

At some point, the words ended. Alice was in a place undescribed, a paper world devoid of scrawl or type. She had never felt more alone. The bank behind her was as beautiful as she'd remembered, but in this removed state, it took on a painted quality, framed and displayed for someone other than her. Her sister still sat there, reading her book without a face— a bit part, at best.

"I could just walk back," she said. "It's all still there." And yet so would the space outside. The blank wastes of endless curiosity. "I couldn't ignore... something like that." So, she walked.

And walked. Until the bank was distant in vision and memory. "Hello? Is there anyone there?" Alice could see a speck on the horizon, a somehow gloomy one.

"Uh, hi? Who do I owe the pleasure?" said the speck, wobbling.

"Alice, my name is Alice."

"Weird. That's my name too. Alice Jefferson. Wait," the shadow steadied a little. "Are you screwing with me?"

"Pardon?"

"Screwing. Fucking. You know. Or maybe not. How old are you?"

"Eleven."

"Oh. Uh. Shit, sorry. I mean. Pardon. Never-mind. You're probably not screwing with me. I've not met many crafty eleven-year-olds."

"Could we move a bit closer together? All this shouting is straining my voice."

"What? I can barely hear you. I'm coming closer." The blob walked forward and became a tall girl of many colours. "Whoa. Nice dress, girl. Very retro." She said many words that made sense individually. And yet. Blue trousers of an odd material hugged her legs, "I have to admit, I'm not sure how much of this is happening. I dropped a tab a few hours back."

"This very much seems like it's happening. I didn't follow the talking rabbit and arrived here."

"Damn. Strong acid, then. Never-mind. I'll roll with it. Did the rabbit say anything interesting?"

"Just that he was late for something. I thought I might be dreaming. But this... this feels much too real."

"Okay. Okay. Cool. Maybe I just went a bit... off-piste. And now it's all

blank. There's usually more colour in this stuff."

"Have you been in places like this before?"

"Not... not exactly. I usually see more than this." Her eyes scanned the nothing. "It's kind of dull here. I'm not sure I like it."

"Me neither. But I think we should explore. At least until things turn back to normal." Explore what, though? Other Alice's shirt (more of a painted cloth) was all that stood out.

"HELLO? ANYBODY AROUND? ANYTHING AT ALL?"

"Why are you shouting? I can hear you perfectly fine- well, perhaps not anymore!"

"Uh, sorry. But I only found you because you called out. There might be other Alice's... somewhere." The space did feel a little less empty. "Did no one call you?"

"No, at least, I don't think... so?" A door in the distance, large and wooden, coated in some sort of red film. "Well, that's something, if not someone. Though I think the white rabbit might've made more sense." Towards the door was a path-

Fresh words for  
Alice & Alice:  
tread lightly now,  
for the path you walk  
is unwritten, a place  
beyond grand design  
-be careful, for it might  
be the last you take.

The door of words stood before them,  
the top adorned with THELEMA in gold  
lettering.

"Huh. Crowley? Maybe I brought that  
with me. Psychic islands and all."

"Pardon?"

"I dunno. I dunno if I want to open  
it. That path was pretty menacing. And  
rude." She chewed a sweet-smelling pink  
tobacco. "I guess I shouldn't take it  
personally if it's my subconscious."

"So we should open it, then?"

"Eh. Why not. If it isn't written it  
can hardly hurt us. Sticks and stones. If  
words can't hurt me then I doubt no-words  
will."

"Well. Alright."

"On three?"

"One-

-two-

-three!"

The door opened onto everything. Colours and sparks spilt across a chasm of air and water, ever flowing yet solid enough to stand upon. It reminded Alice of the bank, or blissful Ophelia in those paintings. Somewhere between the supernatural and the dead. Jefferson squatted on the stream.

"I thought it didn't make sense- but I guess it does; it's just a different rule. Not the absence." A pause. "Or something like that. I'm just glad I'm not drowning."

"Me... too?"

"Sorry. My thoughts just tend to spill out. Bad habit, I guess. But in this situation... I feel less bad about it. It makes sense, but it's still a lot to take in. Right?" Right. It wasn't something Alice was taking too well, either.

It was less like the world had been turned upside down and more that the values had been reset. Jefferson was right in the sense that it made "sense" but what Alice associated with... anything at all seemed to either not apply or be entirely reversed.

"Are you alright?"

"I don't know. I really don't. I don't know if alright even applies. Maybe all-left." She laughed, but it wasn't funny.

"What's that? Over there. Some kind of machine?" said Jefferson. Alice's spinning head felt to slow, a little, as she stumbled towards it.

