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SF PERUSALS

Samuel French Acting Edition

The Nether

by Jennifer Haley

SAMUEL FRENCH

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IMPORTANT BILLING AND CREDIT REQUIREMENTS

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THE NETHER was received its world premiere at Center Theatre Group in Los Angeles, California on March 19, 2013. The performance was directed by Neel Keller, with sets by Adrian Jones, costumes by Alex Jaeger, lights by Christopher Kuhl, sound by John Zalewski, and dramaturgy by Pier Carlo Talenti. The Production Stage Manager was Kirsten Parker and the Producing Associate was Lindsay Allbaugh. The cast was as follows:

SIMS/PAPA. . . . . Robert Joy
MORRIS. . . . . Jeanne Syquia
DOYLE. . . . . Dakin Matthews
IRIS. . . . . Brighid Fleming
WOODNUT . . . . . Adam Haas Hunter

THE NETHER was co-produced by the Royal Court Theatre and Headlong Theatre in London in July 2014. The performance was directed by Jeremy Herrin, with sets by Es Devlin, costumes by Christina Cunningham, lights by Paul Pryant, music by Nick Powell, sound by Ian Dickinson, and videos by Luke Halls. The cast was as follows:

SIMS/PAPA. . . . . Stanley Townsend
MORRIS. . . . . Amanda Hale
DOYLE. . . . . David Beam
IRIS. . . . . Zoe Brough and Isabella Pappas (alternating)
WOODNUT . . . . . Ivanno Jeremiah

THE NETHER received its New York premiere at MCC Theater on February 24, 2015. The performance was directed by Anne Kauffman, with sets by Laura Jellinek, costumes by Jessica Pabst, lights by Ben Stanton, and sound and original composition by Daniel Kluger and Brandon Wolcott. The Production Manager was B.D. White and the Production Stage Manager was Vanessa Coakley. The cast was as follows:

SIMS/PAPA. . . . . Frank Wood
MORRIS. . . . . Merritt Wever
DOYLE. . . . . Peter Friedman
IRIS. . . . . Sophia Anne Caruso
WOODNUT . . . . . Ben Rosenfield

CHARACTERS

SIMS/PAPA – A successful businessman
MORRIS – A young female detective
DOYLE – A middle-aged science teacher
IRIS – A shining little girl
WOODNUT – A fresh-faced guest

SETTING

An interrogation room and the Hideaway.

TIME

Soon.

NETHER REALM

1. Another world for mythical creatures
2. Demon world
3. A dimension of Evil or Imagination

– urbandictionary.com

PRODUCTION NOTES

1. It is recommended to cast Iris with an actress who will appear on stage as a pre-pubescent girl. The child actor takes the audience *out* of the play (Bert States, *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms: On the Phenomenology of Theater*), which is desirable considering the contents of her scenes. The audience is assured nothing awful will be enacted upon the child, whereas they have no such confidence with an adult posing as a child. A young actress also adds warmth, which is critical to the chemistry of the play.
2. There are three references that place the play in the United States of America. However, producers should feel free to make the location specific to their country. "Franklin Middle School" should refer to a public school for children around ages eleven to thirteen. "Illinois State University" should refer to a modest, well-established public university. "Brownstone" should refer to an historical dwelling inhabited by wealthy urbanites who can afford homes made of natural materials like stone and wood.
3. The play's design may be as simple or complex as the producers desire. It is written to be performed in a bare space if that is the choice.
4. In Scene Fifteen, if the interrogation room is also visible, DOYLE may disengage from the terminal and exit the room during the "Once, sitting here" monologue. After WOODNUT's second "Mr Doyle," MORRIS may look up to find him gone and join WOODNUT in saying the final line of "Mr Doyle!"
5. Be careful that the last scene is not overly sentimental.

For Neel

Scene One – Interrogation Room

*(***SIMS** *sits across a wide table from* **DETECTIVE MORRIS**.*)*

SIMS. I want to go home.

MORRIS. Which home?

SIMS. I need to speak with my family.

MORRIS. Which family?

SIMS. I don't know what you're getting at. I want my phone call.

