

We Never Sleep Nick Mamatas

The pulp writer always started stories the same way: Once upon a time. And then, the pulp writer always struck right through those words: ~~Once upon a time~~. It was habit, and a useful one, though on a pure keystroke basis striking four words was like taking a nickel, balancing it carefully on a thumbnail, and then flicking it right down the sewer grate to be washed out to sea. Four words, plus enough keystrokes to knock them out. Probably, the pulp writer was chucking eight cents down the sewer, but that was too much money to think about.

Here's how the pulp writer's latest story began.

~~Once upon a time~~ *The mighty engines had ground to a halt, and when the laboratory fell into silence, only then did the old man look up from the equations over which he had been poring.*

It was all wrong; past perfect tense, the old scientist's name couldn't be introduced without the sentence reading even more clumsily, and by introducing equations in the first graf the pulp writer was practically inviting some reader to send in a letter demanding that the equations be printed in the next issue, so that he could check them with his slide rule. *Oy vey.*

The pulp writer had to admit that writing advertising copy came much more easily than fiction. And the old man with his unusual ideas paid quite a bit for copy based on a few slogans and vague ideas. The pulp writer was never quite sure what the old man was even trying to sell, but money was money.

Industrivism deals with the fundamental problem of modern experience. Both the Communist and the Christian agree—the workaday world of the shop-floor and the noisome machine rob us of our essential humanity. Even during our leisure hours, our limbs ache from eight hours of travail, our ears ring with the echoes of the assembly line. Industrivism resolves the contradiction by embracing it. Become the machine, perfected! You're no longer just a cog, you're the blueprint, the design, the firing piston of a great diesel—

It was possible to write this junk all right, but the pulp writer couldn't imagine that anyone would believe it. But the old man liked wordy paragraphs that were half religious tract, half boosterism, all nonsense. He was a foreigner, obviously, and had little idea what Americans wanted: not just crazy promises, but crazy promises that could be fulfilled without effort and with plenty of riches, revival meeting hooey, and a Sandow physique to boot.

Nobody wanted to *be* a factory. Heck, nobody wanted to work in a factory. People just did. Even pulp fiction was a factory of sorts. The pulp writer's fingers were as mangled as any pieceworker's thanks to the Underwood's sticky keys, and there was no International Brotherhood of Fictioneers Local Thirty-Four to help a body when the cramps got bad or the brain seized up.

Speaking of brain seizures, it was time for a drink. The pulp writer figured that a paragraph's worth of beers would be fine for the night, and that included the possibility of fronting another patron a round. And down the block at Schmitt's, the pulp writer's friend Jake was always ready to drink F&M beer on somebody else's dime.

"Oh my, could I use a catnap right about now," said Jake to the pulp writer with a yawn. "But, up here, it just never stops." He pointed to his temple. Jake was everything the pulp writer wasn't. Big, with a huge right hand that wrapped around the beer stein like a towel. And quick too. The pulp writer was small and slow and a woman. Her specialty was scientifiction, but she also did romance pulps, and Jake was heavily involved in the scheme—he delivered the manuscripts to the office downtown, throwing them over the transoms of the editors of *Incredible Science Tales* and *Thrilling-Awe Stories* so she wouldn't be spotted. For the romance pulps, Jake was the model for the dark hero, reformed and repaired over and over again by the power of a woman's love, twice or three times a month for *Love Stanza*, *True Stories of Love*, and *Heart Tales*. The pulp writer was Lenny Lick, Lurlene St Lovelace, Leonard Carlson—and whomever else it took to get a sale.

"You could," the pulp writer said. "You don't have to think about work at all the second you step through the factory gates and rejoin the rest of us unemployed chumps down here at the bar. What is the old Wobbly demand again? Eight hours of work, eight hours of sleep, eight hours for what we will?" The pulp writer liked to tease Jake sometimes.

"No, I can't," Jake said. He took a long sip of his beer, and didn't bother to wipe the suds from his lip. "The Reds don't sleep. The saboteurs don't sleep. We're doing important work, all classified. There will be another war starting soon, in Europe. You'll see."

"It's been twenty years! You'd think they—"

"Button your lip," Jake said.

"But you were just ta—"

Jake looked at her. "My mistake." He burped lightly then muttered, "Wobblies. I can't believe you're still talking about the wobblies."

They finished their beers in silence. The pulp writer thought about a story she had in her trunk; an unpublished one about a terrible world in which Prohibition had actually been declared and the criminal fraternity had begun working overtime to corner the market on illicit booze. Machine guns and mini-dirigibles and pocket-stills, and . . . nobody wanted it. Who would believe that criminals would employ scientists and engineers, the rejection slips said, and besides the story made it seem like crime paid.

"Pays better than pulp fiction anyway," the pulp writer said, and Jake responded, "What?" and she said "Never mind."

The pulp writer licked her lips. "Will you be coming up?"

