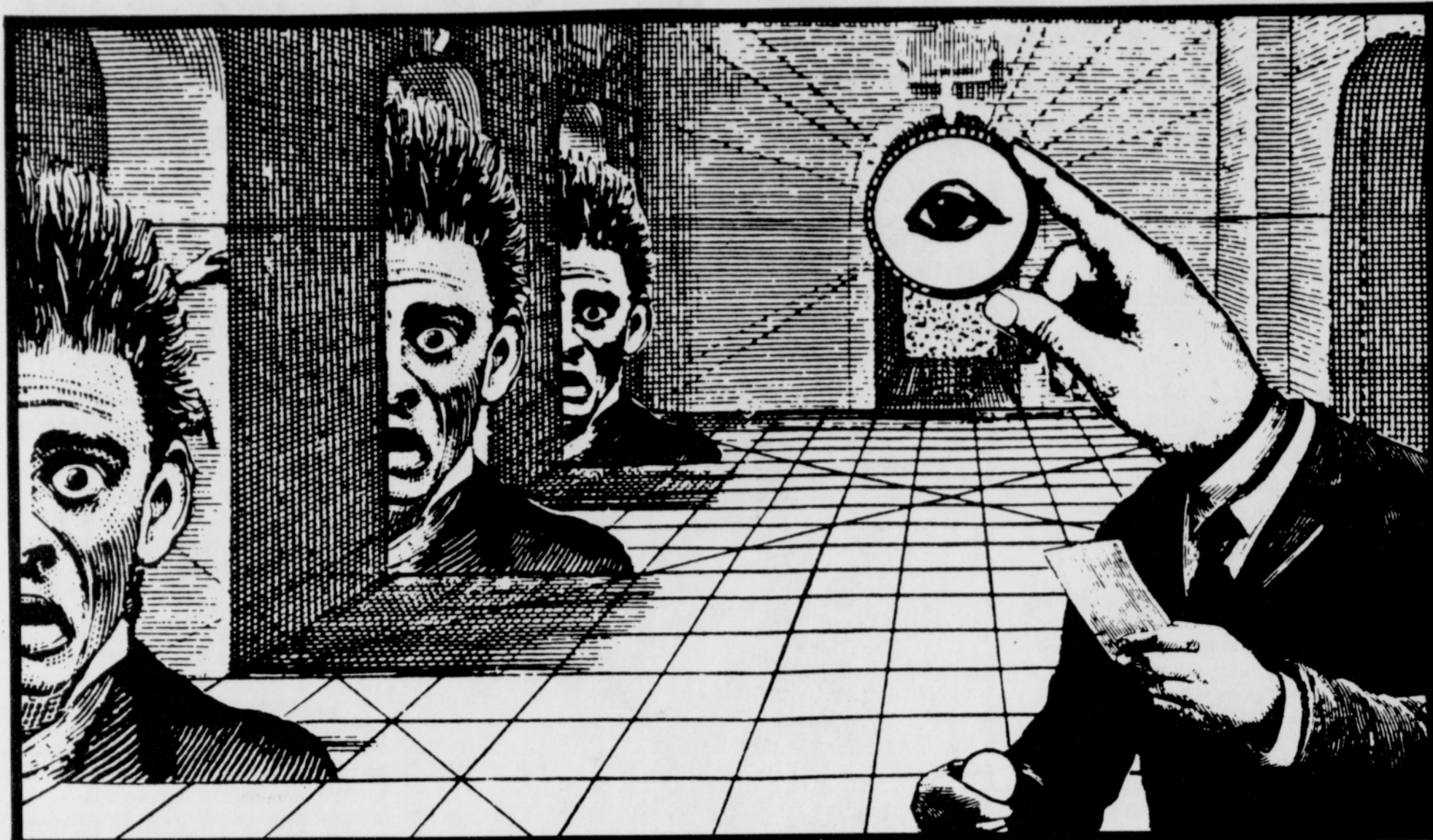




1994

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religious warfare between good and evil, currently waged against the Great Satans and Pagans who occupied the other two-thirds of Earth. Everything since the crucifixion was rendered into ecclesiastical dogma. History thus made sacred was also made to conform to the present iron rule of the High Priests. An example of this was that the old testament was revised to not only directly justify the emergence of the ruling theocracy but to purge it of any connection with Judaism. Jews emerged instead as a satanic cult that murdered Jesus, son of God, affixing his sacred body to a cross like a common criminal. Latter day Jews continued to be persecuted for the ancient murder and for the fact that complete extermination had never yet been successful. Though any reference to the Holocaust of World War II had long been erased, following a period of denial, Hitler's ideas of a final Jewish solution had been resurrected. Success was limited because Jews not caught in the first pogroms went underground to live disguised lives within the mainstream while secretly reviving an oral tradition of teaching the Torah and Judaic culture.

