

Day Creepers

by [Asa Boxer](#) (April 2021)



The camouflage netting overhead hung lower that day, as I remember. And the roughly hewn gates felt like they were hedging closer than before, corralling us in tighter against the rocky enclave. From the entrance, it was 386 and one quarter paces to the farthest end. Perpendicular, it was 523 and one half paces. I'd counted both diagonals too. I'd counted the same paces many times before—I performed this ritual whenever memories of Daphne began worming around my heart—but the space, I could have sworn, had narrowed, as though the whole had shrunk like an ocean sucked from its shores and heaped toward the moon from so much focus on that one object. Today (or tomorrow) would be the turning point, one way or another. Either we were to grasp the torch of freedom, or we were to lose our hero, Grits, and with him all hope.

Our little shantytown of scrap metal, weathered wood and brittle canvas creaked in anticipation. The atmosphere in our secret camp was rank with the musk of nervous sweat. Hardened faces greeted each other, betraying barely but a subdued acknowledgment that the news that did not come yesterday could well come today or perhaps tomorrow. Three dark years we'd been hunted; three years of endless night. When would it end?

This day, the day I am recording, I counted paces in that camp for the last time. This fateful day had started early: nearing 0-five-hundred, I got up, readied my dart rifle, my canteen, my gun belt. I checked in on Draco, who was on comms, watching the video feed with a few others. Every camp had a comms post like this to keep in touch with one another. But usually the post contained a single individual

reading a book or fidgeting or bored numb. Now there was a small group around Draco. Perhaps they'd be the first to know. I pulled back the blanket-door and looked in: nothing but static there. No word yet on Mission Sunshine. I had to climb the mountain and take up my station at Post Niner, well outside the camp, to keep a lookout for Vaxxit Squads: the "Safety Police," they called themselves. They preferred the nighttime; but sometimes, if they were so disposed or if they thought they'd caught a whiff of a trail, they'd track and smoke us Runners out in broad daylight. O, sweet, delicious daylight! I wore the anti-vaxxit vest that tricked the Cyclops Cams—those poor, blind fools and their stupid C-Cams. Total VR heads, they couldn't remember what the world looked like, and they put in their bloody work every day to ensure no one else ever saw the world with their own eyes again.

*God Almighty, who raises us up and lays us low,
in whose thrall we all must grow;
The Almighty Living God, Lord of Shadows,
Who forges hearts and tempers souls
in His mysterious foundry, in His occluded flux:
Give Grits victory. Give us courage. Give us luck.
For surely, we are lost without Thy Grace.
Without Thy Glory, Thy Shining Face,
we are condemned to be dishonoured, displaced
in utter darkness, among the Vaxxed, forsaken race.
The Almighty Vital God, Lord of Evolution,
select us, we implore Thee, for Thy salvation!*

Prayer is one thing, but ethics? Ethics is another thing altogether. Ethics is a luxury. Coming from where we came from—from gentrified city streets lined with cafés and swanky restaurants, trendy speakeasies, from smart phones, colour televisions, video games, automobiles, never mind running water, hot water! and flushing water-toilets, never mind easy food packed in supermarkets ("super" because they held so much)—we learned that the hard way. When survival is

one's daily fare, there remains no time for philosophising. There's food and how you're going to get it. There's tribe and how you're going to defend it. There's sleep and how you're going to avoid being murdered in it. And there are snatches of pleasure in the odours of forests, in the stimulating chill of rivers and lakes. There are moments of bliss in the succulence of roasted beef or fresh tomatoes. And for the lucky ones, sometimes there's the bliss of love in the arms of your beloved. These scraps must be stolen and killed for. Sure, among the ranks of the band, there are ethics: keep each other alive; share everything—if you can call that an ethics. More than anything, there are virtues: courage, stoicism, patience. Ethics requires a complex and confusing hierarchy of priorities; that sort of psychic edifice is built on stability, accumulation, spare time. I would go so far as to say that once an ethics appears, the society is already half-rotten. Sound crazy? Well, what brought us all to this broken world of Day Creepers and Vaxxit Squads was ethics. And if you read your history, you'll note that the collapsing of civilisations is always precipitated by its ethics growing ripe and soft till it festers and stinks. One day, you put your foot down and your foot goes straight through floor; you lean against a wall and it gives, the whole house totters and the roof caves in.

