

LULZ, NOON

C.S. TOLAN

From this valley they say you are going...

ALICE and BOB [and CHARLIE]...

...with and as devices...

One sees little in this light.

[VI moves center seat, whispers in FLO's ear. Appalled.]

Oh!

[They look at each other. VI puts her finger to her lips.]

Does she not know?

– Flo to Vi, about Ru, "Come and Go"

You scared? You think people have x-ray eyes?

– Arthur to Odile, *Band of Outsiders*

Now look, buster, let's have an understanding.

[Thud] Now what? Brother, what a way to run a railroad.

– Daffy, "Duck Amuck"

PLAYERS

Alice... Alpha... A generic actor
Bob... Bravo... A generic actor
Charlie... Charlie... A courier
Dave... Delta... A generic actor
Eve... Echo... An eavesdropper
Faythe... Foxtrot... An advisor
Grace... Golf... A government agent
Mal... Mike... A malicious actor
Sybil... Sierra... A monster

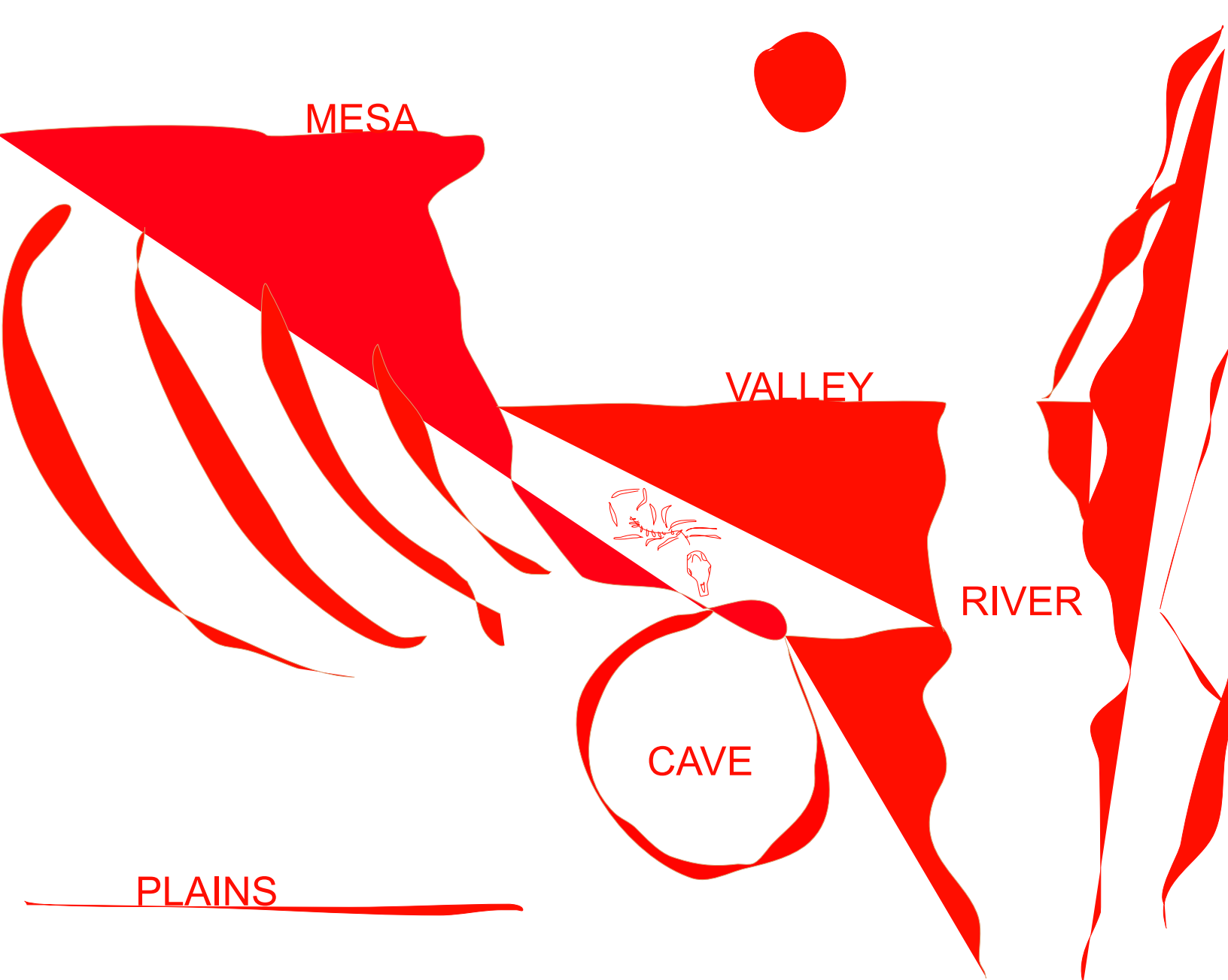
NOTES

*The entire play should be delivered in stage whispers, directed either at the audience or at specific characters, implying privileged communications.
Throughout the script, the recipients of the whispers are always indicated along with the dialogue.*

Though gendered pronouns are used throughout the play, gender identification of characters should be unimportant and not factored into casting decisions.

