

"Such future. Very crypto.
Much catastrophe. Wow."



Wow. It's two days since I rankchecked AreWeThereYet.



Wow. It's two days since I rankchecked AreWeThereYet.

Hello phone! What's my rank?

Wow. Much slippage.

There's a noob who's ahead of me in the rankings. Amaze. BangZoom78 has come out of nowhere and is tipping like a true shibe. Truer. Amaze. Such tippage. We tip our fellow shibes to show our appreciation. BangZoom78 must be surrounded by amaze shibes. Very amaze.

Where am I? I was asleep.

Wow. I'm lying on the couch. I like the couch. I like our room. The light coming through the planks over the window is either morning or evening. Wait, if it's that strong it's evening. School soon! I was working at the orchard today. Much carrying. Such labor. So hot. Maximal tiredness. Ohhhhh. That's why I was asleep. And why it's evening.

I look at my phone again. BangZoom78 has graduated to the regionals?! Amaze. I feel a twinge of envy before I remember that we are all going to the moon. I put down my phone and lie on the couch and look at my ducks on the shelf. Many ducks. They are the old plush skeleton ducks that you find at swapmeets. I tell everyshibe I think they're funny but the truth is I feel sorry for them. I know shibes wanted them pre but srsly noshibe is going to want them now except me.

My phone pings. Kitteh! I'm late for school.

OK feet, go. Downstairs. Out the front door. Across the drive. Onto the street. Outside the kennels (fact: pre it was a McMansion but there's many shibes in each room there now) hot air from formerly sun-heated sidewalk hits cooler evening air and shimmies. Science!

Schoolwalking is kitteh. I'd totally tip someshibe for a piggyback. School is blocks and blocks and blocks away. Why is everything made of concrete if it gets so hot? Is the stuff on the streets still concrete if it's a different colour? Why are animals made of meat if they don't want us to eat them? Wow. I just walked to the schooltarps.

Good evening my fellow schoolshibes let me find some floor behind you all. I sit down squeezed against tarp. Teacher has pinned a new poster of some overdressed shibe, maximally pre, to the tarp behind them. I get tipped for asking who they. Wow. The pre shibe's name is funny. They were ruler of a state with streets made of water. My fellow shibes laugh when I ask why we don't make the streets out of water here. But teacher tips me anyway. Amaze.

Teacher has much to say. They plot a U-shaped graph of occurrences of the word "shibe" over time. Then they show us a clip from a pre film about two bros in a time-travelling phone box. Next teacher explains what a phone box is. Then they talk about an old cereal that was designed for TV. Then they talk about what TV was. Much history.

Another new poster says "Tip your teacher!" and we do because we're shibes. I remember teacher's tippage and my earlier slippage (which rhymes) so I tip some more. Teachers gotta eat. Which reminds me, I'm hungry. As I leave class my phone pings above the hubbub of detarping shibes. Tipped for good homework. Wow.

Back on the street, night is ramping up. Eggers are packing up for the evening leaving the sidewalk greasy. The swapmeet is starting under glaring LEDs. Such service to the community. Zero walking from school. Many shibes. Such goods to browse.

My fellow schoolshibes are gathered around cartwheel vendors mobbing for apples and wraps. Wow. Much noms. Is "noms" kitteh? I look around. Nobody heard me say it. I get thrown a maximally amaze apple and tip large for it when it also tastes good. What was that story with a big red apple in it? And a snake? I'm thrown a wrap. I kerbnom. Wrap is meh. I show its corpse to my schoolshibe sat next to me.

"Do I tip for this?" I ask them.

I get a look.

"Norly." I retry.

Such looks.

"OK, cksake." I pout.

I tip but it doesn't feel good. Maybe this is why I'm slipping. For a moment I think of just tipping my schoolshibes nomming next to me to help improve my ranking. But what would I tip them for? Amaze nomming? Sitting amazely? Thar they be, Mr. Phone. Tip them for being an amaze sitter. LOL. Like that would work.

Their phone pings.

Wut?

Oh maybe it thinks I'm tipping an amaze babysitter. That's not funny. Phone, that shibe's performed valuable services to advance the state of the art of staring. Tip them. Tip them like dudebros rushing a cow.

Ping.

Wutf?

My beneficiary deploys a ninja-level combo look my way. I die inside more than a strong individual secure in their identity should. I concentrate furiously on the kerb. Why has this happened?

I mean technically.

Wut? Phone says I totally tipped for "performing valuable services to advance the state of the art of staring". My toucan! Nooo!

The swapmeet sprawls across the dustbowls fronting old McMansions and into the alleys around them. Shibes have goods on old folding tables or on mushroom boxes. Piles of food ingredients, clothes, phones. Wow, such economy.

I head through wandering shibes across a dustbowl and wander myself down antiques alley. Old milk crate rigs, piles of fiat currency and other pre memorabilia. No ducks. I has a sad. There's an old shibe I've not seen before at a stall by the fiat sellers. With some ostentatiously pre bundles of paper. Kitteh, eye contact!

