

Thanksgiving Politics & Family

by [Gracjan Kraszewski](#) (August 2020)



Coffee Table, Ernst Ludwig Kirschner, 1923

America at least one hundred years in the future

Steve and Susie live in Boise's North End. Great house. Corner lot. The outside is painted a faded yellow, subtle yellow with an even subtler blue trim. The front door is blue, too, but of a striking hue; somewhere in between Ultramarine and Federal Blue, some might even say it hints at a Midnight blue genealogy. A little stone pathway juts off the sidewalk and meanders under a canopy of trees leading up to the entrance. There are trees aplenty in the North End. The houses are tucked snug, one nearly on top of the other. Tucked snug like one'd imagine sibling-children are required to be by city ordinance in Zermatt, SUI, tucked snug—brother, sister, brother— in one bed each wearing matching flannel pajamas, all the palpable warmth in the room being piped in from the crackling fireplace outside in the main room, the wind howling outside and the temperature negative degrees Celsius, the children with warm bellies too having just downed hyperbolic “gallons” of Oma's hot chocolate while ravaging her *haselnussmakronen* and *hausfreunde* in equal measure, their whole bodies pleasantly sore and battered as only a full day on the slopes can do, giddily awaiting Großvater Wolfgang to finally get done “cleaning his back” so he can come into the tucked snugged, properly tucked out, tired but so well fed youngsters absolutely on pins and needles waiting to hear his latest story about the Wolfman who climbed Theodul Pass one night and ate the moon and now, right now, he's going to return for some more delectables...them! Inside, the North End homes are actually quite spacious. And many have these very nice, tucked-snug type cozy backyards.

Steve and Susie's house is quintessential in every regard. They have one of these backyards, abutting a dirt road alley where a basketball hoop stands next to garbage cans,

this beyond a garden that Susie planted where she grows different fruits and vegetables—mainly asparagus, tomatoes, spinach, raspberries and blueberries—this garden in the corner of probably a good sixty by forty green space with a perfectly manicured lawn easy on bare feet next to a garage that doubles as Steve's shop. A place for him to "tinker with me toys."

The house is a four bedroom/three bath. It is uniquely designed; an interesting mix of cottage on the outside, industrial within. The industrial interior can feel either cold or cool depending upon moods and seasons. Steve's office is near the back of the house. He has a large printout on his door that reads, in Andale Mono Font 44: *Keep Pushing Yourself until You hear something Snap inside of You. Then, start PUSHING.* Beneath that: *It's not the number of breaths we take, but the number of moments that take our breath away.* And beneath that a final one: *Yesterday is history, tomorrow a mystery and today is a gift. That's why we call it the present. And because it's a present, never look a gift horse in the mouth. Never, ever, take even one iota of a fleeting moment for granted.*

Steve's desk is clean. It's a wooden desk, bare. Pens, pencils, rulers, yellow-papered notebooks and even old-style pink rubber erasers are on a small shelf nearby. Steve has an enormous chair that looks out of place, both in size and theme. It's fan memorabilia. Colonel Star Spangled Banner, comic-book-turned-action-movie star.[\[1\]](#) Col. Star Spangled Banner is an undersized underdog, a five-foot three one-hundred fifteen-pound chemist turned crime-fighter. Nerdy and shy with women, this unlikely hero gets pulled away from his lab to deal with some evil force threatening America in an unspecified yet deeply disturbing way. The U.S. government wants him for his prodigious intellect. Then a bite in the armpit from a rabid sewer rat transforms him into a seven foot five, three hundred pound monster; but a friendly monster, so not really a "monster," more like a "beast," a "good beast," a

beautified beast, one concerned about social progress and not saying offensive things, etc. One by one, he incinerates foes with a radioactive environmentally friendly laser, shot from the center of his six pack-rimmed belly button. Col. Star Spangled Banner, with the help of his sidekick, Red-Glare Rocket Boy, saves the day but neither he nor RGRB can get the girl(s). This inability to make progress with the opposite sex is a character strength. He, they, are real superheroes too super for sexist paternalism; especially as manifested by holding doors open for women, allowing women to go first in others things, speaking to women before being spoken to. Anyhow, science provides all the love he needs.

There he is, Col. Star Spangled Banner, right on the back of Steve's oversized chair. He's smiling, dressed in his purple, skin tight spandex with the American flag cape drooped over his shoulders and his trademark white polka-dot jockstrap out front, hands akimbo, eyes wide and bulging through thick-rimmed goggles.

Steve's miniature library is filled with science and engineering literature. A small part of his collection—perhaps 5%? —is dedicated to self-help and self-improvement books. Sample titles include *You are much Better Looking, More Intelligent, and More Interesting Than you Could Ever Imagine: Don't listen to that Silly Voice in Your Head*. Also: *How to Make People Like You (Even if they Don't Fall in Love, Even if They Despise You You Despicable La-EWE-ser)*.

"Hey, Dad," Ben[\[2\]](#) says, giving his father a hug. Ben is standing, his dad is sitting down in a chair next to Steve in front of the television. "What are you guys up to?"

Steve[\[3\]](#) looks at his brother. He looks up and down, fixated on Ben's outfit and unable to conceal his disgust. This is given away by a slight twitch of his left eye, a tick that only manifests when he is upset. "Hi, Ben," he says, stretching out his hand.

"Steve," Ben says, extending his outfit's crown jewel, the candy cane colored-cane, in place of his hand. Steve pulls back his hand.

"What are you guys watching?" Ben asks.

"Reagan's speech in front of the Brandenburg Gate," Ben's father says, eyes glued to the screen.

