

Dystopians, Issue 3: "Did I Stutter?"

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Panel 1: Open on the shocked faces of Mya, Jayn and Rosko, looking at Paul on the bench. Paul is offering the last bit of his sandwich to Jefferson, who bounces in his direction.

Paul: Hello, I'm Paul.

Panel 2 - Paul looks up at the group.

Paul: I guess I'll try again. / Hi, I'm Paul.

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Panel 1 - Close up of Rosko's face, he's angry at Paul.

Rosko: Well then, who the fuck are you?

Panel 2 - Close up of Paul's face. He is stone-faced, not smiling.

Paul: Did I stutter?

Panel 3 - Close up of Rosko's face, looking surprised.

Panel 4 - Close up of Paul's face, smiling

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Panel 1 - Paul pulls a prescription pill bottle from his pocket.

Paul: Now that you know who I am, who are you fine young people?

Panel 2 - Paul takes a pill with no water.

Panel 3 - Close on Mya, looks unsure, maybe concerned.

Mya: My...my name is Mya.

Panel 4 - Rosko is still grumpy.

Rosko: Fucking call me Rosko!

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Panel 1 - Over Jayn's shoulder, Paul leans in and points directly at Jayn.

Paul: And who is this little epsilon?

Panel 2 - Over Paul's shoulder, Jayn blushes, with some red in her cheeks.

Jayn: My name is Jayn. / You're a teacher aren't you?

Panel 3 - Paul smiles. Rosko looks puzzled

Rosko: Epsilon?

Paul: That's right, little one, that's right.

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Panel 1 - Paul stands up, taking Jayn by the hand.

Paul: Now how did you know I was a teacher, little epsilon Jayn?

Jayn: You talk like Mr. Chamberlain, my social studies teacher. / You don't sound like him, but you talk like him.

Panel 2 - Close-up of Paul, who has an even bigger grin as he clasps his hands together in joy.

Paul: I know exactly what you mean!

Panel 3 - They walk away from the haze. Jefferson, freshly fed, trots alongside Paul and Jayn.

Paul: Who is your friend?

Rosko: What the fuck is an epsilon?

Panel 4 - Mya puts her finger over her mouth to shush Rosko.

Jayn: His name's Tibbers. He's a bear.

Paul: Well, he's just delightful.

Panel 5 - Jayn smiles. Mya puts her hand on Paul's shoulder.

Mya: What are you doing here...Paul, was it?

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Panel 1 - Paul places his hand on top of Jayn's.

Paul: Yes it was. Yes it is. I was waiting.

Panel 2 - Jayn smiles while she pets Jefferson. The dog nuzzles her as they walk.

Jayn: Waiting for what?

Panel 3 - Paul's smile fades a bit.

Paul: Not waiting for what. / Waiting for who.

Panel 4 - Jayn looks up at him.

Jayn: Waiting for who?

Panel 5 - Paul smiles and playfully musses her hair.

Paul: You, of course. I was waiting for you.

Panel 6 - Rosko is no longer angry as he asks Paul a question.

Rosko: Why?

Panel 7 - Paul walks away from them, gesturing for them to follow. The hum is back, but Paul seems to be the only one who has noticed.

Paul: We can talk while we walk. We don't have time to hang around much longer.

SFX: Hmmmmmm...

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Panel 1 - Paul walks straight towards the reader. Behind him Mya, Jayn and Rosko stare at the haze, which has gotten much closer.

Paul: Look behind you. / Then hurry along.

SFX: Hmmmmmm...

Panel 2 - Paul leads them away from the haze. Jayn and Jefferson follow him closely. Rosko follows reluctantly.

Paul: In my estimation, we are in no rush. / We should move along, but haste makes waste and this haste is unnecessary.

Panel 3 - Rosko lags behind, creating more distance between himself and the others.

Rosko: Dude, you are fucking crazy.

Panel 4 - Mya has caught up to Paul.

Mya: How do you know?

Paul: It's obvious isn't it?

Panel 5 - Rosko runs to catch up to them.

Mya: How do you know?

Paul: I'm an empiricist. I observe.

Panel 6 - Jayn pulls Jefferson by his leash, walking away from the haze.

Mya: Okay, let's go.

Rosko: (whispering) You can't be fucking serious?

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Panel 1 - Rosko is close to the group again, but his face is noticeably grumpy.

Mya: You seem to have some idea of what's going on here.

Paul: I have some... / ...ideas.

Panel 2 - Rosko looks annoyed.

Rosko: Well, are you gonna lay these ideas on us?

Panel 3 - Jayn reaches out and grabs Paul's hand again.

Jayn: What kind of teacher were you?

Panel 4 - Paul's smile returns.

Paul: I am a mathematician. / Do you know what a mathematician is?



