



Abominable Corporeality: A Discourse on Reptilians and Hybrids in "Rakka" and "Firebase"

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Abstract: My paper aspires for an extensive understanding of the non-human Sauropsids and sinister forms of hybrids in the independently made miniseries *Oats Studios* (2017) that anticipate the predicament of humankind. Manifestations of aberrant births, infested anatomies, corrupted flesh, and deviant incarnations permeate the narrative fabric of Sci-Fi Horror, launching controversial challenges against mainstream ideas of the normative and the universal. The traditional body is strained by the machinic and medical dominations alienating the organism from its natural biology. The body becomes a performative site of endless scrutiny, revision and transmutation. Consequently, monstrous creations proliferate disentangled from the fetters of the human, the established and the ordinary. The episodes titled "Rakka" and "Firebase" evoke an apocalyptic vision of an oppressed earth, infested with menacing spectres of other-worldly presences, a symbol of cosmic horror. In the post-alien invasion world of "Rakka", horror emerges from the corporeal physiognomy of the predatory crocodiles and the half human half machines who have upended the very core of creation. The combat soldiers encounter a primitive river god- a vengeful anthropomorphic dragon - appearing from earth's interior in the "Firebase" of the Vietnam War. Combining raw bestiality with atavistic fear, it offers a profound utterance on the terrors of the flesh. In both the episodes, contemporary allusions to growing militancy, neocolonialism and ecological degradation are obvious. Furthermore, the paper shall attempt to grasp how the concept of body horror in mass culture exhibits the biological anxieties and socio-cultural corruptions of the contemporary world through repugnant exaggerations.

Keywords: human, technology, body horror, hybrid, cyborg

Body horror

As a sub-genre category of cinematic horror, "Body Horror" has been traditionally associated with the depraved and the deranged. Undermining the moral and the ethical, it has provoked the audience with audio-visuals on bodily differences that are jarring to human aesthetics and sensibilities, evoking revulsion and fear. Through a heavy reliance on crude physicality, body horror invades the normal and the biological with unnatural forms of desecrations, flourishing from "acceptable" forms of torture and psycho-sexual aggression to unspeakable and unbearable perversions. Yet perceiving body transformations as merely catering to commercial pleasures and sensory thrills is a naïve oversimplification. Acute paranoia over the body and species survival has been one of the major hallmarks of the genre. Despite being relegated to the fringes by film critics



and sophisticated cinematic circles, corporal terror fascinates the audience, liberating their warped appetites and twisted desires otherwise contained and suppressed by the iron bars of social regimentation. Strong depictions of mutilation, disintegration, decomposition, deformation, infection and disease, cannibalism, excretion, transplants and the macabre annihilate the venerated notion of the unified coded body and is substituted by damaged ones as well as revolting hybrids. Furthermore, the degeneration of the flesh encapsulates human refuse and waste- anxieties over human identity, integrity, and corporal perfectibility illustrates the vulnerability of humankind as well as the social and spiritual bankruptcy in a dying world.

Aliens

“We were once mankind. We were humanity. And now, we’re no more than pests, vermin. They came here to exterminate us.”

"Rakka", Neill Blomkamp

That life exists beyond the perimeters of the familiar earth complicates human belief systems. As a symbol of increased isolation of mankind, the figure of the alien has repeatedly piqued human imagination and gripped our creative processes. The extraterrestrial scholarship offers an intriguingly powerful alternative history where non-human intelligences permeate and problematise human civilization. Viewed within the culture of difference, remoteness and even hostility, alien representation in popular culture interrogates the lived reality with a strategic confrontation with the non-human other, generating dread, fright and terror. Evolving out of the earlier disproportionate, aesthetically unappealing comic stereotypes, also sometimes benevolent, the twentieth century humanoids and hybrids have not only undergone a distinctive shift in terms of visual morphology but have also acquired exotic threatening dimensions as a profound comment on the human predicament. The alien is born out of “19th century race theory and politics” and has become exceptionally crude and invasive following World War II (Seed 28). Political and cultural tensions around the Great Wars, rise of US as a global superpower, and rivalry between USSR-USA have fed into the modern alien figure that is more animalistic, barbaric, and largely characterised by a lust for seizure. Subverting the popular notion of humanist exploration of the other planets and the unknown spaces, the modern alien arrives on the earth demanding conformity. Their multifold agendas- to conquer, displace and subjugate the humans.

