

thrice great hermes

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by stanley lieber

vidya remembered grade school. at once a sense of liberation and disappointment. finally, at least, something slightly different than the usual routine. that is to say, a new usual routine.

he remembered the dull scissors, the dull people. fat crayons, flat on one side so they wouldn't roll away. "seriously?" he had wondered, to no one. the other children seemed content with the condescension. he had immediately set to work harnessing their credulity for his own ends.

he remembered being instructed to cease operations drawing pictures of airplanes for his best friend, whose parents had threatened to sue the school. a year in his future he would accidentally stab the boy with the sharp end of a pencil. the boy's parents dutifully threatened, again, to sue. the school administration, and the boy's parents, had seemed to interpret both offenses as roughly equivalent.

those had been the good years. as his schooling progressed, and his estimation of it degenerated, vidya had moved on to such mischief as organized study strikes against the historicist curriculum and smuggling banned reading material. he had shared with his classmates the gutter dialect of cable television and contemporary adult fiction.

today, he had brought his phone.

the adults had seemed relieved when he stopped lugging around all the books. of course, none of them had guessed what had replaced them. boasting limited functionality, the device had been a gift from his dad. vidya had modified its capabilities to include the display of arbitrary byte streams, fed from internal storage or the network. he didn't need paper, anymore.

today he opened a new chapter of the logic of scientific discovery. this one was not even in the public library—he had found it on the network. due to the device's small size, it could only display a few lines at a time, but he found that he relished the precise navigation, back and forth, over individual lines of text. he directed his concentration on the rectangle in the palm of his hand, forgetting temporarily about the incongruous relationships between discreet entities irl that continued to elude his grasp.

some unknown period had elapsed when he noticed the light had changed. he tucked his phone into its usual pocket in his bag and headed back to the school, to make an appearance in front of hallway surveillance cameras before he set out on the long walk home.