Hopefully reading this from such a comfortable perch, you find all this amusingly hyperbolic. Like any sane person, it is my hope to bestow upon future denizens of this Earth the sweet rot of ease and plenty.

When you're pent up and pacing, pent up and waiting, going nowhere, spinning on the compass of your legs, mapping the past into the present, the present into the future, keeping the world rolling under your feet like a caged lion, its dangerous paws still tingling with the warm savannah underfoot and the odour of grazing gazelles in its nostrils, all the while the life behind its eyes flicking back again to

its bleak predicament, the cold steel, the empty cage; when nothing else can hold your attention because your mind is held in a monotonous hammering like an unsecured shutter caught in the whistling wind of a gathering storm and banging, banging away on rusty hinges till there's nothing you can think on but that swinging and banging; when the gear-train of fear and hope and apprehension click into place and engage your soul, spinning it up with such immanent intensity because your salvation or damnation hinge on the uncertain, improbable and squeaky events at hand but beyond your control. . . Under such conditions, I assure you, none of these observations regarding ethics are hyperbolic. All you've got is a throat full of regret that civilised conditions ever encouraged such devastating complacency to corrupt the social contract with its godforsaken ethics.

The short history of this predicament: Not a conscription for close to 50 years. The old heroes retired into a hazy nostalgia of times past and best forgotten—when men were still enlisted to catch lead and die. The next generation made war a video game. A small group of highly trained mercenaries now sufficed. The rest was the domain of drones and satellites. As “the hand of little employment hath the daintier sense,” we grew into a dainty bunch of bloodless hands, indeed. Virtue crumbled. What need for honour when a fellow has rights? What need for patience in an age of fast food and delivery overnight? What need for discipline of any kind?

The virtue of courage was coopted by an effete generation that took it to mean self-indulgence. One was courageous now to indulge a sense of impotence; courageous to cast blame. In the old days, long before the lockdowns and distancing, I remember going to see a play at a Fringe Festival. The small room was packed. It was summertime and air circulation was poor. It was a truly stifling atmosphere, and I had trouble staving off the soporific feeling brought on by

the lack of oxygen. I was there because Daphne had wanted to do something fun, and looking back, I suppose it was fun. Just being in a crowd like that—with her, my beloved—was fun. The trend back then was one-man shows. The write up on this one said something about it being “a bold performance,” and mentioned that it was delivered with “grace and courage.” So we went to behold such valour in action, and it featured a lady who essentially spent sixty minutes changing her makeup and making quick wardrobe changes whilst bemoaning her troubled childhood and a run of terrible boyfriends. There was no introspection, no difficult moment in which she faced herself: just sixty minutes of blaming others for her rotten life. As I exited, I recall several audience members remarking how “brave” she was.

What ethics? What virtue? Instead: values. And before we could tell where the easy life was leading, one value prevailed: Safety.

A Small Sacrifice for Safety: this was the slogan of the New Normal. VaxxitProp proliferated just ahead of the mass vaccinations. And then deeper VaxxitProp in the aftermath when the experiment turned the sun to poison. Twenty-million were jabbed in six weeks. The press was ecstatic to bear witness to such extraordinary international coordination. Week Seven however saw those vaxxed in Week One developing a severe and debilitating sun-allergy, causing blindness, kidney failure, seizures and death by internal drowning. Authorised reports explained that only a negligible fraction was affected: 1 in 10,000. The virus itself effected far fewer than that, but the reasoning was Safety: the vaccine was not for the receiver of the needle, but to protect others.