The extensive presence of colossal reptiles in cultural and theological texts, as corruptors and healers, has initiated cross-species interaction. The Biblical Serpent, the Sumerian snake brotherhood, the serpent worship cult of Africa and native America, the lizard deities of ancient Greece and the Nagas in Asian mythology enrich the reptilian ancestry.¹ From scientific theories and planetary explorations to David Icke’s sensational Reptilian Conspiracy Theory extending up to the Coronavirus as a reptilian ploy to erase weaker humans, from the occult and esotericism of the nineteenth century to the Venusian humanoid lizards of Lovecraft and Sterling’s Pulp Sciences to pop cultural fantasies in SF films, TV series and video games to ‘rumours’ around sightings of alien



crafts and human abductions in the United States, the reptilian icon was revived in the twentieth century. In a historic moment of big revelation in July 2023, former US combat officials David Gruscher, Ryan Graves and David Fraver confirmed before the Congress that the US government has been conducting a multi-decade long hidden UFO program, arousing grave security concerns.

Inspired by the recent surfacing of the classified CIA files including war crimes and UFO technology, Neil Blomkamp's "Rakka" and "Firebase" form political allegories on the US -led democratic and humanitarian transgressions of the world. Additionally, by adopting the military narrative template, Blomkamp threads together dystopian planetary speculations where humanity is at the crossroads of an unprecedented crisis. Repulsive forms of corporeality explore anguish over the self and our existence in its entirety. The reptilian cryptids in the indie- Science Fiction project possess a diverse range of threats through their mysterious pervasiveness and omniscience; they are determined to take humans down to the level of extinction, erase human history and transform the blueprint of the familiar earth. Demarcated from the "primitive" humans, the new hybrids are superior presences, technologically and psychologically evolved but grotesque products of racial profiling, violence, trauma and alienation.

"Rakka"

Cast in the image of the Egyptian crocodile Sobek (Roberts 147), the aggressive militant deity, the 'Klums' in the post-alien invasion world of "Rakka" have invaded the futuristic Texas in 2020, which has been reduced to the ideal state of suppression. They enter the city through the lakes of Hell analogous to the history of seafaring and White "philanthropy" ("From George Washington to Lafayette, 15 August 1786") beginning with the launch of the mighty US armada in the 1790s to the strategic integration of the US Navy and the US Marine Corps battleships in the twenty first century. The despotic alien colony corresponds with contemporary US global schemes for geopolitical domination over the world's resources. The neoimperialist hunt for gas and oil, war atrocities, rampant racism, anti-immigration, and refugee policies permeate through Blomkamp's invasion tale. Presented as advanced cognitive beings, they have burned down the megapolis and colonised mankind in an imaginative refashioning of native American slavery and the controversial CIA Black Sites in the Middle East and Asia.

Divided into three chapters, "Rakka" opens amidst the cataclysmic decline of humanity. Their arrival is marked by an extremely hostile atmosphere caused by rise in global temperature, floods and horrific wildfires, unconducive to human survival. They have destroyed the forests, injected toxic methane into the air, built their own megastructures and ravaged the terrestrial and the aquatic ecosystems. Indicative of the widespread geological disruption in the Anthropocene, the narrator mentions, "It's already hard to breathe" ("Rakka" 01:54-01:56). The 'Klum' militia have blown up the great cities, crumbled the inhabitants, manufactured their own atmosphere and transformed the habitable earth suited to their ideal survival. Obliterating the magnificence of human history, they have covered all landmarks in "dying humanity" ("Rakka" 00:59-1:00), brilliantly demonstrated by the gory image of the Eiffel Tower wrapped in rotten human flesh and ravenous birds hovering in



the sky. Afflicted with multiple waves of genocide and brutal incarceration, the city has metamorphosed into a veritable necropolis. Reduced to the levels of “rats” and “insects” the survivors are flogged to servile obedience and their brains dissected for medical experiments, while a few others are disgraced by their anonymous hiding. Imprisoned within the grotesque breeding tubes, the human victims are diminished to their reproductive irrelevance. As champions of biotechnology “they’re building breeding facilities for those that survive...humans becoming some kind of surrogate incubators for the alien young” (“*Rakka*” 01:08-01:18), resonating with revolutionary breakthroughs in lab-forged life systems and genetically modified embryos and babies. The ‘Klums’ are telekinetic simulators that can hack into the human brain and dumb it down while the “brain barriers” created by the Resistance group to block intrusion and mind-paralysis are of inadequate supply. The political intrigues and deceptions of the lawmakers and the public representatives are indicated when the narrator remarks, “We’re sold a different story by our politicians- ‘Come with us. Do not be afraid! They want what’s best for us. They have built a conservatory for us. Paradise!’” (“*Rakka*” 04:14-04:30).

