just causes her to laugh harder. “Oh, you’re going to be a fun one,” she announces as she pokes him in the side which causes Doug to flinch an over exaggerated flinch.

She then rubs her fingers up the back of Doug’s neck causing him to tense up. He relaxes as her fingers transition to running through the hair on the back of his head.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

Is this really happening? She referred to me as a “one,” that means relationship, right?

The blanket raises in Doug's boner zone.

The Tomboy playfully slaps Doug on the chest as she notices, "Are you serious?"

Doug looks embarrassed, "Sorry, it's morning time, that's all."

She playfully shakes her head, "It's fine. You can beat off if you want. I'm on the rag, or I might join in."

Doug is almost at a loss for words, "No... I, I'm fine... I'll just take care of it later."

She rests her head on Doug's shoulder as she looks him in the eyes, "What do you say we get a couple more hours of sleep then head out and grab some food."

"Yeah, sure," Doug is still a bit overwhelmed by this whole situation.

"Awesome," she exclaims with exaggerated excitement before kissing him on the cheek and rolling over to assume the position of small spoon.

"I've got to go to the bathroom," Doug announces before rushing out of bed toward the bathroom, trying to hide the tent in his boxers with his hands.

"Ew, gross you perv," she yells while throwing pillows at the moving target that is Doug.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

I always knew that relationships just magically happen. Like with my friends, one will meet somebody then next thing you know their moving in. Though they claim to be putting in work, I've yet to see any signs that this is actually true.

Doug sits on the toilet masturbating. He looks lost in thought, but his face shows no sign that said thoughts are about anything sexy at all. Since he's simply going through the motions to get rid of this morning wood, he ends up taking so long that he has to take a break to massage his busy hand.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

Part of me wishes that I was back at home where I'm comfortable enough to just get this stupid urge over with.

Doug closes his eyes and returns to the matter at hand. In a warped effort to be a gentleman, rather than think of the Tomboy who's the reason for his excitement, he fantasizes about being back at his apartment masturbating to porn on his computer. The pornstar being envisioned looks very similar to the Tomboy but is definitely not her.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

I wonder if she really does think that I'm a perv? I really hope I don't disappoint her. I hate how not only did I get a late start when it comes to love, I never had a relationship that lasted long enough to figure out what I'm doing wrong.

He finishes with a grunt then finds himself back in reality, back in the bathroom, pathetically cleaning his sad hand before flushing the toilet and heading back toward the Tomboy's room.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

No girl wants to be with a guy who has a sex history filled with nothing but explanations and apologies. Being a virgin almost sounds better than being a guy who's clueless thanks to his discomfort with human touch.

He reenters the Tomboy's room to find that she's now out cold which leads him to wait at the door to watch her as she sleeps.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

She's so cute. Why would she ever want to be with a monster like me?

He makes his way across the room where he stands over the Tomboy as he takes a moment to figure the logistics required to sneak into bed without waking her.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

They say that women have a higher chance of being diagnosed with BPD. I often wonder if this is where my body issues stem from, or if it's stems from the fact that I had no male guidance in a house full of girls.

Seeing no feasible way to enter the bed without ruining its owner slumber, Doug opts to lie next to her on the ground and struggles to find any comfort.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

Sometime, my struggle to please women makes me wonder if it would just be easier if I was simply gay. Then again, I don't even understand why women like dicks let alone someone who already has one.

The Tomboy eventually rolls over and spots Doug on the floor.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

I mean, sure, I spend a lot of time with mine but that's only because I have desires for my dick to make contact while I've yet to desire to make contact with another dick.

“What are you doing down there,” she asks?

“Oh sorry, I didn't want to wake you,” Doug nervously answers as if he's not entirely sure that she wasn't able to hear his inner dick thoughts.

It's clear that his thoughts are safe as she holds up the blanket so that he can join her in bed. “Come on,” she calls to him like a puppy, and just like a puppy he comes.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

I knoweth this might soundeth that I ameth protesting too much but I promise this disinterest is just my way of being and not homophobic fears over how I might be seen since I don't see same sex interests as an issue, it's just not the right fit for me.

The two snuggle and shift until they find a comfortable pose to attempt to go to sleep.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

But I get it. I'm getting older and remaining single which always seems to trigger the normals with their theories.

It doesn't take long until she's out cold once again leaving Doug to stare at the ceiling until he spots constellations in the ceiling popcorn. "First we send the robots to Mars..." he quietly mutters to himself as he slowly falls asleep.

Hours pass before Doug, and the Tomboy find themselves in the midday sun as they approach the entrance to a popular farm-themed diner where the two plan to share an incredibly late brunch to the point where they're technically just having lunch.

Doug looks exceptionally antsy as he scouts the room in a desperate attempt to spots the sign for the bathroom. "I gotta go, I'll be right back," he says before rushing off.

"Ew, again," she jokes.

This is far too urgent of a situation for Doug to bother to turn around. "Nope, not this time," he simply replies before slowing his walk that turns awkward as he struggles to hold things in.

"Name please," Doug hears the waitress ask the Tomboy just as he crosses the bathroom threshold and waits to shut the door.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

I don't even know her name?

Things grow to be too urgent for Doug to wait so rushes to a stall and has a seat. "Fuck," he mutters to himself before tensing up to push one out.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

Well, I hope I get back in time for us to be seated so I can hear her name when the waitress calls for us.

He pushes really hard once again.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

The thing is, I can't even guarantee that I would have asked her name even if I wasn't blacked out at the time. With me, it's quite possible that it may have just never come up.

He then relaxes a bit.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

Being that I'm constantly analyzing everything around me in a constant state of fight or flight, decisions have to come quickly, so I tend to categorize people at a very rapid speed.

After finally finishing, he wipes then stands then heads back to the main room where he looks toward the waiting area, only to find that the Tomboy isn't there.




DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

Where everyone else may not even notice all the people in a room, let alone what makes each one of them different, this is just not the case with me.