MORRIS. There are things we want, too.

SIMS. My lawyer.

MORRIS. Which lawyer?

SIMS. Come on!

MORRIS. You are free to contact whomever you wish, Mr. Sims. We have a terminal here if you'd care to log in.

SIMS.

MORRIS. I imagine your wife is worried by now.

SIMS. Leave her out of this.

MORRIS. Your children.

SIMS. I don't have any children.

MORRIS. You have a beautiful home, Mr. Sims. Victorian. Set back from a country lane. Children on the front porch in long stockings and sailor caps. Barnaby. Donald. Antonia. Iris. Such quaint names. From an era associated with…innocence.

SIMS. I have a brownstone. My wife is sterile. You've got the wrong guy.

MORRIS. *(She consults a report.)* Solicitation. Rape. Sodomy. Murder. These are heavy charges, Mr. Sims.

SIMS. Are you charging me?

MORRIS. The repetitive nature of the offenses. The amount of money you've made.

SIMS. If you're not charging me –

MORRIS. We know about your account in Burkina Faso.

SIMS. If you're not charging me, you have to let me –

MORRIS. Oh you're free to go.

SIMS. I'm free to go?

MORRIS. We can't hold you here without charging you. That would be against the law.

SIMS. Okay. Then I'm going to go.

MORRIS. We can't control a person's body. Yours is free to walk out the door.

SIMS. Great. My body is walking out the door.

MORRIS. But if it does, we'll rescind your login. You will never have access to a terminal again.

SIMS. Who did you say you are?

MORRIS. This is an investigative unit of the Nether. I am an offline representative. My name is Detective Morris.

SIMS. I have business in the Nether. All of my connections. You can't expel me.

MORRIS. You have a taste for the old fashioned. Think of it as a return to simpler times.

SIMS. This is a violation of my rights. My lawyers are the best in the field. You won't keep me out for long.

MORRIS. Long enough to locate and detain your children.

SIMS.

MORRIS. What's wrong, Mr. Sims?

SIMS.

MORRIS. I thought you didn't have any children.

SIMS.

MORRIS. We sent someone undercover to your realm to make sure our charges were grounded. Because you've programmed it so that nothing there may be recorded, he submitted a written report:

(consulting a report) After undergoing a meticulous security scan of my login, creating my character from a set of prescribed looks, and passing a draconian manners tutorial dissuading modern terminology, I enter the Hideaway.

The first thing I experience is the trees. The flickering light and soft sound as they sway in the sun and wind is almost overwhelming. They surround a beautifully rendered 1880s Gothic Revival with a squeak in the top porch step. I ring the doorbell. I can actually feel my hand sweat, clutching my carpetbag. I peek through a window and spy figures in the foyer – an impeccably-dressed man stroking the face of one of the children, a little girl –

SIMS. They. Are not. Children.

MORRIS. I guess that depends on context, Mr. Sims. Or should I call you – Papa?

Scene Two – Interrogation Room

*(***DOYLE** *sits across the table from* **MORRIS***, head in his hands.)*

MORRIS. Mr. Doyle?

DOYLE.

MORRIS. Mr. Doyle.

DOYLE.

MORRIS. Mr. Doyle, we have not told your wife.

*(***DOYLE** *raises his head.)*

At this point we are merely detaining you. We need information about this man called Papa. In exchange, we will protect your identity.

(consulting a report) Cedric Doyle. You are teacher at Franklin Middle School. You won a Distinguished Teaching Award in Theoretical Physics. You are one year away from retirement with full pension for forty years service in the school district. Your wife is a senior vestry member of St. Thomas Episcopal Church, where you used to teach Sunday School until about four years ago. You have one daughter, a junior at Illinois State.

(looking up) Footing the bill for an offline college. That's a huge expense, Mr. Doyle. Most students get their education at institutions in the Nether. You claim to moonlight as a professor at one of these institutions – the *(consulting the report)* University of Metaphysical Certitude.

If you like, this entire story about who you are may remain intact. We've made arrangements with UMC to actually hire you. All those hours at your terminal, plus the boost in your bank account, will continue to make perfect sense.

