

The Literary Arts Event*

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He was a university student, and he hadn't attended a literary arts event before. But he might, soon. There was a literary arts event today and he has plans to attend it, though I can't say whether or not he'll make it there. That would be a spoiler.

He was taking a fiction writing class, and attending a literary arts event was a requirement. How exotic! He could already imagine the event that he would (hopefully) soon attend: a softly lit underground cafe with a stoic barista polishing cups, café allongé¹ in one hand, smooth jazz in the corner, bongos and psychedelic rugs lying about, and everyone is sitting on those tall and pointed

*This is a work of fiction. Protagonists, side characters, places, incidents, and literary arts events, either are products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events or locales or persons, living (for now) or dead (hopefully forever), is entirely coincidental[†].

[†]Only as much coincidence as life being an endless series of coincidences.

¹Café allongés struck him as an especially artistic species of coffee. First of all, he wasn't exactly sure how to pronounce allongé (was it a-lon-jay, or a-lon-jr, or something else entirely), so he never felt confident enough to order it at a cafe. He could have searched up the proper pronunciation at home, but he always forgot about it until the next time he had to give his order to a barista and by that time it was too late to do anything about it. This inaccessibility elevated the drink in his personal hierarchy of beverages. Moreover, this was a breed of espresso prepared by pulling twice the regular amount of hot water through the normal amount of ground coffee. This extracts more components from the coffee, but, at the same time, dilutes the resulting concoction. The chemistry of this process meant that allongés were more bitter than normal espressos, took longer to prepare, and gave you less of the blissful sensation of caffeine clawing at your consciousness for each mouthful of coffee (all these complaints were hypothetical of course, because he never had a chance to try the drink). Why anyone would order a café allongé was a mystery to him, and the only reasonable response he could think of was that perhaps the equally mysterious artists could appreciate them.

chairs that were too high for anyone's feet to touch the ground (to keep people on their toes both metaphorically and physically).

You see, dear reader, our protagonist for today is unfamiliar with the world of artists. His was a world of strict rectangularity. His field of study was charitably called 'computer science', as if he wore stylish lab coats to work, and dissected computers and placed them under microscopes, or spent long romantic nights studying the mechanisms of computers in the night sky through a telescope on a hill. But the reality was that he spent most of his hours tapping his fingers on square tiles (with varying degrees of oblongness) that sprung in and out of a rectangular plane, so that the 16:9 rectangular screen in front of him would emit the desired squares of light. He did this in a cube-like building that had two smaller building-cubes stacked on top of it (a poor use of vertical space by the building's planners that, in this case, sacrificed both form and function), that stood on a squarish field whose bricks were also white squares (each brick was a microcosm of the squariness of their collective existence). Thankfully, as a respite from all the right-angles, this squarish field existed within the boundaries of a country shaped very much like a whale, and this country was part of a land-mass that floated on a massive wet rock which was — supposedly — roughly spherical.

So, dear reader, let us forgive our protagonist for his lofty and exaggerated (or not exaggerated, as the case may sometimes be) expectations of artistic spaces that are largely derived from cartoons involving anthropomorphic animals, and let us instead focus on more practical matters. Before taking the first step on any adventure, one must answer two questions:

1. Where are you going?
2. How do you get there?

As with most requirements, the answers to these questions are optional — you don't need a destination in mind when given directions to follow (which is what most people do every day once they roll out of bed²); in fact, Conventional Wisdom sometimes insists on the madness that the journey is more important than the destination³ — similarly, you could easily start walking to-

²Living this way might even be preferable to going about your life with the knowledge of where you will end up. After all, sustaining one's life is an act of habit, not introspection.

³This is a rather irresponsible philosophy to have for certain occupations, including:

1. Bus drivers
2. Taxi drivers

wards some destination without any idea of what path to take and where you might have misplaced your compass (a dangerous example of forgetfulness); you could even walk in the completely opposite direction and make it there eventually (supposing the world is as round as people who've never seen the earth in its entirety claim it to be ⁴) — but answers to these two questions are generally considered good to have.

Where was he going? That question was easy enough to answer: to the XxXxxxxxx Xxxxxx Theater. Three words. A fairly straightforward length for the name of a destination. But a common folly of humans — the point of failure for many endeavours — is to mistake knowledge of the destination for knowledge of the journey. True, the two are bound together, and like a coin you could usually flip it around to find the other side. But some coins are multi-dimensional creatures that have more than two sides. These coins prefer the shadows to sunlight⁵, and are less forthcoming with their secrets.

