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## JayTIDS

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Paul Shephard



*The White Horse, Uffington*

## *Jitter Period 1*

*JayTIDS is the Pentagon's acronym for Joint Tactical Information Distribution System. / The JayTIDS system allows several participants in a battle to keep each other up to date on various simultaneously developing situations. / JayTIDS is a time sharing, high capacity, jam resistant scrambling system for transfer of information in real time.*

## *Jitter Period 2*

*This story of George and the dragon describes the White Horse on Lambourne Down, Oxfordshire. / I have showed this representation of it through a two dimensional reconstruction of the JayTIDS system. What you read here is the scrambled version. / The idea is to convert the continuously unfolding dynamic of a narrative into a static arrangement.*

### II/Dragon

It came crashing into the village, with the swipe of its great tail churning up the ground behind it like a wake. It pushed its snout through the walls of one of the houses and dragged out a screaming child.

The dragon's skin was covered in warts, like a toad's, but they were as big as shields and hard like ancient leather. It stood up to run on its hind legs like a dog doing a trick, with monstrous agility.

\*The Bufonidae all have horizontal pupils. In the breeding season they assemble in ponds and slow streams, often in large numbers. The males develop dark nuptial pads on their inner three fingers and call in chorus at night. They use the pads to grasp the females in amplexus, just behind the forelimbs.\*

### III/Horse

When the child heard his name called out and stepped forward to stand apart from all the others excitement gripped him by the back of the neck. He had never felt so cold or so alone and ready to go.

The horse was white like the chalk in the hill, and striated softly with brown veins like the clay in the chalk: her water grey eyes glistened like a flint struck open, still cracking with the spark of the split

### II/Serpent

It was a comprehensive invasion of evil, that shook the ground and ignited the sky with fury. No one knew where it would strike; if it had been a human menace, they were all guilty. It wasn't; they were game.

The dragon's flesh tasted sublime. But even as they ate, their faces began to change: their hair became stiff, their skin took on a green and scaly shine, their teeth became so hot that their breath billowed out as steam.

### I/George

George was as brave as a lion, keen as a hawk, solid as a bear. He never missed a chance for a good deed or to save someone in distress; and rode about the country on a huge white horse.

George had a suit of arms polished up to shine like silver, every last link of it. His white surplus carried a red cross that quartered him like a martyr and which lay lank with the sweat of his efforts.

\*The connoisseur of armour divides the age of mail from the age of plate. He finds the fourteenth century the apogee of the art. In those days, armour was still used for war. Decoration was not yet allowed to hamper the smooth surface of the steel: the eye was expected to find pleasure in the subtle form of the plates.\*

\*The average lambing ratio to ewes is now approximately 2:1, which compares to a historic average of 1 1/2:1. Consequently many more lambs are born spare to the flock. By smart husbandry one can place orphans with ewes who have lost their lambs, but sheep always reject something that doesn't smell right. The motherless ones must be dressed in the skins of the dead.\*

#### V/Child

The topsoil on the hill is only six inches thick and lifts cleanly from the chalk underneath, so they cut out the shape of the dragon, stretched out where it fell, to show a white scar against the green grass.

He was one of a flock of children that raced up and down the street together all day like the lambs in May. They were left to look after themselves, but they were everything, and they were loved like the future.

#### VI/Horse

The villagers dragged the carcase down to the village where, as darkness fell, they roasted it over a huge fire. No one would speak to the child, who sat in the shadows and watched their faces flickering in the firelight.

The horse was as fast as a wave. The spring in her feet rang on the hard turf of the downs and the buzzards swooped in to see her run, curling round her flying mane like scoters shooting the surf.

\**Melanitta Nigra Nigra*, as black as black, is a sea duck, a winter visitor from the far north. It makes its nest of sooty down down among the marsh grasses and lays a half a dozen eggs at the end of May. The crabs cower under the mud when they hear its grating call: but there are softer notes between the ducks and the drakes.\*

#### *Jitter Period 3*

*The subscribers to the JayTIDS system — participants in the battle — are allotted 'nets' of information. / The nets are transmitted in time slots of 7.8125 milliseconds. 98,304 slots make up one 'epoch' 12.8 minutes long. / At the time slot junctures, the net 'hops' to different radio frequencies 700 megahertz apart to minimize the effect of enemy jamming.*

#### IV/Villagers

At last the howl of the dragon sounded clearly through the hills. The crash of its feet chased through the earth and the fire from its nostrils lit up the clouds. The child strained against his ropes, hoping to escape.

