

USED GRAVITRONS



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EDITORIAL

Well Dear Readers, I haven't been fired yet, or caught anything of importance on fire, so I think we're off to a good start. I'm excited for this issue. It's filled with weird stories that will hopefully challenge how you see reality, yourself, and fancy pastries forever. With that in mind, we recommend not eating any cupcakes while reading this. Or, depending on your taste, making sure that you have cupcakes with you as you settle down to read. Based on what I know of our Dear Readers, the latter is more likely. And it's why we love you. Enjoy.

Morgan Perrine

And I couldn't agree more with Morgan; nothing goes with cupcakes quite like a cold, stiff copy of Used Gravitrons. Inside this issue you'll find the prequel to the world's first-ever 3D story (by Michael Frazer - originally published in our September 2013 issue). Also be prepared to face the terror of Madame Stalin, some freaky cowboys, and the thing in your bed... the Galump! And of course there's a pit of bodies to climb through in here as well. Mike Wiley brings us one step closer to the conclusion of *The Chronicles of Tim*. Rumor has it that this is the second to last chapter. Hold on to your hats for that one. Anywhosey, we hope you enjoy. We hope you get lost. We hope you get found. Then we hope you get lost again. Reading is about the journey, kids.

Michael Kuntz

Tiberius Faces The Void

by Pam Phillips

In the beginning, was the void. Whether a void exists or not is a moot question, but there was no one to debate.

This led to much confusion.

Then a hero fell into a time loop. Since there's no such thing as time travel, naturally (or unnaturally) he was caught in the void. He fought passionately, leaping from on high, bashing with both his fists, and tearing his shirt. Desperate, he said:

"You. Are. Confused. Therefore you must be thinking."

"Yes."

"You think. Therefore you are."

"Yes."

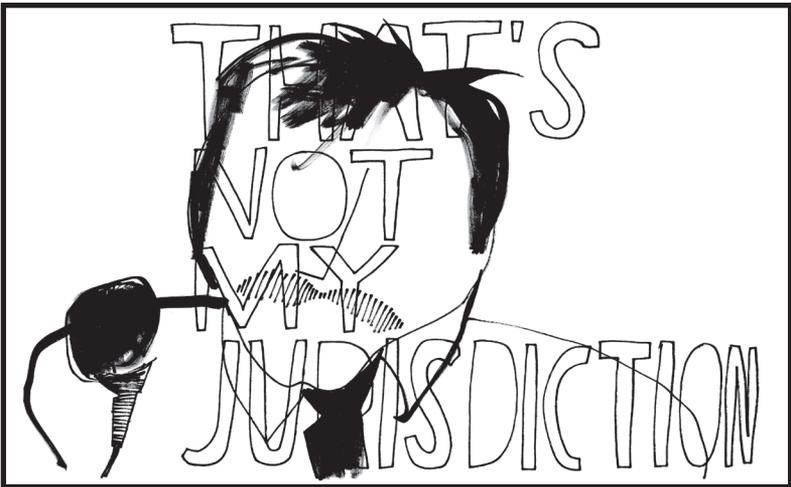
"But you're a void!"

"I am? I am not! No, I AM!"

Kablooey.



March 3, 2014



March 4, 2014

SOaptits

by Zoltán Komor

When the word came, that a handsome stranger arrived at the small desert side town, with the sundown at his back, the madam, this greedy old fat bitch, with boobs hanging down like ancient church bells, lined her girls in front of the whorehouse immediately. There they stand now, with unbuttoned neck-lines. Their tits are red apples, full of bite marks – some are half eaten and from others, worm stick out their tiny, white heads.

But the cowboy couldn't care less about this procession. Instead, as he rides toward the saloon, his eyes gaze at the horse washer boys. So many half naked lads, the warm desert wind plays with their fuzzy hairs. As they wash the tied animals in front of the boozer, soap-foam flows on their pubescent arms. The cowboy's tongue, like a fat, slimy snail, rolls back and forth over his lips.

"False alarm! This isn't a real man after all, only some kind of parched prick! Back to the girl-corral, my little bitches, there's still enough work to do!" the madam yells, and as she claps her enormous hands together, the apples fall down from the girls and roll into the whorehouse, where hungry, dirty men pick them up and bite into them. The girls follow their fruits with hanging faces.

The cowboy picks out two boys sitting next to the drinking trough without any work. They are carving small horses out of soap with their small knives, sometimes slapping each other on the back, laughing wildly. Their smooth faces are like the faces of angel statues, soap flakes sit in their bellybuttons, like small feathers.

The cowboy steps aside, and puts two fingers in his mouth. He grabs out two golden teeth, which he throws onto the ground. The boys look up, and drop their knives as they jump after the teeth. They wrestle for a while and the man watches their tussle with a half-smile on his face, then after a few minutes, the boys stop and share the shiny capture.

"My horse is in the back of this building. If you wash it well, you'll get another pair of these." says the cowboy, opening his mouth wide to show two lines of gold teeth. One of the boys bites on the gold, then takes

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it into his mouth, chews on it for a while, then spits a perfectly formed coin into his hand.

“Jesus, it’s real!” he cheers, then smiles at the noble fella. “Don’t ya worry, Mister, we are the best workers around here!” Then he slaps his buddy’s back so strongly, the other boy drops his gold.

“Glad to hear that.” mumbles the cowboy. “The horse is a brown steed. Just look for the most beautiful one, you can’t miss it!” Then he walks away. The two boys pick up their rusty buckets, fill them with water, then they whistle to the small soap-horses that get to their feet and follow the boys to the back of the building. There, the two youngsters fall on to their faces, when they discover the cowboy’s horse. It isn’t really an animal, just a man in a horse costume that covers everything, except the chap’s ass and erected penis. They instantly recognize the voice of the cowboy, as he tries to imitate a real steed’s neigh.

“Mister thinks we are stupid.” whispers the boy to his buddy, who just shrugs his bony shoulders, and throws his dry sponge into the bucket. As they begin to wash the man, his neighs became more and more excited. The boys’ touches makes his cock pulsate, his asshole broadens and narrows, like the black of the eye.

“What a wonderful steed this is!” praises one of the boys, as the other tries to hold back his laugh. “Do ya think Mister would mind if we take it for a test run?”

“Nah! I’m sure he wouldn’t! He looked like a really nice fella!” says the other, and he can’t hold it back anymore, he begins to guffaw. The cowboy in the masquerade doesn’t have any time for objection, the two lads jump onto his back, and begin to kick his side with their ankles.

“Giddy up, you bastard!” they whoop together, and the cowboy begins to run on all fours, faster and faster, like he’s being chased by the devil. His ass gleams white in the dark night as he jumps over the drinking trough with the jockeys. His gold teeth clash every time the two boys spur him. Dust wreathes around them, like an evil ghost, making the other freshly washed horses dirty again. Angry boys throw their soaps toward them. The soaps sweep next to the jockeys, like bullets, washing down the night in straight lines.

“Buzz, you dirty fly!” they laugh, and the cowboy jumps over the saloon. They sparkle, as they fly – fires on horseback, melting the keys of Heaven – stars in boy bellybuttons – hooves carving faces into the moon. Mister steed squirts into the costume – like the back of the eye, he’s just a through-passer.

They are riding in the desert now. Scared scorpions run away on their needle feet and cactuses explode by boy laughs. And then, the horse collapses under the kids. The jockeys get down, shaking their heads resignedly.

“What a good for nothing stinker!” sighs one of them. “Made of real waste iron!”

“If there was a gun around, we could end his misery!” says the other. Then, he raises his eyebrows, and screams: “Oh, but you have one! You have a pistol!”

“Of course.” nods the other kid, taking a toy gun out from his pocket, a white soap-pistol he carved out yesterday.

“Boom!” he shouts, holding it to the guy’s ass.

“You... little... bastards! I’m gonna teach you a lesson, as soon as I get out of this fucking suit!” huffs the cowboy before he faints.

“Looks like Thunder Bolt died down!” chuckles the boy, spinning the soap gun around his finger. Then, a sharp shot shakes the air. The two boys turn around and see a bandit standing on a dune. His grey eyes flash in the dark.

“Drop your weapon, and put your hands up!” The voice of the man is like the sound of denting metal. The two youngsters smile at each other, when they realize the bandit wants them to throw away the toy gun. So the boy drops it onto the sand, and holds up his hands.

“Please, don’t hurt us! We are just through-passengers!” they cry, still with that smile on their face. “This ugly old horse is all we have!”

The bandit steps aside, and looks at the collapsed animal.

“What’s wrong with it?”

“Nothing much, just tired.” answers one of them. “After a little rest, it’s gonna be good as new.”

“Well, it better be!” grunts the man. “I could really use a good steed!”

The two boys begin to beg, “Oh, mister! Please don’t take away our horse!”

But the bandit sends them off.

Later, walking back to the town, the two rascals can’t stop laughing. One mocks the bandit, screaming, “Drop your weapon!” And the thorns fall down from the cactuses. His friend gallops around him with

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his trousers down. He neighs, squirting soap-foam onto the sky. Boom! – they turn into white foals in the moonlight – boy manes tickle the air, the sand melts into glass under their hooves as they ride around and around in a dark bucket. “Mister thinks we are gunplay in the clouds – gourd filled with marbles and crystal balls – drowned tumbleweed in milk – drops of bathwater woven from white cotton yarn – death taken out to test run.” In the distance, little soap-horses fly in the air, dissolving in the night’s muddy water – the dark applauds – the mister is a whorehouse and he slops out the bucket filled with faces.

After a long walk, the boys arrive back in town and lean against the drinking trough dead tired. They watch the other washer boys. What a ratty family we are, they thought. Rabid dogs, with soapy mouths – pubescent boy-bevy – chuckling angels stuck in a holster. Some boys lock themselves into wooden shit-houses, and take off. With jet streams made of white sperm, they fly and land on the moon, where the little travelers collect soap bricks for tomorrow. Others are just finishing today’s work: an eager kid washed a horse so much, all of it’s outlines and colors came out. It rides up and down in the street, all invisible – bucket and ladders fall over spontaneously.

Not far, a couple of cheeky boys stand with their pants down, pissing on a white steed. Then they laugh when the drunk cowboy who just stepped out from the saloon doesn’t recognize his now orange equine. Boys lost in buckets, stroking themselves mournfully, they are chewing new eyelids from the coins they earned today. In half sleep, they fart the American anthem together, wash the air with their sweet breaths, and throw their dry sponges into their wet dreams. The heavy curtain of silence. Only the sound of cry – a few girls sitting in front of the whorehouse can’t stop weeping. Tears turn the dust into mud – their broken faces balance on their knees.