"Greetings, young shibe!" the eye contactor salesbros me. He's hiding a sign with numbers on but I don't get to look at it because eye contact.

"Uh..." I respond. Thank you for your service, brain. But salesbros are maximally pre. What do you say to them?

"Do you know what these are?" they ask. They pick up a book from their table and flip its pages at me. Such shuffling. Shuffleshuffleshuffle. The blur stops. Each page has small green rectangles of paper glued on.

I fail to conceal my curiousness. "Fiat?"

Salesbro grins. "Close. They're Green Shield Stamps. You would get the book, see, and then you would get the stamps. From supply stores. The stamps had dry glue on the back, you'd lick the back of the stamp..."

My mouth goes "Ew!" and my face is totally onboard with that.

Salesbro continues, unfuzzled, "...and then stick them into position on each page until you'd filled the whole book. Then you could use them instead of fiat to buy things with."

"Did they taste gross?" I must know.

"I don't know. Gluey, I guess. But they're really rare now. You could own a piece of history."

"Pwn?"

“Uh I mean you could hold a piece of history.”

“Is this alt?” I ask. Kinda nervous.

Salesbro doesn't look nervous. I'd look nervous if someshibe I didn't know accused me of having alt.

“No way, young shibe. Just pre.” They keep shuffling the pages at me.

Much awkwardness. “Uh thanks but I have to go see my parent now.”

Wow, such fail. I'm basically an adult and that was my excuse?

Dustbowl walking back to the sidewalk I tip salesbro for their teachings so I don't slip any further in the rankings. I walk home for the next octoseptillion blocks.

After the heat death of the universe I get back to the kennel. Stairs are kitteh. Mom1 is there, my sib UnoY isn't.

“Heya YS, how was school?” Mom1 inquires of me.

“Amaze. But some salesbro tried to gift me alt at the swap after.”

“Rilly?” asks Mom1 in what they have told me is their concerned tone.

“Yeah do you know what Green Shield Stamps are?”

Mom1 gets a look on their face. Then bounces up and down. Much bouncing. Maximal inverse kinematics. Such excite.

“OMFG my Granna had a book of those! I would totally tip you if you got me those tomorrow!”

I give them a look.

“They aren't alt, they're pre.” they assure me.

“That's what salesbro pitched.”

Mom1 nods, pale blue hair waving.

“Pllllllllllease.”

Mom1 whuggles me.

“Pllllllllllllllllllllease, YS! Be a good shibe!”

I squirm to escape the whuggling. “OK! Cksake! Leggo!”

My phone pings and Mom1 lets me go. I check my phone. It's raining! Much random tippage from someshibe! Tomorrow when I wake up I bet I won't even need to check AreWeThereYet. Such tiredness. Wait. Why didn't Mom1's phone ping?

I wake up. Amaze.



Mom1 gets a look on their face. Such excite.

It is dusty in the light between the boards.

Phone, how's my AreWeThereYet rank?

Wow, much gainage. I am a shibe. And BangZoom78 is gone from regionals. Wut? They're on nationals! They'll be Top Dog by (checks projections) two days next? Wutf? THEY MUST BE AMAZE!!! But...

And I know this is wrong...

I can't stop thinking. About yesterday. Tipping a shibe for nothing. Nothing real.

What if...

No. Nonono. Noooooooo. No way. I am a bad shibe. I shouldn't think that. I'm just jealous. We are all going to the moon. Phone, alert me when BangZoom78 becomes Top Dog.

There's a blast of catnip smoke and a sudden weight on my legs. Legs tell brain this should hurt. Brain takes their word for it. My sib UnoY is arrive on what they think is the couch.

"Dudebro!" I shout.

"My legs!" I also. Such pain.

Sib takes a drag on their catnip. Then sloooooowly lift their butt. Juuuuuust

enough for me to rescue my legs.

I sit up and try to look dignified. But I have to cough when Sib blows smoke at me. Kitteh.

Sib is wearing a pre “We Are the 51%” t-shirt I got them at a swapmeet. Idea! Thank you brain. If you tip in our neighbourhood, it probably gets processed by the tangle of wires, computer cards, milk crates, chopsticks and fans that is Sib’s maximally amaze rig. They get such tippage for it. Which makes minimal sense. It’s like giving a cartwheel vendor an apple. Why would they want an apple? They have apples. Many apples. I want an apple. Apple, pls.

“I tipped a shibe yesterday for some bullshit and they still got the tip.” I confide.

Sib is shocked in no way. “Yeah dumbass you can tip for anything.”

I pout.

The giggles pounce Sib. “OK what was it for?”

I show them my phone. “Yeah, yeah, services to staring. The tipping app is such meh. You don’t factually have to give a reason, that’s just for AreWeThereYet. I thought they teach you this shit at school? Kso what you tip them for?”

I know the answer to this one. Amaze. “There’s a poster that tells us not to forget to.”

I was working at the orchard today. Much carrying. Such labor. So hot.



“That’s not what I mean. But if there was a poster that told you to smash your phone?”

“Why would...”

“Forget it. Where was I?” Sib realises their catnip has burned out. They depocket their magnifying glass.