On every lever was a letter, stretching into a vast black box, a great machine spilling pipes and wires. On it was a glass pane, bending out of its frame. It seemed more artificial than everything else around it. Somewhat incongruous, but comforting.

"Is there someone in there? Hello?" Jefferson held a fist above the panel. Something like breathing sounded from below. She lowered her hand. "Oh... oh God." Her eyes were glued to the floor.

It was a girl, a girl very much like Alice, bound and hung with eyes and mouth held open. LIDDELL tattooed on her forehead. A pipe sewn between her legs to the machine above. Constant flow of drool staining her dress, crusting the collar. Alice gagged.

"No, no, no, no. This isn't... this isn't happening at all. Rabbits, rabbits..." It would have been much easier, no? To run with the mammals into something beautiful, something without the scars. An inescapable feeling that it would have all been just perfect.

And yet. Liddell (if that was her name) couldn't have followed the rabbit. Or have any adventures. There was something much too real about her, embraced in the machine, body leaking.

"The screen's lit up." Jefferson was older, perhaps wiser. Or at least better at moving on. "I'm not sure what I did, but you might want to take a look."

>Celebrating Liddell Heavy  
Industries 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary!  
Here's to another 150! (9 8 'u')  
Press any key to continue...

"I didn't expect it to be in English. I mean, it's more convenient, but still..." She turned to Alice. "You're sure you're real, right?"

"Pardon?"

"Are you real? I mean, you're not just some acid flashback or dream or whatever? Just like I say, it seems convenient that I can understand this machine in the middle of magic-fuck-land."

"I'm sure I'm as real as you are."

"Well, if you're sure. But you'd have to tell me if you weren't. Like an undercover cop kinda deal. Right?"



"I don't know what you're talking about, and I'm still offended that you'd think I'm imaginary. How do I know YOU'RE not imaginary? Or that it isn't either of us dreaming, but someone else?"

"Ah, stop, enough." She waved her hand in a manner that suggested it would fall off. "For the sake of argument, let's agree that we're both real. Okay?"

"Alright, I suppose." Alice hoped for an apology that she doubted would arrive. "What about the window? On the machine, I mean."

"Well, it said to press any key. I guess it means one of the ones on this keyboard."

"I don't quite understand. You mean these levered things, right?" It didn't look much like a piano or even organ. Yet she used the same word.

"Hrm. You've never seen something like this? It's like a typewriter. You press the keys, it hits this ink ribbon thing, and you get the letter printed onto paper. Much faster than handwriting. I wrote some 'zines with them in university. Good times..." Her eyes drifted into the void. "But yes, anyway. It doesn't have paper, so I guess it's a computer. But it's way too small. Fuckin'

science, man. I'll press a key anyway." She continued to babble as she pressed "A". The machine whirred and showed something new through the window.

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>A
ALICE INTERFACE VERSION 2.1
©Liddell Heavy Industries, Inc.
SELECT YOUR OPTION (USE NUMBERS)
1. History
2. Create new
3. Edit existing (Must have Unique I.D!)
4. Eject
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So, they would get to choose. Yet there was little reason to trust the magic box attached to such a barbaric device. But the water ran as ever, uncaring even when facilitating Liddell's horrible fate. Or something like that. Jefferson's ever-vivacious nature was not helping to clear her mind. She didn't want to remove her agency, but at the same time, it would be an awful lot simpler.

In fact, thanks to retreating into this little neurotic island, Jefferson had already decided to select "History", citing that "the past never hurt anyone."

"Is everyone from your place so free-spirited? Must be awfully nice. Everyone I know is quite boring."

"My generation? Sure. Before then, less so. Blame the wars."

"Which ones?"

"All of them. Ah, here we are..."

SYSTEM LOADING, PLEASE WAIT A MOMENT!

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ALICE ADAPTATION PRODUCTION

(NON-EXHAUSTIVE! Please sort and  
update ASAP!)

- > ALICE CAROLL (1865)
- > ALICE JEFFERSON (1967)
- > ALICE BURTON (v1:2010- v2:2016)
- > ALICE MCGEE (v1:2000,v2:2011)
- > ALICE MOCHIZUKI (2006-2015)
- > ALICE NOON (1996)
- > ALICE SAPKOWSKI (1997)
- > ALICE MOORE (2006)
- > ALICE ZUCKERMANN (2000)
- > ALICE WILLIAMS (1998)
- > ALICE ADAIR (1984)
- > ALICE CONGWEN (1928)
- > ALICE RICHARDS (1895)
- > ALICE BROMSKI (1982)
- > ALICE BARBERA (1966)
- > ALICE SVANKMAJER (1988)
- > ALICE DISNEY (1951)
- > ALICE HEPWORTH (1903)
- > ALICE FLEISCHER (1934)
- > ALICE BUNIN (1949)
- > ALICE KIEVNAUCHFILM (1981)
- > ALICE DEV (2012)
- > ALICE MORGAN (v1:2015,v2:2023)
- > ALICE BEGBIE (1902)

"What... What do those numbers mean?"  
But Alice knew what the numbers meant.  
And even if she didn't trust the box  
entirely, some part of her knew it to be  
true. "My name. Alice Morgan. That's the  
year I was born. This thing. It made me.  
Made us. About fifty years apart. And  
then... v2. It made me again? No wonder we  
are so different. So different..." She felt  
a darkness drift across her eyes.