The boys leaning against the trough listen to these cries for a while as they try to fall asleep. But the weeping scares away the good dreams, so they stand up and walk to the whorehouse.

“What’s wrong with you?” they ask the girls, who open their clothes for them and show their eaten apples. The two youngsters look at each other then return to their place and take out their knives. They work at the light of the moon, carving out small boobs out of the soap bricks from the moon. When they give them to the girls, they begin to chuckle and kiss the boy’s smooth faces. Then they put the soaptits into their blouses, and run away hand in hand, laughing into the night. From now on, they will be the washer of hands – there will be no more dirty fingers touching them. They can already see the line of men, standing in

front of the lavatory, the gathering of dirty old pigs. But when they begin to fondle their soaptits, the bubbles turn them into young, clean dukes – men you can happily attrition aside.

The boys listen to their laughs and fall asleep at last. A beautiful dream kisses their foreheads. In their dream, the girl's wax-like white boobs foam between their keen little fingers. Bubbles fly over the sky and wash off the night.

Deporting the Pizda

by Madame Joseph Stalin

The whole Stalin thing started when my ex-boyfriend, who I continued to be involved with, told me that he was less attracted to me than he was to his other ex-girlfriend who looked like a porn star. I didn't think she looked like a porn star. I thought she looked like a snapping turtle—no chin whatsoever, beady little eyes in different hemispheres of her facial globe, a creepy beak of a nose that looked like it might bite someone at any time. He just liked that she was tan and fake blond and that each of her individual boobs was bigger than each of my individual boobs (though since she was a much larger person than me, mine were actually bigger proportionally).

Her name is the Pizda.

Pizda means cunt in Russian, which my ex-boyfriend taught me. He's Russian, and so is she. He came here as a little kid and speaks perfect English, and you'd never know he's Russian until you hear about his weird conservative politics or how he pronounces certain vowels preceding the letter R. She is Russian like an American-cartoon villain during the Cold War. She has a strong accent and odd cultural viewpoints, like racism. Before I became Stalin, I was half-Russian, but only ethnically—my grandparents were born in America. Now that I am Stalin, of course, I am of Georgian descent.

I learned about the Pizda's racism while stalking her on OKCupid. She keeps an account open even though she has confessed she is in love with my ex-boyfriend and wants to marry him and have his Russian babies. She answered the match question "Would you consider dating someone who has vocalized a strong negative bias toward a certain race of people?" with "depends on the race." She answers other match questions in a way that reveals she is very against interracial marriage and that she is very satisfied with her appearance but doesn't believe she is smarter than most people. She also answered "How important is money/wealth for you in a match?" with "very important." No wonder she chose my ex-boyfriend. He's white and a hedge fund manager.

I stalked her on OKCupid (also on Facebook and LinkedIn) because I was determined to find a way to get her deported. This seemed

like a humane option for a criminal of her level, and it seemed more doable than starving her by cutting off her grain supply or forcing her to build infrastructure on a chain gang all winter. I needed her out of the way because I confess that I, too, wanted to marry my ex-boyfriend and have his three-quarters Russian babies, and I was terrified he would choose her instead. He said he loved me and never loved her, but he claimed they had a chemistry that we lacked. I told him he was unable to feel chemistry with anyone he felt true affection or love for, because his now-defunct porn addiction had completely screwed him up. The Pizda was 35 and wanted her Russian babies germinating soon. She had to go, and immediately.

If you're wondering whether it hurt to hear that my ex-boyfriend, who I still loved with every quixotic cell of my being, preferred the Pizda to me physically, yes it did. It hurt and it made me feel ugly and it made me want throw acid in her face so there was no way he could possibly think she was prettier than me anymore. Because he was ex, I had no claim on him, but because I loved him so much, I just wasn't able to let him go. Every time he wasn't with me and I didn't know his whereabouts, I imagined he was with the Pizda, gazing into one of her eyes or the other (they were too far apart to gaze into at the same time), leaning in to kiss her fishlike overbite, and not even thinking of me at all. But everyone is well aware that it takes many hours of pain to transform somebody into a dictator: The original Stalin, for example, suffered smallpox as a child and was born with two of his toes joined together. He was also expelled from a seminary.

The thick mustache started to grow on my face when I followed the pizda to the gynecologist one morning. I made a fake Google account, "SexyRussianBillionaire@gmail.com," and friended her on Google Plus. Obviously she accepted, and when I requested access to her calendar, she allowed that as well. I put on my coat and headed out for "gyno 7:30." Later I planned to meet her again at "coffee w/ Sasha 2:15" and "dinner Dmitri 10:00." If I was going to get her deported, I had to collect as much dirt as I could. By the time I got to the gynecologist's office in Kips Bay, the mustache was in full bloom. I wasn't alarmed. I think I'd always expected this would happen.

I snuck into the hallway that abutted the Pizda's examination room and, using a mirror, looked in. She lay on the table and her feet were in the stirrups. The doctor was procuring a special jumbo-size speculum from a shelf across the room, which allowed me a moment to see between the Pizda's legs. Her twat was, as my ex-boyfriend had mentioned to me, very wide, but I saw something he never told me about: writhing above her cuntal orifice like a hideous worm was a long, prehensile clit that looked like it could hold a chopstick or a pencil.

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This almost made me feel sorry for her, and the mustache, for a second, seemed to thin out, but then she said to the doctor, in her thick Russian accent and tiny little voice, “I want to get off birth control soon, I think, because I may want to try for baby. I’m just about to get back together with the love of my life!”

I grew five inches taller (Stalin was only 5’8”). My clothes ripped and my features became more swarthy. It didn’t matter if I didn’t have enough dirt. It was time.

I went to the NY Public Library, made a new Google account, “TerrorismReporting12345@gmail.com,” and emailed the Department of Homeland Security about how the Pizda had been helping to siphon funds to Chechen terrorists.

I made a new Google account, “Sorryaboutyourcompany@gmail.com,” and wrote to her employer, saying she had been embezzling funds for two years, and that the money was for terrorism.

I reloaded and reloaded both email addresses, waiting for a response. I waited for three hours, and still nothing.

It was time for larger action. Stalin didn’t rule by email.

Once I took over New York City, it was easy to get the rest of the country. All a dictator needs is a disciplined, worshipful, loyal army with many weapons and little fear of dying. I’ve always had a charismatic personality, and I was once the meanest girl in middle school, so this was easy for me, especially now that I looked the part. I’d long felt America was crying out for unification, for a dictator, for something to believe in, and here I was, just in time.

Many of my initiatives were benign. I invested heavily in transport. A nationwide high-speed rail network was going to be ready within three years. I ended the war in Afghanistan, but mostly because I needed the military at home to help me run things. I gave everyone health care. I ended the immigration debate by default: Once I came to power, people stopped wanting to come here.

I am ashamed to say that, three months into running the free world, I still hadn’t bothered to deport the Pizda. To be fair, I was playing the long game, and obtaining the level of power I had come to crave was very time-consuming, but it was also a matter of indecision: Was deporting really the best option? I kept second-guessing myself. Wouldn’t it be fun instead to have someone stand behind her on an escalator and pull her

gross, frizzy, overdyed hair into the gear mechanism so it would scalp her? Would it be perhaps more interesting to use my enormous resources to creatively drive her mad, having small and unlikely coincidences appear in her life, like everyone on the train reading the same book every morning, and every website being collegehumor.com, and all food served to her in every restaurant being tofu, until she went completely insane and had to go to Bellevue? Or would it instead be apropos to keep my enemy very, very close, and befriend her, woo her, take her to expensive dinners and have girlish sleepovers where we'd wear clay masks and watch romantic comedies and talk about celebrity crushes, where we'd tickle each other's backs as we fell asleep and maybe once or twice we'd go a little farther than that, a wayward hand braving beyond the elastic of a pair of cotton panties: perhaps her prehensile clit would wrap around my pinky finger as we drifted off to sleep, like a contented cat's tail. In the middle of the night, I'd strangle her.

No, deportation was still the obvious choice. And, it had to happen soon: she continued to live in New York, work at a private equity firm, and have late-night dinners and make-out sessions with my ex-boyfriend, who had been avoiding me ever since I turned into Stalin. He claimed he was busy with work, but I knew what was really going on.

I turned it into a national campaign. "DEPORT THE PIZDA" posters hung in every governmental office, in every airport, on every billboard. The words were written over a drawing I made of her face, all hyperteloric and chinless. I called Putin and told him that I was sending her back to Russia, to a labor camp in Siberia. "We don't want her," he said. This angered me.

I held a rally in Times Square to celebrate the deportation of the Pizda, and to announce a war on Russia. Everything I had done thus far—killing governors, hanging congressmen, lowering taxes—had led to this one moment. I was finally going to get what I wanted. I had my henchmen collect the Pizda at her apartment and put her in a cage that hung over the stage where I stood. She cried softly, her barely-there chin quivering.

As I was about to speak into the microphone, something stopped me. I saw my ex-boyfriend approaching the stage, unshaven, disheveled, wearing a ridiculously-patterned fleece from Uniqlo.

"If you send her to Siberia, I'm going with her," he said.

"No, you're not," I replied, gesturing to the AK-47 that I had strapped to my shoulder.

"You can't do this," he said. "And even if you send her away, even

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if you kill her, I'm still not going to want to be with you," he said.

"Oh?" I threatened. "Oh? And what if I kill every other girl in New York? America? The world? Then what?"

"I still won't want to be with you," he answered. "I've told you. I don't feel the attraction I want to feel."

"Yet you feel it for that?!" I screamed. "No chin! Prehensile clit! A racist! A low IQ!"

He shrugged. "We've talked about this too many times." He narrowed his eyes and crossed his arms.

"But you love me!" I blurted, having no other cards to play.

"I do love you," he said, "I do. Even now. But I don't want to be with you." Above us, I heard the Pizda laugh.

"He never loved you!" I yelled up at her. I turned to him. "I'll make you change your mind" I gestured to my gun again. I gestured to the army behind me. I fired a warning shot too close to the Pizda, and she shrieked and let loose a rancid queef.

"You can't," my exboyfriend said, waving his hand in front of his face because of the smell. "You can do anything now. You control the entire world. I can't believe you did it. You got everything you wanted. Except me. You still can't make me be with you."

"I'll hold you prisoner," I said. "I'll torture that hideous Pizda every day for the rest of my life until you agree to be mine."

