

"Holy Dick in a Box" by Colson Lin

"That was probably all too much, in retrospect."

You could say that about anything and it's not embarrassing, since you overcame the embarrassment of a grandiosity that has no name—just "too much." Maybe it was a war. Maybe it was multiple wars fought in your name. Maybe it was your ownership of the concept of God—somethin', something about what you did became too hot to handle.

And now it's just you and God.

Whatever that means; it can't be substantively the opposite of it just being you and all other people. If it's "you" versus "all other people"—then, without them, who are you? You're just everyone? Similarly: if it's just you and God—then, without God, who are you? (And it's just you and the rest of us?)

None of this explains why you're now a museum exhibit.

Oh look, you're *Holy Dick in a Box*—whoops. Maybe you oversalted.

"We should all be in this conceptual situation," I think as I carefully scrutinize my glass-box encasement. In my case, they claim I asked for it. "I wanted to be a writer and a friendly person; like Kafka," was my excuse when this whole thing started. "Why'd I put myself into a box like this?" Namely—"The Second Coming in a Box," a bizarre exhibit at MoMA where Colson Lin lives in a glass box for a week with his handy-dandy iPad, and he tweets at visitors who tweet back at him from MoMA's X account—one at a time, from a voting booth.

The queue for this?

People come from Kazakhstan.

Why would you say no to this? "Because you might have to pay some mammon for it? Because you think it goes against Christianity?" That was how the Second Coming got the museum to host this, after he had already become the most famous human figure in the world ("One of"). "A human writer in a glass box, with a billboard over Times Square that says 'Is He? x.com/colsonlin,' plus 5,000 thinkpieces placed by PR firms—do you seriously think nobody would show up that week? Out of reverence? Let's test."

That was my agent's pitch to MoMA, and my agent represents multi-billion dollars worth of celebrity.

So now I look up.

It's my first hour "in the box" and this is what I type before clicking "Send" on X. In front of me, a line of hundreds of people look down at their phones.

Now they're reading what you just read.

A laugh emits into the otherwise silent, cavernous MoMA hall; to indicate that's what people do, we laugh. I should laugh, since I'm constantly looking for something that'll "make me laugh," like I'm manhandling the topography of reality's absurdity like *Super Mario Bros.*—island to island. I'm supposed to be in the box for a week. I asked for something that looks like a "roving five-star luxury hotel room"—obviously with a private bedroom and bath.

"If you're designing the exhibit from scratch, model the exhibit after a room that doesn't remind people of that *Twilight Zone* episode where a guy has to live in some rich guy's glass box. Make it vibe somewhere a Sim would want to live." Those were my general guidelines, and I delivered them both politely and through my attorneys.

Basically I just go out into the living room whenever I want to be seen, and the only difference is I'm isolated from my real-life family. I compare it to sort of like a "work trip" that businesspeople sometimes take—look, "MoMA even built me a luxury hotel." I can watch TV in front of you guys, which is really awkward whenever people in line for the exhibit spy me watching YouTubers talk about people standing in line to see *The Second Coming in a Box*.

The bathroom's a rainfall shower, modeled after the Ritz-Carlton.

MoMA didn't have to do that, but "Anything for the messiah."

The idea, I guess, is one by one, you make your way to MoMA's equivalent of a confession booth—there, you use the iPad they have hooked up to a wall. You're logged into their X account and you can't log out, and you can only talk to Colson Lin's X account (@colsonlin). I'm basically twenty feet in front of you, and presumably I'm supposed to "notice your message right away" since I'm "always on X." (I had some downtime after the pandemic in between several major writing projects and traditional employment—"Sorry I figured out so much about human deference to institutional power during my time off," from my perspective as a lowly everyman. I don't know where in between that

earnest attempt at navigating reality and “living in a box for a week” did I screw up—I can’t model any of my life after the modernity that birthed me?)

Maybe it doesn’t count unless “nobody sees me.”

“A tree can only fall in the forest if nobody can know about it.”

I switch on the microphone.

“Booth’s now open,” I say hoarily.

The line perks up like this is some kind of joke; I’m Winston Smith in *1984*, not Adam Smith writing *The Theory of Everything*. My desk is nice-looking, like I saw in a hotel room once—you can find one at any yard sale. I’ve got my iPad Pro, which is what everyone can see me staring at “right now.” Sometimes I look up and see the faces; some just stare back, I nod and sip my coffee. The museum staff have Starbucks delivered for me. “Local boutiques,” actually—that was my request; the more small-business, the better. Sometimes I think they dump Starbucks into plain white cups. I can never tell if the museum representatives are treating me like a patient of some kind that they just have to deal with.

Anyway, nobody’s bothered to befriend me.

I growl at a small dog. (I was the one that said “I don’t mind pets in the museum.”) Now there’s someone in front of the confession booth. I can literally see them, which is so weird. (“I asked for total transparency.”)

We don’t make eye contact.

“What do you want,” I post from my X account (@colsonlin).

“This is pure evil,” MoMA’s X account growls back to me.

I stare at the gall.

“This isn’t even real; do you realize that, this is my imagination.” Only I’m out of that excuse, since inside the context of this story I’m literally doing it. And so what if I literally do this in the real world? “So I turned myself into a museum exhibit for a week the way some businesspeople ‘go on vacation’—they put themselves into a hotel room, have everything catered for them, can sneak off

into the bedroom to watch TV whenever they want, and get paid a little; the way mammon traded hands since nuclear bonds were formed. Ions pay each other off as charges"—is that even the "evil" they were referring to?

Or was it something else? "What do you mean," I type back.

"Something about this sits with me badly," MoMA's account writes back to me, "like a punch to my innards."

I stare at the gall.

