

75¢



# Transaction Tavern: Season 1 - Issue 1

## Clocking In



Tune into the **FIRST** issue featuring the tremendous Transaction Tavern employees! What perils await our minimum-wage warriors?

It was five in the evening and the Transaction Tavern was bustling with activity. Dozens of families poured in to purchase food for their dinner that night. Parents were not paying attention to fellow shoppers because they were looking at their phones and children were opening their food before it was paid for. All of this was set to elevator music.

At the front of the store, there were three checkout aisles, each with a backed-up line. Three teenagers stood against an army of customers anxious to break out of this grocery store and return home. In the first check out aisle, Katie was checking out an elderly woman.



Katie was a tall teenager with a passion for putting others first. As Katie scanned in the woman's items, the woman asked her, "Would you by any chance know where to find the macaroni? I could not find any in the aisle labeled pasta."

"It is actually with the cheese. I know it is a little confusing, but they put it there so people would buy those things together for macaroni and cheese," Katie responded politely.

"That makes no sense. Oh well, I didn't need it that bad."

"No, I can help you out!" She cupped her hands around her mouth then shouted, "JEFF, CAN YOU GET SOME MACARONI!?!?"

A man with wide eyes and a stubble appeared from the aisles. He had some sort of stain on his shirt and big gauges in his ears. His large form gave the aura that he was probably pretty good at giving hugs. He cupped his mouth to respond.

“Right on it!” he said.



In the second aisle, Buff stood and checked out a man who had his daughter sitting on his shoulders. Buff had a towering figure, was well-built, and possessed perfect skin complexion.



“Hey, would you by any chance know where the macaroni is? I couldn’t find any in the pasta section,” the man asked Buff.

“Nope. We probably don’t have any then.”

“Oh, that’s a shame. I guess we will live on anyway.”

In the third aisle, Nathan grabbed some red spheres off the conveyor belt. Nathan would also be considered tall like Buff, but most would use the term lanky instead. Completing the look, his hair was formed by countless curls cascading onto one another. Where did it end and where did it begin?



“What are these?” he asked the blond-haired man whose produce he was checking out.

“Those are tomatoes.”

“No. I know that, but what kind? Romaine, Cherry, Roma?”

“Does it matter?”

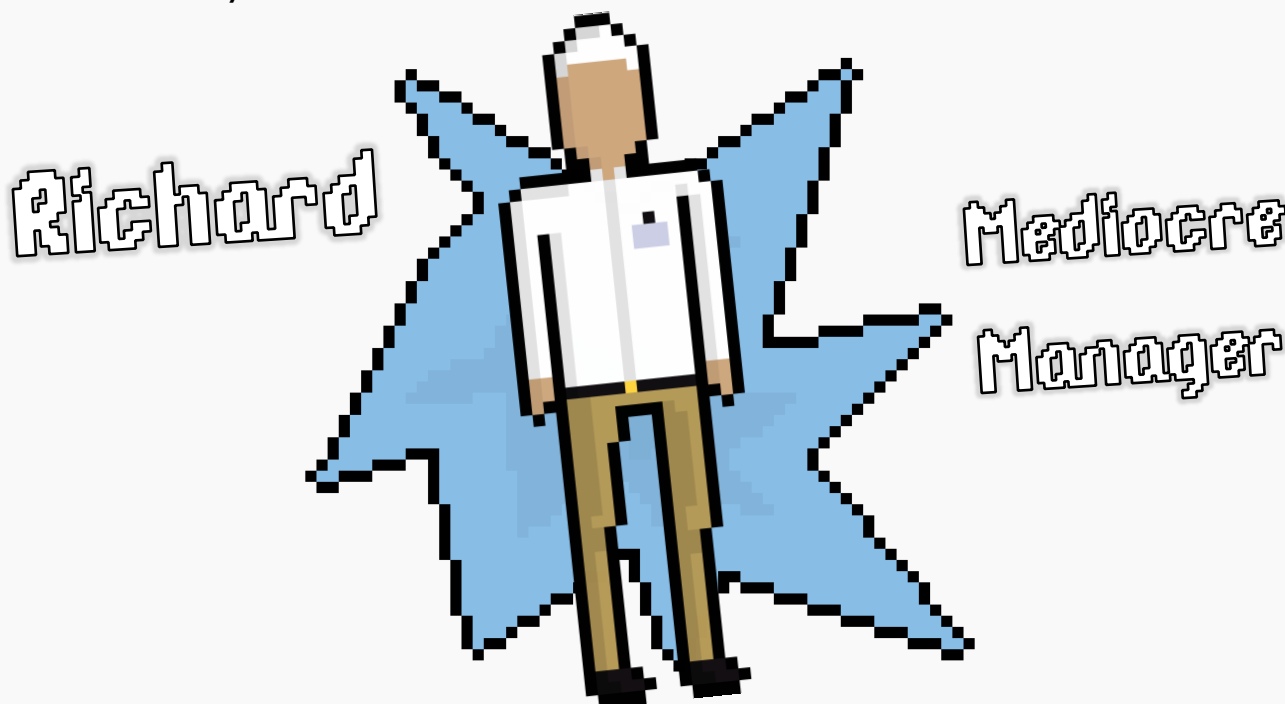
“Yes.”

“Um. I don’t know. Roma?” the man said unconfidently.

“Let me ask.” Nathan reached for the phone and said, “CUSTOMER SERVICE TO AISLE 3!” His request rang through the store.

“Good grief man. I didn’t even want these tomatoes this bad,” the man said angrily.

At the customer service kiosk, Richard was sitting behind a plastic barrier. Some say our founding fathers decided to have their wigs colored white because they loved Richard's hair so much. He has probably managed more workers at the Transaction Tavern than he has bones in his body.



He had his glasses on his forehead and a pen in his hand as he was explaining a coupon to an elderly man. He said, "You see, this coupon only applies to the non-organic packages of beef...JEFF, CAN YOU GET THAT?"

"YES!" Jeff yelled back as he gave macaroni to Katie.

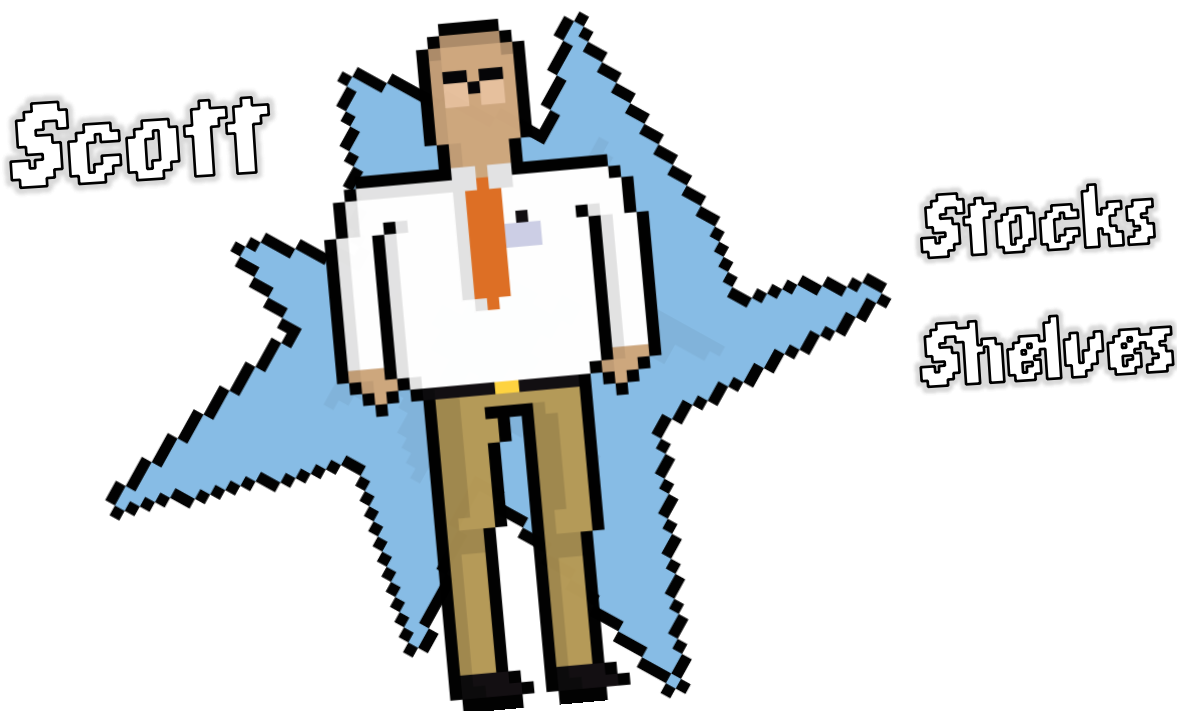
Jeff came over to Nathan's register then asked, "What do you need, Nathan?"

"What type of tomatoes are these?" Nathan asked as he pointed at the red spheres.

"Romaine."

Nathan scanned the Romaine tomatoes.

Meanwhile, in the aisles, Scott had a big box full of smaller macaroni boxes. While Scott also had a large form, he was most definitely not good with hugs...or people as a whole. He quickly put the macaroni boxes up on a shelf by the cheese. As he did this, he muttered quietly, "If only Buff had done his job right then I wouldn't have to be wasting my time here during the rush hour."



The crowd died down around six o'clock. Nathan looked over at Katie who was quietly drawing on a blank receipt paper in her aisle. Nathan watched her slowly draw a flower petal by petal.

"NATHAN, where is your head at?!?! I told you! Go help John get the carts in!" Richard said as he snapped his fingers to encourage Nathan to hurry up.

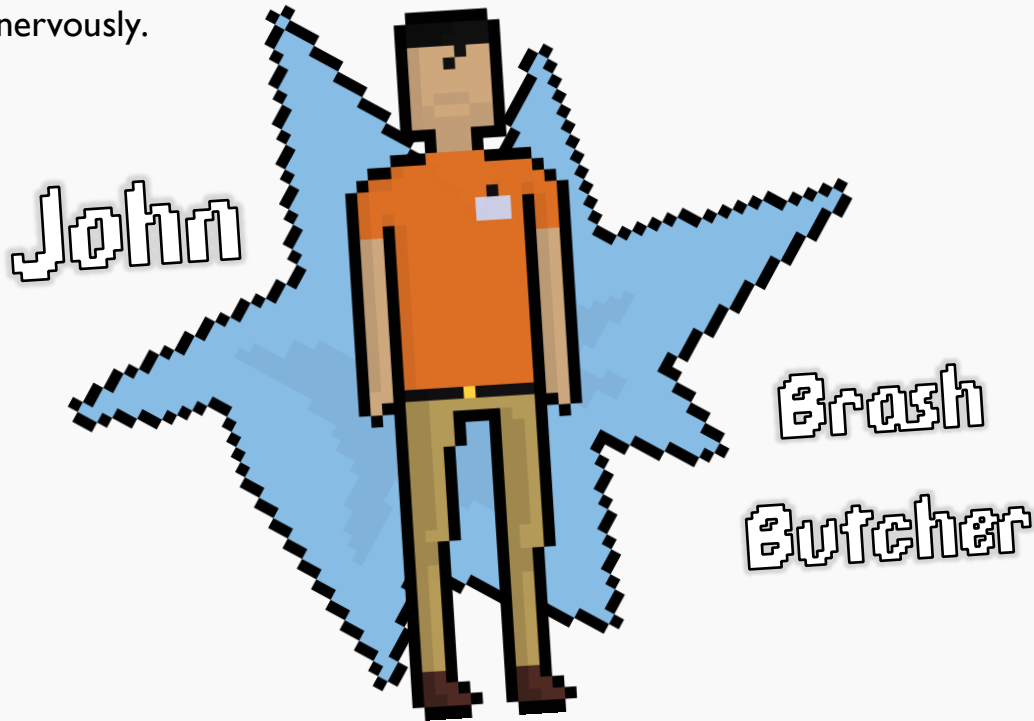
Nathan's nostrils were immediately filled with a strong scent of cologne as Richard's...aroma filled his nose.

"Alright. I'll get the vest."

Nathan grabbed the bright neon vest and a hook attached to the end of a rope and went outside to get carts. It was a relatively cool evening and the sun had start to set. He looked to the back of the parking lot and saw John struggling to pull the final nine carts out of the cart corral farthest back. He ran over and tried to help get the carts unstuck. Nathan usually tried to keep his distance from John. John wasn't talkative and his clothes were always torn in random places. He usually had this musk to him that Nathan could never quite identify. As John jostled the nine connected carts in the corral, he looked up at Nathan and rolled his eyes.