He starts to panic as he scans the room, taking inventory of everyone he sees, while in search of the Tomboy.



DOUG HISTER
Astronaut

Fat guy, old bitch with old man and nice old lady, whore, brat, ugly chick, bucktoothed dud, pirate, Eskimo, Aborigine...

He continues to look from person to person as he mentally assigns them their nicknames while searching for his date. This takes him back to a day where he's watching a baseball game with his roommate while scanning and nicknaming the audience in the same exact way.



DOUG HISTER
Astronaut

I used to drive my roommates nuts.

The pitcher throws an obvious ball only to have the umpire calls it a strike which causes the crowd to boo and the roommate to yell, "What the fuck?"

Doug watches the screen with stunned amazement as he screams, "Woe, did you see that fat guy eating that hot dog," at almost the same exact time. "Watch, when they show the replay, the rest of the crowd goes nuts, but then there's the fat guy in the third row eating a hot dog with a look of pure ecstasy."

Doug's roommate doesn't appreciate this distraction from his own disappointment. "How the hell do you even notice this shit," he yells before adding, "Will you just watch the fucking game?"

"It's right there on the screen. Look, watch," Doug continues on with an urgency that almost makes it seem that he's unaware that he isn't watching a show about the audience and that it's actually about the game.

The replay comes up, and it's just as good as Doug claims. A fat guy is munching down on a hot dog with a face filled with pure ecstasy and shirt filled with mustard stains, immortalized in the background during one of the worst calls in the history *Major League Baseball*.

Doug's roommate can't help but laugh. "Oh fuck yeah, he's loving that dog," he admits.

"See, I told you." Doug then points out the woman to the fat guy's right who's trying her best to hide her laughter. "...And look, look, that lady right there. She catches him too," he adds.



Doug turns to find himself in a memory with the young version of himself in the middle of a classic single-screen movie theater lobby. He's the only white person in the entire room which is very common to Young Doug, so there's no fish out water sense to him being amongst the diverse crowd.

He stands with his Mexican friend, and the two make no attempts to hide their people watching. The people working the concession stand are all Korean while the patrons are mostly black.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

I remember the exact moment that I saw my first real-life little person. It was at the “Black Theater” where my mom used to drop us off while she went to the gym. I’ll never forget this because he was dressed like a tiny pimp.



Young Doug reaches for the door to enter the theater just as a black little person dressed as a pimp walks out. Young Doug holds the door and watches in amazement as he tries to make eye contact with his friend to confirm that he’s actually seeing this.

“Thanks my brotha,” the pocket-sized pimp says with a nod of his head.

Young Doug is at a loss for words but manages to fumble out a, “Yeah,” before quickly turning to his friend the moment the little man is out of earshot. “Did you just see that,” he asks with excitement?

“Of course I saw that you moron,” his buddy says with a punch to Young Doug’s arm, “I was standing right here.”

The two then giggle their way to their seats.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

I learned of a whole bunch of categories for people when I was growing up.

Young Doug then finds himself laughing with a large group of friends on the bleachers of his middle school playground. The collection of the kids is made up of different races who throw around racial jokes as if they've yet to grasp the concept of what's even considered to be offensive.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

I used to say that I was a white minority in middle school but looking back, there was such a blend of races that there was no real majority, just a bunch of kids from different backgrounds but we definitely weren't colorblind.

Doug and his friends take turns stepping forward for their chance to share their jokes in an ongoing "base off."

Doug's Mexican friend is the first to step forward to throw out the joke, "Dude, you're so black you could leave a hand print on charcoal."

The victim of the joke automatically steps forward to retort, "Oh yeah, you're so Mexican Juan Valdez wanted to boycott your ID for its racial stereotyping."

"Oh," the entire crowd reacts.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

In fact, pointing out these differences was our main source of fun. We even had daily competitions where we would “base” on one another with race being the go to topic.

Another Mexican friend adds, “Shit he’s so Mexican everyone in his family has the same social security number.” No one takes any of these jokes to be a personal attack because they’re all too busy laughing.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

I’m not fully sure where the word “basing” came from but it was pretty much just categorizing people and then making fun of them for whatever category they fell into.

Doug studies the crowd looking for the victim of his joke.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

I was pretty quick which made me pretty good and was rewarded with laughs for saying the most horrible things that I could.

Doug steps forward, and with confidence delivers the joke, “You’re so black that when you get out of the car, the check oil light comes on.” This gets the entire group laughing. Even the black kid who the joke is directed toward laughs, and pats Doug on the back.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

...but at that time it was just about memorizing jokes because not one of us ever said anything original.

Doug snaps back to the diner as he gets to the waiting area only to find that the Tomboy is still nowhere in sight.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

I’m not only good at categorizing but I’m also real good with faces. Names, however, names are a different story and right now I am looking for???

Doug looks even more panicked as he desperately tries to find his missing date only to instantly relax the moment he spots her across the room waving at him from the booth.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

...her. I'm looking for her, Cutie McTomboy, friend, tall, short hair, adorable, friendly, possible lover, potentially my next obsession, the reason for my next scar, the next person that I will miss more than life itself and she doesn't even know.

Doug grabs his chest, mocking his fears that she was gone as makes his way over to join her. After sliding into the booth he asks, "They don't have *Moons Over My Hammy* here, do they," in a quick attempt to cover his genuine fear.

"I don't know," she says as she studies her menu, "they have this." She points out an item on the menu, "I think it's close to the same thing?"

Doug shakes his head, disappointed, "No, it's just not the same without the name."

"I see," she says, not entertained, but at the same time not annoyed, as she continues to try and find the meal of her choice.

"Sorry, I'm just obsessed with that name, that's all," Doug adds disappointed by his own entertainment value.

She lowers her menu in disbelief, "Are you going to be sorry about everything you ever say?"

