

ZWVG

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Bad Vibes

Henry Jimothy Glockenshpiel IV

The Exile

Darrin

Snack

R.Hayden

Iteration

Den Sakaldte

Table of Contents

Introduction/Note from the Editors

fiction

Bad Vibes by Henry Jimothy Glockenshpiel IV 5

Icy Awaiting *by Character Corwin* 11

ITERATION *by Krzysztof Penderecki* 12

[untitled] *by Douglas* 16

Smoke *by Winston* 18

The Exile *by Darrin* 19

poetry

Colossus of Babel by Lysander M. 23

Paxil Brother *by Diego* 24

Refrain of the Wanderer *by Lysander M.* 25

Snack *by R.Hayden* 26

Us *by Muphrid* 26

Final notes 27

Introduction/Note from the Editors

We would like to extend our thanks to the writers who have submitted to us. If you are in support of this project, more gratifying than any thanks is an expression of support through submissions. If you have a talent for writing, art, or anything else, please send your submissions or ideas to us, however ridiculous or taboo they may be. Help us continue to make this something that you would be interested in. We hope to continue to expand this project to include a greater number of authors and artists producing a wider variety of creative works. We remain very open to criticism and suggestions on how we can improve ourselves. Give us your opinions, honest and blunt as they may be, and help us make this project better. By Anon, for Anon.

Contact Us

Our IRC channel is still:

Server: irc.freenode.net

Room: #ZWG

Our main distribution page:

<http://zwg.wildwestwaffles.com/>

Our wiki:

<http://zinewritersguild.wikia.com/>

Updates

In the wake of criticism following our decision to use backgrounds for issue 7, the zine has decided to adopt a more straightforward design approach. This change co-incides with the recruitment of Den Sakaaldte as lead graphic artist. His style will be stressing simplicity and readability. If feedback on this method is good, it will continue.

Additionally, I would also like to welcome compiler RevBill to the team. Hilariously ironically enough, while the one time the zine recieves a compiler is the one time the issue is so small we do not need one, the zine will almost certainly have use of his skills for the future.



FICTION

Bad Vibes by Henry Jimothy Glockenspiel IV

Brendan drew the fire toward his finger tips as he inhaled the last of the roach. The apartment reeked, but he no longer noticed. Kenny Rogers was playing on the stereo beside him: I just walked in to see what condition my condition was in.

He assured himself that everything was okay but then wondered why he would have to do such a thing if he was truly safe. Experience had taught him that seeking equilibrium through introspection in such a state of mind was as futile as trying to find the final figure in an endless Russian Doll.

I got up so tight I couldn't unwind. I saw so much I broke my mind.

"Brendan?"

"Huh?" The sound of his name pulled him back.

"You're drooling, man," said Steve.

"Oh shit, I am. Hey, what time is it by the way?"

"I forgot."

"Oh, ok."

"But what do you think about that, man?"

"What?"

"Black holes."

"Kind of scary."

"Seriously! Like, how can they eat light, man?"

"They'd have to have some fucked up enzymes, like, Photonase or something."

"A science teacher once told me that a spoonful of a black hole would weigh more than New York."

"Woah."

"And then there's worm holes. If you went through one of those you could end up somewhere different in space and time, man."

"Space...all that blackness. When the human race goes extinct, why does that have to be the end? All the molecules making you, me and the planet are out there. There's infinite time, there's all the ingredients for Earth Two...why wouldn't they get together again? How do we know this hasn't already happened? How do we know that this isn't the one hundredth time we've basically existed on a planet like this, except maybe there's just one difference? Like, maybe that pizza box wasn't on the floor, but besides that, this planet's history and future is identical to the original Earth in every other way."

"Is there anymore pizza by the way?"

"Nah, man."

"Ok. But getting back to the worm holes—what if you got a camera to go through one! Actually, I'd guess you'd lose it."

"Yeah, but maybe it would go back in time and be retrieved in the eighties. They couldn't play it though—they probably wouldn't have a TV with those red, white and yellow cables or something.

"I never thought of that."

Brendan slouched back into the crumb infested recliner with a feeling of accomplishment. He took the mp3 player and selected the playlist marked by a smiley face: What would you do if I sang outta tune, would you stand up and walk out on me?

“Who cares if Ringo wasn’t the best drummer?” said Steve. “He wrote that song. That’s gotta count for something.”

“True. I ordered their biography by the way. Which reminds me, check this out.”

Brendan reached into his backpack. He took out a grey, hardcover book with a worn out spine and dog-eared pages. It seemed oddly out of place as he set it on the table between the two of them.

“There’s no title,” Steve observed.

“Yeah. I got it used for a dollar between my classes. There’s no copyright page. It’s just an anthology of random short stories. I’ve never read any of them: ‘The Thing At the Doorstep’, ‘It’s a Good Life’, ‘Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius’, and a bunch of other ones.”

Steve took the book and began flipping through the pages. He stopped near the back cover and frowned.

“What is it?” said Brendan.

“Check out these pages in the back. They’re yellow.”

“It has the Yellow Pages?”

“No no, they’re yellowed. As if they’re older than the other ones. They’re slightly bigger than all of the other pages too.” Steve scanned the pages and scoffed. “What the hell? These thirty yellowed pages or so—I can’t tell how many exactly because the page numbers cut off—have no paragraph breaks. I mean, come on, even *Finnegan’s Wake* has fucking paragraphs.”