“Great. One of the kids are here to help me. Just push these carts while I try and pull them out of this cart corral. That back one is stuck,” John said as he pulled at the carts.

“You should be the one doing this. I’m a butcher, not a cart pusher,” John told Nathan. Nathan laughed nervously.



Nathan walked into the cart corral and pushed the carts as John pulled. The carts didn’t move, but with a grunt, John pulled again, and the carts rolled out of the corral. Nathan followed John back in and returned his rope and bright green vest to the customer service kiosk.

“Go on break, Nathan,” Richard said as if he was talking to a dog.

Nathan quickly walked through the store to grab a mini pie, a Fuji apple, and a carton of iced tea. He walked back to the register and went into Katie’s lane as her lane was the only one open.

“Welcome to Transaction Tavern! Do you have a Tavern Membership Card?” Katie said while holding back a smile.

“Very funny.”

She checked out his items then put little stickers on them that said, “THANK YOU FOR YOUR PURCHASE”. She returned Nathan’s food to him.

“Enjoy your break.”

"You too!" Nathan said as he walked outside...*WAIT. I'm an idiot.*

At the front of the Transaction Tavern, he walked to the break tables. He got to where the tables were, and it smelled like cigarette smoke. One of the adults must have just taken their break. He saw Buff sitting down at one of the tables and sat down next to him.

"Sup, Buff."

Buff looked up from his phone, "Nothing."

They sat there eating quietly for a couple minutes.

"Hey, Buff, do you think Katie likes me at all?"

"Nope."

"You aren't even going to think about it for a second?"

"Nope, don't need to."

"Oh. Okay."

Minutes passed with no sound except for carts rolling by and the occasional breeze.

"Hey Bu-"

"Shh. I am trying to enjoy my break. Please stop talking."

They sat quietly for a little longer.

"So, are you doing anything tomorrow?" Nathan asked quickly.

"Working at this piece of crap from five to ten."

"Hey, me too! That's kinda exciting."

"I would more call that de-citing," Buff responded.

"I don't think that is a word."

"Don't care."

Buff got up and threw his stuff away.

"See you, Nathan."

"See you."

Nathan texted his friends for the rest of the break. He then walked back inside, clocked back in, and reopened his register.



The next hour and a half went by at a horribly slow pace. The only thing he had to do to pass time when there were no customers was to watch the Weather Channel on the TV behind him. That's all that was ever on it.

At one point, he heard Richard and Scott get into a bit of an argument. They usually argued over who had the harder job as manager. Scott argued stocking was harder to manage, while Richard argued it was harder to manage the front end. At least them arguing was something to listen to instead of the constant elevator music that played in the store.

At nine o'clock, Nathan turned off his register light and turned in his money from the day. He clocked out then drove home. Another mediocre day at The Transaction Tavern.



When Nathan got home his dad had some leftover bean casserole from dinner in the microwave for him. His dad was off working the nightshift as a janitor at his high school. Nathan reheated the casserole and ate it quietly as he caught up with some of the news for the video games he played.

Meanwhile, at a local bank a massive molecular monster planned his escape as an army of cops surrounded him. Currently stuck in the vault, Critical Point looked out to assess his adversaries.



He counted ten cops closing in on him.

“We got another superpowered one here! Fourth one in the past few days,” one of the cops said.

“We go through this every month. These criminals come out as soon as The Acolytes go into hiding!” another said as she got behind a pillar.

“They all go down the same. On my mark we move!” a cop said as he ducked behind an oak table.

Critical Point looked back at the gold. He pointed his hands at it and green glowing goo sprayed from him onto the gold melting it. He quickly molded the gold into a large shield. He put the shield on his arm then stepped out from the vault.

Immediately, all the cops fired at Critical Point. The bullets that weren’t stopped by the shield bounced off of Critical Point’s thick, test tube-like skin.

“Looks like you all have reached a critical point in your career!” Critical Point yelled over the gunfire.

He reached his arm out and green goo burst forward covering one of the cops. Critical Point kept walking out.

A cop pulled a baton off his belt and lunged at Critical Point. Critical Point swung his enormous arm and the cop went flying into the wall.

The cop from behind the table sprung up then shouted, “NOW!”

Critical Point threw his shield at the oak desk. **CRASH!** The shield smashed through the wooden desk and knocked the cop back. The cop slid against the ground until his body stopped ten feet away from the shattered desk. Another cop snuck up behind Critical Point and jumped up to grab one of the tubes connecting his body together. The cop pulled at it. While Critical Point was distracted by this, the rest of the cops leapt onto Critical Point which knocked him to the ground. As they swung their batons at him, he glowed brighter and brighter. With a bright flash of green, the cops were thrown backwards and knocked out. Critical Point got back up, retrieved his shield, then ran out the door.

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# Transaction Tavern: Season 1 - Issue 2

## New Products



There is no such thing as a dull day at the Transaction Tavern!  
A new shape of pasta is not all in store for our heroes in this  
issue!

Nathan heated up water to make some ramen before he left for work as his dad began waking up after his night shift. Nathan's dad was wearing a navy tank top with the Langsle high school logo on it. His greasy brown hair looked like a mop on his head. His dad reached into their fridge and pulled out some of the leftover casserole as he hummed "Recently" by Jim Croce. He turned on the oven and stuck it in. The microwave beeped and Nathan opened it up to pull out his boiling water which he then poured on a block of ramen. After he sat down at the small circular dinner table his dad sat across from him.

"Are you planning on going to the game next Friday?" his dad asked.

"Nope."

"Come on, son. You gotta get out there a bit. You know your dad was an A plus student in social skills back in his youth. There wasn't a football game I wasn't at."

"I like what I'm doing right now."

"And what is that exactly? It is your senior year of high school and you are spending your nights checking out groceries," he responded quickly.

"Is there anything wrong with that?"

"No...It's just that you're a good kid and I want the best for you. In this case, I feel the best thing for you it to put yourself out there more." Nathan's dad got up and pulled the casserole out of the oven then sat back down.

"Who is Katie?" Nathan's dad asked.

Nathan coughed on his noodles then responded, "No one, dad."

"For a 'no one' you talk about her enough that she must be *some* no one."

"I don't know what you are talking about."

"Fair enough." His father's face lit up with a large grin as he said, "The nights I'm not working it sure sounds like you yap to your friends a lot about her online."

"She is just some girl I work with, nothing more, nothing less."

"Hmm. Interesting," his dad said.

"It's about time for me to head out for work," Nathan said as he got up and put his bowl in the sink. He grabbed his car keys.

“Alright. Have fun at work! I will see you in the morning. Maybe think about going to that game a bit while you are there. Katie might be there!” Nathan’s father shouted at him as he walked out the door.

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It was a very exciting day at the Transaction Tavern as they just got a new shape of pasta shipped in. Scott and Buff worked hard putting the new star shaped pasta up on the shelves right next to the thick, thin, and flat noodles. Scott held the box full of smaller boxes of pasta while Buff took them then reached up to put them on shelves.



By nine ‘o’clock, pasta was still the most exciting thing to happen that day. Although, according to the Weather Channel it was currently flooding down in Iowa. Closing time was upon them. Almost all the employees had left the store by this point except for John, Buff, Jeff, Katie, Scott, Richard, and Nathan. Aside from a man in hospital scrubs, they were the only ones there. Elevator music played quietly in the background as Nathan and Katie worked to spray down the conveyor belts. Buff continued putting away pasta.

Nathan and Katie wiped down the cash register with off brand disinfectant. Nathan cleaned quietly as he thought about what his dad said. He then asked Katie, “Are you going to the game next Friday?”

“Of course I am, I’m one of the cheerleaders. I have to be there for every game,” Katie said while smiling at the silliness of such a question.

“You’re right. That would make sense.”

“Are you going?”

Nathan closed his eyes tightly and rubbed his forehead while saying, “Ummmmm... yeahhh...probably.”

“Guess I will umm, yeah, probably see you there then!” she said.

Nathan chuckled to himself then finished wiping down the registers. The man in scrubs entered his lane. Nathan checked him out quickly and the man walked out the automatic doors. Nathan then turned off his register light so he could start taking out the trash from beneath the registers. The automatic doors opened again.

“Did you forget something, sir?” Nathan asked without looking.

“No, but I think you can help me out anyway,” the voice sounded like it came from a man drowning in a pool of his own saliva.

When Nathan looked over, he saw a hulking green beast. It looked as if everything from his tenth-grade chemistry class became sentient and merged to form one giant monster. No, not just that, it merged then combined with a bear. Nathan’s eyes and mouth opened wide.

Richard stepped out from the customer service area and said, “What is that smell, I thought I had Buff switch out the...” Richard lifted his glasses up onto his forehead.

“oh my...”

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Critical Point stood with all of the Transaction Tavern employees around him except for John. He pointed his arms at the cash registers and sprayed them with green goo. They melted then he combined them all into one big pile to form a barrier.

“You know, I’m surprised I was able to just walk right in, currently I’m all over the news for robbing a bank across the river,” he said.

“Maybe if we had the news on instead of the Weather Channel, we would have heard about it,” Buff said while looking at Richard.

“As a manager, I think I would know what the customers like best,” Richard said while adjusting his glasses.

“I prefer the news personally,” Critical Point said.

Buff threw his hands in the air and Richard rolled his eyes.

“It doesn’t matter. That kind of stuff happens enough in the city you wouldn’t even be front page worthy,” Scott said as he adjusted his tie.

“Watch your words geezer. I am front page worthy!” Critical Point said to Scott.

“Maybe if you committed some crime around here you could be. It would be a nice change of pace,” Buff said.

“Please. The only newspaper around here is your high school’s paper,” Critical Point said.

“The Langsle Lecture is a very prestigious paper,” Katie said.

“Let’s get to the point. What is your plan, Mr. Point? Why are you keeping us here?” Scott asked Critical Point.

“My current plan is to bunker down here. As I said before, I robbed a bank last night, but unfortunately, I lost all the gold. The cops are still looking for me, so I have to hide out for a bit. On top of that, The Acolytes are not going to like that my crime lasted more than one night.”

“But why are WE here, Mr. Point?” Jeff asked while playing with the gauges in his ear.

“You guys are hostages, maybe an offering. I’m not sure. It depends on who gets here first.”

“As long as we still count as on clock this is all okay with me,” Buff said.

Richard noticed John sneaking down the aisle carrying a butcher’s knife.

“Who are these Acolyt-” Richard got cut off as Nathan spoke.

“Wait a second, I thought The Acolytes were a myth around here, just a scary story parents told kids so they didn’t stay out past curfew.”



“Yeah, you look like the kind of person whose parents would do that. To me they are very much real. They have this whole town on lockdown. Everything here happens only if they let it happen. They only let small time criminals like me get one crime a month,” Critical Point responded as he finished molding his barrier.

“If I were you, I would be more concerned about the cops rushing in to arrest you any second now,” Scott told Critical Point.

“Trust me. If I angered The Acolytes as much as I feel I have, they will be here far before the cops.”

Buff noticed John approaching twenty feet behind Critical Point. He moved his eyes left and right to direct him away. John kept approaching. A loud screech could be heard in the distance.

“That’s Famine. I think The Acolytes are only sending him, if it’s just him we stand a chance.”

“WE??? This sounds like a *you* problem!” Katie exclaimed.

“It’s been a we problem ever since I walked in that door. Get ready. Famine can fly so brace for that, oh, and he will drain your life energy,” responded Critical Point.

“Drain our what?” Richard gasped.

“Don’t worry, draining your life energy would be a waste of his time,” Critical Point told Richard.

Richard glared at Critical Point.

“So, Famine is going to break in, I am going to calm him down, then offer you guys up. Just hang tight until then. Don’t try running either. I’ll blast you if you do that. These chemicals will do more than exfoliate your skin,” Critical Point said.

Critical Point grabbed his barrier then planted it on the ground facing the windows at the front of the store. He peered over it. Buff, Katie, and Nathan hid in the next aisle over. Jeff, Richard, and Scott began to walk into the customer service kiosk when Scott looked behind him. He noticed John two feet behind Critical Point.

“JOHN, DON’T DO IT!” Scott exclaimed. Critical Point turned around, John leapt into the air at Critical Point and immediately was knocked back into the end of the aisle from the force delivered to him through a torrent of green goo.

“NO ONE MOVE!” Critical Point yelled.

