

## Wouldn't It

by Noam Dorr '09

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My four year old hand stretches into the space between my parents' bed and the cold floor tiles, the contours of their prone bodies are still, and my fingers want to close around the metal of the rifle. Every night following I wake up in the middle of the night, bend my body down and look upside down under the bed, to search for the silhouette.



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My cousin is on leave from his base and is cleaning his gun. I ask him what that stink is. And he says that that is the sweet smell of gunpowder, you either love it or you hate it.





My mind swings wildly between being obsessive about the cleanliness of my boots and rifle and not caring at all. In the height of mania I need to see my face reflected at my boot-tips, there can't be a single grain of sand inside the barrel of my M-16.

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It would be lovely and terrible to live in a world made of glass. Everything would be so fragile and transparent. We would refract all light and constantly make rainbows. And breaking one of us would mean, perhaps, breaking all of us.

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The rumor goes around that every Star of David stamped on the side of the handle-grip is a kill, and because our guns are the old rejects, and have seen many wars, there are many stars stamped on the side.





The butt of a long M-16 is hollow and contains a sort-of-secret compartment, and because we received these guns as aid from the U.S. government, and because they're so old, I make the joke that hidden inside the compartment are the finger bones of Viet Cong soldiers. Not many people find this funny.

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My grandfather's Mauser is here somewhere. All of the grandchildren are looking for it. Where are the hidden cavities in his house? When the British controlled this land he used to hide Haganah weapons in a secret pit under his bed; a team of chemists would make explosives in an underground chamber beneath the communal Laundromat. I crawl through the hidden passage in his bedroom closet into the bathroom; there are hidden spaces between the cabinets and the walls.



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It would be lovely and terrible to live in a world made of leaves. Everything would be so soft and crunchy. If any of us committed sin we would all rush to cover it. If any of us felt uncomfortable we could simply sink into one another. We

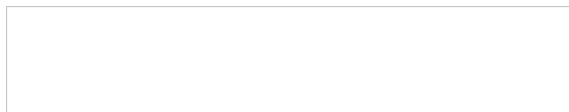
would be green until it was time to be red. We would be red until it was time to be brown. We would be brown until it was time to be dead. We would be dead until it was time to be green.

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The soldier is broad, his frame fills the entirety of the bus seat, and his sleeping head leans against the window. My long hair covers my adolescent face, and my knee hurts at the spot where it's poked by the barrel of his rifle.

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If I release the trigger right after I shoot the rifle jams. If I take a breath, I can keep firing.

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It would be lovely and terrible to live in a world made of stone. A single break would take millions of years of convection to undo. Perhaps then we would be more cautious with our actions.

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In the easiest basic training for men in the entire Israeli Defense Forces (riflemen .02, five weeks long, with a week break for Passover in the middle), the military's future drivers, cooks, quartermasters, pencil pushers, mechanics, and yes, also intelligence men, line up for their first firing range. They ask the corporal in charge what will happen if they get a bull's-eye with every shot; will they be reassigned as elite snipers? The corporal answers to the rejects, the confused, the asthmatics, the flatfooted, the bullies and the nerds, to shut up and give him twenty.

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She tells me how sexy it feels to fire a Glock in the firing range she takes her father to. In the next breath she tells me how difficult it is to try and decide between asking her father to buy her a new Volkswagen Beetle or a new Peugeot 206.

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It would be lovely and terrible to live in a world made of gold. We would wonder if we were the outside wrappers of delicious chocolates. We would wonder if greed was so saturated that it would kill itself, and if Midas was off the hook.

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He tells me guns are not good or evil, people are good or evil. I tell him guns were made by people.

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The 1996 Lonely Planet guide to Israel describes tourists becoming shocked when they see soldiers on leave in civilian dress dancing with their M-16s in nightclubs. The guide asks the reader to understand that the punishment for losing one's gun in the IDF is severe, and many Israeli soldiers choose to take the rifle with them rather than risk losing it.

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During the first night of officer training I look around and understand that I'm not the same as everyone else. I lack ambition, I lack drive, and I lack purpose. All the other future officers are intently cleaning their M-16s. My body makes a decision my mind can't, and I fall ill. The next day I drop out of officer training.