Jake shook his head. "Nah, I'll just take the manuscript and go."

"Fine," she said. Nothing was fine. She slid him the envelope that had been resting under her left elbow. "Next Tuesday then?"

"If not sooner," Jake said, but the pulp writer didn't respond, so he took the envelope and left.

Jake didn't know if he was strictly allowed to read the commissioned work, but he always helped himself to the first few pages when delivering the manuscripts to the

publishing companies, and saw no reason why tonight should be any different. After all, it was Jake who recommended her to the old man in the first place. So he took a look as he walked along St Mark's Street and into the West Village and read:

*Have You Heard Of
INDUSTRIVISM??*

—the document was entitled. Industrivism was the idea of “intrapersonal industrial development”, of using “psychological and philosophical methods to improve the self” and become a superior being. In the same way that factories made superior products by assembling them one step at a time, so too could a human being be improved by embracing “psycho-industrial processes” that would refine and eventually perfect both mind and body.

The very first step was the hardest—admitting that you were a know-it-all, or a wallflower, or a bohemian, or a workaday drudge, a second-hander, or a thug. The list went on at length. Once you had determined your own Essential Flaw, there were a number of exercises one could do to become a True Industrivist, a superior being able to control one's own fate. The pamphlet only hinted at what these exercises might be, but Jake was intrigued, even as he diagnosed himself as an also-ran.

He had no idea what the old man was planning, but what else was new? *It had been twenty years*, Jake thought. Twenty years ago, when Jake was just fifteen, and working on a sewing machine alongside his parents in a ten-story factory. Then when they came for their shift one morning, all the sewing machines were gone. The foreman sent everyone home, and he had plenty of Pinkerton muscle backing him up. They had truncheons, stood in a line like soldiers, and one burly Irishman hefted a repeating rifle. His parents and all their friends could do nothing but mutter in Yiddish and go home and further dilute their cabbage soup. At least the morning papers would have some other job postings, and it would be back to the twelve-hour grind.

Except for Jake. He got up the next morning, went to the offices of the Pinkerton Detective Agency and offered his services—he was bilingual, knew the neighborhood and all the families, had a quick jab, and hated Reds, and thought the *rebbe* was a fool. And he found the Pinkerton slogan compelling.

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They signed him up and a few months later sent him back to the factory, right on the banks of the Hudson, a few blocks south of the Chelsea Piers where all the rich people sailed off to England and back. He retrieved the old man from his ship with a four-horse team, and then helped install him in the factory.

It had taken six days. Jake broke *Shabbos* for the first time. After that, he practically had to live in the factory as his parents cast him out. Twenty years later, and here he was, still at the same factory he'd be sent home from at gunpoint, but at least he wasn't bent over a machine, half-blind with bleeding fingers.

Jake went down to the basement, taking the special pneumatic elevator that looked, from the shop floor, like a broom closet. Jake had the run of the place, you might say. He went where he was needed; his job was to keep the old man happy, if it meant

pitching in on the line or dealing with troublemakers and agitators out by the gates.

Jake knew the factory very well. He could talk to it. And it talked back, in reverberations and slammed doors and clanking pipes and hideous grinding. And sometimes it spoke through the mouth of the old man in the basement.

The old man slept, mostly. He needed his rest. Actually, he wasn't even that old, but he was very sick, and his skin was shriveled and dry like jerky. He lived in a giant iron lung, though the lung was like nothing Jake had ever seen, not in newsreels and not in the pages of *Life*. More like a giant underwater suit ten feet high, and vertical, up against the wall, limbs spread like in the middle of a jumping jack. And the old man's head was behind a plate of thick glass. Tubes and piping came in and out of the lung, making it look like the contraption had a dozen smaller limbs in addition to the main four. Jake figured that all the old man's business was somehow dealt with via the plumbing. He had seen a canteen cook shovel perfectly fine mashed potato and gravy down a drain hole once. Who knew what was coming in, or going out, through the other pipes?

"Sir," called Jake as he entered the room. "We have the latest carbons from the writer." Jake couldn't help but shout as the basement room was largest room in which he'd ever been. His childhood *shul* could have fit down there.

The room growled. Under the basement, there was another factory, with a whole other set of workers pulling the swing shift, manufacturing . . . well, Jake didn't know. He didn't even truly *know* that the old man had them on a staggered shift to keep them segregated from the other workers—it just seemed obvious. The sub-basement line had fired up and was hammering away at something. It felt like the old man was angry, like his heart had started beating like a drum.

The factory often talked to Jake. The old man rarely did so. But now, he did. There was a click, a crackle, and a tinny voice came from the two great loudspeakers.

"READ IT. SLOW. ALOUD."

Jake wasn't much for elocution, but he did his best. It was hard not to snicker, but surely the old man wouldn't be able to hear the laughter catching in Jake's throat.

"WHAT DO YOU THINK?"