The lights flicked off and the elevator music in the store stopped. All that could be seen was the glow of the goo on John, who fell unconscious, and the dull glow of Critical Point. Everyone stood silent in fear. **shewww**. Wind quietly blew outside as if it also stood still with anticipation. **CRASH**. A large shadow shattered the front window. It had the shape of a bat, but the size of a car. Nathan covered his nose, the smell of a petting zoo emanated from this mysterious figure. Critical Point lifted the barrier up to cover himself then blasted goo at the shadow. **SHEW!** The shadow flew to the right with a gust of wind. Two large green dots appeared toward the top of the shadow, then it dived for Critical Point’s barrier. **CHHRRR**. The talons digging into the barrier sounded like a car scraping against the curb. **SHEW!** The barrier went flying back into the store, crashing through the shelves. Critical Point rapidly looked around to see if he could find the shadow. His green glow couldn’t illuminate more than a two-foot radius around him. His hands shuddered slightly. With a loud **THUMP**, something landed next to Critical Point. He turned around and blasted it. The green goo illuminated a sign saying, “Aisle 9”. **SHEW!** Enormous talons reached out of the darkness and clipped the tubes on Critical Point’s back.

“Maybe this will be front page worthy,” Critical Point said.

He started glowing brighter and brighter. The chemicals in his suit seemed to expand, desiring to break free from their encasement. Cracks began to form. **shew**. The shadow flew through the broken window. As the light coming from Critical Point grew more intense, Nathan began to run for the door, Jeff pulled Scott and Richard into the customer service kiosk, and Buff tackled Katie to the ground.

**BOOM!**

The Transaction Tavern erupted in a flash of green.

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# Transaction Tavern: Season 1 - Issue 3

## The Game



Tune in this week to read about Langsle and Kingsley's football game! Who will come out top dog?

Buff strode out onto the football field. Word of the event at the Transaction Tavern had spread around town. But due to the fact Critical Point's explosion had no noticeable effect on anyone, focus returned to things that mattered, like football games. He lifted his hand in the air and waved it side to side slowly at the audience. He made sure to make eye contact with Katie. He couldn't help but smile when the crowd cheered for him. He was a hero to these people.

Nathan stood in the audience eating a soft pretzel. They always came with melted cheese which confused Nathan. *Why not mustard, I can't be the only one that likes that?*

Buff looked to the student section and saw a very tall student standing in the middle school section. *Nathan? Did he know he was in the middle school section? Did he know there was such a thing as the middle school section? Eh, who actually cares?* Buff adjusted his helmet then looked back to the field as the crowd cheered again as Kingsly's team ran out of the locker room chanting. Buff rolled his eyes as the opposing team ran out onto the field. Their uniforms were yellow and purple. *How tacky.* He gathered with his teammates.

Katie stood amongst the cheerleaders rigorously performing every choreographed move one by one. Sweat beaded on her head as she flipped backward, lifted her teammates into the air, and chanted out her 'favorite' seven letters. L-A-N-G-S-L-E. She noticed Nathan by the middle schoolers awkwardly cheering shortly after they did. *Poor Nathan, no one told him there was a high school section.*

Nathan watched from the stands as the blue and orange Langsle football members put their hands into the center of a circle. They then lifted them into the air and shouted, "GO LANGSLE!" Nathan shouted out in excitement. The freshmen next to him stopped what they were doing and turned to him. *Oh so THAT was the wrong time to shout?* Nathan questioned if these people around him really were high school students. *The freshmen do seem smaller every year.*

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Katie came back after taking a water break to check the score. Kingsly was up by four points and there were twenty seconds left in the fourth quarter.

Langsle had the ball and likely only one more chance to score a touchdown. She had seen the team put in this position many times before. She knew if they were smart, they would give the ball to Gus. He is always open. But knowing them, they were going to end up counting on Buff to do everything. Both teams lined up knowing these next twenty seconds determined the value of their last hour.

Nathan stood in the stands with his third soft pretzel. The quarters of this game somehow were longer than the clock said they would be. He thought he would be home thirty minutes ago. They kept stopping to talk about downs and fouls. *Just play the game.* A freshman in the stand behind Nathan tapped him on the shoulder.

“Can I get a piece of your pretzel?” the child asked Nathan with a slight lisp due to his braces.

“No,” responded Nathan.

“I will trade you a piece of gum for it.”

Nathan sat and pondered. This was an important decision. *On one hand I could get a piece of gum. That could potentially have flavor for hours. Pretzels are temporary, but gum is forever.* Although he had to consider the possibility it was fruit flavored gum. *If that were true, the flavor would last minutes at most, and I would just be dissatisfied after a moment of satisfaction.* Nathan realized the weight of such a decision.

On the field, sweat crept into Buff’s eyes. He tried to blink it out. He looked around at his teammates. They stood still and tense, ready for whatever came next. He assessed the numerous plays he could make as quarterback. *Would Gus be open as receiver? Is defense running zone or man coverage? Maybe I will need to call an audible if their coverage is too good.* Buff calculated all of this in the split second before the ball was thrown back. **Thump.** The ball fell into his hands. Buff looked to see if anyone was open. To the side, Gus lifted his hands up in the air. *Nah. I got this.* Buff stuck his head down and put the football to his side. He opened his legs and began to run. He was going to finish this game.

“LOOK OUT!” he heard. Buff ducked as a purple blur flew over him. Buff then leapt over another person that dove at his feet.

*Fifty...*

*Fourty...* Buff could hear two kids running from behind him. His legs began to grow numb, but he kept pushing.

*Thirty...*

“KEEP RUNNING, BUFF!” he heard his coach scream.

*TWENTY...*

*T-urgh.* Buff was hit from the side and slid across the turf.

Nathan inhaled sharply then began coughing. He gasped for air. One of the freshmen smacked him on the back but it did nothing. Another tried to wrap their arms around him to perform the Heimlich Maneuver but was only able to reach up to Nathan’s waist. Nathan coughed out air quietly as another freshman pulled on his shoulders to try and get him to sit down. Once Nathan sat down, this freshman placed their hands underneath his rib cage and repeatedly pulled in. Nathan’s vision blurred as his chest erupted in pulsations of pain.

***HYUCK!***

Nathan spit out a piece of gum then leaned over. He gagged then vomited out pieces of chewed up pretzels. He waited until the gagging stopped then spit out the remaining bits of now spicy pretzel. He leaned back up.

“How did you know to do that?” he asked.

“We just had a speaker come in and teach us that last week,” the middle schooler responded.

“Wait? How old are you-”

Nathan remembered why he choked on his gum in the first place. He got up and looked to the field. Buff’s legs were stretched across the field. They twisted and turned like the wires on earbuds. They looked chewy? Nathan began to gag as he ran for the public restroom. As he ran into the bathroom, he heard people from the audience scream in horror.

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Nathan walked out to his car in the parking lot and when his car was in view, he saw two people leaning against it. They appeared to be kissing.

“Oh, please don’t let that be a football player...” Nathan muttered.

As Nathan approached the car it became clear it was not two people kissing. A large bat-like creature held Buff by his neck in the air. The bat monster stared directly at Buff’s face. The air seemed to be flowing from Buff to the bat monster. Buff wriggled slowly to no avail.



Nathan stepped back and tripped. He fell to the ground and the monster immediately turned its face toward Nathan. Its eyes glowed bright green. He threw Buff to the ground.

“Why are you intervening, Nathan? Your time to die has yet to come.”

“I really wasn’t planning on intervening, you can just keep doing what you’re doing,” Nathan responded.

“Let me guess, this is your car?” Famine said.

“Maybe.”

Famine kicked the car, leaving a large dent and ripping a hole in the side of the car.

“Come on, man, that was unnecessary,” Nathan said quietly.

“It’s a Subaru. I am doing you a favor.”

“What’s wrong with a Subaru?” Nathan said.

“It’s a dad’s car,” Famine said.

“Love is what makes a Subaru a Subaru,” Buff muttered.

Famine slapped Buff in the face and Buff fell unconscious again.

“Does your life draining powers age their humor too?” Nathan asked.

“No, that is just your friend’s sense of humor.” Famine responded.

“Hmm. Although friend is a strong word, I would consider us more coworkers,” said Nathan.

Nathan and Famine stared at each other.

“So, can I get to my car?” asked Nathan.

“Let me ponder that,” said Famine.

Famine lunged at Nathan. Nathan ducked then pulled his car keys from his pocket. **BEEP. BEEP.** The back of his car began to slowly open. Nathan ran for the trunk of his car and as he reached it Famine’s claws pulled at his legs. He grabbed onto the back of his car and reached in.

Nathan loosened his grip and was pulled toward Famine. Once Nathan was close to Famine, he jabbed an ice scraper at his face. While Famine recoiled, Nathan got back up and swung wildly at Famine. Famine ripped the ice scraper from Nathan’s hands and threw it off in the distance. He grabbed Nathan by the throat and lifted him into the air.

“I can sense it. You won’t take as long to drain as Buff,” Famine said.

Nathan shook his body in the air, but he couldn’t escape Famine’s grasp. The world became fuzzy as he heard a dull hum. The only things that were clear were two big green eyes. He tried to look away, but he couldn’t. The smell of horse feces clogged his nose hastening how fast things began to blur.



“Knock it off!”

Nathan was dropped to the ground and he gasped for air. He looked up to see Katie on Famine’s back with her arms around his neck. Famine reached behind him and lifted her off his back. He held her in front of him.

“I was hoping to kill you all at once, perhaps that may happen by the end of the night. War, Death, and Conquest will be envious. They so crave to kill, alas, they shall starve for now,” Famine croaked.

She kicked off Famine to escape his grasp and flew backwards in the air. Katie flipped midair and landed on her feet. She ran at Famine. He clapped his wings and a gust of air blew out. The burst of wind knocked Nathan and Katie to the ground. Famine flew into the hair then landed on her, pinning her to the ground with his claws.

“I wish this fight could last longer. It’s been so long since someone escaped my essence drain.”

“Get off of me now!” Katie yelled.

Katie’s eyes lit up green and she grabbed on to Famine’s legs. Famine lurched backward and hunched over onto the ground. He began to vomit violently. Katie ran off. Nathan got up and looked at his car. *Far too damaged to drive.* He saw Buff on the ground. Slowly wrinkles began to fade from his face. Nathan grabbed him and lifted him up while awkwardly holding him by the waist.

“Erm, sorry, Buff. I don’t really know how to hold someone up, but we have to get out of here,” Nathan said.

“Hey, Nathan. Funny seeing...you here. Did you see me at the game...I can stretch now...I wonder how I did that,” Buff said quietly.

“I don’t know, but we got to get out of here.”

“Whatever...you say...buddy.”

Famine continued spewing out a green fluid onto the ground. **VROOM! CRASH!** A Jeep smashed into Famine knocking him down the parking lot. Katie rolled down the passenger window and shouted, “GET IN!”

75¢



# Transaction Tavern: Season 1 - Issue 4

## The First Quarter



After a fearful encounter with Famine our heroes escape to find their fellow cashier comrades. What awaits them at the Tavern?

Nathan, Buff, and Katie drove together down one of the many empty roads in Langsle. Nathan and Katie sat in the front seat. Buff was sitting up and buckled while unconscious in the back seat. Drool slowly slipped out of his mouth. "Making Love Out of Nothing at All" by Air Supply played in the car. Nathan looked out of the car window as Katie and him sat in silence. Nathan kept opening his mouth to talk, but then closing it. *Somehow after everything that just happened her hair still looked so beautiful, just like Nutella.*

"What station is this?" asked Nathan.

"It's called 80s All Day and Night. Do you want me to change it?"

"No, you're good. I mean it's good. Not you are good. Not that you are bad, just it wasn't what I was talking about," he said before blushing and looking back out the window.

"I knew what you meant," she said. She laughed quietly.

Nathan and Katie sat in silence. Nathan looked forward while watching Katie from the corner of his eye.

"Wow this song is pretty long," he said.

"Yeah, I guess it is," she said with a small smile on her face.

He looked out the window again and tried to rub off a smear on the window from his nose. All they passed were car dealerships, fast food restaurants, and gas stations.

"We are heading to the Transaction Tavern. Buff stretched out across the field and a bat monster appeared then vomited after touching me. Did I do that to him?" she asked.

"Your eyes lit up green before it happened, so I think it was you," he said.

"Ugh, green is not a good color for me."

"Maybe both you and Buff got powers?"

"But why? This kind of stuff doesn't happen to people like us."

"What if it has to do with that night with Critical Point?" Nathan asked.

"Maybe. We can see if Richard or Scott have any idea what is going on."

