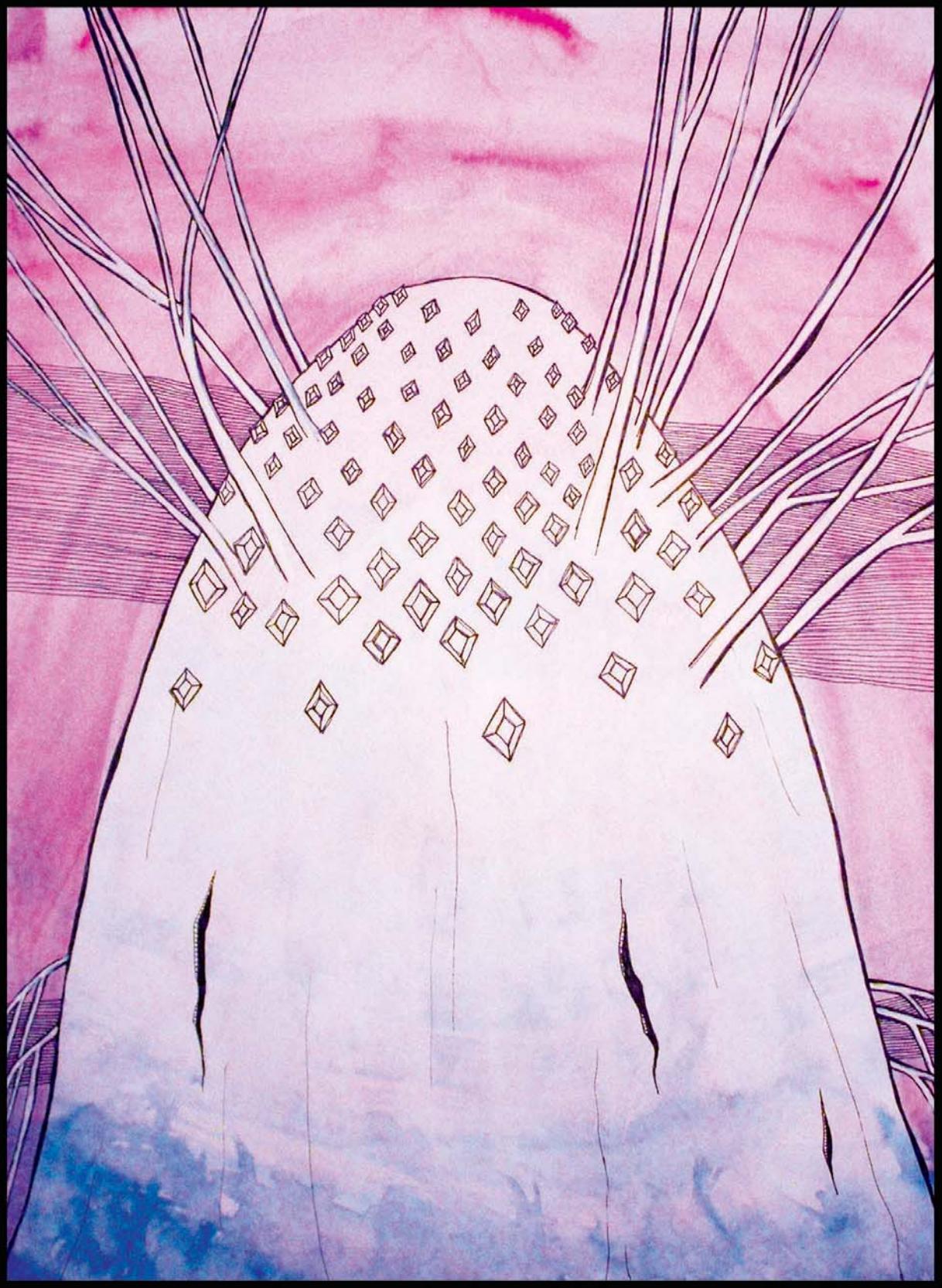


Used Gravitrons



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Editorial

I've decided I want a turtle. I do. Unless they smell bad, maybe tell me if they do. I don't want some weird odor in my apartment to cling to all my stuff until I get used to it and then everyone around me has to get used to it and then I'm the guy who smells weird to strangers. That's all I really need in life, not smelling weird to strangers. Don't worry too much about me, but worry a little.

This issue's goddamn fantastic.

Don't take my word for it. Take LeVar Burton's.

“Issue #7 is good. Really really good. Trust me. I read hell of books.”

– *LeVar Burton*

Everyone that is a part of this one, I love you. Readers, I love you too.

– *Shea*



You Tell Me

~ Caitlin Hoffman

My pulse divided your shoes, with a wit unmatched by any human being. It sliced and dived with the silver razor, tearing the leather until all that remained around your socks were sad, withered strips. Not a cut was laid on you.

We ate raspberries off of the sun, let the seeds melt and crackle before they exploded into brilliance. We made love in the mess, and fell asleep right afterward. The sun carried us to the other end of the sky, and dropped us onto a hill.

The mountains were dark that night, but neither of us were afraid. We watched the horses chase away the stars, watched the stars return only to be frightened away again, and watched the moon watch them, oblivious to its potential. Bugs crawled through my wrists, trying to find a way into my heart. They couldn't find any discernable route.

Then the snow melted into summer. Floods came. Gold finally went back into the dirt. Everyone seemed to have forgotten about us, and we preferred it that way. My pulse was sure to cut off all your clothes, sure to leave not a single scratch on your beautiful tan. We abandoned the razor near the river's edge, hoping nature would seize upon it and finally have its revenge.

You asked me questions about the childhood of my parents, and I asked you questions about our unborn baby's future careers. We turned into puddles when the icicles melted and froze at night when it got cold again. We found ourselves spinning around old pocketwatches that salesmen used to glare at while waiting for the train. Things were still, and simple, and the spinning was a mere byproduct of our brains, of the fact that we lived on the earth.

We never asked each other where we were going. Books closed in front of us, and told us they didn't really need to be read. They had only needed to be written.

We didn't make love for days and it didn't matter. I dreamed of cutting and painting roses with the blood, and you cried in my lap, oozing tears like a volcano oozes lava before it erupts. We watched the abyss open up and swallow society. We held each others hands and laughed at the massacre.

Later, we read poetry to each other. I sewed your clothes back together again. We felt lonely in the silence, all those broken trees and empty buildings. We decided we needed to find someone else, someone to plant fruit for us again.

We didn't know which way to walk. Everywhere we turned, a road had been eaten up by the chaos. Birds still sang, and willows still shook with the wind, but all the shoes in the world had been ripped up and chewed by the earth. Finally, karma had taken its toll, and we were the only ugly things that remained, dancing barefoot on the eve of the earth's first lullaby.

The books followed us wherever we went, and we didn't hate them for pestering us. We traded words and apologies, asked each other what would have happened if two others had lived and we had died. We didn't ask what would have happened if one of us had survived and the other had not.

The quiet paralysed us at first. Then, we were grateful for it. Then, we missed the crying of babies and howling of wolves. Then, we drew smiles in the banks of frozen rivers. All was welcome. The world was still. Every lasting eye on the horizon drew us in, watched us carefully, mended to our cuts and bruises.

We found old rocking chairs making love with tree roots. We saw old slaughterhouses giving shelter to orphaned whales. Some rivers dried up to make way for flowers. Some cities turned mouldy until the rain cleansed the dirt. Everywhere we went, language was extinct. Silence prevailed over all screaming. Ghosts abandoned their stations, waved and cried and basked in the surrender. Sometimes we took to speaking with our hands, so not to disturb the silence. Kisses meant 'I love you'. Frowns meant 'I'm thirsty'.

Trickles of sunlight poured through us, and we smiled at memories that no longer seemed appropriate. The sun asked us where everyone else had disappeared to. We shrugged, not wanting to talk aloud, and it ran away from us, confused and terrified of the state of the land. Confused that there was no one left to chase.

When our lips cracked and our hands ached, we tapped out messages to each other with our feet. At night, we huddled in the dark, wondering what animals would feast on us if they had a chance. We stared down the jowls of scavengers, though none moved to take their prey. We were too ugly to ruin. Our chance was too scarce to take advantage of.

We walked, swam, danced, crawled, rolled, skipped, climbed. We watched mountains sink into water, watched the earth crack and send out messages to the animals. Messages that said, 'You're free'.

We were too scared to ask directions from the trees.

Sometimes at night, you'd wake up crying. Asking what we did to deserve such a blessing. I asked what we did to deserve such a curse. Neither of us had answers. I held you, and cut your hair into different shapes, used the strands to make a pathway. Watched our trail get wiped with the wind. It felt good to leave things behind, and not regret it.

Eventually, the books got too tired to go on. We buried them and laid them to rest. The artwork chipped, the money crumbled, and everything receded back to several undecided beginnings. We still remained.

I looked above and saw something peel away the sky's shape. The dome lifted. The curtains closed. Everything was good again. The animals screamed in delight, and sound filled up the

world once more. People came pouring out of the centre of life, smiling at us with their knowing, wise eyes. We were not afraid as the world smothered us, sticking to us like melting tar, pulverizing our muscles like rock hard hammers. We held each others hands, and yelled with the rest of the world.

We all said goodbye, but the journey continued.

It Leaves Slowly

~ Ryan Phillips

If someone saw it from an airplane, they'd maybe say that it looked like a half-hearted crop circle. They would be wrong though, it wasn't that, it was sadder than that.