Jake stood for a long moment, stunned. The old man had never asked for an opinion before. He'd only ever given orders, and in a precise Germanic tone, via his phonograph contraption. Jake didn't know what to think. He never really had been in a situation where he had to be politic before. *What would the pulp writer want him to say . . .*

"Well, uh, sir," he said, "I think that Industrivism could be the wave of the future."

"THE FUTURE."

"Yes. They'll be talking about it all over the nation, like Populism or Prohibition," Jake said. "Even if everyone doesn't agree, it'll be a topic in the newspaper editorial pages. I can see people handing these out like they do copies of the *Daily Worker*, just to strike up conversations with passers-by." What Jake kept to himself was that the populists and temperance people were horrid anti-Semites he'd as soon spit on as say "How do you do?" to, and that the Commies were even worse.

"PUT THE MANUSCRIPT IN THE TUBE."

Jake rolled up the carbons, stuck them in a capsule and inserted it into a

pneumatic tube. In the morning, who knew what would happen. This was the fifth text Jake had brought over from the pulp writer, and they'd all been sent upstairs, where as far as Jake knew they were being used to wrap fish.

The pulp writer imagined a lot of things: monsters from the depths, clever young men welding de Laval nozzles to locomotive tank cars and transforming them into high-powered bullet-fast tanks, a former silent picture star discovered begging for change with her career-ruining froggy voice, only to find true love with a film producer turned Pinkerton guard . . . but she never imagined seeing her work in the slicks.

And yet, in the current *Henderson's Lady Weekly*, there it was: Industrivism. A whole article on the cockamamy scheme, breathlessly and enthusiastically written by one Doctor R. D. E. Watts. *An obvious pseudonym*, was the pulp writer's first thought. Her second was to wonder how she could get in on such business, given that the slicks sometimes paid one thousand dollars for feature essays. A thousand dollars could get her out of her current accommodations and into an apartment where the bath tub was in the washroom instead of in the middle of the kitchen. An elevator building with a doorman. A zeppelin trip to Frankfurt, or even to Rio de Janeiro.

The pulp writer caught her mind wandering, and with it her fingers twitching. A zeppelin would be a great setting for a romance tale, or even a spy yarn. Perhaps a zeppelin-shaped starship that generated anti-gravity in its lattice frame, or due to some static charge generated by aircraft dope rubbing against the frame. It wasn't quite kosher science, but it was close enough for the pulps . . .

"And that's why I'm not in the slicks," she said aloud to herself.

The Industrivism article was clever, in that to the pulp writer's trained eye it was obviously an advertisement in the shape of a feature, and had been purposefully placed in the feature well to further obscure its pedigree. The old man Jake worked for must have paid a pretty penny for such placement.

At Schmitty's that night, where the pulp writer drank alone and safe from molestation thanks to the protection of the bartender, the word "Industrivism" floated by twice. Perhaps one of the men's adventure pulps, or even a general interest slick, had been paid to run an article much like the one in *Henderson's*.

It was nearly last call when Jake finally walked in, looking like a wet sheet that had been wrung out but never spread to dry. He took his seat on the stool right next to the pulp writer's, careful not to kiss her on the cheek.

"Gosh," the pulp writer said. "Please let me buy you a round for once. I haven't seen you in two weeks."

"We've been busy down at the plant," Jake said.

"Wobblies smashing the conveyor belts?"

"Interviews. We've got three full shifts and are still hiring."

"There's a depression on, haven't you heard?" the pulp writer said.

"I'll drink to that," Jake said. "We have a line of workers stretching around the block starting every morning at five a.m. Grown men climbing over the fences—I even had to fire a couple of warning shots at a trio coming in on a row boat."

"Cheaper than the Hudson Tubes," the pulp writer said.

"What is Industrivism?"

"How did you know," the pulp writer asked.

“I can’t make heads or tails of this Industriv—” Jake started. “Wait, how did I know what?”

The pulp writer held up her arms and set type on an invisible headline in the air before her. “‘What. Is. Industrivism.’”

“That’s the title of my next piece for your boss. I got a telegram this morning. He’s hot for copy. Wants a new Industrivism piece every week.”

“I bet,” Jake said. “So what is Industrivism?”

“Doggoned if I know,” the pulp writer said. “I would have thought you could tell me. The first proposal was vague. The second had a bit more meat to it, but I was just winging it. The third was just the telegram I told you about—no details at all. I suppose it doesn’t really matter what Industrivism is, so long as people hear about it.”

Jake frowned at that. “How does that even work?”

The pulp writer shrugged. “It’s like the American Dream. What does that even mean anymore? Or ‘use a little wine for thy stomach’s sake’—recall that the Dry League claimed that the Bible was recommending that we spill booze all over our bellies rather than drink it. Anything can mean anything.

“Really—the less clear an idea is, the more likely it is to be popular.”

