

The Painted City

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The Painted City

by [Sixteenthdays](#)

Summary

[IMPULSE]

Um, hi. It's me, Impulse. Filling in because Grian has still... not turned up. It's been three weeks now, and Mumbo says the rest of us need to start taking turns because he doesn't get paid to be the head archivist and Grian's office gives him the creeps and makes him sneeze. His words, not mine.

So... next one on the stack is this one. Statement of Iskall Eightyfive, regarding a model city. Statement originally given November 19th, 2013. Statement begins.

Notes

See the end of the work for [notes](#)

[Click]

[IMPULSE]

Uh... huh. So I just talk into here? Right. Okay. (*Shuffling*)

Um, hi. It's me, Impulse. Filling in because Grian has still... not turned up. It's been three weeks now, and Mumbo says the rest of us need to start taking turns because he doesn't get paid to be the head archivist and Grian's office gives him the creeps and makes him sneeze. His words, not mine.

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[IMPULSE (STATEMENT)]

Okay, so this happened about a year ago, in Sweden.

My job is something like a large-scale interior designer. I get hired to come in to malls or office buildings and make them look not terrible inside. Sometimes they're short contracts, sometimes they're longer ones. This was one of the longer ones.

My company had been working at this shopping center that was being renovated for a few months. All of the major construction was finished, so the next step was where I came in. I had to figure out a new installation, to be the centerpiece of the new wing of the complex.

I had a few options. Fountains are popular for this sort of thing. Statues, too. Most places like to keep space open to put up rotating holiday displays. This particular location had been advertising around local artist circles for sculptors who might be interested in contracting, and the applications for that all came through yours truly.

I'd already spoken to a dozen or so interested applicants when the... *weird* guy came in. He introduced himself as Keralis.

He was very friendly. Said he had an idea he thought I might really like- not a sculpture, exactly. He did models, he said, model towns and cities. He said he had a demonstration piece he'd been working on for a very long time in his workshop, if I wanted to come see, and if I liked what I saw he would be happy to make something on commission for the shopping center.

He was a little strange, but a lot of artists are, you know? I didn't think too much of it at the time. He had a big smile, big eyes- his pupils were *huge*, I remember, like when you get them dilated at the doctor's office, and they didn't change with the light.

But I guess his enthusiasm was kind of contagious. He was just very likable! Made lots of silly jokes, and the pictures he showed me honestly did look very impressive. Very detailed, and I figured a big model setup might have more novelty value than just another abstract statue. And I did sort of just want to get out of my office, so I said sure, why not, I'd come take a look.

I met him at his workshop the next day. It was a rented space in a pretty plain building; nothing too impressive from the outside. When we stepped inside and he flipped the lights on, though...

It looked *real*.

It was a big space, at least for what he was using it for- maybe two, three hundred square meters- and the entire *floor* was carpeted with model streets, buildings, bridges, parks, even a *waterfront* taking up most of one wall. Everything looked so intricate- I immediately wanted to crouch down and take a closer look, but I was worried about stepping and breaking things.

He told me not to worry about it, that it was all very sturdy and he wanted me to- 'see how it's like a city you could live in', I think he said.

He didn't have to tell me twice. I was *fascinated*. A lot of the time with models, you know, you get close and it's easy to see that it's all painted plastic, or metal fit together if they're really fancy, but I got down on my knees and looked into the entryway of the first building I saw, and it looked for all the world like real marble and concrete. I couldn't figure out how he'd done it.

I looked closer, and closer, and then-

I wasn't looking *down* anymore.

It's very strange. I don't remember feeling like I was- moving, or falling, or anything. It was just

like I'd suddenly- shifted my perspective a little, like when you figure out an optical illusion, and then I was in the city.

And the city was *huge*.

It was- it could have *been* a real city. If it wasn't for the fact that I could still see the ceiling overhead where the sky should've been, I might've gotten lost in it. The overhead light was like the sun.

It was absolutely empty. I guess he hadn't gotten around to models of people yet, or-

Well, I've wondered, with how realistic all his other building materials looked. Maybe he was having a shortage of... supplies.

Keralis patted me on the shoulder- it was only then I realized he was standing next to me- and said, 'Come on, then! You get the grand tour!'