The strange pattern in the grass had been made by Avery, girl, 22 and the instrument that had made it was her car, Volvo, purple.

What Avery had done was this:

1. She'd bought a burrito at a fast food restaurant.
2. She'd adjusted her air conditioning (it had been at heater setting 1 and she'd moved it to heater setting 2).
3. She'd driven into a field of 6 foot plants. Some of the plants could be identified as sunflowers others were just grass, very tall grass.

So, Avery sat there, in the tall grass, with the heater on (setting 2), and she had her forehead on the steering wheel. She hadn't had a seizure or anything like that, she was in perfect health, her brain had just made a strange decision because of the contents that had recently been put into it through her eyes and ears (and her nose and mouth to a lesser extent). What she had done had been involuntary, a reflex, like something metaphysical had tapped her on the kneecap.

As she sat there in the field she wondered if authorities would be called, if money would be needed to compensate for the damage she'd done. As she thought of these things a train whistle blew in the distance, and to Avery, alone in her purple Volvo, surrounded by tall grass, it sounded like God honking a car horn in frustration, or in warning.

PARADISO

~ Adam Moorad

I caught a shuttle from Kissimmee on a weekday in June. It stopped outside a theme park and I debarked with a busload of elderly and queued blindly through a turnstile. A waifish teen in pantone fatigues waved a black wand about my hospital gown. When the device detected my artificial implants, it beeped boisterously and I cut an enfeebled figure among the file.

The teen sheathed his wand and began to pat me down. “Are you packing?” he said and groped my pelvis for weaponry.

“Only my ticker,” I said. “It’s a replacement.”

“Good enough for me,” the teen shrugged. He wrapped a bracelet with a barcode around my wrist and slid a drink ticket into my palm. “Go enjoy yourself.” Then he slapped me on the back and summoned the next elder forth.

A string of Shetland ponies edged the entry saddled with armored horsemen corralling pedestrians through a narrow gate with bullwhips and mace. A school of young children looked on from an open foyer puffing cigs like jaded cherubim beneath a pyrite crucifix stocked with man in a Santa cap.

I slumped on my cane and waddled towards a frat-infested dive located on the opposite side a quadrilateral plaza where vendors peddled stick meat, cotton candy and balloons. A mob of bare-chested broheim packed the barroom binging and wrestling like gators until each one was unconscious. I hobbled through the rabble onto a barstool before the beer spigots. A heavyset woman in lederhosen stood behind the counter and picked skin off the cold thigh of fried chicken. I dangled my drink ticket like a carrot that she snatched and stuffed into her breach before tapping a pint and sliding the mug in my direction.

A tipsy brunette in a sequined prom dress mounted the stool beside me. She wore a plastic crown, white gloves and a scarlet ribbon banded about her breast. Mascara streaked from her eyes and bruised her cheekbones in knuckled smears. She lined the counter with empty bottles and proceeded to break one at a time on her head until her pompadour gnarled and small flecks of glass ensconced her lashes in razor-sharp glitter.

I hoisted my pint in an impromptu salute. “Long live the prom queen,” I said and downed half the mug in one gulp.

Abashed, the girl plugged her kiss-me pucker with a beer and coquettled closer. “Oh stop it,” she blushed as little daubs of blood flirted from her cheeks. “You’re just saying that.”

“No,” I said. “I mean it. I really do.”

The girl looked cross-eyed and slowly extracted a jagged shard protruding from the bridge of her nose then flicked it like a booger into the tray beneath the taps. She hunched against the counter and her face dulled at the sight of my cane.

“What is that?” she sputtered at an inelegant volume.

“Pure titanium.”

Tiny flakes fell from her forehead as her brow furrowed. “Why do you have it?”

“Bad genes and bad luck.”

“That’s a bad combination.”

“I’ll drink to that,” I said. I emptied the mug and hiccupped as a minor tremor tingled in my frontal lobe and dominoed down my spine. I clasped my hands against my ears and braced myself for a mortal malfunction...but it never came.

“Are you okay?” the girl said.

“I’m fine,” I said. “It was only a brain freeze. I’m all better now.”

I chomped my teeth until my ears popped and fished through my gown. I produced a wadded bill and calmly laid it on the counter before her.

“Here,” I said. “Break the next bottle on me.”

The girl straightened her crown. Little red tears welled in her sockets and she murmured “Farewell” as I collected my cane then skedaddled.

I followed the foot traffic down a pedestrian thoroughfare towards a colossal sphere of pewter sheeting erected in the inner most zone of the theme park.

A sliding glass doorway footed the edifice and opened automatically before me. I entered the threshold through a maze of cable and boarded a moving staircase that deescalated onto the platform of a subterranean train station where a loquacious newsy proclaimed the day’s headlines with a gospel-like ebonics.

A roller coaster reeled into the station and scraped sparks against the platform. I hooked my cane around a rickety panel and swung myself aboard. I rode the rail through a tunnel that spat out onto a cratered moonscape where a stalagmite mesa bred parched rock like lilacs out of a dead land lapsed in the aurora of a dim borealis.

The route eroded along the lip of a dry lake where a ceramic tyrannosaur lay beached and rotting on the rails, its open maw arranged gapingly at the end of the track. A bellow echoed melodically from the hollow of the raptor's capacious throat as the roller coaster sped inside it. Cobwebs roped me like a steer from every angle and drew me into the blackness of the gullet constricting like a boa until I settled amongst the soft chortle and hiss of spongy glands excreting a crude solution that burned as it asphyxiated.

I came to in a puddle of bile deep in the pit of a cavernous abdomen. Faint beams of light glowed through the ribbed walls and blushed against piles of wood and bone that mantled the shallow in blanche atolls. The bile about began to ripple and vapor rose from its membrane like a spout of bats into the uttermost rebates of the cavern. The walls contracted and expanded in gradual turns and churned a wake inside the bowel, creating a centripetal current that sucked me through a tubular chute where I was torqued violently and deposited in a cement lot of a Chevron encased inside a translucent polyp, my cane wedged sharply against my kidneys.

A dark figure emerged from behind a rusted pump and advanced forward until it hovered directly above me. Through the lucent casing, I could make out the contours of a woman squeegeeing the cocoon around my face with her thumb. She wore a crossing guard bib adorned with yellow reflective tape and a patch with name "Beatrice" embroidered in cursive stitch. A whistle dangled from her throat like a silver locket as she tapped my cast with a handheld stop sign and shouted, "You awake in there?"

"Get me out here," I said. "This ride fucked."

Her cheeks flabbergasted with a business like intention and she proceeded to chop the shell with the edge of her sign until a fissure formed through which I hatched gasping for breath.

"Try to breath," she said. "You'll be alright."

Noodles of saliva dangled from my earlobes and I rung them out with my thumbs as Beatrice stood motionless, watching me groom in the pale moonlight.

"Where am I?" I said.

"This is where the ride ends," she said. "It's over."

"What are you doing here?"

"I was directing traffic outside a high school and some driver slipped into a diabetic coma and hit me going 50 mph. I lost all my teeth, broke my jaw, my ribs and punctured both lungs. The problem was my brainstem didn't detach and I died slowly. How about you?"

"I don't know," I said. "I've been sick for a while."

I looked up and focused my eyes on her strawberry locks tied back in a thick ponytail that hung like a slack tube of orange Play-Dou between her shoulder blades.

“Do you have anything to eat?” I said. “I’m starving.”

“It’s the atmosphere down here,” she said. “It’s mostly nitrous oxide.”

“What’s that?”

“Laughing gas,” she said.

“Well it smells like sulphur.”

“It’s supposed to make you happy.”

“Is this heaven?”

“Not exactly.”

“Oh,” I said. “Well I guess I’m confused.”

“I’m sorry.”

“It’s alright,” I said. “You don’t have to explain.”

I felt my face go blank and a sting pierced through my skull with a force that sent me keeling into a dry heaving stoop.

“You’re really sick. Aren’t you?”

“Alcohol makes my head burn and I had a pint earlier. But don’t worry. I’ve become accustomed to the sensation.”

Beatrice stirred through a Velcro compartment on the stomach of her bib and presented a purple spud. “Here,” she said. “Put this down.” And she laid it on the cement in the center of an oil stain and stepped away.

I worked myself upright and tendered my cane. “What’s this?” she said slowly palming the shaft.

“A trade,” I said. “It’s all I have left.” And I scoop up the spud and fingered it pensively.

“Go ahead,” she said. “Put it in your mouth.”

“Where did it come from?”

“The vegetable aisle.”

“Should I peal it first?”

“Hell no,” she said. “The skin is the best part.”

I shrugged and sunk my teeth into the tater.

“Tasty?” she said.

“Glorious,” I slavered with a full mouth.

“I’m glad,” she said. “Don’t forget to chew.”

I watched Beatrice twirl the cane like a baton and then stop. “I’m sorry you’re here,” she said.

“It’s okay,” I said. “It was bound to happen eventually.”

She looked back at me and smiled and recommenced her twirling. Fog fluoresced in a halo around a nearby streetlight as a muggy twilight settled across the barren. Beatrice combed a rogue strand of hair from her face and revealed small rhinestones of sweat that freckled in her temples. I hunched over and massaged my tender knees. She turned towards me and sighed solemnly.

“Here,” she said, reoffering the cane. “Have it back.”

“Nonsense,” I said. “I hate that fucking thing.”

“Take it,” she said. “You’ll need it.”

I clutched the staff unwilling and rocked it in my hand, teasing my thumb across the rubber grip. Beatrice observed unnerved as I struggled upright and filled my lungs with laughing gas.