Terra tres parva est, Winston thought, enlarging upon Caesar. At least he thought the world was divided into three parts. The other two parts were referred to only as the Great Satans and the Pagans. His part, Evangelica (the Holy Evangelical Empire), was eternally at war with either or both simultaneously, though he was never certain as a result of everchanging revisions by the Ministry of Truth. He manipulated information enough to have formed a hazy recollection of which antichrist Evangelica was at war against, and when, but his own processing of misinformation dulled and confused his memory; and of course doublethink interfered — a large part of his mind was trained to believe everything issued by the Ministry of Truth no matter how mutable or how personally the distortions were his own conception. Every revision of circumstance was accompanied by instant and automatic faith in its immutability.

Winston's instructions were faxed from higher echelons within the Ministry of Truth. He was never candidly ordered to alter historical record, which at any rate was little more than fiction. Each revision of scripture was justified by other alliterations to scripture. Winston might question the veracity of his assignments but he relished the challenge they gave his imagination to invent the necessary sacred lies.

Someone else, if they had momentarily put aside fear of thinking improper thoughts, might have become cynical or obsessively spirited. Winston's seemingly instinctual recognition of hypocrisy spurred him to intellectual revulsion of theocracy. He thought he was alone in his lack of faith. He could not trust anyone, which he recognized as the most powerful and compelling psychology of control. But what to do about it he had not a clue.

Winston could not clearly remember if the past resembled the present. Some subliminal memory told him it had not been, that life had been much more open and pleasant. That daily life had been lived without fear. He couldn't be sure. His memory was indistinct, scrubbed so often he was not sure he remembered anything.

But startling thoughts popped into his mind as if from nowhere. One such moment occurred during a vehement noontime exhortation by a visiting high-level cleric against sexual intercourse, first among cardinal sins, demanding everyone, men and women, resist all temptation, unnecessarily warning that death was the punishment for anyone caught in an inappropriate and uncomromising sexual act (though the leniency of castration was often granted men unless they were homosexuals). Winston's mind was not upon the fulsome priest. A bit of oldtime wisdom jacked through his synapses: Everybody constantly thought about sex but believed prayer would take its place in the afterlife. The reality in his lifetime was that prayer was substituted for sex.

Vows of chastity were required of everyone. Only heterosexual couples selected for their spiritual purity and married by the Order were allowed intercourse. The risk was that those who applied for marriage and were rejected after examination faced torture and death. Marital sex was restricted to what was called the 'missionary' position, the

woman on her back, the male on top, which would be an adequate metaphor for any definitive sculpture of Evangelica.

Winston was hungry for knowledge of the real past. He treasured small proofs. Once he saw three pariahs at a cafe who were later arrested and executed. Their names and photographs disappeared from all records. But he remembered seeing briefly a newspaper article about their trial, which was shown on the only television network. Gospel and fervent worship programming was mixed with inquisitional trials of heretics, witches, homosexuals, traitors, enemy prisoners and Jews. The executions were generally the most watched programs, though the names of the condemned vanished and records altered to indicate they never existed. This was a contradiction to Winston and led to his initial questioning of the ruling dogma. What happened to the souls of the disappeared? Did they vanish also? Of course he knew better than to voice his question or give any indication he gave it a thought. His face was as always spiritually reverent.

Once he saw a very old man, and risked almost certain vanishment asking questions in a tavern about the past. The old man had been struck by AI's hammer (perhaps prompted by continual and contradictory brainwashing; Winston's work) and could only recollect personal anecdotes whose meaning Winston dismissed without fanthoming.

One day he left the Ministry of Truth early. Several times as he walked toward his shabby apartment building, derverish holograms besieged him. "GOD IS WATCHING!" the same sepulchral voice warned. He entered his dreary room and sat at a table in an alcove the peeping TV screen was unable to penetrate. He opened a blank diary he had purchased in a small antique shop and hoarded like contraband. He looked at the first page, hesitated a moment, then wrote passionately, almost out of control:

DOWN WITH GOD
DOWN WITH GOD
DOWN WITH GOD

He stopped, frightened of his own damned heresy.

From that moment he knew he was as good as dead.