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Panel 1 - Jayn looks up at Paul.

Jayn: Not really.

Panel 2 - Paul lets go of Jayn's hand and puts it on her shoulder.

Paul: A mathematician is a machine for turning coffee into theorems. / I wish I had some coffee now.

Panel 3 - Rosko and Mya follow Paul and Jayn, but they are close as they continue to walk through the wooded forest.

Rosko: (whispering) Why doesn't old dude answer my questions?

Mya: (whispering) Shhh... / He can hear you!

Panel 4 - Rosko smiles. So does Paul.

Rosko: (whispering) No way, that's crazytalk.

Paul: I can hear you quite well.

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Panel 1 - Rosko looks grumpy again. Paul continues to smile.

Mya: So professor, what are these ideas you had?

Panel 2 - Paul puts his arm around Mya's shoulder.

Paul: Nice guess, Mya. I am a professor. / Now, we have a bit of distance, let's find some coffee, and I'll tell you about the book!

Jayn: Do they have coffee at that Harbucks?

Panel 3 - Paul kneels down and looks Jayn directly in the face with a silly expression.

Paul: Harbucks? What Harbucks.

Panel 4 - Jayn giggles and points past Paul towards the edge of the park. Paul is still at her level, but looks in the opposite direction, his hand above his eyes, scanning the distance.

Jayn: That one!

SFX: Giggle! Titter!

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Panel 1 - Paul stands up and points in the direction of the Harbucks like a general leading an army into battle. Mya joins Jayn in laughter. Even Rosko is smiling.

Paul: Yes, let's off to the local Harbucks and quench the eternal thirst for caffeine!

SFX: Ha ha ha ha ha! Giggle! Titter!

Panel 2 - Paul lets Jayn and Jefferson run ahead.

Panel 3 - Paul drops back to talk to Mya and Rosko. He puts his arms around their shoulders.

Paul: It's going to sound crazy... / ...and I'm not the right kind of scientist...

Panel 4 - They cross the street. Jayn opens the door for Jefferson, who runs inside.

Rosko: Watch out for zombies!

Paul: This fog...

Mya: We call it 'the haze.'

Panel 5 - They stand outside the Harbucks.

Paul: This 'haze,' it only makes sense one way. / I've run the math. / The haze is an eraser.

Rosko: A what?

Panel 6 - Close-up on Paul's face.

Paul: Like I said, I'm not the right kind of scientist. / But I don't think we're in the real world. / And this haze is erasing what's left of the world we're in.

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Panel 1 - Rosko looks at Paul like he's crazy.

Rosko: But that makes no sense. The haze is following us.

Paul: No, it isn't.

Panel 2 - Close-up on Mya.

Mya: But we've seen it. We've seen it follow us.

Panel 3 - Paul has no humor in his face.

Paul: I said it wasn't following 'us.'

Rosko: It might not be following you, old man, but it is following us.

Paul: No, it isn't.

Panel 4 - Rosko is getting angry again.

Rosko: What the fuck is your problem, fucker? I know what the fuck I've seen!

Paul: No, you don't.

Panel 5 - Rosko moves close to Paul. He is livid.

Rosko: Dude, I'm going to break your fucking teeth in if you say that again.

Paul: No, you won't.

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Panel 1 - Rosko moves towards Paul, but Mya steps in the way and blocks him. Jayn has stepped back outside and is watching.

Jayn: He's right. / It's not following us.

Panel 2 - Close-up on an enraged Rosko.

Rosko: How the fuck would you know?

Panel 3 - Paul turns his back and walks away from Rosko.

Mya: You should listen more.

Jayn: It's following me.

Panel 4 - Jayn grabs the door handle.

Mya: How do you know that, Jayn?

Panel 5 - Jayn opens the door, revealing CALLI. Calli is the tallest person in this issue. A white woman in her mid-30s. She is stunningly beautiful, with auburn hair. She is not skinny, rather she is athletic and looks like a professional athlete, maybe a volleyball or basketball player. She has a blood red tattoo of a heart on her neck on one side and a small tattoo of a semicolon on the other. She is dressed in professional office wear, including high heels. She holds a pair of yellow rubber wading boots.

Jayn: I don't know. / But she might.

Caption:

Callie

Age 33

Used to being the boss

Smarter than you

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Panel 1 - Paul, Rosko and Mya are dumbfounded. The hum is back, but no one notices.

SFX: Hmmmmmm...

Panel 2 - Calli walks over and sits down in a chair. She speaks to herself, if anyone. The door closes behind the group and the hum is muted.

Calli: It's ridiculous that I have to do this. / Nobody is here and I'm tired of trying to figure it out.

Panel 3 - She has taken one of her shoes off and puts on a yellow rubber boot.

Calli: I pay people to do this stuff for me. / Now I can't find a single person that even takes Visa or Mastercard.