Brendan reached over to grab a peanut out of the bowl beside the recliner. As he drew his hand closer to his mouth he smelt smoke. There was a cigarette-butt in his hand taken from Steve’s ashtray which was placed dangerously close to the peanuts. His contemplation of what a cigarette would taste like was interrupted by his cellphone suddenly ringing. He turned the speakers off, coughed and answered the phone.

“Hey Brendan, it’s Dawn. You know I’ve got you on the schedule for five tonight, right?”

Why did it have to be Dawn who called? She hated him. Her evil, judgmental glare was enough to make him cry and remain flaccid for a week. Panic struck Brendan as he looked at the clock. 5:12pm—would a busy shift of serving shitty frat boys pizza for six hours be possible? The thought of transitioning from the recliner to the incessant clattering of dishes and bright lights of the kitchen terrified him.

“Uh...” he replied as he tried to think of a way out. His mind was functioning like an old lawnmower—it could do an admirable bit of work but starting it up cold took considerable time and effort. He noticed his fearful, wide-eyed reflection in the blank TV screen. Then it came to him.

“I’ve got pink-eye. Yeah, sorry. I tried calling earlier—”

“What the hell!” Steve said as he continued studying the yellowed pages. “There are no periods!” Brendan turned away hoping that Dawn hadn’t overheard Steve’s remark and concluded that he was commenting on her menstrual cycle.

“Well,” said Dawn. “You really should have tried calling again or letting a coworker know, Brendan.”

“Sorry. It’s really contagious though.”

“Ok, I’ll try to find someone else to cover for you this time, but please try to give me more notice in the future.”

“I will. Thanks, Dawn.” Brendan hung up and let out a sigh.

“What is this crap? There are no punctuation marks in this...what I’m assuming is supposed to be a story.”

“I’m not feeling so good, man. Do you think that shit might have been laced with something? I can’t stop sweating.”

Steve laughed and shut the book. “Dude, you’re fine. Just drink some water and listen to some Sigur Rós or something.”

Brendan arose from the recliner and headed for the toilet. His reflection in the bathroom mirror startled him. He waved his hand back and forth and giggled as he watched the colors bleed into each other. The bowel movement felt good, but the lingering guilt from the phone call spoiled the experience. He had let them down at that awful restaurant. Who would take his place? What if they called Katie? She would have to smile and flirt with the assholes and hipsters. The hipsters were the worst; they emitted a constant aura of hookah smoke and cheap irony. She would have to be subjected to their presence to pay off her classes to get a better job to pay off her student-loans—it was a vicious cycle, and he was making it even worse.

Brendan emerged from the bathroom feeling no better than before and sat down. Steve was leaning forward on the couch and gazing intently at the yellowed pages. “It’s not like anything I’ve ever read before,” he said without looking up from the page. “It seems like a fragment of someone’s stream of consciousness. There are no periods because all of the thoughts build and mutate into each other. It’s like the narrator’s mind is imprisoned.”

“Jesus, dude, don’t talk like that. I’m not feeling too hot.”

Steve didn’t bother to acknowledge him and continued to be sucked into the strange writing. Brendan turned the TV on and tried to calm himself with deep breaths. The commercials came like bullets in loud, radiating flashes. Each one had tiny print at that bottom of the screen. What were they trying to hide? Behind the smiling faces and the guarantees they all had their own agendas. He turned to an educational channel, but the details of Cordyceps mushrooms made him even more uncomfortable.

Brendan turned the TV off. Steve shut the book.

“Wow.”

“Was it good?” Brendan asked.

“I don’t know how to answer that, man. I think I’m gonna go to bed. I don’t feel too good. Maybe that shit was laced with something.”

Without another word, Steve went into his bedroom and shut the door. Steve often pulled him back to reality during their mental excursions each Friday. The sudden change of their ritual did not help Brendan’s state of mind. He sat alone in silence.

The book on the table was conveniently within reach as if it were inviting him to read. He picked it up and skimmed through its esoteric contents. The yellowed pages near the back contained walls of texts with no breaks or grammar just as Steve had described. Brendan decided to skim the first few lines. Within seconds nothing existed outside of the words in front of his face. His jaw hung open, his eyes glazed over. The inner chatter of his mind was silenced. Concentrating on the words in those strange yellowed pages was easier than focusing on any novel or textbook he had ever read.

The words stopped with no particular ending to separate the vivid reality in his mind’s eye and his physical surroundings. He closed the book and looked around. The apartment was no longer familiar to him. It was as though he had seen thousands of pictures of the

interior from every conceivable angle but was seeing it in-person for the first time. The flow had led him to a source of inconceivable depth which threatened to fatigue and drown him.

No more. It was unbearable.

He threw the book to the floor and went into the kitchen. He had given a valiant effort at having a little Friday night fun, but enough was enough. The cheap vodka in the fridge stood next to the orange juice. He made a screwdriver and downed it in a few desperate gulps.