DOYLE. May I keep her?

MORRIS. Keep who?

DOYLE. Iris.

MORRIS. No, Mr. Doyle. Once we have what we need on Papa, that life is over.

DOYLE.

MORRIS.

DOYLE. I have nothing to say.

Scene Three – Interrogation Room

*(***MORRIS** *and* **SIMS**.*)*

SIMS. What authority do you have, yanking me from my garden?

MORRIS. We thought face-to-face interaction would be a good change for you.

SIMS. You shouldn't even know who I am. I have the right to remain anonymous.

MORRIS. We're able to track most of our users, but your identity encryption is like nothing we've ever seen. Once you log in, you disappear.

SIMS. Are you pissed you can't target me for advertising?

MORRIS. We don't care about you, Mr. Sims. It's your realm. The Hideaway. Have you heard of obscenity laws?

SIMS. My realm is properly registered and meets all international requirements.

MORRIS. What about your server?

SIMS. My server?

MORRIS. The physical machine where you store the code for the Hideaway.

SIMS. Yes, I know what it is.

MORRIS. We want to know its location.

SIMS. My server is not in this country. So it's not any of your business.

MORRIS. Your content is here. Your content is everywhere.

SIMS. It's not in your jurisdiction.

MORRIS. Mr. Sims, wherever your content appears is my jurisdiction.

SIMS. Since when?

MORRIS. Your realm is not only popular, but lucrative. It's afforded you *(consulting a report)* two hundred square feet of real grass, surrounding your brownstone. A garden of snap peas and swiss chard. Your wife's clothes are made from cotton. Why, with such abundance, do you choose the life of a shade?

SIMS. I'm not a shade.

MORRIS. Your login records indicate you spend a great deal of time online.

SIMS. You have a lot of work on your hands if that's become a crime.

MORRIS. So you've never considered crossing over?

SIMS. I maintain my life offline. I tend my garden.

MORRIS. But really, Mr. Sims, an average of fourteen hours a day in the Nether? What can be gained by spending so much time in something that isn't real?

SIMS. Just because it's virtual doesn't mean it isn't real. Eighty percent of the population work in office realms, children attend school in educational realms. There's a realm for anything you want to know or do or think you might want to try. As the Nether becomes our contextual framework for being, don't you think it's a bit out of date to say it isn't real?

MORRIS. Is your wife aware of your tendencies?

SIMS. She asks no questions as long as the wine-made-from-grapes arrives at the door.

MORRIS. Your tendencies toward children.

SIMS. *(slight pause)* Like everyone, she's as aware as she wants to be.

MORRIS. What if we made her very aware?

SIMS. I expect she would resent you.

MORRIS. Or brought it to the attention of your neighbors?

SIMS. I don't spend enough time here to worry about my standing in the community. And my record is whistle clean. Real children are hard to come by these days. It's not like they play outside anymore.

MORRIS. Are you trying to be droll, Mr. Sims?

SIMS. Yeah, I'm trying very hard to be very fucking droll.

MORRIS. It won't reflect well on your case.

SIMS. Do I have a case here? A case sounds legal, which this definitely is not.

MORRIS. We need you to give us the location of your server. When we have confiscated your hardware and deleted your realm, you'll be free to go without prosecution –

SIMS. This is against the law!

MORRIS. Relax, Mr. Sims.

SIMS. My realm is clearly designated Adult. There are adults behind the children and adults behind the guests. My background checks are thorough in the extreme to make sure we don't involve users who are underage. This is in accordance with the statute on consensual roleplay –

MORRIS. You seem to be quite up on laws and statutes.

SIMS. This is my business –

MORRIS. This is our business, too. The Nether is home to many businesses, with an obligation to protect the needs of our community. And our community has decided that realms such as yours are impermissible –

SIMS. *(sarcastic)* Was there a vote?

MORRIS. A referendum. I suggest you pay greater attention to the message boards.

SIMS. This is shit. You're feeding me shit.

MORRIS. Would you care to log in right now and check?

SIMS. So you can trace me to my server? No, I would not.

