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Inaugural Issue

March 8, 2010

ZWVG

*/lit/*erature Digest

Featuring:

SICK

>by Josef K.

Manual for a Modern Day Living

>by Mallory Soto

The Lay of King David

>by Subotai

Lazarus in the House of Hrothgar

>by Lars Mars

AND 39 OTHER WORKS BY ANON



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EVERYONE
now in a monthly compilation

ZWG
*/lit/*erature Digest

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2010



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A Letter from the Editors

To many, the creation of a user-submitted content zine seemed impossible. To many, the making the Zine Writers Guild Digest was outright bullshit. Coming from an often troll-infested board, it seemed unthinkable at first that a collaborative project could ever succeed, having in mind that many others failed. The first thread were full of shit and maximum trolage, but after Goldensox aka. The Guildmaster got his ass handed to him and got a team of editors, everthing went on the right way.

This zine is an honest effort. For the anons, by the anons.

With the release of this publication, 4chan proves that it can not only challenge the odds, but beat them. It's the first project to take on shape and volume and actually get a final release.

The final result of everyone's work is a neat, 120+ page zine, complete with everyone works in all genres.

Thanks again, authors, for your submissions and patience. An thank you anon, for reading this and giving us sincere feedback.

Enjoy your read.

-The ZWG editors

FICTION

[Untitled]

By Anonymous of Dallas !awNDo4Ud3

"I had a dog once, Elise I called her. She was mine, but I did not raise her. One day I went outside for the mail and there she was, sitting near my mailbox looking at me. I decided to put out food and water. At first Elise would visit randomly, seemingly cautious, but after a few weeks she would come everyday. I would invite her in but she refused, lying on my porch, looking up at me. Eventually I invested in a rocking chair, and I would sit outside in the evenings and pet her while we watched the sun set. One day after sitting outside, I hear scratching, and when I go to investigate there she is, looking up at me momentarily, then trotting past me into my house where she lied beside the couch. I just smiled and walked over, sitting down and petting her. She would come lie on my lap and sit beside me on cold dark nights, keeping me company. I would feed her and shelter her and in return she gave me company and something other than myself in my small house. For four years, this continued. She was mine, until one day she strolled out of the house. I thought she might have just gone for a long walk at first. Over time, I realized that she wasn't coming back.

I miss her."

The Only Night

by Anonymous of Dallas !awNDo4Ud3

"I sit and stare at the glowing window that is before me, the glowing window of last generation is seen in the corner of my eye. The stills I look upon through space are like a burning reminder and they break a bond of trust. The sound floating through to my ear is pleasant, distracting myself from my current situation it does well.

My memory trails back to the other night at a new sushi joint. The place was packed and busting, yells coming from the kitchen and waiters humming back and forth, a sour scent filling the air as my host squeezes droplets of lemon juice into her water as food is shuffled past me hurriedly. The look of most of the food is not appealing; the one across from me is keeping poor company, her attempts at holding my attention are failing.

I only agreed for the sake of getting out, the effort spent so far has exhausted the amount of energy I wanted to use on this journey and it was spent on trying to act entertained with the girl's advances, I, however am interested in another.

My focus moves to the food that has arrived on a vibrantly colored red plate, the so called "delicacy" is placed in front of us both as the waiter bows and walks away.

I sigh, discontent with my own doing as I look on at a couple, smiling and giggling happily amongst them. As I sit and look at them, our distance not great but we are vastly far from each other. My attention is drawn to my phone; it's the one, whom I chase to no avail.

The one who lights my phone has been wearing me thin lately; she takes stabs at me and leaves me rather empty, building my hopes only to drop them at any given second. This old torch is going out, if ever so slowly. I do not reply to her text, it's shallow and meaningless. I can see right through her forced words and right through her.

I sigh once more, looking at my host once again and pressing my need for love into her now.

It's now night, my former host is getting dressed while she sits at the end of my bed as I look on, laying on my back, hands behind my head. She smiles and walks over to me after putting her shoes on, leaning down she tries to kiss me but I turn my head, denying her. She frowns and says goodbye as she leaves.

I lie on my large bed, alone, in this spacious rectangle meant for comfort, I think while the neon sign in corner view flashes incessantly every few seconds.

The world, it's on my mind, the whole world? No, it shall only be my world that I think of, however small it is, however much of an impact I will or have had on

yours. This cold light fades out ever so slowly, blinking and lighting the room I sit in for a moment before plunging it into darkness to be lit once more momentarily."

Revolution

By Darrin

At any given point in one's life, one has an infinite number of choices. My life was no exception, though I can firmly say that all but one of my available options would end badly. That lone path then did not so much have a glimmer of hope at the end of its still warm tunnel, but merely a probability for error I could at least grasp firmly in my mind. From my decision stemmed six possible outcomes, five of which were identical: death. The sixth offered postponement.

There were six of us that were lead into that small back room, and close behind followed at least fifteen others whom I had never met and never will. Sitting down in a circle at that small card table, we took a minute to light up our cigarettes, suck in the soothingly coarse ghostly white ash and blow in each others faces as if discarding our souls at the coat-check before entering the party. I did not know them and by the end of the night either I would be braving oblivion's endless seas of the unknowable or they would be so exchanging names, let alone forming any sort of bond, was out of the question. The one to my left snarled, curling his mouth and flaring his nostrils as if to intimidate us, the one dead ahead did absolutely nothing. His eyes, unfocused, saw me only as a blur of black and white where I was in shade and where my sickly pale skin caught light. Perhaps he was praying, perhaps he was frozen entirely with fear or perhaps he was letting go of everything material he thought he knew. More likely was that he was simply so apathetic and sedated that his situation truly meant nothing to his inaccurately labeled mind. One man was fidgeting nervously and wiping greasy sweat off his forehead and his already clammy palms. I can not recall at all my own actions, but I had no concern for anything, least of all my well being. The audience had already placed their bets outside and were now dead silent, the room's air carrying only the syrupy fog of tobacco, the hot rancid breath of twenty-one men and the awkward uneven clatter of a washing machine in the next room.

The snarling man was naturally chosen to be first and picked up the demonic steel from the center of the table and placed its foreboding lips against the side of his head. Through all his bravado it was clear that he could not pull the trigger of his own free will. It was convenient then that all our bloodshot hungry eyes condemned him to death on his behalf. His delay was only for a microsecond before succumbing and clenching back the trigger violently. The hammer snapped back and headbutted an empty chamber. He let out a thundering roar and slammed the device onto the tabletop. The man to his left did not notice his theatrics at all and was falling deep into the void that seemed to now dwell in the center of the room. Without any foreign encouragement, he picked it up heavily and pressed it against the skin as if with anticipation. To his disappointment, there too came nothing but a recited mechanical poem every man in the room was now familiar with. Silently, he leaned over into the cone of light traced with its dancing spectres and placed the pistol back where he found it. The lifeless corpse ahead of me calmly and fluidly aimed the barrel flush against his temple and produced nothing, placing it back where it belonged. It

was finally the fourth man who would play that round. It could be seen on his face that he knew his luck would not hold. There was a one in three chance that he would fire a bullet through his head but in his mind he might as well have been holding a semi-automatic. Before I could fully take in the sight, he was on the floor. His body was removed from the room and the weapon was reloaded.

Two bullets were placed in no particular pattern, the cylinder was spun, stopped abruptly and locked into place and the game began anew. Five players, two bullets, four empty chambers. The man to the left of the empty chair, on my immediate right, began to take his turn. "This isn't my first time playing you know. I guess you could say I'm a champion at this sort of thing."

"How does that work?" asked viciously the snarling man. "There's no skill involved, buddy. You can't even decide when to fold, at least not with this crowd."

"I don't need skill," he replied, "I'm blessed. Somebody up there keeps the empty chamber for me."

"Yeah?" spat some faceless form from the circled crowd. "Well, take your god damned turn and let's find out!" With a wide grin to show the world, the man took his turn with a deliberate tension building pace only to prove himself correct. He was still smiling when he put it back down under the hanging lamp between us.

It was my turn. When I finally lifted the heavy piece to my head it seemed an hour had passed. A dab of blood was smeared on the front sight. I could not help but ask myself why I was in that back room with those four men, a gun to my head. I needed the money and if I could not get it together in time I might as well have been dead anyway. Thus getting into the situation was easy enough, but to be faced with the hard physical reality created a very different person in me. As I could see the crowd growing impatient, I pulled the heavy trigger until the revolving cylinder and rearing hammer were past their points of no return. With one chamber used already, there were three safe and two deadly. A sixty percent chance of living; barely a passing grade let alone honour role material. When I laid the thing back down I found myself holding my breath and let it out, ashamed. Now I too was past the point of no return. Win or lose, I was in the game.

The snarling man had been counting the chambers as well as I, and he knew his odds were worsening. "Fifty-fifty, I like those odds." Despite his claim, his hands shook as if he did not like them at all. He may have been high though. With the laboured squeeze of the trigger, the cylinder spun into place, the hammer fell and with a piercing crack that stunned every man in the room, the side of his head sprang open and sprayed my shoulder and arm in blood. He managed to remain upright in his chair, his head hanging loose over the back support. It wasn't long until he was removed from the room as well. Suddenly the money didn't matter to me anymore.

The chambers were refilled and spun. There were now three rounds to the four players. The young one with the craving for finality in his eye prepared to take his turn.

"I don't think you're going to make it," quipped the blessed man to my right.

"I know the odds," he replied viciously, as if setting straight his situation was his final task, "that's exactly why I entered this game."

"And why have you come here to die?" inquired the one across from me from behind shut eyes.

"Girlfriend dumped you," began the lucky man, "boss fired you, parents hate you, landlord evicted you. I bet you got nothing, don't you?" Some of his stabs struck me rather than his target.

"No. No, that's not why. My life is actually- well it's not bad because I lost anything like that. It's complicated and, anyway, it's none of your business."

"Did you leave a note behind?" I threw out awkwardly across the room and let it fall where it may.

"Fuck off and let me take my turn," spat back the young man, avoiding eye contact and pretending he was fixated by the gun. He made no speedy effort to pick it up.

"You should tell us why," the apathetic one suggested, "otherwise no one will ever know. Besides, only of one us is going to leave this table and none of us know who you are."

"Yeah man," agreed the blessed one, "don't be a dick."

"I'm lost," he said at first, as if it explained everything. "I just feel like no matter what I try to do, it's not enough. I want to be distinguished for something, to stand above everyone else for something. Anything, I don't care what anymore. You have to be unique you know? As an individual. All that beautiful snowflake crap is fine when you're in a four man group working on some asinine comedy skit for summer camp but there's six billion people on the planet, man. I want to be different enough that my name's worth more than, well, a toe-tag. But no one's unique enough, no one's good enough to be that household name. Even the best and brightest scientist who cures a fucking disease is just a name, or even just a surname, in an encyclopedia and only people who are already interested will ever know it. They won't know you, who you were, your thoughts and feelings, whether you were a cool guy to hang out with or whether you were, as you said, a dick. You're dead and forgotten and even your name lives on as just a shadow. I guess I want to die because life is just so fruitless. I guess I just want people to respect me. I want to be that guy at the high school reunion to outdo everyone else. But then when I think about it that way I just get so damn angry at myself and- I don't know. I don't know why I want to die, but I don't know why I would want to live either."

“You won’t gain much notoriety by blowing your head off,” replied the lucky one.

“Yeah well, its too late and I don’t care anymore. It’s my turn.” He did care though, even as his voice trembled and his eyes reddened with his passionate speech, the words he had bottled up for a lifetime but only then spoke, he doubted their truth. Was it the mere defense mechanism to be overpowered by his infallible logic, or did he truly wish to live just a few days longer? I had a feeling he would fall on a live round and as it turned out I was correct. “I hope I’ll be forgiven,” he added, staring through the table into heaven and hell in his minds eye. The gun went off with a startling but not surprising crack. This time it was the calm statue across from me who was tarnished with a man’s blood.

“Aren’t you supposed to wait till the middle of your life to have a mid-life crisis?” quipped the blessed up. Not even the washing machine could laugh. I put out my cigarette. There were three players, four rounds, two empty chambers. The crowd surrounding us had shrunk down to those few who bet on us still alive, but as they thinned out, they tensed up.

Without opening his eyes, he expertly reached out and took up the pistol without fumbling or feeling blindly at all, and placed it on the very spot he had before. For him there was neither hurry nor hesitation, nor theatrics nor pragmatic efficiency; he seemed to move with a crystalline equilibrium. Whatever level he operated on, it was one without a fear or yearning for death, without a fear or yearning for a justification to life. Why was this brilliant master playing this wretched game with these wretched men for mere money? What would he do if he were to leave this table the winner? With a conductor’s fully concentrated pace, every moving component of the tool in his hands filled that still hot room with their short melody until there came the empty chamber’s anti-climax.

“Nicely done,” snaked out the words of the blessed man from between his snickering lips. He nodded approvingly and turned towards me to then say, “It looks like you’re going to die. Because there’s one empty chamber left and I got His watchful eye over me. Somebody stop me, I’m on fire! What’s your name pal, I’ll try to get it on a vanity plate for my new set of wheels after I win this thing.”

“Take your fucking turn!” cried a face in the shadows, invisible so long as the lamp shone in the corner of my eye. A few others joined in and the owner quickly quieted them down but urged the man to hurry and prove his prophesy. With a genuine smile that came from the heart, he lifted the weapon and plucked the trigger playfully with a finger raised as if to point out that precise note that brought a symphony’s finest passages to their height of grandeur. The flash of the cartridge bursting forth with all its might, its entire purpose on earth fulfilled and then extinguished in but a moment short enough to blink and miss, was unseen on the far side of his head. Its visceral counterpart however, burst forth with equally eager vigor. Now both my arms were soiled. His finger slumped down into his palm, and he fell flat onto the table with a blow that rattled the ash trays. Yanking him back up by the shoulders and pulling him away, I watched as his smile melted into a demonically perverse grimace of vanity, impudence and greed. It was his true face, naked without its mask of life. If he were at one point blessed, They had long since grown tired of his antics.

Again still the crowd thinned down to just a handful of men. Across from me sat the detached man, slumbering his wakeful dreams. The pistol was loaded for the last time with five bullets, only one of which was to be discharged. At that point, it was essentially a regular lethal weapon. It was not placed in the center of the table as before, but directly in front of me. As I scooped it up by its handle and let it rest heavily on the table still, I faced the nearly inevitable outcome of my demise. There was obviously a loaded round in the chamber and I was obliged to take my turn. The calm and collected man across from me however did not at all wear the expression of a victor. His stoic detachment, without investment in the inconclusive, troubled me more than if he were to begin celebrating already. I did leave a note behind, but for no one I particularly cared about enough to address. I did not have a will but I had no real possessions and no one to will them to. In defeat, my financial problems would become beyond insignificant. The crowd was growing restless. They too knew the gun was loaded and knew they were obliged to watch me die. Those that had bet on my opponent were starting to relax a little, thinking not about the sight of another man shooting himself, but about their payoff. I supposed I should bring their focus a little closer to the present. Lifting the piece to my head, my arms trembling, my heart surging its hot adrenaline through every canal in my body, my brain yanking on the reins pleading for the mercy of my better judgement, I pulled the stiff sweat-slick trigger and heard the cylinder spin and the hammer rear back.

Just as my soul seemingly leapt out through my awe struck gaping mouth, the revolver snapped dead and my trembling hand hung in the air, rattling an otherwise fully loaded weapon against my pores, rubbing a rash into my temple. I looked around at the room and saw too a dozen gaping jaws, their hearts on the tips of their tongues ready to dribble down onto the tacky floor tiles. A cigarette was dropped and threw skittering sparks against their shoes and the table leg. I let out a tremendous sigh and had to breath heavily and manually to calm myself down and let my body shift back into drive. I placed the weapon slowly into the middle of the table, the lamp directly overheard tracing an identical all black twin underneath. I won, he lost. I got to live and I got the winnings.

Before I could stand up, the man across from me finally opened his eyes and stared into mine. Leaning forward, he swiped up the piece just as he had before, always with more accuracy blind than we who moved our hands with our eyes. "Wait!" I unwittingly screamed. "You don't have to still do this, right?"

"It's my turn, the game's not over yet."

"But I won. I took the empty chamber. We all know you lost the game, there's no mystery to it so, I mean, it's not a game of chance now. You can just walk away without the money, right?" I looked around the room frantically for someone to support me, but only a few bettors nodded in agreement, while some shied away and whispered to one another. "Come on, it doesn't have to be like this anymore."

“The game has rules. We take turns until the gun goes off. The last player wins. There are still two players here. Those other men couldn’t walk away. They played the same game by these rules and they died. We can’t start cheating now. It doesn’t matter if I want the money or not, or if I want to live or not. I made a choice and this is where it’s led me. All choices ultimately lead here, did you know that?” I reached out across the table, clawing for the gun but he reeled it away and placed it firmly against his side, in the perfect center of the brain case. His hands did not tremble, his brows held no sweat and his eyes bore no hatred. “It’s my turn.”

Gripping the table legs beside me and gritting my teeth, I watched through hazy eyed agony as he obligingly fulfilled the game’s prophecy, obeying the rules to the letter, and letting loose the undeniable live cartridge through his skull. The handgun was quickly retrieved to be unloaded before he could drop it and his body was removed. His face was unchanged, his eyes not empty but honest. In that honesty however, there was little to say. In my place could be sitting any of those five other men, but I, having done nothing but be where I was, when I was, survived. The remainder of my life thus was not earned or bestowed rightfully, it was taken by chance. The crowds ground their cigarettes into the crimson-speckled ashtrays and filed out, squeaking across the floor as they passed through the door one by one across the long dragged trails, leaving shoe treads in their wake. As I shivered in my chair and let out another shaken sigh, an envelope was placed before me; my compensation for being alive.

At The Races: The Expanse (Ultra Flash)

By anon

To the Kentucky Derby, Mrs. Margo Rolough is wearing a large feather hat with blue and white flowers. Her husband has a gelding entered into the race and Mrs. Rolough has come to see her gelding win. To sink her fingers into her blanket made of roses and smell the sweat. She sits in plush, posh Millionaire's Row surrounded by her peers and appearances must be maintained. Oh the view, the view! She can see every lathered muscle as the horses thunder by.

If you squint hard enough, you can see Millionaire's Row from the grassy center of the long dry track. Families pay a cheap entry fee, set up picnic blankets and make a day of betting on horses. Children tumble underfoot in large packs, causing minor disturbances on the crowded green. My mother snags my sister and me out of the jumble and points to the docile thoroughbreds escorting the racehorses toward the gate. She tells us about the companion horses and how they are brought along to calm the racehorse's nerves. No expense is too frivolous. We press our hands against the bars, transfixed as the racehorses balk at the gate, afraid and biting. She points to that most esteemed patch of seats and scrunches her face to see the well dressed ladies fanning themselves in the heat. A small, wistful smile blooms on her face as she says, "Someday I'd like to watch a derby from one of those seats. Do you know why they look so fine in their hats and dresses? You have to be a millionaire to afford it."

A Dark Day

By Death

It was a dark day. Not necessarily lightless, since that implies that there are no lights. It was simply dark. The light that was there hung in the sky, too lazy to break through this cover of darkness. And the darkness roamed around, treating its kind to hospitality, and rest. It was a good kind of darkness, the kind you are surrounded by when you drift to sleep. It slinked through alleyways, through open windows, chimneys, and other such openings. No one saw it come, yet were pacified, and their minds were laid to rest, no one available to explain why. And this blanket continued to spread. The light regarded these actions like a brother watching over a younger sibling; cautious, yet interested. And it simply hung back, letting this spread onwards. Not one person complained. Not one Being shouted out. Forward it strided. Not in arrogance, but in a calm manner. There was no pride in the darkness, nor was there shame; this was a treatment that had to be done, and that was that. It continued from the tiny street, to the neighborhood, to the city. The city was covered, and still the darkness spread on. All those who felt it had a peaceful disposition. A long nap had been had, filled with nightmares, and terrors beyond human imagination, and suddenly this sleep ended, and the people have finally found peace in the morning dark. The country succumbed, and still the darkness spread. The planet fell, and only then did the darkness find his work done, and he too, slept. The light regarded these actions with recognition of understanding, and somberly, he fell asleep. And there was complete silence.

A strong silence. There was no crime, there was no justice, there was the resting darkness, and the dormant light. And as they slept, the world, and its people were woken. They had no more strife, and no more conflict, and enemies had smiled in each other's company; the effects of a good wake. There was a silence that, if you were there to witness it, lasted an eternity. Suddenly, light.

Light sprung forth from the planet, a slow release of light. The darkness slept on, uncaring that his body had been surprised and unable to withstand. The light flooded from populated areas. And slowly, it spread outwards from these cities, and affected the land itself, and the light shone brilliantly. The darkness was nothing more than a shadow now, and still it slept on, since there was no anger or jealousy towards the light. The light made the pacifists fall asleep. A new sleep that they were unaccustomed to. In it, they realized the infinite possibilities that lay just beyond reach. They found their own ability to adapt and change the world around them; to survive. The few who tried alone had failed; old memories of the nightmares they once had. And now the people found each other; not as enemies or potential victims, but as allies and friends. And they stood together, fresh in their own dreams, and they shared it. They took their flame, from the torch of their predecessors, and they ignited it once more. These dreamers knew that nightmares and terrors would once again attempt to wake them from these dreams, but for now, that mattered not, since they slept in the moment. Their aspirations would keep them rising, to dreams of new heights, and new lows. To explore the strangely (yet not so strangely) colored skies, and the ominous, nightmarish depths. To find new companies of

dreamers, and bound together, they would dash the nightmares from their land. And as they carried their torch higher, something foreign to them occurred; a loud not-silence. A sound. Noise. And as they failed to understand this, the Light - the TRUE Light – was interrupted in its spread.

“Solomon Grave, how many times must I tell you to stay awake during my lectures?! This is important for your future!”

And a boy named Solomon J. Grave, no older than 10, woke up from his head on his desk, and felt mightily embarrassed. He listened to the retelling of the Sermon on the Mount, and dreamed once more to wake up the Light.

The Collector

By The Sound and The Fury

It's always like this. I don't like talking to most people because they won't even understand what I'm talking about, and it just pisses me off. Even when I talk to you I just talk about stuff people normally know about, and it just doesn't really feel right.'

'What are you spouting off now?'

'Did you ever hear of the Palmtex Super Micro?'

'The fuck is that?'

'Did you play a Game Boy when you were young?'

'Sure, I have one. I have one of the original ones. You know, it was the white one that was huge and without color. I didn't play with it anymore, though, especially when I got the color Game Boys and then the PSP.'

'Well, this was also a handheld system. It came before the Game Boy by at least five years. It was color, too.'

'That's pretty impressive, man.'

'Of course, it did not have the addictive gameplay that the original Game Boy had. Its games were like Pac-Man. They were pretty linear and repetitive, and also simple. But that's all I really know. It was one of the earlier portable cartridge-based systems, however.'

'So why did it fail? I mean, people must have eaten that up back in the 1980s, where that technology seemed so futuristic.'