The alcohol only seemed to exacerbate things, but he knew the pot and the vodka couldn't be responsible for the new dread. He looked at the book—it seemed alive somehow. The very sight of it made his head hurt. Fragments from the terrible, yellowed pages were repeated in his head against his will. With a sudden feeling of danger, he approached the book, snatched it, and threw it into the metal wastebasket in the kitchen. It seemed to mock him: That all ya got? You've hardly creased the pages, loser.

An instinctive urge to stop the compulsive fragments from repeating in his mind and return to a sober state arose from within him. He grabbed the matches next to the ash tray, the cheap vodka, and took the wastebasket into the bathroom.

His forehead and palms became slimy with perspiration as he covered the bottom of the door with a towel. He opened the window. The adrenaline pumped throughout his body. It was as though some invisible force knew his intentions and was rapidly approaching to stop him. He poured the vodka into the wastebasket. The clear liquid covered the beer cans, burrito wrappers, notes from previous semesters, roaches and most importantly, the book with the yellowed pages. He flicked the match and stared down at the book. The warmth of the flame felt powerful as he held it above the trash. Surely he was just overacting? Better to simply forget all of this nonsense and go to bed. In the morning everything would be better. No need to panic. It was all in his head...

He released the match. Flames leaped out of the wastebasket, nearly catching him. He pointed the shower nozzle toward the flames and turned the knob. The water instantly turned into steam and filled the bathroom. The flames mutated from orange to green. Despite the endless stream of water, the fire continued to dance in rebellion as though some infinite source of fuel had rendered it immortal.

Brendan looked on in horror until the fire reluctantly began to shrink. It finally receded into the garbage can. He could hear the water accumulating, but he continued to fill the can out of fear that the green flames would return at any moment. The water began to spill over the side. He turned the shower off and stared down at the submerged book. Small flickers of green flames still covered the pages. They persisted for a few minutes before surrendering to the water and dying.

"Was that it?"

Brendan emptied the can into the tub. The charred remains of the book had become soggy and warped. It looked as though it would fall apart if it came into contact with a light breeze. He picked it up.

The yellowed pages in the back were undamaged and dry.

A sense of disgust overtook Brendan. He tore the pages out of the book and a pain like hot needles stabbing into his fingertips forced him to release his grip. The pages fell into the tub and began to crumble. They crumbled into a tight ball and the yellow faded to white. A concave point on the surface grew deeper and wider until it formed a crude

looking mouth and made the paper ball resemble a white, three dimensional Pac Man. The mouth sucked the paper inwards. It swallowed until it turned inside-out and consumed itself entirely leaving no trace of the pages.

Brendan gaped at the spot where the paper ball had been. A small point of light flickered where it had disappeared. The light expanded until the bathroom disappeared and he was completely engulfed in a yellow aura. There was silence—not even his tinnitus was present. He was reduced to nothing except wandering thoughts lost within an endless yellow void when a voice came from nowhere in particular:

Relax, loser.

“What?”

Relax. Let things happen now. Go with the flow.

“What is this place?”

Don’t be selfish. Let go. It won’t hurt. Pinky Promise.

“You’re just me. You’re just a bad part of my mind. You’ve broken into some place you aren’t supposed to be. You should be in the dark.”

I could say the same thing about you.

“Shut up. I’m going to forget this and be back any second now—like waking from a nightmare. This is pure nonsense.”

You’re not a very courteous host. Perhaps...

The yellow light gradually faded. Brendan felt the heaviness of his body return to him. He was slumped over the tub. A thin line of drool trickled down his chin. He wiped it away and stood up. His head kept drooping in various directions and required more energy to lift up each time. His entire body felt drained and rebelled against the slightest movements. A powerful need to sleep became more acute with each passing second.

As Brendan approached his chair, a cry came from Steve’s room. It sounded as though Steve had been punched in the stomach and was trying to say something.

“Steve?” Brendan called.

He sighed and headed toward the room. The smell of shit came rushing out as he opened the door. The dim room was littered with dirty laundry and empty beer bottles on every available surface. A Tool poster supported by a single strip of duct tape hung askew on the wall. Only the stacked text books in the corner desk had a semblance of neatness about them; they hadn’t been opened much.

Steve stood trembling in the middle of the room. The only time Brendan had seen him shake in such fear had been in the public speaking class they had taken together during their freshmen year of high school.

“Hey man...uh, are you okay?”

Steve’s lips twitched. He tried to respond but only managed to squeak. The trembling became worse. His entire body was locked into a constant tension. His hands looked as though they belonged to someone with Cerebral Palsy. A second squeak escaped him. He jammed his thumbs into his waistband with a swift motion and yanked down his jeans and boxers.

“Dude...” Brendan began to step away from the doorway, but Steve made a desperate whimpering sound as a moist fart escaped him. Blood trickled down his leg and gathered in little pools on his boxers. A sharp pain in his stomach bent him over. He reached toward Brendan and using all the will power he could muster he managed to speak, “Mmm...I want it...to st-stop....hnnnnnn—”

A brutal contraction overtook him and he howled with pain as tears and sweat streamed down his face. A large, squishy lump coated in feces and blood fell between his legs.

“Jesus Christ!” Brendan screamed. “What the fuck is that!?” He looked closely and noticed the fissures and the shape—it was a brain.

Steve nudged it aside with his foot and chuckled.

“Hello again, loser.”

Brendan froze as his best friend walked toward him and smiled in a strange way he had never seen before. Steve’s grin revealed a set of yellow teeth.