He nodded then pulled out his phone to check the time. 8:37 P.M. Nathan reached for the volume dial on the car and turned it down.

“Hey, Katie,” Nathan said as he turned his head toward her, “I have been meaning to ask you this for a while and with everything going on I just to get this off my chest. Would you go to Homecoming with me?”

“Now is not the time for that,” she paused before saying, “What do you mean anyway, like as friends?”

“Sure.”

“Nathan, we just work together. You seem like a fine person, but I barely know anything about you.

“Yeah, that makes sense.”

“I’m sorry. I don’t mean to be mean or anything.”

“It’s all good. I get it.”

**click. click. click.** Katie turned on her turn signal then pulled into the Transaction Tavern parking lot. Once parked, she opened her door and got out of the car.

Nathan reached for his door handle and she said, “Just stay here and watch Buff. I should be right back.”

Nathan sat back in his seat and watched her go through the automatic doors.

“Yikes, man...that was rough,” Buff said before licking spit off his lips. He looked down at the wet stain on his letterman’s jacket and wiped the drool from his chin.

“What do you know? You have been drooling all over yourself the past ten minutes.”

“That was so awkward I was pulled back to the land of the living. I kept pretending to be asleep cause I couldn’t bear to make it stop,” Buff said as he smiled.

“Glad you found a way to shake off what that bat did to you,” Nathan said sarcastically.

“Please, that was nothing compared to the morning after the last party I was at.”

“You can’t hurt a guy for trying.”

“Eh, when it is like that you can. What are you doing just asking her to Homecoming out of nowhere? This isn’t middle school.”

“Alright, so maybe I’m not an expert,” said Nathan.

“You have to talk to a girl for a while before you start saying stuff like that. There is a whole process to this kind of thing.”

“Well when was somebody going to tell me that?”

Buff leaned up from the back seat and said, “I am planning to ask her to Homecoming, and we have been talking for the past couple weeks. I will give you some pointers if you promise to stop staring at Katie all the time. For the greater good of humanity someone has to get you to stop flirting with her.”

“Deal.”

“Good,” Buff said as he leaned back in his seat and closed his eyes again.

Meanwhile, in the Transaction Tavern Katie approached the customer service kiosk. It wasn't even nine 'o'clock yet and the store was empty. Richard was sitting at the kiosk staring at a Sudoku book with his glasses on his head. Scott was next to him eating a steaming bowl of mac'n'cheese. He had one hand resting on his belly and the other holding his phone.

“Follow You Down” by Gin Blossoms played from the store's speakers.

As Katie approached them, Richard muttered, “Damn, another cus-oh hey, Katie! You aren't on shift till tomorrow, what are you doing here?”

“What music are you playing in the store?”

“I believe I asked the first question.”

“Nathan, Buff, and I were attacked about an hour ago at the football game by Famine. Buff and I have powers and I think it put a target on our back,” she said.

“I see. It's Gin Blossoms. I play it late at night for Jeff,” Richard said. He set down his Sudoku book and stood up to stretch.

“You hearing this, Scott?” Richard asked.

“Yep,” Scott said without looking up from his phone.

“Are you sure it was Famine, we never even got a good look at the guy,” Richard asked.

“Of course it was him, there aren't many bat-people running around town,” she said.

“I just have trouble taking actions in relation to these claims as I-” Richard began to say. The automatic doors opened. Nathan and Buff ran inside and past them all.

“THERE IS A CRAZY AXE LADY OUT THERE! RUN!” Nathan screamed as he ran past them.

### **CRASH!**

An axe that looked to be made from hundreds of dog tags melted together shattered the window and crashed into the ground next to Katie. A woman wearing Spartan armor made of the same material walked through the broken window at the front of the store.



“War is full of battles and battles are full of casualties. This is just another battle in the war for North-East Point,” she said. War opened her hand and the axe flew back to it.

“War?” Katie said.

Scott and Richard pushed past Katie and ran into the bare essentials aisle. She broke into a sprint shortly after and ran into the soda aisle.

“Run if you like. A true soldier doesn’t die with their tail between their legs,” War said before throwing her axe again.

“I haven’t been a soldier for a long-time lady!” Scott shouted as he ran.

“I just work at a subpar grocery store. I’m not above running!” Richard added.

An axe flew past them cutting Scott’s tie.

Katie heard the axe fly past them and yelled over the aisle, “Careful about the recall!”

“WHAT?” Scott screamed.

Richard pushed Scott to the side of the aisle. Flour flew off the shelves from the force of Scott and the axe flew back toward War.

**thunk. thunk. thunk.**

“She is on top of the aisles, keep moving!” Scott yelled before continuing to sprint down the aisle.

Richard grabbed a bag of flour and kept running. As he ran down the aisle, he took a key from his pocket and ripped a whole in the bag. He threw it into the air and a white cloud spread through the store. Katie approached the end of the aisle and stopped suddenly before running into Buff who stood by the endcap.

“I’m here to save you, Nathan and Jeff are out back,” Buff said.

“What are you going to do, tackle her?” she asked.

Before Buff could answer, Scott then Richard erupted from the aisle next to them with flour covering their clothes.

“KEEP GOING, OUR CARS ARE OUT BACK!” Scott shouted as he and Richard ran through a swinging door to the back of the store. Buff grabbed Katie’s hand and they followed them out.

**THUNK!** War landed on the ground which pushed the cloud of flour away from her. She looked around and saw the swinging door move back and forth slowly.

In the back, Scott and Richard got ready to start their cars. Buff and Katie got into the back of Richard’s car. Jeff and Nathan stood by Scott’s car continually pulling at the door handles until he finally unlocked them. **beep. beep.** Scott sat down in the driver’s seat. Nathan and Jeff kept pulling at their handles.

“IT ISN’T OPENING!” Nathan screamed.

“STOP PULLING ON THE HANDLES!” Scott yelled back.

**beep. beep.** Nathan and Scott opened their doors and jumped into the back of the car.

“GO! GO! GO!” Jeff shouted.

“I’M TRYING!” Scott yelled.

**VROOM! VROOM!**

As War walked out back, she saw the lights of the cars off in the distance.

“No matter. Those that run from War are caught by Conquest,” she said.



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# Transaction Tavern: Season 1 - Issue 5

## The Second Quarter



Our heroes have regrouped after fleeing from War. Now it is time they discuss their next course of action!

The Transaction Tavern employees sat down at a red, velvet booth in Tom's Diner. Far up on a hill with pink neon lights, this diner was the only place with style in the Langsle area. As they sat down, Nathan looked around and saw three families and one couple eating in the diner. *Alright, no bat people or Spartan women. As long as the other Acolytes don't look like a middle-aged man, I'm safe.* Jeff, Katie, and Buff sat down on one side of the booth. Nathan, Scott, and Richard sat down on the other. Over the clatter of plates and chatter of people the Transaction Tavern employees discussed what to do next.

"So, what is going on?" Jeff asked.

"It appears we are under attack by The Acolytes," Scott said.

"Oh, so now you believe me?" Katie said.

"Our recent attack leads me to believe your story," Scott said.

"If you had just listened to me, we could have been out of there in time," she said.

"It's in the past. We need to think about what we are going to do next," Richard said.

"I say we go to the police," Scott said.

"They aren't going to believe us. Besides, Critical Point said The Acolytes have this whole town under their control. Who's to say the police aren't under their control too," Buff said.

"Why are they hunting us? We just work at a grocery store," Jeff asked.

"Oh, crap! I don't suppose you locked up the store before we left Scott. Did you?" Richard asked.

"Of course I didn't. I was too busy running for my life."

"Bigger fish to fry I suppose," Richard said.

"What would you like to eat?" a waiter asked. He seemed to appear out of nowhere they were so deep in conversation.

"Well I could go for a-" Jeff began to say.

"We aren't hungry, but we will take something to drink," Richard said.

"What would you all like?" he asked as he flipped out a small notepad.

"Water."

“Water.”

“Water.”

“Water.”

“Water.”

“A chocolate milkshake,” Jeff said.

“Ok, that will be out in a few minutes,” the waiter said before walking off.

“I am not covering that for you,” Richard said.

“Well it’s rude to take a booth without spending any money. Can’t it count as a company expense?” Jeff asked.

“In what way is that a company expense?” Richard asked.

Katie said, “I think the better question is in what way do we interest The Acolytes. I think it’s because we are starting to get powers. First Buff could stretch then I touched Famine and made him sick,” Jeff scooted away from Katie and closer to the wall, “I can turn it on and off, Jeff...It probably has something to do with the night when Critical Point attacked. I think anyone with powers is bad for The Acolyte’s business.”

“You’re probably right. I haven’t seen a superhero around these parts in years, not since S-Day,” Richard said.

“Why haven’t I gotten my powers yet?” Scott asked.

“Maybe we all had different levels of exposure when Critical Point exploded,” Nathan said.

“Do you think John...” Jeff began to say.

“No. He was confirmed dead,” Scott said.

“Hey, shouldn’t our drinks be out by now?” Buff asked while leaning back in the booth.

“Probably backed up,” Scott said.

“I don’t think so. Look around,” Katie said.

The diner was empty.

“I think we should leave,” Katie said.

“Not till we have a plan,” Scott said.

“You know you keep making crappy plays Scott. First you got John killed when he was going to stop Critical Point, and from how it sounds, you didn’t believe Katie when she was right earlier. Who said you get to make the calls?” Buff asked as he sat up and peered across the table.

“My milkshake isn’t out so I think we should stay for a bit and make a plan,” Jeff added.

“We vote right now. I say we wait till our powers are online then fight them head on. They wouldn’t be expecting it,” Buff said.

“I’ll just go with whatever everyone else votes on,” Nathan said.

“I say we go to the police,” Scott said.

“For me?” Buff asked as he raised his hand. Katie raised her hand with him.

“For my plan?” Scott asked as he raised his hand. Richard and Jeff raised their hands.

Buff rolled his eyes then said, “This has been as useful as our union.” He looked across the table and saw a red dot on Scott.

“GET DOWN!” Buff yelled as he stretched out his arm to pull Katie down with him. **BANG!** Everyone ducked and a bullet flew past where Scott’s head was. Scott flipped the table over to cover the window.

“We can’t go out front to the cars! We have to go out back and lose him in the woods!” Scott said as everyone knelt in the booth. They bumped shoulders as they huddled together.

“How do we know it is safe to move?” Nathan asked.

“Give me your shoe, Nathan,” Scott said.

“Why mine? What about Buff’s shoe?” Nathan asked,

“You have two of your own, Scott,” Buff said.

“Fine,” Scott said.

Scott took off his shoe and threw it up by the window. **BANG!** Scott picked his shoe back up and saw a hole in the top and bottom of it. He put it back on.

“It isn’t safe to move. Buff, can you stretch out and cover the windows?” Scott asked.

“I don’t know how to stretch out on command, and even if I could, I’m not sure what would happen if he shot me when I’m stretched out,” he said.

“This is an absolutely horrendous position to be in. We know he has a sniper rifle, but he could have grenades too,” Scott said.

**Klank. klink. klink.** A small cylindrical container rolled next to them. **Hss.** Smoke started pouring out of the grenade and surrounding them.

“Well that answers that,” Richard said.

“We can move through the smoke, this is perfect!” Katie said.

“Hold up, if this guy has smoke grenades, he probably has heat vision too. That means we can’t run for the woods either,” Scott said.

**Ding!** The bell to the front door rung. **thunk. thunk. thunk. thunk.** The sound of boots hitting the tiled floor slowly moved in their direction.

“be quiet. once he gets closer i’ll disarm him,” Scott whispered.

**thunk. thunk. thunk. thunk.** Scott could smell gunpowder.

“yeah, we are just waiting to die right here. i got this,” Buff whispered.

“wait buff,” Scott whispered back as Buff adjusted himself to a crouch. Buff stood still and listened.

**thunk...**

**thunk...**

Buff leapt into the smoke. He collided with a man wearing a military vest and fell to the ground. A gun slid out of the man’s hands and to the other end of the diner. Buff put his hands together and slammed them down on the man’s head. **thud.** Buff’s hands bounced off something hard.

“What?” Buff questioned.

The man tapped the side of his head and his motorcycle helmet visor lit up with a bright blue target on it.



His boots collided with Buff and Buff flew back against the wall. **thud!**

“Five versus one! We got this!” Nathan said.

Conquest got up. His bright blue target glowed in the smoke. Nathan ran at him.

Conquest slapped Nathan. Conquest swung with such force that the smoke moved around his motion. Nathan’s head spun to the side then he collapsed to the ground.