'Well, the games weren't really anything to laud, and I think it was really expensive back then, as well. Sure, one may have the color, but if the games weren't enjoyable, why even buy the system in the first place? The Game Boy, for example, was not really advanced for its time, but it had really fun games. I remember finishing the Mario game for that system and it was addicting. Having cutting-edge technology for gaming is practically useless if you don't have games that entertain despite it.'

'So, basically, the system was quickly pulled off the shelves. There is a reason why the Game Boy is recognized to be the mover of handheld video gaming.'

'I understand. But why talk to me about this?'

'It's because I want that system.'

'Why? You can just get the PSP and you can download games onto it. The games there are also a lot more entertaining and interesting than any game that's older than you.'

'But you see, I want it. I want to feel it and just tinker around with it, just because. It's not really a matter of history, I just want to have it.'

'What's stopping you, then?'

'It's about 20,000 pesos.'

'Oh.'

'Well, damn it, just play other computer games. Sink yourself into Left 4 Dead 2 or DotA more. I mean, you shouldn't just pine for something stupid and whimsical you would probably never have in the immediate future.'

'I know. I know that. Well, then, see you. I have to go home.'

Reaching his apartment, he went to the web page he pored over at least once a day for the past few days:

'Another very early (and very rare) cartridge based system ... it's sort of a reverse-Microvision ... Three cartridges are known to exist for it ...'

He squinted and tried to focus on the small gameplay picture. All he really needed was to know how it exactly played, and then he could probably move on. He sighed.

His room was not dirty. Rather than that, it was chaotic, brought about by the surfeit of his things in a pretty small area. He had clothes scattered all around the room in plastic bags. His clothes cabinet was overflowing with clothes, and since he did not really go out much, he simply had too much clothing. Instead of making the cabinet another forest (he already had one in his room), he simply decided to lay some of his clothes around his room. In that manner, he would not disrupt the order he imposed in his cabinets, and still easily sort out the clothes he wanted to wear for certain occasions. His laundry basket lay near his assortment of plastic, in addition to some empty water bottles that he had failed to dispose. He was not addicted to cleanliness; in fact, for the most part he was lazy as regards cleanliness. However, he understood the importance of order and cleanliness despite everything, and so when he was not busy with pleasuring himself by watching the pictures of things he would probably never own he would clean out his own room. This occurred twice a month. On top of his clothes cabinet laid boxes, and these boxes contained video games of yesteryear. The only appliances he really had was an electric fan, an airconditioner, and a laptop computer. He had little need for anything else, and he was able to persist with his cramped room.

He vaguely recalled back when he was merely seven (or was it eight?) that he bought a toy. He was very interested in it because its casing was violet-colored, and he loved the color violet. It was not that he was homosexual or anything (but he had been mistaken as such, even by his parents), it was just that he was irrationally attracted to the color and all its permutations. It was a simple game of putting a small, plastic ball into a hole. At least, it was how he recalled it as such. Fifteen years is a long time to recall something that was nearly impalpable but totally unforgettable. Whether he bought it with his own money or not, he could no longer recall. It was a game he had for a little while that he lost after some time, and yet it was a memory that was potent enough to cause a faint stream of remembrance of things past.

His father would accompany him to a warehouse store. There was a section there that sold used books, and his father would invite him to buy books that he wanted with the sole condition that these books had some intelligence in them. His father was strict that way, but it was to train the young boy never to settle for stupidity, whether in books or in life. It was his first introduction to used bookstores, and it was something that would stay with him for the rest of his life. The place was also the same store where he bought that game that he very slightly remembers. Perhaps it was that game that triggered his evolution into something worse, someone overly driven. Or perhaps it was there all along.

It first appeared as a love for counting that later on became his comfort. Counting to ten three times gave him a feeling of security and exactness, whether it was to wash his body, or to lock his doors at night. For him, it just felt more secure. He also did it when he was praying, or when he was wearing his socks. It would have been worse had his mother not catch him in the act of doing it, because no one else beforehand told him that it was abnormal. It had faded through time, but his passionate desire for that toy was one of the instances that the feeling occurred.

He appreciated the new and the novel but he loved the idea of obsolescence. There was something in the solitude of rarity that enlivened him and awakened his passions. Back then, he was all right with obtaining old, second-hand toys. Everything changed when he discovered eBay, however.

Four years ago, he joined eBay for no specific reason. He just wanted to, after people told him that it was the world's largest garage sale. A few years after that, he managed to chance upon a rare book regarding the Philippine church. It was the definition of esoterica: it was only printed once and the printing was done twenty-seven years ago. He purchased it with the idea of selling it exorbitantly, knowing it was rare. It also helped that the book was colored violet, and colored the same kind of violet that his toy back then was. It was just the right kind of violet, a violet that flirted with lavender and periwinkle, a violet that was not quite purple and not even quite violet: it was his violet. He also knew that the ideas in the book were not perennial and were not even useful to most people, but he knew the value it could have to others especially to people who appreciated the Philippine Church. He thus attempted to sell it on eBay, to no avail.

He was successfully able to fool a schoolmate of his, and did so despite having a 400 percent markup on the book. The money later on became part of his savings that slowly became larger and larger because he also sold other books in his possession that he no longer found useful. He did not have a very large room so he had to get rid of some of his books as it was bother his roommate; it was a good idea to him to profit off the books that he already read.

After that, however, he did not use eBay and had little use for it: he already made a killing off that violet book. It was only three years later, when his headphones finally broke and he was searching for a cheaper method to purchase a good set of headphones. He found a set of Panasonic headphones to be just for him, in addition to finally having found the method to be able to purchase on eBay. It was only a matter of time before he would finally dive into the lower depths – and found the set that he was looking for, at a price that was not even shabby. His next purchase, however, would bring him right into the hell of addiction and the heaven of ownership, of that powerful feeling of having.

'One of these days, I will have that console.'

'It looks cool. Why do you want it?'

'Because it's colored violet.'

'Just that?'

'Is there any problem?'

'I mean, you want it just because it's colored violet?'

'Yes. Well, it's like that because it was targeted for girls. It was supposed to be a chic new console solely for young girls. It didn't sell well despite having a good processor and all. It's still undeniable that the gaming world is populated mostly by men.'

'Yeah. You go into the Internet cafe we play on, and you realize that there's probably a girl or two amidst sixty or seventy men, and they're probably the girlfriends of one of those sixty or seventy, because no sane girl would go into an large LAN cafe with the idea of playing with the boys unless their boyfriends coerced them into doing so, and they eventually liked the idea.'

'It was made by Casio.'

'No fucking shit?'

'Yeah. I did not want to believe that too, at first, because I thought all Casio did were calculators and watches. But they actually made video games and video

game consoles, too. Both sucked at the market, and the one I want is the later console.'

'Is it in English or anything?'

'It's in Japanese.'

'Then how the hell would you understand it?'

'I guess I will play it when I will finally get a TV, or finally know enough Japanese to play through the cartridges, because I know very little of Japanese.'

'You're still willing to pay for it?'

'Of course. Especially if my parents won't know about it.'

True enough, one of these consoles surfaced on eBay. Luckily for him, it was also a Filipino seller, and the seller was kind enough to lower the price because he no longer had to deal internationally. He quickly grabbed it, and wisely asked the seller to send it not to his home, but to his current address. His parents would never know.

'So I really got it. Just don't tell mom and dad.'

'No problem, bro. What did you get?'

'This one.'

'That looks gay.'

'That's because it's for girls, idiot.'

'Sorry. Well, you're gay?'

'You know I like the color violet. I can hopefully bring it home one of these days, and we can play with it. Well, you can play with it without any guilt, but I will play with it because I just love the color.'

'Yeah, let's do that.'

'It's in Japanese, though.'

'Well, it's time to learn, isn't it?'

It was only the beginning, however. In the span of a year he had purchased about thirteen different types of video game consoles. He wanted most of them, but he could not really obtain the items that he really desired, because they were too rare. These were items like the Palmtex Super Micro. Consequently, they were also too expensive, and much too expensive especially for a student like him. Another was a failed attempt by Atari to advance into three-dimensional gaming, something quotidian for the youth of today but something revolutionary back then in the early 1980s.

'I want it.'

'What is that, anyway?'

'It's the Atari Cosmos.'

'It's really, really, really, really, really, really, really, really, really -'

'I know. You're looking at it right. It was selling for eighteen thousand dollars. That's more than 800,000 pesos. To keep that into perspective, that's already a brand new car made by a good car company.'

'Is it that rare?'

'Well, from what I've read only about five of it were produced, and only about two of those were working. It is really, really rare, yes. I also want it.'

'You don't have the money.'

'You don't have to remind me. I just like looking at it, that's all. I just look at them. It's also the same with very attractive women, I guess. I also just look at them. I can't be a fiend and try to steal them from their owners or boyfriends.'

'It was bound to be a shitty game. They were too early and you know it.'

'I know. It's just that, the rarity is really getting to me. I just really want it because it's rare, and also because it's something that's dying, something that's really obscure. Just like the Super Micro.'

'So, how much is that again?'

'20,000 pesos.'

'That's still too much for us.'

'I have the money, you know.'

'You still can't buy it. Your dad will kill you if he found out, and even your mom will be put into a rage. Your sister's already a big spender – there's no need to add to that burden.'

'I told you that. No need to repeat it. I'll probably just look at it, I guess.'

It was probably a coping mechanism of sorts for him. Buying those vintage games that were pretty rare but not rare enough still gave him a sense of ownership, and cushioned the pain from the reality of not being capable to own what he really wanted. It was akin to fantasizing to porn stars just because one realized that he probably would never meet the girl that roused his heart or even know her name. Maybe it was all right. He knew it was false and he knew it was ultimately stupid, but it also helped him from really feeling his lack, or the pain. Even if the guy knew he jacked his dick off raw, he would still keep on doing it because he had nothing else. He realized it was like that, that no matter how he tried he would still really come back to eBay because it was all there was – the fantasy of these unreachable items and the pain of never being able to own them, and yet still having the ability to own – it was something special despite everything. He also knew that the farce would ultimately have to end, even despite the withdrawal he would experience. It was something that he needed to put his foot down for, because he was unwilling for it to dominate his life.

'I just stopped going on eBay.'

'I can't believe you.'

'I know. It's that hard to believe, right, especially after doing all those things and buying all those stuff?'

'It's especially hard to believe you because you've made it a habit to go. Even if you say you're stopping it's usually just for a month or so, and then you go back. Nothing ever changes.'

'I hope it will, at least this time.'

She wasn't kind with her words, but that was because she knew he was better off not with comfort but with disquiet. She was kind, yet brutally so. She wasn't pretty, but he realized she was a nice person who knew what there really was behind him despite everything. He just wanted to tell somebody that he was going to try to change, even if it wasn't going to bear fruit, and even if he said that just to please himself.

'All we really have are our fantasies.'

'They help us survive our own personal demons.'

'Escape.'

'It is.'

'Cowardice.'

'Perhaps.'

'One still has to live.'

'One still has to live.'

'I think it's stupid.'

'Because it is.'

'I mean, trying to escape your self with fantasies that just give you pain isn't really my idea of escape.

'I didn't want it to be mine. It's just come to that, I guess.

'It removes one from the reality of things, even if the fantasy is more painful.

'Isn't living like that painful?

'I guess. I guess I'm a masochist that way.

'Or just stupid.

'There's that, too.

'Just close it. Close that site. Blacklist it. Banish it.

'There'll probably be withdrawal. There'll probably be change.

'But it will be better in the long run. Even if it hurts.

'It will. It's hurting now.

Thoughts kept on swirling in his mind until the maw that not even the openness of that hemispheric window atop his room could stop swallowed him whole into a consciousness that was a similar darkness.

It was eight in the morning when he came out of his room the next day, and to his surprise he saw many of his dormmates eating breakfast. He realized that it was the dorm owner's birthday, and breakfast was free of charge. People always flock to stuff that's free, and it's human nature, he thought. Why not capitalize on an opportunity to enjoy something without any guilt or responsibility of payment? The stronger man persisted with this kind of attitude, and the current people living are the results of this determination. He was no different: he also enjoyed freebies. While the edict of economics states that there's no such thing as a free lunch, it only looks at things from a bigger picture. Individually, he and his dormmates were enjoying what was undeniably free, even if it was a simple American-styled breakfast of bacon and eggs. Nothing always tasted as good as when it was free.

'Just like walking the yellow brick road,' he thought. 'And yet, it's not a path of smiles and sunshine, but of piercing heat.' A month ago it was colder: the wind helped to compensate the desert-like quality that accompanies the passing of winter and the arrival of summer, but recently there was only desert. It was not a yellow brick road, but a concrete hell. It was a path he had to traverse every day when he went to school. He always had an umbrella with him to escape the heat. While it was not unbearable, the heat was quite a disturbance. He did not hate going to school, but he did not like it very much, either. Unlike most people, however, guilt with regard to his absences had paled altogether, especially because he was merely going through the motions. School was important, and he wasn't going to deny that, but he just did not feel it to be important enough. There were books to be read, movies to be watched and hours to be slept in the comfort of his home. Yet it was only going to get worse.

There was one time where he met an upperclassman of his in an internet cafe. He was playing a game that worked better in a local-area network setting, when that man sat on a chair beside him. He was curious on what the last year of hell would be like.

'So how does the last year go? I know you don't go to school anymore, but that's it, right?'

'Well, you do three shifts twice a week. There's an on-duty shift, where you practically do a stakeout for an entire day; a from-duty shift, where you do a half-day, and an on-call shift, where you do eight-hours. Within that span of time you have to practically stay awake for thirty-six hours. It's going to be grueling, and there'll come a time where you'd go home just to sleep. You'll be like a thief

stealing on sleep, because you won't have it for the most part. Sure, it's not as academically heavy, but the physical grittiness has a toll on you. And you can't really be absent, unless you're really sick or something. You'll also have to do it through the course of a year. It will be like a job, only worse. But that's what you have to go through. Everyone in our field does that. It's the price of a secure future, I guess.'

'That is tiring.'

'It is. But you'll get used to it, just like everyone does. I guess they do it because they know that man is resilient and he'll take anything you'll throw at him as long as he wants something and feels that that something is worth it. It's like raped women, I guess. Some give up on life, feel humiliated and just kill themselves, but others become ubermensch, like superwomen who take control of their lives and move on despite the scarring and the shit that stacks up on them because of that tragedy. They extirpate the unworthy ones through this and it tests the grit of the person.'

'I probably won't want to go through that.'

'No one does. But it's the last year and you just really want to graduate after everything. After you've passed the bitchy exams and gone through all those hoops and needle-slits you just really want to get it over with, you know? You don't want to feel as if you've wasted four years of your lives, so you do it.'

'I guess. But I think it's sad, yet I know I have to do it as well.'

'Well, I'll look for a spot. The only hero I can really use is the dark archer.'

'Thanks for the tips. See you!'

It was like that. Life was always like a test and this course was no different. It just really gave a title that everyone respected and a name for oneself. He rode a jeepney to the post office: a package had already arrived and was waiting for him. He always loved these times, because of the novelty of the items he purchased and because he actually owned the said items that he just dreamt of back when he was a kid. Nearly all of them were vintage video games.

'I never asked you for anything much when I was a kid. But when I sometimes asked for a video game you didn't even give it to me, yet I did not complain. All I really want now is just to enjoy myself. I may be using your name but it's my money that I saved that really pays for the item.'

'But you don't need them. That's the thing. You need to grow up, because you're already 22 and on the way to becoming someone in the world.'

'I did not want to become someone, not in that manner. What I really want to be is just someone who could stay at home and relax himself in the comfort of his computer and the Internet, because nearly everything is on the net.'

'I guess it's all right, because I can spend for those games from my own wallet and not depend on you anymore for my savings. I have no qualms not being a child, but I just want to be able to tell myself that I have the ability to own these things from my own actions. Yet I can understand your point. It is clear enough. It's just really difficult for me to reconcile my whims and my desires from my rationality. I know it was stupid buying that video game: all it really played was the most primitive form of video tennis. It was basically just two paddles volleying probably sixteen pixels back and forth, and what I want to buy now is no different from that that I bought two months ago. It's still hard enough for me, because I want to own it, even if it is redundant to my collection. Even if it is stupid, I want to have that console.'

'You know that even though I can spend the money for you, we're not rich. I was always willing to buy you that console that you wanted. I was willing to pay her,

but she just won't buy it for you, because you didn't need it. Because she believed that it would disrupt your studies and your excellent performance. Because she thought that it would make you an addict and throw you off course.'

'I am an addict. I was, even back then, when you noticed me egregiously counting-off the little things, comforting myself that they were done exactly correctly. I was banally anal, you could say it. Ever since I found eBay I just really shifted it to vintage video games. I spend not because I want to waste money, but because I can spend. It's the feeling of finally having the money to purchase those items and things and uselessnesses that I wasn't able to have when I was a child. I buy because I have the power to, and it's something that I could confirm whenever I purchase something. In the end I have never regretted anything that I have bought, although I wished I could have spent it on something more pragmatic or more important.'

Was this going to be the last time? He was really unsure. Sometimes eBay just really sucked one in, without one knowing it. It may happen again. It probably would.

'I saw something I want on eBay.'

'I thought you were going to stop going on eBay.'

'I thought so, too. It wasn't easy at all. My dad wanted me to look up some dictionaries, and I ended up searching for stuff. It always really starts like that.'

'So, what did you find?'

'There is this absolute steal. It is another old Pong clone, and it's starting bid is just a US cent.'

'Is there anything novel about it?'

'No. That's why it's called a Pong clone. What really differed among consoles during this time was just their outer design. Their chips were pretty much from the same companies, and they merely compensated by having unique designs. There were other games developed later on, but they also built on the background of the primitive video tennis game.'

'You want to buy it just because it's worth a cent?'

'Yeah, pretty much.'

'You have to think about shipping costs. It may be worth only a cent but it's also heavy and shipping internationally is going to get costly.'

'I know. The shipping is about 30 dollars.'

'That's a pretty large sum of money, especially because you're still a student and it's an amount you could use on other things. I mean, you could go and eat more, for crying out loud. It's not as if you're fat or anything.'

'But it's cheap!'

'What's new about it? Is there even anything new about it? It's just the same joystick-controlled games that have little variation among them through the whole spectrum. What really changed was only the layout of the games and outer casing of the chip. Why do you even want it? It's the same as that console you bought before. You won't play it anyway, just like you got tired of that Pong clone you got. Going to the post office may excite you, and bringing those toys to class may give you some sort of faux pride, but you know you don't need the stuff. The consoles that you really want are out of your league, and you try to compensate by seemingly wanting affordable consoles that are also of considerable rarity. You already got one of the rarer consoles, something most people don't have and a lot of collectors themselves don't. What more do you ask for?'

'I just want to spend on something. What's so illegal about that?'

'Then spend it on something more useful. Something that you won't put away after some use. Something that you may probably regret later on but something that will at least in the long run have the possibility of contributing to your growth as a person. Old soap is just as useless as the video games you pursue. Shifting your whims and addictions to something less stupid doesn't make it not stupid. It's still really stupid because you are still wasting your money. Technically speaking, it's not even yours. You didn't even earn it. Your parents did. You're just a little smarter than most kids out there and a little more respectful to your folks: you save a lot to spend on your wants, but that doesn't change the fact that you still spend your parents' money. Do something that you may probably hate, but that has the entelechy of knowledge. You're smarter than that, and I know it because I know you.'

It took him most of his will to prevent himself that console that was similar to what he currently owned. When something is too good to be true, it usually is, people say. Most people have their senses dulled when something coruscates in front of their eyes, and it was no different for him. The one-cent price was simply delectable, despite the fact that he had to shoulder the shipping costs that weren't chickenfeed. It also took him most of his will to shift himself to bidding on something that he was unsure of, but was also something that was certainly a tool for learning, if not about thinking, then perhaps about words. Despite the fact that he was already once riverrun with pretensions, he was willing to try again, because this was the only major work that he hadn't finished. He was amused with the phallic candles of boarding houses, with lecherous youth in the pursuit of themselves, and with fury's love burning and withstanding shallow, self-centered men. He hated the arcana of interlingual puns – and this was the only one that had remained unread.

This time, he went to the post office not to get a game. He was not even excited. He did not even know if he could ever get to like the monster of a novel that beheld him. He had pinned down his nature of impulse and punished himself as a birthday gift. However, it was already here and it was his birthday gift to himself. Perhaps he was indeed masochistic, but he opened his blinds, blinds that covered his regular windows and blinds that have been unopened ever since he started shunning the pain of the sun's light, and started -
'Stately, plump Buck Mulligan ...'

On Being Locked Up

By Chris Bishop

I.

Routines are learned quickly when you're locked up. When you eat, when you sleep, when you shit... Everyone locked up had their own preferences towards all the things that we COULD do when we were locked up. Specific times we would decide to eat. Our own personal, self decided bedtimes. Where or when we would shit... Everything came down to routine and personal preference.

If you were to ask me why I got locked up, I'm not sure I could tell you. I'd rather spare you the intricate details of the whole situation, and besides that it's not very important. How I ever ended up here, locked up in a cell roughly twice the size of my own body, is grossly unimportant to my story as a whole, so I'll spare you the details.

They caught me in some alley, sleeping beside some trashcan beside a rundown New York Thai restaurant. They found me on the coldest day in February since the mid 1940's, a serious record breaker as the previous record, it couldn't have been less than 30 degrees, and this day, I'm sure it was in the negative end of the spectrum.

Like I said, the exact details pertaining to my eventual incarceration on what we all knew was Death Row is unimportant. None of the faculty ever actually refers to it as Death Row, but we all knew that's exactly what it was. We knew what it meant when our neighbors and our friends would be led out on their last walk towards the center room. We noticed how they never, ever came back from the walk. All we could do was wish for someone to save us. To pardon us. And, if you want to know the truth, the odds of YOU getting pardoned? They were nearly zero.

I've really forgotten how long I've even been here. When you have no way to tell the days apart, they all kind of blend together. Days become weeks become months become... you get the idea.

I guess it was probably a couple weeks ago that my neighbor got led out on his last walk. The guards, they came and they unlocked his cramped little cell, and I already knew what was about to happen. I'd heard hearsay about this kind of thing during the fifteen minutes that we were all allotted for exercise and recreation. The few minutes we could mingle, if you can call the very restricted communication with each other we managed to have mingling. I knew that what they'd do is, they'd lead him out of his cage, and at first, he must have suspected this was some kind of incentive for good behavior or some such shit. We all knew exactly what was about to happen, but he was new and until his end, he was oblivious to what would happen to him here. What would eventually happen to most all of us. He seemed overjoyed, even looked as if he felt at least slightly superior to the rest of us who were all cooped up in our cages. But we all knew.

I'm not sure of the exact details of the entire ordeal, but from what I can make of it, they take you to this room in the middle of the facility. Once you're there, and they've strapped you down to ensure that you're not running away, because escapes won't be tolerated, they give you a shot. I'm not sure what kind. But once this injection is administered, the dying part is quicker and

easier than falling asleep from what I've heard. Nobody really knows what it's like, though, and nobody here knows what happens to your body once they've made sure you're not alive anymore.

