



USED GRAVITRONS

13

SEPTEMBER 2013

COM-
PARATIVENESS
TIVES

EVENTUALITY

QUALITY

SIZE

INDIVIDUALITY

LANGUAGE





**USED GRAVITRONS
QUARTERLY**

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EDITORIAL TWEET



The image shows a screenshot of a Twitter profile for 'Used Gravitrons'. The profile picture is a stylized, hand-drawn illustration of a woven basket or hat. The name 'Used Gravitrons' is displayed in bold black text, followed by the handle '@used_gravitrons' and the location 'Brooklyn, NY'. Below the bio, it says 'UG is a contributor-based art/lit magazine.' and provides the website 'http://usedgravitrons.com'. At the bottom of the profile card, there are three statistics: 487 TWEETS, 37 FOLLOWING, and 310046 FOLLOWERS. Below the profile card, the word 'Tweets' is visible in a bold, sans-serif font.

U guys-

I get waaaaaaaaaaaaay moar than 140 (<----yup, wastin a's) characters 2 rite u an editorial so it's like u get the longest tweet evr. Lucky. Haha. Did u hear? Wen Michael Frazer sent me a 3-D story a few months back I said, WTF could this be? I had never seen a 3-D story b4 and I bet u haven't either unless ur name is @micfrazer. After that, it was like, Wellfuckyeahwe'regonnadoa3-Dissue. So I tapped my buddy Matt for a 3-D cover and well, we were simply blown away. I hope u get a kick out of this issue b/c a lot of sweaty wrk and #eyecrossing went into it. Sarah Ciampa brings us her gorgeous still life oil paintings. @james_lipton pulls a #sixpackstory out of thin air and mystic beer breath. We've got a creation myth, drunk superheroes and some weird tales about food (I may have been hungry during the entire production of this issue).

O! and kids: stay away from the Crazy Clown stuff, k? Call me @OldManCheckers, but u can just smoke the real stuff. It won't put u in the hospital. RT if you <3 #absurdsoop!

-Mike



Biological Clock Series: Figs and Grape Leaves
by Sarah Ciampa
oil on panel, 16"x20"

Cinema Title

by Michael Frazer

You bought the popcorn, and I brought the wine. It was going to be “one of those nights” at Woodbridge in Irvine. Because the dollar theater accepts the rejects, the homeless, the hipsters, the drunks. I’d say I don’t know which we are, but that may be the André talking. We got our tickets before the show and bought an extra for the person manning the ticket booth. Thought he might enjoy the other show we weren’t going to see anyway.² I don’t think he appreciated our act of generosity as much as the guy at concessions did. I guess a \$2 ticket to a film you can’t even see isn’t the same as a box of Milk Duds. They gave us glasses for the film.¹ If I wanted 3D, I’d walk outside. 4D, I’d drink more. Speaking of which, pass the bottle again.

Thanks. The elision of time brought on by the drink is the only way to tolerate a movie of this caliber.

We walk out of the theater with popcorn in your hair and wine on our breath, our hands interlaced tighter than two mittens
inextricably bound by the tumblings of a dryer.

¹ This 3D picture has to stop before I end it.

² I bought two tickets to *This Life*; don’t recommend it.

The movie was some screenplay written by a no-name writer, and it made little sense because it clearly wasn't developed, an afterthought, about a mathematician who used his equations to tell the future, but every time he predicted the future it had some foretold consequences, namely that none of his predictions were true. But you and I saw the future five minutes ago when we saw the credits, namely that paragon of this movie would be decent given under the influence of a not insubstantial quantity of wine and poorly produced film previews, trying also to deliver the message that wine stains through the quinn shirt, and the popcorn in our hair.

The Statue Who Had TWO Mothers

by David Ellis Dickerson

When the flood receded, the world was clean again, and the first city poked its skyscrapers up out of the muddy desert. The city was so beautiful when it was new! It sparkled by day in the light of the sun, and glistened by night in the light of her sister, the moon. At this time there were no people in the city, no pavement, no traffic. The streetlamps stood dumbly, and no signs hummed. The only movement came when the wind rose up and gently rocked the buildings. The only electricity flowed when storms flashed overhead. Otherwise the city was quiet and empty, and completely dark at night, like a jewel in a velvet bag.

The sun and the moon loved the city. They felt that earth had never produced anything so fascinating. The sun loved the city because there were so many reflections, so many subtle shifts in the light as she passed overhead. The city reflected itself, the desert, the sky--it seemed there was nothing it couldn't take in. Her sister the moon loved the city for a simpler reason: she was vain, and nothing so like a mirror had ever come so close to her before. Every night she could look down at her reflection in the bank tower and be assured that she was beautiful.

But one day the wind blew a pebble into the side of the bank tower, and a bit of one window cracked. It was a small crack, but suddenly the city was no longer perfect. And the moon called to the sun and said, "Sister! The wind has marred our beautiful city. And I fear that there will be more wind and more pebbles. The city will not be here for us forever. And if we are the only ones who have seen it before its passing, the word city will never stir other's hearts the way it has stirred our own. What shall we do?"

And the sun said, "Sister, let us make a child, and this child can speak to us of everything it sees, and it will tell others, too, in words we can never speak."

And the moon replied, "This child can protect the city as well, straightening everything that the wind might bend. Then the city will last that much longer." So it was agreed.

Now there was at this time a tall statue on the roof of the post office: a figure of a man with winged feet, bravely reaching for the sky. And the sun and the moon adopted this statue, and breathed life into him using the magic they still had then. "Wake up, child," said the sun to the statue. "I give you motion." "Learn, child," said the moon to the statue. "I give you memory." And the statue opened its eyes, and knew who he was, and he called himself Brass.

So Brass became the emissary of the two sisters, and he walked through the city gently shining the windows and brushing the dust from the fire escapes and awnings. And when he tired of this he would simply walk through the city and report back to his mothers, describing how he had seen a completely dark subway tunnel, or climbed a department store's frozen escalator stairs. He described empty bus terminals and forlorn kiosks. He kicked sand into gutters and wrote songs to the tunes that the wind played when it whistled along the glassy canyons of the financial district. The two sisters smiled and were happy. But Brass himself was lonely. And at night, the city was still dark.

One day he said to the sun, "Mother, I'm lonely! I want someone to share the life you've given with me. And the city is lonely too. Its streets need bustling. Its row houses should creak with lovemaking. We need people. Do something." The sun tried, but there were no other statues in the entire city, and nothing that could be animated to help. The city was beautiful, but barren, and the sun was helpless to produce anything new.

So he called to his other mother, the moon, and said, "I'm lonely! The city is lonely! Bring people here!" And the moon said, "I'll do what I can, but you'll have to hide in the deepest subway tunnel and close your eyes all night." Brass did as he was told, and that night, and that night only, the moon went into the sky completely naked. To this day, there has never been anything so attractive in heaven or on earth, and those humans who happened to see her killed themselves rather than lose the vision to memory. The earth tipped itself off kilter in the hope of stealing a kiss. And all the buildings in the city stretched and stretched to try to reach her, and when the night ended, the city was twice as tall as it had been, and could be seen from horizon to horizon. When Brass emerged into the dawn and saw this, he cried, "Thank you, mother! Now people will see the city and come to explore!"

But people didn't come to the city. Instead, that next night, the dinosaurs did. Dinosaurs, after all, are always fascinated by big things, and they came in herds and prowled the streets. They stupidly

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attacked their own reflections and bit holes in the idle lampposts and knocked over fireplugs with their huge clumsy tails. Brass ran to the park and cried, "Help me, mother moon! They're destroying our city! They're breaking it faster than I can fix anything!" But the moon could do nothing, and stared in horror as carnosaurs rubbed up against storefronts and left blooms of broken glass behind.

This went on all night. When the sun rose, Brass cried out again, "Mother, save our city!" And the sun saw what was happening, and said, "Run down to the subway, Brass, and close your eyes and don't come out till I tell you it's safe!" Brass did as he was told, and the sun blazed hot, with a fury no one had ever seen before, and the dinosaurs all melted into black sludge which covered the sandy desert streets and became the first pavement.

That should have been the end. But quite by coincidence, the sun cooked the bodies of the dinosaurs all day, and a great smell of grilled meat wafted across the desert. And at night, the cockroaches came from all directions, drawn by the promise of food. The next day, flocks of birds followed, some drawn by the smell of meat, some by the cockroaches. Soon the city was populated with the two chief animals of the city, and it sounded much busier, what with creatures darting around, eating and dying. But still, the city needed people, and there didn't seem to be anything more that Brass or either of his mothers could do.