Conquest raised his hand and held up four fingers.

Richard ran at Conquest and swung to uppercut him. Conquest sidestepped him then wrapped his arms around Richard’s chest and charged forward. He knocked Richard into Jeff. Katie appeared out of the smoke and reached forward. Conquest stepped back then pulled rope off his utility belt. He grabbed Katie’s hands and wrapped them together then kicked her down. He raised his hand with only the pointer finger sticking up.

“At least this Acolyte is quiet. Your associates are quite irritating,” Scott said.

Conquest waved his hand forward for Scott to attack him.

“A fool moves first.”

Conquest reached for one of the guns on his back.

“Ok fine, I’ll go first.”

Scott swung at Conquest and Conquest stopped it with his palm. Conquest jabbed at Scott's stomach with his other hand then rolled to the side and kicked at Scott's feet. Scott evaded his kick then grabbed the table he had put against the window. He spun it around and with a grunt he threw it at Conquest. Conquest grabbed the table and stopped it midair.

Conquest threw it to the side.

Scott moved toward Conquest and Conquest reached on his back to grab an assault rifle by the muzzle with both his hands. Conquest swung it at Scott. Scott stopped it midair then Conquest rammed his helmet against Scott and Scott stepped backwards dazed. Conquest threw the gun at Scott and hit him in the head with the stock of the rifle. Scott collapsed to the ground. The smoke slowly began to dissipate.

**BANG! BANG! BANG!** Bullets flew around Conquest. Jeff stood at the other end of the diner with the gun that flew out of Conquest's hand when Buff tackled him. **click. click. click.**

"I never liked guns anyway," Jeff said as he threw it to the ground.

Conquest pulled a pistol off his belt and pointed it at Jeff.

"I also never got that milkshake," Jeff said.

**BANG!** Jeff's eyes lit up green. **crack.** The bullet bounced off Jeff and lodged into Conquest's helmet. Katie got up and touched Conquest with her elbow. He collapsed to the ground. The sound of gagging came from within the helmet as Conquest struggled to remove it. Buff stood to his feet then reached out his hand and stretched his arm around Conquest. **CRASH!** Buff threw him out the window. Nathan threw up a little in his mouth at the sight of Buff's extended extremity.

"Nice work, Jeff," Richard said.

Buff looked out the window and noticed the tires to their cars were slashed.

"We are going to have to keep going on foot. They slashed your tires," he said.

"Let's move while he is distracted!" Richard said as he led everyone out the back of the diner.

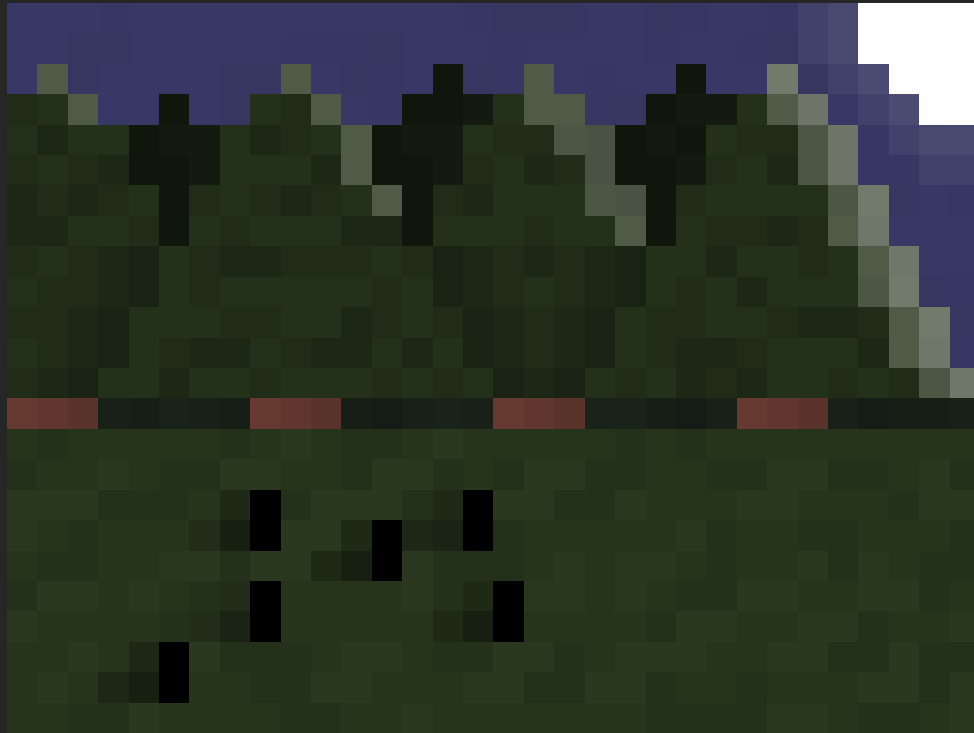
"Wish I had known we would be doing this before I ruined my shoe," Scott said.

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# Transaction Tavern: Season 1 - Issue 6

## Halftime



*On the run, our heroes take a breather in the woods.*



“How much longer until we get to the police station?” Jeff asked.

“Same amount as when you asked just a bit ago,” Buff grumbled.

“It can’t be the same amount of time left, at least a minute has passed,” Jeff said.

“Well there you go, now just do the math,” Buff said.

“About twenty more minutes, Jeff,” Richard said.

Nathan rubbed the bruise on his face as he looked up at the moon. He scanned the forest around them. *No Acolytes, just trees.* Buff reached to hold Katie’s hand as they walked side by side. She lightly held on to his calloused hand. The wind slowly blew past them as the trees calmly rocked back and forth. A shooting star flew over them.

“I am sorry for how I have acted. I know I can be controlling,” Scott said.

“It’s ok, Scott,” Katie said.

“I wasn’t always this way. In my last job when people made mistakes they died. I guess with what has been happening that part of me came back,” he said.

“You’re alright, Scott. I appreciate your concern,” Buff said.

“Aw, Scott cares about us,” Richard said in a mocking tone.

“You know people abbreviate Richard to Dick?” Scott said.

“*WHAT! Really?*” Richard said sarcastically with a smirk.

“We are kinda like superheroes right now. Taking down bad guys and stuff like that,” Nathan said.

“I certainly hope we aren’t. City folk hate heroes these days. Lucky for us it never quite trickled down to the suburbs,” Richard said.

“What even happened in Hope City that day?” Katie asked.

“I forget. It was a long time ago at this point. You would have all been pretty young, it was around the early two-thousands,” Richard said.

“Around when ‘Nine in the Afternoon’ was on the radio?” Scott asked.

“No, it was earlier than that,” Richard said.

“I thought ‘Nine in the Afternoon’ was an eighties song,” Nathan said.

“Yeah, that came out in the eighties,” Buff said.

“What are you all talking about? I was alive in the eighties. ‘Nine in the Afternoon’ did not come out then,” Richard said.

“*Panic!* At the Disco sung that,” Katie said with an emphasis on the panic.

“Why did you say it like that?” Buff asked.

“What do you mean?” she asked.

“Why did you say panic louder than the other words?” Buff asked.

“It’s because they have an exclamation in their name after the word panic. Why else would they put that there except to put emphasis on it,” Scott said.

“Your excess of knowledge about Panic! At The Disco is eerie, Scott,” Richard said.

“Us fans have to look out for each other,” Scott said as looked back and winked at Katie.

“I thought that band was for angsty teenagers, Scott,” Jeff said.

“Well at least I don’t listen to a dead band, Jeff,” Scott said.

“Gin Blossoms is not a dead band,” Jeff said, “They are hibernating.”

“They’ve been coasting off of ‘Hey Jealousy’ for about thirty years,” Scott said.

“Wait, I thought that song was released in the early two-thousands,” Buff said.

“You may think that as it’s so timeless,” Jeff said.

“You are selling ‘Found Out About You’ short, Scott. Gin Blossoms had a lot of hits,” Richard said.

“So, we see where Richard’s allegiances fall now, eh?” Scott said.

“Well after listening to it every day you grow to appreciate it,” Richard said.

“I bet no one here likes what I listen to. My taste is kind of indie,” Nathan said.

“I guarantee I’ve heard it,” Buff said.

“You ever hear of Peach Pit?” Nathan asked.

“Yes,” Buff, Katie, and Richard said at the same time.

“Even you, Richard!?!?” Nathan exclaimed.

“Who hasn’t listened to ‘Seventeen’? It is a well-crafted song that makes me feel young again,” he said.

“Yeah, that is a pretty good song,” Buff said.

“You know what would be pretty good? If we got to the police station soon,” Jeff said.

“Jeff, if you complain one more time, I will demote you at the Transaction Tavern,”

Scott said.

“We’ll be lucky if you even get the chance to do that, Scott,” Richard said.

“Haha! The Acolytes got another thing coming if they think I won’t be returning to my nine to five!” Scott said.

“There isn’t much left, War tore it to shreds,” Katie said.

“I knew we should have picked up that super villain insurance package...” Scott said.

“While we are out here, you three would be wise to test your powers,” Richard said.

Katie looked at her hands

“Erm. Maybe you shouldn’t test your powers right now,” Jeff said.

“Jeff, think fast,” Scott said.

“Wh-” Jeff said before Scott slapped him across the face. Jeff rubbed the red handprint left on his face.

“You’re going to need to think faster than that. What about you, Buff?” Scott asked.

“I don’t need to test my powers,” Buff said.

“Really? You have only used them when you were full of adrenaline. You just said before you didn’t know how to use your powers,” Scott said.

“I figured it out since then.”

“Really?”

“Yep.”

“Then do it right now.”

“Fine.”

Buff stopped walking then punched the air.

“That’s what I thought,” Scott said.

“You’re too tense. I bet you have to stay loose if you want your arm to stretch. Push your arm forward without clenching your hand,” Katie said.

Buff pulled his hand back the pushed it forward. His arm extended until his hand collided with Jeff. It bounced off him.

“I was ready that time,” Jeff said.

Nathan averted his eyes from Buff’s extended arm.

“Nice work, Buff!” Katie said.

“Thanks. Now how do I pull it back?”

“Maybe just swing your arm back?” Jeff suggested.

Buff pulled his arm back and it just dragged against the ground.

“Guys, seriously, what do I do?”

“Try making a fist,” Katie said.

Buff clenched his hand and his arm retracted slightly. Scott picked up Buff’s elongated arm and put it on his shoulders.

“You can keep working on that, but we gotta keep moving,”

Jeff grabbed some of Buff’s extended arm and said, “Let me give you a hand with that extended hand,”

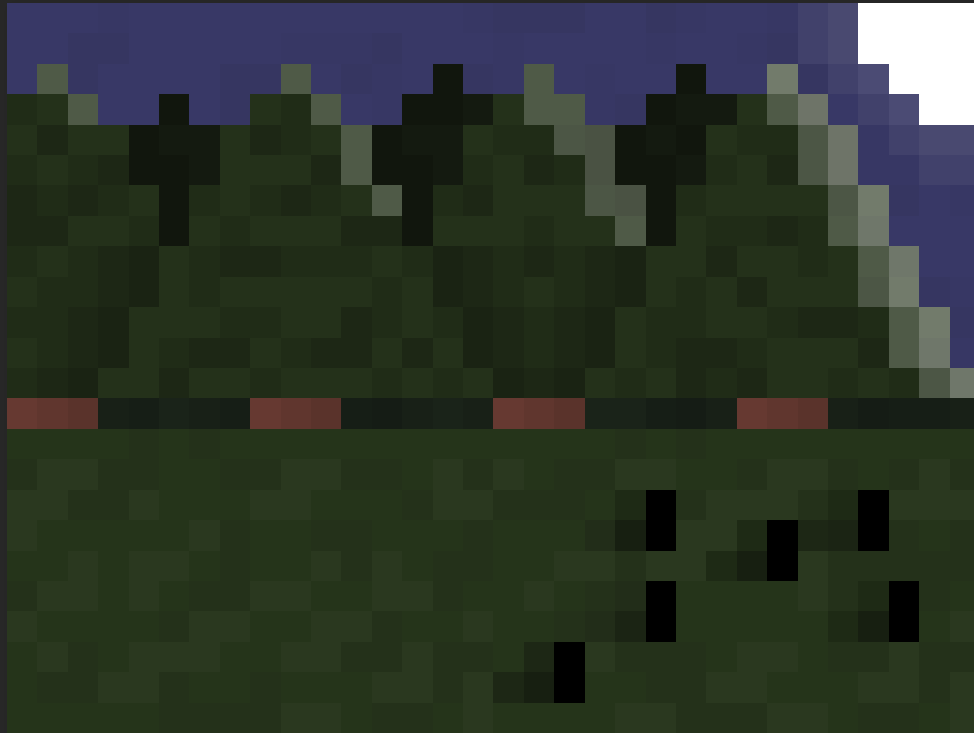
The Transaction Tavern employees laughed as they continued walking through the forest.