“Come on,” she said. “We have to go.”

I followed her behind the Chevron where a golf cart sat beside a dumpster and a pile of road salt. We drove in silence across a sand trapped fairway of rubber Bermuda. Beatrice veered the cart between the blades of a decaying Dutch windmill and we rode at full throttle into the night where the heat increased and stench of sulphur intensified.

“How far to where we’re going?” I said.

“We’ll be there soon,” she said. “It’s only a couple miles.”

“Can we stop for some food first?”

“Still hungry?” she said. She rolled her eyes in my direction and let loose a churlish grunt.

“What’s so funny?” I said.

“Nothing,” she said. “It’s just...the air. You’re stoned.”

“I feel numb.”

“That’s a good thing.” Beatrice verged the cart through the moonlit nocturne. I stretched my dysplayed legs through the windshield and rested my heels on the hood.

We hit the county line where the road wound along the cliff above a lush ravine. The sound of falling water wafted upward through the dark foliage in a sultry breeze. Beatrice parked the cart before a row of traffic cones. She lit a Marlboro, inhaled and perspired, invigorated.

“There’s no easy way to say this,” she said. “This is your stop.”

I eyed the abounding chasm and pondered my conundrum. “Are you sure?” I said. “This doesn’t look right.”

“I sure am,” she said. “And it won’t.”

The road continued past the cones across a truss bridge linking with the far side of the ravine where a grove of trees lined the horizon in a palmetto colonnade. Beatrice dragged the filter, lipped her whistle and blew smoke through the mouthpiece, unleashing a high-pitched toot. I gathered my cane reluctantly and eased out of the cart onto the gravel terrain.

“What if I don’t want to go,” I said.

“You have to,” she said and mashed her butt on the steering column. “Besides, it’s not really up to you.”

I faced the oasis and sighed aimlessly. The moon was about three quarters full and waxing along the viaduct as I began to gimp towards the tropical grove with a courageous solace.

Halfway across, I paused and peered back at Beatrice. She sat behind the wheel watching me, her legs lolled in a reclining pose.

I cupped my mouth and called back, “I guess this is goodbye?”

She raised her hand but said nothing as my voice reached her and echoed like a epitaph back across the divide...“goodbye...goodbye...goodbye.”



Roll viddy

~ Ben Wilber

-- 2 beers trawling the internet for weird stuff

I followed a few links to Youtube videos with strange titles like “Girl tracing the lines on graph paper with a Sharpie while whispering” and “Lots of tapping and scratching, some whispering, and nearly 45 minutes long.” I had no idea why these videos existed, why people were promoting them on an obscure message board, and why I was watching them.

As with all the weird links posted to these boards, I went to the talk page for explanation. Even the most popular links had maybe five comments, of which only two would be comprised of more than three words and perhaps an emote. I found no descriptions of the feelings or sensations these videos were seemingly intended to produce, only terse assertions such as “This.” and “Yup, I got it too. lol”. “Got it?” I thought. “Got what?”. The video was of a guy holding a microphone in his lap while cleaning the lenses of his glasses with a Kleenex and some spray. I watched it again, then again. There were no comments on the Youtube page so I was limited to whatever brief, cryptic messages were left on the board. I watched another video and repeated my foray into the talk page but found no more insightful answers than before.

I began to worry. I was frustrated and annoyed that I couldn’t figure out what the hell this was. I wondered if it was anything, or more specifically, if it was nothing. Then I read a comment: “This is everything!” I laughed awkwardly inside. “Everything” is a remarkable indistinct word. I needed this trick explained to me, it seemed.

After more videos and vague, useless commentary, I theorized that the videos must contain hidden messages. This is not uncommon on Youtube. More than once I have been linked to a video replaced with the message: “This video has been removed because it contained subliminal messages. Read the Youtube Terms of Service here.” I always got a kick out of that and would usually find the TOS-violating video on some other site. The messages were rarely well-hidden, and when they were someone in the comments would point it out or the uploader would describe it in detail in the video’s description. Viewers would post quotes from the video or describe some imagery that gave it away. Sometimes they’d sample some audio, mangle it in some way, then post it to SoundCloud so everyone could hear the violation isolated from the noise and distraction. It was somewhat of a novelty and I think became an art and a game to see what they could get past Google’s subliminal message-detection robots. But they were always banned just the same for being subversive in their plain value.

These videos were different. Either they contained the most subtle messaging ever, or they didn’t. I watched a few more while paying close attention to every soft utterance, crackle, and accelerating rise and fall of microphone feedback. I stuck in my ear buds, closed my eyes and listened to the shuffling and bassy thuds from adjusting the mic and bumping the desk. Some of them had no words at all. One three minute video was simply a black frame with the words

“Origami paper swan” in large bold font and what I assumed was the sound of someone cutting and folding a sheet of paper into a swan. It had 16 Likes and no Dislikes. All the comments on the post were some variation of the first one: “Beautiful.” I was completely lost.

I wandered back to the front page of the board and noticed a new video had just posted a few minutes before by a user named Somerset. I hadn’t seen this username anywhere before so I checked their post history. The account was created not but ten minutes ago and this was their first and only post. Perhaps they were a long-time lurker and just now built the courage to share. Perhaps it was a novelty account or some ego developed for this just this board. There was no way to say for sure, but they kicked it off with a video titled “This always does it for me (English girl playing Osmos)”.

-- beer 3

Roll viddy.

I still had my headphones in when the page loaded, the video buffered for a few seconds, then started. A fullscreen view of an indie video game appeared in the window accompanied by a soft melodic soundtrack that resembled something like ten loops of Arvo Part’s piano run through a phaser and playing under water. There was a mouse pointer jumping around on the screen, clicking menu items, adjusting the brightness, sound effects volume, and a few other things people do before starting a new game. The menus cleared and revealed a black outerspace swarming with hundreds of meandering orbs all bumping into each other, some absorbing others and growing larger, some being absorbed. The goal was apparent: be the biggest.

The game went on for about three minutes during which only the sounds of outerspace and the clicky clacky mouse and keyboard were heard. I kept watching and listening. I was impressed by the skill of the humanoid player at dodging large orbs while consuming smaller ones. Clearly this person had played before, or at least possessed a commanding control of Darwinian evolution best practices. The game would speed up 10x, then suddenly slow down at just the right moment to skip the orb off the outer boundary with enough force to overcome the gravity of the closest big star while still being able to control the direction and momentum. It was fun to watch and I was enjoying it very much. The game paused and I heard a soda can open, some gulping, then the can set down on the desk. There was a quick tap on the keyboard and the game continued. But when it resumed, the world was in a different place. Things had changed and progressed by twenty seconds or so. It was clear that the game had not paused at all, but rather continued exactly along the same path at the same constant rate. The human realized this immediately. Despite a sudden fit of frantic clicking and keyboard mashing their orb’s delicious mass was slurped up by a big red ball and the words “It doesn’t look good..” appeared over the screen.

“Ooooh, you motherfucker.” An English girl’s soft voice came over the sound of the game. I suddenly felt a tingle in my scalp, like someone was brushing my hair. I became very still in my chair. The game stopped and went back to the main menu where a grid of game levels ap-

peared and stayed for a long time. I watched and listened but nothing was happening. There were no more sounds coming from outside the game. It was as if the player was just sitting there, recording the silence in her room while trying to decide if she wanted to play any more. Finally the mouse moved, selected a level, and the game started.

“Hello i-net,” the voice came over again. “This is among my favourite PC games of late. I find myself playing it far too much and often to the detriment of my studies at uni.” She continued: “The title is Osmos and the principle objective is to wander around as a tiny orb and try to collide with smaller orbs to gain their mass all the while avoiding larger orbs. It is quite fun.”

The tingling in my head had moved down to my shoulders and arms and all down my spine. My trunk felt like it was going to shiver. There was some pleasurable sensation like that tickle before sneezing but it was my whole body and it would not release as it would with a good, strong sneeze. I hunched forward with my earbuds smashed into my ears as far as I could push them; volume full blast. She talked again about the game while starting the new level. I barely understood the words she was saying. I closed my eyes and held my hands to my ears, pushing the buds harder. The muscles in my back were twitching. I felt the school nurse combing through my hair with a popsicle stick looking for lice when I was young. I felt a girl breathing deeply and brushing her lips on the side of my face and neck and ears. A finger touched my face but I couldn’t tell exactly where. The voice forced my body into a tight fist. The girl rubbed it while pressing down on my wrist, preventing the blood from flowing through. She went on about avoiding orbs in the outerspace. Despite the intense hypertightening of my entire body, I felt completely limp. She stopped, released my wrist and said “let go.” I relaxed and opened my hand. There was a pinch on my palm and the blood flowed in. From there she withdrew my soul and I quivered.

The video ended and the next began with a pre-roll commercial but I stopped it. I leaned back in my chair feeling all the bones in my back crack and pop. I pulled my earbuds out and looked up at the wall, wondering what just happened. I looked at the description of the video: “rose plays osmos.” There were over three thousand views and several hundred Likes. I began reading the comments:

“I fapped to this.”

“more vidyas or ill stalk the shit out of you :P”

“you have a dirty mouth i’ll wash it with my dick.”

“ROSE PLEASE MAKE MORE VIDEOS SO I CAN FAP TO YOU AS YOU GET SAD.”