Brass asked some of the birds about how to draw people to the city, but the birds were uncooperative.

"Why do you want people here?" they asked.

"The city is lonely. It needs to be appreciated."

"We're here. Us and the cockroaches. Don't we count?"

"It was made people-sized. Forgive me, but you don't see the city properly. Kiosks are merely nests for your young. Ledges are walkways to you. You'll never even use those silent escalators, or go inside the rooms and sit at desks and admire the plastic cacti. Even the views from a skyscraper are boring to those who can fly."

"I'm not following you," was always the response. Brass could only shrug and move on.

Brass found himself walking through the subway tunnels, out of a sort of superstition--he had concealed himself here twice before to save the city, and perhaps this third time would someday trigger something aboveground.

In a way, it did. One afternoon as he wandered among the musty tracks, he was approached by the largest cockroach he had ever seen. It was the size of Brass's entire foot. "Greetings," it said. "My name is Sully. I understand you would like to attract people to this city."

"How did you know?" said Brass.

"I'm a cockroach. And we cockroaches know everything. We live everywhere. And what we're best at is secrets. We know what's in the houses and behind the walls. We see what falls between the cracks, and we live surrounded by the things that light never shines on and eyes never see. We know every secret, and I know a secret that may interest you."

"What is it?"

"There is a generator in this city," said Sully. "Give it electricity, turn it on and this whole metropolis will spring to life."

"Where is it?" asked Brass excitedly. "How do I turn it on?"

"It's not that simple," said Sully. "There's a price."

"Which is?"

"You must give me your left eye, and the wings from your feet."

Brass was horrified. "What do you need my eye and my wings for?"

"I'm just looking out for my people," said Sully. "Your eyes contain the light of the sun, whom we have always hated. With your eye, my whole family will see ahead clearly. We will run from danger before we even know it's there. Your wings contain the lightness of moon dust. When we see danger, we will run faster than ever. Together, these gifts will double our caution and triple our lifespans. There will be nothing we can't adapt to, no calamity we can't survive. We will be impossible to eradicate. We will live in this city forever, even if people come and try to remove us."

It was a terrible price to pay, but it was two wings that were merely ornamental, and, after all, only one eye. He would still have the other to see the beauties of the city with. So Brass tore the wings from his feet and plucked out his left eye and gave them to Sully, who attached the wings to his hindmost legs and carried the eye on his back, behind his head, which is where all cockroaches keep their extra eyes to this day.

"To start the generator," said Sully, "you must first gather the

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longest wire you can find from every telephone pole there is. Then you must climb the highest building and tie one end of the cord to the antenna on its very top. Then you must travel down to the deepest levels of the under-city and tie the other end of the cord to the generator in the place I will show you. Then you must wait for an electrical storm. When lightning hits the steeple, wait three seconds and throw the switch, then jump back immediately for your own safety. When you return to the surface, the city will be more dazzling than ever—so beautiful you will scarcely recognize it.”

So Brass set about gathering enormous quantities of wire, splicing pieces together and coiling it all on a huge spool that only a man of metal could have lifted. One day as he walked above ground, his mother the sun cried out, “Son! What happened to your face? Why are your ankles gouged and torn? Who could have done such a thing?”

“I traded my eye out of love for the city,” he replied. “I did this to myself.” And he told her about the cockroach and the generator.

“No!” the sun called to him in horror. “You mustn’t turn on the generator! Then there will be light all the time! No one will need me anymore! And the city will grow congested! My light will not fly freely anymore down the great mirror of Main Street! How can you do this to me?”

Brass was surprised to discover that his own mother was acting selfish. “I guess you wouldn’t understand,” he said. “We love the city in very different ways.”

“Let’s put it to a vote,” said the sun. “You, me, and your other mother.”

“No, mother,” said Brass. “I know what I’m doing better than you. You’ve never even been down here.”

“Insolence!” the sun cried, and she left the sky early that night, stunned at the rebellion of her child. As she passed low over the bank building, she saw something new flicker across her face: it was the first sunspot. The sun closed her eyes and thought, I’m getting old. Her sighs that evening caused some of her more rebellious lightbeams to sneak away while she was distracted. People reported seeing them dance at the North Pole.

She called to the moon, “Come talk some reason into our son! He’s going to ruin the city! He’s ruining me! My face will never be the same!”

When the moon appeared that night, she saw Brass climbing the CorpTech Building, mightiest of the city towers, and he was managing to do it with one and a half hands and only one eye, while keeping a hold on a huge spool of wire. The moon was as proud as she was shocked by this. "My son," she called out, "what happened to your eye? Where are your wings, and what are you doing?"

"I gave them to Sully the cockroach," he said, and explained what had happened. "He told me that doing this would bring life to the city."

"You can't trust what cockroaches say," said the moon. "We tried to help the city and we failed. Just leave it at that. Let's enjoy the city alone, just the three of us. Perhaps a human population is a dream that was not meant to be."

Brass kept climbing and did not answer.

"Son," said the moon, "Your mother the sun is very cross with you. You've made her deeply sad. You've even made her old. Stop what you're doing and try to see reason."

Brass kept climbing and did not answer.

"Son," she said, "Maybe you're mad at your mother right now, but consider what you're doing to me! If light comes to the city, there will be dazzlement and distraction, and bewitching inventions of electricity, and no one will ever look up anymore. I'll be forgotten. I'll have to retire, and at the height of my loveliness. That would be a disaster, Brass!" She had never called him by his name before. He knew she was furious. "Give up this hurtful quest and go back to the way you were!"

Brass reached the top and faced the moon fully. He was startled to notice that she wasn't as big as he remembered, though still a beauty. "I can't go back," he said. "I would rather die than live alone in a city that's lonely too. You don't know what it's like."

"I'm alone all the time," said the moon. "It's not that bad."

"You're not me, mother," said Brass. "For me it's torment. If you're going to stop me, try and do it. Otherwise leave, or your face will start breaking out too, and I know how vain you are."

The moon recoiled and instinctively covered her face. Where did he get the power to hurt me? she wondered, amazed. "If you do what you threaten," she said, "then you're no longer part of this family! We never want to see you again! Live underground with your

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cockroach friends if you must! Just stay out of our sight! You will have no inheritance from us!"

Brass said nothing; he simply tied the cord to the steeple of the CorpTech building, and then began climbing down, uncoiling the cable as he went.

The moon watched his descent, and as he threatened to vanish completely she realized she loved him more than anyone--even more than her sister did, even more than she loved her sister. She called after him, desperate for him to hear the kindness in her voice, "Dear son, if you repent before you do this horrible thing, if you stop at any time before you hit the switch, I promise to welcome you back. There is always a home with me for any son who wants it."

The mothers were gods, and they could have killed him, but they didn't. Instead, the moon drew clouds to shield him from her sight, and she waited to hear him clomping back with a frame bent in contrition. I will wait until he scales a building before I reply and grant his pardon, she thought. Just a little building.

But Brass was crying, because he had nowhere else to go but deep into the subway. He knew he could not go back, and that his poor sad mothers were waiting for an apology that would never come. Maybe in a few years, he thought. Decades, perhaps. When the city and its lights become old and familiar, and it doesn't seem that important anymore. When I've made it my home and know everybody in it. Maybe then I can call to my mothers and one of them will answer, shyly, and we can build our family back from there. He came to the subway station and saw that after this, there was no return. He let out a bitter piercing cry that echoed against the side of every lamp and sign and building. With this last wail, and weeping from his one remaining eye, Brass entered the subway station, emptying his spool as he went.

It was dark. He could see nothing and he could hear only cockroaches. In some places there were unborn trains that made the way narrow and he had to twist and yank to get his cargo through. But he kept going, on along tunnels and through empty shafts, bumping downward and stumbling still further downward until he was sure he was at the bottom of the under-city. The cockroaches were here too, and some of them glowed. These were Sully's Lights, a race of cockroaches no human has ever seen. Sully's Lights, by tacit command, formed a moving path that led Brass to the room where the generator was waiting.

"This is it," said Sully, and Brass peered around the room in awe. The generator was a huge metal fixture that looked something like a pipe organ, and it was thirty feet high, with a single gigantic switch. "That's the one," said Sully. The walls were coated with cockroaches, glowing dully and listening in. "The clouds that your mother sent to shield you from her sight have turned into stormclouds because the heavens are so sad. There will be lightning soon. You know what to do next."