"Tear down this wall!" Steve says, pumping his fist. "Right, Dad?"

"You know, guys, I think this is probably like, the worst movie ever made," Ben says.

"Movie?" Steve asks, indignant. "This is history. It's not a movie."

"If it's on film and you can watch it then, by my lights, it's a movie. I guess we can quibble over terms."

"It's history, Ben. It's real."

"I just wish there was more action. Like a drag race by the Berlin Wall or something."

"Go away, Ben."

"Enormoustoolboxsayswhat?"

"What?"

Thanksgiving dinner was sublime. A few times after Ben thought he was full he took on another helping of turkey or stuffing, anything in sight. It was a good meal, finished off with pumpkin pie for dessert. Interesting conversation, too. Ben's father[\[4\]](#) is upset with the results of the recent gubernatorial race. His candidate, a member of the far-right Idaho Independent Party, finished dead last in a four-person race. Worse still, a far left liberal was elected governor. Ben's mom was pleased.

"I guess I don't understand the people of my own state anymore," Ben's dad says. "How can you not vote IIP? It's a perfect political party. Limited government," he flicks out his fingers, counting, "a .05% immigration quota, the strongest Second Amendment reestablishment profiles I've seen in my lifetime, no welfare programs, and you all know the thing I like the most, getting rid of all that higher education grant money. Idaho can finally develop its own missile defense system."

"Falcon, please," Ben's mom says. "Can we have one dinner where we don't discuss politics? Just once?"

Ben's dad shrugs.

"I think Dad's right," Steve says. "We, Idaho, had this one chance to make the state what it once was. To make it a force on the national scene, and—

"What?" Ben says. "When has Idaho ever been a force on the national scene?"

"0.9 percent," Ben's dad says, shaking his head.

"0.9 percent," Steve repeats. "That's how many people voted for the IIP. That's it. It's crazy, I don't get it."

"When was Idaho a force on the nation scene?" Ben asks, again.

"You don't even know, Ben," Steve says. "That's what it was once like. People respected Idaho. 'Idahoan' once carried the same weight the word 'Roman' did for the barbarians—"

Ben laughs.

"Yeah," Steve says, "it was like that. You can laugh but it's true. Idaho. The name commanded respect. We had a chance to get that back and we failed."

"0.9 percent," Ben's dad says, shaking his head before shoveling in a piece of pie.

"Increase," Ben's grandmother says, calling her son by his given name. "Honey, don't you think that it is strange for you to support this political party considering they want to take away all of the funding for education, your profession, in favor of these cockamamie ideas?"

"No, mother. I'm not a hypocrite. If the money goes to a good cause then I'm all for it. Everyone needs to make sacrifices. A civilization collapses from within before it's conquered from without. If the safety of Idaho means I, we, need to tighten our belts a bit, so be it."

"That's right, Dad," Steve says, tapping his fork on the plate. "That's exactly it!"

Ben's mother [\[5\]](#) begins to laugh uncontrollably. She's having difficulty keeping the pumpkin pie in her mouth. Ben's dad looks at her. She can't stop laughing. "What?" he says to her. Ben's mom is laughing really hard.

"I, I can't believe you guys, you, Falcon, you and Steve," puts her head down on the table for one more guffaw. "I can't believe you take this IIP thing seriously. First of all, the candidate's name is an automatic disqualification for me. If your name's Richard Smalls, please go by Richard," more laughing. "And then, Falcon, a 'good cause'? The education budget slashing? A missile defense system? How does anybody in that party think that anyone, anywhere, let alone the U.S. government is going to allow a state to build its own missile defense system? Hasn't your own personal experience taught you anything?"

"Saoirse," Ben's father says. "I'm for education. But national defense, beginning at the state level, has to be prioritized."

"You do realize," Ben's mom says, "that Idaho is ranked 53rd of all U.S. states in education-

"Fifty-first, Mom," Steve says.

"Well, that changes everything," putting her hands up, palms out. "Build the missile whatever. We're just fine, thank you," she says. "Seriously. We, Idaho, are at the bottom of the barrel in every nationwide metric. Fifty-third, fifty-first, who cares? Only twenty-nine percent of Idahoans have a high school diploma. Seven out of ten haven't even completed high school. High school should be like a literary test, near 100%. And something like fifteen or sixteen percent of Idahoans go to college. Go to college, I'm not sure what the statistics are on graduating. Falcon, you know. All of our students at U of I: California, Washington, Arizona. Falcon, I had three girls from Kansas in one class and only two students from Idaho. How is there are higher percentage of Kansans in a class at the University of Idaho then Idahoans? Maybe Idahoans are flooding the campuses of Kansas and Kansas State, I doubt it. And still, the IIP wants to slash the education budget further; for missiles."

"I think Dad said it best, Mom," Steve says. "It's about priorities."

"You realize the strength of these proposed missiles is so great that just one can take out an area the size of Luxembourg. Just one fired and the domino effect is the end of the world, literally. We fire one—and at who, Falcon? At who?—and they retaliate and soon planet Earth is no more. But the IIP wants three or four of these missiles. Geniuses."

"To be fair, Mom," Ben says, "I think the more missiles the better. I mean once we destroy the Earth, we've gotta have backup to take out the other planets. Just imagine, nuking Uranus."

Saoirse laughs, hard. Steve doesn't think it's funny. "That's ridiculous, Ben!" he retorts. "You have no idea how science works. If the earth blows up, and everyone's dead, then how can anyone even fire a missile at other planets? They're all dead, Ben. There's no one to fire a missile in the first place."

