

## Chapter 5

### ***Freeman's Mind: Digital Workers of the Universe, Unite!***

To appreciate the aesthetic revolution inaugurated by *Freeman's Mind* in mid-2011, it is important to understand that Ross Scott was employed at the time at Machinima.com, a startup firm whose business plan was to transform the individual works of machinima or machinima series broadcast on Google's Youtube platform into an arm of the commercial publishing industry. This plan had only limited success, due to the inherent contradiction between machinima's non-commercial production and distribution networks, and the commercial advertising strategy pursued by Google.<sup>1</sup>

Scott's period of employment thus inadvertently spurred the radicalization of *Freeman's Mind* between 2011 and 2012, in much the same way that the limited stabilization of the worldwide bailouts and government stimulus packages between 2008 and 2010 unwittingly triggered the worldwide anti-plutocratic protests of 2011-2014. These protests did not occur because these bailouts succeeded in restoring the capitalist world-system to its pre-2007 level of economic growth, which they most assuredly did not. Nor were they triggered solely because of the experience of economic immiseration, although this was certainly a contributing factor. Rather, these protests exploded precisely because transnational audiences had the digital tools to watch plutocrats bailing themselves out at everyone else's expense, to access the citizen journalists who critiqued those plutocrats, and to organize the biggest spontaneous mass protests in human history.

This global protest wave reached *Freeman's Mind* on June 10, 2011, the publication date of episode 35. This was approximately six months after the outbreak of the Arab Spring protests in December 2010, but three months prior to the initial Occupy protests in the US and Europe in September 2011. The episode commemorates this moment by remixing the opening of *Half Life's* "Residue Processing" chapter, wherein the player has been knocked unconscious by a military death squad and must escape from a room-sized trash compactor seconds before the walls close in.<sup>2</sup> Freeman regains consciousness in the unexpected persona of the graduate teaching instructor:

Freeman: *groggily*: "Okay people, listen up. Today we're talking about fermiats. Fermiats have a half integer spin, not a full integer spin, those are bosons." *Freeman's vision clears as we wakes up inside a trash compactor, surrounded by trash and debris. The walls of the trash compactor begin to close in.*

Freeman: "Where am I? Uh, hold on, I – I think we're gonna have to move to another room." *Freeman climbs boxes and escapes from the moving walls, but remains trapped by an overhead metal grate.*

Freeman: "Somebody's renovating this place... I guess... so confused... my head hurts... man, I'm sore all over. I feel like I got my ass kicked." *Freeman watches the compactor crush the last of the debris.*

Freeman: "Jesus Christ. What was I doing in there? How did I even get in here? I want a drink. It doesn't have to be bourbon, I'm not too picky. You know, anything at least eighty proof. It smells like dog vomit in here. Oh, a hatch -- there's the answer. Oh, I don't know if I can reach it. I'll find a stick or something." *Freeman starts searching for a stick.*

Freeman: "...The hell did I do last night? I remember there was some guy with an eye patch, and a

midget..." *He sees a crowbar.*

Freeman: *picks up crowbar: "Oh, perfect. What were they talking about?" Freeman hits the metal grate with the crowbar, but cannot open it. He continues searching for an exit.*

Freeman: "And some sort of scam involving corn dogs..."<sup>3</sup>

What mediates between the rarefied discourse of particle physics and the plebian farce of the carnival is the labor of the graduate teaching assistant, a nod towards the spate of successful union organizing campaigns by graduate teachers at a number of US universities during the first decade of the 21st century.<sup>4</sup> Scott thereby transforms the symptoms of Freeman's recovery from a physical concussion -- temporary disorientation and memory loss -- into an allegory of political awakening. After a moment of virtuoso word-play (after bashing open a flimsy grate covering the exit, Freeman comments: "Hey, the ruptured rusty rods reveal a rift!"),<sup>5</sup> Freeman explicitly names the plundering of workers by the transnational plutocracy as the class warfare it indeed is.<sup>6</sup>

The transnational consciousness of class glimpsed as early as episode 16, and given its first geopolitical context in episode 26, now begins to turn into a coherent transnational class consciousness. Consider this sequence in episode 36, which links the contemporary struggles of transnational industrial workers, digital media producers, consumer rights and human rights activists with the historical struggles against maritime colonialism and imperialism:

Freeman: "Christ, where am I? This is just some chemical processing facility. I don't remember what I was planning to do today, but I'm sure this isn't it. Black Mesa is not a tourist trap." *Freeman opens a door, revealing a corridor he previously explored.*

Freeman: "Of course, I've already been here. It's not just me. Noone should be here. Noone comes to a half-abandoned warehouse unless they work there, they're trying to film a low budget horror movie, or they're a photographer taking bullshit black-and-white photos trying to be artsy. That's it. And I'm going the wrong way again!" *Freeman doubles back.*

Freeman: "I suppose I shouldn't expect the red carpet treatment breaking and entering into the site of a chemical plant, but I still find the building layout confusing and I'll lodge a complaint with the administration if I find a front desk." *Freeman notices a row of giant vats filled with glowing green liquid.*

Freeman: "Well, not this way." *Freeman turns and follows giant pipe further.*

Freeman: "Oh, and I would also like to file a complaint about the number of locked doors here, and about the mutant animals that appear to be eating people. Trespasser or not, I have rights. I'm entitled to a reasonable expectation of safety and comfort when I break into a place. This is America, after all. I need to get an attorney. This whole situation is completely unreasonable for someone of my stature. And there is... Jesus Christ, this is the wrong way, too!"

*Freeman doubles back to previous acid bath room.*

Freeman: "Alright, I'm going to have to start thinking outside the box here. I should think less like a human being that uses doors and more like a... squirrel that has anger problems. Besides, I think it's entirely possible I'm the first person to ever set foot here. My name will be in history books. Therefore, as these are new territories discovered by the nation of Freeman, any and all claims shall henceforth be named after me. Me." *Freeman looks at another giant acid bath and continues.*

Freeman: "The official name of this monument will be... uh... Freeman Industrial Strength Mixer... With Green Crap Inside Of It."<sup>7</sup>

It is no accident that this explicit critique of empire goes hand in hand with the rewriting of the transnational occupations and professions previously mentioned by Freeman's monologues into a series of interactive experiences. For example, in episode 37 Freeman refers to the parlous conditions of the waste disposal and food processing industries<sup>8</sup> as well as the struggles of democratic mass movements against despotic governments.<sup>9</sup> In episode 38, Freeman satirizes the neocolonial anthropology which formed a key ideological plank of the post-2001 US War on Terror,<sup>10</sup> while episode 39 pokes fun at the transnational sports and fitness industries<sup>11</sup> while shining a spotlight on the environmental and human rights abuses of the corporate pharmaceutical and medical industries.<sup>12</sup>

In retrospect, it was probably inevitable that Scott would turn the lens of this transnational class consciousness onto his own class position as a skilled digital media producer.<sup>13</sup> The process was considerably hastened, however, by the dispute which broke out at some point in 2011 or 2012 between Scott and his employer, Machinima.com, over the terms of his compensation and the legal ownership of his series. While management missteps may have exacerbated the dispute, the root cause was the structural impoverishment of the digital artists who depended on Youtube's system of advertisement revenue sharing with media creators, and the consequent pressure on firms such as Machinima.com to extract increased revenue from their artists.

This system of revenue sharing suffered from three major flaws. First, average compensation constantly decreases relative to the total amount of viewable material over time. This is because the total footage uploaded on Youtube and other free-to-view sites increases at double-digit exponential rates each year, mirroring the exponential growth of the production and distribution of data on all devices and platforms. However, total advertising expenditures increase at the far lower rate of world economic growth, which averaged about 2.9% between 2010 and 2014.<sup>14</sup> Advertising expenditure per unit of footage viewed thus had to drop.

Second, the majority of the growth in online audiences after 2008 occurred in the industrializing nations. Since the consumers of these nations had significantly lower per capita market incomes than those of the fully industrialized countries, the advertising expenditures devoted to those consumers were correspondingly lower, sharply reducing the potential income of Youtube media producers relative to page views or other metrics of audience engagement.