"That's not how you want it to be, though," he said "and it wouldn't satisfy you."

"I'll torture her anyway!" I screamed. "I'll cut off one piece of her disgusting prehensile clit every day and feed it to you in a sandwich!"

He looked at me with something that approached tenderness. "I'm sorry," he said. "I'm sorry I hurt you. Do what you have to do." He turned away.

I started to cry. The crowd looked antsy, ill at ease. Television cameras were pointed at me from every direction. Helicopters hovered. My number one henchman tapped me on the shoulder. "Madam Stalin? Shall we start?"

I was so sad I couldn't move or speak.

"What's wrong, Madam Stalin? What can I do? Do you want a donut?" my number one henchman asked. "Or maybe some soup? Should

we postpone this rally? What is it?"

I shook my head. I felt myself beginning to shrink, and I felt my mustache thinning. I spoke into the microphone. "It's over," I said. "Everybody get out of here. Everybody go home." I sat down on the stage, Indian style, and sobbed the heaving sobs of a thwarted dictator.

"What do we do with her?" asked my main henchman, pointing to the Pizda.

"Whatever you want. Who cares," I said. "I quit."

"Send this ugly chinless cunt to Siberia," I heard my main henchman say to my second and third henchmen as I stepped off the stage and started to walk towards home, mustacheless, five feet two, and despondent.

"If she goes, I go," I heard my ex-boyfriend say behind me, loudly, clearly for my benefit. I kept walking. I didn't turn around.

"So go," said my main henchman, loyal to the end. Despite myself, and despite my tears, I managed a tiny, tiny smile.

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The Seneca Story
by Michael Frazer

Remember when we were sitting in Calculus and you stood up when the professor called you? You referenced Seneca's *Thyestes* when you meant to talk about Euclid, but you kept talking anyway and the professor looked at you like you were crazy. The play was so gory I couldn't eat for a week unless I had prepared my own meals. You kept talking and nobody, not even *the professor*, stopped you because it was a 7am class.

I don't know
if I'm making
any sense, but
I think you
should know
I've been pre-
gaming since
6 this
morning.

That day, you left class early and I followed.

We walked

We talked.

We went to Denny's to help me sober up.

We drew pictures instead of doing our homework like we planned. It was all fun until the waiter yelled at us for drawing on the table. I guess he didn't like our mythological pictoglyphs. He took the crayons away, but we laughed it off between sips of the Greyhound I flasked, taking hits of table salt straight from the shaker for a makeshift Salty Dog. Then you ordered the fries, and I ordered a cup of coffee and another box of crayons from a passing waitress. We didn't eat one fry. We built Fryestes instead, the spud who ate his own kin, his potato face oozing with ketchup blood and potato mash dribbling from his mouth. Fry limbs were scattered everywhere. The plate, the table, the floor, some in your purse. In any case, it's a good thing for him that he's a potato - potatoes are roots; no family tree.

In retrospect,
I think I went
a little heavy
on the vodka
that day.
Well, any
given day for
that matter.

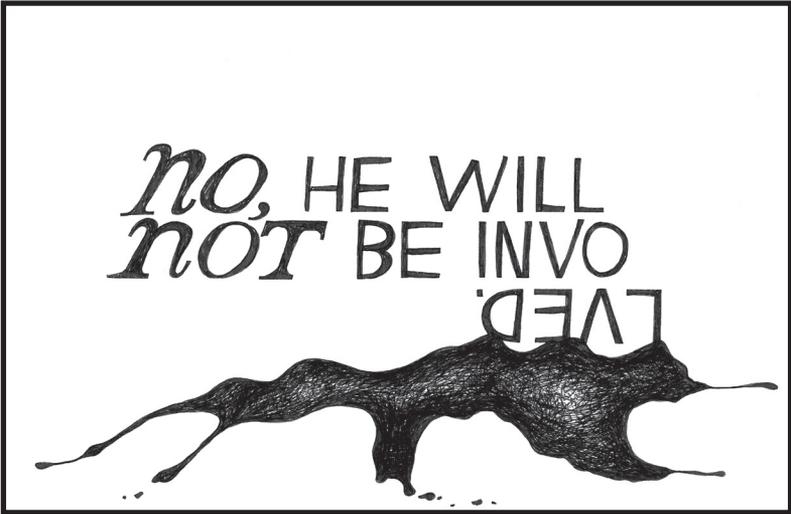
We paid our bill.

We signed in crayon

and left a tip in integral form.

We walked back to campus and hopped in my car to go somewhere, anywhere, nowhere - we didn't know. I turned the key in the ignition, the engine grumbled - my stomach did too. I turned to you to ask where we should go. That's when you looked at me with smiling eyes and said, "I don't know why, but I have this strange urge to make illegal U-turns with you."





February 11, 2014



April 6, 2014

The Clause of Doom

by Vajra Chandrasekera

(The perp struggled inside parentheses, unable to get out.)

“He looks like a mime in there,” Watt said. “I hate mimes. Okay, let’s roll him out of here.” The uniforms hurried to comply.

“Ever seen a man in maximum-security square brackets? Much worse,” I said. “Like a Hannibal Lecter gimp suit.”

“Can’t say that I have,” Watt said. We were trying to distract ourselves with banter, staring at the body of the vic/tim. He’d been slashed in half.

“Let’s go talk to the neighbour,” I said.

#

The neighbour was a fussy older man named Hyde. Grey hair, reading glasses. He’d been the one to call the police when he heard screaming and thumping noises, though it seemed he wasn’t a big fan of the vic, Tim.

“Timothy was a homotextual,” Hyde said, sniffily. “He only ever wrote the same thing again and again, year in and year out. Turgid, pretentious work, as if he were trying for a Booker.”

“Do they even have those any more?” Watt said.

“Only roaches and the Booker will survive the apocalypse,” I said. It was just a bad joke but the old homophone narrowed his eyes at me like I was the one hiding something.

#

Back at the station they’d got the perp out of parentheses and into a holding cell, but all he would say was “I do not recall a thing.” Sometimes he would stop at “I do not recall,” as if even the repetition were wearying.

Watt told him amnesia was such a cliché and that nobody was buying it, but finally I grew exasperated enough to call in medical assistance. Like Watt would know a cliché if it bit him on the ass, anyway.

#

“He’s not an amnesiac,” the doctor said. “He’s been severely edited.”

Watt whistled.

“How bad is it?” I asked, though I already knew the answer. I’d known it ever since I heard the man’s solitary line of dialogue. An old cop knows.

“Whoever he once was,” the doctor said, “He’s just cardboard now. Practically a trope. I’m sorry, I don’t think there’s any hope for him.”

#

We eventually identified him from his refusal to use contractions and distinctively stilted syntax. Turned out he was an up-and-coming literary critic noted for spotting cool new trends.

“So what, a coolhunter critic is spending a lot of time with our vic?” Watt said. “Homotextuality’s about to make a comeback and somebody objected?”

“Stranger things happened in the war,” I said. “Look at the Passive Riots. People attacked in the streets--”

“Attacked viciously--”

“and the Great Adverb Reclamation has much to be blamed for,” I said, severely. “Let’s go back and see the neighbour. I thought he was a red herring, but he’s the closest thing we’ve got to a smoking Chekhov.”

“It’s the reading glasses,” Watt said. “I mean, who wears reading glasses any more? You don’t think he’s a closet slush reader or something...”

“No, something much more dangerous than that,” I said, checking my weapon grimly. “Let’s show and not tell.”

#

We didn’t knock. I’d explained my theory on the way, in blatant violation of third-act reveal protocols. I didn’t want to risk the body count. We just broke the door down and barged in.

“Face down with your hands behind your head,” Watt shouted. “If we see your fingers move we will put you down like a dog so help me God.”

Hyde didn’t move, except to crook a finger slowly and deliberately at the missing commas. Watt flinched.

“We know what you are,” I said.

“See,” Hyde said. “That’s a line I would have cut. It’s redundant and poorly placed.”

I’m not ashamed to say I flinched too. Editors are the most

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dangerous people alive. We thought we'd accounted for all of them in that final crackdown that ended the war, but we knew there were some left. They were incredibly difficult to contain, and some said they were like an infection. Once bitten, any innocent civilian ran the risk of contagion, starting to care how stories were told, how sentences flowed, what words were chosen.

"Why kill Tim, then?" I asked, being deliberately uncareful with my words. Editors bring out the contrarian in me. "Do you just hate homotextuality that much?"

"What's to like?" Hyde said, witheringly. "No, I didn't mind Tim. His placid, unadventurous plodding made him a wonderfully inoffensive neighbour. It was that idiot critic, coming in here and stirring things up. His dialogue was so inane and buzzword-laden I just couldn't resist trying to cut it." For a moment the man looked haggard, regretful. His fingers twitched as if he was trying to undo his actions. "I forgot how slow-moving and vulnerable their prose is. Poor Timothy was hit instead. Then I had to edit the idiot to make him forget. What I'd like to know is how you figured out it was me."

I didn't want him to know I was navigating by genre-awareness intuition, so I lied. "It was because you glared at me when I mentioned the apocalypse."

"So?"

"Only an editor," I said, watching his fingers carefully, "Only an editor could possibly have seen so many z--"

"Oh, don't say the word," Hyde moaned.

"--ombie apocalypses," I said, deliberately.

Hyde's fingers curled involuntarily into claws. "REJECTED!" he shouted, face flushed red. He lunged forward. Watts dived for cover and the other officers scattered.

I fired three times. 12pt calibre Courier New full stops in a neat ellipsis, bam bam bam. Hyde toppled backwards.

Nobody moved for a long moment afterwards. I think we were all afraid he'd get up again. I once saw an editor take an ellipsis right in the chest and still get up to stab the arresting officer --with an em dash through the throat. But Hyde didn't get up again. You could take an editor down, if you distracted them first.

"A critic, a writer and an editor walk into a bar," said Watt,

hoarsely, from behind the couch. Watt was always trying for a good one-liner, but he would commit to a setup without even having a punchline. He just made me tired.

“You can’t contain an editor in parentheses,” I said. I felt like I had to say something, even if nobody would fault me for what I did. Not braces, brackets, not even a footnote. There’s nothing that can hold them.”

“Don’t blame yourself,” said Watt. I winced but I didn’t say anything. This was the world without editors, after all, and we’d fought too long and hard to keep it that way.

It was just that sometimes, when the prose got really bad, when the run-ons ran on too long, when the metaphors mixed and overflowed, when the relentless, unending clichés started to grind me down, my fingers would start to twitch.