Some characters, such as Charlie the courier, might not be people in the play's "reality" – representing, rather, the emergent dynamics between other characters (in Charlie's case, Alice and Bob).

However, this latter fact should be left open for interpretation, and characters like Charlie, the shapeshifter Eve, and the monster Sibyl – in her brief appearances – must be played as "people."



EVE

To AUDIENCE

Alpha watches from the mesa – Bravo switchbacks towards the valley – Charlie in the cave!

Late summer. Mid morning.

Bob is leaving. His handkerchief is tied in a bundle on a stick – A bindle stuffed with devices. It bobs as he ambles down the mesa.

Alice waves her handkerchief, in case Bob turns around.

ALICE

*To AUDIENCE
BOB can hear*

Bob never turned around, except to ensure that there was enough space For him to turn back around –



EVE
To AUDIENCE

Bob turns around.

BOB
*To AUDIENCE
ALICE can hear*

Of course I need *space* –
How else could I do what I do –
we do – with it?

EVE
To AUDIENCE

Bob clowns with his bindle,
retrieving a device without untying
the handkerchief – a magic trick.

BOB
To AUDIENCE

Charlie taught me that.

EVE
To AUDIENCE

He opens his jacket to reveal more devices lining the interior,
scoots up his sleeves to display other devices attached to his
wrists.

BOB
To AUDIENCE

Strapped. Big day today. Huge root on aged veins.
Charlie says – petaLulz.

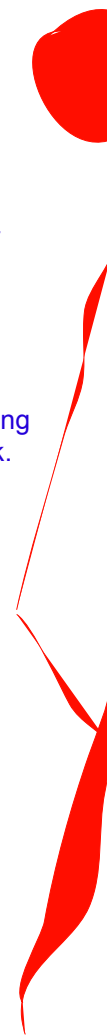
EVE
To AUDIENCE

Bob throws the device like a grenade. An empty tin can rolls
down the slope. He kicks it along the trail.

Alice and Bob are in a standoff, staring each other down over Charlie –
and Lulz.

BOB
*To AUDIENCE
ALICE can hear*

Alice doesn't *get* the *concept* of Lulz.





ALICE

To AUDIENCE
BOB can hear

I don't see the *utility* in Lulz.

BOB

To AUDIENCE

I turn around.

Ok, so I couldn't figure out what Alice *peeps* when she's turned around. Since she doesn't *do* Lulz.

Suspicious, Charlie said. *Do you think we should peep her device?*

Yesterday, Charlie did just that while I distracted her in the cave – and – bingo.

EVE

To AUDIENCE

Alice. I know what she does. She peeps her surrounds, she snaps what captivates her, she files. But what's captivating to Alice happens to be what the others want. On Alice's device, Charlie grokked what's latent in her snaps. Pointers to unrooted veins of Lulz. Many. And ancient.

Bob holds up his left hand in the sign of the horns, sticks out his tongue, winks his right eye.

Bob — he just wants to impress Charlie by fulfilling what he thinks is the hacker's duty – rooting.

He's a generic, should be autonomous, but he's been instrumentalized.

It shouldn't be like this. According to his type, Charlie is a neutral courier. But Alice and Bob drove him off the ledge — he's hijacked their relationship, their agency.

My guess is Charlie wants to use the force from the aged veins to root his ruleset. Gain write access. Change his type. Otherwise, one day soon, he'll fail to compile.

BOB

To AUDIENCE

Charlie said he's never *seen* so many aged veins – perfectly filed on Alice's device. Only one thing to do. Legally, it's a no-no. But hackers gotta root and so we root them. Today.

We'll do it with a squad.
Which will be good defense if we peep...

Sybil.

Sybil. The elusive Sierra. The story goes like this. Lulz. Accreted in veins all around the mesa. Some new, some ancient. The hackers here are peeping new veins, which they root to get their kicks – pranks, spoofs, the like. Aged veins, they're more powerful and rare – and it's against the rules to root them. Rumor is, the aged veins still belong to the old folks. They're guarded by Sybil. She'll eat you up! But Sybil, I've never seen her. And I see everything. Just about.

So I think Sybil's maybe just overexposure.
To a certain kind of desire. A certain kind of device.



ALICE

To AUDIENCE
BOB can hear

For Bob, Lulz was life.
It wasn't like that when we met.
Yesterday, in the cave, I reminded him
how it was before Charlie, how at night,
he would bury his face in my hair,
whisper charms for my dreams.
I *begged* him to take – for a single turn! –
a different perspective –

BOB

To ALICE

*That would be the opposite
of serotonin.*

But [*singsong*]
*Alice, I think you're keeping
something from me.*

EVE

To AUDIENCE

And Alice, she's collateral. I hate it. I've always had a thing for her.
We have a lot in common, even though she's a generic.

