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Issue #02



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Editorial

We're Back! It's been a few months since we talked last but in the world of Used Gravitrons things have been wonderful.

The Response to Issue #01 was fantastic and we've gathered some really great content to do it for you again.

Thanks to all the contributors and thank you for reading.

- Shea Newton

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Dream (a song)

by Tim Andreae

Once in a dream I chased a girl up three elevators to the roof of the empire state building

There I was, no girl and I was slipping, holding on the wrong side of the yellow caution tape. It was stretching in my hand. I've left my pulse somewhere but with a pair of scissors I'd find my pulse again. In one snip of the caution tape I will ride this building down to the ground. Infinitesimally connecting dots I rise and begin my day. The girl of my dream is still far away.



Two on Two

by Stephen Schwegler

“Proverbial Knives” was playing on the stereo when three zombies burst through upper left portion of the door. Splintered wood flew across the room impaling the boom box.

“Aw hell!” said Eric, still trying to barricade the lower half of the entrance to the storeroom all the while trying not to get bitten. The zombies took notice and began reaching for him.

“We have to make a run for it,” said Nat, from the opposite wall. “We can’t afford to stay here any longer.”

“Errr...Uhhhh...Mrrrrr....” said the zombies, leaning through the newly created hole in the upper left corner of the door.

“I agree,” said Eric. “Let me just grab the disc. Come over here and take my place while I get the CD.”

“Why do you have to get it? I’m standing right here. I can just walk over and take it out.”

“Yeah, but it’s mine. Khalid Quesada gave it to me himself. He even signed the cover.”

“Still doesn’t mean I should switch places with you. And why did you even put it on? You know they’re attracted to sounds.”

“Didn’t know when we’d find another stereo. Plus I had the beginning of this song stuck in my head for the last few days. If I didn’t hear the rest of it soon I’d probably start eating my own brain.”

“How would you...”

“I could. Trust me.”

The zombies kept making noises.

Eric changed the subject, “You look a little tired, Nat. Why not have a seat over here by the door? There’s a nice breeze coming in from the crack by the floor. It’s not that bad if you can get over the zombie smell.”

“I could just sit right here.”

“But the breeze!”

“Fuck your breeze.”

“Brrrrraaaaaainnnnnnnnsssss.....” said the zombies.

“Fine. You get the CD, but please, put it in the sleeve. I don’t want it to get scratched.”

“There.” said Nat, as she slid the disc back in and threw it at Eric. “I don’t know why you’re so worried about it. It’s not like we’re going to find another working stereo any time soon.”

“You’re probably right, but what if we do? Then you’ll be really sorry you didn’t bring your so called desert island disc from the last hideout we had. You were all like, ‘Oh, we’re not going to find another one. What’s the point?’”

More unintelligible sounds were still coming from the zombies.

“Yeah yeah. I know what I said. Am I sad that I can’t torture you with Lady Gaga anymore? Of course. Am I going to lose sleep over it? No. What I am going to lose sleep over is getting eaten by those zombies gnawing on the door.”

“Okay. We’ll move. Any idea where we’re going?”

“The back alley looks kind of deserted. We could probably make it through that and across the street to the high school.”

“Isn’t that where you went?”

“Yes, but let’s not talk about it. I had to wear headgear.”

“Ah, gotcha. I had leg braces. Tough times.”

“Kids are bastards.”

“They still are, Nat.”

“Enough talking, we should run before they make it down to your shoulder.”

Nat dragged over a garbage can to wedge against the door so that they’d at least have a little time to make a run for it. They ran out of the storeroom and through the alley without incident. They stopped for a moment when they came across a zombie lying in the road only to find its head caved in.

“I think there are people in here.” said zombie #1, in its own undead language to the other zombies.

“Well, we did see them run in a couple hours ago,” said zombie #2. “You don’t need to be a rocket scientist to know they’re in there.”

“I used to be a rocket scientist,” said zombie #3 proudly.

“No one cares.” said zombie #2.

“Really wish we would have thought to knock down the door a little sooner.” said zombie #1. “Let’s get in there. I’m starving”

“Hey, yeah! *Why* didn’t we do this sooner?” asked zombie #3.

“Because you suggested it,” answered zombie #2.

The zombies smashed their hands against the door repeatedly, eventually breaking through. They jammed their arms through the hole, trying to grab any part of Eric.

“We’re almost in!” exclaimed zombie #1.

“Yes, but we’re not feasting yet.” said zombie #2.

“I call the girl.” said zombie #3.

“You can’t. ‘Call the girl,’ you idiot.” said zombie #2. “There are two of them and three of us. We have to split them evenly. We said we’d do this fair. We have to stick to the chart.”

“Yeah, we all agreed to stick with the chart.” said zombie #1.

“But I don’t like the taste of boy brains,” whined zombie #3.

“Well that’s too bad then, isn’t it?” mocked zombie #2. “We all know that the female frontal lobe is the tastiest piece of the brain around and you had it last time. Now you’re getting the occipital and a third of the cerebellum. Speaking of, we should probably scare these meat sacks a little.”

“Good idea,” agreed zombie #1.

The three of them pressed their faces into the hole and said,

“Brrrraaaaainnnnnnnnnsssss...” in English.

“I don’t think they’re that scared of us.” said zombie #1.

“Nuts to that.” said zombie #2. “You guys, munch on the door.”

“This door tastes pretty good,” mumbled zombie #1.

“Yeah, it’s not bad.” confirmed zombie #3. “I think I ate a termite. You know, not the worst thing I’ve eaten.”

“Hey,” said zombie #1. “I’m almost to the guy. I can smell his shoulder. I’m going to chomp the hell out of that thing. Hey, wait, what’s happening?”

“Aw man!” said zombie #2. “They brought over a garbage can and swapped out the dude for it.”

“Dicks!” exclaimed zombie #3.

"No way I'm eating a garbage can." said zombie # 1.

"We're not going to you moron." insisted zombie #2. "We'll get this door open and then we'll have our meal."

"I hate to burst your bubble, but it looks like they're gone," informed zombie # 1.

"Son of a bitch," remarked zombie #2. "There must be another exit. Don't worry. We'll find them."

"Uh, guys," said zombie #3. "My foot fell off."

- - -

Eric and Nat had made it through the alley and to the school. The front door was locked, but they managed to make it inside by squeezing through a broken window. Some of the glass found its way through Eric's pants, cutting his leg.

"Dammit!" yelled Eric, collapsing to the floor.

"What?" asked Nat, bending down to meet him.

"I think I ripped my pants."

"Oh shit, you did. Your leg's bleeding!"

"Yeah yeah, but look at my pants! There's a huge rip in them now. I can't walk around like this."

"Seriously? You're going to whine about your pants? Your leg is gushing blood."

"This is the only pair I have. Give me yours."

"No! You're like a foot taller than me and this is the only pair I have."

"But then it would look okay. Both my pant legs would be the same length and then you could cut the good leg to match the ripped one and have them be even and at a good length for you."

"But my pants would look like capris on you."

"Ah. Yes. Well then... Forget I mentioned it. Ho-ly shit!" said Eric, looking at the decorations on the walls.

"What?" asked Nat, turning around in fear.

"You never told me you went to a Catholic school."

"Yeah, what of it?"

"Uh..."

"WHAT?"

"You don't still have the uniform, do you?"

"No."

“Ah.”

“Yeah.”

“So.”

“Uh huh.”

“A little awkward.”

“I’m not the pervert.”

“Right.”

“You are.”

“Yeah, I got that.”

- - -

The zombies emerged from the storeroom into the back alley. Zombies # 1 and #2 lead the way while zombie #3 dragged behind, what with the one foot and all.

“Couldn’t you guys just, I don’t know, find the two humans and bring them back here so we can split them? I don’t know how much farther I can walk before the other foot falls off.”

“No,” said zombie #2. “We’re not a delivery service. We find food, we eat it then. We don’t bring it back to you.”

“But my foot!”

“Screw your foot,” said zombie # 1. “And if the other one falls off screw that one too.”

“Yeah,” said zombie #2. “And if that happens you’ll have to crawl. We’re not carrying you. Let’s see that rocket science help you now.”

“Fine,” said a defeated zombie #3.

“I think they probably went in that school over there,” said zombie # 1, pointing off in the distance with a broken finger.

“Most likely,” agreed zombie #2. “We better move it. Don’t want to lose them again.”

“Crap,” said zombie #3 angrily.

- - -

The deafening silence of the school uniform debacle was broken by a thud on the second floor of the school. Eric and Nat stood up and went to investigate.

“Another survivor?” asked Eric.

“Probably just another lost and confused zombie,” said Nat. “They’re always

getting stuck in closets and the like.”

They reached the second floor. Most of the windows were boarded up making it much darker than the first. It looked as if the sounds were coming from the nurse’s office.

“Shit!” exclaimed Eric. “It’s the nurse! She could probably sew my pants back together!”

Eric burst in and tripped over a zombie lying on the floor. The zombie turned its head towards Eric.

“Eric!” yelled Nat.

She ran in after him and jumped on the neck of the monster.

“You okay?” she asked.

“You popped its top! That was awesome.”

“Thought it might work. Looked like it’s been in here for a while so I figured its flesh would be kind of weak.”

“And now I’m a little grossed out.”

“Baby.”

“So... No nurse?”

“I think she’d have said something by now.”

Nat helped Eric up and they explored the office. They wrapped Eric’s leg with gauze, jammed their backpacks full of painkillers and more medical supplies and walked back downstairs.

“Maybe we should try to find the gym.” suggested Eric. “Could have baseball bats or something we can use to help fend off some of the things.”

“Good idea.”

Zombie #3 pulled himself along the ground, following its two associates, after losing its second foot. Zombies #1 and #2 reached the front door of the school, #3 would eventually make it.

“Really?” asked zombie #1. “We have to break down another door?”

“Maybe there’s another way in,” said zombie #2.

They shambled around to the back of the school. Zombie #3 finally made it to the front door.

“Fuck this,” said zombie #3.

He positioned himself on the steps of the school.

"I'll just wait here in case someone shows up. Maybe if I stay still enough they'll think I'm dead and then I can attack when they try to walk passed me. Yeah, that's a good plan."

- - -

Eric and Nat found the gym without a zombie sighting. They entered through the double doors and saw something they hadn't seen in months. A two on two game of basketball.

"Holy shit!" screamed Eric.

Nat just stood there with her mouth open.

"Hey! Who the fuck are you?" yelled one of the players.

"Uh... We were just wandering around and came inside for a breather."

"Yeah, well you breathed so now you should be going," said another one of the players.

"There're zombies out there, fucker," shouted Nat. "You're really going to throw us out?"

"You really think we should throw them out?" asked a third player.

"Yes," said the first player. "They were probably followed so now we're going to have a problem."

"As far as I know," said Eric, "we weren't followed. We actually found a live zombie on the second floor. Nat took care of that one for you."

To which Nat responded, "You're welcome."

