

SYSTEMS

By

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A short story from The New York Times Magazine's Decameron Project.

They need each other. Like to be around each other. Like to touch each other.

They search for things:

Harry and meghan

hary and megan Canada

new year's resolutions

new year's resolutions how long

They like being with their families. They like being with strangers. They work in small spaces. Crowd into boxes, push the air around. Sleep in boxes. Need each other. Touch each other. They move around the world.

Everywhere in the world. Like us.

They search for things:

Harry and William

meghan and kate

Meghan and Kate feud

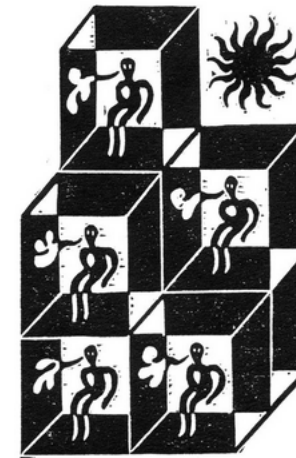
N.F.C. playoff picture

They ask themselves:

should I be afraid

how afraid should I be

They ask themselves: What is coronavirus. corona
virus what is it. Oscar party ideas. State of the



Union. State of the Union what time. Super Bowl
odds. Bean dip very spicy. Bean dip not so spicy.
They ask themselves if they should be afraid but
they already are.

They have patterns. Weekends. Summer plans. They have ways of doing things. They don't see how they can give those up.

They have weaknesses. They need each other. Like being around each other. They make noises. Open their mouths and push the air around and make noises at each other. Ha ha ha is a noise. Thank you is a noise. Did you see the thing about megan and harry is a noise.

They have systems. Systems have pressure. Pressure to grow. Make more of things. More and more and more.

They go in the air boxes and in those boxes are smaller boxes and smaller boxes and many of them crawl inside a box and sit there and share the air.

Their movements seem random at first but study their movements and it becomes clear that the systems have patterns. Sunlight brings them out of their small boxes, they move together in streams. Massive streams, sometimes traveling quite far from their home boxes to hubs or centers where they collect in large boxes. Streams on the ground. They are

also capable of airborne travel. They sort themselves and divide their work up. The work is to make more. More and more and more. All day long they break off in groups then reform new groups. Air is pushed. There is touching. In the moonlight they stream back to their boxes or to other boxes.

When it gets warmer they spend less time in boxes. When it is colder they heat up their boxes. They follow cycles of earth and moon and sun. Most of them live for many cycles.

They search for things: First date ideas. Tapas

bars. Tapas downtown. Wuhan. Wuhan where. Sushi near me. How to tell if he's interested. How to tell if she's interested. Good first date how to tell. Second date ideas. Italy. Lombardy Italy. Chinese virus. Trump Chinese virus. Coronavirus versus flu. Covid not that bad.

They search for things: Why do some people say coronavirus not that bad. News sources trustworthy. Fauci. Fauci credentials. Fauci facepalm gif. Fauci handsome. Fauci married.

They divide themselves into groups. They say: some of us are them and some of us are us.

They do not always tell the truth. They spread things
on their own. More and more and more.

They ask themselves:
 who invented coronavirus
 W.H.O. invented coronavirus

They search for things: governor. Lockdown.

They change their patterns.

They search for:
 how long is six feet

They ask themselves: Zoom what is it. How to use
Zoom. School grades. Do my grades count.

They search. They look for patterns. They gather
data. They look for patterns in the data and then
they do something unexpected: they change their
own patterns. No more streaming to large boxes.
The hubs are empty. The streams are gone. The
airborne migration is gone. They stay still in small
boxes.

They ask themselves: affordable chromebooks.
Does Zoom cost money. Bored kid. Activities for
bored kid. Teacher thank yous. Teacher

appreciation. Green onions grow. Green onions grow how fast. Quadratic formula. Sine cosine tangent. How to be hopeful for kids. How to seem hopeful for kids. Lockdown how much longer. What to say to kids.

Their older ones sit alone in boxes. Staring at smaller boxes. Their older ones have trouble with air.

They find patterns but some of them need to find more patterns.

Showing results for: *coronavirus*

Search instead for: *coronavirus conspiracy*

They ask themselves: How to cut hair. How to fix kid's haircut. Hats for kids.