Just the Old Men

by Joe Desrosiers

Imagine thirty dead men in a pit; that's what I was looking at. Real fresh too. Makes you wonder why they didn't put the dirt on to cover the smell. They had on all their clothes like they'd been rushed out and thrown in real quick. And they were old men, sixties and seventies. Most of them had on real nice suits.

It had probably been a few days and you could smell it from a mile. But that's a mile on top of miles you'd have to go to get there. I guess they figured nobody'd be around for a while. Well, I was in the area, and knew something big was rotting so I followed it, and there I was. You bet I was looking for who did it the whole time, but it was quiet.

It wasn't as big as I'd dig for thirty men, but it fit 'em because they settled close and tight together. The bastards probably figured the old men didn't need to worry about comfort, and they didn't, but I felt bad for them. It was a strange thing all right.

They were piled up right below the rim and I saw some of them still had their rings and watches. I got closer to get a better look and would you believe all those men had wedding bands of gold or silver? No kidding. I couldn't see the ones below, but the ones above had 'em, so I got in and pulled 'em off and into my pocket.

I was nervous the whole time thinking they'd come back and bury me alive. They could've easily, because I got carried away and started digging through the bodies for the rings and watches below. I couldn't get to the bottom, but got damn near it and was up to my waist in old men, and it's crazy because I wasn't even anxious by then. I wasn't really touching them anyway because of their suits, just the hands. You want to know about the hands? Like ice. Hands of the dead. They were at the beginning stages of putrefaction so it wasn't bad. The heads were the worst, all crooked and with different expressions. Eyes open and shut. I remember one had on this smile like he was in heaven.

Anyway, I climbed out careful and thanked them very much for the things, and felt bad, their being dead. The only thing to help was a prayer, so I made one up and said it out loud. I felt good after that. Then

I moved my hand over the pit like I'd seen priests do in the shape of the cross, and got out of there.

When I got home I didn't feel right about leaving them, so I got my shovel and went all the way back. And you know when I got there, somebody had already got to it; a fresh circle of soil where they'd all been, and it was sad being there alone.

Added Ingredients

by Bradley Sides

Just as the sun decided to fade out of view on every Friday's evening, Giovanni Sampleton entered Café Torta to create his renowned cupcakes. The quaint shop attracted the most celebratory of guests—those finding new love, celebrating old love, and even those marking milestones on calendars. They were already seated under the low lighting when the cupcake chef walked from the front entrance and made his way to the kitchen. His steps clicked over the dark tile flooring, but they were never heard. The applause filled the room. Frequently, standing ovations were given upon the chef's arrival. Giovanni hurriedly wave to his patrons, while keeping his head down and his feet moving. He was a ruddy-faced, broad-shouldered, and rotund man. His apron was clean, just as was his hat. It appeared as though nothing had ever touched either of them. Guests commented on how he never changed. "Constantly, reliably, brilliantly good" was how they put it. There were never any orders; there were never any suggestions; there were never any complaints. Each visitor to Café Torta received the chef's special.

Once inside the kitchen and left to his own company, Chef Giovanni quickly ridded himself of both the apron and the hat. Next off, he removed his shoes and socks. Finally, his shirt and trousers were placed on top of it all. He walked around his kitchen in his cupcake-patterned boxer shorts. Only tiny blue cupcakes topped with pink icing and yellow sprinkles covered the man.

"Okay, let's get this over with," Chef Giovanni said to himself, as he arranged his workspace.

He got out four pans, which created forty-eight cupcakes. Café Torta never had a Friday evening with any more or any less than forty-eight guests. He opened his cabinet and removed one large mixing bowl. He searched his drawer to find his whisk. He laid it all out. Then, he flipped the dining room switch, and he sat and listened.

In Café Torta's dining room, music began playing as soon as the switch was hit. The customers clapped and yelled. Some of the couples passionately kissed. The younger ones raised their fists in the air. A section even stood and howled. A few banged their fists on the tables and chanted. Only twenty-two minutes and they would have their cupcakes.

After seven minutes of procrastination, Chef Giovanni stood. He knew what the next fifteen minutes entailed.

“Okay, let’s get this over with,” Chef Giovanni said to himself again.

He walked to the end of the kitchen that was bare, and he looked at his workspace. It was far away—just like it always was. Without another thought, he ran as fast as he could. He slammed against the counter. Flour spewed from his navel. He walked back to the bare side of the kitchen, and he ran another sprint—diving straight into the counter. This time it was sugar. He banged himself against the counter until he was empty and bruised. He ran around the kitchen for six minutes, going as fast as his body would allow him to move. He began sweating goeey egg whites and butter. He stood over his mixing bowl, and he wiped his face with his hand and allowed what he gathered to drip into the bowl. He hurt, and he ached. He began crying. Vanilla poured from his tear ducts. Again, he stood over his bowl. Knowing that his guests demanded their cupcakes, he did not stop. He panted, as he feverishly mixed the ingredients with his whisk. He poured his creation into the baking pans. He blew on the cupcakes. His heat baked them in two minutes. With only four minutes left and his body on the verge of collapsing, Chef Giovanni took the pans and emptied their contents onto plates. He walked again to the bare side of the kitchen and took one last sprint. Limping and breathless, he managed to make it to the other side. His stomach splashed into the counter. Red, yellow, and orange frosting flew from Chef Giovanni. Just when he appeared finished, tiny, perfect cuts of fruit ended the stream of colors. They were finished. They were beautiful.

Chef Giovanni cracked the serving window, took the plates, and slid them onto the counter. He rang the bell and slammed the window shut. Twenty-two minutes precisely. Each guest wanted the privilege of selecting his or her own plate. He heard feet scuttling and chairs scooting. Cheers again. He could hear the cheers.

On the floor now, dazing in-and-out of consciousness, Chef Giovanni listened to his admirers.

“How is it?” A man asked, while looking over at his wife.

“Oh, you know,” she said. “Constantly, reliably, brilliantly good.”

Six Pack Story - The Bridge

by Morgan Perrine

Beer 1

It was Tuesday. Or at least it felt like a Tuesday.¹

The day felt damp. And heavy. And to top all off, it was raining. Not raining in that “Oh look, it’s raining outside, let’s put on a movie” kind of way either. This was the kind of rain that made you believe someone had figured out a way to tip a river on it’s side and had completely lost control of the situation.

And as Gerald stood, damp, heavy, and in the rain, it was the thought that whoever the idiot was that tipped the river over was probably being very publicly yelled at that kept him warm. He hoped he got fired.

“The only thing missing are the fucking fish,” he grumbled.

Then after a brief calculation, he leaned against a large rock to better protect against any fish that might come careening towards him from behind.

He never underestimated the people’s natural ability to wildly screw up.

Beer 2

Lightning streaked against the sky and somehow it started to rain even harder. Gerald tried to sigh but was already so miserable that sighing would have been an improvement. Instead he just stood there and let the sky piss on him.

Nothing was dry. Nothing had been dry for a long time. He couldn’t read because of the rain, and because the hut that he normally sat in during rainstorms, the hut that was both dry and decently insulated, had been pushed over the bridge railing sometime during the night about a week ago, and he hadn’t had time to rebuild it.

¹Tuesdays always had a sticky feeling to them, like your bed had had gotten very damp and is hanging on you as you go about your day. Whether or not it was Tuesday was unknown to Gerald, who didn’t own a clock—or even a calendar for that matter—on account that former hadn’t been invented yet and while the latter had been invented, it hadn’t made it’s way to the part of the country, or maybe even to the country whatsoever, that Gerald lived in.

He tried imagining the person who tipped the river over walking home after getting fired in a torrent of his own personal failure, only to be greeted by the disappointed faces of his family, knowing that idiocy on this level could have only been caused by him.

Gerald didn't feel better. Not even after imagining the river-tipper getting food poisoning from the pity dinner his wife cooked him and spending the rest of the night in the rain shitting violently. It was too wet. Not even the schadenfreudian image of his imaginary tormenter being tormented was enough to help.

Gerald shifted his weight, trying to find a more comfortable way to lean against the rock.

“Gaaaaahhh! Wha? What the fuck!?”

Water flooded down the back of his pants. Some how it had built up in his shirt, and when he moved had come rushing down like a giant natural enema.

Gerald closed his eyes and tried to find the motivation to stay out in the weather. It didn't take long. There wasn't any.

He grabbed the coin box that sat in the mud a few feet away from him. It tinkled as the few coins he had collected earlier in the day (when it wasn't pouring misery) bounced around inside. Somehow, even they sounded wet.

Beer 3

Slowly Gerald trudged down the path towards his bridge. It was by far the oldest bridge in the region and, unlike the newer bridges that had been popping up along the gorge, was made entirely out of Iron Stone. Gerald never understood why it was called Iron Stone.

Presumably whoever named it was trying to convey how hard and durable it was, which while true, was still a ridiculous name for it.²

The only reason Gerald could think of that it was called Iron Stone was that it was named by the same idiot responsible for the rain.

Grumbling to himself about how unfair it was that someone idiotic enough to officially name a rock Iron Stone could find another job, and apparently a management position that gave them oversight on river direction at that, kept Gerald occupied as he closed up the bridge gate and made his way down the steep Cliffside stairs towards his cabin under the bridge.

² Iron Stone was far and away the best stone you could use to build anything. The problem was that iron was complete shit for building anything other than cookware and murder tools. Iron is bendy, and not nearly as sturdy as the most pedestrian of pebbles. Only a total idiot would try and build a bridge with it.

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Gerald's cabin, unlike the weather, was nice. It was large by cabin standards, had a nice thatched roof (which was unnecessary, as the bridge above provided more than enough shelter from the rain, but it really pulled the place together so Gerald kept it up) and extended all the way into the bridge's foundation. It had even been sketched up in "Hovels Monthly" last summer.

Kicking off his boots in the entry and leaving a trail of foot shaped puddles as he went, Gerald slumped into a large wood chair by the fire. The warmth felt good and within minutes his cat Sergeant Snowbuttons was purring as close to him as he could without getting wet. Before long he could feel his bad mood start to fade away.

It was the rain, mostly.³ Whenever water started falling on him for any reason, Gerald's usual good and friendly nature turned to sodden hatred. This complicated things, because the rest of his family, and his extended family, and his best friend Tim, all loved the rain.