I remember! “What if there was a poster...”

Sib nods. “And so but well yeah I really don’t think they’re teaching you what you need to know at school. AreWeThereYet was meant to be a stop-gap measure when shibes set up tipping rings and bots early on. Giving a reason for tipping and checking it was meant to be proof-of-human. Like primitive neuro. But shibes started gaming that too. It became a reputation economy. They wanted being Top Dog to be like being the president.”

Amaze. “Amaze!”

I get a look. “Shibe it’s basics. Your school is kitteh. You need to get out more. Much, much more.”

I pout. “I go to swapmeet.”

Sib sighs. Or inhales. Is it a sigh if it’s through catnip? It’s maximally a sigh. Wow. “And then you come home and sit there like you’ve just been printed. YS you’re about the least annoying sib imaginable but that’s kinda annoying.”

Wow. Such paradox. I extend the pout. Much silence. Sib blows smoke into the sunbeams.

Question! “Why don’t we need AreWeThereYet any more?”

“It’s just eigentippage.”

“Eigentippage?”

“How much you’ve tipped, how much other shibes have tipped you, how much the shibes who tipped them have tipped etc.”

UnoY inhales catnip. Such inhalation. Much catnip.

“Everyshibe knows how to tip, everyshibe knows what a bot attack looks like, everyshibe is going to the moon. Pups love AreWeThereYet but it’s just a game and it has to stay that way.” I start to protest at this but Sib gives me a look. “It’s the underlying currency protocol underneath and the analytics overtop that matter. But that’s boring, just part of the system. It’s the dial tone of the economy.”

“Like Cap’n Crunch.”

“Wut?”

“Teacher tortoise about phone phreaking. On the old copper wire net. It’s funny.”

Sib looks thoughtful but doesn’t say anything. I get out more. Sib can be mean

but that had interest. I tip them as I downstairs from the kennel. Much heat. I get a wrap from a passing egger. Much taste. Such delicious. I tip them.

Life is amaze.

My phone goes ping. Sib tipped me! Nowait, they refused the tip. Refund fees! Kitteh.

I hate everything.

Wow. Such heat. School isn't for about a googolplex blocks.

There's a white line painted on the sidewalk. It wasn't there yesterday. I walk along, following. It takes me along the street in a long slow curve, then waves from side to side of the sidewalk. Amaze. I walk faster and faster along it, then when it ends up in a spiral I follow that round and round and round and round and fall over. I giggle. Up on the side of the tall building by the sidewalk, in the same white paint, it says "You got it!".

I clap my hands. Wow. Phone, tip whoever painted this. Such fun. I must tell my schoolshibes about this. Phone, remember where this is. Feet, back to work. That was amaze. Such fun.

A quintoseptillion blocks later I clamber under the tarp of my class. More posters! There's one of an incongruously cute shiba inu. There's one of elliptic curves super-imposed, with their names at the bottom. One of a Claes Oldenburg sculpture of cutlery. And one of how to wash your hands. I know how to wash my hands. Teacher is watching me making hand-washing movements. Such embarrassment.



*School isn't for
about a googolplex
blocks.*

“Good evening, YS” says Teacher. It’s not evening yet?

“Uh hi Teacher.” I reply. “I like your posters, where do you get them?”

“My sib has a 2D printer. They grow inks and everything.” says Teacher.

“Amaze. So cool!” I exclaim. Teacher smiles.

“I didn’t think young shibes still said that. You can stay in here until class but please let me concentrate while I set up.” says Teacher.

“Said what?” I ask.

“Cool.” says Teacher. What’s cool? I look confused then remember I promised not to disturb them. Did I promise? It’s an implied contract. So I guess I did. Hello phone.

BangZoom78 is now on the continental rankings. My toucan! They must have arms like one of those Indian superheroes, tipping left and right. Tiptiptiptiptip...

“YS?” says Teacher.

“...tiptiptip-Yes?” I reply.

“Please can you think more quietly. I am glad you are here but I need to set up and it takes some concentration.” says Teacher.

I nod. The continental rankings! Shibes are tipped just for being on them. Which

I guess makes that a loop. What’s a fruit loop? Mom1 mentioned them once. How do you make fruit into a loop? Mobius fruit? Where would you start eating them? Wow.

My phone pings. Wow. BangZoom78 has made it rain.

“Really?” asks Teacher.

Teacher pulls up AreWeThereYet on the tarp screen. They show the rainfall for BangZoom78’s recent generosity. Wow, much tippage. Teacher groups the tips by physical location, which makes a map of this side of the continent. Then they overlay a subset of the results over an old satellite map of our local area. I look up at the tarp. Falling from a satellite would be creepy. Wheeeeeeeeeeee-

“YS...” says teacher.

“-eeeeee, yes? Oh.” I respond.

Teacher groups the tips on their display by what looks like time. And then by other criteria I don’t know. Isn’t it time for class? No, still much waiting. Teacher flashes up the details of lots of tip transaction on the screen, which does look like rain. I feel my face smile. Teacher glances back at me.

“Do you know Bangzoom78?” asks Teacher.