My well-meaning neighbour Stacy explained it to me one afternoon. She knocked in her usual manner, so I knew it was her. Stacy lived down the hall. She'd been a high school

teacher, retired now some 10 years. Her husband had died and she was collecting two pensions, so she had little incentive to pry past the surface or pick at the government wallpapering. If you brought up information she hadn't heard on legacy television, she looked at you aghast and called it "dangerous fake news." She leapt back a little when I opened the door. She was a very pious Safetyist, and I referred to her as Safe Stace when talking to my friends. She wore a mask, and said something muffled I couldn't follow. So I asked if she'd remove the vile thing, which she did, but not before stepping farther back. She said, "Did you hear? We've got a vaccine." She widened her eyes as she said this. I looked down at the purple carpeting and smiled and said, "Yes, but why would you take it if it can kill you?" The vaccine could kill you, she explained, but it wasn't contagious. There was little talk of the success rate or reliability of the serum; it was enough to know that it was safe and being taken to promote public safety. One was expected to make A Small Sacrifice for Safety.

How can I communicate the creeping sense of urgency, the sense of utter horror that I'd rounded a bend in Time and this dimension was very similar, but not at all the same? The folks around me just suddenly in a snap started altering all their behaviour and it was okay with them to turn like that on a dime, no real questions asked. The answer to Why? could be vague and groundless. If you attempted to point out the baselessness of their behaviour, as I did with my well-meaning neighbour standing in the hallway at a pious distance, you were met with incredulity, as though it were perfectly normal to live this way in fear of talking because of the pestilence breeding in your mouth, afraid to eat dinner with friends under a rising tyranny. Sure, sure. Many around me nodded their heads. All's normal. All's fine. It was a true gaslighting. But who was toying with the gaslights in people's minds?

The dream back then was painless longevity, life without struggle: the end of evolution. Citizens were medicated into a brain-fog, psychically flatlined. Troublesome, disobedient types, those who dared challenge authority, those who cried out with passion, those who quarrelled or even cursed, or merely insulted another were declared deviants by HR and dealt with using the devices of both soft and hard tyrannies: shouting and intimidation followed by indoctrination programs teaching right-think from wrong-think. You were commanded to sit down square under the Tree of Safe Knowledge and forced to see things the Safe Way. This meant you were to loathe your confidence, hold your own mind in contempt, feel shame for your successes and your sex appeal. Wherever you turned, the Safety Cult was waging its relentless War on the Heart.

There arose in those days a Sex Police. Policies criminalised all sexual behaviour. It was a safety precaution to make it impossible for rapists and domestic abusers to beat a rap. It was a small sacrifice, landing the rest of us in the hands of safer evils. Safer that a few innocents should suffer after all than one criminal go free. A small sacrifice for safety.

By the time the virus came, Safety was so well dug in, it took little effort to make folks afraid of their own breath. Much as they'd done with courage, the Safetyists turned the word science to sinister effect. This new science—now referred to as "The Science"—did not require any rigour, was exempt from alignment with relevant data and was beyond public scrutiny and criticism. The Science declared deadly droplets to be issuing from our lungs and killing people. Only crazies disbelieved. Smart folk did what they were told. Only stupid folk asked questions.

At the very onset of the spread of the nonlethal virus, I remember sitting on Matt's rooftop terrace, crushing beers and shooting the breeze. Looking back now, we were

enjoying our last easy days. The roof overlooked a luxuriously green and well-manicured park with flower beds, a football field with a baseball diamond fixed in the southwest corner. And beyond that, to the north, rose the mountain wadded in green treetops. The sky had some thin, attenuated clouds that caught the late afternoon sun and grew pink, taking on progressively darker hues as the evening deepened. We soaked up the warmth and drank and joked around. You could hear the occasional crack of a baseball bat, the shouts of children at play. There were fewer airplanes in the sky, but the occasional drone of a plane yawned its way into the soundscape. Yeah. Those were good times when folks took robust pleasure in the vital air and the bright, vibrant light of day.

