

When Gen Z finally set its coveted gaze tapirward – randomly and unwittingly capitulating to the beast’s mute and patient champions – the Internet’s purpose had come round at last. For here, in a viewer-viewed union shipped straight to Heaven, was a creature the mere sight of which could inspire abject silliness in a boy, and the boy so sillified. “What’s that on his face?” he wonders. “Is it a penis?” Upon perusing the creature further, one finds that, when mating, the male tapir resides not only in the Perissodactyla, but also in the *Perissosceles*. “‘Tis an obscene creature,” the boy concludes, “with a dick for a nose, and a leg for a dick.”



How did the tapir remain *hidden* for so long? It appears in Kubrick’s *2001*, of course, its femur being the preimage of a satellite. To the Pokemites it took the bipedal form of Drowzee, this time the preimage of a hypnotist. For our Brazilian and Malaysian brethren, meanwhile, the creature had no need for an artistic representation – its snouted self being a constant, if somewhat mysterious, fixture of the forest. To such bedfellows, I conjecture, the tapir was not unlike dark matter. That is to say, it was a massive, attractive presence felt more than seen. Like a plump, loving uncle sleeping in the other room, the tapir must have nudged a calming lode in their minds – a harmless co-inhabitant of that off-black space we all enter when we close for the time our eyes.

But all these facts considered, the tapir was still a rather obscure creature. Though plainly part of the megafauna, ‘twas never canonized in the cardboard books of toddlerdom, and instead remained the domain of thousand-dollar Jeopardy questions. Indeed, round about this time the tapir was something of a one-question IQ test, with knowledge of the beast’s name and the spelling thereof being a necessary and sufficient condition for a subscription to the New York Times. That is, until it became a meme. For deep within the bowels of Reddit, a Rickroll-esque redirect gag involving the tapir would eventually assert itself, and thereby bring this loving and odd-legged thing to the ever-loyal and readied masses.

So when the tapir reared his ugly head and beggared Brendan render him costume, the boy, in the spirit of the hour and with nary a whine, obliged. “I don’t have a choice,” he thought to himself. “Tapir it is! Lord Kek demands it.”

Somewhat bizarrely, and much to his annoyance, Brendan was all alone in this assessment. Why was this child, of all the larval men at Brocktown High, the only one with the genius and the wherewithal to wear with all his might the dread suit of the trunked dreadnought? Surely in a school of some thousand students, all of whom were subjected to the same furry theme day, and who daily drowned themselves in the same media sea, Brendan Baxter could have found an ally? Unfortunately, the child was not particularly popular, nor did he make for a very good communicator. In fact, he was a terrible communicator – and this was what did him in.

You see, back in those days the reality chauvinists still held sway. They touched grass and inspired others to do the same. They built muscle and could hold down eye contact. They spoke of testosterone, and Vitamin D, and, for the love of God, getting those phthalate levels down. Holdouts from the days of yore, the reality chauvinists arbitrarily privileged the “real” world and refused to take seriously any other. With immense bigotry they preferred atoms over pixels. They were bodies, not minds, one might say – and to the extent that they could not decouple an information from the medium temporarily instantiating it, the days of these bloody Aristotelians were numbered.

Now this idea – that of the entropic doom of the reality chauvinists – paid regular pilgrimage to Brendan’s mind. In fact, whenever it came to visit, Brendan found the thing to be enormously obvious – sort of like the non-existence of God, or the correctness of utilitarian ethics.

“Bigots will be on the wrong side of history,” the boy figured.

Like many his age, and like many frequenters of reddit.com, Brendan was a *consent-based monist*. Put simply, ethical behavior, to Brendan, was that which optimized the Good – and the Good, for a person, was whatever they consented to. Brendan was profoundly uncomfortable with the thought that numerous, distinct ontological claims could be out there in the Void waiting to ambush him, and the arbitrary preference of one stream of sensory input over all others – that is to say, the supposition of the reality chauvinists – constituted such a claim.

Put another way, that off-black space Brendan would enter when *he* would close for the time *his* eyes was not a homely, lived-in thing, but a phantasmic, crackling jungle. Out of necessity, the boy strove to master, through awareness, his potentially harmful co-inhabitants. It was Brendan’s hope of hopes that the space contained not a multiplicity of dangers, but only a single being other than himself – only a single Thing Which Asserted Itself.