It was... the way he acted like it was so *normal*. Like nothing strange had happened at all. I think it did something to my head. I started to wonder if maybe he was right, and this city *was* somehow-real. It *looked* real, so long as I didn't look up.

It was just missing the people.

So... he gave me a tour.

To be honest, thinking back on it now, even though I was definitely... lost and confused and more than a little *terrified*, the main thing I remember feeling is... wonder. I remember wanting to stay. It was like a perfect place- clean and beautiful and perfectly arranged, better than any *real* city I'd ever visited.

I could see myself wanting to *live* there, if only it was real. And that *scared* me.

He led me through the downtown, past a bank and a fire station, down a street lined with shops, out to the bay. From above I hadn't been able to see the water moving, but from inside the city I could taste the salt in the air and see the waves crashing against concrete moorings.

I remember looking down into the water. I should've been able to see the bottom clearly- it was all set up in *one room*, the 'bay' couldn't have been more than a foot deep in reality- and I still remember the shiver I felt when I realized I couldn't. It looked endlessly dark. I took a few quick steps back.

Keralis was perfectly friendly the whole time. Like he didn't see anything weird about any of it. He just seemed honestly excited to show it all off to me. I felt like I was losing my mind.

The sun never moved overhead. And- it made *sense* that it didn't. It was the light. It was the light in the room. I had to just try and keep holding that in my head, every time I started to wonder if this was real after all. The shadows never moved; the sun stayed beating straight down from overhead, so bright it was almost white.

We did a full circuit of the city, I think. I think we must have. It felt long enough for that. Keralis wasn't in any rush- he showed me inside buildings, took us down sidestreets.

At a certain point I started to wonder if he would finish the tour and just leave me there. First citizen of the city. That was almost how it felt- like I was being shown a house I was going to live in.

That didn't happen. I mean, obviously. I'm here talking to you. I still don't know if it *could've*, but.

Eventually, we circled back to where we started, and then between one step and the next I was standing at the doorway of his workshop again, looking down at the model city, right where I'd entered.

Keralis clapped his hands, and said, 'Well? What do you think?'

I honestly don't even remember what I said. Something about how it was very impressive and I'd get back to him in a few days about his application, probably. He shook my hand with both of his and said it had been a real pleasure. His skin felt weird. Almost like rubber, or plastic. I remember *looking* at him, as I stepped out the door, and wondering how I'd ever thought he looked human.

And... that was it. I left, stepped out on the street, and I was back in the real world, with all its litter and people and shadows that moved.

Uh, we went with a local sculptor for the installation.

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[Click]

[IMPULSE]

Find anything?

[PEARL]

Well, he's definitely *real*. Most active in Sweden and Poland, which tracks with the statement. I couldn't find a last name, though a lot of websites that mentioned him weren't in English, so I might've just missed it? He's actually mostly famous for his work on model trains, from what I could find. He's still active, has a couple world records, I think.

And apparently, in the last year, his projects have gotten some new attention for the addition of some really impressive lifelike figurines.

[IMPULSE]

Creepy.

[PEARL]

Yeah, a bit.

[IMPULSE]

Uh, thanks for doing that. (*Laughs uncomfortably*) I don't... know what I'm doing in here. Feels like I'm not supposed to be sitting here.

[PEARL]

'Course. And I know what you mean. It's this office. Feels like it's watching you, right? Whenever Grian's not here. And you *always* catch one of those recorders running before too-

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[CLEO]

Let's see... how's that? *Ooh*, balance still a bit off... we can fix that. Let's-

[JEVIN]

(Shouting, distant) Are you doing weird stuff back there *again?*

[CLEO]

(Shouting back) Mind your own *business*, *Jevin!*

[Click]

End Notes

fun fact: with this statement, all active hermits have appeared at least once!

speaking of which, i said this on twitter a couple days ago but i should say it here too: we *are* truly drawing pretty near to the end of the story i have planned here! i know with a story told in a series like this it can be less clear how long the author intends it to be, so: i have five more statements planned! and they will be fun ones!

the conclusion of the main written story will not be the end of from the archives, obviously. we're continuously working on the podfic, AND my cowriter and i definitely intend on continuing to write side material. so don't be sad please!

next time up: scar takes the mic for the first time in quite a while, and pearl follows up on something.

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!