



momentary
flat world
bulging outward

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2017-18

DAPHNE

Daphne makes a strange sight, on the small boat in the creek. She stands at the bow in a dramatic pastiche of a ship's captain, with two of the youths from the island sitting behind her, rowing, quietly anxious as they always are around these toon-world visions. The ruin of Leamouth Peninsula moves past on their left as they pick a course through the mangled red bridge. To their right is a barbed-wire no-place.

Daphne pities the Bow Creek community. Her flat heart aches seeing the children; phones in hand, clothes stained and torn. What is the world to them? she thinks to herself. Daphne is melancholic and clouded as she scans the crumbling lego-brick high rises of the island. It had been new once, she thinks laconically.

The community had moved to the island many years ago, after a prolonged period of abandon – that was all Daphne and the others knew. It was different for them, they were flat and infinite... not like these stinking, real people, embracing apocalypse every passing second.

Daphne's mind drifts, as it often does, to thoughts of Fred. His powerful, toon-world nature was now known in Bow Creek. If

Daphne feels something rising within herself, an unbearable marshmallow ache that she can't sink her teeth into. Ahead, she sees bubbles rising from the grey sludge – a patch different from the rest. As in a dream, she becomes aware of the figure of Fred, staring at her from the railings, aghast.

The top of the monster's head is visible now, rising out of the odd patch of mud. The gloopy grey-brown folds turn over and over themselves smoothly, endlessly ... a glistening black spot, another: swamp eyes staring at Daphne from the sludge. The head lifts up, as from some cavern below – two dripping shoulders, arms, hands gripping an invisible muddy edge – a hole to nowhere. The viscous swamp-skin strings down from the monster's body as it rises, growling, eyes fixed on the boat. The two youths jump into the water with a scream and head for the island. Daphne doesn't notice or care.

She looks to the monster, in a joyous dream-like haze.

Fred comes into view as the crumbling buildings shift. Daphne sees him standing powerfully in a shop door, ankle deep in muddy green water. She can't love him... how can she? ... or perhaps she does. Daphne can't help but think of the swamp monster since their last encounter in the warm cement room. She longs for it, still, in her tense, flat body.

She sees Fred stiffen, at the same time as she hears a wonderfully disgusting noise from ahead. The tide is receding, much faster than it should. The slimy, brown-grey sludge of the creek is exposed along the bank, clinging to the bricks in long gloopy veins. Daphne senses that the swamp monster is close, and celebrates internally. She knows that once again she must keep this joy a secret from the others – but also that something about this time is different.

As the bend carries on, Daphne feels certain that this is the monster, re-emerging – come to seek revenge, or satisfaction.

anyone could do it, he could – this was the general consensus – what 'it' was didn't make much difference. Daphne could tell they felt strange, these ragged, ill people, approaching flat Fred, with his perfect red cravat. But they did approach. There was nobody else... nobody like themselves. Just these four flat teenagers and their bastard flat dog.

Leamouth Peninsula had been separate from the rest of London for a long time. The small community were completely unknown; left to their fierce but impotent struggle against an accelerating force at odds with their parochial lives. They had modified their state-issued phones some generations previously with the help of some craftily intercepted digital materials, after realising no new ones were coming. The phones were now self-replicating, the rate of their reproduction programmed to correlate with that of the community's own (this was in decline).

They had been left behind; left to their wild, inbred lawlessness while the world enjoyed the fruits of advanced automation. That had at least been the state of things the last they knew – before the internet had been internationalised and the ISP satellites were released from orbit.