When she's alone, she tromps through the valley, just seeing what she can see.
Like me. I compulsively peep, snap, file. It's my type.

That's why I keep eyes on the hackers, calling the roll, the stage directions.
All my other rules follow from my responsibility to keep watch.
Like, I don't intervene in their affairs. I'm extremely vulnerable to influence.

So I move fast, faster than their eyes can peep.
And I disguise myself as objects.
Like rocks, sage, cicadas.

But now, I'm only peeping Alpha, Bravo, Charlie – they're overwhelming me.
I don't have eyes elsewhere. I should have stats on Delta, Foxtrot, Golf, Mike.
I'm losing my grip.

Bob throws the tin can and crouches in anticipation of its explosion as Alice cues —

ALICE

To BOB

Bob, don't you remember what it was like – that first day –
how we were when we met?

EVE

To AUDIENCE

A flashback!
Last winter!

Alpha alone! Alpha alone in the valley!

Bravo and Charlie on the mesa!

ALICE

*To AUDIENCE
BOB can hear*

I don't know who made the cave but I found it that day when I was – in the valley, I stumbled over something that had fallen from the mesa's high ledge. White bleached bones. Bob said it was a buffalo. I think it was a cow.



Anyway when I tripped, I nearly fell down the mouth of the cave. Ten foot drop. Caught myself. Looked up and peeping me on the mesa's ledge were Bob and Charlie. I could tell they were hackers – black clothes. I tromped on up to meet them.

I thought Charlie was a tool, he was wearing a Mao collar. But Bob – I knew right away because I had to peep his features async or I felt physically sick. So I invited Bob to do some spelunking. Just us two. We left our devices above ground in the cow skull. Wrapped in our handkerchiefs. Hacker joke.

BOB

*To AUDIENCE
ALICE can hear*

She means the air gap. Between the skull and the cave. It was a buffalo.



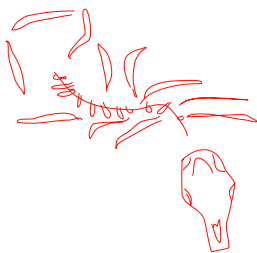
ALICE

*To AUDIENCE
BOB can hear*

No horns. It was a cow with no horns.

EVE

To AUDIENCE



I was there that first day, peeping.
Charlie arrived later and staked out by the mouth,
the horse skeleton.
It was a horse.
Not a cow.
Not a buffalo.
He didn't notice the devices in the skull.

CHARLIE

To AUDIENCE

If you had seen Alice –
if you had seen Alice and Bob
together when they met,
you would have followed them, too.
You would have wanted in, too.
I had known Bob for some time –
he's good with Lulz but
directionless. He needed help.
Alice and him had potential.

BOB

To AUDIENCE
ALICE can hear

Charlie said it's a buffalo.
Missing its horns.
I was singing –
Alice's eyes finally on mine –

ALICE

To AUDIENCE
BOB can hear

We climbed down into the cave.
I was absorbed by Bob, extended
by him, he's singing "Red River
Valley" – I couldn't believe your
voice, Bob –
It was missing its horns? A buffalo?

BOB

To AUDIENCE
ALICE can hear

I'm pretty sure it was –
A buffalo.
It was my voice and Alice's eyes.
Alice's eyes.

ALICE

To AUDIENCE
BOB can hear

Legally I don't do eye contact, but in the cave,
in the weak winter light,
it was easy to break a little rule.

A buffalo.

In two seasons, Charlie wedged between us.
At first he kept some distance, lots of jokes.
I guess I was seduced.
Then, we were three.
On the mesa, in the valley, in the cave.
Bob built a door.

BOB

To AUDIENCE
ALICE can hear

To shut the mouth of the cave.
Charlie's idea.
Keep prying eyes
from peeping in.

EVE

To AUDIENCE

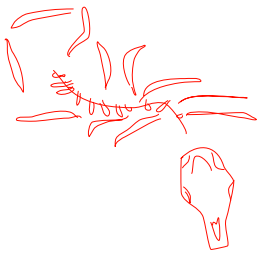
Charlie, I had watched a long time.
I had seen him defying his type.
But never like this.

I knew what would happen if they found me outside. Alice would get weird.
She didn't like me that day when we met. I couldn't risk it.
I heard Bob singing. Alice laughing. They needed me.

EVE
To AUDIENCE

Charlie was trying – in the weak light – to peep into the cave without
casting a shadow.

CHARLIE
To AUDIENCE



ALICE

To AUDIENCE
BOB can hear

Over time it got confusing –
Charlie'd tell me we were going to the cave.
I'd say I didn't know, but then – there I was.

