Introduction

I had been looking for an internship for about three months when a friend of mine came to me with an offer. This friend was born in Germany to a military family and had for a long time been a gateway to a place I had no experience with and thus found fascinating. It is a common symptom of living in a suburban plateau of culture that even small slices of a different way of life becomes a lifeline to a more exciting life. It seems my friend felt the same on some level because he had selected his internship on the exacting standard of: it must be a German company. He had come to me with a job offer and after hearing the words, “European company” I was in.. Afterall, what is more American than the dogged pursuit of the European ideal of high culture and class.The company was a Germany based technology company that provides hardware for parts of the public transport sector. Our office in Chesapeake is the head of the North American branch and we provide parts to projects all over the globe either sourced from Germany or other companies. The parts we supply range from fare collection machines to enteral PC units for trains and every little connector in between. One thing I've felt as I’ve progressed in the tech field is that the once popular west coast, laid back, image of our tech companies is changing. In the cultural consciousness there was the image of a sandal wearing boss that you could call by the first name, working out of a bean bag riddled office with no cubicles has faded. This identity seems more inspired by Zen mindfulness culture as opposed to overbearing corporate America but as that image merged with the sterile corporate profit maximization routine, that couches itself in the sugary pastel language of slogans and affirmations as it cuts your benefits,a new one rose to supplant it. This vision was one rooted in the ostentatious 80s maximalism and boot strap Americana, but not totally divorced from the cultural touchstones of nerd iconography. This new wave of technowarriors being named affectionately: “Tech Bros” These men seem to reject what they view as a weak human resource driven culture in favor of classical male hagiography. At Init this creates a rather strange environment of wanton misogyny, transphobia, Trumpism, and racism mixed with the stereotypical laid back floor plan of open spaces to host weekly team bonding meetings in cushy bean chairs. Onboarding is a frictionless process of pure sterile managerial design, it slots you in and spits you out with an ID badge and points you at your chair, it's efficient and quick. I was hired to work in the APC lab where the focus is on quality control, this is not

my field. I was billed as jack of all trades, able to slot into any role, and my cyber security background was enticing to a technology company despite there being no roles in IT, so I was put with the engineers with the promise to morph the job to fit me. So, that was the start of it, I began with a lot of hopes and a feeling of determination to impress my supervisors. The APC was going to a home for me for the coming years, and I was itching to get started.

INIT

The hierarchy of APC was undergoing a shake up at the time of my arrival, the interns would stay directly under the project leads but the quality specialists would be moved under a new boss. This in practice changed nothing. I am overseen by a man named Al, a New Yorker who maintains a strong Long Island accent to this day and a conspiratorial crank. I hardly see Al other than in periodic check ups or meetings to dissect malignancies, but he is an amiable man who tried to work with me to make the job suit my skills. It is never easy to tell what one moment sets us down the path we are on; if you look at life like a diamond its side where the two rays mirror each other until that one faithful turning point where they begin to converge. As we hurtle towards our ray,which is still obscured by the distance of time, we think: "There's still so many options or turns left to me.” That's the irony of life isn't it? Once you finally see that fatal crashing of points it's too late to stop it. In the early 70s the BBC ran a program called *A Ghost Story for Christmas,* like its title implied these serials were ghost stories aired on or around Christmas. All shot on 16mm to accentuate their earthy tones and imbue them with that living texture only film can, these films always had that inexorable feeling of Britain in winter and it's a desolate place. One of these stories has been stuck in my head for a year or so now and it was called: *The Signalman*; in this story a cloistered and insulary signalman watches a lonesome stretch of track. To keep it brief the signalman is beset by portents of all kinds of an incoming disaster but all of his efforts to avert this only intractably lead him back to the same fate. There is no escaping this quantum quagmire, the train will crash and he cannot stop it. This faithful watchdog takes on a grander meaning when viewed in the macro scope as at the turn of the century signalmen were falling out of fashion and our hero was a relic of a dying age. Stuck in a monotonous cycle watching his doom creep forward unable to prevent it and this is such a striking motif it has stuck with me. As I stand in the midst of the Al bubble, watching our world change much too quickly around us, I feel like that

signalman. All I can do is stand as a silent witness as my future is systematically dismantled to make way for the future. There isn't a single person at my office who doesn't use ChatGPT for work, we even have a company profile. Our IT uses it for every problem, so at what point does it become more profitable to cut the undergrad worker in favor of a lower paid laborer who can read whatever the ai spits out. At what point am I stuck in this field with no way to escape into my dream of becoming some sort of writer? I think it started when I entered that APC lab. I'm watching the rays converge.