The third and most important reason was the structural contradiction between the non-commercial institutions and practices of the digital commons, and Google's core mission of maximizing returns to its shareholders. On the one hand, Youtube's users upload thousands of videos each minute and watch billions of videos each day, making the platform one of the largest institutions of cooperative cultural production humanity has ever devised. On the other hand, Youtube generates microscopic revenues relative to its vast media archive. Although Google does not release exact figures, an independent analyst estimated total Youtube revenues reached \$3.5 billion in 2013.<sup>15</sup> This is a tiny fraction of the \$64.2 billion in advertising expenditure for US television recorded in 2012.<sup>16</sup> This miniscule revenue base is why even the wealthiest Youtube creators of 2015 received compensation in the low tens of millions of dollars, as compared to the hundreds of millions of dollars received by the top tier of cinema directors, popular musicians, athletes and other celebrities.<sup>17</sup>

In Scott's case, the convergence of these three factors drove his income far below the US poverty level, threatening to halt the production of *Freeman's Mind* completely.<sup>18</sup> Due to this

revenue crisis and the dispute with Machinima.com, Scott was able to produce only five episodes during the nineteen months between the release of episodes 39 and 45.<sup>19</sup> This is approximately one episode every three months, far lower than the series average of one episode every five weeks.

Scott's response to this crisis was to double down on the theme of transnational labor. While *Freeman's Mind* had always contained scathing references to workplace antagonisms and poor management, the tone of its satire sharpens considerably during episodes 40 through 44. Episode 40 refers openly to the phenomenon of digital sweatshops<sup>20</sup> and the devaluation of professional credentials by means of outsourcing,<sup>21</sup> while episode 41 refers to workplace safety hazards.<sup>22</sup> A passage in episode 42 employs an ingenious triple pun to express Scott's sense of frustration with the obstacles blocking independent digital media artists,<sup>23</sup> whereas the beginning of episode 43 describes the subjective experience of transnational immiseration -- the feeling of being hunted by the entire planet -- with remarkable clarity.<sup>24</sup>

At the precise moment *Freeman's Mind* was teetering on the edge of extinction, the series was rescued by the transnational audience in the most literal fashion imaginable. Scott acknowledges this rescue in a sequence near the end of episode 44:

*Freeman enters bunker.*

Freeman: "This is a step up from the death-slide trail. Is that...? Oh my God, it's a rocket launcher."

*Freeman picks up launcher, aims its red tracking laser in several directions.*

Freeman: *in soft voice*: "The perfect gift for the man who has everything. Ohhh... you and I are gonna go places. My mind is spinning with new possibilities. You are the first good news I've had all day."

*Freeman picks up rocket ammunition.*

Freeman: "Yes, I'll bring your friends." *Freeman attempts to open door. Door is locked.*

Freeman: "Locked!" *Sound of helicopter in distance.*

Freeman: *in mock medieval accent*: "Hark! Dost thou hear with thine ears what I hear with mine?"

Interloper! No quarter shall be shown hither, fiend. Anon -- show thineself, churl. Have at thee!" *Freeman fires rocket. Laser guidance system causes it to miss target.*

Freeman: "Hah! Curses. Fie upon me! But ho -- the laser on mine rocket launcher be not a mere target, but a guidance system. Where art thou?! Come hither that I may smite thee!"

*Helicopter circles back into view. Freeman uses laser pointer to guide rocket to helicopter, destroying it.*

Freeman: "Thou shalt not be missed."<sup>25</sup>

What makes this sequence so startling is Freeman's unexpectedly calm and self-confident tone after discovering the rocket launcher, combined with the ensuing mock-heroic dialogue which pastiches the fantasy role-playing videogame genre.<sup>26</sup> This was the first time Scott employed these particular modes of vocal characterization in the series, and they signify the beginning of Freeman's transformation from a paranoid survivor into an active agent of collective resistance.

The nature of this resistance would be revealed eight months later, when Scott made two important announcements to the fan community on May 4, 2013. Firstly, episode 44 was the last to be published under the auspices of Machinima.com's Youtube channel, which meant that Scott was now a fully independent media creator. Secondly, Scott had moved permanently to the Eastern European nation of Poland for personal as well as professional reasons.<sup>27</sup> Poland was a

propitious choice for a number of reasons, ranging from the country's strong economic growth since 1993, its adoption of democratic institutions via its accession to the European Union in 2004, its low cost of living relative to the United States, and its thriving digital media culture.

Scott's simultaneous declaration of artistic independence and relocation to Poland unleashed an extraordinary wave of aesthetic innovation in *Freeman's Mind*. The first example of this occurs in episode 45, published on May 18, 2013, when Freeman wages an epic battle against a group of soldiers while singing "Modern Major General" from Gilbert and Sullivan's *Pirates of Penzance* (1879). After singing the first four verses of the original song, Freeman improvises three new verses, transforming one of the icons of Victorian mass culture into a satire of US imperial decline.<sup>28</sup> This wicked parody of a parody is followed by a reference to the transnational logistics worker,<sup>29</sup> and finally by this artful pastiche of a popular subgenre of the late 20th century Hollywood romance film:

Freeman: *while battling soldiers*: "Hey, what's up guys, you hanging out, that's cool, I'm not intruding or anything am I, I figure you guys are cool and all... I'm just going to kind of chill out here if that's cool, I figure it's like, my place is your place and the other way around and stuff so I'm just cashing in on that, hey I'm just going to borrow this gun, I'll give it back, I swear you can ask anybody, I'm good for it I just need it for a little bit. Like, you won't believe this but there's like this big misunderstanding and something going on with me, I know, right, and I have to set the record straight and stuff so you know how that is. Like I don't know what this guy's deal is but he's really pissed at me, like I was trying to start something with him. As if. I mean, everybody knows me and I would totally not do something like that so this is all bullshit. Like I've never tried to piss anyone off in my life so why should I start with him. Does he think he's special or something, because he's not, I just don't go around doing something like --"  
*Tank round explodes. Moment of silence.*  
Freeman: *gloomily*: "Shit."<sup>30</sup>

This sequence is the gender-bending satire of the "valley girl", a.k.a. romantic dramas centered on a seemingly empty-headed but ultimately good-hearted upper middle class young woman, a trope memorialized by a 1983 Hollywood film starring Nicholas Cage.<sup>31</sup> Scott accurately captures the vocal intonations of the valley girl, namely the accent-free diction of the mass media English which bears no trace of the regional accents prevalent in most areas of the United States.<sup>32</sup>

What mediates between the late 19th century Victorian music-hall number and the late 20th century Hollywood romance, in short, is the class subjectivity of the 21st century transnational logistics worker. There is an even more radical version of this strategy in episode 48, which triangulates between the Edgar Allan Poe detective tale *Murder in the Rue Morgue* (1841) and the most progressive action-adventure films of the late 1970s and early 1990s<sup>33</sup> via the labor of the transnational airport staffer:

Freeman: *initially speaking to security guard, then to himself*: "On a lighter note, I never told you the second part of my plan. The cop car is just the beginning. The next part would take awhile because I would have to pay somebody to train a chimpanzee in hardcore karate and attack people on sight. I mean, he would have to be loyal to me, of course -- and the trainer -- but everyone else would get a beat-down.

Then we could ride around at night and I could just let him loose on the street for awhile watching him beat the crap out of people. Nobody would be prepared for this. I could have a little whistle or something I could blow to get him to come back to the car.”

*Freeman notices a military transport helicopter circling the landing field.*

Freeman: *yelling while firing at helicopter*: “Hello, this is ground control. Please approach my signal. Do you see my signal? Let me try another one.” *Freeman fires rocket at helicopter, scores one hit.*

Freeman: *yelling while firing a second rocket*: “How about now? Do you see that one? Hello?” *Second rocket hits helicopter. Soldiers start to rappel out of helicopter onto landing zone, Freeman shoots them.*

Freeman: *yelling*: “No, no. Please stay inside the aircraft until after you've landed. Thank you.”

*Alien soldiers demolish a nearby set of doors and attack the landing zone, Freeman turns to fight them.*

Freeman: *yelling*: “Hold on, we're having some technical difficulty. I'll be right with you.”