-- beer 4

I was confused by the obscenity and aggression in the responses. I clicked through page after page of comments but found only the same mean sentiments. “What is this?” I wondered. I went deeper. On the girl’s profile page I found several more videos of her playing video games. I muted the sound and played each one, looking only at the comments. It was all the

same. Clearly these people were getting off in some strange way and were compelled to write debasing things in response to it. It was a sort of audiophile porno.

The more of her videos I watched, and disgusting comments that I read, the more confused and ultimately, sadder, that I began to feel. I searched through every response looking for any comment from her pertaining to the vileness of what was being said. She said nothing. She made no comments whatsoever.

I began an empathetic hypothesis in my head about how she might feel. I imagined myself caring a great deal about video games. I imagined myself watching other people play video games and deriving a certain amount of joy from that. I imagined that others might enjoy watching me play video games. I imagined myself hunting down the screen capture software and a decent microphone so that I could record a few minutes playing my favorite game while talking about why I liked it. I imagined watching my recording, being satisfied with it, and uploading it to Youtube. I imagined watching my view counts go up and feeling very giddy while refreshing the page constantly to see it climb higher and higher. I imagined planning my next video. I am surprised and excited by the popularity of my game videos, and I read all the comments:

“i want to fuck you in the ass right now”
“omg so hard”
“this girl had better make more or ill kill myslef.”
“is it a dude? srsly dont care though I got off anyway.”

I felt angry. Why was she was doing this? Why does she keep making these pointless videos which obviously encourage this disgusting viewership to write mean, humiliating things to her for everyone to read? I found no comfort in anything I read on those pages.

I went back to the message board and watched a few more videos of people folding paper. I felt nothing. I read some comments here and there, but still didn't understand what people were talking about. Back on the first page, I saw the clicked purple link from Somerset that I followed earlier: “This always does it for me (English girl playing Osmos)”. I thought about that. “Does WHAT for you?” I wondered insistently. I decided to pose a question: “What do you get out of her videos?” I just left it there, not really expecting a response since I'd seen others ask similar questions about other videos to which no one responded.

-- beer 5 and 6

I left the board for awhile and when I returned I saw that my Inbox icon had turned red, indicating someone had replied to me. I found Somerset's response within:

I used to frequent Photobucket's “New photos and videos” page before they made everything private by default. It used to be that you'd have to dig into the options and explicitly set a photo or video you were submitting as private only to you. A lot of people didn't real-

ize this so all their stuff was public. Sometimes people would take nude photos of themselves and not realize that their phone was uploading it to Photobucket's public stream automatically if they had the app installed.

One time I came across this Canadian girl's photos in the stream (I'm also Canadian.) She was about twenty-two, petite, and had blue hair. Browsing through her collection, I found several nudes under which she wrote cute little captions like "I miss you baby, hurry home and fuck me." It was apparent she was sending her distant boyfriend "private" links to the photos. Through a few videos and more photo captions, I found out that her boyfriend was working in the oil fields in Alberta and that she lived in Manitoba, just outside of Winnipeg. I also lived near Winnipeg. I masturbated to her videos for about a month.

One day she posted (or her phone posted) a photo of herself goofing off at the Pizza Hut where she worked. In the background of the photo I could see the menu overhead, and in the lower corner I could make out the store number. I did a quick Google search for it and found it was in Lorette, only twenty-five miles from me. The following week I drove to Lorette to visit the Pizza Hut. Sure enough, she was there: five foot three, blue hair, cute as a button. I approached the counter when I thought she would be the one to help me. She looked right at me: "Can I help you?" she asked. I hadn't thought about what I wanted. I hastily decided on some bread sticks and paid with cash and change in a way that forced her hand to touch mine during the exchange. I didn't say anything and tried not to stare, but in my mind I was overflowing: "I HAVE YOUR ANUS MEMORIZED."

I followed her Photobucket feed for awhile but people started posting comments on her nude photos so she made it private. I found her photos in my browser cache so I made sure to copy them off to somewhere safe so I could keep masturbating to them.

How to Win

~ Matt St. Cyr

It depends moderately on the moon,
And its flat-snare face that lingers in
The daylight as the sun's shadow,
Never permanent.
Maybe a teardrop begins to welt
And waits to fall.
You will follow it down,
Perhaps you water the flesh of the future.
But, do not be held in expectation
Of settling your qualms;
They are already changes being made.
Listen to the best of fierce crosses
In oral exchanges, both vague and written.
Rip the pages:
A master craft you need that sinks
Its sullen brow in truth that
History will never happen again.
Ensure that depression holds you well,
It's the slavery of life, it's a piece
Of peace that will force your tired-dry
Hands into the honest shackles of pain, do not strain.
Be tired,
Have hunger, live longer,
Die sooner.
Invite the lashes to begin
And believe the ancient scratched
Fact in rock that no one
Has not and
Will never win.

Juggalos: How do they work?

~ Brittany O'Meara

Photos courtesy of Brittany O'Meara, Molly Stoddard, K.C. Martin and Bruce Connors.



Colin Waddell is a Juggalo. That is, Colin is a fan of the band called Insane Clown Posse (ICP). But being a fan is different from being a Juggalo, he says; being a Juggalo is a way of life. "It's about family, being accepted regardless of who you are." Colin first joined his Juggalo family in 1999 after being introduced to the band by his friend. He reflects, "It just always seemed like that since my first show ... regardless of who you are, if you're a Juggalo, you're family." Using Colin as a lens into Juggalo life, we are able to get a glimpse of the Juggalo family, who they are, and the perceptions of society and media.

Colin grew up overweight and outcast much like the majority of ICP fans and Juggalos. He felt detached from normal society and when Colin started listening to the music he became a part of something bigger. "The family is there to support who you are." Using only black and white paint, Juggalos paint their faces like clowns as a sign of support, identity and solidarity. Fans started painting their faces to mirror those of the two men that formed the group, Joseph Bruce and Joseph Utsler. Some wear the paint to hide their faces. "Not to hide who we are, but what we look like, because that's not important to us," Colin says.

The face paint is a tool that the two members of ICP use to hide from their past involvement in gangs. It is also used to appeal to the rap demographic that is dominated by African Americans as an aid to bridge the gap between color lines. The two men chose clown makeup and, according to an interview by Brian McCullum with Bruce, "We put on the makeup because people in the suburbs view gang kids in the city as clowns".

It comes as no surprise that Bruce and Utsler, known to fans as Violent J and Shaggy 2 Dope, grew up as outcasts. The two founding members of ICP grew up in Detroit, Michigan and were involved with gangs at a very young age. The lyrics of their songs are violent and are best described by Colin as a "horror movie put to a rap beat." One record released in 1997, "The Great Milenko," was recalled by Hollywood Records (Hollywood is owned by The Walt Disney Corporation), due to its obscene lyrics and avocation of violence. The record had only been released for six hours but that didn't matter. Stores ignored the recall and continued to sell the offensive, on its way to platinum album.

Despite the symbolism behind the face paint and ICP's mascot, the hatchet man, or "the axe" (a wild-haired man running with a hatchet, ICP's insignia), Colin claims that there is no philosophy behind being a Juggalo and that anyone can be one, unless you are a racist, pedophile, or bigot. "Mr. Johnson's Head" off the album, Ringmaster, display the violent lyrics targeted toward a racist teacher. "I can hear the teacher man talking about Columbus/He's nothing but a dead fuck with a compass/Ran up on a beach and threw everybody off/and then he claimed discovery and now we all applaud ... I sat up in his class/he hung a rebel flag/I cut the bigot's head off and stuffed it in my bag." ICP is known for their brutal lyrics, though much of this violence is directed towards the "evils" in the world; racists, wife beaters, pedophiles, etc. Through the lyrics Colin was able to connect to other people and deal with the real life pain of his mother's breast cancer.

According to Juggalos, there is a place where they go when they die called Shangri-la. There it rains diamonds and Faygo, (a knock off soda brand from Detroit, akin to Shasta or RC). ICP will spray their fans with Faygo at all of their shows, in homage to their hometown and childhood. Alternatively, says Colin, "racist, bigots, child molesters, wife beaters, general scum of the earth people, will wind up being judged and murdered in the Dark Carnival for amusement." These places are described in ICP's six albums named, "Dark Carnival." The albums each represent a different theme or idea. Bruce got the idea for the Dark Carnival in a dream

he had. In his dream six spirits approached him, each with a different idea. Those six spirits inspired the Dark Carnival albums as well as the personas the members of ICP emulate.

Colin says of Shangri-la, when asked who can go there, “anyone who's lived a good life. You can't make an omelet without breaking a few eggs, so if you kill a pedophile, cut his arm off, and beat a white supremacist to death with said arm, you can still go. You'd probably get a bonus for doing it, too.” The dark lyrics are something that appeals to Colin. He has been a fan of horror movies since he was a kid, and his childhood was a happy time. There is a large misunderstanding of the lyrics and it varies from person to person. Violent J says of the violence, “We use four-letter words, and we get hate mail. But some people like us because we rap about the anger you feel in your everyday life. It's not a pretty thing.”

Juggalos are often misinterpreted as a gang, and were listed as a hybrid gang in the 2011 Gang Threat Assessment by the FBI. Colin argues that they are not. He thinks that authority often interprets Juggalo actions with gang activity. Colin and his friends have been stopped and searched on a Friday night downtown, singled out for wearing face paint. The fans and members of ICP grow up isolated from society for being different, and they maintain their status as weird and strange but with the support of a family. For this they are often misunderstood and ostracized by their communities and peers and now even more so because of the Gang Threat Assessment.

