

Melbourne University Puzzle Hunt — 2004

Act 1

“Speak, thou vast and venerable head,” muttered Ahab, “which, though ungarnished with a beard, yet here and there lookest hoary with mosses; speak, mighty head, and tell us the secret thing that is in thee. O head! thou has seen enough to split the planets and make an infidel of Abraham, and not one word is thine! Speak!”

—H. Melville, *‘Moby Dick’*

Prelude

At 9am on a Monday morning you walk past Richard Berry theatre A. From within you can hear several voices and the gentle sounds of someone playing a lyre. Curious, you try and peer in, but the theatre lights are off and the door is locked. You listen at the door but can not make words out of what is being said. You start to wander around to the rear of the theatre but someone grabs your arm. A friend who tells you to follow them.

After class you return to theatre A. Flanking the theatre doors you now see a group of tall men in dark suits with walkie-talkies and expressionless faces. One of them is methodically taping black paper over the theatre door's glass panel. As he bends down to cut another strip of tape his suit shifts and you see a firearm with the insignia 'AFP'.

Several people approach and enter the theatre. You recognise Prof. Ray Volkas, Dr. Robert Foot and Dr. Andrew Melatos from the department of Physics. They are shortly followed by more security types escorting John Howard, several aids and the previous Vice Chancellor, Alan Gilbert. The doors lock from the inside.

Walking outside, you wonder what to make of it.

10 minutes later, there is a strange arcing sound. Coloured light splashes over the ground where you are playing with a pair of black and white cats. You turn to face the Richard Berry building which seems to be the source of the light.

Suddenly you can no longer see. You grope forward and feel fragments and dust fall all about you. An acrid smell fills the air. You rub your eyes. The cats are gone. Part of Richard Berry is gone. You hear nothing despite the rain of debris.

Where theatre A once stood is a 15 metre hole. The hole is surrounded by hundreds of twisted, scorched and smoldering lecture chairs and tables.

The hole emits a dull heat. Down at the epicentre the conflagration appears to have uncovered the surface of a giant metal pipe. The pipe is covered with bundles of wires. A vapour swirls about it as if it were very cold.

Surströmming

—Julian Assange

You find a buckled and partially molten aluminium briefcase near the edge of the theatre A crater. It contains several documents. You read one:

TS AUSTEO TS AUSTEO TS AUSTEO TS AUSTEO

PATH: DSD!ONA

TO: PM

SUJECT: Daily Intercept Briefing

DSD intercepted chatter. Unusual features. Unknown significance.

<inaudable>

may have support. I can't name him on the phone. No Such Agency, right. America. You'll understand why soon. It's not enough to cover. Semantic forests will pick it up. I'll say it like this. He is and a politician from a political dynasty; his father was a politician. Both he and his father and share the same name. Their surname begins with the letter 'B'. If both are referred to, the son is usually called 'Jr' and the father 'Snr'. He is an avowed Christian to the right of his party. He has close defence and intelligence connections for which he is sometimes criticized. His full name (Christian name, middle initial and surname) has 11 letters. Four of those letters are vowels. The remaining seven are consonants. The sixth letter is an 'e'.

Yes. We must act immediately.

The Call

—Tharatorn Supasiti

You drift into a reverie. Without knowing why, an image of John Howard doing his morning power walk in his Vodafone-sponsored tracksuit, surfaces in your mind. You are pulled back to reality by a sudden vibration under your thigh. Turning over you find a mobile phone. You answer it, but the other party disconnects without word. Looking through the contents of the phone for identifying details you find an old outgoing message.

8666044332377882777833777-7777077733766677780333777666-
60477728884448999063355-556669

John Howard has secretly funded a \$2 billion particle accelerator under Melbourne University and University Square. Melbourne University Private a mere construction cover. I am yet unsure as to the exact motive, but I think it may suit our objective.

66339980633-338444664075552-222330444777703355-556667777

You quickly decode the message. An attractive first name.

Pianola

—Daniel Yeow

You gingerly make your way down towards the metallic structure at the bottom of the pit. Strange, now that you are so close to it, you find you can't focus properly. You look up and the world spins. An approaching figure is a circle, coarse fabric fills the sky.

You slowly regain consciousness. Your surroundings have changed and you can hear music which sounds vaguely familiar. The buzzing in your ears is still quite loud so you can't quite make out the tune. As the dizziness wears off, you stumble in the direction of the sound. The music has stopped and you hear two men walk out of the next room and close the door behind them and bolting it shut.

As they disappear around the corner, you can just hear one say to the other

"...music to tell the time by..."

but you find yourself unable to hear anything after that.

You walk into the next room to see an old pianola in the corner. There is a post-it note scribbled near the keyboard which reads:

"The password to the mainframe is the title of the song."

Carefully you remove the cartridge, but all you can make out are an array of punched holes which correspond to certain numbers. The numbers read like so:

*15, 10, 7, 15, 10, 7, 15, 10, 13, 10, 5, 13, 10, 5, 13, 10, 13, 10, 5, 13, 10, 5,
13, 10, 12, 8, 5, 12, 8, 5, 12, 8*

Those numbers repeat themselves four times then the holes stop. There is scribbled *"end of intro"*. If only you could hear properly! You feed the cartridge through the machine but the overpowering ringing sensation in your ears drowns out the sound of the old pianola.

The Pairs

—Tharatorn Supasiti

In middle of the night you walk to University Square. You stand looking at the fine gravel and stunted trees in the moonlight. You sit down and notice how warm the ground feels. Grasping a handful, you feel a vague writhing and throw it away in disgust.

Your attention is drawn to some voices. Out of the unerground car park emerge two suspicious-looking gentlemen in Hessian robes.

“Hey Zhao, do ou eally tink hat tis ting is going to bing bak te ead?” says the taller one.

“The accelerator must really affect your speech enormously for you to be talking like that, Kwok” replies the smaller one.

They look around furtively, kneel down and pull a measuring device out of the ground. Gently nodding, they return underground.

A movement catches your eye. Looking at the disturbed gravel you see ae roll of cellulose fluttering. You retrieve it. Nearby a white flooklight beams up uselessly into the night. You hold the cellulose against it:





