


## STOP ONE

# Fata Morgana Café

Our first stop on this journey through the Void is the Fata Morgana Café. By now you're probably a little parched, or feeling peckish. That's not too surprising; ultimately, we are all used to the conveniences of the Real World and, not unlike any earth-side road trip, a trek through the portal into the Void is strenuous on both body and mind.

 Founded ~~the~~ the Fata Morgana Café (henceforth known as FMC) is a place a respite from the rest of the Real World™. Conveniently—as you'll soon find out is true of most of the Void—you need not be physically in the café to experience its restorative powers. Sure it would be much more immersive, but a visit on paper and through the wilds of your imagination works just as well.

The FMC is often, if not always, visitors' first encounter with the Void. Think of it as a portal, if you will. If, perchance, you came across a time machine and transported back to 1892 Paris in the historically-famed artist enclave of Montmartre, you'd find yourself facing a similar kind of portal vortex into the Cabaret du Néant.

There, you'd be welcomed by a robed monk, and served by waiters

dressed as undertakers. Once led into the drinking area, aptly called the Salle d'intoxication—Intoxication Hall—, patrons were advised to get *bières*, a French homonym for beer and coffin (*bier*). Looking around, you'd certainly take notice of the décor: chandeliers made of human bones, tables shaped like coffins, and human skulls for cups. You can imagine that such an establishment may have then inspired shock and awe, and disturbed the neighbours in one fell swoop.

While the welcoming committee at the Fata Morgana Café feels tamer by comparison, it is by no means less peculiar. The stained glass window on the teal half-wall lets you know you have arrived: were it not for the café name being spelled out, the four-legged rooster serves as a dead giveaway. A mirage bird for a mirage-like place.

Pick a side to enter through. There isn't a right or wrong, only right and left. You will find yourself in a small rectangular room. The walls are the same deep teal, and the trim is old but adorned with golden paint strokes that emphasise its flaws and embrace its age. "Waste not, want not," as the saying goes. Suddenly, you feel like you're being watched until it comes to you that your re-

flection is staring back at you by the dozen: the wall directly across from where you are standing is covered in mirrors. Under it is a small love-seat, also covered in the all-seeing eye pattern. In front of it is a coffee table covered in pamphlets that read like long lost letters and unsent emotionally-laden missives to people who once mattered.

To the left of the Wall of Contemplation is a collection of shelves blanketed in titillating ceramic vessels, dinky paper flora, and a hodgepodge of tchotchkes.

To the right, there is a coatrack with garments covered in all-seeing eyes, too. Are you looking at them or are they looking back at you? There is also a variety of headgear with hair buns atop. By now, you've probably put two and two together: at the Fata Morgana Café, YOU are your own host, as well as being the guest. This isn't for shortage of personnel, no. Here in the Void, we simply believe that the best service is self-service.

Directly nearby, there is a rack replete with more publications advertising Void locales and arts and crafts, along with some café merchandise. May we recommend a bag of the Black Onyx Eye of Truth roast? It's strong enough to unnerve the dead!

Turn around and scan around the room. The faint amber glow of the lights overhead bathes the space

with warmth. Somehow, it feels both forbidden and inviting. Why, you may ask yourself, do hidden things feel so enticing? Truth be told, there is no easy answer to this conundrum.

The Void you've entered only contains a fraction of the answers you may be seeking, and posits many more to the one. Mysteries and temptation have been around for as long as humans developed a sense of guilt. Or at least, since someone decided some things were forbidden. But here, you need not worry about consequences: the Void is neutral, much like La Santa Muerte who bestows blessings upon any strata of society.

#### DID YOU KNOW?

A combination of Old and New World, Aztec and Catholic beliefs, la Santa Muerte is described as a neutral and magnanimous entity towards all strata of society.

In the middle of the room is a table that is halfway set. A game of The Eyes Have It (colloquially known as "checkers") seems to have been abandoned halfway through... Or maybe it's just waiting for you to play your turn? Unless you'd rather partake a rousing game of Lotería?

In any event, now that you've got the lay of the land, why not sit and stay awhile? No doubt there's a lot to ponder before setting back out on your travels