

Compass

—Adrian Khoo

Having read your fill, you attempt to stuff the newspaper into your trusty satchel. Brimming as it is with voluminous textbooks, your satchel finally gives way to the newspaper, but only after reducing it to mangled tatters. Cursing the finite capacity of physical objects, you exit the library and approach the elevators.

You sidle up against two freckled strangers, each complete with straw hat, overalls, and a stalk of wheat protruding from between their lips: probably some new post-docs from the Land & Food Resources department. One of them is tall; the other, at a mere 6'4, is only *somewhat* tall. They chew on the stalks unwholesomely while chatting to each other in nasal Alabaman accents.

"It's dun' pressed it three times," insists the taller one.

"Is that right?" responds his friend. "And the lift still ain't comin'?"

"Yes sirree, three times, and I just ain't got no patience left!"

"None left what-so-ever?"

"Sos I says, I did. Must I be sayin' everythin' two frickin' times before ya'll understand?!"

"Aw man, don't go raisin' this here hullabaloo, alright? I don't need no everythin' said two frickin' times."

"Right, well I always seems to be sayin' everythin' two frickin' times before ya'll get the message."

"You really ain't got no patience left. . . But I'm thinkin' all you need is a good hearty drink. Some port?"

The first man silently accepts the proffered flask and takes a large swig. An otherworldly "ding" rings out in the corridor and the elevator doors slide open. They follow you in. The one who had offered the port reaches for the button marked '1' and presses it, while you press 'G'. Descending to the first floor, the doors slide open once more; however, they do not exit, instead looking at each other in puzzlement.

"These 'ere lifts are weird, I tells ya," remarks the taller man, apparently recovered from his previous outburst, as the doors wearily close once more. "When we's went up, I's could have sworn we pressed 'two', but we ended up on that floor with the library."

"You're right," affirms the shorter. "Thanks to these darn confusin' lifts, we've missed the start of the Four Corners of Evil Convention at the bar, and we would now be. . . *barred entry.*"

Five whole seconds manage to pass before it clicks, and the first man erupts into a fit of laughter. Outraged at this *punishable* abuse of the English language, you cannot help but turn to the offender and retort, "Wow! You know, you are just so funny."

“I know!” comes the arrogant reply, completely oblivious to your blatant sarcasm. By now, the lift has brought you to the ground floor. The pair, looking out, decide this was the floor they wanted. You need to head in the same direction as them to get to your car and go home, and you cannot help but hear their piercingly nasal voices, even as you walk behind them.

“That there lad was right,” boasts the amateur comic. “This here two meanin’s of ‘bar’ . . . that was very clever of me.”

“He’s sho’ was right; the two meanin’s of ‘bar’ . . .” echoes the taller man with a chuckle. He pauses and sips some more port. “Your jokes sho’ are so brilliantly left-field.”

“Ya know,” continues his friend, “we should really network with these *Oh*-straylians. Wouldn’t want ’em turnin’ into lefty scum now, would we?”

“Yeah. Network, and point ’em in the right direction, least ’til the steak operation is finished.”

“Savin’ them from an un-American fate - we’s gonna be heroes! The man his’self - Clint Eastwood, would be proud.”

Emerging onto Swanston Street, you all proceed to jaywalk across the tram tracks. As they turn off to the tram stop your curiosity gets the better of you, and you decide to follow them and catch the rest of their conversation, at least until they get on a tram.

“You’re dang right he would. Ya know, I’ve lost my cell two times today, left it behind someplace, and just gone got up and leaved it behind. Can you believe that? And the guy who’s found it, a right hero, then’s turned around and wanted a ree-ward. Three times he asked before I caved.”

“Ha. Soon you ain’t gonna have no cash left! Wait, you got enough money to get us back to the apartment don’t cha? Gee, the crowds on this tram sure are frightful. We gonna ’ave ta squeeze. Clint Eastwood sho’ wouldn’ta liked it.”

As they get on the tram you notice a mobile phone lying on a nearby seat, and you can’t help but chuckle at their stupidity. Snatching it up, you’re about to bolt after the tram, when you remember what he’d said about a reward. This could take some negotiation. You just needed to find out where they lived, and a quick call to a contact should do the trick.

Switching on the phone, the backlight flickers to life, but the screen seems to be frozen, fixed on displaying a tiny grid. How are you going to get directions to their apartment now?

