

Ava the Hunted



Jules Adrienn

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DEDICATION

To all my writing friends who helped me, my family who supported me, and to those who inspired me by saying it could never be done. Never doubt a writer's dreams.

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CHAPTER ONE

Ava Phoenix gazed into the endless blue sky of the Reserve—the last place on Earth with water. Fighters on horseback thundered around her, galloping toward the sounds of celebration rising from a valley in the distance. Her horse, Brute, shook his head and stomped. She tugged the reins to settle him, and then untied a water bag from her saddle. The water was hot and gritty. She wiped her mouth and watched Ahsazi warriors fly past in a wave of dust, the ground trembling.

A straggler followed the Ahsazi—an older woman with streaks of silver coloring her black hair. She reached out as she passed. Ava touched hands with the woman, who said, "We put them down, didn't we young one?"

"We did," said Ava, smiling as the woman snapped the reins on her horse and whooped, galloping after her tribe.

Ava heeled Brute forward. The old woman was right. The Reserve's Elite Guard had suffered a terrible defeat at the border wall yesterday. Ava and her team of fighters, the Braves—Beau, Tommy, Josie, and Marlon—had done their part. They'd started this rebellion. They'd fought and killed for it.

But she had more important business today.

A scattering of trees clinging to life along the valley rim dappled her with shade. Brute ducked his shaggy head,

following the hundreds of fighters picking their way down through the scrub brush and timber into the valley. The trees grew higher and leafier the farther Ava descended, weaving a canopy that broke the unrelenting heat. She glanced over the heads of the warriors and surveyed the far side of the valley.

Her gaze focused on a cave half hidden among the trees near the top of the ridge. It was where Beau had kissed her for the first time, despite the arrow in his chest. Because of his injury, she'd left him to find a horse that could carry them out of the valley. And when she'd returned, Beau had been lifeless. Another victim of the corrupt regime, just like her father, and her village.

Except it might not be true.

According to a Ronin warrior she'd run into during yesterday's battle, a young warrior had been found in a cave in this valley.

A warrior with an arrow in his chest.

A warrior wearing a leather vest emblazoned with the name *Braves*.

It was probably mistaken identity or some other nonsense, but as crazy as it sounded—according to a woman named Filomena—Beau might still be alive.

Ava guided Brute down the steep slope, her heart beating high in her chest.

If you're alive, I'll find you, Beau. Please be alive.

Brute snorted, clomping his way closer to the Ronin's main hall that stood halfway down the side of the valley. As she drew closer to the hall, Ava could see the warriors massed around the giant, barn-like structure, drinking and laughing. Their victory over the Elite Guard had left them rambunctious as children. They were scary looking. But having fought with them took the scary out of their appearance. Brothers and sisters in arms weren't to be feared, no matter how dangerous they looked.

She watched them cavort in the bare dirt around the hall. Trees towered over the hall, shading it from the sunlight that blasted through the cloudless blue sky. Other structures dotted the valley above and below the hall. Cabins that clung

precariously to the steep slope. Tree houses that hid among the thick limbs of the ancient trees.

Ava rode Brute into the teeming mass of warriors. Big, small, muscled, skinny, male, female, old, and young—finding Beau in this jumble of humanity wasn't going to be easy. She heeled Brute next to a tall pine and reined him to a stop. How would she find anyone in this chaos?

A curvy, barefooted Ahsazi woman with a sword on her hip walked by, holding a clay pitcher. She stopped and raised the pitcher. "Ferment?"

Ava shook her head. "No thank you." Before the woman could turn away, Ava lifted her chin at the crowd of revelers. "Have you seen a Brave in this crowd? I heard he was found with an arrow in his chest and nursed back to health."

The woman drank from the pitcher, wiped her mouth, and flipped back a lock of her long, black hair. "Does he have beautiful dark hair like me?"

Ava couldn't help but smile. "He does."

The woman took another drink and grinned. "Is he big and tall with muscles?" She smirked and flexed her bicep.

Ava eyed the woman, feeling an unfamiliar spark of jealousy. "Sounds like you know who I'm looking for."

"He's hard to miss."

"Can you tell me where he is?"

The woman laughed, turned her back on Ava, and walked away.

Ava's cheeks burned with anger. She stood in her saddle, debating if she should jump off Brute and teach the woman some manners. A hand grabbed her thigh.

She looked down, and her heart stopped.

Beau stood behind her, his hand still on her leg. Dried blood colored a bandage wrapped around his naked torso, marking the spot where the arrow had pierced his chest. He smiled and raised his arms. She jumped off Brute into his embrace, wrapped her legs around him, and hugged him so tight he grunted in pain.

Beau was alive.

She breathed him in. He smelled like pine—the Ronin

must have washed him before they tended to his chest wound. She pressed her cheek against his.

"You left me," he said.

"You were dead."

"I was not. I would've remembered that."

She pulled back, ran her hands over his shoulders, and stared into his brown eyes. She hugged him again, feeling the light thump of his heartbeat against her chest. "I guess you're right. You're not dead," she said.

He pressed his lips against her ear and whispered, "Or maybe we're both in the valley of light."

They looked around, and then looked at each other, and laughed.

"If this is the valley of light, we're in trouble," said Ava.

Beau ran his hands through her hair, down her shoulders, down her back, stopping to grip her hips. "I can't believe we didn't get killed in all that fighting."

She grabbed his face. "I really thought you were gone. Don't do that again. How did the Ronin revive you?"

Beau squeezed her tight. She closed her eyes and breathed his pine scent, listening to his husky voice.

"I don't know and I don't care. I'm just glad they did so I could see you again." He lifted her until her lips were nearly touching his. "I heard the Ahsazi and the Ronin slaughtered the Guard at the border wall, and then chased them out of our village," he said. "But I also heard our village was burned to the ground. Is it true?"

Ava unwrapped her legs from Beau's waist and jumped to the ground. She grabbed Brute's lead. Beau didn't know that everyone he'd ever known had been burned to death by the Elite Guard. It wasn't going to be easy to tell him, but she had to. She did her best to smile and said, "It's been a long ride. Show me where I can tie Brute and then let's find someplace where we can sit and talk."

Beau cocked his head and stared at her for a bit before saying, "Sure." He reached out and grasped her hand. "I can't wait to hear what happened, but no matter what, we're together. I can't think of anything that could spoil that."

Ava squeezed his hand. Beau was about to find out what could spoil it—his parents and his home being burned to ash. And, unfortunately, it was up to her to tell him.

CHAPTER TWO

The hall was built of logs yellowed with age. As they walked closer, Ava rose on tiptoe to look over the crowd streaming in and out of the barn-like structure. A slab of wood nailed above the door caught her attention. The words, Men Without Masters Must Master Themselves, christened her as she walked with Beau through the threshold.

Long tables filled the room, packed with men and women drinking and reliving yesterday's glory. More than a few of the warriors were on their feet, wrestling, hugging, or swaying arm-in-arm, singing. Ava took a seat across from Beau at a table in a back corner. She looked over the scene. The hall was crowded. Along table sat on a stage at one end of the hall. The group around that table was split between Ronin—former Elite Guardsmen who had been banished from service in the Reserve—and black-haired, brooding Ahsazi barbarians with almond-shaped eyes. Ava saw Cole, the leader of the Ahsazi, sitting up there next to a gray-bearded Ronin. She shook her head. No matter where she went, men always lorded over everyone else.

She lowered her gaze to a barrel-chested man with long sideburns elbowing his way through the crowd, balancing a platter of clay mugs on his shoulder. He stopped and eyed her and Beau.

[&]quot;Yes?" she asked.

He grabbed two mugs and set them on their table. "You're youngsters, but everyone drinks today. We've slaughtered the Guard!" he boomed, and then he continued on his way, passing mugs to the scores of warriors.

Ava pushed her mug to the side and reached across the table to hold Beau's hands.

Beau leaned toward her. "I wish I was there to see the Elite Guard get crushed," he said, running his thumb over her knuckles. "I'll bet whoever survived at New Moon Bay is celebrating just like this."

Ava nodded and said, "Yes, but-"

Beau side-eyed an Ahsazi woman edging by their table and said, "And thank the One that we had these Ahsazi barbarians on our side. They fight almost as hard as you. Come to think of it, they look like you too."

"So I've been told," Ava replied, remembering how the Ahsazi warlord, Cole, had also remarked on how she looked like one of his warriors. Whether she had Ahsazi blood or not, there was no telling. Her father had found her as a baby, drifting in a boat on the Lake of Man during one of the many water wars. But it didn't matter. She was a member of the Braves—regardless of the blood that ran through her veins. She tightened her grip on Beau's hands. "Beau, forget what I look like and just listen. The Elite Guard was beaten, but not before they burned everything and everyone in New Moon."

Beau pulled his hands away. "Everyone?"

She bit her bottom lip. "We got there too late."

Muscles rippled under Beau's ear as he clenched his jaw. He locked his gaze on Ava. "My father and mother could've slipped away without anyone knowing. They could've escaped through the village's back gate."

She thought back to the blackened bodies scattered on the streets of their village and slowly shook her head.

Beau grabbed his mug of ferment and took a long drink. He wiped his mouth and banged his fist on the table. Ava grabbed her mug and gulped a burning mouthful. The mug nearly tipped over as she dropped it, eyes watering. Beau shook his head in disbelief. "What about the rest of the

Braves? Are we all that's left?"

Ava started to talk—to tell Beau that all of the Braves were still alive and waiting for them in the ruins of New Moon—but the burn of the ferment seized her throat. A coughing fit bent her over. Her face was half numb and flushed with blood when she finally straightened.

"How can you drink this?" she squeaked, pushing the mug away. Clearing her throat, she added, "Marlon and Josie are in New Moon, salvaging what they can. Tommy hurt his back, but he'll be okay. They're all waiting for us."

Beau shook his head. "So the Reserve killed your father, my parents, and everyone in our village." He snorted. "They deserve more than just a battalion of dead Elite Guardsmen. Aragonia should be destroyed, along with everyone in it."

Ava could see Beau's anger building. It was there in his short breaths and tightly pressed lips. In this state, she could see him riding straight to Aragonia and trying to hack his way through its front gates. She knew how he felt. She also knew that kind of anger was dangerous and could get him killed. And it wouldn't bring back the dead. Beau started to raise his mug for another drink. She pushed his mug down and locked her gaze on him. "This isn't our fight, Beau. We have better things to do than kill or get killed."

His eyes widened. "But they burned our home. We have to do something."

Four Ahsazi warriors turned, hearing the anger in Beau's voice. Each held a mug, and Ava could see dried blood on their hands, arms, and shoulders from yesterday's battle. She smiled at them. They turned back to what was obviously an exciting story being told by a blonde-haired woman holding a long knife, fending off imaginary attackers.

"You're right," Ava said, switching her gaze to Beau. "They tried to kill us, but now the grand praetorian of the Reserve is dead, his chief of the Elite Guard is crucified, and a whole battalion of the Elite Guard is slaughtered. On top of that, all the warriors in this valley—Ronin and Ahsazi—are ready to take the fight to them. The Reserve bit off more than they can chew. Now they're going to choke on it, with or

without our help."

Ava switched her gaze back to the woman holding the knife, undoubtedly play-acting some legendary battle for the Ahsazi warriors standing behind Beau. The woman's face was barely visible, but there was something familiar about her. Maybe it was the way she held her knife. No, it was the long blonde braid that hung down her back. The woman turned and showed her face, confirming Ava's guess. It was Filomena, the Ronin woman who'd told her that Beau was alive. It was good to see she'd survived the battle at New Moon. Ava watched the Ahsazi around Filomena clap as she finished her story and sheathed her knife.

"I'm glad the grand praetorian is dead," said Beau. "But what about his wife and son? They're as much to blame as he was."

An image of Lorelei and Cort escaping the ruins of New Moon after the battle played through Ava's mind. "The rebellion will catch up to them," she said.

Beau drank the rest of his mug in one long swallow. His brow furrowed. "That's not good enough. They need to die in the most painful way possible for what they did."

Ava had known Beau since they were toddlers. Even as a kid he'd always been calm and level-headed—someone who saw two steps ahead. But right now, his head seethed with revenge. And who could blame him? His parents had been incinerated and his home was ashes. The answer, however, wasn't joining the rebellion. She'd had a bellyful of the Reserve, its Elite Guard, the Ronin, the Ahsazi, and all the other people who wanted to kill each other. And, contrary to the way Beau was acting, she knew he thought the same way. Back in the cave, right before their first kiss, he'd said as much.

She laid her hand on the table, palm up, in front of Beau. He grudgingly placed his hand on hers. She circled the tip of her index finger inside his palm, watching the furrow in his brow relax. "Remember what you said in the cave?" she asked.

Beau looked down at her finger and watched it circle. The

red in his cheeks faded.

"You said you wanted someone to laugh with," she murmured. "To help build something with."

"I did?"

Ava smiled. "Well, I said it first. But you agreed."

He exhaled slowly. "I remember."

She felt his grip tighten. The furrow in his brow reappeared. "But I can't help thinking about Cort and his mother," he said. "Sitting in Aragonia like nothing ever happened. Like they own the world."

Ava waved at the room. "All these people want revenge. They all want to kill Cort and Lorelei. And if they do, what do you think will happen? More fighting for power. For money. For control of the Reserve. I have better things to do than spend my life fighting. Don't you?"

Beau exhaled long and slow. He fixed a stare on Ava. "I want to kill Cort and his mother, but—" He smiled. "But I'd rather run away with you."

She pursed her lips, trying unsuccessfully to hold down a smile. "Let's get you a horse and ride to New Moon. We'll gather the Braves. We'll build a new life together, Beau. We can do it."

Beau nodded. Then he leaned across the table and kissed her.

When he sat back, Ava gazed into his dark brown eyes, feeling her heart pound so hard she was certain the whole hall could hear it. In all the years she'd known Beau, they always counted on each other. They always brought out the best in each other. The funny thing was, she'd never considered they could be more than friends. It seemed impossible looking at him now. Everything about him made her pulse quicken. His long black hair. His strong hands. His brown eyes. His square jaw and broad shoulders.

Squeezing his hand, she pushed her chair back and stood. "C'mon, let's—"

A hand clasped Beau's shoulder as he started to stand with her. It was Filomena.

"I'm glad to see you're both doing well," Filomena said.

The four Ahsazi warriors she'd been talking with stood behind her, their expressions flat. Filomena nodded at Ava and then pointed at Beau. "This young man really likes you. He was hellbent on riding to New Moon after I took that arrow out of his chest. Said he wanted to help you fight the Guard." She patted Beau's shoulder. "I couldn't let him go in the state he was in. But he looks ready for battle now, doesn't he?"

Ava shrugged. She reached for Beau's hand. "If you'll excuse us, we were just leaving."

Filomena smiled. "Before you go—now that we've helped both of you, can you help us?"

"Help you with what?" said Ava.

"With the rebellion," said Filomena. "We need warriors like you to defeat the people who burned your village."

Ava walked around the side of the table. She pushed Filomena's hand off Beau and pulled him to his feet. "We'll think about it," she said, grabbing Beau and trying to step around Filomena and the Ahsazi warriors. Filomena blocked her path.

"There's nothing to think about," Filomena said, fixing her gaze on Ava. "Your boyfriend convinced us to fight the Elite Guard. We killed the grand praetorian and destroyed the Guard because of you two. The least you can do is help us."

The four Ahsazi behind Filomena pushed in closer. One of them—a stout, older warrior—cocked his head at Ava. He crossed arms of corded muscle over his chest.

"You look like Ahsazi," he said. "Ahsazi help people who help us. You have to fight." He looked Ava up and down and snorted. "Is it because you're afraid, youngster? Do you need me to teach you how to fight?" He reached for Ava.

She slapped his hand away at the same moment Beau punched him in the face. The man fell flat. The other three Ahsazi bent over him. They slapped his face, trying to revive him. Other warriors turned to watch, holding their mugs of ferment. The man regained consciousness, his eyelids flickering. He sat up and then sighed, falling back to the floor.

Ava turned her attention to Filomena. "He started it. He

tried to grab me," she said, pointing at the man.

Filomena nodded. "I know. But maybe your boyfriend overreacted a bit, don't you think?"

Ava grabbed Beau's arm and whispered, "Let's go."

The three Ahsazi warriors standing over their fallen comrade straightened. They stared at Ava and Beau. She could see their anger, but she could also sense their hesitation. Beau was young, but very big, and more than a little dangerous looking. And she wasn't far behind Beau in size or looks. But they were just a couple of teenage fighters in a hall packed with drunken warriors who'd just fought and defeated the Elite Guard. It wouldn't take much for the whole hall to start fighting. It was time to go. She started to pull Beau along when Filomena pointed at her and said, "So after all we've done, you're going to walk away?"

A combination of things struck Ava. The words, accusing them of being ungrateful, were the most obvious. But the look on Filomena's face, like she was disappointed in them, that was too much. Filomena was trying to shame them into joining the rebellion. Ava's face grew hot. She pointed at Filomena.

"All you've done?' Are you serious?" she yelled, her voice echoing through the hall. "Our parents are dead. Our village is burned."

She smacked Beau in the stomach and heard him grunt. "We're lucky to be alive." She pointed at Filomena. "And I was there when the grand praetorian was killed. You and all the Ronin and all the Ahsazi had nothing to do with it, so don't tell me you did. The only reason you attacked the Elite Guard—the only reason you're having this celebration today—is because the Braves had the guts to fight them first."

Ava expected Filomena to be shocked at being called out. But Filomena didn't look angry, she looked concerned. The three Ahsazi warriors, however, looked furious. One of them pulled his knife and took a step toward Ava. Filomena grabbed his shoulder, yanking him back. She turned away from Ava and whispered something to him and the other Ahsazi. They all glanced at Ava and Beau. The warrior holding

the knife slid it back into its sheath, and all three of them stepped back. Then Filomena turned around and stepped up to Ava until they were nearly touching noses.

"You need to be careful," Filomena said in a voice so hushed Ava was sure no one—not even Beau—could hear. Filomena gripped her arm, pulling her closer to whisper in her ear. "I know the grand praetorian and the chief of the guard are dead because of you. I also know an Elite Guard battalion is gone because you and your Braves decided it was time to fight." Filomena looked left, right, and then settled her focus back on Ava. "But I would never say that in front of so many people."

"Why?" Ava whispered back. "Are you afraid they'll know the truth?"

Filomena raised her eyebrows and nodded. "Of course. And you should be too."

Ava cocked her head, confused.

"Think, Ava," Filomena said. "The Reserve can't send an assassin after an army, but they'll send one after a person—or persons. All they need is someone to point a finger at who deserves to die. If you're with us, we'll protect you. But if you go off on your own, you're an easy target."

Ava felt the blood drain from her face. How stupid could she be? She looked around the hall. All the warriors were staring at her and Beau. Now they knew that she was involved with the death of the grand praetorian and that the Braves had sparked the rebellion.

Filomena stepped back, looked around the hall, and laughed. "Who gave these children ferment? They actually think they're responsible for the grand praetorian's death and that they led the attack on the Elite Guard."