Freeman: *yelling while shooting them*: “Excuse me, sirs? Sirs? You're not allowed back here. Thank you.”

*Freeman defeats them, then takes ammunition from bodies of human soldiers.*

Freeman: *yelling*: “Okay, you're going to have to check these through customs.”

*Helicopter circles around.*

Freeman: *yelling*: “This is ground control again. You're flying south. Follow my signal. If you decide you want to keep flying to another airfield, that's fine by me. Just keep going... somewhere.”

*Freeman attempts to open hangar bay doors. They creak but stay closed.*

Freeman: *yelling*: “We're going to need maintenance down here. We've got a problem with the hangar doors. Okay, you're heading back east? Ah, you're coming around. Okay, let's line it up then.” *Freeman fires rocket at helicopter.*

Freeman: *yelling*: “Your approach looks good, I'm just going to guide you in. Just follow my signal.

Looking good!” *Freeman fires another rocket. Helicopter explodes in a shower of metal parts.*

Freeman: *yelling*: “Perfeect!”

Freeman: *normal voice*: “Welcome to New Mexico. Ground temperatures are 88 degrees with clear skies. Thank you for flying with us.” *Pause.*

Freeman: *normal voice*: “Those aircraft didn't have the best safety records anyway.”<sup>34</sup>

Scott rewrites Freeman's absurd vision of felonious animal training, a fantasy of aggression seemingly modeled on the media stereotype of the serial killer or terrorist, into the interactive experience of transnational class rage. This rage is partly rooted in one of the most notorious moments of US labor history, namely the firing of 11,000 striking air traffic controllers by the Reagan Administration in 1981. However, this class rage draws in equal measure from the experiences of the service and transportation workers who work in the international air travel and tourism industries of the late 20th and early 21st century.<sup>35</sup> Freeman pays back the plutocrats in their own service-sector coin, by remaining calm, polite, and committed to the highest level of customer service in the midst of a frenetic battle.

The theme of class rage is developed still further in episode 50, when Freeman cites the malevolent ghosts of Kubrick's *The Shining* (1980), one of the most skillful and subtle cinematic critiques of political revanchism in the post-1973 US.<sup>36</sup> This is followed by a sequence which satirizes the post-2001 US War on Terror,<sup>37</sup> and by Freeman's prediction of the open deployment of violence by transnational corporations against US workers on US territory in episode 51.<sup>38</sup>

What helped to transform these episodes of class rage into a sustained strategy of resistance was Scott's serendipitous discovery of a new long-term funding model. The crucial event here was the online fundraiser Scott announced on March 15, 2014, just after releasing episode 54. The original goal of the fundraiser was to purchase the computer equipment

necessary to produce all further episodes of *Freeman's Mind* in high-definition video format. As an additional incentive, Scott bet fans that if he failed to complete *Freeman's Mind* by the end of 2014, he would return double the amount of their pledge money. In later interviews, Scott revealed that he did not expect to raise more than a couple thousand dollars from the entire campaign. Instead, the fan community donated a sum in excess of \$16,000, a fortune in middle-income Poland.<sup>39</sup>

This unexpected bounty and the subsequent stabilization of Scott's income via direct online fan donations did more than just guarantee the completion of *Freeman's Mind*. The resulting fan mobilization enabled Scott to test and refine a range of experimental aesthetic strategies between episodes 55 and 59. In episode 56, Freeman delivers a sophisticated critique of corporate-dominated science, research and development,<sup>40</sup> while pastiching one of the prominent tropes of the 1970s Hollywood paranoid thriller, namely the “China syndrome” by the film of the same name.<sup>41</sup> Episode 57 features a great deal of drug-related humor, something new to the series,<sup>42</sup> while episodes 58 and 59 remix the demo version of *Half Life* released by Valve as a stand-alone experience in 1999.<sup>43</sup>

What Scott gleaned from these five episodes was detailed fan feedback about how the series should conclude. For example, Scott discontinued the theme of Freeman's drug use after episode 58, due to negative feedback from fans with painful past experiences of drug addiction.<sup>44</sup> In like manner, fans were lukewarm towards monologues which were not interspersed with action sequences or other immersive game-play, but were appreciative of sequences wherein Freeman expressed doubt or vulnerability.

Equipped with these insights, Scott produced the final nine episodes of the series (episodes 60-68) in just three months between September 26 and December 31, 2014, averaging one episode every eight days. These nine episodes synthesize the series' critique of plutocracy, the power of digital networks, the subjective experience of transnational immiseration, and the class consciousness of transnational workers into a new kind of mass mobilization. The first glimpse of this mobilization occurs in episode 60, when Scott rewrites *Half Life's* theme of interstellar teleportation into a metaphor of digital copying:

Freeman: *puzzled*: “This is the same thing, right? I already --” *Freeman touches orange plasma ball, teleports to nearby rotating machinery.*

Freeman: *yelling*: “Ohhh shit -- it's a teleporter! We invented f---king teleporters! The new age of man begins with me! And teleporters!”

Freeman: *normal voice*: “Oh my god, I am dizzy from this. Or maybe that's because I'm spinning. I've got to try it again. Does this work? It's orange.” *Freeman touches orange plasma ball, teleports to supply room.*

Freeman: “Oh-ho-ho-ho. So this is what it's like to be a ninja. Amazing! Wonder what the power source is. Or why they hover. Yeah, I have a lot of questions.” *Freeman collects supplies.*

Freeman: “Nice! Like, is this *Star Trek*-style where it's transmitting my matter as energy and reconstructing it on the other end? Or is it just creating an exact duplicate of me and I'm really just committing suicide over and over? Hmm.” *Freeman touches orange plasma ball, teleports back to spinning room.*

Freeman: “Whoo... no, I don't feel dead. But am I me, or am I Gordon number six? I might not know the difference. Well, I should continue either way, even if that means making sacrifices for the Greater Gordon.”<sup>45</sup>

This is a brilliant exposition of two of the most subversive and least understood aspects of digital copying. The first is the fact that all aspects of digital technology evolve at exponential rather than linear rates of change, i.e. the cost of replicating, storing and transmitting a given unit of data falls constantly over time in a curve asymptotic to zero, while the total volume of data increases exponentially to infinity.

The second is the concomitant expansion of the transnational workforce which builds, operates and maintains the hardware and software platforms through which all digital copying takes place. Scott gives us a broad hint by mentioning the matter-copying machines which have abolished economic scarcity in the *Star Trek* universe, as well as in the seemingly offhand quip about possibly being the sixth Gordon (Freeman's comment is accurate, a characteristic sign of the precision and rigor of Scott's scriptwriting).<sup>46</sup>

Yet instead of simply celebrating the advent of planetary digital copying, Freeman immediately questions how it works, ponders who benefits from its use, and makes a conscious decision to explore its social consequences. This is the moment transnational class consciousness turns into transnational collective action. Freeman is no longer concerned with restoring the lost privileges of high-skilled US workers, but instead begins to play the role of the 21st century citizen journalist: the quest to save the Freeman gives way to the mobilization on behalf of the Greater Gordon.

The effects of this mobilization are immediate and electrifying. Freeman openly mocks corporate digital monopolies,<sup>47</sup> savagely critiques the corporate monopolies which choke off genuine scientific and technological innovation,<sup>48</sup> and celebrates the demographic preponderance of the transnational proletariat.<sup>49</sup> Most spectacularly of all, episode 62 links this mobilization to a momentous transformation of geopolitical space. This latter is revealed when Freeman is teleported into the realm of Zen, an intergalactic buffer zone connecting the Earth to various alien worlds. Freeman's reaction is priceless:

*Freeman pauses on rotating platform floating high above Zen.*

Freeman: *in a tone of rising hysteria*: "Okay, don't freak out... Don't freak out..."

Freeman: *yelling*: "I said don't freak out, dammit! Okay! Nah!" *Freeman jumps onto next platform.*

Freeman: *yelling*: "Nuh! I'm totally not freaking out right now! Because this is me not freaking out! What do I have to freak out over, anyway? Nothing! Because I'm not! I'm just navigating a floating obstacle course that looks like a giant... plate-balancing trick designed by H.R. Giger! F--- you, reality, you're full of shit!"