By the time we were three sheets to the wind, our buddy Harold stopped by. He was a civil servant, a clean-cut and stylish administrator with a manicure and a tousled head of hair with frosted tips. He worked in the communications department of some branch of government—I forget which. (Such specifics have never meant much to me.) The drink had made me inarticulate a good half hour before he began talking about social distancing and masking. I blurted in a rather foamy way something about it all being bullshit. And he scolded me, explaining that I was contradicting The Science, and was I prepared to mount an argument against The Science? This was not the first time I'd heard of The Science, but it was the first time the subject had come up seriously amongst my compatriots. Well, let's just say I did not feel the need to justify my disbelief in fairy dust and unicorns; instead I made his administrative character and trendy appearance the target of some blunt observations that made everyone who'd been having a good time until then feel a little uncomfortable. Daphne was there. She shot me a censorious glance that ended my bloviations.

According to The Science, longstanding and well-

studied medicines that were held in high regard until this time were declared unsafe. Any doctor who spoke about such an obvious misdirection of effort away from medical treatment was silenced. The Science spoke only of The Vaccine. Weeks Nine and Ten saw the 1-in-10,000-number turn into 1 in 100, soon 1 in 10, and eventually everyone succumbed to the light allergy. None could explain why, but those jabbed after Week Twelve started reacting immediately. Nevertheless, it was A Small Sacrifice for Safety. The vaxx was the sacrament of this cult. So the vaxxing continued. And of course great numbers resisted.

In the earliest period, Vaxxit Squads had easy work. They came to your home at night—three of them to everybody in the house. They grabbed you and jabbed you, and that was that. Everyone was going to make his small sacrifice. It took three weeks of that behaviour before folks began abandoning their homes and going into hiding. Squads soon turned to blasting open strong rooms, smoke-bombing and tear-gassing shelters. They hauled out the bodies and vaxxed them. Early hits by trigger happy vaxxers left folks exposed to the sun. These people died in seizures, foaming at the mouth and gasping for breath. Safety protocols soon followed. Squads were responsible and were required to bring those without adequate shelter to underground bunkers: Safety Camps.

Among squad leaders there arose a number desiring better homes who would do what became known as Jab'nGrabs: they'd jab a family in a nice house and haul them to a camp. Once there, HR was too overrun to verify each citizen complaint. That's how it fared for many families who thought they could slip the loop of tyranny with compliance.

By the time they got to Grits, the system had adapted to us Freedom Runners—(or “Day Creepers” as we were known among Safe Spacers and Vaxxers). Grits, they waylaid with his

family when they were at a secluded river spot bathing and splashing away in the sun. Back then, no one expected squads would go that far out of their way, hunting through the woods, grabbing unsuspecting Runners out of paradise. It wasn't too long before they did though. Their method was to use dart guns that delivered a paralytic agent. (Drugs like that don't render the target unconscious, just unable to move.) Once they saw it taking effect, they swaggered up nice and slow as they broke out their vaxxit kits. So you watched powerlessly as they forced themselves on you with their syringes.

Grits's wife was taken on the rocks above the river where she was sunbathing. Grits and his 12-year-old daughter were taken in the water. By this time, vaccines were deadly in the sunlight. The squad vaxxed all three and left them right there in the blazing sun to die a horrific death. They also violated his paralysed family before his paralysed eyes in ways that Grits couldn't bring himself to talk about. They propped him up to watch while this gang of thugs in C-Cam goggles and sunproof, body-tight fatigues, treated themselves to some live-action Grand Theft Auto. And they laughed, they jeered and they made a game of doing what no predatory beast ever does to its prey.

Some say the VR goggles turn everything into a video game. You never see the world; you barely smell it. After a while it turns unreal they say. That's why the Vaxxit Squads are so cruel. Those who explain why some engage in unnatural acts of violence are more charitable than me. We all know right from wrong, especially that sort of right and wrong. You don't need an ethics to crack that nut.