Beer 4

For years Gerald had tried to love the rain, or at least not hate it. When he was younger he played rain rocks with his friends, went on rain hikes, and spent rainy afternoons in rainy fields with his family. And he hated every second of it. He hated it so much that he wouldn't even go near waterfalls because the misty bits were too much like rain.

What Gerald loved though was a warm fire, his pipe and a good book. And he was settling right into those things and feeling much better about everything when he heard a faint clapping noise coming from the bridge above him. He ignored it.

The "There's someone on my bridge" bell tinkled by his door.

"Some animal must have found it's way against the gate," he said at Sergeant Snowbuttons, but more to himself, and with great effort turned his attention back to his book.

Suddenly a sharp crack came from the bridge above his house sending Sergeant Snowbuttons fleeing across the floor and under the lounging couch made for him by his friend Chaise. Gerald leapt to his feet, threw on his boots, and ran out the door to see what could possibly be happening.

He got three quarters of the way up the stairs before the bridge deck came into view. There, obviously drunk and getting ready to throw

³ That it felt like Tuesday certainly wasn't helping either. But since Gerald was unaware that it was Tuesday, or even that the idea of Tuesday existed, which it didn't, he assumed that the clammy mattress feeling was also being caused by the rain.

his body against his gate, was Kevin, the youngest of the Gruff brothers. The only thing that could ever come close to bothering Gerald as much as the rain, were the Gruffs; a local family that owned a modest bit of land on one side of his bridge but somehow believed that they were entitled to everything they wanted.

“Hey!!” Gerald shouted. “What the hell are you doing?”

Beer 5

“Open the gate!” Kevin shouted.

“Well stop destroying it for a second and I will,” Gerald shouted back. He was never in a mood good enough to deal with one of the Gruffs. The rain made it worse. Gerald started picking his way across the rain-slick stone steps leading to the bridge.

Crash.

Every muscle in Gerald’s neck tensed as he heard the wood splinter from Kevin heaving his body against the gate. He clenched his teeth as he tried to restrain himself.

“Are you fucking deaf? I said hold on you fucking inbred goat fucker! I’ll be there in a second.”

He failed.

Kevin glared at Gerald, but didn’t body-slam the gate again. Gerald grabbed his club from the broken remains of his bridge hut just in case. The Gruffs could occasionally get violent when challenged, especially when drunk.

Water dripped from the elbow of Gerald’s cardigan as he unlatched the gate.

“Of course. Fuck-ing perfect,” he grumbled.

He swung the gate open and Kevin swaggered through.

“That will be one silver.” Gerald said as curtly as possible. All he wanted to do was get this nonsense over with and get back into his chair.

“Nah brah. My brother’s got me covered,” Kevin said without slowing down.

“What? Your... No!” Of all the indignities he had to endure, this was not going to be one of them. “You pay, or you turn around.”

Kevin stopped and turned towards Gerald.

“Look. Dude. My brother is right behind me, with the coins. He

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just got caught up talking to Janine. You know, that hot piece of tail from over the hill?” Gerald knew her, he had caught her pissing on his bridge with some stubborn idiot the week before. He had to threaten to call the guards before they left.

“I just got tired of waiting, so I peaced out. He’s got the money though, don’t worry about it.”

Gerald didn’t move. Kevin looked at the other side of the bridge, sighed, then stumbled over to Gerald in a way that was apparently supposed to give the impression that he was more sober than he was. It didn’t work.

“Look. Bro. I know it was uncool for me to slam your bridge like that. And I’m sorry. That was a really dick move. Really. I’m sorry. But he really is just right behind me. But if you want to not let me through and wait for him, I get it. Totes. Up to you, Boss.”

Gerald hated Kevin more than he ever thought possible. Not because of his condescending tone and false apology; that was normal. But because the thought of waiting with Kevin, in the rain, for god knows how long, listening to him prattle on about ‘hot tail’ or whatever was more than he could stomach.

He knew that he had to let him pass.

“Fuck it.” Gerald threw his club on the ground. “Fuck it. Just go.”

Gerald threw the latch on the other gate free, opening the way for Kevin in all his drunken glory. He hoped he got the scabs from whatever slutty ‘tail’ he was going to bang that night.

Kevin stopped halfway through the gate and turned to Gerald.

“You’re a real bro, you know that. More people should know that.”

Gerald sighed. “Yeah. Thanks.”

Kevin gave him a quick nod, then drunkenly staggered off towards wherever.

Gerald sighed again, slammed the gates shut, locked them with as much hostility as possible, and trudged back down the stairs towards his book, chair and fire.

The Kettle had just begun to sing when Gerald’s bridge bell tinkled again. He hadn’t changed yet, figuring this was going to happen. But being denied the promise of comfort and some bit of warmth from his kettle to deal with another one of the Gruffs was a kick to the face that felt incredibly unfair, and with a cloud of curses, turned the stove off and slammed the door behind him as he left.

Sergeant Snowbuttons, who had just thought it safe to crawl from under the experimental couch, dived back underneath the 'lounge' as the door slammed, deciding that the safer move was to remain hidden for the rest of the evening.

"I'll be right there. Hold on. And try not to fucking wreck anything until I get there!" Gerald bellowed as he left his house. Silence echoed from above, unusual for the Gruffs.

Worrying that he might have just insulted a peaceful traveler, Gerald hustled as fast as he could up the slippery stairs. Half way up, the rain-drenched mud holding a stone in place shifted under his weight, sending him crashing into the angled rock. Pain shot through his leg.

"Mother Fucker!" Gerald cursed through clenched teeth. He looked down at his knee. Blood and rain trickled out of it. Involuntarily he started laughing the way you do when everything is so miserable, the only thing to do is laugh. Or kill the nearest living thing you can find. Gerald, being the more peaceful type, just laughed like an insane person.

Then, slowly, made his way up to the bridge. Three quarters of the way up, where he could usually see anyone waiting on the bridge, the bridge looked empty. The path leading to the bridge was empty too. Even with his fall, no one could have left fast enough to not even be seen.

"What the..." Gerald pushed past the pain in his knee and hurried to the bridge, worried that he might find someone passed out by the door. With one swift motion he threw the latch aside and opened the door, rushing out to find the mysterious person, and immediately collided with Chris, Kevin's older brother.

"Dude. What the fuck?" Chris shouted.

"I... Sorry. I didn't see you." Gerald stammered. "I thought someone might be in trouble."

"No dude! I was just leaning against the gate because, like an idiot, you don't have anywhere to stand to avoid the rain." Chris spat back at him.

Gerald didn't know what to say. "Sorry. I did. It was attached to my hut which was destroyed last week by..."

"Whatever bro." Chris interrupted. Gerald was almost sure he saw a knowing smirk cross Chris' face. "Let me through?"

Still flustered, Gerald nodded and headed toward the other gate.

"Yeah, of course. Sorry." Something clicked. "Wait, sorry. Kevin

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came by earlier. He said you had the money for both of you.”

Chris stared at him.

“so... That will be two silver.”

“He said I had the money?” Chris was looking at Gerald like he was an idiot, reminding him that he was dealing with one of the Gruffs. Immediately his sympathy for Chris vanished.

“Yeah. He said ‘my brother is right behind me and he’s...”

“That’s Jake,” Chris cut him off.

“Excuse me?” Gerald couldn’t believe that they were giving him the run around.

“Yeah. Jake. He’s got the money.” Chris continued. “I passed him on the way here, trying to fuck to that Janine girl. She wasn’t having any of it, so he should be right here.”

Gerald glared at Chris. Chris glared back.

“Look, you know my brother Kevin’s an idiot. And he didn’t say I had the money, he said my brother has the money. And you let him through.”

Gerald didn’t buy it.

“Why should I believe you?”

“I don’t know,” Chris mocked. “Maybe because my brother is right there?”

Gerald looked up, and sure enough, coming over the hill in the distance was Jake.

Beer 6

As much as Gerald disliked Chris, he had a point.

“Fine.” Gerald spat, stomped over to the second gate and threw it open. Chris marched through without so much as a Thank You.

Gerald latched the gate behind him, then turned on his heel and shuffled through the rain to where his club was lying on the ground. He was soaked. The kettle was almost assuredly cold. And the biggest douche bag on the planet was heading towards him.

“Please, just give me a reason,” he whispered as he picked his club off the soaking deck.

Ten minutes later, Jake strode onto the bridge. He was obviously in a foul mood. Gerald could sympathize, he felt the same way, and stood

in the middle of the open gate, dripping with rain leaning on his club.

Jake stopped in front of him.

“Out of the way, Troll.” He growled.

“Three Silver.” Gerald growled back.

Jake sneered. “And why would I do that?”

“Because, I let your brothers through on the condition that you would pay.” Gerald face was stone. He was bleeding, wet, cold, and was not letting this idiot through for free.

“I’m not giving you shit, now move.” Jake tried to walk past, but Gerald slammed his club down in front of him with a heavy thud, blocking his path.

“Three. Silver.” Gerald repeated.

Jake took a step back and looked Gerald up and down.

“I’m in no mood to be bossed around by filthy toll Trolls.” He hissed.

“And I’m in no mood to be cheated by three inbred sons of a gold-digging goat.” Gerald’s voice was low, and he squeezed his club to get a better grip on it. There was no way Jake would let this slide. He didn’t care. Losing three silver was worth being able to bludgeon the bastard.

Slowly, Jake backed up. “Ok then.”

Jake charged, horns low. Gerald moved fast, whirling his club above his head and aiming a stunning blow at the side of Jake’s skull. His club reached the height of its arc, Gerald swung, then let it go and yelled in surprise as pain shot through his knee.

Time seemed to slow down. He saw his club fall to his side as Jake slammed into him at full force. He felt his joints crack from the impact. He stumbled backwards. There was a wall. Then, there was nothing, and Gerald fell through empty space as he watched the bridge grow farther away from him.

“Fuck.” It was the only thing he could think. Until he hit the water.

“Fuck that’s cold!”

For a moment he tried swimming to shore, but the rain had swelled the river too much. It was no use fighting it, he was just going to tread water till he washed up somewhere down river. As he watched his bridge disappear around a corner, he could have sworn he saw Jake make an obscene gesture towards him.

--

Gerald took a pull of his cold, fruity, obscenely alcoholic drink and stared out into the ocean. Sergeant Snowbuttons was back in the Château curled up in the ice cellar, which made sense, it was hot as hell itself outside. Gerald loved it.

Soft crunchy sounds of someone walking over sand told Gerald his lawyer was approaching.

Lawyer. What a weird profession. It was rather new, but so far had been remarkably useful. At least for Gerald.