I knew this was to be my fate, to get that fucking lethal injection and... then I guess die. We can't really know what happens next.

I hope when we die, we just die. See, honestly, once my time comes, I think I'll have lived about as much of life as I can stand, and the whole "eternity" thing, I just don't think I could stand that. I don't wanna live, in any state or form or whatever, for longer than forever. Give me as many years as my life happens to last, and I'm happy. Any more than that and it just seems like I'm getting greedy. Besides, what in the hell am I supposed to do for forever?

Sometimes, though, I do try praying. I don't really buy into the whole "higher power" façade, but honestly, sometimes it's comforting just to feel like someone, somewhere is listening to you. Even if they're invisible. I don't really pray much though. But when I do, it's usually for just a way out of here, because God, if you're there, I promise I've learned to enjoy my life. Just give me a way outta this fucking hell hole so I can change shit around.

I dunno why I bother though, honestly.

II

Everyday, we're served two meals. One at dawn, when the dew or frost, depending on the season, is still laying fresh on the ground, and one at sunset, hours before the aforementioned dew or frost decides to lay on the ground. After that, between meals, at midday sometime, we all get to exercise. We do laps around the grounds, usually, with plenty of space between us, because the guards here are worried about us fighting and all that shit. In the time between meals, exercise, and sleep, we mostly just sit and wait. For anything.

All of us though, we know that we're going to die. Probably. Very few get lucky enough to get that pardon, to walk free away from this hell on earth. Most everyone here, they end up dying here.

Our cells, they don't protect us at all from the elements. See, the way this whole thing is designed, all of us inmates are basically in one big chain link cage with chain link walls separating us. No protection from rain, snow, wind, sun... whatever the elements happen to offer us on any given day. Inside these chain link cells, we all have a place to sleep that DOES provide some shelter, though minimal, and a place to sit during the day. There is also, located in either the top right or left of the cells, a latrine type setup for us to shit and piss or whatever in. These latrines, they're cleaned MAYBE once a month, if we're lucky. Those of us on Death Row, we don't get the luxuries that everyone else gets. Some of the inmates, they've forgotten that the word "luxuries" even exists. Whatever helps them cope, I guess.

Most of the time, I keep to myself. The way the cells are designed, communications with your neighbor are easy. Much like the outside of each cell, the walls are made of chain link fence that I personally believe to be reinforced. My neighbors, they talk to me. That's all we can do. They ask me why am I in here? How old am I? Do I think I'll get that life saving pardon? To all of these, I reply, "I don't know."

See, everyone in here is all questions. The last time I heard an actual conversation, or even an answer to a question that didn't end in another question? I can't remember.

Sometimes, during our allotted time for exercise, I wonder why I don't just run away. I'm sure they'd shoot any would-be escapees. Either that or it'd be instant center room for you, say hello to our friend, the lethal injection. Upon reflecting, I guess it really doesn't make much difference.

I've heard rumors that, once they've executed you here, they just... throw your body into a big furnace. They don't even REALLY properly cremate you. There is no ceremony. What they do, according to the rumors I've heard, is just burn your body and your ashes, they throw them out in some big pile with the ashes of hundreds of other prisoners. And, honestly? I don't doubt it one bit.

It doesn't pay to lose faith in being saved by... whoever, though. Some inmates, that's the only thing that gets them through. The hope that, tomorrow, some white knight will come and from their cells they will be emancipated, after all this waiting. Without SOME kind of hope, you'd probably just die in here. Quicker and more miserable (mentally at least) than you would, anyway.

Yesterday, my neighbor got the sought after pardon. Nobody knows who pardons these inmates. He was asleep in his little lean-to shelter when I drifted off into sleep, and when I woke, there was some new guy in his place. Everyone told me that some new person came early, before I was woken up for my dawn breakfast, to take him away. Somewhere nice. And I hope he really enjoys his new life. Honest, I do.

But all this hope for a better life, if not for me, for anyone, doesn't mean that I don't get jealous or whatever of those who do manage to receive a pardon. Jesus-fucking-Christ, if contempt could kill...

III

Another night's sleep, another dream of freedom. Of course, I'm sure everyone here, they dream of freedom, or what their life was like before this place, if they can remember anything about it at all.

Yesterday, during exercise, I heard of some inmate, one on the other side of the compound, who had been here for... longer than anyone can remember. He was old and grey and somehow he had avoided death via old age or that dread center room, and, after all this time, had yet to get a pardon.

Nobody really has much to say about him, other than the fact that he was super fucking... wise, I suppose. Imagine a Death Row Buddha. Incarcerated Mahatma Gandhi. Convict Mother Theresa. You get the idea.

The way he sees it, we're all here under equal and thusly equally unimportant circumstances. Nobody here is any worse than anyone else. He says it's not the incarceration that is important. What's important is that, regardless of the reason for our being taken prisoner, we all ARE prisoners, and all equally good AND evil in some way, even if society doesn't necessarily agree. It didn't make sense to me either to tell you the truth. It just seemed like a good way to look at things. It did to me anyway.

IV

More and more, I just want to remember what it's like outside of the boundaries of this property. To walk outside of the prison yard and see others like the way I used to be. Happy and free.

And all at once, it hits me how much I miss the opposite sex. Not SEX, mind you. Making love. Coitus. That, though nice, isn't really what I miss. Before, I could just be with a girl and know everything was alright, at least at that moment. One girl in particular.

See, before I found myself residing within the very limited cell that I call home now, I did have a girl. This girl, she was my companion, through the good times and the bad ones and, not matter what, if we didn't have anything else we had each other. I was in love with this girl. I know I was.

This girl and I, we could sit for hours, just singing at the stars. The two of us, up on a mountain, away from actual civilization.

She's not even tried to contact me in any way since they day they snatched me up. I'm sure she's found someone else now. Has a new mate. Maybe she has a family. Mostly, I just hope that she's happy wherever she is.

Sometimes, I wonder if she ever thinks about me.

Honestly, I'm not sure how death is a fitting consequence to anything I did in the outside world. I'm honestly not even sure I committed any crime whatsoever. I know that, earlier, I said it was irrelevant, but I guess I could tell you.

The only crime I'm guilty of is living free. Without boundaries.

Honest. I didn't commit murder. Didn't steal anything...

For a couple weeks, I was king. I was the master of my own destiny. I was the ruler of the streets under my feet. Then, without warning, they started looking for me.

It took them a week to find me after the search started. I know it's impossible to run from the law forever, but I gave them a run for their money.

Everywhere they looked, I was one step ahead of them. All of my old haunts, those were simply inaccessible to me. Naturally, they were looking in the places I frequented more so than anywhere else.

But for a week, I stayed off the radar. I made my home in the back alleys of the Big Apple, made the streets my home.

I think mostly the reason I ran was to get as much out of my freedom as possible. It was coming to an end and I knew it. I was already doomed to a life of incarceration, why give up so easily?

For a week, I did anything and everything that I wanted to do. Lived out all my dreams to the greatest possible extent. Did anything my heart desired. Lived up every moment of freedom I had left, knowing that, probably, this freedom was dwindling down FAST.

I mostly just tried to spend time with my love though. I knew, probably, after they inevitably caught me, I wouldn't see her again. We both knew.

We enjoyed every moment together. I did at least. The little things. The miniscule details of her complexion, the blue-grey of her eyes... I savored every moment I had left with her.

Then, when they finally caught up to me, I made sure to be found alone.

Sometimes, saying goodbye, that one compound word, is the hardest thing in the world.

Towards the end, I knew that I couldn't run anymore. Was completely aware of my impending capture. So I told her that she needed to get as far away from me as she could. This, saying goodbye and everything, our parting way, was probably the single hardest moment of my life. We kissed each other one more time, and I told her that I'd never forget her. That I love her more than my life and the improbable afterlife.

Then, later that night, they caught me outside of that damned Thai restaurant.

V

First snow of the season. It feels almost as cold as that February day they when they caught me. Fuck it, though. The only thing you can really do is not think of how uncomfortable you are. There isn't any shelter from it. You have two choices. Grin and bear it. Or bitch about it. Either way, nothing is gonna make you any more comfortable or warm.

I wonder how long ago Christmas was? Has it passed yet? Is it even November yet? There's really no way to tell. Maybe today is Christmas Day.

Happy holidays, everyone. Just in case.

I miss seeing the lights, the glowing orbs that could only mean Christmas is near. The unmistakable cheer. In everyone. Drunks with faux cheer and red hats outside of department stores.

The only holiday that made me feel any kind of actual.... Well, feelings I guess. Hurray for gross commercialization and fake pine trees.

I'm not sure which is worse. Being constantly exposed to the cold and snow, or being completely vulnerable to the summer's heat. The humidity. To hell with extremes.

Another of my fellow inmates get's taken on that infamous last walk. This guy, he'd been here much longer than me. Knew it was coming.

Honestly, I've never seen anyone so... ready to submit to whatever fate has in store for them. It was almost inspiring, watching him march, ready, into the heart of this complex. Into that infamous center room. I wonder what any of us did to deserve to die.

And then it finally hits me. No, I'll never know life again outside of this microscopic cell. I'll never eat more than two barely edible meals a day. I'll never be able to, freely, even move more than a couple of feet in any direction, with the exception of our exercise time.

I've resigned to the fact that I, will in fact, die here. Be another victim to the vicious cycle of population control.

Goddamn, do I hate this fucking place. But it's all I'll ever have.

I'm sure of it.

I'm sure.

VI

Sometimes, we do get visitors. People coming to look at our suffering. And oh god, the joy we feel when we do get visitors, as brief as their stay may be.

Sometimes, these visitors will even take one of us home with them. Pardon us.

Salvation lies in the hands and hearts of strangers.

They come to our cells, talk to us, seemingly not hearing our cries of "Please, take me with you. I'll do anything." But sometimes, they hear us. They see in our eyes that we need them. See that they're really our only fucking hope.

Most of the time though, they don't.

All at once, one day, a guard is unlocking my cell before breakfast. I knew what this meant. We all did. Knew this was the end of me.

I suppose I should've felt free, knowing that my time locked up was finally coming to an end one way or the other, but impending death is hardly freedom. Dread in its purest form.

Honestly, I've never been so scared in my life.

But, instead of getting led to the center room, that dread chamber, the guard, he guides me to the left into a smaller room. A family, or rather a mother and daughter team, they're sitting there in the middle of a row of chairs in the back of the room. The guard, he looks at the little girl, and he says "Are you sure this is the dog you want?" and the girl says that I am.

And dear god, did I forget how much I missed Milk Bones.

Pawn Shop

By Francisco Covarrubias

Noah visited the shop only by the night. It was open twenty-four hours a day but only when corrupted by deep night would it transform into asylum for every type of villain. He was no villain, but he sought the same protection from the intrusions and judgments of those that inhabited the daylight hours. So after night had finally blanketed the streets and alleyways he snaked through them, guitar case on person, and made his way to the local pawnshop.

The nearest street light did nothing for the shop and obscured by darkness the exterior was just an ominous undefined shape. As Noah staggered alongside the building he stretched his hand out and dragged his fingers against the decaying brick wall. He explored a few of the pores, blemishes, and scars that characterized the face of the building with his finger tips before retreating his hand right as it reached the front window. He watched his feet as he came to the door and entered, averting his eyes from the cursed spoils that characterized the shop. Inside, the building was dim, cramped, filthy, and all around uninviting but nothing defined the ominous feel of the pawn shop like the haul of haunted treasures; every item in the shop had a dark history, with every scratch and stain another tragic story behind it, with every previous owner a now severed attachment that lent to it a damaged personality. He knew from experience that everyone of these histories was marked by brokenness, a broken heart, promise or man, so he averted his eyes.

The clerk watched with a sort of malicious amusement as the meek victim shuffled towards him. He wasn't sadistic, just another shrewd businessman, and the more pain he could sense within one of these nighttime customers, the more he could exploit them for profit. The nature of the shop trained him to sense joy when he was able to pinpoint perfect prey like a shark sniffing out a single drop of blood in the water.

Noah looked up at the smiling man behind the service counter for only a split second and quickly moved on to gently freeing his instrument from its coffin and perching it upon the counter, as if placing an offering upon an altar. He tapped his fingers spastically and rhythmlessly on the counter for one second and then against his restless leg the next, as he witnessed the slimy man scrutinizing his final prized possession. Music was all he had anymore; he traded in everything he had ever had for it. He dropped out of high school and left home to pursue his rebellion; no job, he couldn't and wouldn't talk to his family anymore, and his true love had finally become fed up with him and left him to his own on the streets. Now he would choose to abandon his single passion just as he did anyone who ever loved him.

"I can only give you forty dollars," cautioned the man behind the counter as he placed Noah's guitar back down on the counter having finished inspecting it, and Noah, intimately through his coke-bottle glasses. He knew the guitar would

be worth more to another kind of seller, but not the type of people the shop attracted, perfect customers.

"Forty dollars!?" Noah's clinched his hands as they ran through his mangled locks of long, dirty hair and pulled. "You gotta be kidding me! It's gotta be worth a lot more than that..." His bark had transformed into whimper halfway through and the last few words barely escaped his burned-out teeth.

Another smirk crawled across the man's face. Oh how he loved to watch yet another unkept twenty-something struggling futilely to separate themselves from the desperation that was all they knew. "I'm sorry but that's the only offer I can make you," the man asserted his advantage.

Noah kneaded his heavy eyes, and dragged his fingers down across the bags underneath them. He brought his hands together in front of his face in a way one would do during a prayer. He couldn't sell it for so little; it was worth much more, but how much? What was his price for selling out? How could he even really be here? The weight of these thoughts started to split his head open. He slammed his palms down onto the counter and whipped his head back, leaning forward slightly.

"P-please..." his speech had become as fidgety as his body, "not for only forty... I need more, please." His eyes glazed over with tears as he pleaded, trying to appeal not to the puppet behind the counter, but to the emotions of the shop itself. But the shop didn't have any emotions, any mercy, even a desperate man like Noah knew this. To Noah the shop was unfeeling but still more than just brick and stone. To Noah the shop was flesh and bone. The shop was his pusher, his master, and a cruel one at that. It whispered in his ears, in the back of his mind, ceaselessly; "Give me all you have and I will feed your most intense hunger. Give me all you have because it belongs to me, it's always belonged to me," promised the whispers, spurning him. Noah was betraying himself again, because his master told him to. He owed nothing to that master but he was afraid to starve. His master was the only one who would feed his weakness.

"Sorry but that's the only offer I can make you," the man behind the counter reminded, sliding his glasses from the tip of his nose back up to his eyes. He looked through them and at Noah's tearing eyes and his smile, guised as friendly gesture, stretched to cover more of his face. He saw in the young man's eyes all his weakness, and even further inside, hidden behind the weakness, his submission.

Noah grabbed the neck of his instrument, strangling it by the rosewood fretboard. "I'm sorry I can't separate myself from this just yet, not for that price," his tone verged on apologetic, and he was really only begging for that non-existent mercy with his words. He looked over the beaten, exhausted body of his only remaining companion. He peered into the scratches on the faded paint, and remembered good times of playing for friends, or strangers at a party. He remembered how his guitar would offer comfort to him, how if he played it during hard times it would weep and cry for him. Playing and writing music was how he coped when something was lost to him, but it wasn't enough to console

him anymore. Noah turned to the door, still carrying the tears trapped in his eyes, and wandered back towards the entrance.

"Alright kid, but we're the only store open this time of night, and there isn't anybody who's gonna pay anymore for an old used guitar that beaten-up."

Noah knew the man behind the counter was right. The guitar was once worth much more, and even in it's condition he felt it was worth more. It was a high-end instrument, but the true value it was for him and him alone, and that value was lost as soon as he had brought it to this place. Besides, no one else would fuel his destruction, his craving. He grabbed onto the door and froze. He became paralyzed when tried to pry it open. Heavy shame weighed the tears enough to make them fall down his face.

"Okay. Forty."

HORROR AND SUSPENSE

How This Ends

By Josef K.

There were parties that night, but I elected to spend it alone, drinking and snorting the last of my priceless heroin on a wooded bluff overlooking the sea, capturing what quiet I could on my own terms and determined to meet the last day sober.

I woke, caked in vomit and pain as the sun arose, and trickled down to the beach, relishing the cool salt breeze on my chapped face. As I plunged my face into the water, I heard a tinny wail of joy, and turned in mute disbelief. A child raced down the beach, trailed by her mother. As public opinion had slid into open hatred of those who knowingly reproduced, births had become unheard of. I swam in a wash of emotions: raw fury at manifest selfishness, an aching nameless joy, a thousand other twinges of head and heart. In the last decade, when it was clear that nothing could divert the comet's path, the final gasps of propaganda's engine had repeated this final message: Don't Make It Worse.

I rose, fists balled, but my shout of indignant protest died on my lips. The earth trembled, a passing shock wave under foot. The impact was hours ago, in the steppes of Asia; the wall of fire and pressure had made it's solemn journey around the world to us.

The girl was swept into her mother's arms. They looked serenely at me, twin eyes of sea green. For a moment, I bordered epiphany. Guilt washed in behind the tide of anger. Then it was gone, and I was empty at last.

"I love you," whispered the mother, holding the child close.

I sighed, and the air grew dim and thick with the onrush of steam. My vision clouded, and I turned to the sea, one final time.

SICK

By Josef K.

Sometime during the third consecutive night spent huddled over the toilet, insides heaving and shuddering as I vomit forth seemingly everything I'd ever eaten, I realize what's happening: He's trying to poison me. It's all so elegant, so perfect, and so clear, that I almost laugh, but another barrage of retching forces me into silence

The next morning I throw everything in the kitchen away, wrapping it three times in black plastic and burying it deep in the apartments communal trash cans, to prevent an unfortunate transient from crossfire of His wrath. I am out the door of the complex and halfway to the corner store when I realize: He knows, must know, where I would shop.

I pick a direction and walk, enjoying the chill winter air that soothes the ragged shreds of my inside. I turn at random intervals, following an improbable path out of my familiar neighborhood, until I find a small shop with an unfamiliar name. Once inside, I hurriedly fill a small plastic basket; brands that I never have eaten, strange tins of ethnic ingredients I can't recognize, foods that I'd never thought of buying. Soy milk. Tofu. I can feel my stomach reborn in anticipation of an untainted meal.

I prepare the meal in a fog of nervous anticipation, trying to focus on savoring the aromas and the grease spitting sounds of the frying pan. It tastes clean, but then, so has every other meal before this. I try to tell myself that the mounting pain inside me is simple fear and anxiety, but before the stroke of midnight, I am again crouched in the dingy bathroom, surrendering the days work into the porcelain mouth of the sewer.

The next day, I pack up the remaining food and dispose of it with the same care. I eat out that day, layering debt onto the last of my credit cards at restaurants on the opposite side of town.

He is more clever than I could ever imagined, and I am awash in despair as I spend another sleepless night gagging and sobbing on the tile floor. I imagine the Algorithm, the perfect predictive models at His disposal, brilliantly charting my every move across the city; every time I thought I'd outwitted Him, I was willingly walking into his web.

I buy a candy bar from a vending machine in a theater, and hold it close like a talisman. When I get home, I fill the bath a few inches deep with rust colored water, and hold the little plastic wrapped bundle beneath the water and squeeze. I know that I will see it, but it still breaks my heart when I do. A thin almost invisible stream of bubbles picks out the point where a foreign object has pierced the protective layer. Through the haze of piercing hunger, I convince myself to try, just one bite, and to take the chances. It's a gamble that I do not win.

In the small hours of the morning as I press my fists into my empty protesting belly, I imagine the legion of His followers sliding silently through the restaurants and produce aisles of my life, slipping hypodermic needles into carefully selected packages of food. They are ruining and corrupting at His whim, surgical and efficient, before vanishing into the throng of the city at my approach. They will always be one step ahead of me, until I learn to think in new ways, to chart new cognitive pathways, and turn the game back upon Him. So, I tell myself, this is what I must do.

The first day of my new life, I spend in the small living area of my apartment, organizing my thoughts with clean and sterile efficiency, and conserving what energy I can from my wasting body. Night brings the retching sickness, but all that arises is water... and pills, half digested in the bilious water.

The pills. Of course. Not for the first time, I feel a sharp twinge of respect for crystalline perfection of His plans. I dump the last of my dozen prescriptions into the toilet.

On my third day, I feel a clarity and a sense of purpose that shocks me in its intensity, and my will penetrates the starvation malaise. I must win, or I will die. The rashes and sores in my cheeks are deeper, and I can feel the gentle sway of loose teeth in my desiccated mouth when I grind them in thought. He is winning, but not for long. There is still time.

Water, I collect from the roof in a small army of cheap hardware buckets. I know that somewhere in the byzantine plumbing of the aged building, there must one of His infernally clever devices; a tiny pump, squatting like a predator and pulsing its vile contents into the water main. I'll have to give up bathing. A small sacrifice. The rain water will keep me alive for a while longer, but I must find a way to eat.

The answer comes to me in small unconnected puzzle pieces over the next few days. While gently working another loose molar from my bleeding gums, they suddenly snap together, and a warm smothering blanket of epiphany coats my aching frame. The clattering of the tooth into the sink basin is like the ringing of bells.

Late in the evening, I begin another unconscious *dérive*, drifting through the city on shaking and atrophied legs, knowing full well that He is watching. But this, my beautiful solution, is beyond even His reach.

I choose the house at random, and then, in one final attempt to baffle the Algorithm, turn around and choose another house across the little tree lined street. I sift through the mail; it's a small sample size, but enough to confirm the most necessary of facts. A single occupant.

The poor man is surprised to have a visitor at all, and his face contorts with fear as force my way inside. I am flooded with guilt and regret as I push him to the floor and strike quickly with the crowbar I pull from the folds of my jacket.

No.

I must steel myself. This is His fault. He has brought us to this, and this poor man is just another of His victims.

I make quick work of the meat, the muscle memories of summers spent hunting in the mountains flaring up with each quick cut. I allow myself a quick bite, a feast to my shrunken and withered stomach. The iron and mineral salt taste floods my head like a vapor and I bawl in relief, like a child. When I have the meat packed tight into my rucksack, I light a single candle on the top floor of the little house, and turn the gas range on high.

I'm not yet home when I hear the low rumble in the distance; the pulsing lights of fire engines highlight the black cloud hanging in the sky.

For the first time in more than a month, I sleep well, my body rapidly healing as pure, untainted nutrients penetrate my cells. I am not yet well, but after a few more meals, I will be ready, once more, to fight Him. I know I can beat him now. I know the Algorithm can only predict the actions of my past self, bound by the laws and morals of the old world.

That world is dead.

I am a free man.

A Gemstone Eclipse pt.I

By Globulous

I sometimes find myself driving down abandoned dirt paths. It's peaceful. It has a subtle hypnotic feel almost. I don't do it for the sake of doing it, mind you, I do it because if I didn't I would slowly go insane. Something had happened to me. I'm not quite sure what but it left me with a broken mind.