The younger ones search: interview with astronaut. Museum virtual tour. When does my school start again. Thing versus Hulk who wins. Hulk versus Thor no hammer who wins. Hulk and Thing versus Thor drunk who wins. Coronavirus real. Coronavirus kids. Mother's Day ideas. Gifts for your mom. Gifts to make for your mom no money. All the Spidermans versus Hulk who wins.

They need each other, like each other. They miss each other.

They ask themselves:
can cats get depressed

They search for:
Food bank donation. Food bank near me.
What is a pandemic. What is furlough. How to keep kids safe. How to keep older people safe. How old is old. Am I old.
What is
How to
Is it OK

Can I

Numbers. Numbers up. Numbers growing.
How long before symptoms of coronavirus appear? Is there vaccine for coronavirus? How do I avoid coronavirus? How did coronavirus start? Is virus getting worse? What is mental health? How can I tell if I am depressed? What is safest takeout?

They search for:
Stop payment indicator.
what does stop payment indicator mean for unemployment
unemployment office number

when do we open up Lexington
when are we reopening Flint
when can we reopen Bowling Green

When it gets warmer they change their patterns
again. They are temperature-sensitive and they
spend less time in their boxes.

Many of them die. When they die, they stop pushing
air. When they die they do not search for things
anymore.

The weather changes and their patterns change
again. Staying still in boxes for many cycles, they

begin to emerge. Some of them are hungry.

Some of them are hungry. They restart the
system. Slowly, the streams resume. The pressure
builds. More and more and more. They make
food. Some of them have too much food. Some of
them share food with others. Some of them line
up for food.

They search for things: cat still depressed
are we in a bear market
what is a bear market
what is a payroll tax cut
what is martial law

how do I shelter in place

safest cities to live

What is considered a fever. What is considered
a dry cough. What is considered essential.

What is open right now. What is Marshall law.
How to make hand sanitizer. How to sew a face
mask. Shirt as mask. underwear as mask. What is
N95. How to break a fever. Living alone. What if I'm
alone

They have subgroups. The subgroups are virtually
indistinguishable. Genetically. They have invisible
signals that help members of one subgroup

identify fellow members. They divide themselves.

They say: some of us are us, and some of us are
them.

They have weaknesses.

Some of them are aggressive. Some of them are
confused. Some of them have short memories.
Some of them cannot change their patterns. They
have systems. Systems of air. Of information. Of
ideas.

Some of them enjoy breathing as their right.

Some of them can't breathe.

Some of them send signals with incorrect information about the environment.

Misinformation spreads quickly through the population.

Misinformation can be transmitted through the mouth or eyes.

These signals confuse some of them.

Others of them study us.

They know what we are: not quite alive.

Invisible. Information.

They have invisible signals.

They talk to each other. They push air. They need each other, like each other. Miss each other. Think about each other.

They harness invisible forces. Electromagnetism. Light. They are like us. They have codes. Codes of symbolic sequences. They encode information and spread it.

They can be in small boxes and signal to each other in codes and coordinate their actions. They can be one and many and one somehow. They have particles, they have transmission, they have magical powers. They can communicate across time and space.

They have science.

They know:

Approximately 8 percent of the human genome
is viral DNA.

They know we will never be apart. There are no
subgroups. There is no us and them.

They search for things:

where is protest

safe to protest

how to protest

They realize:

Community is how it spreads.

Community is how it is solved.

They will keep going. Emerge from their boxes in
boxes in boxes into sunlight. Cycles resuming.

They will transmit messages to each other. Some
of them will be confused. Some of them will share
food. They will make more and more and more.
Some of them will die. Some of them will be
hungry. Some of them will be alone.

The systems will be the systems. But some of
them may change the systems. Rebuild them.
Make new patterns. They will fly again, collect
again in hubs, gather by the thousands and push
air at each other, ha ha ha and other noises they
make to each other to signal invisible things.

Some things will not change. They will need
each other. Like each other. Miss each other.

They will have weaknesses. And strengths. They ask themselves: Harry and Meghan what now. Harry and Meghan what next.

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Sophy Hollington is a British artist and illustrator. She is known for her use of relief prints, created using the process of the linocut and inspired by meteoric folklore as well as alchemical symbolism.