In the following chapters, the survivors, as ghettoised human forces, feebly attempt to resist the calamity fighting off indiscriminate butchery, dwindling food resources, incompatible technology and depleting arsenal. The Resistance is compelled to give away some of its sick and dying people to be baited by Nosh, a “pyromaniac”, “bomb-maker” and matchless inventor of ammunition from heaps of scavenged junk, implying that the morally ethical scales are consciously disbanded during moments of extreme desperation. The audience is introduced to a deformed male refugee, Amir, with a series of metallic devices, electric cables and chips protruding from his ruptured scalp and extending up to his shoulder. A victim of the Klum experimentation on the human brain, Amir is a human discard whose head has been partially ripped open, evoking one of the most repugnant images in the series, a case of biological horror. Yet he must commit to the rebel forces to frustrate a successful alien ascension and preserve the human race.

Brigid Cherry informs that “Body horror, splatter and gore films (including postmodern zombies)” comprises “Films that explore abjection and disgust of the human body, often involving mutation, disease, or aberrant and fetishist behaviour (for example cannibalism or sado-masochism) (6). She illustrates how physical horror, in a fringe storytelling mode, magnifies the socio-cultural apprehensions generating intended emotional and psychological disturbances in the viewers. As a genre, it appears to be “more flexible and adaptable in its encompassing of the cultural moment, giving scope for filmmakers to encode changing socio-cultural concerns with ease... issues such as social upheaval, anxieties about natural and manmade disasters, conflicts and wars, crime and violence can all contribute to the genre’s continuation” (Cherry 11).

The expression of the abject in body horror invokes mankind’s own unease about biological and cognitive disintegration associated with illness and ageing. The ‘Klums’ as ideal creators and the hostages as flawless hybrids embody the abject, disrupt established notions of identity and propriety, and complicates the accepted definitions of ability and disability. A fusion of the organic with the machines, ‘Klums’ are post-language, post-gender cybernetic dictators, vivifying modern techno-based intoxication, ecstasy and a transhumanist enhancement of the body. Visually, the ‘Klums’ resemble gigantic bipedal crocodiles freed from the constraints of biological procreation; sharp fangs



and forked tongues adorn their oral cavity. Fully sentient in nature, they form a robust legion of alpha species armed with heavy artillery. Nourished with an all-pervasive technology that ascribes to biogenetic modification and artificial intelligence, they have wrecked the fecund womb and cracked open the human brain. As expert geneticists and master vivisectionists, the 'Klums' degrade human mind and body and alter their organic constitution through scientific accuracy. The rectification of the ordinary figures problematises ownership of one's own bodies, separating the real from the ideal, coercively melded with engineered antibodies. The failed human bodies are brought under medical scrutiny and preserved through correction as objects of regulation, control and painful experimentation.

Exposed to extraterrestrial inventiveness, the humans undergo explicit transformations to become the "perfect" body, an emblem of the Klums' glorious triumph. Toying notoriously with reproduction, they carry out terrifying acts of interbreeding and cloning, and continue to test on the human captives by forging mechanical wombs which could be an indication that the 'Klums' have lost their ability to naturally procreate. Obsessed with the idea of creation, they simulate the archaic monster-mother prototype devoted to the continuation of alien species; as super-creators they are also the annihilators of the human race. This idea is further heightened when they form new beings of unnatural unions, blessed and/or punished by total mind control (the politician) and extraordinary consciousness (Amir). Wary of the "irresistible force of technological determinism" N. Katherine Hayles anticipates how "coming conflicts will be decided not so much by overwhelming force as by 'neocortical warfare' waged through the techno-sciences of information" (277). Amir is a non-biological upgrade, a cyborg of violent creation who endures the agony of a hideous rebirth. As a cross-pollinated duplicate his body of flesh is replaced with endless cybernetic circuits. Subverting the Christian idea of resurrection and renewal, Amir is the specimen of gradual human disembodiment and paraplegia. Technologically augmented to the point of dehumanisation, he and the unnamed politician are robotic hybrids, crudely syncretic manifestations of machine-based intelligence's forceful intrusion into the natural body. Donna Haraway famously theorised the cyborg to propose a non-dualistic genderless society and observed, "In short, we are cyborgs. The cyborg is our ontology; it gives our politics. The cyborg is a condensed image of both imagination and material reality, the two joined centres structuring any possibility of historical transformation" (289). Nonetheless, carefully embedded in her cyborg hypothesis are the shocks of techno-possibilities that have already begun to rearrange the world through "scary new networks" of simulation, global AI, machine learning, and inorganic enhancements, that she labels as the "Informatics of Domination" (303-304). All these reflect the dangerous controlling strategies of a corporatised super-economy and prediction of a dark future where humans will be enslaved by technology.