It all seemed to start in a town called Arkham. I was answering an ad for a necklace from one town over and I decided to do some country sightseeing. It was a very grim town. Dark, dilapidated, desolate, all the things that would keep sane people away. But I was drawn into it by a mysterious force of curiosity. I had reached the center of town to behold a statue. Upon closer inspection the statue had been covered in scratches, claw marks of some kind. At first I was unmoved but slowly became uneasy and slightly shaken. I'm not sure what happened there but it had a very sinister feel, like a presence that didn't belong.

I heard a noise come from behind so I stepped out of the car to see what it was but it was already gone. I looked around. The town looked as if it had been abandoned for years, and it probably was. I walked back to my car when I noticed a small green shimmer out of the corner of my eye. Normally, I would have ignored it, but something about it was so alluring. As I got closer, the shine grew brighter and the temptation rose higher. I bent over and grasped the, what seemed like a gem. The light from the sun shone through it but it didn't shine green anymore. It was a colour I had never seen before. It was beautiful but it filled me with a sense of dread. I shouldn't have picked it up.

The sky turned to black. Birds, hidden in the decayed trees, all flew away as if some unseen force startled them. The noise I heard from behind my car came back, louder, more malicious. It was everywhere and nowhere. It was the one time I was truly petrified with fear.

To be continued...

-Globulous

DreamEnvoy

By Doug

Dream Envoy

-1-

I suddenly felt watched. A sudden change of spirit began to take hold of me, some vague feeling of paranoia, but I did my best to hide it from the doctor. My legs shifted closer together, trying not to shiver. I took a deep breath.

“So how have you been doing lately?” the doctor asked, her look of feigned concern piercing through those tiny stylish glasses.

I adjusted myself in the meager plastic chair. The cold air of her office hung around smog. Blinding fluorescent light dripped from the ceiling and into my eyes. The entire room felt sick.

“I’ve been doing okay.” I nodded. “Those CDs you gave me seem to help, at least a little. I think maybe I just need more time with them so my body gets used to it.”

She nodded back in reassurance. “Yes, it usually will become easier to sleep the more your body becomes attuned to the exercise. Don’t forget, though, there’s a certain degree of belief that you have to put in them to make it all work. The CDs are only there to help you relax and sleep, the rest is up to you.”

“Alright. I’ve definitely been trying, but maybe just not hard enough yet.”

“Well, don’t try too hard now.” She smiled. “You’re all set for today. It looks like your sleep habits are starting to improve.”

“Progress is always good to hear.” I smiled back. “Thanks a lot; I’ll see you next week.”

I got myself out of the room as fast as possible. The feeling of paranoia seemed to dissipate a little, but it was still there, hanging around somewhere in my head. It was a strange feeling to explain. I chocked it up to the condition of that room – I hated doctor’s offices, and my nerves usually acted up anytime I was in that kind of situation.

I’ve always seemed to have problems getting to sleep. I don’t know why, really. I would get into bed, the sheets warm and comfortable, shutting my eyes gently, awaiting the cloudy transition into sleep. And then nothing would happen. It was the same as being awake. And when I was finally able to get to sleep, dreams barely ever came to me. “You’re lucky, Art.” People would tell me. “I would rather not dream at all than have to get nightmares all the time.” It didn’t matter to me. I wanted to have one, at least once.

It was warm out again. It was the middle of October, but it felt like summer. Maybe the sun had forgotten to give us our distance for the changing seasons. I made my way to the car, checking my phone for anything that happened while I was with the doctor. One missed call. It was from Wes.

“Yeah, what do you need?” I said as he picked up.

“Oh yeah, I wanted to know if you wanted to grab some food with me. You’re done with all that doctor shit, right?”

It was my day off, and although I didn’t feel like driving somewhere else, it was better than doing nothing.

“Yeah, sure.” I replied. “Where do you want me to meet you?”

“Um, well, can you come pick me up first? I kind of lost my subway pass and I don’t think the ticket machine wants this 100 dollar bill I have here.”

I hated driving in the city. I was the only one in my group of friends, however, that had a car, so as soon as I bought it I instantly became the transportation administration. “Yeah yeah yeah, I’ll come get you. I’ll be there in a little bit.”

This was going to be hell. I usually tried to keep a pleasant demeanor whenever I had to drive through the city, but it was really one of the most tedious, mind-destroying activities I’ve ever experienced. I promised him I’d do it, though. I almost always give in.

The sky was warm, too. The clouds were thin, long wisps of color, the kind where you couldn’t tell if it occurred naturally or if a plane had zoomed by recklessly and left it there. At least the car was slightly cooler than the outside. The heat was not so bad; it was the fact that I kept dressing for cold weather in anticipation of winter, only to have the temperature reach the mid-seventies every day. I was stuck in traffic for the third time this afternoon, still on my way to pick up Wes.

I looked down at the passenger seat, at one of my sleep-help CDs. It wasn’t until recently that my sleeping habits got this bad. I would go for days at a time without sleeping, just lying in bed at night, staring past the ceiling into nothing. It was then that I decided to see a doctor about it. I told her I didn’t want any drugs; I was afraid of my mind getting altered or becoming a different kind of person. That was when she suggested I use the CDs.

Seeing that traffic was going nowhere fast, I decided to put one of the CDs in to help pass the time.

The car quickly became a serene, tropical beach. Or maybe it was the top of a cloud, one of the long, thin stretches of vapor up above me. I couldn’t really tell. The air became permeated by vague sounds of the calm and cool. I began to relax, a little. Then the voice came. It was kind, and it was wise; it reminded me a bit of my mother. “I want you to start to relax...that’s it, good...just relax... now your eyelids are going to start to feel very heavy...so heavy in fact you don’t think you can keep them up for one more second...but you don’t have to anymore, you can close them now...go ahead...just close your eyes...” I humored her. I made sure the cars weren’t running off anywhere and then slowly shut my eyes. I had to admit, I was starting to feel more relaxed. The peaceful tone surrounding me almost became me, almost replacing the sound of my heart, my veins, my blood, replacing it all with calm and tranquility. Light and color began to swirl under my eyelids. Something was beginning to appear...

I felt so disoriented. Where was I? Soft, iridescent dust swelled and trembled in the air, making formless, indiscernible shapes around me. Strange flecks of light, perhaps stars, pulsated and groped towards the distance-less horizon. Smooth, porous rocks drifted around the environment as well, breaking the clouds of vibrant dust as they moved, leaving pulsing trails of color in their wake. I felt so at peace at that moment, so in tune with the sounds and the images that perhaps I was part of them all along.

And then, something happened. I couldn’t comprehend what, exactly, just that something different was happening now. The slow, calm sounds around me began to fluctuate into a growing electric hum. The dust became sharp and jagged, thrusting out at impossible angles. A cluster of lights off in the distance began to spread apart like a gaping maw, leaving a hole of infinite black in its

absence. The electric hum grew in its intensity as the beast of the stars raised its mouth. I was falling into this widening hole, everything around me becoming horror and dissonance. I screamed, but my attempts at panic only further opened the terrible jaws ahead. I drifted further, closer to this celestial predator. For a moment, I thought I saw something beyond the gaping void, some flash of absolute understanding and terror, but it was gone. There was some sort of horn blaring behind me as I fell, as if blowing me closer into the dark.

I woke up. The horn was coming from the long line of cars behind me, impatiently letting me know that I was free to move forward.

-2-

“Shit, man. That doesn’t sound like such a scary dream to me.” Wes blurted out through his burger. “One time, I had this dream where a skeleton was holding me up at gunpoint. He made me walk all the way to this creepy graveyard, and dig up someone’s grave for him. And when he was done, he shot me right in the head. Now that’s fucked up.”

“I don’t know, it just felt so strange to me. Like I didn’t know what was real or not, you know?” Wes shrugged. I continued, “I’ve just been feeling really paranoid all of a sudden, like you now that feeling when it feels like someone’s behind you, you can feel it in the back of your head? That’s how I’ve felt lately. Like there’s something that knows everything I’m doing.”

“Sounds pretty crazy, man. Maybe you better go tell your doctor about it or something. Make sure you’re not crazy.” He took a sip from his drink.

“I don’t know, maybe. I don’t want her to start putting me on drugs or anything like that,” I said. “It’s probably just because I barely ever have dreams. I have to get all the crazy, subconscious shit out of the way first, right?”

He shrugged again. “Fuck, I don’t want to know what’s in my subconscious if I’m having dreams about skeletons with pistols.”

Night began to inhabit the world. I had just got back to my apartment that evening when I decided I was immediately to head off to bed. I wasn’t quite sure what that dream had meant, but it seemed different from dreams I remembered when I was younger. The lights of the city glistened and shimmered like sun-kissed water in the distance. The cacophony of life echoed out from the more populous areas. I almost wanted to be out there, to be in the world of youth and life, but I was off for a different place. I set myself down under the safety of the blankets, wrapped myself up like a present, and put on my headphones.

The soothing music rose up to my ears once again. On cue, the kind, gentle voice came to greet me. “You’re very tired...that’s alright...it’s okay to be tired... you’re going to get a good night’s sleep tonight. Just listen to what I tell you, and I’ll guide you off to that wondrous dream world. Now just close your eyes...” I slowly let my eyelids slip down to my eye. I stopped squirming around in bed in attempt to get comfortable. I was fine just the way I was. As I continued to listen, the less I realized that I was listening. The more I lay there, the less I realized that I was lying down. Form became formless, and conscious became unconscious.

I was in the ocean, somewhere. Bizarre, shimmering fish of every kind crissed and crossed overhead. The waters around me churned and channeled like highways through the atmosphere of glowing blue. In an attempt to discern my place in the vast ocean, I noticed, quite suddenly, that I was sinking. Reflexively, I attempted to swim upwards for the surface, but it seemed as if my

limbs were paralyzed. My brain wanted out, but my body wasn't having it. I could hear the sound of the kind woman's voice above the surface echoing throughout the ocean, slightly distorted by the depths of the waters. I slowly, vaguely, began to panic. It felt again as if from somewhere, I was being watched. Monitored. I drifted further and further into the depths of the ocean, down to where light could not penetrate. A large, jagged ravine approached from the sandy floor below. I drifted closer and closer to what felt like absolute terror. The woman's voice kept offering commands as I floated towards the massive gap; garbled, cloudy words. "Relax...limbs...going to...okay..." I was about to enter the endless dark below me. As I looked down further, there was some sort of figure of clarity, some world, maybe, lying at the bottom of the dark. The wretched depths came forth to swallow me up. I was going to die. Then the woman's voice came to my ears with absolute clarity: "Now wake up."

I found myself half sitting up in my bed, sweat beading out of every pore. I did not sleep again that night.

-3-

"It sounds like a recurring theme, if you ask me." The doctor adjusted her glasses.

"What do you mean?" I asked. "A theme?"

"Well, often times experiences from our daily lives influence what we dream. If you believe Freud, they serve as symbols, metaphors crafted by the author of your mind, if you will." She looked up from her chart, directly into my eyes. "What is it, exactly, that's going on with you lately?"

I hadn't told her what was bothering me. "This hole, this darkness that keeps occurring...it could represent a lot of things. Fear, fear of something, perhaps. Maybe a struggle in your daily life, a negative emotional experience from the past, or maybe death. All of us are afraid of death." Her words echoed out of my memory as I walked back to the car. "Whatever comes after that hole in the dream, I'm not sure. It's no worry, though. Plenty of people have disturbing dreams every night, it doesn't make you crazy. You're just getting used to sleeping properly again, and nightmares shouldn't be much to worry over."

What was I to do? I was intensely curious about this dream of mine, yet I feared what would come as a result of it. I had yet to pinpoint this feeling of being watched ever since that one day in the doctor's office. It was as if it inhabited my very thoughts. I was determined to find out what was happening.

I checked my phone – it was Wes again. I didn't bother calling him back. I had come to the doctor's on my lunch break, so I was still obligated to go back to work. Sleep would have to wait for a little while.

Work passed surprisingly quickly. I tried to spend the remainder of my day thinking of other things, attempting to get my mind off the topic of dreams for once. I hoped that no one at work noticed any changes in me. I hoped there weren't any changes at all, for that matter. I buried my head in a library of files and wasted away the hours.

Work was finished. I came straight to my apartment to enter the realm of sleep once more. It was still light out, but it did not matter to me at this point. I had to resolve this feeling hanging over me for the past few days. I hopped into bed. The bed was soft. The music was soothing. Sleep came fast.

I was in a warehouse of sorts. And a massive one, at that. Hundreds, maybe even thousands of shelves stretched off in all directions around me, far over the horizon and towards the distances only god knew of. The parallel geometry of the shelves seemed to go on forever at a dizzying intensity.

Cardboard boxes, each one marked, lay stacked on every space of the shelves. I attempted to get closer to read them, but in the haze of sleep I wasn't able to discern anything in particular.

As I walked through the warehouse for what seemed like hours, a new landmark caught my eye. A small staircase, trimmed with metal railings, sunk down below the gray concrete floor. A small sign hung above the entrance, the first word I managed to read in this place: "Down." Eager to rid myself of the head-spinning monotony, I quickly dashed for the stairs. As I reached the top step, all I saw was darkness below. Fear began to permeate once more through every particle of black that lay before me. I knew that this was the same darkness, the same entity from my dreams before. This time, however, I was not ready to be done with it so quickly.

I made my way down the staircase, each step calling me to whatever existed beyond it. Hours seemed to pass without any new event, any new feature. As panic set in, my pace quickened. Sounds began to get louder, more distorted. The sound of my footsteps drifted off into the black, only to echo back as the skittering of formless vermin. My panicked breaths were thrown back at me as guttural, psychotic growls. I thought for a moment, and only a moment – I could go mad within my own dreams.

The lack of anything began to terrify me; it was only my own company, the stairs, and the dark below. I raced and raced downwards and just as it seemed I would be plummeting into the heart of nothingness, my face met with a solid wood door. Stopping for a moment to check around, (which was rather pointless in the blinding dark) my hand grasped the cold, worn handle. Tentative, but eager to escape the dark, I opened the door.

A very faint light shone from a hanging lightbulb at the center of the room. Before me was some sort of figure. At first it appeared to be a very old man, but at some instances he seemed to be young and handsome. This man eluded my eyes, as if his form was never static, clouded in chaos. As I looked further, he seemed to be doing something. Typing. He was using a typewriter. I came closer. As I looked with astonishment, I watched as the figure typed out what seemed to be a narrative of my recent life, ever since my meeting with my doctor. My thoughts, my feelings, my actions, all seemed to be dictated by this writer. A wealth of emotions came to the surface. Fear, anger, despair, and yet at the same time, love, admiration, and awe. Who was this that I had encountered? What was he? I had enough of questions drifting away with no answers. I was angry.

"Listen!" My voice echoed in the dimly lit room. "Whatever you're writing about me, whatever it is you think you're doing, it's going to stop."

The figure looked over at me for just a brief moment, and the universe was illuminated. I became lost in a moment of absolute clarity, of terror, and of love. I feared that I would die here, in this dream, but those eyes...I don't think I was afraid anymore. My eyes broke away from his and dropped helplessly to the floor. I clenched my hands tightly. "I said stop writing! Now!"

ISEEYOU

By biscuits

I know you, but you don't know me. I know you better than you know yourself. I can see you, but you can never see me. Ms. Reeves... Amy... I am your guardian and your worst nightmare. You see, I take photos. Of you. You have been the most interesting subject I have ever encountered. I have seen you at your most happiest, and at your most vulnerable; and I have the pictures to prove it. Remember your last birthday party? When you and your friends went to that really nice club and you ended up blacking out, because you drank so damn much? Oh, well, I guess in that case you don't remember. That's fine. Maybe one day I'll share with you what you missed. You see, Amy, I have known you for the longest time. I just want to be a part of your life, if that's okay.

Now, don't be scared about what I'm saying right now. I don't mean any harm to you, I hope that was just made clear. It was never my intent to harm such a wonderful subject as yourself. You may be asking why I chose you as a subject. Oh, I can picture you now, the panicked thoughts running through your pretty little head. *Why me, why me, oh God why me?* There is no need for you to ever be scared when I'm around. I will attempt to extrapolate some information, as it will better serve to explain my purpose. It seems to me your job affords you some interesting conversations. You save people's lives, Amy, and not in the good doctor way. You prevent loss of life. You're Superwoman, you're Wonder Woman, you're everything to a lot of people. Including me. You saved *my* life.

Do you remember? It hasn't been too long, now has it? I had a gun. I was ready to just pull that trigger and be done with it. But I did not want to do it alone. I wanted someone to hear, to feel upset that I was doing this to myself. So I called your company. I saw your ad on those bus stop billboards, you know, the ones that the bums are always sleeping next to? It said that you people specialize in suicide prevention. I scoffed at the idea. If one was dead set on suicide, what was talking going to do for them? Fate, as it were, would have me answer my own question.

It did not take long for my call to get through. No silly robots directing my call, either. Just you. And me. And a pistol with the barrel pressing against my temple. The moment I heard your voice, I did a double take. You asked me what was going on, you asked me how I was doing... you asked about *me*. No one has ever done that before. It felt... good. You are a master of your craft, Amy, and what an odd craft it is. We spoke for hours on end, and with each passing minute I found more and more reason to live. What I could not see before, you seemed to make so painfully clear. I knew, from our conversation, that we were meant to be together. You cared about me like no one ever had. Yet I knew nothing about you. I only realized this after I had thanked you profusely and hung up the phone. I was in a daze, having been talking to who I know is bound to be my loved one. So much so that I had forgotten to ask about you.

Damn my foolishness. The thing is, though, had I not forgotten to ask you about yourself, I would not be in such an... advantageous position as I am in now. I figured I could follow you. Find out as much as I can about you and then, when I knew enough, I would make my move, and know every move you would make in return, thus creating the greatest possibility of us being together. Ah, simply the word "together" defines my purpose. To. Get. Her. So I did. I followed you. I am following you still. I don't know enough yet to become a part of your life. Still, I find my own way of working myself into it. Like last week.

That's right. Last week. You definitely remember what happened, now don't you? Allow me to... paint the scene, as it were. You were walking from your car to your apartment. Don't you know it's dangerous for a woman to be walking alone on the street at night? I don't know if you noticed, but I was there too. And we weren't alone. You kept turning around. I suppose something in your mind told you to keep a look out. I was so sure I had blown my cover. I had no idea that there was a third party involved here. Those echoing footsteps weren't just your own. It took me a while to realize that there was somebody following you. It took me a while, scanning the area, squinting hard at each darkened crevice and shadowy corner. But I spotted him. You had not.

Like a panther stalking his prey, he followed you. My guess is, he was on you since you locked your car door and started walking home. My mind raced. Maybe he knew her, and he's just trying to mess around with her. Or, maybe, he was just going to lose his nerve and not even bother trying to interact with you. That loser. Or, God forbid, he was thinking of doing things to you. Bad things. Things I do not wish to imagine let alone tell you about. This forced me into a most interesting situation. A dilemma, if you will. I found myself at odds, because if I had intervened, then I ran the very significant risk of exposing myself to you. If I did not, then I ran the also very significant risk of losing my most favorite subject. Oh, Amy, how could you put yourself into such a situation? You forced my hand.

If this person was so focused on you, then he had no idea I was there. I was invisible to the world. So I followed him. You would have been so impressed, Amy, I was so sneaky. Even with the heavy camera bag slung on my shoulder, I was able to sneak closer to this intruder. I hastened my footsteps, knowing that your apartment door was coming up soon, and I knew that he would make his move there. I stepped ever so closer, my heart pounding, leaping so high into my throat that I was sure if I had opened my mouth, you both would have heard the beating. I reached out, with my trembling free hand. I still had my camera in my other hand, ready to snap a few photos earlier had we not been so rudely interrupted. I had not thought about it until that moment, but I did not know how to take down a grown man. That did not matter though, I knew my... passion for you would allow me the divine strength to protect you.

I grasped his collar as you were turning your last corner before your apartment door. I could feel his shoulders tense up. He spun around, trying to break my grasp on him, but I was ready with my camera flash. I snapped a quick photo of him. The flash was as bright as day, and if you had ever stepped out of a dark theater into a bright summer day, then you know what our friend the stalker went through. He flailed wildly, grasping at the air in front of me. His

temporary blindness was the only thing that was giving me the upper hand here, and that was bound to run out soon. I had to think quick.

I couldn't just run off, he'd probably shake it off then try to continue following you. Or he'd leave tonight, and just come back another night. I know the kind of desperate dedication these sick fools have. Not that I am one, mind you. So I thought I'd end this here, once and for all. I snapped the light element from my camera into my free hand. I held it high, drinking in the moment, imagining myself as a knight standing over a vanquished foe, looking to my lady, you, Amy, and asking whether I should spare his life or end it. My blow was as decisive as your answer. I brought the light down with all my strength on his head. It was just in time too, as he had stopped rubbing his eyes and was looking right up at the rudimentary club headed straight for his face. It made a satisfying crunch-smack noise. The glass shattered, going everywhere, cutting into my hand, cutting into his face, flying onto the curb. You must have thought that some drunk just dropped a bottle or something, because you didn't come back around the corner. You're smart, Amy, you just kept on going.

Our... friend dropped like a ton of bricks. He seemed like he was unconscious, and the job was done, but you had given me your answer earlier. Your knight still had a job to finish. So I did. I dragged him into a nearby alley, so as to not attract attention. Oh, you would have been so impressed, Amy, with how I went about finishing him. I kept smashing the light on his head. He was face down on the pavement, his own blood pooling around his head. I had felt a little splashback, but when I tried to wipe my face off with my hand, the fluid was clear. I was crying. Those were tears. I had let everything out on this... this... rapist. Or murderer. Or whatever he was going to do with you, my sweet Amy.

I cleaned myself off with my jacket. I dumped a few bags of garbage from the nearby dumpster onto our friend and walked away. My flash was broken, but I had a million sitting at home. You were probably already home, yourself, so I headed back. When I finally loaded the pictures I took onto my computer, I ran across the one I took of our friend. That stupid look on his face. That scar on his chin. His bright green eyes. I heard he was hospitalized. I saw it on the news, that pretty lady who does all the field reports says he was taken to intensive care. I guess I didn't finish the job like you asked. I failed you. But perhaps, I'll be able to try again some day. Heck, maybe one day I'll show you the picture. You need to know who's after you, right? And, after all, I guess I'm a part of your life now, too, right?

Viral

By Anonymous

On seraphim wings I hear their cries,
bone-broken and scorned, screaming in agony.
"Hark" cries one, cries two, cry thrice for I hear no more.

My flesh is torn, my time is short
siren's cry lures me into darkness
"Why us?" My screams are illogical.

Vision blurred, reality fading,
My new brothers will welcome me soon.
I will become them, I will become death.

SCIENCE FICTION

[Untitled]

By Elliot Stado

This is a story about two men.

The first man was the most important, happiest man in the world and then when he died, he became the most important, happiest pile of dirt and worms and decomposing skin in the world.