"You're right, Steve," Ben says. "What was I thinking? When you explain it like you did, when you really break it down, I think you're right. But just think. Just, hypothetically, okay? Everybody on earth puts on a tin foil hat, presses all the buttons, fires every missile including a boomerang one that'll come back and finish off Earth, and then they just jump off the western part of the Earth. The Earth is flat, Steve, so it should be no problem, so long as everyone is wearing the proper spaceman gear, to jump off into outer space and float off somewhere new while everything else blows up."

"It could work, Mom," Steve says, referring to the proposed placement of the missile system. "One out by Twin Falls, pointed east. Another out there by Oregon, near the border, by Ontario. It could cover Boise up through the middle of the state. That's the greatest threat, right Dad?"

Increase says nothing.

"Yeah," Steve says. "The IIP passed out a bunch of pamphlets. Getting nuked from the North Pole was right behind government run public schools, I think."

"And then," Ben's mom continues, "the strong 'Second Amendment' stuff. There's a good reason that no longer exists. How did it exist in the first place? Look what it leads to. Look what they're proposing. Allowing kids as young as eight to have concealed carry permits. Making it mandatory for all small businesses to have a staff member trained in urban warfare. Who's going to pay for this?"

“Saoirse,” Ben’s dad says, extending his hands, palms up. “Okay. They have to, okay, okay you asked who’s going to pay? How about your guy? Who’s going to pay for all of his ideas?”

Ben’s mom’s “guy” is governor-elect Bartholomew Slamon. Slamon is a Neo-Engels Post Socialist Renaissanced Democrat (“Nepper” from N.E.P, as in the first three letters of the party’s full name. Neppers are slightly to the left of the largest liberal body, the Libgressives). Originally from Boise, he served five years as Idaho State Treasurer after teaching accounting at the community college level and, as a side business, worked as an animal clothes fashion designer. He developed a line of winter cat wear that did surprisingly well.

Slamon is a polarizing figure.[\[6\]](#) He is viewed as either the greatest champion of the people yet seen, “Eugene Debsanders on Steroids” as one publication put it, or the harbinger of a communist societal implosion just breaking over the horizon. Slamon has promised Idahoans implementation of his OWI (Optional Work Initiative) within his first one-hundred days in office.

Work, Slamon has said, “kind of sucks, am I right?”[\[7\]](#) Any Idahoan eighteen years or older can apply for OWI status. Under the program, which Slamon and his associates and his supporters vehemently deny is in any way similar to welfare, members receive a bi-weekly stipend of \$904.45. Slamon has promised to put a cap on Idaho rent prices—to be set as low as \$600/mo. but not to exceed \$715/mo.—allowing OWI members, once they have purchased groceries and other essentials, to spend the rest of their money on “the free pursuit of happy creative energies and or synthetic stimulants designed to produce similar sensations in the user.”

The OWI program will be funded by a tax bracket system based on current income profiles. Under the proposal, Idahoans

would pay all taxes to the state without any federal requirements. Skeptics doubt the federal government would grant Idaho a similar waiver to the one given to California, allowing that state to handle taxes internally in exchange for promising to stop deluging the rest of America with Californian emigrants. No Californians could relocate in the first ten years of the agreement with only 7% allowed to leave following that, with a perpetual moratorium on surfers, skateboarders, men with shoulder length dreadlocks, men or women who wear sunglasses indoors, and anyone who has ever auditioned for a daytime television soap opera, at present the longest running television medium in entertainment history, still drawing heavy viewership today, especially in the 95-110 demographic.

This is of course not literally true. Ben's father, who like many Idahoans doesn't like Californians just because, enjoys telling this story, with those exact details, at parties. California's federal tax exemption had something to do with their enormous economic output and was tied up in transportation routes along the Pacific coastline, something like that. Conventional wisdom says Idaho's not getting a similar exemption.

Under Slamon's plan anyone currently making \$37,500 or less per year will pay no taxes and be automatically enrolled in the OWI, allowed to have a double-income, if they so choose, between their job and the OWI payments. But, Slamon believes, most will choose not to work once they have the OWI grant because, well, why would you work if you don't have to?

There is a 3% tax on anyone making between \$37,501–59,999. Under Slamon's plan all taxes are bundled into one, combined payment. A twenty percent tax would be enforced on the bracket \$60,000-79,999. Anyone making over \$80,000 per year, but not exceeding \$145,999, must pay a 40% tax. Income in the range \$146,000–\$215,999 is taxed at a 62% rate. Anyone making \$216,000 or more per year will pay a 75% tax with an

additional 10% “luxury tax” on anyone making five million dollars or more per annum.

Critics of Slamon’s OWI—once they make the most popular complaint that this system is A. government grand larceny under the cover of law or B. anti-American or C. I mean really un-American like Big Ideologo-Nuclear Game of Chicken Don’t Flinch[\[8\]](#) Communist Russia stuff, guys—cite the most popular Idahoan (beloved by those on the left, right, far left and far right, alike), Boise State football coach Rock Brick, as Patient Zero regarding the predatory nature of Slamon’s tax plan. Brick has been head coach at BSU for eleven years. In that time, he has led the Broncos to two national titles. He guided the program through its transition to the Southeastern Conference, Far West Division[\[9\]](#), and for his efforts was handsomely compensated.