Grits survived. His skin miraculously produced a protective reaction while he lay there paralysed and propped up staring at his dead tormented family. He developed welts. When he could finally move, every inch of his body burned as though scorched with acid, but that part that faced the sun burned worst of all. It was bloated and sensitive to the

slightest breath of a breeze or the abrasions of a stray hair. After a few days, the welts scabbed, protecting his flesh from the sun. He'd formed a kind of mutant shell, but at what a price! It was a hideous deformity, covering his face, shoulders, arms, legs. He was encased in a hard crust that often itched. Chunks would come loose and fall away, and he suffered frequent infections that suppurated and stank.

About a month after they hit him and his family, the Vaxxit Squads came to know the name Grits . . . and to fear that name and that hideous body. They called him Grimpus or Gimpus to make light of their sense of terror. Patrols were hit daily, and only one vaxxit-grunt from one squad each day was spared to spread the word that Grits was hunting them. After his first three days in action, every squad knew it was a target of his wrath. He was unstoppable. Reports said he was immune to paralytics, that they'd shoot a dozen darts at him and nothing would happen. And soon he worked with a team of us Runners, and we were all immune. In his life before the new regime, Grits had been a chemist. So the first mission he set himself after his recovery from that squad attack was to break into a warehouse and get his hands on the ingredients he needed for an anti-agent.

This is how we handled them when we got our hands on them. Squads were stripped of their goggles while we laughed and told them to open their eyes and look at the real world. Most of them squeezed their eyes shut and tears poured out because they were so sensitive to any form of natural light. Sometimes—caught up in our rage—we'd force the lids open, or even cut them off. Then they were summarily stripped down in the sunshine and left exposed like that, the way Grits and his family had been. They died like vampires, howling and sizzling, foaming at the mouth, twitching and writhing in agony. Maybe you judge us for our cruelty. Maybe we went overboard at times. But likely you understand by now how an ethics in our situation might have been a luxury beyond the

grasp of our tortured hearts. By the time we joined Grits, the situation had grown too desperate. We were fighting an existential threat for the future of humankind.

We hit food and supply transports out of necessity. From the perspective of the authority, we were terrorists. But to be deemed a terrorist by such a wicked regime was heroic.

When I first saw Grits, I didn't know what I was looking at. I was hiding behind this makeshift wall at an early Freedom Camp in the middle of a raid. Back then, we were a ragtag bunch without leadership. We knew enough to keep ourselves in small tribes, so that if we were caught, it would only be one cell and not the lot of us. But we had no coordinated network, no battle training, just rough plans of where to reassemble if we managed to escape. My camp was under fire, and the situation appeared hopeless. Not only was the Vaxxit Squad shooting us with paralytic darts, they'd come with a flame thrower to herd us into a corner. I was hiding . . . cowering and quivering. There was fire everywhere. Smoke. Shouts, barked commands and gurgled cries of agony arose from every quarter. I expected I was going to burn to death, if I was lucky, hopefully suffocate first. That's when Grits appeared. He stepped out of a wall of fire, all six feet four inches of him—a terracotta hulk. My initial impression was that this mutant was something monstrous cooked up by the Safety Police to intimidate and capture Runners. So I resigned myself to my fate. In fact, I wanted to die after what had happened to Daphne. Our eyes met. He looked right through me or perhaps clear into me with his thousand-yard gaze. Then he stretched out a hand, and I understood he was on our side, and I crawled out of my miserable hiding place.