A ripple of laughter ran through the hall.

"I thought the entertainment was scheduled for later, but I guess I was wrong. Nothing but water for them for the rest of the night," boomed Filomena, pointing at Ava and Beau.

Laughter rocked the hall.

Ava saw that Filomena's mockery relaxed most of the warriors. They turned away to continue their drinking and

storytelling. But more than a few stared at her and Beau. The Reserve had power and riches that could change a warrior's life in an instant. The more industrious members of this crowd were probably already plotting how they could sell their knowledge of where to find the teenage girl and boy who'd sparked the rebellion. Filomena was right. They were easy targets.

Grabbing Beau's hand, Ava pulled him through the crowd, nearly bowling people over as she made a beeline for the exit.

"Take it easy," said Beau, trying to keep up. "What's the hurry?"

Ava ignored him and pushed through a group of dirty warriors splashed in blood. She felt Beau's hand begin to slip, and she tightened her grip, pulling harder. If something happened to him because of her, she'd never forgive herself. Her father was dead because of her. Beau wasn't going to be added to that list.

A slight man with an unruly mop of brown hair collided with her, sloshing his mug of ferment. She pushed past him as he wiped his shirt, but she noticed how his gaze followed her and Beau. He was probably committing them to memory. Figuring out how he could get word to the Elite Guard about where they could be found. She redoubled her steps, feeling her heart hammer against her ribs.

This was her fault.

All because she couldn't keep her big mouth shut.

After pushing through the crowds jammed in the front entrance, she pulled Beau into the dappled shade outside the Ronin's main hall. Walking across ground that was hardened to stone by years of Ronin activity, she veered toward the young trees, ferns, and bushes that had overtaken the hillside above the back of the hall—away from the people milling about the outhouses and vendor stalls set up to sell produce, game, and ferment. The farther away from people, the better. Everyone knew vendors did nothing but gossip, and there was no juicier gossip than to say they'd seen the two Braves who'd started the rebellion.

She tightened her grip on Beau's hand and redoubled her

steps. Her father was dead. Beau's parents were dead. And now, because of her, people were going to target them next. No one could be trusted.

"Ava, stop," said Beau, pulling his hand away. "You're acting crazy."

Ava looked around. People passed by on all sides. She could swear they were all looking at her and Beau, no doubt thinking of tying them up and turning them in to be burned in Kingdom Park by the leaders of the Reserve. Her mind raced.

"We have to get out of here," she said in a sharp whisper, beginning to slide her sword out of its scabbard. "Just follow me. If anyone comes near you, I'll—"

Beau's hand clamped her arm. He pushed her sword back into its scabbard. She struggled and he pulled her close. His pine scent fell over her as he talked in a low voice, holding her tight. "Ava, stop."

She looked around. The curvy, black-haired woman she'd met when she first rode in was standing in front of a ferment stall twenty feet away, drinking from a clay pitcher, watching. A group of three muscled Ahsazi warriors sitting on a bench near the stone well stopped sharpening their swords to gaze at her. An older Ronin woman stared as she pushed a cart loaded with roots and dandelions toward a produce stand.

"They want to turn us into the Reserve for a reward," Ava whispered. "We'll be burned, Beau, just like my dad, and all the people in New Moon."

Beau let out a loud exhale. "Is that what Filomena whispered to you? That people are going to turn us in if we don't fight in the rebellion?"

"It's true," Ava said. "We convinced the Ronin to attack the Elite Guard. I caused the grand praetorian's death. I sent the chief of the guard to her crucifixion. They're watching us. Waiting to—"

Beau wrapped his arms around Ava and whispered in her ear. "They're watching us because you're acting crazy. No one is going to do anything. And if someone tries, I promise it won't end well for them. Okay?"

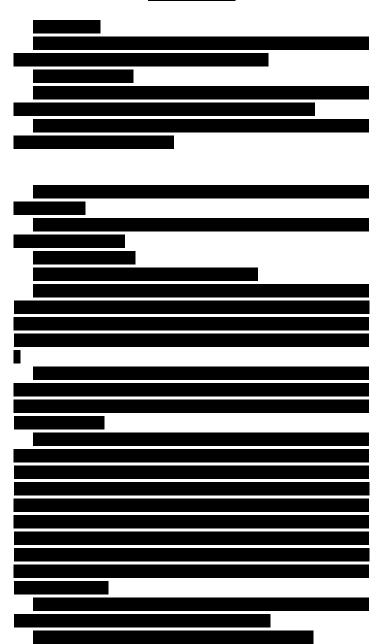
Ava nodded. She took Beau's hand. "Okay. But you have

to at least tell me you understand why I'm worried."

He pressed his lips tight, scanned the people walking around them, and then pinned his gaze on Ava. "I understand," he said. "We caused a lot of trouble for the Reserve. And now, because of that, they're going to try to hunt us down."

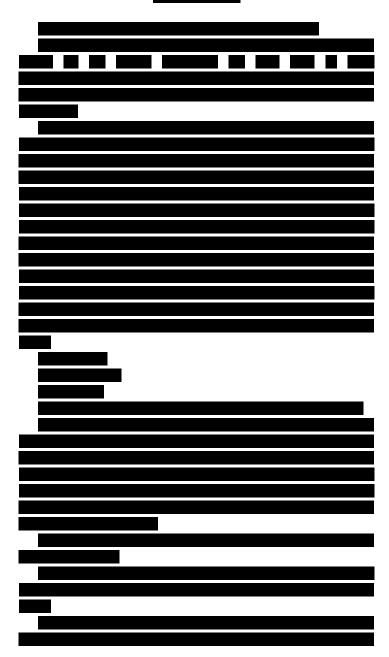
She pulled him close. "First they'll hunt us down. And then they'll burn us alive." She let go of him and took a step back, eyeing him. "And I am not going to let that happen to you or anyone else I care about ever again. Let's find someplace to talk. We need a plan."