MORRIS. Then you'll just have to trust I'm telling the truth.

SIMS. Trust you? Who are you?

MORRIS. The Nether is no longer some great, wild west. We have a political body that is just as real as anything offline. And we're making our own laws, with our own form of prosecution. You ask what authority I have? Look around. There's no Hideaway here. Now I suggest you sit down.

SIMS.

MORRIS.

SIMS. Look, Detective, I am sick. I am sick and have always been sick and there is no cure. No amount of cognitive behavioral therapy or relapse determent or

even chemical castration will sway me from my urges toward children. I am sick and no matter how much I loved him or her I would make my own child sick and I see this I see this – not all of us see this – but I have been cursed with both compulsion and insight. I have taken responsibility for my sickness. I am protecting my neighbor's children and my brother's children and the children I won't allow myself to have, and the only way I can do this is because I've created a place where I can be my fucking self!

Scene Four – The Hideaway, Foyer

(A ray of sunlight beams through a high window. **PAPA** *enters as* **IRIS** *runs in, breathless. He catches her, spins her around. She shrieks with laughter. He puts her down, and she wobbles in circles.)*

IRIS. Whoa! I'm a top!

PAPA. Was that fun?

IRIS. Yes! I feel dizzy!

PAPA. I thought you'd like that. It's new.

IRIS. Have you given it a name?

PAPA. Not yet. Any ideas?

IRIS. I'd call it the Spinning Top.

PAPA. The Spinning Top it is.

IRIS. Did you try it on Barnaby?

PAPA. You're the first.

IRIS. I am?

PAPA. I knew you'd appreciate it the most. I need an easy audience to give me heart.

IRIS. *(suggestively)* Are you saying I'm easy?

PAPA. Now Iris…that joke is too old for you.

(She giggles and re-assumes innocence.)

IRIS. I've never asked you for anything, have I Papa?

PAPA. No, you haven't.

IRIS. I was thinking. I might want a birthday party.

PAPA. A birthday party?

IRIS. Yes.

PAPA. Are you trying to grow up? You're already nine years old.

IRIS. I imagined the yard dressed in streamers. And birthday cake. We could invite our favorite Hideaway guests.

PAPA. Involve the guests. So this is an entrepreneurial idea?

IRIS. Somewhat.

PAPA. Somewhat?

IRIS. Not altogether.

PAPA. Then what? You must tell me what's on your mind.

IRIS. I want a day that's all about me.

PAPA.

IRIS.

PAPA. Come here.

(She moves to him.)

We have a beautiful home here, Iris. We have a beautiful family, of which you are an important member. It is this beauty which draws our guests. And of course a sympathetic community. But do you know what is the most important thing we offer?

(She shakes her head.)

An opportunity to live outside of consequence.

(She thinks this over.)

Nothing here can change. Which is a beautiful reflection of the way we are changeless.

IRIS. Like the way God sees us.

PAPA. God?

IRIS. *(almost guiltily)* I've been thinking about God.

PAPA. I see.

IRIS. Not as in a person. But as in the way we are with each other. Do you think about God that way?

(sound of a grand doorbell)

PAPA. We have a guest. You'd best go to the parlor.

IRIS. Yes, Papa.

(She turns to go.)

PAPA. Iris? I'm sorry we cannot have a birthday. It would upset a balance here to suggest you're growing older.

IRIS. I understand.

PAPA. I know you do. You're my darling girl.

*(***PAPA** *puts his hand to her cheek.* **WOODNUT** *enters, and* **PAPA** *quickly drops his hand. He gives* **IRIS** *a gentle push, and she exits.* **PAPA** *turns to* **WOODNUT**.*)*

My good sir! Welcome to the Hideaway!

WOODNUT. Thank you!

PAPA. Your first time?

WOODNUT. As a matter of fact, yes. Is it obvious?

PAPA. Not to worry. Keep coming back and you'll fit right in.

WOODNUT. You're confident I'll wish to return?

PAPA. I guarantee it, Mr…

WOODNUT. Woodnut. Thomas Woodnut. And you are – ?

PAPA. You may call me Papa.