Doug goes into a subtle panic mode, "No, sor..." he catches himself then decides to go with, "I mean, fuck you, it's just one of my quirks."

"Nice," she says, finding Doug's attempt to be assertive very charming, "Now what are you getting for breakfast there sorry boy. I think I'm going to get the Salmon Benedict."

Doug continues to study the menu.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

I wonder if she even knows my name?

Doug closes the menu and looks the Tomboy in the eyes, “Are you one of those people that would freak out if I ordered the same thing as you?”

“And what if I was,” she asks, loving this game.

“Well, then I’d order the biscuits and gravy,” Doug replies, unsure whether or not they’re both playing the same game.

“I guess we’ll just have to see when you make your order,” is the card she decides to play.

Doug picks up the menu and begins to study it again.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

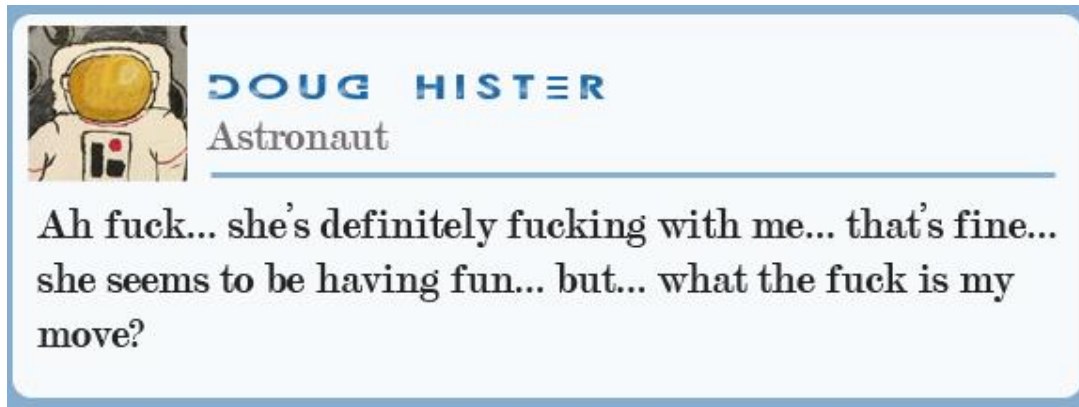
Is she fucking with me or flirting with me? What the fuck is going on?

The waitress arrives and asks, “May I take your order?”

“I’ll have the Salmon Benedict,” the Tomboy orders almost on the verge of sounding braggadocios as she looks to Doug for his move.

The waitress looks impressed, “Excellent choice. That’s my favorite item on the menu.” She then turns to Doug, “And you?”

The tomboy raises her eyebrows to taunt her brunch date.



Doug closes the menu in defeat, “I’ll just have the French Toast,” which leads the Tomboy to look confused and the waitress to seem thoroughly unimpressed.

“French toast it is,” she says as she writes the order, collects the menus and leaves.

“Why didn’t you get the Salmon Benedict? She said it was her favorite thing on the menu,” the Tomboy asks? This is the first time that she doesn’t appear to be all that entertained.

Doug is utterly confused, “I don’t know. I changed my mind at the last minute.” This causes the Tomboy to shake her head, partially disappointed and partially feeling some guilt.

This also causes her to change her tone from playfully confrontational to playfully teasing in an attempt to cheer up Doug. “You’re going to be so unhappy. She didn’t say a word about the French Toast, just, French Toast it is,” she says in a serious effort to get him to switch his order before it’s too late.

Though he’s perfectly fine with the jokes, he’s really annoyed by the awkward attention from floundering to play along. “I’m fine with my choice,” he responds with a little more attitude that he was planning which only adds to his concerns that he’s being misunderstood and feels on the verge of ruining everything.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

God damn it, even I can make fucking French Toast. I hope her having fun is worth it.

The Tomboy switches to be more apologetic, “We can call her back.”

“No, no, I’m fine,” Doug says as he grabs the specials display and begins to read it.

“You’re not going to pout are you,” she asks trying to get back to the playful jabbing?

Doug slams the specials display on the table, “No, I’m fine. Can we just drop it?”

“I was just kidding,” the Tomboy offers in peace.

The two then sit in awkward silence.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

And queue the hate spiral.

He continues to stare at the specials display as she looks out the window working out in her mind how to break the silence. “Hey, what’s your number,” she asks pretending as if nothing awkward has happened, “I’ll text you really quick so that you can also have mine.”

This technic works as he lightens up thanks to the change of subject. “Oh, yeah, It’s 492-2222,” he replies.

“Really, like the *Pizza Hut* number,” she asks with a laugh then enters the number into her phone and begins to compose a text?

Doug looks confused, but in an entertained way as he asks, “*Pizza Hut* number?”
“They used to have these commercials for *Pizza Hut*, and that was the number,” she explains.

Doug is now completely relaxed and back on his game. “Really, no, I’ve never heard that,” he informs her before a question clicks in his head, “Wait? How do you remember your childhood *Pizza Hut* number?”

“It must have just been a regional thing. They had a song and everything. It was sung to the tune of *The Lone Ranger* theme song. It went 4922222 4922222 4922222 *Pizza Hut* delivery,” she sings.

Doug laughs, “No, they didn’t have that where I’m from.”

“Oh, speaking of western shows, do you remember what you did to the band last night,” she questions as she finishes typing her text and hit send?

The *Would You Like to Swing on a Star* ringtone sounds off from Doug’s phone.

“Band? What band,” Doug asks as he fumbles to retrieve his phone to silence it?

The waitress arrives with the food before the Tomboy can answer. She places a fantastic dish of Salmon Benedict in front of the Tomboy and drops the pathetic plate of French Toast in front of Doug as he finally silences his phone.

“There was a band last night,” Doug continues as the waitress steps out of earshot?

“Oh, you’re the greatest,” she informs Doug as she grabs half of Doug’s French Toast with her hands before sliding half of her Salmon Benedict onto Doug’s plate.