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Icy Awaiting by Character Corwin

Light snow falling from the sky dusted the temple where Harry went nightly to pray. The night was cold; the eyes of the Goddess were cold. He didn't know why he was there every night in the dark halls staring up at the window of light. As he kneeled on the floor he muttered questions to the white statue that gave no answers. "Tell me what I want to know Goddess." The only reply he got was the light's delicate touch on his cheek. Eventually he stopped asking questions and fell silent. He sat in the silence, hoping that some divine voice would speak to him. No answer came. So he walked back out onto the frozen plains. He would return there night after night with nothing but a sense of awaiting, icy awaiting.

[\[Click here to give online criticism and feedback for Icy Awaiting\]](#)

ITERATION by Krzysztof Penderecki

CANTICUM CANTICORUM SALOMONIS

The Man woke up in the middle of the field, completely disoriented. The fuzzy sunlight filtered through the tree leaves, blinding him for a few minutes. The Man rolled against the grass, completely hungover, as his skin lightly bruised with the small rocks and tree branches. He reached with his arms what lied around him, and he felt the cold touch of an empty bottle.

"Where am I?" he thought. He lifted the bottle between his face and the sun, watching the glittery reflection of the last drops of liquor inside. He dropped the bottle, letting his arm fall heavily next to his body. He looked around him, nothing but trees surrounding him. He had no idea how he got there.

Ahh, now I remember, he said to himself. "Aunt Carolyn said she wanted some firewood for the evening". He looked around him, and yes, he saw the axe next to a tree stump. He kept looking around him, but he didn't see the pile of wood he'd at least had picked up.

Ahh, but there's that fine bottle of scotch, he thought. "I was probably dicking around and forgot about getting what I had to". He finally stood up, picked up the empty bottle and put it next to the tree stump. Even below the trees, the sunshine was strong. He stepped outside the comfortable shadow and looked around. He couldn't see the sun, just a fuzzy uniform shine in the sky. "Funny", he thought, "it should be at least noon judging by the heat, but I can't see the sun..."

Ahh, but it could be rain season, he thought. "It'd explain why it's so bright yet the sun isn't visible. Yeah."

It makes sense.

He picked up the axe, and looked around. No suitable trees nearby, apparently. He was surrounded by young ones, forming a tight barrier, sort of. He couldn't see the hills at least, the ones he always climbed to get to his aunt's place. It seemed like a clear spot in the middle of the forest, probably a kilometer away from home.

"Well, all I have to do is find a good tree and chop it, I'm getting hungry". He found a short one, he flailed his arms while wielding the axe, and with a clumsy movement he slashed some of the branches. He kept doing that for one hour, until he gathered a good amount of firewood. He was tired. His arms hurt but at least it wasn't a terrible task. He found a rope and rolled it around the branches, making a tight package. He wiped off the sweat out of his forehead, looking at the sky. "Still no sun, eh? How am I supposed to know where I am?", he thought.

Ahh, it's just a matter of climbing the highest tree and look around, he thought. "Seems like the logical thing to do". He walked across the small clearance towards a tree that seemed perfect for farsighting, he gripped his hands against the tree, wrapping his legs around it. He kept climbing up that way, until he reached one of the thickest branches. He felt his whole weight balancing

down the tree, so he went slower to avoid falling down or (even worse) causing the branch to collapse. He finally reached to a safe distance in the branch, and in that position, he tried to look in the distance. Nothing. Just more trees and greyish clouds.

Ahh, the fog has probably formed already, he thought. "But why does it feel so warm still? Shouldn't this happen in the evening?" "It's probably not even relevant, it just seems like the best explanation."

He kept trying to look into the distance, failing miserably. He then looked up, and that's when he noticed something strange. Some kind of crystal sphere, floating in the middle of the air right above the clear path, a few meters away from him. He frowned, trying to make some sense of it. He rubbed his eyes, assuming his sight was too blurry to make out a real shape, but the sphere was still there. Nothing seemed to be holding it, which made it more unexplainable.

Ahh, it's probably just an illusion, he thought. "I'm tired and slightly buzzed so that's probably it". He moved forward in the branch, just to judge how far he was from the sphere. He almost got to the very tip of the branch, feeling how the branch was getting notably bent with his weight, and tried to reach the sphere. Yes, it was still too far from him. "Perhaps I should get a longer branch and knock it down", he thought.

He crawled down the branch, and with the axe, he cut one of the longer branches of the same tree he was onto. He weighed it with a single arm, just to see if he could handle it, and then he climbed the tree branch again. The branch was bending again, but he kept moving forward. He raised the arm with the other branch, gripping himself as tightly as possible to where he was, and feeling the whole tree at the verge of collapsing. He was sweating hard, but he didn't care.

Ahh, I bet I'll reach it, he thought. "It's probably nothing, but I want to know". He moved the branch towards where the sphere was supposed to be, but he seemed to aim too low. He moved forward in the branch, and flailed his arm a few more times, still being unable to reach it. He then felt how the branch was snapping slowly in the base, so he raised his arm more, trying as best as he could to hit the sphere.

He then felt a huge shake in the earth, followed by the tree branch snapping behind him. He held as much as he could, but his whole gravity centre was compromised for a few seconds.