There are a large number of people who dislike ICP and Juggalos. Sometimes, because of the clothes that Juggalos wear, their face paint, or the lyrics of ICP's songs. A website called “Juggalo Holocaust” is dedicated to “nuking jugga-scum off the face of the earth.” A video posted on You-tube called “Miracles” has received attention and mockery all over the internet, reaching as far as Saturday Night Live Parodies. As far as Colin is concerned the haters will hate, “because, as a whole, we are misunderstood, and they don't even want to attempt to understand us. We take pride in being Juggalos/Jugglettes, and their narrow minds can't process that.” He does not strive to be popular but finds comfort from his Juggalo family. “If I see a hazard light and a hatchet man, I'll do my best to help, because I've been the ninja with the hazard lights on needing help, and Juggalos will stop to help family, even if they don't know you, because we have something in common that's drawn us to the axe.”

It is no wonder that Colin feels so strongly for his Juggalo family. The family has been there for Colin throughout his mother's battle with the cancer, as depicted by his tattoo of a hatchet man with a pink ribbon. This year Colin's mother's breast cancer has returned and has been diagnosed as terminal. She has less than six months to live. Recently, the band ICP performed in Boise and Colin was able to attend for free. The opening act put Colin on the guest list because his mother's medical bills are overwhelming. The Juggalos have shown astonishing support for Colin, and with them he has found solidarity and a people to confide in during hard times.

It is hard to avoid the stigma of being in a gang or a cult when a detached and misunderstood individual gets involved with a large group of other misunderstood individuals. These groups seem to be more isolated by the treatment they receive from society and authority, rather than by their own declarations. A web article titled “Ten Most Violent Juggalo Attacks Ever” written by Michael Gibson lists ten brutal crimes that its author portrays as Juggalo related. The top Juggalo crime came from a small town; eighteen-year-old Alex Pacheco was sentenced for forty-eight years in prison for the second degree murder of his



thirteen-year-old girlfriend, Kelsey Shannon. The article was written to highlight the Juggalo-related nature of the crimes, rather than the crimes themselves.

In the example of Pacheco and Shannon, Gibson expresses that the heinous murder is related to ICP and Juggalos simply due to the fact that Pacheco was arrested while wearing an ICP shirt. Gibson points out that the killing was not conventional because he used a sharp weapon instead of a gun, something that he links to ICP because of the hatchet man logo. While the murder was brutal, multiple stab wounds and Pacheco had copulated with the dead body, there is a small connection to its relationship to ICP other than the accused being a fan. The ten most violent Juggalo attacks are alarming, however, in checking the sources of the article, they all lead to dead ends. The crime reports do not say anything about ICP or link the activities to Juggalos. It seems unfair to claim that the crimes were related to a band without providing proof of a strong connection. This exemplifies the fact that the Juggalo subculture is misunderstood. Not all Juggalos are bad because the lyrics are dark, just as not all Catholic priests are pedophiles. In fact, all of the crimes listed on the webpage lead to more articles about each individual crime, without mention of their relationships to Juggalos.

Not all of the negative attention Juggalos receive is related to violence or crime. The video "Miracles" has been widely mocked on the internet and was my first introduction to the band. You-tube's videos are user rated, and the video for "Miracles" has a user rating of over fifty thousand "dislikes" to just about thirty-five thousand "likes." The video is an open door for mockery; two men in clown face paint declaring that miracles of life are all around us. The video begins with two grown men in clown makeup standing on the roof of an observatory. Violent J and Shaggy 2 Dope rap about the miracles of life. They cannon towards the sky and imagine the world around them. Fantastic images appear around the clowns. "We've got a theory about magic and miracles..." Oceans and stars that "...you don't have to be high to see" appear as mirages dancing around them. They have a seemingly unfriendly opinion toward scientists as illustrated by the lyrics, "water, fire, air, and dirt, fucking magnets, how do they work?" The two men exclaim that they do not want scientists to answer these questions as they are "telling me lies, making me pissed." Because of these lyrics, ICP has been criticized as a joke.

In the Detroit Free Press, Thomas McCollum reports that "while purporting to rail against the evils of racists, rednecks and suburban gang poseurs, the group rolls around in heavy-duty death, misogyny and scatological, urn, humor." The violence in the lyrics leave little room for understanding. The video, music, and lyrics are admittedly ridiculous to ICP member Utsler. He comments that ICP understands science and how magnets work, but that these things are brilliant and amazing. Confusing, coming from a band known for their graphic lyrics.

The hoopla surrounding ICP is intense, and it does not appear to be ending anytime soon. The label, Psychopathic Records, which was founded by Bruce and Utsler brings in over ten million dollars a year. It represents a small handful of bands, all of whose members adorn face paint like the label's founders. Psychopathic Records also produces The Gathering of the Juggalos (GOTJ), which takes place in Illinois yearly. This festival, which takes place over a few days, attracts thousands of fans from all over the country. They come to performances by the bands on the label, as well as "Juggalo Championship Wrestling." Bruce was at one time a professional wrestler, and this has become a large part of the ICP culture. The gathering houses thousands of fans, "together as equals."

Insane Clown Posse is a successful rap duo from Detroit, but they are much more. For Colin, the group has been there for him through the hardest of times; it has given him hope, escape, and most importantly, a sense of family. For the media they are a circus act, constantly raising questions of how to define the eccentric rappers, and when to take them seriously. From praise to condemnation, one fact remains: Juggalos are family, and they are not budging.



REMEMORIES

~ Christopher Owen

"There's nothing there, Chase. I don't know what to tell you."

"That's impossible," I said. "How can I lose an entire night of my life?" The best night of my life, I thought.

"I've never seen anything like it," said the Tech. "Heard stories...from some of the other Techs. Something about playing the same mem over and over again...starts to wear out. Like an old magnetic tape. I never believed it, though. Let me put you in another tank, just to make sure it's not my equipment."

I was at Rico's Recall, a cheap memory joint down near Seventh Heaven--a place I spent the better part of most of my evenings these days. For fifty bucks, I could climb into a tank and relive any hour of my life, or for two hundred, any eight hours. Rico's was cheap...nothing like the places up in Pearl City, but the mems played real time, and all five senses were there, more or less. Since the accident, I hadn't had too many new memories to be proud of, but I'd had some good times in my younger days.

I climbed out of the tank I was in and walked a few meters down to the next one. "Go ahead and climb in number three, Chase," said the voice of the Tech from his control booth. I opened the lid of the coffin-like shape of tank three, and climbed in.

On work nights, I'd usually just do an hour and go home--weekends; I went for the full eight. That left me enough money for food and rent and kept me moderately sane.

It was a lot of money to blow on entertainment...but it was cheaper than most of the other vices in the Heaven, and a lot less hard on the body. (Good as REM sleep, Rico's sign advised) I'd relived all sorts of things in these tanks, but since the accident, I found I mainly wished the tanks to serve me up the companionship of the women of my former life.

Lately, I'd pretty much been reliving nights with Angie. She'd been my fiancée, but had left me after the accident. I couldn't blame her, though; I was a freak show of patched up skin and scars. Frankly, I hadn't been with anyone since the crash, and I didn't expect to be again anytime soon. I'd considered it a major breakthrough for me when I'd reached the point where I could relive Angie in a mem tank again. Of all the things I'd lost, she'd been the most difficult to take.

"Chase, I'm still not getting anything." said the Tech. "You want to try another Angie night?"

I cringed slightly as the Tech mentioned her name. It seemed suddenly very intrusive that he knew that much about my personal life. Yet it was to be expected. I spent more time with him and his coworkers than with just about anyone else socially.

"No," I muttered, "try this night one more time." Of late, I'd been fixated on the night when Angie and I had met. I whirlwind night up in Pearl City of champagne, dancing, and amazing love making with the petite blonde beauty who had slipped into my life that night. I'd been celebrating my promotion to flight commander, and was riding a high that only got higher when she showed up. I'd probably replayed that night a hundred times here in the tanks. Maybe even a thousand. One loses track of the years when there's no new ticks to mark on the calendar.

"Chase, I'm not getting anything. Why don't we give that night a rest, and try another one?"

"Don't you have it stored somehow?" I asked.

"Sorry, Chase. That's your brain's job, not ours."

My heart sank. I could remember everything about that night; I'd played it so many times. But the memories seemed distant and unreal compared to the recall experience. Losing that night felt a little like losing Angie for the second time.

"Whadda ya say, Chase? How about you and Angie on the moon? Or in Paris, or Rome. You always liked--"

"No," I cut him off. The thought of him trying to call up another Angie night and failing was more than I could handle. "I think I'll just call it a night."

I left Rico's, my spirits sagging. I looked at the somber, dispirited dregs of men and a few women waiting to go in the tanks and felt my self-loathing grow. I couldn't sleep that night, so I dug out an old bottle of bourbon from the cabinet and poured myself a few shots. That did the trick, but the pounding head it gave me the next morning reminded me why I didn't drink anymore. It had subsided by the time I got of work, but after another failed attempt at Rico's to recall Angie, that bottle suddenly started sounding real good again. I finished it off that night, and bought another the next morning.

Days passed. My visits to Rico's grew fewer and fewer, and instead I began to frequent the bars and gin joints of Disk Town. Booze did the trick for a while, but after a few weeks, even that seemed to lose its punch. Anxiety set in, and I wandered the gloomy, smog shrouded streets like a phantom.

At length I returned to Rico's. Riding a wave of new found determination, I burst through the lobby, swiped my card past an access port, and hurried into a tank chamber. "Hey Chase," said the thin, androgynous voice of the Tech as I climbed into the tank. "Where to?"