Freeman: *voice cracking*: "...and bone pillar things... and breathable atmosphere... Nyah!" *Freeman jumps onto next platform.*

Freeman: "...Ahhh! Reality's broke."<sup>50</sup>

On the personal level, this is a compelling depiction of the experience of losing the last vestiges of one's imperial political, cultural and economic privileges, and it is no accident that this particular episode features Scott's biographical experience of the crisis of affordable housing in the US, one of the hallmarks of the post-1973 immiseration of the US middle class.<sup>51</sup> On a

more general level, this is the prescient anticipation of the shock experienced by billions of citizens after the US election of fall of 2016, when a kleptocratic faction of the US plutocracy seized national political power from its elite financial wing through clearly undemocratic means.<sup>52</sup>

Freeman's arrival in *Zen* thus captures the vertiginous moment when transnational audiences had to acknowledge the end of the age of US hegemony and the arrival of the multipolar world. Although the US retains vast wealth and influence in this new era, it has almost no control over continent-sized polities such as the European Union, China and India, and the rapid spread of literacy, industrialization, and digital technology has made it increasingly difficult for even the most powerful of nation-states to impose their will unilaterally on their less powerful neighbors. To be sure, the decrease in the power of the US plutocracy relative to that of its geopolitical competitors does not signify the end of plutocratic rule altogether, but merely underlines the urgent need to create new forms of planetary economic, political and cultural solidarity against a henceforth transnational plutocracy.

The final six episodes of *Freeman's Mind* make an indispensable contribution to this solidarity, by rewriting the final two boss battles of *Half Life* into episodes of anti-neoliberal collective struggle. Freeman's two main antagonists are a giant alien spider which wields biological weapons, and an alien being called the Nihilanth which wields energy-beams and teleportation. Here is the opening of the spider battle:

*Freeman is in a standoff with a giant alien spider.*

Freeman: "I have a present for you. As the Ambassador of Earth, I wish to give you this gift on behalf of my people." *He tosses a satchel charge close to the giant spider without exploding it. The spider does not react.*

Freeman: "Actually, I have a few, you can have all of them. It's what my planet would've wanted, I'm sure of it. And more importantly, it's what I want. I guess I'm not really the best ambassador, come to think of it. But hey, I'm all you get. Okay now just keep standing there, this is a very important part of the ceremony. We have to get the photos and attend the luncheon... alright, say cheese!" *Freeman detonates explosives and fires rocket at spider, spider attacks him.*

Freeman: *sardonically*: "Diplomacy breaks out."<sup>53</sup>

Scott rewrites the late 20th century espionage thriller, the late 20th century Japanese monster film, and the early 21st century science fiction film into the epic saga of a new kind of people-to-people diplomacy. This diplomacy is not rooted in national governance structures or political movements, but in the alliance between digital citizen journalists and the transnational social movements of the post-2008 period against one of the key instruments of plutocratic rule. The nature of this instrument is revealed by the fact the giant spider attacks Freeman with venomous spittle, a.k.a. white ink reminiscent of old-style correction fluid, and with an endless stream of tiny spiders, or miniature biological copies of itself. The giant spider is an unmistakable avatar of the transnational media platforms of the plutocracy, ranging from Murdoch's news empire to the plutocrat-owned mass media of Brazil and Russia.

Freeman's pitched battle against the plutocratic mass media signals a final wave of aesthetic innovation in *Freeman's Mind*. This ranges from Freeman's meditations on the

ambivalent legacy of the Cold War, cf. the fact that the information technologies developed by the US military-industrial complex have become some of the most important tools of democratic resistance against the plutocracy,<sup>54</sup> to the series' first depiction of a nascent intergalactic labor solidarity between Freeman and worker aliens.<sup>55</sup> When Freeman explores the shop floor of a stylized transnational factory, he encounters both intergalactic solidarity as well as xenophobic hostility from the worker aliens, just like any human workplace.<sup>56</sup> Eventually, he discovers that the aliens are exploited by an imperialist plutocracy just as monstrous as its human equivalent.<sup>57</sup>

This wave of innovation culminates in episode 67, when Freeman discovers a giant alien teleporter floating in mid-space. This teleporter is a media transmission device, and replays various lines of dialogue from past events in the game, a tongue-in-cheek reference to the digital music revolution of the late 1990s.<sup>58</sup> Scott takes this opportunity to incorporate one of the most significant innovations of the Occupy protest movement into *Freeman's Mind*, namely the call-and-response technique of the “mike check”. This is a mode of public speaking wherein a member of the crowd is invited to tell their own story in the form of short sentences, each of which is subsequently repeated by the audience at large. The effect is to transform every audience member into a potential speaker, and to transform every individual speech into a democratic collective utterance. Freeman's version of the “mike check” triggers the final battle:

Freeman: *examining alien teleporter*: “Huh. This is just random chatter. This is an intergalactic CB, but I think it's just getting old signals. Is there a switch in the back? Maybe I can set it to broadcast. No... well, I have plenty of time to learn how to use this, don't I? Okay, let's try this center orb here. Maybe it does something. Check-check, mike check, hello --” *Freeman teleports to the Nihilanth's conical lair. The Nihilanth floats high above Freeman.*

Nihilanth: *in a voice like distant thunder*: “Freeemaaaannn...”

Freeman: *yelling*: “Aaaugh --”<sup>59</sup>

It is no accident that the Nihilanth has the appearance of a gigantic deformed human baby, and draws life-energy from giant glowing crystals located in its lair. This is the grotesque figure of the late 20th century and early 21st century authoritarian kleptocrat, a.k.a. the lumpen-billionaires embodied in the Presidential monarchies and energy-rent oligarchies of the Middle East, Eurasia and Central Asia, as well as in the authoritarian kleptocracy which took power in the US in 2016. During a pause in the battle against the Nihilanth, Freeman finally grasps the collective stakes of his battle, namely the fact that he is merely one of thousands of others caught up in the struggle against interstellar plutocrats:

Freeman: *while jumping to top of cavern*: “Well, hey, now I know all the big secrets. This is why security was so tight at Black Mesa. We were killing people by the hundreds. The best part is there would have been no evidence at all. None! Now I'm not even sure if these were Science Team members. I think they might've just been spare security guards. 'Hey, you want to make an extra fifty bucks? Just put this suit on and walk into that chamber.' That's probably why we had advertisements for security guards all over the damn place. They might not have even been guards, not all of them.”

*Freeman notices supplies left by a previous researcher, takes ammunition.*

Freeman: “Yeah, I'll take that. We were in f---ing New Mexico, they could've just thrown migrant workers

in here. Because hundreds of scientists disappearing? There's no way they could've gotten away with that! That would send shockwaves. What was it that guy said to me? I know more than any one man should? He must've been dead serious when he said that.”<sup>60</sup>

Against interstellar plutocrats, only the solidarity of the digital workers of the universe will do. Scott subtly reconfirms this insight by reappropriating the horror fiction of H.P. Lovecraft, one of the most influential but ideologically reactionary writers of the 1930s, in a progressive turn.<sup>61</sup> This leads to this extraordinary sequence which directly channels the energies of the mass protest movements of 2011-2014, the first great episode of transnational resistance against the world plutocracy:

*Freeman battles Nihilanth in its lair.*

Freeman: *yelling while firing*: “Yeah! Feel the sting of Defense Department funding! I don't know what this gun is, but it's very, very expensive!”

*The Nihilanth is defeated, its head splitting open to reveal a giant teleportation portal at its core. Green portals begin to fly in all directions from its body.*

Freeman: *yelling*: “Oh my god, his head is a portal! He keeps a universe in his head! I want it! Yes! It's breaking apart! That means I get to be the new God! That's how it works, right? I've got to get up there!”<sup>62</sup>

The ambivalent nature of Freeman's triumph mirrors the fundamental ambivalence of the 2011-2014 protest movements. These latter could chase individual Presidential monarchs and energy-rent autocrats from office and enact limited electoral and social reforms, but they could not challenge the plutocracy's control of the world economy as a whole. These movements were, in short, only the beginning of a much bigger and longer-term struggle against the plutocracy, not the end-point of such.