They were all so closely related in colour and type and surface shine, as indeed their genes were, deep inside them (and that came from their deep proximity), that, flocked together, they appeared to be feathered with the same brush.

\*Tarring and feathering is a people's punishment for nonconformity. The victims are arrested by the crowd, stripped, and head shaved. They are daubed all over with liquid pitch, and buckets of feathers are thrown at them till they look like ugly ducklings. It seems just, like humiliation, but the pitch must be heated to liquify: it burns the skin.\*

#### VII/Child

George jumped up and drew his sword

again and the sound stopped the crowd in its tracks. He went at them with his gorgeous agility, slicing the scales off their cheeks and cropping their spiny hair like an angel, shearing.

The child was loose and young and perfect. His face had a guileless smile which he used as a shield against the rest of the world's too sharp interest in his beauty, in which his beautiful face conspired against him.

#### I/Horse

George's species was *Homo Sapiens*. One part of his crusade was to wipe out the lesser species of homonids, like *Homo Erectus* and *Homo Neanderthalensis*; the other part was to clean up the dinosaurs, of which the dragon was one.

Her hair grew short and straight, sharp with grease, warm from her lively body, covering her like atmosphere covers the globe. When she ran on the open down the wind and the thorns pulled its nap into calms and storms.

\*Up on Odstone, Uffington, and Kingston Warren, the sheep keep the grass cropped short. But on Woolstone, the turf changes to a run of soft and springy grass of a different sort, planted in a strip one hundred yards wide by one thousand seven hundred and sixty, and known as the Gallops. They practice racehorses from the studs on the downs there.\*

#### *Jitter Period 4*

*Several Nets are transmitted simultaneously. Any single frequency read through in time sequence will manifest a random collection of disjointed events. / Each net transmission may be delayed from the start of a cycle by a lag known as the 'Jitter Period'. / I am exploiting these periods to furnish the explanation of the piece.*

#### *Jitter Period 5*

*Some time slots are filled with redundant information; asterisked here. They may be exploited to double up useful information over short periods and this is known as '2 pack'. / A '4 pack' potential exists in cutting out jitter periods and shortening the silent gap between each time slot. / The information content of each time slot may also be reconstructed to scramble it within the pulse*

#### IV/Dragon

When the shadow of the beast was upon him and it stood there slaving like a dog he shut his eyes tight, but he could still hear the roar and feel the heat of its breath as it came closer.

There was no pact to be made with the dragon. It was as hostile as a virus invading the body and had the violence of a neutral gender. It was not a description of raw nature, but the fact itself.

#### III/Child

The chosen child was tied by the hands and washed, and led up the steep chalk hill path by the elders of the village. He left behind him the stone face desperation of his family, never to be seen again.

His victimization was completed when the people chose him. It gained character in the ritual of his preparation, and the journey up the steep path whose bands obscured everything but themselves and the sky. All that remained was the death.

\*Kent build and invisible path at Rousham, that garden which lost all its trees in a storm. It goes slowly down hill from the house, meandering through meadows, making for a copse with a secret fountain at its centre. The path has imperceptibly graded banks at either

side; they cannot be seen, but gently push you back on course if you stray. \*

#### V/Serpent

The White Horse is an ancient figure cut into the chalk hills. It dances on the horizon like the horizon itself. When you reach it it becomes a miniature of the landscape and you become, instead of human, a giant.

The particular kind of evil that grows when people are together grew in them then. It was the same kind of substance as the common good, the kind of good that grows when people are together, all moral, all meaning.

#### *Jitter Period 6*

*In my two dimensional model of JayTIDS, each page of the manuscript corresponds to a frequency, with page 9 High. / The events of the story are parcelled into seven nets, I-VII, and distributed randomly across a matrix made of frequency against time. / The six characters are piggybacked onto the event nets by allotting them the time slots. Hence Event is frequency and Character is time.*

#### *Jitter Period 7*

*Each event—character pair corresponds to a time slot and consists of two paragraphs of 40 words each. / The presentation of each character transforms from description to metaphor according to frequency, with description low. / The event nets are: I: George in abstract, II: dragon raid, III: choosing child, IV: fight #1, V: marking up, VI: feast, VII: fight #2.*

#### I/Dragon

His reputation as a dragon killer was as wide as the sea, but how to call him into action was a mystery, hidden even from those in extremis. The chances he never missed were the ones he could see clearly.