A casual inquiry posed to the everyday Oracle In The Clouds yielded an ambiguous address that stretched across 146 acres: Xxxxx University. Touché, Oracle. One must never forget the law of conservation⁶. To get the information he wanted, he needed to put in more effort. The required additional units of effort produced the promising address of 70 Xxxxx Street.

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3. Ministers of state
 4. Mice that are participating in a find-the-cheese-in-a-maze experiment for a study on some aspect of cognitive functioning (the kind of research whose results eventually trickle down into self-help, parenting, and management guru books)
 5. Deliverymen of self-help, parenting, and management guru books
 6. Airplane pilots
 7. Pigeons
 8. Squirrels
 9. Ambulance drivers
 10. Your oesophagus

⁴Every so often, he was disturbed by the realization that most of our knowledge might come from the hand-me-downs of ancient Greek thinkers who believed that beans have souls (and how depressing it must be for the beans that we've lost this particular morsel of wisdom).

⁵A preference, so I'm told, that is inconceivable to Swedes. As such, I must apologise to any Swedish readers for mentioning such an uncomfortable thought.

⁶Energy cannot be destroyed; information cannot be created; there's no such thing as a free lunch (even the 'free' lunch events you see around a university are an illusion: a sleight-of-hand to distract you from the fact that you pay good money to be in the vicinity of such events).

He pushed the door open *(it was a 'push' door, but what's the point of restricting the direction that a door swings anyway? (and who would ever pull a door? Pushing is often a much more natural motion as one avoids the need to interrupt the momentum of their stride in order to manipulate the opening (unless, of course, there was a need to hold the entryway open for someone else, in which case pulling becomes the superior strategy (at this point in his train of thought he was beginning to admit that a pullable door had some merit to it, and so he concedes that perhaps certain doors might well have good reason to be pushable rather than pullable, or vice versa (he justifies this change in mindset to himself mathematically: like parentheses, it was sometimes more sensible to go in one direction than the other))))* and stepped into the world beyond with its wild and unconditioned air.

The event began at 1730⁷; he started out at 1715. Cutting it close. But he was nearby, and he had an address.

And all this reasoning and preparation didn't matter when he walked up to the end of Xxxxx Street and learned that it ended at the 69 $\frac{1}{2}$ th block; a last half block spitefully vanished away from the landscape, as if mocking his false confidence in information bartered from immaterial sources, as if road makers of decades past plotted to deny him access to his romantic vision of attending a literary arts event, as if he'd stepped into a universe where non-integer block

⁷The use of the 12-hour or 24-hour clock was a question that occasionally tormented him. He had some fondness for the 24-hour time format's lack of ambiguity, but he sometimes had to confront its utter uselessness. Firstly, people often misread the time written in this format (he had once arranged to meet someone at 1700 and they had showed up, on the dot, at 7:00pm). Secondly, it didn't solve the issue of ambiguity when faced with bigger monsters such as daylight savings (he had heard once of an older twin who was born at 0255 during daylight savings, who had a younger twin born at 0205 after daylight savings ended). And thirdly, even if you left out the am/pm most people can figure out when to show up (except in the case when you meet a friend for a meal at an all-day-breakfast restaurant).

numbers were socially acceptable⁸.

What could he do with 10 minutes left to the start of the literary arts event if the triumvirate formed by the Oracle In The Clouds, Urban Planners, and Mathematics, conspired to keep him away?

Despite the recent betrayal, he consulted the Oracle In The Clouds once more. This time, he noticed that it pointed to a building next to the conceptual (but not literal) center of Xxxxx University, and at the entrance to this building he saw a sign that said Xxxxxx Theater. It didn't have quite the same ring to it as XxXxxxxxx Xxxxxx Theater, but if he believed hard enough (as he had been taught to do by the aforementioned anthropomorphic animal cartoons), if he pit the unstoppable stubbornness of his will against the immovable reality before his eyes, perhaps he could create a contradiction that would bend logic to the side, or at least make logic close an eye out of exasperation.

⁸Did this charade of urban design grasp the consequences of its existence? The integers were a predictable sequence: if you started walking down in one direction, you'd come up against the next after some unsurprising amount of time. While the occasional surprise (like discovering you had a test the very next day, or a road you took every day being closed for construction) was good for breaking the monotony of day to day habits, it was generally unpleasant for certain staples of life to suddenly change their mind. No one would be pleased if, on the morning of an important work meeting, the office decided that it liked being a nice even hour away from home instead of the usual twenty-five minutes.