Scene Five – Interrogation Room

*(***MORRIS** *and* **DOYLE**.*)*

MORRIS. *(reading from a report)* Papa escorts me to the parlor, where I find three of the children. A girl who looks to be twelve years old playing a perfectly rendered Vintage Steinway Pianoforte. A five-year-old boy dancing with a dandified guest. And the little girl I saw in the foyer – the one whose cheek Papa was stroking – sitting in a window seat. *What is your name?* I ask. She replies, *My name is Iris.* Without further discussion, she takes my hand and leads me up a grand staircase to the second floor.

We move down a darkened hallway, doors on both sides and the walls covered with weapons. From behind one door come the low sounds of what must be a fourth child, whimpering. Iris leads me to the last door off the hallway. Hanging above it, covered in dark red stains, is an axe.

We enter a bedroom with flowered wall paper and a white lace bed. A little girl's dream. I case the joint in frank amazement, the detail of rendering – down to the smell of mulch rising from a garden beneath her window – throwing me into a state of pleasure and confusion. Iris beckons to me… *Why don't you come here? I won't bite…* She then circles her fingers around the bunny's ear, stroking from base to tip –

DOYLE. Okay.

MORRIS. Okay what, Mr. Doyle?

DOYLE. Do you think you're going to shame me into helping you? I'm past shame.

MORRIS. Then why are you finding it hard to listen?

DOYLE. Because I'm sick of your voice. How old are you?

MORRIS. Why do you ask?

DOYLE. You remind me of my students. So full of themselves. So sure they know what the hell is going on.

MORRIS. I'll shut up if you give me the information I need on Papa.

DOYLE. I don't have information. We are anonymous to each other. I have no idea who he is other than how he presents himself in the Hideaway.

MORRIS. Does your wife know about him?

DOYLE.

MORRIS. Why don't we log in right now and contact her?

DOYLE. Fine.

MORRIS. Fine?

DOYLE. My wife won't leave me.

MORRIS. Your daughter?

DOYLE. I've saved enough money for her to finish college. And I don't care what she thinks of me. She's an adult now. She can think any thoughts she wants.

MORRIS. Your job?

DOYLE. Puh. I was considered one of the top teachers in the country, an inspiration to future scientists. I turned down professorships to stay in the public system. I won awards. Then came the Single School Act, which consigned all lessons to educational games in the Nether. I became no more than a monitor, making sure the students weren't hacking through the school firewall to engage in porn.

MORRIS. Is that how you discovered the Hideaway?

DOYLE. The advertising was compelling, to say the least. I wanted to see if they'd gotten it right with Victorian-era inventions.

MORRIS. When you entered, were you aware of your proclivity?

DOYLE. What proclivity?

MORRIS. Little girls.

DOYLE. The image of a little girl.

MORRIS. It's more than that, Mr. Doyle. It's sound, smell, touch. The Hideaway is the most advanced realm there is when it comes to the art of sensation.

DOYLE. Our bodies are ninety-nine percent space. Physical sensation is inconsequential.

MORRIS. As a scientist, how can you say that? Sensation is our gateway.

DOYLE. Yes? Gateway to what?

MORRIS. To understanding the rules of the world.

DOYLE. The world we walk upon. But what about the world of our imagination?

MORRIS. Exactly the same. People meet as physical beings in the Nether.

DOYLE. But there are no longer physical barriers to that contact. Now we may communicate with anyone, through any form we choose. And this communication – this experience of each other – is the root of consciousness. It is the universe wanting to know itself. Can't you see what a wonder it is that we may interact outside our bodies?

MORRIS. Who are we when we "interact" without consequence? What is revealed by feeling an axe slide through the flesh of a little girl?

DOYLE. The revelation is when she resurrects and comes to stand before you again. Images, sensations – those are fleeting. It's the relationships that matter.

MORRIS.

DOYLE.

MORRIS. You intend to cross over. I thought your affairs were in remarkable order. Of course you're not concerned with anything offline. You were going to become a permanent shade.

DOYLE.

