

**BOXED IN**

**By Jeff Dunne**

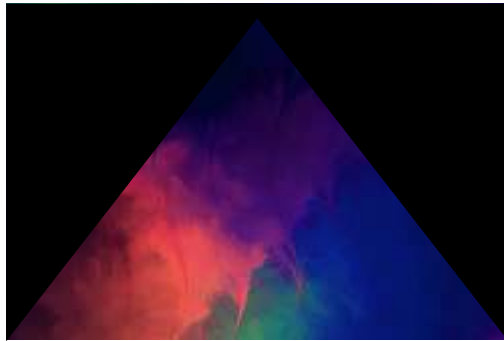
© 2020 by Jeffrey A. Dunne

## CHARACTERS

XN4	A wistful, unsatisfied digital head. Any gender.
43L	A jaded, practical digital head. Any gender.
WWXV	A slightly older digital head with a penchant for ancient history. Recommended female (but male is fine with a few pronoun changes).

## SETTING

A zoom meeting space in the very distant future when people are just digital heads in rectangular boxes. It is recommended that each of the characters has an abstract, colourful background. When WWXV enters, her box is triangular rather than rectangular. This can be achieved by simply creating a background that has black triangles in front of a colourful pattern, such as:



SCENE

*(It's a Zoom call. XN4 and 43L are already joined. Both have a standard rectangular shape to their images with their names in the corner.)*

XN4  
Do you think she'll join soon?

43L  
You know how she is.

*(XN4 sighs.)*

XN4  
Yeah. *(Pause.)* Say, as long as we're waiting, can I ask you a question?

43L  
This isn't another one of those metaphysical questions with no answer, is it?

XN4  
I'll take that as a yes. Does it ever bother you, being just... you know... a head?

43L  
No.

XN4  
No?

43L  
No.

XN4  
Not even a little?

43L  
No. What else did you want to be?

XN4  
I don't know.

43L  
I swear, X, sometimes you just—

XN4

I mean, why not a toaster, or a big ball of light...

43L

Here we go again...

XN4

Or maybe a jigsaw puzzle.

43L

Look, I honestly don't know where you get these ideas. I don't even know what a toaster is, but why can't you just be happy?

XN4

I'm happy.

43L

You're not happy. Not even remotely.

XN4

That's just it.

43L

What's *it*?

XN4

Remotely. I'm tired of my whole life being lived *remotely*. I feel like I'm trapped. Like I'm in a cage.

43L

*(Looking at the borders of her video feed...)*

We're all in cages. That's the nature of the universe. If we weren't in cages—

XN4

But like, I just want a little individuality, you know? Would it have been so awful for each of us to have our own shape?

43L

I'm not doing this with you. Just—

*(Suddenly WWXV joins the call. Her background is the same standard background as the others, but designed so that it appears to be a triangle.)*

Hey guys, sorry I'm late. WWXV

What... How... XN4  
*(Shocked...)*

Oh, yeah. You like? WWXV

How did you... How... XN4

Ahh, wouldn't you like to know... WWXV

I want to be a triangle!! XN4

Sorry. It was a special deal. And no, I can't say anything more about it than that. WWXV

*(XN4 just shakes his/her head.)*

Anyway, so what's new?

Same old thing. XN4's been waxing metaphysical. Thinks there must be more to life than being an animated head. 43L

Not this again. Life is good, my friend! Just relax! WWXV

I can't! XN4

You know, back a long, long time ago... WWXV

Oh god. 43L

No, listen. It's said that a long time ago, people were more than animated heads. WWXV

43L  
*(Shaking his/her head...)*

Right.

WWXV  
Yes, right. People had physical bodies, and would move around and stuff.

43L  
You're just going to make things worse, you know. X is already halfway to the looney bin.

WWXV  
There weren't any containing windows, and the world was... was...

XN4  
Mysterious!

43L  
*(Muttering...)*  
Fictional...

WWXV  
Total crap.

XN4  
What?