Brick currently makes \$16m/yr. Under Slamon’s OWI, Brick would this year pay \$13,600,000 in taxes. Critics of the OWI allow this number to hang in the air. Case closed, they say. Supporters of the OWI, Ben’s mom in the number, feign pity for Brick asking how in the world can a man feed his family on \$2,400,000 a year? That’s not the point, critics of Slamon say, you, meaning the government, can’t just take someone’s money. It’s that person’s money. They earned it. You can’t take it. The point, Slamon supporters say (the vast majority of whom hate sports, especially team sports and most especially any sport that flaunts an aggressive, even primal/visceral form of masculinity), is that football is one of the stupidest time-wasters ever invented, fat men in too tight nylon and mesh rolling aground in mud hitting one another in a wild goose chase over inflated pigskin (which Slamon supporters also take umbrage with, the pigskin, as almost all are hyper-environmentalist and/or animal activist types). If there was a way to take all of Brick’s money in taxes it still wouldn’t be enough. Enough of a penalty for his role in orchestrating the nylon and mesh mud-covered and

animal hating goose chasing.

Ben's dad scarfs down his next few bites in rapid succession. "He wants to make eating meat a Class C misdemeanor, Saoirse," Increase says, of Slamon. "He wants make cutting down a tree aggravated assault."

Ben's mom waves her hand through the air. "Like you need to be eating any more meat, Falcon."

Increase snickers.

"That's what it always is with you people."

"You people?"

"Libgressives.[\[10\]](#) Always trying to tell people what to do. And then you play up this innocence about whatever you're trying to force on someone is objectively good; good for them, for society."

"Usually is."

"Really?"

"Usually so, yes."

"Like Slamon's idea about capping soda sizes," Increase says, "like that? How can a self-respecting man drink soda from a thimble, Saoirse?"

"No self-respecting HLM[\[11\]](#) should be drinking soda, period. Why can't you see that he has a vision?"

"Oh, I don't doubt the man sees things," Increase says, chuckling. "Being that far detached from reality it would be strange if he didn't."

"Dad," Ben says, "didn't you, like, uh, once, um, lead an uprising against the government?"

"How dare you, Ben?" Steve says.

"It's okay, Steve," Increase says. "Son," to Ben, "one day you'll realize that a man has to stand in front of a mirror naked and say to himself, 'Ole boy, this is what you are.' He's gotta stand there naked as a jaybird. He's gotta stand there all by himself, by himself with nothing but the silence of the world around him, buck-naked in front of a mirror. And here's the thing, Ben. He can't look away. Yeah, right there, yeah, I see that skin tag. I see those scars and that extra roll of belly fat. I should probably shave that, should probably cover that up permanently with some kind of patch. You see, Ben, once a man sees himself as he is, warts and all, then he begins to be guided by the truth. And that's what life is all about: searching for and living by the truth. Okay, Ben? Do you understand? There's only one truth out there and a man's gotta find it. That search is the one and only thing this life is about. A man's got to find his principles and live by 'em. If a man's got to go to war for those principles then, so be it. Maybe even lay his life down for a cause. You'll see one day, son."

"That's right, Dad," Steve says, patting his father on the shoulder. "I couldn't have said it better myself."

"My ass," Ben says.

"Excuse me?" Steve says.

"I was asking if you were familiar with my friend, Mortimer Yves-Aloysius Sschultz?" Ben says. "Maybe not, because Sschultz is spelled with a second s upfront and he's better known by a shortened version of his name. M as in Monsieur, dot, Y hyphen A, dot, double S, period."

"Who is this guy?" Steve asks.

"A close friend," Ben says, "but with him it's always 'but,' you know? 'I'd like to go but...Yes, I can, but...at least

you can always count on him to be the butt of a joke, he takes it well, you know? The thing is I'd like to know why you didn't tell me there was updog in this food, Steve? I would have liked to have been warned beforehand."

"What's updog?" Steve asks.

"Oh, nothin'," Ben says, "Just chillin'. You?"

"What?"

"I just asked you, how are you doing? You doing good?"

Steve gets up from the table and heads into the kitchen. Saoirse seizes the interlude to get back to discussing politics, as is the fashion with those who pretend to be most avoidant of such conversation. It's not that their hoped avoidance is a farce. They really do want to avoid such discussions. And primarily because they follow one of Socrates' most worn out maxims concerning self-knowledge/awareness. They have a (recently, and unanimously, voted best commercial jingle/skit of the past century) "Pringles-Chips" *once you pop, you can't stop* pathology.

"The problem with those of your philosophical bent, Falcon," she says, "is that they claim to be all about traditional values, even traditionally religious values, but it's a total game of pick and choose. These people will make a big deal out of things like saying 'Merry Christmas.' They use it as some kind of litmus test to separate believers from heathens and yet they neglect, like their supposed Master teaches, 'the weightier things of the law.' These Right-Winger idiots actually believe they are 'living their faith' faithfully as long as they say Merry Christmas in between stripping poor people of any kind of necessary-basic! -social programs and kicking out a long list of undesirables from the country."

"That's hardly accurate," Increase replies. "And at least Right-Wingers hold to some, *some*, vestiges of religion. No, no what I mean is at least they're religious about religion, even if many of them are hypocritical like you say."

"So, you admit Right-Wingers are all hypocrites?"

Increase laughs. He would like nothing more now than for all the world to fall away, all the world and everyone in it, leaving just him and Saoirse and maybe an old inflatable mattress, the more dilapidated the better. Increase can see the glint behind Saoirse's eyes and knows the way only decades of marriage can lend an understanding to, that she is feeling exactly the same way. Increase would be the first to tell anyone that marriage can be difficult at times; that the one half grates on the other; that things fall into a rut, sometimes; that the spark gets dimmer, sometimes; that it can be very hard to recapture the initial refulgence and general incandescent pyrotechnical rocket science of the whole deal. But this is just picking low hanging fruit. Everyone knows this; everyone harps on it too. What they don't tell you: there is nothing like twenty years in the bank with the same person, with a real ceremony behind those twenty years and a twenty-year-old mattress and no electricity, no connection to nothing and so everything by necessity must be left to the imagination.