Brass nodded, and his entire spirit jangled with a new energy. This was an adventure! This was risk! He'd never felt so in love with everything behind him--the light, the air, the city, his mothers--as he did at this moment, in the dark room filled with roaches, waiting to change the world. He hooked the cables up to the machine and then stood beside the switch, awaiting orders.

There was a distant crack, and something smelled like ozone.

"The wire's been hit!" said Sully, who knew everything. "One! Two! Three! Now!"

But Brass paused, and thought about his mothers. He wondered for an instant if maybe they were right. "Sorry!" he yelled, wincing, and then hit the switch.

His hesitation cost him. He was left holding the switch when the electricity shot through, instead of letting go as he'd been warned. The shock blasted his frame, his consciousness, everything, and he pitched backward onto the cement floor of the Generator Room. If a statue can die, then Brass was dying.

The switch was thrown, however, and the city flickered on. Streetlights lit! Sirens sang! Escalators crawled to life! Every building hummed merrily with air conditioning's song of hope. Behind the clouds where nobody could see, the sun and moon came together and looked down, holding each other's hands. They'd thought it was beautiful before, but this was something even more breathtaking. They instantly regretted all they'd said. And at that moment, Brass's final "Sorry" floated past them, and the sisters looked at each other, and a parental mercy tugged at them. They did the best they could for their only son.

They saved his life. Brass would never die. "But he renounced us," said the sun, whose face was still burning. "He renounced all that we gave him." So she bent low in the confusion of city lights and took away his motion. "He won't go off adventuring again." The moon thought

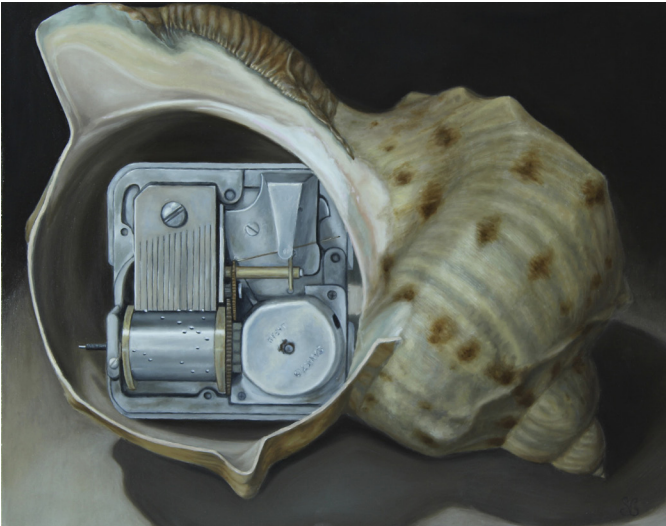
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this was cruel, and in mercy, she took away the memory she'd given him, so Brass would never know what he was missing. Then the moon retreated, and she and the sun have grown more distant since. They say that Brass still lives somewhere at the deepest part of the city, motionless and orphaned of memory, surrounded by glowing cockroaches who tell him all their secrets. They say he has become omniscient. He could answer all our questions if we just knew where to find him.

Meanwhile, people saw the lights and came across the desert, first in trickles, then in washes and tides. They all found places to fit: kiosks just their height, apartments just their style, doorways the perfect length for sleeping. The birds never even knew what happened--they just backed off to make room for the newcomers, and then decided they weren't worth leaving over. Many things the sun and moon said came true. The people invented spectacle, and noise, and business, and numberless new kinds of stress. The city grew moths and squirrels and cars and trucks and even a few bewildered trees. Everything became more complicated. And it's true the lights never do go out, and people don't look up that much these days. But they were wrong about two things: The sun has never ceased to give us hope when we remember, and there still is nothing lovely as the moon.



Dream for a Down Economy
by Sarah Ciampa
oil on panel, II "XI4"



Shell and Music Box Motor
by Sarah Ciampa
oil on panel, II "XI4"

The Most Important Meal of the Day

by Edward Kerns

Breakfast's dry. Eggs, toast, bacon's chewing sandcakes. Hashbrowns too. Everything crumbles. Falls apart in pieces. Filling my face with grease is my favorite thing to do, next to sleeping in the afternoon. But not today. I try my coffee, milk, orange juice, water. Nothing helps. This is the first sign, my first symptom of what's to come. Just a taste, and I can't even do that.

"Why are you making that face?"

"Wha ace?"

"Like you ate a fart."

I spit out my mouthful, only there's no spit. More like it falls.
"Thorry. lth thuth tho dwy."

"What?"

"Dwy."

Half an hour later, she's freaking out in the ER. My lips stick to my teeth, and when I talk, they stick to my gums, so I'm trying to be quiet. She's far from it.

"Can't someone see him now!?"

"I hine."

"He can't even talk!"

"Miss," the receptionist's a nurse, I know it. "Take a seat." She's fucking with us, making us wait.

Mom listens, and as she does, I watch her chew her cheek like me. Only I gnaw mine to salivate, thirsty enough to rip her blouse open and suck her dry as I am.

After ten minutes, my lips are cracked bleeding and Mom's screaming, "He's bleeding! For Chrissake, he's bleeding!" True, but it's helping. Suckling blood, I sit back and breathe. The air is stagnant, plastic as my seat, or the GI Joes in combat poses over my bed back home, waiting to attack. It soothes, sedates me, and I sleep.

Waking up, I'm on a metal table smaller than me, under lights

brighter than I've ever seen, naked. Coughing up sand, skin flaking off in clumps, people hover over me in masks strapped tight, mumbling things I can't understand, faces bent together. They're cartoons, staring at me with eyes the size of grapefruits, dripping powdered sugar. I can't see through the fog, but I taste it. They're putting something in me. Water. Filling me up with a garden hose. I hear it splash down my gullet, but my tongue won't move. Neither will my eyes, dried wide open 'til I fall out again.

"Andy, can you hear me?" It's Mom. "Andy?" She's floating on her back, splashing my face with a tail.

I try to say, "I can't swim," but she pulls me in.

"Come, drink."

And I do. I drink and drink and drink until I'm the sea, the fish and the beach.

"Andy? Please," she turns away. "He's not breathing."

"Yes he is. Look," the voice is distant, echoing and garbled. "But he has to eat."

So she feeds me, nurses me into a sandcastle of a man in a hospital gown, palm tree feet paper-slippered, orange blossoms sprouting from my hands, built by a boy who looks just like me.

I watch him work, patting me into the ground, packing me tight. I watch Mom stroke my hashbrown hair, listen to her sing stories about breakfasts I've never tasted, and in the end, I'm back on the table, shivering cold, weeping seawater.

The next day we head home. Arms and legs potted, she rolls me to the car, plants me in the passenger seat. At the house, she sets me by the window, waters me daily, turns me toward the sun when I'm in the shade too long. It's sweet, like the dates growing from my feet. She picks 'em for milkshakes. First for her, then for me.

Now I'm eating, growing. Towering over the kitchen, I break the window and crack the ceiling, 'til she makes the most important meal of the day. Buries it beside me, deep – two fried eggs, bacon, potatoes and toast. When my oranges ripen, she reaches with the picker for the highest ones, 'cause up there they're sweeter. Only I wouldn't know. I've gone too far, grown too fast to taste the fruit of my creation.

Interrupted Dinner

by Benjamin Revermann

"You mean they had pizza there pre-made and you went with meatloaf?" He says to his mother with an air of disbelief.

She pulls the already cooked meatloaf out of the paper bag, sets it on the table and replies, "We just had pizza last week and I don't want you getting sick of it, it's for your own good."

He scoffs, "I will NEVER get tired of pizza mom, that's not even possible. Besides, last week was like forever ago." His mother, keeping her calm tells him, "Go wash your hands and sit at the table." Silently he does as he's told.

The kitchen has a warm yellow glow from the forty watt light bulbs. The floors are well swept and the refrigerator is gently humming. The mother is lightly singing. The son, eleven, is washing his hands in the bathroom which is not far off from the kitchen.

There is a forty's something man sitting at the head of the table reading a newspaper, he is digesting the news and wondering if he should have stepped in when his son was arguing with his mother but is thinking she handled it pretty well.

On the kitchen table, there's a purple vase filled with lavender flowers, the scent is just right for this moment in this kitchen. Even though it's ten degrees below zero outside. The snow is piling up against the front door. It's a colder than average winter for this southern Minnesota household.