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# Transaction Tavern: Season 1 - Issue 7

## The Third Quarter



*Approaching the police station, the employees prepare for Death!*

The Transaction Tavern employees continued walking through the forest. Nathan rubbed his ankles to try and dull their pain.

“HEY LOOK! THE POLICE STATION!” Jeff yelled as he took off running.

“Hold up, Jeff!” Richard yelled at him.

The police station was a small brick building with a sign aptly stating “Police Station” over it. It had two windows at the front and consisted of a main room with one back room. The employees entered the building and noticed no one was at the front desk. The station was empty with papers on the desks and pens not put away.

“Are they all on break?” Nathan asked.

Scott reached for the coffee mug on the front desk. It felt hot.

“Something is wrong, they were here recently,” Scott said.

“Wow, your detective skills are remarkable. I could have figured that out based on the fact a guy is sneaking out the back door right now,” Richard said as he pointed to an officer attempting to sneak out of the building.

The officer opened his eyes wide then ran for the back door. Buff chased after him.

“HEY WAIT! WE NEED YOUR HELP!” Buff yelled.

**SLAM! Click.** The police office closed the door behind him. Buff twisted the door handle, but the door was jammed.

“I would say our chances of being ambushed are high right now,” Scott said.

“Go to the police station he told us,” Buff said mockingly.

“Don’t look at me, we voted on this,” Scott said.

“Do you think the police are ok?” Jeff asked.

“In all likelihood they are. I assume The Acolytes told them to stay out of their way,” Richard said.

“Well as long as they are alive then I don’t feel guilty looting them,” Jeff said as he ruffled through the drawers in the police officer’s desks.

“Everyone split up and look for something of use,” Scott said.

Richard and Scott went to inspect the entrance as Buff and Katie went to look for supplies. Nathan went to help Jeff search.

“What do you think of these windows?” Scott asked as he pointed at them.

“Very translucent. Easy to see Acolyte’s through. Small, so low chance of breach,” Richard said.

“What about the door?”

“Very opaque. Hard to see Acolyte’s through. Human size, high chance of breach.”

They laughed then continued inspecting the station.

At a file cabinet, Buff sifted through files as Katie checked some nearby desks.

“What are you hoping to find, Buff?”

“I don’t know, something about one of The Acolytes.”

“What more is there to know?”

“We don’t know anything about the last one. You always scout the enemy team.”

“Knowing their personal lives or past isn’t going to help us now.”

Buff closed the drawer then said, “Yeah, you’re right.”

Katie looked at his letterman’s jacket and noticed “Haider” written on it. She put her finger on it then said, “I think you should be more concerned with them finding out stuff about you if you keep wearing stuff with your name on it.”

“I can fix that.”

Buff went to a nearby desk and ripped off a piece of paper from one of the police reports. He scribbled something on it then taped it over his last name.

Katie read it out loud, “Asskicker?”

“Yeah, is there anything wrong with it?”

“Nope.”

They stared at each other.

Nathan stood behind Jeff as he searched through drawers.

“Jeff, I’m a little nervous about this all. I know I mentioned earlier how we are kind of like superheroes, but it’s starting to hit me right now.”

"I get that. But what can you do about it? We are sorta stuck here. We either keep pushing forward or die."

"I suppose if I had to pick-"

Nathan was cut short as Jeff shouted, "Take a look at this everyone!"

Scott came over then asked, "Did you find any weapons?"

"No, I found something better."

Jeff threw Buff, Katie, and Nathan a small mask that covered their eyes and the bridge of their nose. He threw Scott and Richard ski masks.

"What are these?" Buff asked.

"Woah these look like superhero masks!" Nathan said as he put it on.

"The correct term for one of those is domino mask, Nathan," Scott said.

"Why do you guys get the ones that cover your whole head?" Katie said.

"Seniority," Scott said as both he and Richard put them over their heads.

"Hey, Scott, can you cut mine open at the top. It's itchy," Richard said.

"Yeah. While I do that, let's get in position. We searched this place clean," Scott said.

-----

Scott and Richard stood on either side of the door at the entrance. Buff, Katie, Nathan, and Jeff hid behind police desks.

**crunch. crunch. crunch.**

Scott waved his arm to alert everyone. They stood ready.

**creakkkkkkk.**

The front door opened and a person in a black suit with a green cloak walked in. She wore a skull mask and had two small scythes hanging from her arms.

Scott lifted his mask then mouthed, "You get her."

Richard lifted his mask up then mouthed, "No. She has knives. You get her!"

"They are scythes," she said.

Scott and Richard slid their masks back down then froze.





“Judging from the cologne I am smelling behind me, there are two old men at the door. One of you is using too much for your own good,” she said as she lifted both of her scythes into her hands.

Nathan nodded his head in agreement from behind the desk.

“I am barely fifty, lady. I am not old like Richard!” Scott said

“It doesn’t matter, just get her!” Richard said.

Richard and Scott charged Death. Death reached her arms up in the air. **Pop! Pop! thunk. thunk.** The scythes flew out of her hand and stuck to the roof. Each scythe was attached by a rope to a device on her wrist. **WHIR!** The devices hummed. Death ran forward as the devices pulled at the ropes which lifted Death into the air. She swung through the air then kicked Richard and Scott in the face. Scott and Richard recoiled as Jeff charged at Death. Death unhooked her scythes then landed on Jeff’s neck. **WHIR!** The scythes retracted back into her hands. She wrapped her legs around his neck and squeezed. Jeff began coughing as his face turned purple. Buff appeared behind a desk and thrust his arm forward. His arm extended toward Death. Death reached her arm out. **Pop!** A scythe burst from her hand and flew at Buff’s extended arm. Before it could cut him, Buff quickly pulled his arm back then dove to the side.

“Katie, can you daze her or whatever you do?” he asked as he laid behind the desks.

“I need some bare skin in order to do that,” she said.

“Help...me...please,” Jeff choked out as he swayed back and forth.

“Wow, your power is much less cool than mine,” he said.

“Two out of four Acolytes isn’t bad,” she said.

“Nathan, why aren’t you out there?” Buff asked.

“Still...choking,” Jeff said.

“Are you kidding me, did you see those scythes she has?” he asked.

“You attacked the guy with guns just a bit ago,” Buff said.

“Yeah well he wasn’t shooting them at us. She is currently swinging those at us,”

Nathan said.

Jeff collapsed to the ground and Death leapt off him. Scott and Richard got back up. Death pointed her arms forward. **Pop! Pop!** The two scythes flew past Scott and Richard. Death pulled her arms toward her chest. One rope began wrapping around Scott and the other around Richard. As it wrapped around them the scythes at the end got closer and closer to cutting them.

“SOMEONE HELP US OUT!” Richard shouted.

“On it!” Buff said.

He slid over the table then reached his arms out. Buff grabbed Death.

“That isn’t stopping the scythes!” Scott said.

**WHIR!** Death retracted the ropes which pulled Scott and Richard, still tied up, past her and into Buff. She retracted the ropes so the scythes were back in her hands. Katie tackled Death to the ground and reached for her mask. Death swung her scythes up and cut Katie’s arm.

“KATIE!” Buff screamed.

Richard’s eyes lit up green.

Time slowed down around him. He tried to run but he couldn't move his legs. He could only move his arms and hands. He spun them and saw the papers around him slowly lift off the table. He kept spinning his arms then time returned to normal. A gust of wind blew forward and knocked into Death. Katie collapsed to the ground. Scott and Buff ran over to her. Scott knelt to assess her wound. Death got back up to her feet. **Pop! Pop!** The two scythes flew forward at Scott and Buff. Buff extended his arm out and grabbed the rope attached to the scythe flying at him then pushed it back. Buff reached out his other hand and missed the second scythe.

"LOOK OUT, SCOTT!" Buff shouted.

Scott clenched his fist. His eyes lit up green. He sidestepped the scythe then grabbed the rope. He ripped it back and Death was pulled toward him. Scott uppercut Death. The skull mask shattered. She flew up and hit the ceiling then fell back to the ground. Death left an imprint on the ceiling. Scott knelt back down and continued assessing Katie's wound.

"She didn't get me that bad," Katie said.

"Just let me check real quick," he said. Scott looked at her arm then helped her up. He cleared his throat then said, "It wouldn't look good for the company if we had an employee die on us."

Katie smiled and Buff hugged her. Jeff coughed then rubbed his neck as he laid on the ground. Nathan and Richard ran to him and helped him up.

"Can we do my plan now?" Buff asked.

"But I still don't have my powers," Nathan said.

"Five out of six will have to be good enough," Buff said.

"So, what is your plan," Jeff asked.

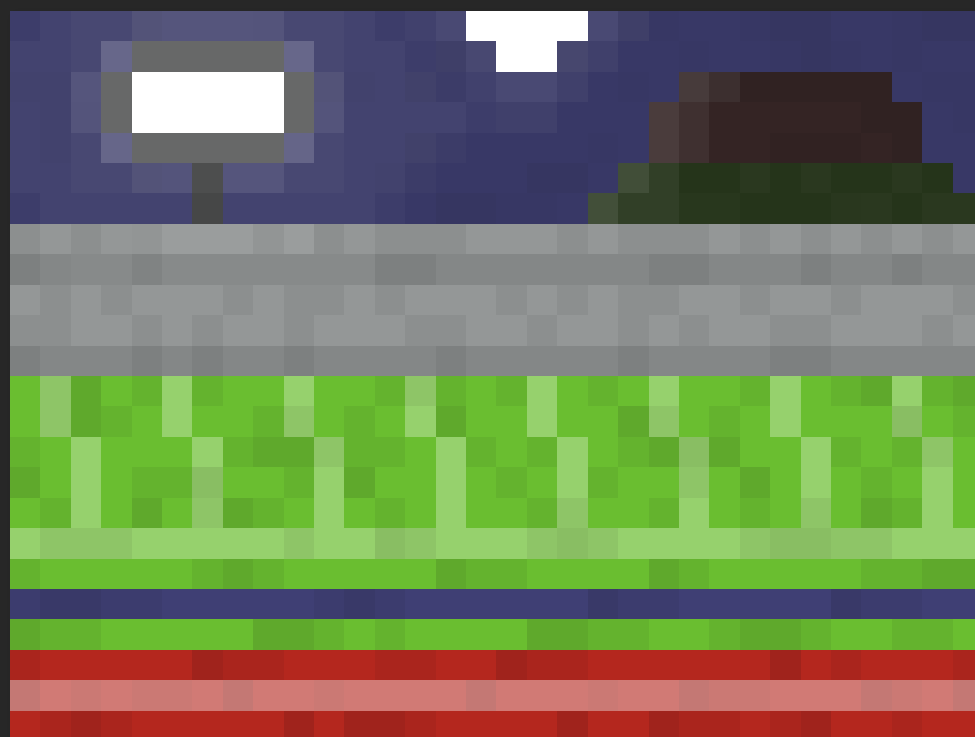
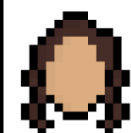
"Well..." Buff began to say.

75¢



# Transaction Tavern: Season 1 - Issue 8

## The Fourth Quarter



The Transaction Tavern employees make their final stand against the fearsome Acolytes!

Richard, Scott, Jeff, Buff, Katie, and Nathan stood on the field by the Langsle High School. Clean and now empty of spectators, they stood waiting for The Acolytes. Nathan held his hand up to his eyes to block out the bright lights shining on the field. *How do they play on this?*

“What is your plan, Buff?” Scott asked.

“It all revolves around Katie. If we can get her to touch all of them, we win. She is their Achilles Heel,” he said as he adjusted the football helmet on his head.

“I don’t think you are using that term right,” Richard said.

“No, I am. It is their weakness, so it is their Achilles Heel,” he said.

“But it is called Achilles Heel because it was *his* heel. You are just listing off a general weakness. For example, bullets aren’t Achilles Heels, they are just deadly,” Richard said.

Buff rolled his eyes then said, “It doesn’t matter. There are four of them and six of us. Nathan can just do whatever. Katie will stand by and wait to sickify them-”

“We are not calling it sickify,” Katie said.

“Terminology is not important. Each of us will take on one Acolyte and once there is an opening, we call in Katie,” Buff said.

