

DoomAuthor(s): WILLIAM STOBBS

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Doom

WILLIAM STOBB

TO DESCRIBE THE TIMPANI PART AT THE beginning of Strauss's *Zarathustra*, you could say doom doom doom doom doom doom doom, and then you'd probably sing up with the trumpet part, as if a twisted brass tube could escape fate.

DOOM IS ONE OF THE EARLY FIRST person shooter video games that people got addicted to. You were "Doomguy" and you shot your way through thousands of goat-faced demons from Mars. In Russia, I saw men sit at public terminals for days at a time, playing *Doom*, urinating into their empty Mountain Dew bottles. I also saw alcoholic men writhing in the gutter and a uniformed soldier open a beer bottle with his arm stubs.

ONE CONVERSATION REACHED THE conclusion that everyone's depressed—how could you sail on the burning funeral ship of the species, your own body, watching the landscape of extinction pass on the receding shore, and be essentially well-adjusted? "Look at us," said D: "everything we're wearing, drinking, eating is totally screwed," and even though we were on a bright patio at a pizza place in Chicago, I felt a foreboding sense, as in a horror movie, that a spear would be thrust from the ground up through my body and out my mouth, leaving me gagging blood while everyone ran, screaming. It was a secondary sense, though, which allowed me to continue my lunch, because obviously stuff like that rarely happens.

AWESOMELY, AFTER ABOUT ONE MINUTE of finger wiggling, I am able to start Kubrick's *2001* on my laptop and I can tell you that the *Zarathustra* trumpets come before the timpani. And now the cres-

cent moon. And now the approaching sun. And even for the dawn of humanity that music is almost too much.

THE MIND IS ALWAYS RUNNING ON multiple tracks, I think, but then I recognize that that very thought is swiped from audio production software. Still, most times thinking feels perfectly normal. Thinking can even be boring, even oppressive. One positive thing about death might be the end of having to think.

I DO KNOW SOME ESSENTIALLY POSITIVE people—one orthopedic surgeon who coaches little league baseball, one coffee roaster who teaches homeless people yoga, and one old beatnik poet who loves to yell about the military industrial complex, which seems like a positive attitude. I know he's had problems like heart problems and money problems and woman problems and liquor problems, but I always felt essentially good and positive around him until one time we reached a point in conversation where "yeah Marilyn Monroe had a huge black cock" was actually the sensible, predictable reply, and while we laughed about that, we also recoiled, slightly. The whole conversation seemed like a bad sign, overall, for the species.

VICTOR VON DOOM IS A SUPERVILLAIN. Because of a small scar on his cheek, he forged a metal mask for himself. Unfortunately, he donned the mask while it was still really hot, and burned the shit out of his face. After that, he started calling himself Doctor Doom, and once you go that route, well . . . what can you do but wreak havoc?

NOW THE PEOPLE IN APE COSTUMES are going "scram, scram" at each

other, and then the cheetah is poised over its kill, sunrise gleaming in its eye, on the day that that domino-thing arrives from outer space and the ape is able to imagine using a large bone to bludgeon another creature and then immediately does so and becomes human.

THE OLDEST USE OF *DOOM* I COULD find is as the title for the law book of King Alfred the Great, circa 900 CE. This book is so awesome that the Ten Commandments are the *preface*—that would be my blurb for it. In this book, "doom" means something like "law" or "judgment" because language evolves over time. "Doom very evenly!" King Alfred liked to say. "Do not doom one doom to the rich and another to the poor!" King Alfred rated honesty pretty highly: "if he belie himself and be slain, let him lie uncompensated," and it's ironic that I get a very *doomy* image from that of a big red-bearded Viking guy lying in the mud, bleeding out from an axe wound, blinking his last blinks knowing that no one has prayed for him in the way you need to be prayed for if you're going to heaven. And the camera pans up into the sky and into our solar system and our galaxy and our universe, but the heavy string music continues over top of all of it because my capacity for imagining stuff is afflicted with the sappy conventions of my time (as if Viking heaven required beseeching prayer—I'm pretty sure Vikings just attacked and took over their heaven, which wasn't even called heaven—it was called V-something—Valhalla. Yes.) which I cling to as if they had a merit I would someday defend to an Art Critic God. "Those were great accomplishments," I'd say. "You have to concede the skill and dedication to craft." □