Doug smiles at her, appreciating the gesture, “Thanks.”

The two go on to enjoy their meals.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

I don't know why comfort has to also equal fear.

Doug unwraps one of the mints that the two received with the bill as he and the Tomboy exit the diner.

“Are you sure you don’t want a ride home,” the Tomboy asks as she digs through her purse to find her keys.

Doug looks around as if to find his excuse. “No, I’m fine. I’m like four blocks away,” he informs her while double checking for a reaction before continuing. “Besides, I have to stop by the store.”

She gives a “suit yourself” shrug of the shoulders before adding, “Well, we should definitely do this again sometime real soon.”

Even though there have been no real signs of a terrible experience, other than a few awkward spots, Doug is instinctually caught off guard, “Oh yeah, for sure. Whenever you want?”

She steps toward Doug, “How about you text me later and woo me with an idea?”

“Something fun,” Doug tries to hide the fact that he’s flustered.

“Something with booze,” she demands as she steps even closer for whatever farewell that might follow.

Doug makes an awkward attempt to go in for a kiss on the cheek that lands just next to her lips due to the fact that she turned her head at the last second for a real deal lip lock.

“Fucking astronauts,” she laughs as she turns toward her car, a blue 1976 Plymouth Valiant.

“Sor...” Doug stops himself.

“Don’t say it,” she turns back to threaten.

Doug raises his hands, “Nope, I caught myself.”

“Good boy,” the Tomboy smiles as she finally enters the car and starts the engine.

Doug watches her as she drives off. The two give each other one last wave before losing visual contact.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

I've never once had anyone reassure that things are going to be okay but this seems like really happening and it feels fucking magical to me!!!


Doug struts off toward the store with an extra pep in his step which makes him look like he's walking against lower gravity.

Doug exits the grocery store with a couple of bags filled with supplies in one arm while he types a message to a friend with the other. The text reads, “Dude, this morning was fucking amazing. I think I just got off the best first date I’ve ever had!!!”

He’s able to text while also paying attention to where he’s going, unlike the receipt double checking old lady who nearly runs him over once again. As always she’s trying to multitask while pushing her cart and blames Doug for the near miss as she complains, “Why don’t you watch where you’re going?”

“I fucking hate old people,” he mutters to himself while his words stay contained by his helmet.

The old lady doesn’t even notice the man in the spacesuit as she continues to her car nearly colliding with another victim of her old lady ways.



DOUG HISTER
Astronaut

You know, I’ve never felt this way in my entire life. Granted, I wasn’t fully comfortable, but still, that was the most comfortable that I’ve ever felt while spending sober time with a fellow human.

Doug enters his space-station apartment with an arm full of groceries, locks the hatch and heads to the kitchen to put away his supplies. His phone rings, blasting the song, *Would You Like to Swing on a Star*.

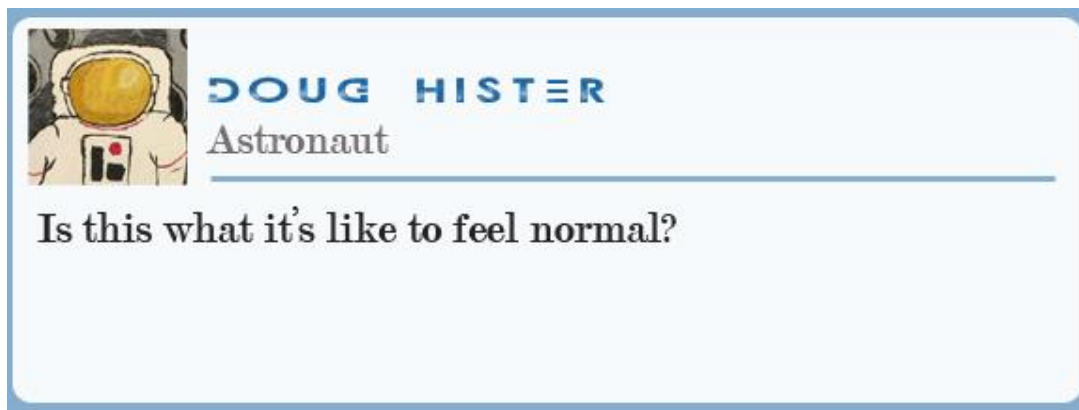
There’s a new message amongst the list of already read texts that congratulate Doug for his dating news that he apparently continued to spread on his walk home from the store.

Not every text is congratulatory as many had Raw Hide jabs mixed in, some with no mention of dating at all. The new message reads, “Congratulations... fag... hahaha,” which causes Doug to roll his eye and shake his head before noticing a notification showing he has a new voicemail.

He hesitates to hit play because this is from an unknown number which is usually a sign of someone seeking money for something that hasn't been paid. It turns out he just forgot to add the Tomboy's number to his contacts because the message is actually from her.

"I know that the movie *Swingers* taught us never to contact the people that we're actually interested in. Well, at least not until enough time has passed for them to forget you. Well, fuck that. I just wanted to say thanks again and that I had fun. I can't wait to do it again. This is Sammy by the way. I just realized that you must have been blacked out during our introduction and I know I never told you my name during brunch. Oh well, whatever, I'll talk to you soon, you big lush."

Doug stares at the phone dumbfounded by the evidence that continues to grow.



Doug then finds himself later in the night with his friends on the space-deck. Everyone, even Doug, has their helmets off which is rare but he's very excited to tell the tale of his date. "Then there was a voicemail from her right when I walked in the door. I'm not being overly optimistic am I," he asks?

His buddy looks confused, "No, it sounds like she's totally into you."

"What's your next move," one of the others asks?

"She's coming over to my place on Tuesday. She's never been to outer space and said that she's excited to check it out," Doug replies, sounding more matter-of-factly to share the evidence that he's repeating to himself over sounding like a humble-brag.

