



CC&D

the **UN**religious,  
**NON**family-oriented  
literary & art mag

**v199**  
**August '09**

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## Scars art

1 (a white cat watching a blazing fireplace fire, a hotel exit sign for fire emergencies, and the historic San Juan fire station), 2 (drawn lobster), 5 (John drinking Guinness at Kaiser's). Cover art of a plant in SouthWest Florida.



## The Fire

Julia O'Donovan



I was getting blemishes on my face  
My pores were dirty  
Then I realized  
I hadn't showered since the fire

Would have been no use  
There was smoke damage everywhere  
The shower. I would have mixed soot and water  
And made myself worse

We went out of town that week-end  
To get away from it all  
I couldn't relax, I kept seeing flames  
Shooting in my facea



## Beyond the Sea

Michael Ceraolo

The lobsters interviewed in the newly-discovered cave colonies  
expressed extreme surprise that the humans,  
by their flailing and wailing,  
were objecting to being boiled alive before being eaten



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## Sorry, Your Soul Just Died

(Ms.) James Savage

If you saw a child drowning  
You'd jump in and save them, wouldn't you?  
Well, apparently not, apparently no one cares  
When parents who've known every day  
That their children were being raped  
Throw up their arms and say "Well, what could we do?"

If you saw women being mauled by rabid animals  
You'd try to save them, wouldn't you?  
Well, apparently not, apparently no one cares  
When a rapist is given three years in prison  
After being convicted of one of the most heinous crimes there is  
While everyone throws up their arms and says "It happens"

If a plague outbreak was killing people daily  
You'd try to stop the spread of the virus, wouldn't you?  
Well apparently not, apparently no one cares  
That there are virgin children  
And faithful wives dieing of AIDS  
And everyone just throws up their arms and says "What do I care, it's not me"

If you were slowly getting frostbite that would become gangrene  
You'd try to save yourself from dieing, wouldn't you?  
Well apparently not, apparently you don't care  
You want to be cold and numb  
And blackened to dead inside  
Then tell others you're happy but never believe yourself

# My Dead Daughter



Janet Kuypers

Heart of the Child,

art by Mark Graham

I keep getting this image in my head  
of a little girl, and she has long straight dark hair  
and she is quiet and she comes to me and asks me questions  
and I am working, but I turn around to answer her  
and she sounds really intelligent  
and I treat her that way and I answer her like an adult  
and then I wonder if I'm not spending enough time with her  
so while I'm answering I turn off my computer  
and I turn around to her and I continue to look at her

I make a point to make eye contact when I communicate with her  
and I get up so we can walk to the library  
as I finish answering her question  
and we get to the library and I ask her  
is there is anything else she wants to know

because I want to be the one to tell her the truth  
and she says no  
she says she doesn't need anything  
and underlyingly she makes me feel as if she doesn't need me  
and I think,

I gave birth to that girl, she has to need something from me

and maybe she's a smart girl  
and maybe she's learned to do things on her own  
maybe she does all the things I have had to do in my life  
maybe she understands more than I ever did

but these are my memories

these are the memories of something that has never happened  
and will it ever?

I always imagined a girl

maybe that's the maternal side of me,  
being a mom and knowing women  
but I never knew who the father was  
and I never got her name, whenever I would have these memories

maybe she never had one

# Why I'm Not Submitting to your Magazine

John C. Erianne

Sure kid, I'm flattered by  
the offer and in another life,  
I might be persuaded  
to stuff something  
in an envelope  
for you.

But, you see, I've  
learned the meaning  
of futility -- beat my head  
against its stoney  
silence daily for  
40 years.

Literary rags offer  
a dubious kind  
of fame and

on my worst day  
I cannot write  
badly enough  
or be well-liked  
enough for  
most of those  
places to publish  
me.

And although  
I am sure you are  
good people,

I doubt you offer me  
anything I can't  
get standing in  
the middle of  
traffic shouting  
at the sky.

I've long accepted  
that I will be a  
posthumous  
man.

When I die they  
will assemble

to piss on my grave  
or make love at my grave.

Clergymen will  
set themselves on fire

and there will be  
weeping and cursing  
and singing.

Beautiful women  
will get wet reading  
my poems

drunken rednecks will  
run around naked with  
4th of July sparklers  
dangling from their  
assholes.

When all is said and done --  
when I am dead

they will all finally be  
made to remember.



How Many  
Doors, art by  
Edward  
Michael  
O'Durr  
Supranowicz

# Poem from the Blue Danube Lounge & Restaurant: Fine Dining, Cocktails, and Every Night Polka Music (Drinking)

Kenneth DiMaggio

“It’s either us  
or the drinking”  
--but so far  
the record  
goes to Earl & Phyllis  
for threatening  
to secede  
from a marriage  
that may not have  
much love or sex  
anymore  
but would always  
have enough alcohol  
to pass out together

--for which  
they had their own  
special corner

--their stupor  
never very long  
once the bikers  
at the bar  
pelted them with  
bottle caps pretzels  
and salt & pepper shakers

--rousing from  
Phyllis & Earl  
“Sons a bitches!”  
“Fuckers!”  
“Let’s go kick their asses!”

--Phyllis fist-ready  
to slug one or two  
of those bad boys  
who were young enough  
to be her sons

But Earl  
pulling her back  
more sober in  
knowing  
if not for their drinking--

--who would there be  
to protect him

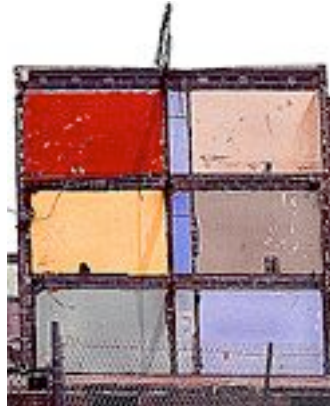
and who would he have  
to save & support

when he no longer  
needed protecting





i love receiving tons of mail  
i read every piece of mail i get  
the way i see i don't receive any junk mail  
one piece of mail is as important as any other piece of mail  
i closely examine every piece of mail that is sent to me  
i don't miss a thing when it comes to my mail  
i even read the advertisements and special offers  
i never if they will have something i'm looking for  
mail is a very important part of my life  
without my mail i would have nothing  
mail is the only contact i have with the outside world  
mail is how i pay my bills and keep in touch with friends  
waiting for the mail everyday fills me with excitement  
cause i never know what kind of mail i'll be getting  
receiving mail is the highlight of my life  
i look forward to the mail each and every passing day  
theres nothing more gratifying to me than getting mail  
i feel like an important person when i receive tons of mail  
i read every letter as if it were to be my last one  
i read every word with intense interest  
i respond to most of my mail  
but only to further my efforts to get more mail  
some people say i should see a therapist  
i would but only through written correspondence  
i don't see myself as a crazy person  
simply because i like to receive lots of mail  
i thought about taking a correspondence course on mailology  
to expand my knowledge on the mail system  
i don't have a telephone or even a television  
all the information i get is strictly through the mail  
i and my mail carrier have a special bond  
we've gotten to know each other very well over the years  
i tip my mail carrier every chance i get  
and write him thank you notes whenever i can  
if it wasn't for my mail carrier delivering my mail  
i would be lost and shut off from the world  
if it wasn't for my mail i would be a wondering soul  
lost in the unclaimed pile for eternity  
theres nothing more satisfying than sorting through my mail  
for it is my only link to civilization  
for me receiving mail is what sustains me  
except on sundays and holidays



Six Apartments,  
art by Peter Bates

## Evil Floats (the mind of John)

Janet Kuypers

Evil floats  
it is lighter than air  
it will always rise to the top

# Argyle

Natalie Williams

Ashen faced;  
her soul now weaved into moments of loss and  
despair. Coloured by grief-stricken  
tears; death is her loom.

The threads of her forgotten self  
knitted back; now shabby coat, shag-piled and  
broken.



Clothes, art by  
Nick Brazinsky

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# If I Breathe

David J. Thompson

November then; the trees had lost  
their splendor. We were up the Hudson,  
in the woods past Poughkeepsie, talking  
poetry at a conference when we heard  
that Dylan Thomas was dying. My friend,  
John Berryman, said, *I'm breathing for Dylan,  
if I breathe for him, perhaps he will remain alive.*



Foil Leaves, art by  
Mike Hovancsek

He and I got to back to the City in the morning,  
went straight to Dylan's room at St. Vincent's.  
A nurse told us his wife was there the day before,  
a bottle of rye stashed in her coat. She screamed  
she felt like a bride, tried to climb in bed with him,  
and tore a crucifix down from the wall. Security came,  
took her away, probably to Bellevue.

When I came back with sandwiches and coffee  
for lunch, the lights were out and the shades drawn.  
I put my arm around John's shoulders and we stood  
bedside, swaying slightly from side to side to the rhythm  
of some silent hymn we both were hearing. I could sense  
him trying so hard not to cry that I pulled him closer  
to me, felt his beard against my cheek, and whispered  
to him to remember always to breathe.



# American Cathedral

J. Neff Lind

If you dropped  
a Wal-Mart superstore  
into a dusty  
third world village  
they would all  
gladly spend their souls  
on credit cards  
and worship  
at the altar  
built of  
row on row  
of things they didn't  
realize  
that they needed  
'til they saw them  
under fluorescent lights.

At Wal-Mart  
you can buy  
a frozen pizza  
a big screen TV  
a lawn mower  
and a 12 gauge  
pump shotgun  
with one swipe  
of your credit card.

They even have  
black powder  
which I use  
to make  
signal flares  
when I can't find  
anyone  
to lead me to  
the Aspirin.

846559187\_  
4365afafcb,  
art by Paul  
Baker



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## They Watched From Their Windows

Mel Waldman

When I was a younger man, a man of dreams and vision,  
I read about the poor woman who was raped.

They watched from their windows and did nothing. It's  
true. It really happened. No one called 911. No one  
helped *her*.

In the Times, I read about the heinous act that humans  
witnessed. Later, we talked about *it* in my psychology  
classes.

From above, they watched. Yet no one made the call.  
What have we learned since that brutal day?

It's far away in *our* past, and it's here-buried in *our psyche*.  
We share the guilt, for it's *our* sin of omission.

Beware! Evil's lurking in the postern of our fractured souls  
and out there-in the dark, blemished earth.

Tomorrow, someone will need our help. Shall we find  
redemption or by the sin of inaction, condemn ourselves  
to Hell?

prose  
the meat and potatoes stuff

## The Good Olde Days

Arthur Charles Ford

Forced from our distant continent where unspoiled rituals were our daily prayers, we shared and lived off the land, thus avoiding technocrats feeding us junk food. The rains came often enough to cultivate our God given earth; for it was “our supermarket”. Pining for the sight of the morning sun, we absorbed the freshness of the night carried to us by tribal drum beats. These beats communicated to us who was healthy, ill, hungry and their location. We responded!!! We knew not of buying, for “bartering” defined our means of marketing. Money, memos and contracts were not generated, for we cherished the trees that God gave us for cosmic ray protection and housing. Clothing was not abundant, for our bodies were not thought of as a commodity to be sold, ridiculed or abused. But used to communicate, by way of dance, the pulchritude of God’s most unique machine, and for reproduction-when He granted it!!

Now here we are today! Encapsulated in a society where avarice, crime, fame, drugs and nepotism rule. Our surnames are misnomers!!! Our daily meals no longer blossom in the backyard, but are advertised to us with prices that depend upon how a Middle East sheik behaves and Wall Street Postings day to day. The farmer is slowly being replaced by the researching and developing of synthetic “breakfast”, “lunch” and “dinner. Life itself is being compressed into a pill and a test tube!! Nature is being disobeyed!!!! Science has yet to categorize racism as a disease, so no cure or treatment is being pursued. The drum beats we now hear are those which lead funeral processions for victims who fell trying to eradicate this disease. This disease (racism) has been modernized and camouflaged. We have succumbed to it, and practice its skullduggeric tactics.

Our concentration on keeping pastures green has been superceded by “the green paper”, which at one time was denied to us. But since then, “some of us” have been allowed to flourish in “some of it”. We lustfully buy elaborate cars, clothing and waste food, while forgetting or ignoring those of us who are in need of compassion. But thank God, there are some of us who pensively think about the metamorphic changes we as a people have experienced. Those few, while meeting and greeting at black-tie affairs, devouring caviar, sipping champagne and turning business deals are dying inside to return home, if possible!!!