The Outsider Man watched with attention.

He lied in the ground, covered in leaves, pieces of branches, and minor bruises. His head was shaken, but he was fine, apparently. He looked to the sky, but the sphere wasn't there, as he expected.

Ahh, so it was an illusion after all, he thought. He stood up, cleaning the leaves off him, and looked around just to see if he knocked it down, but at a first glance he didn't see it. He sat down, crossing his legs, and exhaled loudly. He was starting to get frustrated over nothing.

He then saw the sphere, at a few meters away, in the middle of the grass. He crawled with caution towards it, and stopped at a short distance, looking at it, contrived. "Why was this sphere floating in the sky? That's not possible", he thought. He moved his hand slowly towards it, and covered it with his palm. As soon as he did it, the whole sky darkened, leav-

ing him in a pitch black darkness. He looked up, as he removed his hand, and the sky light up again.

His heart raced. Getting closer to the sphere, he noticed it was semi-transparent, but he couldn't see what was inside of it. He tried to pick it up with caution, using his two hands, but as soon as he moved it, he felt a violent shake.

Ahh. I think I'm still drunk, he thought, trying to shrug off his concerns. He sat down, and carefully he picked up the sphere. He moved his hand above it, nothing happened. He then covered it again, and the sky instantly darkened up, as if it was covered with a blanket. He threw down the sphere, fully nervous, causing another violent shake. "No, no... This is probably a dream", he thought. "But why can't I tell where exactly I am? And why does it feel so real?". He stood against one of the trees, after the violent shake, visibly affected. He then looked back to the dark forest behind him, thinking about running for help. The bushes were thick, avoiding any further movement, so he used his axe, slashing away as best as he could. He kept doing that, until he reached a cold stone wall covered in wild grass. He was starting to get desperate. He looked around to see if he could climb it, but the trees were blocking the sunlight, making it difficult to look for a way through. He walked towards the wall, looking for an exit, but after 15 minutes spent on this futile task, his concerns were starting to become reality.

"I think I'm trapped", he said out loud, in a raspy voice. He went back to the clear path, looking around for the sphere. He found it below some branches teared down by the earth shaking. He moved his hand above it again, nothing happened. He scratched his head, "well, maybe if I touch it...". He placed his thumb against it, and a shadow appeared in the sky, darkening some trees at the distance. He was shocked. He lifted up the sphere and tried to look into it, but since it was semi-transparent, he couldn't really make out what was inside of it. He did notice, however, that it was half-transparent, half-dark... Like a small habitat, he thought. "I can control this place". He shook the sphere slightly, feeling everything around him shake, as he expected. He wrapped it with his two hands, blocking the light. He put it against the light to try and look inside, but it wasn't clear enough. And that's when he thought:

Ahh, maybe if I break it, I'll be able to come out of here. If it reacts to everything I do to it, it should set me free, as one would logically expect. It makes sense...

The Outsider Man watched silently.

He flicked the sphere with his fingers, but all he heard was a metallic sound, and the sphere didn't seem fragile enough. He scratched his head, "this sphere fell down to the ground without suffering any damage, I guess it's very resistant". He kept doing it until he realized it was useless. He then decided to bang it with a rock. He looked around in the ground, finding a small stone, sizeable enough to grip it with his hand. He started banging the sphere, hearing a thunder-like sound in the air. "Yes, I'm probably breaking through", he said out loud. But the sphere was too resistant, and his hands were starting to bruise. He was getting desperate.

Ahh, I know. The axe. He looked around for it, and found it resting next to the tree stump. "Perfectly placed, one would say it was meant to be". He placed the sphere carefully in the middle of the tree stump, and with the other arm, sweating hard, raised the axe, aim-

ing towards the sphere. "I hope I don't slash my own arm by doing this", he thought.

He hit the sphere. Loud thunders were heard in the sky. "Yes, it could be working". He kept banging it, his hands were sweating, but he didn't stop. He kept hitting the sphere with the sharp axe, feeling it close to split in half. He heard a crash, "yes, I'm close!", he saw a small crack in the sphere. His eardrums were almost destroyed by the loud raging thunders in the sky, but he didn't care. He wanted to escape. He kept doing it until he finally felt the sphere splitting up.

His body was sucked off the ground, in a violent lift off. He didn't even have time to think about what he did, he saw how the ground he was sitting in was far away in the distance. He felt he was moving slowly, while in reality he was being shifted forward at a high speed. I am free, he naively thought. Then he saw him, and them.

A giant version of himself, floating in the distance, as he moved in the empty space. He looked back slowly as he could while drifting away in the void, and then he saw something even more unexplainable. An even bigger version of himself, exponentially big, floating against the background and in the same void both him and his "smaller big version" were, and moving in the same directions as well. And he kept gazing in the void, even bigger versions! They were floating there, like huge planets, in unfathomable sizes, one after another, and another, and another, unable to grasp its significance or reason to be. They were as confused as he was, because they were Him, and he was Them. His very definition of reality was completely compromised. As he looked in the distance he kept distinguishing even larger versions of himself (all of them against a gigantic, humongous net, resembling fabric), but then like an exhalation, all the floating bodies spiraled towards a new sphere, which he couldn't even see due to its small size and distance, but he knew it was there, they knew it, and they feared it. A loud scream was heard, as every body was pushed towards the sphere, finishing with a loud crash, as if the entire universe was dropped in a kitchen sink.

