

*PbvG*

*by Jason Haas*

*I'm here to take a photograph. The distant monument against a grey winter sky is the perfect image for the new album. Out on the sea, the massive figure casts a calm, solemn, and imperturbable presence.*

*Behind me, over the hill, a lanky young man races through the ankle deep dead leaves. The sound of his breath and the crunch of the leaves is enervating, quickening my heart, preparing my feet to run too. He has a broad grin though, and it puts me at ease. There is likely no trailing bear or a machete in his hand. He hastens down the hill and does a shallow dive into the low waves across the beach. It must be ice cold in there--my skin tightens in sympathy.*

*I continue to watch as he swims out to a sandbar filled with people in lines doing...yoga?*

*As I drift toward my destination on an overlooking cliff, my attention is riveted entirely to this grid of mostly young people doing yoga poses in unison. The lanky young man, his clothes dripping, has moved to a place in the back, an opening in an otherwise full grid. It looks like*

they were expecting him, although no one really acknowledges him.

Before I know it, I've come to rest at the cliff. I take off my pack, set up my tripod, and screw my camera to the plate. All of this I do on autopilot, my hands doing everything without help from my brain. My eyes are just glued to the majesty of what must be two hundred people performing and elegant pose after another. It occurs to me that I don't think anyone is actually doing a yoga pose I've seen before. These must be advanced students or maybe from some new form. Isn't most yoga filled with Swedish calisthenics? Maybe this is the real stuff.

The camera is set up, and I get to work. It has begun to snow, which is great--falling snow is only going to make these pictures more awesome. Desolate, calm, majestic...yeah. I grab a small umbrella that I use for these situations, so the lens doesn't catch any flakes. Put my eye to the eyepiece, and sneak one last little peak at my yoga friends. With the zoom on, I can see all of their faces. There's a kind of giddy determination, some joyful effort on their faces. It feels like they're working towards something.

I pan and tilt and start framing the statue of the placid warrior. I want to try a bunch of stuff, so I start

up close. The texture on this monument is so carefully crafted. Sculpted from brown and pink marble in some definitely ancient time, there is real stability and endurance projected by each detail, even in the eyes that are hundreds of feet off the ground. No one was meant to see this, and yet here it is hundreds of years later. The eyes are kind and vigilant, and the mouth is determined and peaceful. I take some shots, varying the focus and framing to give myself some options.

As I widen out to get the wider landscape images that I initially imagined, I see that the snow has picked up. This is going to be perfect. I place the statue in the bottom right ninth of the frame, almost engulfed by the vast, empty, and snowy landscape. The snow adds a delicate patina to the field that I couldn't have dreamt of. As I tighten in, I see a bright flash from off camera. Holy shit, am I going to get snow and lightning together?

I lift my head to see something like lightning crackle in the sky, but it's not lightning at all. It is pale violet, radiating not down from a cloud but out in all directions from a point in midair. I hear a roar that I wish were thunder, but instead sounds like an elephant with twelve jet engines in its mouth.

*The radiating lightning bolts get larger and brighter, and, in a sudden flash, the scaly and horrific face of a thirty-story creature appears. In the explosion of light, there is a sonic boom and accompanying wave of air that knocks me to the ground. As the creature emerges from a rift, I feel my entire body tightening in terror. I feel the weight of the camera and tripod on my chest and regain my senses. My hands, again on autopilot, open the LCD viewfinder and start filming. With something to do, I can at least breathe again.*

*I hear screams below from the yoga people. And holy shit, they're not screams of terror, or at least not mostly. This is a cheer of accomplishment! They did this! It was some kind of ritual, I guess? I pan down to capture their elation as the monster plants its feet and issues another deafening scream. They are opening coolers and passing out beers and snacks.*

*The monster starts to move toward them, and the mood changes a bit. The monster's powerful legs are pushing massive waves toward the sandbar. Coolers and yoga mats are washing away. Gym bags are drenched and lost in the surf.*

*The screams of terror turn to cheers though as people turn their attention to the statue. With almost no noise,*

*the marble giant is rising! Its majesty is doubled at least, moving with remarkable grace. The loudest sound it makes is an almost trivial amount of splashing in the water as it strides toward its goal. I frame the monster and this beauty in a two shot, just hitting my frame as a giant blade of light appears in the rising, ready hands of the statue.*