There's two more residents in this house, the one on the floor is a wiener dog, in exactly 6 minutes and 32 seconds she will be the last of all five of them still alive, when she escapes she'll live just long enough to freeze to death outside. During her autopsy they'll find meatloaf in her stomach concluding that she was in fact the dog who belonged to this family.

The last person is the family's sixteen year old daughter, she was watching T.V. but has been called to dinner but can't help finishing this

last text message, then another, then another. Her phone will be used as evidence. She stands up from the couch and walks to the kitchen never taking her eyes off the phone and never comes close to running into anything. Her mother says, "Put the phone down honey; let's try to eat like a family". Her next text is to her friend who lives in town, it reads, 'sorry gotta eat, meatloaf ugh!!'. This is her second to last text, in five minutes and four seconds she will make one last panicked attempt to call for help from her bedroom closet upstairs, with no reception she texts her friend, 'CALL THE COPSIM NOTKIDDING MY DADS DEA'. The police will believe she didn't have time to finish the message, they'll be angry she didn't get the chance.

The son, back from his hand washing adventure sits down with a sigh and holds his plate up, meatloaf and mashed potatoes are scooped onto his plate, along with a little gravy. Despite his preference for pizza, mentally he does admit it smells pretty good; just in case he cuts a large square off his slice and hands it to the dog who sits eagerly at his feet because she knows who loves her most.

The father puts the newspaper down and hands his plate to his wife. He hasn't spoken very much tonight because he found out earlier today he'd been fired. There was a safety check he didn't remember doing at the plant which was done incorrectly costing someone a lot of money. The blame had to land somewhere, he was it. He didn't know how to tell his wife. The cops who hadn't been to the crime scene would automatically blame him because of his situation, "he would have been under a lot of stress that night" they would later say. Those police officers who will have been to the crime scene and will have seen what had been done to the father didn't doubt his innocence, not in the least.

Once the family has everything dished up and is on the way towards dessert the father thinks he should tell the whole family about his job, when the dog whines. The father tells his son, "Don't feed the dog table scraps" but he knows his son will anyway. The son bends down to look at the dog and asks, "What's the matter girl?" He understands her language and according to him that wasn't her 'I want food' whine, it was closer to her, 'there's a visitor' whine.

The son turns around to look out of the kitchen and through the living room to the big bay window that's facing the long driveway leading to the highway. With the snow the driveway would be almost un-drive-able right now but there's no cars coming up the drive. It being close to full dark there weren't any headlights anyway.

In the following weeks detectives would learn that the dog and

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the son were inseparable. When the son would have friends over and they would play wrestle the dog would go crazy and protective when she thought he was being hurt. More than one of his friends went home with a bite mark or two. Said detectives would learn this and it'd explain the dead dog's mouth full of broken teeth but it wouldn't explain her missing tail or the shades of white on her fur. They would say, 'She's only two years old, no way she'd be going gray already'. Witnesses will tell them she was all solid brown the day before.

As the family continues to eat the father asks his daughter, "How was school today". They have less than three minutes to live, the daughter replies, "Fine". The father leaves it at that.

Finally the mother asks the father, "Did something happen at work today? You seem distracted." The father replies, "Yeah, I need to talk to you guys about something." There is a long pause as the father gets the nerve to say what's on his mind. With the long silence the family now has less than two minutes to live.

The father, uneager to start and looking for something to get the spotlight off of him hears the dog bark. He looks at his son who tells him, "Dad, she jumped on my lap. What's the matter girl?" The dad stands up pushing his chair backwards with his legs, glad he's got something to save him from this moment. Walking around the table he goes to the son who also backs his chair out from the table. The dog is trying to crawl under the boy's shirt, trying to hide. The dad looks at this unexpected behavior and asks, "What's got into her?" That's when there's a knock at the door.

Princess Leia Went to the Gap by A.J. Huffman

They built something called a mall just beyond the Mos Eisley spaceport, so she fought her way through Storm Troopers and bounty hunters for the May the Force Be with You blowout bonanza sale. She almost choked on her Slurpee when she saw the price tag on the front-table sweaters. Two of those things could fund the rebellion for a light year. The sales wookiee working the floor herded her into a dressing room where she traded her combat pants for dot legging skimmer jeans. One look in the mirror at the way they hugged her ass and she knew she would hock her soul and her starfighter for just one pair.

The Wormhole Wave Rider by A.J. Huffman

rip roaring through the cosmos, gathers stars in her ponytail, becomes portrait of post-modern passport, a nightlight to dream by. She is galactically dumpster diving into milky way work-space, borrowing pigments to paint her eyes. Different colors contact different species, allow understanding to flow without words. Weapons have never needed triggers. To conquer is to commune. Inhale knowledge, exhale authority. She is goddess to all who have been touched by the wind waving above her in flagged crown of complete contentment.



Shell and Vacuum Tube
by Sarah Ciampa
oil on panel, 8"x10"



Can and Shell
by Sarah Ciampa
oil on panel, 11"X14"

Peashoot

by David Howard

My dentist subscribed to one of those “oldies” magazines that remind those of us over a certain age how great things were when we were young. While waiting for my name to be called I picked up an issue and saw a picture of peashooters - a bit of Americana from the 1950’s I have been trying for years to forget.

The appearance of the eight-inch-long, narrow, green or red plastic tubes signaled for most of us in the sixth grade the beginning of spring, more than seeing the first robin.

We usually bought the peas at Puhl’s food store where there was less of a chance to run into parents than at the A & P.

But I hated buying them from Mrs. Puhl even more.

She always yelled something at us, saying what horrible boys we were for shooting peas at everyone. “Someday the rats and bats and snakes will get you all!” she shouted as we left the store, hiding our boxes of Blue Bell Hard Peas under our shirts or sweaters.

“You’re a bat,” Wes Regan, the minister’s son, once shouted back at her, bringing an even louder oath from the woman, and one from her husband, a man who always wore dark glasses and walked with a stoop. He never waited on customers; just walked around the tiny store, putting things on shelves or sweeping the two aisles.

Peashooters were banned from school, though none of us paid much attention to that. Every year, kids would get caught as they blew peas at classroom windows during recess.

I’d often be among the boys that would shoot at the first grade room windows, to scare the little kids, remembering how scared I was when a hail of peas hit the windows.

That year, the teacher warned us of dire happenings if we got caught with peashooters or peas in school. “You don’t want your classmates losing an eye from those awful things.” Most of us just looked at each other and grinned.

Peashooter season was almost over, besides, we were ready for playing baseball and collecting baseball cards - time to put the

peashooters away for another year. Still we agreed to share a last box of peas. I didn't go right to Puhl's with the others. Instead I stopped in at Glendower Drug to see if the first baseball bubble gum cards were in.

When I walked in the store the kids were all at the counter. Mrs. Puhl was pointing her finger at Wally. "No, I'm not selling you kids any more peas. The school called and said they would send the police here if I did. Now get out of my store!" The husband stood next to her, stooped over his broom, wearing his dark glasses.

Wally and most of us started to leave, but Billy Joost and Nonmacher stayed, saying something to the old woman. From where I stood near the door I couldn't hear much, but then they took out their peashooters and sent a round of peas toward the food on the shelves behind the counter. Peas were bouncing off boxes of corn flakes and cake mixes.

"You rotten kids!" Mrs. Puhl shouted. "Get out!" She came around the counter. But it was her husband who caught my attention as he lifted his broom and yelled: "Rats and bats and snakes you'll taste, if you don't leave this place in haste!"

We'd never heard him talk before. His voice was slow and scratchy, as if it had hardly been used. Then he pulled off his dark glasses still saying that rhyme, now staring at us with only one eye. Where his right eye should have been was just the dried and wrinkled skin of a socket. He raised his broom again as the woman said, "I told you boys about the rats and bats. I warned you, I did."

I edged closer to the door when I heard Billy scream. "Look at Joost, look at him!" Nonmacher dropped his pea shooter and stood there, terror on his face as he watched the furry head of a rat come out of Billy's mouth. Billy tried to scream and spit at the same time as the rodent fell to the floor and ran under the counter.

Mike ran toward the door, but couldn't get by me. I was frozen there watching Nonmacher yell as a snake slithered from his mouth down his chest to the floor where it wrapped itself around the leg of Mr. Puhl, who was mumbling so fast it was impossible to understand him.