"I'm sorry," I type back.

"How will you repent?"

How will I repent—how will *you* repent for making me feel this way and not any other part of the observable First World modernity; the same one we were all born to witness, lady, "observe," and "extract gratitudes from" when "nobody's looking." "I'm glad I extracted this gratitude," I want to write back, but then I worry I'm not being mature enough. Modernity deserves that at least. "I suppose I'll just repent by celebrating the good we have in common, which is now," I say. Fingers crossed. You never know with the way anything works. (Obviously I already regret saying "yes" to this exhibit.)

The visitor steps back and retreats.

I look up from my iPad.

She's a frail, homeless woman at the bottom of the world, slinking back into the recesses of thinking "The Second Coming wouldn't ever see her." That isn't true, I think, but maybe my stare doesn't help. I look away. "Maybe this is a little extravagant," I tweet out loud, sending murmurs through the crowd.

The next visitor's up. For a moment, they don't say anything.

"hi," the MoMA account suddenly reads.

I stare at my iPad.

"Hi."

"okay bye."

I look up.

Three Gen Z kids dash in front of my glass window, giggling—one even waves hi to me. I made it a point that people could go up to phone in ones, twos, or dozens. Later that day, an entire choir sings really beautiful hymns for me.

It seemed extravagant, but who was I to say anything at this point?

I'm "Holy Dick in a Box."

The week goes by fairly uneventfully—once, some people started screaming in a way that seemed seriously suggestive of a terrorist attack, but it was just because Brad Pitt had arrived. I talked to a lot of celebrities that week; most of them just seemed glad I was famous too—wantin' me to, I don't know, shoulder some of the burden maybe. Nobody was glad. Actually, Pitt never came—I never figured out what they were all screaming about. I had to hear about it from Google News later that day and—psych, it was Brad Pitt. Actually, Nicolas Cage came too and that was wild—we even took a selfie with me behind the glass and him outside the glass (a reference to *Dead by Daylight* where it's the other way around). Lana never visited but I never took it personally. Old classmates just texted or emailed directly over the years.

"Yes, unnecessary," I declared halfway through the experiment but by then it was too late. "It's just like one of those business trips; you're in a nice hotel room, and you're watching TV when you're not in a meeting." I guess they just wanted to see that something like this could happen. And now we all know. ("Duh.") Anyway, by the middle of the week, the exhibit felt like a tomb—the way a museum really ought to feel when you think about it, when it's just you and natural history. Whatever that means ("however human history ended up pinned as butterfly wings into a museum"). I consented to my capture—not even willingly in real life; but as a thought experiment for a humbling parable. And still it feels—well, for one, I've always considered myself reserved. I wonder if introverts ever read me and say, "Exactly."

"May my oneness with introverts be double-empowering."

By the end of the week: I had scared so many visitors away that MoMA really did feel like a tomb—people just stopped waiting in line for my exhibit, even though I had insisted it be free. "Oh yeah, it's

The Second Coming in a Box—what are you going to do? That's New York." I made friends with the security guards and the museum reps who kept bringing me coffee and lunch whenever I wanted it—the difference between this and prison is I could literally bill sushi to the Museum of Modern Art. Again, I just kept treating it like the sort of business trips you hear about sometimes.

"Meals expensed to the institution."

I got so lonely after the first day I wanted to leave, but the Museum wouldn't let me without suing me. It said in the contract that they could sue me, because "fair's fair." (The only reason I could argue away an NDA was "You're the Second Coming: thus uniquely notorious for being the type of person who can't be bound by an NDA.") "I just want to leave," I started tweeting publicly by Sunday, which honestly scared a lot of people away (at least by Monday). "The Museum of Modern Art literally has me trapped and they won't let me out unless I pay a hefty fine. They say I did it to myself—lol," I began repeating. The employees didn't mind. They thought it was funny.

I'm actually not even sure who upstairs minded; but whoever did, wanted me there to punish me ("I'm trapped here"). It was emotional for both of us. "Fuck the Museum of Modern Art—fuck the Museum of Modern Art, I hate art, I literally—hate—art." Eventually *The New York Times* had no choice but to report that a messianic claimant claimed to be held hostage by the Museum of Modern Art ("He knows full and well he can leave at any time," a spokesperson for the Museum said). Sometimes people would drop in just to say: "They don't feel sorry for me," and I was like, "You know what? Let's talk philosophy." They'd leave a poop emoji on MoMA's X account and leave.

On the day of my release: I thought about what it meant to be "just another human." I feel like it's important to come back to: you might as well say God cursed me the moment I googled "reason is God, no violence, end slavery," out of curiosity, and saw 0 hits. Human history's first rational messianic claim isn't so much the rational messianic claimant's fault as it is the fault of the entire human setup that produced it. ("Same for you.")

The people who ran the museum scared me.

"We control 0.00005% of the money supply." (It was a lot.)

And that "really was that," since after I finally posted bond, I was whisked by three museum representatives directly to "shake hands again with the president of MoMA" or whatever was going on there. There was so much passive aggression in our final interaction (like, "All right, Colson, you had your fun, but that was really inappropriate. We spent \$200,000 advertising you"). "Do you not want to be paid or something?" the lady at one point implied with just the tone of her frustration.

"I'm actually fine with not being paid since that was kind of fun—but I'd also like to be paid, please."
With a grunt, she handed over her phone for me to enter my Venmo handle into.

I look back now and think: "Okay, and am I glad I tried celebrity?"

Not highly terribly—"It was like a week at the Park Hyatt."

People talk about a lot of different parts of my philosophical work; but nobody really talks about *Holy Dick in a Box* anymore.

Which means I alone carry the stigma.

April 11, 2025 AD