The pulp writer peered down at her drink. She didn’t even ask Jake if he were coming up this time, and Jake didn’t hover like a fly, waiting to be asked, as he used to. She had no manuscripts for him to deliver to either his employer or the various pulp publishers about town and it sounded like he had no time to do any errands anyway.

Upstairs, the pulp writer pored over a slim volume, *The March of Diesel*, published and distributed by the Hemphill Diesel Schools of Long Island City, Boston, Chicago, Memphis, Los Angeles, Seattle, and Vancouver. It covered the basics of the technology, and made some breathless predictions for the future-sort of a low-rent version of what she was doing, and oriented toward getting some down-on-their-luck pigeons to pay for a course on diesel mechanics. Then inspiration struck. Her fingers flew over the keys.

What Is Industrivism?

Industrivism is the engine of life in America itself during this, the Era of Diesel.

Like the mighty diesel engines that power our factories and automobiles, Industrivism is a Four-Stroke Process.

Intake Stroke: The nation itself, home to all the peoples of the world, and every race and creed. E pluribus unum!

Compression Stroke: The communities—the great cities and towns where we live, work, play, and love.

Combustion Stroke: The workplace, where we come together with furious energy to build a nation that shall lead the world.

Exhaust Stroke:

Well, “exhaust stroke” was a tricky one, the pulp writer had to admit. Exhaust carried connotations of both the polluted and the bone-weary, which she had decided were the very opposite of Industrivism. The deadline was tight and no pulp writer got anywhere by wasting time, and ribbon, in revision. Sometimes thinking was the wrong thing to do. Let

the fingers handle it.

Exhaust Stroke: Rejuvenated and refreshed by a gentle breeze from the oceans that protect this great nation from its jealous enemies, we redouble our efforts.

The pulp writer's only remit was to somehow make the diesel engine a metaphor for America itself. The pulp writer was creating a Bible of sorts for other writers to interpret and embellish. She imagined them bent over their own typewriters—Remingtons and Olympias, some portables and others iron monsters from the war era—a thousand literary pianos playing together, or one large and radically redistributed factory, all creating Industrivism for the slicks, for pulps, for religious publications, for the community pages of daily papers in English and Yiddish and Greek and German and Italian. All based on her notes. And like an assembly line, they'd all fall idle without new material. The pulp writer caught a second wind—an exhaust stroke of her own—and wrote till dawn.

While the pulp writer toiled, Jake wondered. There was something special about being foreman and factotum, specifically he didn't need to know very much about what was actually happening at any given moment. When he was confused, he'd point to a worker and ask what he was doing, and what this process was for, and how it contributed to the final product, and he could then pretend to be satisfied or discomfited with the answers.

Jake could never bring himself to ask what the final product of all this production was, and not because he was embarrassed not to know, but because he was comforted by the idea that at least the workers on the line knew, and he couldn't bear to have that illusion shattered.

But still he wondered, so he took the steps to the first floor where the electroplating vats bubbled away, as the platers had time to chat.

"Fellas," Jake said, and the three men straightened out and muttered nervous hellos. "What is Industrivism?"

The three men looked at one another, glancing back and forth as if deciding who would speak. Finally, one of them who Jake had pegged as a snickering wisenheimer type, said, "Sounds like a new radio show."

"It's a kind of foot powder," said a tall, heavyset man.

The third fellow kept his eyes on the bubbling vat, as if electrodeposition would cease if he ever stopped staring.

"You fellows are pretty funny. Tell me even one more joke, and I'll make sure you have plenty of time to take your act on the road," Jake said.

"It's the heart of a diesel engine," the staring man said without looking up. "It's the heart in all of us."

"Sounds good to me," the heavyset man said. The first wisenheimer just looked confused.

Jake went off without another word. He could always ask the old man, but what would the old man know? He wasn't even American, which is probably why he depended on the pulp writer for his political ideas.

The heart of a diesel engine . . . the heart would be where the fuel goes, like blood.

He tried someone else, just a random fellow leaning over a compressor. “What are you making?”

“Compressors,” the man said. “Wiring.”

“For what?”

The man shrugged. “Frigidaire?”

“You think . . . we’re manufacturing refrigerators?”

The man shrugged. “Look son, I just got this job this morning, and I don’t mean to lose it this evening by falling behind.”

Jake couldn’t fault the man’s attitude. He pursed his lips and tried again. “Sir, in a few words, how would you describe the American Dream?”

The man looked up, and Jake saw that he was very old. Old enough that he probably wouldn’t have been hired at all under normal circumstances. “I say I’d describe it as getting a job in the morning and starting work some minutes later, and not being laid off by the end of the first shift.”

It was a taciturn bunch, but of course Jake couldn’t expect men hard at work to wax philosophical. Intellectuals liked writing romantic stories about the proletariat and its struggles, but all in all Jake preferred to read *Six-Gun Stories* and *Mad Detective*. Even that put him ahead of the shift workers, who couldn’t be bothered to read the labels on their beer bottles half the time.

“What’s the heart of a diesel engine?”