The Outsider Man nodded to himself, and walked away

[\[Click here to give online criticism and feedback for ITERATION\]](#)

[untitled] by Douglas

Out he stepped, unto the urban streets of Prague. It was high time he made a tour around Europe. Back in the states; all his resources were either used, stolen from him, or just not up to his standards. It had taken him three months to exhaust Pennsylvania, ten months for the east coast, two years for the whole country. So he waited. Three years to be exact. But one day, the hunger overtook him. He bought a plane ticket to Paris.

The particulars of his undertakings up to Prague are of little excitement or interest, so it picks up here.

At 8:00, he left his lodgings. He walked the city looking so what he so strongly desired. Up and down each street, but to no avail. Two hours he walked, not finding his prize. He gave himself fifteen more minutes.

Down a small alley he went, when he saw what he was looking so hard for. On a third floor, a light glimmered. He waited a few minutes. He saw a figure leaning over, as if giving a kiss to someone, a routine he had saw so many times, and recognized so proficiently. He had his mark, and now he waited.

The light went out nigh 10:30. He smiled. Up the wall he scaled. He couldn't help but admire how refined his skills were at this point of his career. But at the moment, ego boosts be damned! More pressing matters were at hand.

He dropped out of the window and into the room with a noise so soft, it hardly existed. He walked over to the figure the mother had kissed. He looked. It was a boy, not twelve years old, dirty blond hair, of a tall, lanky figure. He was perfect. "So, you thought you could escape me?" Spoke a gruff voice coming from the back of the room. He recognized it, dreaded it and cursed it.

"Confound you! Nigh one week approaches were I hath not been satisfied, and ye dare deny me the right I deserve?"

"You and I both know what it will take for you to pass"

"Very well, the usual? Ah yes. I have the correct amount. Take the lousy sum and leave. I grow weary of our frequent encounters, yet I cannot help but think of you as the father I never had."

"As you wish. Until next time!"

And so he went, under the boy's covers into the gapping maw of the boy's soul. Nightman had received what he craved so badly.

Inside the soul, Nightman lived the life he never had. His parents weren't abusive. He had friends. He could afford toys, and so on. Nightman's troubled childhood is of little interest to the reader.

Nightman left the lifeless corpse at midnight, and was on the street five minutes later. By and by he walked happily down the street. He was not in the least expecting that not fifty miles behind him, Dayman was following. Looking. Waiting. Fighting.
END

[\[Click here to give online criticism and feedback for Untitled\]](#)

Smoke by Winston

I don't suppose he felt much pain, just a deep dread to match my own. Fear gripped at us, my hands on his throat, the pit of my stomach. Even the darkness of the room couldn't shroud the whites of his eyes, deeper than any black, billiard balls I could see myself in. I felt his lungs grip and claw under my knees straddling him on either side, curled around him like a snake. He died.

His body was limp and relaxed, all his fear and guilt strapped to me like a ball and chain. I'd seen some men drop it then and there, contract killers, soulless and thriving because murder's cheap when you don't give a damn. I'd seen some carry it for weeks or months or years, I'd seen some men go their entire life, their back bent, their spirit broken by the combined guilt, the assumption of another man's sins. He could never repent or atone. I needed a smoke.

I carried it. Down the hall, down the stairs, through the lobby, and out the door. I thought someone must have seen the weight tugging at my leg, massive and noisy along the wooden floor. Witnesses peered out of doors, bell hops fled in my wake, the receptionist called the police, my mother shook her head silently at the end of the hall. I limped through the dark halls alone.

Slumped against the outside of the grey building, I pulled out a cigarette and lit it. I took as long a drag as my lungs would hold and held it. When it seemed they would burst I breathed out a plume of smoke, nicotine and beaten wives, crack lines and rat poison. I was reborn; Lazarus from the grave but the cigarette was my savior. I was one smoke nearer to death and one step closer to God. I walked away.

[\[Click here to give online criticism and feedback for Smoke\]](#)

The Exile by Darrin

I finally awoke staring at my knees under the crackling flicker of some antique bulb, my wrists aflame with the string of sweat in my cuts and my head still sore from the club. My jacket was missing, the camera in the pocket unaccounted for, and my holster was empty. Everything else was left alone, as I had nothing else on me worth taking. I struggled for a moment, of course, but my arms were fed through the back of the chair's beams and cuffed together on the other side. The seat was bolted to the floor and I was too weary to do anything rash. I looked up and groped at the shapes in the corners. Even in that tiny cell, two men managed to hide their faces from the light.

For six months I had crawled on all fours, nose through the garbage, searching for the trail of the scent, begging my master over and over again for just a little more time, losing further credibility with each plea – and now by some sheer miracle I had made the greatest single breakthrough of my career, but only by being so careless as to be caught by my own quarry and dragged into their den a prisoner. Powerless, voiceless and without a scrap of evidence, I had both cracked and spoiled the case in a single stroke.