The 'Klums' can also be interpreted as pre-human predatory ancestors, aggressive towering divinities who have emerged from the deepest aquatic craters to reclaim earth, an echo of Len Kasten's speculations in his ambitious *Alien World Order: The Reptilian Plan to Divide and Conquer the Human Race*². He points out, "As the first race to occupy the Earth, the Reptilians considered it their planet. There were no humans on Earth for hundreds of thousands of years" (n.p). Seemingly inspired from Plato's fictional naval empire of Atlantis, Bacon's "New Atlantis" utopia and Madame Blavatsky's pseudoscientific treatise on the sunken Lemuria and the heroic Atlanteans, Kasten notes how the reptilian colonisation of Lemuria on earth caused the human Atlans to bombard the



continent and push the beasts under the bottomless depths of the Pacific Ocean. The victorious humans obliterated the reptilian histories and replaced them with the glories of human accomplishments, though the vanquished have repeatedly bonded with humans through abductions, shape shifting and hybridization in an attempt to besiege the universe. "Rakka" begins exactly at this point of a sweeping Draconian assault and destruction of the human species. As a political symbol, the reptiles could be studied as disguised human elites who have dominated the history of civilization. In the October 31, 2013 issue of the American magazine 'The Atlantic', political columnist Philip Bump writes, "As 12 million Americans 'know' the United States government is run by lizard people (or, to be scientifically accurate, *reptilians*). But they never said *which* members of the government are the reptilians" ("How to Spot the Reptilians Running the U.S. Government"). A casual web-search with the keywords "Reptilians and US government" yields a shocking number of "about 2,33,00,000 results". The cult of the Reptilian shape-shifters has become a cultural icon embodying government evils, growing gun violence, soaring privatisation, debates around socio-economic and environmental justice, state-funded ultranationalism, and techno-invasion of individual privacy and other forms of exploitation in America. SF authors like H.G. Wells, Aldous Huxley and Margaret Atwood among others have repeatedly associated the menacing future of a nightmarish world with the USA, headed towards a totalitarian regime with a systematic conservation of the privileged (Seed 79).

"Firebase"

The jungle thriller "Firebase" is a compelling parable of the 1969 Vietnam war crimes, a brutal ethno-political conflict that pervades American war-memory and literature. H. Bruce Franklin's pathbreaking essay titled 'The Vietnam War as American SF and Fantasy' remarks, "America's war in Indochina cannot be dissociated from American SF, which shaped and was reshaped by the nation's encounter with Vietnam... For American SF very explicitly defined the war, which unalterably redefined American SF" (341). As a fervent critic of the Vietnam War, Noam Chomsky has studied the American atrocities as a grave legal violation aimed at the carnage of the Communist forces and the dismantling of the North Vietnamese rural economy. For him the US involvement was "a murderous repression" that involved the "US forces in counterinsurgency, bombing, and "population control. By 1964 it was obvious that there was no political base for US intervention" (Chomsky 1-2). "Firebase" opens at the height of the war with the graphic exhibit of a mangled Viet-Cong rebel, executed and exposed to slow decomposition by the specialised capture-torture agency of the CIA's Phoenix Program. Within *Firebase* Tarheel the Vietnamese captives are stripped off and hot liquid is poured over their half-naked bodies. Surreptitiously operating to neutralise the North Vietnam forces, the covert missions of the belligerent MACV-SOG multi-force have led to outrageous massacre. The Vietnamese An Gian Province is a gritty metaphor for war-machinery conveying the psycho-somatic impact of war on the soldiers and the civilians. Major Brickerson confirms massive air-strikes being carried on to foil Vietnamese ambush: "We lit the jungle on fire and we burned everything" ("*Firebase*" 09:04-09:08). The raw footage of aerial shots of napalm explosions is a haunting reflection of war journalist Nick Ut's photograph of a "naked South Vietnamese child just sprayed by American napalm, running down a highway toward the camera, her arms open,



