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This story is an excerpt from **THE AWFUL POSSIBILITIES**

A girl masters the art of forgetting among kidney thieves. A motivational speaker skins his best friend to impress his wife. A man outlines the rules and regulations for sadistic childrearing. You've heard these people whispering in hallways, mumbling in diners, shouting in the apartment next door. In brilliantly strange set pieces that explode the boundaries of short fiction, Christian TeBordo locates the awe in the awful possibilities we could never have imagined.

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and never any better, and for indoctrination sessions which he calls Right Righteous Teaching. Right Righteous Teaching is a combination of esoteric and problematic racial/religious philosophy and horrible word play. White stands for With Hell I Triumph Evermore; black for Belief, Love, Action, Knowledge. The missing *c* is the white man's Cancer. Miscegenation is the only hope for humanity. Hence, Mongrelolds.

Imagine you find the ideas ridiculous at first and still but there isn't much to do in Brooklyn and you like hanging out in the apartment above the garage which they call the sanctuary, the lab, the thirty-sixth chamber, and eventually start enjoying the teachings, not because you believe, but because it's a very involved and imaginative mythology developing before your eyes and the eyes of the internet, though no one out there seems to be paying much attention. Statcounters don't lie.

Imagine you're there when your brother has the revelation, and though you don't see the connection, you can see that it's utterly spontaneous and that your brother truly believes it. A man will come, a boy really, and he will terrorize a school with the white man's weapons and the black man's sense of style, none of these trenchcoats, shiny black fingernails, combat boots, and hockey player haircuts, and this will trigger the revolution, the new era, the tupacalypse.

If you think for a second that this is reason enough to plan your own school shooting then you're a fucking idiot. But it's interesting at least.

demanding that the sins of the Mongrelolds be visited upon the brother and the mother and the fetus of the mother and the motherfucker. They're demanding retribution and the restoration of a reputation of no repute, and all I can do is pray they get tired of it before they realize I'm up here, pray they go home.

Now when I'm not praying, I'm sleeping. It isn't as peaceful as it was the night my brother left—how could it be?—but you'd be surprised. The chanting of the angry villagers, the glow and crackle of their torches, can be soothing enough that I fall asleep despite myself, and though I only nap for minutes at a time, I dream, and I remember my dreams. In the dreams I'm strutting through school in slow motion with a gangsta lean, arms extended and guns blazing, my black hood barely covering my thousand-yard stare, nothing but my erection keeping my jeans above my ankles, and all those faces begging me to stop, to spare just me, but I can't hear them even though there's no soundtrack now, or maybe just the static at the end of the Mongrelolds' album, or the crackle of torches in the distance, and all those faces are the face of Chris Nelson, though sometimes they're my brother. And I know now that dreams aren't reality. I know now they're a stand-in for something else, something bigger than a school shooting, like a nudge from God himself, that complicated motherfucker. So when I wake I go back to praying, that they'll go away, burn the house if they have to, my mom, whatever, so that I can head out for the back yard under cover of night, and dig up my bag of guns, and head out east. I could use some Right Righteous Teaching. I need to assess a tax where a tax is due.



Keep that in mind. Imagine your brother's two grades ahead. He does a little worse than you in school but not bad. He's got friends, not as many as you, two in fact, but he likes them more and they all live together in the apartment above your mom's garage. They're in a rap band and call themselves the Mongrelolds, but they only have one song and it isn't very good, for lack of inspiration, they say. They've got ideas but no inspiration.

Imagine they are perfectly good at expressing these ideas when they aren't rapping, especially Wallace, your brother, which is not his real name but his rap name, but the ideas are not perfectly good. They're a weird mixture of Nuwaubianism and the Wu-Tang *Manual* with a dash of the *Da Vinci Code* thrown in for balance. Your brother and his friends believe the white man is the devil, but they don't feel like the devil and they all feel in their very cores the call to throw around the word nigger casually.

Imagine your brother won't let you up above the garage except to listen to new mixes of their one song, which always sound the same

Remember how the news crews descended on Brooklyn to investigate what kind of evil hamlet could breed such a virus.  
Remember the headlines: The Real Children of the Corn. Hitler in the Heartland.

Remember that stupid article in the weekly magazine of the national newspaper of record suggesting a few possible insinuations for why there are no Jews in Brooklyn.