No matter how much time passed, we Runners couldn't surmount entirely a sense of disbelief at the way an irrational spirit had managed to sweep the globe. True, it was rare we discussed the past now; once we'd found our tribe and our duties, we began to feel less apprehensive. Once we were

doing something, that overwhelming sense of impotence wore off. We had other worries now, promising ones. But back at the start, three and a half years ago . . . or just over four, if you count the pre-Vaxxit Squad period. . . we couldn't stop talking about it. We were internalising a societal about-face, a schizoid crackup at the anthropological level in which all the truth of yesterday was dropped in tandem and a goose step kicked in. Only looking back does there appear any indicator of so extreme a dimensional shift dislocating a whole civilisation, dissociating a collective psyche from its common ground. This was a cosmic level warp in the collective. Some astrologers had predicted a reality shift along these lines, but not even the open minded paid much heed to readings of that data-field. We were experiencing a minute shift in the kaleidoscope of our universe, and then just like a kaleidoscope, the whole picture changed.

So we talked and we talked till we heard ourselves talking again in disbelief about the same things, our circumstances pacing back and forth between our ears and between our hearts and our brains. Watching the machinery of checks and balances fade before our eyes like an insubstantial pageant, some magical interlude or bit of entertainment . . . Watching our party leaders and our press betray us, our economy collapse and the legal framework fail us, all intelligent thought and rational action melt into air, into static air!—leaving us all suspended upon a groundless ground . . . With such a swift pulling of the carpet from under our feet, we struggled to hold our centres. So we talked.

When the first psychological pinch started to bite, closing in on a year of administrative overstep into authoritarianism, my close friend Duncan reached out directly to a Human Rights lawyer. It was some months since it had been ruled illegal to visit our friends and family, but we met up anyhow.

The past summer, they'd closed Mount Royal Street to

traffic to allow pedestrians to circulate at a distance from one another. One was to assume that deadly droplets formed invisible but toxic cirrus clouds in the energy-envelopes of our auras and that these auras extended a distance of two metres. This was never stated directly of course, it was so ridiculous, but it was implied. The state encouraged musicians to play in the streets. It felt a little engineered to me, I remember, so instead of calming me as it was clearly meant to do, it piqued my paranoia. It was a sign of a psychotic schism, a double messaging: Panic! but Stay Calm!

By the time I met up with Duncan, those days of crowds and street music had passed and become a time to wax nostalgic about. Those days were by then the good life that was and is no-longer. It was now early winter, cold, and we had to meet for a walk somewhere inconspicuous. We arranged a spot by the railroad tracks where we were sure to go unmolested. It was raining and the ground was soft. We navigated a muddy walk, working our ways around large puddles that pooled up here and there against the rail embankment.

Duncan was wound up . . . a little out of his mind with incomprehension, never mind a little unstable from the house arrest we were all enduring under the guise of “quarantine.” He’d been through a lot: had to close his two computer repair and accessories shops and declare bankruptcy when lockdowns obliterated his customer base. Folks just stopped supporting mom and pop shops and turned to buying everything online. There were periods he wasn’t even allowed to operate because his goods and services had been declared—by backroom fiat—to be unnecessary. Unlike Safe Stace, he had plenty of reason to be pulling back curtains and tearing away blinds.

What had crawled up his leg was that this Human Rights lawyer—this representative of our freedoms, who should have been a guardian and watchdog of our liberties—was spiritually dead at the wheel. A judge had recently ruled from the bench

that micro-managing a citizen's walking and standing habits was not an infringement upon his liberties. In other words, without review of any arguments, this judge had declared farm management of a human population in accord with our statutes. Duncan had also just watched a provincial health authority inform citizens that those who refused a vaccination would become a subclass under the newly crystallising pharmocracy. One politician suggested human traceability tagging, so that with a swipe, it would be known whether the individual in question was vaccinated or had come into contact with an infected subject. "For the public good," he told reporters. So Duncan wrote to this lawyer hoping to raise some community support against such proposed horrors. A great man once wrote, "Any law that degrades human personality is unjust". . . and "an unjust law is no law at all." He quoted this to me. He quoted this to that lawyer. He quoted it to everyone.

It was that time of year when everything looks desolate, like the rain has melted reality away, all the trees empty handed, dripping, and the vines interlacing the chain-link fences denuded and dripping from the knotted places where their leaves had formerly clung. There was fencing along either side of the tracks. I was watching the water bead here and there as he spoke.