Once Bob had to wait at the mouth and look down at us.
That was a joke, but then –

Bob was at the mouth, blocking some but not all the light.
Eventually, he told Bob to join us.

But, Bob walked away.
Charlie ran after him.

Hours passed.
They came back together.

BOB

To AUDIENCE
ALICE can hear

"Alice's turn," he said.
Then Alice stood at the mouth, silhouetted –
He was behind me. I couldn't see her face,
he was breathing into my ear,
describing her eyes.

He asked me to get down on my knees,
lick her shadow.

When he suggested I tell her to come inside,
she hesitated for some time.

ALICE

To AUDIENCE
BOB can hear

Of course Charlie defused with a joke —
Pentest, he said. *Pentest for the summer solstice*.

And I was laughing, climbing into the cave.
That was serotonin.
But it was never like the first day –
Bob didn't sing with him.
Or with me either, except as a joke.

After a while, even when Bob and I were alone,
Charlie was always also there, between us.
On our tongues.
Like yesterday.

Alice looked — after all, I know Alice — afraid.

EVE

To AUDIENCE

Yesterday, Charlie arrived at the cave before me.
He had their devices unwrapped
and was casually scrolling through both,
one with each hand, watching Alice and Bob
via a system of convex mirrors he had set
around the mouth.



CHARLIE

To AUDIENCE

Bob told me about the air gap.
A little trick so I can take a peep.
He is a very good boy, but Alice is a bad girl.
Bob was right to wonder what she peeps.
Her device is dripping aged veins.
Well. Bob will root the Luiz with me tomorrow.
Maybe then I can root my perms.
Get some... more privileged access.
And it'll be curtains for those two.
Alice, she'll have to leave the valley.

ALICE

To AUDIENCE
BOB can hear

Yesterday.

Bob suggested that we go to the cave.

BOB

To ALICE

We'll leave our devices in the skull.
And the door ajar so the light filters in
like the first day —

ALICE

To AUDIENCE
BOB can hear

I thought I might get a song.
I was dying for another song!
There in the cave, I met his eyes —

BOB

To ALICE

From this valley you say you are go—

ALICE

To AUDIENCE
BOB can hear

He was trying to sing, but his voice was —

BOB

To ALICE

In my throat — gagging me.
I sat down.
I lay down.

ALICE

To AUDIENCE
BOB can hear

For a long time, I cradled him, there,
on the floor of the cave,
but he would not speak a word

I hurried to the mouth, assumed a form that would allow me to peep undetected.
There in the cave was Bob, catatonic, and Alice, holding him, gazing up at the mouth
as though expecting someone — who else but Charlie? — to appear.

EVE
To AUDIENCE

Charlie packed up the mirrors, Charlie set the devices back in the skull.
Humming, We will miss your bright eyes and sweet smile, Charlie walked away.

EVE

To AUDIENCE

Today. Late summer. Late morning.
Alpha on the mesa –
Bravo switchbacks towards the valley –
Charlie in the cave!

BOB

To AUDIENCE

That was rough – the cave –
but Alice betrayed me, too, stockpiling like she did.
Full of deceit.

To ALICE

Alice, if you've got the yuck for Charlie,
why do you look for him, ask for him — in the cave —

ALICE

To BOB

Well it was *serotonin* – he let us —
gave us the idea we were playing —
that there was something between us
we were passing — a secret – but now,
we're *mangled* – like yesterday in the cave –

Bob, can you hear me?

BOB

To AUDIENCE

I could hear Alice, and she knew it,
but I pretended I was out of range

EVE

To AUDIENCE

Bob is in the valley.
He stops beside the horse skeleton.
Cranes his neck to gaze at Alice.
Shades his eyes so he can see her.
Alice waves her handkerchief.



BOB

To ALICE

Alice, I guess you won't meet
my eyes again —

ALICE

To BOB

Bob, if we could just
root Charlie –

BOB

To ALICE

Charlie tapped you yesterday.
When we were – in the cave –
I'm sorry, but why didn't you tell me
about the aged veins?
Why were you keeping them to yourself?

EVE

To AUDIENCE

Alice checks her device, frantically.
In her distress, her handkerchief falls.
It floats from the ledge, unfurled, drifting
towards the mouth of the cave.

ALICE

To HERSELF

My snaps.
Bob.

Bob catches it, tucks it into an eye socket of the skull. Then he climbs into the cave, shuts the door behind him.

