

After Prona
by Hancheng Wu

"[M]ankind shall mark the end of its own resolve."

—Anonymous, *An Analysis of Prona*

After Prona

He pressed the cup to his aged lips and drank. The thick, white liquid flowed into his mouth and down his throat. He felt it; he felt it greatly. The drink was named *prona*, and it was every bit as pleasurable as its name. He had always loved how the word left his lips as he said it. It was a majestic sound for a majestic drink.

"*Prona*," George whispered. The sound reached no ears but his own for he lived alone.

George immediately felt the substance's effect: the most sensational of sensations. It was as if he were untethered from the earth. Minutes later, after the magic had lifted, he was flung back into his dusty room. Ruffling his greying hair, he leaned back against the chair, indulging in his fleeting moments of climax as he entered the denouement. There existed no words to describe that peculiarly powerful sensation. Numbed by satiety, George arose and walked outside.

The afternoon sun shone upon George's fair face—not handsome but seemingly just. The pallid complexion simply appeared as if it understood everything; his dark eyes stared beyond what many saw and his dark hair with grey streaks swooped down to his mellow eyebrows. Despite his worn, somber features, a rather radiant expression stretched across his face.

His dull, sullen eyes fell upon the derelict village. The village had adopted the motto: "With *prona*, one needs nothing." The closest to a fully erect house sat with a

slant, heralding its own collapse at any given moment. He gazed upon the spot where the village's water well had once stood. It had been replaced with a *prona* station—a massive metal tank that supplied the drug from underground. The station had multiple nozzles on the sides, with buttons to release the *prona* when desired. A few villagers laid down by the tank, with one of their hands positioning the nozzle into their mouths and the other pressing the button that released the *prona*. The rest had filled large containers and were drinking it in the remnants of their former homes. Such prosaic people, he thought.

George's walks were his sole habit that had not been overrun by the *prona*. As he headed to the forest, he ambled past many who were immersed by the drug. To them, *prona* was their water. George, who only took it once or twice a day, knew he was better off than they were—but by how much?

At last, he left the barely human ruins of his village and proceeded to the delicate green forest. The green trees emitted exquisiteness into the air—something besides *prona* in which George found near complete solace. He often would lose and find himself in these woods but he enjoyed every bit of it.

The tall trees towered towards the red sky. It seemed as if the world itself had bled. He longed for that azure sky, teeming with crisp clouds back in his childhood, but what could one withered man do? Even ripples can conceive tides, he thought in response. His entire past had vanished sometime after the introduction of *prona*, for *prona* caused a second to feel like an eternity and an eternity into a second. There were morsels of memories that managed to survive but few were clear. Though, sometimes—while walking—he was struck with sudden remembrances. Today was one of them.

George recalled that the village had once been a grand and glorious city. Towering houses scraped the cool skies and thousands of tiny houses on wheels drove down the spaces between these buildings, discharging dark clouds as they moved. In the midst of it all were the muffled voices and the constant clip clop as the crowd walked on the side. The city had shrank until it was the size of a small village. Landin, he believed, was the name.

George's legs soon tired, and he sat in the shade of a hulking tree. He suddenly caught sight of something heavily out of place. Reaching into bushes, he pulled out a curious-looking rectangular object. George had once seen something similar in his buried past: It was a hook—no—a book.

The book was battered beyond repair but still legible. In black, bold letters ran the title: *An Analysis of Prona*. Carefully, he opened to the first of its wrinkled pages. He beheld the neatness of the handwriting; the penmanship rivaled that of a computer. George jerked his body upwards at the word. Where had he heard “computer” before? He shook his head in an attempt to clear it and focused his mind back to the book. George began reading:

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Chapter I

The Purpose of Prona

Throughout recorded time, philosophers argued what made humans human, but most have agreed that mankind represent the triumph of intellect over instincts. Following the discovery of *prona*, humanity reverted itself to its animal stages. This potent potion caused men everywhere to be

addicted to this artificial stimulation. Three years after it was introduced, all of England set up *prona* stations to constantly and continuously supply the drug. As of the time of this writing (3 A.P.), there exists not a single person that is sober from the grasp of *prona*. Without a control group, it is more than difficult to determine the danger of the substance.

Because of this obvious lack of experimental truths, I took it upon myself to establish two theories. The first: *Prona* is pleasing for its hallucinogenic properties. Before the drug was discovered, there were the less potent hallucinogens, such as marijuana, used to escape cruel realities but they gave a low feeling equivalent to the high. With *prona*, there is no hangover. The second: When taken in, *prona* heavily releases a chemical in the brain known as dopamine, which...

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George stopped reading to absorb fully the meanings of the letters. It had been a perennial moment since he had last read. The words screamed at him as the dusty smell came onto his fingers. He caressed the thick scratches on the cool, smooth cover as he contemplated this complex object which unraveled itself to him.

Soon enough, nightfall arrived and George, still clutching the book, fell asleep under the providence of the tall trees. Morning came: He had finished reading the book. It sang of of *prona's* dangers yet had nothing on conquering it. He had always suspected *prona* was detrimental, but everyone around him took it, and they all seemed fine. Planning to spread this information, George headed back to the village.

George glared contemptuously at the *prona* machine. For too long have they been enslaved to it. Picking up a fallen brick, he ran towards it. The screech of jagged edges hitting the steel surface echoed throughout the village. As the brick made contact with the rusting steel, a dent was conceived. He raised his arm to assail it again, but a mob of furious villagers clustered near him, screaming at him to stop.

“Can’t you see that I’m trying to free you?” cried George.

“From what?” someone in the crowd shouted back.

“From yourselves!” George trumpeted with vehemence. “And from this poison!”

As he prepared to strike once more, the villagers, enraged at the assault on their deity, began to attack George—some with bricks, some with rocks, and some with their bare hands. Thanks to years of substance abuse, their bodies were frail and fragile, and thus they did not maim George—at least not physically.

George broke down. He battered himself with questions. What good is imposing freedom upon slaves who grew to love their chains? He sighed. He realized that it is not war but peace that shall bring upon the end of mankind. George’s entire body furtively quivered as his tremulous lips whispered: “I am a mere ripple caught in the great tide of the World; who am I to stop the waves?” He lost consciousness.

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George recovered from most of his injuries but he believed his limp would never heal. Everything regressed to normal: The dent remained on the machine, but it did not damage its function; the villagers returned to indulging in *prona*. George lay on his bed, weary of the world. On a small shelf beside him lay the book he had found. Hours seemed to pass until suddenly, he smelled burning wood. Tilting his head, George glanced out the window and saw the red sky swallowing the ground. He was puzzled at

the sight and squinted for a clearer view. The forest was on fire. The inferno spread through remains of the village and ultimately to his house. For the first time in years, his fireplace had fire. The carpet, the walls, and now the bed had all caught on fire as well. With the last of his strength, he grabbed the book and tossed it into the fireplace, wishing he had never found it. As the fires engulfed him, George took a sip from the *prona*.