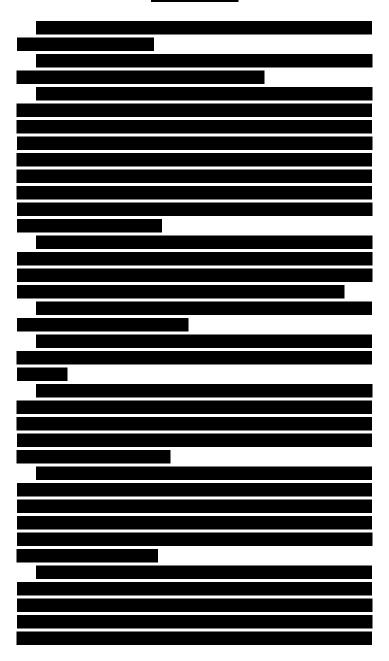


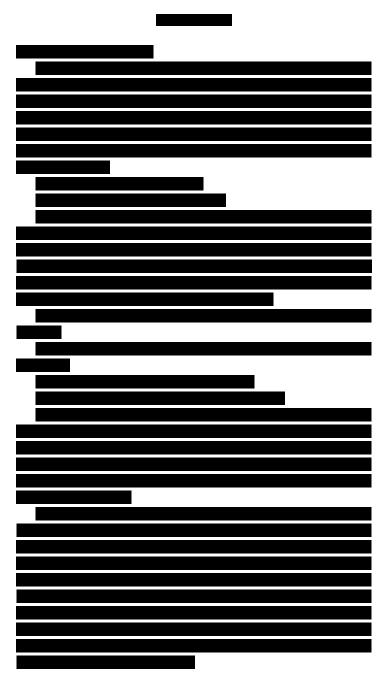


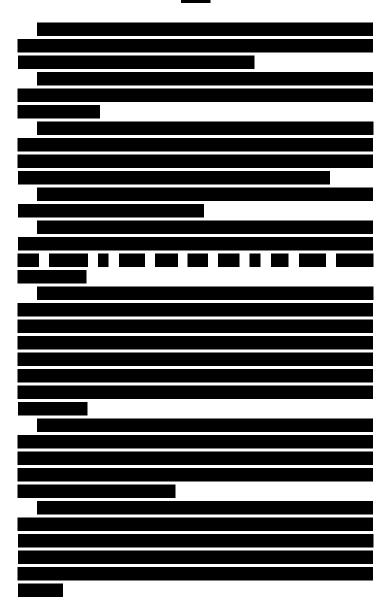






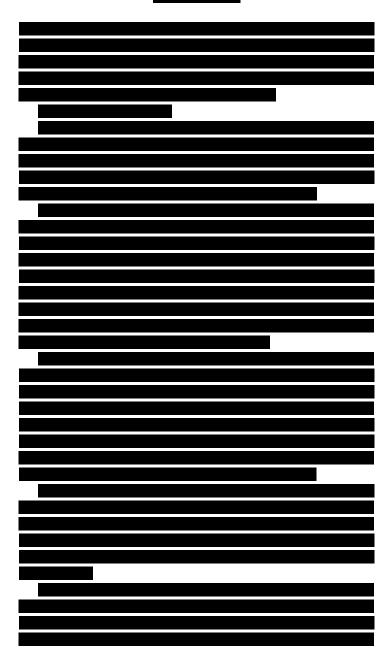


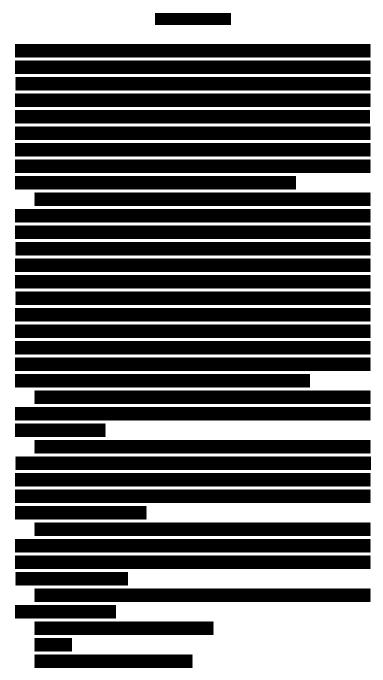


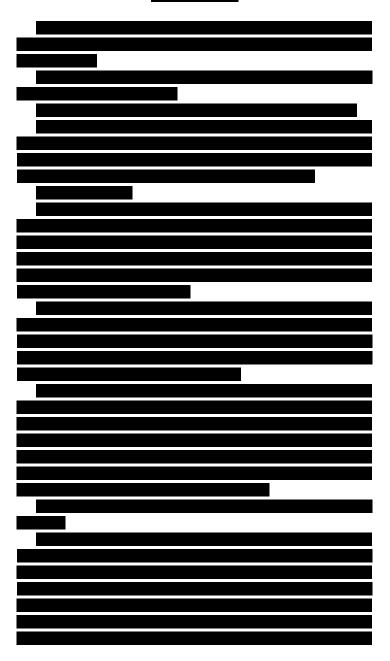


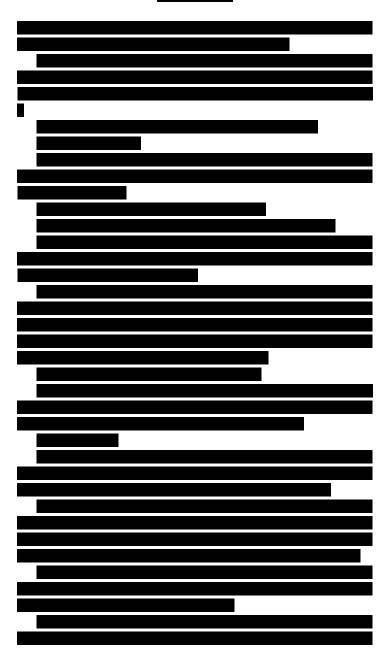


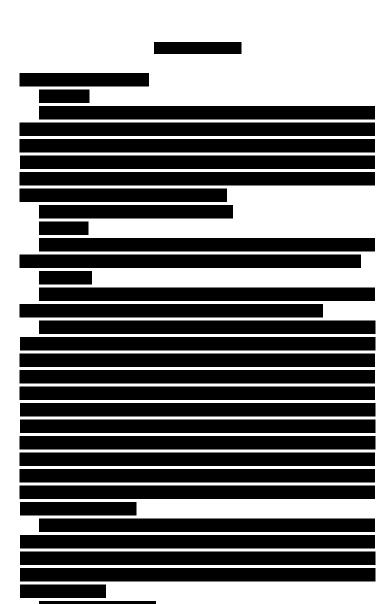




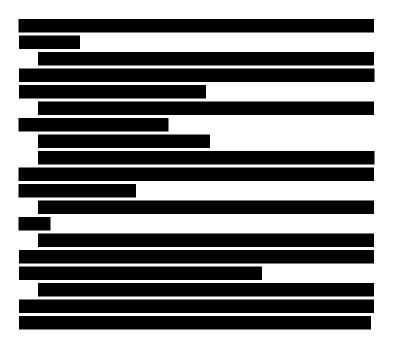


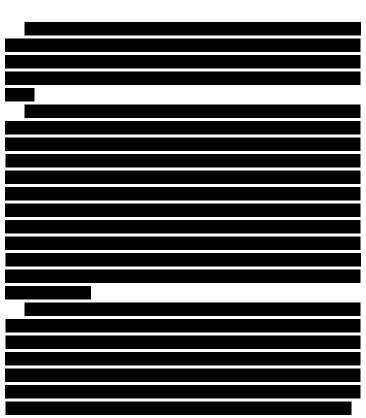


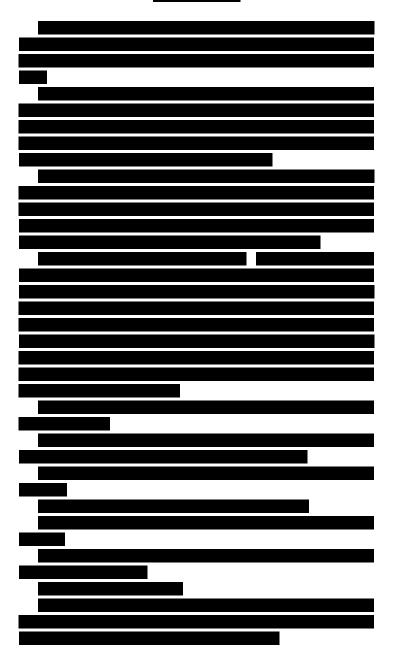


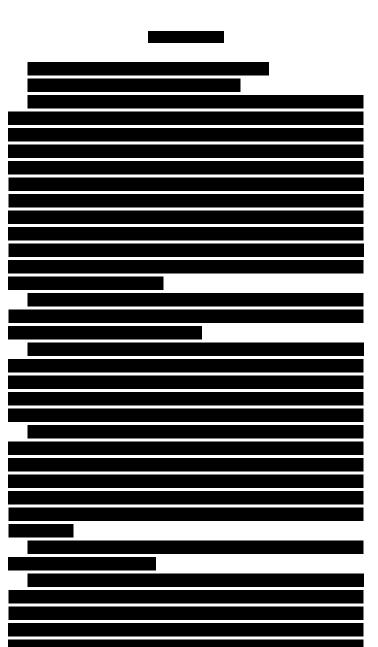


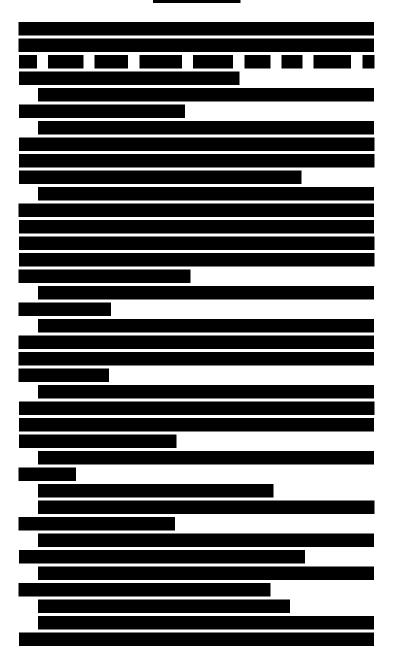


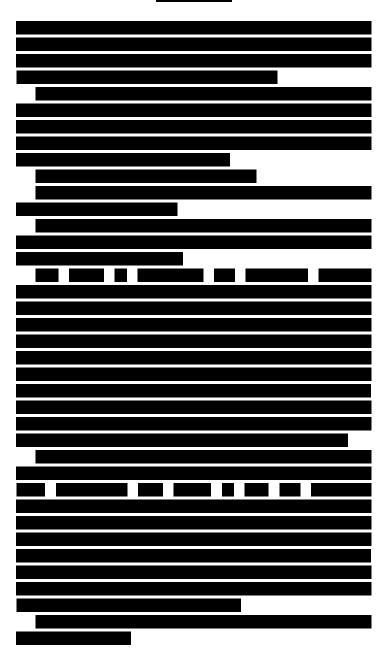


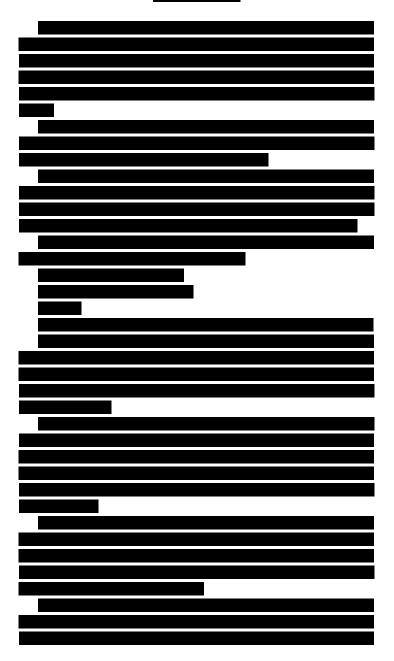


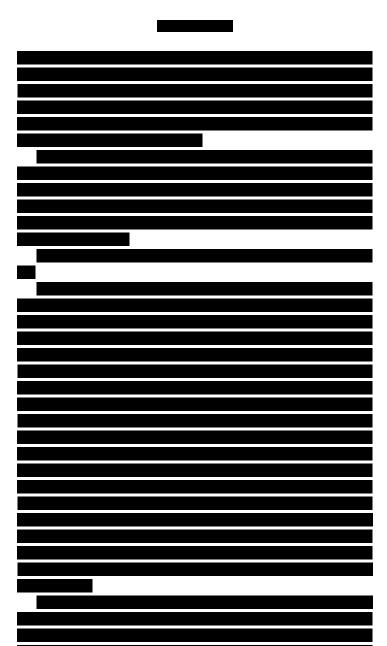




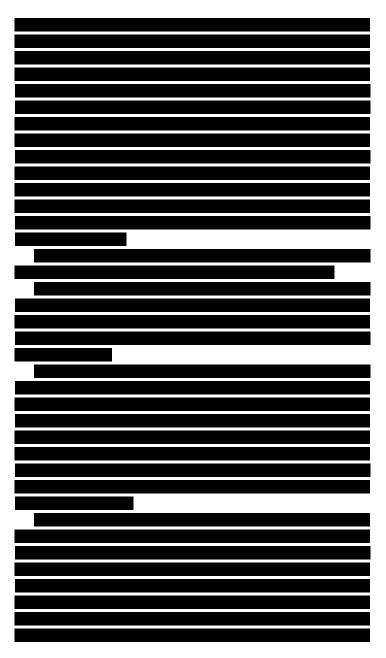


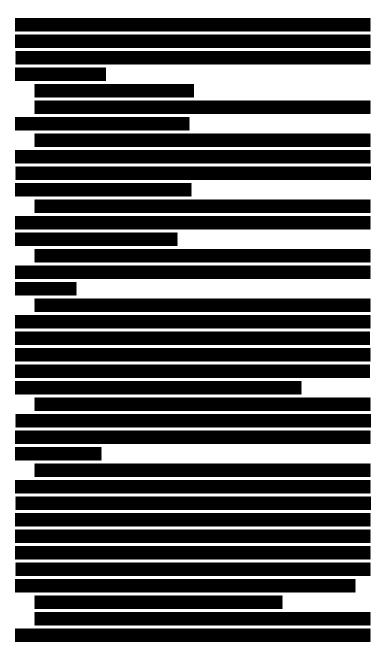


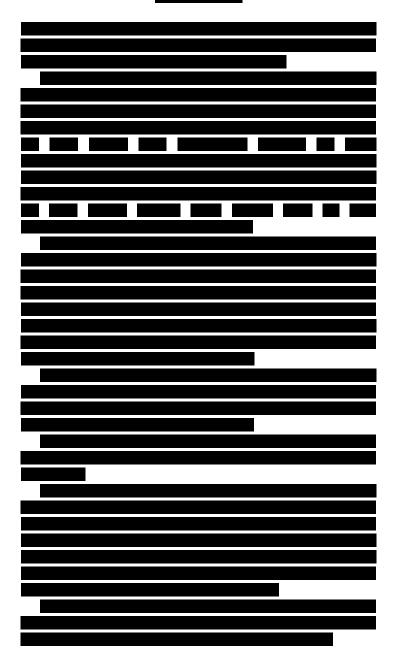


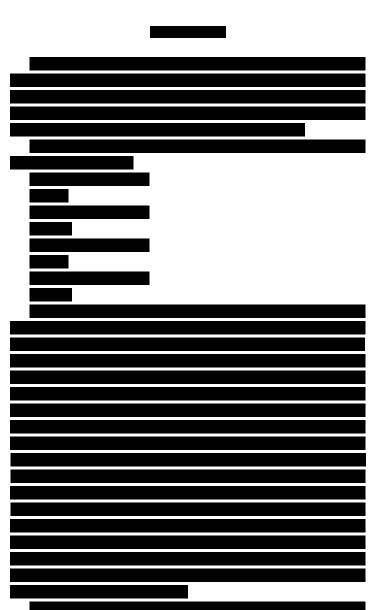


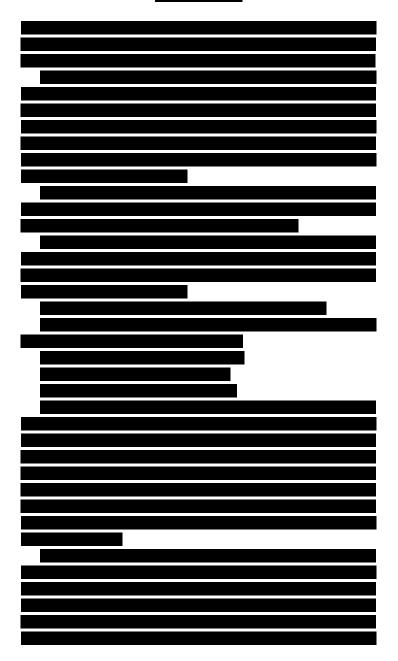


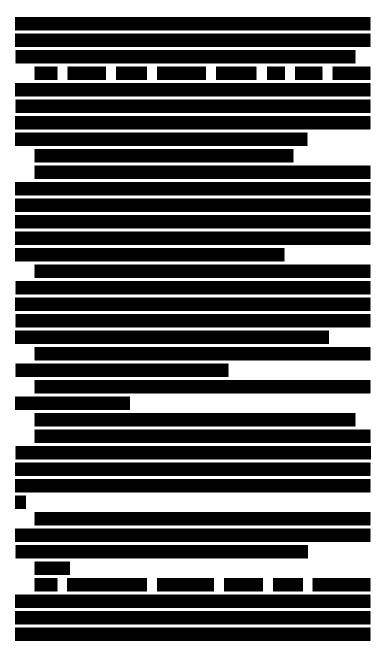


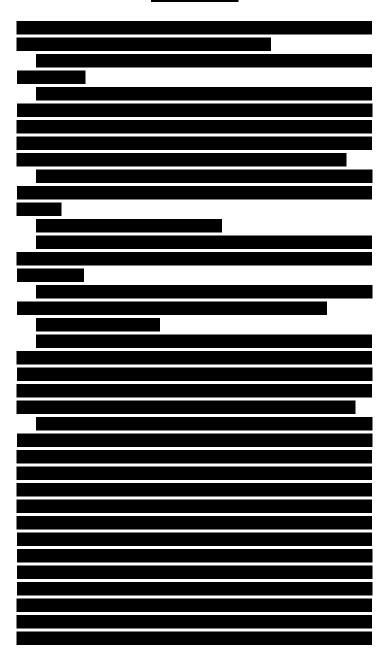


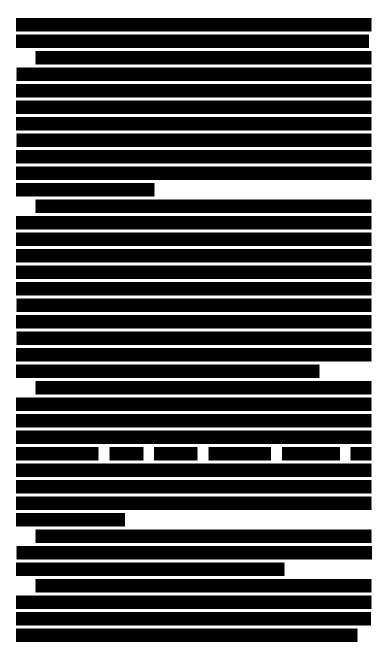






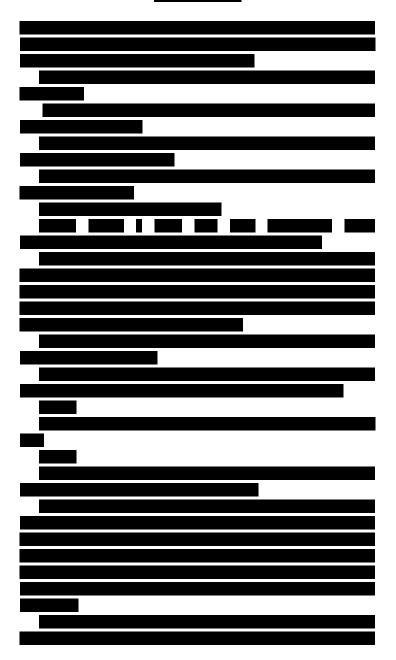




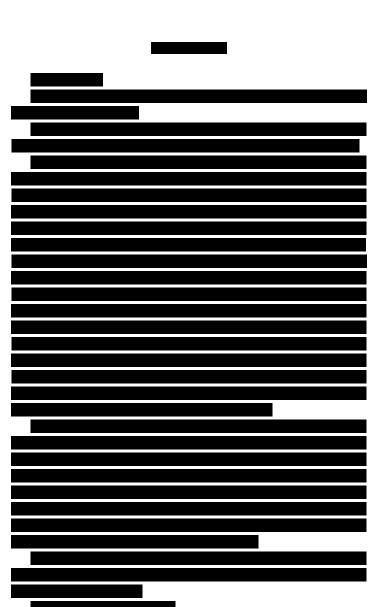


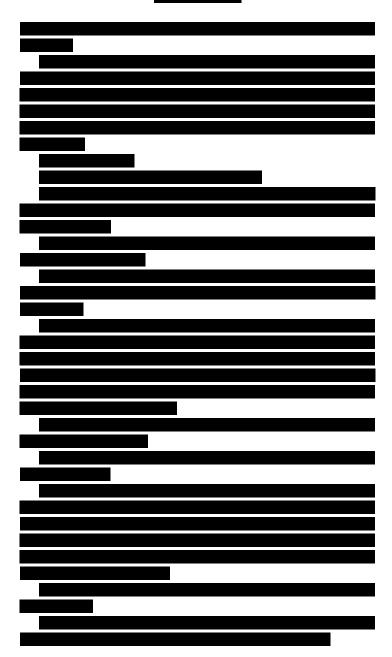


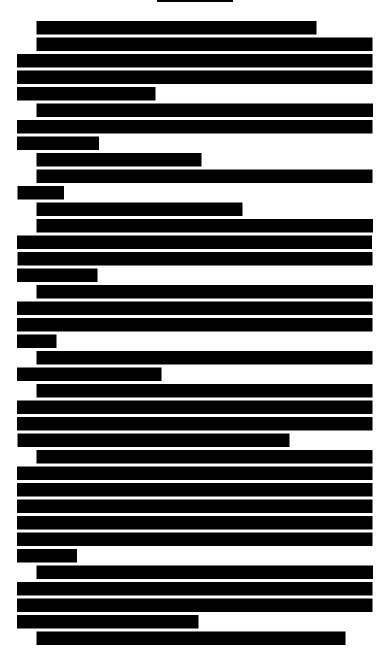




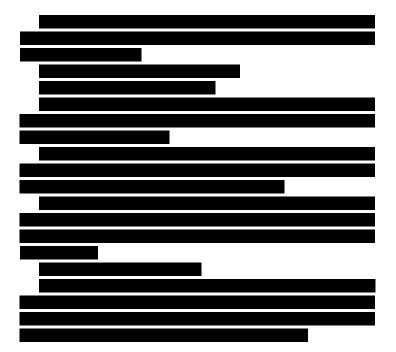




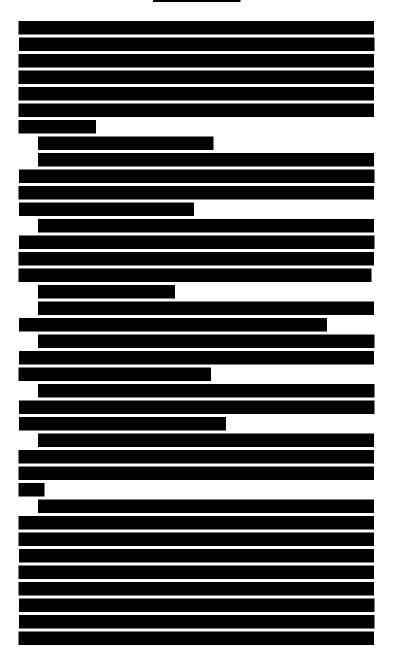


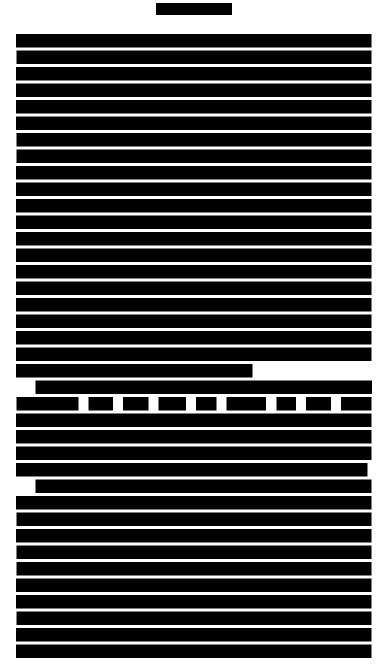


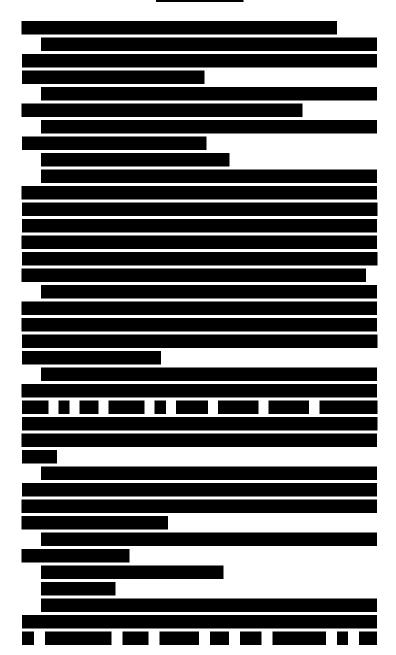




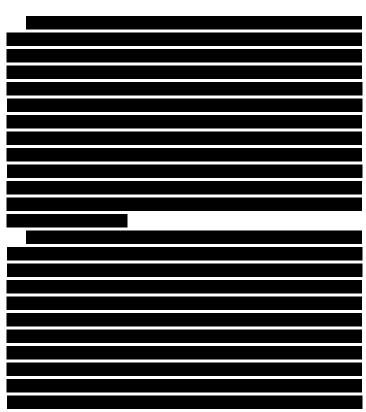




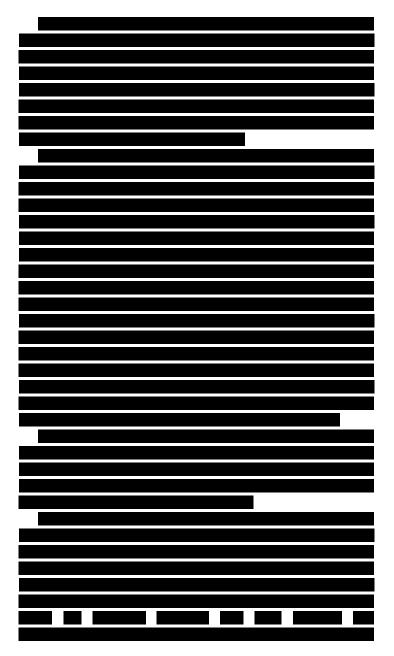


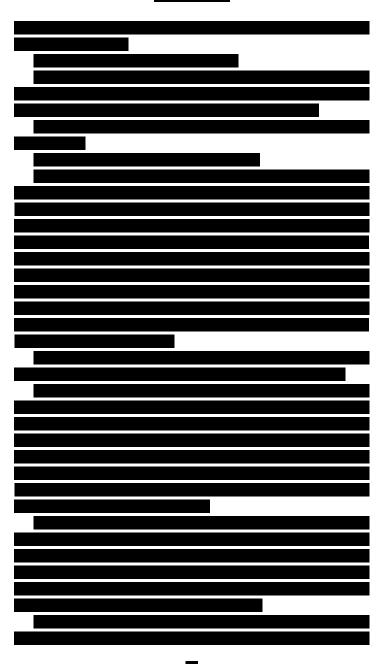


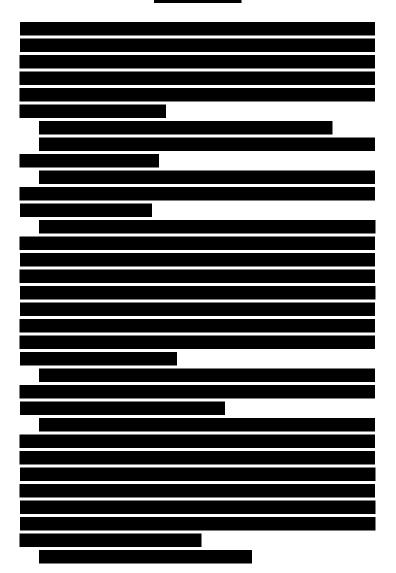
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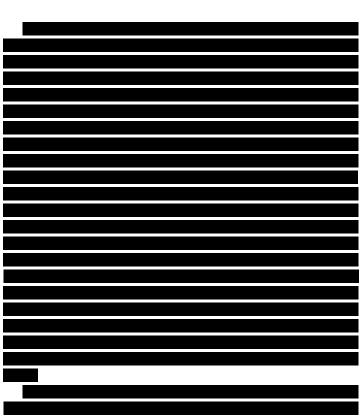




