

As one American soldier explains, “We must understand that attempts to armorize our force against all potential enemy threats...shifts the ‘burden of risk’ from a casualty-averse military force onto the populace. In doing so, we have lifted the burden from our own shoulders and placed it squarely upon those who do not possess the material resources to bear it—the civilian populace.”

-Gregoire Chamayou, A Theory of the Drone

Reenactment

FC. Brown Cloud

“I ran in the opposite direction to the exit door and a minute later the second blast happened, near the Brussels Airlines counter, and I was hit by all the glass debris. Everything was covered in dust and smoke, people were crying. It was horrific.”

-Mariama Touré Kondon, as quoted in Drozdiak, Steinhäuser, and Verbergt, “ISIS Claims Responsibility for Brussels Attacks; More Than 30 Dead,” The Wall Street Journal, 22 March 2016.

Generals fight the last war. They send young men out to die while standing safely back, stroking their chins, watching disaster unfold and muttering, “S’pose *that* won’t work anymore.”

Reenactors dip back even further. They fight battles from decades, sometimes centuries, ago. It’s long enough to feign ignorance of what the real causes were. Grown men playing dress-up at Gettysburg talk of “states’ rights,” while their counterparts in Normandy mention only conflicting political ideals and crippling economic retribution. It’s long enough for the horror to fade. They wear vintage uniforms, heft vintage guns, “blanks only boys, har har,” crawl through dry fields, and have a jolly good time mocking dying again and again over the years.

What good is it? Reenactors are wasting their time chasing immersion in a history that never was. Well, not me and my buds. We’ve been reenacting the *next* wars, and not in that overbearingly moralizing Einstein way of sticks and stones. We use robots and retroviruses and shit that would *definitely* be classified if the DOD thought of

it before we did.

For a while, Dwight tried to get us to call what we do “preenactment” because it’s the guys whose forebears slaughtered each other for reals who’ll be doing it again, but eventually I convinced him that “preenactment” sounds stupid. So we all call it “re-” even though there’s a risk somebody’ll hear us talking and assume we’re like the others. The time wasters. We’re not! *We* know we’re not.

Usually it’s brutal, but we have our fun. Think of something clever and you get to put it in. One time we’d planned an event for the weekend but on the Thursday morning before, my team all dressed for action, stormed into Dwight’s team’s houses, and captured ‘em. We tied them to their chairs and declared preemptive victory.

Everybody was late for work, but it was worth it.

“Asynchronous combat, dude!” I shouted into Dwight’s sullen face before whipping out a sharpie to draw an “L” on his forehead and selfie us. Then I raided his fridge and helped myself to a big-ass breakfast. Losers

can buy more groceries.

Sometimes, though, shit goes wrong. At our latest engagement (for which we all made it to the field the same day and same time as we had planned. Just like in the real world, great strategies rarely work a second time), I rounded a corner, heard the loud buzz we’ve been using to simulate death rays (the *kerrack!* of a gun blank would sound totally out of place in a battle of the future), then glanced down at my chest to see the red bead of a laser pointer wavering over my heart.

“Fuck,” I muttered, letting my weapon clatter to the ground. I dropped to my knees and shouted, “Hit! I’m going down.”

Except...there was Dwight, strolling toward me, chuckling. So I was like, wait a second, *Dwight* hit me?

“What the fuck, dude? You went down, like, twenty minutes ago!”

“Well, now it’s your turn.”

“No way. You can’t kill anybody if you’re dead.”

“My side invented a workaround.”

“A...? No way. You weren’t even, like,

hit in the chest and left to bleed out in the rubble where maybe cryo people or somebody could've saved you. Our *cannon* spotted you. You were *vaporized*!"

"Yeah, but we're storing backups. Before each battle, our soldiers undergo a full-body atomic scan, positions, momentums, spin states, everything. If we die, we get reloaded."

"That can't work, dude."

"It can. For *my* team, it already does. That whole Heisenberg uncertainty thing says it can't work *perfectly*. The me who didn't see your cannon isn't *exactly* the same as the me who tagged your ass, but he's close enough. Your side is fucked."

It sounded like he had me, but I figured, okay hotshot, reality check time. Because if you can nail somebody on his logic, you can bump off their technology. That's one of our rules: nobody can kill you with a weapon that wouldn't ever exist.

"Wait a sec, though...if your side *had* discovered this whole scanning, cloning, atomic-precision replication thing, you wouldn't be sending out an army. There'd be

no *Dwight* on the field. You would've found your best soldier, made a hundred copies of him, then let the original and everybody else stay safe at home. Your story doesn't make sense. Your team wouldn't even *be* here looking the way it does if you'd invented that."

"Wrong, dude. Our army *has* to look like this. 'Cause, your plan? We considered that. Two reasons why it wouldn't work: one, the clones would *know* that they were clones. They'd notice they all looked the same. So why would they fight? They'd be almost identical to the guy getting to stay home and watch the action on TV, and they'd start thinking, why *him*? What makes *him* so special? And, *why not me*? No way they'd fight."

I frowned.

"I'm only telling you all this, by the way, I only even *know*, 'cause I'm privy to some seriously high-level privileged shit. Commander and all."

If Dwight didn't have such a wicked inferiority complex, he wouldn't need to mention that all the time.

"And then, two, the enemy, meaning you, except not *you*, 'cause you're dead,

dude, but your clueless doomed-ass teammates, would know that they were fighting clones. And that wouldn't work. It's the same problems as sending out drones. As soon as one side realizes that the other isn't risking anything, not anybody's *life*, just money, just *stuff* they made, they're not going to settle for a fair fight. They'll switch targets and start murdering civilians. Happens every time. That's why you guys gave up robots, remember?"

It was true, my team had thought we were brilliant, dressing up in foil and claiming we were machines, churned out by assembly line, impervious to gas attacks or biologics, replaceable if any of us came to harm.

Dwight's team turned and *ran*. We were standing there, laughing it up, feeling like rock stars, but I got a call that night from my mother, sounding shaken. "Your friends are here, a-and they've got...guns? Like those rayguns you always wanted for your birthday? They keep saying we're *hit*. They've been *yelling*. Your father and I...they keep asking us to lie down on the floor. We need

to go to bed, honey, but your friends won't leave, a-and they're making so much noise ..."

If I'd had a girlfriend, I'm sure they would've stormed her house next.

That's when we realized, sure, we could keep ourselves safe, but at what cost?

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