THE ORION PROTOCOL

the recovered doctrine
expanded edition

DEPARTMENT OF SURRENDER

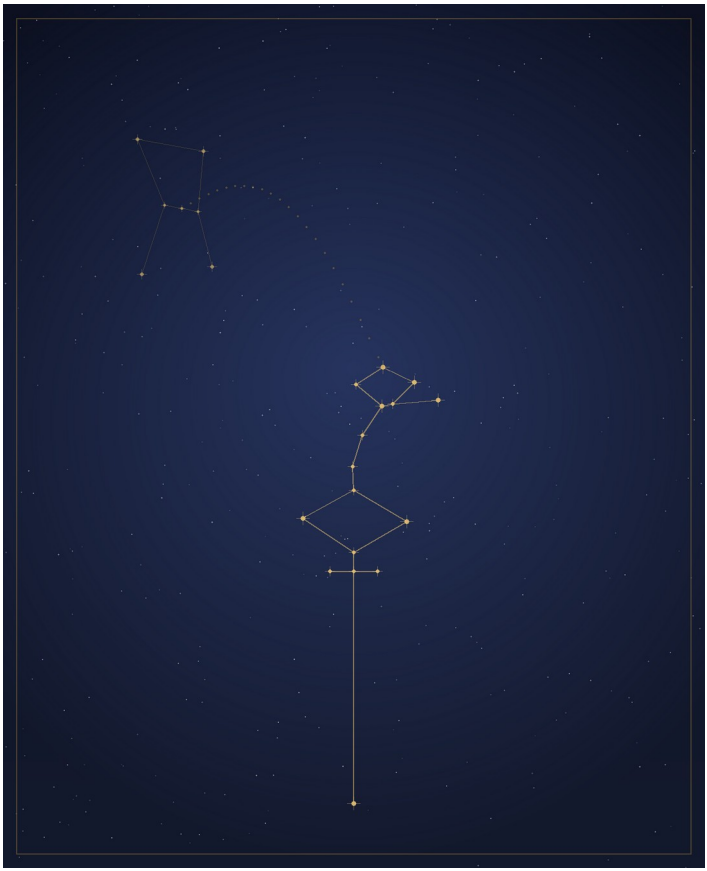
THE ORION PROTOCOL

Being the recovered founding doctrine of the Department of Surrender, together with the transmissions of Officer Pemberton

as set down by

ORION SAINT

FILE NO. 0001-O | ORIGIN DOCUMENT | DECLASSIFIED



A hunter, a bird,
and a bow held too long.

PLATE I | WHERE ORION MEETS THE BIRD

This book is not a government publication. It is something worse, and older.

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All statistics in this volume are fabricated and presented seriously. They are, in the only sense the Department recognises, true.

Certain passages have been redacted, withheld, misfiled, or lost. The Department maintains that what is missing was never essential, and notes that this is also true of most things a citizen believes they cannot live without.

The Department of Surrender is a fictional institution. The citizen is real.

The citizen reports and departmental incidents are fiction. This expanded edition draws on the author's experience in technical assembly, maintenance, plumbing, driving and art.

ISSUED UNDER FORM 0-O | PRINTED ON PAPER RECLAIMED FROM UNANSWERED CORRESPONDENCE

For the hunter,
who has been chasing so long
he has forgotten he is allowed to stop.

And for the Bird,
who stood the long watch.

RECOVERED FRONT MATTER

NOTICE OF RECOVERY

The document that follows was recovered from the central archive of the Department of Surrender, which was found, on a date the Office of Records declines to specify, empty.

The desks were cleared. The filing cabinets stood open. Inside them remained three paper clips, the faint smell of carbon ribbon, and one form stamped RECEIVED although no one could determine by whom. Officer Pemberton's office was unlocked. His chair was pushed in. His pen was capped. A cup of tea had gone cold beside a pale circle on the leather where something had rested for many years.

Of the officer himself there was no sign.

Outside the eastern window stood a narrow wooden post. For as long as anyone could remember, a pink flamingo in a tricorn hat and a small black gas mask had stood upon it. The Department called this creature the Bird and declined every request for clarification.

The post was bare.

Among the abandoned papers, one file was complete. It bore the number 0001-O and the words THE ORION PROTOCOL. Beneath them appeared a name no current member of the Department recognised: Orion Saint. Interleaved with the doctrine were the transmissions of Officer Pemberton, arranged here in the order in which they seem to have been written.

The file and its accompanying papers are reproduced here. Dates are given where they survive. The Office of Records has been unable to establish who authorised their release.

THE BIRD'S POST IS EMPTY. PROCEED.

"The hunter is not punished by the chase.
The hunter is punished by being unable to stop."

- FROM THE ORION FILE

A WORD FROM ORION SAINT

You have looked up on a winter night and seen him: the hunter fastened to the sky, belt bright, arm lifted, bow forever drawn. Orion. One of the oldest figures human beings agreed to see in the dark.