“The cylinder,” the man said.

“How do you figure?”

The man just laughed. “It was a guess. Why don’t you just go away?”

Jake fired him on the spot. Let the compressors pile up for a few minutes; it hardly mattered if nobody even knew what they were manufacturing.

That night was like every night—Jake slept fitfully, dreaming of a factory. Not the factory for which he worked, but another one, darker and larger, in Europe. Jews marched in when the bell rang and out the back end the factory spit out exhaust and shoes. Jake’s rational core, the bit of himself that woke him up, knew what was going on. He grew up on hair-raising stories of pogroms and riots from his parents and uncles and cousins and family friends, and he felt guilty for throwing it all over for the Pinkerton job. So the back of his brain gnawed away at his spine every night, poisoning his system with visions of an industrial pogrom, a diesel-powered völkisch movement.

But his parents were fools. Europe was a happy, prosperous place, and even the Germans were doing well thanks to all the imported beer Americans liked to drink. There would never be a pogrom of any sort again. How did the President put it when he stared down the Kaiser at the end of the war? “Send us your tankards, or we’ll send you our tanks to fetch them.” It was a fair and free trade, and everybody was happy now.

Jake took a slug from his own emergency Thermos-stein and tried to sleep. It worked for once. He even slept through the morning alarm.

The pulp writer was extremely nervous. The old man had sent another telegram, again circumventing Jake. He wanted to meet, in person, that afternoon, and Jake’s name was absent from the telegram as well. It would likely be a one-on-one luncheon. The old man had no idea the pulp writer was a woman . . . or worse, perhaps Jake had let it slip and that was why she had received such a sudden invite. Romance, crime, horror, all of them

were possibilities. Would it be love at first sight, or would some greater intrigue about Industrivism be revealed, or would the old man chase the pulp writer around his great mahogany desk his lips pursed and his hands clenching and unclenching like pincers?

The pulp writer decided to bring her hatpin, and a brick for her purse as well. But she also applied some rouge, chose a superior hat, and decided to walk rather than take a crosstown bus to both save a dime and keep her clothes from being wrinkled by the crowded carriages.

Industrivism was in the air—literally. A skywriter had been to work, and the letters “RIOLOGY” had yet to dissolve in the sky. It was a waste anyway, given that in New York only yokels and bumpkins pointing out the skyscrapers and dirigibles to one another ever looked up at all.

Why did the pulp writer, who was born in Canarsie and had a diploma from Hunter College High School, look up? She had taken a moment to pray. It was a prayer for protection that, when she saw those letters in the sky, transformed into one of gratitude.

The city was limned with Industrivism, though the pulp writer had to wonder if she was just especially sensitive to the presence of her own ideas and phrases on posted bills, on the back pages of newspapers hawked by children on the street corner, flitting by in overheard conversations. When she crossed Broadway, the pulp writer decided that she would studiously ignore all things Industrivism and instead concentrate on some symbol sure to be ubiquitous: the American flag.

There were . . . some. A lunch counter offering All-American Pie and Beer. A single legless veteran of the war with a flag draped over her shoulders as she pattered past in a hot-bulb engine wheelchair, begging for change and showing off her stumps. The West Village’s local post office flew one, as did the Jefferson Library.

And there was one close call—a great flag two stories tall was draped over the side of warehouse just two blocks from the old man’s factory, but where the stars should have been on the blue field instead were crudely stitched white cut-out gears.

The pulp writer stopped to gape. The passers-by, and in New York the streets were always choked with pedestrians, workers loading and unloading diesel trucks, and tourists, ignored the flag. She blinked hard and rubbed her eyes, and then someone grabbed her wrist.

She jerked away, but the hand held strong. A man in a cloth hat and a shapeless worker’s jumpsuit tugged to him and he asked with quivering lips, “Lady . . . what is Industrivism?”

The pulp writer pursed her lips and yanked her wrist away. And then she told him, “Oh, hell if I know, fellah! It’s just some gibberish somebody made up to get you to work longer and sell you soap . . . and you could use some soap!” She brought her hand up to her hat and withdrew the pin, but the worker scuttled backward, palms up. “Sorry, ma’am, sorry!” he muttered as he retreated.

The pulp writer realized that if she ever became a famous writer, she was going to have to come up with a more politic answer to that question. Her meeting with the old man was certainly going to be longer than he likely anticipated, and she hoped that he had cleared his afternoon schedule. She already had a piece of her mind apportioned out and ready to give him.

In the factory, Jake stalked the shop floor, looking for someone else to talk to.

Maybe it was true that every workaday Joe Lunch Pail-type was just dim. The old man's factory was unique—no management, just Jake, and occasional instructions from the basement. All decisions were built into the construction and layout of the assembly lines, including redundancies and contingencies. The place was packed with machines and crowded with people, but nobody had more than a couple of words for Jake. Then he had a brainwave and rushed to the loading dock where the hogsheads were delivered daily. He opened a barrel with a crowbar and scooped out some peanuts, then filled his pockets with great handfuls.