This is a lesson delivered with magnificent aplomb by the conclusion of episode 68. To appreciate just how extraordinary this finale is, it should be noted that in the original version of *Half Life*, the G-man delivers a monologue to Freeman after the latter's defeat of the Nihilanth, offering Freeman the choice between a life of cooptation or death in exile. Scott rewrites the G-man's monologue into a tongue-in-cheek dialogue, replete with satirical references to the US espionage thriller and the British science fiction franchise, *Dr. Who*.<sup>63</sup> Scott concludes this dialogue by showing Freeman choosing to cooperate with the G-man. Just as in the original *Half Life*, this choice results in the “good ending” of the game, wherein Freeman survives and the player hears the G-man say, “Wisely done, Mr. Freeman! I will see you up ahead.”

After this dialogue, however, Scott pulls off one of the greatest aesthetic masterstrokes of the early 21st century, by transforming *Half Life's* good ending into an allegory of transnational fan media. At first, the episode displays the standard credits for the episode. However, the screen suddenly switches to two simultaneous streams of media content. On the left side of the screen, a series of uproarious Youtube comments on the series delivered by the fan community scrolls by slowly on the screen, allowing viewers to read each comment. This fan commentary is especially entertaining due to the satirical user names employed by commentators, some of which are comic gems in their own right.

On the right side of the screen, a video stream showcases footage of the various bugs in Valve's open source engine which Scott had to battle or work around (Scott added explanatory subtitles describe the effects of each bug). These two combined streams, curated to showcase the most amusing comments and the most bizarre bugs, run for approximately four minutes.<sup>64</sup>

Conversely, the last sixty seconds of *Freeman's Mind* rewrite *Half Life's* "bad ending" by means of a fan-created game modification called "G-invasion".<sup>65</sup> In Scott's version of the bad ending, Freeman is devoured by a variety of monsters which are all grotesque variants of the G-man -- the nightmare, in short, of regressing to an unending and endless realm of plutocratic domination.<sup>66</sup> But whereas the final player choice in *Half Life* was limited in scope to the fate of the individual player, the collective choice at the end of *Freeman's Mind* between transnational fan media and plutocratic monopoly is still playing out to this day on every digital platform, every online community and every social media site.

The true significance of *Freeman's Mind* is that it is the first work of transnational fan media to break the shackles of plutocratic rule and transform the products of digital labor back into the solidarity of digital play. In doing so, it raised fan media from a marginal phenomenon to a motive force of world history. Indeed, it is surely no accident that just four and a half months after the conclusion of Scott's series, CD Projekt's *Witcher 3* delivered the first blockbuster open world videogame designed to function as transnational fan media vis-a-vis its literary source material.

While we are still in the early stages of this transformation and can only dimly imagine its long-term consequences, what is undeniable is that the social consequences of transnational fan media will be as revolutionary as the popularization of print, telegraph, cinema and television were in the past. While *Freeman's Mind* is arguably one of the best non-commercial web serials ever made and surely the single greatest machinima ever made, its single greatest achievement is to have opened a portal between contemporary videogame culture and the democratic media revolution of the 21st century.

1. The post-2008 expansion of Google, Baidu, Tencent, Facebook and a handful of other firms into transnational behemoths occurred due to their state-guaranteed capture of oligopoly advertising rents. This has structural similarities to the manner in which US and European banking oligopolies which extracted vast profits from the 1995-2006 US dotcom, real estate and securitization bubbles, and then had their losses conveniently socialized by the US Federal Reserve, the European Central Bank, and various other national central banks. To be sure, transnational audiences have far more power to evade or resist media oligopolies in the post-2011 period than banking oligopolies.

2. This sequence in *Half Life* was inspired by an iconic scene in the original *Star Wars* (1977), wherein the protagonists escape from being crushed to death inside a trash compactor on board the Death Star.

3. *Freeman's Mind*, episode 35, 0:20-1:32. June 10, 2011.

4. Between 2001 and 2006, successful unionization drives of graduate teaching workers occurred at the University of Massachusetts Boston, Oregon State University, Michigan State University, Temple University, the University of Washington, the University of Rhode Island, the University of Illinois at Chicago, the University of Illinois at Springfield, Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, the California State University system, and Western Michigan University.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Graduate\\_student\\_employee\\_unionization](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Graduate_student_employee_unionization).

5. *Freeman's Mind*, episode 35, 2:15-2:18. June 10, 2011.

6. *Freeman jumps down onto the descending platform.*

Freeman: "Well, I'm pretty sure this isn't the executive elevator. That would have carpeting." *Freeman shines light on the pipe entrance.*

Freeman: "Huh. This is kind of a crappy entrance." *Freeman enters the pipe and continues:* "Oh, well, I didn't see any rose petals waiting for me on the outside. Still, with our budget, this is kind of bullshit. I think there's some class warfare going on at this company."

*Freeman's Mind*, episode 35, 6:15-6:35. June 10, 2011.

7. *Freeman's Mind*, episode 36, 4:47-6:41. June 17, 2011.

8. *Freeman dodges organic debris from garbage chute.*

Freeman: "Ahhh... yuck... What is... That... that is nasty. I do not have to accept this."

*Freeman tries to open door, door is locked.*

Freeman: "Oh, you bastards. Fine... got to avoid the blood shower... This isn't the sort of thing I should have to worry about." *Organic debris continues to pour from chute.*

Freeman: "Jesus! Where's this coming from? Maybe we don't even ship in meat. We just slaughter the cows right here at the facility. And then just dump them in the water like we know what we're doing. Oh my god! This better not get in my hair. If I wanted to smell like McDonald's, I would've stayed in the trash compactor."

*Freeman's Mind*, episode 37, 0:55-1:25. June 24, 2011.

9. *Freeman is fighting off a number of alien animals called bullsquids.*

Freeman: *yelling:* "This is not a democracy. I have a gun, so I'm in charge. Many governments around the world function on this principle. And some of them last for months." *Freeman shoots the final bullsquid.*

Freeman: *yelling*: “This is not complicated. You're making it that way.”  
*Freeman's Mind*, episode 37, 6:52-7:07. June 24, 2011.

10. *Freeman spots a metal door in a nondescript corridor.*

Freeman: “Oh, hey, a door. This means that the builders of this temple were civilized.” *Freeman tries to open door, but door is locked.*

Freeman: “No... no, my mistake. They're savages. But who am I to question their ways. Maybe they play hide-and-go-seek here when it's a slow shift. Maybe... they're doing it right now.” *Freeman notices headcrab, takes aim.*

Freeman: “And you... are it.” *Freeman dispatches headcrab with a single shot.*

Freeman: “I win. Okay, so who's at more fault here. Me, for entering this place like I'm trying to break into the Pentagon, or... everyone else, for not giving me an exit to begin with.”

*Freeman's Mind*, episode 38, 4:24-4:57. August 19, 2011.

11. *Freeman climbs ladder into a room full of hopping aliens.*

Freeman: “Okay, I'm your dance instructor --” *Aliens attack, Freeman defends himself with crowbar.*

Freeman: *yelling*: “No, you're starting too early! Stop that! I said stop that! 1-2-3 left! 1-2-3- left! No, no, your rhythm's all wrong! Rrrgh!” *Freeman defeats the last alien.*

Freeman: *normal voice*: “I give up, I can't teach this class. Some people just don't want to learn, you know? Oh, hey, there's a box of ammo. Hell, these will fit the revolver. I guess being a teacher does have its perks.”

*Freeman's Mind*, episode 39, 3:23-3:47. October 21, 2011.

12. *Freeman discovers an alien soldier sealed in a glassed-in specimen chamber.*

Freeman: *pressing controls*: “Button's locked... computer's locked... well, I'm the locksmith!” *Freeman smashes glass and presses button, unwittingly releasing alien soldier. Alarm sounds.*

Freeman: “Alarms? You'd think I would --” *Alien soldier breaks out of glass, attacks.*

Freeman: *yelling while firing*: “Oh god! See, this is why people need to do their own work! When I have to do their jobs for them, this is what happens!” *Freeman fires once, retreats down corridor.*

Freeman: “Did I kill it?” *Alien reappears.*

Freeman: *firing while retreating down corridor*: “Waaah! Okay, the bullet test is inconclusive, so... let's see how it responds to a different set of stimuli.” *Freeman tosses satchel charge into corridor, waits for alien soldier to approach, then detonates charge.*

Freeman: “Hypothesis confirmed! Christ. I hate biolabs.”