And while it was fine to cut an integer into pieces, one shouldn't carry out the act without the same due diligence they would conduct before likewise splitting an atom: by creating a new paradigm and giving addresses the freedom to think in terms of non-integers, you open the door to more possibilities. At a university no less! Soon the young liberals will start numbering streets by the fourths, or thirds, or sevenths (which was an especially perverse fraction).

All fine, admittedly, as long as people learned to put up with a little irregularity. But if the history of human ingenuity has taught us anything, it's that where there are rational fractions, there are irrational numbers following close behind.

This is where our problems begin. The integers are nice and even steps: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5... The fractions are wilder and require more finesse: $\frac{1}{2}$, $\frac{1}{3}$, $\frac{1}{7}$, $\frac{1}{12}$... But these are merely countably infinite (a term human mathematicians like to use to show off their intelligence; don't pay it any attention in case it gets the wrong idea and becomes more clingy than you're comfortable with); the irrational numbers are *uncountably* infinite.

I cannot stress enough how dangerous this is. If you were walking along a grassy sidewalk of numbers and you stepped on a pile of irrationals, you won't escape with just the stink of ∞ on your shoe: you see, a rational number might seem like solid ground — just as an untouched rock in the eye of a hurricane might seem like the safest place in the world — but never forget that an endless void surrounds you: if you step in between the cracks of two rationals, you will find yourself walking along an infinitely long irrational stretch of pavement; a horse cannot help you; a ferrari, while a sleek status symbol, and a word that produces a very agreeable vibration on the tongue, cannot help you; faster than light travel (still impossible⁹, last I checked) cannot help you.

⁹There's a reason that humans do not travel between the stars.

He entered the empty building (which should have given him pause for buildings are rarely empty; not in the center of a university campus; not when the sun is still out) and looked around. He saw no indication of the literary arts event, but he also didn't know anything about what one looked like. This could very well be the face of the Arts: a dark and echoing entrance hall; confusing; lonely; the best guess one has; located at wherever one finds themselves. He opened the doors to one of the theaters, saw it was empty, then went the other way. He started to climb up a flight of stairs, then realized it led to an exit. They were trying to get him out! He turned and took a set of stairs that led downwards — *down, it must be down! Underground, in a basement!* — and there he saw something promising.

He saw a group of students arranged in a semicircle around a mirror that lined the far wall. This struck him as a rather artistic arrangement and seemed to be an event of some sort, although it was slightly lacking in the literary aspect of things. It clearly qualified as an arts event. He wanted to feel reassured, knowing that he was at least two-thirds on his way to a *literary* arts event. But he knew a shell game when he saw one. He bolted out of the building. 5 minutes left!

He ran down the stone steps, passed a fountain of beads, went up the hill, and found himself back at $69\frac{1}{2}$ Xxxxx Street. Treacherously numbered $69\frac{1}{2}$ Xxxxx Street. Sometimes numbers were inevitably jumbled up. Perhaps 70 Xxxxx Street was lost somewhere between $69\frac{1}{2}$ Xxxxx Street and 69 Xxxxx Street. If he needed to he would follow the buildings all the way to 1 Xxxxx Street, and if the sun hadn't set he could muster the courage to venture towards $\frac{1}{2}$ Xxxxx Street, even 0 Xxxxx street. Although the world of -1 Xxxxx Street, -2 Xxxxx Street etc. crossed into a threshold his humanity wasn't ready for. He would do anything to get to THE LITERARY ARTS EVENT (anything except trying his luck at an irrationally numbered Xxxxx Street¹⁰).

He stepped into the space in between buildings (*he wouldn't normally do this so casually if there wasn't THE LITERARY ARTS EVENT to get to*). But the jumble of bricks, alleys, and $XX\frac{x}{x}$ Xxxxx Streets whirled around and spit him back out. It was no use!

A distant bell chimed out $5\frac{1}{2}$ times as the clocks of Eastern Standard Time simultaneously struck 1730.

THE LITERARY ARTS EVENT had begun.

¹⁰He who falls for this trap deserves to miss THE LITERARY ARTS EVENT.