They did not want to ask me questions, they said, nor did they want to hold me for a ransom, they only wanted to try and convert me to their cause. Stepping forth into the light and flicking the bulb, sending it not only still strobing but now gyrating on its cord, he betrayed his face and dress to me. He was not some slummer or jacker, or even a majmin – pardon my French – but wore a lab coat over a faded blue suit jacket and had a clean shaved face of about thirty years. He was not at all how I had expected one of these extremists to look, but that was only my own fault, I suppose. I asked him how he expected to do that, but before he spoke it suddenly all fell into place. Reading the acknowledgement and fear off my face, he let show a transparently gloating grin, completely unashamed in enjoying my horror. The supposedly unthinkable offense was about to be committed against my person, a theft of that one last vestige Nature had preserved from the probing fingers of Man. His friend came around behind me and carefully let one of my arms free so that he could rebind them again free from the chair. I was lifted onto my feet by the shoulders and led out of the room.

A faint blue glow was draped over the entire chamber. Sinuous cables of all thickness, grouped and spun like rope and sprawled out as chaotically as the streets of the ill-planned city, connected dozens of consoles and five-foot tall towers to each other and all ultimately to the centerpiece of the room. Expressionless faces turned to observe me, their glasses full of reversed alphanumeric glaring off their screens. The roar of the hundred some odd cooling fans that filled the room was not enough to calm me as I looked upon the fate they had in store. There in the center of the room lay a circle of sixteen comatose men and women violated by rubber and insulated copper in nearly every place you could imagine, appearing to be no different from the servers standing row on row along the walls. Their every sign of life was monitored, and each person had a large screen up high dedicated to their brain activity. One additional bed lay open for a new volunteer, though this bed was unique in its addition of straps and harnesses. This was in fact not a

bed for a volunteer, but for a victim.

“Mister Fortescue,” the once grinning man said, “you are about to experience for the first time something that only a handful of men in the whole of human history have ever experienced and I won’t lie to you; it will irrevocably change you forever. What we have accomplished here over the past fifteen years is not legal – you of all people do not need to be told that – but it is moral, sir. It is of the very highest morality, you must understand. When our secret was leaked, they all cried the same thing you would say even now: it’s a violation of basic human rights to deny a man his individuality. But what you will soon grasp firsthand is that we are not stealing individualities, we are merging them. Are these people mobile? No. Can they easily communicate to us? No. Is this practical on a national, even municipal level? Not likely. But should we abandon our research, after how far we’ve come? Absolutely not. We won’t let a little manhunt discourage us. When we’re done here, we’ll send you back where we picked you up, don’t worry, and you will tell your employers whatever you wish. But you will drop your case and refund your employers and you will perhaps dedicate yourself to championing our position. Now then, let us begin.”

The moment the cuffs were loosened I thrashed with all my might but though I may have broken a wrist or blooded a nose, I could not break free of the two, then four, then six men that fixed me to that table and strapped me in. I was nipped in the timbow and in short order that dim blue world began to meld and bleed out onto itself. Voices fell backward into a hall of looming granite and lime and became too quiet and scattered to understand. Every muscle became too heavy to contract, I stumbled over my profanity and then, without warning, I fell under.

~

What is this? A pang of anger, hopelessness, mortal terror! It was gone again just as quickly as it came. Lost my train of thought. Wait, just a moment. What is all this? Memories of parents fighting in the kitchen while I covered my ears under a pillow, of a first date with Sarah, the only redhead in the school, of mixing alcohol with medication and suffering the consequences, of trailing cheating husbands from home to work to the motel and back, of bounced cheques and eviction notices – when was I this man? Which of us... no. There is a new member! A private investigator named Patrick Fortescue, against his free-will, has been added unto us so that he may leave again and share his experience. Now all of my other memories feel knew again, now I have to relearn myself, an inconvenience I’m growing tired of. But at least it seems less severe the larger I grow, as if it were diluted. If and when I have twenty or thirty bodies, I may not even notice it at all. Now, what was I even thinking about before? I had it almost! Now I’ll never remember it until I get busy with something else. Damn that Patrick, he’s not even of any use to me! The sooner they pull him out, the better. Ahh, that’s it! I remember now...

~

When I was back on that table, strapped down and now apparently half-naked, I felt like I had been awoken from some lifelike dream of falling and now, though flat on

my back, I could still feel the vertigo, as if the ceiling was racing away to a vanishing point. Twice I gasped for air, too fixated to do it either automatically or manually. Feeling the leather against my neck, wrists and ankles, I began to panic. There was the man in the blue jacket and white coat again, ignoring my alarm while prattling on about his work. "... but it will take a great deal of time to acclimate It with the ability to wakefully use the five senses of sixteen people simultaneously, and the immobility may prove a psychological problem. None the less we're completely confident that..." It took half an hour to unfix my now apparently bald head from all their patches and subdermis plugs. I was unresponsive and they had accomplished their goal so, like that, it was over.