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He scratches his head like a robot. His hand picks his scalp like a robot. His face twists in an itch like a robot's face. He can't stop, like a robot. He sits in front of the computer like a robot. He stops to type a sentence like a robot. And then his elbow comes back to rest on the volume of "University Physics" and he goes back to picking his scalp like a robot. I am not him.



I beg my dad to fire just one bullet. We're walking down the road, it is night and there is no one else around, and he is the guard on duty. My head reaches his hip, and my small steps try to keep the rhythm with his. He tells me that it would be dangerous to shoot, that it could hit someone. I tell him to shoot into the road, that way it won't hit anyone. He tells me it's late and that the sound would wake the entire kibbutz up. I tell him to just shoot one bullet, that's all.

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It would be lovely and terrible to live in a world made of steam. How could we tell ourselves apart? Flesh and blood visitors would enjoy having their pores opened and their sinuses cleared.

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I'm walking back to the bus station from the military recruitment center, where a military doctors' committee had ruled me fit to serve in a non-combat capacity when I turn eighteen. He sees me walking towards the stop and calls out to me: "Akhi (my brother), what's the time?" I tell him the time, and think to myself that the era in which I am a brother to other men has begun.



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It would be lovely and terrible to live in a world made of Lego. We would all fit together consistently. Our faces would carry a permanent sickle smile.



My father claims to have been able to strip, clean, and put an Uzi together faster than anyone in his base, but he has never used one in combat.

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It would be lovely and terrible to live in a world made of hair. We would all be sinners. We would all be saints.

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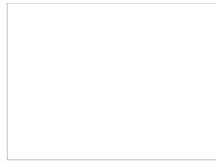
The first gun I ever own is a blue plastic water gun. I hold it upside down and pretend I'm ironing clothes.



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It would be lovely and terrible to live in a world made of milk. Our skins would be so soft before we turn sour.

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The barrel of the rifle is pointing towards the sky. I'm holding the charging handle back tight, knowing that if I let go of it, the bolt would spring back into place, crushing the digits of the officer who is fingering the insides of my M-16, searching for forgotten bullets.

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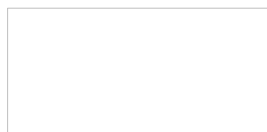
It would be lovely and terrible to live in a world made of margins. Over there, the line. Over there, beyond the line.

It would be lovely and terrible to live in a world made of wheels. To be together would be. To be together would be. To be together would be precarious.

It would be lovely and terrible to live in a world made of cork. Enjoy it once, on special occasions.

It would be lovely and terrible to live in a world made of yarn. Beware the space cat.

It would be lovely and terrible to live in a world made of matches. Intimacy would be cautious, but the risks would be known.



Guard duty, and the rifle that comes with it, is every five weeks or so. Close enough so I don't forget how to use it; far enough apart so that I don't get used to it.

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The outdoor lights of the West Bank settlement make the whole dark world look orange. I occasionally glance at the ☐ I'm guarding, but mostly I sink into my padded winter suit, and read my book. A settler-boy shows up and I pay him

no mind, just tell him to stay away from the  . He comes up to me, and gyrating his hips, simulates fucking the barrel of my M-16 with his twelve-year-old crotch.



They try to steal your arms, your rifle that is, when you're asleep. So sleep with your gun under you. Clutch the strap in your hooked fingers.



He tells me it's a hostile village down there. That they all know it's a matter of time before someone from over there will try to infiltrate the base, which is why we're on patrol. He tells me we should sit down and take a break, hide from the officers in the tool shed for a little while. Shouldn't we keep patrolling, I ask him, I thought he said it was a hostile village down there, isn't it a matter of time before something happens? That's right, he says, it's just a matter of time.



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A two week assignment on this base, at this time, means taking the 02:00 to 08:00 shift every night, and watching the so-called hostile village as it wakes up for another day of Ramadan. The sleepers are woken early so as to take their pre-dawn meal by the sound of banging tins and fireworks. The fireworks sound like gun shots, and I wonder, should I call it in, or should I not?



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It would be lovely and terrible to live in a world made of clay. Dirt our eyes; dirt our ears; dirt our nose.

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