As Duncan expressed it, this lawyer could not put two and two together any better than that judge or that horrible health authority. He said to me that day: "Are we going to wind up fighting in some sort of resistance?" "Naw," I said to him, "Of course not! It won't come to that. Someone will figure out how to torpedo this insanity and the whole thing will fizzle like an unpinched balloon." So we talked that sort of talk, talking ourselves in circles, hoping the gyre churning at our guts might be still awhile. But it was to no avail. My sober remarks fell dead before us like skeet. It was clear that all the sentry posts were vacant and the city walls had been breached. We were witnessing the final days of a

doomed Troy. Always a new turn of events would start that churning up again, at first monthly, then weekly, then daily, then hour to hour till we ran for dear life.

That was the last time I saw Duncan. He joined the skyrocketing statistic of suicides, carbon-monoxided himself in his car. I wish he'd stuck around, but I cannot blame him. The world had become a ghetto full of capos and snitches, a prelude to something far more sinister, and not a place worth living in.

Before my guard duty was over, I heard music. At first I couldn't believe I was hearing it. The last time I'd heard music was back when the state sponsored street music was hauntingly ubiquitous. Not long after we'd established our underground network of Freedom Camps, one had been raided. Nearly the whole camp was vaxxed and exposed. Turned out they had been celebrating a wedding, and the music had carried enough to ping a Vaxxit Squad. After that, the most one heard of music was the strumming of muted strings and the dead click of the stops on baffled horns. This music seemed to be emanating from our camp. My heart leapt as I considered the possibility that we'd won, that Grits's plan had met with success and the worst episodes of our collective nightmare were finally behind us. I couldn't leave my post though. There were sure to be Vaxxit Squads unaware of the blow we'd struck and still on the hunt.

I tried to contain myself, but my heart kept turning to my beloved Daphne, and I wept like those ravaged vines clinging to the chain-link in the cold rain. Daphne. What a noble, beautiful creature: intelligent, incisive and always ready to fight if she had to. At times like this when I broke down, I'd flash back to that foggy dawn raid when she'd been vaxxed. When it came to Freedom Camps, Vaxxit Squads had special orders to "Vax and Sun"—which is what it sounds like.

I should have thrown my lot in with hers. Yes, we'd talked about it before it ever happened: What if we were separated? What's the plan? And we'd decided: Better to run and live free in the sun. It was love made us want the best for each other. That was all fine in theory, but living it was hell, and it was often that I came damn near pulling the plug on my pathetic life. I'd watched her face turn purple, her eyes bulge and seep blood; I'd watched a blister grow on her left cheek in just seconds and explode; I'd watched her scream and choke on the foam pouring from her mouth; I'd watched her writhe and die through a crack in the jury-rigged wall I was sheltering behind like a useless child. I watched that vaxxit-grunt jab her and walk away like a begoggled alien exterminating an undesirable race. Why didn't I call out? Why didn't I tear that disgusting C-Cam from his blind eyes? Why did I hide like that?

I might have died that day. Lord knows I'd welcomed death. But that was when Grits had stepped out of the flames like a Greek god and uncrushed my dead heart and filled it with a new substance—an expansive radiative energy of revenge that stood in for courage until I could find the real thing. One might say that I did die that day. I died to the illusion that we could keep hiding, and maybe make it through to the other side, Daphne and I, and still manage to have a home and raise a family.

Strains of music made their way out to me and touched off an inner chemical reaction that warmed my heart. Years of tension loosened all at once. I rolled onto my back and looked up at the sun and listened and drew a deep breath. It was beauty incarnate. Paradise was close enough I could smell it now.

It was three whole hours before Sam sauntered up with a big grin on his face. "You missed it," he said. "Crouch down," I said, "and keep your voice down for godsakes. . . Why didn't you come get me right away?" "Sorry, man. I forgot

about you in the excitement." "Thanks," I said.