Not like a bully: not like the tyrannous giant who wore a cloak woven of the beards of the men he had defeated. Like a flood: and impassive deluge of digestive juices. No close shaves, but the smack of impact.

\*Retho, the giant, lived on Mount Arvaius and was the strongest being Arthur had met. The encounter is re-

peated in Geoffrey of Monmouth's history of Britain, x/iii. It is a twelfth century chronicler's history, where the facts seep through the gaps in a fiction designed to substantiate the Norman claim and to down grade Rome in favor of Britain's mystical supremacy.\*

\*The White Horse lies on the 250 metre contour at National Grid SU 3028866 in the county of Oxon. It faces West North West with the scarp slope at the head of a dry valley called 'the Manger'. You approach it by the Dragon Hill road, which curls round Dragon Hill itself: the hill bears a white scar where the grass will not grow, which counterpoints the Horse itself.\*

#### VI/Serpent

No one spoke to the child, who sat in the shadows watching their faces flickering in the firelight. He was the only one in the whole village left out of the celebration, yet it was he who had been saved.

They filled the air with terror. The babble of their yells and shouts made one ghostly howl. Their hot green bodies, straight from the savage feast, made one beast that chased after him round the serpentine bends of the road.

#### *Jitter Period 8*

*JayTIDS Subscribers deal with position, attitude, speed, weapons and fuel reserves, radar signature returns: the parameters of contemporary military action. / These dynamics may be compared with the lines, blocks, and squares of a previous tactical theory from the days when buildings were the picture of action. / Process has changed everything.*

#### III/Villagers

All the children, the little lamb pack, were gathered together on the green. They were all examined, slowly, and the waves of despair and relief were so great that by the end of the day no cheek was left unstained.

Superstition ruled their lives: they thought the fact of the springing crops

was only guaranteed by homage to the gods. They were always praying, and it was effective when it came to each other, but they found the dragon unimpeachable.

#### VII/Dragon

Then suddenly the child saw George again, sleeping off his day's exertions under a tree. What a relief! He ran up and hammered on his breastplate which rang like an alarm bell and woke him up, fresh to the new danger.

The dragon was a force of nature, like gravity, which is unbending to the human mind but seems to have intentions, like a living, killable thing. Killing it was only cheating: all satellites come to earth on some planet eventually.

\*Total cluster weight of Skylab was about 100 tonnes. Total cluster length was 36.12 metres. Mission period was eight months, with three crews operating 28/56/56 days. Orbital lifetime post mission was estimated at four years. Terminal splashdown was predicted for mid-Pacific. The people of Australia imagined it falling on their heads, the victims of rocket-paranoia.\*

#### II/Horse

The rape of the village happened again and again and again. Every time they fell to their knees and prayed for it to stop, but it happened again. They repaired the damage to expunge the memory, but it happened again.

The cleft between its ears looked like it had been cut through almost to the neck. Its front left leg looked like it had been detached from a spider, its real left leg like a boomerang. No mouth: a beak.

\*Flatland inhabitants can communicate by shouting over two mile distances, but only on a dry day. In the damp, shouts in the open landscape disappear as if the air were blotting paper. In Wales, the songs roll up the

valleys on the backs of the echoes. The sound of hooves miles away can be heard with an ear to the ground \*

#### III/George

Eventually the people decided to appease the dragon by offering it a sacrifice. They felt that by choosing one of their own children themselves they would be spared the agony of waiting for fate to choose which one would die.

With his honour, his armour and his horse. Like a cowboy with the bible stuck in his shirt pocket, his six shooter and his four legged friend, George quested goodness up on the downs and down in the valley below.

\*The quest is a bark put up by hounds at the first site of their quarry. The quest in chivalry is a task to which all ends are subordinated. It describes the continuing activity in terms of its conclusion, but not the drama of the conclusion itself. The quest may also stand for the group involved in pursuit, as in posse. The posse, etymologically, is able to do what it sets out to do \*

\*There are sixteen white horses on the Chalk and Limestone escarpments. They are: Uffington (?) Westbury 1 and 2 (1778) Cherhill (1780) Pewsey 1 (1785) Marlborough (1804) Alton Barnes (1812) Osmington (1815) Hackpen (1838) Litlington 1 (1838) Kilburn (1857) Woolborough (1859) Broad Town (1863) Litlington 2 (1924) Pewsey 2 (1937) and Rockley down (?).\*

#### VI/Child

When he saw what he saw, the child crept further into the shadows. Up to this moment they had ignored him, but now, with all of their bodies corrupted and their faces sheathed in smoke, they turned their attention on him.

