

Twenty2

The city without secrets.

Nate Balding

"Berlin is the new American experiment."

Vocal intonations; voluminous, deep, resonating inside the monorail car, translations from German into a multitude of languages tickling foreign cochleas lightly from translucent earbud speakers. A short history of Berlin since the erection of the Mitte Arcology and the subsequent construction of similar towers, falling away from the central point like evergreens on a mountainside; reinforced faux-glass impervious to high winds, acid rains, falling space-rock and high-frequency waves topping every pellucid spire.

Sprita's fingers circled a hollow titanium alloy bar running the length of the magnetic train's passenger chamber, body poised to offset any recoil.

"Our citizens, ten years ago, voluntarily became subjects of the Panmetropolitan Drive. There are no more secrets in Berlin."

Sprita stared through the monorail's tinted windows, watching information scroll over plexiglass as the train passed businesses and points of interest, relaying site info just that side of too-fast-to-read. She assumed it was easier for citizens, with their technological accoutrements gifting enough additional processing capability to endure the informational onslaught constantly pressing into the visual and aural cortices. It induced a headache the first day she'd been there, taking a holiday on the European continent with thousands of others who wanted to see firsthand the world's foremost social experiment.

"The Wall was built during the construction of the first arcology and lined with plates of copper and gold. Inside it, thousands of ferrous bullets fly alongside the edges, generating a massive electromagnetic field that engulfs the entire city. Every person living inside it is coded to communicate with what is essentially a city-sized geomagnetic hard drive."

The monologue continued. Sprita gazed at the other riders, easily discerning Berliner from visitor. Pronounced electronic excesses aside, the Berliners bore certain uncanny homogeneities. Similar hairstyles; similar dress; similar everything. Even the way they sat, practically posed: feet forward, parallel legs, hands in laps occasionally shifting intertwined over chests, and then back.

She'd picked up an oLED-equipped teleshirt. Everything you needed to know could

be played into an inlay along the sleeves, RSS'd in Arial MT. A miniature rfid tag issued on arrival stored the mainstay of her characteristics, physical and political, and launched her into the hard-drive world amid every other inhabitant, long- and short-term alike. Grant of the pass made her a subject to the experiment and she could, as everyone else, ping information back to a viewing screen or through the earbud she wore. Everything one wanted to know was easily available, constant wi-fi interaction conveyed everything to anyone upon query. Each and every purchase, location, trajectory, ping, glance; recorded, available. The city without secrets.

"Berlin is the only city in the world that can truly call itself twenty-first century. We are at the apex of a technologically advanced civilization, surpassing all others in scientific research and discovery. An entire city of would-be scientists and engineers, our collective knowledge available to anyone willing to share their own."

She was heading into the central arcology seeking a club called Twenty2. Her *personenkult* card informed her, based on commercial purchases and local browsing data, that Panda Parade was playing that night — one of Berlin's only surviving neo-Höllenspektakel groups. They'd exposed the viscera of their guitar pickups to heavy subdermal magnets — a common remanufacturing of the human hand — manipulating strings at varying frequencies, phalangeal theremins operating at resonant frequency and scrying ambient tones from an otherwise maniacal cacophony. The phenomenon started in the heart of Berlin and spread outwards, enthraling the youth of western Europe and slowly trickling on to sonic radar screens in America.

The monorail approached Sprita's stop. Twenty2 lay on the outskirts of the central arcology, in the detritus of last century's dimly illuminated gothic bars, primitive rave clubs and sparkling house-music meccas. Sprita drifted over the threshold as the magdoor bisected and swivelled aside, bodies pressed coarsely together, flash-throng shopping evidently under way as markdowns and sales and other notifications of imminent mercantile importance

scattered into the district, setting off mp6 alerts and charging buyers fractions of cents for personalized content. Her low-heels clicked and flickered over ceramic tiles comprised of super-atomic structures manufactured via bacterial scoring and forced bonds; elements not found in the leylines of the old periodic table.

Signals bounced off Sprita, tiny inversions of field straining against the vibration feature of her teleshirt tingling nerve clusters around her wrists, minuscule exosense shivers. She saw him from across the floor of the dark stage, multicoloured lights ambushing retinas at calculatedly odd moments, glaring and burning away. Their loop was positive, feeding back on each other in the holographic nightstream of virtual knowledge. Relationship status; exact weight and height; recent purchases what and where; living space; names of friends and degrees of separation between him and

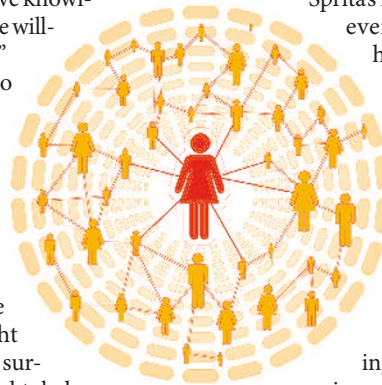
Sprita's nearly vacant friends list; everything grinned across her sleeve between ulna and radius.

He dug the music, she knew. So did she. It was almost dancing; faint glances parried by strobelights, vForm 2.0 imagery, carefully constructed coifs. Another boy's ping; another; reciprocating and reading and analysing, unearthing familiarities.

Recollections sparked and breathed; latent epiphanies in the corridors of her neural puzzle. So many; so many familiar likes and dislikes, favourite movies and books and bands and supermodels; political affiliations and angles of personal pictures. So much genetic differentiation between them all. So little cultural.

Acute paranoia developed and Sprita edged backward, vying for the club's front exit. She stumbled into the enclosed, recycled air of 'outside' and breathed deeply, gulping, nearly panicked. "I'm so foreign," she thought. "So, so foreign." Her eyes reflected the club's glowing versicolour logo while Sprita wondered if her hotel room had locks.

Nate Balding writes a zine called *Nico on Sunday Mornings*, knows how to rock, stays up later than you and drinks scotch instead of anything else. Reach him at NicoOnSundayMornings@gmail.com for enquiries.



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