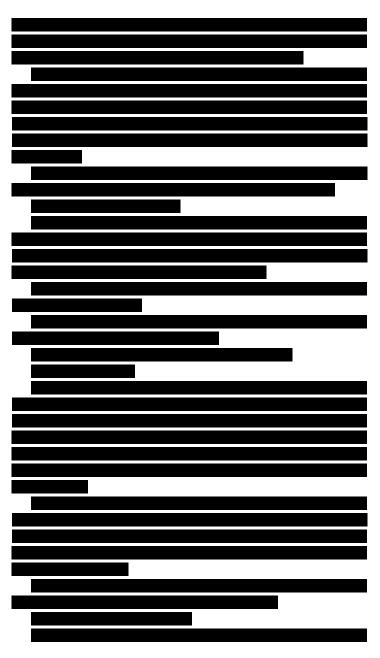


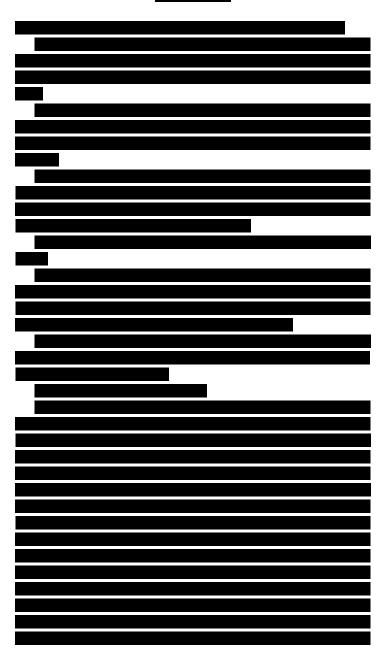


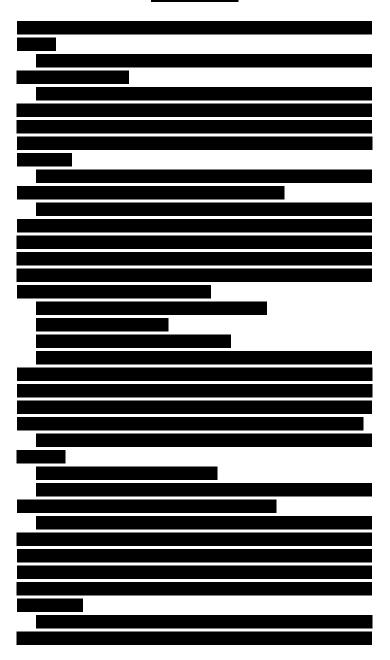




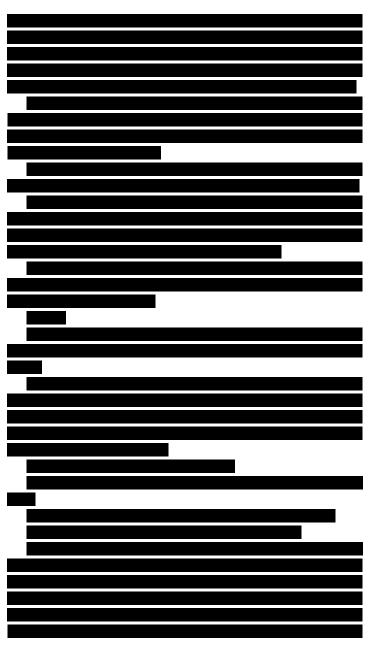


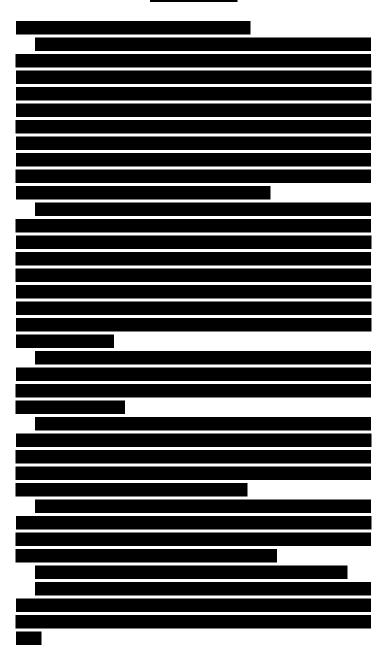








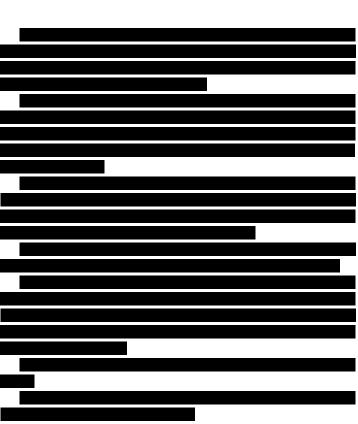


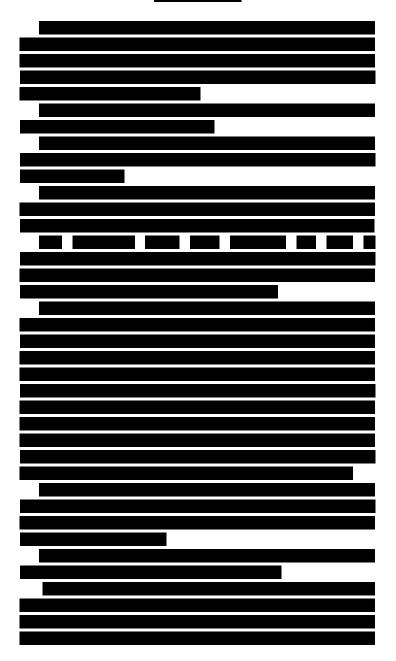






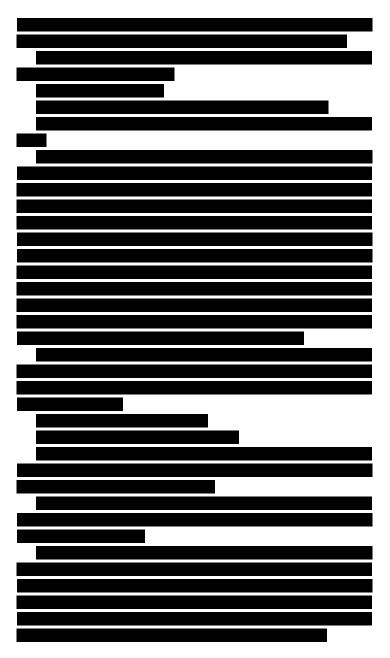


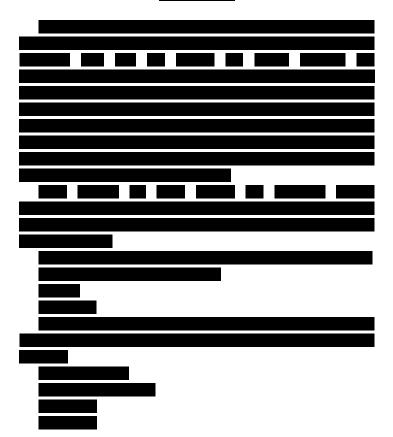


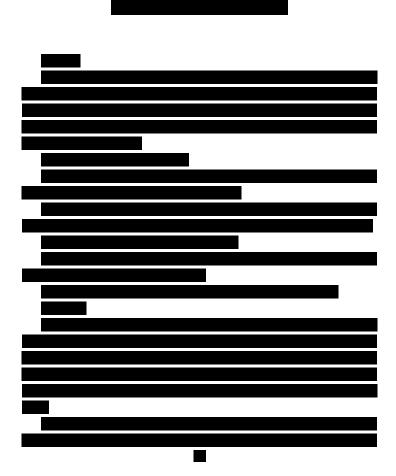




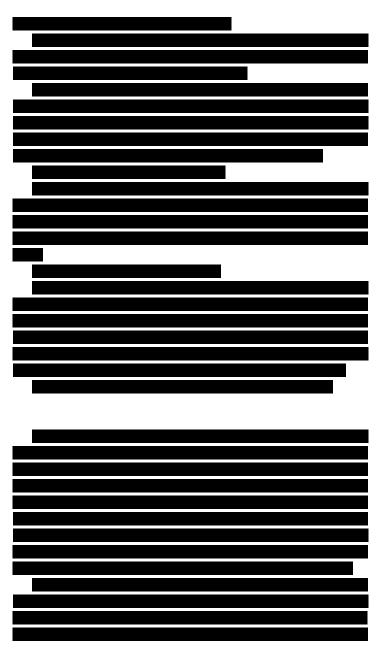






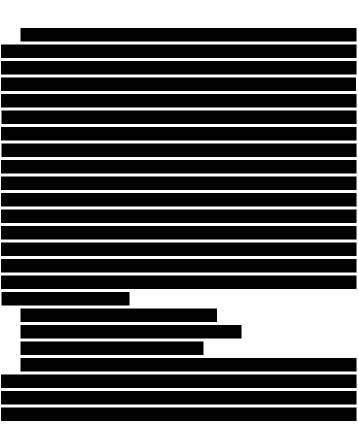


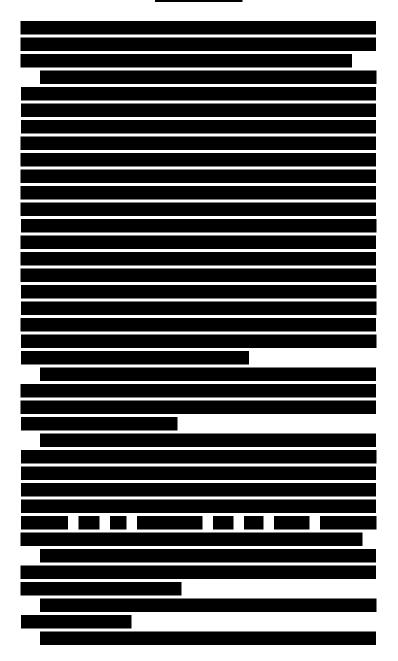




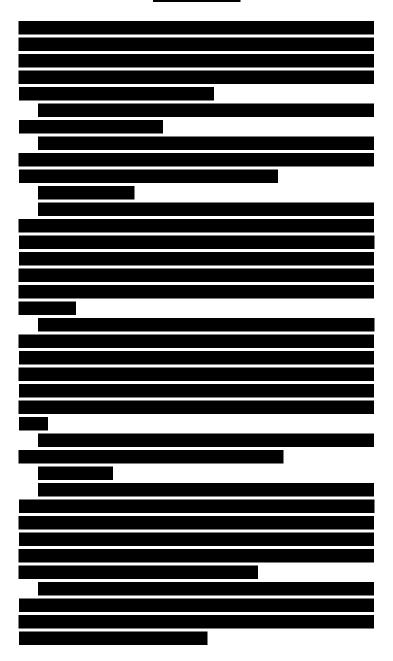


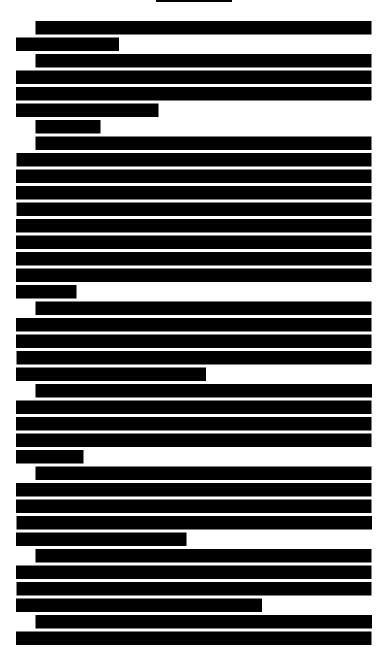


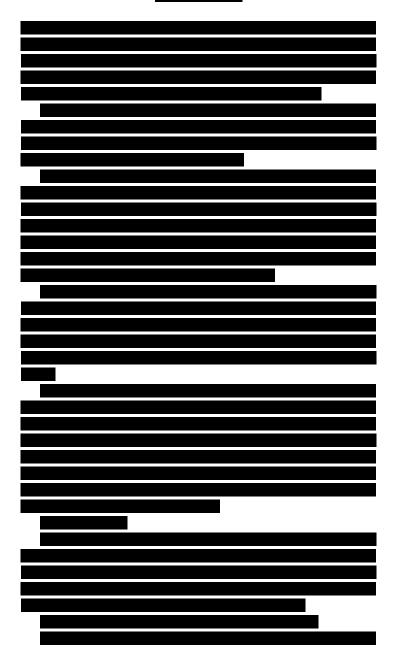


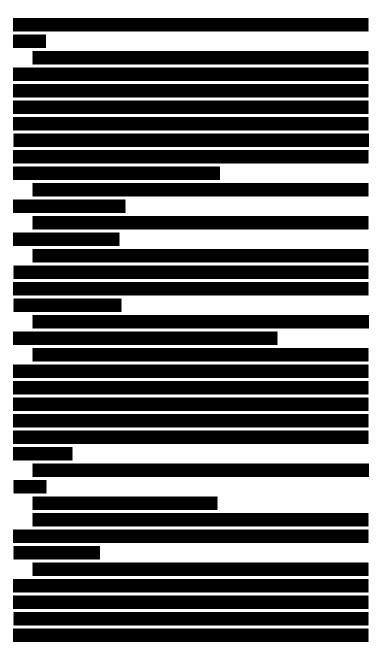


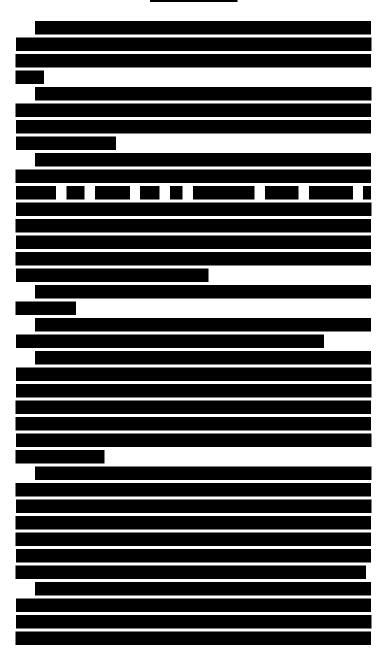


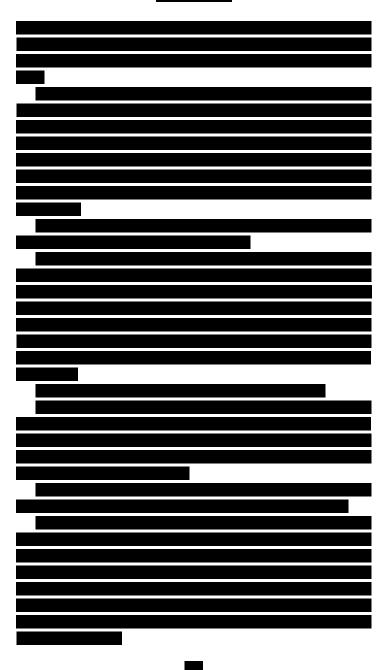


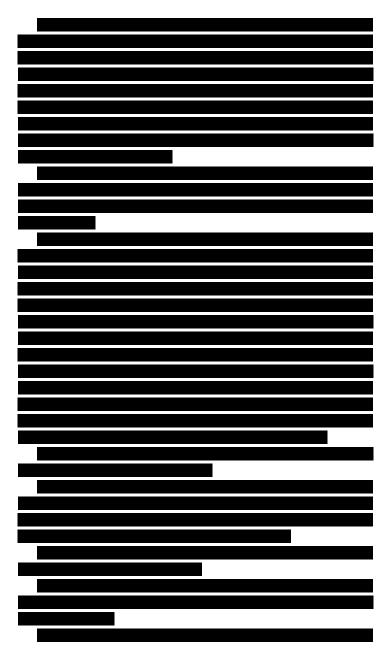


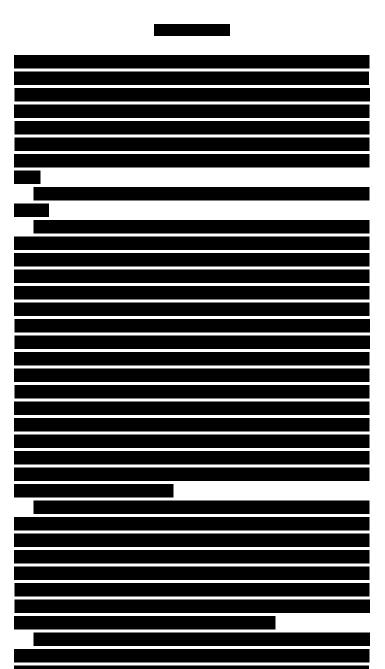




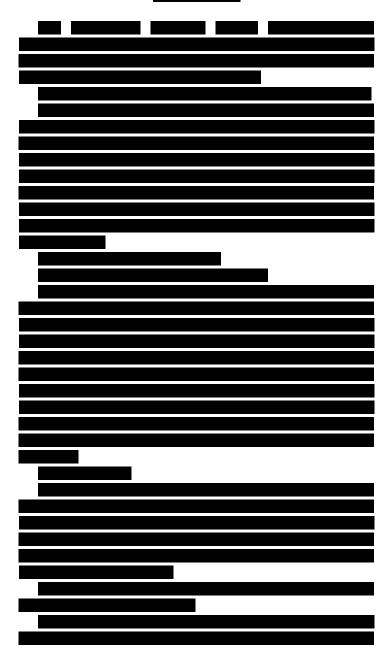








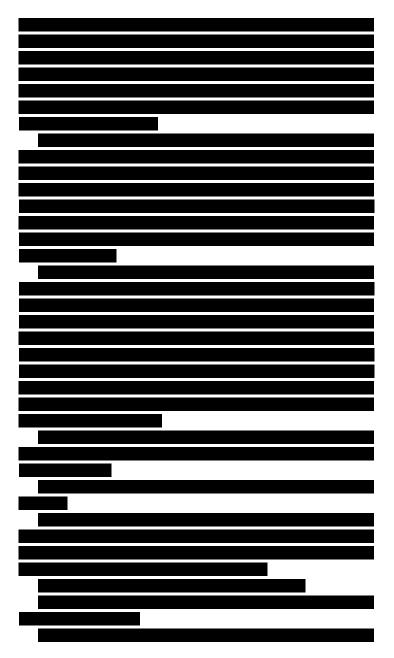




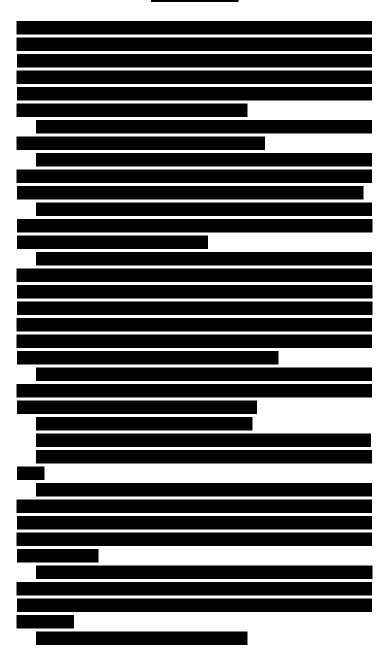