MORRIS. That is an egregious step, Mr. Doyle. And still highly experimental. You've probably looked into life support systems. I can tell you from experience they're not half as good as they're advertised. I've seen bodies, after only one year, that are unrecognizable.

DOYLE. This bag of flesh is unrecognizable.

MORRIS. We treat shades. It is a long battle to get them to accept themselves again, but our programs are designed to –

DOYLE. I don't want your programs.

MORRIS. The desire to live as someone else is a symptom of depression.

DOYLE. I'm not depressed. I'm sad.

MORRIS. What about your offline relationships? What about your daughter?

DOYLE. I'll tell her where to find me.

MORRIS. So she can come visit? A nice little family visit in the Hideaway?

DOYLE. We could stroll arm in arm down a country lane…

MORRIS. Do you think Papa would allow that?

DOYLE. Absolutely.

MORRIS. Our agent didn't find Papa so magnanimous. In fact he reports a rigid behavioral prescription –

DOYLE. Your agent listed facts in his report. But the next time you have a chat by the water cooler, don't ask him, *What did you see? What did you do?* Ask him, *What did you feel?*

Scene Six – Iris' Bedroom

*(***IRIS** *caresses her stuffed rabbit as* **WOODNUT** *inspects the room.)*

WOODNUT. This bedroom. It's beautiful. A little girl's dream.

IRIS. I'm glad you like it, Mr. Woodnut.

(He goes to the window.)

WOODNUT. Sunshine. Warmth. Is that a garden down there?

IRIS. Snap peas. Swiss chard. Lemon basil.

WOODNUT. Is it seasonal?

IRIS. Absolutely. You are fortunate to visit us in late Spring.

WOODNUT. Four seasons…adding up to a year?

IRIS. We don't think of it as "adding up." Nothing here truly changes.

WOODNUT. And whose idea was all of this?

IRIS. Papa's, of course.

WOODNUT. Papa? He is not merely a chaperone?

IRIS. Oh no, he created the Hideaway.

WOODNUT. He came up with the idea? And did the programming?

IRIS. We don't use that word here, Mr. Woodnut.

WOODNUT. I apologize.

IRIS. It is your first time.

WOODNUT.

IRIS. Why don't you come here? I won't bite.

(She circles the bunny's ear with her fingers, strokes it from base to tip. **WOODNUT** *hesitates.)*

IRIS. It's okay to be nervous.

WOODNUT. I'm not nervous.

IRIS. Go ahead then. Touch me.

*(***WOODNUT** *pats her stiffly on the head. She takes his hand and moves it over her face. He jerks his hand away.)*

IRIS. Perhaps you'd like to start with the axe.

WOODNUT. I beg your pardon?

IRIS. That usually comes after, but if you're more inclined that way –

WOODNUT. No. No. I do not wish to start with the axe.

IRIS. Alright.

WOODNUT. Is it – expected?

IRIS. Papa prefers it for returning guests, but we don't have to do it the first time. Is there something else you'd like to play? I've got marbles, jacks, pick-up sticks…

WOODNUT. What are those?

IRIS. They are games. I can show you. How about jacks?

*(***IRIS** *produces a bag of jacks and kneels on the floor.)*

First I'm going to drop all the jacks. *(She does.)* Now, I'm going to bounce the ball, pick up a jack, and catch the ball again – with the same hand. *(She does.)* See? *(again)* Would you like to try?

*(***WOODNUT** *kneels.* **IRIS** *hands him the ball.* **WOODNUT** *clumsily bounces the ball, pecks at a jack. The ball goes bouncing off.* **IRIS** *retrieves it, laughing.)*

You were close! Try again!

(Intrigued, **WOODNUT** *gives the task his full attention. He snags a jack and catches the ball.)*

WOODNUT. Aha!

IRIS. Very good! My turn!

*(***IRIS** *scoops up two jacks, catches the ball.)*

WOODNUT. You took two of them!

IRIS. First you take one, then two, then three!

WOODNUT: Let me try.

*(***WOODNUT** *scoops up two jacks, catches the ball.* **IRIS** *claps.* **WOODNUT** *laughs, pleased with himself.)*

IRIS. You did it!