Yes, return home!!! Way back home!! Back to our culture, honesty and simplicity-back to the good olde days!!!!

# Goodbye, Princess

Christopher Schmitz

Ned briefly looked down from the wheel to use his long, yellowed fingernails to split the pistachio shell. Smiling, he peered over his coke-bottle glasses at his wife; she scowled at him.

“Don’t you look at me like that, pervert.”

“S-sorry,” Ned stuttered, tossing a handful of shells out the window. He couldn’t help it; even though Haroldina had put on more than four hundred pounds these last forty years it just made more of her to love. The mechanics had become more difficult, however, due to Ned’s frail stature as much as Haroldina’s “condition.”

He gulped down a handful of nuts. A couple of them missed his sparsely toothed mouth and lodged into his thick, scraggly beard. Zooming through the Duluth area freeway at a steady forty miles per hour, Ned tilted the bag to offer some pistachios to his beloved.

“Ned! You know I don’t eat salted nuts,” she clutched a half-eaten Double Whopper with both hands. “All that salt is bad for me.” In her revulsion, Haroldina twisted in her seat. “Ow, ouch! Now look what you’ve done, Ned. My fibromyalgia is acting up!”

“Sorry,” Ned repeated. “I didn’t mean ta hurt you.”

“Well ya did!” Haroldina crossed her arms and huffed. “And to think, I was thinking of doing that thing you liked tonight.”

“S-sex?”

“I swear! What is it with you men? It’s never enough that we consummated on our wedding night; you just concentrate on the road. I’m in pain now; there’s no way you’re getting any tonight.”

Ned sighed and looked down to the bay. His daily routine never changed much; truthfully, he felt more like a chauffeur and butler than a husband. Between the weight gain and her fibromyalgia, she couldn’t hardly move without his help anymore. Ned shrugged; at least he had this whole bag of nuts to himself. He cracked a few more shells and ignored the rambling complaints from his wife.

Tossing another nut into his mouth, something caught in his throat. He’d missed a shell and it caught against his uvula. He tried to suppress the gag reflex and cough it out, but couldn’t dislodge it.

Haroldina glared daggers at him. “Are you quite finished?”

Ned smiled at her and nodded. He couldn’t upset his precious. Seconds later, he felt his cheeks flush and his vision got foggier than normal. He shook his head “no.” She wasn’t paying attention any more.

He tried to speak up and tell her he was choking, but couldn’t talk, either. The shell had completely restricted his airway.

Ned picked up his cell phone. Swerving erratically through all three lanes, he scrolled down to an entry titled “Princess” and tried to type a text message to his wife.

Haroldina slapped the phone from his hands; it clattered to the center console.

“See why they got this new anti-texting law in this state? You almost killed us, Ned!”

Mustering all his nerve, he glared back at her and sped up an exit ramp. He pulled over near a refinery on the bay side and clambered for his phone. He knew it stunk horribly near the plant but didn't care; Ned couldn't smell it because he couldn't breathe. If not the stench, Haroldina would just complain about something else.

He found the entry and furiously hit the keys. Pushing the Send key, Ned got out and walked around to Haroldina's door and waited for her, his face beginning to purple. He stood there for six seconds while he waited for her phone to chime; she glared at him the entire while.

Taking her time, she methodically dug through her overstuffed handbag and pulled out a pink, jeweled cell phone. She read the message. “Give me hemlich? Hemlich? I don't know what kind of crazy stuff you've been lookin' at on the YouTube, Ned, but I ain't into that, especially in public!”

His vision crowded with tunnel vision. Wiping a tear from below his thick glasses, Ned typed one more message and clicked send.

The pink phone chimed again. Haroldina read the screen as Ned slumped against the car and slid down to the pavement, his chest fluttering as his lungs panicked.

“I lovv you?” You know what, Ned? You're a terrible speller!” She slapped her window. “Get up. I'm gonna miss my soaps. You don't want to see me angry!”

Haroldina peered out her window. “Come on, Ned. Get up. You know I can't go anywhere without you.”

Ned smiled, exposing a toothless grin with gums blackened from years of chewing tobacco. He tipped over; everything became shaded in tones of surreality.

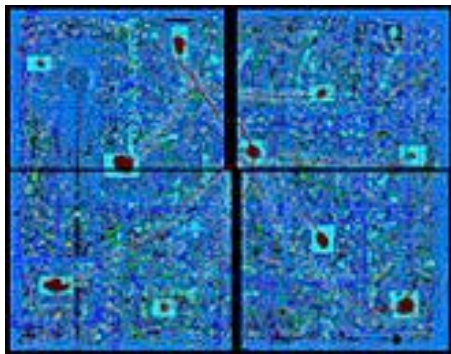
“Ned? Neddy?”

Haroldina carefully wrapped the remnants of her sandwich in its wrapper and set it down on the dashboard. “C'mon Ned. I 'lovv' you too. Now get off the ground.”

His sight fully black now, if he had breath to laugh he would have. Ned suddenly realized that he was just as happy right now as he ever had been in his entire life. He wavered for only a moment, but decided if he had to choose to do it all over again, he wouldn't change a thing.

In the last flash of life, he imagined himself texting one more message to Haroldina. “Goodbye, Princess.” And he would spell it wrong on purpose.

## The Possibility of Suicide, art by Peter Schwartz



# Boy with the Bones

S. William Hepner

When they finally find Jake, he's on all fours, savagely snarling, and clawing at the earth. His clothes are torn and dirty. And when they put the trap on him, the seven-year-old starts to howl.

Like he's taught to do.

Child-care services say that trapping is the only option in these types of cases. Jake's putting up a fight, swinging his arms wildly and kicking at anyone that attempts to get close to him.

And then the dog comes to the defense of the boy.

It takes child-care services three tries to snare Jake. They finally manage to separate the dog from the boy by laying down bait for the fifty-pound grey and white Siberian husky.

Still, Jake howls.

And barks.

Days later, Jake sits on the floor in an observation room. A man and a woman hover above, talking about him in low voices. Jake can speak, albeit not very well, and he can understand language since he wasn't entirely abandoned before the *critical period*, or what some call the *sensitive period*. This is the time in a child's life where if he isn't exposed to language, he'll most likely lose the ability to learn it.

If you lock a child in a room for his entire childhood, make sure you leave a television in there with him.

For his own benefit.

The man in the observation room calls Jake a feral child and a wolf boy. Affectionate terms for children who grow up isolated and confined, with very little human contact. No social interaction with other people.

Oh, and, of course, raised by animals.

It's not all that uncommon, really. Throughout the world there have been dozens of cases of feral children. Raised by dogs. Raised by wolves. Raised by monkeys. Some children were even brought up by sheep and gazelles. Jackals and panthers. Bears and goats. Leopards and cows. Hell, in the 1940's a boy in North Africa was even raised by ostriches.

Remus and Romulus getting a tongue bath by the mythological she-wolf.

The man in the observation room says that Jake is still aggressive and showing signs of depression.

It looks like he has rickets and several wounds that are infected, the woman says.

Obviously, he's malnourished, the man says. And he has fleas.

All Jake wants to do is go back to his family. His *real* family. His *real* mother. The one who raised him, that protective grey and white husky named Paddy.

Jake demands: Where's my Paddy?

Jake insists: Paddy is my family.

Jake pleads: Let me go back to my family.

When they find Jake, his parents are nowhere to be found. The neighbors say that it has been quiet in that house for several months. No car in the garage. A heap of weeklies piled at the front door. But some barking, they say. Some barking.

Before the silence, the neighbors say, it was quite a different story.

Jake remembers this, too.

When Jake is born, his mother, Aimee, is only sixteen-years-old. She demands to be emancipated and gets her wish. She's an adult now, she insists. She moves into a run-down apartment with Jake's father, but he leaves shortly after. Something about not wanting to be tied down.

Aimee collects her welfare checks routinely. She waits tables at the Village Inn. She's let go because she asks for too much time off to take care of Jake.

Aimee collects her welfare checks routinely. She answers the phone for a crooked bail bondsman. She's let go because she asks for too much time off to take care of Jake.

Aimee collects her welfare checks routinely. She sells her body a couple of times so that she can work from home.

But hides Jake in the closet while she works.

When Jake is three-years-old, Aimee meets Rex, nearly twice her age. He's a local ex-con working in construction, the only job he could get after being released from prison after serving a three-year-stretch for killing a guy while driving a boat with a blood alcohol count of point two-four. After work, Rex drinks heavily at a local dive bar with no windows, video lottery machines, and old people with lots of stories. This is where Rex meets Aimee while she's trying to get a pack of Kool's out of the cigarette machine.

Aimee and Jake move into Rex's house before the month is up because she can no longer pay the rent. It's a trashy two-bedroom in north Portland, Oregon. Its plastic siding is cracking and covered in soot. Its carpets are covered in beer stains and dirty bong water. Its walls are yellowed from nicotine.

It's in the back yard of this house where child-care services find Jake, four years later—on all fours.

Aimee doesn't abandon Jake immediately. For the first couple of years, she makes what, at most, could be called, an effort. She doesn't pawn him off just yet. She's still aware that Jake's in the room, half the time. But then one day Rex brings home an eight-ball of cocaine—and a puppy.

Rex lets his friends stay at the house until all hours of the night. Smoking cigarettes. Drinking. Drugs. Sometimes a beer bottle soars across the room and shatters against a wall. Sometimes a fight breaks out. Sometimes a couple just starts having sex in front of everyone. Sometimes Rex lets his friends take a turn on Aimee—depending on who brings the drugs.

Jake sits in the corner with Paddy.

As Jake grows, Paddy grows. Within a year, Paddy is full grown. She growls and shows her fangs at any one of Rex's friends that try to get near her or Jake. When



she growls, Jake follows suit. Rex's friends sometimes flick lit cigarettes at the two of them. And they howl until Rex comes over and uses his foot to shut them up.

While Jake becomes completely forgotten, he watches Rex close-fist Aimee's face several times a week. They scream at all hours at the top of their lungs. They hurl at each other anything that they can get their hands on. Jake and Paddy's barking doesn't even register.

Jake recalls hearing Rex screaming at Aimee late at night. "You goddamn whore! I'm going to kill you, you slut bitch!"

But just as quickly as night turns into day, Jake hears Aimee's screams from the bedroom. Those satisfied screams. Those religious screams. Those screams asking for Rex's forgiveness.

When it's time to eat, Paddy is at Rex's heels. Rex always too preoccupied to care.

He's rolling.

He's cutting.

He's baking.

He's on the phone setting up a coke buy. Or, he's talking to one of his many other women. "I don't care, baby," he says into the receiver. "I'll make it happen."

Paddy's barking because she and Jake are hungry. "Shut the hell up, you goddamn mutt," Rex yells. He kicks Paddy with full-force, and she yelps, running back to Jake.

"I swear," he says into the receiver. "One more time and I'm gonna bury that bitch in the backyard."

Eventually, the dog and her pup stop asking to be fed. They learn to root through the trash. They learn to catch birds. Rats and squirrels. Cats and raccoons. They learn to shake their catch until the neck breaks. They tear into the pelt with their teeth, peeling it back and biting into the meat inside. They toss the bones aside, in most cases.

Sometimes, like with mice, they just gnaw on the animal whole.

Rex and Aimee continue to fight regularly. But Aimee's screams, eventually, become nothing more than background noise. Rex's friends are nothing more than a muffled memory. Like listening to someone trying to talk underwater. So Jake doesn't even notice it when there is no more noise at all.

They all forget about him, and he forgets about them, too.

He just continues to lay in the shade with his mother, with Paddy. Catch his breakfast. Snare his lunch. Trap his dinner.

Sniff the yard.

After Aimee and Rex's disappearance, Jake and Paddy are left to fend for themselves. The absence is old news. As far as the boy and his canine mother are concerned, Aimee left them a long time ago and Rex, well, was never really there in the first place.

After several months, a curious neighbor finds Jake in the backyard chewing on the long coil tail of a rat. A seven-year-old who looks the size of a four-year-old. The neighbor tries to communicate with Jake, but he just snarls and grunts and chomps on the tail. Finally, the neighbor gives up and calls the police.