*Freeman's Mind*, episode 39, 5:35-6:02. October 21, 2011.

13. One of the early signs pointing to this reflexive radicalization was an episode of Scott's machinima series *Civil Protection* titled “The Tunnel”, published on March 24, 2011. This episode is essentially the horror film rewriting of the original premise of *Civil Protection*, a series which starred two human police officers who are collaborators with an interstellar alien colonial occupation of earth. Midway through the episode, the narrative perspective shifts away from the two collaborators and towards a homeless inhabitant of City-17 who manages to find a secret living space in the city, a space which turns out to contain a dire secret.

14. World Bank. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator//NY.GDP.MKTP.KD>.

15. <https://venturebeat.com/2014/07/07/youtubes-revenue-hit-3-5b-in-2013-report-says/>.

16. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/183852/total-us-television-advertising-revenue-since-2003/>.

17. <https://socialblade.com/blog/youtube-rich-list-highest-earning-creators-2016/>.

18. Scott described the fall in his earnings in a 2013 blog post as follows: “My views have been cut in half multiple times, despite adding more videos this whole time. While you could maybe blame this on the age of the show or not having more frequent updates, that would only account for a gradual decline looking like a wheelchair ramp, not the dive bomber maneuver that is this chart. So what’s causing this? The short answer is Youtube. Their algorithm 'tweak' in 2011 caused me to lose half my views. Not just in popular recent videos, in EVERYTHING [sic] from years back. I’ve read about many people losing up to 90% of their audience during this time.” Ross Scott (blog). <http://www.accursedfarms.com/escape-from-machinima/>. May 4, 2013.

19. Episode 39 was published on October 21, 2011, and episode 45 was published on May 18, 2013.

20. Freeman: “Okay, new job: find something to climb out of here. I'm doing a lot of jobs. Every employer I've had pulls this crap. They hire me to do one thing, and what they really mean is one thing plus fifty other things, because they don't have enough people. And guess what – I'm the new hire, so I do it. Forever.” *Freeman tries to open door, door remains locked.*

Freeman: “Riiight. Well, at least Black Mesa has a legitimate excuse, that most of their workforce is dead. Got to cover for the dead guys.”

*Freeman's Mind*, episode 40, 0:25-0:50. February 17, 2012.

21. Freeman: “I almost feel like my degree is being wasted here. I mean, what I'm doing now really has nothing to do with quantum mechanics or general relativity. There's just no crossover.”

*Freeman is attacked by patrolling soldiers, shoots back.*

Freeman: *yelling*: “Don't come near me! Don't come near me! No! No! I have a personal space zone goddammit! Personal space!”

*Freeman's Mind*, episode 40, 2:52-3:12. February 17, 2012.

22. Freeman addresses scientist, indicating he should follow Freeman past rotating machinery.

Freeman: “Okay, dopey, you come with me.”

Scientist 2: “All right.”

Freeman: *while dodging machinery*: “Okay, now this slicer is kind of dangerous. You ought to know, you designed it. Just take your time, it's only a cocentric circle pattern. All you have to --” *Crunching sound. The scientist had attempted to follow Freeman but ran into the machinery, resulting in instant death.*

*Freeman's Mind*, episode 41, 3:27-3:38. May 4, 2012.

23. The triple pun is on the epithet “damn”, the noun “dam”, and the verb “dam” (to dam something up, i.e. Freeman's progress through Black Mesa symbolizes Scott's career as a machinima producer):

*Freeman views a hydroelectric dam from atop a concrete tower located in the dam's reservoir.*

Freeman: “So, let's assess the situation. I'm in a damn canyon. I'm stuck on this damn tower. What's in this damn room, anyway? It's a damn button.” *Freeman presses button.*

Freeman: “Sounds like that did some damn thing. So how am I going to get out of here? The soldiers

blew up the damn bridge and that damn shark's still in the damn water.” *Freeman notices giant alien fish.*

Freeman: “Ah ha...” *Freeman shoots alien fish.*

Freeman: “Maybe he's faking it.” *Freeman launches grenade at body of alien.*

Freeman: “No, I think I got him. Well, that's one less damn problem to worry about. But how am I going to get up these damn walls? I don't see a damn ladder anywhere. There's no damn steps. This is a damn mess. Why did those damn soldiers blow that up, anyway? I bet they're trying to cut the damn power. That means all those scientists are going to get stuck underground in the dark. Well, that's their damn problem. Okay, my options look pretty damn limited this way.”

*Freeman's Mind*, episode 42, 1:52-2:50. June 15, 2012.

24. *Freeman hears sound of helicopter circling overhead.*

Freeman: “Another helicopter? I get the feeling something doesn't want me alive. Besides the obvious.” *Freeman notices aliens in distance.*

Freeman: “Yeah, okay. This is the wrong way.” *Freeman turns around to head in a different direction.*

Freeman: “I mean, sharks, mortar shells, attack helicopters, drowning... some force wants me dead. Maybe that's why all of this is happening.” *Freeman climbs on box to reach ladder, begins to climb ladder.*

Freeman: *climbing ladder*: “I was supposed to die yesterday in the test chamber. But I didn't because I'm hardcore. So now reality is slowly unraveling. That makes me the most important person in the universe. Still don't like getting shot at, though.”

*Freeman's Mind*, episode 43, 0:19-0:51. July 13, 2012.

25. *Freeman's Mind*, episode 44, 8:18-9:23. September 9, 2012.

26. Three years later, Scott revealed to fans one of his long-term goals as an artist was to create a machinima movie best described as a role-playing fantasy adventure comedy. In hindsight, this sequence was the first test-run of this project. Ross Scott, “Accursed Farms 2015 Announcements”, 2:54-3:01. January 30, 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BMSCAlv4ZsU&feature=youtu.be&t=174>.

27. Scott's then-girlfriend and current wife is a native of Poland. Scott announced his impending move to Poland to fans in September 2012. <http://www.accursedfarms.com/forums/viewtopic.php?f=19&t=3488>.

28. Scott peppers these additional three verses with one of the most subversive tropes of American culture, namely the call-and-response form typical of African American poetry, popular music and hip hop:

Freeman: *singing while battling soldiers*:

“I can fire at a target and hit it at least half the time  
or graph out an electron path while using only numbers prime  
I calculate the fall rate of a bullet shot a thousand yards  
and perforate the thick heads of a hundred military guards.

I can make a simulation of an atom bomb and build one too  
or flank a dozen men and ambush ten of them out of the blue

from SMGs to RPGs I carry quite an arsenal  
and skip around a warzone like a subatomic particle.”

Freeman: *yelling*: “Still no chorus!”

Freeman: *normal voice*: “Okay, come on, sing and I won't kill you. Those of you that are left, I mean.” Freeman discovers Abrams tank, which fires a round at him.

Freeman: “Ah. Okay, there we go. Ahem.”

Freeman: *resumes singing while battling soldiers*:

“Every soldier out here wants to kill me for my curiosity

I wage war on the whole damn world because of my tenacity

in matters combat tactical and physics theoretical

I am the very model of a modern major general.”

Freeman: *normal voice*: “Alright, no one else is even trying to sing along. I quit.”

*Freeman's Mind*, episode 45, 2:38-3:22. May 18, 2013.

29. This satire is relayed by the mention of the M-1 Abrams tank:

Freeman: “Okay, delivery for Mr. Abrams.” *Freeman launches rocket-propelled grenade at tank, damaging it.*

Freeman: “Oh come on, I know someone's home.” *Freeman launches another rocket-propelled grenade, destroying it.*

Freeman: “No, I don't need a signature. You have a nice day.”

*Freeman's Mind*, episode 45, 3:26-3:35. May 18, 2013.

30. *Freeman's Mind*, episode 45, 4:17-4:56. May 18, 2013.