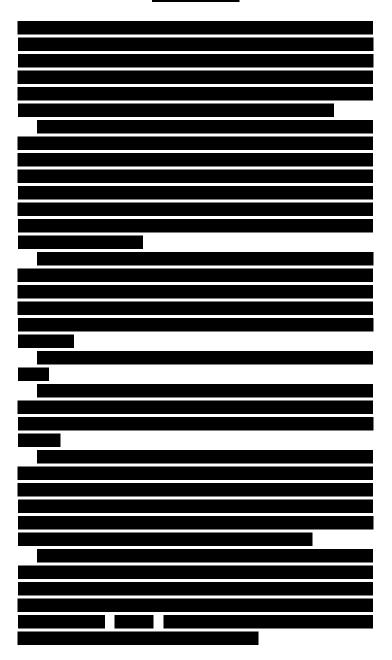






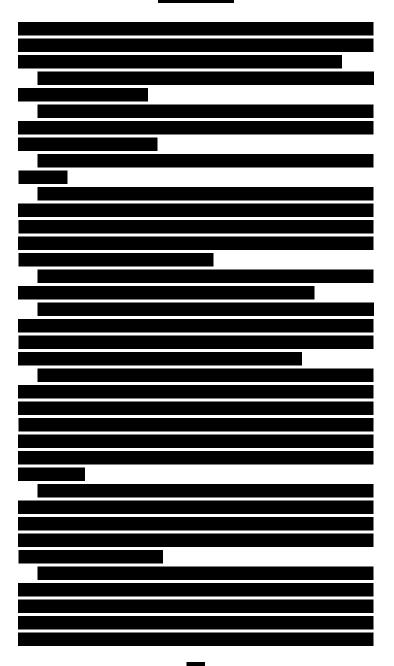


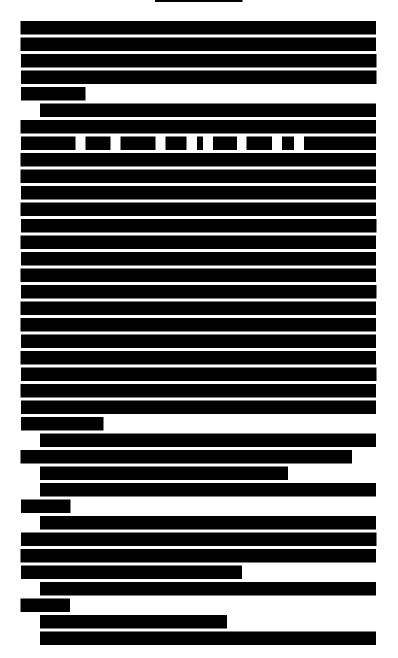


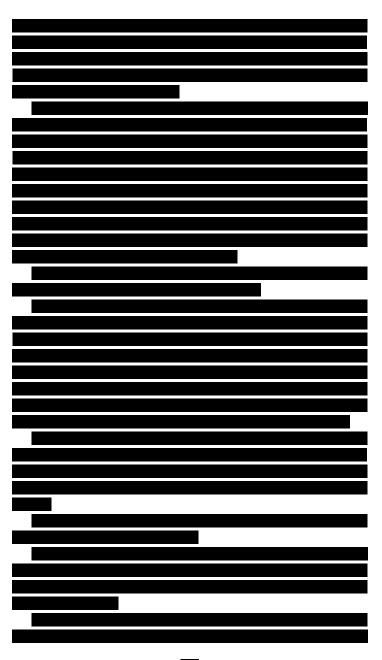


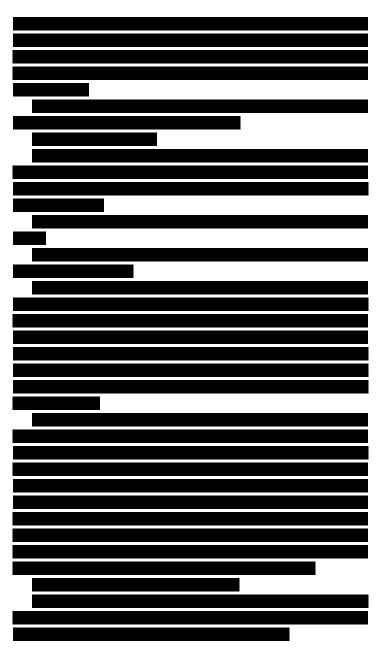


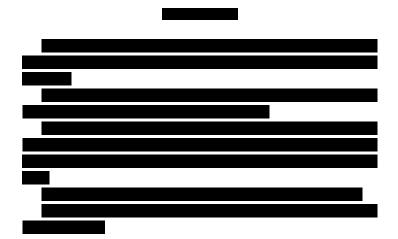




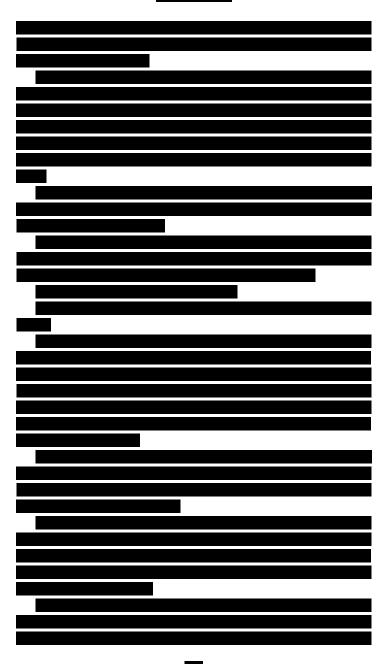


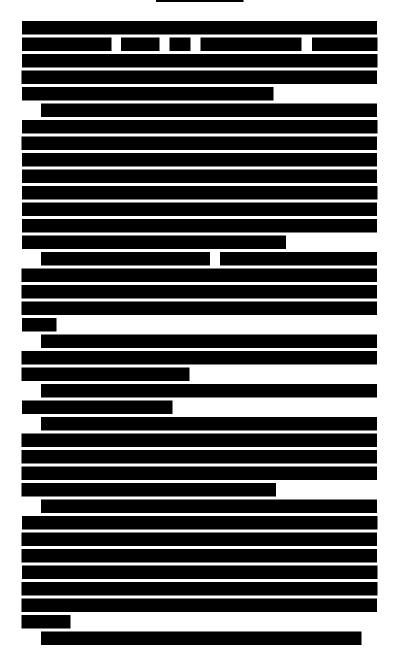


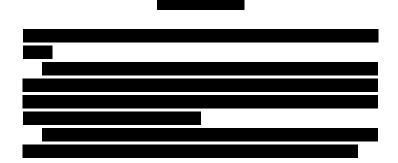


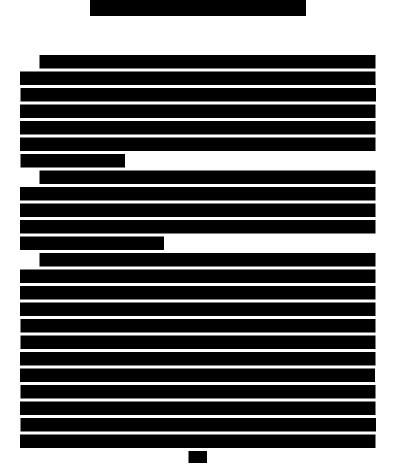


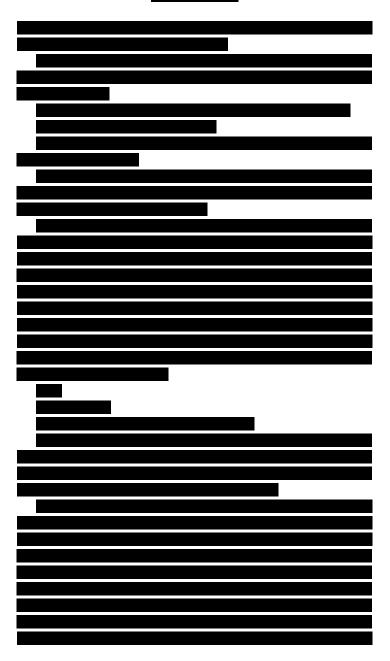


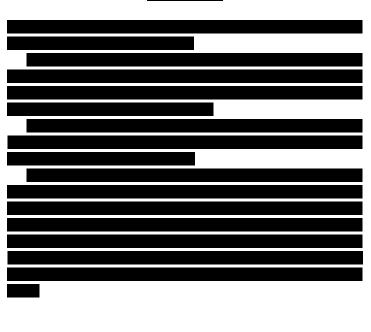




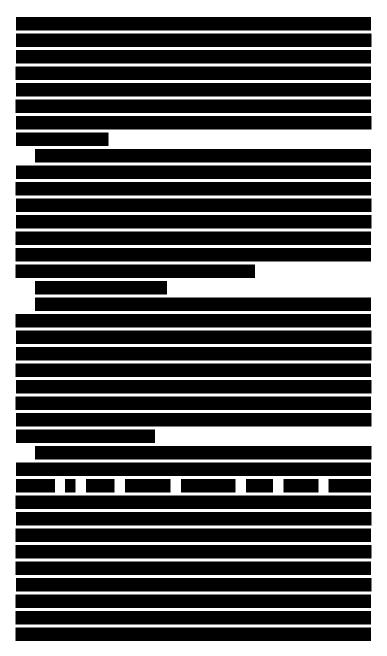


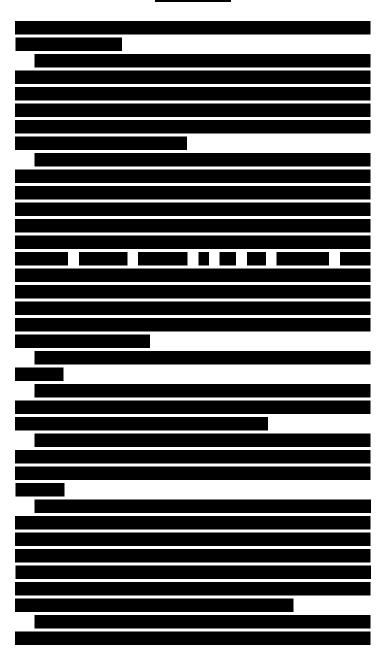


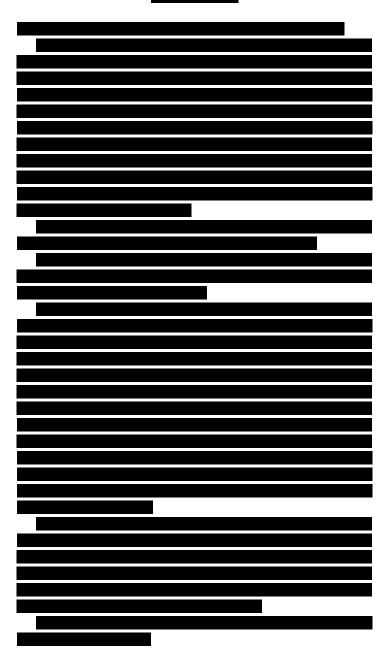


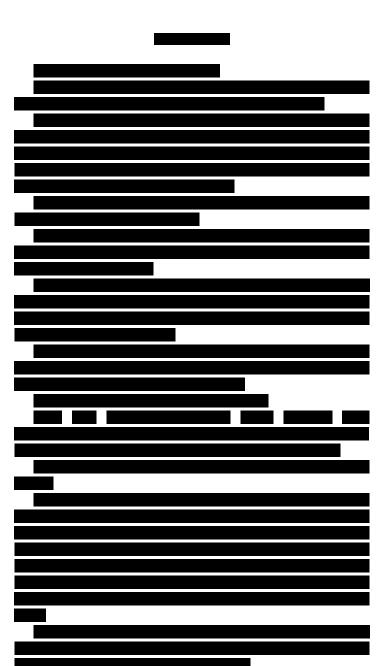


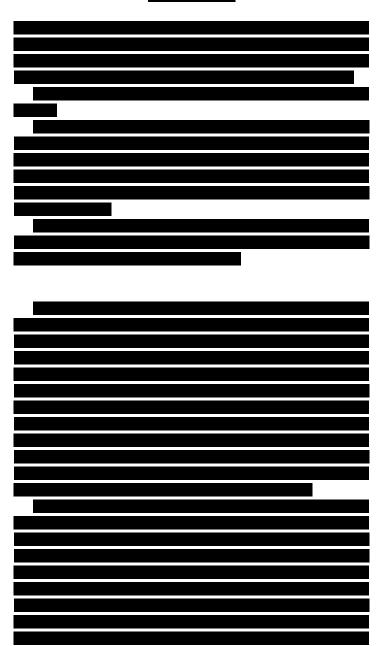


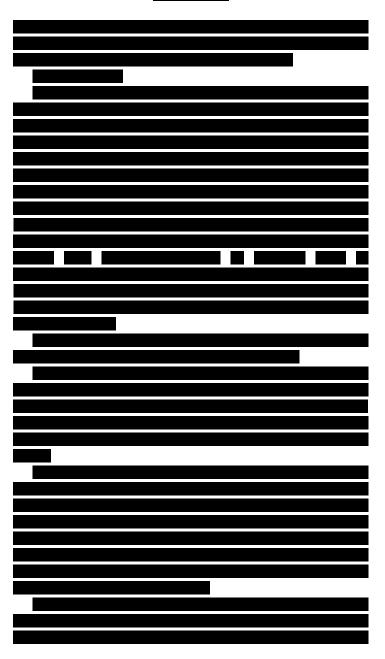


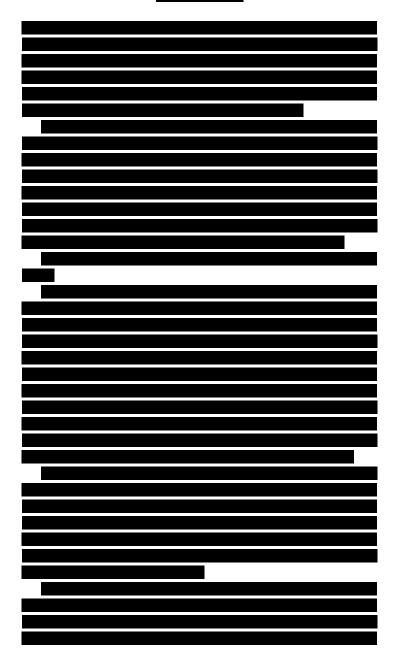


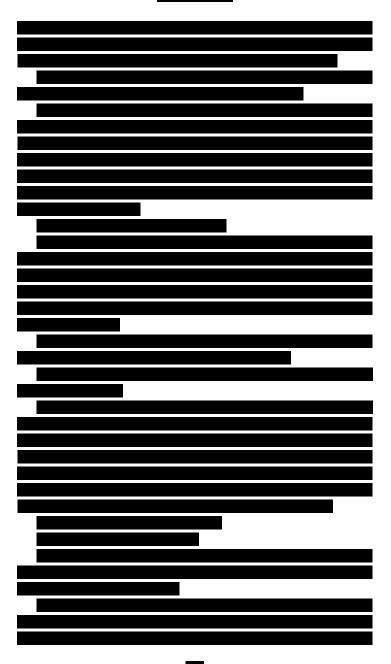


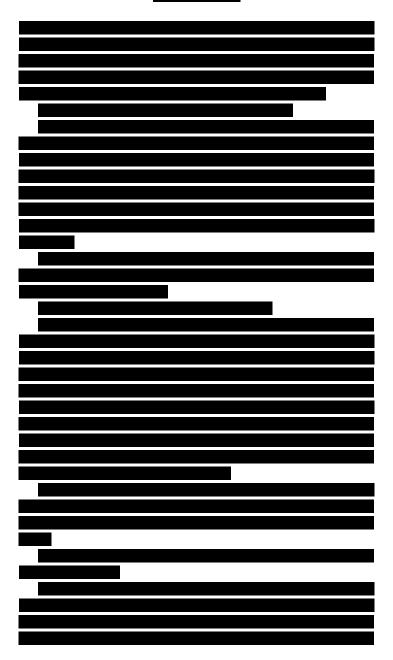








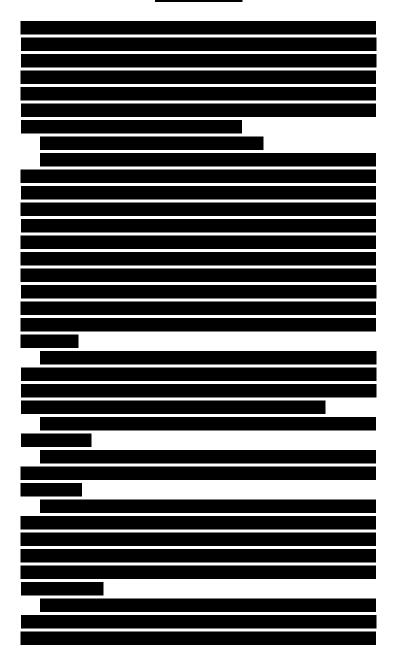


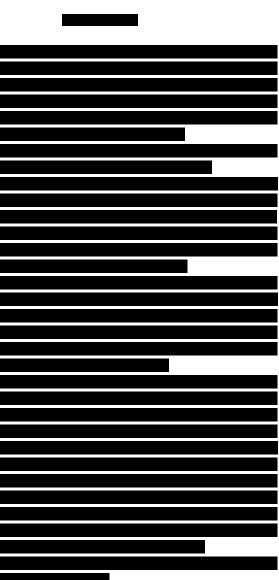


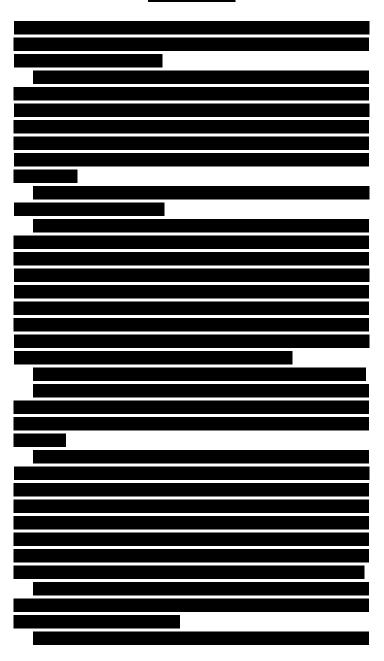




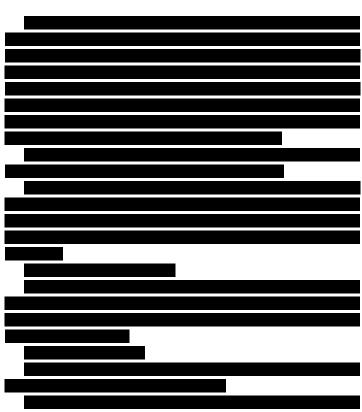