Put yet another way, Brendan was a consent-based monist not through an abundance of empathy, but through a lack of courage. For to hold a belief and to grip it tight requires something of a bodily presence. It requires that robust, action-and-feedback way of knowing the world completely alien to a starrer of screens. And that the very belief in question was the necessity of spending time outdoors – this put Brendan into a sort of paradoxical rut. The only way out of it, apparently, was a Kierkegaardian leap.

Not that this leap was forthcoming. And not that Brendan understood, through and through, the preceding material. For recall, dear reader, that Brendan Baxter was a terrible communicator – both to himself and to others. He was at that stage in life where the ideas had him and not the other way around. His was a staring and fish-lipped face, ostensibly bent on downloading, through passive observation, as much information as was humanly possible. One could almost make out the progress bar on his forehead, and one could only imagine what volcanic speech would burst forth once the download was complete.

“Fish-lipped, you say? But tapir-nosed he need be!” Now this – the hobbling together of the costume in advance of the school’s furry theme day – was what really did the boy in.

Spirit Halloween, having recently been spirited away to its mysterious post-autumnal abode of which no one knows, was of no help. Fast Fashion at the mall couldn’t get the job done either, them fellas primarily trafficking in Vietnamese tee-shirts. Finally, as for seeking the tapir in its very home *the Amazon*, well, Brendan was no Prime member and too much of a procrastinator to make that work.

Nope. Brendan had to make his tapir costume entirely by hand, the night before. I shall not bore the reader with the entire logistics, but I will note that the most *essential* component of the costume came by way of Megan Baxter’s lower right dresser drawer. She was three years her brother’s senior, bereft of boyfriend, and rather routinely attached to the toy he took.

Suffice it to say Brendan was suspended for this stunt, but only after the contraption’s obfuscating paper mache failed him. That critical, crinkling moment came to in Mr. O’Brien’s social studies class. It began with a giggle and ended with a roar.

Now, when that round-the-room mockery came to its peak, Brendan, frozen to his chair and dead to rights, latched his eyes onto whatever they could find. They settled on a list of Roman emperors near Mr. O’Brien’s desk and, by a process thoroughly unaccountable to the boy, scanned the thing until a comforting name was found. Twixt Macrinus and Alexander Severus, Brendan’s eyes came to rest on Elagabalus – the great *she*-empress herself, who loved nothing more than a big black rock and who with that love united asunder the godly impulse.

Yes, it was Elagabalus who brought monotheism to the hesitant Roman horde, and it was Elagabalus whose ghost gave great consolation in that moment. Hers was an altogether fitting and proper presence.

“Why me?” the boy thought. “Chad here laughs and laughs, but he wears only wolf ears and a tail – a total cliché. Why must I be punished for my creativity?”

Elagabalus was silent, at first, though she imbued Brendan with the spirit of dominance. Even there, roundly mocked and attacked on all sides, Brendan maintained saintly composure. He comprehended the reality chauvinists in their higher-dimensional totality. He understood their donning such trivial costumes to be a foregone conclusion the moment the theme day was announced, and, through the all-seeing eyes of his she-empress, glimpsed the very paths of least action their inert masses did follow. In being able to perform a *manual* override on a task the reality chauvinists *had scarcely been conscious of*, Brendan swelled a feeling of great power. It was as if he had a qualitatively superior capacity for agency.

Yet there Brendan sat, with a dick on his face.

“To buttress with bulbous gargoyle those two glass windows through which all light enters the mind is to induce dissociation on the regular. Why look out – with such an obstructed view – when one can look within?” Elagabalus mused for him. “Why not cultivate an immense and profound headspace given such an ugly thing for the birds to rest on? Thus the almighty and everlasting intellectual dominance of the Jews; they are forced indoors of face by necessity.”

And with that, her spirit vanished.

Brendan was left perplexed by this thought. Surely it spoke of a connection between nose size and intellectualism, but where did it come from? Was the boy *really* just visited by the ghost of a Roman emperor? Also, what of the Jews?

But no matter. Mr. O’Brien had approached, and he was a man who needed answering.