"Hello!" said the pulp writer, waving from the asphalt.

"What are you doing here?"

"What are you doing here?" the pulp writer said, squinting. "Lunch break?"

"You can make diesel fuel with peanuts ..." Jake started.

"One of the many miracles of the diesel era, yes I know," the pulp writer said.

"You can make diesel fuel with pretty much anything. But what are *you* doing?"

"What would you say the heart of the diesel engine is?" Jake asked.

"Why . . . the combustion chamber," I suppose, the pulp writer asked. "It's where the fuel goes, and fuel is like blood. But the peanuts—"

"But wouldn't it be the crankshaft," Jake said, his voice rising querulously. "That's what transmits power to—"

"Metaphors are never perfect, Jacob. Now why are you stealing peanuts?" the pulp writer said.

Jake pulled one from his pocket and held it out to her, wiggling it with his thumb and forefinger. "Want one?" She just glared at him.

"I just want someone to talk to me for more than ten seconds in here," he said. "I was going to scatter these across the floor, and maybe someone would stoop to pick one up, or even trip and fall. Then I could talk to him, and ..." Jake realizes that he sounded insane. Too many all-nighters. When was the last time he had even been home, in his own bed?

"You're a Wobbler after all," the pulp writer said. She stood up on her toes and wobbled a bit. "Get it?" Jake snorted. "Anyway," she continued, "it is almost impossible to find one's way in between shifts, and I have an appointment with your employer. We can talk about your, uh, 'shenanigans' later." She waved the telegram like a tiny flag.

Jake ate the peanut and led the pulp writer across the shop floor under a cloud of embarrassed silence. The factory was too loud for them to talk much anyway, but Jake was full of questions, for her, and for himself. What had he been thinking, with his little stunt? Why did the old man want to see her in person, and why hadn't he been informed? Maybe he had been informed, and had forgotten, but what would that mean for his mental health?

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In the small, secret, lift, he spoke. "I should tell you something about the old man. He lives in an iron lung of sorts."

"In the basement of a factory?"

"Don't believe me?" Jake said. "You can see for yourself." And the doors parted and they walked into the huge basement room.

"That, sir," the pulp writer said, "is not an iron lung."

"Well, it's *at least* an iron lung," Jake said.

They approached quietly. The pulp writer was reminded of any number of cover paintings—the old man’s head was visible behind a windowed helmet, just as a spaceman or deep-sea adventurers might be on this month’s *Captain X’s Space Patrol* and others. But he was wrinkled and brown like a pealed apple left out too long in the sun, not an astronaut with a right-angled chin.

The pulp writer heard something like the arm of a phonograph dropping onto a record, and then the old man spoke.

“THANK YOU. WHAT IS YOUR NAME?”

Jake stepped forward to introduce her. “This is Lurle—”

“Doris,” the pulp writer said. “You can call me Doris.” She turned to Jake. “Can he even hear us?”

It occurred to Jake that he had never had a lengthy conversation with the old man. That is, he obeyed orders, made suggestions, and once or twice tried to engage the old man, but now he realized that nothing that old man had said was really informed by Jake’s actions. It was all “DO THIS” and “DO THAT”.

“I am not quite clear on that, all of a sudden,” Jake said.

“MY NAME IS RUDOLPH DIESEL.”

Rudolph Diesel, the inventor of the diesel engine, who had famously committed suicide twenty years prior. The pulp writer, whose name was not Doris either, knew that much. Fortune had turned to failure, idealism to despair, and the man had left his wife the sum of two hundred marks in an attaché case, booked passage to England, and then had thrown himself from his steamship. His waterlogged corpse had been found ten days later by a fishing boat, which had retrieved his effects and thrown the body back into the ocean according to the Code of the Sea.

Occasionally, the true crime pulps raked over the details and suggested instead that Diesel had been murdered. He’d been going to England to sell the patents to the Queen and thus save his family and thwart the Kaiser, and a Hun assassin had first thwarted him. Not a bad theory, except that British rolling dreadnoughts and American Diesel-Jeeps and Diesel-Leaps and had won the war in six months, so who had actually been thwarted? Another common story played up the Red angle: Diesel was a naïve Utopian who was going to meet with Irish radical James Connolly and break the Dublin Lock-Out by creating a new factory where diesel engines the size of a fist would be manufactured, and the capitalist overlords overthrown.

The pulp writer had never cared for such speculation in the true crime rags, but her mind was already running like sixty to . . .

“This is Industrivism, isn’t it!” she suddenly shouted.

“PLEASE WRITE ABOUT ME.”

“You hear that, Lur . . . uh, Doris? He doesn’t respond. Not really. He just has a stack of records in there somewhere and when he wants to say something he plays one. But he only has a handful of phrases recorded,” Jake said.