31. Martha Coolidge, director. *Valley Girl*. MGM, 1983. The original valley in question was the San Fernando Valley, one of the wealthier regions of Los Angeles. By the 1990s, the meaning of the slang term broadened to include upper middle class white teenagers from all over California and eventually the West Coast. Later directors rewrote the valley girl trope into more complex and ambivalent forms, most famously, as the heroine of Joss Whedon's television series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003).

32. The only exceptions to this general rule are the West Coast states of Oregon and Washington, where the popular parlance is almost identical to that of mass media English.

33. The most prominent of these include Walter Hill's *The Warriors* (1979), Australian director George Miller's *The Road Warrior* (1981), John Carpenter's *They Live* (1988), and Hong Kong director John Woo's *The Killer* (1989) and *Hard-boiled* (1992).

34. *Freeman's Mind*, episode 48, 7:45-9:41. August 1, 2013.

35. While the number of world tourist arrivals increased from 529 million in 1995 to 1.1 billion by 2013, the privatization of previously state-owned airlines drastically reduced wages for airline staff. *UNWTO Annual Report 2013*. Madrid: World Tourism Organization, 2013 (10).

36. To be more specific, Kubrick's film shows how imperial white masculinity revanchism deploys open forms of violence against women, children and non-white US ethnic groups in order to justify legitimate the rule of the plutocracy. Freeman intuitively grasps the underlying message of the film:

Freeman: “No, I think a ghost just let me out of there like Jack Torrance in 'The Shining'. Where am I going? So a ghost let me out. Does that mean I have to kill people now, or... wait.” *Freeman notices metal pipe with a valve hatch.*

Freeman: “Oh, there's another pipe. Yeah, why not? I won't get stuck. The ghosts have my back now. Wish they'd showed up sooner.” *Freeman jumps onto pipe to open valve hatch.*

Freeman: *opening hatch and continuing through giant pipe*: “Yeah, look at this hatch. There is no way something like this opens by accident.” *Freeman opens valve hatch and continues through giant pipe.*

Freeman: “So it's confirmed: I've been chosen by ghosts. Well, in 'The Shining', they let him out so he could kill his family, but that doesn't really apply to me. Maybe I've been looking at this the wrong way. I'm doing the world a favor by killing these people because I'm stopping their horrible timelines from continuing. I don't know. I mean, the ghosts haven't been especially clear with me what their message is. So if I get confused and kill a bunch of people, am I really to blame?”

*Freeman's Mind*, episode 50, 1:24-2:16. November 12, 2013.

37. Freeman: “You know, this [targeting] map is great, but it has one severe flaw -- and it's too small. I need one of the whole world.”

*Freeman's Mind*, episode 50, 7:35-7:43. November 12, 2013.

38. Freeman: “Although I have to say, this is just a taste of what the future holds. Like right now, if you walk in the parking lot of Walmart, there are dozens of surveillance cameras watching you. I think in maybe fifty years, there'll also be roof-mounted turret guns in order to gun down shoplifters.”

*Freeman's Mind*, episode 51, 1:15-1:32. November 27, 2013.

39. *Accursed Farms* (website), March 15, 2014. <http://www.accursedfarms.com/forums/viewtopic.php?f=19&t=3488>.

40. Freeman: “Let's look at the evidence. We have a staff member getting snippy with me about a reactor. We have that intercom talking about biological contaminants. We have those red pump warning lights. And we have the building literally falling apart. I think we have a nuclear reactor down here, an alien teleported inside it, now it's broken, and is going to melt down unless I flood it with coolant. I mean, somebody tell me I'm wrong, that a team of top researchers are not so tragically obtuse that we pass off a f---ing China syndrome as just 'one of those things'! The scientist trying to give me orders was slightly annoyed. He wasn't somber or panicked at all. Yeah, a meltdown is really annoying. I get it! I think I'm the only person here who understands how serious this is. I hope I'm wrong, but this is all too plausible. Even though we have a dam, we use as much power as a city. I can believe we have a nuclear reactor here also. Plus, these are my colleagues who thought sealing off the entrance would contain random teleportations. They drew straws to decide who would let me in. Now that I am in, I'm sure the prevailing theory being discussed behind my back is that all these aliens just showed up during the two minutes they left the door open and I walked in. This is my fault. Of course. I know what's happening here. I've seen this a hundred times. This reeks of groupthink. You have one normally brilliant person make a stupid decision and everyone else just falls in line, doesn't question anything. These people aren't scientists, they're cultists with advanced degrees.”

*Freeman's Mind*, episode 56, 4:02-5:46. April 25, 2014.

41. This is the notion of an unstoppable meltdown inside a nuclear reactor which would presumably cause radioactive materials to sink into the Earth's crust, like an out-of-control machine which is digging to China. James Bridges, director. *The China Syndrome*. Columbia, 1979.

42. The original *Half Life* allowed players to replenish their health with somewhat unrealistic health packs, consisting of morphine and first aid. Due to Scott's narrative strategy of narrative realism, Freeman had avoided using these packs until episode 57.

43. The playable demo is titled "Uplink" and is available at the following locations:

<https://www.fileplanet.com/10360/download/Half-Life:-UpLink-Demo>.

<http://www.moddb.com/games/half-life/downloads/half-life-uplink>. Viewers are advised that due to technical issues, Scott recorded episodes 58 and 59 with a much smaller field of vision (FOV) than all other episodes of the series. This narrow FOV can induce motion sickness in a significant subset of the viewing audience. All other episodes of the series feature a normal FOV, greatly reducing the risk of motion sickness.

44. In a note to fans, Scott explained: "The other big change made is based on the feedback from the last episode, I decided to drop Freeman's morphine tripping as many people were finding it annoying. While I try my best, I see no reason to adhere to consistency if it hurts the overall impact of the show, so this episode is much more the standard Freeman you're probably used to." Accursed Farms.

<http://www.accursedfarms.com/freemans-mind-episode-59/>. September 19, 2014.

45. *Freeman's Mind*, episode 60, 1:53-3:00. September 26, 2014.

46. Freeman was teleported once at the end of episode 57, once at the end of episode 59, and then three additional times prior to this comment in episode 60. It is possible that the reference to being number six is a lateral reference to No. 6, the hero of Patrick McGoochan's classic science fiction television series *The Prisoner* (1967), one of the touchstone works of the late 20th century.

47. At one point Freeman nearly falls to his death due to the wholly irrational placement of the teleporter spheres, which rotate at odd angles for no discernible reason. Freeman survives, but has this reaction:

Freeman: *with rising fury*: "Why would they put the exit point there? Especially when there are rotating platforms? Why are there rotating platforms? It's not like they're needed for the teleporter balls. They're all over the place! Yeah, what the f---!? Look at this place! All that's missing are the bobbing horse rides and calliope music. There's no goddamn reason for this! We've invented teleporters! That's 'F--- you, pay me' research! We don't need to pad our costs with high-tech carousels!"

*Pause.*

Freeman: *sardonic normal voice*: "Oh, I get it. It's to double the experiments so if the teleportation doesn't make you vomit, then the platforms will."

*Freeman's Mind*, episode 60, 3:13-3:47. September 26, 2014.

48. The original *Half Life* contained a number of satirical references to Microsoft, the most famous being the infamous "Blue Screen of Death" on Black Mesa's computers (this blue screen would be triggered by the crash of Microsoft's Windows operating system). Scott's version of this moment:

Freeman: *yelling while navigating teleporters*: "So what happened? Did they make this off our research? Or were we duplicating work for no reason at all? I thought we were all the same company! Why are divisions backstabbing? Are we Microsoft?!"

*Freeman's Mind*, episode 60, 6:08-6:20. September 26, 2014.

49. This is the subtext of cloning or the mass-produced biological copy in episode 61. The demographic preponderance of the proletariat has always terrified oligarchies and plutocrats, who have responded with everything from the toxic ideology of Malthusianism in the early 19th century to the racial ideology of eugenics in the late 19th century, and from Fascist ideologies of racial-imperial conquest in the early 20th century to the ideologies of financialization and revanchism in the late 20th century. In contrast, Freeman celebrates the extended reproducibility of the subject:

Freeman: "Man, it's too bad these teleporters aren't the duplicating kind, then we can just tell it to not destroy me on this end and I can create copies of myself. Now, the conventional wisdom is if you see a clone of yourself you should try to kill it, but I think that's the view of a small mind."