“Who takes who?” Richard asked.

“Well Famine is going to fly into the air, and I am the only who can reach him. We need to shatter War’s armor so Scott will take her. Richard, you stand the best chance against Death’s scythes. Conquest has guns so Jeff will have to take him,” Buff said.

“This better work,” Scott said.

“It’s the only play we have left unless we plan on moving to another country,” Buff said.

“There could be worse things,” Scott said.

-----

The Transaction Tavern employees stood together on the field. **SHEW!** Famine landed ten yards away from them. War leapt onto the field from the stands. Death swung from a spotlight onto the field. Conquest cut the chain-link fence open to run in from the parking lot.

“You are even more moronic than your occupation would imply,” Famine said.

“Check the scoreboard freak, four to zero, Transaction Tavern,” Buff said.

“You can play tough pigskin boy, but fear emanates from you,” Famine said.

“You may have beat us as lone soldiers, but now we are an army,” War said.

“You insult the very idea,” Scott said.

“Enough talking, more fighting,” Jeff said as he ran forward and punched Conquest in his helmet.

## The Transaction Tavern

vs.

## The Acolytes



Conquest kept his feet planted and slid back slightly. **SHEW!** Famine flew into the air. Buff reached out his arm and grabbed Famine by the leg. Buff pulled back then was launched into the air. He landed on Famine's back. War threw her axe at Scott. Scott evaded it then stood still. War opened her hand. **thump.** Scott stopped the axe midair. **Pop! Pop!** Death's scythes flew at Richard. Before they could touch him, Richard caught them in a blink of an eye. **WHIR!** Richard let go before he could be pulled in.

"Remove yourself from me, flea," Famine said to Buff as they soared through the air. The Acolytes and Transaction Tavern employees brawled below them.

"I'll show you fear, you hairy rat," Buff said as wind blew past him.

He wrapped his hands around Famine's neck then hopped off his back. Buff hung from Famine's neck slowly pulling him to the ground. In retaliation, Famine put his wings against his chest and began to dive toward Buff below him. Buff stressed his legs to reach the ground. After touching the ground, he pushed his arms up to stop Famine. **THUMP!** War's axe flew out of Scott's hand and into Famine knocking him to the ground.

"Thanks, Scott!" Buff said.

Scott winked then was drop kicked by War.

"Now, Katie!" Buff yelled.

Katie ran toward Famine on the ground. **SHEW!** Famine flew into the air. **CLAP!** Famine slammed his wings together and a gust of wind blew out and knocked Katie back.

"Famine will not be fooled twice," Famine said.

**thunk.** A rock hit Famine in the head. Famine looked to the ground and saw Nathan waving to him.

"THAT'S FOR MY SUBARU!" he shouted.

**SHEW!** Famine tried to fly toward Nathan but was stuck. Buff held onto his leg. Buff had another arm wrapped around a pole to one of the stadium lights. Katie ran up his arms to Famine. **CLAP!** Famine blew a gust of wind at Katie. Katie jumped off Buff's tightrope arm and over the gust of wind. She landed on Famine. Katie touched Famine and he fell toward the ground.

She leapt off him and Buff pulled her back to the ground safely.

**SLAM!** Scott punched War in the chest and left a dent in her armor.

“How many soldiers have you killed to make that armor?” he asked as he held his fists defensively in front of his face.

“Thousands have faced death by my blade.”

“Yeah, well I bet it makes for some crappy armor.”

Scott attempted to punch War. She grabbed his hand then threw him over her and slammed him into the ground. She felt someone’s hand grab onto her helmet. She grabbed it and ripped it off her helmet. Buff tried to retract his arm, but War held tight onto it. She held her other hand out and her axe flew back to her from where it laid on the ground after hitting Famine. She threw Buff so he was between her and the axe then ducked. The axe flew past War and it took Buff with it. The axe smashed into the side of stadium crushing Buff in between the axe and the wall. He collapsed to the ground. Nathan ran to Buff and tried to help him up to no avail. Scott grabbed War’s foot then pulled it out from under her. War reached out her hand and the axe began to fly back to her. Scott grabbed her and then stood up. He held War still with her arms behind her back. She struggled to no avail. **Crunch!** The axe flew into War’s stomach and left a hole in the armor.

“There’s your opening, Katie!” Scott said.

Katie ran toward War. **BANG! BANG! BANG!** Katie dove to the ground as bullets from Conquest flew over her.

“SORRY!” Jeff shouted as he was punched in the face by Conquest.

War slammed her head back and hit Scott. Scott loosened his grip. War summoned her axe from the ground then swung it down at Scott. Scott rolled to the side.

Conquest berated Jeff with punches but Jeff remained still. Jeff grabbed Conquest by the neck and lifted him into the air. Conquest pulled the pin out of a grenade on his belt and threw it at Jeff then slipped out of his grasp. **BOOM!** Jeff coughed and waved away the smoke of the grenade. **BANG!** Smoke came out of the muzzle on Conquest’s sniper rifle as a large bullet bounced off Jeff’s head.



Jeff's vision flashed black and white as he saw two Conquests in front of him. He shook his head, then everything returned to normal. Conquest pulled a pistol out of his belt. **BANG! BANG! BANG!** Conquest approached Jeff as he fired his gun at him. Jeff raised his hand to cover his head. **FWOOSH!** A gust of wind blew over from Richard's arms and slammed into Conquest. Conquest's gun flew out of his hand as he fell to the ground. Richard nodded at Jeff then returned to fighting Death.

**Pop! Pop!** Death swung her arms inward as she shot her scythes out. They closed in around Richard. Off in the distance, Jeff held Conquest down as Katie touched him. Richard spun his arms toward the ground and flew into the air. **FWOOSH! SLAM!** War's axe flew into Richard midair and knocked him into the stands. Death turned to Jeff and ran toward him. Scott swung at War and she stopped his punch midair while she recalled her axe with her other hand. In the distance, Famine stood back up and wiped vomit from his mouth.

"We aren't moving fast enough! My powers are wearing off on Famine!" Katie said.

**SHEW!** Famine took off into the air.

"One second," Scott said as War and him continued to brawl. His face was bright red from exhaustion. He loosened his tie.

"Surrender," War demanded.

"We both know that isn't an option, lady," Scott said as he wiped sweat from his head.

"Then face death," she said as she slammed down her axe.

Scott clapped his hands together and stopped the axe midair. He said, "Actually, I think Death is preoccupied at the moment."

Scott ripped the axe from War's hands then grabbed it by the handle. He swung it at War and War raised her arm to block it. The axe shattered the armor around her arm and bounced back. Scott jabbed War with the other end of the axe then tackled War to the ground. Katie ran over and touched War on the arm. War rolled over and began vomiting.

"Nice work, Katie," Scott said as he got up.

**FWOOSH!** A brown blur flew past them and Scott was knocked to the ground. He slid across the turf then came to a stop. He remained motionless.

“SCOTT!” Katie yelled.

**Pop! Pop!** Across the field, Death’s scythe flew forward and bounced off Jeff.

“Wow! I should have called dibs on you. This is too easy,” Jeff said as he approached Death.

**FWOOSH!** A brown blur came down from the sky and picked up Jeff. Jeff was lifted into the air then screamed as he fell toward the ground. Jeff hit the turf then laid there still.

Nathan ran toward Katie. He hunched over to catch his breath. After breathing in and out, he looked up to her and said, “We have to get out of here, Katie!”

**FWOOSH!** A brown blur flew past Nathan and picked Katie up into the air. In the air, Famine held Katie by her shirt as she struggled. Katie reached for Famine.

“I don’t think I will allow that to happen again,” he said as he dropped Katie.

Nathan ran toward where she was falling. **thud.** Nathan caught her and his knees buckled. He fell to the ground with Katie. **FWOOSH!** Famine landed in front of them as Katie and Nathan got back up. Katie ran toward Famine. **CLAP!** Famine crashed his wings into each other. A gust of wind blew forward and pushed Katie backward into the air. **thud.** Katie landed on the ground. She didn’t get back up. Famine towered over Nathan. As Famine walked toward Nathan, he kept stepping backward until he tripped over a pistol. Nathan grabbed it then stood up.

His hands shook as he pointed it at Famine. **click. click. click.**

“No...no...no...Richard?!?!?”

“Buff?!?!?”

“Scott?!?!?”

“Jeff...”

“katie...”

“There is no one to help you, Nathan,” Famine said as he licked his lips.

“No...somebody is going to come...”

“Who? There are no heroes coming for you, Nathan,” Famine said he approached Nathan.

“Stay away fr-from me,”

Famine’s shadow loomed over Nathan.

“Or what?” Famine said. He grabbed Nathan by the throat and slowly lifted him high into the air. Famine’s claws dug into Nathan’s skin.

“Pl-please put me down. It hurts.”

Famine tightened his grip.

**thud.** Nathan hit Famine in the arm with the butt of the pistol. Famine did not loosen his grip. **Thud!** Famine hit Nathan with his other hand. **Thud!** Nathan coughed up blood. **Thud!** Famine moved his hand from Nathan’s neck to hold him by the shirt instead. Nathan hung limp in the air. Blood trickled out from his nose past his stomach and then dripped off his sneakers.

“You notice how all of your friends got powers except for you? How pathetic. Your friends got exposed to Critical Point’s radiation when they went to protect each other. Meanwhile, you ran because you only cared for yourself. You’ve been a coward this whole time,” Famine said slowly as he examined Nathan’s injuries.

“no...i’m not a...coward,” Nathan muttered. His mouth hurt to open.

“Then fight back, Nathan.”

Nathan hung still.

Famine slammed him down into the field then picked him back up. Turf stuck to Nathan’s face and slowly fell off piece by piece.

“FIGHT BACK!” Famine yelled.

Nathan flinched at the sound of Famine’s voice.

Famine smelled the air then said, “Perfect.”

**thud.** Famine dropped Nathan to the ground. Nathan stood still as he laid sprawled on the ground. **FWOOSH!** Famine flew into the air. He pulled his wings in then dove claw first toward Nathan.

Famine slammed into the turf. Nathan was gone.

75¢



# Transaction Tavern: Season 1 - Issue 9

## Team Meeting



Nathan having barely escaped The Acolytes' grasp finds himself alone in his room. What will he do next?

Nathan appeared in his bed and beneath his blankets that hadn't been washed in weeks. His head laid against his navy pillow. He was back in his room. It was dark and quiet. Nathan sat up and coughed. The domino mask flew off his face as blood splattered out onto his blankets. He struggled to turn on his lamp. Something was caught in his throat. His body shook violently as he tried to cough it up. Hyuck. A small lump of mucus and blood flew out of Nathan's mouth and onto the carpet in his room.

“dad...”

“DAD!!!”

No one came. Nathan sat up on his bed and looked around. He wiped blood from his face with his hand. He stood up and slowly hobbled to his door. He leaned against it for a bit. Nathan opened it up then walked to the kitchen. In the kitchen, he found a note left for him. He picked it up and read it.

“I will be back from work in the morning! There is some casserole in the fridge if you want any. I am so proud of you for going to the game tonight. You showed some real strength!”

Nathan slid down to the ground and started crying.

“But, I'm not strong...”

Nathan's tears grew red as they picked up blood while rolling down his face. Red snot slipped from his nose. He wiped his face with the back of his arm.

Nathan noticed his father's orange and white letterman's jacket hanging on the wall. He reappeared by it with the letter still in his hand. He looked at the chest of the jacket. The last name had faded over time. He felt the worn leather sleeves.

Nathan went to the fridge and grabbed a plate of casserole and put it in the microwave. He grabbed a rag from the cabinet and cleaned the blood from his arms and face. Nathan set the rag down then ran to his room and returned in a new pair of cargo shorts and a fresh plain blue shirt with his bloody domino mask in hand. He delicately cleaned the dry blood off the black mask.

Nathan grabbed the letterman's jacket off the wall and put it on. It fit snugly but the sleeves ended an inch before they reached his wrists. He reappeared by the closet and grabbed bandages. Nathan winced as he wrapped them around his wrists. **beep. beep.** He reappeared by the microwave and took the casserole out then ate it.

Nathan teleported to the sink and put his plate in then disappeared.

Meanwhile, on the field, The Acolytes lined the Transaction Tavern employees up on the field. Conquest would kick their legs out from behind them and once they were on the ground, he'd handcuff their arms together.

"I can just stretch out of these you know?" Buff said.

"Why would you tell them that?" Richard said

Conquest made a pistol with his fingers and pretended to shoot Buff in the head.

