

WHAT FEVERED IMAGININGS THERE BE

“Everyone likes to think the Devil died in the mists of mediaeval history. No one wants to admit he’s always just a hair’s-breadth away.”

It was a cold winter night, and as the Husband and I were impatiently waiting for the kettle to boil, we began discussing trivia about the extended branches of my family tree. He, being American, was endlessly fascinated with the macabre rumours and whispers swirling about my bloodline that stretched back almost a thousand years. To someone whose country was barely a quarter millennium old, I suppose that span of time seemed mystical, unapproachable and mythological somehow.

I delighted in subverting his desires to hear tales of mediaeval magicks and monsters – the myths that were used to scare the children in my family to sleep at night – by always focussing closer to the present, because the truth was the horrors around us had *never stopped*. They had never faded with the rise of the Industrial Age, or the interconnection of the world via the Internet. They’d crept down through to the present silently, stealthily and seductively, seamlessly integrating with the fabric of modern-day life, leveraging the lusts of humans to lay them fallow just as easily - if not moreso - than they had in the misty past.

“Take, for instance, my arsehole third cousin twice-removed (or something like that) Sean Ulster MacMillan. He found that out the hard way.”

“The *detective*?” Husband asked in surprise. “The one who’s been missing for weeks?”

“*Constable.*” I corrected. “Though I’m sure he told you - and everyone he’d ever met - that he was an Inspector. It was the kind of thing he would have done. A right piece of work that one.”

“*Would have?*” Husband interjected quickly. Sharp as a tack, that one. It was little wonder I loved him so.

“Yeah,” I replied. “We know what happened to him. But it’s going to be a while before the police find out. For everyone’s sake.”

“Your family’s?” he asked suspiciously. I shook my head slightly.

“When I say ‘everyone’, I *mean* everyone. Full stop.” I nodded over to an ancient globe in the Great Hall, barely visible through the doorway.

“As in... *the world?*”

I didn’t bother to confirm his supposition. The kettle was whistling, and I needed my tea.

“What happened?” he asked, getting up to follow me, his own cup in hand.

“This is all based on his last writings, eyewitness accounts, and internet history, mind,” I replied, “but we’ve no reason to doubt the veracity of it, considering the evidence. The MacMillans are still working on containing the damage.”

“Damage?” he asked as he poured his drink.

I began the tale.

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It’d been a rainy Saturday night, and Sean had struck out at the pub.

Despite his best efforts of showing up in uniform, puffing up his chest and telling every kind of exciting 'war' story he could imagine to prove his virility, the sexy ginger with the big chest and impossible legs he'd been ogling, chatting up and getting a little too handsy with had - having been in possession of a functional brain and bullshit detector - wanted nothing to do with him, sensibly leaving him hanging at the end of the night with the bar tab.

As she walked out, arms crossed over her chest, she bitterly left him with the scathing parting words "If you like 'em so much, you should've taken a picture. Though I bet you probably have with some hidden camera, *you creep!*"

Sylvester cursed his luck and trod home, images of her dancing in his head. He'd never seen anyone like her before. And he *wanted* her. He could barely walk, such was the extent of his drunken, lecherous desire.

Making it back to his flat, he sat before his computer, trousers down, pitching a massive tent in his boxers. Futilely, he ran through various adult sites trying to find a performer that matched up to the mental image he'd had of the alluring redhead. But no one could compare.

Frustrated, he noticed an advert mixed in with the search results. "BANG AI Video generator. Make the woman of your dreams! Uncensored! Absolutely free!!"

He'd heard of such things. Artificially intelligent tools that could take written descriptions and generate realistic pictures and videos of people. Sure, they got the fingers and toes a bit wrong, but he didn't care. Those weren't the parts of her body he was interested in.

He quickly skimmed over the instructions for how to use the tool, ignoring all the caveats, tips and tricks. He was desperate, hungry. He wanted to *possess* that woman, no matter what. She might have said no to him in the flesh, but with this... he could have her any way he wanted, any time he wanted.

A sick leer on his face, he quickly typed in the “prompt”- the text-based description of the video he wanted the AI to generate. It was a lewd, lascivious laundry list of the redhead’s body parts (exaggerated, natch), along with sexual positions and acts which were equal parts dehumanising and debasing.

He poured out his internal fantasy to the machine in disgusting detail, describing *exactly* what he wanted that woman to do for him. *Fuck consent*. What she wanted didn’t matter. With this tool, *he was God*. Only *his* wants mattered.

Feeling flushed with the rise of blood pressure in his entire body and sweating with sick anticipation, he hit “ENTER” on the keyboard, instructing the AI to generate his video.

He gulped as he watched a timer tick down from 665 to 0, representing his place in the remote computing queue.

A blue bar then appeared onscreen, showing the progress of the video’s creation.

His throat dried as he stared at the screen, heart pounding so hard it was almost hammering through his chest as the bar approached 100 per cent.

Finally, the work was done. The server spat out the video, a large friendly prompt asking him if he wanted to **DOWNLOAD NOW**.

Feverishly, he clicked “yes”, only to be intercepted by a pop-up demanding credit card information. The free trial only applied to still images you see, and—

—he didn't care about the details. Like a rabid animal he fished through his trouser pockets for his wallet, took out his card, rapidly typing in the numbers off its back, each keystroke a violent assault on the keyboard, pounding and shaking it with each hit, hands trembling in tumultuous, volcanic desire for the sensual treasure that awaited him.

Completing payment, he gleefully completed his download and opened the AI-generated video, hitting play, moving one hand down to his rigid member, which was throbbing madly, enfolding it in his fingers.

Now she is mine! he imagined, as he clicked start and the video began to play.

Her still form was nude, lithe, and bounteous, intoxicating and perfect. But then it moved, becoming hypnotically strange, misshapen and surreal - face and limbs morphing, shifting and twisting like vines - eyes subdividing from two to four to sixteen to millions.

Breasts swaying like perfect fruit shifted suddenly into massive hills, then inverted voids. Genitals folded and furled, encompassing and inverting, receding and rushing.

The woman had become a miasmatic maw of mismatched, mishmashed grotesquery that was at once inhuman and yet something supremely sublime - a *thing* hallucinated by an imperfect algorithm whose initial condition had been set by a lustfully imprecise query.

It was sheer Chaos born of a mathematical seed of base desire coupled with an insane improbability of algorithmic chance that *just so happened to coincide* - for just three frames out of three thousand - with the appearance of That Which Lives at the

Edge of Time, Space and Sanity And Which Must Never Be Seen.

But Sean *had* seen it – and his mind was burning. Eyes glowing with fire, his mouth opened wordlessly, blasphemies and brimstone tumbling forth.

In his madness he slit his arm, and with the resultant gusher of blood serving as his ink and fingers his pen, began inscribing his last maleficent testament upon the bedroom wall, fixing into place Words never meant to be read by mortal man. Keys to forbidden doors that would forever break the veil between the “real” and the “Outside.” Prompts for the collective machine. Instructions for the Universal Algorithm to use as hammers against the walls of reality should they ever be read aloud.

The message thus inscribed, his role was complete.

Climaxing with a spray of blood that coated his computer screen, he dropped to the floor dead as the miasmic phantasm in the video let out a final, soundless scream of pleasure and froze on its final frame, its blackened hollow eyes and O-shaped mouth filled with a million razor-teeth challenging the world, a pixelated portent of dark nightmares yet to come.

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