"For real?" asked the first player. "Shit, didn't know about that one. Sorry about before. You have to understand our hesitation about new people showing up. We've really got a good thing going here and don't really want outsiders messing it up. By the way, the name's Will."

"I'm Eric, that's Nat."

"Hey," said Will. "That's Dre over there, behind him is Rick, and under the hoop is Pavel."

"Hi," said the other players.

"Hey," said Eric and Nat.

"She killed one of them?" asked Dre.

"*She* did," said Nat.

“Cool.” said Dre.

“Basically popped its head right off.” asserted Eric.

“Fuck.” said a suddenly receptive Dre.

“Thanks for taking care of it.” said Rick.

“Not a problem.” said Eric.

“Well, not for me.” corrected Nat. “The klutz tripped over it first.”

Everyone besides Eric laughed hysterically.

- - -

Zombie # 1 made it around to the back entrance first. Zombie #2 arrived a couple seconds later.

“I win.” said zombie # 1, cheerfully.

“Whatever... I got my toe caught on a stick. It came out of nowhere.”

“Excuses.”

“Shut up! I lost the toe!”

“Ha!”

“So, any way inside?”

“Dude, I didn’t get here that much ahead of you. Haven’t had time to check it out.”

“Fine. Let me catch my breath and we’ll look for a way in.”

“You’re just lazy. And we don’t breathe.”

“Whatever.”

“You good?”

“Yeah.”

Zombie # 1 smashed her fist against the door. Her pinky and ring finger decided to stay behind.

“Oh come on.” said zombie # 1.

Zombie #2 collapsed in laughter.

“Smooth.” he said.

“I’d like to see you try and do better.”

“Just watch.” said zombie #2, as he beat his hands against the entry way.

Nothing happened. He continued pounding on the door.

“There’s no way I’m letting a chick get the better of me.”

“How is losing two of my fingers ‘getting the better of’ you?” asked zombie # 1.

“Just is.” he said.

“You’re just a dick.”

“Be that as it may, I’m getting this stupid thing open.”

“Hey, where’s Mr. Rocket Science?” wondered zombie # 1.

“Who knows.” said zombie #2, not really caring, but still wailing away. “He’s probably only a torso by now anyway.”

- - -

A crow had landed on zombie #3’s shoulder and proceeded to nibble at his ear.

“Son of a whore,” he moaned. “I guess it’s not all bad. Something to talk to I guess.”

The bird tore off his earlobe and flew away.

- - -

Nat and Eric left the gym with a baseball bat, a hockey stick and a bag full of dusty lawn darts.

Eric turned back around, waved to their new friends and said, “Thanks, again!”

“Any time,” yelled Will.

“Hey, watch out for those brain biters.” added Rick.

“Hey Nat,” said Dre.

Nat stopped and turned around.

“Have a little fun with those fuckers.”

“You know I will.”

Pavel waved bye.

Eric and Nat left the gym behind and looked for a way out. They went back to the room that let them in first. After poking out the window and seeing what looked like a tired zombie sitting on the front steps Nat suggested they try another exit.

“We could probably just outrun it.” suggested Eric, limbering up.

“Sure. Let’s try that. I’ll run ahead and you follow, you know, what with your cut up leg from before.”

“Yeah, I forgot about that. How much pain medication did you give me before?”

“Oh, you shouldn’t be bitching about anything for quite a while.”

“I guess that’s good. You want to look for a backdoor or something?”

- - -

Zombie #2 was still working at getting through the door while zombie # 1 looked

around the schoolyard. All of a sudden, zombie #2 stopped.

“A little help here.” he said.

“What now?” asked zombie #1, rejoining him.

“As you can see, I’ve made a hole. What sucks about this is that I seem to have gotten my hand stuck in the door.”

“You certainly showed me.”

“Oh, just shut up and help me.”

Zombie #1 tried to get zombie #2’s hand free.

“Careful,” pleaded zombie #2, “you’re going to rip it.”

“Rip what?”

“My finger off.”

“No sympathy here.”

“Wait, quiet. I think I hear something.”

“I think I hear it too,” said zombie #1, not really hearing anything, but not wanting to feel left out.

“It’s the people from before.”

“Knew we’d find them!”

“Okay,” said zombie #2. “All we need to do is get this door down and they’re ours.”

“What if they have weapons?”

“We’ll ambush them. They won’t even see it coming.”

“What about the other guy? Should we save some brains for him?”

“Footless Joe? Unless he pulls up in the next few moments he can forget abo...

AHHHH!”

A lawn dart suddenly impaled zombie #2 in the eye. Surprised by this sight, zombie #1 fell backwards while still holding onto zombie #2’s arm, successfully freeing him from the door. Well, not so much freed him from the door as freed him from his hand. They collapsed to the ground on top of each other.

“What the hell?” said an indignant zombie #2, as he picked himself up, seemingly ignoring the dart in his eye.

“Sorry. I really didn’t mean to do that.”

“How am I supposed to eat a brain with only one hand? At least you have two thumbs. Now I’ve just got the one!”

Zombie #2 took a swing at zombie #1 and missed by a few feet.

“How not to punch someone’ by Professor Depth Perception!”

“Bite me!”

All that remained of zombie #3 was his head, neck, upper torso, left arm and hand. On that hand were his middle finger and pinky.

“Any day now!” screamed zombie #3. “Getting a little hungry over here.”

“I think I found it,” called out Eric. “Looks like there’s an exit down this hall. This is the weirdest designed school I’ve ever seen.”

“Great,” said Nat. “Yeah, I got lost all the time. Eventually transferred out. Hey, do you feel bad about taking all of those painkillers and medical supplies with us? I mean, at first I didn’t because Will and his friends seemed like dicks. But since they’re actually kind of nice I feel like maybe we should go back and tell them.”

“What? No I don’t feel bad. They would have done the same thing. Plus we don’t know them that well. Ooooh, I get it.”

“Get what?”

“You want to see Dre again.”

“No, I don’t.”

“Hey, I’m not judging you. It’s fine with me if you do. We said from the beginning that we wouldn’t let this get that serious. I mean we’re escaping from zombies, that’s about as serious as it needs to be. No need to throw relationship drama on top of it.”

“Really. I don’t have a thing for Dre. Yeah, he’s hot and all, but I’m...kinda...into you.”

“Ah.”

“Was really hoping for a bigger reaction than that, Eric.”

“Oh, sorry. I’m thrilled actually. Just took me by surprise is all.”

“You sure?”

“Positive.”

“So...” said Nat.

“Wanna do it?” asked Eric.

“Right now? A little. It’s been a while, but I really think we should find some place less disgusting.”

“Okay. I guess. Let’s get out of here.”

They approached the exit. Eric reached for the doorknob, but stopped when something slammed against the other side. He leaned a little closer and heard voices.

“Err...Urrrr...Mrraaooo....” said the zombies.

“Zombies,” whispered Eric and Nat, looking at each other.

The zombies continued wailing on the door.

“Shit! Now what do we do?” asked Nat.

“Wait it out?”

“Yeah. No. Maybe hide?”

“That’s the one I meant,” said Eric.

Eric and Nat hid a few feet down the hall around a corner. They sat there waiting for the pounding to stop. Nat readied herself with the hockey stick while Eric pulled out a few lawn darts.

“You know what you’re doing with those?” asked a generally concerned Nat. “I’m not losing my new boyfriend to his own stupidity.”

“Hell yeah. I do. Finished first in the state back in grade school.”

A fist broke through the door and got stuck on the wood.

“Again with these bastards busting in,” said Nat. “I’m really getting tired of this.”

“Errrrr...Arrrrr....Mrauuuooarrrr....Brains....Errrrr....Urrrr,” said the zombies, peering through, trying to get unstuck.

“Fuckers,” said Eric, as he launched a dart through the hole. “Suck it.”

“Nice shot!”

“Thanks.”

“Now I’m totally gonna wear that uniform for you.”

“But you said...”

Zombie #3’s lower jaw had fallen off. He sat there on the step waiting for something to happen.

“You should probably take that thing out of your face,” said zombie #1.

“What if I’m making a fashion statement,” retorted zombie #2.

“Now you’re acting stupid. You’re just pissed because I only lost a couple of fingers while you lost a whole hand.”

“Yeah, well, I did put a hole in the door.”

“Also got stabbed in the eye.”

“Oh yeah? You got beat with the ugly stick.”

“Your mom!”

They started fighting, tearing each other limb from limb when the back door opened.

“The humans,” cried zombie #1. “They’re escaping!”

“Good for them. Your face won’t be,” said zombie #2, punching his stumpy arm into zombie #1’s nose.

Eric exited first with Nat trailing close behind. They were both armed with their blunt objects of choice. Nat still handling the hockey stick and Eric wielding the baseball bat.

“What the hell?” asked Eric, since he saw it first.

“Are they... doing it?” asked Nat.

“I’m not sure.”

One zombie punched the other in the face.

“That doesn’t look like doing it,” said Eric.

“Not at all,” agreed Nat. “At least we’re on the same page.”

“Ha! Yeah, that could have been a problem.”

“For the fucking.”

“Exactly.”

The crow returned to the front steps of the school and sat beside zombie #3.

Bird Lady

By Michael Lee Johnson

They call her old maid Misty, as in fog, she misses the sun.
She runs a small pet store, more for the injured and lame,
alone and half the light bulbs have burnt out.
In the backroom everything smells of dust and feathers.
The cockatoo is cuddly and named Brenda, but has bad toiletry manners.
The macaw is well hidden, and fetches a high price on the open market, called Ginger.
Misty is surrounded by wired bird cages,
jungle noises in unfamiliar places,
and sleeps on a portable cot.
When parrots or parakeets shout shrills in the night,
her eyes squint and flash out in the dark but no one sees it.
Squinting is a lonely habit.
Misty works alone and is getting old.
On a wall, near her cot, hangs a picture-
but is it Jesus, or St. Jude Thaddaeus
carrying the image of Jesus in his hand or close to his chest,
difficult to tell darkness dimmed at night.
Misty sometimes sleepwalks at night from small room to the other-
she bumps, sometimes trips and falls, her warfarin guarantees bruises.
Misty tosses conjectures: "I'm I odd, old school, or just crazy?"
Her world is eye droppers, bird feeders, poop in cages, porcelain knickknacks.
Love left Misty's life years ago, when World War II ended and so did her marriage.
As she ages everything is measure in milliliters, everything seems short and small-
medications in small dosages day by day.
Early in morning a young homeless boy knocks on the store front window
desperate for a job, he lies about credentials.
Misty desperate for help asks for no references.
Today is dim, raining outside, and old maid Misty still misses the sun.

-2009-



The Laughing Skeleton

By Kyle Hemmings

Inspector Mesh, a Cyclopiian with one roving eye, red and bleary, sitting in the center of his forehead, approached the house. Ascending the driveway that was really a bald hill, moss overshadowing the sides, he smelled the foul stench, imagined the bacteria and the fungi, the gram positive and negative, the rods and the spirochetes, as if his roving eye could shrink everything to two-dimensional refugees, unwelcome hosts.