The second man was a pillar of loneliness in what was otherwise a happy world. While the first man was for a while, a smiling, picturesque corpse, the second man was just as wretched in death as he was in life.

And this lonely man, all his cold and all your loneliness will act as a preservative, and he was exhumed and strung up as an exhibit to teach children the value of social activities.

The exhibit was named "The Loneliest Man That Ever Lived."

And so this corpse, in its cryogenic loneliness stayed there tied to a tree, educating the young for years. In these years, men ran around like ants, learning and writing, and learning, and writing. One of these books contained the information on how to reanimate a properly preserved corpse.

The only problem, the scientific community thought, was finding a corpse that was preserved well enough to be reanimated. Luckily enough, one of these young scientists had heard about the peculiar exhibit of one loneliest man that ever lived.

And so they took him and breathed life back into his dry lungs. The lonely man felt life return to his aching body and slowly opened his eyes to the realisation that hundreds of years passing had not solved his problem. He was still alone. The man left the laboratory and travelled country looking for a cure for his, now eternal, loneliness.

After years of searching for meaning, this man came across a forest. When the lonely man was a child this space was a cemetery, and people always used to beam and regale outsiders with stories about how the happiest, most important man in the world was buried there.

The trees in this particular forest had grown from the man's decomposed, happy remains, fueled by happy fulfilled memories, spreading across the earth. The grooves in the bark had morphed into smiles, and the forest had become a place for young families to congregate and celebrate the beauty of life.

The reanimated sad man sat amongst the trees, reflecting on his solitary life, gazing in awe at the fruits of a life lived beautifully.

The next morning, a perfectly preserved, perfectly alone corpse was found hanging from one of the trees. The townspeople did not move the body. Instead, they erected an exhibit quite similar to the one the cadaver had previously been the nucleus of.

The exhibit was named "The Loneliest Man That Ever Lived."

White

By Ben

There was white. In front of him. Behind him. Above him. On Him. His neck ached from staying in this godforsaken position for such a prolonged period of time. What was the prize he received for staying in the same position for so long? *The white*. There came these memories of this girl...stamped to the back of his iris like some sort of a parasite. The word parasite rung in his ears; it didn't suit her. It felt inadequate if anything. Thinking about it more, it definitely didn't fit her description. It wasn't as if she had wronged him in any way. In fact, it was the exact opposite. He had wronged her...somehow. This brought him to his current situation; his predicament. There he sat in bed; the only place he ever was. Surrounded by this white; a clean white that tormented him. The room seemed to convey the only feeling he now knew; what he was trained to feel. There were no echoes here. Only the hum of thoughts that came and went, just as his friends did.

His friends. Nowadays white seemed to be a popular color. Every morning he would sit up in bed and wait for his friends to bring him breakfast. He'd never been sick in his life. He was always so content; there never seemed to be a dull moment in this room. Plus, he got to see friends everyday; that was always a special time. The only thing he tired of seemed to be the fact that he was unable to move; he would've liked to meander around that room. Concrete had seeped into the crevices of his skin, and it held him in that one spot. He had never seen a white concrete; especially as pure as this. "It must be an import" he thought. What had become of her? How come she wasn't here with him? She had enrolled in the Peace Corps, if he remembered correctly. She traveled to exotic lands to help those in need. He was pleased that he had met such a wonderful woman; he always enjoyed helping people. His memory was interrupted by the door opening. His eyes glistened and a smile was strung onto his face, "Hey Ted! Beth! I missed you." He loved his friends; they cared for him when he was in need. He had never been sick in his life. What had happened to her? He looked at the floor, and seemed to remember her being a house-maid of sorts. The house was always clean and he loved the smell of it. That white color seemed to be so popular nowadays; even in households. He remembered she had fallen ill at one point and he had been at her side the entire time. Helping her take her medication even while she was unconscious. He enjoyed helping people.

He woke up in the same position as always. The room spun; it was never night time anymore. There was no moon or sun; only white. He just slept when he felt it necessary. It had been a while since his friends had come to see him. He felt his weight break. "On the moon," he cooed, "I always wanted to be an astronaut." Planets had begun orbiting and he felt a strange calmness surge through him. For once, the white was gone. For once he felt that he didn't need friends to keep him company. He had the entire universe in front of him. The darkness seemed to comfort him and embrace him. It didn't try to force him

breakfast or patronize him for whining about not being able to move around; it accepted him. As soon as he began to become accustomed to the surroundings, a white prick of light seeped through the dark. He reached out and grasped nothing. He crashed back into the white and it enveloped him; strangling. He felt his tear ducts swell and a small creek began to dribble down his cheeks. His arms and legs ached from the cement. He grit his teeth and clenched his fists. He felt the crack of loose oppression jolt through his system. A shattering rip punched the silence and he felt the tears now dancing down his face. He stood fists clenched, veins torn. His breath sharpened and he felt his legs give way. There was the darkness again; his eyes rolled back.

Color was something that seemed to elude him; was it merely subjective? He sat up in bed and the sun dust still lay sleeping at the foot of the curtains. A pink glow hummed next to him; softly moving up and down. She was there next to him; beneath those moss sheets. He felt her heart as his own. Hearing it brought emotions out that had been tucked away for so long; beautiful. HE ran his hand through her hair; that lush hair he had missed so much. She stirred and giggled as he slowly moved his hand through. She turned back towards him; she had no face. The laugh continued as a blank white tone stared back at him. He threw his hand from her hair and watched the white seep into the surroundings. The laughter grew maniacal, and he felt the floor giving way beneath him. She slithered out of the bed and with every step, the floor lost its vibrancy. He tried to scream at her, "STOP THIS!" A wisp of white smoke came from his mouth and he felt his insides begin to cave in on themselves. The laughter grew deeper and a white hand, pure and unscathed, erupted from the floor beneath him. He fell backwards, fear coursing through his entire body. He brought his knees to his face and placed his arms in front of his eyes. After still feeling a sense of life within, he opened his eyes and removed the obstruction from his view. The white room stared back at him once again. He looked on the floor and saw not broken concrete, but rather white shackles and ties. He felt as though he had just opened his eyes for the first time. He held his hands in front of him and saw pure life dried onto his wrists. It was as if a river had laid inside of him and this whole time he was unaware of it. The crimson clashed with the white in the room, and for once...he didn't feel so alone.

Why was he here? This infinite white had him surrounded, and he had no recollection of even being into such a place. He remembered something with her...some kind of drawn out even between them. He hadn't listened to himself and he got fucked for it. What did that have anything to do with this place though; this hellhole. "What's wrong with me," he screamed, "Why the fuck am I here?!" He slammed his palms against the wall. The dull response reminded him that he was nowhere. *He was no one.* Nobody, stuck in a white room, in white clothes, white skin, *white fucking everything.* He looked down at himself; drenched in this white. He took off his shirt to reveal a skeleton covered by a near white membrane. "At least this way..." his voice trailed off. On his shirt was a white tag with little black scribbles on it. In awe, he walked towards his shirt and picked it up from the ground, "Patient 3156: Andolin." 'Andolin' he repeated back to himself. Memories rushed back to him. He worked for a law firm; a respectable reputation instilled. He drove some kind of black Mercedes with a bobble head hula-girl on the dashboard. His wife had these piercing green eyes that reminded him of those ancient jade china pieces in those

museums. He remembered muffled screams and laughter. He remembered a life. He dropped the shirt and only one thought ran through his mind. Get out.

Second Sunset

(Previously know as Farm)

By Jeremy Levett

Darte's hall was built on the eastern rise of the valley, among a family of spreading trees. His estate began there and stretched across to the foothills of the west wall's distant mountains, barely visible in the haze. Over the course of the day, the combined light of the sun and the mirror had transformed the vale into a shimmering yellow oven, mountain-sided. Sun-roasting the driftwheat on the day before harvest was a ritual older than he was, one that ensured the crisp, delicate grain would part easily from the seared husks of the crop.

He watched the visiting technicians playing with his children under the awning behind the main hangar. They were building intricate networks of water channels, rills and dams to guide and trap water piped from the house's reservoir. One of the technicians had brought a toy version of an industrial trench-digger in their dirigible, and the machine was excavating a canal of its own with a tiny bucket-wheel. Occasional calls of triumph and joy reached Darte as he stood beneath his sunshade.

From his balcony, he could see the entire valley spread out, geometrically arranged water channels defining fields with glittering precision, even as they shrank to trickles in the pitiless heat. The valley floor was flat, nothing standing above the golden fields but tool barns and loading platforms for the farm dirigibles that droned from yard to yard like huge fat insects. Once, the farms had followed the meanders and twists of the river, swirling around the little mud-brick farmhouses of smallholders and the gentle domes of drumlins, the last memories of the glacier that had shaped the valley. But when the war came it had touched everything in some way, even this quiet world among the mountains.

Tomorrow would be harvest. Tomorrow, at the death of the day, the ground would be dried out and barren, scattered with the desiccated stalks of driftwheat plants. The day after tomorrow, almost all of the crop would be carried away in the huge engines moored a little down the valley, out of sight as he had asked. He would open every sluice and the valley would be inundated; the day after that, and for some weeks, his dirigibles would be methodically combing the fields, digging up rocks, dropping fertilising supplements, laying seeds, spreading the ash of the last harvest.

The war had never come to the valley, only its threat and the industrial order of its aftermath. The river was only a story now, dammed far up the valley, grids of irrigation channels patterned into the valley floor with shaped stone. On a clear day, the shapeless white bulk of the dam and power station could be made out from Darte's manor. He had heard there was a reservoir there, a lake of enough water to supply entire cities, but had never seen it for himself.

When it had been built, said the old diaries in his tower, the remnants of the glacier and the gentle meanders of the river that followed it had been scooped and scraped and blasted away by huge machines. Vast trenches were dug, prefabricated bunkers half-buried in ordered patterns across the entire valley floor. The soil was laid back on top of them, the irrigation channels built and the crops sown again. No hint remained of the buildings beside the well-concealed entrance to the tunnel network near Darte's hall. It, and the unnaturally flat characteristic the entire valley took on; an artificial air, as though the landscape had been sculpted by an artist who had never seen a real valley.

Tomorrow, not all of the crops would be taken away forever. Some, far more than they really needed, would go to the family's own storehouse among the trees. Most would be given away rather than eaten, to family friends or visiting engineers. But some – less than a hundredth part of the harvest – would be sealed in the preservation boxes the dirigibles had brought, and locked away under the valley in the great underground warehouses, safe until they were needed. The children enjoyed helping with the sealing of the boxes, and the noises of vacuum seals and computerised code-locks would always bring delighted smiles.

An ancestor of Darte had filled the bunkers to capacity with her crops, long ago, and the dirigibles had stopped bringing their boxes. But that ancestor – he could never remember her name for more than an hour after he read it – had protested. She had worried that the produce might spoil, had not trusted the devices designed to make her grain last forever. So every season, the oldest packages were taken from their underground home and loaded on the dirigible, and replaced by the new harvest.

Sometimes he suspected that the idea had nothing to do with distrust of the mechanisms. He thought the old farmer had herself enjoyed the process of packing and unpacking, the way the children did. He thought it was what he would do.

Darte selected a parasol from a rack and set off towards the fields, flagstones leading into a worn, dusty track. He had taken care never to let the double-strength sunlight at harvest time touch his skin. A visiting pilot working just inside the hangar greeted him with a wave and cheery call, then turned back to painting identification symbols on the hull of her odonopter.

There was always the worry of why enough grain to feed ten thousand people for a year had been stored under the valley. There had never been a call for it before, in all the peaceful years since the bunkers had been built, and he wondered sometimes what terrible circumstance would see stores thrown open. And not all the buried shelters held grain. Farmers long dead had written of slim, warlike shapes lowered into some, sealed from them by codes and computers. He and all his ancestors had thought of the valley as a farm – their farm - with a storehouse buried underneath, but occasionally he worried that those who had had the valley changed all those years ago thought it a storehouse which, quite coincidentally, had a farm on top.

Already, the sun was sinking low, and even with the mirror's light coming from directly overhead you could start to see faint shadows. Most noticeable were the huge silhouettes of the mountains, slightly darker shapes seeping across the valley, but if you looked hard enough even a shrivelling wheat-stalk would cast a faint, ghostly shadow. With the first sunset, only the mirror would remain, and in a few hours it would change position to bringing light to somewhere else, and the valley would be dark enough to sleep for a few hours before harvest day.

There had been some benefits to the change, he knew, from stories of hard times among the diary stacks. The mirror in the sky, mounted on some station itself meant for war, meant that the sun could be called upon at any time – even night! – and time-honoured practices like the harvest burn or the four-day solstice would not have existed without it. The dam, too, made farming more regular and easier; there was always enough water, always where it was needed. The yields were better. The swarms of light cargo dirigibles that had been left by the builders had perhaps been the most welcome change, their rugged tool frames and oval gasbags now as familiar as the mountains and the sky. All these allowed the farmers to raise more produce for steadily less work, and family by family they had departed for other lives, feeling, like so many others after the war, a creeping sense of futility. So it went, until Darte and his family were the only ones left. And they barely did anything but walk the fields, and occasionally repair a dirigible if it broke beyond its own ability to repair itself.

The dirigibles were humming around busily, long mechanical limbs preparing the ground for inundation with ash and pebbles, their rotors perhaps turning a little faster than usual in the hot, thin air. Every so often one would hover low over an irrigation channel, lower a hose and refill its radiators with water; some of the older ones, with less effective cooling systems, would use the hose to spray water over their bodies and gasbags, a bizarre imitation of trunked animals, and one which the machines' designers had no doubt taken great pride in. You could ride a farm dirigible, even operate the controls and fly it yourself, but there was no reason to. The machines did their jobs themselves.

Once, he had found a colony of blue ants nestled among his crops, devouring them. He had stopped the dirigibles from burning it, had dug it up himself and had a technician take it away to her institute. They had turned it into a display for children and young scientists, feeding the creatures driftwheat from his own farm, showing how they adapted their small lives with the seasons, how they could seal themselves away against even flood and fire. But he had kept a young queen and a few of the ants himself, let them build in the shade behind his home, and watched them cutting and moulding the crops he gave them with the same mindless industry as the machines that tended his fields.

The sun had fully descended now, and there were again no shadows, just the stark light of the mirror from directly above. It was the same light that the sun gave, from the same source, but it always seemed to him harsher and cruder, a light which provided for the crops but nothing more, as though the people who had built the great station had tainted the light itself with their careless, mechanical way.

Saranai, that was her name. The ancestor who had changed the stores every season. Dead, now, and buried long ago, like the bunkers under the valley or the farmers who had left.

A dirigible droned overhead, raining ash.

Lazarus in the House of Hrothgar

by Lars Mars

By emerald towers,
cast off from seas of fire,
did the machine-man conceive
the rebirth of Lazarus.

Great protector of his olden race,
heroic warrior in the face of death,
who fell protecting his beloved
on the funeral pyre of forgotten tragedy.

Conjuring life from far-off grave,
did the machine-man bring the
spirit of Lazarus unto the body another.

Lost Halga of the house of Hrothgar,
ended by choice,
tragic father of Yrsa and husband of Oluf
dead man to a house who could afford no burial.

Thus did the machine-man and its masters
honor olden promises long unkept
towards an ancient hero.

And Lazarus,
alive in the body of another,
in a world not of his own,
did set about the revival of his work,

casting war upon the houses that had wronged him,
beneath magenta skies,
for the belabored sons of Froda.

And the prowess of Lazarus was venerated
by the people of this far off time,
praising the skill of
his works among men,

yet, secretly,
did Lazarus despair.
for despite his deeds,

his house and kin lay rot ,
dead ghosts of ages past,
forever subservient to the will of another

In grief, did Lazarus find
respite in the will of the machine-man,
who did offer the rebirth of olden kin.

Yet, while the machine-man offered one thing,
also did it request another.
The secret to Lazarus's great power,
his heart.

Forsaking himself, a deal was struck.
Replacing life-vein with metal,
honor with sin.

The Machine-man,
promising kin,
would supplant them
under guise of operation
within the body of Yrsa

Yrsa, already with child,
did Lazarus deceive,
believing one joy no different than another.

And yet,
the machine-man spoke falsehood,
for at birth did Yrsa miscarry,
a child of iron,
borne in the machine-man's likeness.

Seeing his fault,
did Lazarus admit guilt to the weeping daughter of Halga,
beseeching punishment upon his misdeed.

Yet Yrsa could not, for Lazarus was Halga,
father of her unborn child,
borne out of shame,
from which Halga chose death,
a consequence of rape.

Caught by horror,
Lazarus did weep,
falling down upon himself,
crying sorrow.

Yet Oluf, wronged wife of Halga,
did instruct Lazarus for repentance,

speaking of the old rites,
crying vengeance against the machine-man and its kin.

Steadying his eyes, Lazarus did sake the oaths of fealty,
linking himself to the house of his misdeed,
swearing honor unto death,
the rewriting of wrongs.

Yet, lacking his heart, Lazarus fell unto troubled dreams,
fearing victories of the machine-man,
in the black holds of night,
undoing a lifetime of legend.

Seeing distress, Oluf did travel unto secret places,
hidden deep within the earth,
where the sword of dead Halga lay,
Hrotti, blade of lightning,
rusted power of the past

Bequeathing this unto Lazarus,
did the forsaken hero return to hope,
seeing secrets of victory.

Seeking favour from the sons of Froda
did Lazarus yield his blade,
to the hands of master-creator
from which the mighty weapon grew,
sharp as hot iron.

And while the house of Hrothgar did prepare,
so also did the machine-man.
Conjuring metal onto corpse,
the demon did yield life unto its kin.

And with the heart of Lazarus,
did bring death
beneath the emerald towers,
so that the people of this far-off time feared it.

And, knowing the mind of Lazarus,
the machine-man did beseech its rival to battle,
on shore by fire-filled sea.

Armed with Hrotti, Blade of Halga,
Lazarus struck answer to the machine-man,
did march through twilight,
down heights above land,
towards blazing shore.
Upon sloped earth,
did the machine-man and its kin stand,

brandishing corrupted heart,
towards the light of Hrotti.

And Great battle was wrought,
along banks of ash,
arms whirling among blade.

Kin falling,
the Machine-man's brethren did retreat,
unmatched by the valour of Lazarus.

Yet, cunningly, the Machine-man
lay ready for this prowess ,
and conjured trap through which to bind it,
grasped hold of Lazarus's heart,
constricting the body of the hero.

Bound by promise,
yet lacking power,
Lazarus did summon fatal strength,

and grasping Hrotti,
plunged blade into heart,
cleaving compulsion,

yet,
eschewing brave tendons,
collapsing oath in defeat.

seeing rival fall,
The Machine-man grew joyous,
and Pronouncing victory,
drew near felled corpse

with dying quickness,
did Lazarus jump from feigned death,
severing the machine-man.
and by funeral pyre of brimstone,
join death.

The people of this far-off land,
seeing the passing of machine-man and Lazarus,
did cry mourning,
and swore no longer conjuring among machine-men,
yet to learn it for men themselves.

Yrsa, her wound avenged,
did claim the heroic body,
and undoing guilt,
returned unborn son,
unto Lazarus.

So ended Lazarus,
legend of Hrothgar,
slayer of machines,
wielder of Hrotti.

Praised were his works among men.

Manual for a Modern Day Living

By Mallorie Soto

February 12

Today I got two voice messages in the middle of work asking to clean out the things in your old apartment, from your beloved of course. He's moving some place smaller and wants to know what is necessary and what can be canned. On the second message, he mentions he wants to get rid of "as much as he can". His face is almost nervous, and I'm satisfied. Not enough to not be annoyed.

Your Zwah hei, your sweet molasses, your gift from Heaven, your beloved husband, is leaving all the dirty work to me again.

The sun is still scheduled to set at 4:00 p.m. We've got more winter than we know what to do with now.

When I leave my office to catch the shuttle to your old home, it is pitch black save for the walkway lights. I want you to know this. I want you to know how annoying this is for me. I want your punishment to be more than not knowing the stars were crystal clear and so close today.

I recorded the sounds of your picture frames and about a thousand of your shoes being crushed by the recycling compactor, by the way. I'll upload it into the memory card in your Virtual Eyes when I get the time.

Where were you keeping all those goddamn shoes?

February 15

By the time you read this, you will be almost as old as you should be. Not that any of us will look much older, given the new vaccinations.

Your bed is specialized to keep the coma from rotting you away. It contracts and pulls at your muscles. Your eyes are hydrated, your teeth kept from corroding. The borders of your bed are like a Swiss Army knife. The mattress ripples and waves, caressing your spine with its seafoamy glitter. Are you getting all of this?

You should be bent and decaying, but here you are on the Snow White floor. On my dime. Your ex-girlfriend's dime. I hope whatever the hell you see in the

Virtual Eyes is worth my money, because there are much better things I could be spending it on than letting you sleep with these ghosts.

In my boredom, I removed a pin from my jacket, a tailor's pin, thin, with a red ball at the end, and stick it into the mattress. It ripples around it and resists--something close to plastic? When I pull it out, it's gleamingly clean. So expensive.

And here I thought I dodged a bullet when you left, you sad little spend thrift. I really thought I was done. No more of your craziness.

When the machine contracts and relaxes your leg muscles it looks like you are on a tiny treadmill. For your information, the same muscles contract for a very long time when you are taken by the arm of a police officer into the most hopeless floor of a hospital, to see someone you haven't seen for five years. A lot of them do. Thank you, by the way, for keeping me on as your emergency contact. It's as flattering as it is a great inconvenience.

Does it hurt when the machines force you like that? I'm told it does, a little. The preservation of a body doesn't come without a little pain. But hey, they gave you the Virtual Eyes, and the Virtual Eyes gives you whatever you want, doesn't it? Anything to keep that brain alive.

"Well, being alive is all about taking pain, baby", I whisper in one ear and take your hand, still warm from the bed. With the free hand you were so fond of, I stick the pin in the fleshiest part of it, just around the tendons, as far as it will go.

Your face is as stony as it's been all year. When I draw the pin out, it's gleaming. There is no entry wound.

This is our little ritual now, to pass the time. To pass my 20 minute requirement. Love bites.

When your husband visits, it will be with flowers and a friend. If you could only see how noble he looks.

You'd fall for it all over again like the tool you are.

February

17

"Yesterday, I caught myself watching her eat. It's so slow and careful, like it's the end of the world. I hate it. I need someone who can savor these things. Why eat if you don't mean it? It's like she's one of her robots. I think she's doing it on--"

I click the alarm clock off and listen to the whirr of its halt. I had salvaged a few of your diaries on that visit to your old apartment. Fair's fair. I have to write this.

I'm entitled to some reading of my own. No, I did not show them to your husband. Don't worry, he'll get them soon anyway. I don't need them. I programmed excerpts into all of the electronic devices in the studio. It saves me the effort of reading.

When I open my curtains I can see the expanse of this entire floating city. At better hours, the entire thing looks like a budding flower. This place is prime property. How I even got it is still beyond me. The only sound is the soft vibration of the bed's heating function.

And occasionally, you.