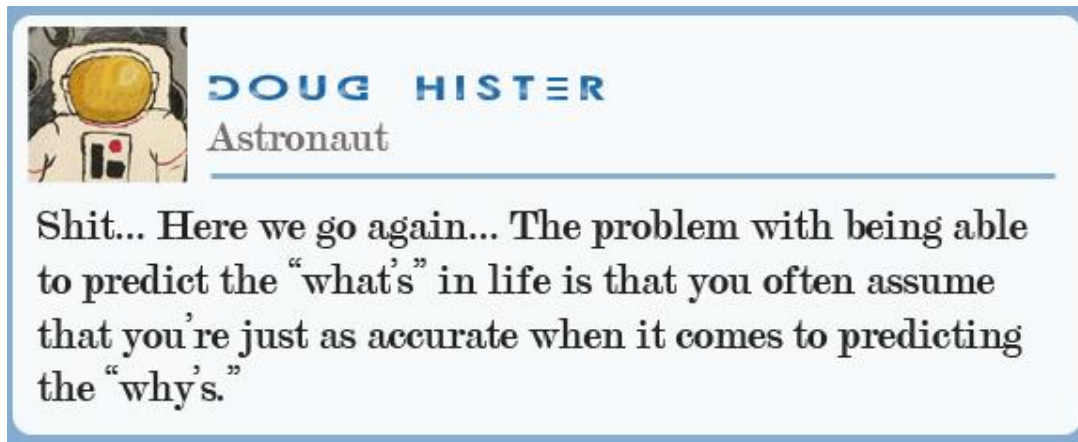
Doug's buddy pats him on the back, "That's awesome man. I hope we get to meet her. I was pretty drunk that night and don't remember her at all."

“You guys are going to like her. She’s funny. I can never tell if she’s fucking with me or not,” Doug says sounding proud of her. He quickly adds, “...but in a good way,” in an attempt to reassure she’s not a bitch.

“Well, cheers,” yet another buddy proclaims as he raises his glass. Doug and the rest of the group raise their drinks to give cheers to the now bashful Doug, over his new potential mate.

Would You Like to Swing on a Star, sings from Doug’s pocket. He quickly clinks a couple of glasses before rushing to silence his phone.

He checks the screen to see a message from Sammy which causes his mood to quickly change as he becomes more silent and somber toward the rest of the group.



One of the astronauts notices the mood change leading him to ask, “What’s up?”

“You alright,” another friend adds, also noticing the difference?

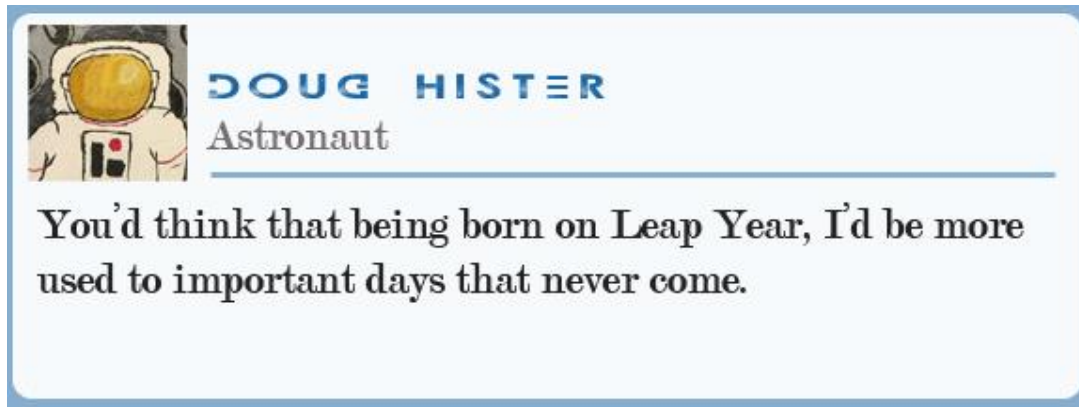
Doug searches for words as he stares at the message, “Yeah... no... I’m fine. It’s her. She wants to reschedule for Thursday. It’s just... I don’t know.” The two concerned friends simply quickly attempt to squelch any of his neurotic fears.

“Oh, it’ll be alright,” the first one says with the wave of a hand.

“At least she agreed to a new date,” the other one quickly adds.

“Yeah, if it were a blow off she’d say she’s unsure when she’ll be free again,” the first one adds and he’s actually read *Online Dating For Idiots* and thinks he’s a bit of an expert.

“I know, that makes sense,” Doug says in a settling tone as he sneaks one more peek at the message before putting the phone away and becoming distant to the group, chiming in just enough to not draw attention to himself.



It's Tuesday. Doug lies on his bed in his favorite position, staring at the wall. The silence is broken by, *Would You Like to Swing On a Star* singing from his phone on the coffee table. It takes him the effort of an Olympic Athlete in training for him to muster up the energy to sit up and retrieve the phone.

He checks the screen to find a text from Sammy that reads, “Ground control to Major Tom, I was bored, so I thought I'd check in. How are things? You haven't texted back in a while.”

Doug looks empty inside as he replies, “Things are good, took my protein pills, just been busy, that's all.”

It takes but a second for the tune, *Would You Like to Swing on a Star*, to sound off again. There's a new message that reads, “Can we do Friday instead?”

Doug raises his hands in annoyance, then goes on to type, “Sure, whenever.”

Would you like to swing on a Star, Doug stares out the window as if he were in a trance and lets the full song play out without checking the message, “carry moonbeams home in a jar, and be better off than you are, or would you rather be a fish?”

A fish appears outside the window and swims across the sky.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

I really miss my aquarium. Those fish were the only thing on this planet that ever had to count on me for anything, including their mere existence.



Doug walks closer to shut the blinds.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

Then one day, they all just died during a power outage while I was asleep. There was nothing I could do. They were just gone.

Doug finally checks the message that reads, “Thanks, duder, you’re awesome.”