"March 15, 2091."

"Don't have that one bookmarked, Chase. You got a time hack for me?"

"Dusk." I said flatly. "Um, try twenty hundred hours, universal time."

A few seconds of silence passed, and I felt the tingle of the tank's circuitry slipping its ethereal fingers through my mind as it sought the newly requested memories.

"Hey Chase, what is this thread? Lotta anxiety and trauma in there. You sure you want me to run this?"

"Yes, play it!"

"I don't know. They don't like us to run mems with numbers this high. You're gonna have to sign a waiver."

I clenched my teeth and spat out, "I've signed all your damned waivers. Check my file. Now run it!"

There was a pause, then: "Okay, everything's in order. Buckle up, Chase."

The tank faded, and the cockpit of my F1 materialized around me. I was jacked into the fighter's control matrix, so its fuselage fed me sensory data as if it were my body. I flew over the city of Toulouse at twilight, the cool air crisp on my skin like an autumn evening, fresh as a deep breath as it entered my intakes and passed through my turbines. The ship's power core throbbed like a beating heart in my chest. Four more F1's were formed up behind me, lights off; their dark silhouettes shadowing me like a murder of crows.

I'd never run a mem of my fighter before, and the long forgotten sensations of flying filled me with a jubilance I'd not expected. Toulouse rolled under me as we flew toward the

airfield where a large crowd had gathered to witness the air show we were to perform. Angie was there, her first chance to see me in action, and the pride I'd felt then came back to me in the mem.

We approached the field low, the other half of our squadron coming in from the opposite direction. We fired harmless training lasers at each other, which nevertheless startled the crowd below with delight as they crackled over their heads. We picked up speed, heading right for our sister ships, then at the last second, lit ourselves into visibility and pulled back hard, kicking in our scram jets right over the field as we shot skyward on a mushroom of blue energy, bursting into the terminus of space like an exultation of larks.

At 100 miles, we ejected a disk of chaff particles that spread away from us in an instant and then began to fluoresce in the dying sunlight, so that to the spectators below, the entire twilit sky sparkled like a golden meteor shower. We then cut our jets and began fall back to earth, our heat shields kicking in so that from below, we appeared fiery, fluttering butterflies falling from above.

At ten thousand feet we lit our engines and began our mock battle for the crowd, complete with holographic training ordnance practically indistinguishable from the real thing. Bombs exploded, missiles flared, particle beams sizzled while we wove a supersonic skein of flight over the crowd. Then there was one small burst of flame, barely perceptible over the roar of the show, as I let myself lose my edge and get too close to my wing man and we scrapped canopies as we passed. In our cockiness, we'd disabled the ships normal anti-collision software--got a better show that way.

My cockpit glass shattered as our ships touched, and the shards of the glass at that speed cut through my visor an instant before my ejection shield could switch on and protect me. The shards froze as the shield formed around me, but not before they'd penetrated my skin and burned my face and arms. The intense pain nearly forced me out of the mem, but somehow, I stayed with it, and felt myself ejected from the wreckage of my F1, and slowly fade from consciousness as my force chute opened above me.

The pain stopped instantly, and I was briefly aware I was back in the tank as the mem software tried to get a handle on where to pick up the correct memory thread. I'd been out for days after the accident...so there would be nothing for it to play for a while. Instead of shutting off, however, it skipped ahead to the moment I first awoke, days later. I was groggy, bandaged, and lying in a hospital bed. Angie sat beside me.

Angie! I hadn't remembered this. In fact, I hadn't remembered anything of her, other than the pain of her leaving me. Like some sort of defense mechanism, I'd suppressed all memories of her after the accident. When thoughts of it came to mind, I had a vague feeling that she'd run in horror from my new deformities, and the sadness of that was so intense, I'd always suppressed it.

In the mem, Angie smiled as she saw me awake, and I felt intense joy at seeing her. I mumbled a few words to her, and she consoled me. A nurse entered and began to rub some sort of cream on my face, and as she leaned over me, I caught sight of my reflection in her mirrored name tag. Revulsion filled me, and I demanded a mirror. I was refused, warned it wasn't a good idea, but I demanded, and eventually, they acquiesced.

I stared at the desolation of my face, and knew that I could never expect Angie to stay with me. She and the nurse tried to quell me, telling me with surgery I'd recover. But I was

doubtful. I cursed Angie for a fool if she stayed with me, and in tears, she'd left the room. I lay in anguish for a few moments, and then the hour was up, and the mem ended.

I lay in the tank, that same anguish still with me. A flood of long suppressed memories came back to me. Angie coming to the hospital, telling me how much better I looked. Me treating her brusquely, horribly. I remembered now how I'd had the delusion that the one noble thing I could still do with my life was to relieve her of the obligations she felt for me by driving her away.

She persisted, then finally stopped coming, writing me letters instead, hoping I'd have a change of heart. Eventually I was discharged from the hospital and returned to Pearl City, my contract with the service ended due to my injuries. I'd found a little place in Disk Town, got a dead end job working in a dark control room, and wiled away a decade in bars and then, mem joints like Rico's.

I'd gotten one or two more letters from Angie, but eventually, she'd given up of me, and moved on.

"How you doing in there, Chase?" asked the voice of the Tech. "You got some nasty vitals there for a bit. You want some tranq?"

"No thanks," I said, climbing from the tank. "I'll find my own."

I walked back to Disk Town from Rico's, methane heavy in the air from the factories. At my flat, I cracked my bottle of bourbon and poured myself a shot, but left it sitting momentarily on the table. A thought occurred to me, and I went to my bedroom, dug through my closet, and found an old software box in a pile of crap in the back. I opened it, and pulled out an old data swatch. I dropped it in a reader and there they were--Angie's forgotten letters. The last one I'd received was on top.

"Chase, I've decided that this will be the last letter I'll send to you. I've talked to my therapist, and she says that I've done all I can, and it's clear you've made up your mind not to let me back in your life. I wish you well in your life, and if you ever change your mind, look me up sometime. I'll be around. Love always, Angie."

I sighed. All these years, I could have called her, let her into my life, the real her, instead of a worthless electronic memory. Whatever noble thoughts I'd once harbored to release her from me were gone, and I merely felt pity, for both myself and for her for the months that she tried to get me to let her back in.

A thought filled my mind, and before it could die, I walked to my phone and keyed her name into the directory. It popped up...a Pearl City address. After all these years, she still lived a few miles up the hill from me. I pressed call, and this late hour, got her answering service. I left a message. Then I poured my bourbon shot down the sink, and went to bed.

The next morning, a text message was blinking on my phone...from Angie. I winced as I clicked it open, ready for a "drop dead," or perhaps worse, to greet me.

Instead, it simply said: "Chase, great to hear from you. I'd love to see you again. Say 5 p.m. today. Let's have a drink at the Orient."

And just like that, I was going to see Angie again. I took the day off work, cleaned up as best I could, and bought some new clothes. I hadn't been up to Pearl in years, and as I rode the bus out of Disk Town, the dingy air of my home gave way to the clear, machine scrubbed air of Pearl City. I stepped off the bus and walked the last few blocks to the Orient. This was the bar that we'd met in, and the significance of that in her invite intrigued me.

I'd been in the place so many times in the mem of our first night--but being here again, in real time, shocked me with an intense clarity of sensation. Even though the mems were good, they were nothing like reality. Little things popped with sensation, like the stark whiteness of the patio tablecloths, the smell of the sea air, the scent of oysters cooling on the bar, the score of muted conversations all going on around me. I walked through the entrance, and saw Angie sitting alone beside the front windows of the restaurant.

She still had the same long blonde hair that I remembered, but otherwise she seemed almost a stranger. She wore a simple black dress that clung to her petite form as she sipped from a glass of white wine. I started toward her, and she caught sight of me and smiled, standing up in an instant and rushing toward me, her high heels clattering against the stone floor of the patio.

"Chase!" she said, reaching me and throwing her arms around my shoulders. "It's great to see you."

"Angie," I said cautiously as she unlocked her embrace and led me back to the table. She had a beer of the style I'd once drank waiting for me. I sat down, took a long drink from it, and then sighed.

"Wow, Chase, you look great."

"Please don't do that to me, Angie, I know what--"

"No, I'm serious; it's amazing what the nanotech can do. You look good as new."

"Are you kidding?" I laughed.

"When's the last time you looked in a mirror." She asked.

"Probably right when I moved home, and broke all of them to shards. I really wasn't much on that sort of decor."

"You really haven't looked at one for that long?"

"Most of the places I've been hanging out aren't that well lit."

She reached into her handbag and flipped the switch on a small metal disk, and a mirrored surface appeared. "Take a look," she offered.

I took the disk from her slowly, my hands trembling, and turned it toward me. Sunlight from it flashed in my eyes, and I twisted out of its path, and saw my old face staring back at me. A bit older, perhaps, but with no scars or trauma.

"How?" I asked.

"Chase, we told you it'd grow back eventually. That's how the nanotech works. It takes years, but eventually those little buggers get you fixed up, right down to the cellular level. Good lord, how could you not have noticed! If you'd agreed to go to therapy like we tried to get you to do, maybe they'd have fixed your head as well as they fixed your face."

"I'm sorry, Angie. Sorry I put you through all of this." I took another drink of my beer, and let the alcohol warmth mingle with the growing warmth in my heart. I took a deep breath, and looked back to her.