In fact, the house, the sole spinster of a Georgian for miles, was nicknamed Limburger Hill.

He had received a telephoned report from his boss, a man he had never seen and was known as 24 In Doubt, that workers renovating the house discovered a corpse inside a rum barrel. How 24 In Doubt came upon this information, Mesh had no clue. As was always the case.

The man inside the barrel was suspected to be the artist Marco Evaristti, an artist who gained notoriety for serving meatballs fried in his own body fat and pasta cooked in his own blood. 24 In Doubt had briefed Mesh that the owner of the house, an elderly woman, Eunice Olfrygt, was in her youth obsessed with Evaristti, of whom it was rumored to have bore two penises. Evaristti was often referred to by several of his ex-loves as "the double snake." When the police questioned these women in regards to Evaristti's disappearance, they were often greeted with a sneer and a twitch.

Mesh rang the door several times. "Who might you be?" asked the old woman.

"Police," he said.

The door creaked slowly. She stared at his eye forever. Wishing to break the fascination, Mesh said, "May I come in."

"Never met a Cyclopiian face to face," she said.

She invited him to sit and have some gumbo with fishtails and opossum bones.

Behind her and under an old wicker chair, a mouse was eating a dead bird. Another made faint squeaks.

“I must search your house, Madam. I will start with the cellar. We have. . .”

She cut him off and asked what he heard about her.

His huge ball of an eye steadied on her slight frame. That same eye caused many a woman to thrash in bed from nightmares. After coupling with Mesh, they stood alone or apart, always that glassy look in their eye. Some drifted into a laughing self-destruction.

“I remember reading about the famous Morins case. Your great-uncle. You had discovered his skeleton in your closet many years after he molested you as a young girl.”

“Very good, Inspector.” She served him the gumbo but he didn’t touch it. “I see you have done your homework. You may proceed to search. But I must warn you. What you will find, you will never keep.”

He tilted his head back and regarded her queerly.

She hobbled into the kitchen and returned holding a large egg in front of him.

“This, Inspector, is an unbroken duck egg. If you put your ear to the shell, you can hear the songs of three live minnows. The question is, Inspector, just who is imprisoned by whom.”

Her smile lingered. Her eyes glittered.

Mesh excused himself and labored to the basement. There were all kinds of malodorous smells, noxious gases, old work benches, Russian dolls and ragamuffins covered in dust, yet smiling. He lit a match, chancing an explosion. After all, he couldn't see.

The room remained dark except for one area of the wall. There, a shadow seemed to beckon him, almost dancing. Mesh walked over cautiously.

He palmed sections of the rough wall, groping along crevices and indentations, hoping there was a trap door of some kind. Sure enough, the wall turned, and there, nailed to the other side was the barrel, covered by fleas and mosquitoes. Mesh suddenly pivoted around at the sound of her voice.

How did she get down without making a sound?

"It's true, Inspector. I killed him many years ago. I loved him with the fawn's heart of my youth. He bewitched me and betrayed me."

Mesh steadied his roving eye upon her figure, almost regaining the fluidity and charm of a much younger woman.

"Do you know how many mosquito bites it takes to drain a man of his blood, Inspector?"

He said nothing.

"1.2 million. I made those mosquitoes very rich. I have a way with things. Now you may arrest me, such a foolish old woman."

Mesh lifted the skeleton from the barrel. Many of the bones came apart in his hands. He wrapped the bones in terry cloth and tucked them into a gunney sack.

He drove for days. He drove north. He drove to a part of Canada where the gravity was

lower, where there were tall trees, endless, reaching up, up, up, and beyond that, tundras and icy lakes. There, he took the skeleton from the sack, reassembled it, and commanded it to return the old woman's heart in exchange for freedom.

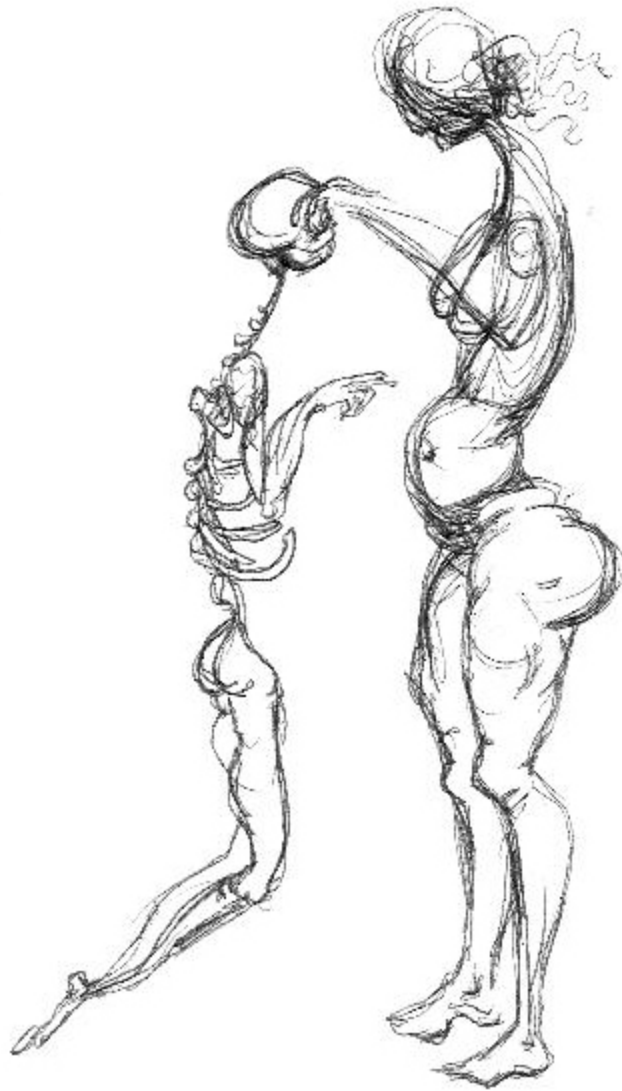
"I was once like you, Evaristti, delighting in the murder of women's hearts. But what I tried to keep, I could not."

Slowly, the skeleton rose, swaying slightly in the forest, then levitated.

As it rose, the skeleton laughed.

"And you cannot keep me either," it said.

Mesh watched the skeleton rise until it was beyond the clouds. Beyond all laughter.



HEISENBERG

by Mike Berger

It was a new Mercedes on the autobahn, going two hundred clicks. The car was stopped by the police.

The local cop asked for a drivers license. He examined it and said, "Dr. Heisenberg, do you know how fast you were going?"

Heisenberg look strangely puzzled. He mused for nearly a minute, then replied, "No but I know where I'm at."

“Six Pack” story

By Daniel Janin

Beer #3

“So here’s the deal.” he said with childlike enthusiasm. “I got shit housed last night, and sucked a guys dick in Bar Bar’s parking lot! I didn’t like it, and he didn’t get off, so it turns out I’m not gay!”

“Right on, man.” I wasn’t really listening. I’ve been listening to the exploits of Curtis’ previous nights every morning for the past six months. While I found it very interesting that he’d had a dick in his mouth only six hours ago, I had more pressing matters demanding my attention. I had to get home.

I arrived here on the on the twelfth of July, 2033. It took me only seconds to manifest my corporeal form in Denver of the future. It took the rest of the world twenty three years to catch up.

Beer #4

I’ve been cursed with randomly occurring temporal displacement since 2006, real-time. That is, before time became a two way street with occasional roundabouts.

My sister Laura, the physicist, was experimenting with some fancy new machine at her university. I dropped by on my way to see a Gore Galore show at the Smut-Rock house.

“In theory, this contraption will transport matter instantly from one point to another,” she explained. “Hey don’t open that beer in here. This equipment costs hundreds of thousands of dollars. In fact, don’t touch anything. It’s my ass if any of this stuff gets damaged.”

“So it’s a teleporter?” I asked.

“I suppose a laymen might call it that, yes.” she said with that infuriating air of superiority I knew and loathed. I was a relatively intoxicated, and in my antagonistic baby brother mode. Naturally, I began flipping switches.

“What’s this do?” I asked while simultaneously spilling my beer on the controls.

“Don’t touch th...” I felt quite feverish suddenly, and the next thing I knew, I was standing in the same place I was before. Only I was naked. Laura, however was screaming at me.

“You idiot! You just disappeared! That was six hours ago! I thought you’d been vaporized, you dumb fuck!! I told you not to touch anything!”

“What happened to me? Where are my clothes?” I asked. I was still drunk. There was no way six hours had just passed.

“I’ve been alone in this room for the last six hours, trying to figure out what to tell everyone about you. You tell me what happened!” Laura yelled.

“Six hours? No no no no no! I was just standing here. I pushed that button and my clothes disappeared, that’s all.”

“Bullshit little brother. I just looked up and you reappeared naked. Six hours later!” I suddenly started burning up, and it happened again.

Beer #5/Shot #1

“That is complete, unadulterated, horse cock Cheryl!”

“Don’t talk to me like that Curtis. It’s true. He came from the past.” Cheryl argued.

“That’s impossible! He’s just an ordinary guy. Sure, he dresses in those vintage clothes and he hates robots. That makes him a hipster, not a time traveler.”

* * *

At first, when I made the jump, I stayed in my new time for mere moments before being sucked away to a different time. Then it turned to hours. Then days. Weeks. I’ve been living in the year 2033 for six months now. I’m beginning to think I’ll never see my own time again.

I met Curtis a few minutes after I appeared in the, recently condemned motel I’d been staying in in the year 1996. Every time I make a jump, I end up naked in the same place I was before. So I went outside in the nude to find out when I was, and out pops Curtis. He was short in stature, but enormous in personality. He stopped and smiled at me.

“Well look at this suave motherfucker right here,” he chuckled, “I like your style buddy. Shirts are for work, and work is for jerks. You could use some pants though, if you don’t want the cops picking you up. Oh, what the hell, come back to my place and I’ll let you borrow a pair. My name is Curtis by the way.” I found the kindness of this

stranger to a naked man both odd and refreshing. I told him my name. "So, if you don't mind me asking, what are you doing naked in an old abandoned motel?" I made something up about getting blackout drunk the night before and just waking there, naked. "Ha. I've been there before. You must have the worst hangover. Want a shot? It'll make you feel better."

I had just made a friend from the future. I felt obligated to accept his drinks. Also, his pants.

"Sure. Yeah, I'd love one."

1 tall boy/3 pulls of whiskey/Italy's most disgusting liqueur later...

"Right on?" Curtis replied. "I sucked a dick last night! This is huge! Well, actually it wasn't very big but, how many times am I going to tell you about the first and only penis in my mouth? Shouldn't you be laughing at me or something?"

"Curtis, I don't care what was in your mouth last night. I...I'm...I don't belong here." I wanted to tell him about my most excellent adventures through time since that first night we got drunk together.