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

What the fuck is a duder? I hope to hell that it doesn't become my pet name.

He crawls back into bed and goes back to staring at the wall.

Doug sits at his computer with the blinds closed as he clicks through photos of Sammy from her Facebook page. She's partying in almost every shot, and it's hard to tell if the people she's posing with are friends or lovers regardless whether they're a boy or a girl.

Would You Like to Swing on a Star, sings leading Doug to check his phone to find a new message from Sammy that reads, "We still on for tomorrow?! Can't wait to go to outer fucking space!!!!"

Doug lets out a sigh as he types back, "Sure."

Would You Like to Swing on a Star, message, "You okay? You don't sound excited."

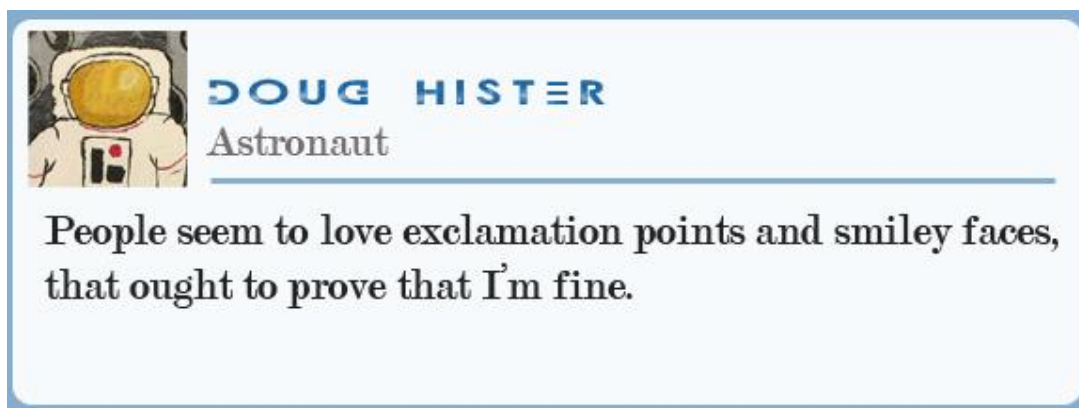
Doug lightens up as he replies, "Yeah, I'm fine and excited! Sorry, I'm just not good at texting."

"Or life," he mutters to himself as he hits send.

Would You Like to Swing on a Star, message, "There's the apologetic loser that I'm falling for!!! ☺"



He then replies, "That's me. I can't wait! I'll see you soon!!! ☺"



Would You Like to Swing on a Star, message, “I’m not on the rag this time if that cheers you up?”

This does in fact cheer Doug up as he quickly types, “I added the “!” and the “☺”, what else do you want from me woman? :p” He laughs to himself as he hits send nervously excited about this new detail.

The grocery store's automatic sliding doors hold back a wall of fog as a Muzak rendition of the song *Space Oddity* plays over the store's public address system.

The automatic doors open allowing the fog to flood the store. Doug appears from out of the fog as if he were walking in slow motion this time he's full of confidence as he makes a beeline for the stack of grocery baskets.



He walks right past the old woman who's once again too busy checking her receipt to pay attention to where she's going.

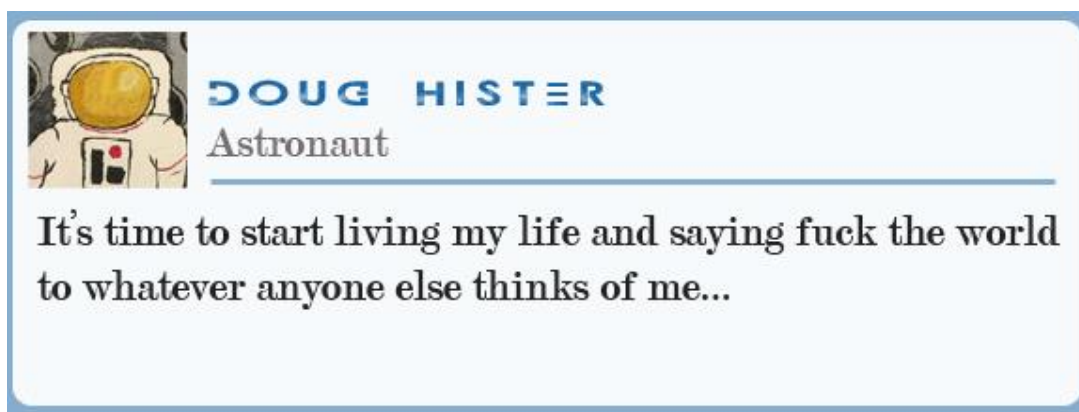


Doug storms past her, allowing his basket to be hit by her wondering cart. "Excuse me," he barks with the appropriate hostel tone. The old woman is startled and offended, but Doug is gone before he can notice or care.

He arrives at the booze aisle where again he spots Rowdy Roddy Piper checking out the store's inventory of Scotch.



Doug walks right past Rowdy Roddy Piper and heads straight to the boxed wine.



Rowdy Roddy Piper looks over to watch Doug and doesn't seem put off at all by his astronaut's attire. In fact, he goes as far as to give a nod and a thumbs up as the spaceman marches on toward the fancy cheese

After snatching an assortment of fancy cheeses and edible cheese scooping receptacles, Doug heads straight for the condom aisle where he throws a large box of condoms in with his stuff.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

Tonight is my night...

He then marches to the cashier to pay.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

And if all goes right, I'll be in my first legitimate relationship by this time tomorrow!!!

Doug exits the store and notices a dog tied by its leash to the bike rack. The dog looks at everyone who exits with pathetic hopeful eyes, waiting for its owner to return. He watches the dog, fully familiar with the feeling which causes him to lose a bit of his confident facade.