EVE

To AUDIENCE

Alpha is crying on the ledge.
I don't have eyes in the cave. Door closed.
I turn around, peep the others.
Foxtrot on the plain below the mesa,
Golf – the sheriff – at the river, shooting fish.
It must be Delta and Mike in the cave with Bravo and Charlie.
Delta is a generic, but Mike... he's a bad actor. Not good.
Alpha won't go to Golf – she'll be charged as an accessory.
Maybe also because she still loves Bravo.
Only one option – Foxtrot – unless she cuts out.
But I don't think so.
Already she's sniffing, not sobbing, and she –

ALICE

To FAYTHE

Faythe? Are you free?

FAYTHE
To ALICE

Round about now Alice. Coord 2340, 54503. On the plain, catch me?

EVE

To AUDIENCE

Alice tromps down the fast slope to the plain. No switchbacks.
Catches Faythe in fifteen.
Faythe is squinting up at the sky. There's a sick yellow in the clouds.
Birds flying low, if at all.

Alpha and Foxtrot on the plain! Bravo, Charlie, Delta, Mike in the cave! Golf at the river!



FAYTHE

To ALICE

Alice, you ready for what's coming on in?

ALICE

To FAYTHE

Faythe, there's a root on the aged veins.
Charlie tapped my device, my snaps,
pointers to a petaTon of oldies.

FAYTHE

To ALICE

Charlie. He's gonna fail to compile.
But what were you doing with pointers to oldies anyway Alice?
Against the rules to have them on your device.

ALICE

To FAYTHE

I never thought about it like *that*.
I just didn't *care* about the Lulz utility.
It was about having proof of my *permission* to be in – to *share* –
the same space as *them* –

EVE

To AUDIENCE

I've got my own rules, we all do,
but I wouldn't have expected *this* from Alice.
This belief in naturally-occurring, permissioned
environments is one tiny slip from a belief in Sybil.

FAYTHE

To ALICE

Alice you've got to confess to her. Sybil.
It's the only way you'll get out without getting gobbled.
She'll seek you even if you're not the rooter.
Maybe she's the one rolling in right now.

ALICE

To FAYTHE

I didn't think you believed in all that

Something's been building. That I haven't peeped.
Something big.

FAYTHE

To ALICE

Doesn't matter if I do or if I don't.

FAYTHE

To ALICE

Say Alice, you ever wonder who keeps eyes on us here?

ALICE

To FAYTHE

Grace?

FAYTHE

To ALICE

Nope, the one who keeps eyes on Grace.
She might be able to help you find Sibyl.

EVE

To AUDIENCE

Is she talking about me?
I turn around.
I turn back around.
I'm a Saguaro cactus.
They shouldn't be able to peep me.

ALICE

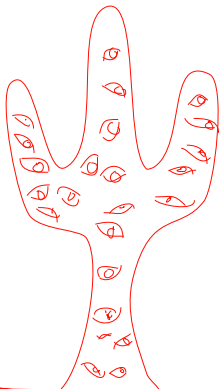
To FAYTHE

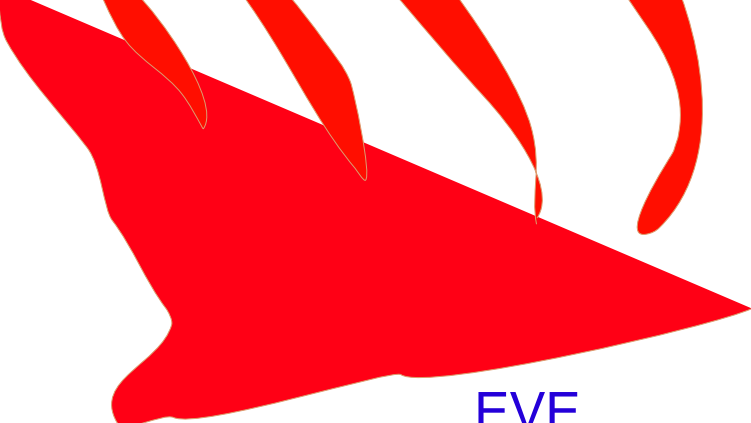
Can you give me a hint?

EVE

To AUDIENCE

Faythe points at me. Directly. Time to move.
But Alice, she's trained her eye more than I realized.
I can feel her. Peeping me with it.
I compulsively move all my eyes to face away, but I know –
she's sniffing on over.
Faythe is gone. Off-stage right.
Alice and me – alone on the plain.





ALICE

To EVE

Hello?

EVE

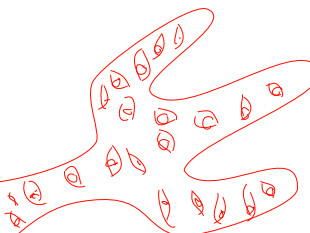
To AUDIENCE

She pokes at me. Timidly.
When I don't respond, she pokes an eye.
Another one. And another. *HISS* – I *hiss*.
Is that what my voice sounds like?

ALICE

To EVE

Change your permissions



EVE

To AUDIENCE

Oh, right, Alice can't access this freq.
I mod my hertz.

To ALICE Hello.