All over the store rats scurried and bats flew in and out of the aisles, alighting on tops of boxes for a few seconds, then darting somewhere else. Nonmacher was still crying, as Billy took him by the arm and pulled him away from the Puhls.

"We've got to get out of here!" he yelled, throwing his

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peashooter at the old man. It struck him where his eye used to be causing him to howl even more loudly.

We ran down the street to a small park. No one said anything as we caught our breath. Joost and Nonmacher kept spitting, clearing their throats and moaning.

We talked about telling our parents or the police, but in the end pledged to tell no one. Who would believe it?

Mike, crying again, said he had felt something in his mouth when he looked at the old man. Wally didn't say anything; he just sat on a rusted swing set with his eyes closed, sniffing.

The Puhl's store was closed for a few weeks. When it reopened new people were there, younger versions of the Puhls. Only this time it was the woman who wore the dark glasses, some other kids reported, because after that day we never went in there again.

The Hall of Heroic Citizens

by Gregg Badichek

Meanwhile, at the Hall of Heroic Citizens:

Bombasta-Man, yawning and stretching his superhuman physique, groggily walked into the command center. "What's going on?" he managed, "Why're you all sitting here? Is this an intervention?" He half-chuckled at the joke to which nobody responded. "Another, I mean."

Pantra lifted a nearly emptied wine glass and clicked her lethal nails softly against the rim as if to say, Does this look like an intervention?

"Okay, so what is it?" He looked around the Command Center and noted the various heroes milling about with no sense of urgency. Have they already finished daily briefing? He pointed to a bottle of bourbon at the table's edge, "Long as we're just standing here, somebody want to hook me up?"

Structuro filled him a generous glass.

Pantra started in: "Well, Mr. Bombastacular, we have a bit of a situation here. A teensy, tiny situation is happening. Right now."

She's drunk, he thought, typical, but definitely earlier than usual.

"I'm all ears, team." He sipped from his glass. His mouth quivered, his face contorted. He thrust the glass in front of his eyes and dissected it with his spectral vision.

"Wait! Team, this-" He shook his head in disbelief. "This is the good stuff! The expensive stuff! What the hell's happened!?"

Hog-Man gingerly toed over, his movements wobbly. "Well, buddy, thing is, while you were asleep, uh..." He seemed unable to find the words.

Bombasta-Man nodded for him to continue. "Whatever it is,

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Hoggy, we'll face it like we always have: as a TEAM!"

Thrusting his hands into the air, Bombasta-Man searched for a response that did not materialize.

"As a... team? Right, guys? Right?"

Hog-Man resumed, "Well, okay. So, While you were asleep, it looks like Optitron, go figure, returned from his cosmic exile and, well." He winced.

"He pretty much punched the planet out of orbit."

Bombastman laughed, his chuckles turning nervous.

"He... punched it?"

"Oh yeah. Straight up punched the planet." Hog-Man chugged the rest of his highball and nodded solemnly. "Right out of orbit. We're pretty much just floating towards the sun right now."

"Optitron returned? And punched the planet? The whole planet?" His mouth fell agape in disbelief. "I-I-When?"

Mystic Mister's ethereal form floated toward Bombasta-Man. In his ghostly voice he whispered, "About 3 hours ago. He was on our radar for less than a minute before he socked the Himalayas right in the nose."

Bombasta-Man waved his arms as he entered an utter panic.

"Why didn't you wake me?! If I could've flown out, met him head on maybe--"

"We tried that!" Panthra screeched. "But your oh-so-necessary-state-of-the-art tranquility chamber must've kept our voices, sirens, and all forms of superpowered banging from reaching you!"

Bombasta-Man turned red and dropped his gaze.

"I need that room. My senses are so powerful, I can't sleep if I don't... have total peace and--"

"We told you!" cried Atomic Bob, storming toward Bombasta-Man and apparently sober. "We told you when you had that infernal room constructed, that making the construct completely impenetrable to sound, heat, and phasing would lead to just this sort of situation! But you insisted on it! You greedy, selfish, super bastard!"

Hog-Man slid his arm around Atomic Bob's shoulder and gently pulled him away.

"Come on, A-Bob, what's done is done." Hog-Man's meditative

mindset shined; it was nearly impossible for the untrained eye to perceive his blinding drunkenness.

“Look, Bomba. There’s nothing we can do at this point. Optitron socked this rock so hard and so fast that we couldn’t even respond. If we stepped outside, like Quadrocore and Flame Game tried to do, we’d be swept away by the centrifugal force in an instant. The Hall’s gravitational and heat shields are the only things protecting us. Optitron must’ve been pissed out of his wits.”

Loudly, Hog-Man said, “There’s nothing you could have done!” Then he leaned in close to Bombasta-Man and whispered, “because who wants to die hated, eh Bomba?” He clinked the ice in his glass. “Grab yourself a drink. Computer reckons we’ve got about 75 minutes before shield failure, and then,” he tipped his glass and trickled bourbon onto the floor, “we melt like the rest of them.”

Bombasta-Man observed his colleagues, the most powerful beings on the planet, as they stewed in alcohol and their own misery. The Deflective Detective broke into sobs and buried his moistened face into Panthra’s bosom; she sneered at Bombasta-Man.

Using his incredible speed, Bombasta-Man grabbed an unopened bottle of whiskey off the table, and easily downed it in the blink of an eye.

The Monster

By Mitchell Edgeworth

"I'm bored," William said.

His grandfather glanced up at the windowbox. William was sprawled out across the cushions, staring out the frosted glass at a dismal, snow-blurred landscape of white fields and scratchy winter forests.

"How would you like to hear a story?" his grandfather asked, wheeling his chair a little closer. "I used to tell you stories all the time when you came up here."

"I'm a little old for stories now, Grandpa."

"You're never too old for stories," his grandfather smiled.

William sighed. "All right. Shoot."

Once upon a time, a man was hunting a monster across the desert.

The man reckoned that he was about four or five days behind it. He judged from the weathering of its tracks, and sometimes by the state of the bodies he found in its wake. He had a sword and a gun. Cutting across the sandy dunes and dusty plateau, the tracks of the monster were unmistakable.

He walked all day beneath a murderous sun. Raptors wheeled above. Sweat soaked his shirt against his chest hair, and ran down the back of his legs. His flesh burned. He refilled his water canteen from the wells that hadn't been fouled by the monster, and drank lovingly and greedily whenever his rationing allowed.

He followed the monster into the desert.

"A sword and a gun?" William asked. "Is this story in the past? Or in another world?"

"The past is another world," his grandfather said. William rolled his eyes.

The man came to a village, melted and smoking at high noon.

Spot fires burned in the ruins, rubble strewn amongst splintered timber, limbs and corpses sticking out of the wreckage. Here and there a crumbling clay wall still stood. A thin, clear ooze coated every surface, slowly evaporating under the sun.

"Is the monster not actually bad?" William asked. "Is it just misunderstood?"

"No," his grandfather said. "The monster destroyed the village and killed all the people. It did it on purpose. The monster is not misunderstood. The monster is evil."

"Maybe it has an injury," William said. "A thorn in its foot."

"No," his grandfather said firmly. "The monster is evil. It is evil because it is evil."

The man found a woman half-buried in the rubble, mortally wounded, and knelt by her.

"The Crawling Beast," she murmured. "Came at dawn... destroyed everything..."

The man trickled some water on her lips, but she choked and spluttered. "Are there any weapons here?" he asked. "Or food? Hidden away?"

The woman could offer no more than incoherent mumbling. She died soon after.

The man left the village and followed the monster's tracks across the playa.

"Is the monster not actually a monster?" William asked. "Does it turn out to be an army, or something? Or maybe the man is crazy and he's making it all up. Or maybe he turns out to be the monster!"

"No," his grandfather said. "This story is not an allegory or a metaphor or a parable. It is not a trick story. It is a story about a man, hunting a monster."

"There must be some kind of moral. It's too simple a story not to have a moral."

"Every story has a moral," his grandfather said. William rolled his eyes again.

The man followed the monster's trail west, through dry creekbeds and stony gullies, across salt flats and through cactus forests, past the occasional water seep or oasis that kept him alive. Once, while

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camping in a jumble of byzantine ruins half swallowed by the sand, he thought he saw a flash in the north. He watched it a long time, and decided it was lightning - some dry and distant thunderstorm. The desert was empty of life. There was only carnage behind him, and the monster before him.

"Why is the man chasing the monster?" William asked.

"Why not?"