Nodnodnod.

“I mean personally.”

Shakeshakeshake.

Teacher frowns. “You tipped them earlier.”

Wutf?

Teacher pulls up the transaction records. “They have lots of different accounts but under the same name. That’s problematic. And they tip each other. A lot. And there’s other accounts under the same name...”

Teacher searches for related accounts. The diagram of transactions between them looks like a Spirograph drawing. Spirograph is amaze. Mom1 has one in The Box.

“This looks like an inverse sybil attack. Why hasn’t anyshibe checked for this?” asks Teacher.

“Nobody checks. They don’t have to.” I repeat what UnoY said earlier.

“But it’s so brazen!” vocabs Teacher.

As our schoolshibes arrive the investigation becomes a lesson. School is amaze. Much opportunity. Several other shibes have tipped BangZoom78. None of us remember doing so. It must be MIND CONTROL!

“It’s not mind control, YS.” says Teacher, “Who did you tip in block 9829294?” “The shibe who drew a line on the street I followed.” I repeat what my brain tells me.



Teacher has pinned a new poster of some overdressed shibe, maximally pre.

“You liar!” shouts my schoolshibe NoUr, “you did not!”

Many eyes on NoUr.

“I wasn’t tipped for that. Nobody has tipped me for it.”

NuWae puts their hand up. Teacher tells them they told them they don’t need to do that.

“I did.” says NuWae.

“No you didn’t!”

Eris friends us for a few blocks. Teacher pulls up the transactions again.

“YS did tip the shibe who painted something, but it was a sign not a line.”
Teacher rhymes.

NoUr gives me a look. If the ground swallows me up before the next block I will tip it like a tower in Europe.

“But I told my phone to tip the person who drew it!” I yip. Much awkwardness.

“Drew what, YS?” asks Teacher.

“The line and the sign.” I rhyme.

“I didn’t paint the sign you kitteh–” NoUr says before Teacher says their name in

a way that stops them.

“But I meant to tip the shibe who, I mean I didn’t know, I mean I uh – the line was amaze!” Mr. Brain, this be mutiny, I’ll see you hang for this!

“NoUr I think YS has been the victim of a context collision attack.” explains Teacher. Meaning I’m not lying. Such relief. Also wut?

Teacher looks at me. “The sign was added by someshibe else to hijack the tips from NoUr’s line. Whoever added it knew that anyshibe who walked the line would see the sign,” Teacher rhymes once more, “and relied on their proximity to cause people to regard them as a single unit, tipping the one that drew their attention at the end. Or relying on semantic confusion in people’s tipping.”

“People?” I ask teacher.

“Shibes.”

“Ohhhhhhhh.”

“Everyshibe’s homework is to analyze these transactions. But we need to talk more about the Byzantine Generals now...”

Teacher is amaze. Much knowledge. BangZoom78 is cheating! Such cheating. Wow.

I has conflict. In the pros column, I was right to hate them. In the cons column, it was jealousy not reason. But the market doesn’t care about motivation. So nor should I. Wow. I win!

After class everyshibe tips teacher and I tip NoUr double and teacher tips us and it sounds like a flock of phones trying to find mates. Ping! Ping! Ping! (etc.) Swapmeet time!

I walk across the night sidewalk to the swapmeet. Apple, wrap, kerb, nom (Is nom kitteh? Deja vu! Amaze.), tip.

“Wow look what the cat hawked up.” says my sib’s voice from behind me.

“Heya UnoY.” I reply without looking up. Such dignity.

My sib pats me on the head. “Since you ask, we’re picking up gold.”

“Gold?” I ask. I’m a cockatoo. Wow, much squawking.

“Yeah, gold. LiCat here makes jewelry with pre metals. Gonna get Mom1 some for their cake day. You want in?”

LiCat gives me a look as they hang on to MogoDan like gravity is about to turn off.

“Uh no I booked a slot in the oven for a factual cake.”.

“You can’t cook.”

“Mom1 said they’d help?”

I get looks.

“You’re getting Mom1 to help you make their own cake?” UnoY accuses.

“They said they’d like to do something with me.” I mumble. Wow, much awkwardness.

“Cute.” says MogoDan. Is that mockery? UnoY and LiCat give MogoDan looks, which I know means probably not.

“Thank you.” I say to MogoDan, like I’ve practiced. LiCat gives me a look.

“How’s school?” asks MogoDan. Before I can answer, LiCat drags them away. Sib follows. I watch them disappear into the crowd.

The salesbro from last night is across the swapmeet, by the alley between two of the McMansions. They must’ve done well last night. Do they still have the stamp book?

OK feet, go.

“Good evening, young shibe. How may I service you?”

“Heya. Do you still have the stamp book thing you showed me?”

“I do indeed.” flickerflickerflicker. Such flickering. Also: thank you stamps for not being gone! You are my new best friends.

“Pls can I have them?” I request.

“Of course, young shibe, I am glad they are going to a good home. Can I interest

you in anything else? I have these...”

They are coloured plastic cards. Many colours.

“Phone credit scratch cards.” Salesbro answers my face, which was saying: “Wut?”.

