

Zawad Chowdhury

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3 Ames Street

Cambridge, MA 02142

zawadx@mit.edu

Fiery Rocks, Diary Locks

It is Wednesday, my dudes!

And a Wednesday it has been! As you can see in the background, riiiiight here, we have a frickin asteroid in the sky coming down on us. And I'm gonna stream it all for you, all until that rock. drops. down. This livestream is brought to you by the end of the world, my dudes!

Yeah broskis, the city of Rochester is about to experience Armageddon! It's been 30 minutes since the news dropped, and I must say, we are soon going to be the top post on Reddit of all time. As you can hear, we have cars honking up and down the streets, everyone trying to get themselves and their grandma out of town A. S. A. P.! Announcements were a bit slow, now we got a shit show, cars in a big row, to drown in fire-snow.

Actually, I can see my neighbour Ram over there. Send your questions for my bro Ram in the chat everybody. Let's see what a member of the general public has to say about the big rock in the sky.

Yo, Ram! Care to share, about the pale mare, take the chair of doomsayer? What do you mean you gotta pick up your girlfriend? Come on, we're hitting 5M concurrent right now, that's even higher than the time I filled your pool with cream cheese and you got to swim in it. Tell him guys, let's remind Ram about the last time he got PRANKED!

Alright dudes, Ram's not gonna be joining us today. Or in the future, since his car is prolly dying on the side of the road as he stares up, mouth wide open, watching the sky engulfed by the flames of hell. The same flame, from the blame game, a dame's shame, which made him a big name.

Ok, we have a comment from xX_JaiLBreaK_Xx. Listen up broskis, this is gonna be real funny. He says, "What's the weather forecast like for the next hour?"

Well my dudes, the meteor men would've said we're gonna get a light shower of firey space rocks. But they've probably all left their offices to pick up their wives and kids from home. Or mistresses and dope, more likely. They've all left, my dudes. Even the delivery workers are kaput! I got some doms an hour ago, stocking up for the apocalypse and all that, and it's been stuck on a five minute ETA for the past 30 minutes! So yeah, don't think we're getting any forecasts soon. It's a desperate time, no respite for rhyme, no choral chime. Damn, I could go for some tequila and lime.

Woah, did you see that! The rock's splitting up there. It was all supposed to go into the lake, but it looks like we might have some downpour down south too.

Well broskis, no guarantees that it doesn't hit a line and take out all the internet,

y'know. In case I go off, don't forget to share the VOD of this important livestream with all your friends, and make sure to like and subsc-

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Ting!

Jay Rahman swiped the notification away automatically, faster than one could read the “25 minutes have passed: time for a short break!” accompanying the sound. She minimized the web series about corporations copyrighting the Names of God before looking up from her phone. One pomodoro on the way to work, and one pomodoro on the way back, was all the time she had for “light reading”.

The commuters on the 5:13pm 1 train were even more frantic than usual. Many people were listening intently to their phones, while others frantically typed off text after text. Jay, whose carrier did not provide coverage underground, had no inkling of what was going on beyond what sounded like “STATE ...GENCY” on the incomprehensible conductor radio.

Jay sighed, the force of the breath tumbling her brown curls. She considered whether it would be wiser to head straight home and hunker up for the storm (or whatever else had New York in a flurry). But the nights she spent volunteering at the library were the highlight of her week. The only hours she did not diligently track, because she knew she spent too much time there. And it was Tuesday too, and she would've gotten to help Roxy teach the kids...

The train screeched to a halt, forcing Jay to hug the support pole she had been holding on to. Before she could recover, people started pushing and rushing out past her. The radio blared “This train will not be continuing past this stop. Please exit the train and evacuate the station.”

I guess I'm not going home or to the library. Jay sighed again. *Hope Ariana makes it; she's coming the other way around.* She walked past signs saying “42nd Street”, up stairs that might get her cell signal. Messages and pings start streaming into her phone as she ascended.

Mom: Are you watching the news, sweetie?

Uncle Thomas: Jay, you should call your mother as soon as possible. She's very distressed at the airport.

Selena: Yooo check out this livestream this is so wiild

Mom: Jay, are you OK? Have you heard from TOMMY?

Levi: I can't believe the US military cannot detect a small asteroid impact more than an hour in advance. Is this what we're giving up universal healthcare for?

Ariana: You might want to skip the library and head straight home.

Mom: IT'S GONNA HIT ROCHESTER JAY. That's what the news said. PLEASE, IT'S GONNA HIT TOMMY. YOU HAVE TO GET HIM OUT.

Jay walked northwards, pushing past confused tourists and concerned locals alike. Her eyes kept darting through the 43 messages she'd received in the past

half an hour. By the time she'd finished reading all of them and started drafting a quick reply to her mom, she was in Times Square.