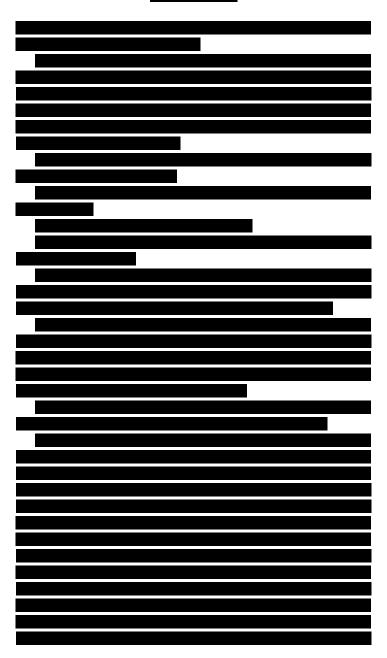


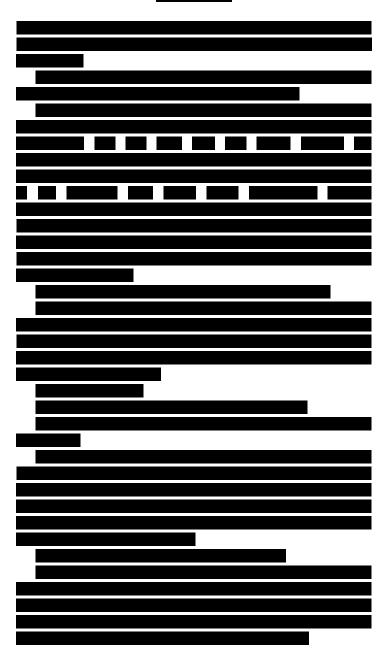






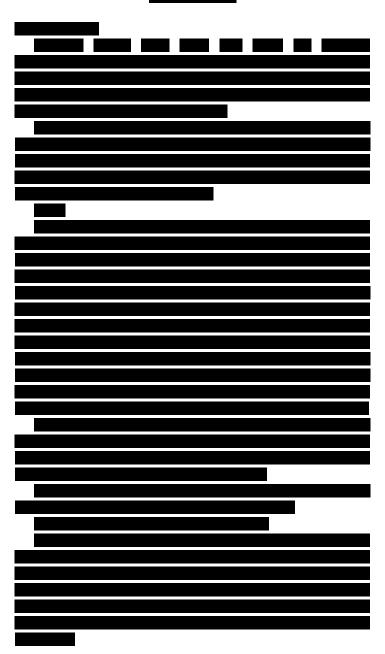


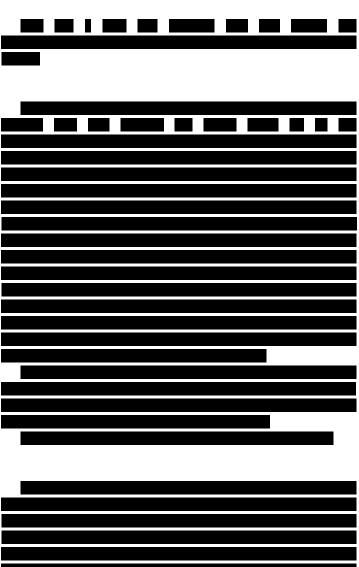


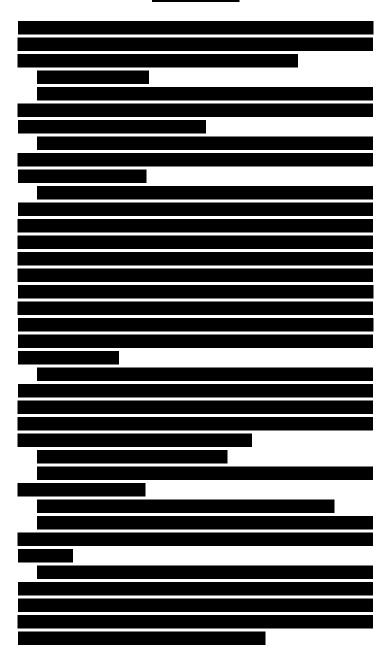


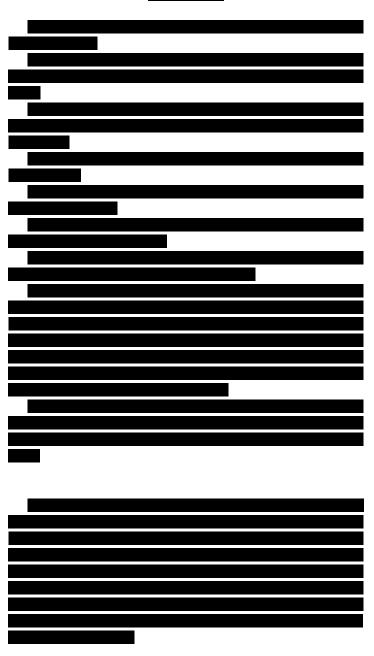


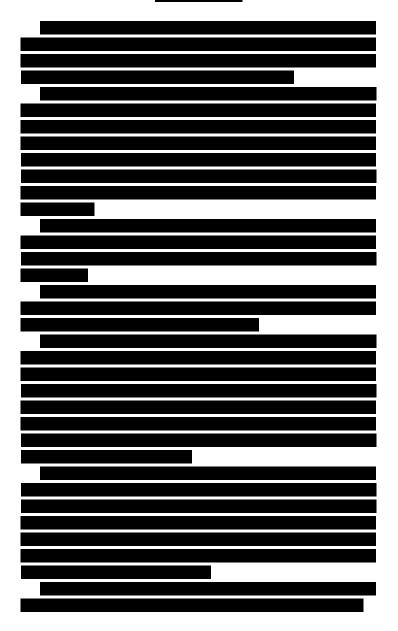




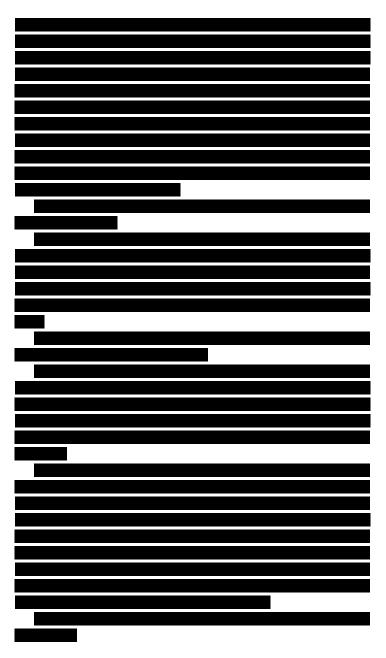


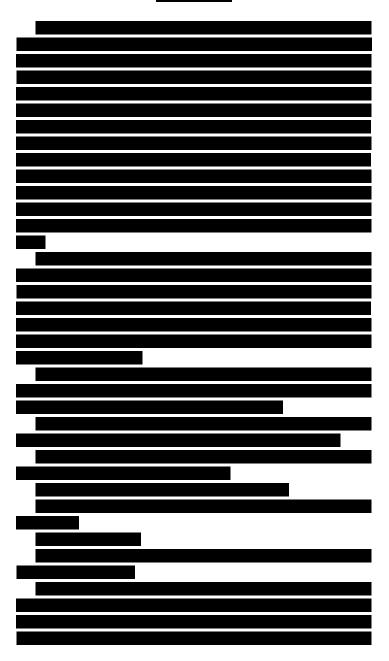


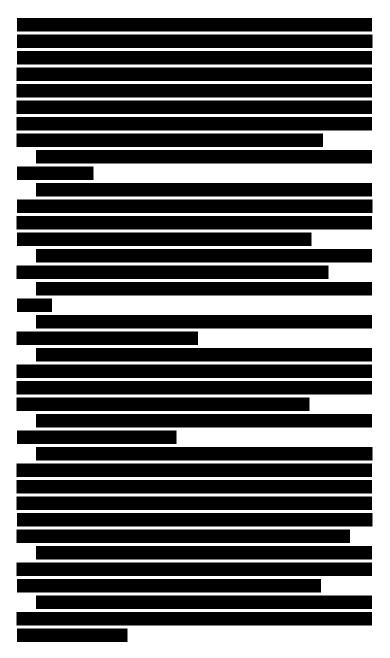


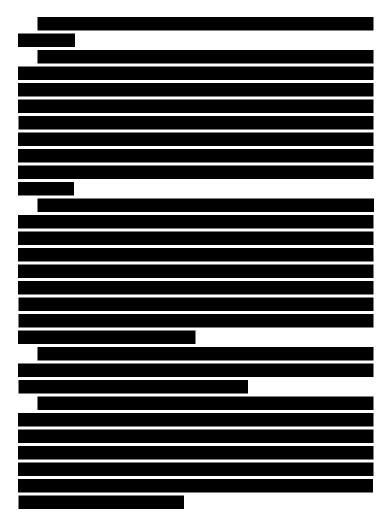




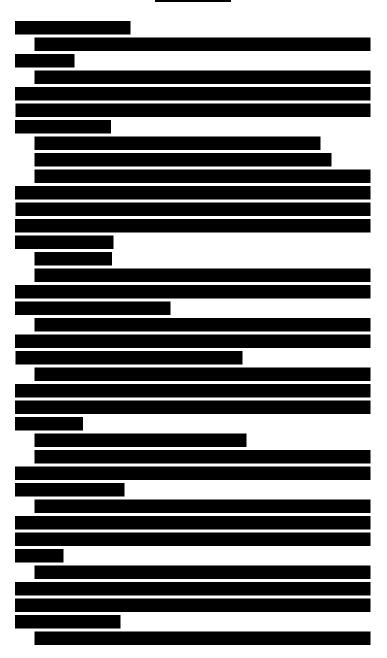


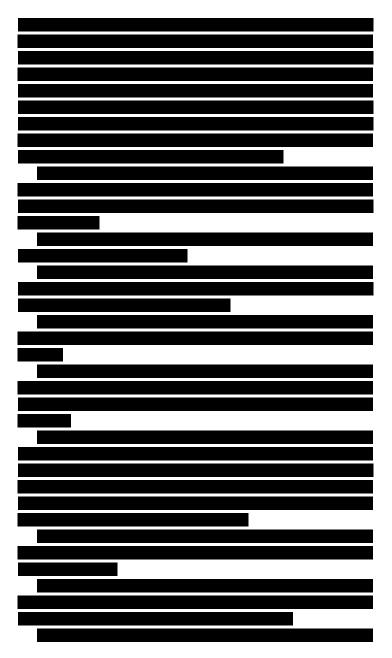




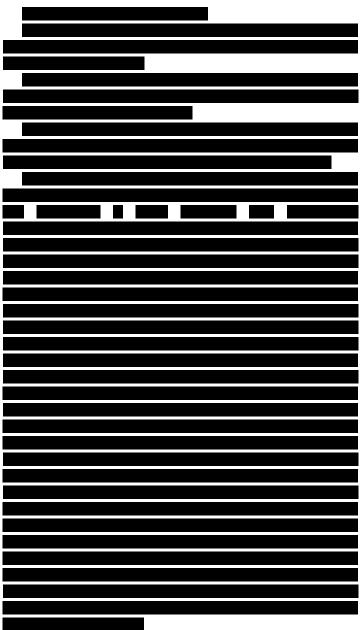


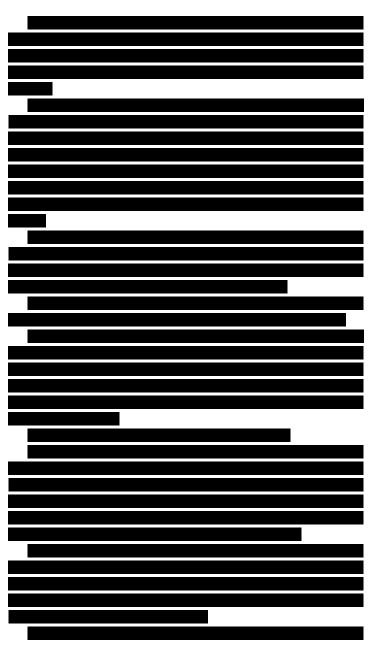


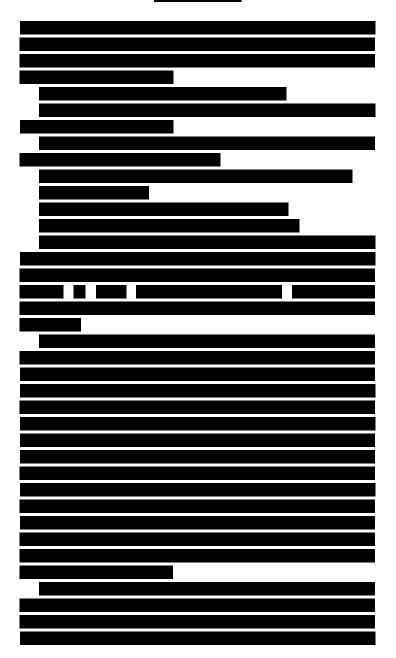


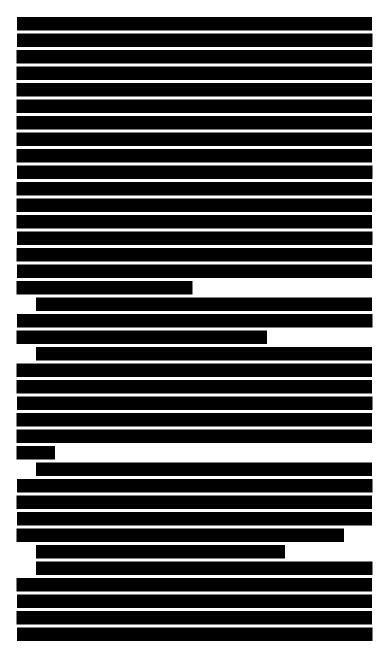




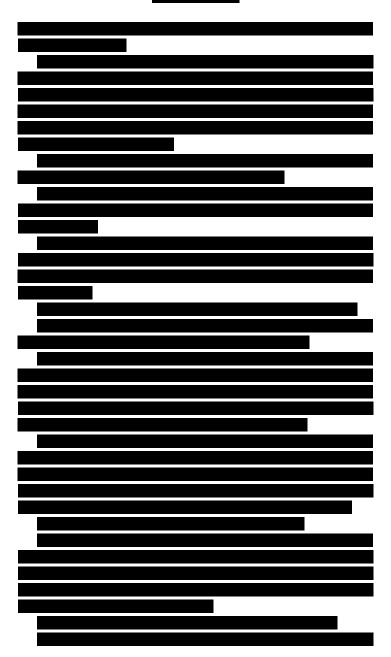


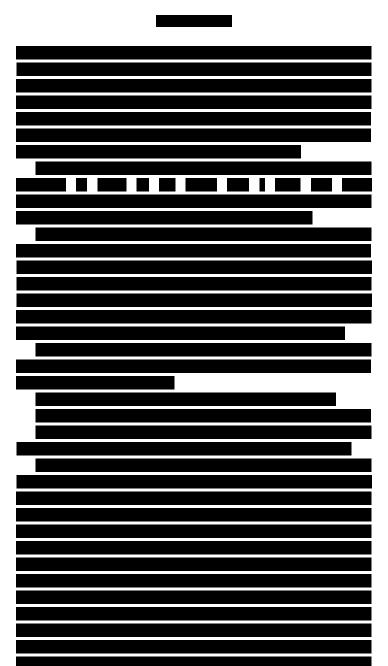


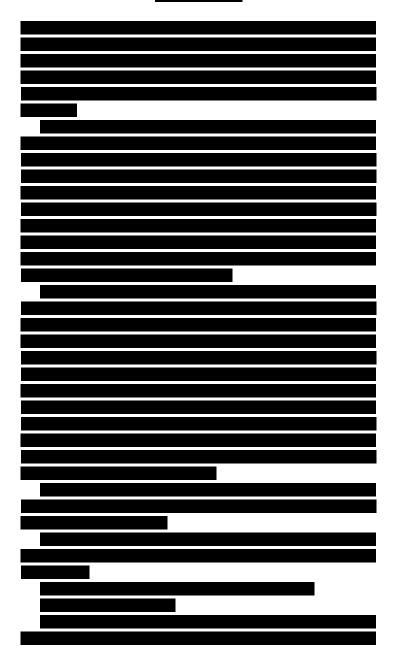


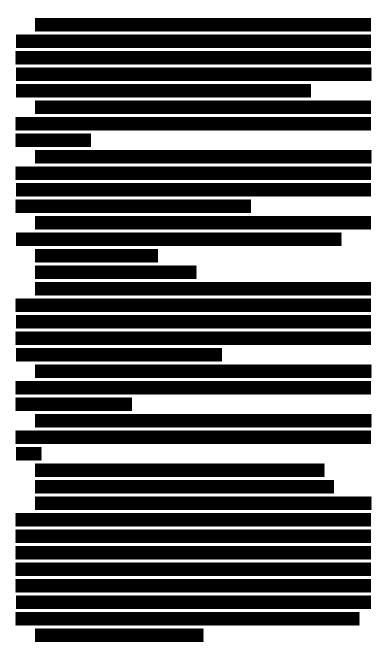


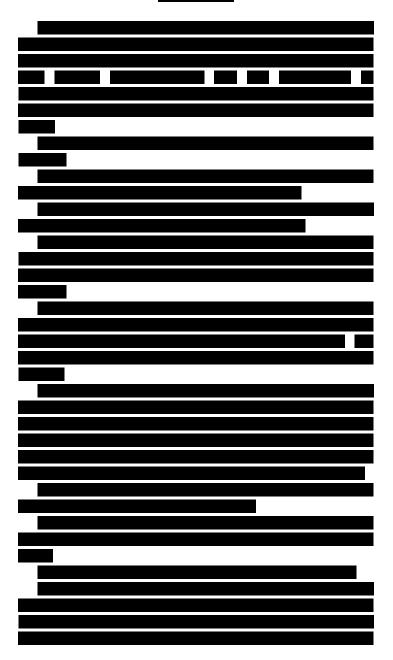
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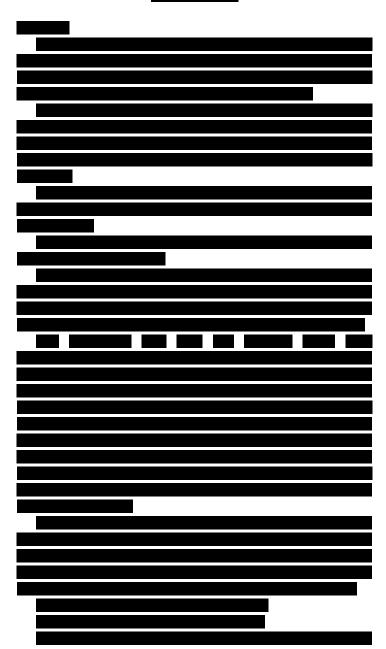