“I want to know if you somehow survived your suicide attempt, or if it was a murder attempt, or are you the murderer who dumped someone else into the sea to start a new life . . . if you can call this life!”

“NO.”

“Don’t ask multiple choice questions,” Jake said.

“Yes, I know that now!” the pulp writer snapped. Then, loudly, to Diesel. “Were

you the victim of some crime?”

“YES.”

She was silent for a moment then said, disappointed, “Well, that’s that. Jake, why did you never tell me, or anyone, about this?”

“Not my job. My job is keeping this place running, no matter what. Anyway, I got a question—What is Industrivism?”

“THIS IS.”

Jake often thought he could hear the factory talk to him. This time he felt the whole place take a deep breath. Not in anticipation, but in preparation for release. The pipes gave way with groans and a hiss of steam, and the long limblike projections separated from them and began to swing. Herky-jerky, like a bus-sized toy automaton, Diesel began to move. After three steps, he stopped, and black smoke belched from the exhaust pipes projecting from the contraption’s “shoulders”, as Jake thought of them.

“WRITE ABOUT ME.”

“What do you want me to write?”

“I WISH TO WALK AMONG YOU ALL.”

“Is that supposed to be what Industrivism is? Just getting people used to the idea of you walking down the street in this, uh . . . tank-suit, tipping a steel hat at the ladies?” Jake said. There was something happening to Jake. He didn’t know whether to be angry or awestruck, or just to take himself out back and punch himself silly out by the loading docks for being such a fool. He had spent too much time just being a cog in the big machine that he hadn’t taken notice, *real notice*, of anything until the past few days. Past twenty years, maybe.

“It sneaks up on you, doesn’t it,” he said to the pulp writer. “All these changes.”

“Snuck up on me, and I was the one who came up with the word ‘Industrivism.’ I wanted ‘industraturgy’ at first, but I was worried that people wouldn’t know what the suffix—turgy meant.”

“INDUSTRIVISM”

Now it was time for Jake and the pulp writer to both inhale sharply.

“INDUSTRIVISM IS”

The pipe on the left shoulder of Diesel’s tank suit blew and the sound reverberated throughout the basement almost as if had been designed with that acoustic effect in mind.

No, not almost, Jake realized. Exactly.

Where the tank-suit had once stood there was a door, and now that door opened. It was the swing-shift, the noon till eight crowd. All men, as was typical, and . . . *not* all men.

The first was armless, but his limbs had been replaced with a remarkable set of prostheses. He actually had eight hook like fingers at the end of each arm-rod, and then opened and closed like a rose whose petals could snap shut in the blink of an eye. Behind him was a legless man, his waist a corkscrew, legs thin and pointed, but perfectly balanced in their way like a drafter’s compass in expert hands.

The entire shift, and there weren’t many of them, had some replacement. Jake had never seen any of these men before, not in the factory. Maybe on the streets, one or two begging, or just idling listlessly. The last man seemed to Jake to be whole, and he Jake recognized. It was the man from the electroplating vats upstairs, the utterly normal-

appearing man with no defect at all. He walked up to Jake and the pulp writer and undid several buttons of his work jumpsuit, to show off the chest still fresh with a huge incision.

“I have a combustion chamber for a heart,” he said, fingering the surgical line. Thick staples held his flesh together. “You know what’s interesting about Industrivism, what we all just found uncanny about it? Every other ideology they’re selling out there—Communism, Americanism, Kaiserism, you name it, they all promise that you’re going to die. Spill blood for your country, or your class, or the Glorious White Race, or something. The only difference is that they all promise that the other fellow will kill you worse.

“But Industrivism, when I started reading about it, I noticed that nothing about death or blood or glorious combat was ever mentioned. It sounded sweet, so I came here and went looking for it. We all came here, just over the last month or so, for the same reason.”

Jake glanced at the pulp writer, who was smiling.

“I don’t think we’re ever going to die,” the man with the combustion chamber heart said. “We’re making tank-suits.” He hiked a thumb at Diesel. “They work fine. He doesn’t even need to dream anymore.”

“THIS IS MY DREAM.”

Jake said to the pulp writer, “Good thing it was you, eh? I bet most fellows would have to throw in a little of the old blood and guts.”

The pulp writer shrugged. “Women know a lot about blood and guts. I was just tired of writing about it.

“Mr Diesel, I’ll be pleased to write about you.”

“What about me? What am I supposed to do with all this!” Jake said, suddenly red in the face. It was fine when the pulp writer was just as confused as he was, but now she had signed on for something he still didn’t understand at all. “How come you didn’t tell me, ‘old man’? I did everything for you!” He pointed to the pulp writer, and seemed nearly ready to shove her in Diesel’s direction. “I found her for you!”

The pulp writer tensed, and deep within Diesel’s tank-suit something whirred and whirred. Finally, from the horn came the words.

“I APOLOGIZE.

“I NEEDED YOU AS YOU ARE.”

