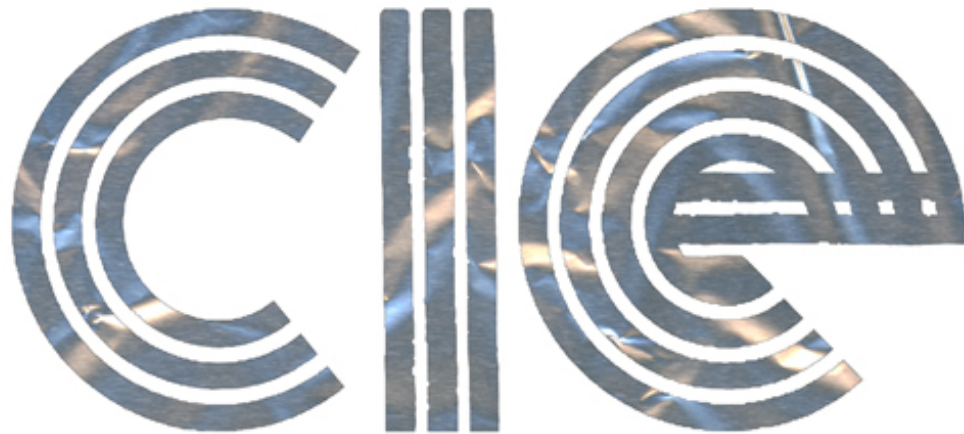


## The Highlights - The Adventures of Nuclear Wad & How He Learned To Stop Dreaming

Nuclear Wad was slightly bothered by the email that appeared on his screen at Cuna Inner Enterprises. This was the second time in six months he had been called to the conference room to help conduct a new hire orientation. He would greet a fresh faced group and talk of his experience starting out at CIE, ushering the trade school graduates into their new lives as firewall techs whose purpose was to dig the ever-widening electronic moat that kept James Cuna's dreams protected from those who wished to discover his next profitable idea.



Justin Cole, *Cuna Inner Enterprises*, digitally constructed image, 2012

The swell of techs and the wrought faces of upper management reminded him of the week leading up to the last hacker crusades, three years ago, when he too was just out of school. But it also could be the result of company expansion, a beefing up of security in preparation for a new product line or brand. Either way, Nuclear Wad wished that management had chosen a more enthusiastic veteran of the tech department. He just wanted to work, go home, and make his music.

It was nine in the morning, which was sad to Nuclear Wad. The reflex to check his phone revealed a video and text from Arturo Midorous, a man he'd never met in person. "Hey Nuc, that track 'furtheradventures' off your soundcloud fits perfectly with last night's recording. Check it out..."

He pushed play and watched Arturo's dream from last night unfold. In an underwater scene, a slowly approaching behemoth meandered out of a dark canyon of the sea floor. The skin encapsulating the giant, round, barrel of a body was black and shiny like a seal. Its face was an obese Labrador retriever, closed eyes and slight smile. Nuclear Wad noticed dim purple lights casting a throbbing glow within the body of this strange animal, hinting at an electronic core. As the view shifted, he saw a woman in scuba gear gazing upon the creature with an expression ecstatic from the encounter.



Justin Cole, *Underwater Adventure*, digitally constructed image, Eamon Ore-Giron, 2012

The scene was not new to Nuclear Wad. Midorous had been developing these images by cultivating his dreams on a Myoshi mattress tablet. Midorous was pleased to consider himself a "dream tender," a film director who exclusively worked with the raw material of his imagination. After dreaming, he would watch what had been recorded while he slept, have subsequent dreams that were inevitably affected by what he saw, and look for consilience among the associations. In the end, Midorous would have a carefully curated manifestation of his unconscious in which visceral, empathic feeling could be communicated between dream tender and viewer.

One year earlier, searching for film scores, Midorous felt a strange connection to Nuclear Wad's music and became convinced that Nuc was the unknowing composer to his unconscious. Since then, they had developed a rare, if lopsided collaboration. Midorous was obstinate about using only Nuc's compositions and thus adhered to his one condition: not to edit, remix, or manipulate the music.

In contrast to Midorus, Nuclear Wad resisted dream tending and the whole culture of dream capture. He was more interested in isolating moments than tirelessly tweaking a composition to perfection. Nuc made the track "furtheradventures" at his last studio called "Ocean View Estate." It was located in McArthur Park, Los Angeles where there was no view of the ocean.