Every reprogrammable billboard (the few that hadn't already fixed up an ad schedule for the next 24 months) was playing the news, detailing the minor asteroid about to impact within a few miles of Rochester, NY. Jay looked up, following the thousands of others watching the shining screens. The reporter was telling how the residents have gone hysterical, as the camera switched from her face to one Jay hadn't seen in the eight months since Christmas.

"They've all left, my dudes!"

The giant screens of Times Square were all showing little Tommy. Of course, most people in the square knew him as Cyrien, rhythmic genius, lifestyle vlogger and prank TikTuber. But take away the straightened neon pink and blue hair, the three cartilage piercings, and six inches of height, and the person on-screen would look like a slightly prettier version of Jay.

The crowds streamed past Jay as she stood, breath held and fists clenched white. Several images streamed through her mind: a computer screen displaying the locked text document holding her deepest secrets. A video of her vomiting into a toilet bowl, on the phones of everyone in her high school. 27th December last year, a night she remembered only through a grainy camera.

If he dies right now, they'll hold memorial service for him. Hell, maybe even make up an "unreleased" studio album. Jay's eyes were wide. I've waited for eight months. For too long.

With a start, she looked away from the giant screens and sprinted off. A few eyes followed her, but most remained trained on billboards and phone screens; quite a few people out of the thousands in Time Square were sprinting. Jay found an alleyway besides a theatre where she could sit down and take her MacBook out. With trembling hands, she opened the statement she'd written, revised, rewritten and rerevised a hundred times in the past eight months. She copied the whole thing and pasted it into a new email, her eyes not reading a single word. She pulled up her list, of both serious journalists and internet icons, all with a flair for online drama. Her fingers felt numb as she typed the subject line. *I'm Cyrien's sister, and I have proof that he physically assaulted our mother.*

Jay sent off the email, packed up her laptop, and walked the 30 minutes it took to get to the Upper West Side. In her giddy relief, she forgot to look out for the shooting star that would mark the end of Rochester, NY.

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“Jay, are you in there?”

Jay murmured a sleepy reply as she rolled in her bed, ruffling up the blanket she'd slept on top of. Sunlight streamed into her room, having risen above the Manhattan high-rises to end on the bold blue, green, orange adorning her walls. Several screens glared through the bright light: a personal MacBook, a work MacBook, two Pro Displays accompanying a Mac Pro, and even an alpha version of the Apple AllScreen (most Apple engineers would not touch a Mac

outside the workplace, but Jay felt it was important to be using the products she was optimizing). The screens showed different social media sites, some with pictures of Tommy Rahman, others with clickbait titles. All the posts had the link to the video Jay had shared.

“I’m coming in Jay!”

Ariana opened the door, her head doing a disapproving shake as she saw Jay’s disheveled sleeping form. She gently prodded the sleeping engineer. “C’mon, don’t make me have to get the blanket from under you.”

Jay sat up, her eyes opening wide and doing a systematic scan of the screens before resting on Ariana’s straightened black hair, brown button nose and wrinkly blue scrubs. She blinked before squeaking, “I’m awake!”

“As I can see. Jay, you good, friend?”

“Mmhm, my sleep schedule’s just been pushed a little— Oh shit!” Jay had picked up her phone, whose screen said 10:39AM in big bold font.

“Jay, listen,” Ariana started, as Jay jumped out of bed and started snatching jeans and socks from the orange dresser. It was impeccably organized, so Jay had picked out a whole outfit by the time Ariana laid a hand on her shoulder and said, “It’s ok Jay. It’s Saturday.”

Jay froze for a second, before carefully placing the clothes back into their respective drawer on the dresser. She then turned towards Ariana, biting her lip as she looked up at the tall woman.

Ariana took a quick glance at the bright screens before speaking. “Why don’t we talk in my room?”

Ariana liked to call her room “The woods, but in New York”. She had gotten the perfect curtains for her windows, which transformed the harsh morning light into a dim golden glow. Her bed was held up by two ornate teak bookshelves, so that her books would always be “within arms reach at bedtime”. There was a rug, as soft as fresh-mown grass, on top of which lay a couch that you could just sink into.

Ariana and Jay sat down on the opposite ends of this couch. Ariana let Jay snuggle up to a sloth plushie (she had a throw blanket for herself) before she started, “I’m worried about you Jay.”

“I’m doing great Ria. The sleep thing... it’s just a small issue. Honestly, I’m wonderful! I mean, I’m going to be on CNN on Tuesday, isn’t that great?”

“I’m very happy for you.” Ariana smiled, deciding not to remind Jay about the library shift she’d be missing. “But aren’t you worried, that they’re just playing you for the story?”