A pathetic figure tied to a stake hammered into the ground, not demure, just terrified, with his face screwed up

tight and pulling hard against his ropes, entangled in the consequence of his elevation. All hope gone with the wind.

#### IV/Horse

Then suddenly above this terrible noise there was a sound as clear as a bell, the sharp and shining sound of a sword being drawn from its scabbard, and there stood George, armoured and ready for battle with the beast.

It stands there today, this building which is no more than a six inch depression in the ground; with the erosion of the rains transferring the top to the bottom, it moves uphill one fortieth of an inch a year.

\*The Tennessee Valley was subjected to widespread woodland clearance, which opened the landscape to sheet erosion. The rain ripped away the unprotected soil. An average of one metre in depth was lost to the Mississippi over the entire area. Three thousand tons of topsoil are washed or blown annually from the United States every year.\*

#### Jitter Period 9

*Architecture has been invaded by the narrative and the textual explanation as a result of our contemporary Furor. It no longer benefits from its static state. / Nor do buildings benefit from the narrative: they cease to exist. / Meanwhile, as Gertrude Stein said, the Landscape is such a natural setting for a battlefield or a play that one must write plays.*

#### Jitter Period 10

*I suggest a camouflaged shed filled with literate people and smart machines. Out of doors is designated wilderness, garden and rubbish tip. / Architects can deal with the camouflage. / Literature waits in the wings to take over the determination of our attitude to the unimpeachable natural world. The techniques are there, all that matters now is the content.*

#### V/Dragon

The great humped shape of the beast lay across the sky like a new horizon. They cut out its shape in the thin turf to expose for ever the white chalk beneath and dragged the body down into the village.

Buried inside the brains of all dragons was a precious stone known as a carbuncle; something like a ruby with alchemic properties. The only way to possess the precious carbuncle was to face the living beast and cut off its head.

\*Borges has researched the mystery of the Carbuncle in his 'Book of Imaginary Beings'. In mineralogy the carbuncle, from the Latin meaning 'little coal' is a ruby. Shakespeare's toad 'ugly and venomous, wears yet a precious jewel in his head'. A conquistador in Paraguay went in search if it and described an animal 'with a shining mirror on its head like a glowing coal.'\*

#### VII/Horse

At last everything grew quiet. The people milled about in the road, confused and relieved at the passing of the great pain. The child led them back to the village just as George had led him down from the hill.

The impassive observer of a great battle whose disinterested pose came from utter self concern: a creature which panics with the rest of the herd at the predator's approach but is calm again once the victim has been picked out.

#### VI/Serpent

The Knight stood his ground, and went in under the dragon's great scaly reach to plunge his silver sword up to the hilt in the stinking flesh. He cut the child free and hoisted him up onto the horse's back.

Wherever the pieces of flesh fell to the ground, the pieces which were the character of the serpent sliced from their faces by George's talented action, the grass burned as under a shower of acid. Nothing has grown there since.

#### V/George

No one spoke to the child, who was still alive, but should have been dead.

They crept up the hill to the scene of the fight, and saw the dragon's corpse stretched out on the hill like a new horizon.

He thundered across the countryside on a magnificent horse. At the time of the dragons, he always had and he always would. Now he has disappeared. The mark of the horse galloping across the horizon is all that is left.

\*There are three main ancient Ridge tracks in the British Isles. The Jurassic Way runs along the Limestone Scarp from Lincoln to Dorset, the Icknield Way along the Chalk uplands from Norfolk to Wiltshire, and the Pilgrim's way along the Chalk spur of the North Downs to Canterbury. The 'Ridgeway' on which the White Horse stands is part of the Icknield Way.\*

\*Immolation refers to sacrificial slaughter. 'Mola' is Latin for meal; To immolate is to sprinkle with sacrificial meal. In the 'Mound of Pitch' at Ur, the great ziggurat of bricks and tar, there is an outhouse called the kitchen. In ancient Ur great numbers of servants died with their masters. They self immolated, drinking poison from a cauldron prepared in the kitchen.\*

#### II/Child

The terrible howl of the dragon shook the air, and the people knew that their homes were to be plundered and one of their children carried off. They dropped to their knees and hopelessly prayed, and were rewarded with despair.