"He must have some reason. We don't know anything about him. Is he a family man, whose wife and children were killed by the monster a few villages back? Or is he a mercenary? A spaghetti western man with no name? Or is he responsible for the monster? Like in Wizard of Earthsea or Jonathon Strange & Mr Norrell?"

"I don't know those stories."

"They're books. The main character brings a monster into the world, because they don't know any better, and then it wreaks havoc," William said. "See, they're not just noble heroes, they're the ones responsible for it."

"We are all responsible for the world's monsters."

"So he did release it or something?"

The old man sighed. "No."

After countless weeks of hunting the monster, after endless ruined villages and despoiled corpses, the monster's tracks began to narrow. The prints that it left were less rhythmic, more random. The marks of its tail were more prominent in the sand. The monster was slowing down.

The man hurried on.

"There must be some point to the story," William said. "It's not a very good story if there's no point to it."

"You know," the old man said, "when I was your age, I always thought the opposite. I hated stories where I was told to believe something, and liked stories full of monsters and guns and adventure."

"This story doesn't have much of guns and adventure either," William pointed out. "That's why I thought it was going to be... what did you call it? An allegory?"

"It's just a story."

"Well. It's not that exciting. Does it have a point to it or not?"

"Of course it has a point! What would be the point of a story without a point?"

The man found the monster at the edge of the dune sea. It was a slug-like creature the size of a whale, with dozens of tentacles and thousands of wriggling legs like a millipede. Its head was a protruding rhombus shape at odds with the rest of its body, like a hammerhead shark or an iguanadon. Its tail was a long, dark whip.

He'd seen the monster once before, when it crashed about with frightening speed and whipped its tentacles around, breaking down walls and grasping people like dolls. Now it was dying, lying on its side in the lee of a great sand dune, its flank slowly rising and falling as it struggled to breath. Its tentacles were splayed uselessly in the sand like the legs of a drowned spider.

The man watched the monster for some time before approaching it. It was drying out beneath the afternoon sun, its skin turning from a translucent white to a dark and crinkly brown. He walked around its head and stared it in its half-lidded, foot-wide eyeball. It didn't seem to realise he was there, until he drew his pistol and shot it in the eye. Then it roared in agony through its slit of a mouth, breath stinking of rotting meat, and rolled its body slightly. Its tentacles twitched, but it could not raise them. Thick blue blood oozed from between its eyelids.

The man walked around to the other side of its head, where its second eye was now fully alert. The monster knew he was there, and stared at him with contempt. It made a huffing and wheezing noise from its gills.

The man climbed up onto its carapace, ignoring the gel that stung his hands, and stood above its head. Then he drew his sword and started hacking at the monster's neck, bracing his feet against it to keep his balance as the creature screamed and bellowed and weakly tried to buck him off. After the first six blows it went limp. After another ten blows, the monster's head came clear and tumbled satisfyingly into the sand.

Panting for breath, the man climbed down carefully from the beast's carcass, and walked to the bottom of the dune where the head had rolled. It was half as big as he was. His sword was now notched and useless, and he planted it up to the hilt in the monster's eye.

Then he climbed back up the dune, sat at the peak, and watched the sun go down.

William looked at his grandfather, waiting for him to go on.

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"Wait, what? That's it?"

"That's the end," his grandfather said. "He killed the monster."

"But it was dying anyway," William objected.

"Yes."

"That's not an answer!"

"Are you unhappy with it?"

"I'm suspicious of it," William said. "You said it wasn't an allegory for anything. But the monster was dying when the man found it and then he killed it in cold blood."

"Yes."

"That doesn't seem to me like an ordinary story. That seems like something that means something."

"It doesn't mean anything," his grandfather said. "It's just a story."

"But you said it had a point," William said.

"It did."

"I can't see one!" William said. "It was just a waste of time!"

"William!" his mother's voice called from downstairs. "Dad! Dinner's ready!"

The Ladies' Lycanthropy Club

by Linda Ann Strong

Like something out of Red Riding Hood
the timbers take their tea,
paws on the Royal Albert,
fangs that can fracture a femur.

Their guest, their intended victim,
eats her petit fours appalled.
The wolves looked perfect ladies
when they waltzed at the charity ball.

The pearls on their furry throats aglow,
their eyes burn cornelian red –
voices go from elocution,
in a wink, to snarls instead.

Candied angelica, madelaines
will soon no longer suffice.
Their toothsome little victim, though,
is a witch with a secret device.

Her dress is covered in mirrors
beneath her fawn skin cloak.
When the wolves rise up to rip her apart –
each meets its own terrible throat.

From the magnifying mirror dress
larger wolves leap forth at her beck.
Protecting their crafty mistress,
they crush each lycanthrope's neck.

She returns to the Faerie Tollbooth
emerging from a wedge of wood –
releases a sack full of blackbirds –
wishing them all well and good.

Six-Pack Story

by James Lipton

*revised after beer 4 (and also after beer 5...)

Beer 1: (and that crunching sound that the aluminum makes.
and that feeling it gives you when when you're exhausted and
thirsty.)

:

Preface: Prophecy

It's a funny place to be in. Two tall vodkas down,
thinking about a nap then there's this half remembered
feeling that strikes you as morefamiariyouknow(?!), but
from a long time ago. And you find yourself walking to
the market and then walking back you find yourself
talking out loud to

This is that funny place, written in Emacs.

It's summer and the bears are awake and the morning starts with
a phone call unanswered. There are leaves on the floor and dried
mud from the last of the rainy spring not soooo far gone. If A*y could
remember clearly. But all that's left of that cold place, and all that's left
of what brought her back is, it's fuzzy. A memory of green apples and
red licorice. Maybe that's enough though (she knows it's not). Already
there are somethings almost human shivering in the streets, lost. That
memory. Green apples and red licorice.

A*y didn't die slowly. She had plenty of time to say goodbye. Goodbyes
said over and over again. She had enough time to gather courage and
then to watch that courage whither away.

Maybe that was part of it.

It hurt coming back. A*y's muscles were rigored. Her blood wouldn't
move. And she kept trying to breathe. Her feet on the hard cement. She
knew that her feet had

Beer 2:

It seemed to A*y that the sky got darker after all this. But it'd been so
long since

She met ANOTHER man with a metal heart. He said it was just to remember

but without your teeth would fall out of your fucking face you fucking you're not. A*y had watched the almost humans stumble terribly. And she'd watched the transformations, science fueled by the deranged, that slowly became the synthetics and the parasites. The synthetics were metal and alloy and white noise and they needed liquid and there wasn't a lot of it. The parasites just needed something else.

A*y wondered if everything would have died (and not come back) without her. That memory(!), still no clearer (At first there were people, followers, who wanted some sane perspective on everything but her "wisdom." That memory.). A part of her would have liked

Beer 3:

There are synthetics beyond the stars. And there are parasites as old as mountains. A*y saw a creature (how long ago?) and her first thought was fox but that's such an old word. A*y has been walking and maybe she just dreamed that there was a time before she started. She found a box with hats yesterday(?) and there was one that was supposed to be that thing she saw and she'd put it on and hadn't taken it off since and she felt like telling the thing that ran by that made her think fox but she thought too long about that word and missed her chance for any of her words to have been heard.

Beer 4:

A*y stared at the stars in the pitch, almost/maybe tomorrow sky, and there were something like clouds, glowing.

A*y gather-ed the bones of a thing and, after holding them wrapped in her arms, she

History: The synthetics augmented their bodies with technology. When they began to rot after their crippled resurrection, they replaced the offending patch of skin or foot or lung with the artificial. The parasites fed on blood.

.....

Vi was synthetic, he'd learned not to trust his memory. The mind is an unstable thing. But he remembered someone from soooo long ago. Why?! That someone looked soooo much like the funny(girl? is there such a thing anymore?) figure dancing below the streets. It was probably some drug on his raisin-ed brain.

History: Transferring identity to synthetic brain matter is difficult and prone to failure. Synthetics avoid it until their

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counterparts strap them down and demand the procedure at the nearest parts store.

History: Synthetics and Parasites alike regularly take mind altering drugs. Lots and lots of mind altering drugs. Shit's fucking DOOOOOOPE when you've lived long enough to remember speaking a dead language.

Beer 5:

Why was he below the streets? Some whim? There's nothing down there but rats and crawl-bots. That's what you learn after getting a new limbic system. But Vi went. And he felt good down there, because he'd seen her, dancing(?!). She'd seen him too. She waved as if it was a perfectly

.....
A*y was used to baffled stares. Both the synthetics and parasites forgot her, a long, long, time ago. Even those old enough to have met her. But she understood that she was just a strange dream now. A hallucination.