Then he described to me how events had transpired. The screen static went black and an image flickered through. There were three long rows of Cyclops-Cammed faces in sunproof suits on their knees. Grits's team stood behind them, and Grits himself stepped up to the camera with that lurid figure of his and that signature gruff voice that sometimes quavered in a frank, humanising manner and announced the names of those they'd rounded up: key politicians, key members of the press and health authorities. He enumerated their crimes. Then he gave the order . . . and their goggles were torn away. They squeezed their eyes shut. Next, their suits were cut away with hunting knives, like they were being skinned. And then everyone just waited. . . and waited.

Grits stepped up to the camera, looked at his watch and announced: This is the trial. Mark your time. Now. . . we learn the truth: Who is guilty. Who is not. After one minute, twenty seconds, one body in the group fell over in convulsions, another five seconds and another fell flat on her face and began to writhe, three more seconds and numbers three and four fell over in sharp pain, wheezing. And Grits, who had walked away to examine the dying, now returned to the camera and checked his watch once more, and he paused a while and surveyed the denuded group before him, and began to address the viewers when one last collaborator dropped away from sun sickness behind him. Quite an image. Hell itself: Grits in the foreground (the Overseer) and beyond his shoulder in the background, sinners on their knees and naked, their eyes shut tight while those around them shriek and wretch through prolonged agonies. "These," he said, standing aside and pointing, "Are-Not Guilty."

With a deeply anchored, stoic air, he turned to the remaining survivors, those who were not reacting to the sun. "Open your eyes! You're not fooling anyone anymore." But only about half of them opened their eyes. "Open your eyes! All of

you!" But only a few more eyes opened. "Okay then," he said, "if you want to play it that way."

This transmission was being watched across the globe: other Runners like us in other countries, Safety Camp authorities, nearly anyone wearing a C-Cam (other than any on-duty vaxxit-grunts), collaborators, victims—everyone was watching this. I imagine the whole world held its breath as these policy makers—now naked and exposed and trembling—faced the direct sunlight. . . but five minutes passed and nothing happened, upon which, after consulting his pocket watch, Grits was seen to go off camera and come back with a vaxxit kit. He loaded up a syringe and manoeuvred his way to a chief bureaucrat who refused to open her eyes.

"O-pen . . . your-eyes!" Grits barked like a drill sergeant. She cried out when she felt the jab, "Nooo!"—she shouted. The rest of those naked criminals on their knees now opened their eyes, looked around and saw Grits's imposing figure, their colleagues gagging and drowning in growing puddles of blood. They looked and shuddered to see with their own eyes that deformed and crackled scab of a man, and at his feet, they beheld their vaxxed comrade crumple as her skin boiled, and watched as she cried out in pain and succumbed to those ghastly seizures. And the world looked on at that naked group (their tormented eyes wide open now); the world looked on and saw them.

[Table of Contents](#)

Asa Boxer's debut book, *The Mechanical Bird* (2007), won the

Canadian Authors Association Prize for Poetry, and his cycle of poems entitled “The Workshop” won first prize in the 2004 CBC Literary Awards. His poems and essays have since been anthologised in various collections and have appeared in magazines internationally. His books include *Skullduggery* (Signal, 2011), *Friar Biard’s Primer to the New World* (Frog Hollow Press, 2013), *Etymologies* (Anstruther Press, 2016) and *Field Notes from the Undead* (Interludes Press, 2018). A new collection of poems is expected in the spring (2021) with Guernica Editions. Boxer is also a founder of the Montreal International Poetry Prize. He presently edits *The Secular Heretic*, an online magazine for the arts and sciences. And he appears in a weekly cultural video series called Daymakers (with fellow writers Marko Sijan and Marc di Saverio) in which he reads poems, conducts interviews with provocative thinkers and participates in conversations on the arts and sciences.

Follow NER on Twitter [@NERIconoclast](https://twitter.com/NERIconoclast)