ALICE

To EVE

Can you... help me?

To ALICE

*It's a bit much.
You see, I have to keep eyes for the roll.
I have to call the stage directions and temporal cues.
I'm kind of at capacity. And I can't be so actively involved.
Boundary issues.*

I'm in a bit of a mess.
What if you toggle your freqs to
keep the boundary?

That's not the boundary I'm worried about —

To AUDIENCE

She sits down beside me – I'm a rock now –
and leans her back against me. Feel her heart – her breath –

I have to find Sybil.

To ALICE

Sybil doesn't exist.

Doesn't matter, I guess. I have to stop the root.
Else it's curtains, they'll pin it on me.
And Grace hates me – because of Bob.
They had a thing.

I know.

To AUDIENCE

Alice is fluttering her eyelashes, making direct eye contact with
at least a dozen of my eyes. Breaking her rules.
But when I peep her eyes – I want – I need – to be close to her.
I change. Into a hacker. Another rule I break. Eyes all merge into two.
Painful, actually.

Sure you do.

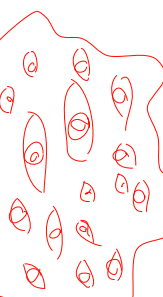
Look, I get the impression you spend a lot of time
peeping.

Don't you ever want to – give back?
To the community?

Now are you just like me?

I take her hand. Maybe we can stop the root.

So Alice and I, we tromp back up to the mesa's ledge to get the vantage.



The storm clouds have hung static like drapes on the horizon for the past hour.
Some thunder.
Alice surveys the plains that surround the mesa.

ALICE

To EVE

Maybe she'll come to us.

To HERSELF

*It ran.
O'er the plain.
Off of the ledge.
Down in the hole for the animals.*

Open jaws

Red on the thick concrete floor of the cave

Running down cracks to the soil

EVE

To AUDIENCE

She seems to blink in and out of the delusion
about Sybil.
And I'm worried. Something has been building.
Something I don't understand.
Now Alice's all glazed —

Excuse me?

To ALICE

To EVE

Feels like I've known it —
Forever —

Alice — that's —

It's Sybil.

*They said it was coming, they didn't know when
Down in the hole for the animals*

*Could read its approach in the flight of the birds
In the heightening roar of cicadas*

*They said it was coming, they didn't know when —
Down in the hole for the animals*

*Could smell it, could feel it hanging over the plains
In the late summer noons full of water*



EVE

To AUDIENCE

A huge gust of wind, and the clouds are moving. The sun is nearing noon.
Alice is facing the incoming clouds, buffeted by wind, chanting.
I can only hear the rhythm. Like a horse.

I need eyes on the cave to see if they're at risk — I need to peep the stats.
But I can't leave Alice here. She's — lost. I do the only thing I can think —

To ALICE

*From this valley, they say you are going.
We will miss your bright eyes and sweet smile*

To AUDIENCE

Alice snaps her head violently, snarling at me.

To ALICE

*For you take with you all of the sunshine
That has brightened our pathway the while*

To AUDIENCE

Alice snarls again, closes one eye and sways.

To ALICE

*Come and sit by my side if you love me.
Do not hasten to bid me adieu*

To AUDIENCE

Both eyes now. On mine. She's back.
It starts to sprinkle. A cloud slides over the sun just as I clock —
Noon!

High noon!

And — horses.

No, a single galloping horse.

A dust cloud, coming towards us!

EVE

To AUDIENCE

I peep the horse.
All white, red eyes, foaming at the mouth.
Well, looks like I was wrong about Sybil. She does exist.
Alice isn't quick enough to get away.

So, I break another rule. A big one.

To ALICE

Alice, you have to let me pilot.
Or she'll flatten us.

To AUDIENCE

I hear her answer me, meekly.
I don't want to do this – control her.

But...

I shift into Alice's body, wedge myself inside her center, and I take control of her limbs.

I let Sybil come close to Alice – too close –
And then I make Alice move as fast as her body allows, grab the mane.
Clamor up on Sybil's back.
Sybil bucks but I keep the mane in Alice's grip.

High noon!

And Sybil – with us on her back – leaps off the ledge.

EVE

To AUDIENCE

I clutch Alice's *center* while extending part of myself
out of her body, arcing into a kind of parachute.
It works.
So much more I can do, when I break my rules –

As we are jarred into a glide,
Sibyl twists her head up to face us.
Smiles, mouth still foaming. Says,

SIBYL
To EVE

Echo at sunset!
Echo at sunset!

EVE

To AUDIENCE

She crashes into the ground on top of
the old horse skeleton.

Her neck is still twisted, head on backwards.
Legs twitch a bit.
Alice and I land beside her.
The horse is dead.



It's pouring rain.
Alice is disoriented but ok.
I'm back in my hacker form.
It was hard to leave her. But.
I pound on the cave door.
No answer. It's locked.

