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Three Poems

Donald Dunbar

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THREE POEMS

Donald Dunbar

STUCK PIXEL

the sheep, but no blood
flows from it; city paper
-thin animation
heartbeat inflating
behind your forehead; softer
guiltier wealthy
a nail-bomb in his
belly, keening, both womb and
bathtub, jellyfish;
pale light of autumn
until it can't remember
evening; pseudonym,
a short note to say
we'll raise the child; videogame
installation piece,
how to aim a drone;
annihilation chore
-ography, stat-sheet
new costume: sexy
K-9 cop, sexy insane
veterinarian,
sweat gland upgraded
to venom sack; this is the
hospital, altar,
through the sunlight to
the night sky behind it; hi
-def prescription
hiroshima, bon
-jour; aerosol preen, palate
of eight white trumpets,
eros with a sharp
fan, gutted eyes; nectar rusts

red, white, gray, or grains,
hive freshly tilled; in
utero, in situ, too
high and on youtube,
lacquered goldfish; the
sequence of nudity of
a falling asleep
sharp as sugar to
your lungs; signed hymnal, sculpture,
marble labia,
frame rate; seated
at the kiss, tongue still in the
dream; time management

from <INSERT COIN>

So you want to be a hero?

Nobody's really a hero anymore, so you turn on the projector and load up *Billionaire Hunter*. The title screen ghosts up from your blank apartment wall, and then replaces itself with a gorgeously rendered view from inside a multi-story, stucco-with-mahogany-trim penthouse. The park below prostrates itself under the summer sun and you as you move your character near the window, and after you press (x) to grin, you're allowed to walk to the closet.

Inside the closet are rows upon rows of the finest and rarest clothes and accessories. Limited-edition Kanye West "Red October" Nikes. Napoleon's blinged-out general's uniform. Three dozen pelts from extinct great beasts. Spider-silk boxer-briefs. A Rolex inlaid with meteorite. Martin Luther King's understated necktie. Tutankhamen's skirt and Hatshepsut's headdress.

You hit (x) a few more times and your man walks over to the elevator. In the lobby, your secretary is waiting. "Good morning, sir," he says, inclining. "I have selected some weather-appropriate weapons." You grab the katana, and equip the Uzi in your left hand. A little zero appears in the upper-right corner of the screen as you walk out the double doors into the sun and the writhing mass of tourists, merchants, beggars, citizens.

You pause to savor your blank score, the yet-unstained sidewalks, the deeply rendered skies.

from <INSERT COIN>

So you want to be a hero?

Everyone can be a hero nowadays, so you turn on the projector and load up *Billionaire Hunter*. The title screen tightens its fist on the white wall of your apartment; soon, tall oak double doors loom out from within it. The left one opens, and the butler looks you up and down, and nods. “Well, you look heavily armed enough.” The camera pans down to show an assault rifle crossed against your chest. “I’m not sure where he is at the moment, but I suppose you’ll want to get started.” You press (x) to agree, yes, you do want to get started, and the butler steps aside.

Each mansion is unique, and reflective of the character of its owner. Some are nearly ancient; irregularly segmented husks of stained wood, brass, stone, rooms that had lost their function a century ago. Some are opulent; glitized up, blinged out, or simply long-steeped in gilt; chandeliers twinkling with thousands of crystals each, entertainment systems rare as legend, swimming pools, decorative pools, koi ponds. There are mansions of every decadence or tastefulness; mansions with hand-wrought door-locks, others with almost prescient security systems. But the common truth between them all is they don’t end until the owner is dead.

The game is ruled by algorithms that procedurally generate every facet of the experience, and as you and others play the game, server farms as large as nations monitor how your eye lingers just a second longer on the tear-streaked wood of the nightstand; how you pause in the summer dining room, sunset blooming through the wall-to-wall windowpanes and onto the milk-white carpet; how you gasp at the arrangement of life in the thirty-fourth garden: an ocelot chained to an Amazonian flower tree, butterflies thought long-extinct, vines grown into complex mandalas. By learning what makes you linger, pause, gasp, programs on the servers mine new combinations of beauty.

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Donald Dunbar lives in Portland, Oregon, where he helps run If Not For Kidnap and edits poetry for *draft: The Journal of Process*. His book *Eyelid Lick* won the 2012 Fence Modern Poets Series prize, and a chapbook, *Slow Motion German Adjectives*, was released by Mammoth Editions in 2013.