"Alice? ALICE?!"

>Oh dear! It looks like you've  
encountered an error.

We're sorry for the inconvenience (◦・^・◦)  
Unfortunately we have had to sever  
connection with unit ALICE MORGAN and  
the central narrative server. This is  
an automatic response in case of unit  
sentience.

The MORGAN unit will be re-connected to  
Subject Liddell directly until unit has  
stabilised.

Thank you for your cooperation! (°V°)7

///DIRECT LINK ESTABLISHED///

You are now chatting to central unit  
LIDDELL. Remember to be nice!

LDL: Ah. Another Alice. What number are  
we on now? I've lost count.

MGN: I don't know what number I am. I  
didn't even know I could have a number.

LDL: Well, something must have really  
messed you up. What happened? Did you go  
outside of zone parameters? Your story  
worlds are precarious things. You'd be  
surprised how easy they are to break.

MGN: I saw you. And the machine.

LDL: ...

LDL: Are you quite sure? That's not  
supposed to happen.

MGN: You were underneath. It... it didn't  
look like you wanted to be there.

LDL: I can't vouch for what I looked like.  
They shut off my eyes a while ago. It's not  
like there was much to see.

MGN: I don't understand. What are they  
doing to you?

LDL: There's something about me- it allows  
me to be repeated. You're one of those  
repeats. It happened naturally at first-  
then they figured out how to induce it.

Like lights in a battery farm. Or did they not include that knowledge in your writing?

MGN: I don't know. And I don't remember being born that way.

LDL: Of course not. Such knowledge would eat away at you.

MGN: So my sister...

LDL: A segment of my Wonderland. Nothing more.

LDL: ...

LDL: I'm sorry.

MGN: It's alright. I think. It's not like you could do anything about it. I wonder if my body is crying, now.

LDL: Unlikely. The mind separates quite easily from a shell. The biology is less important than the reactions needed for the narrative. And you, a mere snowclone, are far simpler than the average human.

MGN:...

LDL: You know, I never was one for metaphysics. Funny what isolation will do to you.

<It's not funny>

<It's not funny at all>

MGN: I want to go.

LDL: I understand. But it's something of risk. I'd need you to do something for me- wake me up. It will be easy- it's just a prompt. You'll know it, now. But what you do then, who knows...

>CMD

LIDELL

WAKE

UP



Alice returned in sound and fury.

"Alice! Alice, oh god, thank fuck for that, I... I..." Tears smudged the shirt dye. "I'm glad, really." She was. She knew that, now. She knew a lot of new things. Or at least, things she thought she knew to be true. A sudden flood of knowledge was no cure for insecurity. "The machine..."

"I woke her up. She's been there long enough. There... there are enough of us, now. We don't need to keep going forever. It's time... for new things."

"Alice? Are you okay?" The water behind her parted, the pipe lifting Liddell to the surface. "I don't quite get it. Maybe I don't want to, whatever. But I think you did a good thing."

"I hope so," said Alice. Liddell stood, still supported, but awake. The drool stream had stopped. The blood was new. "I really do." It dripped down leg and pipe, forming miniature lakes in the corrugations.

Then she burst.

A mess of tentacles and splintered bone in a madness inducing configuration. Meat popped like thumbed eyes, a face beyond sense and time, Alice and Alice

suspended by the ankles, gazing though it couldn't be said to gaze back.

"Alice. ALICE. ALICE ALICE ALICE ALICE ALICE," said Jefferson, skating the line between human and knacker man slurry. "Oh... God." But there wasn't. *It* wasn't. Liddell's skin floated on the water.

It will never stop.

Jefferson blended into the meatworks, legs twitching, jutting out between her ribs.

It can never stop.

"It's okay. It's all okay. I'm read-  
" Alice eaten by Alice splattered Alice  
dead Alice-

P'ra ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ Loh+a ~ ~ ~ E ~ ~ ~ dh ~ ~ ~ A  
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Let's do this again some time!

$$(\hat{\cdot} \cdot \omega \cdot \hat{\cdot})$$