So child-care services bring Jake to their facilities and begin to go to work on him. Child-development experts are called in to help return Jake to that of a normal functioning boy and to rear him into a man. Experts who all have different opinions. Experts who all want a piece of the boy. Experts who all want to be published.

Jake is closely monitored for months. It's over a half year before Jake finally starts to communicate with the staff. He slowly becomes receptive and starts to accept the human attention that he never received at home. He starts to speak again but has trouble with syntax and grammar. He's a fast learner, but he still huffs and grunts and growls when he gets frustrated. And he still lifts his leg a little when he pees.

Because Jake's onset development was stunted, he absorbs information slowly at first. However, his immature, under-developed mind seems the need to catch up with the age of his body. In two years, Jake covers the stages of learning that would normally take six or seven years. By ten-years-old, he's beginning to interact and play with other children. At year twelve, Jake hasn't talked about his mother—his dog mother—in over two years.

Child-care services make a minimal effort to locate Aimee. And since he wasn't Jake's biological father, they don't even bother looking for Rex. Deep down, the only interest in finding either of them would be to file formal charges of neglect. But, really, from the first sign that Jake is showing progress, the state begins looking into foster care.

They never even do a follow-up at the house to see if Aimee or Rex ever returned home.

The state looks for years—ever since Jake begins speaking—to find the best suitable candidate to act as a foster family. One that has experience working with children who have special needs. One that knows how to attend the needs of children who were raised in an unpleasant environment, a product of abuse and neglect. One that is loving, caring, attentive, supportive, drug-free...

And, especially, one that doesn't have a dog.

But it doesn't really matter where he's placed. Jake's got other plans. He's played their game. But now he's ready to go home. Just because he hasn't talked about Paddy, doesn't mean that he hasn't been thinking about her. Jake's been secretly plotting for years. He wants to know what happened to his mother, his Paddy, and he's planning on finding her.

When Jake is finally placed, a month shy of being a teenager, he immediately scans his new surroundings for ways to escape. He pretends to settle into his new room. He politely sits at the dinner table with the rest of his new family. He hides his disgust—still having not acquired the taste of cooked food. He waits for someone to look the other way. He waits for someone to leave a door open. He waits for everyone to fall asleep.

He waits.

He waits.

He waits.

When Jake finally escapes, he doesn't just bolt through an open door and race down the street. He causally unlatches the lock and leisurely disappears from the fos-

ter family's home. He doesn't know where he's going, but Jake's instinct takes over. Somehow, he just knows. He *knows*.

Jake's stride is long at first. He turns a corner and hikes four blocks.

Jake's slowly starting to lower his torso as he moves down the street. He turns another corner and hikes six blocks.

Jake's left hand touches the ground every dozen steps. He turns another corner.

He can feel Paddy's eye watching him, that one sharp blue eye. He can feel her hot breath on his skin. He can feel her soft, comforting coat. Jake can also picture Rex on the phone, kicking Paddy hard enough to make her cry out. He hears Rex's callous voice clearly:

*One more time and I'm gonna bury that bitch in the backyard.*

When Jake reaches the house, he's regressed back to seven. Snarling and growling. He heads straight for the backyard, hopping on all fours, chimp-like. Purely animal.

He's howling and frantically sniffing at the dirt and the grass. The backyard is vacant—a mirror of what it was over five years ago. The property is completely abandoned. Probably, a neighborhood ghost story. Cursed. A dirty memory.

Jake picks a spot like he is intuitively drawn to it. He's down on all fours and starts to dig. He rips and pulls at the weeds and what's left of the sod. His fingernails scratch the dry dirt; the topsoil is rock-solid but doesn't slow him down. Jake breaks through the top layer of earth quickly and tosses the bits and pieces, the clops of dirt, aside.

The deeper Jake gets, the softer the soil. The softer the soil, the faster Jake can work. Jake pauses between scoops of earth only to sniff at the hole—to make sure he's still on track. And keeps digging and digging. He's looking for...

What he's looking for...

When Jake finds the first piece, his heart is racing. He dives head-first into the pit, and when he emerges, Jake's face is black like a coal miner, dust and mud caked on top of sweat. And in his teeth, locked in his jaw, is a large bone.

Looks like a femur.

Jake spits out the bone clear from the hole and dives back in. Within minutes, he appears again with what looks like a half of a cantaloupe. And then follows with the other half. The skull, cracked in half. Jake places it near the femur and continues to dig.

The mandible—also in two pieces—are found near the skull. Jake places the bones on the ground accordingly, below the cantaloupe.

The more Jake digs, the more bones he finds. Always climbing out of the tomb, bones in his teeth.

He surfaces with a humerus bone between his teeth, dangling from one end is the flat, triangle of a scapula. He drops them on the ground.

Jake retrieves more bones and lays them with the rest, setting each in its proper position, like building a model. Like he's following that song: *The neck bone connected to the shoulder bone; the shoulder bone connected to the arm bone...*

Like he's trying to resurrect the dead.

From the hole, in his teeth, Jake has a handful of ribs. He tills the ground and

bites down on, on... a clavicle?

Again and again, in the hole and out, the boy with the bones.

The other scapula. The other humerus.

Both ulnae and radii, one fractured. The long, studded, spinal column: cervical, thoracic, and lumbar vertebrae.

The crude, dull dagger of a sternum—its handle, the manubrium.

Jake finds the pelvic girdle and the other long femur. And he begins to whimper. Still on all fours, Jake assembles the body, moving each piece into place with his mouth. Head bone connected to the jaw bone. Jaw bone connected to the neck bone.

On and on. This bone connected to that bone. On and on.

Jake whines like a scared pup as he builds the skeleton. All the memories of his past flood into his head. Again, Rex is screaming:

*One more time and I'm gonna bury that bitch in the backyard.*

Jake finishes laying down the bones, the framework not quite complete—lower legs missing. He crawls to the edge of the hole and stares down into the dark plot. Slowly, he descends and eventually returns with a tibia—the fibula still attached like a violinist's bow. At the body, the bones drop from Jake's mouth into his hands, and he gently places them in their proper place.

Thigh bone connected to the shin bone.

Full skeleton before him, sans the hands and feet and lower left leg. On his knees, Jake stares at the body—a body that's not quite right. Its skull a little too small. Its arms and legs a little too long. Spread out, overall, much too tall.

And no tail.

Jake's eyes swell. His face, camouflaged in dirt with lines of clean trailing down his cheeks. He gapes at the skull and the jawbone, chopped in half. The hollow eye sockets look darkly back at him. Jake shivers and feels as if he's being seen for the first time. He rises, little by little, off his knees and works his way to his feet.

Jake stands. Erect. Staring at the body. *Her* body. From all fours to upright. He's a boy becoming a man. A boy becoming a dog becoming a boy becoming a dog becoming a man.

The skull, his skull. Rex's voice resonates:

*One more time and I'm gonna bury that bitch in the backyard.*

The skull, *her* skull. Jake can still hear Aimee's screams from the bedroom.

art by David  
Thompson



# Heatship

Frank Fucile

As blue Earth loomed closer below the blinding Sun (shaded only slightly by the ceiling filter) we prepared to convert the *Prometheus* to reentry configuration, beginning by retracting its thirty-three giant photosails. As we neared the Sun in the past few months, we had increasingly shed our clothing until now we were stripped to heatship casual: anti-radiation briefs to cover our bits and our scrawny tattooed bodies tanned to an almost uniform shade of orange-brown despite daily sprayings of relatively effective anti-burn coat. The heatship had been soaking up as much energy as it could and storing it in its batteries for the long trip back to the edge of the solar system, where it would only have a trickle of photons from the perpetual night sky.

Captain OHandley looked like an Irish pirate with his white-streaked red beard and shaggy floating hair, but his eyes and nose were Asian and his voice Plutonian, widening out in flat aas to comment distantly on the blackness surrounding us. OHandley loved to sail in open space with the clear polymer bubble above us the only thing between our bronze bodies and the blue-orange photosails floating overhead in empty space. In the pinholed night of our year-long voyages he would proclaim, “And this aalso has been one of the daaark places of the waaard,” and laugh stupidly at himself. In addition to being a self-styled literary enthusiast, OHandley fancied himself a direct descendant of the old days of sailing in an open boat at the mercy of the winds and the tides. Now he basked in the distant glow of the planets, stars, and moons that had plagued his distant ancestors, harnessing the power of their photons through the *Prometheus’s* array of solar cells and photosails and amplifying it in massive hydrogen engines, simultaneously heating the deck and cooling the cargo hold. The term *Radiation-Collecting PhotoElectric-Steered Thermal Separation Drive Space Vessel* seemed too pretentious, so we called it a heatship.

The *Prometheus* was a custom job OHandley had built with his family’s fortune. He was a decadent gentleman adventurer who traveled with an impressive library and all-male crew at his disposal. His Plutonian forefathers had been renegade members of the intelligentsia who had escaped to the colonies during the anti-intellectual twitch of the late twenty-first century. Even though they had been successful colonists and businessmen well-versed in technology, they never lost their appetite for knowledge in the form of the old-fashioned paperback. As a result, the older members of OHandley’s crew (particularly myself and my buddy Eskimo Joe) were a self-selected bunch of wannabe intellectuals. The same couldn’t really be said of the younger crewmen.

The *Prometheus’s* cargo hold was full of Kuiper Belt ice bound for The Big Melted Popsicle (as Joe used to call it). Not that they don’t have freezers down there, but if you’re a rich asshole on a dying planet, why not have your ice flown in from the distant outer reaches of the motherfucking solar system? Especially if inside is the famed Plutonian hash grown under UV lamps in microgravity, baked lovingly in hyperpressurized fission ovens, and pressed into blue-black bricks in the cold space ice. The Plutonians had been pulling off this crazy business model since they settled generations ago, and the Earth’s tangle of crumbling and soaring economic classes

managed to keep it profitable.

I of course know this story of the reasons for the Plutonians' unlikely success because OHandley had drilled it into my head with his stoned ramblings for the past fifteen years I'd worked for him. "Once we sailed to harvest whale oil." (I remember him thumping a battered copy of *Moby Dick* on the crystalline roof and drifting down to snag a foothold on the deck.) "Then came coal power. Then we hauled crude." (He opened his arms to the blank sky and let the book drift away from him.) "Now we have a purely heat-based economy."

After pulling in the sails, we brought up our heat shield, shutting out the swirl of sea and cloud below us and encapsulating the ship's deck. The artificial light cells came up, and we strapped ourselves into our bridge seats, calculating speed and trajectory. After the bumpy mess of passing through the atmosphere we activated breaking thrusters, deployed chutes, and splashed down in the Gulf of Mexico. The shields came down and the bridge opened up onto blue sky and green sea. A couple of the greenhorns looked a bit weepy, but the shift to blue after almost two years of black was dramatic even for the old salts. Though certainly nothing in my life ever compared to that first moment. For a man to grow up without ever seeing the Sun as anything but a distant star, and for his home, his real original ancestral home, to be an invisible speck snuffed out.

We know after this shore leave we'll be hauling passengers and products up to the colonies. And it'll be a serious, fully-clothed, respectable transport of businesspersons, their families, and their consumer goods instead of sexed-up hashed-out pirate anarchy. Joe used to say the civvies we transported were rats leaving a sinking ship. That's probably what his grandparents told him about abandoning their ancestral oil-field ice sheet for Europa.

As we unbelted, the misty reveries of the greenhorns were literally crushed by a gravitational force greater than any they had felt before (making them realize how useless those half-assed lifting sessions in the inertial gym were). I even felt sluggish under Earth weight then, and I was in my peak condition. Half the crew wanted to lay down on deck, and OHandley wobbled out in a goddam tricorne hat with a cutlass strapped on his waist, lit a corncob pipe, and shouted, "Raise the sails to caaatch the wind or we'll never make New Aaarlens."

The greenhorns moaned, some of them maybe expecting OHandley would actually produce a set of masts and canvass sails and force them to climb through the rigging in their weakened state. But they were still in their space minds. Us older crew knew the Captain was on our side, because now all of a sudden this was Earth, and we were spacers, and systemic pariahs at that. As the bubble came down wind breezed across the deck. A breeze with a smell, the first in two years. And if you've been on land before you know what that salt smell means. The bubble is off and you stick with your crew and your captain. Because down there you're weak. You can feel it in your body and see it in people's faces.