screaming in pain” (Butler92). The Vietnamese forests remain strewn with morphed human corpses from untellable attacks. Something inexplicable terrorises the American troops. The reinforcements arrive as “monsters in the shape of men. They wouldn’t die, not by shooting them” (“*Firebase*” 08:36-08:44). The river god is a diabolical entity that torments its victims by paranormal levitation of the deceased and the military vehicles rendering humans and their technologies impotent. The “Omega Event” has claimed “15,212 FATALITIES. 2124 VEHICLES” (“*Firebase*” 02:15-02:18). As Tarheel mysteriously disappears, Sergeant Hines, in his quest to gun down the abominable beast, meets its sole survivor for his testimony, the only casualty who can still talk. In the field hospital bed, Corporal Bracken is a maimed and immobilised meat lump crushed by his gruesome experience with and memory of the fire-spitting alien; giant burns have wrecked his body. Amidst Hines’s relentless pursuits, the mysterious brute rages on, eludes and disorients its enemy through teleportation and resurrection. The CIA, on the other hand, clandestinely eliminates all the dead bodies, covers up the statement and enlists Bracken as a person “missing in action”. “*Firebase* Tarheel never existed” (“*Firebase*” 16:40-16:44).

Sensory and stylistic shockwaves permeate through the antibodies invoking strong sensations of body horror. “*Firebase*” elicits the aesthetics (or the lack thereof) of body mutation explored through hideous disfigurement, behavioural abomination and despicable enhancements. An element of scarification infiltrates through explicit close-ups opening up the limitations coded by the normal body- the slashed bodies, the nefarious undead, a mutilated Bracken, and an ungodly savage sully the narrative frame. The body graphically transmutes into a wasteful dumpyard as necrotic violence disregards the corporeal boundaries and eventually threatens selfhood and identity. Caught between the flesh and the spectral, the privileges of the coded human body are lost in the maze of bodiless corporeality.

Scary body modifications encoat the military base of Tarheel. The viewer is steeped into the horrors of war as s/he witnesses documentary clips of actual battlegrounds strewn with corpses. Visual gore emanates from outlandish cases of transmogrification- the putrid bodies of the fallen soldiers have been gutted out and ripped open at the jaws; their bodies are charred and the skin has metamorphosed into a hard crusty texture. The necromantic god inflicts an odd disease that transforms the corporeal. Anatomical disfigurement haunts the viewers as spider and cockroach-like features form underneath the skin of the corpses. Touched by an unnatural birth, the dead have risen as reanimated zombie figures, immune to bullets and grenades. The American Zombie is itself a solitary figure, a socio-political victim, and a walking personification of First World machinations, indigenous exploitation, accelerated consumerism and techno-capitalism. The god can assume control over human bodies and summon a Zombie apocalypse: “He is raising the dead up. Like ghosts. He’s making their insides...like hard...like a cockroach. They look like spiders or something” (“*Firebase*” 15:40-16:00). Bracken’s traumatic contact with the blazing deity leaves the young man distorted.: “And I just seen him there looking at me. The river god. He was looking right at me. And I never felt anything like that... Soldiers burning. Like Hell!” (“*Firebase*” 12:20-14:10). Here war and madness are entwined with one another. Bracken is a battered residue; his psychic and physical degradation is a commentary on the violent consequences of war. His skin has melted and scalded, peeled off at places and precariously hanging from the skull, his eye is ruined and pressed into the



socket exposing the bones underneath. Caught in a time warp and bombarded with multiple realities, he is unsure if his recollection is factual, a nightmare or a mere hallucination.