.....
Vi couldn't sleep.

.....
A*y couldn't sleep

Beer 6:

"How does it work A*y?"

"Ha!"

"It's strange right? That green apples and licorice made all these terrible things, me, possible?"

"Yep, and it's RED licorice."

"RED, right. So what are you?"

"Doooooom voiiiiiiiice: I'm the last human and the only immortal that I've met."

"Seriously, whyhowherewhenwallrus did you realize it?"

"Ha! Wellllllllllll, It was a half dream and a taste and an image. And they're still fresh on my tounge and

Beer 7:

Cheers!



Persimmon with Fruit Loops

by Sarah Ciampa

oil on panel, 9"x12"

One Day in Singapore (A Sort of a Song)

by Mark J. Mitchell

Down an unnamed street
struts an unmanned man
knocking on narrow doors.
"I come seeking certain music"
he would ask each oval face,
then tilt his head in hope.

All through the night he knocks.
and through the night locks turned.
Through the night he'd pause and dally,
then stop short and move on sadly.
Come morning he just sagged
and dragged his bag on down the street.

At dawn he thought I'll try one more
and pounded on a bright red door.
"I seek a measured music," he said.
Mamie smiles grand as a piano.
The sailor knew it was her at last,
and Mama never stood a chance.

Corruptions of the Flesh

by Mark J. Mitchell

His criminal earlobes left him.
Those windy Tuesdays proved too much.
He pulled the cap low and walked on.

His left hand nails were next to go.
He barely noticed. His habit
kept them secret in holy gloves.

When one knee left, there were problems.
Nothing tragic—he didn't dance,
though now most people thought he did.

Saying goodbye was too easy.
His extremities would never
return. He waltzed away with cold hands.

The Chronicles of Tim Pt. XII - Omnipotence and the Crystal Castle by Mike Wiley

Tim has just come through an theodine-laced ordeal in which he witnessed many multiples of himself swarming over one another in a frenzy of autointoxication. Coming back to reality, he has taken on a strange, new persona, now capable of conversing with inanimate objects and able to see things untold. After being deceived by James once already, he has turned a contemptuous, evil eye towards him in particular as they are having a discussion around the kitchen table.

James sat across from Tim. "I don't appreciate the tone you are taking with me," he said.

Tim worked up a smile, lips pressed together, so large and cartoon-like that the cheek bones threatened to close his eyes entirely. This created dimples large and deep enough that one could stick the eraser-ends of two pencils into each one so that they would stick out like cat whiskers. "I don't appreciate the tone you're blah blah BLAH," he said and stood up so fast, so suddenly that he knocked the chair onto its back.

Geryon rose from his stool and took a step in the two men's direction until Tim shot him a look that suggested he, Geryon, had better think long and hard before coming one inch closer. There were propane flames in Tim's eyes. The false smile was gone.

Geryon sat back down.

"I've been doing some thinking," Tim began. His tone relaxed into more of a lullaby. "You see, there aren't really a lot of little secrets going on in this place like I initially thought. Because a lot of little secrets would imply that the people here were keeping secrets from one another and that there was more going on here than any one of us could possibly comprehend on their own. But that's not actually the case, is it? No, I think that it's just one BIG secret, and everybody is in on it but me. Isn't that right?"

Until this point, James had been sitting frozen, opposite the table from Tim. His oxford button-down shirt with the eyelet collar had become damp with sweat the moment Tim had accurately recalled the minute and detailed events of the debacle at the nevercaves. Tim had relayed in excruciating particulars how James had been ambushed and had his hand removed by the attackers. There was no way Tim could have known those things unless he had been there. Or else something miraculous had occurred and this person standing before him, this "Tim", was somehow a maniacal phoenix risen from the ashes of a theodine overdose. James wondered why he had never thought to play the go-big-or-go-home game with the drug himself. Then he attempted to confront the prophet. "Tim, I'm not sure what you think--"

"What I think!" Tim said. "What I think is no longer relevant, JAMES!" His eyes grew wide as milk saucers and he leapt to the table top in a single movement, landing on all fours. The fruit basket flew into James' lap and apples, oranges, blooborts and other strange fruits tumbled to the floor. Tim brought his saucer-wide eyes within inches of James' own and Tim watched as Panic struck James' very soul like a flash flood.

As James shrank in his chair he noticed the paint in the corner wall over Tim's right shoulder began to crack. A small crack at first, perhaps three inches long - but enough to be seen from across the room. In his terror he might not have even noticed such a detail except that its appearance was marked by a teensy-weensy, cloudy-like explosion of white drywall that blew out like a puff of cigar smoke.

That was only the beginning.

As Tim's eyes turned from intense, mesmerizing blue flames to raging volcanic explosions, he kept coming closer and closer to James, who was shrinking more and more until his head was nearly in the seat of the chair. The crack in the wall grew bigger and the floor began to shake. Plates and cups were rattling in in the cupboards. The crack was now full streaking breaks that spanned the entire wall behind Tim. Paint chips were breaking off in large chunks, more pops, pings and explosions of chalky white dust, and all the time the rumbling, shaking of the floor growing more violent. Smoke from a six-shooter and the cracks were now noise, great thundering POWs and deafening quakes and then, without warning, it stopped.

The cracking walls, the quakes, the noise - everything went calm. Tim was eye to eye with James, their noses nearly touching. Then there was a shift.

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If James had to describe it, he decided he would have a difficult time putting it into words. It was as though the three-dimensional world had somehow become two-dimensional, nearly imperceptible, but he could sense it with every fiber of his being.

Geryon scanned the ceiling and walls, surveying the damage. His head moved in a great rainbow arc while his mouth was agape as though to speak. Nothing came out. Tim remained perfectly still.

Then, just as suddenly as everything become silent, every window, door and cupboard of the kitchen exploded open and into the room streamed dozens of Tim doppelgangers. They fell from the vent in the ceiling. They toppled over one another in hordes. One after another they appeared until every inch of space in the room was crowded with Tims. There were a hundred, maybe more. They seized both Geryon and James by the arms, legs, tail, whatever they could get their hands on.

One team wrapped James' tie around his remaining hand and, while still attached to his neck, bound it to a door knob.

Dozens of others had piled onto Geryon like an entire football team that refused to let the play end. They shouted questions all at once, the scene quickly became an hysterical, panoply of chaos.

"Take us to the remaining daughters!" some said.

"We want to go home! Just let us go home!"

Beneath the skirmish of tacklers, a few sets of hands worked into the folds of Geryon's tough lizard skin. "Where do the eggs come from?" they demanded.

The rest began tearing cupboards apart, as they cried, "Where is the whisky? We need more whisky!"

This seemed to go on for minutes before Tim clapped his hands twice and the commotion ceased. The room was quiet. From there on out they all spoke in creepy unison.

"You see," they all said, "we know what this whole charade has been about. You here, aaaaaaall of you, have been seeking the elixir of immortality. And you're close, so very close. Yet you needed me. You needed us, as a vessel, a sacrifice perhaps?" The gang let Geryon to his feet, but kept him bound by the wrists and shoulders. One Tim kept hold of the tail and another hugged his ankles as he gnawed at Geryon's shin bone. "There always was something about me, and not even you, Geryon, were sure what it was exactly. But you knew you needed me all the same. Perhaps you were told by your predecessor. It

doesn't matter. You just didn't know for what. But what you also needed was my cooperation. And that you most certainly do not have. As you can see, we are not happy and we have many demands. Even if you could fulfill them all it in no way guarantees our cooperation, but it may spare you your lives."

James struggled against the binding neck tie. "Tim, I know you're still in there," he said. "You don't have to do this."

"Oh James," the Tims said, "you came so very close with your duplicates, but they really are nothing without the drug and they are certainly nothing without you, the original, their master. Mine are fully autonomous, individual. Yet we share a hive mind now. We are become Death's hydra. Destroy one and two will rise up in his place! And Geryon, your ancestors have managed to increase the escape velocity from death exponentially with each generation. How old was your father when he died? Just over a thousand? You've even entreated the gods of time to work in your favor, stalling here, accelerating there, but even with all these things together, you haven't managed to discover that final step, have you?"

"Please," said James. "We can make this right Tim. We can help you."

Tim rushed at James and forced him up against the wall.

"I don't think you're listening to me. You kidnapped me. You tore me from my home. Were you thinking about my interests when you took me from my wife?"