“I appreciate your concern, Ria. You’re right, they want me for the story. And I’ll give it to them! I need to reach more people, build my platform.”

“Ok, and what will you do after you have the platform? Your video’s been watched 300 million times, Jay. That’s more people than there ever lived in Rochester in all of history, times a hundred.”

Jay played with the sloth's hands, folding one paw over the other, before responding. "I can help make the internet better. You know that, right, Ria?"

"You're the sweetest person I know," Ariana sighed, "but I don't think you alone can fix the internet, y'know? Plus, Jay, the sleep thing is not minor. You'd sleep for eight hours from 11-7 even during Spring Quarters at Stanford. You can't convince me that you being up when I left from my Friday 3am is normal!"

Jay set down the sloth on Ariana's end table. "Alright. It must be the blue light toggles on the AllScreen. Don't worry, I'll tweak it down. Can I go now?"

Ariana looked down at the sloth, now sitting next to her aardvark and axolotl plushies. She wanted to bring up the paparazzi swarming their apartment entrance, who she'd jostled through when she left for work at 2am and when she returned after a 30 hour shift. She considered discussing how they still hadn't found Tommy's body, because no matter how many troops you send it's impossible to recover two hundred thousand bodies in three days. But she knew Jay wouldn't care. And why should she? The world didn't care. Not for all those lives when there was some streamer's drama to fuss about.

"Just give a call to your mother, ok?" Ariana finally said. "She wants to talk to you."

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Jay swiped down from the top of her screen, causing a little circle to appear with a moving swirl.

She looked up for the few seconds it would take for her feed to refresh. She'd chosen a café to be the neutral location to meet her mother. It was quiet during Sunday afternoons, populated mostly by students typing away on their laptops. Nobody had recognized her. Yet.

Jay turned back to scrolling through her newly refreshed feed. The engagement on her posts had died down in the past couple of days, since it'd been over a week since her one and only TV interview. But she still had several comments to reply to.

“Jaya, you’ve become as thin as a skeleton!”

Jay’s mother was even shorter than her. She was wearing a dark grey burqa, covering her body with intricately patterned fabric from head to toe. The burqa only revealed her round face, with its dark brown eyes and pretty features. Tommy’s features.

“How are you mother?” Jay ignored the usual jab at her appearance.

“Doing alright, doing alright.” Her mother took the seat across from her.

“Managed to finish up all that government and insurance business.”

I suppose you can prove that a house was on fire, even if nobody alive saw it burn. Jay mused. *Though you certainly don’t need the money from your third house, mother dearest.* “What did you want to meet me about?”

“Always running to the point, aren’t you?” Jay’s mother stared for a while at Jay. “They’ve found his body. Finally. The funeral’s on Friday. You should come, and stay at least till the forty day mourning period.”

“Really?” Jay stood up, ready to charge out. “You want me to mourn him for forty days, after all that?”

“Sit down, Jaya.” Her mother was low, so that others could not overhear, but stern. “Of course you must mourn him. He’s your brother.”

“He’s no brother of mine! After what he did to you—”

“Jaya, stop shouting!” Her mother implored. “You’ve got some nerve.”

“You can’t boss me around, mom, I’m not fifteen anymore.”

People were looking up from their laptops now. Jay’s mother looked around, eyes wide and lips parted, before grabbing her hand. “Please, sit down, I beg you to not make another scene. I don’t want you to get recognized.”

Jay scoffed, but sat down on her chair.

Her mother shook her head. “You know, I don’t get it, Jaya. Why did you have to release that video?”

“I was trying to help you. To protect you.”

“By sharing with the whole world that I was a failure of a mother? Did you really think that’s what I wanted?”

“I had to get justice, mother! What Tommy did was unforgiveable.”

“Only Allah can demand justice for the dead, Jaya.” Jay noticed the tears welling up in her mother’s eyes. “I lost my son on the day of the Lord’s wrath. Please don’t let me lose my daughter too.”

Jay looked down on her phone, where her latest post was open. 102 likes, 13 comments. Of which 7 were catcalls, and 4 was banter with Ariana. She knew her meagre social media fame would not survive a visit to her nemesis’s funeral.

“Ok, I’ll come on Friday.” Jay looked up. “But I’m not staying after. No!” She reacted as her mother opened her mouth. “I can’t drive to Manhattan from Long Island every day, mom. I have a job here. Those screens won’t optimize themselves.”

Her mother gave her a slight smile, though the tears still streamed from her eyes. Jay couldn’t bear to see her crying, so she turned away to the news playing on the TV placed right above the barista. There was no headline about her or Tommy, or any of the thousands in Rochester. They were too busy talking about the 33 year old oil heir who would be the next billionaire going to space.