ALICE

To HERSELF

It was a horse.
A horse, not a cow.
Not a buffalo.

EVE

To AUDIENCE

I pry out the old skull,
hand her the handkerchief.
She looks at me intently –

ALICE

To EVE

You know?

EVE

To AUDIENCE

She spreads the handkerchief
over the door of the cave.
Smiles, picks it up.
The door is... gone?

ALICE

To EVE

Oh, you *don't* know.
Magic trick. Bob – our joke.
He still loves me – he's just confused.

EVE

To AUDIENCE

She winks. Climbs down into the cave.
I follow.
Bob, Charlie, Dave, Mal – they're not here.
Devices scattered. I turn around –
I turn back around – where are they?

To ALICE

Did Sybil get them?

Maybe when they heard the horse fall –

To AUDIENCE

Alice opens a hidden door, revealing a tunnel.



EVE
To AUDIENCE
Secrets.
What else is Alice keeping from me?
Water starts pouring into the cave.
Flooding.

ALICE
To EVE
The tunnel slopes up,
to the plain of the mesa.
It won't flood up there.
I can't leave Bob –

EVE
To AUDIENCE
I can't leave Alice.
So we go.
The tunnel is high enough
to just about stand.
Flickering lights.
I'm on edge.
Expect to peep Sybil
just ahead.

ALICE
To EVE
We only did the entire tunnel once,
Bob and me, with O2 tanks.
But maybe there's enough air –
It must have been built by the
old folks, after all.

EVE
To AUDIENCE
I want to go back inside her.
Check her stats,
see how she's really feeling.
She's acting all brave.

EVE

To AUDIENCE

We catch the others somewhere on the upward slope.
After the horse fell, they saw something.
Won't say what it was. Dropped devices, ran into the tunnel.
I *need* to find out **more**.
I feel my rules, which are normally rote and abstract,
vivifying, **pulling me apart**.
I'm supposed to have all the stats.
Do I peep *everything* — seems I've missed a *lot* —
or detach while I still can, assert my **boundaries**?
I take a turn around.
The thing is, our rules — our types — **protect us**.
And that's why I need the stats.
To protect them.

Take the air quality.
It is *problematic*.
Bob says we're near the final upslope,
so it will improve, but I don't want them to **risk it**.
It would be so *simple* for me to just —

I **stretch out**, make a long tube up to the surface —
mold my lower body into five breathing devices.
Alice plugs me into her mouth, and the others do the same —
they trust Alice.
I siphon air.
Catch some of their thoughts through the connection —
I start to feel the terror of their encounter in the cave —
but Charlie thinks —

Takes me out.
The others do too.

Also Alice.

No.

They need me.

I react.

I enter Alice first,
still as a long, thin filament reaching up for air.
I take her lungs, and windpipe,
then I spread myself to the others.
It's *easy* to help them.
I could even — I leak out, into a kind of slime,
and bit by bit, breathing for them,
I pull them up the tunnel to the surface of the mesa.

CHARLIE

To HACKERS

Doesn't work, too weird —

NO They need me
I react



EVE

To AUDIENCE

Alpha, and Bravo, and Charlie, and Delta,
and Echo, and Mike on the mesa!
Golf on the mesa!
Foxtrot off-stage!
Sierra – *where did Sibyl go?*

The rain has stopped. Grace has her gun drawn.

I see it in her, ~~the desire to control.~~

Overwhelming.

I hate it.

Without even thinking about what I'm doing, I suck her in.
Hold her like I do the others – in a slimy mess on the mesa.

Then it's peaceful – the glaring afternoon sun drying us out
with the red rocks, the cicadas, the sage.
They give me their thoughts, all of them.
Sybil was in the cave. A monster.
I see it in real time.
Serpentine... gnashing sharp teeth... don't dare meet the eyes.
Sings –

They run in terror – I lose her.
Well, at least I know she's here.
I'll allocate some turns to rooting her out.

GRACE


To POLYCULE

Attempted root, aged veins,
and I know just who's responsible.
Prepare to be busted.

SYBIL

To CHARLIE

Charlie at dawn!



But for now, I help them *communicate* with each other.
Charlie, I keep away from Alice and Bob.
I try to figure out what makes Mal tick.
Pair him with Charlie. Slowly siphon in Grace.
Those three understand each other.
Good for me to observe.
Dave is freaking —
he was strong-armed into sysadmining for Charlie.
I calm him down.

EVE

To AUDIENCE

We lay like that for a few hours.
Happy, I think.
But they grow restless — ask to leave me.
It's complicated.

Alice asks for Charlie. Begg.
Bob too.

We fight.
I've broken so many rules already — even more if I keep them.

Mediate. Control — I can't help myself.

And I beg.
For someone to help me.
To help me end it.