The shimmering light on the monitor slowly came into the focus of James Cuna's waking vision. He lay in knotted sheets listening to the faint hum of the Myoshi tablet's cooling fan gently whirring beneath him. The alert on the monitor beckoned his attention. Lydia Schulz, Cuna's most trusted Interpreter, would have received the alert too, and would soon be arriving. But the droning fan appealed to his senses, and as he closed his eyes he could feel the deep prehistoric veil of sleep pull him towards that dark oasis. Cuna got up and walked to the monitor for play back.

From an elevated perspective, the dream looked out over a small dimly lit crowd and a karaoke machine. Cuna could hear his nervous off-key voice singing the question that appeared in Spanish on the karaoke screen, "¿Quién es Javier?," while the view bobbed to the slinky groove of the backing track. The crowd seemed disaffected. As Cuna watched his own sweaty, slightly misshapen hand grip the microphone, he felt compassion for his dream self and its performance anxiety.

"Good morning, James. The system alerted me to the return of 'Javier' in last night's recordings." Lydia Schulz was approaching from the elevator that directly connected their suites within the massive expanse of the Cuna Inner Enterprises compound.

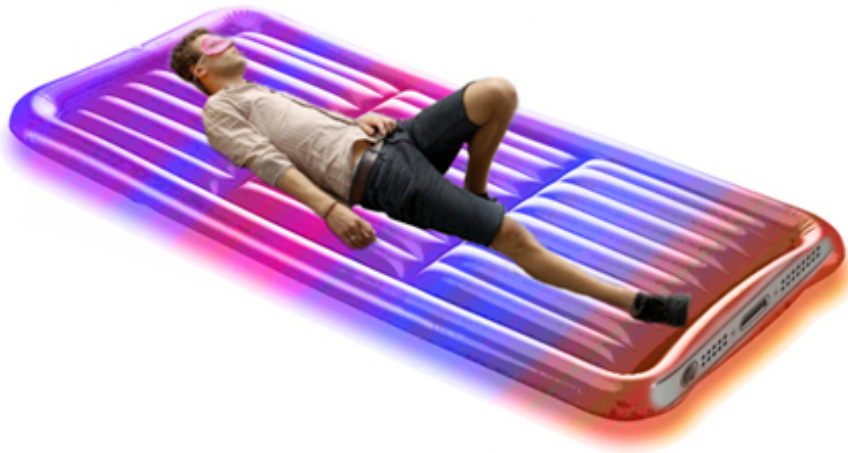
"'Javier' last appeared," Cuna responded, hitting return on the system search, "two years ago, during the launch of the tablet sensor upgrade."

Schulz nodded in agreement. "And based off our analysis at that time, the etiology of the word, from the Basque 'Xavier,' inspired an association with the 'nationalist' archetype, prompting your decision to continue refining CIE's initial line of products, rather than expand into the grocery chain business like the board approved. This resulted in considerable profits for the company."

Her proud recitation of this important period of CIE's thirteen-year history, which explained why the system was sensitive to the word "Javier," was met with a frozen stare from Cuna.

She knew this look. He needed to review last night's recording and drink coffee, not run through new associations. "Let's do this at lunch," Cuna responded with a nervous hand gesture and sleepy indifference.

As Lydia Schulz entered her suite and hit play on her stereo, the first guitar line of Nuclear Wad's album "Don't Dream" crawled ghostlike out of her speakers and howled through her body. She sat on the sofa and opened her ears. Shulz had been intrigued when she heard of the firewall tech who took Ambutol to stop dreaming, composing music that wasn't altered by the usual tending tools. She found him among the throng of bodies and servers that made up the tech department and got some rough mixes off him. The sound was loose.



Eamon Ore-Giron, *Memory Mattress Tablet*, digitally constructed image, 2012

She thought about when she used to practice psychotherapy. That was before mattress tablets and dream capture technology, when people needed guidance to wade through their still-shrouded unconscious. As the technology that enabled people to record, watch, share, and protect their dreams became accessible to ordinary consumers, Shultz witnessed the progressive impact on humanity.

People invested in mattress tablets, cuddled up to their unconscious, and messaged the detailed or distorted portraits of their inner and outer worlds to each other. Shultz saw mass fear, an eventual acceptance of sexual fluidity, and a new age of hacker culture, blackmail,

and celebrity sex tapes. As people became motivated to understand themselves through dream capture instead of therapy sessions, her career transitioned from psychotherapist to interpretive consultant within a matter of months.

The jumbled sound of a cascading drum roll tumbled out of the murky sonic texture, sending a jittery sensation through Lydia Shultz like electric goose bumps. This bodily awareness unwound her thoughts. Nuclear Wad swirled, and kept swirling, frantic and urgently emptying out into space...