I gave the greenhorns this sermon in my capacity as first mate while the more experienced of us punched up the command sequences for raising a photosail in full Earth



gravity. We couldn't afford to waste energy by running the thrusters on battery power.

After plotting our course, the older mates began drifting below decks to change into their land threads. Even if we couldn't be as strong as we needed to for the natural world we could at least be covered up. Some crewmen went with nondescript outfits while others went with retro-wear. Though they sometimes won't admit it, nostalgia for old Earth can be even stronger among space truckers than civvies. I changed into a grey three-piece suit I had picked up on Mars the last trip (but no shoes or tie, for a less restricted feel). Eventually the greenies caught on and put on street clothes or even space threads if they had no other option. I've seen kids get beat up on the docks for coming off the ship in nothing but their shorts.

The dockworkers who unloaded our cargo were always burly men in stained clothing who glared at us suspiciously, resented us for our weakness, despised our way of life. It was rare to get off the dock without somebody at least being called a faggot. As we approached port the veterans fixed themselves into a cold posture and attitude. I stole my last glance at Joe in his jeans and leather jacket. He had been ignoring me since we had put the heat shield up. It seemed to happen farther from port every time. I thought maybe we wouldn't bunk together on the haul back, but it would be a long trip. I watched him grease his hair like he always did in heavy gravity.

We coasted into port at night under battery power to a shadowy crowd of figures pacing on the dock of the city we called New Orleans. Actually it was somewhere in the area that used to be Arkansas, but it's too depressing to call it New New Orleans. Everybody always expected these dockhands to be gang thugs, but only the oldest salts who knew the secrets of the *Prometheus's* amplification engines realized how deep OHandley was in with the syndicates.

Despite the heatship's exceedingly frugal use of photoelectric and solar energy, its amplification and battery systems required an embarrassing amount of hydrogen to keep running. So Interplanetary Hydrogen secretly sponsored the *Prometheus* and most other heatships as a distraction from their ongoing rape of Earth's atmosphere. In return OHandley traded his Plutonian hash to the Delta Mob (which had a controlling interest in Interplanetary Hydrogen) and got dockworkers who didn't ask questions.

Very few crewmen were actually aware of this system, and in fact a lot of greenhorns saw working on a heatship as some kind of utopian lifestyle outside the pervasive corruption of terran politics.

And maybe this was why the dockmen hated us so openly. We came off our ship wiggling bare toes on the wet wooden planks of the pier, and it must've looked like we were convinced not only that Earth was a wonderful place to be but also that we were actually making it better. And the grim-faced workers sneered at our scrawny bodies in the halogen light and murmured insults as we staggered past on unsteady legs. They winked and laughed and whistled at us. Some would flash the guns in their waistbands as a way of telling us what kind of place this was in case we had any doubts.

But there was one man that night whose blank stare straight into me carried something entirely separate from disdain. He was dressed in a polo shirt and khakis, very unlike a dockworker. Cold eyes and face shaded by black hair. A body less

robust than the other hands, casually leaning against the lamppost instead of standing with the men near the edge of the dock.

At first I thought he was a new recruit who hadn't yet developed a disdain for spacers, but when he caught up to OHandley and me later that night in the bar, he and the Captain looked at each other with the kind of vague familiarity that signaled something was afoot.

The man tapped his fingers on the dark countertop and smirked at the Captain, who ordered him a beer. His sweaty hair stuck out in all directions.

I turned my blurry eyes away from him to Joe in the corner, sipping his whiskey and staring at his shoe.

"Who's this scrawny weirdo you're with?"

I looked up to see the dockworker chuckling at me. It wasn't quite an insult, so I didn't say anything, though I did find it odd for him to call me weird when I was sitting next to a grown man in what amounted to a pirate costume.

"Sammy," OHandley said, gesturing to me with one hand as he stroked his beard with the other, "meet Tyler, our man inside."

I squeezed hard as I could on the handshake and didn't look him in the eye.

"You boys better be careful around here."

Boys? Careful of what?

"Gonna be some big changes." Tyler swigged his beer and tilted his head towards me.

"Go ahead," OHandley said, then murmured something into his hand about trade secrets.

Tyler and OHandley guffawed for a second.

Then Tyler leaned in. "Hydrogen market's goin bust."

He said it so quickly I wasn't sure he meant it. Especially when Interplanetary claimed the economy would be stable for at least another century. But I've already established what crooked fuckers Interplanetary Hydrogen were.

"Overhead's skyrocketing. They're running out of materials. Plants are either shutting down or being forced out by the locals, and they're running out of places to dump the carbon. We've got about a month, maybe a month and a half before hyperinflation hits."

It had happened before after all, with gas, with coal, with ethanol. It was only a matter of time.

OHandley looked into his foamy mug.

I clenched my toes on the wet tile floor.

Tyler leaned in closer, spoke faster, whispering. "You can't fuck around with this long-haul space captain shit anymore. You gotta break with the Delta Mob and get on board with my plan."

OHandley spat. "The faaack can you do fer me?"

"Even if you sail back out before the crash you won't be able to make it back without a refuel. And out there you'll be up shit creek with those useless photosails."

OHandley shook his head and slammed his empty glass on the table. "Some

faaackin beer daaammit!”

“The only way you can stay afloat is to drop that rig of yours into a Mercury orbit and convert it into a sunmill. And I’ve got the plans to do it. We’ll make a killing selling the energy to Interplanetary.”

It was cruel to tell such an old and passionate man he could never go home, but Tyler was right. The business model was completely fucked without cheap hydrogen.

The Captain finally had his heat economy.

Sensing either an argument or very secret dealmaking coming on, I slid off my stool and padded over to Joe in the corner. He was still alone, finishing that glass of whiskey, and scratching something into the table with his butterfly knife.

“Having fun?” I said.

“Fuck off,” he muttered.

I sat down across from him. His hair was brushed over to the side apparently from falling asleep somewhere, making him look like a drunken Inuit Fonzie.

“Buy me a beer,” he said after a long silence.

When I came back with the beers he had reanimated enough to be flipping through a pocket book of poems.

“Oh come on you’ll have time to read on the way back. Now’s the time to party.”

“I’ve been drinkin since we got in.”

“Fuck you put that book away and talk to me.”

He slapped the book on the table. “Who you talkin to over there?”

“Don’t get jealous. That guy was talking to the Captain.”

“Guy’s a mobster.”

“Wrong again.”

Joe shook his head at me.

“Just because a guy hasn’t had the luxury of spending the past fifteen years with his nose in a book not even having to bother to stand up doesn’t make him a thug automatically.”

“I’m not a fuckin idiot.”

We sat and fumed at each other. I wondered if it would be possible to go home with Tyler.

Joe snorted. “Fuckin Delta assholes.”

I wanted something to storm off on, but instead I chose a more thoughtful exit: “You know it isn’t going to last,” I said. “Men of leisure like ourselves, sailing the system stoned, living off the surfeit of others, reading” (I grabbed the book from under his hand) “Ginsberg or whatever.” And walked on cold tile back to the bar.

OHandley and I stayed for the next week in Tyler’s dusty brown apartment. It turned out he had been a solar power engineer before the smog got so thick that terrestrial units became unfeasible. We went over the modifications that would have to be made to the *Prometheus* and agreed to bring Tyler on as a partner. He seemed level-headed enough, even though he showed outright disdain for our intellectual and literary tendencies.

There was, however, one topic on which everyone, intellectual or otherwise, had an opinion.

“I’m sure we’ll always be able to come up with new energy sources,” Tyler said nonchalantly.

“Always is a long time,” I said.

I never ended up getting in bed with him. Every time I felt I was getting close he would look at me with those cold eyes and I could feel him laughing behind the mask of his face.

The crash hit a lot faster than we thought it would. In a week and a half the space elevator hiked up tow fees again and the dockworkers threatened to strike if their pay were cut. Suddenly we were in a position where the hash had to sell like gangbusters for us to even make it back out to orbit. But by then the recession had started, and only the richest of assholes were willing to shell out the money for Plutonian Ice Hash. Consequentially we would be forced to sell the bulk of it at a huge loss and install the conversion components for the *Prometheus* ourselves. But it ended up taking longer than a month to move the hash, and the dockworkers were getting agitated. Tow fees went up again, and soon whole commodity chains started to fold.

With coal and gas plants shutting down everywhere, the overburdened nuclear infrastructure couldn’t keep up with demand. Any kind of energy was suddenly ridiculously expensive. Inter- and intra-planetary commerce fell to pieces. Cities started shutting off power at night. Civil unrest was imminent. The dockworkers threatened us daily. Just when everybody wanted to get off the dying puddle it was most expensive to leave. All the high rollers (including the executives of Interplanetary Hydrogen, who knew they were going under in time to sell their shares) evacuated to the colonies, and we were marooned with only a useless spaceship and a hold full of melting hash.

OHandley withdrew his family’s savings only to find it inadequate compared to the vast sum of money required to fund the expedition. Once hyperinflation set in, we realized there would be no way to get off the planet without a massive loan, and it just so happened that Tyler knew some people who could help us. Never mind they were sketchy people; never mind they were dangerous people. All we had to do was finish those modifications to the *Prometheus*, tow out to space, drop into orbit for a few years, and we’d come back with more than enough battery power to pay off the loan and ship back out for the next cycle.

Banks were collapsing all around us, and the only people who had the kind of money we needed were the upper echelons of the Delta Mob, so while Tyler had originally come to us claiming we’d be free of them, he ended up taking us right back when we had nowhere else to go.

We took Tyler’s skimmer down the floodplain and through a coastal marsh that probably used to be great farmland to a watery villa. It must have been built before the last melt because the water came up over the front porch. Most of the walls on the first floor had been knocked down (presumably because they had rotted to uselessness), leaving a forest of improvised support columns holding up the second level of the building. Two men in olive drab uniforms meant to imitate mid-twentieth-century Army fatigues stood on the wet porch, long black imitation M-16s pointing

into the air. One tilted his head and waved us forward.

We beached the skimmer on the submerged front steps and stepped onto the slimy wooden porch. The water came to my ankles, soaking the cuffs of my dirty grey suit pants. The guards stared at my feet through the murk.

I laughed. "And you guys are getting pond scum all over those nice boots." I was excessively stoned after deciding there was no way we could unload the rest of our hash.

Tyler smiled and shoved me quickly into the building. Not that there really was anything to go into. More like being under a building.

When the sharks came clunking down the stairs from the upper floor, I had to stop myself from cracking up again. The two of them were dressed in full Napoleonic gear: long blue double-breasted jackets, knee-high leather boots, giant plumed hats, and yellow fringed epaulets. Nostalgia garb is pretty common on Earth, but these were mobsters. It was difficult to take anyone seriously when they were dressed like that on a planet like this. I wondered whether they had planned their style together to impress us with their atavisim or if they dressed like this all the time.

The one on the left spoke in a gravelly voice. "You pansies would be trapped in gravity forever if it weren't for us."

"Your corporation's going baaankrupt."

The one on the right laughed at him. "You don't think we have a whole fleet of ships already sailing to the Sun?"

"Obviously not or you wouldn't be helping us."

"That's what you think we're doing?" The right one smirked.

The leftward Napoleon splashed down off the stairs and paced in front of me kicking waves of muck onto my pants. I decided he was the commanding officer because his motions were those of a leader. As his left hand massaged the pommel of his sabre with lascivious intensity, his right stuffed itself in between the buttons of his jacket. All he needed was something stuffed down his pants to complete the look.

I couldn't help but chuckle under my breath a little.

The man spun throwing a wave off from his ankles. "What makes you think we didn't just bring you here to kill you?"

The silence was finally broken by the man's laughter.

On that signal, a young man, maybe only fourteen, slinked down the staircase in some retro-avant-garde chainmail getup with a briefcase handcuffed to his arm.

The lesser Napoleon unbuttoned his jacket and removed a small stack of papers and a pen, stepped awkwardly through the water, and handed them to OHandley, who flipped through the pages, signed them, and handed them back. Then the kid splashed forward and placed the briefcase in the Captain's hands. The mobster with the sword tossed a single key onto the briefcase. OHandley unlocked the handcuff from the briefcase, and the two generals walked slowly back upstairs with the boy.