“Wut?” I actually.

“You would turn them over, scratch this section here, and that would reveal a simple code representing a certain amount of credit to use a particular corporation’s telephone infrastructure.” Salesbro mimes the scratching. Which means actually scratching would devalue them. Thank you, brain!

“Can I have one of each colour pls?” I politely.

I unfold my pre plastic bag and put everything in there as Salesbro hands it to me. Mom1 will love this. I tip Salesbro maximally.

“Thank you young shibe!” says Salesbro, “Do remember to visit again, I get new stock daily.”

I nod and engage my feet. They take me back into the swapmeet. I get some pre plastic bottles that are too damaged to be useful or collectible, we can feed those into the printer. I also get a pencil sharpener.

Feet, homeward!

Today has made no sense. More than usual. Less than usual? There has been more,

but it has all made less sense. A light in the sky! Amaze.

The light is accompanied by the thwockathwockathwoka of a helicopter. Wow. Such rarity. I watch the light disappear behind the McMansions, and the noise fades with it. Helicopter where you go? Being on a helicopter would be amaze. I could never tip enough for that.

For the googolplex blocks it takes to walk home I pretend I’m a helicopter. I use the light on my phone. Thwockathwockathwoka.

Mom1 is home when I get back to the kennel. I gift them.

“Thank you, YS! Amaze!” says Mom1. It’s funny when they speak shibe. Usually they’re pre. I like that about them. Also their blue hair. I said it makes them look old once. They laughed and said that’s what their mom said when they were UnoY’s age. I wish everyothershibe understood me like Mom1 does. Also more wishes. And chocolate.

My phone pings. It’s raining! I check and it’s BangZoom78. I refuse the tip. Which costs, but I don’t care. My phone bworps to confirm the refusal fee.

Mom1 checks their phone as well. “Oh wow, there’s a weakness in the current tipping system. Some sort of collision problem. There’s going to be a hard fork to address it in a few thousand blocks’ time. Don’t look at me like that, YS, I learnt this stuff when they didn’t teach it at school.”

“Um.”

Mom1 whuggles me. So I didn't actually offend them. Much relief.

"Are you OK on the couch, YS? You're almost too big for it now." says Mom1.

"I like the couch. It's my friend." I tell them.

"It's an amaze night, you could do your homework on the roof." they suggest.

"OK!" I reply. There is a sticky note with some numbers written on it above sib's rig. I note them on my phone. Then I bounce up the stairs onto the roof. Hello stars, you are my new best friends! It's getting colder. But not too cold. Cool. Is this why "cool" used to mean "good"? It feels good.

I spend some time finding subpaths in the topology of BangZoom78's transactions. This is fun. Many paths. Such happiness. I look at location, time, and reason. Then I find save point conflicts next to tips to BangZoom78. Wow, many points. It wasn't just me. I geolocate the transactions and order them by time. The transactions follow the terminator across the continent each night. I make the transactions glow blue on a black globe. Maximally pre animation.

I check the list of BangZoom78's transactions against the account numbers from my sib's rig. Many of BangZoom78's transactions were processed by it. I tell my phone to just show just the lines in the graph representing transactions between my sib's rig and the other rigs on the network. It looks like a drawing. I zoom out. It's a drawing of the poster dog's face. Wow.

I wake up feeling cold. My back hurts. I am on a roof. It's the roof of the kennels. How did I get here? Oh. Wow. Such sunrise. Many colours. So still.

I hobble on sleepy legs to the edge of the roof to watch the sunrise. I am the only shibe in the world to see this. Amaze.

I look down. UnoY is in the street below. They are wearing their PLA surplus coat. So is their shibe MogoDan. Not UnoY's coat, they have their own. Mom1 will maximally berate my sib for staying out all night. They never tip them. They have plastic bags. They are swapping. It looks like phones. Many phones.

Why would anyshibe need more than one phone?

I flag a drone and sharpen my pencil. With my own pencil sharpener. I shall become a pencil sharpening artisan. Shibes will come from everywhere in post, and I will sharpen pencils for them. They'll tip me like an insider trader.

The drone has paper. I write in my best block capitals: who u?

Then I tell the drone to deliver it to BangZoom78. And I tip it. For the reason of: please tell me. It flutters down into the street, ignoring UnoY and MogoDan. It disappears behind the McMansion opposite.

My phone pings. BangZoom78 is Top Dog. The hard fork is in less than ten thousand blocks. I don't understand what BangZoom78 is doing. But I think my Sib does. I will ask them later when I go back inside.

I sit on the edge of the roof. Such sunrise. Very calm. Much wonder. The sunrise is my new best friend. Wow.