Remember how you watched the screen as the clueless townies, the shit I grew up through, in order to clear a good name they'd never had, because they'd never had a name of their own, because their name was Brooklyn, announced their intention of clearing Brooklyn of the remnants of the virus it had gestated and incubated unaware for so long, with pitchforks and torches, and how you did nothing, never considered that those remnants were more than my house, were my mother, her fetus, myself.

Now it is now and you can neither remember nor imagine now.

#### 4

Now I'm in the apartment above the garage, but it isn't like I'd imagined it would be because I'm alone, because my brother's in the city of brotherly love forgetting me and getting turned into nothing but Marilyn Manson with better clothes and dope beats, and because the goyim of Brooklyn, Iowa, have my house surrounded. Lucky or not for me they don't know about the apartment above the garage. So they're standing around the house waving their weaponized farm implements and

the only note they leave for you. To date it's the last time you've seen your brother in person, and you can't decide even now whether to be crushed or fucking furious or both from one day to the next.  
Now remember. Remember what you already know.

3

Remember how within weeks Chris Nelson had turned from grad student to rap impresario, how with the guidance of some stupid or unscrupulous advisors the album was released, not as an album—the record industry was dead, they said—but as the soundtrack to an 8-bit first-person school shooter, maybe the worst, stupidest video game ever undeveloped.

Remember how the game was released without so much as a tracklist much less a lyric sheet.

Remember how the news media, controlled as it is by the forces of the white devil, with its obvious investment in not having a revolution bent on the overthrow of precisely itself, heard, or pretended to hear in the lyrics what it wanted to hear, despite my brother's repeated insistence that the song was called *ASSESS A TAXI*.

Remember how within weeks everyone involved had achieved a level of notoriety, infamy even, usually reserved for petty African and Middle Eastern dictators, but how, despite the protests of the Anti-Defamation League, the Congressional Hearings, the emergency session at the United Nations, the game sold like crazy, and my brother really seemed to be enjoying himself, at least on the screen.

Imagine some asshole grad student finds the Mongreloids on MySpace and decides to do some kind of dissertation on them. You are suspicious, but your brother, who, despite his naiveté, is actually a pretty skeptical guy, agrees to go along with it. Because the grad student lived in Brooklyn, the real Brooklyn, not this Iowa bullshit, for a year before grad school, so he probably knows what's up, he says.

Imagine the next thing you know the grad student's moving into your brother's old room in your mother's house because he's too good to sleep on the couch in the apartment above the garage but not too good to spend all the rest of his time with them in the lab, the sanctuary, the thirty-sixth chamber, smirking behind his hand like the devil he is, and he might be fucking your mother for good measure. You don't know it then, you're not even suspecting it, but keep it in mind.

Imagine you know this, the smirking part, because you're still allowed up there a couple of times a week for Right Righteous Teaching, though it's more performative now, less freestyle, and your brother tones things down, i.e., is suspiciously silent on the once world-historical issue of a school shooting, but still you can see Chris Nelson, the grad student, the motherfucking devil biting his tongue 'til his eyes water like it's the funniest thing he's ever heard. Like your brother is a joke.

Even without the motherfucking you have your reasons now, right? The only choice is between grabbing the grad student by the back of his blond head and pounding his pale face in until it's red, and throwing your set in the air as you walk down the hall between homeroom

and first period. Chris Nelson lived in Brooklyn, the real one, for a year after college, your brother says. What do you do?

If you can get beyond imagining, if you start dreaming of strutting through school in slow motion with a gangsta lean, arms extended and guns blazing, your black hood barely covering your thousand-yard stare, nothing but your erection keeping your jeans above your ankles, and all those faces begging you to stop, to spare just me, but you can't hear them because the soundtrack shuts it all out ("Sound Bwoy Burrell," Smif-N-Wessun), and all those faces are the face of Chris Nelson, though sometimes they're your brother—if you can dream that, you can understand.

2

Now imagine you're in the backyard trying to dig a hole deep enough for a backpack full of guns, but the ground itself is buried beneath a foot of hardpacked snow, and the dirt at the surface is practically permafrost and taking forever to break. You're freezing and sweating and aching, and you only hope is that you can get it done before anyone notices you're missing.