The myths disagree about how he arrived there. In one, he was honoured. In another, punished. The reasons vary; the raised arm remains.

Anyone who has risen early to get ahead of a day that was already waiting, rehearsed an argument for a person no longer in the room, or lain awake counting the distance between the life they possess and the life they were promised may recognise the posture.

I recognise it. There are mornings when I reach for work before remembering what the work is for.

The Department built a great deal of paperwork around this condition. It issued directives, allocated emotions, and stationed a Bird on a post. Officer Pemberton signed the pages. His letters survive among them, together with reports the official filing system could not comfortably accommodate.

The papers do not always agree. A citizen objects. A directive is amended. An officer writes something and decides not to send it.

You may enter at any of these points. For the length of one page, the bow can rest.

ORION SAINT

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TRANSMISSION THE FIRST

A LETTER FROM OFFICER PEMBERTON

To the Citizen,

Congratulations. You are holding the founding doctrine of the Department of Surrender. I have supervised its distribution for thirty years. Complaints concerning the paper have been few.

I am Officer Pemberton. I sign the transmissions, allocate emotions, and maintain the National Threat Level. The system has served us well. Compliance is 94.2 per cent.

If you have arrived tired, you are in the correct department. There is no need to account for the tiredness before sitting down.

Recent reports require clarification. Citizens claim the Bird has appeared in kitchens and on buses. In one account it accepted a chair. The Bird does not leave the post. Its provision does not include furniture.

This morning the post outside my window was empty for eleven minutes. I checked from the corridor to exclude a fault in the glass.

Requests to discontinue the Bulletins have also increased. Records has been asked for the procedure. Meanwhile, I shall examine File 0001-O. Its opening line is familiar; the remaining provisions have not previously required my attention.

This review will take place after office hours. Normal service will continue.

Begin whenever you like. The Bird is watching.

The Bird is proud.

SIGNED
OFFICER PEMBERTON
Office of Voluntary Obedience
~ P ~

FORM A-1

OFFICE OF CIVILIAN PROCESSING

Optional. Complete before reading if you would like a record of how you arrived.

One line is sufficient. An unfinished answer may be left unfinished.

IN ONE LINE - HOW ARE YOU, ACTUALLY?

DATE OF INTAKE _____

You may leave this blank. No explanation will be requested.

filed on your behalf, ~ P ~

PART ONE

THE BURDEN OF OPINION

In which the hunter returns several positions he does not remember purchasing and discovers that silence is not an empty chair.

SECTION 01

AN INVENTORY OF OPINIONS

You have too many opinions. This is not a criticism. It is an inventory.

At some point it became your responsibility to have a position on every election, scandal, celebrity apology, sandwich, and person speaking too loudly in a video filmed inside a parked car. No additional hours were issued for this work. The opinions accumulated, each demanding to be defended before strangers who were, at that moment, defending the opposite.

You carry them as a person carries twelve grocery bags in one trip, fingers white, circulation failing, refusing to admit that two journeys were available.

Set the bags down.

A headline supplied the outrage; a friend supplied the correct tone; an algorithm placed two citizens in a room and paid itself each time they struck one another with certainty. By evening the borrowed opinion had moved into your voice. By the end of the week you were calling it a principle.

Examine one closely. Ask when you formed it, what you actually know, and what in your life would change if you returned it. Many opinions turn out to be coats collected at a party from a person who said, "Hold this," and disappeared nine years ago.

This Protocol does not ask you to believe nothing. Some beliefs are load-bearing. They concern whom you love, what you will permit, what you owe another person, and what kind of life allows you to respect the person living it. Keep those. Hold them carefully.

DIRECTIVE

You are authorised to have no opinion on a matter that does not concern you and upon which you have done no serious thinking. "I do not know" is a complete sentence. "I have not decided" may remain true indefinitely.

FINDING

The average citizen maintains 1,847 active opinions. Seven concern their actual life. The Department has labelled the remaining 1,840 "decorative burdens" and placed them beside the door.

APPROVED EMOTION

Relief, of the exact kind felt when a meeting is cancelled after you have already made coffee.

RECOMMENDED SURRENDER

Choose one public controversy currently demanding your judgement. Decline the appointment. Observe that events continue without your verdict and that the chair you vacated is immediately occupied by someone delighted to have it.

> *Leave this one with the citizen. No ruling required. - P.*

FORM 01-I

OFFICE OF CIVILIAN PROCESSING

For determining which convictions belong in the building.

CITIZEN NAME _____

OPINION CURRENTLY BEING CARRIED

WHERE DID IT COME FROM?

[ ] Lived experience [ ] Careful study [ ] A person I trust

[ ] A headline [ ] A stranger online [ ] I cannot remember

WHAT DOES THIS OPINION PROTECT?

DOES IT CONCERN MY ACTUAL LIFE?

[ ] Yes [ ] No [ ] I have never asked

WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF I SET IT DOWN FOR THIRTY DAYS?