“But why?”

“CONTROL GROUP. IN THE FACTORY, BUT NOT OF THE FACTORY.”

“We’ve been working on something for you,” said the man with the combustion chamber heart. “We’re building all sorts of devices and implements, all diesel-designed if not diesel-powered. Tank-suits for men on the edge of death, limbs for vets and even spines. We haven’t gotten your thing quite perfected yet, but maybe . . . how would you like to never need to sleep again?”

Jake shivered and started to cry. The pulp writer reached into her purse for a handkerchief, and laughed when the tips of her fingers caressed the brick. She recovered the hanky from under it and handed it to Jake, who took it without a word and blew his nose into it.

Finally, Jake said, “I have to get back to work.”

“Spoken like a True Industrivist,” said the pulp writer.

~~Once upon a time~~ There was a knock on the door of the second-class stateroom, but Herr Diesel's embarrassment was not due only to his reduced circumstances but to the fact that he had been on his hands and knees, ear pressed to the ground, to listen to the reverberations of Dresden's steam engines. An article Herr Diesel had read promised that her steam engines outputted twenty boiler horsepower at five hundred revolutions per minute, but Herr Diesel suspected Dresden's capabilities had been overstated by its proud engineers.

The door opened, and the mate who opened it jingled the keys on the wide ring he carried. He was English, but Diesel was a polyglot and so understood the man perfectly.

"You're to come up to the poop now, sir. There is an unfortunate issue with your accommodation."

Diesel rose to his feet and dusted off the knees of his trousers, which was not strictly necessary as the rooms were kept clean, even in second class.

"What would the problem be, sir?"

"Well, there's an issue with the water," the mate said. "The water supply, I mean to say. The WCs are all overflowing, the urinals as well, so we need everyone to clear out. All the other passengers are already in the dining hall, sir, but you had not answered any previous knocks." With that, the mate made a fist that flouted several large white walnut-knuckles, and knocked on the open door slowly, three times. Then he crooked a finger and said, "Come along then, sir."

Herr Diesel followed the large mate out of the second-class area. Something was very wrong, Diesel knew it. He asked, "Pardon me, boy, but what is the problem with the water supply?"

"It's the piston in the pump, sir. It got all stuck like a you-know-what in an underserviced you know where, eh?" The mate winked at his own crudeness, reveling perhaps in the reputation of sailors and the absence of any of the fairer sex as he led Herr Diesel to the poop deck.

"Why, sir, have you led me astern if the rest of the complement is in the dining hall, presumably at least enjoying some English tea, if not a glass of complimentary beer?" Herr Diesel enquired.

"Well sir, it's a bit embarrassin' to say, but we know your reputation. You're the famous Rudolf Diesel, inventor of the eponymous engine. We have a lot of toffs in first class, sir, and you see they caught wind of your name on the manifest, but also that you were sequestered in, erm, humble accommodation. We told them that in addition to our own capable mechanics, we'd have you take a look."

"I see, and you've told me that the problem is the water pump's piston."

"Yes sir."

"And this was explained to you by the German hands, or by a fellow Englishman?"

"Sir, we are all bilingual round here. Sea life, eh?" The mate

winked again, crudely, and nudges Herr Diesel with his elbow.

“Then, sir, I am now convinced that you are not simply mistaken, and I have diagnosed the mechanical difficulty. It can be repaired instantly.”

“It can?” the mate said.

“Yes. You see, you mountebank, Dresden is outfitted with a pulsometer pump, a clever and economical design which takes advantage of the principle of suction. A ball valve separates two chambers, one filled with water, and the other with steam. A pulsometer pump requires no piston, and has no piston, as it depends solely on suction!”

“Suction, eh? Yes, something like that!” The fraudulent mate, in actuality a paid assassin in the employ of certain Germanic interests determined to keep the patent on Herr Diesel’s inventions the exclusive property of the sons of Goethe, launched himself at the man. But Diesel, forewarned by the inaccuracies in the thug’s narrative, had already plotted a stratagem. He ran to the right, evading the killer’s apelike arms, and secured for himself an emergency flare from the poop deck’s box.

“Stay back,” Herr Diesel cried, holding the flare before him. “Or I shall ignite it!”

The assassin paid no heed, having taken the measure of the inventor and finding the man’s courage wanting, but he had again misapprehended Herr Diesel. Diesel yanked the cap from the end of the flare, igniting it, just as he was tackled by the assassin. Flaming and tumbling, limbs coiled about one another like a pair of enraged octopodes, they rolled the length of the poop deck and fell into the churning white sea below, dangerously close to Dresden’s rudder head, where surely both lives would be lost.

Jake slipped the carbons back into the envelope, reared back like a major league pitcher, and flung the manuscript over the open transom and into the office of *Espionage!* a pulp dedicated to spy stories and non-fiction features about a new philosophy dedicated to anti-Communism, technological-organic unity, and physical immortality. It was catching on.