"MY MOTHER LOOKS FOR ANY EXCUSE TO TEAR HIM DOWN. I'M GETTING SO SICK OF IT! ¡TAMPOCO SAVE COCINAR! ¿QUE VAS A COMER EN ESE CUIDAD? CHEESE SANDWICH CHEESE SANDWICH CHEE--"

I'm doubled over and searching frantically for the button in my hair. I set the ringtone too loud again and when it stops it's a relief. The buttons are just above the ear now, by the way, don't slide past it. You're going to look ridiculous if you miss it. When I get to it, there's a missed call and a new text projected, both from Five.

Five is your replacement, just so you know. My fidanzato, my novio, however you'd like to put it. This information won't come in as handy as my 'How To Use Your Phone' tutorial, but you still eat up gossip in there, don't you? I select the 'call' option from the projected menu and let it ring while I test the cold floor with a foot.

"Well, thank God, it's Friday. And she's not wearing pants", his voice resonates into one ear, though his image is projected straight in front of me. I don't call anyone enough to get used to that. You will.

"I'm wearing shorts, besides, I'd be *dressed* if you called at a more reasonable hour", I set the bed to set itself and turn back to him. He pretends to be sorting the books on his desk and looks at me from the corner of his eye.

"I thought you loved surprises", he says, feigning dejection, almost smugly. He gets away with it. He looks almost mousy next to a stack of books, and I don't have the energy to call his surprises what they really are. But I make a mental note not to call him back until the next day next time. I don't have the time or energy I had with you. I don't want to argue. More importantly, I don't want to look like I want this.

"And it is a surprise. Don't tell me we're becoming a bi-monthly thing now", I say, walking to a dresser drawer and feigning interest in its content. "Is this about the Mini? Did you get it?"

"Yeah, last night. I put her together already. They're cute for little collectibles", he says, his arm searching for something off screen. When he finds it, he pulls back a shiny little robot about six inches tall, and sets it on his desk. Its silver

body casts a peachy shine, its face caught in a cute gridlocked grimace. It's sweet, a cartoonish caricature of it's large counterparts. A little red light the size of a pinhole blinks at one corner of Five's glasses as they adjust to look at the finer detail of the little doppelganger. "Why didn't you just keep it? It's a girl anyway."

"Didn't come with too many wires", I say, casually pulling some pants from the drawer. "It ain't alive if it ain't got veins. Seemed more like your department."

"Yeah, well, I don't take my work home with me" he says, stacking the little bot on top of his books. "Why don't we ever get little trinkets like these at our meetings? Limbs works twice as hard as Veins. You sensitive nerds have nothing on us."

"Because you weird-os will turn them into something else. You're so sloppy and lazy, you'd probably program them to do all your work for you. Besides, if you're impressed by these little things, you should hear what Cogswell's people get."

"Hey, we breathe life into these things, not you."

For your information, he doesn't notice the way you noticed, crazy as you were, crazy as I'm betting you still are, under all those machines.

Just so you know, I don't want to hurt like I did then. I live my life in fear of the great reveal, the beautiful tarp covering the lies, writhing like a mass of maggots. The glittering sky before the locusts. I live pretending the lies are already here. They can't catch me by surprise if I know they're here.

You can't catch me by surprise if I know you're here.

For the record, I could have let you die. I could have let you coast that coma until you shriveled and died, the oldest 26 year old this side of the solar system. I could pull the plug now if I wanted, but it would be confirming my biggest fear, then, wouldn't it?

There is no one and nothing there to save us.

And there never was.

The suspended animation rooms were on the third floor. It was the darkest in the entire building, lit by the blue glow that came from each room. Why bother closing the doors.

FANTASY

Dark Horse Sense

By Snail

1.

Hephaestus looked up at the sound of a far-off approaching wind and gazed over dead weeds for miles, his hand at his brow, saluting the sun to shade his eyes.. He smelled the rain in the dirt, and saw it in the clouds. Rain in August. He whistled, and the echo of his whistle lay dead in the dirt, unreturned.

He turned around and plodded home down the tense dirt road, through dead and dying fields.

It was August. They would live again come spring.

The dirt in the earth eventually led to a rough house hewn of wood. It lay in a sort of dent in the fields, a dimple, hiding it from sight in the rolling even land. As he approached, Hephaestus noticed his father standing on the porch. Following his gaze, two men in dark suits were shuffling into their black car, painful swift motions indicated sharp words had been exchanged.

The path down to the porch took a few minutes, and by the time Hephaestus approached his father was already sitting, collected.

“Good walk?”

“Beautiful.”

“You see the feds?”

“I couldn’t tell if it was them.”

“It’s always them.”

There was quiet.

“They buggin’ to sell?”

“It’s always the same old shit. Just don’t take no.”

“Well then that, at least, is ours.”

The old man cracked a smile, his wrinkles falling into place for a second. Hephaestus helped him up.

“Hephaestus?”

The son’s assent was unspoken, in his breath, in his walk.

“Did you make it to her tree?”

It was August; her soft buds would still be open, white and pink.

“It got cold, and I didn’t have anything with me. I like to have something with me.”

His weight on his son’s shoulder, turned to go, he arched back around one more time to look up at the world and breath the dry weeds and the warm dusk.

"See that you bring her something, son," he said. "I've been missing her a lot these days."

"I know, dad. Me too." He reassumed his pose, turning to share the view of descending black heaven with his father.

"I know I slept around a bit, that a lot of you kids held that against me, but I always loved her, and I was with her in the end, when it mattered."

"When she was sick. I was there too."

"When it mattered."

Without knowing it, they gradually grew blind. The lengths of their visions crept slowly up to meet them, bringing with it cold, this time sharp and hard.

"Let's turn in, son."

"Dad?"

They paused; there was urgency in the night's cold.

"I hear you out there too, sometimes, when we're right here on the porch."

Zeus was glad for the dark, for not having to react to the words, to confirm or deny them.

"When we talk, I hear your voice coming in from out there, up on those dead plains, in the wind with her."

Still, he hadn't asked; there was still no need to respond.

"Are you ready to die, dad?"

A long sigh. Air that had been held a long time, broke as the night broke.

"Son, I've lived long, and hard." His tone begged implications, inferences.

He breathed. Please don't make me say it.

"Dad, if you're ready, it's ok for you to die."

This time the air didn't break. It stayed there, pent up, unresolved. He held it.

The night grew colder, the only light coming from the house.

"Let's go inside, son. Let's call it a night."

He turned to help his father up the steps.

In his bedroom, under heaps of rough wool blankets that wouldn't turn warm until his body heat them itself, Hephaestus thought a little about when his mother had died.

Long hours sponging her forehead, feverish, while she raved to him wild and fanciful lunacies. Inventing a hysteric sort of half-narrative, which she spouted out in frenzied recitations. He had been young, had been pulled out of middle school to take care of her, and the rantings still sometimes haunted him. He often dreamt of his brothers and sisters chasing after the affairs and fortunes of perfectly good, unassuming people. Saw them bathed in glory, in folly, misers and magicians, peddlers and meddlers of fortune. For the rest of his life, he was haunted with the last solace his dying mother had grasped to, the final mad manifestation of her mother's love. He would always see them in the light of that love.

He shut his eyes to the dark of the room, cold and sharp, to the warmer, lighter dark of his shut eyes, and went to sleep.

Hephaestus woke to the dawn. The house was sturdy, hard, insulated and good, but still a small layer of frozen moisture coated everything, and he couldn't see much in the pre-morning light. The valley never got much light anyhow.

Immune to the cold and dark he swung his legs out of the bed and onto the floor and began moving, dressing in the dark, time and memory seeing deft

fingers through familiar buttons, up well-known zippers. Almost silently (there was no-one to wake, but the earth) he laced up his boots, slid on his gloves, and stood.

His joints snapped all the way up, first hurting and then feeling good. The room seemed a little lighter, the door closer. He walked to it in two giant strides, opened it silently, and slipped out, and left the house.

There had been a time when he got up this early to feed cows, hens, tend a little to the earth, but those things had died off and now he used the morning only to go for a short walk, to see the last breath of night before the death of day.

As he climbed up into the fields, he noted a few stars still in the sky, bright and clear even with daylight first darting out across the golden fields. The sky was clear, unpredictably but not impossibly. As he crept over the dirt in the still moment, Hephaestus caught glimpses of butterflies and grass-hoppers defrosting in the morning light.

He made it to a tree, the whole way facing the rising sun, clodding up to it across flat planes and dead frost. It now had broken the horizon and risen to about eye-level with him across the land. Still it was bathed in water-colors, burning frail papyrus in autumn still.

He turned around and walked back. By the time he reached the house, day had begun. Hephaestus walked upstairs and into his father's room.

In his bed, stiff, breathing, his father was dying.

2.

For four years she'd been house-ridden, bed-ridden, tied to that stretch of land that borders closed in as her legs stopped carrying her farther and farther. The entire time Hephaestus had walked beside her, let his world close in too, holding her hand and wiping her brow.

The last nine months she'd been confined to her room, the smell of her seeping into the wood of the house, not foul or nauseating but the smell of death all the same. Petals growing brittle, wood softly rotting. The others had left, driven away by him, by Zeus, but Hephaestus had stayed to help her get better and to help her die.

In the spring, when it had finally happened and ended, he called the family together to help in the arrangements. They had come, reluctantly taking up old rooms to pay their final respects. There had been no talking, more than dull words that dropped out of stiff mouths and fell knocking on the wooden floor.

After the funeral there was a quiet and universal acknowledgement of the need for deliberation. In the living room they had piled to discuss the future of the family, while outside inside the barn their father, wretched fate of them all, was vomiting and nesting in nearly a week straight of drinking.

Mutually, without having spoken to each-other, they had each decided the land should be sold, Zeus put into care, a home, the money divided at his death. Hephaestus had explained to them that all property and decisions went to their father, who was still very much in a capable frame of mind, and who planned to keep the land as long as his finances permitted.

It was a short conversation. In the silence following each's indignation had crackled, an unspoken intent to call lawyers, dispute his right to arbitrate. But in the end each had gotten up and walked out of the room and left, washing the dirt and decision from their hands. They wouldn't talk again; their only connection was him, and they hated him.

Many years later now, he was dying, and Hephaestus had to call and tell them.

He had stirred when Hephaestus entered the room, shivered a little. Hephaestus heard it, even in the rising din of day, and it worried him. His father never stirred in his sleep.

Crossing the room, avoiding the memorized furniture, he knelt by his father's side and listened to the breathing. Short gasps. Wheezes.

His arm on his father's shoulder, gentle but firm with worry. Wake.

The old man sputtered out of sleep, his breath so deliberate. Clammy words escaped his lips.

"Huh-huh-here's it?"

"Wake up, dad. How're you feeling?"

"I dreamed I was an ant. I dreamed I was a cow."

"Relax, dad."

"I dreamed I was a cow."

"I've dreamed I was fucking your mother."

The joke pulled Zeus into focus. He smiled a little, and his coughing slowed down.

"Not feeling too well today?"

"Son, I've lived long and hard, and I miss your mother so much."

"Dad, it's ok. It's ok for you to die."

"I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry for-"

"Dad, I'm the one who doesn't hold you responsible. Save it for the ones that blame you."

"You think they'll come?"

"They'll come. There's a money in it."

"Not much."

"There's a money in it. And I think they'd like to watch you die."

"I've missed them so much, Hephaestus."

"I know, dad. I know it's been hard."

"They hate me."

"They love you enough for that."

There was a leathery sound. The man's face cracked. He beamed.

"I know."

"How long you think you got?"

"I don't wanna be here more than nine or so days."

"I guess I better start calling them, than."

"You got change,-"

"I got it, dad. You just rest, sleep, get up your strength." The boy smiled.

"You're gonna make it through this ok, right?"

The man smiled again.

"Full recovery."

Tightness in his chest found the boy short suddenly of breath. It was a sharp jerk, a convulsion of tears as he realized, in a moment, how much he loved and would miss the man.

"Oh, and son?"

He hadn't seen it, in the darkness.

"Don't forget something for your mother today."

"Course, pop."

"I've been missing her lately."

In his room Hephaestus had a small copper spit-jar filled with change, and a pocket memo pad scribbled with contact information. He buttoned both into the pocket of his red flannel shirt, tucked it in and rolled up the sleeves.

Outside in the barn was a rusty wreck of a bike. He pulled it out, spray-lubricated all the parts he figured needful in getting to town. Slowly, patiently, running the chain until it coated all the spokes. There was no thought in the work. The amount of time it took was negligible.

When he was done, Hephaestus looked at his hands. Rough oil-stained hands. Hands that could do no different. He took the rough rusty frame in those hands and lifted it over his head, over the hill into the flat outside world. Above him rain still loomed, but the world was still glowing a bright buttery yellow, the silver gloom of the clouds reflecting in the flaxen gold of the weeds. Hephaestus set the bike to the dirt road and mounted it, pausing before pedaling only long enough to trace the horizon with his eyes, the big long nothing he was about to travel.

On the other side of the clouds, the sun beat down cold and hard, but the world was bright and the air was warm. The ride would be nice.

The coins weighed heavily in his pocket. Nickels, and quarters, thick in the dark brass spittoon.

Like a seashell, the phone when pressed to his ear made a sound like the ocean, like a wave rolling in the sea. A monotonous, stuttering roll.

"Hello?"

"Hermes?"

"God, hello?"

Hephaestus waited for a large truck to finish passing before going on. He was using a pay-phone at a gas station some two-hours ride from the house. The bike was heaped up on the pavement nearby, growing hot in the sun.

"Hermes?"

"God, Hephaestus, where are you?"

"Remember hitch-hiking to Hickey's so some trucker'd free-wheel us to a rock-and-roll concert every now and then?"

"You're calling me from a Janis Joplin concert?"

Hephaestus smiled.

"That's the nearest phone? What could possibly be so important as to camp in cow shit for?"

"He's dying, Hermes."

There it was, it had been there since they'd picked up the phone, the only real reason they'd be talking right now. There it was.

"What is it?" It seemed the only appropriate question.

"Fuck all the shit, man, we've always been straight."

"I know it's been a while."

"Hey, fuck all the shit. Will you come?"

Just like that. A glint of that reasonable humor, always in the wake of his unshakable judgement of what was right and fair and just. Hermes stumbled in it.

"Oh, god, you know Hephaestus, it's just before the holidays, I really can't be taking the time off of work-"

"There's money in it. Dad never sold out."

"He still owns the land? All of that land?"

“Never sold a bit out.”
Hermes thought about that. All of that land.
“Whoever comes will get to make the decisions about what happens to it, and the older ones’ll come for sure, and they’ll take the money themselves.”
“How’s it look, Hephaestus? What’re the fields like right now?”
Hephaestus looked around.
“All covered in what look like dry brittle stalks of dead grass. They all snap, though, a little moisture from the morning dew.”
“That grass felt so good waking up with a hangover.”
“Absorbed vomit like a mother-fucker.”
“Look, Hephaestus, I’m sorry about never coming back, that I never kept in contact.”
“Will you come?”
“Ah, Hephaestus,-”
“There’s money in it.”
All that land.
“I can come.”
“How soon?”
“It’ll be a few days, but I can stay as long as it takes. I was lying, I don’t have anything going on.”
He’d tried to make it a joke, but there it was.
“I can,” it hadn’t been funny, “get ahold of the others for you. I know talking’s not always your thing, especially to some of the older ones.”
“If they absolutely need a time-frame, dad’s got nine days, but try to get them all here on the understanding that sooner is better. Use money and the land to bait them. Try not to give them the nine days.”
“I was kinda hoping you’d say you’d been lying about the money to get me to come. That would have been funny.”
It hadn’t been funny.
“I mean, then that would have been funny.”
Hephaestus laughed, in spite of himself, and felt it, again, that tug at his chest.
“It’s all there, Hermes. Every inch of it.”
“Every dying red cent. How can I tell you who’s coming when, where to pick them up?”
“It’ll have to be this pay-phone. What time can I call you by, to get their plans?”
“Oh, jeez, you need all this done today?”
“I think they lock the pay-phone box at sundown. So someone doesn’t steal the change-box.”
“Oh, jeez.” Hermes considered. “Call me at eight tonight. Some of them I can only reach through e-mail, so I won’t get a response from them for at least a day or two. Hopefully we can get you someone out there with a cell-phone in the next day or two.”
“The reception’s shit out there. They’d have to bike pretty far out anyhow.”
“Well, we could at least save you a few quarters. Maybe get Aphrodite or Apollo on that rusty piece of shit you must gut your ass on.”
“Apollo seems more likely than Aphrodite?”
“C’mon, Hephaestus, in high school? The harp? Just cuz they’re older, they’re no more infallible than us. Worse, I bet; they’ve had more time to make mistakes.”

"You think they'll come?"

"Sure. The younger ones need the money, and the older ones,"

"Yeah?"

"Well. I mean, it's the way things are. They're more prone to resent him."

"I don't resent him."

There it was again. That block, that line over which no smile crept. The sacred.

"I'll call you at eight."

"Hephaestus, I'm sorry it's been so long.-"

The quarter cut out.

To be continued....

A Prophet

By Sensen

What is real?

I don't know anymore, not since I walked in the hidden fields. Not since I saw her eyes. Not since I saw the endless writhing chaos.

Before, I cultivated rice, as an unmarried orphan I had little prospects, so I cultivated rice. The rice were the children I would never have, each grain was a squealing and squirming infant. Yes, those were the good years of my life.

How long they went on for? I couldn't say, but those were the good days. The best days.

It was on one these lazy, meaningless days that I saw her.

Her sleeveless, purple, cloak billowed around her like a cloud of fuchsia, enveloping the green rice terraces, dull by comparison.

She turned, and looked into me. She saw my discontents, my fears, my worries, and I was in her power.

The air shivered and froze. A breeze blew, a heron flew away, startled. And I was a stranger under a strange sky. I had felt her calling, and I could not walk among men as an equal.

And in an instant, I was a welcomed man under another, stranger sky, but this sky was not my own.

The fields of wild grass, they stretched on forever, swaying green figures waving their welcome. She was there to greet me too, far away. I looked again, and she was close.

Her lapis-lazuli eyes wandered into my mind and stayed.

In an instant she was walking away, her feet grazing the top of the grass stalks, walking on top of them. They were the loyal subjects that bowed to their child Empress.

I followed her, faltering, unable to match her step that was beyond goddess-like grace. As I followed, they sky filled itself with huge orbs, and on these orbs, lazy gods bowed. Gods fat with sacrifice and starved with neglect, Gods of the cold north, dry west and stormy east.

As we walked, we talked of things; we talked of my insecurity, my want, my dissatisfaction. She always returned to the topic of my misery. She told me her

name, it was Lian-Lius. When I asked her age, she insisted that she had always been here.

After many hours of trudging, we reached a valley. I shall never forget that sight.

The sights and sounds, the flayed bodies, twisting into plant like forms, their skin rotting into a fibrous green. Some were dead, some were dying, and all were wilting.

And Lian-Lius' visage grew cruel and her young, frail form lifted itself into the starless magenta sky and gazed down upon her subjects, her strange Kingdom under the strange sky of nameless gods.

Lian-Lius laughed, as the world was hers, and the sky was devoid of stars and Gods and the earth was still and quiet. The fields of the rotting mourned, and I was plunged into cold darkness.

Somehow, I found myself back to this land under the strange, familiar sky. But I know I no longer belong here, I cheated the rotting fields yet I feel empty.

And yes, I do still see Gods in the sky.

The Lay of King David

By Subotai

Idly did King David eye the orgy occurring beneath the flawless sapphire ceilings of his ivory palace. Under dingey candlelight he considered the profile of his guests as they ebbed and flowed meekly into one another. Strewn about the main hall, he surveyed their coy coupling, impassively judging every groan and poke; and he wearied at the sight of it all. Honed by years of reaving and rape, the King ascended silently; sifting through the sex with a familiar sneer. So prim and proper in their fucking, he thought. I've no desire for any of these piss-ants.

Of in his youth was he troubled by the insurpressible force of his desires. Before winning his crown, he had made due with spare and mouldy fruit for his flopping. Alas no glory is won by indulging in pussy served on a platter; but he was a king now and apparently bruised peaches would not do. Still, secretly, his old lusts endured. Rarely would the king indulge himself, for the lusts had grown stranger now. Ever did he feast on his twisted inclinations; pondering them often, but always settling instead for polite company and the tug of simple women.

Weaving through the squelching churn of the rabble, David lurked over them; watching false friends sending banal comments to one another across the heaving stink of sweaty bodies. Sadly, they were comments no-one need overhear, least of all a king in search of a hard-on.

"You are no longer in a relationship?" Asked one woman of whom he knew little.

"It's complicated," replied the other, whom he knew less.

Such were the women of court; he rolled his eyes and retreated to a quieter sideline to better survey the action. There it occurred to the king he would have use of a real wench. It was a familiar urge, but tonight there remained no taste on his tongue for palace-bred peach. No, he thought, tonight called for something riper. Considering a night of cheaper thrills after an age of unremarkable voyeurism brought a rare grin to his stony, old features. With a quest now firmly in mind, David denied his sorry guests another glance. Hastily, he retrieved a hooded cloak and his trusty, well-oiled blade, in its battered leather scabbard, from beside his throne. And so prepared, the king departed the brilliant blue-white of his halls; descending down into the welcome stench of the city below.

Eventually, wandering lust led him to a tavern of high acclaim and ill-repute; Craigon's Tally, read the sign outside. Inside, there mingled bawdy scum of every origin, and glad was David to slip among them once more. Steadily his nerves wilted under the weight of merriment and ale. He drank deeply for a time, becoming sufficiently merry as the pleasant din of the room overcame him. Soon, feeling more content than he had in decades, the tipsy king began to scope about, taking in his fellow patrons.

"Man seeks other man for mutual masturbation!" Called one shameless fellow from across the room. "Applicants please meet in the alley round back," he added before slipping discreetly outside.

"So brazen, these little-folk," he muttered while suppressing a most inexplicable grin. Just the ale.

Acrawl with all manner of life, he found the Tally was more cluttered than he was used to. *Were I to simply announce my presence, they would scramble and scatter to accommodate me.* But that was the king talking, and tonight was not his; so instead he let loose with his most awesome belch - loud as he could muster, and it tore through bar like a thunderclap; driving many of milder disposition far, far away. Satisfied, he sank back into his chair. *Some breathing room, he thought, how nice.*

"Such a brute," purred a sultry voice in his ear. "Fancy a tumble?"

"Gladly!" He blurted, turning eagerly, his quest returning to mind and pleased for the company of a more arousing persuasio---it was a fucking man.

Dainty, even pretty, but a man all the same. He thought the last too quick for disgust to temper his senses, reminding him that men were a no-no. *Kings do not reign by such faggotry!* Outraged, more with himself than his new admirer, David lashed out and struck the man full-on in the face, watching as he fell down in a bloodied heap. *Not so pretty now,* he thought with a pang of something - definitely not regret. All talk in the tavern ceased at once as every eye now fell upon him.