This—political discussions with her spouse either involved or within earshot proximity—is another reason why Saoirse tries to avoid politics at all costs. Many years ago (and here is where the lack of alternating currents and etc. plus resourceful inventiveness comes in) one such heated exchange had taken place as she and her newly wedded husband had just turned the key on their little Bear Lake honeymoon getaway cabin. They had planned, beforehand, a nice week consisting of laying around the lake, some swimming, some boating, and a lot of taking-it-easy strolls about town. But politics had triggered *something* and the week went to waste.

They never left the cabin.

"No, Saoirse," Increase says, savoring her name a little too long. He has to clear his throat to reset. "Right-Wingers are not *all* hypocrites. But like I was saying. At least the religion they believe in is a real religion. Look at all these kooky Libgressives, all of them atheists to some degree, yet more religious than I could ever hope to be. The only thing is they don't call what they worship *religion*...but it is! Look at the one environmentalist quack woman who was going to save the planet by having sex with the earth—

One of Steve's kids laughs. He gets a medium strength sthwock to the back of the head. This followed by something like *hey why don't you guys go do, go do something, go outside while the grownups have a chat, huh?*

Saoirse laughs too. "Of course, go right to the extremes. How about the RW (Right-Winger; but obviously) who 'cracked the Biblical code' that told him the end times were imminent and he had...what did he say, Increase, you remember the news report, this was like two, three years ago. What did he say? That he had, uh, 'exactly nine-hundred and ninety-seven hours to buy nine-thousand nine-hundred and ninety seven guns' and fire each one of them in the direction of the 'harvest moon' or else," she laughs, again, "or else, and this was my favorite part, 'the government will finally let us know what's been-been done happenin' down at the Area 51s.' Remember? And then remember the reporter asked him, *but haven't you cracked some kind of end-times code?* You remember his response? 'Oh, yeah. The world'll end too, no doubt about it.'"

"C'mon, Mom," Ben says. "That's not nice to talk about our dad that way—especially to point out that he thinks its Area fifty-ones."

Both Saoirse and Increase laugh heartily. Steve

doesn't think it's funny. He gets up from the table. "I swear, Ben, you insult our Dear Leader one more time and it's going to come to fisticuffs between us."

"Handcuffs, you mean."

"No, I—"

"Cufflinks?"

"I do remember that guy," Increase says. "You remember the Libgressive 'Positive-Thoughts Self-Esteem Empowerment Coach' guy who got arrested for something like 50 counts of repeated public urination while publicly intoxicated? You remember his little extraterrestrial story? He had come from forty years in the future to warn us of an impending cataclysm. The aliens that had abducted him had told him to warn everyone. And remember, remember how he explained his ability to time travel? Because the aliens had filled his body with alcohol."

"Okay, fine," Saoirse says, chuckling as she stirs some sugar into a long-cooled cup of coffee. "We can agree about the crazies. I'm taking about the principles that separate the LGs from the RWs. Again, the hypocrisy. You mentioned the immigration quotas. The RWs are shameful on this. I'm not a religious person, Increase, but didn't Jesus, somewhere in the Gospels, talk about a final judgment consisting of if we did or did not feed and clothe the poor, welcome strangers, that kind of thing? These fake Christian RWs talk a great game about religion and then they treat the same people their supposed Master most cherished horribly. These people who he said were proxies for him, that however *they* would be treated would really be a litmus for how *He* was being treated."

"That's pretty good, Mom," Ben says. "Really. That's a good summary. And a devastating argument if I may say so myself."

Steve rolls his eyes.

Increase nods. "It's not that simple, Saoirse. What? You want what? Open borders? You want every problem *out there* to come in here, into our country? I'm all for legal immigration but that's not what all these people mean. And then they, like you, have the gall to cloak it in religion. Religion my foot. They want these people to come in and vote them into, or vote them steady in place, into office. They give a rat's behind about charity and all that. Check the statistics. The LWs are the hypocrites, Saoirse. They are so good at feigning compassion and virtue signaling and all this other endless bullshit. But who gives the most to charity? Who does mission trips the world over? Who actually puts a boot into the mud to help people? It's always RWs. And forgive us, I mean excuse us, for not wanting our country to turn into a cesspool commie-socialist shitshow 4th-world shitfest ...huh, I mean, with Slamon in office now it's only a matter of time for Boise."

"Amen, Dad," Steve says. "This is what I've been saying the whole time, Dad! This is the paper that I'm working on right now. I'm going to get it published, we'll get it posted, everywhere, and then we'll really start turning the tide. Onward brave soldiers!"

Ben laughs. "What do you mean *get it posted*?" Ben really starts breaking down in laughter. It was probably repeating Steve's phrase out loud that did the trick. "Get it posted? I think you mean, 'go postal.' Your brain has gone to pot and your only remaining option is rage filled anger in the form of punching mailboxes all about town."

Steve says nothing for a few moments. "What?"

"Nevermind."

"No, Ben," Steve says. "C'mon, Ben. You're really good at criticizing and making fun. What's your solution Mr.

Really Smart Genius Guy?"

"Nah, thanks," Ben says. "Sall good in da hood, bruh...Mr. Rogers sweata-vurst swaaaaaaaag..."

"I think Steve's right," Increase says. "You can't just be a teardowner, son. Be a builderupper. A true leader's gotta have a plan, a practical philosophy. What's yours?"