When they dumped me back on that pedestrian overpass face down in the newspapers and empty hypos, wheezing in the fumes like some newborn orphan, I felt for the first time in thirty years lost again in that sprawling cubic labyrinth. It was obvious I had to come back here and report to you everything I now know, but it all felt so trivial then. Recalling a handful of memories from my lifetime, I questioned if they were authentic. I could still vaguely see a kaleidoscope of nonsense which was the fading sum of sixteen other lifetimes. Nowhere, sadly, could I find a lustrous enough plane in which to see my face, and confirm my suspicions that I was the private eye called Patrick Fortescue. I grasped a column below the handrail, feeling the texture of the spotted paint and warped sores of rust, and understood the texture anew as if I had just then felt it for the first time. Looking down the storeys to the street below and following the haloes of amber, blue, and green through the haze, I had suddenly like never before an urge to paint them, to wield that colour. In all the jumbled, impenetrable melodies of voices from all the dozens of languages passing by, I wanted to speak some clumsy facsimile if only to convey the sounds of their words. I had never before such a desire to express everything I felt to anyone and everyone, and receive their expressions in kind, but just as it all came to a crescendo, I was dashed. In my mind, I struggled to put even the simplest sensations into words. With an imaginary palette I could not begin to think how to mix the paints just right or how to apply them to the canvas to render the scenes I saw. My will alone was not enough.

They were right, they had converted me to their cause after all. I could for the first time see the walls of my cell and only through a keyhole could I cry out to the other prisoners. A singular desire crystallized: I wanted to find those banned surgeons and programmers somehow and volunteer myself completely and fearlessly to their experiment. I dropped to my knees at the railing and cried, reaching out at the lifeless steel and glass forest before me, calling the names of those nine men and seven women whose lives are still now burned like phosphor in the back of my brain. It is a universal experience to be isolated, but only my personal memories contextualize it – I have been cursed to remember many, but keep always only one.

[\[Click here to give online criticism and feedback for The Exile\]](#)

An aerial photograph of the ocean showing a large, white-capped wave breaking. The water is a deep blue-green color. The word "POETRY" is overlaid in the center of the image in a bold, white, sans-serif font. The letter 'P' is a light teal color, while the rest of the letters are white.

POETRY

Colossus of Babel by Lysander M.

Colossus of Babel;
Bathe in mass shadow of
Collective undone.

This
Silent collapse. Rest slowly
On black-footed garrotte while
The cloaks sweep inward to where
The nameless ones kill.

Proceed. Dynamic colder than frost
In red crest over stone
By void gaze of the state while
Paperwork corpse expand till burst
Of laughter and newborn.

Except, never.
Cyst grows

[\[Click here to give online criticism and feedback for Colossous of Babel\]](#)

Paxil Brother by Diego

Paxil Brother

Oh, those Gods of War have struck the fine line again
Setting alight those fields of poppies
Breathing in the fumes to get high
Maybe it'll make me feel better

Paxil Brother

Here's cheers to the side of the road
Lonely, cold, where one's committed to answer

Paxil Brother

Here's praise to insufferable fears
Faulting, mould, climbing like AIDS or the Cancer

Paxil Brother

Paxil Brother

Corrupt so abrupt my spirit, killed a couple and many
Won't kill me though, I got that Paxil!
GlaxoSmithKline, you'll make me feel so fine
(Corny rhyme scheme yeah, but it gets the point across)

Paxil Brother

I prayed you lay in wait as singe from deluge of the afterglow
Paxil Brother, they cried 'just too late' as ventured into valley
where shadows go

Won't kill me though, I got that Paxil!

Paxil Brother

Clinical whiteness, clinical passion

Clinical solitude all by the ration

Clinical 'pression, clinical feed

Clinical want and clinical need

Clinical solace, clinical bought

Clinical madness, clinical taught

This anti-depressant, this anti-sad

This anti-prejudice, this anti-'bad'

This anti-corruptor, this anti-sin

This anti-want from heart to the skin

Paxil Brother

[\[Click here to give online criticism and feedback for Paxil Brother\]](#)

Refrain of the Wanderer by Lysander M.

Old one,
Ye who rests sombre in the woodland and sings in the rivers,
Guide my steps.

I am but a
Sick man, whose time has passed long ago
Partaking voyage overland by callused feet into
The midnight kingdom where
Sleepless ones gaze visions of
Wolves who are men and men who are wolves amid rubble of industrial
cairn;
Pilgrimage in tundra of vine and thorn whose
Barbs bleed deep the humble unto insect and vermin to
Tree of carved horn whom speaks no more
Save hoarse whisper:
Never.

Oh
Ancient one,
Arrange my thoughts.
I the dead, whose plague walks the earth,
Lend me sacrament.

[\[Click here to give online criticism and feedback for Refrain of the Wanderer\]](#)

Snack by R.Hayden

Help.
Stuck to barricade.
Tried to steal food. Failed.
Torso between table and metal cabinet.
Eyes gorged. Itchy and gooey. Infected?
Arms free. Legs stopped hurting.
Shots fired. Shotgun.
Same one that took out my legs?
From one side of the barricade:

Angry voice: "You fucker! You're gonna kill us all!"
Crazed voice: "Food's gone. No escape... No-"
Clatter of struggle. A shot. Whimper.

The other side:
Deafening stampede. Moans.
Rotten breath. Pain across my face.
Teeth to face. Teeth to bone.

It's "Them".
Help.
I won't last.
I'm only a snack to Them.

[\[Click here to give online criticism and feedback for Snack\]](#)

Us by Muphrid

Leagues of people staying awake
in comfortable chairs Living
countless alternate lives Wanting
nothing more than for tomorrow
to be a cold day in april
Or perhaps for mother to die
yesterday.

[\[Click here to give online criticism and feedback for Us\]](#)

Final notes

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