

**THE OTHER OTHERS**  
By TIM CUMMINGS

I'm having such a good day! Then, I nearly kill someone.

Pleasantly exhausted, I return home after my final graduate school Residency, ten twelve-hour days of workshops, dissertation presentations, evaluations, and readings. I'm prepped to head over to the campus the following morning to receive my MFA. I'd be beaming were it not for the exhaustion. I am beaming, but like a flashlight whose batteries are low. "Let's go see *Jurassic World: Fallen Kingdom*," I say to my partner, Paul. I need to take my mind out of the realm of the scholarly. What better way to chill than gazing at Chris Pratt's bulge and watching dinosaurs chomp dumbass humans to bits?

In the Arclight Cinemas Hollywood parking garage, a large red Four-Runner in front of my little green Mini Cooper suddenly stops and backs up. There are several cars behind me; I've got nowhere to go. I honk. It's just a little honk, but in the parking garage it resounds louder than the roar of a T-Rex. The driver pops out the window and snarls obscenities, then maneuvers the truck up a different aisle. We park and are walking out of the garage when the guy in the red Four-Runner appears: he has parked in the same aisle, a row or two up. He approaches, wearing a mangy T-shirt and jeans. He's slight, a little wily; a troublemaker judging from his tough-guy gait.

“There they are, the fucking pricks,” he says. “What the fuck’s wrong with you?”

“Excuse me,” I say. “You backed up your truck, I’m in a little car, I couldn’t tell whether you could see me or not.”

“So you honk on your horn like a little bitch?”

“What did you want me to do? You were gonna hit me.”

“I wasn’t gonna hit you. I knew you were there.”

“But who stops like that in the middle of a parking lot and backs up?”

“Fuck you, you fucking faggots. FAGGOTS.”

Sledgehammers knock against my heart; millipedes race my veins; bile boils and spurts out my salivary glands, filling my mouth with a metallic, acrid taste. Then, quite calmly, and quietly—and much to my surprise—I say, “That’s right, bitch. And this faggot? This faggot right here? This faggot is 6’2” and 230lbs AND HE WILL FUCKING DESTROY YOU.”

I advance on him, violently. “YOU WANNA TRY ME? YOU WANNA GET INTO IT? I’LL POUND YOU TO A BLOODY PASTE YOU PIECE OF SHIT. COME AT ME, BRO.”

The guy looks shocked at my intensity. He blinks. Surely no other faggot he’s harassed has come back at him quite like this. I could so easily grab his little head, twist it, snap his neck. So easily. Too easily. I’ve morphed into a Trump crony at a White Supremacist rally. I’m a stranger to my own self. Now, I’m backing away, both middle fingers raised, yelling, “Have a nice day. You and your family enjoy the fucking dinosaurs. I snapped a picture of your license plate and I’m calling the cops right now, KING OF THE DICKHEADS.”

*What.*

*Is.*

*Happening.*

While I’m admittedly angrier than most people I know, I’m pretty much a pacifist. I don’t even kill bugs. I capture them and set them free. Anger gets filtered into positivity and creativity; I use it as fuel for my acting and my writing. It’s what I’m most proud of in my life: my Anger Filtration System. AKA: my “AFS”.

But there's a whole other component to this, and a complicated one...

Three weeks before, Paul and I are running errands in West Hollywood, one of the most formidable LGBTQ districts in the world. We hit Target at Santa Monica & LaBrea and we're headed back to our car when a family emerges from another shop. As they pass us on the street, the patriarch of the family goes, "More homos. H O M O S." He draws it out long and slow.

It is so shocking and unexpected and violating and disgusting that neither Paul nor I have a reaction. In the moment, it's just...we turn to stone, icy stone. We utterly ignore it, deny its existence. We succumb and continue on with our day, with our errands, with our lives.

We address it, eventually, later that day:

"Did you hear what that guy said?"

"Yeah."

"What the hell?"

"I know."

"Well, what...?"

"I know."

And that was that.

But it haunts me. Cellular-memory assaults me; recollections of being bullied and beat up for years. Nights, it haunts me: a nightly salvo of fuckery sleepwalking through my skull, causing tosses, causing turns, causing bed sheets to soak up stress-sweat. And the ever-churning mind whirls: *What the fuck are you doing in WeHo if you don't like homos? Where do you want us to go?!* See, when the incident at the Arclight parking garage took place, I had been mulling over the prior instance of gay-bashing—whatever you want to call it—for weeks. Ergo, I snapped.