"Practical philosophy," Ben says, "a plan? No, c'mon. It's way too early in the day to be killing princes. But if you want something, I'll say this: we have to develop a recognition of, and appreciation for, the *freedom to* rather than the *freedom from*. That's what we've had, and still thankfully do to a large degree, here, in America. I wonder if people stop often enough to consider how radical this gift is? Freedom from is stupid. It's not freedom at all; just the 'freedom' to not have to do whatever you don't want to do. I mean, at the risk of being hyper-redundant here, it's a wholly negative philosophy. Not just negative in a subtractive sense, what I mean is it's a creed for the lazy, the entitled, the talent squandering. Within this paradigm it's just like, yeah we live in the best place on earth, the most impossibly utopian project ever gone successful and even though I did nothing, I mean *nothing* to win this freedom, I'm going to exercise it all in the worst *freedom from* excesses I can imagine: I will not try to become authentically educated; I will not learn any other language, why the hell would I, starts and stripes suckers!!!; I will not eat healthy, will not exercise, will not do anything, I especially won't believe in anything, what's the point? I have perfect freedom from any serious questions in life thanks to my perpetual entertainment loop, superhero flicks, virtual reality voyeurism aplenty. But then...if one takes the *freedom to* approach to American Freedom it makes all the difference. To realize worshipping God, and I mean like getting out of bed once a week to attend some kind of service, is not a right but a privilege, a privilege tons of thousands of people more devout than you can imagine would

and do die for, and they can't, they don't live in a country where they can or cannot go to church; to realize that there is a point to intrinsic development. That pragmatic questions should not be the guide for life, that pragmatism is really the philosophy of the *freedom from* crowd. That 'what can I use this for, what will this get me?' is a death sentence question. What will learning a bunch of languages *get* you? What is the *use* of studying philosophy and theology, traveling when possible, developing a musical or athletic talent, actually seeing politics in the light of science and art, of a community glue seeking a true common good and not just a celebrity contest where whoever has the most glitz, arrogance, and ability to slander the opposition wins? If you even have to ask, you're already past the point of help."

After a brief moment of silence Steve says, "Why are you so hung up on superhero bashing, Ben? When will you realize these characters represent the best our society has to offer? True hope for a beat down, boo-bood up society."

"You know what I hope for, Falcon?" Saoirse says, bringing the conversation back to its roots. "I hope that you see one day that Bartholomew F. Slamon is a man of integrity. A visionary. He's aiming for a better Boise, a better Idaho, even a better America. He's a man driven by the ideals of hope and change. Yes, he's fond of making impetuous grandiose promises. But I know, you know, deep down inside even *you* know, he will deliver. He'll be president one day, you'll see," she says, pointing a whip-cream covered spoon at her husband.

"Mom," Ben says, "is it true that Slamon's middle name is Fart?"

Bert, Steve's twelve-year-old son, bursts out laughing. Then he starts choking on his food. A few hard pats across the back and he's okay. With most of the guests just about done, Steve, now back at the table, taps his glass to

make an announcement. The glass breaks. The shards fall into the hereto untouched cake Susie had prepared for this special occasion. She worked into the wee hours of the morning. Now it's ruined. Steve lets out a long sigh. He leaves the table to get something to clean up the mess, all this mess.

[\[1\]](#) A few months ago, an article came out in *North America Now* magazine. Authored by Dr. Susan P. Kent, professor of psychology at UC-Berkeley, it was a scathing critique of Col. Star Spangled Banner type films, the comic book into major motion picture summer blockbuster low hanging fruit genre. Entitled "Thomas Jefferson Would Agree," it is being reprinted (with permission by *NAN*, the original in the Summer issue, Vol. 74 No. 2, pps 46-71) here in highly abridged form.

Postscript. Ben showed Steve the article and Steve kind of went apeshit. He ripped up the article in Ben's face—after more than a few choice words—and accused him of not understanding what "fun" is and that it was a "disgrace" that this "professor" would lump in one of his favorite pastimes with two things he finds utterly reprehensible; although number two more so than the first. Ben was upset with Steve because his printer had run out of ink and he had to go out and get some more ink just to print this and present it to Steve and then Steve had ruined it all in a crybaby fit of childish tempertantrumness.

Thomas Jefferson Would Agree

"We hold these truths to be self-evident that..." Even today, most American school children can complete this sentence with little effort. And until today, I would propose that the very term "self-evident" had the strongest, if not an almost exclusive, association with Jefferson's Declaration of

Independence. Well, no more. It has become self-evident to me, and to my colleagues, and in a way that I can only half-humorously surmise that Mr. Jefferson would concur, that what is most self-evident today in contemporary American society is a widespread disease of the creative mind. More than a disease, a declension; a complete atrophication of the once proud and fiercely independent creative genius that built what was once called "Western Civilization" and even our own Union of States. In short, people like Jefferson once studied languages, political theory, philosophy and theology, the science of the surrounding world and that world within themselves, both physical and metaphysical, and kept abreast of the latest technological developments of their time hoping that they might just add but a drop into the rushing waters of progress. Today? Today, young men named Jechoarsun (the ninth most popular name for American boys last year, because purposeful misspellings pass for creativity and these intrepid parents have bequeathed this genius to their progeny in full) study nothing and think of nothing and do nothing but mock the "lameadactyls" who came before them. (And, yes. For those not in the know, yes. "Lameadactyl" is indeed a portmanteau of "lame" and "pterodactyl," and is considered by our most gifted youth as the most creative of insults). Who is our hypothetical—although unfortunately, very very real—Jechoarsun? He is a man of no discernable talent. A man who not only spends practically every waking moment corrupting his mind via endless video game play, or corrupting his soul and heart via watching endless pornographic consumption, but who also, and unsurprisingly, is an avid and in nearly-religious fanatical fashion devotee of all things related to superheroes. It has been said that true geniuses were men of future centuries, men born before their time. Alas, poor Jechoarsun is a man born long after his time should have passed. A man stuck in the worst aspects of the early 21st century S.C.E*, a time also marked by the detestable triumvirate of video games, pornography, and superheroes, a tyrannical triumvirate no less despotic nor society crushing then than now. One can say, and