*The monster perceives the threat and issues a bowel-shaking howl as it charges the statue. The yoga people are losing their minds, cheering even as they try to keep their heads above water in places. I know how they feel.*

*The monster raises both arms above its head, prepared to make a devastating blow against the statue, and the statue doesn't move. Then, as the monster swings and lunges forward, the statue moves to one side. The monster passes through where the statue had been with full force. Wrong-footed, it tries to stop itself as the statue's light blade connects with its midsection in an uppercut stroke. The monster is cut almost in two. It issues its loudest cry yet, leaving my ears ringing. As it collapses, its hideous form kind of melts. Red sparks and grey ash float into the sky as the snow falls.*

*As I snap back to consciousness, watching the ashes and feeling a kind of pleasant wave of heat on my face, I*

*realize that the statue was already back in its place, settling into its cross-legged resting position again. I zoom in to see the look on its face settle back into the same peaceful vigilance.*

*I move to catch the reactions of the yoga people. As the sandbar slowly re-emerges from the turbulent sea, I can see that some were still celebrating what they had seen, some were disappointed, and some were kind of quiet and still.*

#

*After I uploaded the video to YouTube, I saw an amazing amount of traffic in a short period of time. I got ads and made a couple million dollars in seventy-two hours. I guess mine was the definitive video of the event, given my vantage point and serviceable camerawork. There were a few phone videos from what had to have been the yoga people--maybe the waves soaked most of their stuff.*

*The government got Alphabet to issue me a takedown notice to keep the copycats down. Ten groups managed to get into that cove and summon three Planebeasts (as the internet took to calling them), each of which the statue dispatched with equal ease. After the military perimeter was established, one final group managed to find a secluded*

portion of the cove that was apparently within range of where portals can appear. They summoned one final Planebeast, the statue dispatched it handily, and the perimeter was redoubled. The military must have some kind of EMP going, because none of those fights were recorded. People's phones and cameras were straight up ruined. Text accounts circulated, but mine was the only video of a battle that was seen by the public.

My personal fame was minor compared to the fame of the PhD student who had organized the yoga people. He found the ritual while doing his doctoral research and felt he had to try the summoning in order to know if he, "really had something." He eventually finished his dissertation from jail. I know this because his university has stringent copyright policies, and he had to get permission to use all of the stills from my video that he needed. He was in jail for reckless endangerment, but not because one of the summoners had died in the event, the only casualty (besides the monster). The dead summoner's family tried to sue him in a civil case as well, but he was absolved of responsibility eventually because no one could really prove that his friend was coerced.

*It took years, but the government found people who could seal the rift permanently and disenchant the statue. They couldn't afford to maintain that kind of permanent military installation. When they had only yet discovered that they could remove the Guardian's powers (that's what the news took to calling it), there was a brief discussion of whether they could stop there, assuming people wouldn't summon a Planebeast without the Guardian there. That was a fun day on Twitter.*

*For a while, corporations and governments tried to turn the magic research they had developed into weapons and products. The "wizards" and shamans and physicists who managed to resolve this crisis of ancient origin were all over TV and streaming sites, but as far as we know, the magic has been remarkably resistant to those kinds of uses.*

*The EP of EDM with my one of my photos of The Guardian on the cover that I uploaded to bandcamp was downloaded seven million times. I got ... a lot of feedback. I don't really record anymore, but at a dollar a download, I guess I don't need to. No one wants any of my "shitty edgelord shit." Still, people re-mixed it and soundtracked the video with it and uploaded it to countless sites for torrents and*

*cracks. Some of the remixes weren't bad, and one got a pretty good write up on Pitchfork.*

*A lot more of my music is used in "explainers" though-- videos explaining how Planebeast versus Guardian (PBvG for short) proves there is a god. Or proves there isn't one, or proves that Planebeasts are gods. PBvG proves that the Earth is flat or isn't, or that Earth is just one of many Earths, and that at least some of those Earths must be flat. PBvG proves that a woman's place is in the home, or that capitalism is evil, or that 9/11 was an inside job.*

*I don't go online a lot anymore.*