

Edge of Reason

by Brendan Winter

At the end of a very long string of 1s, in a five star room in a syringe-like hotel clustered within the porcupine city, sits Norman.

Norman doesn't read newspapers because he finds them stressful. If he won't need the information tomorrow - and he won't - he reasons that there is no point. His wireless lappy is warm. Its gentle hum gently massages his bare thighs.

Norman reads gossip magazines at supermarkets in a standing position. He uses his lappy in a sitting position. He masturbates lying down and slightly twisted.

He's in a casino room run by Russian mafia, registered in the Bahamas for tax purposes. He can feel the jetstream of possibility washing him clean of responsibility, leaving a digital vapour trail. Some options never happen and they dissolve into nothing, into 0s; others become the reality and they are the 1s. The future is probability. The past is statistics.

He smokes one cigarette per day, after dinner.

Norman gets tense by having arguments in his head with people he knows, literally whole arguments, in which he often loses overall, but gains a major moral victory in some way; a snide remark that hits the spot by highlighting his tormentors hypocrisy. *You can't win an argument with your boss*, he once read.

He's just transferred his meal allowance for the conference he's attending into his casino account. Click. He loses.

Norman also gets tense by worrying that, if went back in time to the 16th century, he should be worshipped a god and be the oldest smartest bravest wisest man to have lived, but actually he would probably starve and die within a week.

He stretches with a sleepy, feline sexiness. Humans were once gods. He transfers his last month's pay to the casino. Click. He loses.

Later humans realized they were monkeys on a rock, the product of blind chance. His heartbeat decreases in frequency by five percent. He transfers his entire savings account to the casino. Click. He loses. His spinal pulse slows, as happens when falling asleep or meditating. The mind is what the brain does. Studies show if a sad person wins the lottery, after six months of elation, they once again become sad. Norman imagines cruising the Bahamas with a bevy of Eastern Bloc jailbait.

He spends half an hour organising an emergency overdraft base on his home equity. Norman transfers every single dollar that he has ever earned and saved, and then some, into the casino.

Click.