The child was a picture of innocence, but everyone could see that once he joined them in adulthood his smile would flash like lightning, dangerous and frightening. Because of this his sacrifice was greater to some and lesser to others.

\*There is a conundrum arising from attempting to convert the world to domestic use. If the South side must be

given to the garden rooms, the North goes to the hall. This means that the entrance face will always be in shadow: when it snows, the last ground to thaw is the front doorstep. Abandon hope, all ye who enter here.\*

I/Serpent

Newton's pendulum swings between the ages of the beast and the ages of the good. In this figure, the hot breath of the dragon is gravity, pulling you to darkness and the underworld; George's prismatic sword the freedom of light.

Upon eating the flesh of the dragon the people became like it. They grew into their potential for destroying those who held goodness above mundanity, and who deployed thoughts in the future against the shadows cast by things that exist.

Editors' Note: the following is offered by the author as an outline addressing or clarification of the above text.

Appendix: The White Horse

George was as brave as a lion and as consolidated as a bear. He never missed a chance for a brave deed or to save someone in distress; and rode about the country on a huge white horse.

His reputation as a dragon killer was as wide as the sea, but how to call him into action was a mystery, hidden even from those in extremis. Whenever the terrible howl of the dragon shook the air and the people knew that their homes were to be plundered and their children carried off, they dropped to their knees and hopelessly prayed: and were re-

warded with despair. Eventually the people decided to appease the dragon by offering it a sacrifice. They felt that by choosing one of their children themselves they would be spared the terrible agony of waiting for fate to decide.

They had not long to wait. When the monstrous intimations of the dragon's coming were next felt, the chosen child was tied by the hands and washed, and led up the lonely hill path by the elders of the village, leaving the stone faced desperation of his parents behind, never to be seen again. When they reached the top, the child was fastened to a stake that had been hammered into the ground in readiness for this very moment, and then left him alone, with nothing but the wind and the fear of what was to come to comfort him.

When at least the howl of the dragon sounded clearly through the hills and the crash of its great feet ran chasing through the earth, and the glow of the fire from its nostrils lit up the clouds, the child strained against his ropes hoping to find the strength to escape, but it was useless; when the shadow of the beast was upon him, and it stood there slaving like a dog he shut his eyes tight, hoping that it might disappear, but he could still hear the roar and feel the heat of its breath as it came closer and closer. Then suddenly above this terrible noise there was a sound as clear as a bell, the sharp and shining sound of a sword being drawn from its scabbard: and there, in his power and his glory, stood George, armoured and ready for battle. The child watched in astonishment as the two circled each other, and thought when the dragon made its charge that the miracle must be a useless dream—but the knight stood his ground and went in under the dragon's great scaly reach to plunge his silver sword up to its hilt in the stinking flesh. Fatally wounded, the dragon roared one last time and fell to the ground, its great length stretched out against the sky like a new mountainous horizon.

George's sword flashed again to cut the child free, and he was carried down to the village on the white horse's wide and undulating back, and set down on the green. When the people saw the child return they hid in their houses, frightened of the power that had saved him, and only after George had ridden away did they creep out to see what had happened. They did not speak to the child, but made their way to the site of the battle. They cut the outline of the dragon out in the turf so that it showed in the white chalk underneath to commemorate its size and dragged the carcass down into the village, where, as darkness fell, they roasted it over a huge fire. Still not speaking to the child, who sat in the shadows and watched their faces flickering in the firelight. Then a great feast took place, and all the people ate the flesh of the dragon. The child watched in horror as their faces began to change: their skin took on a green and scaly shine, their hair became stiff, their breath became hot; and when they started to turn their attention to him, the memory of his previous terror was so great that he took to his heels and fled.

He stumbled down the dark road with the people of the village yelling and running after him, the crowd coalescing into one form, round the serpentine bends of the road. Then suddenly, to his great relief, the child saw George again, sleeping off the day's exertions beneath a tree, and he ran up and hammered on his armour which rang like an alarm bell and woke him up, fresh to the new danger. He drew his sword and sliced the scales off their cheeks and shaved their spiny heads with it and at last they were like they had been before and everything was calm again.

The shape of the dragon is still outlined in the chalk on the side of the hill, and carefully tended by the descendants of the village to remind them of the horizon: and so they call it the White Horse, and the terror of what lies behind it has gone.