"Tim, that life, you have to admit it wasn't much," Geryon said.

"It was mine," they said. "And all we want is to have that life back. Tell me why I shouldn't end you right here and now?"

Geryon thought for a moment. He looked to James, who returned the look and briefly tossed his head to one side. Then Geryon turned towards the main Tim and said, "While you may have mastered space and become omnipresent, if the one thing you truly want is to go home, you'll have to go through our channels. Like you said, we have the gods of time working on our side. The life you once had may well be gone as you know it, but it doesn't have to be so. The gods of time can send you back, they can turn the clocks in your favor. Or..." He hesitated.

"Or what?" they all said together.

"Well, this can all still be yours. If you stay here, finish with my libertine daughters. Enjoy their bosoms! Help us achieve what we've

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been working towards and spend the rest of eternity with us in paradise.”

“Not good enough,” they said. “We want to go home. I want to go home and this is not my home.”

Geryon looked at James and squinted as though to indicate that he thought Tim was really just a daffy sack of baked oysters.

Flim flam.

Many years later, while the three men (Geryon being included here in the class of ‘men’) were enjoying an afternoon game of straaaaaattchkbball (something of a cross between lawn darts, bocce ball and a Hemingway daiquiri), the topic of the aforementioned mentioned day (in which hundreds of Tim clones took both James and Geryon hostage and demanded that he be able to go home - home being Arizona in a time that no longer existed with his former wife, Tina) was brought up haphazardly by James (who was feeling a bit affected by the delirious amounts of rum they were swishing past their gums) and they all had a laugh about it.

“Man, whaaaaaaaat was I so pissed about that day?” Tim said. It was a question directed to the dirt. He was wearing a bright yellow fedora that fell to the grass as his body kept bending forward and his head came nearer and nearer his ankles. A helpful Timclone bounded from out of sight to correct the slowly-toppling man’s posture. “Thanks, dude!” he said as the clone ran off.

James walked over to the drink station on the deck of the house and filled his three-gallon stein with straight rum nearly to the top, dropped in a maraschino cherry and winked at a jug of grapefruit juice. When he received no response from the jug he threw a lime wedge at it. “It’s a grand thing,” he said, chuckling, “still having all these Timclones around to do, well... everything for you, Tim.” He poured half of the megastein’s contents into his stomach and the rest into his left shoe, for luck.

Tim giggled, hiccoughed, then snorted a barely intelligible response that must have meant, “Agreed, my good fellow.” All three men laughed again.

Meanwhile, two teams of Timclones were busy occupying the greater part of the lawn playing straaaaaattchkbball. Though ranging from three months to thirty-two months pregnant, Geryon’s daughters were busy keeping score, keeping wombats in the players’ hands and

keeping players on the field. They were having a hard time of it.

Geryon surveyed the field. "Why are your people so disorganized when it comes to organized activities?" he said.

Tim dropped his stein. "What do you mean by 'my' people?" he said.

"Oh, hey. Come off it, will ya. You know what I meant. You! Your... dudes, or whatever you call each other."

"Geryon, only we get to call each other 'dude'. It sounds ignorant coming from your mouth."

Geryon rolled his eyes. "Whatever," he said. "So anyway, back to my question. You're fully capable of tending the gardens and helping James with house chores. You keep all seven of my daughters, not to mention my countless grandchildren entertained and happy. You're our sole harvester of theodine though you do not use it yourself, and you built that crystal palace over there." Everybody looked in the direction Geryon was pointing. Beyond the regular castle, dwarfing the regular castle, mocking the regular castle, on the other side of the regular castle from where they were gathered, there stood a monument glorious enough to take an angel's breath away. It was a completely glass structure, a quarter of a mile high and twice as wide. In fact, there were a dozen or so grounded angels, who had happened to pass by, currently gasping for air in the bushes surrounding the building.

"You did all that," Geryon continued, "and somehow it all goes out the window when it comes to a mindless game of straaaaaattchkball. How is that?"

Tim bent a knee into the the yellow fedora still on the ground, stood up, plucked the hat off his knee and put it on his head. "I don't know," he said. "I really don't know." He walked a three-quarters circle around Geryon and approached him from the other side and said, "Why do your daughters have such incredibly long gestation periods?"

Contributor Bios

Ed Kearns is a Brooklyn-based writer and desert rat transplant from Phoenix, Arizona. His work can be found in Pearl Magazine, CC&D, By the Overpass, One Off, The Junction, Post Apocalyptic Poets of Deep Brooklyn, and Having a Whiskey Coke with You. He's also a curator of the monthly reading series, The Buzzard's Banquet. Multiple collections of his work are forthcoming, while writings and readings can be found online at edkearns.com.

Ben Revermann is from southern Minnesota. He is currently in college and working on his Associates Degree. Four kids, two dogs, one wife and an inferiority complex.

David Howard is a former newspaper reporter and editor in Rhode Island and has recently published fiction in Black Fox Literary Magazine, Fiction on the Web, Blue Lake Review and upcoming in Plots with Guns.

A.J. Huffman is a poet and freelance writer in Daytona Beach, Florida. She has previously published six collections of poetry all available on Amazon.com. She has also published her work in numerous national and international literary journals. She has is the editor for six online poetry journals for Kind of a Hurricane Press (www.kindofahurricane.com). Find more about A.J. Huffman, including additional information and links to her work at <http://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100000191382454> and <https://twitter.com/#!/poetess222>.

Mark J. Mitchell studied writing at UC Santa Cruz under Raymond Carver, George Hitchcock and Barbara Hull. His work has appeared in various periodicals over the last thirty five years, as well as the anthologies Good Poems, American Places, Hunger Enough, Retail Woes and Line Drives. His chapbook, Three Visitors has recently been published by Negative Capability Press. Artifacts and Relics, another chapbook, is forthcoming from Folded Word and his novel, Knight Prisoner, will be published in the coming months. He lives in San Francisco with his wife, the documentarian and filmmaker Joan Juster.

Gregg Badichuk is a poet and writer based in New York City. He is an environmentalist, organizer, and bicycle enthusiast, among other titles, and is generally in awe of the world. He currently attends Columbia Law School.

Mitchell Edgeworth is a writer currently based in Melbourne, Australia. He has had fiction published in journals including Allegory, The Battered Suitcase and SQ Mag, and his Black Swan sci-fi stories are serialised in Theaker's Quarterly Fiction. He keeps a blog at www.grubstreethack.wordpress.com and tweets as @mitchegeworth.

A former greeting card writer, **David Ellis Dickerson** is a regular contributor to public radio's This American Life, and the creator of the YouTube webseries Greeting Card Emergency, which has led to appearances on Studio 360, Weekend Edition, and Talk of the Nation. He is the author of the greeting card memoir House of Cards (Riverhead, 2009), and his work has appeared in The Atlantic Monthly, Year's Best Fantasy and Horror, and is forthcoming in The Believer

James Lipton stole name brand candy a few times as an adult. He also wrote in the past and then drank a lot of beer to do it again. He twitters unpredictability @james_lipton. Also, he really likes you.

When **Sarah Ciampa** was 5 years old she wanted to be a lion tamer. But eventually her career interests changed and she is now an emergent visual artist based in the Great Northwest of America, in Eugene, Oregon. Though she grew up sculpting and drawing, she became passionately enthralled with oil painting while attending community college and this is the medium she currently works in. She utilizes a highly rendered, classically realistic style, based on indirect painting techniques that date back to the Renaissance to produce thought provoking still-lives from live observation. Sarah lives happily with her husband and their 12 healthy house plants in Eugene. You can see Sarah's work and website at sarahciampa.com.

Linda Ann Strang is the author of the poetry collection, Wedding Underwear for Mermaids (Honest Publishing, 2011). Her poems have been published in many journals, including Electric Velocipede, Orbis and Yemassee. The editors of Poetry Kanto nominated her work for a Pushcart Prize in 2007. Linda teaches writing at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University in Port Elizabeth, South Africa.

Mike Wiley woke up this morning. He writes from Andover, IL. Area code 309.

Michael Frazer is STILL working towards a Ph.D. at Auburn University. That being said, nothing else is really new. He continues working on his experimental novel at present (which is, unlike "Cinema Title," unfortunately in 2D). Recently, his piece "Cinema Title" was accepted by Used Gravitrons for this issue that you are reading. Right now. And guess what. The copy you are holding is in 3D. Now isn't that something?

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