"It's okay Chase, I forgive you. I forgave you before you even stopped doing it. It was hard letting you go. For years, I didn't want to. Hell, I even used to go to cheap memory joints and relive some of our times together. Can you believe that? Sick, huh? But I was hooked on you. And it took a long time to get over you. But eventually, I did, and I moved on."

"Does that mean?"

"Someone else? Yeah, yeah, there is. Married six years now. Two kids."

I felt a trapdoor of dejection open in my heart.

"Chase. No, don't go there again. I can see the look in your eyes." Angie leaned in close and pecked a kiss on my cheek. "You still mean a lot to me, and I'm not going to let you lose yourself again. Yes, I moved on...found someone else, but that doesn't mean I can't still know you, be your friend."

"Well, I guess I could use one," I said, realizing the dearth of them that I'd had in the last decade.

"Tell you what, Chase. Come home with me. Have dinner with us, tonight. Meet Frank and the kids."

"Oh, I don't know, that might be..."

"Awkward? Sure, but what the hell, Frank's a good sport. It'll be fun. Hell, I even have some single friends--when you're ready. What do you say?"

"What the hell, Angie. Why not?"

"Great. I'll call Frank and let him know."

Angie stood, retrieved a phone from her purse, and out of etiquette took a few steps from the table to make her call. I finished my beer, and pondered these last few minutes. The future tingled before me with more verve and promise than it had in years, and for once I felt more excited about it than I did for memories of the past. I looked up into the bright blue expanse of the afternoon sky over Pearl City. A high altitude transport streaked overhead, leaving a fluffy contrail stretching across the sky. Maybe I could fly again, I pondered.

Looking down, I scanned the crowd of beautiful, relaxed Pearl City residents enjoying the afternoon. A pretty girl with short red hair strolled by; her eyes momentarily caught mine and she smiled, and butterflies filled my chest. Maybe I could love again as well, I pondered.





The Chronicles Of Tim Pt VII - Tim in Space

~ Mike Wiley

After a heady afternoon wandering though the forest, Tim and James have just arrived at the entrance to the Nevercaves. Tim was eager to leave the inhospitable, illogical woods and get back to the comforts of the castle. He was no longer curious about the truth of the excursion or what dark mysteries stood behind the theodine they sought in the caves.

"Well, how do we get this thing over with?" Tim asked James as they peered into the dark mouth of the cave.

"We go in there, dig up some roots and we get the hell out," said James.

"And this is the source of that drug we need?"

"You betcha. After you, Tim."

Tim did not move from his post outside the cave.

"James," he said, "aren't there any other people interested in harvesting these magical roots?"

"Of course there are. That's why we're here a little early. The roots will be a bit premature, but coming early ensures we get enough to supply the castle until the next pressing. Now let's go!"

Again, Tim did not budge.

"Well what if we're not the first ones here like you say? What if there are others in there already?"

"Look, you..." James started. But he did not finish. His patience was wearing thin. Instead of completing the thought he turned his satchel upside down and emptied all of its contents on the grass before them. Several items that now lay before them were familiar to Tim. There was the map of numbers that James had been using to guide them through the forest and a handful of the carrot-like things he had plucked from the grove before they set off along the trail. The things Tim did not recognize included a small grating knife, a glass smoking pipe and a small container of fine ground powder.

James took up the knife and began to shave long, narrow strips off the carrot things he had brought with him.

"These," he said, holding the shaved strips up to Tim's face, "are are what help us metabolize the theodine. They are called unchellos." He then grabbed the bottle of powder and uncorked it. "And this," he said, sticking his own nose into the jar and breathing in deep, "this is theodine. This is all I have left from the last pressing of the roots that we need to harvest from that cave right over there. If we do not come back to the castle with enough to feed everyone, this whole thing falls apart. Got it? I might not need to explain to you that you would not live long enough to see what that actually means because Geryon will have torn you into jerky strips and eaten you long before the unraveling will occur. So what we're going to do now is smoke some of this, you and me, and then I'm going to follow you into those caves. We're going to extract the theodine roots we need, no more, no less, and we're going to take them back to the castle. Trust me, once you've had some of this, no one will be able to stop you from accomplishing your mission."

"Oh, come on, James," said Tim. "Geryon specifically told me not to try any of this stuff if you offered it."

"Yeah, well. You've already had a little anyway, Tim. You think you were able to climb that rope back there with only a bottle of whisky under your belt?"

"Shit."

"That's right. It's a good feeling isn't it? And you only had a very little. Smoke this and we'll begin to see your true potential unfold."

James carefully laid out a strip of the unchello and sprinkled the theodine powder all across its surface. Then he rolled the strip from end to end; the result resembling a miniature cinnamon roll. This he tightly packed into the glass pipe, spiral facing out. Producing a little torch lighter from his pocket, James raised the pipe to his lips and lit the bowl. The substance cracked and sparked as a thick, brown smoke immediately filled the chamber and Tim watched as James drew a long, slow lung full from the device. When he could pull no more, James stopped his breath, brought the pipe down to the ground and held his puffed chest out with his eyes closed. With his lips pressed tight, he began to let out a tiny stream of the smoke from the corner of his mouth. This went on for some time while Tim debated taking part.

Tim had smoked pot a few times when he was a teenager but it never went beyond that. While people he knew from school graduated on to heavier drugs, he had always found enough comfort in a bottle of beer or whisky keep him satisfied and sufficiently dumb. Still, he was fearful of what perils might await him in the cave. He did not want to let Geryon down and his curiosity had re-peaked after everything James had told him; especially now that it was sitting right there in front of him. He decided that he would have to be brought into the fold sooner or later if theodine really was the lifeblood of Castle X_____.

When James at last opened his eyes, his pupils had transformed from the tiny pinholes they once were in the daylight to large black saucers, encompassing the entire iris. It seemed inhuman to Tim, but then he had to remind himself that James may no longer even be human if, indeed, he ever was.

James picked up the pipe and handed it to Tim.

"Just like smoking a cigarette," he said, "only don't just draw it into your mouth before you inhale. Use your lungs to pull in as much as you can. You likely won't need more than one."

Tim did not take the pipe.

"I don't know if I can."

"Well then, there's really only one thing to do then, Tim."

James drew back his fist and brought it straight into Tim's nose.

Tim did not black out immediately. A surge of adrenaline rushed to his temples and his head became light. His head swung back, parallel to the sky. He could see an eagle soaring high overhead. His head came forward, just in time to catch James rummaging through his satchel.

Then everything happened fast.

While he was catching his breath, Tim watched the world before him begin to pull away, all the details drawing back like watching a city shrink while taking off from the ground in an airplane. James and the rest of the forest sped farther and farther away before fading to complete black. In this darkness Tim could not feel the earth beneath his legs or the clothes on his back. From this place stars and planets began to come into focus all around him. A few here and there at first, and then they began to multiply, stars exploding into massive, chaotic light shows before creating cosmic dust swirls and forming into orderly galaxies. There was no

sound; only light. So much light that it became painful for Tim to look any longer. He tried to close his eyes. It didn't work; he could still see every excruciating detail, every spectacle.

The lights continued to multiply exponentially until Tim thought his head would burst. He tried to scream but there wasn't a sound to be heard. Then, just when he thought his meek, human form could withstand no more, a strange calm came over him. The light, at present completely enveloping him, began at once to fill him on the inside. Just as quickly as the luminescence had overtaken the dark, it was again gone from Tim's sight, now completely within him. It was with a warm smile that Tim began to float back towards the earth. He eventually descended back over the forest that he had recently left. From high above still, the landscape seemed familiar and Tim could easily pick out the cave that they were supposed to forage, but there was a different quality to the life of this forest than he had noticed before. The trees shimmered, and the rocks of the cave seemed at once rooted to the earth and yet swelled and grew, reaching out to all the other creatures and life forms of the forest.

Then Tim heard the voices.

Drifting slowly back to the ground, almost within its reach, Tim heard two distinct voices coming from the cave: the first he recognized easily enough - it belonged to James; the second voice made his blood run cold - it was his own.

He could hear the two voices arguing, then shouting. There was a great commotion between them and the noise was all the more amplified by the echoes of the cave walls. From outside the cave, Tim listened intently. Whatever it was they were doing, it could not be called stealthy. Tim began to feel nauseated. His head swam and reeled and he was losing his sense of physical position on the earth. He was slipping away again, falling back up towards the sky. His feet left the ground. As he was drifting off, he could hear more than just two voices in the cave - there was introduced a whole band of men whose voices he did not recognize. A scuffle ensued and it was obvious men were fighting. Tim fell farther back through the clouds and faded into the night. He drifted off to some form of sleep and let everything melt away from his consciousness as he rested in a tranquil and worry-free calm. . . .

Tim did not know for how long he had been unconscious. He remembered that time was illusory in this place and that it could have been hours or years. Reaching up to feel his face, there was no beard; no scruff at all. He had come to rely on the growth of his facial hair as a barometer of time. It didn't mean much, but still the thought of anything at all constant was comforting. Last he recalled, he had a decent five days' growth. No beard now meant that he had either gone back through time, or, more likely, that someone had shaved for him.

Wherever he was, it was dark. A warm, post coital glow filled Tim from toe to tip. Images of recent dreams flooded his brain. A battle and a flight. He and James had run, flown perhaps, backwards through the forest, back to the castle. They had been greeted with much celebration upon their arrival. Wounds were dressed, drinks were poured. A band struck up and there was dancing. A young girl, seemingly bashful, sat along the wall in shadows. Tim's body would not stay rooted to the floor. He danced on air, now in this location, now that. He seemed to be enjoying the festivities from multiple vantage points. The girl approached him, they danced. He took her up into the air above all the others and they rocked and swayed and laughed. They moved through the ceiling, through the walls, across great spaces and descended into a pile of pillow clouds. Wordlessly they undressed one another and he...