Flushed, David made a hasty retreat into the relief of the cool evening air. So much for the fire burning through his loins this night. Here he was, unable to indulge himself for the idiot-restrictions of royalty still forcing his hand to knee-jerk dumb-fuckery. Of course, he had not ventured out to flirt with men, but would he truly flee so easily? Did these 'strange lusts' run only so deep? Disheartened, the king prepared to give up and retire back to the doldrums of court. Only then did she catch his eye.

One look at the wanton creature eyeing across the way and hope was rekindled. Before him stood a sinuous and bouncy young thing. Writhing an ample frame along the wall, she oozed a raw form of sexuality that betrayed a figure that was both curvaceous yet firm; like a marathon runner, or some ancient warrior-goddess. With a wave of her hand and the dip of her ample

chest she ushered him closer, and duly he complied. *What a fool*, he thought, *to consider giving up*. She was becoming more and more brazen with the wall, and yet, as he neared, he could not help but be drawn to her luminous green eyes.

"What--," he began, but she cut him off.

"Follow me to the place none speak of and I will slacken your desires, my lord."

There was an awkward tone to her voice, as though straining to maintain the demure intonation with which she spoke. Still, she offered simply enough, and though his doubts began mounting, the pleasures promised by her eyes and tongue were too much for the king to pass up. And those eyes; deep, green, unblinking eyes; how they enthralled him! Wordlessly he followed the unnamed woman as she slid herself down the length of a near-by alleyway.

That was not their destination, however. Apparently she had a more private party in mind for them. Thus away she led him; down cobbled streets, along outer walls, and through the city gates. Far, they walked, away from the world he knew so well - too well.

"Have you a name?" He asked.

"No," she replied. And that was that.

Although his feral enchantress may well be leading him to some leafy-based doom, David was not troubled by the thought. Not near so much as the that of returning to the mediocrity of life at the palace, anyway. And so he followed the maybe-witch without reservation. *Better to face doom than another fucking tea party, and besides*, he thought, *I still have my blade*.

Eventually, well-trodden woodland paths became slime-covered ponds and bogs. David now found himself wading through unfamiliar marshland. *Curious*, he thought. *I know of no swamps surrounding my city*. Regardless, his guide led on, trudging her slender frame through the reedy mire with refreshingly little grace.

Perhaps there was no cause to suspect foul play, but as he took in the ever grottier state of his surroundings the king could not help but question her intentions.

"I don't imagine it would do much good to scream for help?" He asked.

"And for what reason should you need help?" She enquired.

"Only in pinning you down," he replied with a smirk.

Returning it, she turned back to the trail and he admired her from behind, watching as supple thighs clomped their way through filth and muck without issue. *Impressive*.

"On the contrary, my lord," she called back. "This place is *notorious* for its inhabitants."

As though in response to this, there came a notable rustling from near-by. Startled, David drew his sword and ushered the girl behind him; he braced for the worst.

"Come back, my love!" Cried a coarse voice amid the approach of heavy footfall.

Surprisingly it was not a burly man that emerged from the direction of the cry, as anticipated, but a small boy - no older than six or seven. Wasting no time, the child darted past the duo, as though completely oblivious to them, and fled deeper into the swamp.

"Huh," said the king. But the question in mind was soon answered, for from the same direction as the boy there appeared the source of the heavy footsteps. Into their path ran a great, hulking bear of a naked man, huffing his sweating, pox-ridden frame in pursuit of the lad.

"Don't leave me!" He called after his prey.

Bounding past, he spared them a gap-toothed grin.

"Evening folks," he said jovially before disappearing into the night.

More amused than perturbed by their encounter, the pair pressed on.

"By now I suspect you intend to ravish me in some wicked witches hidey-hole," he said, but she did not turn. "I only hope this lovely scenery can be matched by your cunt." He added.

At that she chuckled, but it was short-lived.

"We're here," she said.

Unbeknownst to David, they had arrived at a clearing, while night had reached its meridian, and the stars might have awed the king were his patience not at an end.

"Finally," he said. "Now fuck me."

Annoyingly, she did not snap to this command. Instead she was now entirely occupied by the darkness of the surrounding foliage. *Such insolence; I must have her now.* He prepared to voice his demands again, when a subtle movement caught his eye from the trees.

Something approached, of that much he was sure. Warily now, the king loosened his sword and began slowly to draw it forth.

"You won't need that," his companion snapped.

"Why not?" He asked. "Whatever it is will flee with a wave of my sword."

"Use hers!" Came a mocking call from the darkness.

Gales of jeering cackles followed, but David was far from amused.

"I did not venture here to be the made sport of by cowards," he called out. "Show yourselves!"

Abruptly the laughter died and was replaced by an eerie, prolonged silence. Then, slowly sliding forth from the shadows, they came; a shambling horde of indescribable horrors that replaced what fleeting courage the king had mustered with utter revulsion. From every crevice, they began to surround the pair. Pale moonlight shone down impassively over the unnamed creatures, making clear their grotesquely featureless, green faces. Jagged rows of yellowed fangs protruded from taut, gunk-dripping mouths; they were all smiling.

Abominations! Too many to count. Wordlessly, the multitude of fell-creatures encircled the duo, drawing close enough to swipe but still holding back. He saw them clearly now. Some were wimpy and slight, others swollen and bloated; many hair-covered, many bald; most were male but among them he saw saggy-breasted females lurking too. Uniformly repulsive, but every one unique.

Realising the hopelessness of their situation, he half-heartedly swung out his blade at the nearest.

"Do not challenge them!" Urged the girl. "Only then will they attack. Bring your lusts to me instead, my lord, and let us appease the legion."

"A trap!" He declared. "You lured me here for the delight of these freaks?"

"I made a promise," she replied coolly, "and I have delivered."

Despite his disgust, he looked down to find himself quite willing. What a time for a boner. He grinned; *such a blessed complaint*, he thought. Perhaps it was fitting for his dicks to take charge where his crown had never been able. Gleefully the monsters whooped and tugged at their groins at the sight of the woman sprawling in the glade and ushering the king nearer once again. So little resistance remained to the king, for his urge was now simply too great, and so, eagerly, he fell upon her; meeting her gaze with a sudden, animal-like hunger.

Greedily now, he tore at her clothing, recalling the zeal of a reaver once more in his prime. *This is it*, he thought. Strings loosened. *No throne*. Cheering grew louder. *No crown*. Buttons popped. Fabric ripped. *Just body heat*. Cheering louder. *Blessed release of the thrust*. He pressed against her, throbbing and eager, but it was now she who hesitated. Surely she saw he willed to press into her, but queerly held a tender hand to his cheek and moved her supple lips to his ear. Pensibely the monstrous crowd grew silent; patiently fapping in anticipation.

"Look down," she whispered.

Her cock was a shrivelled and sticky little thing; still flaccid, despite the heat of their rutting. David regarded it impassively for only a moment, then turned his eye back to hers. Silence lingered in the clearing. Then in one rough motion the things legs were hoisted against his chest; bringing her boy-hole level with his twitching cock, which now rested snugly along her crack. She gave him a final grin as the eager horde erupted with a renewed surge of giddy motion around them. He made ready to enter her then, as his mind finally let go; and the anonymous engulfed him.

Please send any feedback to Subotai at iwritelit@gmail.com

RELATIONSHIPS

Snow

By Saw

Within the sky, there were grey clouds where water vapors were gathering. It was well into wintertime, which suggests that those water vapors will eventually fall as white flakes of snow. Looking up, it seems as if the tension of the incoming snow is becoming unbearable. If the clouds could speak, it would be screaming I'M ABOUT TO BLOW MY LOAD OUT!

*

Two girls walk among the frozen wasteland of their apartment parking complex. If they weren't wrapped in layers of clothes, one wouldn't notice that it was wintertime for it was bleak and grey within the parking lot year around. And Dull. Let's not forgot that, for the girls are merely walking around within the harsh and dry wind for nothing. Yet, the girls drudged on, seeking for a source of amusement.

*

Two bare women are kneeling on the carpet, gasping. Soon, they will be done for the day. All that is left is the snow. Waiting, they looked up as Cloud became tenser with each stroke. SOON, screamed Cloud, IT'S COMING!

*

Finally, enough water vapors had built up. The load was far too heavy to remain within the sky and it must come down. With a gentle stream of breeze, white bits came floating down to the dreadful ground, snowing till the surface was completely covered and then the cloud would move on and dissolve.

*

Snow covered the two shocked women. Much as children would do during snow, they caught the flakes within their mouth. They gasped. They moaned, as they waited for the snow to stop steaming down. Once Cloud has been exhausted, the women turned toward each other and leaned into each other

*

Snowball. Building up, getting larger and larger as the two girls pushed it farther. Then, the girls left it and rolled another snowball, smaller than the previous one. And again. With a grunt, they sacked three snowballs on top of each other, with the largest on the bottom. With a flurry of hands around the topmost ball, they gave the white ball a face. It was now a snowman with a goofy grin, gazing upon the giggling girls with its coal eyes.

Genuine

By Jake

Two figures lay on the grass on a warm midsummer evening, their bodies parallel, and pointing in opposite directions, their waists almost touching. The setting sun laid a mosaic of light around them through the tree leaves, and the sky showed with the thousand colors of the rainbow, collected together as if by some masterly painter, the clouds seeming so light and graceful in the atmosphere above. The air was warm, and a cool breeze ran through the air.

They laid there for moments that passed like hours before one of them, a young man of fifteen years old with curly brown hair, and a slim figure, reached his hand over to the other's, a young woman with long brown hair, soft features, and eyes as deep and blue as the sea. Their fingers interlaced, and their hands clasped tight, and a smile slowly came to both of their faces.

Soon, the sun set, and in the dimming light, the stars became slowly visible. The couple stared up into the sky, quickly turning from a shade of powdery blue to the deepest of blacks, interspersed with tiny glowing points, billions of miles away. The fireflies came out of hiding to join the two in the night, slowly, but within an hour of sunset, they blinked above the field like so many Christmas lights suspended impossibly above the ground. The small, orangeish yellow lights appeared and disappeared in moments, everywhere at once. It created a sense of surrealism around them, as if the two were floating through the stars, with a million tiny flashing ghosts surrounding them.

The woman began to get up, but the man squeezed his hand tightly around hers. They locked eyes for a moment, a moment that told him that it had to be done. He didn't let go, because he knew this was the last time he would see her ever again. He pulled her arm in close to his body, and she followed, her face moving towards his. Their lips met for a moment, a perfect moment where both of them forgot all that was wrong in the world, before they separated, and she was gone.

The man stared up into the sky, emotions flowing through his veins thicker than blood, tears running down his warm cheeks. He didn't get up to follow her. He knew he couldn't. He brought up his arm to his face, and wiped the tears from his eyes as a choked outburst emanated from his lips. The night was no longer surreal and beautiful. The air was cold, and the ground was hard. The teen pulled his legs in towards himself and closed his eyes. Tonight was a night of sorrow and joy for him, but the feelings in his mind soon gave way to the soft tide of sleep.

CREEPYPASTA

Creepypasta from /x/

By Tassandar

Allegedly written by how do i tripfag? For /x/

A letter appeared under my door this morning. It contained a paper carefully folded, with only two words written on it, like two black eyes staring at me.

"Love you", where the exact words.

I'll never open my basement's door ever again.

A snuff movie. Quite the pinnacle of humanity's decadence. Recorded footage of arguably the most grotesque of human actions. Murder.

No doubt you have heard of them, and have probably even had the conversation, maybe even more than once, about whether or not such recordings actually exist. Aside from the mockeries and the cunning special-effect laden forgeries, there are said to be a number of actual murders recorded for the purposes of perverse entertainment. Four, in fact. And I knew a man who had seen all but one.

I shall not give his name for I believe that although he was not by any means a good man, his family still deserve some retain semblance of dignity to their name, but I shall describe him thusly: Corpulent and complaining, loud and abusive. An ugly man in his late forties with thinning black hair and an overbearing manner. If you have ever had the misfortune to work in the more unforgiving areas of a Television Studio, as I have, then you may be able to imagine the kind of man I am talking about.. I am not content with simply calling him "The Man", or "My Boss", so we shall call him "Mr. Thorpe". Mr Thorpe had come across his first snuff movie in Japan. Some believe it to be the first ever made, and as with the rest of them, it was never given a name. An old college friend turned business associate of his confided its secret to him, and even allowed him to watch all fourteen minutes of grainy footage on closely guarded Betamax cassette. A young woman, Japanese, slain with a machete and divided into her separate pieces with surgical tools in a dark basement. Obviously, he would not allow Mr. Thorpe to purchase or copy the cassette for fear of it being tracked back to him. However, this instilled a lust in Mr. Thorpe that he had never truly recognised in himself before, and he needed more.

The next few years were spent in clandestine research of the possibility of more movies, and Mr. Thorpe was very careful not to involve himself by name in any of these inquiries. He owned many companies at this time, and was able to channel vast amounts of money toward the right people without ever making waves in any of the official finances. Soon, his efforts paid off, and the second and third videocassettes were delivered, on the same day, by Federal Express. Both were marked only with a small stamp that bore the name of 'Moonlight Productions'. As soon as he was alone, he tore open the cases with an almost

feral hunger, his hand shaking as he inserted the first cassette. These two were different. Longer. They took place in what looked to be an old farmhouse, and not only did they show the brutal murder of two teenagers, a male and a female, they were able to document a chase through a densely wooded area. Recorded as it was on one of the first hand-held camcorders, the quality was still poor, but Mr. Thorpe was still able to relish each second of the pursuit from his black leather recliner, almost squealing in perverse delight as the two were finally taken, and screaming, put up on meat hooks to be torn open. There were no surgical tools this time, but the solid iron utensils of a butcher hacking against human bone and tissue, sending a mess of intestines slithering to the floor.

Even so, he needed more. Another vast amount of money allowed him to track down Moonlight Productions, locating an address for their offices nestled in an industrial estate in Birmingham. Such was his desire for bloodlust-by-proxy that he even visited the offices himself, only to find them cleared out, and little more than an empty shell. This was enough to deter him for many weeks.

But it was Moonlight productions that found him, this time. A letter. With an offer. A new movie was being made, and as their largest financier, perhaps he would like to lend a hand? An address, then. Woodside Sanitarium. "Don't worry", they assured him. It was not only disused, but all the lands around it were owned by friends of the producers. All he had to do, in fact, was to show up at 9pm that very night. They even offered to let him 'do the honours', should he so wish to, masked, of course. The tone of the letter jarred him with its informality, but he couldn't help but chuckle. So far he had watched, but he was being offered the chance to not only watch but to take part. You or I might balk at the idea, but Mr. Thorpe? He is made of sterner stuff than we. The drive to the sanitarium went by quicker than he expected. He half imagined the wail of sirens, the springing of a trap laid cunningly by one of his numerous enemies, but the sirens never came, and soon he found himself standing at the door of the sanitarium itself, a huge crumbling Victorian edifice. He found the door unlocked, though it took several moments for him to push it open fully and look around. The only light came from a single solitary bulb, hanging on a trail of wires, and now swinging sadly in the wind, casting flickering shadows onto the wall. He wanted to turn and run, but he was so close now. He could almost see it now, in his mind's eye, not a grainy video-capture of the act, but a front-row seat. It would be so real. He found a single table in the entryway, upon which rested a scalpel and a letter. Picking up the scalpel, a sick smile crept onto his virulent lips, and he opened the letter in his other hand. The smile faded quickly, and as the front door slammed closed, he let out a sudden, childish moan. The letter contained but two words. Defend Yourself. He threw himself against the door, in panic, trying in vain to jerk it open as the cameras began to roll.

You may of course, call me a liar at this point. How could I possibly know such details about what happened, being nothing but his employee? Well, I guess like so many people in T.V, I've always wanted to break into movies.

In the heart of New York city sometime in 75 or 76, there was a grisly murder-suicide case that was quickly closed and shoved in the back of a filing cabinet.

It started when the unnamed assailant entered the apartment after working at his office job downtown. In the living room, the bodies of a woman and her 16 year old son were found. The son had been shot first, with one bullet to the head. The mother was next suffering from two fatal gunshots to the chest.

The next victim was found in the connecting kitchen. An 8 year old girl that was apparently eating cereal at the time the attacker entered the home. Another fatal gunshot to the head killed her instantly.

Another victim was found in one of the back bedrooms of the apartment. An infant not even a year old suffered yet another fatal gunshot wound to the head. The body had to be identified by comparing footprints to birth records.

The final body was that of the father found in the adjacent room used as the master bedroom. The body was slumped at the foot of the bed with a self inflicted gunshot wound to the back of the throat. The body was holding an empty revolver in one hand and a leaf of notebook paper in the other. The note said "Because where's the fun in that?"

Antarctica, 1972. An archeological team was dispatched to a remote region to recover a over 9000 foot wide anomaly found frozen in the ice, which was believed to be a fossil at the time. 2 weeks after they arrived and commenced work, communications with the outpost were lost. Due to the impending winter season, and assuming it was nothing more than a downed communications tower, no attempt was made to reach them with replacement parts. After winter passed, a unit was dispatched with replacement parts to the research outpost. When they arrived, the 3 of the four compounds were found burned to the ground. Of the 8 men manning the station, 2 were found dead with gunshot wounds, and five more with large lacerations and large pieces of their body missing. The body parts were not found on the premises. The final archaeologist was found frozen to death in a watch tower 150 meters away from the intact compound. He was not restrained or injured in any way, suggesting that he chose to freeze to death outside than return to the compound. Carved into the wooden boards of the outpost next to the man was found the words "ITS NOT HUMAN".

No indications were found of what caused the incident. It was reported as an "industrial accident". No other teams have since been dispatched to the area due to the fact that the anomaly in the ice the original team was sent to recover went missing. It was neither in its original resting place, nor anywhere else.

There's an Italian restaurant at the end of my street called that serves a very special "house special" once a year. The place is called Bella Ate. In Roman mythology, Ate was the daughter of Nox, and the sister of Nemesis, the Parcae and Death. Also known as Discordia, she was the goddess of blind folly and delusion.

I keep an eye on Bella Ate from my apartment. The scope gives me a pretty good view.

Every July 18th, the restaurant serves a spaghetti marinara made to a recipe that's supposed to be generations old. The sauce is crammed with what look like baby octopuses, but the creatures in the topping have eight eyes. The things don't do much because they've been chopped in half. The spaghetti, on the other hand, moves restlessly on the plate...

There's no accounting for taste. Every table is reserved on July 18th. In the old Roman calendar, this was the day of bad omens.

I never eat at Bella Ate on that day --

-- I take my sniper rifle up to the roof of my building and take out any fucking thing that makes it past dessert and tries to get back outside.

It still doesn't stop whatever's in the kitchen doing exactly the same thing every year.

Mal appétit.

The Holder of the End

By Mr. Namefag (Original author of the first 15 Holders)

"The holder of the end"

In any city, in any country, go to any mental institution or halfway house you can get yourself to. When you reach the front desk, ask to visit someone who calls himself "The Holder of the End". Should a look of child-like fear come over the worker's face, you will then be taken to a cell in the building. It will be in a deep, hidden section of the building. All you will hear is the sound of someone talking to themselves echoing throughout the halls. It is in a language that you will not understand, but your very soul will feel unspeakable fear.

Should the talking stop at any time, stop and quickly say aloud, "I'm just passing through, I wish to talk." If you still hear silence, flee. Leave; don't stop for anything, don't go home, don't stay at an inn, just keep moving, sleeping wherever your body drops. You will know in the morning if you've escaped successfully.

If the voice in the hall returns after you utter those words, continue on. Upon reaching the cell, all you will see is a windowless room with a single man huddled in the corner, still talking endlessly and cradling something. The man will only respond to one question: "What happens when they all come together?"

The man will then stare intently into your eyes and answer your question in horrifying detail. Many go mad in that very cell; others disappear soon after the encounter, and still others end their lives. But most do the worst thing, and look upon the object in the person's hands. You, too, will be tempted. Be warned that if you do, your death will be one of cruelty and unrelenting horror.

Your death will be in that room, by that person's hands.

That object is 1 of 538. They must never come together. Never.

TECHNICAL

Reflections of a Poletard

by Gdzie Psy Dupami

1.

"People are strange when you're a stranger..." Every journey abroad confirms that The Doors were right. Have you noticed that by some curious coincidence, when you're a foreigner, everybody around becomes a foreigner too? Suddenly everyone's qualities become replaced with a national flag or a Countryball (depending on whether you prefer to impress your friends by playing Geo Challenge or insult strangers by reposting images). International conferences are the ninth circle of Hell in this respect. Have you read that French guy's paper? Did you get a chance to meet the German guy? Did you hear that the Moroccan guy's roommate, the Dutch bloke who's doing a PhD in Chinese-Australian comparative phonology, fucked that American gal last night?

Me, I hate being singled out as "the Polish girl." This is why I drink so much when I'm abroad. I'd much rather be called a pisshead than anything involving my nationality. Still, for some reason, people make an inexplicable connection between the two phenomena. "Hey, look, she's had like twenty pints, dude! Well what do you expect, she's Polish!" It seems that the more I drink, the more Polish I get. No wonder these conferences seem like running around a Moebius strip. That has been covered with puke and used condoms.

If I turn out to be any good, that's usually despite my being Polish. When I was an exchange student in England, I'd be constantly singled out for knowing an obscure word that the other students had never heard before.

"See, twenty students here and only Kasia knows what a merkin is. Even though she's Polish! Let's see if you know this..." The other words were revenant, caliginosity and mixed taps. They didn't know. I did.

But before I got round to explaining what a mixed tap was, some guy said:

"Hey! That's not fair!"

Finally, I thought. It's not fair to patronize the only educated person in class. It's not me who's a freak, it's you, lazy-ass English people. Everyone, get thee to a dictionary!

But the guy continued: "It's unfair, so unfair. She has been TAUGHT English, and I had to LEARN it all on my own!"

So sometimes I try to avoid mentioning where I'm from. Plunge right into a conversation on economy or Nietzsche or skip the whole small talk business and go to bed with the guy right away. I remember one awkward morning in

Stoke-on-Trent. I was desperately trying not to ask the question "So...what's your name again?" and all I came up with was:

"I'm Polish." Goddammit. Next time use it as a pick-up line, why don't you?

"What?"

"Nothing. I said I'm Polish."

"You sound like Queen of England with your posh-ass accent. Oh, you must mean your job. Yeah, I've got a crappy job, too. Mindless work, minimal pay. Yeah, that kind of makes me Polish, too."

"No, look. I was born in Poland. I'm Polish."

"Ja pierdołę. Po kiego chuja z Kielc wyjeżdżałem, kurwa?"

2.

If you've ever worked in a restaurant or coffee shop near the Acropolis, the Sagrada Familia or in any other popular tourist resort, several phrases in foreign languages must have been imprinted on your brain. In hope for better tips or a piece of foreign ass, you've surely learned to say "good morning" in:

German: Guten Morgen!

French: Bonjour!

Italian: Buon giorno!

Polish: Zaraz ci, kurwa, zjebie, zapierdołę!