This was the liberation he needed: now that Time had trounced him, he could focus his efforts on Space (after all, it is significantly easier for humans to look in one direction than to look in two at the same time¹¹). A feeling of calmness entered his brain, slipped through the innocently ajar amygdala, crept behind the occupied swivel chair at the front of the Prefrontal Cortex, and casually garroted the anxiety that was sitting at the helm¹². Where in Space was the issue most likely to exist? It was obvious. Even if 70 Xxxxx Street was hiding from him, it couldn't have gone far. His search space shrunk to the blocks surrounding 69½ Xxxxx Street and he found it! It had been running in the opposite direction, but after going past 68 Xxxxx Street and 68½ Xxxxx Street, 70 Xxxxx Street had gotten tired and was left panting on the cold pavement.

But it was locked.

Locks were difficult for him because they were a social problem rather than a mechanical one. A material lock had as much power as a polite suggestion: physical locks can be picked; electromagnetic locks can only whimper in the face of a building-wide short-circuit; and if it came down to it, doors are often made of weaker stuff than their locks. The problem was the other people who had crawled out and swarmed about the sweet honeyed scent of *THE LITERARY ARTS EVENT*. For a moment he considered them as potential allies, but he remembered the last time he had trusted a stranger too soon. Besides, strangers do not look kindly upon a healthy disrespect for locks.

So all of them stood there, looking dumbly at the door along 70 Xxxxx Street. Someone mentioned the name of the author who was going to read at *the literary arts event*. Others nodded mutely.

A person-in-the-know, dressed in a fashion that suggested experience with

¹¹The special privilege of being able to look at two directions at the same time belonged to a few extra-dimensional creatures such as the Chameleons. But with this ability came significant burdens. In addition to the dimensions of Time and Space, they also existed along the axis of Colour. It was a slippery axis filled with twists and traps and humans should be grateful that we are barred from it for our safety.

¹²This was the exact opposite feeling he had when taking a shot of espresso (or, hypothetically, a café allongé). The yet-undiscovered anticaffeine molecules responsible for this effect would eventually¹³ become classified as a class zZZ controlled substance due to the unproductive waves it generates when colliding with its corresponding antiparticle. Our caffeine-run society will one day be unable to ignore the existential threat of this molecule. But, apparently, not today.

¹³After, of course, its discovery in the year XX█, by █ M. █ following certain experiments conducted on an overworked Japanese salaryman who seemed immune to the effects of espressos (curiously, both with or without milk).

attending literary arts events, walked by and pointed out that everyone had gathered around the wrong door along 70 Xxxxx Street (our protagonist briefly chided himself for forgetting that doors sometimes presented greater concerns besides its pushability versus its pullability). Reassured murmurs, hesitant glances, shuffling of feet. The herd of lost-university-students trailed behind the person-in-the-know, and made their way into the XxXxxxxxx Xxxxx Theater.

He was quickly separated from the herd of previously-lost-university-students. It had happened when, immediately after they had entered the building, he saw the sign for a men's bathroom.

The previously-lost-university-students-who-didn't-have-full-bladders had pressed onwards to the literary arts event. It was then that he had to choose between the safety of numbers, or the opportunity to relieve the mild pressure from his bladder (this sensation had been present for some time now, but had been willfully ignored in the face of more urgent matters). In the end, he chose to tend to his bodily functions¹⁴. This had taken him on a short misadventure that we shall briefly recount.

Upon entry into the bathroom, he had felt deeply disturbed, and was compelled to step outside immediately. Once outside, he had checked the sign that was next to the door to confirm that it was indeed the universal sign for men's bathrooms. He had then reentered the toilet, and conducted his business as quickly as was sanitarily possible. It was afterwards however, as he left the bathroom and another man entered, that he had seen his own curious set of actions repeated by this stranger: the man had stepped into the bathroom, stepped back out, glanced at the sign, and went back in. Belatedly, our protagonist figured out the source of discomfort. There had been no urinal in the toilet! It was a fact known to both genders that men's bathrooms had urinals, and women's bathrooms did not. Male *homo sapiens* had obviously evolved the advantageous trait of checking for the presence of urinals as a mark of male territory. But the corollary was that the absence of urinals in a bathroom raised primitive alarms in the brains of male *homo sapiens*. What a fruitful realisation! Already, by mere proximity to the literary arts event (which was ongoing past a nearby door covered in alluringly dark and mysterious shadows), he had learned more about

¹⁴This was actually an illusion of choice, because the decision had been made for him many years ago when, as a primary schooler, he had peed in front of his classmates because he underestimated the demands of his bladder. Since then, the memory has haunted his subconscious mind, and was the majority stakeholder in any executive decision related to bodily fluids.

his underlying psychology¹⁵. What further enlightenment did the literary arts event itself offer? The door beckoned and so we now return to the present for our protagonist.