Now imagine how pretty soon parents all over the country are going to be digging through their children's things looking for exactly what's in that bag, or even less—plans, drawings, journal entries, rap records—and you know your mom will do the same, will call in the cops for your own good or because she needs some attention too, more than she's getting from Chris Nelson if she's getting any yet, and even though you don't give your own motherfuck about the cops, the



Now imagine that you accept the invitation, but grudgingly, and with low expectations that have less to do with the grudge than with your memory of how bad their first and for so long only song was. But as the music begins it becomes clear that something has changed, and drastically. In fact, it's maybe the greatest, most unexpected jump in quality since The Fugees scored. By the time the final anthem, "Assess a Tax," explodes climactically and decays to static leaving the silence crackling in your ears like wax paper, you're left drained, and you find yourself weeping softly.

Now imagine you have no words to offer your brother, and at first that makes you feel frustrated and guilty and like a fraternal failure. Then you realize, you can see on his face, that he doesn't need them now. Your brother has become a god, a mongreloid god, and he knows it.

Now imagine you go to bed, and despite the night's excitement you sleep well and soundly, assured that you've witnessed the beginning of something new, a renaissance with roots in Brooklyn that will change the world like a virus, the good kind if there is one, the kind that will cure the world of the white disease. Chris Nelson and your mother could be having screaming farewell sex in the room next door and this would not effect much more than a moment of your peaceful dreams of a new era, a new America, completely reversed of its curse. Now imagine that while you sleep so well, sex or no, Chris Nelson and the Mongreloids are loading their things and themselves into the band van and stealing out of Brooklyn under cover of night, headed east to Philadelphia where the motherfucker knows some people who know some people, the tracks in the gravel driveway

give up on shooting and feel about the same about school qua school as you ever have. Your brother and his friends don't. They don't go back to school. They don't even leave the lab or don't seem to, though they must, sometimes, because they have to eat, right, and neither your mother nor your motherfucker seems to be catering to them. Sometimes when you creep around the perimeter of the garage trying to hide your tracks in the snow you can hear their rhymes and drums bouncing like machine-gun fire off the low winter sky, but you can't make any of it out.

Now imagine you still see Chris Nelson pretty regularly. You still see your mother pretty regularly. You don't see any signs of any funny business and you never hear any creaking or moaning creeping through the groaning wooden walls of the old house. But you could be missing something. You're at school all day most days and neither of them ever seems to have anything to say to you anyway, even when you say something to one or the other, even when you interrogate. That's the way it all goes until spring.

Now imagine spring comes to Brooklyn and the snow thaws and the grass greens and what trees there are start to bud. But instead of emerging from the garage, your brother invites you, through Chris Nelson, to enter yourself in the lab, for one night only, where the Mongreloids will perform, live and in its entirety, the concept album they've spent these last months composing and recording and preparing to perform, a concept album full of Right Righteous Teaching with a through-line about the first hip-hop school shooting and how it changed the world forever.

last thing you, the Mongreloids, your brother, want is for you to be called a copycat.

Now imagine what everyone else is doing as you pack the earth back into some approximation of its former self. Wonder what Wallace and the guys and Chris Nelson are doing that very moment. Imagine what your mother is doing. Think quickly back to the Mongreloids and wish you hadn't. Remember the look of your brother as you watched the school shooting unfolding the hour before.

Now imagine you can remember watching that grainy cellcam footage yourself. Maybe you can. Everybody else can. Everybody else did. But can you imagine watching him doing exactly what you'd imagined yourself doing, from costume to posture to facial composure. It's exactly like you thought it would be. It's scarier than you thought it would be. It's like watching your imagination of yourself, but cooler and a thousand miles away, a thousand miles ahead, just one fucking hour. Fuck.

Now imagine yourself crying as you bang the snow back over the spot you've dug and filled. It's cold enough to freeze the tears to your face but your face is so hot with rage it never will. Your brain won't stop telling you that whatever the Mongreloids are doing, they're doing it above the garage, and they're happy about it, and you're not allowed to join them now. You'll never get the chance to join them. School's closed. Go to bed little bitch.

Now imagine that—what are the Mongreloids doing?—could be one

You probably don't have to imagine having watched the videos yourself, so remember instead. Remember the way the kid, his hood already up, stood in front of the camera, in front of the cinderblock wall of his dorm room, talking calmly, deadvoiced, about accounting like it was more death sentence than major. Remember the haunting way he told the story of his high school aptitude testing. Remember? It says here you'd make a good tax assessor.

What does a tax assessor do?

Assess a tax?

Assess a tax. Okay, I'll assess a tax.

Do you see my point now? It's a parable for the generation after metaphor died. It's the Mongreloid creed. Don't forget to remember. You'll be doing more remembering than imagining soon enough. But before you remember again, imagine school reopens and you