

# Trojan

*Jay Jameson, Trinity Western University*



“Trojan”

An open-mouth, inward breath primes the nerves.

Sudden and soundless, eruptions flame from the torso. Exploding from the ribcage, slow-moving marrow of chalky white spreads out like wings, teetering on nothing in the early air. Shock and convulsion radiate top-down out of the uncompromising ultraviolet blue of the sky. Blinking still, the body curls in upon itself, spiraling into the dense soil of Sunday morning. Choking on ash, enveloped by its own vapor and tears and gone. Noiseless as snowfall. Silent. An unbroken moment passes in silence. All silent! Then, the oblique, indelible echo of that which is no longer there catches up with the speed of light. Shakes your blood. Pine needles tremble and drop all around you. And you are reminded of just how slowly sound actually travels.

*A Reflection on the Demolition of the Trojan Nuclear Cooling Tower*  
by Jay Jameson, Wednesday, May 24, 2006

*O harp and altar, of the fury fused,  
(How could mere toil align thy choiring strings!)  
Terrific threshold of the prophet's pledge,  
Prayer of pariah, and the lover's cry,--*

*To Brooklyn Bridge by Hart Crane*

If Irenaeus was correct, and the Creator of earth, heaven and hell will someday recall all things back into himself, much like gravity collapses a monument or pulls a man to his knees, then I can only assume that such a day has long since come and gone. Theologically, or perhaps just logically, I have

cause to suspect that my short life is taking place after this recapitulation of infinity. For in the empty space between breaths, I have often caught shadowy and disquieting glimpses of heaven and hell intermingled casually with one another here on earth.

The Trojan Nuclear Plant's cooling tower took a year to build and cost more than \$10 million. Its concrete and steel weigh as much as an aircraft carrier, and its crown of strobe lights, 499 feet up, has been a landmark for generations of drivers passing by on Interstate 5. On Sunday morning, it will come down in about 10 seconds.

*The Seattle Times* by Jonathan Martin, May 15, 2006

*And they said, "Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth."*

Genesis 11:4 (KJV)

In 1975, as Communism was reclaiming Vietnam and Elton John was conquering the record charts with his remake of "Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds," the Trojan Nuclear Plant achieved full power. For twenty months, they erected it above the northern Oregon landscape and named it Trojan – well before anyone could associate the name with condoms and computer viruses. Muttering wordless prayers to progress, a thousand men assembled the hundred million horrible tons of oppressive dimensionality, which curved gracefully into the air not unlike a young woman's waist. With breaking backs and bloody hands, they raised it into the heavens. They bound its mighty frame together from radioactive flesh and hot, iron bones to pump its electric blood into the countryside. Landmark, mountain and monument. It was a bridge into the future, a commitment to unborn generations. The practical hope of humanity and the American Dream. With the weight of the world shackled to its ankles, it climbed into the sky and rested its heavy crown upon a scrim of stars. And,

having torn its own heart apart in the awful ascent, it lay stolidly in the night, bleeding, waiting to die.

From: "Iain Cook"

To: "Jay Jameson"

Date: Friday, 19 May, 2006

Subject: The Perfect adventure!

Jay, I have the perfect plan! you and I shall drive down to Portland where we shall find a good viewing / videotaping spot for the destruction of the Trojan power plant. it'll be amazing. we have to do it! email me back, or call me.

- Iain

As I sit, watching the smooth flicker of evergreens drift past my passenger seat window, I allow my fingers to play idly with a strand of fabric from the worn-out upholstery of Iain's car. The ride is pleasant, but tedious, as the two of us make our way down the Washington coast along Interstate 5. The sensation of having driven on the freeway for several hours is perhaps one of the only constants I've known in life. Strangely, it never seems to change whether one is traveling in luxury, or in the case of our current vessel, modesty. It is a sensation unfailingly characterized by restlessness, faint nausea, and almost imperceptible vibrations of the teeth. What's more, the frequent traveler will also be accustomed to the sensation of having more time to think than he knows what to do with. Traveling thoughts are indeed unique. They seem to stream over the back of the eyeball like flashing frames of light, dissociating the mind entirely from the view.

Even now, ten years after the fact, I can still recall this peculiar thought process occurring on my long journey northward from my childhood home in California. This was not the first big move of my life, and it has certainly not been the last. Still, its memory lingers as vividly in my mind as any I've ever had. And on long trips, it seems as though memories are about all a person ever has.

“Hey, you wanna film this?” Iain ventures to ask after a long spell of silent staring.

“Sure, might as well,” I say, flicking on his digital camera and pointing it toward the emerging Seattle skyline gliding over the trees.

The dancing dimensions of the Emerald City in summer funnel their way through Iain’s dirty windshield into the whirring camera in my hands. Though it remains unspoken, we both know that there is no real reason to film this trip. There will be no audience for it back home, and the two of us will probably never care to watch the footage again either. At any rate, there are still a couple hundred miles to go before we reach Trojan, so filming presents a happy distraction. Reminiscing has become tiresome, and my anxious fingers need something to do.