WOODNUT. I did it!

(He suddenly stops, drops the ball, stands.)

IRIS. Is something wrong?

WOODNUT: I have quite. Forgotten myself.

(He goes to the window, stands in the sunlight and shadows of leaves.)

IRIS. It's okay to do that here, Mr. Woodnut. It's okay to forget who you think you are.

*(***IRIS** *lifts her dress over her head and stands in her knickers.)*

And discover who you might be.

WOODNUT.

IRIS.

*(***WOODNUT** *slowly moves toward her.)*

Scene Seven – Interrogation Room

*(***MORRIS** *and* **SIMS**.*)*

MORRIS. *(reading from the report)* I approach the little girl and fold her into my arms. Her skin is covered in goosebumps, which quickly fade in my embrace. *(looking up)* The next section of the report is classified, but our agent did collect the evidence we needed to pursue this case. He confessed to me in person this experience left him traumatized.

SIMS. Your agent. Who was he?

MORRIS. That's not important. What's important is – we know everything that goes on in your establishment. And I have been eager for this encounter, Mr. Sims, so I could ask: How can you, in good conscience, infect people with this content?

SIMS. People come to my realm of their own free will.

MORRIS. They're enticed by its beauty. By sensations they can no longer experience in the real world.

SIMS. Is it my problem the real world no longer measures up?

MORRIS. I would say it's all of our problem. But who's going to do anything about it when they're busy molesting children?

SIMS. What are you afraid of? Violence? Porn? Did you know porn drives technology? The first photographs? Porn. The first movies? Porn. The most popular content when the Nether was called the Internet? Porn. The urge, Detective – the *urge* – as long as we are sentient, you will never stamp that out. You must have spent time in those collegiate fantasy realms… questing…killing wicked demons and wild boars. And the sex… I've been there… I've seen the cock bulges. Offline men are no comparison, with their soft, interface hands. Don't tell me you never fucked an elf.

MORRIS. No, Mr. Sims, I never fucked an elf.

SIMS. Come on, you're missing out. The point is – it doesn't matter whether you kill a boar or a demon. Whether you have sex with a child or an elf. It's nothing but images. And there is no consequence.

MORRIS. Images create reality. Everything around us – our houses, our bridges, our wars, our peace treaties, began as figments in someone's mind before becoming a physical or social fact.

SIMS. Are you accusing me of creating pedophiles? If anything, I'm giving them a place to blow off steam.

MORRIS. You foster a culture of legitimization, telling them their desires are not only acceptable, but commendable –

SIMS. Show me a study that proves a correlation between virtual behavior and actual offense –

MORRIS. Children are violated all the time with no record of it. Who knows what your guests are doing offline. Who knows if they understand the difference anymore. Your code is so lifelike, there's no way to distinguish –

SIMS. My code?

MORRIS. Spend enough time in the Hideaway, and you forget –

SIMS. You want my code.

MORRIS. – you forget what right and wrong even is –

SIMS. You want to sell it to Disney.

MORRIS. No, Mr. Sims –

SIMS. Use it to create some insipid realm where you can brainwash users into buying crap they don't need.

MORRIS. We give our users more credit than that.

SIMS. You track them like bloodhounds. Now you want to tell them what to do. Or rather, what not to do. What not to think. What not to feel.

MORRIS. You said yourself – the Nether is becoming our contextual framework for being. If it's the same as life, the same laws should apply –

SIMS. It's not the same *way* of being! It's imagination! People should be free there. That's one place where they should have total privacy.

MORRIS. There is a line, even in our imagination.

SIMS. You will never be able to enforce that.

MORRIS.

SIMS. How did you find me? The Hideaway's identity encryption is so profound, even I don't know who comes in.

MORRIS.

SIMS. Was it one of my users? One of my guests?

MORRIS.

SIMS. One of my children.

MORRIS.

SIMS. Iris. She started asking questions. After spending time with…Mr. Woodnut. He's your agent. He got to her. What did he do?

MORRIS. It's what you did Mr. Sims. And I assure you, there's been a consequence.

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SF PERUSALS