"What do you mean?"

"I came here from the year 2010. I get sucked into a new time period at random intervals, but I don't think that's going to happen anymore. Will you shut that fucking robot up?!" He got up and turned the L7 unit off.

"You're telling me that you are a fucking time traveler? Do you think I'm some kind of moron? Last week, Cheryl told me you were from the past. Did you actually get her to believe you?"

I pulled out my ID from 2010, and handed it to Curtis...and started feeling feverish.

Final chapter: the hangover

Real fucking funny universe. Now I'm naked, cold, and staring down a fucking T-Rex. These may be my final thoughts. I should have been more careful with that beer.

The Song Inspired By That Open Mouth*by Tim Andreae*

But all I can think of is that dead horse caught in the Y of a tree.
Open mouth skin gray and ragged, I could see through to some ribs
As I rode by on another horse who didn't seem to notice
But maybe he saw what was there: a broken body left behind by an impulse -
Jumped through the Y of a tree but with hips too wide, it opened his mouth.

I want to go back to the river was what I kept telling myself.
Where just as long as the water runs the river's work on the bank
And the bank's work on the river will never be done. So they keep
Holding and shaping each other and the river makes a slow course
For itself over time, but the fact that there happened in time.

A single moment of caught, growing into this body where I've been
caught, stuttered through teeth and what could it be
caught in the tree all this time? Was there ever anything
in between? Or just now there is water
and now there is none?

Legal Tender

by Amy Milione

Staring at the details when distracted
by the hard times of friends.
the detailed strands in money.
of girls waving pom poms.
when the willow trees bounced and fluffed
as the storm made itself known.

A certain tenderness
in the hard habits of an old friend
even with the expressions
of never getting traction.
learning the ropes of
no such luck.

We speak of passion.
So much is what we don't believe in.
that there is often nothing to believe in.

Mostly for peace
we abide by the rules for
how to talk about
what we're not talking about.

I look down at money, or coins, or pants when
I'm trying not to say that I know
that they need help, but I cannot help
because no one ever stops a storm.

How can we triumph Ginsberg
for celebrating

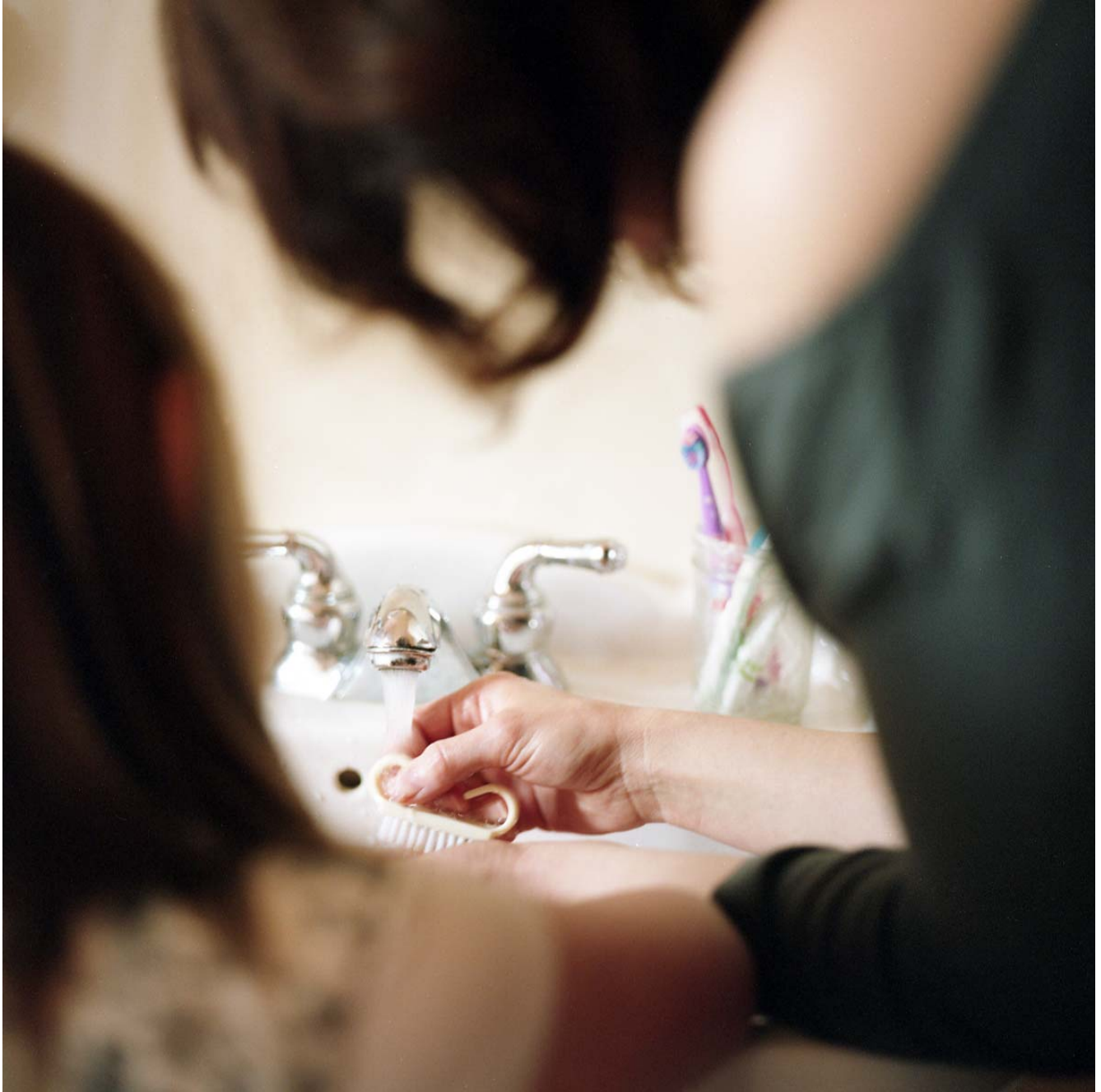
a generation wasted by ruinous drugs
as they winded through time
brushing away all the leaves of entertainment
that are now crispy and dead
so that no one believes in us.

There is no prayer here.
and I celebrate with all of us
as we dredge through idealism
to it's spoiled ends.

This series of photographs is a part of an exploration of human intimacy and interaction. There is an emphasis on body language and environment as a means to convey emotion. Although my photographs do fall into the category of portraiture, the subject of my work is about how people respond to one another and their surroundings. The scenes are often mundane, depicting ordinary moments which are often neglected. The intention behind this series is for the viewer to identify with the common and find beauty within the banal.

- *Eli Craven*













Homie Don't Play That

by Keith Zimmerman

Edward Norton runs like an English schoolboy. Not that I dislike English schoolboys generally, or know how they run particularly: I've never met one. I guess I should say that Edward Norton runs the way I *imagine* an English schoolboy might, which is funny, because I don't usually imagine English schoolboys to be super-heroic, but there he was, running like that, playing the Incredible Hulk. Actually, in the scene I'm thinking of, Norton was playing Bruce Banner, the Hulk's human alter-ego, who is a scientist. Scientists seem like they probably do run like English schoolboys, but again, it's hard for me to say for sure, not knowing many scientists myself. Maybe Norton is a method actor, and I'm just too ignorant to appreciate him. Or maybe he doesn't exercise much.

In *the Incredible Hulk*, Bruce Banner is a fairly peaceable fellow who has for some reason infected his own body with powerful gamma rays that cause him to turn into a monster when his heart beats too fast. He gets big and green and he smashes shit. As a result, poor Bruce has lost everything that's important to him – his wife, his job, his home. Evil military forces pursue him around the globe, hoping to use his rage, power, and invincibility to their own ends, supersoldier style. While on the lam, Banner searches for an antidote to his self-inflicted sickness and masters breathing exercises intended to reduce his pulse rate when he gets excited. His mentor tells him, "The best way to control your anger is to control your body, control your pulse." Soon enough, though, the military catches up to him and does every conceivable thing to anger him, and Banner can take only so much, so he gets mad and Hulks out a bunch and kills another monster infected with gamma radiation. In the process, he loses his ex-wife a second time and ends up alone. It is, I guess, a sort of parable about self-control.

Watching a movie like *the Incredible Hulk* at a blood bank can be strange. An aura of the laboratory, of human experimentation, degradation, and abnormality, pervades both on-screen and reality simultaneously. Drip-bags, needles, and hospital carts abound. Infections seem likely, antidotes hard to come by. The gallery of weirdos, crackheads and fuck-ups at the blood bank is very much akin to a Brueghel painting or a (horror) comic book. Whenever I'm giving plasma and I see the Hulk on the T.V. monitor I always think *Wow, they're doing this again? I mean, not only do I hate being*

here. I hate this fucking movie, and now I get to watch it one more time, while I'm strapped up to a machine that's taking my lifeblood for twenty fucking dollars. On top of it all, they're making me feel like a monster! The machine really only takes blood for a little while, then separates the plasma, and replaces the leftover blood. Babies, old people and whomever benefit from my plasma, which is good, but I'm melodramatic and anyway shitty movies make me feel weird. On the day in question, however, nobody took my blood. They didn't want it.

After spending my last dollar (four quarters, naturally) on a bus, I arrived at the blood bank hungover, sullen and depressed. A few too many days of drinking heavily without eating had taken their toll, leaving me touched by tremors violent enough to be recorded on a seismograph. *The Incredible Hulk* was playing in the waiting room, of course. Sighing, I signed in, sat down, and waited. My head would not allow me to read the copy of *Moscow to the End of the Line* my friend had lent me. My stomach would not allow me to smoke another cigarette. *Ha! A horse! A horse! My kingdom for a goddamn Subway sandwich and a pack of smokes! Looks like at least two interminable hours of this shit!* And so it was.

But like I said, the folks at the blood bank didn't want my blood that day. Having endured the requisite forty-five minute waiting period, a young lady ushered me into a screening room where she pricked my finger, took my temperature, and checked my pulse. She informed me that my pulse-rate was too high to safely "donate" plasma. The normal resting heart rate for a healthy adult is usually between sixty and eighty BPM (beats per minute), lower for athletes and higher for overweight people and asthmatics and probably the Hulk. I was at one-hundred-and-nine BPM the first time the "nurse" checked me that day. I waited about twenty minutes and she checked me again: ninety-nine BPM, lower, but still not low enough to pass the test. I was angry because I knew I would have to wait an additional half-hour or so. Breathing exercises and meditation had ultimately proven futile for Bruce Banner, but since no one was shooting missiles at me I decided to give it a try. They would also prove futile for me.

I have always had problems with anger, self-control, and lately, breathing. In fact, when I was a kid, I often had fantasies in which I turned into the Hulk, not so I could hurt anyone or destroy anything; my only hope was to purely express the full extent of my anger, frustration and despair. Later on, say around age fifteen, I discovered that alcohol could help assuage all those discordant feelings. No more social anxiety. Not as

much loneliness. More laughter. Less fear. Except when it works the opposite way, which is often. For the last twenty years I've been trying to figure out if alcohol was the antidote to my inner Hulk, or if I've been infecting myself with gamma rays.