*



*Then I tell the drone to deliver
it to BangZoom78...It flutters
down into the street...*

**Afterword
IS THE FUTURE FORKED?!**
Ruth Catlow

Bad Shibe is published as the Internet of information (the World Wide Web) is being superseded as the next big thing by the Internet of value and assets (the blockchain). It invites us to imagine what kind of society emerges when a system designed to verify the transfer of digital assets is combined with a world where reputation is based on "followers" and "likes"¹. It is a tale of loss of innocence, and it is also packed full of good jokes! Information isn't what it used to be. Once regarded as an infinite resource and wellspring of universal emancipation,

decontextualized information now washes through our societies like toxic waste, glutting electronic superhighways and neuronal byways, and confuzzling global populations. And so, the cryptocurrency evangelist speaks to a present-day yearning for a global system that might provide a trustworthy structure—an economics of information, and an informational economy. The story deals with the implications of a new wave of fully financialised planetary-scale automation and the struggle to discern right from wrong when human and machine agency merges. It also invites us to think of humans and societies as much as the effects of technology as its beneficiaries.

About the Author

*"In a post-truth world, authenticity and accuracy are the twin chambered beating heart of communication."
Karla Ptáček, Avatar Body Collision²*

Rob Myers is an artist, hacker, and writer. For more than two decades his work has probed and clarified the significance to society of practices in expressive and engineering cultures, from the apparently mundane and bureaucratic to the deeply mysterious. Through his artworks, many of which take the form of software, he plays with concepts of art, value, authorship and creation in the age of digital networks. My appreciation of Rob Myers's oeuvre has developed and intensified over

¹ The economy of Bad Shibe is similar to the reputation economy described in Cory Doctorow's *Down and Out in the Magic Kingdom* (2003), a story based in a post-scarcity, post-death society where the amount of Whuffie currency you have equates to your popularity and you need it to access all amenities. Apart from this similarity Myers's story, with its uncertainties and psychic slippages of material and symbolic reality, is much more Dick than Doctorow.

² www.unaussprechbarlich.tumblr.com/post/157391802665/urgency-of-speech

the last decade. And it is no exaggeration to say that his art and writing have made it possible for me to endure the difficulty (and with it sometimes boredom) of learning about the emerging technical protocols of our age that lie beyond the candy coated surfaces of the social web, and the new analytical approaches and techniques for exploring their consequences. Bad Shibe is typical of his work in many ways. The text is packed with delicious references and jokes that derive from high, low and pop cultures; from art, literature and computer science; from "maximally pre" and since-net. It is simultaneously high art and high geek. Its time-of-writing is encoded in every utterance of its characters, the topics of their conversations, and the structure of their grammar and syntax.

World Shibe Web

"My mouth goes "Ew!" and my face is totally onboard with that."—YS is disgusted by the Salesbro's display of antique money.

Bad Shibe is a meditation on the emergence of ideologies propounded and executed by an elite of technical experts who are also free market believers. YS lives in a post-gender, post-fiat (government backed) money era in which tweens work in orchards to pay for school. YS is a little wrapped up in themselves and gives a running commentary of their every action, in a way reminiscent of MUDs and MOOs—early virtual worlds in which you write your world, relationships, and passage through them into existence. In the tradition of some of the best dystopian literature (by for instance Russell Holborn, Kathy Acker) the mode of language

is fundamental to its worlding. The categories of speaking, thinking, intending and acting overlap for YS in ways that conventional language doesn't allow. This overlapping affects how bodies, beliefs and consciences work in this future anarchic higgledipiggle of dustbowl landscapes, green shield stamps, milk crates, apples, wraps, blue hair, drones, phones and 3D printers, and a city that resembles circuits. A symbolic world as much as a material one. Concepts of sin, illegality, hazard, faith and social embarrassment are interchangeable for YS—a confusion that plays out in subtle yet profound ways in the story. It is also possible YS is not entirely in control of their phone and is able to affect the world in ways they have not yet understood. The narrative is powered by a surge of jealousy which causes YS to doubt the

integrity of the reputation market that is their whole world, and to feel bad. Bad conscience: the 3000+ year old innovation of city dwelling priesthoods that enabled the masses to internalise the techniques of their own oppression now mediated through the Panopticon conceived by enlightenment utilitarianism guru Jeremy Bentham, and the Netopticon³ via which corporations and states are able to track and monitor our every action online. The Netopticon 2.0 dramatised in Bad Shibe institutes the 360 degree all-dimensional, all-perspectival review, analysis, critique and management of the algorithmic citizen by the algorithmic citizen. As a result, the entanglement of emotional, legal and financial relations is complete.

³ www.no-org.net/opticon/index.php?m=1

⁴ www.en.bitcoin.it/wiki/Genesis_block

In the near now of Bad Shibe, morality is reduced to what is provable (YS tells us "the market doesn't care about motivation"), in the service of the market, on the blockchain, and therefore it is forever. Some readers might like some background on cryptocurrencies and the blockchain, with which the speculations of Bad Shibe concern themselves.

What do we need to know about cryptocurrencies and blockchains?