When we opened the briefcase, it was filled with pure silver bars, something that was actually gaining value.

We would be able to make it to Mercury and still have enough left over to pay the dockworkers extra for their wasted time so we wouldn't be attacked when we came back down.

After a year of chasing that planet around the Sun our crew was ready for the trip back to Earth. I had attempted to read Marx's *Capital* over the trip but found it filled with hilariously confusing equations attempting to ascribe actual value to things. We knew nothing had any value except what value people thought it did. Numbers are arbitrary.

I asked Joe about it. I remember he used to mention Marx sometimes. He had been reading an absurd amount this time around, even for him. Shirking his duties, hiding in the engine rooms sometimes, his nose in books even I hadn't ever heard of and probably couldn't understand. He had been ignoring me since we'd taken Tyler on board, presumably out of jealousy. Now he was tied down in his bunk flipping through a black book with the word Adorno on it.

I pulled myself to him on the handrail and flicked the huge tome in his direction. "Fuck does any of this shit mean."

He glanced at the cover and smiled. "Nineteenth century obsession with quantifiability. Like a lot of theory, it's just a fancy way of saying something everybody already knows."

"Which is..."

"We don't get paid what our work is worth."

Silence a moment. Then I pointed to his book and said, "I've never seen that one in the library."

And he erupted. "So you're gonna bust me for smuggling extra books on ship?"

Technically it was my duty to. Before we launched, the order had come down not to bring anything extra on board that would add to inertial mass. Tyler had wanted to dump the Captain's whole library to cut down the tow fee, but that proposal was rejected by various hyperliterate crewmen as something that would make the trip unbearable.

I pulled myself onto his bunk. "Your secret's safe with me, baby," I whispered.

His face flashed contempt, and he shoved me off.

I spun and pushed off the opposite wall with my foot.

"Leave me alone."

"Fuck's your problem?"

He shoved his book angrily under a strap. "I told you we shouldn't have brought that thug on board."

"He's not a thug, he's an engineer."

Joe rolled his big eyes again.

For some reason he hated me, and it hurt more than I wanted to admit.

But at that moment a call came over the intercom for a full crew meeting. We assembled on deck, taking care not to face the Sun, which was blindingly close even with full ceiling filters up.

OHandley (in radiation briefs and cutlass, feet clipped to the deck) and Tyler (stubbornly in full land threads, floating) at the front of the bridge shouting to each other in whispers the way married couples do when they don't want their children to hear. The Captain threw his hand out to the side in what looked like anger. Tyler



pushed over to our floating crowd.

“We’ve caaallected enough battery power to make a good profit, aaand I’m suggesting we return now since the paaawer’s needed so much.”

At which point Tyler very rudely pushed off my shoulder to propel himself to the front of the group. I recovered against the ceiling.

Tyler pulled a sheaf of paper from the inside of his (quite inappropriate) jacket. “Unfortunately part of the contract with our lenders promises to maximize profits, meaning we need to orbit another year before...”

He was drowned out by a chorus of moans from the crewmen. “Let’s vote,” someone shouted. Voting on such matters wasn’t uncommon in those days.

Tyler let out an annoying scoff. “It’s a contract. You’ve already signed on. You don’t get to vote on it now.”

“We’ll get enough caaash to pay off the loan aaand have enough energy left to make it to Pluto,” said OHandley. “I say we go home.”

Tyler shook his head and waved his hands in frustration. “You people don’t understand. This isn’t some game where you get to float around the solar system for fun. You’re supposed to be turning a profit. You’re supposed to be businessmen. You...” (and he didn’t have the courage to say it) “...are so caught up in your books and your drugs and your...” (and he didn’t say it again) “...stupid, homoerotic” (he hedged) “fantasy world that you have no idea how to do anything right.”

That’s when Joe grabbed Tyler by the neck and we had to pull the two of them apart.

OHandley stood scowling up at us in the glare of close sunlight, contract papers floating by. “Don’t ever question the way I run my ship, you goose-stepping dirtcrawler. My aaancestors left Earth to get away from aaasshole beancounters like you.”

Tyler said, “Who do you think you’re working for?”

It took us all a few seconds to figure out what happened next. Tyler moved suddenly and there was a loud pop as the Captain fell. But that didn’t make sense in freefall orbit. OHandley had been pushed onto the deck as Tyler flew back into the ceiling. A bullet. From a gun.

Never mind that firearms are completely prohibited on ship. Never mind that firing one in space is completely insane and threatens the whole crew. Thankfully Tyler had been above OHandley so the bullet only went through the deck and not the ceiling enclosure.

But OHandley was dead. We would have killed Tyler right away, but we were frozen in disbelief. Then he spun upside-down and turned the gun on us. We were terrified his next shot would decompress the whole ship.

Tyler kicked off the ceiling bubble and propelled himself to OHandley’s body, where he pulled the Captain’s sabre from the dead man’s belt. “I’m taking command of this vessel in the name of the Delta Trust as stipulated in the contract.” He waved vaguely at the cloud of papers with the sword. “Captain OHandley, having violated the terms of his contract, has been executed as a mutineer. You’ll do better without him anyway. Who’s ready to make some serious cash?”

About half the crew grunted tentative acceptance. They had no loyalty to

OHandley. I had overestimated the man's charisma.

"It's time you sailors ran this ship like a business and not some queer intellectual adventure."

Some greenhorns nodded in agreement.

"It's time to stop floating around like idiots just getting by when you can make a killing off that thing." Tyler pointed with his gun as he squinted into the blinding Sun.

More nods from the less-experienced crewmembers.

I had never thought there would be a mutiny on the *Prometheus*, and certainly not a successful one. I was sure Tyler would be dead in a few days and we would be on our way back to Earth.

But instead the crew fell in line behind him. In another week he had us dressing in full space uniforms. Our shift hours were increased with all sorts of meaningless tasks meant to keep us *efficient* and *disciplined*. For the first time ever the crew was doing things like cleaning and standing watch. Twice as many crewmen as were necessary would be posted to sail control at any particular time. We were instructed to maintain the solar arrays in the most absolutely efficient positions possible and not to trust the ship's automatic readjustment systems (which could be off as much as a degree at times).

Eventually smoking was banned on ship. It was deemed *counterproductive*. People claimed this wasn't a big deal because they could still find ways to do it secretly. Then came the order to jettison the library. Joe and I took it hard, but only a few other crewmen objected. The atmosphere was one of such fearful seriousness that nobody even spoke as we tossed OHandley's books into the ejection chamber.

Perhaps knowing we cared the most, the others left Joe and me to finish the job. Joe pushed into the chamber and unzipped his leather jacket, which he had been wearing over his uniform jumpsuit. He motioned for me to get in with him.

Hesitant, but feeling he was the only person I could still trust, I let myself float into the chamber. Joe was already halfway out of his jumpsuit.

He closed the door behind me. The feeling of being in an ejection chamber is a lot like leaning over the edge of a tall building in gravity. As terrifying as it is exhilarating. Joe kicked his jumpsuit off and it drifted to the other end of the chamber.

He fished in his jacket pocket, then nodded and handed me his hashpipe. "Hit this and get out of that gear."

I took a deep drag from the pipe as Joe stared at the leather jacket in his arms, then passed back to him and started on my zippers.

We were down to heatship casual again, puffing Pluto hash like the good old days. Then Joe grabbed his radiation briefs and, in one quick motion, whipped them down his legs and off his body, exposing the bouncing penis and testicles I hadn't seen in a year thanks to our tendentious sex embargo.

I let out a cloud of smoke and sneered, squinting into the yellow-orange ball of hydrogen through the tiny window at the far end of the chamber. "You know that's gonna fuck with your junk."

Joe just shook his head.

When we finished smoking we floated silently, rebreathing the green-brown car-

bon dioxide cloud around us.

Joe stared out the window a moment then turned back to me. “You ever wonder why we’ve never come into contact with any aliens?”

“You mean we this ship or we us humans?”

“We anybody.”

“They’ve found lots of alien microbes. All over the system. Mars, Venus, Europa, Callisto, Titan.”

Joe sighed. “I mean intelligent life. Spacemen in flying saucers. That kind of thing.”

I shrugged. “Maybe interstellar travel isn’t workable.”

He raised his eyebrows and a finger, very pedantic. “Ahh, but why?”

I didn’t see what he was getting at.

“I have this theory,” Joe said, “that there are two kinds of species in the universe. Either they’re like us or they aren’t.”

“Well...yeah...but what do you mean by that? That isn’t terribly specific.”

“Either they’re the type of species that has a compulsion to grow beyond their means, or they’re not.”

I stared at him blankly.

“If they keep their numbers and technology under control, we would have no way of detecting them. And if they have a technology fetish like us, they inevitably...” He rubbed his forehead.

There was nothing I could say.

Joe shook his head. “And we’re all marching to self-destruction.”

I wanted to say something about the new power theories I’d been reading about. Researchers were going crazy trying to find new fuel sources, and they were actually making good progress. But what Joe had said made so much sense I felt any attempt to cheer him up would be disingenuous.

“Take this,” he said, pushing the leather jacket into my arms. “Let me stay with the books.”

“What?”

He slid the door open. “Get out of the chamber, shut the door, and hit the button.”

“I can’t do that, Joe.”

“Will you please just listen to me this once?” He looked into my eyes, something like exhaustion on his face.

I touched his bare shoulder before slowly pulling myself back into the ship. I wanted him to suggest mutiny instead. I hoped he would want to take back the ship. Maybe we would die, but at least we would die fighting.

He shut the door.

I watched him through the window and waited for him to change his mind. I put his jacket on to waste time. I waited as long as I could. But I could see in his eyes he had given up.

I heard hands pulling their way towards us down the tunnel.

Joe shouted silently to me, lips flapping wide, and I could see what he was say-

ing: “Hit it fucker.”

The handsteps came closer. I put one hand over my eyes and slammed the jet-tison button with my other fist.

Eyes closed, I jammed my shaking hands into the jacket’s pockets and found something heavy, cold, metal. When I finally turned around and opened my eyes, Tyler was hanging in front of me.

He looked my half-naked body up and down, squinting his whole face. “What happened to that bookworm butt-buddy of yours?”

Without thinking, I flipped out Joe’s butterfly knife and buried it in Tyler’s throat. Blood plumed out from the stab wound like a sail.

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## Deadfall

Antonin Dvorak

*There’s something out there, I thought, staring through the cracked and dusty windshield of my Dodge Ram, and I need to know what it is.*

This was the late 1980s, a time when the nation looked to the sky only to watch the Challenger felled by an O-ring. Bush held office then, I think, and we lived in Canard, California. It’s a place we haven’t visited in years.

The sun was already falling when I set out. It pushed its rays through the mountains and trees just enough to streak the road with a patchy, dusty light. My pickup bucketed down this dirt road on weak shocks, though I’m happy to say that the O-rings were in frisky-fine order, thank you very much. The woods bore down on me from the left, a dense forest that wasn’t completely pine yet. Behind the trees, a sharp-faced mountain jutted up into the sky.

*I need to know what it is.* My hands clenched the wheel, knuckles gleaming white.

I’ll never forget the way the forest looked that day. It was as if it knew that it was going to let its secret out. When I looked hard enough, I could make out sneering lips and squinty eyes born of twigs and leaves. Those visions frowned and glowered as the winds played through them.

Samantha, my wife, hated what I was doing. She thought that I should have been tending to my daughter and not this tracking nonsense.

“You’ve got stupidity in spades,” she always said, only half-joking.

I pulled the Ram to the side of the road, where the long grass tickled the undercarriage. This wasn’t one of the new Rams, of course. Dodge reinvented the Ram long after this one was on its way out. Mine was boxy and rugged, not sleek like the new ones.

For a moment I just sat there smelling the oily cabin — no rush, as I hadn’t actually heard the howling yet. It was Teddy who had heard her, and I had gone out straight after work.