*This hollow fabric either must inclose,  
Within its blind recess, our secret foes;  
Or 't is an engine rais'd above the town,  
T' o'erlook the walls, and then to batter down.  
Somewhat is sure design'd, by fraud or force:  
Trust not their presents, nor admit the horse.  
Aeneid by Virgil*

Only recently did it occur to me that the excruciating profusion of labor God poured into the formation of the earth was endured with the knowledge that His flawless creation was doomed to perish. Not just perish, but be systematically contaminated and obliterated from the inside out. “Good,” was the word that came to His mind when He first laid eyes on it. “Good,” a word so elementary and complete. Yet in the same omniscient glance, He saw its goodness being mangled and disfigured day after day, for millennia to come.

The creation of the world is a scene too fantastic for me to visualize. However, I can perhaps imagine the sound it made. I imagine it was loud. Loud and horrifying with the torrents of shattered energy, and deafening with the

echoes of atoms giving up their sharp cries as they tore themselves into the likeness of rocks and waves.

The thought of my own creation, however, garners a different sound – the quiet clicking of my body being knitted together in a womb. In my mind’s ear, I can hear Him fusing the fibers of my body into one tremulous entity. I hear Him working away with intricate care and delicacy, though only to have His efforts unraveled by the lacerations of a demonic hand. Watching over time as my tender threads are undone one by one.

For the frailty of every patchwork inexorably resides in its seams. Though thoughtfully woven from many unlike parts, the most infinitesimal of loose ends can cause the entire body to disintegrate. How senseless is it then that I am composed of millions of tiny particles, bound together by sinews that are so easily dissolved?

But perhaps Satan, that great unraveller of all men, intends to leave my body intact, to wear my frame like a disguise to sneak inside the city gates of the new Eden. Should its citizens receive me, they will invite me, unsuspectingly, into their courts. There, he will wait until the sun sets low over the camp, and its protectors are fast asleep.

Though unheard, I know he waits, quietly within, making his plans.

*What sphinx of cement and aluminum bashed open their skulls and ate up their brains and imagination?*

*- Howl by Alan Ginsberg*

From: "Iain Cook"

To: "Jay Jameson"

Date: Friday, May 19, 2006

Subject: RE: The Perfect adventure!

Jay!

dude, I'm so excited you wanna come. I guess I can drive. heres the skinny: it's set to implode aparently at 7am on sunday morning, and they're closing off the surrounding areas, so we should maybe go find a good look out point and camp out the night before or something. call me as soon as you get this! I'll be up late

We drive on. The time passes easily now and we spend it making jokes and talking about common acquaintances and movies we've seen recently. Trojan is imploding in about twelve hours, but for some reason that is last thing on our minds. For now, we laugh and allow the stories we are telling to take the foreground of our thoughts.

The sun is on the last leg of its descent, and apparently, so are we. Without warning, the heavy tower looms into view. Excitedly, we exit the freeway and find a place to park. My legs are weak with atrophy as I open the car door and stand up straight. Iain gets out, too, and we watch, silently, as the sun sets for the last time over Trojan's gigantic, granite chest. The evening sky, as a farewell, has become brilliant, draping a hue of soft red light across its somber visage. Despite the sea-foam hills swelling all around it in defiance, the tower is so much larger than it appears in pictures and on the evening news. I muse to myself that it is a cigar being smoked by the planet as it faces a firing squad. As the minutes flit by, the tower's color continues to change and is becoming indistinguishable from the sky behind it. It is almost invisible.

My heavy eyes blink, and it is night already.

*Then, behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth quaked, and the rocks were split, and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised.*

Matthew 27:50-52 (NKJ)

When I was very young, my family and I lived on a quiet golf course nestled neatly among the rolling, poppy-laden hills of central California. I remember watching these hills from my window through the amber sunlight of perpetual summer and thinking their shapes and contours resembled those of sleeping monsters.

On a particular bluff beside the eighth fairway, there was an overgrown weeping willow tree in which I would often spend my evenings reflecting in solitude. Most nights, after supper, I would strike out across the fairway, part the willow's draping branches which swept the well-groomed grass, and lose myself inside. With the pale green limbs cascading all around me like a motionless waterfall, I felt wholly secure upon every visit. Climbing into a convenient fork in the branches, I would hide there, wearing the tree like a shroud to sneak into the night. Outside, the sun would set low around my sanctuary, though I could scarcely notice the change from inside. There I would pass the time, quietly within, making up excuses to tell my mother when I went home so late after dark.