Scientist: "Hello, Freeman!"

Freeman: *jumping*: "Dah!"

Scientist: "I'm up here! Practice your long jump if you must, but hurry up!"

Freeman: "All right, all right. I'm coming, just hold on. Hah!" *Freeman jumps to scientist.*

Freeman: "You know, a ladder wouldn't kill you, this catwalk has poor support as it is. There's too much stress on the beam. Actually, hold on. Is there an exit here? Like is there a snack machine in the back or something? Because I could use that." Freeman tries to open door, door is locked.

Freeman: "No... hey, I don't know what they told you but I need you to teleport me to Massachusetts. If you can't swing that, just get me to the nearest city like Los Alamos or Santa Fe would be fine. I should be able to hijack a ride, no problem."

Scientist: "All right, I can open the portal now. The process is complicated and once it's begun, I must not be interrupted or I will have to start all over again. Don't enter the beam until I give the okay. Understood?"

Freeman: "Yeah."

Scientist: "I will begin."

Freeman: "I'll get out of your hair. Just don't screw up." *Freeman jumps down.*

Freeman: "Man, if the teleporter could make a copy of me I should have a plan how to unite myself in the future so I need to have a plan now before I make the jump, just in case. I guess... I'll leave contact info where I buried the gold. That'll work."

*Freeman's Mind*, episode 61, 8:22-9:40. October 20, 2014.

50. *Freeman's Mind*, episode 62, 2:32-3:11. November 26, 2014.

51. Freeman: "This actually isn't the worst apartment I've ever had. It's close, though."

*Freeman's Mind*, episode 62, 5:45-5:51. November 26, 2014.

Later in the same episode:

Freeman: "Okay, this apartment is definitely the second worst I've had. It's still not infected with bed bugs." *Freeman's Mind*, episode 62, 6:16-6:22. November 26, 2014.

The WHO has observed that after almost disappearing from the US in the 1940s, bedbugs reappeared on a mass scale in the US in the 1980s and became epidemic after 2004. Xavier Bonnefoy, Helge Kampen and Kevin Sweeney. *Public Health Significance of Urban Pests*. Copenhagen, Denmark: World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe, 2008 (131-135).

52. It is worth emphasizing that the winning candidate for President in the US election of 2016 received only 62 million votes, whereas the losing candidate received 65 million. The winner was appointed by the Electoral College, an institution created by 18th century US slave-owners to count slaves as three-fifths of a citizen for purposes of representation. The US elections for the House of Representatives are fundamentally flawed due to gerrymandering and the restriction of voting rights by ethnic minorities, while the elections for the Senate are flawed due to the fact that each US state receives two Senate seats, with no regard for the vast differences in their population (e.g. Wyoming has 650,000 citizens and elects two senators, while California has 37 million citizens and elects two senators). The result was an unprecedented decline in the credibility of the US around the world. See: Richard Wike, Bruce Stokes, Jacob Poushter and Janell Fetterwolf. "U.S. Image Suffers as Publics Around World Question Trump's Leadership." Pew Research Center. June 26, 2017. <http://www.pewglobal.org/2017/06/26/u-s-image-suffers-as-publics-around-world-question-trumps-leadership/>.

53. *Freeman's Mind*, episode 63, 4:37-5:09. December 5, 2014.

54. Freeman: "A wise man once said, Jesus tap-dancing Christ. You know, I have a new theory. I think, instead of teleporting me, maybe the scientists just blew up the universe. We found a way to do it -- we were really motivated -- but since I was wearing this suit, I survived and that's why all I see are other people wearing this suit and the laws of reality and everything else just got scrambled a little bit."  
*Freeman jumps down into small cave.*

Freeman: "Whup! No, that can't be right. Then my weapons wouldn't still be here."  
*Freeman's Mind*, episode 63, 6:27-7:03. December 5, 2014.

55. Freeman: "You're actually not trying to attack me. This is a first. Okay! Wow. You are doing everything right for someone who wants to live. I wouldn't want to discourage the learning process here. Looks like some of you can be domesticated after all. Good! I mean, what's the point of being king if you don't have any subjects? I feel like we're making some real progress. Eventually, I'll need you to kill your own kind who would harm me, but that's still a ways off."  
*Freeman's Mind*, episode 65, 2:31-2:59. December 15, 2014.

56. Freeman: "Yeah, we have lifts, barrels, lighting. This is some sort of manufacturing or processing. They're still not wearing any clothes, though, so I'm not that impressed. Yeah, I'm pretty sure I can take this place over. It's ripe for colonization. I just need to find the leader, blow his head off, then they'll start bowing to me."  
*Freeman's Mind*, episode 66, 1:59-2:19. December 19, 2014.

57. Freeman: "Man, I really hope I did kill their prophet or oracle or whatever. That actually would explain this elaborate and impractical architecture, if this was a temple. Why not? Just build it right next to the manufacturing plant. Floating island space is limited after all. If I get up there and find some religious symbols, I'm going to wear them as a hat. If I'm lucky, they'll bow down to me. But if not, I might at least demoralize them. If I want to go the extra mile, I could cut off the leader's head and wear it around my neck. I think even among complete aliens, that still sends a pretty universal message."  
*Freeman's Mind*, episode 67, 7:15-7:51. December 27, 2014.

58. Jonathan Sterne. "The MP3 as Cultural Artifact." *New Media Society* 2006:8, 825.

59. *Freeman's Mind*, episode 67, 11:56-12:30. December 27, 2014.

60. *Freeman's Mind*, episode 68, 1:31-2:30. December 31, 2014.

61. Freeman's first coherent comment after teleporting to the Nihilanth's lair:

Freeman: *yelling*: "Lovecraft was right about everything! How did he know?!"

*Freeman's Mind*, episode 68, 0:23-0:27. December 31, 2014.

Later, Freeman fleshes out this insight with a reference of Lovecraft's mythical Elder Gods:

Freeman: *yelling while battling Nihilanth*: "Okay, keep moving! I'm totally not fighting an Elder God! Nope! No no no! That's not what's happening! It's just really big... levitates and... looks like an Elder God! But I should try to and keep perspective! Nuh! We had dinosaurs bigger than you! Or at least taller! Wuaah! And Earth gravity's way higher, so what's your excuse?"

*Freeman's Mind*, episode 68, 2:46-3:15. December 31, 2014.

62. *Freeman's Mind*, episode 68, 10:05-10:27. December 31, 2014.

63. G-man: "I have recommended your services to my... employers."

Freeman: "What, you're CIA?"

G-man: "And they have authorized me to offer you a job. They agree with me that you have limitless potential."

Freeman: "Well, you're right, but CIA? God, I don't know."

*G-man and Freeman are teleported to interstellar railcar.*

Freeman: "Man, CIA is hardcore."

G-man: "You've proved yourself a decisive man so I don't expect you'll have any trouble deciding what to do."

Freeman: "I want a pardon."

G-man: "If you're interested, just step into the portal and I will take that as a yes."

Freeman: "A pardon signed by the President."

G-man: "Otherwise, well..."

Freeman: "I want lab work in Hawaii."

G-man: "I can offer you a battle you have no chance of winning. Rather an anticlimax after what you've just survived."

Freeman: "So you're threatening me? I'm not hearing a 'yes' to my conditions."

G-man: "Time to choose."

Freeman: "Seriously, I want Hawaii. And I'm a physicist. I'm done being shot at. You understand that, right?"

G-man: "It's time to choose."

Freeman: "You're threatening me, you took my weapons, and you're a f---ing Time Lord. This is bullshit."

*Freeman enters portal.*

Voice of G-man: "Wisely done, Mr. Freeman! I will see you up ahead."

*Freeman's Mind*, episode 68, 11:24-12:39. December 31, 2014.

64. Most of these fan comments were archived by a group of fans, who Scott credits at 12:47 of the

episode. *Freeman's Mind*, episode 68, 12:47-16:52. December 31, 2014.

65. The mod was created in 2007 by a group of Russian *Half Life* fans.  
<https://www.moddb.com/mods/g-man-invasion>.

66. *Freeman's Mind*, episode 68, 17:04-18:04. December 31, 2014.