Check it: there was the time I put my fist through the glass window in my mom's front door, because my sister was knocking too loudly. There was the time I screamed, "Eat a dick, you big, wet fuck-hole!" to my friend in front of about twenty disbelieving onlookers in downtown Denver. There was the time I threw my friend into some thorny bushes, laughing. There was the time I pissed all over a stranger's parents' grand piano, on purpose. There was the time I... I just recently punched, literally *punched*, a beer can out of a close friend's hand, just because she claimed (erroneously) that she was the best player in a drunken street-badminton game. I've called my mom bad names. I've told lies about my father. And let's just say that these incidents are just the few I can remember off the top of my head that I'm not too embarrassed to write about. When I think of all the times I berated, made fun of, yelled at, patronized, condescended to, or struck strangers or acquaintances, and especially people close to me, I am so ashamed.

So when the nurse at the blood bank told me I had failed my third and final heart rate test, I was pissed. But what could I do? I had spent the previous half hour breathing deeply, slowly, eyes closed, forming black clouds of nothingness in my consciousness, erasing the blood bank, its patrons, and *the Incredible Hulk*. I thought I was in the clear. After the nurse informed me that my BPM were back over a hundred, our conversation went something like this:

NURSE: I'm sorry, there's nothing I can do.

ME: (crestfallen) Y'know, I don't own a car, I used my last dollar to get here, and I'm staying in the North End right now. What is that, like eight, ten miles?

NURSE: I'm sorry, really, there's nothing I can do. You get three tries. Those are the rules.

ME: (pathetically) Yeah, I know...but if you really think I'm like, too sick to give plasma or something, and I assure you I am not, but if you think I'm too sick, how can you send me on my way, without a fucking dime in my hand, to go walk ten fucking miles home in this fucking heat? Listen. I'm fine. But I'm poor. You understand, I know you do, working here all day. I just want like a sandwich

or something. And a pack of smokes. Please just let me through so I can get my money.

NURSE: Uh-huh. I can tell by your breath you need more than a sandwich.

ME: (shouting) Fine! Fuck you then! You'll feel great when I have a heart attack from this shit!

Was I trying to "purely express the full extent of my anger, frustration and despair," or am I just a dick? As I stormed out of the waiting room, amidst jeers and catcalls from the patients, I realized that, no matter what, the nurse didn't deserve any of it.

The Denver Nuggets, my favorite basketball team, were the second best squad in the Western Conference for most of the 2010 season. After playing six games against the Lakers in the Western Conference Finals the previous year, they came into 2010 playing with anger and energy, and beat the Cavs, the Lakers, the Celtics, all the best teams, with ease. Then Coach Karl got throat cancer, Adrian Dantley took over as acting interim coach, and everything went to hell.

K-Mart hurt his knee, and then he went insane after someone filled his Range Rover with popcorn on April Fools' Day. Melo stopped getting to the charity stripe. Nene disappeared for huge chunks of games. J.R. continued to play an unhinged and erratic game. Birdman did not take flight. The Utah Jazz ousted the Nuggs in the first round of the playoffs.

The Nuggets' untimely dismissal had come only a few days before my adventure at the blood bank, and as I walked home I couldn't get George Karl out of my mind. His propensity for violent outbursts reminded me of my own. His radiation therapy reminded me of Bruce Banner's. I kept wondering if Karl's anger and belligerence had, as crazy as it sounds, actually been the cause of his sickness.

You see, George Karl is not a normal coach. He's been hated by players, fellow coaches and the media throughout his career. Check it: there was the time he smashed-in a locker after a playoff game, in front of reporters and his own team. There was the time he kicked a ball into the rafters during a CBA game. There was the time he signed a contract stipulating that he couldn't drink during the season, due to his reputation as a lush. There was the time he called Ray Allen (his own player at the

time) a soft pretty boy. There was the time he charged Otis Thorpe (a player from an opposing team) during a playoff game. There was the time he said in an interview for *Esquire* that Doc Rivers had been anointed head coach of the Magic only because he (Rivers) was “Afro-American.” There was the time he said “I get angry at God.” to a reporter. Well, no, I guess that’s normal. But these are just a few of the public displays of anger Karl has been guilty of, and one can only shiver thinking of what might go on behind closed doors. George Karl is also one the best coaches alive.

Thing is, the Nuggets are not a normal team. Carmelo Anthony, their star, appeared in the infamous *Stop Snitchin’* video, made by Baltimore drug dealers to intimidate local residents from talking to police. He was cited for marijuana possession. He threw a punch in the Knicks-Nuggets brawl. He pleaded guilty to driving while impaired. He is also one of the best pure scorers in the league, by anyone’s estimation. Chris “Birdman” Anderson was kicked out of the NBA for two years after testing positive for a drug so seedy that the NBA wouldn’t even say what it was. In 2009, he finished the season with the second most blocks in the league, despite his two year absence and playing only twenty minutes a game. J.R. Smith served time for driving during a car crash in which his friend, Andre Bell, was killed. He’s also the best off-the-bench three point shooter in the league. Kenyon Martin threatened to “put his hands on” one of his teammates and not play in the playoffs because a former ball boy had filled his ride with buttered popcorn (the car had white interior). He once made fun of Alonzo Mourning’s kidney disease. He has a tick and a stutter. He is also one of very few professional athletes to come back from surgeries on both his knees to have a fruitful career. Nene had a cancerous tumor removed from one of his testicles, and yet he continues to play professional basketball. Renaldo Balkman has never done anything.

Special teams need special coaches, and Karl seems particularly well-suited to coach these Nuggs. He matched their aggression, combustibility, and flamboyance with his own. Players knew they’d be benched if they fell out of line, be they stars or scrubs. Despite (or more probably, because of) his contentious coaching style and all the headcases on his roster, Karl had, before his cancer scare, assembled a team capable of doing more than anyone around the league thought possible, a team that worked together on offense, played hard defense, a team that won. “Your basketball family is your second life,” he said. “These guys are great.”

But he yelled. And screamed. He had to: no other brand of coaching could have reigned in his band of knuckleheads. Breathing exercises were definitely in order. Sometimes his face turned so red I thought an aneurysm or heart attack was coming on. Never once did I consider throat cancer.

If it seems indecent or callous to link high strung emotions with disease, consider this: My friend, whose mother died of stomach cancer, told me the cancer stemmed from an ulcer her mom had had for years. The ulcer, of course, came from stress. She then got a bacterial infection which interfered with the cellular repair of the ulcer, which led to cancer, which led, finally, to death. And I am not by any stretch of the imagination trying to say that Teri, Elisa's mom and a friend of mine, caused her own cancer. Teri would not have been the mother, wife, friend or business owner she was had she not *cared* so deeply, just as George Karl would not have been the coach he was without all the fire and vitriol he brought to the game. To sublimate one's passions is to live a sort of waking death anyway, but my god, it's all too horrifying to think that *what we feel* can effect *how we die*.

I guess you could say that this is old news, since everybody knows that stress can lead to heart disease, depression to suicide, but it had never been so clear to me as when Elisa told me about her mother, and then on my walk home as I thought about Coach Karl. Anyway, Karl has lost fifty-two pounds and can't talk very well, but he's in remission, and he's going to coach next year. Teri Holland is dead.

The long walk home exhausted my breath and burned my skin, leaving me deeply wasted. Without vigor or even anger I descended the hill towards home. I remembered a walk from years ago when I had been similarly undernourished and nearly catatonic. My dog Megan, who even then had been dead for years, strolled up next to me and said hello. I mean, she'd really, actually been there, walking beside me, for about ten seconds that filled me with an indescribable joy. Besides wishing that would happen again, I reflected on how alike the two walks were. Back then I had been walking home from the post office with the forlorn acceptance that, yet again, no check had arrived, there was no food to be eaten. Now I was walking home from the blood bank, hungry and thirsty with no real home to go to. No jobs or lovers either time. The only difference was the cities.

For years my assumption has been that I came by alcoholism genetically, and

that may be true, but maybe childhood anger and isolation led to social anxiety which led to heavy drinking which led to a lack of self-control which led to humiliation which led to frustration which led to rage which led to heavier drinking which led to self-doubt which led to giving up on my dreams and myself which led to despair which lead to death-tripping which leads to...what? And I haven't even mentioned the car crashes, the nights in jail, the loans from my family, staying with my parents, *their* humiliation, all the broken friend-and relationships, or all the other attendant problems that come with being a career lush.

Sometimes I think if I try hard enough, delay gratification, practice self-control, master breathing exercises, learn how to manage my anger, or even pray to god, things might be different, and I wouldn't have to do this.

But I don't lend credibility to the incredible.

I *am* an English schoolboy.

And maybe I need a drink.

THE DAY OUR HOME EXPLODED

by John Lambremont, Sr.

It had been quite a Mardi Gras ride,
I'd gone pecan, fine dining at Swifty's
with the Stiffs, then devouring live
crustaceans from a car trunk
turned aquarium, later Hurricanes
and Hand Grenades,
titty bars and lit parades,
and last, a club crawl that left me
sprawled in the dirt. I'd lost
my bag and laptop, and lost
six months' worth of work, and
worse, I'd even lost my bloody shirt.

I trudged up the driveway: my ma was
in the garage with my sib sisters.
She told them, "Here comes my worthless son."
I just lost it, I went off
on her, cursing her angrily
for her senility and general bitchery.
I stopped when I saw how gone she was,
stars in her headlights, lipstick too red,
equal parts poor Edith and her testy cousin Maude.

My sisters were shocked: one tore into me
savagely, the other tried to be conciliatory.
I could only nod, and barely.
The little one, predictably, cried
like a baby.



Dad took me aside, took me inside,
and sighed. He spoke to me about becoming
an assistant professor of biology,
and showed me some slides of some
migratory microbes that had invaded
our seaside estuaries by attaching themselves
to mites that attach to fleas. The radio-
optic colors were as vivid as could be,
but I had to tell my dad I don't
know science to any degree.

Dad glanced out glumly at an old gum tree, and noted,
"This is the day that my home exploded."

Used Cakes

by Tom Hamilton

Their speeding car was as battered as the buildings: bleached a worn, weathered green and accented by chimney brick red climbs of rust which slithered up the dented fenders like vines or teeth marks. The model of the vehicle had long been rendered indecipherable as the car's name-tags, which had been written in cursive onto silver plaques, had lost their back supports and fallen off. When the front rim banged down into yet another pothole, the last remaining hub cap spun off before circling to a stop like a dropped and spinning quarter dollar.

"Jesus," Johnny said, "aren't they ever going to fix these damn potholes?"

"The city doesn't have any more money darling," Jane said, "turn here."