"Pups love AreWeThereYet, but it's just a game. It's the underlying currency protocol and the analytics overtop that matter..."—UnoY

A cryptocurrency is digital, but it can be used and exchanged like other currencies. The "crypto" bit refers to the techniques

used to prevent counterfeiting and maintain its security. Bitcoin, the leading example of cryptocurrency was launched by the pseudonymous Satoshi Nakamoto in 2008, just as, and in part perhaps because (there is evidence to suggest⁴) the banks were being bailed out by government with taxpayers' money. Cryptocurrencies are not issued by a central authority like a country, nor controlled by a central bank. Instead, their value and use as an exchange medium is reached by consensus between its users using blockchain technology. In cryptocurrency, trust in the mathematics of cryptography and the fairness of market forces replaces trust in people and institutions. The value of a cryptocurrency is set by market supply and

demand, just as with gold or silver. Hard metals derive their value from scarcity and the difficulty of extraction, with cryptocurrencies the only difficulty is computational, the only scarcity by design. Miners' machines run software that uses processing power and lots of energy to compete for coins. To mine new coins, these computers periodically gather up a "block" of new transactions from across the network and then race to solve a difficult mathematical puzzle for that block. The winner is said to have successfully mined the block, granting them ownership of the freshly minted coins and any transaction fees paid by users. This new block incorporates a reference to the previously mined block (represented by its "cryptographic hash" ID number), and joins a sequential, unmovable chain of blocks.

The security and stability of a blockchain is maintained because all users hold a record of every transaction made. Because each new block takes so much computational power to mine, it very quickly becomes prohibitively expensive to hack the currency. The blockchain solves the longstanding computer science problem of the (delightfully named) Byzantine Generals: "How do I prove that the payment I have received can be honoured, in order that I may release my asset to the payee?" The initial advertised benefits of cryptocurrencies (there are lots of altcoins now all with slightly different features) included the lack of interference by states and banks, the "trusted third parties" Nakamoto's white paper, required in all solutions to the Byzantine Generals problem; the low cost of payment processing

(compared with wire transfers); and the ability of its underpinning blockchain technology to provide infrastructure connecting transactional apparatus to secure votes and shares holdings. Because of the anonymity of transfers, Bitcoin is also said to have facilitated money laundering, the trading of illicit goods and nefarious services such as assassination markets.

What do we need to know about Dogecoin?

Dogecoin is a real world altcoin, from which the near-future society of Bad Shibe seems to have evolved. It's not hard to see why Myers would chose this lovable altcoin at the basis for his story. Dogecoin launched in December 2013 as a joke cryptocurrency based on a dog meme.⁵ The central design of the crypto-token is the enchanting face of the shiba inu puppy

which exudes trusting, playful positivity. It says "WOW" and is encircled by the words "very currency wow much coin how money so crypto plz mine v rich" in the delightful meme based language of Doge⁶, so satisfying for joking. And as Brett Scott writes:

The Doge is a figure without ego, with cross-cultural, cross-gender, and yes, even cross-species appeal. We can all get something from the gaze of the Shibu. This is reflected in the resultant community that has emerged around Dogecoin, people who refer to themselves

⁵ I am not alone. See *Much soul, very emotion: Why I buy into the cult of Dogecoin*, by Brett Scott, 12 August 2014 www.suitpossum.blogspot.co.uk/2014/08/why-i-buy-into-Dogecoin

⁶ www.the-toast.net/2014/02/06/linguist-explains-grammar-doge-wow

⁷ www.reddit.com/r/Bitcoin

⁸ www.reddit.com/r/dogecoin

⁹ I am not alone. See *Much soul, very emotion: Why I buy into the cult of Dogecoin*, by Brett Scott, 12 August 2014 www.suitpossum.blogspot.co.uk/2014/08/why-i-buy-into-Dogecoin

¹⁰ www.reddit.com/r/dogecoin/comments/1v5imo/origin_of_the_phrase_to_the_moon

as 'shibes' and give each other gifts of Doge. While the Bitcoin subreddit⁷ has turned into a moshpit of aggressive trolling, Dogecoin forums⁸ feel inclusive and accepting, cohering around a surreal world of esoteric slogans and acts of goodwill.⁹

The Dogecoin currency is 'dug' at high frequency, for low financial value. Users both express and inspire generosity, through extravagant tipping, showing their appreciation, or admiration of others. This proved to be a remarkably successful community building strategy. In 2014 (at the time

that Myers was writing Bad Shibe) the fiat-value of the currency blew up unexpectedly, and by January it had achieved a market capitalisation of \$60million. Shibes adopted the phrase "going to the moon!"¹⁰, which originated with Bitcoin, using it ironically to describe the coin's rising value (making everyone holding it rich).