Climbing out of the truck, my back cracked and I winced a little. If I got lost out

there, or if she was to get me, I wanted people to know who and where I was. Just leaving my driver's license on the dashboard would do the trick. So I fumbled through my pocket, pulled out the license, and a few dollars fluttered to the ground like dying butterflies. I don't carry a wallet. When people carry wallets, all their spare change ends up there, and they start thinking that they have more change than they can spare. I raked up my money and slipped it into my pocket.

My license caught my eye that day. I don't know why that was. Maybe it was the way the woods seemed alive. Maybe I was more scared than usual. There I was. The picture had been taken almost four years earlier, and I hadn't even cared so much as to flatten the cowlick that sat on the back of my head. I looked like Opie on a bad hair day. My name was printed beside the picture and looked too grand to be next to it: Frank Shepherd.

I stared at that snapshot for a minute before deciding that when I got back, we'd all have to go out and get some good pictures taken of us. They had just opened a new photo place in town. Why let it go to waste?

The driver's license ended up on the dashboard, and I pulled my shotgun — for protection, only protection — from the pickup bed.

I turned away from the truck, slowly, like I was in one of those B movies where there's some Swamp Thing, Vampire or, yes, Bigfoot. I felt like an actor; this scene couldn't have been real. The wind eddied at the edge of the forest, making those faces and making the grass ripple like water. It eddied under the truck, the grasses clipping against the underbelly and making a sound like distant applause.

All that wild thought left me once I was in the forest. All *thought*, really, fled from me. I stepped through the forest skirting and into the shadows. Inside, there was almost no wind. Just squirrels and chipmunks rummaging through the underbrush.

I buttoned up my flannel against the late autumn air and soon I was climbing at an odd angle. It was cool enough down in the valley, but as I went up into the Klamath Mountains, the air went from cool to cold.

I had done this many times before, this tracking, always done it alone and always done it hoping more that I wouldn't find anything than that I would. For the first hour, with my ears straining to hear her, I walked with just one word in my head: bucolic. My mom called me that when I moved from San Diego to Canard. For a long time I was actually scared to look it up in the dictionary, but when I did, it wasn't so bad. In her eyes, I was just living the rural life.

Higher and higher I went, the shotgun bouncing against my back. The first hunger pangs picked at my stomach, and I ignored them.

I looked down at my watch: 5:30 pm. An hour gone.

"Where the hell is she?" I whispered. "Teddy said that she was out here. Said he heard her howling, loud and clear."

And then my eyes fell on what looked like a footprint. I crouched down to the pine needle-blanketed ground and studied the imprint. It was deep, maybe two inches. It was long, too, at least twice as long as my feet. I shifted uneasily, my thick clothes concealing the goosebumps that had sprouted all across my skin.

*Damn*, I thought.

*Huge*, I thought.

I didn't think, *Turn back you idiot*.

I ran my hand over the cold print. Whatever it was, it had to have been heavy to crush the cold earth down like that. The idea that it might have come from something else never crossed my mind: some rock's old resting place, some rotted-out root system, some natural phenomenon — no, this was her. I was sure of it. It was her, or it was *something*.

After a while, one of those feet caught on a knot of tree roots, and I fell forward onto the stiff dirt. I picked myself up and looked down at my watch: 6:28.

By now the hunger pangs weren't coming and going; they were just there. It was like some tiny rodents were scuttling around in my gut, clawing and spitting angrily, waiting to be fed. I ignored the pain. More important things needed tending.

I walked on. I walked, and I eventually came upon a clearing in the woods. There was no field of grass — this was high in the mountain, remember. All that lived here were scruffy bushes and a chipmunk that hightailed it out of there when I came. Funny that I had never been to the spot before, never noticed it before.

The view from that clearing sticks with me. I can see it like a photograph in my mind, like one of those new photographs, those panoramas or whatever they're called. I could see for miles out over the green canopies of tree. The Klamath Mountains rolled up and down, into and out of valleys, over and under the milky white fog that had gathered in the dales. The clouds were thick and gray above me. Wherever the sun was now, it was no longer casting its patchy, dusty light here. It wasn't dark by any stretch of the imagination, not yet, but it wasn't light either.

I stood there for probably ten minutes, just relaxing, the howling completely out of my mind. The air was so rich. Cold, yes, but rich. It was intoxicating. And in the end, I had to drag myself from the clearing. I *still* needed to know what was out there.

I pushed on for another ungodly length of time. The cold only got colder. My need only grew stronger. When the next stop came — I stood between a fallen pine, very near to Deadfall Lake — I glanced down at my watch again, 7:48. Only this time I had to look through a shuddery puff of my own breath to see the time.

The hunger pangs would no longer go ignored. My fingers were tight with cold as I unwrapped my sandwich, but I would find her. If she was anything worth finding, I would find her tonight. And I sat down in-between patches of snow like icy toadstools.

The noise started soft and deep, almost like a rhino's whistle might sound. It grew in intensity until it was echoing in the trees. I could feel the sound against my body; the animal couldn't have been more than half a mile away.

The animal — I haven't even told you what I was looking for, have I? No? Well, you've probably figured it out by now; this part of the world is Bigfoot country. And Canard, California, seems to be Bigfoot country's capital. It's a small tourist town that sits on the Rouge River. Mr. and Mrs. Riley own the Bigfoot Bed and Breakfast. There's Bob Hastings who owns the Bigfoot Bar and Grill. Teddy Rumsey operates Howl Lodge, a resort very near to where you can always seem to hear the animal

screaming. Howl Lodge is where I worked, as a front desk manager. The names are corny, I know. But if there's a buck to be made, people will do corny.

Some towns are built on legends and myths. That's all good and well. Some towns make their lives of the legends. *My* life was part of the legend.

But I was close now. I could practically feel her breath on me. Or was that just the wind?

Now I've got to get something straight with you. I was a skeptic, too. I wasn't sure if there was a Bigfoot out there. That's why I was in the woods to begin with, tracking for answers. I needed to know.

I put away the half-eaten sandwich and shouldered my pack. I followed the howling with squinty eyes. I walked as quickly and quietly as I could. My hands trembled. The wind blew around me in waves. I clutched my shotgun with swollen fingers.

How could it howl for so long? The sounds came in such excruciatingly long stretches. *This thing must have huge lungs*, I thought.

Then, after my foot stupidly snapped a twig, the howling faded away into the wind. Now I ran. I ran in the direction I thought the sound had come from. I ran like a jackass, my legs bucking under me, my body just along for the ride. This part I remember only as a blur. I remember seeing more and more moss. Then the moss was replaced with clumps of lichen. And then my lungs clenched like there were fists around them. I stopped running. I panted.

The woods had grown shadowy.

Where was I running to? If you ask me, I'm lucky that I *didn't* find Bigfoot then. She surely would have gotten the jump on me.

I spun around, peering through the trees wildly. An icy sweat held the goosebumps at bay, but I shivered anyway. And my legs weakened: I was lost. My insides flinched. *I'm lost*.

I had had the foresight to leave my driver's license on the dash, but not the foresight to bring a compass or a map. Hell, these were my backwoods, practically my backyard. How could I get lost in them?

And there were real things to worry about — screw Bigfoot — real things that were more than legends. There were grizzly bears and cougars and moose. I'm not sure what a moose could do, but I bet a moose would have had its way with me just then.

That's when I saw it. Not Bigfoot. Only the strangest-looking tree I've ever seen.

Its lifeless limbs reached out into the air, holding shiny bunches of snow in their crooks. Its bark had probably been eaten by elk and deer during some particularly nasty winter, because its white innards were exposed. And there was a splintery hole in the middle of it. Lichen lolled out of this hole like a tongue. Two trees had fallen right next to it, their branches stretching yearningly across the ground and over the useless roots of the first one.

I smiled at this tree. At the very least, its absurdity framed my own. It was *something* I could talk about when I got back.

The adventurous spirit had finally run out of me. I was just a tired idiot lost

out in the woods; another Bigfoot hunter stumbling over his own shadow. I had “stupidity in spades.” My wife — as with every idiot’s wife — was right as usual.

I sat down, rested against a tall pine, and stared at that odd tree. I retrieved the peanut butter and jelly sandwich and wolfed it down.

I peered out from under heavy eyelids: 9:02.

*Sleeping out here is a horrible idea*, I told myself. *I might just as well shoot her in the toe and then climb into her arms to see how she’d react.*

No. I shouldn’t have slept out there and I did my best not to. But every time my mind resolved to get up, my body lacked the energy. I was weighted down with cold, fatigue, and mounting fear. The last thing I can remember thinking that evening was, *I wonder if there are any bats in that tree.* After that thought, it was all just sensation and memories.

The temperature dropped as I drifted towards an unrewarding sleep, dropped far below freezing. Darkness crept into the forest and lurked through the trees. I don’t think it ever gets quite as dark out in the open — not by Deadfall Lake, anyway, not as dark as it got out there on the tree-covered mountain. I can remember playing as a kid late into the night, playing by the quiet waters of good old Deadfall. My brothers and I had stayed out so late, telling wild stories and scaring each other.

I slept.

I woke to the howling — the howling, practically in my ear.

My eyes had trouble adjusting to the darkness. And for those few seconds, it was all I could do to keep from pissing my pants. The adjustment made things look unreal, made the darkness stretch in places it shouldn’t have stretched. It made hairy arms out of branches.

There were no hairy arms, though. There wasn’t even a whisper of howl.

“Stupidity in spades,” Samantha said from somewhere inside me. “There’s no medication for that, you know?”

I clawed at the ground, trying desperately to find my shotgun. But the darkness was thick and heavy, like I was under icy black water; I couldn’t see anything. I tried to feel it out, but to my numb fingers, everything felt cold and smooth. My fingers finally closed over the barrel though, and I held the gun against my chest. I sat there, my back pressed hard against the tree trunk — so hard that the indentations from the bark would linger for hours.

Numbness like I had never felt climbed through me. It had already taken my fingers and hands, my toes and feet. Now it worked on my nose.

Still, there was no sound except for some pestering owl off in the distance. I waited to hear Bigfoot’s bellow again. I waited to feel her sticky breath against my skin.

Now and again — just as I would start to let my guard down, it seemed — I would hear the faintest hint of her. And again, my body would go tight.

I tried to smell her. In any respectable Bigfoot legend, the animal stinks to high heaven — I couldn’t smell anything but cold. I had given up trying to see her. To my eyes, everything looked like her.



Then, about an hour before dawn, the howl came full force again. And now I did piss my pants. I screamed right back in a high, waspy voice. A sharp wind tangled my hair and ran through the trees. And I pulled the trigger on my shotgun. There was a soft, dry snap, like a tree branch splintering in two. A misfire.

And suddenly I knew the howling. It wasn't Bigfoot. It wasn't a bear, or a cougar, or a moose. It was that damn tree, that odd-looking tree. The wind had caught in it and gotten all riled up, making those howling noises.

I sat, still shaking, dropping the shotgun down onto my legs.

My last thought before falling asleep was funny; only the stupidest of bats would hide in that tree. And Samantha's voice came to me again, "So, I guess if you were a bat, that's where you'd be." She followed that remark with a little laugh, and I laughed, too. Then — abruptly as anything if I remember it right — I fell asleep again.

I still jittered the next morning though. Snow tumbled from the sky and frosty piss clung to my jeans. And when Teddy found me, he said that I looked like I had seen a ghost, like I had seen Bigfoot.

The snowflakes melted on Teddy's nose, but seemed right at home on mine. My nose would be fine though. So would my fingers. The doctors would be able to save everything except the pinkie toe on my right foot.

"God, Frank," Teddy said, "Samantha's so freaking worried. You're lucky I'm a better tracker than you." A pause, then: "Did you see her?"

He was all talk that morning. I wasn't: I shook my head, no.

"Are you sure?"

As if I wasn't. What kind of a question was that? *Was I sure?* Of course I was sure. The idiot didn't even notice the tree.

"So what did you see?" he asked, eyes as bright as lamps.

"You don't need to know."

Not as  
it May  
Seem,  
art by  
Aaron  
Wilder



# Color, Forms and Family

Brenda Boboige

July, 1976. My five-year-old self sits at the backyard picnic table, floating on a sea of green grass. Sap from a hovering pine tree drips like thick sugar rain on my cheap timber island. My spindly legs dangle from a shaky plank of bench as I open the veritable treasure chest in front of me.