Within the "Firebase" of the Vietnam-Cambodia border, the river god is an unstoppable metahuman, a living dead filled with suppressed rage who plagues the Mekong: "Invisibility, telepathy. As a god walking the earth. His mind is set free" (*"Firebase"* 23:08-23:20). The alien god was an aggrieved innocent Vietnamese villager who lost his family to the American slaughter and is now rendered dehumanised by the war. As he holds his dead wife within his arms his skin begins to peel away, his mouth forms a gaping hole and is supernaturally transformed with powers of invincibility, super-cognition and telekinesis like the 'Klums'. Once a mortal man, he is now a natural and cosmic anomaly, a necromantic freak who rips apart his human victims indiscriminately. As violence breeds violence, the demigod represents the exploited, the invisible and the marginalised now turned on with unbelievable barbarity. An immortal anthropoid, it stands for prolonged human interference with nature. The decade-long bombings and spraying of Agent Orange and Agent Blue during the Vietnam War destroyed the forests and the farms, and polluted the air and water of Indochina, rendering the civilians disabled, homeless and hungry for several years. Adhering to the lost island hypothesis, the god is aqua-born like the 'Klums' and is revered by the North Vietnamese as a fierce guardian and custodian against the US filth. As an antithesis, the river god is both a preserver and destroyer.

The river god is a supernatural conglomerate of the half human half beasts such as Egyptian Hapi and Sobek gods of Nile, the Celtic Druids, Underwater Cthulhu, the Zambesi snake spirit, the mysterious Vietnamese god "Hà Bá, and the Cambodian Khmer Nagas. However, it mostly resembles the mythical hybrid cryptid, the Phaya Nagas of river Mekong, portrayed as the divine protectors of marine culture, the forests and the people who depend on nature for sustenance. The Naga takes the form of a fierce fire-breathing ginormous reptile with fangs and horns in the South-East Asian cultures³. Morphologically, the river god is closely associated with snake worshippers predominating in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. As a dark deity, it is death incarnate, an inevitable fiendish dragon-human hybrid who rampages through the fortified defence and punctures American invincibility. Its awakening is provoked by Western encroachments, a tangible example of bio-horror. The audience is an equal participant with Bracken in the affective torture that astonishes them, suspends their notions of reality and de-stabilizes their perception. The mutant tormentor advances with coordinated locomotion. It is an unearthly being, "a devil", who fills the onlooker with a deep sense of awe; it is wondrous and repulsive, arresting yet accursed, elusive, (in)organic and ephemeral all at once.

The initial appearance of the burning god is a startlingly riveting experience for the audience, both within the screen as well as for those outside of it. Major Brickerson asserts, "And there he was, just standing there...not running, no pain, invisible, except for the napalm just sticking to him. Something I'll never be able to explain. It just doesn't make sense" (*"Firebase"* 09:18-09:36). Torn apart by tremendous physical agony, the gothic spectre is perpetually on fire from the inflammable napalm dropped by the American warcrafts. Infused with supernatural animatronics the deity transmits its own pain onto the US fighters through brutal dismemberment and fearful incineration. Defiant of scientific taxonomy and everything that is natural and sacrosanct, it is perfectly capable of constant



reinvention and can clothe itself in a flesh armour. Tracing the horror-cinema heritage Robert Spadoni accurately points out that the unorthodox body is a site of othering and interrogation, associated with heightened unease and agitation “a countercurrent of sensations ran underneath the exclamations of realism. In particular, something seemed to be wrong with the status of the human figure on sound film. This figure could seem ghostly –or uncanny...” (6). The river deity can be interpreted as a cinematic uncanny⁴ that violates the strictly compartmentalised categories of existence. As an anomaly it lives on as queer hybrid, an apparition stocked on firm bones, simultaneously corpsed and alive, its body defiled by countless trauma and militaristic wickedness.

The monster archetype in popular culture is a detriment that invades the human species. It embodies investigative challenges to the workings of the world systems and inspires awareness against audacious endeavours and human malevolence. In her chapter on ‘Bio-Terror’, Priscilla Wald observes how the aberrant body in new media becomes an agent of human annihilation: “Biohorror proliferated in the years following World War II, fuelled by the increasing circulation and popularity of both epidemiological detective stories... and horror fiction and films. Toward the end of the twentieth century, a noticeable shift in biohorror stories marked a heightening attention to terrorism, especially in the United States” (100). Biological warfare program and weaponising of bio-agents had been officiated by US President Franklin Roosevelt, and secret research went on involving a new kind of horror. Anthropologist Jeanne Guillemin’s medical oeuvre inspects the abuses of bioscience and makes astounding revelations about the political-patriotic motives of the global superpowers. Raising ethical questions surrounding dangerous US bioweapons programs and mass killing during the Vietnam War she informs:

During these years, scores of biologists and physicians covertly used their skills for military purposes with virtually no oversight or high-level review, either within the military or other agencies or by Congress. The programme’s experiments included nearly a decade of tularaemia research on volunteer Seventh Day Adventist servicemen, who were exposed to the disease via aerosols....

