

Dispatches From the War: The Trial of John Q Citizen

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August 20, 2020

John Q found himself in a small courtroom. The lighting was dim. He'd been brought there to stand trial for a minor offense. He was trying to remember what it was. Not wearing his mask? Not keeping his distance? Breaking curfew? The judge was sitting behind a table on an elevated platform.

The judge began speaking—

You think you've been arrested because of some little item. You're wrong. What we're talking about here is reality. The picture frame and your place in the picture. Your life is INSIDE. That's the deal. Whether you agreed to the terms is beside the point.

Once you're inside the picture, you're expected to take on all the duties of a law-abiding citizen. That's your ID package. No exceptions. It doesn't matter what the rules are, you follow them. You're supposed to get a haircut and a shave, that's what you do. You're supposed to wear a suit, you wear a suit. You're supposed to fall in line, you get in line and wait. If one day the crap hits the fan and everything goes blooey, you wait for orders.

Some days are sunny, sometimes it rains. You have other dreams, you ignore them. You're carved down into a shape. You assume that shape. You live according to what that shape is supposed to do. You're a CITIZEN. You aren't anything else.

This is a one-time offer. Today we fine you. If you show up here again, we stick you in jail. You and all other citizens put together are a PATTERN. We don't expect you to understand it, we just expect you to do your part.

What else do you think this IS? Stop testing the limits. The limits aren't going to move. Everybody starts out thinking he's a foreigner to reality. He's taking a look-see. He's checking out the situation. But that's not the way it is. We're here to make sure everyone gets the message. Once you're in, you're in.

We're not interested in speculation. We're interested in facts. We make the facts. Somebody has to. You didn't wear a mask. We don't care about the mask. Can't you see that? We only care about the rule. Tomorrow we say don't wear a mask. Then that's the rule.

You're shaved down and carved down to be a citizen who follows orders. That's why you're HERE—Earth, reality, America, whatever you want to call it. You don't understand reality. We do. That's the difference between you and us.

We thrive because you're powerless. We want you to forget about power. You're up against a whole lot of good citizens who believe they're powerless. Get it? That's their religion. It makes perfect sense to them.

Remember the Old Testament story of Joseph? During the seven-year famine, he was chief advisor to the Pharaoh. He sold back, to the people, part of the wheat he had already collected from them. Then finally, he distributed one more pile, in return for the people selling THEMSELVES to the Pharaoh. There is nothing new about our current arrangement.

What kind of show did you think we were running? I'm not just a petty bureaucrat. We know there is power. We know the individual secretly has power. We work to keep that fact away from him. We want to make him forget, to feel shame and guilt.

When we see he's convinced he's lost and we've won, we feel our own juice. We want to see him defeated. That's our goal. That's why we run things the way we do. Every citizen who gives up is a feather in our cap.

This is our movie, we're the producers, and you're in crowd scenes. That's it. We don't want you sticking out from the crowd or wandering off. Virus, no virus, epidemic, no epidemic, do you think we care about any of that? We only care about BEHAVIOR.

People above us in the pecking order wrote the script, and then other people sold it, and now we're producing it. On a day to day basis. It's our job and our calling. As long as you pretend you have no power, as long as you do whatever you need to do, in order to keep pretending, we're good. We sell amnesia, and you're the customer.

We don't care whether you're rich or poor, whether you work at some menial job, or you're a high-brow, as long as you toe the line. You can salute whoever and whatever you want to—the flag, the country, the president, God, it doesn't matter, as long as you stay in your place.

At some point in life, everyone gets a glimpse of the fact that reality is elastic. It's invented. Our job is to make sure everyone shoves that moment down into his memory and below his memory into the dark and forgets about it.

If he bows down to Something he thinks is telling him that he can't change reality, that it isn't up to him, all the better. If he worships doom, all the better. If he believes he's coming to a rational conclusion that reality is permanently fixed in place, all the better. If he believes inventing new reality is a sin, good. If he thinks real rebellion is impossible, good.

We want realists. A realist is a person who says, "What can I do? Nothing." That person is a little fleck of gold in our

account.

We've studied enough history to know the evidence is ABUNDANT: pushed down inside the individual is enormous creative power to invent new reality. We also know his hostile, vicious, rabid denial of that fact is a chronic disease. Have you ever thought about—

John Q Citizen clears his throat and says, "How much do I owe, Your Honor?"

"Two thousand dollars."

"Where do I pay?"

"The clerk's office down the hall."

His eyes dull, Citizen turns and walks out of the court room.

As he's about to place his hand on the knob of the door to the clerk's office, a spontaneous question forms in his mind. He's asked himself this question before, but never with such immediate clarity.

"What am I?"

He feels an explosion at the back of his head.

Suddenly, he looks around...makes up his mind, and then walks toward the entrance of the building.

He feels light on his feet. Alive.

However, before he can walk outside, he notices the scene around him has reshaped itself. He's no longer in a courthouse. It's a theater. He has a ticket in his hand.

He sees a door. He goes over and opens it. Moves inside, into warm darkness.

"Is this a good idea?" "Why did I do it?"

He can already feel a merging sensation. Electromagnetic fields are humming, even before the movie starts.

The theater is filled with people. John Q takes his seat. Crystal clear thoughts move through his head.

“Don’t forget where I came from. Don’t forget this is just a movie. Don’t fall asleep. The movie creates nostalgia for a place that doesn’t exist. Don’t surrender. I’m here to find out why the movie has power.”

The lights dim.

On the big screen, against a gray background, the large blue word REALITY slowly forms.

Suddenly, he’s looking at a huge pasture filled with flowers. The sky is a shocking blue. He can feel a breeze on his arms and face.

