

About 550 words

## **THE VAULT**

By Paul Lambrecht

In the echoey vault beneath the earth, exact coordinates unknown, apart from little ramps of antediluvian dust, sat relics of men around what could have been King Arthur's round table.

The only other furniture in the room was a dot matrix printer on a stone pedestal. The knights periodically rose to rip sheets of paper from the roll whenever there was a pause in the carriage operation.

The pyramids, somewhere overhead, had shot down most of the alien ships. That had not stopped the aliens however, most of which were strong swimmers. My dad had been one of these crazy gunners. I had yet to hear anything of his fate.

A beautiful woman too, there was, of whom I was awaiting news. Her name was classified, and that pleased her because she was quite shy. She loved butterflies, or was it moths? She kept a diary, full of boy band lyrics, and vaguely vaginal sketches of larvae, and pupa, and metamorphoses. I think she was a Libra.

Me, I am most definitely a Leo. How did I become a knight? Was it before or after the death ray? I wrote a very long love letter to this woman, let's call her Angelina, in cold candle light after the First Great Earthquake. I think she hated it because she never mentioned it. I try to recall the words I used to seduce her. Hey babe. Do you like me? Check yes or no.

When it's my turn I rip off an article about shopping for finger bowls. Apparently these artifacts fell victim to upstart barbarians known to posterity as moist towelettes. I imagine what they must have looked like. White shiny souls, greeting me with an antiseptic odor, in a formless faceless dance of the veils.

The enemy always has an unknown face, that's how you know it's the enemy. They flew around, shaking the earth, distracting our attention from baskets of fries and funnel cakes. I

have so many memories that make no sense. Sitting on a stump while the waves lapped up on the shore. Talking about our Sex Ed classes from childhood.

In 2023, you were attacked by a swarm of moths. They ate off your shirt so they wouldn't even let you hide in the nearby church. Ever since then I ask the other knights: have you read an article recently about how to make homemade moth repellent? Mothballs in an aerosolized solution?

After these memories come feelings - mainly rejection, abandonment, nervousness, angst, old age. How did we ever overcome these obstacles? I guess it was only ever time that smoothed things over. You were the only free and lovely creature who roamed the virgin forests of my dreams. I chose you, or you were chosen for me.

When we met it was as if God had prepared a dedication. A million bulls were slaughtered under a setting red sun. I'd never felt so welcome, so loved, such belonging. Surrounded by the ashes of our former lives, we held hands, and ate Mariner dogs.

The door to the vault opened and a young soldier walked in. "Paul," he said, handing me a half-crushed moth, "There is someone outside who would like to see you."

**End.**