once more half-humorously only, that King VPS still reigns supreme in the hearts of many Jefoarsuns the country over. We thought the King was dead, no, long live the King! It is here that I sense both outrage and protest. Really, you say, King VPS, really, you're telling me that there is a link between video games, pornography and superheroes? And to that I can only respond: no, not "a link." Not a link but indeed a direct link. All three of these horrible past times have their common denominator in a denial of reality. Does Jefoarsun have no talent because he is intrinsically a talentless man? Of course not. And especially not in the still largely meritocratic America where all people basically start at the same starting blocks and hard work does still pay off. Jefoarsun's problem, to put it bluntly as these things should always be put, is that he wastes his life on useless bullshit. No matter how good he becomes at video games he is only becoming good at something that does not exist. Imagine if companies took this approach to their earnings, working long hours for a virtual currency that can buy nothing in the real world. And to those critics who say that some "gamers" were able to "perfect" their "art" so as to receive actual compensation I can only silently raise two middle fingers and thank these people; yes, thank you for making my point about how low society can really go, so low to where people with *actual* money will give people doing *actually nothing* a sign of *actual value* for their objectively valueless activity. It is at this point that I am tempted to go off on an axiology tangent. I will resist the urge. Jefoarsun could be developing actual (perhaps virtuoso grade) talent in music, in the arts, in athletics, in academics, but no, he plays video games and slowly dies inside. Understanding this, I can present the problem of pornography in the same light and with immediate apprehension that it has the same problem at its root. Once more it is the doing of nothing for no reason in a virtual reality of shame that leads to nothing but despair and destruction. If Jefoarsun actually ever finds the courage to talk with a real woman, do you think "he'll have what it takes?" Ladies, anyone

want to weigh in here? Is this a portrait of your dream man: fanatical gamer and consumer of pornography, voyeur in the distant lands of make believe, each land a physical dark and damp space far from prying eyes? Which leads me to superheroes. I hate superheroes. Just like video games and pornography, they are fake stimulations, parodies of actual reality, bad parodies as they are so far removed from actual reality, serving only to encourage men and women who might actually wake up from their apathetic slumber and do something productive to only go deeper down the hole. Also, so called comic book "superheroes" have nothing on the real-life version. The list is too long to journey through, but names like Rosa Parks, Witold Pilecki, Jackie Robinson, and Maurice Britt, for me anyways, immediately come to mind. And these are ancien real life superheroes. What about today? What about Melanie Reddsninheimer, Wilson Jessup, Craig Feeler and David O'Connell? Do I need to say more? Superheroes are not only detestable because they are so intellectually vapid and one-dimensionally obnoxious, but also because they usurp the attention that real life heroic men and women should receive. If more young men and women followed the examples of someone like Pilecki—who *volunteered!* for a Nazi concentration camp in order to gather reconnaissance information authoring the first comprehensive report of the horrors within and who had the Polish Rabbi Michael Schudrich say of him "When God created the human being, God had in mind that we should all be like Captain Witold Pilecki"—instead of some idiot in tights and a cape whose one "talent" is being able to fly or see through walls or get punched in the face a trillion times without injury (see: stupid shit that does nothing, absolutely nothing, to inspire anyone to anything at all because it is all so unrealistic and yes, dumb) then maybe there would be more Jeffersons in America than Jechoarsuns. At least now, thanks to King VPS, and especially the third part, especially the superheroes, we know once and for all who the real lameadactyls are.

* S.C.E.= Secular Common Era.

[2] Benjamin Gert de Gopher-Bonk Saoirseson von TyVole. Sometime during his college years, he changed his surname to TyVole. TyVole is Czech for “you ox.” The name is a multi-layered *hommage–hommage* as in *don qui exprime le respect* more so than the alternate *marque de respect*—of sorts to a certain piece of medieval legend involving Thomas Aquinas, Albert the Great, and an ambition to bellow and, no less, a shout-out to his Czech born great-grandfather Ales Jindrich Novotny who went by the nickname “[Krásny](#) Knedlik.” A math prodigy, Ben turned down scholarship offers from Georgia Tech and MIT to enroll in an independent think tank college—East Southwestern South Northeastern West North American University of the Arts and Logic (ESSNWAU-AL; pronounced “ESS-Wall”)—in New Mexico whose curriculum is based around designing and selling a banal final project (school motto: If it can sell, it’ll do well, by us, to get people to buy us, and it, in the U.S.)

[3] Ben’s older brother, Steve Adams John Monroe George Jefferson Thomas Franklin.

[4] Dr.Increase “Falcon” Franklin, a member of Bazookas for the Common Man, the Cato Institute, Citizens United, The Heritage Foundation and the Traditional Values Coalition. He has founded two organizations himself. He is a professor in the University of Idaho’s Department of History. He has served two-terms as mayor of Preston, Idaho, founded an interior-design company and, prior to that, earned his PhD abroad in Eindhoven Ben’s father attempted a coup of sorts a few decades ago. It failed; the attempt to create a new nation in the Southern Utah. Nonetheless, it made Ben’s father *the* celebrity in Idaho and Utah. That’s how he ended up on the University of Idaho faculty; true and instant, *au-dela* to the insane max, stardom.