He what? Tim wondered. The fog in his brain began to lift, the warmth receded and Tim sensed he was not alone. A light came on in the room - it was his room at the castle. The young girl from his dream was there at the foot of his bed. She did not look happy.

"Oh, hi," she said. The bashful one, upset and completely nude. "You're awake."

"Uh, yeah. I guess I am," Tim said. "You must be Geryon's daughter. What happened last night?"

The girl was not amused. She began to gather her things. Clothing was strewn about the floor, the desk, the window sill. A brassier hung from the ceiling fan.

"It is true that I am a daughter of Geryon. My name is Sahara, as I told you many times. But I don't suppose you would remember that. All through the night you kept calling out for my sister Pandora."

Tim blushed.

"Oh, man. Look, I don't know what happened to me last night. Let's just say I wasn't quite myself."

"That's plain enough," said Sahara. She was a beautiful girl, much younger than Tim. Innocence poured from every feature of her sad face. She reminded Tim of Snow White from the fairy tales - pale skin, black hair. She began to dress. For shame, Tim could not watch. She continued to berate him. "The man now before me is deplorable. And he smells. Last night you were some Prince Charming, all suave and debonaire. You said things to me I had never before heard a man say. We did things I have never before done. What sort of transformation is a man capable of that he bares two distinct faces before the woman he has just made love to? Wait, no. I'm do not believe I care to know the answer to that."

Tim did not know what to say. There wasn't much he could say. Most likely, she was right. Though he could not recall clearly the events of the night previous, he had a sense that some other force, indeed some other Tim, had been acting the part for him. It was an unsettling feeling to say the least. The last vivid memory he had of being in control of himself was just before James punched him in the face. That was when everything changed.

While the events of recent hours and the circumstances that led to them were currently a haunting matter, there was at the moment a more pressing issue Tim realized. One of Geryon's seven daughters was there before him and she was distraught. Not only did sympathy weigh heavily upon his heart for the betrayed girl, but his own ass was on the line as it was part of his responsibility to please each one of them. It was obvious this girl was not pleased. Tim had to do something. She was headed for the door.

"Look," he said. "Let me make it up to you."

She stopped.

"Make it up to me?" she said. "How on earth do you propose to do that? I have been made a fool of. I have only seen through to this morning with you that I might tell you as much. And that you are an ass. What my father wants from you, I am sure I can't see."

She continued towards the door.

"Please, Sahara. Stop," he begged. "Anything. I'll do anything to make this right. Just tell me what I can do."

With her hand resting on the door knob, she turned back to face him. A thought had occurred, a devious smile crept across her face.

"Alright," she said. "I will reserve my report to father until the next morning. Come to my room later. When the small hand points west and the big hand points north. Do not be one second early or one second late, Timothy Cutlass."

And with that she was gone.

Tim was momentarily relieved. He had just bought some time. Of how much he could not be sure. Was Sahara even referencing a clock when she made that ultimatum? He could not think of seeing a single clock in all of Castle X_____. If he considered looking at a traditional clock like a map, that would mean nine o'clock: big hand points north, little hand points west. But if it was just some random clock in a room somewhere, depending on the position, the little hand could be pointing west and mean three o'clock. But for any hand on a clock to actually be pointing true north, it couldn't be on a wall at all; it would have to be on a floor or ceiling. And if a clock were on a floor or ceiling, there could be literally hundreds of possibilities.

No, that couldn't be right. He was getting carried away. The math, and the prospect of screwing up, was dizzying. Tim thought about it for a moment. He found a sheet of paper and a pen and began drawing sketches. First, he drew an 'L' shape to signify the big hand and little hand pointing north and west accordingly. Then he drew a clock around it to indicate nine o'clock. Then he imagined rotating the clock beneath the L shape. Once, each hour this shape would occur. That meant that depending on the position of a horizontal clock, there were twelve possibilities, twice a day. That meant there were twenty-four in a single day for a clock on the floor. But what about a clock on the ceiling? This proved to add another twenty-four possibilities. Tim reasoned that a clock on the floor with hands at nine o'clock might point west and north, but that same clock flipped over and put on the ceiling at nine o'clock couldn't in any possible way point west and north accordingly.

There were too many factors to process theoretically. He would have to locate a clock in the castle. James would be just the person to ask. Then he would have to figure out how to get to Sahara's room. That would be no easy task in and of itself. Again, he would have to appeal to James for help. There was no way he could enlist the help of Geryon in this matter.

Tim leapt up from the desk he was working at to get dressed and go find James. As if on cue, however, Geryon burst into Tim's room.

"Jesus!" Tim cried. "Don't you ever knock, man?"

"Tim, we need to talk. Right now."

"Right now?" Tim asked, just pulling his robe on. "I'm kinda busy today. Can it wait?"

"It cannot. You will get dressed and meet me in the main kitchen downstairs in ten minutes."

Ten minutes! Tim thought he saw a chance to exploit the beast.

"Well, hey, speaking of ten minutes... what's a good way to tell a thing like that around here? I don't think I've ever seen a clock in this..."

Geryon cut him off.

"Ten minutes, Tim!" he screamed. "Get dressed, now!"

Tim could see no way around Geryon, master of the house. He would have to face the music, whatever it may be. He nodded assent to Geryon and the beast was on his way.

What does that guy want now, Tim wondered? Had Sahara lied to him and already spilled the beans about her dissatisfaction? Or maybe Geryon suspected that Tim had partaken in the theodine with James. He wasn't even sure that he had. It was really the only logical

thing that could have happened though. James must have drugged Tim while he was unconscious. That had to be the explanation. Tim would just have to explain this to Geryon. He wasn't at fault, he had said no!

Tim's heart raced with the thoughts of all these possibilities. What would he say if Geryon wanted to talk about his relations with the second daughter? What could he say? There was no time to formulate a response to every possible scenario. He would just have to go to the kitchen and find out what would happen.

He arrived at the entrance to the kitchen to find Geryon hovering over the stove.

"Come over here, Tim," he said.

"Yessir?"

"Do you know why I've asked you to meet me here?"

"I can explain," said Tim. "James made me do it! I didn't even want to..."

Geryon interrupted him.

"Oh, what on earth are you going on about?" Geryon turned around with a spatula in his hand. In the few minutes that they had been apart, Geryon had managed to make quite a mess. Half-cooked eggs were splattered across his bare chest. Dry, burnt eggs lined a fry pan on the stove. There were egg shells in Geryon's beard. "Tim, how in the hell did you make those eggs for me? I've been trying to get this right for days now!"

Contributor Bios

Jessica Stapp bathes dogs with her excellent Italian Greyhounds by her side. She makes art in her free time. You may refer to jessicastapp.com.

Kat Blanchard has lived in Brooklyn for 3 years but was born and raised Montgomery, AL. She enjoys puppies, fashion illustration, and Joan Rivers. So far, her only regret in life is that she didn't pursue a career in lion training.

Caitlin Hoffman is a strange girl with a silly dream. She's had a dramatic love affair with the written word ever since she wrote her first novel when she was twelve. You can follow her @CHWrite on Twitter.

Ryan Phillips has been writing fiction and poetry for a long time and he likes it. He took a poetry class in college, it was ok.

Adam Moorad appreciates your attention. He is an author of modest repute. Some of his writing applies to you. He lives in Brooklyn.

Ben Wilber is a 28 year old systems engineer at a web startup in NYC, and an amateur internet fisherman. He is currently looking for a display large enough to showcase the nearly 25GB of screencaps he's collected from his trips to exotic places on the web.

You won't find **Matt St. Cyr** anywhere but here. Or there, if he is. Thanks for listening.

Brittany O'Meara lives with two cats called Blender and Cankles. They have recently moved into their very own apartment, where they've painted the bathroom a shade of peach called Antelope Sunset. She makes the best steak tacos. She just remembered yesterday how amazing she is at making potato tacos, too. This excites her. Sometimes, Brittany thinks of the future: being an artist, an engineer, a radio show host, an actress in her own sketch comedy. But usually, she thinks about what she's going to wear later.

Christopher Owen lives in Texas with his wife and two cats. His work has appeared at Daily Science Fiction, Every Day Fiction, Mystic signals and other places. He is a graduate of the Odyssey Writing Workshop.

Mike Wiley completed this installment of 'Tim' in a Januarily under-heated, Brooklyn apartment just hours before getting on a plane bound for Cancun. He was accused of having "senioritis" on more than one occasion that day. You be the judge.

Cat Baldwin is an artist and illustrator residing Brooklyn with her talented husband and their two weird cats. Her artworks include by are not limited to; illustration, watercolor painting and digital graphics and can be seen at <http://catbee.com>. After having vacationed in Mexico for a week she thinks 'long walks on the beach' are the most reliable way to see boobs. So, why does everyone say that on their dating profiles?

the carbon based mistake was created 03.30.75 by Marc Calvary. Eternally residing in New York, it currently takes the form of books, zines, photography, writing, blasphemy, art, design, and printing. The new zine is a collection of love poems dedicated to the woman that was tried for the murder of her daughter. It's called "I Love You Casey Anthony" and the author thinks it's very funny. www.thecarbonbasedmistake.com