"He said he will shoot you if you try," Death said.

"I picked up on that," Buff said.

"Speaking of, why are we still alive?" Scott asked.

"Originally, Famine wanted us to maximize your fear, so we chased you around all night. Then, we were going to kill you one at a time in an 'incredible finale', but someone spent too much time showing off and the weak one slipped away," Death said.

"His powers were an unexpected occurrence," Famine said.

"As I was saying...now we will use you as bait for Nathan. He is dumb enough to come back," Death said.

"They have programs to help people like you," Katie said.

"It is as if pawns believe they should make the moves for the rooks," War said.

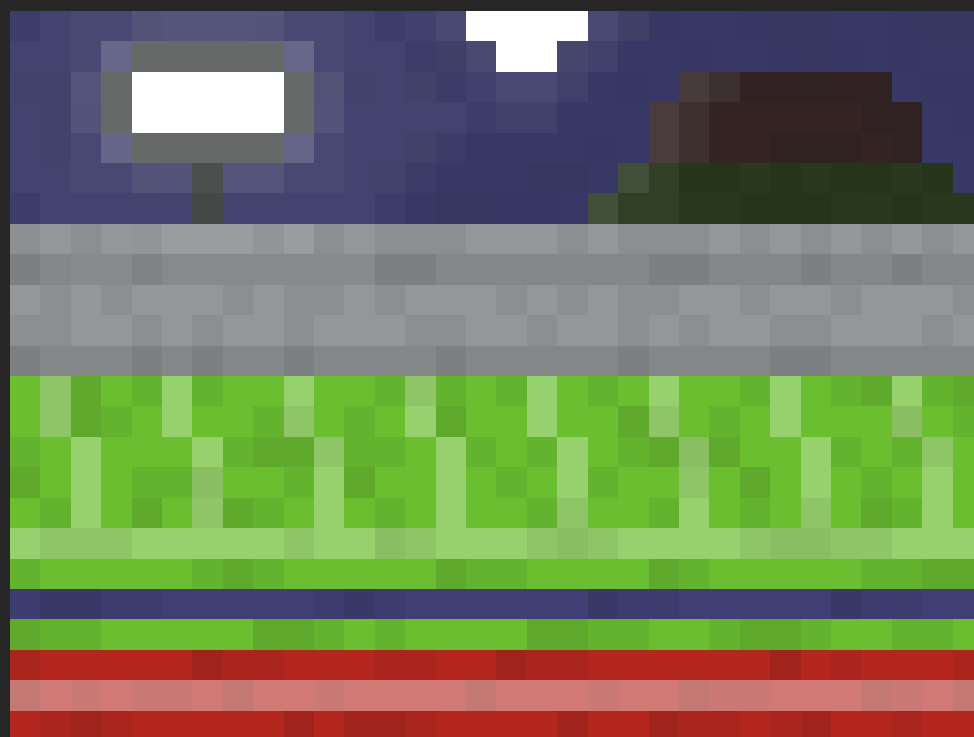
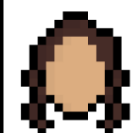
"Keep chess out of your filthy-" Richard said before disappearing from the field.

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# Transaction Tavern: Season 1 - Issue 10

## Audible



Nathan has returned for one final battle with The Acolytes! How will he save his friends? Find out in this issue!

“-mouths,” Richard said.

Richard and Nathan sat in front of the Transaction Tavern at one of the break tables. The parking lot was empty. Crickets chirped as an occasional car drove by.

“My oh my, is it good to see you, Nathan!”

“Good to...see you...too, Richard!” Nathan said as he took heavy breaths.

“Now why are we here? I want to lock up the cash registers as much as the next guy, but we have more pressing concerns. For example, you think you could teleport everyone else out of the field?”

“I can only teleport someone one more time, I think. It takes a lot out of me to teleport someone else.”

“Alright, so take these cuffs off me and let’s get back in there. It’s only a matter of time until The Acolytes stop going for a fancy finale and start killing us off.”

Nathan grabbed Richard’s handcuffs then teleported back to his seat with the cuffs in his hand.

Blood started trickling out of Nathan’s nose.

“Tip your head back, son.”

“Thanks.” Nathan said as he leaned his head back.

“So, why did you teleport me out?”

“Going to be honest, still don’t have complete control of these powers. I was aiming for Scott or Buff. I was hoping they had a plan.”

“I am capable of coming up with a plan, Nathan.”

“Well, hit me with it.”

“We are going to want to distract and disarm.”

-----

“Oof, the union will not be happy with that,” Scott said after Richard disappeared.

“Enough waiting! We tried your way, now we do it mine,” Death said as she gripped her scythes.

“Do not test me frail human,” Famine said.



Death turned toward Famine and pointed her scythes at him. Famine's ears twitched.

"My way it is. The boy has returned."

**CRACKLE.** "Recently" by Jim Croce began playing loudly on the stadium speakers.

Famine collapsed to the ground as his ears shook violently.

"SOMEONE TURN THAT OFF!" he shrieked.

Conquest pointed his assault rifle toward the speakers. Nathan appeared next to him.

He grabbed the gun and disappeared with it. Conquest reached for the pistols on his belt.

Nathan reappeared and grabbed the two pistols. He disappeared.

"ROUND TWO!" Jeff said excitedly as he stood up.

The  
Transaction Tavern

VS.

The Acolytes



Buff stretched out of his zip ties. **POP! POP!** Death shot her scythes at Buff. Scott snapped his zip ties then grabbed Jeff.

“I’d activate your invincibility powers now if I were you,” he said as he grabbed Jeff.

“What do you mean-WOAHHHH!” Jeff was cut off mid-sentence as Scott threw him at Death. Jeff knocked her to the ground.

War pulled her axe back to throw it. Nathan appeared behind her and disappeared with her axe. Without her axe, War raised her fists to brawl with Scott. They jabbed at the same time. **Boom!** Their fists collided midair. The armor on War’s arm shattered. Scott followed up by upper cutting her. **Pow!** She flew into the air and collapsed to the ground. Katie ran up to her and touched her.

In the distance, Richard ran down toward the field from the stands. He spun his arms to form a gust of air to push himself onto the field. He landed next to Conquest. **BANG! BANG! BANG! BANG!** Richard caught the bullets from Conquest’s backup backup gun and dropped them to the ground. **Pow!** Buff’s extended arm slammed into Conquest and he collapsed to the ground. Katie touched Conquest on the arm.

“Recently” stopped playing as Famine flew out from behind the speakers. Nathan appeared above Famine and fell toward him while gaining speed. Famine flew away. Nathan reappeared below Famine while maintaining his speed and flew upward into him. **POW! SHEW!** Famine flapped his wings in hopes of escaping Nathan. Nathan reappeared on top of Famine and grabbed hold of him.

“You will perish for this!” Famine shouted.

Nathan took a deep breath then closed his eyes. The wind blew through his hair as he soared on Famine’s back. Nathan and Famine teleported onto the field. They tumbled across the field kicking up turf. Nathan was flung off Famine, but Buff caught him before he hit the ground. Famine stopped rolling. Katie ran over then touched Famine. Scott ran up behind her.

“This is for good measure!” Scott said.

**BAM!** Scott hit Famine and he flew into the air.

**Thud.** Famine landed on the ground.

“When...the moon turns blood red...Apocalypse shall return...” Famine muttered.

“I think he needs a double dose,” Katie said as she touched Famine again.

He rolled over then began vomiting.



It was break time at work. Nathan sprinted to the small pie section of the store and scrambled through the selection until he found a lemon flavored one. Usually they were not hard to find. He ran back up to the checkout aisle and Cordelia scanned his item. She had frizzy orange hair and freckles dotted across her face.

“2.17.”

Nathan passed her three dollars.

“83 cents is your change.”

“Thanks,” Nathan said. He feigned a smile as he walked off. Even though she worked the hardest out of anyone else at the Transaction Tavern, her lack of humor left her out of the social circle at work.

Nathan sat quietly at the break table in front of the Transaction Tavern while he ate his lemon mini pie. The wind calmly blew by him as the sound of shopping carts on pavement could be heard in the distance. He scrolled through his Instagram feed and saw the photos taken before Homecoming tonight. He scrolled down and saw Katie and Buff standing together smiling. She wore a purple dress and Buff wore black pants with a white button-down shirt complimented by a purple tie. Nathan frowned.

“Why the long face?” Richard asked as he poked his head out of the sliding door.

“No reason,” Nathan said.

“I know tonight was Homecoming, Katie and Buff called off work for it. I imagine it hurts to see everyone there while you are still here.”

“Eh, it’s no big deal.”

“I also know you really liked Katie.”

“Is there anyone here that didn’t know?” Nathan asked.

“I doubt Scott did, he isn’t really good with emotions. Listen, the point is, I wanted to come out here to tell you that dating a girl isn’t everything. You don’t need that to justify your life.”

“You’re married, right?” Nathan asked.

“You know the answer to that.”

“I always have people tell me that kind of stuff, but they are always the ones who made it out. Why aren’t single people the ones that tell me it is ok to be single?”

“Can you stop whining so much and listen to me, Nathan. There is nothing wrong with being single. Be yourself, do what you want to do, say what you want to say. There is no one you need to impress. I look back fondly on my single days,” Richard said.

“I guess I never really looked at it that way.”

“And now get this, this is the best part. If you are being yourself and someone still decides they like you, that’s how you know it is real. Somehow my wife thought my miniature train hobby was attractive. Something about organizational skills. Point being, this is a tried and true technique.”

Nathan nodded as Richard spoke.

“A man that has tunnel vision never gets to enjoy the scenery. Speaking of scenery, I have been craving Chinese food. I was thinking you, Scott, Jeff, and I could get some after work.”

“What does scenery have to do with Chinese food?”

“Who is to say, I’m just hungry. Are you in?” Richard asked.

“I guess I have nothing else going on,” Nathan said.

“Fantastic, I will see you after work,” Richard said.

He got up and pat Nathan on the back.

“By the way, three minutes left on your break. You are going on the express lane when you go back in.”

Nathan nodded as he shoved the rest of his pie into his mouth.

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Nathan, Scott, Richard, and Jeff sat in a booth at the Chinese restaurant next to the Transaction Tavern in the shopping plaza. At the center of the restaurant, there was a small tank full of koi that had a dragon statue spitting water out of it. A lantern shaped light above them illuminated their table. A Chinese woman in her twenties dropped off their food. When she put their plates full of food down, Scott noticed a tattoo of a dragon’s head on the back of her hand. Its body hid behind her sleeve.

“I like your tattoo,” he said.

“Thank you! Is there anything else I can get for you?” she asked.

“No, I think we are all good for now. Thank you!” Richard said.

They chatted as they ate noodles and rice. Richard was the only one who attempted to use the wooden chopsticks.

“...and then I said, ‘You silly goose, that isn’t where the rice goes! It goes in the pasta aisle!’” Jeff said while chewing food.

Scott, Richard, and Nathan couldn’t stop laughing.

Richard took a sip of his tea then said, “My favorite day at work was the day all the power went out! It may have been a bad day for profits, but just seeing Scott’s face made it worth it. I swear I saw steam coming out of his ears!”

“Can you blame me? Frozen pizzas aren’t so good covered in the dew of dead ice!” Scott said with a smile on his face.

“Do you remember the day it was raining so hard we didn’t have customers for hours?” Nathan asked.

“Oh, you bet! The only thing better is when the roads are frozen over!” Scott shouted.

“Here is to more black ice!” Richard said as he raised his teacup.

“As long as no one crashes!” Jeff said as he raised his teacup.

“Can’t complain with that!” Scott said as he raised his teacup.

Nathan smiled and raised his teacup. They cheered then drank tea.

“Oof, this still needs more sugar!” Jeff said.

In the parking lot of the shopping plaza, a man hidden by the night sat in his dented pickup truck. With binoculars, he peered through the window to the Chinese restaurant and watched the Transaction Tavern employees laugh. “Fruitless Trees” by Brainstory played on the radio. He held the binoculars to his face with one hand and used the other to lift a triple patty burger into his mouth. He bit into it. Three wrappers sat on the passenger seat next to him. Two of the three wrappers contained empty hamburger buns. He chewed loudly as he stared at Scott.

“Laugh now Scott. Your days are numbered.”

A piece of meat fell out of his mouth and onto his pants. He removed his eyes from his binoculars to look at his radio.

“Ugh, I hate indie music.”

He twisted the dial so he stayed in between stations. He stopped when he heard only static. He turned his volume up and looked back into his binoculars.