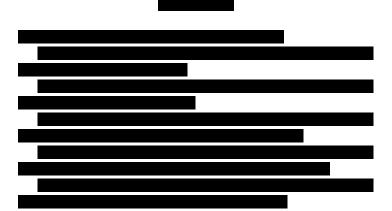


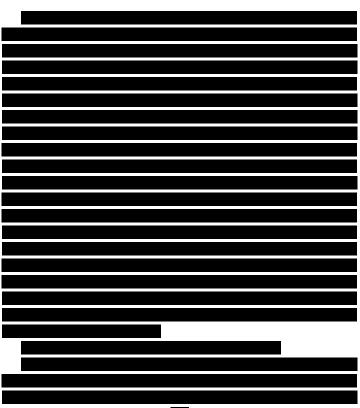


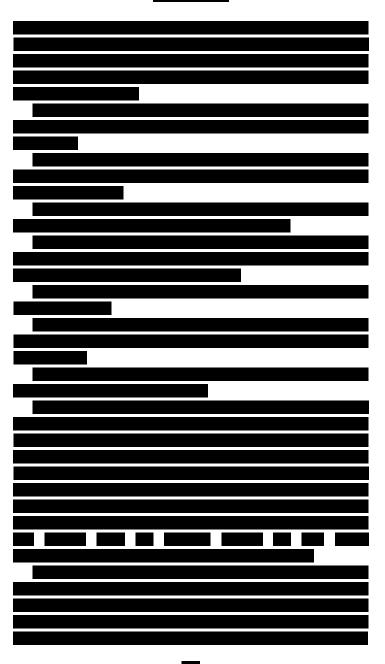


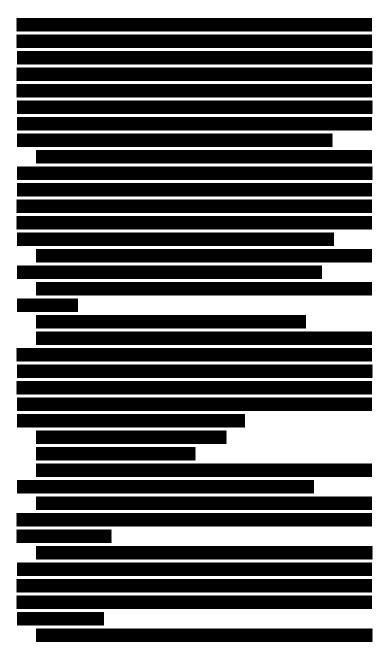


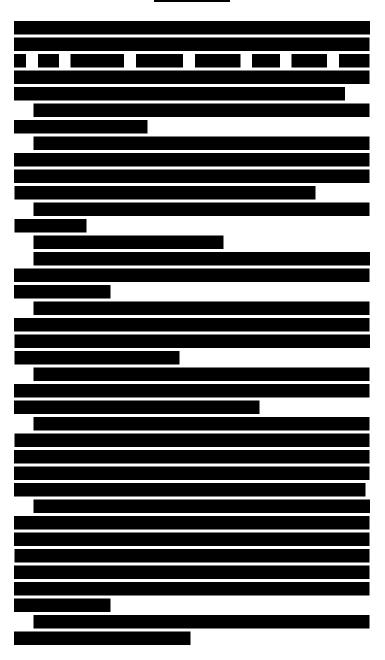


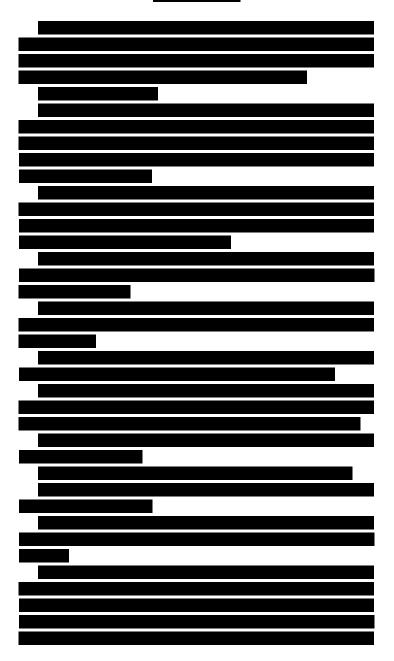


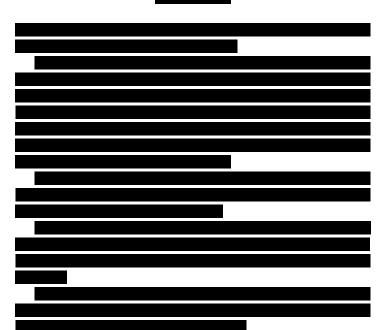


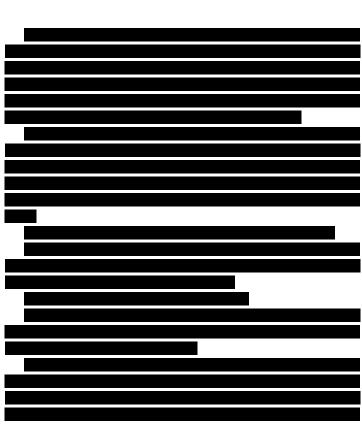




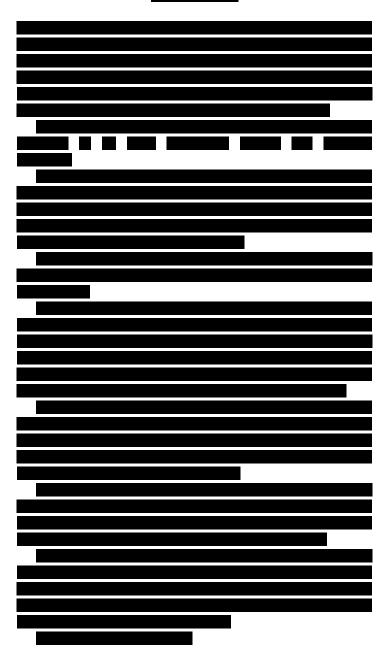


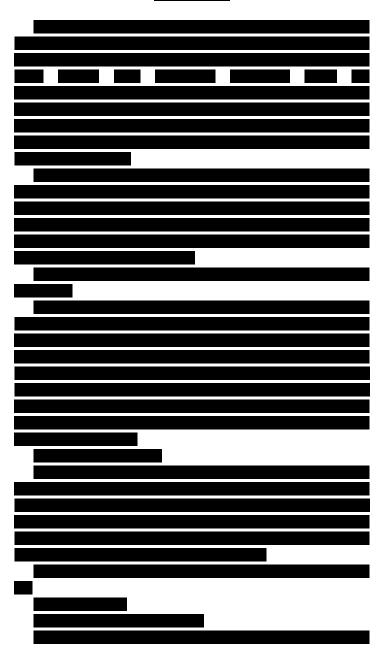


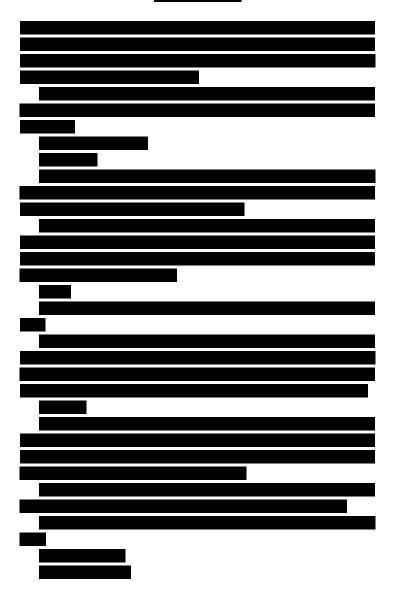




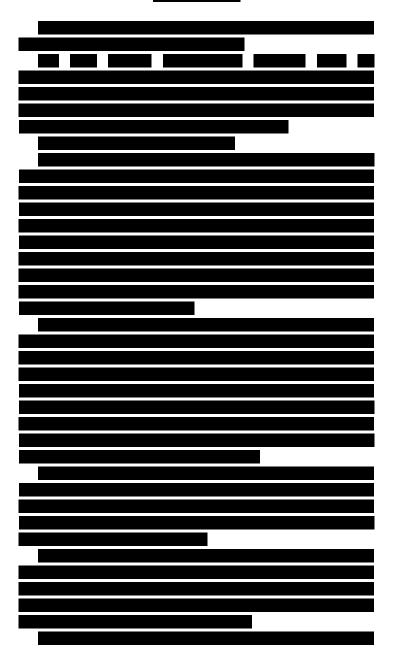


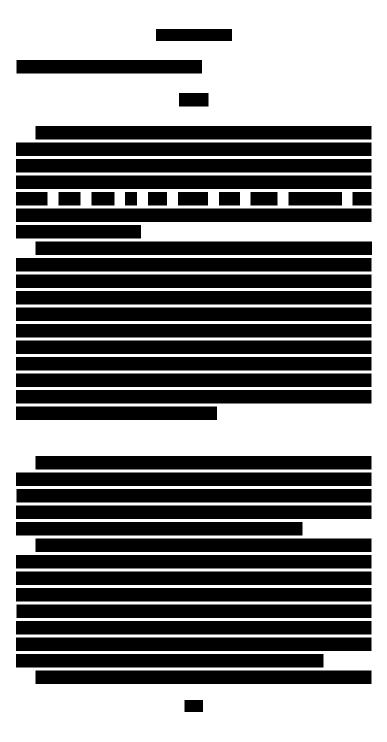


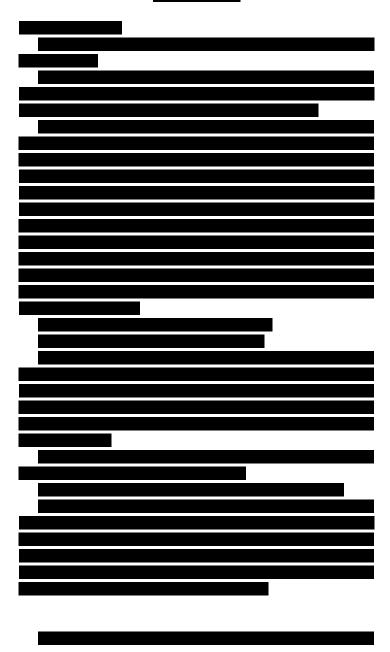


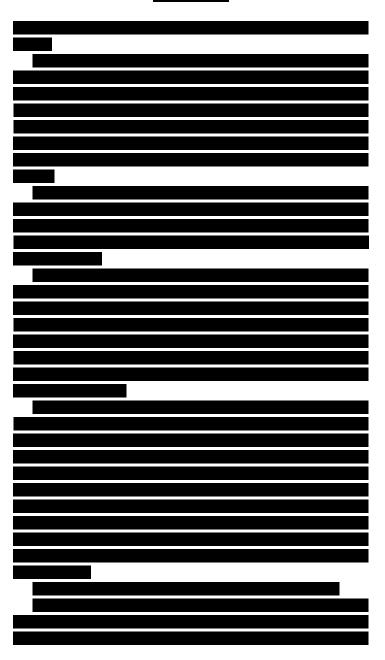


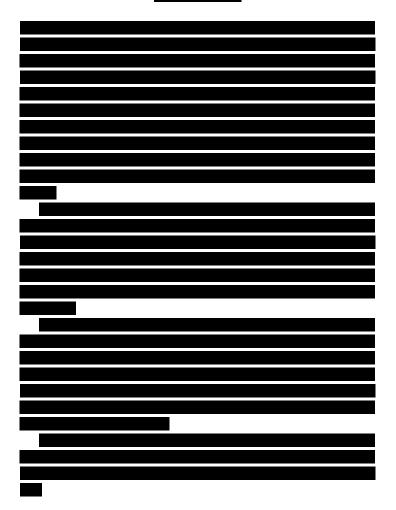




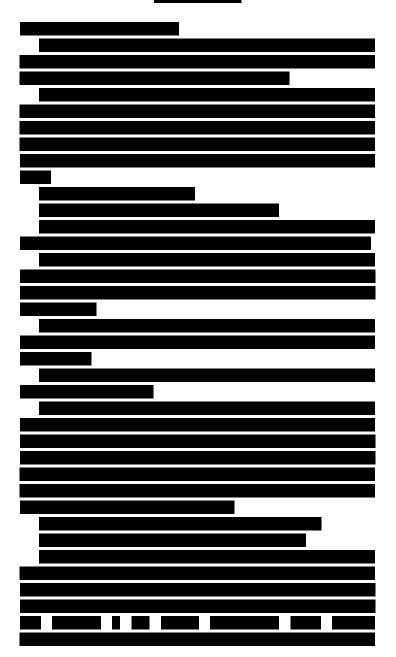


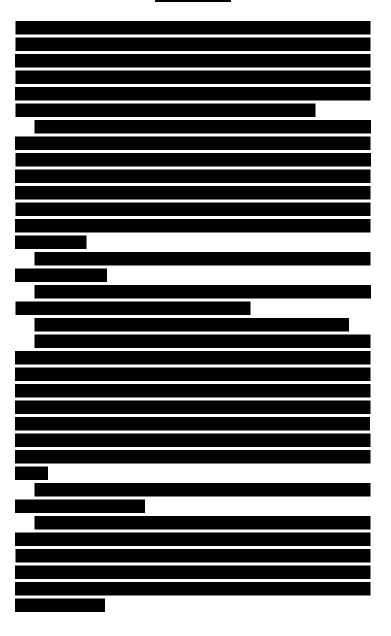




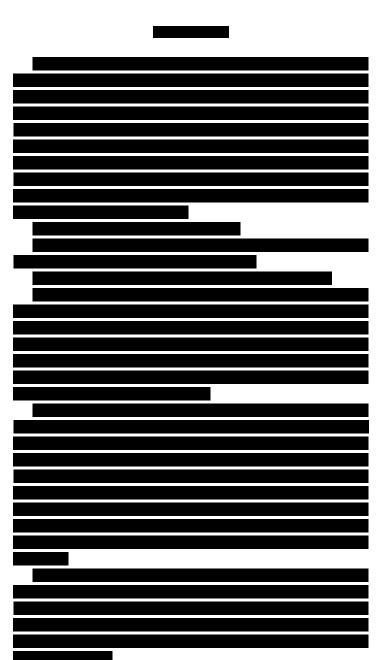


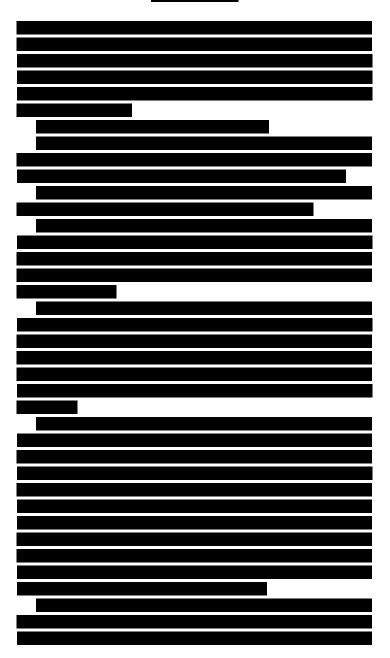


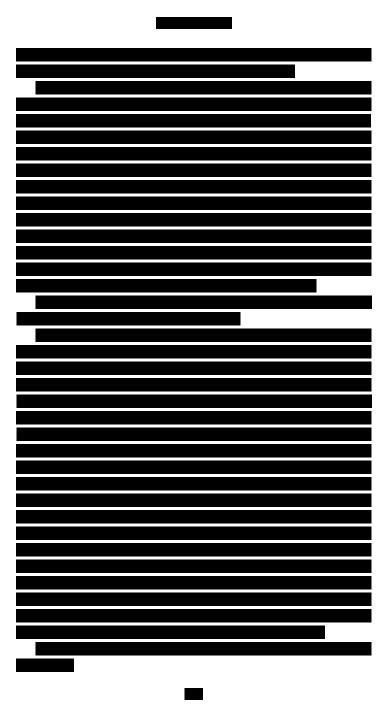




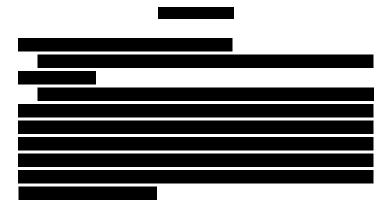


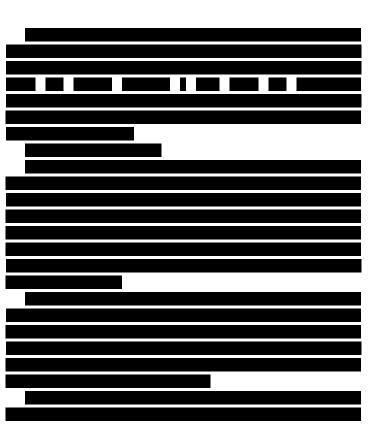


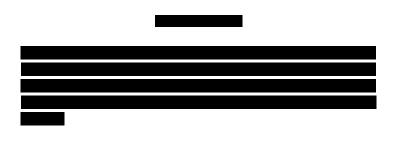




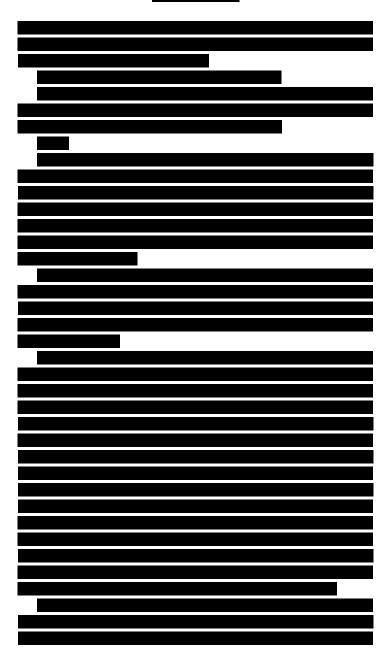


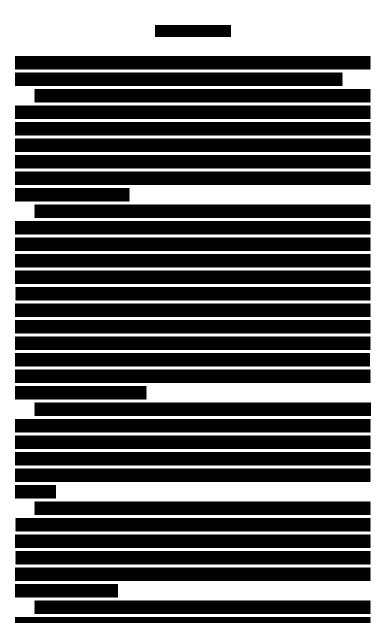


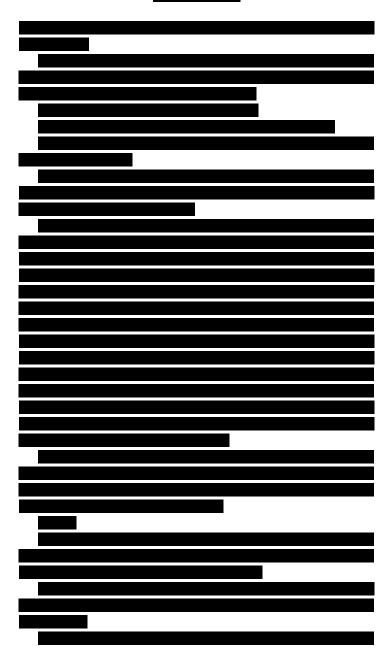


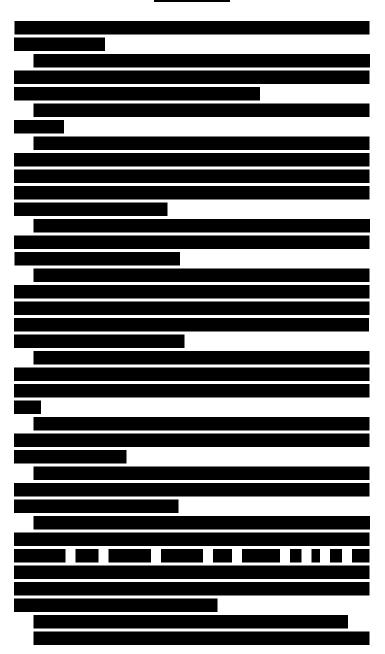


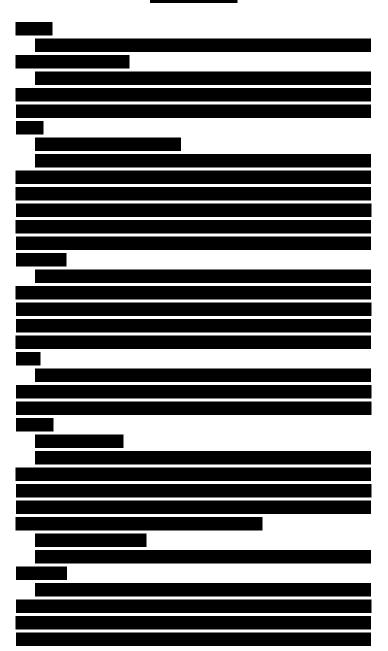




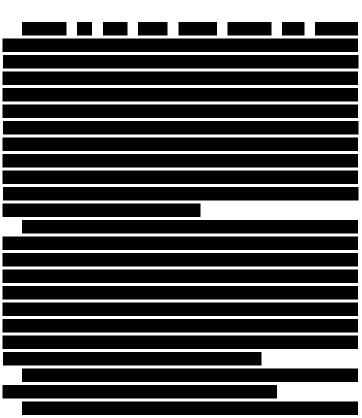


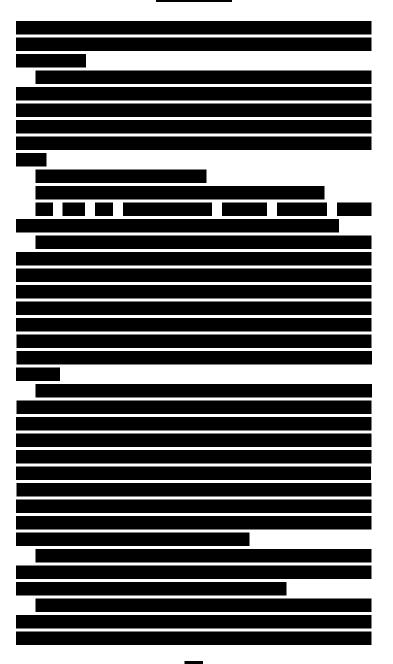


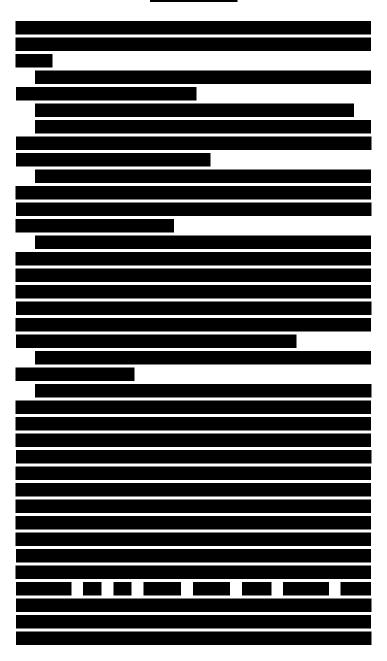


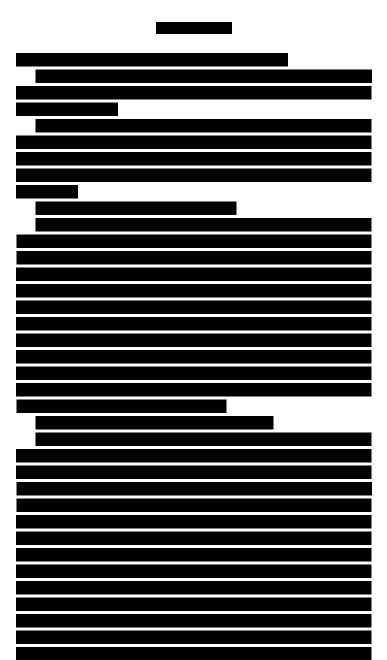


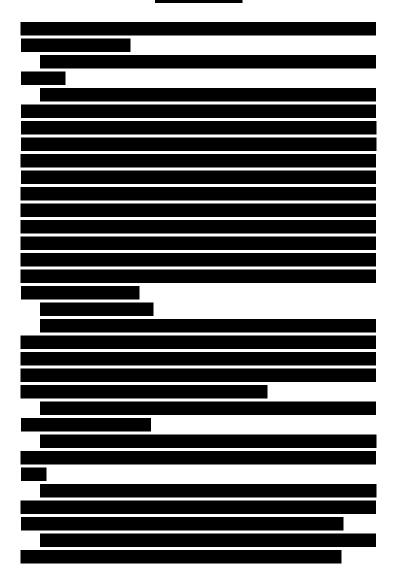


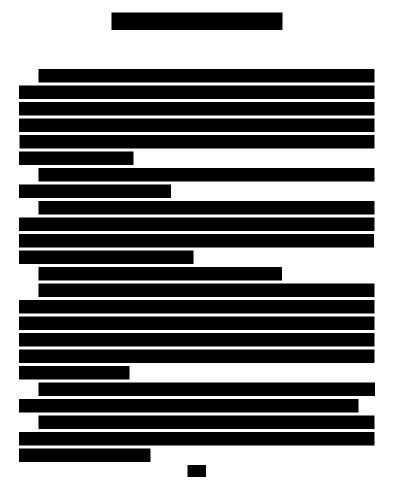