GOD IS DEAD! he wrote defensively.

At his lowest depths of drepression and futility he met Julia. He was terrified of her at first. He thought she was a wanton temptress in pay of zealous sex vigilantes who trapped unwary respondents and executed them on the spot. He wanted to crush her skull when he saw her on a ghetto street, convinced she was sent by the inquisition to break his required commitment to chastity. Always the testing of spiritual surrender. That in itself seemed reason to cudgel her. But he was afraid to strike.

She stumbled into him one day in a corridor at the Ministry of Truth and pressed something into his hand. Shaken and unexpectedly excited, Winston unfolded the paper circumspectly in his palm, out of sight of security screens, and at his computer added it to a pile of revision orders. He took her message off the pile after processing a few revisions. "I love

you," the note read. His heart surged, and he never again thought of her as an agent of the priests. Instead his fear was that he was too old, too shabby, too haggard for his years. She was young, impressively vital. She would not want him. He told her this the first time they met in secret. She shook her head and kissed him. "You're like me," she said. "You hate the priests. I knew it the first time I saw you."

They made love the first few times in places she selected and carefully committed to both their memories the details of their separate approaches and departures. He became obsessed with her. He wanted her to be soiled, impure. She laughed and said she was just the woman. Once he asked her if she enjoyed sex for itself. Oh yes, she said. He rented a room finally in the attic of a bedraggled antique shop cluttered with cheap memorabilia of an earlier age, to him precious icons of a far better past.

Julia was much more aware of the past than he was. She revealed herself as a Jewess, so far undected as a result of her public fervor for the ruling theology. She inherited the continuing scholasticism of her religion and its intense oral tradition that survived the incessant rewriting of scripture. The old testament belonged to her people; they lived it and wrote it, and most envious to Winston bound Julia inextricably to a community of time from which he was isolated. Though he yearned for a known ancestry, he was a creature of discontinuity. He was without a coherent past, barely even a conscious present, and when he was eventually found out as a heretic and made to vanish, no trace of his life would subsequently exist.

Both knew they were doomed. They knew it when they rented the attic room from the sympathetic elderly owner of the antique store, who seemed to cherish the historic curios in his shop and seldom sold any. Renting the room hastened the certainty of their discovery, but they were tired of planning elaborately detailed trysts in the countryside or in abandoned tenements. They wanted a place they could call their home, however briefly before the inquisition captured them.

It was inevitable that they would take the greater risk yet logical next step of seeking out the opposition underground so fanatically denounced and hunted. Winston was certain one of the high priests at the Ministry of Truth, was sympatico. He had, indeed, based his entire personal revolt on his faith in the priest as his mentor. Once he had exchanged a quick glance with the priest and read into it intellectual recoil at the hypocrisy and plain stupified malevolence that represented itself as godly omnipotence. A second occasion he was approached by the priest and engaged in a brief conversation that strongly indicated intimacy with the forces of reform and change.

It seemed only natural that Winston and Julia accept a veiled invitation to the priest's personal quarters, though a mistake of timing put them together at the outside door. They were let in quickly by a servant. As they followed him down a long hall, Winston and Julia marveled at its opulence. Winston found it difficult to compare the richness of art and furnishings with his own mean room. He felt elated at the thought of such a high level priest risking everything for intellectual freedom. Julia, from a long tradition of religious intolerance and betrayal, was more restrained in her enthusiasm as Winston introduced her.

Julia left first. Just as Winston was about to scurry out the door, the priest gave him a book disguised as a bible and said it would explain everything. A flurry of work prevented him from reading the book for several days. During a weeklong observance of intolerance toward the Great Satans the war changed and the current enemy were the Asian Pagans. The Ministry of Truth was forced to immediately revise all records and media to prove that the Pagans were the major enemy all along, which was difficult due to an immense official effort at enflaming public hatred of the Great Satans, who, of course, remained an implacable enemy despite the transfer of interest.

One evening he took the book to the attic room above the antique shop a couple of hours before Julia was to arrive. He read about the political subversion that underlie perpetual spiritual war, the manipulation of religious fervor to attain material goals. Actually a single goal. Power. Pure and Supreme. Absolute. The power of God. Not a benevolent God. History proved the weakness of benevolence. Raw power, violent and cruel. The power of the Big Bang, the instant God created the universe with a mighty clap of hands. That was the power the Order intended to wield over the world, the most elemental power possible. Sanctioned by the mandate of celestial supremacy, the priests set about spiritually sanitizing their increasing flocks, virtually



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