*My mother handed me the box after dinner, told me to go outside, go play, stay away while she and Dad talked.*

As the lid tips off the flimsy box, a toxic mix, reminiscent of Mylar balloon and pleather shoes, blows through the air. This plasticity overcomes other neighborhood smells of burning leaves and bar-b-ques. Nothing covers the hundreds of shapes at my fingertips. Red triangles, yellow circles, green squares, blue rectangles. My new Colorforms set, my new friends, cut-out to play with me, cut-outs to play a part in my own private masterpiece.

*I hear voices rising through screened windows. The only word I can make out so far is 'bitch.'*

A 9" x 12" coated-cardboard frame sits, blank, ready to stick with my ideas. I pick at the corner of a green square, pry it from its backing. It takes three tries before the piece sits straight on the board. A home must start with a good foundation.

*"You're a crazy bastard. Your father was a jealous asshole, and so are you. He sent your mother to an early grave, and now you're trying to do the same to me."*

A red triangle for the roof, a green rectangle for the chimney.

*A plate smashes, a glass shatters. My mother screams.*

My house has no windows and one secret door. No one hears what I say; no one gets in unless I say it's okay.

*Heavy footsteps shake the walls and chase each other up steps. From the second-floor landing, Dad spits, "I'll kill you, whore." He always goes for the throat.*

Thin rectangular boxes create my new, two-dimensional existence, stiff and blue.  
*Silence.*

I give myself two eyes and a nose, no ears.

*A thunder cloud of pounds, Dad on the bedroom door.*

In the upper, right-hand corner, I attach a yellow circle. I want the sun to shine on me.

*Mom always outruns him, locks herself in the bedroom. She waits until his ranting stops, until he gives up trying to break down the door, until he leaves. Then, sometimes for hours, we sit there in the dark.*

I try to bend a tiny scrap of the vinyl into a smile, but neither the cut-out, nor my imagination, is that pliable. Both of my faces freeze. We stare at each other, waiting for my father to go, waiting for me to clear the board.

*A car door slams, an engine revs, a tire squeals.*

I peel myself off, pick myself up.

*My family forms an arrow, pointed towards dead end.*

I ask myself, ‘why do they stick together,’ as I head towards the house, once again, to pick up the pieces.

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# International Date Line

Magdalena Hentel

The brochure in Julie’s hand was bright and glossy. “Finest Travel Experience,” it said, and “Visit the Land Down Under!” People in bathing suits rubbed elbows with exotic animals and birds. Even the font, with its looping e’s and o’s, lured with the promise of pleasure.

“Matt?”

Matt’s knees were drawn up and positioned slightly at an angle; economy class wasn’t kind to people over six feet tall. He tapped his pencil against the reports spread out in his lap.

“Look at this, Matt: they have a 1888 racing cutter at the maritime museum. That sounds like something you’d love.”

“Mhm.”

“We could go see it. Then the Opera House, of course. And the zoo.”

Matt’s pencil stopped tapping and crossed a series of lines through figures on a graph. His brows were drawn in concentration, his hairline, once straight and even, now dipping and curving like an irregular seaboard. Julie felt a twinge of strangeness at not having previously been struck by the extent of this change in landscape. But it had been a while since they had sat in such proximity for so long.

“We could go to some nice restaurants, now that we can afford it,” she said. “Wouldn’t be like last time. I bet you the seafood’s just... Matt?”

“Mhm.”

“Matt, are you listening? When will we talk about this, after we land?”

“What?” Matt woke from his trance. “Relax, Jules. There’s plenty of time.” He bent to his report again.

Julie closed the pamphlet and stuffed it into the seat pocket in front of her, next to the emergency evacuation procedures. Outside the window, the sun illuminated the clouds below with a bright, unearthly serenity. The scene looked the way she had once imagined heaven to be: an endless expanse of white, untouched perfection. If she were to jump, she thought, the clouds would cradle her, hold her. She turned her eyes away and pulled down the plastic shade.

On the armrest beside her, Matt’s elbow was a jutting, aggressive thing. Julie felt her stomach tighten. The drinks cart came trundling along just in time.

“Something to drink?”

She adjusted her tray. "Wine for me. White, please."

Manicured hands unscrewed the lid of the tiny bottle, poured the yellowish liquid into a plastic glass. The flight attendant leaned over with Julie's wine, twisting his hips to avoid the napping woman in the aisle seat and Matt with his mountain of papers. His uniform was crisp despite the many hours already spent in the air, his cologne strong and sharp.

"Thank you." Julie breathed in the unfamiliar smell, redolent of freedom and duty-free shopping; nodded at the tanned face. But the flight attendant was already brandishing his fold-out smile at the people in the next row.

Julie sipped her wine. "Matt—"

Matt's shoulders jerked in annoyance. "Quit it, Jules, will you? I don't have much more to do, honest. And I want to finish before we get there. Said I'd e-mail the results by Friday."

"Sure, okay."

She leaned her head back, closed her eyes, and imagined the air pressure in the cabin dropping suddenly, people being sucked out of their seats, Matt's papers flying every which way. The morbid satisfaction of dwelling on this picture was pleasantly absorbing, but soon wore off.

Shivering, she pulled her sweater tighter around her; the circulated air in the plane was cold. Though it had likely been through hundreds of pairs of lungs by now, its touch on her skin was as impersonal as if it had come out of a laboratory.

"Ladies and gentlemen," a voice floated over their heads. "The captain would like to inform you that we have just crossed the International Date Line. The current date is Friday, November 17. Please adjust your watches accordingly."

All around, passengers dutifully began to raise their wrists and nudge up their sleeves. Julie hesitated and, seeing Matt gather up his papers, leaned against his shoulder.

"How about that, we just lost a whole day."

"We'll get it back." His voice, as usual, was unperturbed.

"I know. But isn't it curious to see a whole day just disappear?"

Matt slipped half his papers into an attaché case, closed it, and managed to shove it under his seat without dislodging the pile still on his knees. Then he looked at Julie, eyes narrowed sceptically. "How old are you?"

"I'm twenty-eight, thank you very much, and you're just jealous because you've lost your enthusiasm."

"You mean I've matured."

"No, you've grown crotchety and cantankerous."

"Cantankerous." Matt exhaled. For a moment he said nothing, then the corners of his mouth began inching up in a half-smile.

Julie felt herself relax. "Right."

"That's a big word."

"Oh, shut up."

"Make me." He grinned.

Their hands were touching now, Matt's fingertips rubbing Julie's palm. The

hairs on his forearms were raised; he was probably cold, too. Julie ran her hand up his arm, to his shoulder, resting her fingers on his neck.

“Remember our first trip to Australia?” she said.

“Sure. Backpacks, hostels, sleeping at the airport while waiting for the standby flight...”

“It was a wonderful trip!”

“I never said it wasn’t. An exciting way to meet and hook up, anyway.”

She smiled. “Do you remember on the flight back, when we...”

Matt’s eyes locked with hers, and suddenly it was as if they were alone in a room.

“Yeah.”

Julie leaned over and whispered in his ear, “Do you want to do it again?”

“What, now?”

“Yes, now.”

“But, Jules, the plane’s full of people, and—”

“So? It was last time, too.”

“Right. I guess it was.”

Matt gave one of his sheepish smiles, and Julie felt herself gripped by a memory. The way they had held each other and kissed, unwilling to wait until landing, the novelty of touch sharp and potent. Matt’s skinny hips and warm hands, and how the tiny space in the airplane bathroom seemed to expand around them until it was no longer a constraint but a buffer, protecting them and binding them closer together.

“Let’s go,” she said and tugged at Matt’s hand. He rose awkwardly and stacked his reports on the seat. They squeezed past the napping woman.

The plane was full. Snatches of conversation spilled into the aisle, eyes followed them as they walked past. It had been like this the last time too, no doubt, but somehow this time the scrutiny mattered a lot more.

“Jules.” Matt stopped by the door to the lavatory, looking uncertain.

“Oh, come on, Matt...”

“I really don’t know about this. Can’t we wait until we get there? The hotel room would be a lot more comfortable.”

“I don’t want to wait.”

“Why not?”

“I just don’t, that’s all.” Julie could hear her voice going shrill. She knew she was being unreasonable, but how could she explain it had to be here and now? The door to the bathroom beckoned like a talisman.

“It’ll be fine,” she said. “I’ll go in first, then you walk around a bit and come back when no one’s looking.”

Matt stuffed his hands in his pockets and hunched his shoulders. He said nothing.

“Matt?”

“All right, all right.”

The curtain swung behind him as he disappeared into the business class compartment. Julie pressed the latch and pushed open the door.

The bathroom was just like any other airplane lavatory: sterile-looking, utilitarian and tiny. And yet its moulded plastic walls seemed to embrace Julie as she sat on

top of the toilet lid. The shiny sink fixtures reflected the light with an optimistic glint, the paper towels in their dispenser looked crisp and a little rough. She had an urge to press her cheek to them and relish their texture.

After a few minutes, she heard a soft knock on the door and let Matt in. There was no room for two people to stand apart in such a small space; immediately they were pressed together in a forced intimacy.

“Any trouble?”

“No.” Matt looked down at her from his lanky height. “So, how do you want to do this?”

“Um... quickly might be a good idea.”

“Right.”

He put his hands on Julie’s hips and leaned closer. She moved to accommodate him, and felt the toilet seat dig into her leg as the muscles in her back strained. He swayed, tried rearranging his feet, straightened up.

“This is difficult. How’d we manage last time?”

“On the sink.” She smiled at the memory. “Although the layout might have been different. Another airline, you know.”

The rim of the sink was too high to easily scramble up on, and it was splattered with water. She grabbed a few paper towels and wiped up the mess, feeling slightly put out.

“Move over a bit, so I can get a foothold,” she said, and used the toilet to hoist herself up. Fighting to keep her balance, she wrapped her legs around Matt and kissed him.

Matt’s mouth tasted of stale coffee. His hands hovered for a while, then clumsily reached under Julie’s skirt.

She flinched. “Matt.”

“What?”

“I know we’re in a hurry, but... you could at least touch my breasts or something.”

Matt’s hand retreated from under the flower-patterned cotton and cupped Julie’s left breast. It stroked, once, twice. Then it just sort of lay there. Annoyed, Julie tried to move, to arch her back a bit. The last time they had done this, they had needed no stage management.

“You could act like you mean it, you know,” she said.

“Damn it, Julie!” Matt broke contact and stepped back. The withdrawal of his touch felt so abrupt that she almost toppled to the floor. “Do you want to do this or not?”

“I do!” She took a deep breath. It was true; she did want this, more than she could easily explain. Only it didn’t seem to be turning out right. Once, this cramped space had nestled them in their own private universe, now the metal that touched her skin felt hard and cold. “I’m sorry,” she said.

Once again, they kissed. It still felt off, but to mention that now would have dredged up matters far too troublesome to be allayed with a simple apology. Julie closed her eyes instead, willing herself to focus on the moment, and stroked the front of Matt’s jeans.

He moved closer. She tugged at the button and zipper, slipped her hand inside. His skin was warm, the trail of hair soft and private. As always, Julie had the impression of intruding into the lair of some untamed, fragile animal, to coax it out of its sleep.

Only, this time, nothing happened.

She curled her hand around him and stroked a few times, gently, then harder. Still nothing. Matt's mouth was slightly open; they weren't kissing anymore, more like breathing each other's breath. His eyes were shut tight and his forehead screwed up in concentration.

Julie's thighs tightened around Matt's hips, pulling him closer, as if the intensity in her body could be communicated to his, to the part of him that needed it. She sped up her hand's movements.

"It'll be fine, Jules," Matt said, his tone unnaturally bright. "Just give me a minute."

But the minute, passing tensely, served only to turn Julie and Matt from participants to spectators. Julie could feel the mirror at her back reflecting their actions, could sense the tableau grow increasingly ridiculous. They were both self-conscious now, touch almost too awkward to bear.

"Stop, Jules. Just stop."

Matt stilled Julie's hand and turned away. Quickly, he did up his jeans and straightened his shirt. Julie reached out to touch his shoulder.

"Don't." He shrugged her hand away.

"But Matt, it makes no difference, it happens—"

"I said, don't! What part of that didn't you fucking understand?" He spat out his words. He was looking straight at her now.

