

## “Have It Your Way”

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Press Release:

“LOST SOMEWHERE BETWEEN THE KING & THE RUSSIAN” by S.T. Lore

Polish-born Władysław Ziembicki (belonging not to one system, nor to any nation) re-entered the government building at exactly 11.23pm on the 31st of December. Using a pocketknife to force the locks, he quietly navigated to his desk and logged onto beige PC desktop: Number One. His profile — WZ — prefaced by an obscure quote (never referenced): ‘In the din of language, in the millions of words per minute, in the excrescence of press, film and television, there looms another, unmediated reality; and the first, which is mediated, cannot keep pass with the second, ever less so in the last century.’

The Community Centre Committee (CCC) had delivered its verdict that week. The ‘Key Privilege’ suspension was based on ‘inappropriate uses of government media resources’ and relegated Władysław to the arrangement of books dumped at the lending library. Stacked into microwave cookery, local biography, romantic fiction, and horror/fantasy: the donations were endless and the shelving hopelessly inadequate. Demoralised by his demotion from ‘Computer Technical Assistant’, he sat amongst pushpin corkboards, laminated newspaper articles, and early pregnancy pamphlets, sorting through the multiple copies of Stephen King and Terry Pratchett novels. At the bottom of a fresh pile, he discovered — Bend Sinister (a book title he instantly recognised from an album by UK band ‘The Fall’). The back cover blurb promoting: ‘The story of a rising tyrant state which, under the slogans Equality and Community, destroys the free intelligence.’ Inside the foreword, author Vladimir Nabokov, had this to say: ‘the term ‘bend sinister’ means a heraldic bar or band drawn from the left side (and popularly, but incorrectly, supposed to denote bastardy). The choice of title is an attempt to suggest an outline broken by refraction, a distortion in the mirror of being, a wrong turn taken by life, in a sinistral and sinister world.’ In fewer than twenty printed pages, Władysław felt unusually disturbed.

Now in the near darkness, his belly distended by KFC Zinger burgers, Big M flavoured milk, and ENDONE® prescriptions, he posted to the World of Warcraft forum: ‘A nimbus of evil surrounds Blizzard Incorporated. Single crimes are no longer distinguishable from harmonised bureaucratic cruelty. I have been here 8 years and taken issue with every single expansion. The traditional ways of making gold (on top of questing and dailies) was to hone a crafting (or gathering) profession. It required at least a month to make any money, and yet old characters, rich from previous expansions, wouldn’t know anything about the misery of starting afresh. No doubt those closest to the original hoard, as with many other ancient coin hoards, put out false information claiming: ‘that all things ancient, found in their part of the realm, belong to them!’ To me, this only leads to secrecy and misinformation. On top of that, the old world mats have been disposed. I could tolerate the world updates if they weren’t such an annoyance to navigate: unable to fly, doomed to hug mountain passes, forced to struggle down perilous rope ladder descents. I enjoy playing the monk and the holy priest (yet am only passably proficient at shadow). If only my shield, my sword, and my helmet were intact to protect from unswerving

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arrows. Sadly, Blizzard has limited the ability to customize armour/characters and cheapened the experience. The heraldic symbols that once distinguished armoured participants in combat (their faces hidden, their identities enclosed, their individual features masked forever). The bend sinister drawn crossways from right to left, crossing the centre and angling downward, featured on banners and flags, banderoles and pennons, pinsels and gonfalons, indicated a company disgusted with 'formal rules'. Yes, I know these posts are usually met with, "K, bye" and "Don't let the door hit you on the way out" but I've taken another wrong turn and figured I'd share what I feel. Yes, maybe I stayed too long and my chaos bolts are limp: the rest I'm sure you can guess. The game is no fun anymore.'

Needing to piss, stumbling to the toilet door, triggering the automatic lights, he glared at himself in the mirror. Now, serving his 14th year as a volunteer (middle-aged, overweight, and financially bereft) he felt reduced to a spine-less little catastrophist. Once, a near contemporary of serial-pest Peter Hore and a vanguard supporter of ANZ hoax activist Jonathan Moylan, from 1992 to 1994, Władysław had belonged to Panic Merchant Press. The subversive, yet non-violent, anarchist collective distributed illegal posters, political comic books, advertising murals and various counterfeit paraphernalia. Amongst the first-wave of email users to circulate 'viral flyers' (absurd animations of quasi-religious beings) they held benefit gigs by his local band Scum Erections ('just means 'dirty, tall buildings' he told his Mum). Disillusioned with the 'cause', estranged from his Catholic family, and desperate for money, he joined the Australian Armed Forces in 1998 (Correction: Defence Forces). Trained in Signals and struck down with Measles during the INTERFET crisis, he never saw conflict, yet filed for illegal compensation claiming various PTSD afflictions: a compressed spine, painkiller addiction, and as yet, undiagnosed REM sleep disorder. It was all a lie. One mother, attacking false survivors outside the DSS, put her fist through his Panasonic camera: handheld and fragile, the screen caved in, the casing fell apart, and the anguished mother crushed the remaining components into the bitumen.

Władysław often read (with dumbfounded anger) the exaggerated political news posted to the WoW forum: 'In Syria, the modified controller of an X-Box 360 commands an armoured tank. In New Zealand, \$6000 built a fully functional cruise missile inside a suburban garage. In Warsaw, three teenagers tunneled underground, and igniting explosives, cracked the foundation of the Narodowy Bank Polski (NBP: Central Bank of Poland).' Determined that these stale fictions would pale in comparison, he entitled his petty diatribe: 'Be forewarned before you enter the bizarre tangle!' Bookending his post with the avatar of an exploding octopus (uploaded from his obsolete PC), this tired old welfare recipient, would soon corrupt, not only the financial records of local government, but the system files of millions of WoW Forum subscribers. "Have It Your Way" he thought, before pissing violently against the little man on the toilet door. The urine pooling at his feet reflected his grimaced face in the shining amber puddle. A portrait of a man caught in fragile delusion: as though on the edge of a vast, granite bluff. /

NB: Various quotes can be attributed to 'The Land of Ulro' by Czeslaw Milosz (translated by Louis Iribarne) New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1984. Milosz identified as Polish, but was born in Lithuania, and the author had the privilege of befriending his niece, Natalia, before stumbling upon the final source of these brilliant texts. INTERFET refers to Australian participation in the 'International Force for East Timor'.

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