*With both his arms on those two massie Pillars  
That to the arched roof gave main support.  
He unsuspecting led him; which when Samson  
Felt his arms, his head a while enclin'd,  
And eyes fast fixt he stood, as one who pray'd,  
Or some great matter in his mind revolv'd . . .*

*When Mountains tremble, those two massie Pillars  
With horrible convulsion to and fro,  
He tugg'd, he shook, till down they came and drew  
The whole roof after them, with burst of thunder  
Upon the heads of all who sate beneath.*

*Samson Agonistes* by John Milton

In the autumn of my third grade year, my father decided to move us from our comfortable California home to a much colder and stranger place. About a week before this painful relocation, the golf course landscaped the eighth fairway. There were now a few additional saplings, a row of pink and purple flowers by the path, and on the bluff, the willow tree stood, marred beyond recognition. Though I did not understand why at the time, the tree had been extensively pruned. It now hung there in the dusk like a skeleton, bald and weak. Its leaves had all vanished, and I could see right through to the sunset which lay

behind, as though it were invisible. Without its elegant locks, the weeping willow was bereft of its power to obscure. Fighting tears, I climbed into its defeated arms for the last time, feeling as naked as the tree itself. Looking out from my favorite limb, I could now see the fairway in plain view, and beyond it to the house I would soon leave forever, and beyond that still to the surrounding hills of daunting gold monsters.

Later that night, I sat crying on my dad's lap, encircled by cardboard boxes and empty bookshelves, lamenting the desecration of the willow tree and the changing state of all things. My father, in an attempt to offer me solace, assured me that pruning is the only way to keep trees healthy. But of course I didn't believe him and I didn't care. Mystery had been stripped of its veil, and I was unprepared to look it in the eye.

*Light takes the Tree; but who can tell us how?*  
*The Waking* by Theodore Roethke

One does not need to be a theologian to fear the night. For as all living things know, in darkness, everything looks identical. The caliginous mountains mingle with the black of a starless sky, and all matter appears as one collective and mysterious substance. In the forest, the tree must endure its own shadow climbing up from the ground and bending its asphyxiating form around each and every bristle. It is in these shadows that we must tread and make our way, clinging to our distrust like armor, until the dawn comes and its light tears a thin horizon along the surface of the earth, separating heaven from hell.

*Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away.*

Revelations 21:1 (NKJ)

Like the EKG of a dying man, a line of light rips its way along the tops of the tall evergreens overlooking the Trojan tower from the sturdy Oregon hillside. Their jagged silhouette produces a row of sharp teeth that is hungrily devouring the early morning sky as Iain and I watch from the hood of his car. The two of us are parked on a precipice, taking in the rays of the last sunrise Trojan will ever see.

“How’s the shot?” Iain asks, regarding the camera in front of me.

“Good,” I tell him, my eyebrow pressed against the viewfinder.

We are not alone on the bluffs, as Iain and I share our vantage point with excited families in well-traveled motor homes and bands of hippies sitting in lawn chairs atop their dilapidated Volkswagen vans with California license plates. The hippies have undoubtedly come to celebrate the collapse of the nuclear age, though perhaps somewhat prematurely. I smile to myself, finding it both amusing and endearing that their pot-addled minds appreciate the symbolism of this event just as much as I do, though for slightly different reasons. In any case, we can at least unite in the primitive thrill of seeing something explode.

It is nearing 7:00 a.m. and the nearby roads have all been officially closed. The traffic noise coming from Interstate 5 has vanished, probably for the first time in years, and the only sound is the restless murmuring of our fellow sightseers. Even the sound of birds is strangely absent, as if they intuitively know what is about to transpire.

*This is the way the world ends  
Not with a bang but a whimper.*  
Hollow Men by T. S. Eliot

The scene before me is still, and my mind begins to drift. My thoughts disengage from my optical nerve, and I have the sensation of movement. I envision myself blind inside the lightless tower, shackled at the wrists to its

girders with spindly vines. Beyond the concrete walls, the fabric of the earth is being rent apart, but as I surmised, it is almost inaudible. All around me, the walls of Trojan are climbing up from the ground into the heavens in a desperate maneuver to be spared annihilation. Ascending ever higher, the pace of this false vessel quickens with the momentum of a crazed mare. An unknown source compels me to pull taught the tethers and I find myself with the strength to do so. Agonizingly, I strain at the tower's supports until they buckle and fall, drawing a mountain of rubble upon myself into a broken heap.

*And I will look down and see my murmuring bones and the deep water like wind, like a roof of wind, and after a long time they cannot distinguish even bones upon the lonely and inviolate sand.*

*The Sound and the Fury* by William Faulkner

Glinting sharply at me across the green valley, Trojan erupts. Lateral columns of smoke diffuse swiftly from its flanks. In an instant, its lower half dissolves into a noxious vapor of debris. Its crown lingers for a fraction of a second in mid-air before gravity can coil its bony fingers around the reins, inevitably drawing it into the earth. As the tower sinks, its hollow muzzle breathes out a colossal wisp of white dust that ascends to take the structure's place among the mountains. Rising slowly and decisively toward the sky, Trojan's nebulous ghost is assertively snared by a southward wind that carries it over the countryside. Enveloping the trees and the rocks as it slithers away, the ashen specter begins its slow, southern journey toward its final resting place. Meanwhile, Trojan's one hundred thousand headstones settle into place.

Recalled to my own senses, I exhale, slowly and completely. We climb back into Iain's rusted car and begin the long drive home.