But there's yet another component to this, and it's even more complicated.

The man who said “More homos” in West Hollywood was African American. His wife and children darted their eyeballs over at us with disdain. The man who said “FAGGOTS” in the parking garage was Latino. His kids watched from the Four-Runner with a sour insouciance.

I’ve maintained a pretty surface-level comprehension about rampant homophobia in minority communities. Basically, “Black and Latino men hate fags” is the gist of it. Cats hate water, Catholics hate sin, and Black and Latino men hate fags.

It’s a stupid, surface-level judgment on my part; shallow and apathetic, yet totally truthful. But why? Why?

I take time to read widely, particularly enlightened by an article titled, “Why Can't We Talk About Homophobia in the Black Community?” by Daniel Reynolds in the Politics section of The Advocate, May, 2015.

I speak with African-American and Latino friends about this, ask them the tough questions.

The investigation, however, lands me nowhere near where I feel I need to be; no revelations.

So I do what I do when I need a solution that the world won’t provide: meditate.

The little meditation voice—soft as a whisper, loud as a bomb—says, “It’s about manhood.”

(Logically that makes sense to me; homosexuality is a threat to masculinity. I’ve felt that my whole life and have scars to prove it. But I dig down to where the soil is wetter, darker, the earthworms translucent.) “Show me more,” I say.

“It’s about breeding,” the voice says. “Carrying on your race, your kind, especially if that race is an oppressed or threatened one.”

“Okay, so homosexuality destroys that possibility? If you don’t breed, you’re a defector?”

The voice: “In certain circles, yes.”

I accept this, but it still does not elucidate what I think is happening. Especially since I’m Caucasian—so why persecute me? If anything, wouldn’t minority men be happy that there are white people who aren’t procreating?

But that’s not what’s happening either. I feel it in the air like cold electricity and it’s disquieting, because it happened twice in two weeks and before this it hasn’t happened since I was a teenager.

And so I aversely pose this question to you: Is the current administration winning by turning the Others in society against other Others?

Think about it for a second.

Do African-Americans feel extra-threatened lately by a President who says that people at White Supremacist rallies are good people; or by abominations like Roseanne Barr who tweet out hate rhetoric against them? Or by simply watching everything Obama did be overturned like it never existed in the first place?

Latinos? They’re watching their citizens get round up and shoved into cages and their children forcefully removed from their parents, handed silver foil blankets with which to curl up on the floor. And then the government can’t even meet the deadline to reunite them.

Are we Others of society defending ourselves against the other Others now? Because the President and his minions need only turn us against one another and they win. And America is back to 1957, which is what it seems they really want.

Even SCOTUS sided with the cake baker—I know, there were insinuating circumstances about religious rights, but did you see the “FAGS NOT WELCOME HERE” signs that cropped in store windows all over America the week that ruling came down? I did. How many more hard-earned civil victories will fall like bombed towers, blanketing hope with so much gray ash?

If you give people a reason to hate, and an allowance on which to spend it, then it's Wal-Mart city, baby.

I'm loathe to convey this because I do not want to emanate a cynical, pessimistic, or victimy energy. Yet, I fear that if we don't staunch the flow, there's going to be another Civil War in this country. Someone I know posted something on Facebook, a meme, quoting Ted Nugent, the former rock star turned toxic Republican. He's an ultra-conservative, gun-loving aberration—and that's me being kind. The meme quotes him as saying, "Folks keep talkin' about another Civil War. One side has 8 trillion bullets. The other doesn't know which bathroom to use." I nearly stood up and peed on my own computer screen I was so enraged.

But how am I any better than the other side if I can't keep my own reactions in stride?

So part of that aforementioned staunching starts here, with me, with how I reacted, with how I let my anger off the leash like a vicious Rottweiler. I'm ashamed, a little, because my reaction is at the heart of the problem here. I'm also disappointed, because that reaction is totally logical, despite its consequences. Lastly, I'm confused, because I don't know what to do about this situation moving forward, and that is why I pose the question to you.

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In the end, I was so upset that didn't even enjoy Chris Pratt's bulge. The dinosaurs, though...such majestic giants, colossal and ferocious, instinctual and simple.

Yes, simple. They kind of had it better than we do. Didn't they?

At its heart, I felt the film was a story reminding us that their extinction was not their fault.

Will ours be?