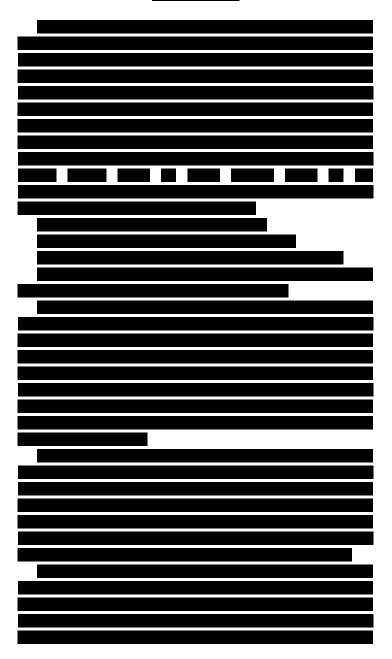


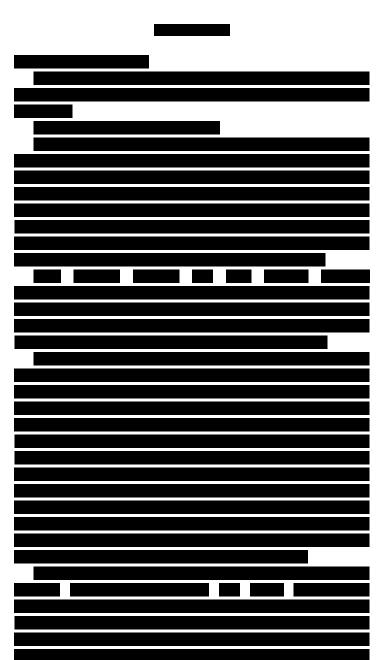


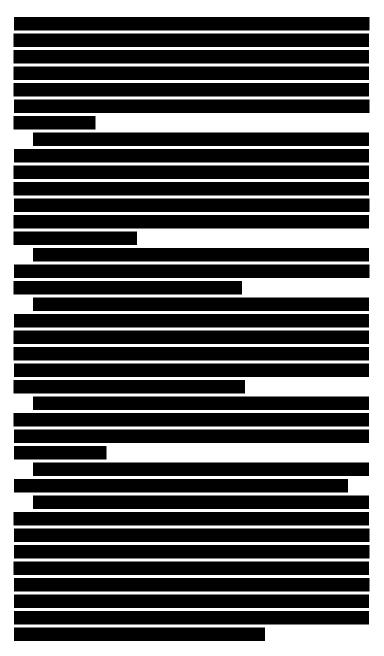


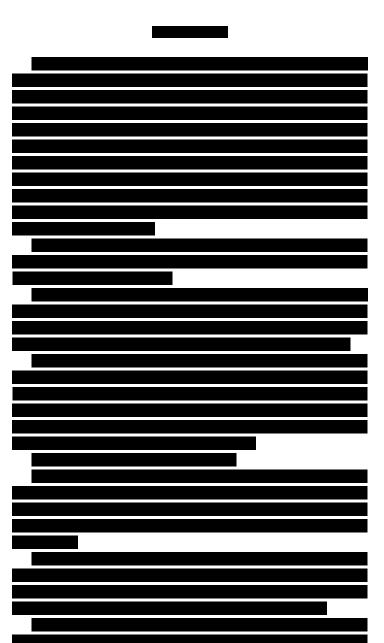


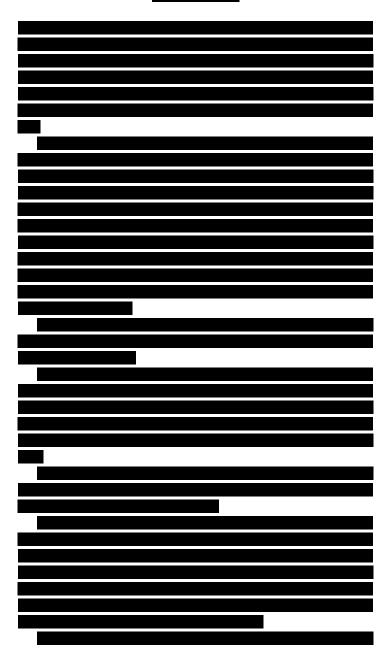


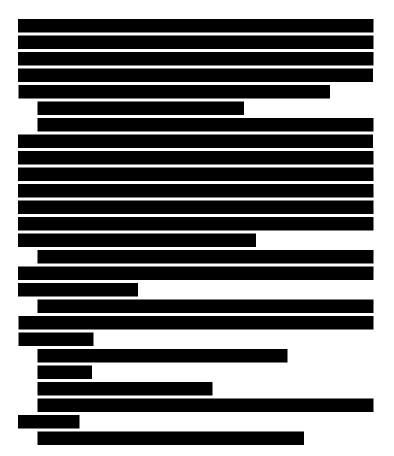


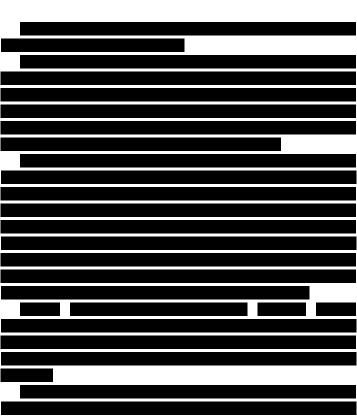


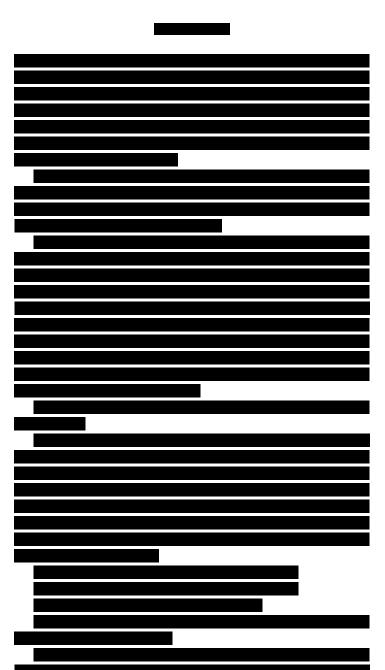


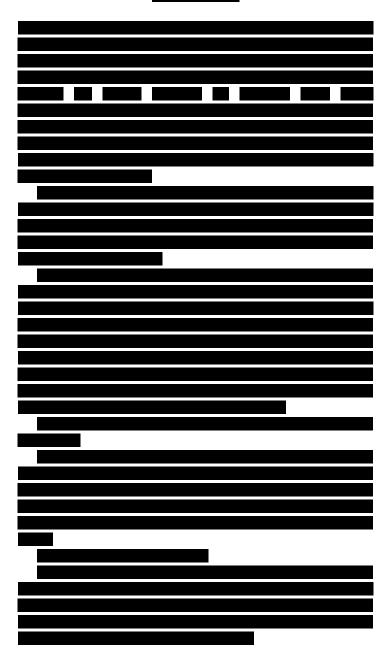




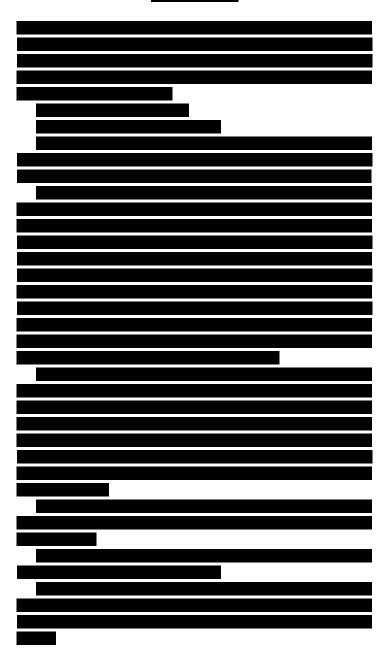


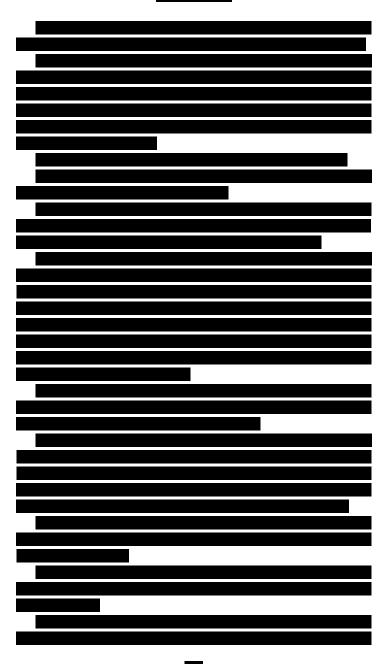


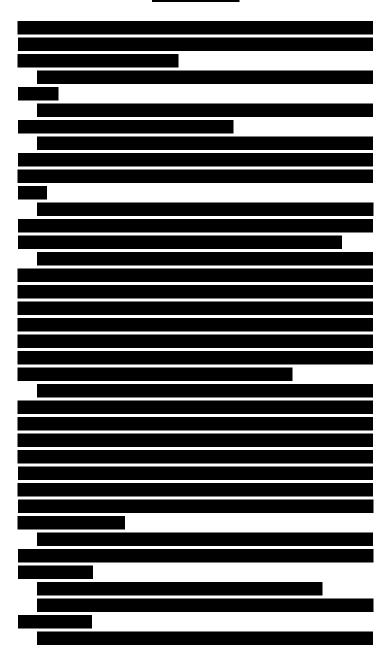


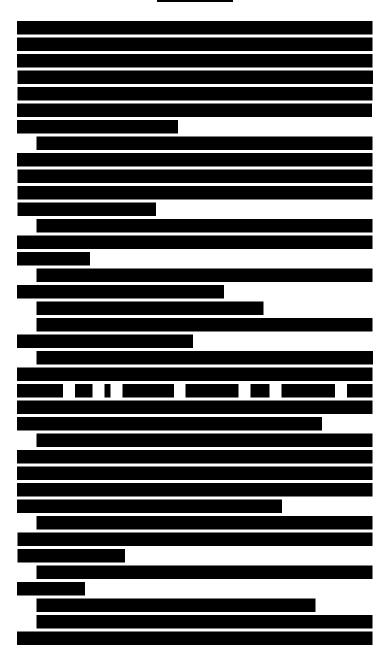


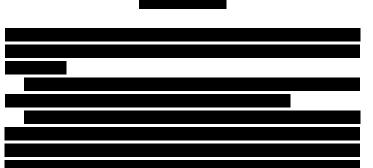
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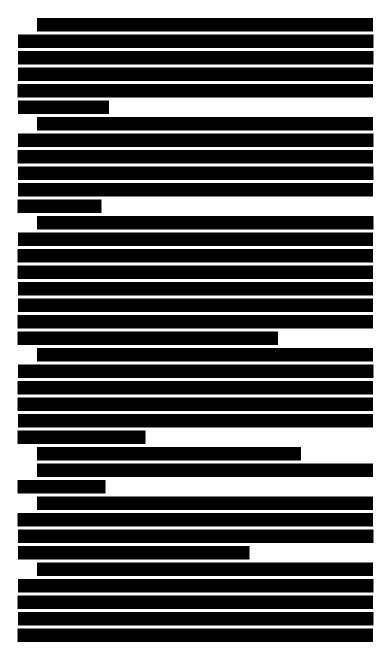


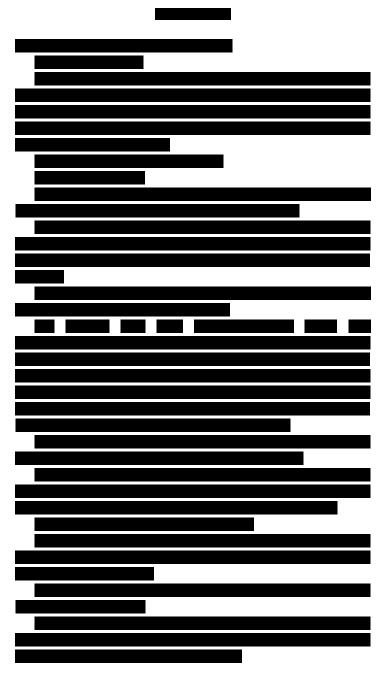


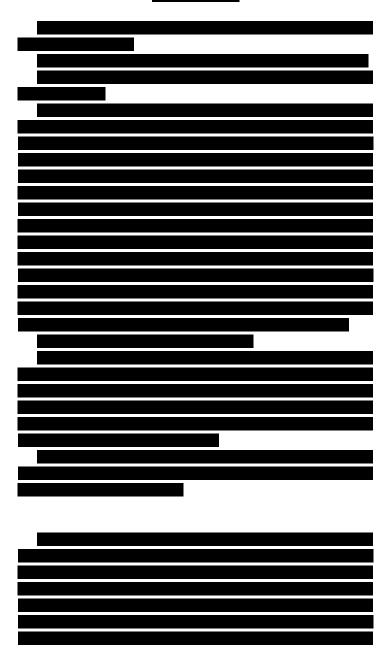




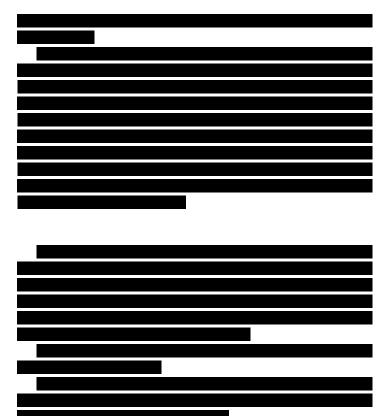
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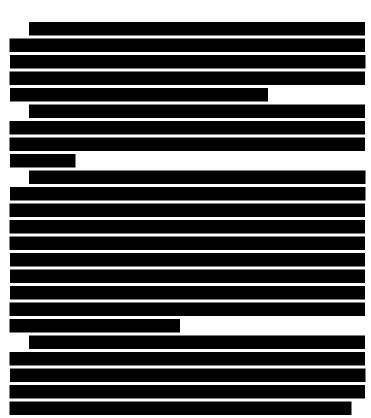


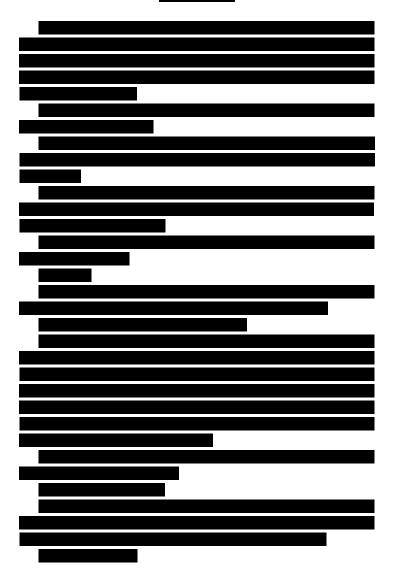


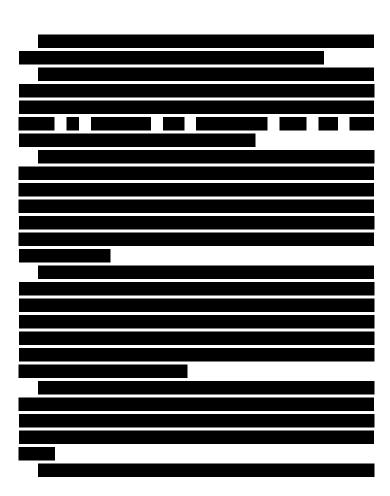






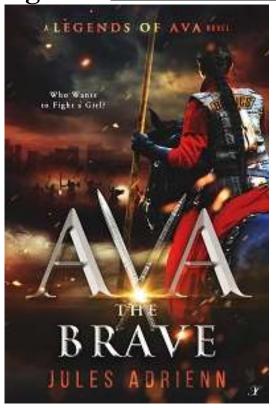








See Where Ava's Story Began in *Ava the Brave*



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Jules Adrienn is the Young Adult fiction-writing alter ego of an award-winning author from the Midwest. She's a world traveler, a homebody, a belly-laugher, a bawler, a lover, and a fighter. Stay tuned in to her latest adventures in writing (and life)—she's always up to something.

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