Menial Tasks

Deft hands, nimble fingers, and charm need not apply at APC. The lab is a hive of ribald humour, strewn parts, and low skill grunt work. The main focus of the intern is the sensor. The sensor is not a delicate tool of a specialist but the blunt heavy club of an ogre but it's something the intern must come to wield with love. These sensors mostly are for buses around America to track passenger counts. This data can be used by the FTA to distribute federal funds and give an accurate look at use or effectiveness. Programming these sensors is rather simple, to use a quote from King Sejong the Great, “A wise man can acquaint himself with [Hangul] before the morning is over; a stupid man can learn it in ten days.” Just replace Hangul with Sensors. Each sensor comes packaged in a small cardboard box that you have to remove before connecting it to your laptop, once it is connected you use the IRMA matrix software to program its IP and door address before stickering it and boxing it back up. This is still 70% of the work I'm doing at Init. On our train projects we have to set up and test CoPilot PC3s which are internal computers that pilot the train. These take a bit more time but are still large bulky metal cubes that a monkey could be trained to handle. The test process is a straightforward software test made up of button presses. Then there is the customary signing and resigning of approval documents that make any bureaucratic process complete. I’ve had other jobs in my time at Init as far ranging as building a doorway to test sensors in Spain to running SQL queries to compile efficacy data on buses but mostly I am a sensor hound.

Losing Motivation

The most discouraging part of this whole experience is the fact that I just don't enjoy it. I was shocked to find how miserable the day to day of working a

job like this is. Partly due to my incompatibility with my coworkers but also just coming to terms with the banality. These days young men are sold this idea that they are trapped in a crushing system that rewards stooges and hampers creatives with the only way out is to break through. I don't buy into this but I do understand why an increasing number of men my age are disillusioned with the promise of a good life by playing by the rules like our parents. Accepting that not everyone is Alexander the Great and more importantly YOU aren't Alexander, can be hard. I wish for more every day but I have to accept that not everyone can have it. There is nothing wrong with a simple life but a life outside my control is what I don't want. Sadly, I already have it. In Kyoto there is a shrine called Kenkun and in this shrine lies the remains of Oda Nobunaga a man who seized Japan through determination but lost it all due a betrayal outside of his control. Etched permanently on stone next to his shrine is a quote favored by the warlord,“A man's life of 50 years under the sky is nothing compared to the age of this world. Life is but a fleeting dream, an illusion— Is there anything that lasts forever?” Even the mightiest of us, the ones who can seize with their own hands the world and shape it to their image cannot fight impermanence. There is no saying when the idea to betray Nobunaga came to his craven retainer, no moment we can point to as the second the rays of his life began to turn inward but he lived for every second he had. I may not be capable of unifying Japan but I can carve out a piece of my own happiness and I will. I have learned what I don't like and I will pursue other paths until it's too late. I wasn't expecting to react so negatively to the job, this was my first non retail experience, so I expected the world to open up before my eyes, not close.

Conclusion

I have learned a lot about myself from working at Init and I don't regret a single day, not even the agonizing ones. When I leave Init I will walk away with a resoldified spirit and determination to live the best life possible. I will carry the hours of experience handed off to me from my coworkers and boss. I will take these experiences and use them to finish my time at ODU replete with a job well done. I have learned much and cannot wait to apply it. I cannot see where my degree will take me yet but I have been forming ideas about where my interests can bloom. The first hand encounter with legal papers has inspired me to look into Law based career paths and if not maybe something where I can share what I know in a teaching role. I want to let my personality out as much as possible

before I stifle it and lose it. Init may at times feel like the turning point of my life, but until those rays collide fatally I will make it just one of the many stopping points that do not define my life, just inform it.