Stuff n Things

My novel, *Stuff n Things*, intends to show a world much like ours but accelerating towards ruin. It unveils pressing societal issues stemming from the rampant trends of conspicuous consumption, planned obsolescence, and fast fashion. Corporations have perfected the art of enticing the masses to buy unnecessary items, such as single-use plastics, fast fashion clothing, and electronic gadgets destined for The Landfill, thereby expanding the sanitation empire's territory, wealth, and power. The narrative centers around a global clash between the resurrected Turtle God and the ambitious heir of the sanitation empire, Jacobus, "the wretched." Jacobus will be portrayed as “roguelike” because he prioritizes survival and is resilient to his environment, much like a lot of the waste and plastic humans dispose of. Turtle God is inspired by the symbology of turtles possessing longevity, wisdom, and their realistic tendency of reaching considerable size. The story veers into science fantasy as the magnitude of the swift transformation needed to curb consumerism necessitates divine intervention.

Fig 1: Turtle God vs The Raccoons (“A giant godlike turtle”)

The novel unfolds through a third-person omniscient narrative. The stories of Jacobus and the Turtle God are revealed in intermittent interludes or flashback chapters, which delve into the history of the sanitation empire, the rise of consumer culture, and the origins of the Turtle God. The chapters alternate between the protagonist and antagonist, not only shifting perspectives but also advancing the timeline. Jacobus manipulates his raccoon minions as part of his plan to expand, while the Turtle God uses chief priests, a group of influential individuals who interpret and enforce his word, to spread his message. A rotating cast of chief priests narrates the chapters as their “dissociated knowledge [opens] up such terrifying vistas of reality… that [they] either go mad from the revelation or flee from the light” (Lovecraft, 16). The Turtle God eventually discards these priests, much like how regular humans dispose of two-thirds of their Shein order when it doesn't quite fit.

Turtle God employs telepathy and mind control to reprogram his followers, advocating for sustainability. Jacobus struggles with his methods to expand his empire and resist Turtle God, as other, more mainstream corporations and governments fall in line. The narrative underscores its characters' moral and ethical complexities and their internal battle between personal freedom and ecological responsibility. Turtle God, noble in his mission to save the planet, resorts to ethically questionable means like mind control. Jacobus, in his pursuit of empire, brings joy to others through material possessions. Together, these characters navigate a nuanced world of conflicting intentions and methods, and the ethical dimensions of environmentalism and happiness.

Jacobus The Wretched

His majesty, Jacobus “The Wretched”, twelfth king of The Landfill, is a fictional character in the novel Stuff n Things. He is one of the point of view characters of the book. He finds himself at war with a newly risen elder god, over consumerism, which he is in favour of as it increases the size of his empire. Jacobus is depicted in the novel as somewhere between a protagonist and an antagonist. The character is royalty in this story as it serves as a commentary on the power dynamics in society, where only the wealthy have the privilege to make decisions for the population. Royalty, in this context, can exploit societal habits to benefit their domain. The more waste produced, the larger his empire becomes, symbolizing the way in which the rich can profit from the masses.

Despite his harsh methods, tough exterior, and seemingly nefarious goals, Jacobus displays genuine compassion for the raccoons who serve him. This relationship suggests a softer side to his character, one that values loyalty and companionship. The raccoons, often seen as pests by others, are his friends. He trained them, nurtured them, and in return, they helped him expand his domain. His relationship with the raccoons is paternal and protective. He sees them as more than just minions; they are his family and his closest allies. Further, it emphasizes that animals are worth more than things.

Fig 2: Jacobus “The Wretched” (“A rogue like man”)

There is no explicit mention of Jacobus's race in the story, but this deliberate omission is a narrative choice. This allows readers to question why they might have assigned a race to him, inviting a deeper exploration of racial assumptions and stereotypes. This is a nod to postmodern literary techniques that challenge traditional narrative structures and expectations.

In the context of the story, the fact that heirs are usually male is a societal norm that influences Jacobus's role and actions. Certain industries like waste and recycling have long been male-dominated because of their "dirty" nature or historical precedent (“Sanitation Worker”). Yet, waste and recycling workers are 83% male because traditional job postings and recruitments subconsciously favor them over women.

The story's allegorical elements serve as a lens through which to examine deontological ethics, where an action is considered morally good because of some characteristic of the action itself, not because the product is good. Gandhi's ahimsa exemplifies this concept of prioritizing method over result. It invites a deeper delve into the moral paradox presented in Jacobus' duality. Jacobus's character embodies a moral paradox because he knows his ambition clashes with long-term success. His children will live in a world of war because humanity is currently overusing Earth's natural resources by more than 70 percent (Clayton). Jacobus has a complicated

relationship with society. His empire thrives on consumerism, yet he likely harbours disdain for the very system that allows The Landfill to grow.

The Wretched Bloodline

Jacobus the Wretched's bloodline began centuries ago. The Landfill is a longstanding family business passed down from generation to generation, with each ruler taking it in different directions depending on their beliefs and priorities. The Founding Ancestor, Tiberius the Cunning, saw an opportunity in society's wastefulness. During a time of rapid industrialization, the ever-growing mountains of garbage gave him a sense of purpose and power. It was here that the core idea of transforming waste into wealth was conceived. His successors continued the strategic expansion, demonstrating how empires are born of the cumulative effort of multiple generations.