He walked into the theater. It had an absurdly high ceiling that only made sense to him after he acknowledged the mezzanine in the room¹⁶. Despite taking up two floors worth of space, the room still managed to feel cramped. There were not a lot of people (the previously-lost-university-students-who-didn't-have-full-bladders-but-who-might-potentially-have-fuller-bladders-than-they-had-earlier made up for about $\frac{1}{7}$ th of the crowd), but everyone seemed to be huddled together as a preemptive measure against the cold October air. This contributed greatly to the sense of crampedness, but not as much as the fact that everyone seemed to have forgotten to turn on any lights except for a lone lamp hanging from the second-floor ceiling (this was another example of a social problem that he couldn't solve: much like adjusting a thermostat, it is rather impolite to change the lights in a room once someone else has been inside for awhile because it showed that you didn't consider their tastes to be sensible).

Peering from one dark corner into the other dark corners, he couldn't find an empty seat (there were seats of course, and where there are no seats it is always possible to improvise an additional one. It was just hard to see because nobody was brave enough to turn the lights on). So he climbed to the second floor and found it agreeably empty. In this moment, he thought that perhaps having a mezzanine wasn't such a waste of space after all. In the black muteness of the second floor, he settled into the end of a row of seats. Someone pulled a chair over and sat down to his right. He focused on the singular circle of light drawn on the first floor and tried to ignore the existence of the stranger to his right. Despite his efforts, he became vaguely aware that his new neighbour was very tall, very feminine, and very distracting. But he didn't look up. The people here were decoration for the event. They had gathered as strangers and would leave as strangers.

Still looking at the first floor, his neighbor's black and white heels entered

¹⁵He was also glad to learn that he was not alone in the act of checking for the presence of urinals upon entering a men's bathroom. However, the question of whether women performed the opposite check for the *absence* of urinals was still unanswered for him at this point in his adventure. Although, if he had to speculate, he would guess that they didn't carry out this ritual confirmation. Which is understandable, because it is far harder to check for the absence of something than the presence of it. Out of sight, out of mind, so says Conventional Wisdom.

¹⁶A mezzanine! This was a structure that required two floors! Think of all the wasted floor space! Perhaps if the building designers had been more prudent in their allocation of flooring to rooms, they could have squeezed a urinal into the men's bathroom and saved many men from performing a confused dance at the boundary of a bathroom with indeterminate sex.

his field of vision, and he recognized them! He turned to face his neighbor, and there on his right was Ingénue. And she recognized him! Neither had expected to find a friend in this literary sea of background characters.

Just then, the author approached the light and began to read.

"On her way home from Brighton she stopped in London, where she met the writer and music critic Charles Shaar Murray at a dinner at a Mexican restaurant in Soho. They went home together. Within twenty-four hours they decided they were in love and resolved to spend the rest of their lives together..." He was split: approximately $\frac{4}{7}$ th of him clung to the words of the author, which was the primary objective of the night; another $\frac{2}{9}$ th was aware only of Ingénue to his right¹⁷.

"... Meanwhile, she'd already accepted a visiting xxxxxx position at Xxxxxxx University in Xxxxxxx, Xxxxxxx, for the spring 'xx semester..." Cinnamon, he concluded. That was the flavour of the perfume that Ingénue was wearing.

"... Arts event xxxxxxxxxxxxxx xxx literary xxx xxxx event arts xxxxxx literary the xxxxxxxxxxxx. The terarily rats vente xxxx xxx het tars xxxxxxxxxxx xxx rearlity star xxx'x literary the xxxx arts event..." It was at this point of the reading that he noticed the chairs.

They were a jarring color of bright orange. The rest of the theater was a uniform shade of black. Someone had gone to great efforts to ensure this. The walls were black. The curtains were black. Even the wires and the pipes running along the ceiling were painted black. An interior designer had paid close attention to the blackness of each and every corner of this room. But there they were. Rows upon rows of bright orange chairs rebelling against the mainstream current of blackness. Who picked the colors of the chairs? Were these the same people who decided that having a mezzanine in the XxXxxxxxx Xxxxxx Theater was more important than having a urinal in the men's bathroom?¹⁸ He imagined the scene that must have played out between the chair-pickers and the chair-suppliers.