Julie felt cold, though not from fear. Rather, the chill had something of amazement in it, of being let in on a great and awful mystery, like the moment long ago it had first dawned on her that she, too, would one day die.

Matt's fists were clenched, his face flushed—and Julie knew with a certainty transcending reason that this wasn't in anger or hatred, but in self-defence. His body was all sharp angles, discouraging touch, and the look he gave her held an unyielding core of individuality: alien and inaccessible. Suddenly she felt like a character in a play, grappling with a door that will never open—for the simple reason that it isn't a door at all, merely the image of one, painted on wood.

Matt left, and Julie had enough presence of mind to turn the lock lest some passenger with a full bladder barge in. She glanced around, feeling stunned. The lavatory looked exactly as it had ten minutes before: plastic, self-contained. The ventilation unit hissed as it sucked out used air and pumped recycled air back in. The current moved through her hair, probing her scalp with its institutional touch.

Slowly, she lowered herself until she was sitting on the floor, hugging her legs to her chest. She laid her head on her knees and rubbed her cheek against them; they felt warm and soft, and reassuringly familiar. If she closed her eyes and concentrated, she could hear her heart pumping blood cells through her body. Round and round they flowed, pushed along by the rhythmic pulse of life: an unbroken circle, the only world that would ever truly be her own. She wrapped her arms around herself and squeezed tightly.

# Stepping Out

Bob Rashkow

"I guess it's that time again," Evelyn heard Marshall say from the bathroom.

"I guess so, dear," she replied. Evelyn was carefully dabbing cold cream on her face. It felt really nice. She wondered if she should do this more often than just on Saturday nights, when she and her husband of 43 years would step out.

The jar was securely closed. Next she selected a beautiful old gown, still in perfectly good shape, passed down to her by her mother. It was a chiffon, frilly piece, just the right touch for their evening together. Evelyn marveled that it could still fit her after all these years; she decided it was a miracle. At our age, we need all the miracles we can get, she laughed to herself.

She checked herself in the full-length mirror. Her hair. She went for the blue brush inside the drawer. Patiently, she sat before the mirror and made smooth strokes, brushing and combing until she was absolutely certain it looked the way she wanted it. Soon Marshall would be gently knocking on the door.

Now, a bit of make-up—nothing special, no, just a touch of pancake, to help smooth out the wrinkles. After all, Saturday evening was a sacred occasion, and everything needed to be just as right as rain. There! She didn't think she could possibly look any better.

Marshall adjusted his bowtie in the bathroom mirror. It was his favorite black bowtie. He had four or five of them, he was never sure which, but he liked this one the best; he'd had it the longest time. It still looked fine, once he dusted it off. He checked his white hair and brushed it again, watching each curl closely. Should he put on the cuff links? No, perhaps he would leave them tonight. Only Evelyn would notice if he was wearing them or not, and she really didn't care.

He looked down at his newly buffed brown loafers. Almost perfect. Stepping out was always something he and Evelyn looked forward to, as they only did it once a week.

One more check, one more quick glance. Marshall flicked off the bathroom light and walked down the hall to their bedroom. He gave a light knock and there was Evelyn at the door, looking more beautiful than ever. "Oh, sweetheart. You look so nice!" she gasped, giving Marshall a quick peck on the cheek.

"You do, too, hon," he said, returning the compliment. "Are we ready?"

"I suppose so!" Evelyn twirled around in the gown one last time, checked in the mirror again, and finally turned out the light in the bedroom. They clasped hands and went down the stairs, taking their time, because after all, they had plenty of time to get where they would be going.

They paused for a brief moment at the front door.

"How far do you think we'll get?" Evelyn asked her husband just as he moved to unlock the first bolt on the door.

"As far as they let us get, my dear," Marshall replied. He winked at her and



unlocked the inner and outer locks.

They opened the screen door and stepped out onto the porch. The night was cool and crisp with the sound of crickets. Their quiet, suburban street was dark, and lights shone in many of the surrounding houses.

Marshall and Evelyn stood for a moment, breathing in the cool, fresh air. The two waited there, content now just to look around at the silent lane. They drank in the scene, and Evelyn was about to ask Marshall if maybe they should start walking toward the bus stop.

It was then that the first two neighbors approached the house. They were children, of course, and they came as close to the porch as they dared. Marshall glanced at Evelyn knowingly. She smiled sadly back at him. Maybe, if no one else came—

But the signal had already been delivered. Several of the children's parents were now walking quickly toward the house, their attention focused on the elderly couple standing serenely on their porch.

As if on cue, everyone else on the block who happened to be home at that time began coming, walking toward Marshall and Evelyn's house, giggling or whispering, stopping along their driveway or on the adjacent sidewalk. Half of the gathering crowd were children and teenagers. There were, however, many adults, the majority of them somewhat younger than Evelyn or Marshall. The couple waited, standing proud on their porch, not looking at the gathering group.

"Weirdos!" A yell pierced the quiet night air.

"Cave people!" "Creeps!"

Marshall and Evelyn glanced at one another, but didn't say a word. They stood there, heads held high, and waited, waited until the crowd would part, would return to their homes and whatever it was they were doing before.

After a few more minutes and a few more hurled epithets, the crowd reluctantly began to scatter. Children were encouraged to run along home by their parents or caretakers. All of the adults began walking away, a few of them pausing to stare back at Evelyn and Marshall. Finally only a few small children remained. Marshall took Evelyn's hand.

One of the little boys called out in a high-pitched, hoarse shriek, "Old geezers!" He ran away, followed by his friend, until there were just two little girls left, slowly walking backwards down the driveway toward the sidewalk, not taking their eyes off the couple, until they broke and ran for it.

Their neighbors gone, Marshall held on to Evelyn's hand. He said quietly to her, "Have we had enough?"

"Yes," Evelyn answered, looking down.

"OK, let's go back in." Marshall opened the screen door and held it for Evelyn. She went on upstairs while Marshall locked both locks and bolted the door. He joined her upstairs to change into their night clothes. Their Saturday night ritual was over. It was time to begin another week. No more stepping out until next Saturday night.

# Our Leader

Daniel Beaudoin

I parted the bluish-gray folds of dawn and squinting my eyes stepped into the sea of acidic brilliance that flooded the lobby inside. The aftertaste of my four a.m. coffee slithered up from my bowels and into my throat like the slippery eel, and I fumbled at my shirt pocket to reassure myself that my little orange pill was there, just in case. How I dreaded these meetings.

“Today,” I promised myself, “yes today, I will make it through the meeting without it.”

We were scheduled to meet our Leader, a megalomaniac and power crazed shit, a brutal manipulator of human sentiment, raper of souls and pillager of hope, fumbling his way like a blind beggar through the wasteland of his barren soul.

Nodding at the sleepy security guards to my left, I took a deep breath and began the march across the seemingly vast stretch of marble that spanned the lobby like a shiny sheet of delicate crystal. A digital chime heralded the arrival of the lift and I picked up my pace as the doors ahead of me hissed open, joining the rest of the group as we squeezed into the narrow and suffocating confines of the lift.

A short stutter, and up we went, as in slow motion, up the nine floors of the monumental steel and concrete edifice. Nine floors of perfunctory greetings accompanied by the usual bullshit and feigned interest. Fuck, how these miserable bureaucrats disgusted me. “Yes the weekend was great, thank you, “I hope that you drop dead, thank you.” “Still strangers after all these years,” I thought to myself, as we shuffled for space in the cubicle.

Finally the elevator coughed us out, and we made our way through the long corridor to the Offices of the Wise One, as the faces of the former Selected Few ogled us from their photographs on the walls. I lagged slightly behind, fighting the burning sensations in my stomach, and tried to cancel out the noises in my head. I contemplated the group’s pathetic vigor, they too only just barely disguised their growing malaise. “Maybe we are the new white color proletariat,” I thought to myself, “working for masters that monopolize our dreams and hopes, the most precious possessions we may still have?”

Our Leader’s personal aid (Beatrice her name, would you fucking believe it, like the one from Dante’s *Inferno*) conducted a ceremonious roll call, demanded that we prepare ourselves, reminded us that we were to be seated in our assigned seats, gently opened the doors and ushered us in.

There He was, seated behind his meticulously tidy desk. I forced a grimace as I sat down directly in front of him, and hoped that my thoughts were safe. “You inflated bag of hot wind, dragging us into his office at the crack of dawn, first thing on a Monday,” I dared think. I was reminded of Clinton’s answer, when asked by his biographer “Why did you let Monica chew on your cigar?” He reportedly answered, for the worst possible reason, “because I could.” Well, the only difference of course is that Clinton is

Clinton and this fat fuck is just a monolithic bully sitting there as if he were God's gift to humanity. "Jesus," I thought to myself, "is it possible that he is oblivious to the disdain and fear in the room, I mean you could cut the air with a baseball bat it is so thick."

The meeting ran its predestined course, the sycophantic shit to my left, the one with the yellow flaccid face of a junkie in rehab, nodded like an ostrich on amphetamines at everything the Enlightened one said, was trying to earn his moment in the sun at the expense of some other poor ashen faced sod sitting next to him. "May flatterers be steeped in human excrement", I thought, and thanked my literature teacher at school for that one. The rest of the participants sat rigidly in their chairs, perched like uniformed toy soldiers in their electric chairs, barely breathing and wishing they were undetectable.

"Yes of course sir, you are absolutely right sir, no of course we are not here only to drink coffee, what I meant was.....".

"Open your fucking ears and listen to what I am saying, you primitive moron, you may actually learn something," is what I meant. Miraculously I managed not to ruffle any feathers and even allowed the Leader the illusion of acumen. I felt the eel stir in my stomach; revulsion crept up on me again for wasting precious resources of energy and creativity on trying to pacify this intimidating corporate henchman.

The meeting was coming to a close, fortunately this time it was the folks to my right who were threatened with defenestration, reminded that they were a bunch of useless imbeciles; I had survived the hour unscathed. Hoisting myself from my seat, I bade farewell to the Heap of Ceremonious Trappings of Rank and Panache, and led the pack out of the door, past Beatrice and back to the welcoming elevators.

The doors whispered behind me, and I stepped out onto the lobby floor. The expanse of marble seemed more opaque now, the huge glass sliding doors almost at arm's reach. I took a deep breath, re-assured myself that my orange companion was still in my shirt pocket, proud of myself that I had not used it to pacify the eel, which continued to hibernate in a distant corner of my intestines. I traversed the lobby and exited the building into the boiling furnace of the morning.



Him X3, art by Cheryl Townsend



# children churches & daddies

the **UN**religious,  
**NON**family-oriented  
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<b>Produced By</b>	Scars Publications and Design
<b>Editorial Offices</b>	Children, Churches and Daddies; Scars Publications and Design 829 Brian Court, Gurnee, IL 60031-3155 USA
<b>Internet</b>	ccandd96@scars.tv ▶ <a href="http://scars.tv">http://scars.tv</a>
<b>Publishers/Designers Of</b>	Children, Churches and Daddies magazine; cc-d Ezines; Scars Internet Radio (SIR); The Burning mini poem books; God Eyes mini poem books; The Poetry Wall Calendar; The Poetry Box; The Poetry Sampler; Mom's Favorite Vase Newsletters; Reverberate Music Magazine; Down In The Dirt magazine; Freedom and Strength Press forum; assorted chapbooks and books; music, poetry compact discs; live performances of songs and readings
<b>Sponsors Of</b>	past editions; chapbooks; books; past Poetry Chapbook Contest; past poetry book Contest; past Prose Chapbook Contest; past prose book Contest; Poetry Calendar Contest; Editor's Choice Award (writing and web sites); Collection Volumes

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• **Children, Churches and Daddies** (founded 1993) has been written and researched by political groups and writers from the United States, Canada, Australia, Belgium, England, India, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Malta, Norway, Pakistan, Russia and Turkey (as well as input from both Japan and Slovenia). Regular features provide coverage of environmental, political and social issues via news and philosophy as well as fiction and poetry, an academic information and education source. Children, Churches and Daddies is the leading magazine for this combination of information, education and entertainment.

• **Children, Churches and Daddies** (ISSN 1068-5154) is published monthly by **Scars Publications and Design**, Janet Kuypers.

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