He continues across the parking lot with his two bags of goodies for the night until, *Would You Like to Swing on a Star*, sound off. He checks his phone to find a new message from Sammy that reads, "Shit, I really hate to do this to you, but I don't think this is going to work out. Sorry ☹"

He drops the groceries without thinking in order to type his panicked response of, "Wait, what? Why?"

Would You Like to Swing on a Star, message, "I just can't, you're too nice, and I'll only end up hurting you, I hope you understand."

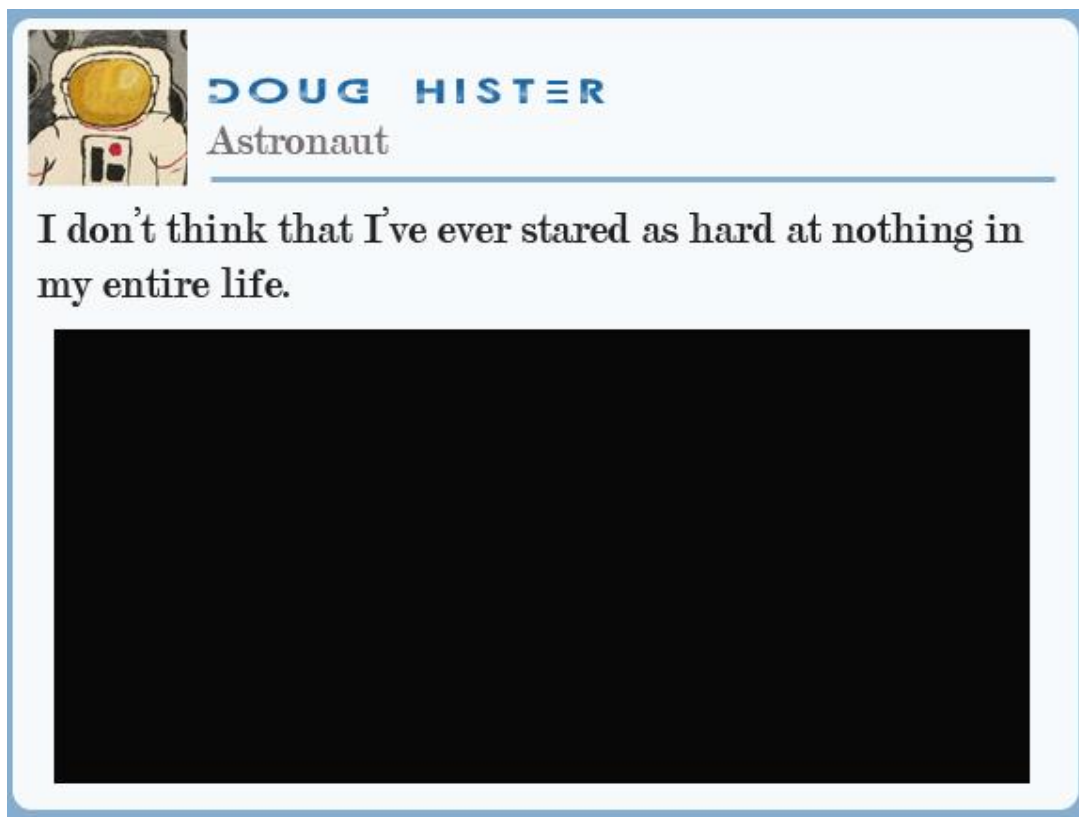
Doug replies, “No, I don’t, I don’t understand what happened? Why did you keep pushing hanging out only to vanish on me?”

Would You Like to Swing on a Star, message, “You were very open about your disorders which made me think that you'd be understanding of mine, but I just can't put you through my crazy life because the last thing I want to do is hurt you.”

Doug replies, “But you already have...”

Would You Like to Swing on a Star, message, “Sorry ☹”

Doug throws his phone across the parking lot and stares off into the sky.



Doug looks up and finds an angle that allows for him to see the back of his own head.