[5] Saoirse; Professor of the interdisciplinary Department of Post-Gender Studies at the University of Idaho.

[6] Slalom has hosted *Impressionistic Phantom Pantomime* night at his residence for a almost two decades now. To be invited is the ultimate validation of being at the very core inside the tachocline of the convective zone of the man's inner circle. Only two people—Susan D. Crye Oehsusanna and Steve “Forester” Foster aka “Chocolate Truffle”—have been granted lifetime passes to the events that take place on the first Tuesday night of the odd numbered months of the year. Unsurprisingly, Oehsusanna and Foster played critical roles in Slamon's recent successful gubernatorial campaign. That they were behind the scenes actors seems hardly worth mentioning; it should be plainly obvious. Rumor has it that, to date, more than four hundred people have been admitted to, and performed in, the *Pantomime* night-Level I Tryout but of these none has yet to ascend to the top of Slamon's nineteen tier ranking system, the apex being the coveted lifetime pass and perpetual seat on the Judgment Council. Here is what the first, introductory level looks like (although it is hard to see; performed in a dark room, the only light being two candles on a nightstand in the corner and one of the actors [of three; FYI-real names are never allowed to be used] who has been granted a flashlight. Two of the three actors must wear full, red, white and blue snowsuits while the third can dress as he/she pleases. The crowd [seven level elevens] must hear the entire five hour, fifteen minute performance in complete silence before the Judgment Council passes, uh . . . judgment. Oehsusanna and Foster's votes count for two points each. Slamon's vote counts for 98.6 points, more if he's running a fever, for which a thermometer is always at hand to account for fluctuation. Votes are cast by scream: A yea vote: “Yep pep step reppin peppity pep!” A nay vote: “Blap!”):

“Ocean...Fire...Sand and Sky, oh I can see the sea.”

"Copy Ranger. Copy, copy."

"Loud and clear, Bunt. Third base line...Bunty?"

(sound of a cat meowing followed by the Marseillaise)

"Is that you?"

"Me?"

"You?"

"Are you meaning Y, O, U, or Ewe?"

"Cheese."

(canned laughter from the audience)

"James?"

"David?"

"Jackson?"

"Paul"

"No, Pollock. Kevin?"

"Wait...a thought, a poem...

Coach Noneck is jacked,

Out this galaxy

Milky Way, not Reese's, he's built

Piece by pieces

Of ripped muscle/amid the huste'n' bustle to
be his fan

Check out the pan,

That holds the cakes

Papa, he ain't fake—"

(three voices simulteamosuly screaming Blap!)

[\[7\]](#) The full speech, given when Slamon announced his gubernatorial campaign, is entitled, "Work as a Means to Providing for Oneself is a Thing of the Past."

[\[8\]](#) The U.S.S.R (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, S.C.E. 1922-1991) waged what scholars once called a "Cold War," and now call "The Big Ideologo-Nuclear Game of Chicken Don't Flinch," (Большой Идеологическая Ядерная игра курица не делают испуганный движение) with the United States between 1945/49–1991.

[\[9\]](#) Current Southeastern Conference (SEC) composition following most recent realignment of nine years ago:

East: Clemson, Florida, Florida State, Georgia, Notre Dame, South Carolina, Tennessee.

West: Alabama, Arkansas, Auburn, LSU, Mississippi State, North Dakota State, Oklahoma, Ole Miss, Texas, Texas A&M, Texas Tech.

Far West: Arizona, Boise State, Oregon, Utah, TCU, BYU, UCLA, USC.

**Due to its eleven members, the SEC West champion earns a bye and an automatic berth into the Quadruple Deluxe MegaWinter Burger © SEC Championship where they await the winner of the East vs. Far West Semi-Final. The SEC Champion earns a spot in the 64 team, single elimination, Chick-fil-A Spicy Chicken Sandwich © National Tournament sponsored by Elimenx-Z 5 © brought to you by Pepsi/Amtrack, Inc ©. Last year's champion, the South Dakota State Jackrabbits, out of the Big Sky Eastern Conference, completed a 13-0 regular season followed by a six-win run in the tournament to set the modern N.CP.A.A (National

Collegiate-Professional Athletic Association. The former NCAA started paying its athletes in S.C.E. 2023 after which it made sense to add professional to the organization's name) record of nineteen wins.

[\[10\]](#) Many years ago there was a distinction between a "liberal" and a "progressive." Then the larger liberal platform kept leaning further and further to the left until the two terms could no longer be separated.

[\[11\]](#) High Level Mammal. The current asexual, non-patriarchal term for human being. Replaced the naturally phased out BT-DT (Breathing Thing with Deposable Thumbs).

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Gracjan Kraszewski is the author of two books: a novel entitled *The Holdout* (Adelaide Books, 2018) and a Civil War history entitled *Catholic Confederates* (forthcoming with The Kent State University Press, 2020). The first chapter of another novel (currently in progress), *Job Search*, was published in *Eclectica* Magazine. Short fiction has appeared in *New English Review*, *Wilderness House Literary Review*, *The Dead Mule School of Southern Literature*, *The Southern Distinctive*, *PILGRIM*, *Bull: Men's Fiction*, *The Coil*, *Adelaide Literary Magazine*, *RumbleFish Press*, *Five on the Fifth*, and on The Short Humour Site with pieces forthcoming in the *Tulane Review* and *Riddle Fence*.

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