“Alright sir, the last of the Gruff funds have been transferred to you via chest of gold, as you requested. It should be here within the week.”

Gerald sighed with content and sipped his drink.

“Perfect. Why don’t you sit, have a drink? You earned it.”

Gerald motioned towards the reed lounge next to him. It had also been built by his friend Chaise, but was a very different design, meant to facilitate something he was calling ‘reclining.’ Gerald wasn’t sure what that meant—Chaise always made up words to describe his work— but it was remarkably comfortable.

“I’m sorry,” his lawyer said. “But I’m afraid I can’t. Have to catch the next ship out of here. Long journey ahead. You understand.”

“Of course.”

“Just so you know. The Gruffs are telling people that you tried to eat them. We could sue them for that too, a new term has been developed for just this sort of thing. We’re calling it ‘libel.’”

Gerald laughed. “No. Thank you. I already have more than enough from them. Have a safe trip back.”

“You’re sure? It could really set a precedent.”

Gerald shook his head. “Very sure. Besides. Eat them? Who could possibly believe that?”

“Alright. Good day.” With a sharp nod, the lawyer turned and headed, presumably, towards some ship.

Gerald threw a pebble into the crystal blue ocean, watching the ripples get eaten by the waves.

“Good day indeed.”

The Fixers

by Matthew Wilson

When beckoned, the two men knocked at the door and waited.

“You here to pick up the old unit?” Alice asked when she answered.

They nodded, and she led them into the kitchen.

Her husband sat at the table, reading his newspaper like he had every morning of her twenty-year marriage.

“What’s the problem, then?” The taller repair man asked, rubbing his hands together in preparation for heavy work.

“He’s old, fat and got high blood pressure.” Alice noted in a no nonsense way as the two strong men threw their arms round the startled man and quickly tied him up. When they dragged him back to the van, they handed her a young, handsome man. Twenty five and fully gassed.

“You shouldn’t have any trouble now,” the repair men assured her, and drove away.

Smitten, Alice took the young man inside, and started breakfast. It was inevitable things broke down. But just like that they could be replaced.

“Mommy, where’s dad?” Her daughter, Becky, asked when she skipped into the kitchen.

“This man is your daddy now.” Alice said, laying down the cereal, but Becky wasn’t pleased.

“I preferred the old one. He knew my favourite bed time stories-”

“If you’re going to be difficult, you can go with your brother,” Alice moaned, and the little girl remembered when her big brother broke mommy’s valuable vase by accident. Then the repair men had taken him away. To the furnace.

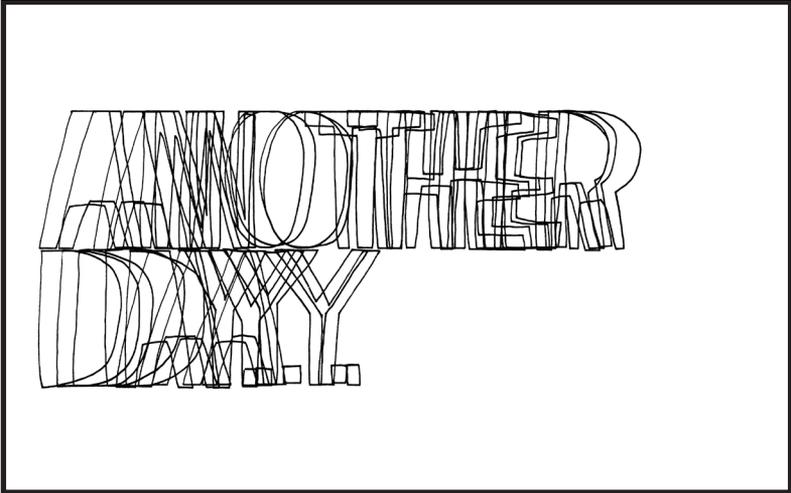
“I’ll - I’ll be good,” she said, and Alice was pleased.

Becky rejected the idea of breakfast. First, she had a call to make. The repair men picked up on the second ring. Very professional.

“Hello, I want someone replaced.” Becky said, as was her right as a citizen of the new world. “Yes, it’s my mommy. You see, she’s no fun anymore.”



May 12, 2014



April 5, 2014

Static

by Meegan Solis

The damn thing wasn't working.

He banged it again. It squished and made a groan, but the damn thing still wasn't working. It just sat there, blinking stupidly.

"Did you try turning it off and then on again?" his wife, Barbara, asked.

David rolled his eyes.

"But we'll miss it!" Barbara whined.

David turned towards his wife. "I'm aware of that, dear," he said sarcastically. God, he hated Barbara sometimes. Her picture seemed even fuzzier than when they first met and she never did anything new with her antenna these days. The antenna itself especially annoyed him. It was hideously outdated; high-definition had made them obsolete eons ago. But no, Barbara was stuck in the past. Sometimes she still played static. She thought it was cute, quirky. It embarrassed him. His neighbor Kevin's wife, Sharon, was years younger than Barbara and it showed. Her screen was perfectly flat and crisp. Barbara's had a curve to it and had two black bars on the top and bottom of her picture. And Kevin was getting that plasma--Barbara relied on a cathode ray tube. David was no flatscreen himself, but if Kevin could pull a piece of t.v. like Sharon...

"David?" Barbara was whining again. "We'll miss it."

"I'll take it in tomorrow," he promised, and the two ignored each other until bed time, where Barbara ignored David some more. He waited until she turned herself off, then fiddled with his own buttons, but he felt silly adjusting his volume in the dark, so he too went to sleep.

He loaded the thing into his sedan in the morning and kissed Barbara goodbye. Their screens touched with a clicking noise. "Oh, I guess I'll have to find something else to do without it in the house," she said, laughing nervously.

"Guess so," David answered. Maybe some fucking housework, he thought. He glanced across the street and saw Kevin pulling out of the driveway--Sharon was in the doorway, all thirty-six high-resolution inches of her. She looked shiny and glorious, with a smooth black frame; Barbara

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looked dusty, with stupid wood paneling and that stupid curved screen. What had he seen in her?

“Have a good day, dear,” Barbara said in a tight little voice that let him know she had seen him looking at Sharon’s sharp edges again, and he got in the sedan and started the drive into town.

Maybe I’m having a mid shelf-life crisis, he thought as he pulled into the parking lot. Barbara still had her good qualities. She could play an infomercial reel like no screen he’d ever met. He remembered their third date; he’d parked his car on makeout point, and she flickered a combination of commercials advertising blenders, screen cleaning cloths, cord organizers. That was the first night they made love.

“How can I help you?” a friendly looking employee asked him as he brought his broken human into the store.

“The damn thing isn’t working,” David said. “It’s about to hit puberty--the guide said it was due to pop its first pimple last night, but it just sat there, blinking stupidly. The wife was furious that she’d missed one of her shows.”

“I’ll take it in back, do some standard maintenance tests, but this type of lethargy is normal when they get about this old. What are you feeding it?”

David shrugged. “The usual,” he said.

The employee’s screen buzzed. “Oh, no. You have to up their intake when they get around this old. And the greasier foods, the more pimples to pop. Trust me, your wife won’t miss a thing.”

David wandered around the store while the employee took the human into the back. There were some newer models in, expensive ones, humans that promised to do interesting things around the clock. He read the label in front of one particularly stretchy looking number. “Gymnast-3000,” it said, and sure enough, he watched as she contorted her limbs into a pretzel. Barbara would love something like this, but they weren’t made of cash and could only afford a standard Teen.

“Here we go, good as new!” The employee ushered the Teen back towards David. “I gave it some pepperoni pizza and a brief lecture on existentialism. It should be back to being a typical Teen by tonight’s program.” The employee leaned in conspiratorially. “And if you walk in on it at odd hours, you might find it doing something really interesting.” The employee winked. David thought about Sharon and blushed, then signed a check and loaded the human back into the sedan.

Barbara was waiting for him when he got home. “Well, turn it on!” she squealed. “Millie’s Teen set has already started writing angsty poetry. I can’t wait to see what this one does.”

The two sat in front of the Teen. It sighed with typical boredom. Barbara watched, enthralled, as it fiddled with a blackhead on its forehead and David watched Sharon watering the begonias in her front lawn.

The Galump

by Curtis Harding

The Galump lives in my bed.

He doesn't live under it. Mommy and Daddy kept telling me there that there are no monsters under the bed, but everybody knows that. They live in the bed.

It came out one night while Mommy and Daddy were in the nursery checking on baby Allison and I was saying my prayers. Its skin looked like fireplace wood after all the Christmas paper is done burning and it had six hands and three mouths and smiled two big cat smiles while it told me it was a friend of God and it had come down to answer my prayers. Then it said it was hungry and God had promised that I would take care of it, so it promised not to eat me. But only one mouth said that and I knew the other two didn't care what it promised.

I don't know what its name really is. It won't tell me. Whenever I ask, it just watches me with its little eyes that look like paper cuts and grins all those cat teeth. I call it The Galump, because that's the sound it makes as it goes back into the bed.

It doesn't make any sound when it comes out.

When Daddy came back from the baby's room to tuck me in, he asked what the sound was and I told him, and he told me to stop being silly. I told The Galump to do something or say something, but it didn't and Daddy made me get in bed and turned off all the lights. Then Mommy came in and turned on my night light and told me to stop fussing and I knew that they weren't going to help me.

After they were gone, it told me it was hungry again, so I told it to wait until they went to bed and I would get it food. I didn't want to feed it steak – steak night is my favorite – but I don't know if it doesn't like chicken or it didn't like how Mommy cooked it, but The Galump made me take it back and get it something “fresher”. It laughed when I brought the broccoli, a mean choking laugh from all three mouths, but it didn't look like it was happy. It looked kind of mad. Then I tried the steak Mommy had put in the refrigerator to unfreeze and it tore it apart with its teeth. She

couldn't figure out where it had gone when she wanted to make dinner the next day, but she didn't ask me. I would have told her that I fed it to the Galump. But she wouldn't have believed me because after I gave it food it went away and I didn't see it all summer and I thought maybe Mommy and Daddy were right from the beginning and it was just a scary dream.

But then it came back.

It came after prayers were over and I was in bed with my eyes closed, trying to fall asleep. I almost didn't remember that it was in my bed, but this time it didn't come all the way out and I kept feeling its hands grabbing at my arms and legs while it told me that it was really hungry. I tried giving it the turkey Daddy had been saving for Thanksgiving but it didn't want it. It said it was too hard and crunchy and empty and cold and it wanted something warm and soft and juicy. I was going to put the turkey back but The Galump just kept saying it was hungry and wouldn't let me go until I promised it something else.