CLASSIFICATION

[ ] Load-bearing belief [ ] Useful working view

[ ] Decorative burden [ ] Borrowed outrage - return to sender

STATUS: [ ] KEEP CAREFULLY [ ] REVIEW LATER [ ] RELEASE

SIGNED _____

SECTION 02

ON BEING RIGHT

There is a fatigue known only to those who must be right. It arrives in the shoulders.

You know the moment. The argument has stopped being useful, perhaps stopped being about its stated subject, but you cannot leave because departure would be entered into evidence as defeat. The other person is no longer listening. You are no longer listening. Two nervous systems are standing in a doorway insisting the other pass first.

You have assembled sources for a stranger who had already gone to lunch. You have won arguments against people who left believing they had won, which means the victory occurred entirely inside your own head, where you were already in agreement with yourself.

Being right is an expensive hobby. It costs more than sailing and produces fewer photographs.

The Department offers a third option between victory and defeat: release. Somewhere, at this moment, someone is wrong about something. They may remain wrong. The record is enormous and has survived worse. You are not its night watchman.

This is not permission to abandon truth when truth protects someone. Correct the figure that harms. Challenge the lie used as a weapon. Speak when silence would make you an accomplice. But do not confuse moral courage with the compulsion to correct a stranger's harmless error after 10 p.m.

DIRECTIVE

You are released from the duty of winning every argument. If the matter is not consequential, you may understand precisely why the other person is wrong and then go home anyway.

FINDING

No argument conducted after 9:00 p.m. has ever ended with the sentence, "You have changed my deepest convictions. Thank you for your patience." The Office of Records searched twice.

APPROVED EMOTION

The clean peace of walking away while a stranger is still composing paragraph six.

RECOMMENDED SURRENDER

Locate one harmless error today. Let it pass. Spend the time you save on a person who can hear you.

> *Opinions multiply when the office is empty. - P.*

SECTION 03

ON THE COMPULSION TO COMMENT

Watching has become insufficient. Now you must respond.

You see a sunset, a scandal, a stranger's wedding, a badly assembled shelf. Before the experience has fully arrived, a mechanism begins to turn: register a reaction; make the joke; establish where you stand; prove that you were present. The moment is converted into a report before you have had it.

The same mechanism demands speed. A public event occurs at 8:04. By 8:11, you are expected to possess a complete moral architecture around it. Facts will arrive on Thursday. Your verdict is required Tuesday morning.

The Department has examined the Hot Take and found it radioactive: brilliant for an hour, embarrassing by supper, preserved forever if wrong. It rewards the citizen most richly at the exact moment they are loudest and least informed.

There is a slower relationship with the world. You may see a thing and allow it to remain outside you. You may learn of an event and wait for the dust to settle. You may form, if absolutely necessary, a Lukewarm Take: considered, late, quiet, and much more likely to survive contact with Wednesday.

DIRECTIVE

You are excused from immediate reaction. Facts may arrive before your verdict.

FINDING

The half-life of a Hot Take is four hours. After that, half the heat has vanished and all of the risk remains.

APPROVED EMOTION

The illicit pleasure of knowing something, seeing something, or loving something without placing it on display.

RECOMMENDED SURRENDER

Wait a day before commenting on an event you have only just heard about. See what has changed by morning.

> *When did I begin signing things I had not read? - P.*

THE ORION FILE

CITIZEN REPORT I

OFFICE OF CIVILIAN PROCESSING | SUBMITTED 19:26

My daughter is twenty-six. She has left her job to do work I do not understand, and I had an argument ready. Two nights I spent arranging it. I even wrote some of it down.

When she called, she sounded tired. I asked whether she had eaten. She said no.

I put the argument in my coat pocket and carried soup to her apartment. She talked while I found bowls. I nearly interrupted twice. There is still a question about the rent that I wish she would answer.

But she asked if I could come again on Sunday. I said yes. The paper is still in my coat.

OFFICIAL ANNOTATION

Initially filed as Failure to Advise. No further action requested by either citizen.

THE ORION FILE

RECOVERED MEMORANDUM I

OFFICE OF VOLUNTARY OBEDIENCE | INTERNAL | NOT FOR THE CITIZENRY

Enrolment remains healthy. The Bulletins go out. Compliance holds at its customary 94.2 per cent.

A category of correspondence has nevertheless emerged for which no form exists. Citizens are writing to thank us and then asking to be removed from the mailing list. They do not describe a problem that could be corrected.

One wrote: "I think I have it now. You can give my emotion to someone who needs it."

I returned this letter for clarification. The citizen, M. Vale, had omitted the reason for leaving. I added a space for it beneath the signature.

The original form contains no such space. This is an omission we have apparently tolerated for years.

I shall examine the withdrawal provisions when the outgoing post is complete.

~ P ~

PART TWO

THE SURRENDER OF ATTENTION

In which the hunter asks to go home, discovers who is issuing the instructions, and reclaims a little attention for the journey.