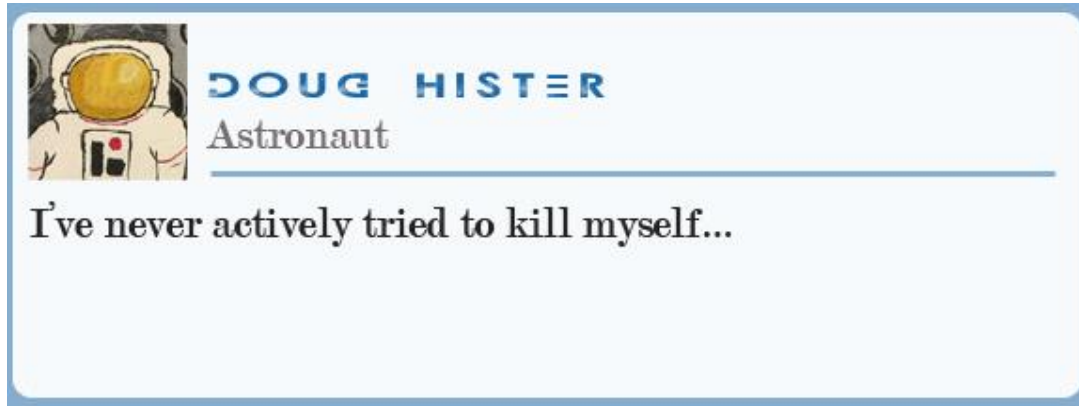


DOUG HISTER

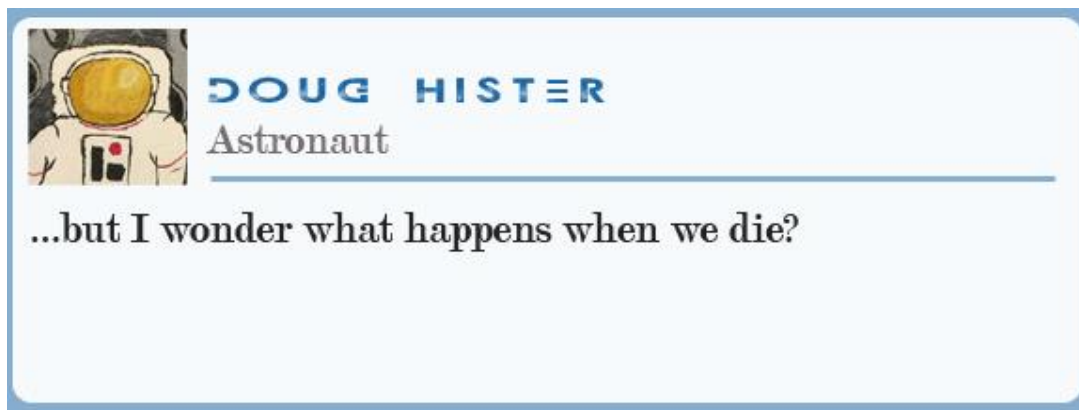
Astronaut

I used to wonder when one goes from losing their mind to the point where it's actually lost. That is until I found that exact moment tonight.

Doug lies in his bed using the bladder from the box of wine as a pillow, lifelessly taking sips from time to time, while randomly munching on crackers and cheese between his defeated sips.



Doug fills his bathtub with water, then slowly lowers himself in to attempt to drown himself.



The room goes black even though Doug's helmet prevents him from drowning.

After a few moments, Doug arrives at the waiting room outside the Pearly Gates where he asks the receptionist, "You mean I seriously have to check in before seeing the guy with the list?"

The receptionist can't be bothered to look up from her game of Sudoku, "Yes, if you just have a seat over there."

Doug looks over to where she's pointing and notices a bunch of dogs mixed in with the people leading him to ask, "Why are all these dogs here? I thought they just automatically got in."

This gets the receptionist to look up from her game, but only long enough to shake her heads and respond, "You watch too many movies."



Doug then abruptly falls from heaven and finds himself back in his apartment, his feet dangling as he hangs from a noose.



Only his helmet prevents him from choking out but again, the room still eventually goes black until Doug lands after falling from heaven to find himself next to Happy Hitler, who's being poked with red-hot pokers.

There's a lot of fire and torture going on, which leads Doug to watch with concern as Happy Hitler's torture regiment gets more and more extreme.

Happy Hitler takes notice of Doug's look fear and informs him, "You know it's actually not that bad once you get used to it."

As he says this a tiny demon runs by and stabs Doug in the ass with a tiny pitchfork which causes him to squirm from the pressure, but it doesn't seem to hurt him at all.

Doug nods, impressed by Happy Hitler's honesty. "You know, you're right," he agrees.

Happy Hitler shrugs, "Yeah, they do a lot of weird shit to you, but there's free health care."



Doug then finds himself back at his apartment where he's tried to shoot himself in the head only thanks to the lack of gravity the bullet slowly floats out of the barrel of the gun and taps into Doug's helmet without leaving even a hint of a scratch but of course, the room goes black anyways.

A reincarnated space monkey Doug finds himself spinning plates for tourist in India until once again he's sent back to his Earthly apartment to find himself raiding the medicine cabinet and taking as many sleeping pills as he can find.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

I wonder what happens when we die?

He washes the pills down with wine that he continues to drink straight from the wine bladder, then stumbles out from the bathroom, staggers over to the bay window and stares out as the beautiful view of the moon and the universe fade away to reveal the shitty apartments across the way.

Doug lowers his head in sadness as he stumbles backward and falls onto his bed where he forces himself for swallow a couple of times to hold back the vomit. His breathing becomes shallow as he limbs begin to jerk until finally, his body goes totally limp.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

...but there's that moment where everything just kicks in
and you're like...

He looks more relaxed than ever as the room goes black one more time.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

If I were guaranteed that death was exactly like sleep, I would kill myself today.

He then starts to snore as he continues to sleep the night away.



DOUG HISTER

Astronaut

But I always seem to wake up.

Doug wakes on his futon to find himself staring at the wall as usual until he feels body joining him in bed. He rolls over to find himself face to face with Sammy.



DOUG HISTER

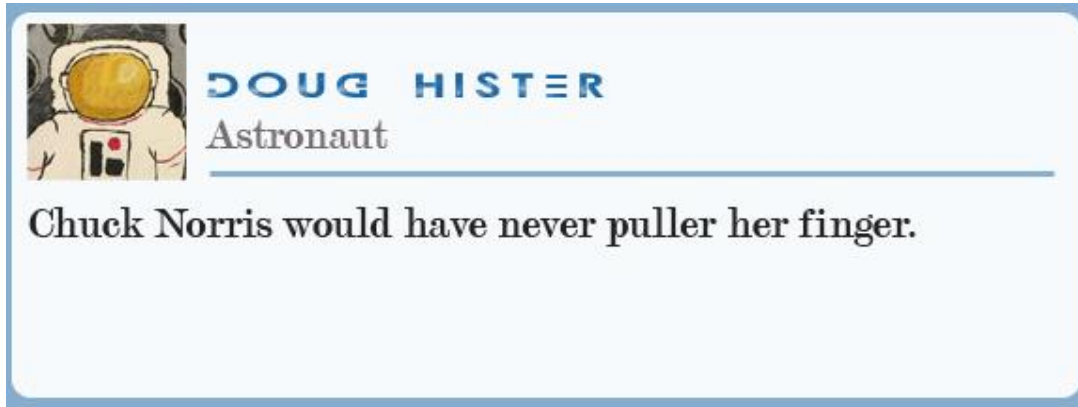
Astronaut

All I ever wanted was to be happy.

Her smile is kind of crazy as she offers Doug her pointer finger.

He tears up as he reaches to give it a pull with all of her might.

She smiles before shifting in the bed and vanishing in a cloud of smoke following the biggest fart that Doug has ever heard.



Doug loses it in the same hybrid blend of laughter and tears that he displayed in Dr. Murray's office while a shooting star streams past the bay window.