Cornelius the Ambitious, who attended an Ivy League business school, established the importance of strategic alliances. Education often fosters connections, which can be used or misused for personal gain (Brint et al. 153). This benefit often neglects the impact on the environment. It became clear that wealthy individuals are willing to cause irreparable damage to the planet if it means increasing their wealth. This marked the beginning of the direction in which the Landfill would develop. The formation of alliances with companies offering them solutions to their waste problems in exchange for resources and political support allowed the Landfill to grow exponentially into a formidable empire at the cost of the environment.

Fig 3. The Wretched Bloodline ("Illustrate this:")

Cornelius' granddaughter, Delorus the Wise, brought a maternal and diplomatic approach to the Landfill. Expansion was not her main focus. Instead, she spent years strengthening the empire's internal structures and was the deciding vote in raccoon unionization. She held cultural balls while maintaining cordial relationships with the allies her predecessors had established. The effect a woman has on running an empire is made poignantly clear.

Delorus had two sons, Robert and David. While Robert was indifferent to his family affairs but revelled in the money and power it granted him, leading to his name being Robert the Unbothered, David, on the other hand, became David the Ruthless, marking the beginning of a darker era for the Landfill. Corruption had caught up with the ruling elite, and David was a master of it. He began an aggressive expansion of the empire and strict control over the raccoons. Many lost their lives due to unsafe working conditions. David's reign was characterized by fear and oppression, but he was eventually forced to abdicate to his son when he suffered a stress-induced heart attack surprisingly young (Libby 530).

In the present era, Jacobus the Wretched, the sudden heir, inherited a kingdom he did not know how to manage. Determined to uphold his family's legacy, Jacobus adopted many past strategies encouraging consumerism and maintaining control. His story is one of struggle and potential redemption as he seeks a path that balances expansion with ethical responsibility.

Works Cited

“A giant godlike turtle fighting raccoons in water with a human watching”, prompt, *DALL-E*, Version 3, OpenAI, 5 Jun 2024, labs.openai.com/.

"A rogue like man with no assigned race, beloved by racoons, and is surrounded by mountains of trash, have him wear a hood, make it black and white”, prompt, *DALL-E*, Version 3, OpenAI, 21 Jun 2024, labs.openai.com/.

Brint, Steven, et al. "Where Ivy Matters: The Educational Backgrounds of U.S. Cultural Elites." Sociology of Education, vol. 93, no. 2, 2020, pp. 153-172.

Clayton, Mark. "A Voracious Earth ; some Regions - especially in Asia - are Overusing their Renewable Resources: ALL Edition." The Christian Science monitor (1983), 2004.

"Illustrate this: <entire text of The Wretched Bloodline>”, prompt, *DALL-E*, Version 3, OpenAI, 3 Jul 2024, labs.openai.com/.

Libby, Peter. "The Changing Landscape of Atherosclerosis." Nature (London), vol. 592, no. 7855, 2021, pp. 524-533.

Lovecraft, Howard Phillips. “The Call of Cthulhu” *The Lovecraft Compendium.* Arcturus, 2017.

“Sanitation Worker Demographics and Statistics in the US”, Zippia, The Career Expert. Zippia Inc. 05 Apr. 2024, https://www.zippia.com/sanitation-worker-jobs/demographics/. Accessed 20 June, 2024.

Bonus Story

This is not an ancient redwood forest untouched by man. It's far from it. Far.

Jacobus, a man of peculiar habits, found himself fixated on a McDonald's cheeseburger wrapper. The remnants of cheese, once vibrant, now coagulated and darkened by the sun, swayed in the breeze, captivating his attention. His trance was abruptly shattered by a raccoon, Patty, who scrambled up the mound of garbage he was perched on, disturbing a crushed aluminum can that tumbled down the heap, finding a new resting place.

At Jacobus' feet, Patty, a young raccoon of only 482 days, stood on her hind legs. She had embarked on a journey to deliver a message to her master. The note, a flattened cardboard box, bore a hastily scribbled message from the only person known to give Jacobus instructions, adding an air of mystery to the situation.

"build west."

Jacobus instinctively straightened after acquiring this note from Patty. Not before gently patting her head and bopping her nose. His deep-set eyes travelled across the note; finally, after a pause, the page moved down, and his eyes moved up. He got up, shifting more garbage beneath his feet, and presented his arm to Patty, who took it. He took her in his arms and cradled her like a baby.

They quietly walked, crushing noises the only sound for miles, not taking in the colours, textures and smells their environment afforded. It extended far until the eyes could see. Ten minutes later, they entered a shipping container. It has windows cut jagged and wasn't all that level. It had been the office of many before him. Tiberius the Cunning was the first to enter it and decided to leave his lunch inside, especially on hot days. Several generations later, Cornelius the Ambitious drew maps of the expanding landfill to show the raccoons precisely what areas needed working on. Cornelius' granddaughter, Delorus the Wise, had seen the desk on a ship being decommissioned. The desk took people to move it, not raccoons. Her sons, Rob and Dave, supervised. Dave, the Ruthless' grandson, Jacobus, was now its user.

He set Patty down on the desk, and she scratched her nose. It was a suitable desk, antique wood that didn't fit its surroundings whatsoever. Jacobus always felt small in its presence. Its grandiosity made his small frame even smaller. He switched on the radio and grabbed the walkie. Gathering his breath and his courage, he said, "Yes. West."