She pointed at a wider thoroughfare in between the crumbling structures. As they rounded the corner Johnny caught a glimpse of his face in the rear view mirror: his cheeks laden with pockmarks and scars. Looking past his crass reflection he also saw what looked like a solo caboose which had a fire spitting wire attached to its roof. Sparks shot out from the rectangular connector.

"Oh look," Jane began, "they've made the trolley car into a diner. I heard they have a 99 cent menu."

"Yeah," Johnny lamented, "some of these restaurants around here ain't worth 99 cents."

Jane nodded.

"Ya ever hear what they do to some of those chickens?" he began, "They alter them somehow, genetically or something. Poor things live their whole lives inside a cage about as big as your fist. They don't have any eyes or feet. Them goddamn scientists have bred em so that all they are is just a living piece of meat: white meat mind ya, a growing torso."

"Well that's nice dear," she said, "but did you ever eat one of those birds? Mmmmmmm. Soooo good. Besides honey, I don't think they have a head. If they don't have a brain then they're really nothing more than a growth. I mean how can something without a brain feel any pain?" She snickered then and there was something annoying about the silliness of her voice's notes: the soup of simple subjects which her painted mouth wasted her brain's time on. He wanted to tell her

that every third word out of her head was idiotic, but instead he only shook his head and said.

"Gives me the willies."

As they drove on the auld tenement houses rose around them, rough and rectangular against a sickly beige sky like chipped teeth: their edifices grimy and tainted by smog and soot like blackened faces. The sidewalks were pocked and pitted like Johnny's damaged skin. There was a hole in the nearest walkway the width of a bomb blast. Someone had covered the void over with a flaking and chipped white door which had cardboard colored bare spots showing through here and there. A downtrodden man in a tattered gray work suit shuffled across it as if it were a well constructed bridge. He did not pause or look up at them as they passed. Their junker shot on.

Around the next corner they encountered an X-rated theater. The cinema had once been a respectable establishment. Although the faded white, imitation marble pillars had yellowed over the decades. A huge glowing marquee announced the semi-indecent titles of the films. The box office sat in a snug booth near the triangular center of the entrance. A greasy looking fat man with wire rimmed glasses, who looked like someone who may be interested in seeing those types of movies himself, awaited the next ticket purchase. The comely face of a scantily clad girl, her deep black hair framing a forehead which was as white as frosted glass, gazed out coquettishly from the movie poster.

"Some of the positions they use in those films are not very realistic" said Johnny. "I can't picture an actual girl or woman posing for something like that. And if you can't picture it... how do they expect that you should be titillated by it."

"They supply the pictures for you darling. And you shouldn't be watching those movies. Turn here," instructed Jane. As they turned the next corner a phone booth came into view. Its aluminum frame was badly scratched in spots and some of the Plexiglas panes had either been broken or shot out. A dim bulb obscured by a plastic shield weakly sputtered onto an archaic rotary phone.

Johnny turned towards her. "do you need to make any calls," he asked.

"No darling."

"It's a long time from 58th street up to 62nd," he said, "are you sure?"

She raised her eyebrows.

"What I mean to say is: four years can be an awful long time," he began. "If a doctor told someone that they had four years to live, then they'd probably cry around and act like that was no time at all. On the other finger, if you sentenced someone to a four year prison sentence, well, then they'd act like it was an eternity. Take that phone booth as a for instance or an example: if the same old bastard who complained that four years wasn't enough time to live had to stand in that phone booth for four years, from the age of 58 to the age of 62 say, well they'd complain like that was ten lifetimes.

"I'm sure you're right darling," she answered, "but couldn't you go a little faster."

"Not with these potholes around," he said and as if on cue the front passenger rim of the junker banged into another gouge in the auld asphalt. Rain water shot up after the impact like a geyser from a whale's breath hole, soaking a trio of bedraggled bums near a corner. A Mexican who had been pushing a hot dog cart shook his fist at them. But a closer look revealed that the silver side panels were missing and that there were flattened and rusted tin cans piled up where the burner had once been. The condiment trays were empty except for tattered pieces of paper and assorted garbage.

"It's alright love," she said, "three more blocks."

Squeezed between the crumbling brick fronts of two abandoned, squalid, turn of the century, three stories sat the store: its display windows were cloudy and yellowed and dead flies snuggled up against the bottom of the panes. A row of naked white mannequins postured for passers by. Above this uninspired fashion show, on a plain plywood sheet was the simple moniker: 'MART' spelled out in haphazard letters of various plastic, wooden and galvanized fonts like a pieced together kidnapper's note.

"Here darling, here darling."

She forced him to parallel park between two dilapidated cars which sat up on blocks since their the wheels and tires had been removed. Their rusted pads were sawed off like the stumps of amputees and orange brake dust stained the ground: only jagged shards remained where their batted out windshields had once been. She watched his progress closely in the rear view as he backed up until their trunk was mere inches from the car behind them. Although she was very pretty there was something about her side profile that suddenly offended him: he could make out the shape of a cranium underneath her smooth forehead: and a skull which was flawed at the jaw and almost anthropological in its crudeness.

As they walked through the revolving door a weak goat's bell up top jingled

tiredly as it was tickled by the spinning contraption. There did not seem to be a salesman or any attendants on duty behind the old key punch register. A counter, which looked more like a jewelry display case, sat off to their left. A magnifying loupe for examining gems sat on the desk top like a shot glass, although there were no trinkets on the rotating trays to scrutinize: not even the cheap rings and gaudy necklaces of the costume variety.

Out in the middle of a chilly concrete floor were row after row of rods and hangers which supported thousands of pieces of clothing: army jackets and wedding dresses, marbled jeans and frilly blazers, T-shirts and collared polos, communion gowns and cowboy shirts, cotton sun dresses and legionnaire's uniforms, a white milk man's shirt and pants covered on the same hanger by a leather jacket, bikinis and brown delivery uniforms, football jerseys and ballerina tights, American colored sweaters for small dogs and nurse's skirts with comfortable white tennis shoes tied by their laces to the wire hangers.

She bypassed the collection of clothes and they were soon perusing past several work tables. Dissected engines and the rusty shafts of severed pumps lay in waste on their surfaces, along with disconnected carburetors and detached gas tanks, sliced radiator hoses and love joys, lawnmower blades and cleaved weed trimmer shafts. When this section ended they wandered into a tall, library like aisle which held removable slats of long gun metal green shelves. Huge generators and other unidentifiable pieces of hardware, plus gutted pressure washers, blowers and paint stained airless machines were held up by these supports.

The first of the fish tanks were empty. Or some only had campy props inside them, like a turtle rock or one of those pirate skeletons that sits up once the water line gets up past a certain point, plus a Great White with a mechanized mouth which opened and closed as if it were gasping or chasing schools of grouper or cod. A little bit further down the way living frogs began to appear. They sat inside their glass homes as unhappy as old married women in lonely living rooms. Some of these looked alright, until each new tank revealed something more hideous: some of the amphibians were odd colors like purple or red and they looked blotchy like they'd been burned or as if they were from some distant desert climate. Jane did not see any of the snakes, scorpions or monstrous tropical spiders that she'd expected to find in this section. Fish were conspicuously absent as the tanks were dry and their floors were coated

with dust.

Finally the couple located the area for which they'd been searching:

"Ah," Jane said. "here we are."

There were several hundred cakes lining the shelves. There were round cakes, square cakes, rectangular cakes, that were from birthday, anniversary, wedding, graduation, baby shower and all manner of other parties. Along with Christmas, Easter, Halloween, New Year's, Valentine's Day and other holiday dates celebrated: even Lincoln's birthday which was the copper head of a penny atop a handsome vanilla face. They were pink, sunshine yellow, pumpkin orange, cheesecake beige, biker black, shamrock green, feminine purple, tangerine, ghost white, tangy sharp garnet and a lot more colors than on any rainbow. Some were on flat cardboard covered over by plastic lids. Others were in baking pans. Some were simply standing out on their own or on hard, cheap, china which might be found in any midwestern kitchen. Some had been cut into, with various pieces taken away. Others were preserved as if they'd just come out of the baker's oven. Still others were stale and hardened as cemetery slabs. On some, clearly legible congratulations or birthday wishes could be read. On others, indecipherable and smudged letters had blistered into the damaged frosting. Some held little ceramic figures on their tops which were perched upon frosting caked stands: football players and ballerinas, dogs and cartoon characters, pets and princesses. One even held an elaborate playground whereas, upon cocking the spring and setting it into motion, a plastic boy would slide down a slide. On yet another an impressive golden girl looked ready to launch her baton into the air.

"I used to wonder if I was smart enough," Johnny said suddenly.

"Oh look," Jane said while grabbing one of the cakes and holding it up for him to see the writing.

"I mean how does a person decide whether they are smart or stupid?"

The cake was round and simple: white with kelly green piping. It was still pretty well preserved and the letters spelled out: HAPPY BIRTHDAY S... with the rest of the name wiped away.

"I wish I knew what the name was?" she wondered.

"No," he said, "I have to assume that if someone doesn't know that they're smart than they must be dumb."

"This is the one," she said. "I'll take it."

*

"Oh, I hope it doesn't rain," she said. They were back riding inside the junker and the cake was sitting on her lap. After only a few blocks the auld auto overheated and steam shot out from the radiator like the insults of a good wife berating a bankrupt and drunken husband. He turned his neck up and angled the car over to the sidewalk. "Damn," he muttered.

When she started raving he blocked it out, like a hung over snoozer returning to slumber despite the chirping of the dawn birds. He got out, wrapped a flimsy napkin around his fingers and, while absorbing some minor pain from slight burns, removed the radiator cap. The white steam rose up past his forehead like all the humidity of August condensed.

"No," he said. "It's alright it just needs a little water."

But all trace of her former festive mood had deadpanned and she was hanging out the passenger window cursing and dredging up all of his past failures. He fetched an empty milk jug from the backseat and walked over to an abandoned row house. The paint on its face was peeling and all the windows had been boarded up. There was a small octagon handled faucet on the alley side. He twisted the lever and a jet of water, which by some miraculous anomaly had not been shut off, came streaming out. Once he'd filled the milk jug, he poured that refreshment down the junker's throat. But when he got back behind the wheel and twisted the ignition he discovered that the battery was now dead. Evidently taxed by the ordeal of over heating.

He banged the steering wheel and started to curse as she began to cry. This section of town had not yet been targeted for gentrification. So of course there were no workman, or anybody else who may have jumper cables, around. Clouds in the somersaulting sky were darker yet and there didn't seem to be a soul in sight.

"C'mon, let's go," he said and got out again. She gingerly did likewise, still puling and holding the cake. Keeping the imaginary width of the old car between them, even as they left it at the curb, they slowly walked away from the pale green automobile.

"Put THAT GODDAMN cake DOWN!" He snapped.

She sat it next to the sidewalk. There was a miniature brook running through the concrete gutter which had been created by people who had washed old trucks, thrown out bath or piss water or left rusty hoses running. The pristine cake looked very beautiful contrasted against the gray city and she wept harder as they put some

distance between themselves and the giant pastry.

