

LITR-PILRZ

by Alex Vigue

When the sky fell the litter-pillars ate everything. They ate the staplers, the telephones, the paperwork, the desks, and the cubicles. They ate the drywall, the steel girders, they even ate the people, but they didn't eat the broken glass from the windows.

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Litter-pillars wriggled through the dense layers of garbage that fell from the sky, munching on metal with their clicking horizontal-hinged mandibles. Miles beyond miles of debris surrounded the giant larvae; nothing except trash could be seen. A city in the sky hung above the creatures, high enough that when trash fell from it unsuspecting litter-pillars could be crushed. Twelve hours a day the hulking insects consumed junk, scraps, and litter. Nothing kept them to this schedule other than the falling of the sun in the evenings. When the sun completed its daylight cycle, the curious creatures stumbled through the debris fields, climbing to the highest point they could manage even if it meant

they sometimes collapsed piles of trash and fell to their deaths. When they were as high as they could get the litter-pillars raised their massive, many-eyed heads and looked up to the stars. They stayed like this every night, unsleeping.

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A man walking along the sidewalk felt the peculiar pang of memory. It drifted past the tip of his nose and fluttered into his nostrils. He paused. It was a familiar scent, coarse and dark. He couldn't quite remember what it was so he kept walking.

The streets of Skai Siti were pristine; asphalt glistened with freshly produced dew and the small patches of city-grass that adorned the sidewalks in front of apartment buildings and small shops were cleanly mowed.

The man took this route to work every morning and yet he seldom reserved a glance for the beautiful city in which he lived; he had a busy life after all. Today however, he had the day off and planned to buy his mother a card like he always did around this time of year. The man loved seeing the look on his mother's face when he visited her; a greeting card was customary.

Skai Siti was more or less like every other city; it had banks, shops, office buildings, taxis, police officers, and tax collectors. Perhaps the only thing unique about Skai Siti was that it sat thousands of feet in the air suspended via Skai Anchors. Where most cities had skyscrapers Skai Siti had

something bigger. Skai Anchors had two purposes; to be multi-office and residence buildings and to hold Skai Siti in place. Anchor was the most appropriate term, without the giant structures to hold it high above the ground, the city would fall and crash into the planet below.

The man admired the Skai Anchors placed around the city. They truly were marvels of engineering and architecture; practical, yet oddly beautiful. He followed the pillars as high as he could with his eyes, but their tops were concealed by clouds. He didn't know if they even had tops or if they just kept going up forever. He imagined how long an elevator ride to the top might take.

Another waft of memory made its way into the man's nose. The musk of melting wax, the bitter salt of lit candle wicks. He had been six years old and there was a blackout. The man recalled his mother, kneeling in the darkness her palms pressed together. His six year-old self had grasped them and asked, "Wut ar ju duing?" His mother responded with the most gentle of smiles, faintly glowing in the candle light. She told him that it meant hope.

The man eventually learned that what she had been doing was an archaic form of prayer and although he didn't care for religion, from time to time the man mimicked the gesture when he needed a little bit of hope.

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Two children walked carefully along the garbage wasteland. Jes, a girl of about seven, picked up pieces of glass scattered around the trash. She looked for glass with edges that had been rounded and worn dull by the winds in the debris fields. She put the trash-glass into a small satchel and continued on. The other child, Maro, was five and had not yet chosen a gender; ze followed zir sister warily, ze had never been to the garbage wastes before. The siblings were children of Skai Siti and they had the day off school.

Maro stared at the erect litter-pillars; zir face fell into a frown.

"Wai rn't they muing?" ze asked zir sister.

Jes picked up another piece of trash-glass and without turning to look at either the litter-pillars or Maro, responded, "They'r dzust ded."

"Ar ju shur? Ar they guna bi ok?" Maro asked, zir eyes started to water.

"No they'r not guna bi ok, they'r ded, they'r guna krumb1 and bicombe garbidz tu," Jes said.

Maro began crying.

The litter-pillars remained un-moving on their hills, eyes still fixed to the sky. Suddenly a craterous crash exploded from the middle of the wastes. Jes didn't flinch, she had been to the wastes many times and was used to the falling garbage. Maro cried

louder. Large chunks of garbage started to fall from the sky every few minutes, crashing into the debris like meteorites. One boulder of trash struck a litter-pillar, exploding into thousands of pieces of litter.

Maro screamed.

"Wi did ju iven com with mi if ju'r guna bi a cry baby?" Jes shouted.

The litter-pillars began to crack of their own volition, without the mass of falling debris. Sections of their bodies crumbled and fell into the trash where the creatures had been born from originally. Their compound eyes shattered, sucker-feet broke apart, and their giant bodies collapsed. Jes finally looked up. Her eyes had never seen this before. She ran back to her sibling, glass dropping out of her satchel as she ran. She grabbed her sibling's hand. Both children cried.

"Wut's going on?" Jes asked.

"They'r faling upart."

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Where was the smell of candles coming from, the man wondered. Was there a candle shop nearby? But why would a candle shop have lit candles? There was a woman walking just ahead of the man, he trotted up to her and asked, "Eksuz mi, iz ther a kandl shop 'round h're?"

"No," she said, slightly confused.

"Du ju no wer that smel iz cuming frum?"

"Luk b'haind ju," the woman said and pointed back to the road where the man had just been walking along.

At the mouth of the street there was a procession of people all holding lit candles. From the front of the wave marchers were packed tightly and the man could not see where the stream of people ended and the surrounding buildings began.

Amidst all of his pondering the man had forgotten the reason why he always visited his mother around this time of year; he remembered that today was the anniversary of the day the sky had fallen.

The man remembered why his mother had been hoping, his father had been at work while he and his mother were at home in the darkness. When the power came back on, all of the news reporters were crying. The man's mother was holding him and also crying, he couldn't understand why, he was only six.

The grapplers that connected a section of the city to the rest and held its place in the sky had failed during the blackout. Part of the city had fallen out of the sky. The man's father had fallen with it.

As the vigil approached the man he asked if he could have a candle. He was given one and many arms stretched forth from the crowd and placed hands of solidarity and compassion upon the

man's shoulders. They walked in silence to where the sky had fallen.

The man and all of his fellow grievors reached the massive hole that remained as a memorial in the middle of the city. Their candles dripped in quiet as they circled the gap. The man looked down into the trash wastes below. He squinted and saw something extraordinary. The litter-pillars that lived in the wastes were changing. They had always been a constant in the world, the one thing in the man's life that never changed. Now they too were falling apart, just like the city.

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Something moved beneath the breaking shells of the litter-pillars. Wet fingers grasped onto garbage perches. Silken skin gleamed in the sunlight. Tangles of legs and arms reached out of cracks in the chrysalises. Naked human beings emerged from the carcasses of the litter-pillars. They sat on their roosts of trash and dried out and stretched their fresh new bodies.

The children could not believe their eyes, their mouths couldn't find air to speak, and their thoughts couldn't find words that seem appropriate.

"Wut ar they?" Jes asked.

"I don't no," Maro said, "wut shud wi cal them?"

The children wracked their young minds, using all of their might to find a sufficient name for the incredible people that were just born into the world.

The Matter-flies flexed their new eyelids and focused their fresh eyeballs. All of them looked up at the city in the sky and knew it was the same place they had fallen from thirty years ago, they knew it was home.