The widespread use of chemicals, riot-control agents and herbicides in Vietnam provoked international criticism and drew public attention to the less well-known US biological weapons programme. (S47-48)

The appalling deity, is also a byproduct of the war, created inadvertently from covert US operations, an analogy of their humiliating defeat against Communism and the US’s endless military interventions through history. The American assault altered the weather with cloud-seeding technology, transformed the Vietnamese ecosystem and caused health hazards through body defects, diseases and death (Austin and Bruch 1-2). Viewed as a predatory demon of the impenetrable jungle, the phantasmic being is skinless and sinewy, an allusion to the horrors of state-sponsored medical organisations, the US military exploitation of DNA and scientific failings. Concerns have been raised over clinical experiments in US biotech laboratories in the twentieth century such as the inhuman ‘Tuskegee Syphilis Study’ on Negro male, Project MKUltra, NIH sponsored vaccine trials on unprotected infants, the chemical weapons experiments on American GIs, the gas chamber experiments and radiation tests on civilians, soldiers, and ‘volunteers’.



The god can be read a “biocyborg” birthed out of the convergence of synthetic biology and genetic manipulation at the medical table (Pio-Lopez 600). Its second birth echoes our own bodily imperfections and vulnerability as fallible mortals that could be amended by giving in to the entices of technology. Plastic fillers, life enhancing drugs, Cryo-preservation, freezing of reproductory parts, skin, tissues and even the brain have suspended the natural process of ageing and mutability. Pio-Lopez lists Elizabeth Parrish, CEO of the anti-ageing biotech company BioViva, as a biocyborg and records, “The biocyborg is this new kind of cyborg emerging from this technoscience. By developing technologies at the genetic, molecular and/or cellular levels, synthetic biology is pushing the boundaries of the hybridity organic/technology and seem to abolish them” (605). As a biocyborg, the river god has developed new functions- it is deathless, immutable, autonomous and capable of self-replenishment. Biology and technology intersect to reprogram natural bodies, the river god being a simple rice farmer once, reminiscent of the biotech and the military merging in “Rakka”. The modern world is a template of complicated coding “illustrated by molecular genetics, ecology, sociobiological evolutionary theory, and immunobiology.... Biotechnology, a writing technology, informs research broadly. In a sense, organisms have ceased to exist....” (Harraway 307). As a biocyborg or monstrous product of bio-experiment gone awry, the river god exemplifies medical scientists’ obsession with the human demonstrating increased bio-political domination and lust for machine-backed transcendence.

The political and the existential mingle in the urban rubble of “Rakka” and the rural Vietnam of “Firebase”. The reptilians and the hybrids vivify the threats posing before mankind- global movement towards greater social stratification, political violence, totalitarian state mechanism, decay of democracy, unparalleled technological incursions and climate change- precarious risks that abound in the actual world and jeopardise our present and the future. The stringent compartments of life and death, animal and technology are blurred out as horrifying mutations and bizarre cross-breeds with grotesque prosthetics complicate the temporal body. The deviant and the infected proliferate breaching in the neat and bounded definitions of the normal and the anatomical. The fluid body is despicable and unredeemable, a decadent symbol of chaotic humanity and a cautionary tale on the dystopia we are heading to and already inhabiting.

Endnotes

1. Scott Alan Roberts’s book on the history of serpents traces the reptilian origins of the human species, human-animal cross breeding and reptilian domination of the world.
2. Len Kasten offers a daunting account of the prehistoric Draco-reptiloids, their galactic history, defeat in human hands and future endeavours to re-dominate the earth as its original occupants.
3. The Naga is depicted as a human-snake demigod within the Hindu and the Buddhist cosmologies. It resides in the subterranean realm of the underworld.
4. The Freudian “uncanny” conceives the imminent “return” of the “repressed” old, through the ghostly and the ghastly. It arouses primal fears following a disclosure, accompanied by an acute and vivid psychotic disturbance.



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