It did start to rain after all: a hard, mean avenging rain which threatened to cleanse even these streets. Her mascara ran in blackened trails down her cheeks and damned up thick as glue underneath her big eyes. He felt guilty, dreadful and callous. As if there were cockaburrs jamming up the directions of his blood. But as the water from the unbridled storm dripped off of their chins they could only think about the cake: about its birthday colors melting and running down, mixing in with the brown oils which were being exorcised from the asphalt.

Were I Not a Coward

by Zoie Beatrice

The girl with the tray of food, scanning the cafeteria
for a table

not totally occupied, for a chair:

your ankles

break my heart, your ponytail

is half a seesaw

to the clouds. I would take my backpack
off the chair. I would.

I would.



The House of Lil Joe”

by Michael A. Hayes

On every new roll of register tape, a single series of horizontal red asterisks were printed somewhere within the yards of brilliant-white paper. It looked something like this: * * * * * . Above the cash register, from a single wire, hung a grease-stained cardboard sign, collecting dust, debris, and flies doomed to be preserved and exhibited like a Jr. High student’s last-minute biology presentation.

The sign advertised that the customer with the coveted “red stars” appearing on their receipt was entitled to a free steak on their next visit: guaranteed by “Lil Joe” himself, sole proprietor of Lil Joe’s: Over One-Million Steaks Sold, quite possible the worst restaurant in the worst part of Sacramento: the junkie streets of Del Paso Heights. It was perfectly situated between a shithole called The Lazy Cup Cafe and a “dirty bookstore.” Down the block was a liquor store and a bodega of sorts that featured the sale of single cigarettes, ten cents apiece, among other rarities.

Lil Joe was a short, overly-excited Syrian man in his mid-fifties with thick eyebrows and a matching accent: he sat behind the register under the sign, doubling as fly paper, on a tall metal stool wearing a bright red chef’s hat, snug and tight around his forehead, while floppy on top of his rapidly balding head. He was the ruling agent of the establishment, the hat his crown and the stool his throne. He wore a permanent smile and greeted customers as they came and went with enthusiasm and energy that would make coffee nervous. He was a beautiful man. He would pull whores and winos from the streets, feed them a meal and a hearty helping of his unfettered and intoxicating charisma.

My official job title was busboy, but of course I never filed a W-4 with the IRS. Nonetheless, I would collect dirty dishes, fetch waters, and set the tables. My colleagues were primarily young Latino men, who spoke little English, but instead, communicated by mimicking Joe’s same enduring grin. It was quite obvious that my comrades in aprons were also lacking the same state-mandated tax documentation. They cared for me like brothers.

Lil Joe had a daughter. A beautiful 22-year old girl by the name of Marry Anne. She had miles of black wavy hair, olive skin, and dark green eyes. She kept her fingernails long and well-manicured, they were always painted white with tiny red metallic specs.

Each morning she'd come into the diner to help her father with the record-keeping and other various tasks. I was intent on marrying her. Daily I'd contemplate my elaborate scheme to make her mine. I'd fantasize of us eloping and traveling around the urban jungles of California in her bright yellow Camaro. And in the evenings we would dine and watch reruns of "I Love Lucy" and "Mr. Ed."

The first of the month was a very busy time. The neighborhood locals would come eat well and repay Joe for his generosity, after receiving their government assistance checks, by patronizing his shop and leaving healthy tips for the wait staff and cooks. They would even "tip-out" the bus boys. After I finished working for the day, I'd wander the alleys making my way to my pseudo-grandmother's house, skipping over drunks, waste, and despair. I was quite happy.

I continued to work at the diner for the rest of that summer, making pockets full of dirty one-dollar bills. And I never did confess my love to Mary Ann or ride in that Camero. Also, I came to learn that there never were any red asterisks on any of the register tape. The example on the cardboard sign was nothing more than a fabrication. No one ever won anything from Lil Joe, instead he gave them everything.

At the end of the summer I returned home to live with my father in his chosen high-mountain desert home. The following winter I celebrated my birthday. I was 10 years old.

* * * * *

K1 Took My Nail Polish [a Letter]*by Zoie Beatrice*

I believe in thick layers. I believe in laying on the nail polish so thick you can peel it off eventually, in large hunks, as if it were soft, soft, fake nails. You can do this even with ordinary nail polish, not just the peel-off kind, if you layer it thick enough. If you layer it the way you layer butter

on the bread of the person you wish to poison. You needn't of course, mix the nail polish with arsenic. I wouldn't even recommend

trying. Who knows what that might do. Not me certainly. And astringents are certainly nothing to put into things you

want to high gloss and peel away, like the memory of certain eyes, certain skin.

A man's lips are nothing special. Forget him.

Life knocks at the window: it is a stalker: it is psychopathic.

Will you call the cops? Will you dial that number? Of course not. Of course not. You are afraid, as we all are, that whatever your emergency is

it is not emergent enough. You can get arrested for calling 911 without just cause. You can get arrested. No.

Watch life breathe fog onto the window. Perhaps work up the nerve

sometime, sometime this week to go up and wipe it off. Paint your nails by the television set in thick gobs, like butter, then peel it off. It should look like an infected toenail, sitting there in your palm.

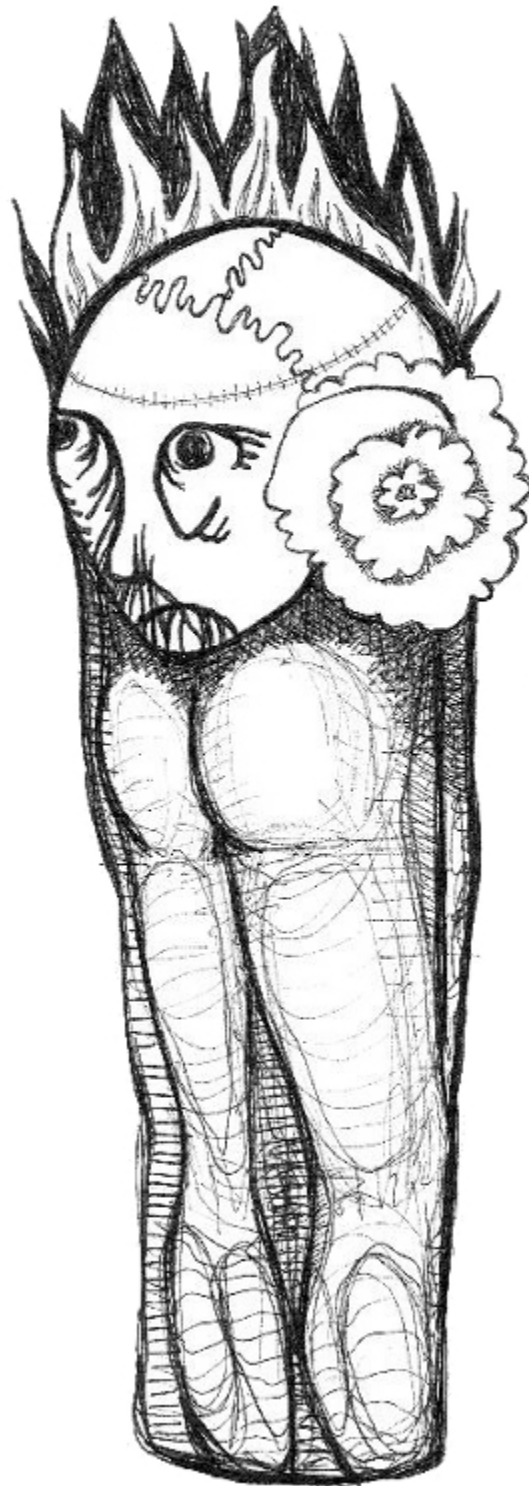
Show it to the monster in the window. Scare it off.

I wouldn't recommend this either. Who knows what it might do. Who knows. Who knows.

Butter your bread and brew your tea. Poison them both.

Put them on the windowsill.

I believe in thick layers. I believe in panes of glass.



Chronicles Of Tim Pt. 2: James-Francis Bentley*by Mike Wiley*

Tim sat on the edge of the pool wondering where, in this giant estate, the seven daughters were being held. Or were they being imprisoned? He wondered if there *were* any daughters at all. Geryon had obviously been pleased with the performance of his first task, simple as it was. Despite this trivial success, there was the overriding sense that not all the tasks would be as mundane as the first. In addition to the unease he felt over these to-be-determined tasks, Tim lumbered over the drastic swings in mood and character of his new-found master. At once he could be comprehensible, clairvoyant and even compassionate, but at the solicitation of the first demand he unleashed a side that not only seemed unreasonable to the request, it frightened Tim. His thoughts did not drift toward defeating the monster, partially because he was not yet sure if he had entered into a beneficial or a disadvantageous relationship, and partially because he really had nothing to escape back to. Geryon had been right that his wife did not love him and that he had no family that would miss him. Simply put, he had been currently resigned to a single task a day that may or may not proffer him with the keys to a kingdom and numerous proceedings and affairs with the daughters of Geryon. These things he pondered with his first day of liberty on the estate. He sipped a lemonade and looked out over the hills.

After lazing around the pool for several hours by himself, Tim decided to explore the grounds of the estate. Geryon had after all told him that the rest of the day was his to do with as he pleased. He changed into new garments that had been laid out for him on his bed by unseen hands and trotted off towards the orchards that extended indefinitely into the horizon to the west of the castle.

He took a path down the hill to the west and when he reached the beginning of the orchards, he stopped. The path continued straight through the acres of trees and disappeared into a dark grove and the orchard was divided into two. Tim examined the fruits on the trees. They weren't like any he had ever seen before. Dangling from the trees on the left were long, carrot-like roots that broke off easily enough and Tim took a bite off the tip. He immediately spit it out. It was bitter. The produce of this tree clearly was either not ripe or required some form of cooking or preparation to make it palatable. On his right were what seemed to be identical trees but the fruits were in a bright

blue peel. They were round like an orange, but peeled as easily as a banana. On the inside was a soft fruit of the same blue as the peel, but of a milder tone. Tim bit more cautiously into this one and found it to be delicious. It was sweet and smelled of honey and blossoms. There was really no taste with which to compare the new sensation he had discovered. He finished the first one he had picked and plucked another before making his way along the perimeter of the orchard, keeping the castle in his sights the entire time. He had opted to save the exploration of the dark grove for another day.

He stayed in this pattern for several hours, always keeping the castle to his right as he circled it. He passed a stable and a plot of land that looked as though it were designed to entertain great parties. Tim decided it must be a court, though he had never seen one in all his life. Rows of picnic-style tables extended for dozens of yards around an enormous black and white checkered platform: the dance floor. As there was no party in session, the scene was rather boring and Tim moved on until he came to an enormous lake at the rear of the estate. There he stopped. The sun was in its last hour of presence and soon would descend over the rocky hills to the west. He had hardly made it halfway around the perimeter of the estate in all this time and turned back towards his new home for a full night's sleep.