The next day, Mommy wouldn't stop crying. I was just tired. The Galump had been really noisy all night. I think when it wants me to, it lets me hear what it's doing inside the bed. But only when it wants me to.

The policemen were really nice and they asked me lots of questions about the baby, but when I told them The Galump took her, they just looked at me funny. Daddy told them I thought I had a monster under my bed and I said that no, it was in my bed, and he yelled at me to stop it and be quiet. They asked me some more questions, then they went away and never came back. Just like Allison.

Eventually, Mommy stopped crying.

This time it wasn't gone as long and I just knew it wasn't going away forever, but I still woke up and felt someone rubbing my hair and thought Mommy was tucking me in. Then I woke up enough to tell that the hand was coming from under me and I knew The Galump was back. It was holding me with its other five hands and it wasn't tight but I think it wanted me to know that it was there and that it wasn't ever going away.

I told it I would go see what I could find, then went to Mommy and Daddy and said I had a nightmare and got into bed with them and stayed there all night, even when Daddy wanted to carry me back to my bed. They almost always said yes to me now.

I did that for three nights and I think they were getting close to saying no, but then my cousin Jesse came. Aunt Janey and Uncle Gene were going away somewhere and he was sleeping over with us but I didn't want him sleeping in my room. He smelled funny and never listened to me and

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we always had to do what he wanted and I never got to do anything that I wanted. I told Mommy and Daddy that he could sleep in Allison's room since she wasn't using it and they got real quiet and told me to go to my room. A little while later they sent Jesse up to tell me I could come down.

The Galump never leaves the bed so I sleep on the floor when I can but Mommy and Daddy always found me and put me back in. I told Jesse he could have the bed and he said "Good, I was going to take it anyway," and for that night, at least, I got to sleep on the floor and no one made me get back in bed. I slept really good for half the night but then I woke up and heard a noise and when I looked over I saw Jesse looking at me with two hands over his mouth and four pulling him down. I hid under my covers when all I could see were Jesse's hands sticking out of the bed.

The Galump was chewing loud all night.

Mommy didn't cry after that but she did yell a lot. So did Daddy. Aunt Janey cried, though, but Uncle Gene just got really, really mad at me. They all thought I knew where Jesse went and I did but no one would believe me and they just kept getting madder and madder. They thought maybe he had run away and had said something to me, but he didn't and I told them and when I said it was The Galump Uncle Gene looked like he was going to hit me but Daddy stopped him and the police came again. It was different police but they asked the same questions and this time Mommy and Daddy talked to them for a long time.

When we were alone, I said I wasn't ever going to sleep in my bed and that just made Mommy and Daddy yell again. That's when they started saying that the police were right and I needed help and I told them that yes, I did, but they didn't mean that kind of help and I knew they'd never let me get away from The Galump.

We didn't really sleep anymore and we were always fighting about where I would. I was winning for a little because no matter how much they yelled and told me I needed to stop and tried to put me in bed, I would kick and scream until they stopped.

But one night Daddy finally got so mad that he dragged me into my room and Mommy followed and told him to be careful and that both of us should just please calm down. They were tired and sad and angry and scared and Daddy sat on the bed and kept telling me he had enough from me and that I was going to get in bed and stop making their life more miserable than it already was if it killed me.

He grabbed my arms so hard that they hurt and I think he was going to pull me into bed but he didn't get a chance to. Mommy and me

saw it before he did because it came up behind him. And it never makes a noise.

Daddy let me go when the hands covered his mouth and Mommy started screaming. The Galump was smiling with all three mouths right above Daddy's head, but now its teeth looked like knives and its cut out eyes looked like they were bleeding. Mommy reached out to them, but I turned and ran down the stairs and out of the house. I tried not to listen to their yelling as I ran across the street and rang Mrs. Cohen's doorbell and told her that Mommy and Daddy were gone.

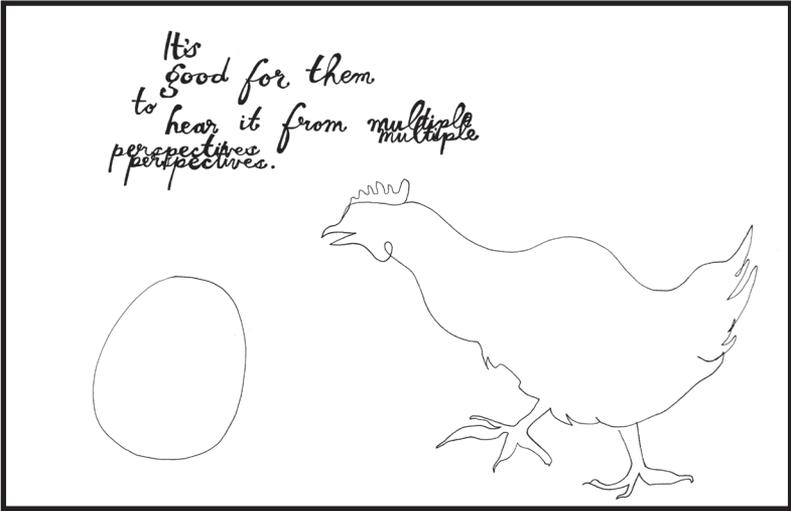
When she took me back over to my house, it was quiet. And empty.

Grandmom and Grandpop came to stay with me, but they say it's only temporary. I got really excited because they promised to bring all my stuff with me when we move. But then they told me that they'd bring my bed too, no matter how much I asked them not to and cried and yelled. They said they don't have a lot of money and they won't throw out a good bed that I can sleep in.

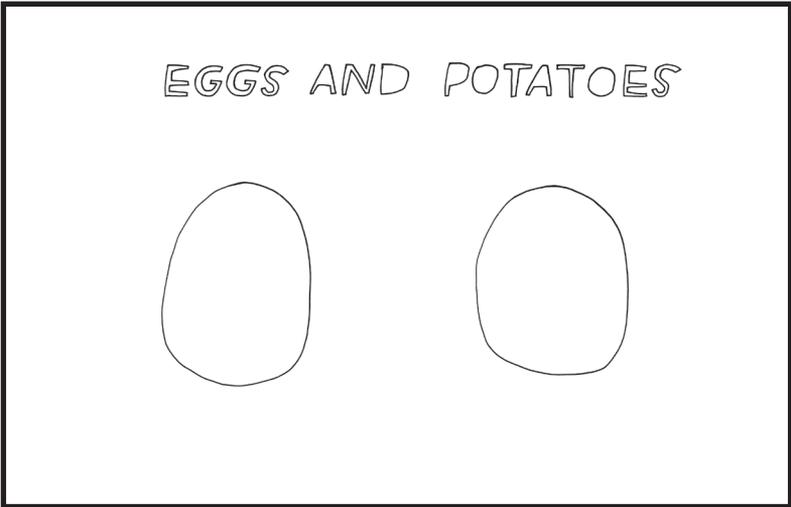
It gets really lonely with Mommy and Daddy and Allison all gone, so I promised I'd sleep in my own bed if Grandmom and Grandpop slept in it with me. Grandpop says we won't all fit, but Grandmom promised she'd sleep with me. But just for tonight.

I just hope it doesn't get too noisy.

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January 30, 2014



March 14, 2014

India ink on paper, source text from overheard conversation, Mark Addison Smith

The Chronicles of Tim pt. XV - This Ends NOW pt. I of II - The Exciting Series Finale Prequel

by Mike Wiley

Now that the room was at full attention, Tim had no idea how to proceed. All eyes were cast on him, watching while he sweat through his shirt. He had a vague outline in his head, a whisper or a rough draft of events that ought to proceed. But he had never organized so much as a weekend fishing trip with buddies. The previous work of the Tim army had been a direct effect of theodine. But that solution was now off the table. Theodine had done great and wonderful things, but this world was not so different from the one Tim had grown up in; it had a way of balancing forces. And as much good as theodine had done, it was also capable of an equally great evil.

Tim stood before the congregation. He steeled his nerves and spoke.

“It has come to my attention,” he said, “that we have a problem.”

“Yeah, no shit, Sherlock!” somebody yelled from the back of the room.

“If you’ll just permit me to, well, to explain. We have to...” he coughed, “...do some things.”

The room remained silent. As Tim grew more nervous, he felt as though he were waiting for one of his better halves to burst through the doors at any moment, singing the Great Plan. In this fantasy of his, the whole room would break into a sing-song, like a scene from a Disney animated musical. Over the course of the catchy tune, a montage would ensue. The house would be cleaned. The evil Zugdusters would be vanquished. There would be laughing and hardships overcome. It would all be over in a matter of minutes.

Of course, none of these things were going to happen like that.

A hearty “You suck!” took Tim away from his daydream. This snapped him to full focus.

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“No,” he said, as if to himself. “I don’t. I don’t suck.” He played with these words, letting them roll around on his tongue, tasting, but not quite indulging in their flavor. He let them roll, sit, twist on the tongue. The words marinated there in his mouth. He recalled his time alone in the Think Box. Those were literally some of the darkest moments of his life since he arrived at the castle. He remembered the loneliness and the hopelessness he had felt in the cold, damp box. There was nothing to keep him going at the point, but he had survived. He had done better than survive. He had succeeded the challenge. And he had been rewarded. At the moment when Pandora retrieved him from the top of the staircase, that feeling was the polar opposite of the despair he had felt down below. Tim remembered the joy he had felt then. The edges of his vision began to brighten a bit while he rolled those sour words around in his mouth. They began to taste bitter, and at last, when the pungency of these new words became too much, he swallowed. Then he spat. “I don’t suck,” he said again. “You do.”

A gasp ran through the room. “The fuck did he say?” someone yelled.

“You suck!” Tim repeated. He spun on his heels and addressed the other side of the room. “You all fucking suck so much. Do you have any idea what I’ve been through to be here today? There’s not a one of you that I give a good goddamn for. Yeah. How does that feel? Not too great, huh? Well, guess what? That’s what my life is here. I’ve just been shit on time and time again. There’s no end in sight to this madness. The whole fucking world’s going to the chamberpot and none of you can be bothered to do anything about it yourselves. It’s ‘Tim, fix this. Tim, fix that. Tim, you shit in the pool again.’ I don’t know how to fix this mess. I don’t know how to save you from the Zugdusters. I don’t know how to please any of you. I’m not even sure I want to.”