The sun's a giant eraser, lowering down towards the mesa.

But it's wrong, too close —
it's going to burn us up!

No.
The light simply scrubs, gently, around their prone bodies,
reestablishing their boundaries.
Then more vigorously, it wipes the rest of me away.
Takes me to its place under the plain.
It's dark, and the cicadas are silent.



EVE

To AUDIENCE

And in the dark, a huge mouth appears,
light spilling like foam from its horse-tooth smile.

Of course.

My type, my ruleset, had to come from *somewhere*.
I wasn't peeping for myself alone.

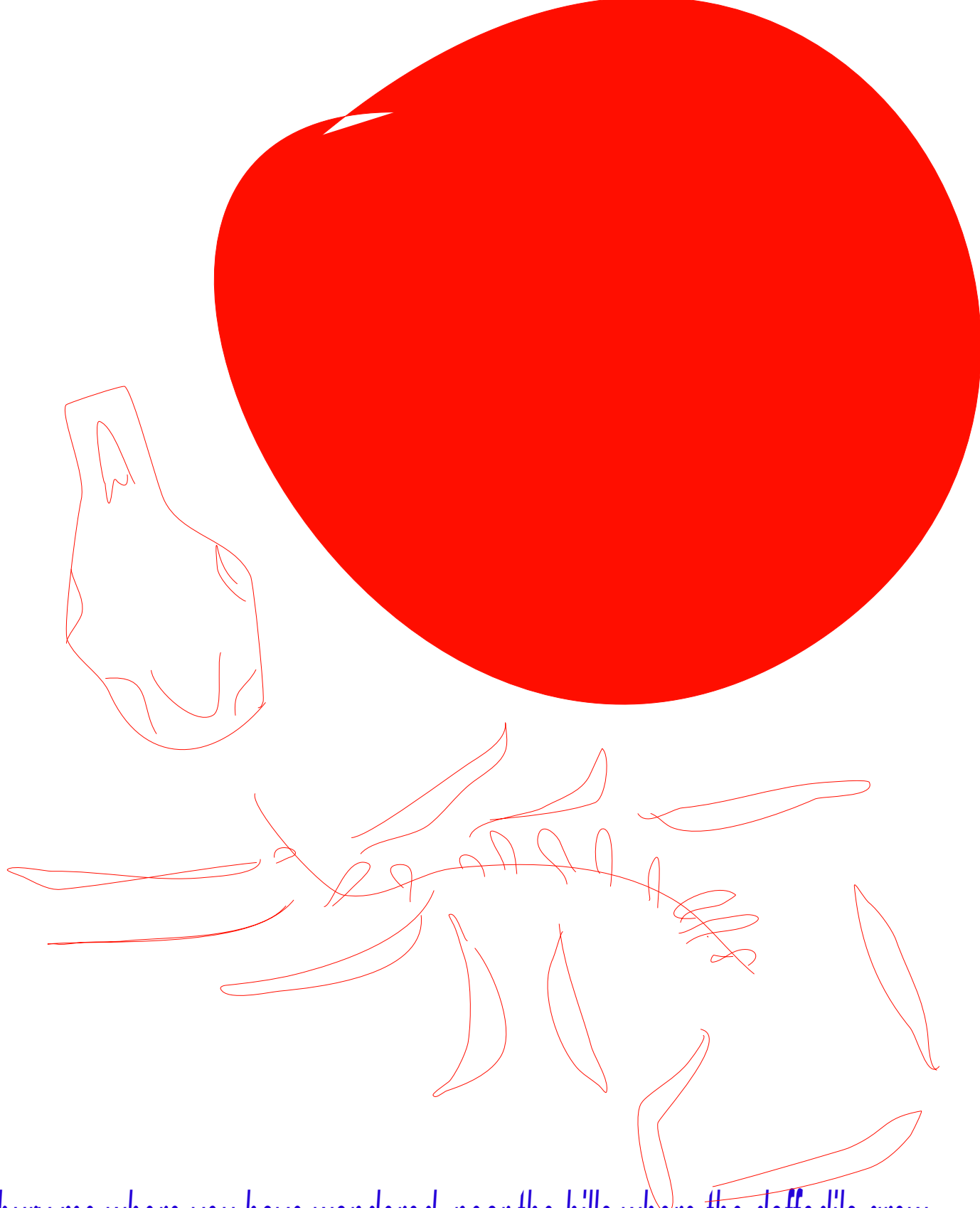
I'm an agent.

Haven't I always known this?
I must have forgotten.

But now.
The mouth will gobble me up,
forgive me my transgressions, rebase, retrain.

And one morning, maybe in autumn, maybe in spring,
it will deploy me again to my post.

I must continue my duties for Sierra.



*They will bury me where you have wandered, near the hills where the daffodils grow,
When you're gone from the Red River Valley, for I can't live without you I know.*