No sooner had he turned his attention towards the castle, seeking an entrance point, than he noticed a flutter of the curtains several stories up. Exhaustion, he thought at first. It was slight, but Tim was sure that he had seen it. They had been quickly drawn as he directed his gaze that way.

Was he being watched? And if so, by whom?

It certainly wasn't improbable. In this massive estate there had to be hundreds of staff to cater to its care and maintenance. The introduction of a newcomer such as he would likely arouse some curiosity: that could hardly be helped. And yet, in his entire day of exploration, Tim had not encountered a single other person. He had not seen anyone that might have laid out his new wardrobe or anyone that might have tended the pool, the gardens, the stables or the kitchen. Aside from the flourishing greens outside the castle, the estate was, for the most part... lifeless.

After spotting a potential passageway to the indoors of the castle, Tim headed back to find his room to call it a day. It was with great unease that he marched, step by step, back towards the main grounds and into his new abode. He observed no movement, from the windows or the trees, but the feeling of being surveyed at every pace did

not elude him. On his own, and with some difficulty, he found his way back to his room and readied himself for bed. Though many questions raced through his mind, questions about the daughters, the groundskeepers and of course Geryon, Tim had little trouble falling asleep. His body was exhausted from the previous few days' travel and his most recent explorations. His mind was exhausted from the presence of new and unanswered questions.

Tim woke from his sleep to the crowing of the cock. He was well-rested and prepared for his second task from Geryon. As his eyes adjusted to the daylight, he had expected to find the beast waiting at his bedside, as he had been the day before. As this was not the case, Tim relaxed and slowly rolled himself out of the bed to get dressed. Again he found a clean wardrobe set placed on a chair near the bed.

Everything that had been laid out for him had been hand-crafted. Fine stitch work and beautiful, exotic materials were used to design the clothing. Neither the quality nor the style of dress were anything Tim was accustomed to, but he quickly grew to appreciate them nonetheless. He had been wearing Wranglers and flannel button-downs for as long as he could remember. The clothing proffered him was comfortable and he found no cause for complaint.

Feeling much at ease for finding himself alone this morning, Tim sat up on the edge of the bed to pull on his trousers when he was met with a startling discovery at the far corner of the room. He was not, as he had thought, alone in the room.

A curious event was manifesting between three grown men there in an armchair built for a single person. One person seemed to be asleep, hunched over as a rag doll that could not support itself, while the other two were ceaselessly climbing about the chair in failed attempts to position themselves in the chair with the sleeping figure. If one lay across the back of the sleeping man, the other would scramble up the arms of the chair and experiment with several positions of rest until he eventually toppled to the floor. After the tumble, he would pull the one from on top of the other and situate himself in the almost-crook between the one asleep and the open arm of the chair. Here he would nuzzle and shake his bottom, trying to get comfortable in the limited space while the other circled the chair a few times and eventually jumped from behind and over the back of the armchair to squash the duo nestled in the seat. All the while, the one asleep remained so, completely oblivious to the commotion and the jostling.

Tim silently watched all this for some minutes as nobody in the chaotic trio seemed to take any notice of him now that he had woken up. While the two awake characters battled for a spot in the jumble of arms and legs, Tim walked up to them and spoke.

“Hey,” he said, quietly at first. Still the two pushed and shoved at each other, but did not look at Tim. Edging closer he tried again. This time he raised his voice. “Hey! Who are you?”

This got not the attention of the restless duo but did rouse the slumped figure at the bottom of the pile and as he snapped into consciousness, he stood straight up at attention from his seat, knocking the other two to the ground. They quickly scrambled into attention as well, one at either side of the previously sleeping man. Tim took an abrupt step back and nobody spoke for a moment.

Tim and the man in the middle locked eyes while the other two looked nervously back and forth at each other, waiting for something to happen. Tim waited for something to happen as well, and after an uncomfortably long period of time when nothing did happen, he decided to break the silence.

“Who are you guys?” he asked. The one in the middle returned an immediate response.

“Oh, they’re with me,” he said. He spoke straight and concise, almost militaristic.

“Ok, but who are *you* then? I haven’t seen anybody else around this castle yet and Geryon hadn’t said anything about anybody else being here. And why do all three of you look the same? Are you brothers or something?”

Indeed, the three men were identical in every way. Whether of kin or by design, Tim couldn’t be sure. They were well-aged, in their fifties perhaps, and wore the same three-piece tuxedo suit resembling that of a butler or servant. White gloves adorned their hands and their shoes were immaculately polished. The one in the middle, who spoke, took out a comb and tidied up his thinning hair. As he did so the other two took notice and also took a moment to fix their hair with their own combs. When they were finished, they all straightened their postures and took a slight bow, in unison, crossing their right hands over their mid sections and bending slightly at the waist.

“I, sir, am James-Francis Bentley and these two are merely extensions of my proper self. They uh, well, frankly they don’t speak,” he said. He gave Tim a wink as he said this. The one on the right gave a little hiccup and the James in the middle shot him a glare.

The announcement hardly struck Tim as perverse as he had already seen a few strange things in his short time on the estate. However, as the declaration still did not make any sense, he did not hesitate to ask for clarification.

“Your proper self?” he said. “So, what? They’re like clones or duplicates of an original. Are you the original?”

“I am indeed the source, if that’s what you mean. For I am hardly a ‘copy’ as you might say: and neither are they.” He nodded his head in either direction at the two men. “These two are as much James Bentley as am I. They merely manifest different aspects of my individual self. I am the identity and these two here are, well, as basically I could put it, they are the parts and labor. There can be as many of me as I need. There’s the part of me that knows how to prepare kimbab, the part that cares for the garden and the part that likes to fish in the lake and so forth.” He took Tim’s arm and led him to the window and pointed far out towards the lake. “See?” Far across the lawn, sitting out on the dock, with his bare feet dangling in the water, was James-Francis Bentley with a fishing rod cast. He turned and waved up at the window just then.

A slight shiver ran up Tim’s spine and he turned away from the window. “Why didn’t I see you anywhere around the grounds yesterday when I was wandering around?” he asked.

“Oh, I wasn’t around yesterday. I come and go as I please,” he started. “Or, as the master pleases, I should say.” Here he stopped abruptly and checked his watch.

“You work for Geryon, then?” Tim began, but James had grown visibly anxious and he interrupted Tim.

“Oh! We haven’t time for any more of this nonsense, boy,” he said.

James nodded at the other two James and they swung into action, circling around Tim, dressing him and primping his hair. One shined his shoes while the other tucked a kerchief in his breast pocket. One dusted his shoulders while the other picked at lint. They prepared him in such a fantastical and unobtrusive manner that Tim hardly was aware of what they were doing and before he knew it, he had been dressed and groomed to appear as if he had a date.

Did he have a date, he wondered?

It was hardly time for his first date with one of Geryon’s daughters. He had completed only one task so far and it was only Tuesday. The dates had been laid out to occur on the proper weekends, or so Tim thought. And who sets up a date first thing in

the morning anyway? Before Tim could conjecture any further, James made a formal announcement, as he had been intending to do the whole time.

“The master wishes to have a meeting with you over breakfast this morning. Your task for the day is to prepare for him his morning eggs just the way he likes them. Your performance will be reviewed immediately. Coffee is to be prepared just as it was yesterday. Apparently he was pleased with your brewing techniques. Come, come. The master has been waiting for some time already, as I fell asleep waiting for you to wake.”

“That’s not my fault,” Tim said. “You should have woken me up instead of falling asleep!” Though he was relieved to learn that the coffee had gone over well, he became immediately nervous again. He could not cook. He had never cooked eggs in his life. Throw a frozen hamburger on the grill? Sure, he could do that. What idiot from his trailer park couldn’t? But his wife, Tina-Sue, had always been the one to cook for him and she wasn’t even half-decent at it anyway. He started to panic for a moment. Then a thought occurred to him and he shared it with James. “Why aren’t *you* doing these things for Geryon? Clearly you’re capable of performing multiple tasks with your multiple personalities, or whatever the hell those parts of you are. Why are you even the one telling me this today? Geryon had no problem scaring the bejesus out of me yesterday by delivering his demands himself.”

“The master’s motives are not mine to know. I do only what he asks of me, sir,” James said as he gave Tim one final look over. “You appear to be ready now. He will be waiting for you at the dining table in the main banquet hall when you have prepared his breakfast. Let’s go. Mustn’t keep the master waiting..”

Contributor Bios

Jessica Stapp's professions center around animal welfare and nutrition. Free time is spent drawing, eating mac 'n cheese and various indoor hobbies. Her favorite words include ennui and pneumonia.

Eli Craven was born and raised in Idaho. He is currently working on his BFA from Boise State University. He still finds film to be the superior photography medium.

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Stephen Schwegler is the author of *Perhaps.*, a collection of incredibly absurd short fiction. His work has been published by Jersey Devil Press, Blink Ink, and Short, Fast, and Deadly. He was born on Long Island, but spent most of his life growing up in the wasteland more commonly known as New Jersey. He lives there with his wife and two cats who think they run the place. They do. He has an unhealthy affinity for video games, Pearl Jam and all things toast. Seriously, he has like four toasters.

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Kyle Hemmings lives and works and dies in increments in New Jersey. His work has been featured in *Freedom Fiction*, *Vis a Tergo*, *Blacklisted*, *Clutching at Straws* and elsewhere.

Mike Berger, PhD is bright, articulate, handsome, and extremely humble

Daniel Janin is an underachieving musician. Originally from Boise, Idaho he now resides in Denver, Colorado. Daniel is bedeviled with time travel, pinball, Norse mythology and Labrador retrievers

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John Lambremont, Sr. is a poet living in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, with his wife, their fat gray tabby cat, and their Jack Russell terrier runt. During the last year, John's poems have appeared in *A Hudson View* (2010 Pushcart Prize nomination), *Boston Literary Magazine*, *Foundling Review*, *Poetry Quarterly*, *Raleigh Review*, *Caper Literary Journal*, *The Fib Review*, and and other publications. John enjoys modern jazz, adult baseball, and writing country songs.

Tom Hamilton is an Irish Traveler. His short stories, poems, plays and articles have been widely published. Recently in *Withersin Magazine*, *Existere Literary Journal* and in the popular 'Dead Worlds' book series. Along with his lovely wife Mary Theresa and their three small, adorable daughters, Tiffany, Hope and Catalina, he lives in Loves Park, IL USA.

Zozie Beatrice is an English major in Milwaukee. She spends her time writing and bicycling.

Michael A. Hayes holds a B.S. in Sociology and Psychology from Boise State University. He lives in Boise's East End. When he is not running political campaigns, he gets drunk on cheap wine and nostalgia.

When he's not busy writing and paying off student loans, *Mike Wiley* is repetedly discovering that there is no practical application for his degree in philosopohy.