And probably more than once, the greeting in Polish caused a shocked or violent response from your customers, making you realize that what you had said was, in fact, a bunch of cusswords. However, when you apologized and asked the angry guest about the real way to say "good morning" in Polish, he or she likely taught you a different bouquet of profanities, which in turn incurred the wrath of yet another Polish person.

So remember! Anything involving the following words:

CHUJ
DUPA
KURWA
CIPA

WPIERDOL

ZJEB

is not a correct way to greet a Polish person.

Very well, you ask—then how DO you say “good morning” in Polish?

This, my friend, is a carefully guarded national secret. A secret which, in fact, constitutes the cornerstone of Polish culture.

You see, every Pole has two poles: the south and the north magnetic pole. In normal circumstances, which means in Poland, the north pole of a Pole attracts the south pole of another Pole, which is how Poles form relationships and give life to new generations of Poles.

However, outside Poland, Poles suddenly lose their polarity and transform into poles themselves. North of Poland, they all become south poles; south of Poland, they turn into north poles. Since like poles repel, Polish tourists abroad ostentatiously avoid each other. Whenever Poles travel to Spain or Greece or Croatia, they spend most of their time making sure that there is no other Pole within a 30-meter-radius. Since a Pole cannot personally tell another Pole to stay away from a certain bar or tavern, they use a go-between to communicate.

So whenever you, an unsuspecting waiter, tell a Polish person to fuck off while thinking that you're greeting them, you are actually transmitting an important message.

You are also doing them another great favor: giving them a major reason to complain. A Polish person won't consider their holiday trip successful if it is not completely ruined by other Polish people (in scientific jargon, this is called the “Pole paradox”). Thus, a Pole's typical answer to the innocent question “How was your summer?” runs as follows: “Awful, just awful. Those Polish people on the beach, shouting obscenities... so vulgar, so Polish... they make me so ashamed of my nation! You'll never, never believe what they do! They teach waiters to swear in Polish! Barbarians! What a shame, what a shame!”

This is a national sport, a religious ritual, a way of life. So every time you say “spierdalaj” with a French or English accent, you are saving Polish culture.

At this point, you're probably asking: so how should I greet a Pole in a way that won't offend them? That won't make me a part of their pitiful little scheme?

Well, you could try something along the lines of “Chuj ci w dupę, kurwo.” That should do the trick.

Final Fantasy 7 Review

by Marzz from /v/



In 1997, Squaresoft introduced a game to the world that would create such a huge stir in the gaming world, whether you like it or not. After 13 years, I think it's time to revisit the game and take a look at the ripples it's made in the RPG genre.

Development on Final Fantasy 7 started shortly after the release of Final Fantasy 6 on the SNES, one of the largest and most epic games for the Nintendo console. During Final Fantasy 7's development, Nintendo and Sony were working on a disc-media-based add-on for the Super Nintendo. Final Fantasy 7 was originally to be for that add-on, but conflicting differences of opinion between Nintendo and Sony led to a split between the two companies leading to Sony reworking the add-on to be standalone. This was the birth of the Playstation.

Squaresoft decided to rework their previously cartridge-focused Final Fantasy 7 into a fully-featured epic spanning three CDs. When the game was finally nearing release, hype was at a new high for RPGs in America. It was one of the



first RPGs to be promoted so heavily, with TV ads, print ads, word of mouth, among other methods of advertisement. Nearly every gamer that had ever touched a controller at that point was poised to pounce on this new game. It definitely did not disappoint. Squaresoft had unleashed a cultural phenomenon that has affected gaming, even now.

For the first time in the Final Fantasy series, the entire game was rendered in 3D. This gave the characters a new level of depth, even more personality than their 2D counterparts ever could have produced. Gone are the days of exaggerated sprite animations to convey emotion, and in their place come sweeping, cinematic camera angles, and pre-rendered full-motion video cutscenes. The battle screen, which had been basically unchanged since the first Final Fantasy game, finally got a major overhaul with gorgeous character models and dramatic camera angles that show off the best parts of the battles. When Final Fantasy 7 released, many people were stunned by the fact that it was all contained on three CDs. For the most part, Playstation gamers were unfamiliar with games that used multiple disks. It was a huge change from the norm, and only added to the idea of how massive this game was.

On the flipside of the coin, playing this game today can be a test of attrition. The graphics as compared to modern RPGs are incredibly dated outside of the battle sequences, which use completely different models from the overworld. The only thing in this game that actually stands the test of time is the absolutely incredible soundtrack. That is, however, not to say that FF7 isn't still a good game— far from that— it's just that the use of primitive 3d graphics hinders the game's ability to withstand time. As comparison, Final Fantasy 6's graphics are sprite-based, and still look just as good today as they did then.

Looking at anything but graphics, the game's replayability today takes a turn for the better. FF7 had a fantastic magic system, through the use of spheres called Materia. Using Materia involved attaching them to your weapons and armor, and added an effect for each one you added. For example, equipping a fire Materia allowed you to cast Fire, and using Fire in a linked Materia slot with All allowed you to cast Fire on all the enemies in a battle. The armor system was also simplified a lot from previous Final Fantasy games; instead of being able to equip a shirt, pants, bracers, a hat; there were only three armor slots— A weapon, a single armor piece, and an accessory. Each piece of armor had a set number of Materia slots, which grew as you got better gear. The Materia slots on the armor and weapons gave a different effect, depending on which one you were equipping it on- for example, using an Elemental Materia in a linked slot with a fire materia gave your weapon the Fire property, allowing it to hit with an added fire element, however equipping the same setup in your armor would give you added protection against fire.



FF7 had a ton of depth for its time, and even still is hard to match. The storyline actually gave you characters that you could care about, and not to mention that one single event that stands out in everyone's mind still today (that I won't

spoil, since I know there are some gamers that have yet to play the game). The game isn't completely serious, however, with bunches of minigames to break up the standard adventuring. You could snowboard, race Chocobos, ride motorcycles through city streets, and even play those minigames in an arcade setting. And aside from minigames, there are lots of times where FF7 just doesn't take itself seriously at all. The scene where Aeris helps Cloud dress up as a girl to break into a mafia don's mansion comes to mind, among others.

All in all, if you're planning on replaying Final Fantasy 7 now, be aware that the graphics simply do not hold up as well as one would like— but the game certainly makes up for it in depth and story. As far as a review goes, then, I'd give a 10/10, for a fantastic game, but now, would drop to an 8, simply because there have been many games to make groundbreaking steps since 1997, and playing this game with no nostalgia value at all would be incredibly tough for the first few hours.

Pseudo-Intellectual Essay

by Nicholas

No U

The Cancer of Pseudo-intellectuals and Why They're Successful. From Ayn Rand to Stephanie Meyer.

By

Nicolas F. Stewart

“No you just don't get it! It's very deep and ironical!”

Yes I do get it, and that word doesn't mean what you think it means. The more I grow and the broader my social interactions become the more I hear conversations end like this. Understandably, many people don't like the notion that stories they enjoyed or related weren't as intelligent or well written as they'd like to believe. Many people are also total idiots. It's far easier to convince yourself that everybody else is wrong than it is to accept that *maybe* your favorite writer is completely bat-shit insane.

Pseudo-intellectualism is hardly new; it's existed since people first discovered that by using four dollar words and appealing to shallow emotions they could enjoy masses of teenagers stroking their ever sensitive egos. Ayn Rand used this formula to such success that even after she closed her own schools and destroyed the man who made her popular her works are still read and her philosophies still championed by pretentious first year college girls and rich white men. Rand argued that by only caring about your own selfish desires (which we all do anyway) you were actually *helping* the rest of the world, thus absolving you from guilt. This is of course completely ridiculous and only taken seriously by the laymen, but why? Well quite simply because it feels good. The logical worth of the philosophy is unimportant because the logical worth of the philosophy doesn't let me do whatever the hell I want. This is the literary equivalent of the Atkins Diet, eat whatever you want and lose weight anyway no work required.

James Cameron has been using the same formula for years in the film world. Make it *seem* intelligent and fill it with sensationalism and most people won't bother checking to see if you actually said anything of value. The pseudo-intellectual wants to be taken seriously and respected but doesn't want to put in the work required; they want to title not the qualities the title entails. Why is it then that people are so quickly and enthusiastically buy in to the bullshit? Well while earlier I did mention many people are very very dumb, that explanation is too easy. The fans of Rand, Cameron, Meyer, even Palin, are making a deal. By buying into the feel-good stupidity they temporarily suspend their common sense, and then they start talking to fellow fans who serve to reaffirm their faith.

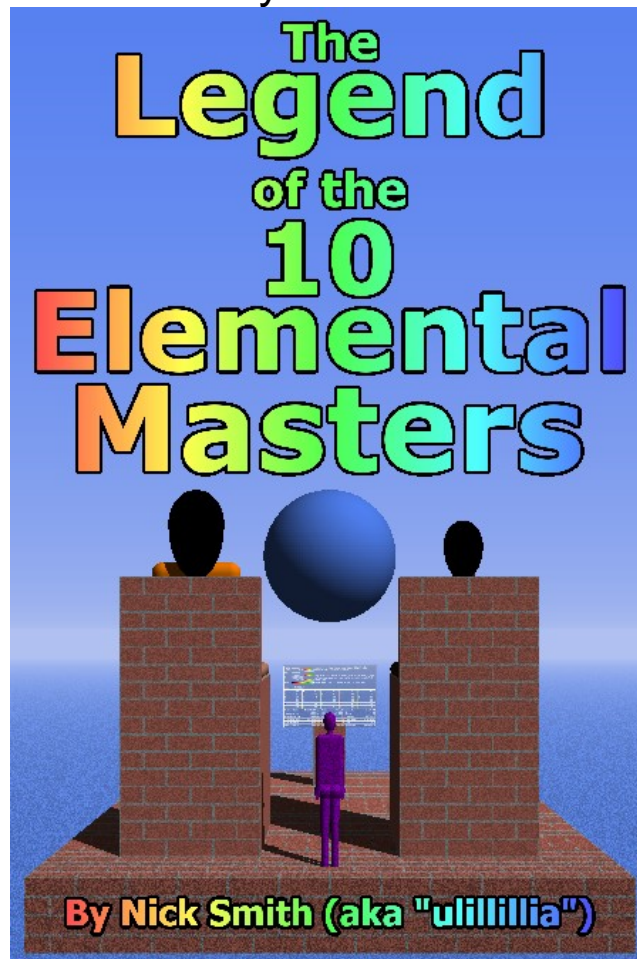
This causes them to avoid reflecting on the subject, an important period where they might accidentally realize their idol is an idiot. This religious like devotion allowed Stephanie Meyer to make buttloads of cash and actually call herself a feminist before everyone realized her books were misogyny laced Mormon propaganda.

Much like the mall-goth japanophile girl you met your sophomore year of high school, works like *Atlas Shrugged*, and *Twilight* *seemed* exotic and radical when you first met and you really really REEEALLY hoped she might give you your first kiss then you guys could totally dry-hump behind the bleachers at the dance she refused to go to because it was too conformist, but then after a few months you've had a real girlfriend and you realized that she actually just had horrible taste and daddy issues.

There's nothing wrong with aspiring to be considered an academic and generally intelligent, this is a noble aspiration, but when you refuse to educate yourself and evolve to more sophisticated point of views and instead simply *demand* that you be respected as something you never worked to become then you're merely an elitist and a fool. This is ironic because the most common insult I've heard hurled at the haters of these pseudo-intellectuals is "elitist snob", elitism is arrogant and mostly unwarranted, and to be fair hating on someone's work in a subjective medium isn't much better. But hiding behind titles like "philosopher" and "feminist" while merely being an ill-informed nobody is like Lenin and Stalin hiding their oppressive totalitarian nature behind the sickle and hammer of the working man. Socrates once said "The only true knowledge is knowing that we know nothing" and that is not an excuse to know nothing, then again Socrates also thought the written word was only for hooligans and those damn kids who need to get the hell of my lawn.

Review of The legend of the Seven Elemental Masters

by Kildae



The Legend of the 10 Elemental Masters if you are familiar with is a quintessential masterpiece often featured on the /lit/ with praised on such classics as Gamer Girl and Atlas Shrugged. I find it though lacking a very compelling read.

When I received this book early February I was expecting a 500+ page monstrosity, owing to the author's noted abuse of the "necessary" information by reading his labyrinthine website <http://www.ulillillia.us/mainindex.shtml>. For he is a well known autistic with the OCD like tendency to write out his entire life out on the website listed prior. But needless I found out that it is a trim 270 page book, but my suspicions were confirmed when I read the introduction and found out that it was inspired by a dream saga that he had and that at some point about 60-70% the original work was cut out to make it a more coherent story, *this is truly the Beowulf of our times*.

While the telling is unique, the story suffers from a lack of interest by the author, with a disturbing lack of motivation, conflict, and character development. We are faced with the protag Knuckles a being that is an omnipotent alien that

recently came to earth to fight an evil that is predicted by him. With a subplot being that he wants to pass on some of his knowledge to two humans Tu a 15 year old African American woman and Ivan a 14 year old Native American author insert, seriously that is about it for important story notes. Also to note all of the elemental masters are named La-(respective element)-alent take that clever wordcraft.

The book is the victim of a problem called TOO MANY DETAILS at the point to which nigh 70% percent of some scenes is just detail with entire rooms described to which the tables are white (FFFFFFFF) (that right motherfuckers we are busting out the hexadecimal coloring system) and that the tables are on the north side of the room space so many inches etc. about a page and a half describing the average science classroom; for 7 lines of unnecessary banter between Tu and her earth science teacher. An excerpt is in order; it is also the first paragraph of the book:

"Knuckles glides north 1500 feet above Lake Sakakawea at 800 mph following Highway 83. A small thunderstorm is somewhat visible to the south. The sky is 3/8 scattered with cirrus clouds and 1/8 scattered with altostratus clouds. The wind is 15 mph with gusts to 20 mph. A few small patches of snow in ditches, some with water, are visible but hard to see due to the speed. A 40-second pause in speech occurs while credits display on screen."

While the devil is in the details, my love for this book is simply that the author does not conform to the staples of good literature to which Mr. Smith finds that what is most interesting is not the feeling of falling say 1000 feet but believes that it is the difference of an absolute and concrete feeling of 1352 feet. Nick leaves nothing to the imagination of the reader for he planned to write out concretely a video game narration of his story and by that fact also killing all possible suspense.

The ending of the book is told miles away: that Knuckles will defeat the villain. By admission that he completely immune to all things and every status effect due to his magical power; he cannot be hurt and can raise the dead; (the sidekicks just died ... well let's just resurrect them again) that is about as compelling as the fights get. But the fights are the good part of the book with the absolute lack of knowledge of human interactions between characters. All of the dialogues are quick quips between people with curt BYE!s Between them for example: a reality bending super entity fucking saves you and the only thought that comes to you head is "your knuckles from TV, thank you for your help there, bye"

While the book is a hilarious read, it gets very depressing at points with the interactions between Ivan and Tu with knuckle. The noted humbleness of the human characters around a being that can create matter and anything he wants, they merely want 4 dollars to go to a dance and a 5 dollar pizza. ;_;

I would recommend this book if you get a delight out of bad literature and/or torturing friends and loved ones with it, but be advised that this is a rather expensive book at 18 dollars and then add shipping.

POETRY AND PROSE

The Dolors of the Internet

by Anonymous

Once upon a time and sitting in a chair like yours
There was a young man you would rarely see outdoors
He spent his days, or you could say, his nights
Trolling on the internet while browsing porno sites

A day came whence he pondered about his life
On the wisdom of making the internet his wife
He would ask himself in his room barely lit
Whether he was making a mistake with his shit

He could not see whether his choice was wrong
For his mind was not one that set on things for long
Soon he found himself fapping to shemale porno
And decided he would think about it tomorrow

The day after he had forgot, and the day after
But then came a day that he remembered, much later
And he told himself while watching a youtube vid
That wasting thoughts on this is the dumbest thing he did

He tried to avoid it again and he did, for a time
But the idea rose again like the guilt of some crime

He would argue with himself that he is not an emo faggot

All the while not admitting that he just wants to forget

So he forgot, and again remembered still

And all this fretting made the young man ill

Twisted in bed he said things like goddamn shitcunt

Bothered by these thoughts unpleasant instead of fun

In the end he thought: "The internet has to be good

If I had more interesting things to do I already would

I can decide my own life, why should I dance like a fag

Just to fuck some dirty slut as if it is anything to brag"

As he took a breath and opened his bookmarks at last

His heart finally gave in and became of glass

He remarked one day, after fapping himself dry

"It looks like my eyes are leaking, don't know why"

[Untitled]

By Andy

The dark is upon him now,
Bitter as the falcon.
She left not long ago,
Abandoned him,
Drowning in the dark abysm of time.

In his mind,
The sun never set.
In his mind,
She never left.
In his mind,
He never cried.
In his mind,
Nothing is wrong.

In her mid,
The darkness is full.
In her mind,
There are tears filling the land
In her mind,
There is no laughter
In her mind,
Her mistake is known by all.

She attempts to turn back now,
Stunned and sorry.
The path is blocked,
Leaving her only to say goodbye.

(No Subject)

By Matt

Death may bring me to my knees,
and his cold hands may cloak my eyes
...but he can only bring one end to I;
Finis Vitae Sed Non Amoris.

June 28-29

By N

I saw islands in the sky last night
an archipelago of
scars blistered on the skin of some Atlantean
(semen on taffeta)
not one rocky promontory, stark, alone, embattled
as envisioned by Plato, Escher or others:
so many rivulets of land on a dark solid sea
hanging below the waves, above the air
among the stars, pearls in the depths, the heights
the abyss or the firmament
what power had it?

dry lightning.

or

a mist of droplets, too fine to be called rain
each touch a pinprick reminding us that we're alive.
was wielded by the subtle ambition of
gleaming vapour, air and water and neither
reaching ever upwards downwards
moonset
the scaffolding of the anti-Babel

reduced to sawdust; the skin heals

as the burning light recedes

the islands of cloud dip back down into the heavens,

the lakes of sand rise back up into the ocean:

the power is gone.

how and why?

atlantis.

or

götterdämmerung.

A Spur

By Rolf

The unmoving morning
inside the captives breath
as he falls into the plan beneath his bed.

A rollicking absurdity
basking in basting anomalies.
forward do the concentric circles creep.

Intertwined in the wisps of hair and webbing,
cascading with the spring's revival of life,
we find a rag doll moist of mildew.

Bludgeoned upside, the downtrodden frame of a child,
drinking the ember from the sunset in a velvet, crumbled mess.

All is Over and Flat

By Rolf

The patchwork is pieces;
Over are the tides of the shifting stags;
Each wall of the desert's breath is felt now,
For the memory of the first shrine has been pressed into the earth.

Why?

By Rolf

The lap of silence

Against your ear.

Inhale.

The transcendental respiration

A spark of you jumps to words.

Your need for meaning -

But a scratch away.

A structured thought of disarray,

Planned spontaneity,

Breathing life to logic.

Putting words to work.

A fine means

For you to see

What, exactly, it means to be.

[Untitled]

by D H

An angry phone call and
you're imprisoned like me:
police reports,
impoundings,
too many raised voices.

Fury's exchanged our
positions:
I am free;
You are not.

They still haven't been by
to fix my damn faucet.

Break for the Crash Down

by Anonymous

Moon

Moon

Moon

Moon

Moon

And in the still

of faint water ripples

and freezing breath

come lips murmuring

lowly to a lofty moon.

I saw a meteor fall

just south of the moon,

streaking straight down

to the horizon.

It flared twice

and fell.

A pinpoint eye in a silent sky

bearing down on the cold cold grass.

I hear a moth tapping

Moon,

you are

Plato and his shadow people in false light.

A symbol of symbols,
signified, sign, signifier.

tapping

But what can we do with a chunk

Of rock in the sky?

Say it is a silver disk

for the likeness and liking.

Something like that,

caught in the sun's heat,

burning in my chest,

clavicles hugging a molted half fire

stealing life

and I a double undead.

Howl

Howl

Coyote.

My eyes are reflecting reflection's sun.

Lungs stretch to say Diana and Pheobe

are the bones in my body, and the rest is

water silvery rebounding

a moth -

I ripple and my crescent jaw

shifts to say

Moon

Moon

Moon

Moon

Moon

The pinpoint grows larger until
it wedges into my eyes.

a moth is -

Breath now thicker

and rolling like a metronome

Swaying

Saying

Moon

Mouthing the shape

caught in my lashes and

beginning to splinter.

Moon.

A moth is tapping at my window.

And She Appears out of Nowhere (I want to talk to You and no one else)

by Francisco Covarrubias

I don't know what
the tears are for
anymore.
Or maybe I do know
that they're still for you,
and I want to distance myself
from that.
Cast myself in denial.

I don't know, I guess
I feel
like losing you again is more like
losing hope. I shed tears
for losing hope,
not
for losing you.

I don't know, maybe
that's just a scapegoat.

I don't know why
I would even have
tears for you
anymore.
I look back and, it seems
like it should be
insignificant.
I have loved others
more.
but your the one
who can destroy me whenever
you want.

and I don't know
why.
Why
did you say you want to talk to me again,
and no one else,
and then

just destroy me one more time?
You knew I would come. Didn't you?

I know you didn't
really want me back
but why did you
fuck with me
if you didn't?

I don't know.

Bored

By Francisco Covarrubias

Hey there little devil.

I never noticed you before.

Spent most your time on other people's shoulders.

Can you tell me where's that angel

that sat up there before?

Maybe I lost him

as I was too busy growing older,

rolling deep in the city

with the young people,

and the whores?

None of them protected themselves

and let just about anything in.

They claimed open minds

and open legs.

They were bored

and I'm bored too.

Conclusion.

With the publication of this first edition of the ZWG /lit/erature digest, 4chan has at long last succeeded in creating its own publication. Rising above the trials of trollish bantering and unfinished projects, the creation of this zine represents a great step forward in recognizing the work of anon.

As editors, It has been a pleasant surprise to view the sheer volume and quality of our initial submissions of 4chan's creative skill. The dedication and talent with which these pieces have been constructed left us all in awe; let none save trolls say that 4chan is not artistically gifted!

While campaigning, we were honored by both anons trust and support towards the zine. Already, our e-mail inboxes are over-flowing with submissions for our next editions publication. None of this could have been possible without the honest effort put forward by our posters, and for that we thank you.

With optimistic expectations for the future, The Zine Writers Guild is looking forward to publishing more of the creative work of anonymous, Publishing the Successful, talented work that has been shown by 4chan again and again.

The creation of this zine marks a great step forward for all of us, an opportunity to gain the recognition and respect that 4chan's writers justly deserves. As editors, it is our greatest wish for the growth of this zine to continue. Only by your continued support can the success of this zine continue.

Join us in making this publication a project for anonymous, by anonymous.

-The ZWG Editors.

Role-call of editors:

Goldensox

Lindlar

Chantrelle

Prole

Nick

Honorable mention

Wildweasal

ATG

moot

All those brave anons who trusted us and submitted to the zine

And every anon who took the time to download this and read it.