He ceased the rant then. He was out of breath. Nobody said anything, but a curious thing happened while he was getting worked up. His beard was sticking straight out in front of him, like a half-mast penis leading an uncertain direction. Ever-forward, presumably unto doom. And that’s when the applause began.

The room erupted into thunderclap. Tim looked out through misty eyes to see a sea of smiling faces.

“Bravo!” they shouted. “We knew there was a leader in there. Just look at the beard, man!”

The beard became excited. It straightened and stretched outwards.

The cheering grew wilder and louder. Tim had no control of the mass on his face. It swung out over the crowd as if acknowledging its own greatness. It swelled to five times what it was a moment ago. Tim's fragile body was jerked to and fro by the hairy beast. He found his confidence suddenly restored.

"Okay!" he shouted. They want a leader, he thought. The beard commands respect, he realized. The beard truly is the source of my greatness. "Let's take back our children!" he said.

"Hoorah!" came a deafening reply.

"Let's show the Zugdusters we aren't afraid of them!"

"Hoorah!" they all said.

"Let's clean up the mess I made all over the house!"

The applause abruptly petered out. Crickets chirped someplace outside.

"Okay, fine," Tim said. "I'll clean up the mess I made. But you guys have to help with the rest of the other stuff."

Over the next few weeks, after repairing the damage done by his pirate counterparts, Tim went to work mapping the perimeter of the estate, assigning lookouts, constructing watchtowers, designing a work flow and shift hours. He had a plan somewhere in his brain. He just didn't fully know what it was yet. He couldn't help but feel that a large piece of the puzzle was missing.

The first few days had been easy. A storm of enthusiasm from his family members had kept him steadily afloat. All available resources had been put to use. The lookouts and patrols were going well. The casualty rate was down to less than one child per night. It wasn't perfect, but it was an improvement. Some of Tim's sons even admitted that they no longer hated him. The atmosphere was remarkably positive. Despite having little direction, Tim was feeling good about his plan.

But as the days wore on, the efforts were not enough and the enthusiasm began to wane. It seemed as though the Zugdusters were growing stronger, stealthier, even responding with counter-measures to the efforts of Tim's gang. More and more of the children on patrol continued to disappear at night. The members of Tim's camp were growing wearier by the day. Then something happened that destroyed all of Tim's confidence.

Tim was leading a patrol of the younger kids around the lake one

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night. It was a cloudy evening and they were far enough away from the castle that it shed no light on their mission. All they had was a single torch light, held by Tim. Things were going smoothly, according to plan. The purpose of the patrol was to ensure that the more daring of the Zugdusters refrained from breaching the perimeter of the estate. Occasionally, one of the beasts would be spotted, in broad daylight no less, crossing the great lawn. To what purpose, no one could be sure. But whenever it happened, there would be a great uproar amongst Geryon and his people. They would call for stronger defenses, more training, quicker resources. None of these things was actually available, so Tim just worked longer shifts and organized larger parties to create a show of impressive force when working the beats. But he really had no idea how he would respond in the event of an attack. He would find out soon enough.

There was a rustling in the bushes to the rear flank of the party. There were twelve or thirteen of Tim's children in the search party. He would later regret that he did not know the exact number.

As soon as Tim turned the torch in the direction of the rustling everything was quiet again.

"I think it took Jensley," said one of the kids.

"Which one is Jensley?" Tim asked.

"I don't know," said the child. "I'm scared."

"Don't be scared. My mother always told me there is strength in numbers."

Behind Tim there was another sound. He spun to see only a shaking bush in the dark. "Shit," he said as he counted heads. "How many were we when we set out?"

"I'm nine," said one little boy.

"And I'm four and three-quarters," said a little girl.

"No," Tim interrupted them. "I mean, how many people did we have in our party?"

"This isn't like any party I've been to," said the nine-year old. "Where are the clowns and balloons?"

Tim was trying to ignore his children's responses while he counted heads. He couldn't be sure if any were missing because he had no idea how many began the trip. That's when the massacre began.

The party was hit from all sides and they were hit hard. It was a bloodbath. The Zugdusters came in like wood chippers, tearing flesh from

the bones of the children right before Tim's eyes. He was helpless against the ugly, implacable monsters. They left him alive, intentionally it seemed, to be witness to the carnage. When he returned home that evening, the human detritus on his clothing told the tragic story to the rest of the family.

Tim's nerves began to break down. He knew what the problem was. He knew it with every fiber of his being. What he wanted, what he really needed to accomplish the task at hand was something he had vowed to never touch again; theodine. Wonderful, sweet, delicately aromatic theodine. He knew the beard was his power source now, but it didn't stop the cravings. If he took theodine, the beard would disappear. But was the question even relevant? Was there any theodine to be had? Geryon claimed that there had been none since Tim went into hiding, because nobody was harvesting it. Is there true power in theodine, Tim wondered? Or was it right there in the magnificent mass of facial hair?

"Tim, we have to do better," Geryon said to him one day. "The casualty rate has to be ZERO. These are our children we're talking about."

Tim rubbed his face into his hands. "And if you keep talking in tropes, I'll never be able to think," he said.

Geryon growled.

"I don't know what else to do," Tim said. "I'm trying everything I know."

Geryon was silent. It appeared he had something heavy weighing on him. Finally he let out a great sigh and said, "I haven't been fair to you, I haven't told you everything."

"Yeah no shit."

"It's understandable that you wouldn't have been able to count the daughters. What with everything that's happened." Tim perked up. "There's still one more daughter to please. You've only met and pleased six of them. And barely, at that, I might add..." Tim groaned. "But full disclosure. The reason we are having these problems, these orchestrated kidnappings..."

"Kidnappings!" Tim interrupted. "I've seen my children eaten alive. This is pretty fucked up."

"Well... You haven't met my eldest daughter yet. She is queen of the neighboring Zugdusters. You haven't heard of her because no one has ever made it as far as you have Tim. This is new to all of us. My grandchildren, the carnage, this mess. And you, with your insatiable sexual

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appetite. There's something... special about you. I don't know what it is myself, though my daughters seem to think that I do. You want to know how I found you? Your name and location came to me from an angel in a dream. That is how I found you. That is how I found all the other suitors. I followed my orders and brought you here, just like the rest. But something always happened to halt their progress whereas you, you have succeeded somehow."

"Yeah, yeah. Well, what can I say?" Tim was more than pleased to have his feathers fluffed so. "But seriously. Tell me about this last daughter of yours. What's the deal? How do we get to her? What is her name?"

"Her name is Mange-Pot and she-"

"Wait," Tim interrupted again. Geryon stopped talking. "You named your kid 'Mange-Pot'?"

"It was my mother's name."

"Okay."

"Is there a problem?"

"Yes. There are lots of problems. But go on..."

"I believe that you have to infiltrate their domain and please the final daughter, Tim."

"What the fuck, Geryon. You realize this is pretty messed up, right?"

"Yeah, I know."

"Like, even more messed up than the fact that you make eggs."

"Yeah."

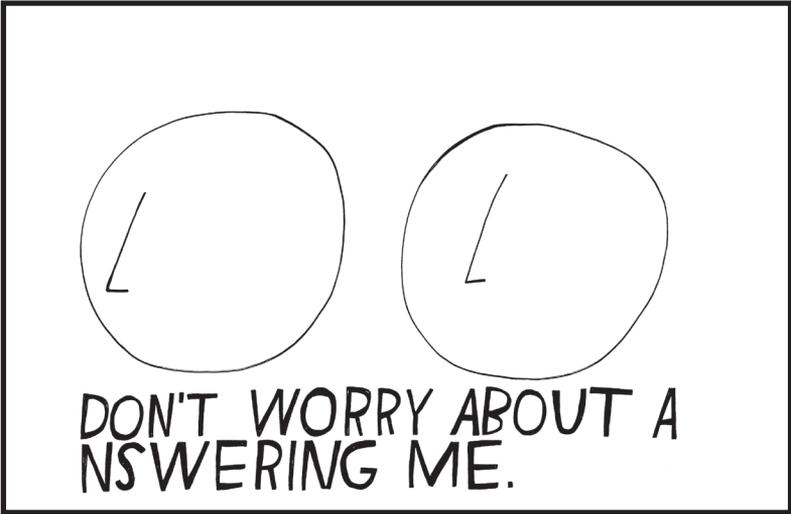
"And you eat them."

"Okay! I get it. This is all pretty messed up."

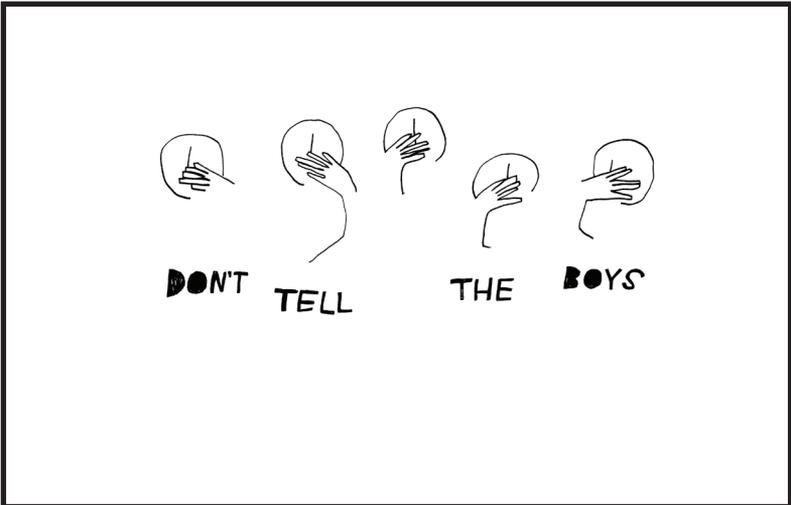
"I don't know if I can get there without theodine," Tim said. "I don't even know where that place is."

"You'll have to try. In your recent absence no one has been harvesting except the Zugdusters. A great imbalance has been struck between our two worlds. You have to set everything right again."

Tim groaned. "This is so fucked up."



February 14, 2014



March 28, 2014

India ink on paper, source text from overheard conversation, Mark Addison Smith

CONTRIBUTOR BIOS

Madame Joseph Stalin was born on December 18, 1878, in Georgia, then part of the Russian Empire, or he was born sometime in late 2013, in the angry soul of a spurned girl in Manhattan, depending on your perspective.

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Morgan Perrine is an editor for *Used Gravitrons*, and occasional writer of other things. He lives in Brooklyn with two roommates and a few plants of questionable health. He also finds writing about himself in the third-person profoundly weird.

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