Panel 4 - Over Rosko's shoulder, everyone has made their way inside. Calli finally spots them.

Calli: Oh, you must be Jayn's friends, I'm Calli. / Can you believe this shit?

Panel 5 - Calli puts on the other boot.

Calli: Well, who are you all? Come on, come on.

Mya: I'm...I'm Mya.

Rosko: You can fucking call me Rosko!

Paul: My name, m'lady, is Paul.

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Panel 1 - Paul walks behind the counter to get some coffee.

Paul: The electricity remains for now. Anyone else want some?

Rosko sticks his tongue out in disgust. Jayn tries on one of Calli's shoes. Jefferson eats the other one.

Mya: No, thank you.

Calli: Oh my fucking God, finally! / Black, black, black!

Panel 2 - Calli walks towards Paul, who is pouring coffee into a mug.

Calli: I'm Calli, vice president of blah, blah, blah. / I thought this would be just drive-through territory. / Should've been fly-over territory.

Panel 3 - Rosko is totally enraptured. On a very small, subtle level, you can see hearts in his eyes.

Calli: I don't know what the fuck is going on around here. / Any of you have any ideas?

Panel 4 - Paul hands her a cup of coffee.

Paul: I happen to have some ideas.

Calli: Fucking awesome! Shoot! I'm drawing a blank.

Panel 5 - Paul pours a cup of coffee for himself.

Rosko: The geezer thinks we're in one of those Inceptions movies.

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Panel 1 - Paul looks a bit red in the cheeks. Rosko throws his hands up in the air in innocence.

Paul: Well, you see, not exactly...

Rosko: That's what you said.

Panel 2 - Mya stands stiff and her eyes go totally black. Her face is completely emotionless.

Caption: Mya! Go now! Your time is short!

Panel 3 - Mya's eyes are back to normal. She looks panicked. Calli looks at her in shock.

Mya: We've got to go! Now! It's coming!

Calli: Who's coming?

Panel 4 - Paul refills his coffee cup. Calli stands up. Jayn grabs Jefferson's leash and Tibbers.

Mya: The haze.

Calli: Oh, you mean that white fog of death stuff? / Yeah, I saw that shit coming the other way

Panel 5: Mya looks puzzled as they walk out the door.



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Panel 1 - Outside now, they look at the haze, coming from the direction of the fair.

Mya: Wait, if you saw it coming the other way and we saw it coming up behind us... / ...Where will we go?

SFX: Hmmmmmm...

Panel 2 - Rosko grabs Jefferson's leash and moves away from the haze.

Rosko: I'm not fucking staying here!

Mya: What do we do?

Paul: We have to follow him!

SFX: Hmmmmmm...

Panel 3: The group continues down the street.

Calli: This isn't the right way.

SFX: Hmmmmmm...

Panel 4: The road they are walking down splits into a "Y." The leftward fork is heavily enveloped by the haze. The right fork leads to a sewage treatment plant.

Mya: Which way do we go?

Paul: Doesn't really matter, does it?

SFX: Hmmmmmm...

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Panel 1: They take the right fork and pass through the gate into the sewage treatment plant.

Mya: Why not?

Paul: I think you know.

Panel 2: They come to an intersection. The road to the right leads to a large access tunnel that leads underground into the sewage system. Inside the tunnel is dark and dirty.

Mya: I don't.

Paul: Then think harder.

Panel 3: Mya's face goes emotionless as she stands stiff and her eyes go black.

Caption: Go into the darkness!

Panel 4: Mya points towards the access tunnel.

Mya: There! / We have to go in there!

Calli: That's fucking disgusting!

Rosko: Right on!

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Panel 1 - The group walks into the tunnel. Jefferson runs ahead with his leash dragging along behind him. Jayn's face shows exaggerated disgust. Paul rummages through his jacket pocket.

Jayn: Ewwwww! / This place is gross!

Paul: I do believe I have a... / ...yes... / ...here it is!

Panel 2 - Paul pulls out a small flashlight and turns it on.

Paul: Never leave home without it.

Rosko: What if there's haze down below, too?

Jayn: (whispering) There isn't.

Panel 3: As they walk along, Paul shines the light in front of them, revealing a large underground tunnel. The tunnel curves to the left.

Calli: I had no idea it was so fucking huge down here!

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Panel 1 - The gang approaches a bend in the tunnel. Rosko trails behind them.

Rosko: Hey, is it safe in here?

Panel 2 - The first of the group is around the corner.

Jayn: No.

Panel 3 - Paul's flashlight lays on the ground. Disembodied screams come from around the corner: "Aggggh!" "Help!" "Fuck!" "Yelp!" and "Ahhhhhhhh..." The last one trails off the bottom right corner of the panel.

End.