Two years is a long time in Doge years

Rob Myers wrote Bad Shibe in 2014. Since 2013 blockchain-based platforms like Ethereum have been under development to enable software

programmes known as "smart contracts" to perform actions and administer capital across digital networks without human user verification. The result is Decentralized Autonomous Organisations, and Applications (DAOs and DAPPs), that act like computer viruses with wallets in their pockets. They have ambiguous legal status, and therefore operate outside of government regulation. While this is one of the main attractions to people whose political complexion we might describe as anarcho-capitalist and who ask "what has regulation ever done for us?"¹¹, there is growing concern about the impact of these technologies. As Dr Catherine Mulligan puts it "The redefinition of society will happen in smart contracts and these kind of places unless the law courts are actively ensuring that people aren't getting

disenfranchised" and the worry is that society is being restructured by a small unrepresentative group of technocrats while "it's something that everyone needs to participate in—the discussion about society and economy and also governance, how we rule ourselves."¹² Bad Shibe explores a number of threats to a society operating on the logic and infrastructure of cryptocurrency systems, smart contracts and DAOs and anticipates "The DAO hack" of 2016.¹³ The software fork¹⁴ that followed was highly controversial and split the community in a moment reminiscent of the theological schisms of medieval Christianity. Breaking with one of the core tenets of blockchain ideology, that all actions on the blockchain are immutable and sit forever and into eternity outwith potentially corrupting human influence, it prompted a true crisis of faith

in the blockchain community. It is also the subject of one of the best jokes in Bad Shibe (look out for the Claes Oldenberg reference).

Some final thoughts

Bad Shibe is fiction based in fact. It helps us to feel our way around some of the consequences of the global infrastructure under construction. This is conceived by one blockchain start-up, BackFeed as "a social operating system that enables massive open-source collaboration without central organisation"¹⁵ for a world free from the tiresome daily deliberations, discussions and negotiations of both ethics and politics. One in which we could avoid all conflict (from the horrors of war to blushes of social embarrassment) simply by hard-wiring social softwares for justice and good manners. In this universe the only limits

we face are to our powers of imagination, innovation, organisation and coordination. We could do away with the need for trust, by creating and maintaining a shared open record of all actions and transactions, and mechanising all incentives and punishments, from now to eternity. A universal, decentralised and frictionless infrastructure to facilitate the productive forces of free markets—to satisfy every desire of every shibe?

*

11 Asked in all seriousness by Vinay Gupta, in one of his informative, entertaining and terrifying podcasts.

12 Dr Catherine Mulligan, in *The Blockchain—Change Everything Forever*, a short film by Furtherfield and Digital Catapult 2016.

13 "The DAO" was a specific decentralized autonomous organization and venture capital fund built on the Ethereum blockchain. In May 2016 the DAO was crowdfunded via a token sale and it set the record for the largest crowdfunding campaign in history. In June 2016, hackers exploited a vulnerability in the DAO code and stole one third of the DAO's funds.

14 The Ethereum community's response to this was to make a change to its protocol that invalidated all transactions after the date of the hack and to require all of its users to update to the latest version of the Ethereum software. In the open source software development community this is known as a hard-fork. A soft fork, is where the software is updated but transactions not backdated).

15 From the slogan and mission statement of BackFeed—a blockchain based start up.

PUBLISHERS' NOTE

We are proud to bring you this wonderful new work by Rob Myers and Lina Theodorou. It is a prequel for a book, **Artists Re:Thinking the Blockchain** which broadens the current debate about the impact of emerging blockchain technologies. It is a collaboration between Torque and Furtherfield, connecting Furtherfield's *Art Data Money* project with Torque's experimental publishing programme. The Blockchain is the underpinning technology for Bitcoin digital currency, and is said to be at the same stage of development as the World Wide Web in the late 1980s. The Blockchain is a database created, and coordinated across a large array of machines without a central administering body and its promoters claim that the global deployment of smart contracts via this new decentralised

protocol will change everything forever. Since 2013 blockchains have become a focus for investment by world banks, FinTechs and corporations who predict a fourth industrial revolution of super-automation and hyper-connectivity which the World Economic Forum predicts will cause an increase in global inequity. Imagined as a future-artefact of a time before the blockchain changed the world, and a protocol by which a community of thinkers can transform what that future might be, the publication *Artists Re:Thinking the Blockchain* acts as a gathering and focusing of contemporary ideas surrounding this still somewhat mythical technology. The book to be published and launched on the Blockchain in Summer 2017, will feature book-based, online and IRL artworks, reflecting on blockchain themes, poems, manifestos, howtos, sci-

ence fictions and theorisations, particularly in their hybrid form. Our intention is to diversify the people involved in its future by bringing together leading researchers, art workers and players, computer scientists, entrepreneurs and activists to discuss and speculate about (and with) this new technology: What can a blockchain do? Who builds this new reality? How will we rule ourselves? How will the future be different because of the Blockchain? It is our intention through this series to bring together people from diverse disciplines and backgrounds to work out how blockchain technologies can be shaped for more decentralised power, diverse needs and interests into the future.

*

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Furtherfield is an international hub dedicated to new forms of cooperation in arts, technology and society.

Furtherfield's *Art Data Money* programme which seeks out alternative economies to build a commons for the arts in the network age www.furtherfield.org

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Rob Myers' ***Bad Shibe***, is a sci-fi novella set in a future society that may or may not be based on a descendant of the Dogecoin cryptocurrency, where it's as hot and as dusty as a cryptocurrency mining rig. A trusting young shibe called YS is bewildered by new shibe-on-the-block BangZoom78's inexplicably rapid rise up the ranks of the social media app-du-crypto-jour. This makes YS question the basis of their utopia and their place within it. This makes them feel... bad.

**Print edition offered for sale at £10 or equivalent cryptocurrency amount
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