CHAIR-PICKERS : Hello sirs, we would like to buy some chairs.

CHAIR-SUPPLIERS : Certainly sirs, what would you use these chairs for?

¹⁷The last $\frac{13}{63}$ rd of him was devoted to bodily bookkeeping, such as ensuring that his heart continued beating, his lungs continued breathing, and his eyelids continued blinking (this last one was an often underappreciated act that kept the eyeballs well hydrated, and, in general, was helpful for keeping the surface of the moistened eyeballs free of dust (which tends to stick to wet surfaces); a poetic setup).

¹⁸The answer, dear reader, is yes.

CHAIR-PICKERS : For literary arts events.

CHAIR-SUPPLIERS : In that case you'll want chairs that come in the latest shade of literary arts orange.

CHAIR-PICKERS : That would be exquisite. Thank you sirs.

That was probably how it went, plus or minus a few conversational details. This was clearly a decision made with utter irreverence towards the blackness of the rest of the room. But he restrained his annoyance. What did he know of the arts? It must be vogue these days to be daring with one's choice of furniture colors.

"...X xxxxx'x xxxx Xxxxx. Xxxxx xxxxx'xx xxxx xx. X xxx'x xxxx. X xxxx'x xxxx xxx, xxx xxxxxx'x xxxx xx. Xx xxx xxxxx'xx xxxx Xxxxxxx Xxxxx. Xx'x xxx xxx xxxx. Xxx xx xxxx X xxx'x xxxx xx'x xxx xx xxx. Xxx xxx xxxx xxxx X xxxx." "That was so sad," Ingénue whispered. He was surprised by the sound of Ingénue's voice. He hadn't expected the reading to end just as he began to come to terms with the aesthetics of the XxXxxxxxx Xxxxx Theater. What a pity! He hadn't really heard much except xx's in the last few minutes, so he opted to respond with the most pressing thought on his mind: "Do women check if there are urinals when they enter a bathroom?"

At this point, people started asking the author questions about the xx's and the xxx's. He tuned out most of these questions while he tried to recall the past hour. He needed to write about this literary arts event, so he tried to catch his thoughts lingering in the air of the black-and-grudgingly-orange room. But these thoughts were giddy, high on the scent of cinnamon, and therefore useless to him. He wasn't worried. He had made an audio recording of the event that he could go over slowly¹⁹.

The literary arts event ended, and he walked out of the black room with a mezzanine and orange chairs, away from the crowd of previously-lost-university-students-with-bladders-of-unknown-levels-of-fullness, and out onto 70 Xxxxx Street (but not yet onto 69½ Xxxxx Street). He looked around to say goodbye to Ingénue, but she was gone. She had likely slipped back into the sea of literary characters while he was transitioning from the previous scene to the current one (or, from her perspective, he was the one who had slipped back into the sea).

¹⁹He would later learn that most of the recording was inaudible, and few words could be heard over the sounds of his bag zipping, footsteps on wooden floorboards, and intermittent polite clapping. It was, however, an interesting piece of ASMR, and would put him to sleep a few days from now.

Since he was alone, he took a moment to consider how he felt about this literary arts event. Very quickly, he concluded that he was confused.

He stepped forward, and as he did so he made plans to try again and attend the next literary arts event (which was happening in a week! 1730! At the XxXxxxxxx Xxxxxx Theater!). This time, he would bring a friend — one who was decidedly non-distracting, as a buffer against other characters in the story. This time, he would know the location of the XxXxxxxxx Xxxxxx Theater (and a confidence that, even if it tried to run, it cannot travel far from where it had been this week). And this time, he would clean the xx's from his ears beforehand. What our protagonist doesn't know is that, a week from now, all the same, he might walk away confused from the literary arts event. He would possibly feel this way for many literary arts events in the future, and no amount of experience or preparation would change this outcome. Or perhaps it would. He doesn't know this yet. But the great adventure of life is that we walk towards some unknowable destination, sometimes without a compass, or without any sensible knowledge of cartography. And even if I knew the outcome of his future attendance at literary arts events, I wouldn't let him know. And I wouldn't let you know either, dear reader. That would be a spoiler.

He stepped forward into the distance. Onwards! Towards the next literary arts event!