He thinks, “This is a hypnotic weapon.”

Now, the pasture fades away and he’s standing on an empty city street at night. It’s drizzling. He hears sirens in the distance. A disheveled beggar approaches and holds out his trembling hand. He waits, then moves on.

John Q looks at the wet shining pavement and snaps his fingers, to change it into a lawn. Nothing happens.

He’s shocked.

He waves his hand at a building. It doesn’t disappear.

Incredible.

He reaches into his pocket and feels a wallet. He walks over to a streetlight and opens it. There’s his picture on a plastic ID card. His name is under the picture, followed by a number code. On the reverse side of the card, below a plastic strip, is a thumbprint.

There are other cards in the wallet, and a small amount of paper money. He looks at the ID card again. There's an address.

He remembers the address. He remembers a small cottage at the edge of an industrial town. There's a pickup parked in the driveway.

It's his truck. He knows it. But how can that be?

He walks toward larger buildings in the distance.

Three men in uniforms turn a corner and come up to him. Behind them emerges a short man in a business suit. He nods at John Q and holds out his hand.

John pulls out his wallet and give it to him. The man looks at the ID card, at John Q, at the card again.

"You were reported missing," he says.

"Missing from what?" John Q says.

"Your home. Your job. What are doing here? Are you all right?"

"I'm fine," John Q says. "I was...taking a short trip. I'm just out for some air."

"In this part of the city? That's not smart. We'll take you home. Our car is right over there."

One car sits on a side street. In large red letters printed on the trunk is the word Concern.

John walks with the men to the car.

Waves he's never felt before are emanating from it.

Mentally, he tries to back up from them. For a moment, he's in a haze.

He looks at the short man in the suit. The man is smiling.

Suddenly, the smile is transcendent. Tears fill John Q's eyes.

John thinks, "They built this so I would be lost and they could find me. I'm supposed to be rescued. I've never been rescued before. I never knew what it meant."

He hears faint music.

It grows louder. As he nears the car, he realizes he's listening to a chorus and an orchestra. The rising theme is Victory.

One of the uniformed men opens the car door.

John nods at him.

"My pleasure, sir," the uniformed man says.

The music fades away.

The scene shifts.

John Q is standing next to the pickup in his driveway alongside his cottage.

He's home.

Think, he tells himself. What's going on?

He recognizes his mind has sections. The first part registers this new reality.

The second part of his mind sees problems and solves them.

He was never aware of these two sectors of his mind before.

Where did they come from?

Now, as he walks into his cottage and instantly remembers the rooms and the objects in these rooms, a separate accompanying sensation of Familiarity, slightly out of phase, grows stronger.

He realizes, without knowing how, that he's supposed to feel tremendous relief. This is what's expected of him.

It's expected of everyone. They live with one another through the Familiar. They share it like bread.

They keep coming back to it. The Familiar.

It's built in. It's invented through...it's stamped on every object in this space...

...In order to suggest he's been here before. To suggest he belongs here.

As he looks around the cottage, he notices a third sector of his mind. He struggles to identify it.

It's the start of a different kind of perception.

Yes.

He keeps staring at the cottage and he sees space.

He sees pure space that...

...Has been placed here. For him.

And at that moment, there is a small explosion behind his head.

And John Q is sitting in the theater again.

The movie is playing on the screen. All around him, in the seats, people are sitting with their eyes closed.

John feels a tap on his shoulder. He turns. It's an usher.

"Sir," he says. "Please follow me."

He leads John up the aisle into the lobby, which is empty.

An office door opens and a young woman steps out. She strides

briskly over to John.

"You woke up and came back," she says. She gives him a tight smile. "So we're refunding your money. It's our policy."

She drops a check in John's hand.

"What happened in there?" John says. "What happened?"

She shrugs.

"Only you would know that. You must have done something to interrupt the transmission."

"And the rest of those people?"

She looks at her watch. "They're probably into their fifth month by now. It's typically a time of conflict. They rebel. Well, some of them do. They rearrange systems. They replace leaders. They promote new ideals."

"I had such a strong feeling I'd been there before."

She smiles. "Apparently it wasn't strong enough. You're back here."

"How do you do it?" John says.

"I'm sorry," she says. "That's proprietary information. Did you meet your family?"

"No. But I was in a cottage. It was...home."

She nods.

"If you hadn't escaped, you would have been subjected to stronger bonding pulses. Do you have a family here?"

John starts to answer and realizes he doesn't know.

She looks into John's eyes.

“Go out to the street,” she says. “Walk around. Take a nice long walk for an hour. You’ll reorient. It’ll come back to you.”

“Why do you do it?” John says.

“Do what?”

“THIS.”

“Oh,” she says. “Why does a travel agent book a vacation for a client? We’re in that business.”

John turns toward the exit. The sun is shining outside. People are walking past the doors.

He takes a deep breath and leaves the theater.

The street is surging with crowds. The noise is thunderous.

He notices he’s carrying a rolled up sheet of paper in his hand.

He opens it.

It’s a non-disclosure agreement. It has his signature on it.

“If you return from your movie experience, you will not reveal or discuss, under penalty of law, anything about its nature, substance, or duration...”

He looks at the sheet of paper...

Makes up his mind...

...And it bursts into flames.

He looks behind him. The theater has vanished.

In its place sits a small stone building. Engraved over the door in gold letters: BOARD OF EDUCATION.

The door opens and young man walks out holding a large plastic bag. He comes up to John. He reaches into the bag and pulls out a thin envelope and hands it to John.

"It's a mask," the young man says. "Did you watch the news? We're all supposed to wear them and hide behind them."

He walks away.