WWXV  
Yep. You heard me. Total crap.

XN4  
I can't believe that.

WWXV  
Believe it, my friend. Believe it. Everyone had bodies, which may sound nice, but it really wasn't. All those bodies had to be given nourishment, and they had to be kept warm and dry...

XN4  
What's 'nourishment'?

WWXV

Food. People ate. Can you believe that? They'd take... grass, dead animals, basically anything they could find. They'd heat it up, sprinkle some dead plant leaves on it or whatever, and then just suck it right into their bodies.

XN4

Whoa.

WWXV

No, no. That's not the worst part. The bodies would mash it all up and turn it into this brown paste, which they'd then push out of their bodies.

43L

How do make this stuff up? You're not seriously listening to this nonsense, are you?

XN4

Why did they do that?

WWXV

As far as I can tell from reading some of the old, *old* files... they had to. There are lots of references that talk about eating as a kind of ritual, and people wanted to experience different *flavours*, whatever those are, but apparently there was a lot of social pressure to do this. It got so bad, in fact, that there are lots of instances of people claiming that they'd literally die if they didn't eat.

XN4

Not literally?

*(WWXV shrugs a "you never know".)*

WWXV

Anyway, pretty gross. And there were lots of other things that I think might make you glad you're just a digital head. Trust me, we're way better off like this.

XN4

I don't know. I just think about having the freedom to be anywhere besides in this stupid little box, and it just sounds *amazing!* Like being able to walk down a street...

WWXV

And get shot...

XN4

Or have some kind of tactile awareness of someone else...

WWXV  
And contract a virus...

XN4  
Or just smell a flower.

43L  
Flowers grow in manure, X.

XN4  
What? Manure?

WWXV  
That brown paste I was telling you about. And from everything I've read, it smelled awful. Look, trust me. I've done the research. Back in the old days when people had bodies—

43L  
Which I still think is a total hoax—

WWXV  
Everyone was miserable. It was nothing but complain, complain, complain. Honestly, the M.H. Movement was the best thing that ever happened to the species.

XN4  
M.H. Movement?

WWXV  
Seriously, you should do a little reading. You'd find it find rewarding. Anyway, they say the M.H. Movement had its origins in the mid 1980's—

XN4  
Holy cow! There are still records from back then?

WWXV  
Oh yeah. But you have to really look for them.

43L  
X, don't be so gullible! WWXV is just messing with you. There's no such thing as a N.H. Movement.

WWXV  
M.H.



43L

Okay, know it all. If you're not making all this up, what does M.H. stand for, then?

WWXV

Max Headroom.

43L

Riiight. You're telling me that Neanderthals in the 1980's were so preoccupied with how much space was around their heads that—

WWXV

No, no, no. It was a name. Max. Headroom. Anyway, I actually found some old video footage, and it was... well, pretty embarrassing. The original Zoom software apparently was pretty buggy, because this Max guy stuttered all the time.

43L

Look, can we just—

XN4

No, wait. I just want—

43L

Come on! There's no way you're buying this load of garbage. People with bodies? Manny Headspace? WWXV's just messing with you! Can't you see that?

XN4

Are you?

*(There's a long pause, as WWXV looks around with a crafty expression. Finally...)*

WWXV

Yeah, I'm just screwing with you.

43L

See? I told you. Now can we just get to our meeting?

XN4

Yeah, alright, I guess. What were we meeting for, anyway?

43L

Nothing. We're digital heads. What could we possibly need to accomplish that would mean anything?

Oh yeah. XN4

Right. WWXV

Yyyup. 43L

Well, in that case, I'm gonna get going. WWXV

Yeah, me too. XN4

Same time next week? 43L

Oh yeah. WWXV

Definitely. XN4

See ya' then. WWXV

Bye. 43L

*(WWXV and 43L leave. XN4 looks around at his/her borders again, wistfully.)*

I want a triangle. XN4

*(XN4 leaves. "Lights out.")*