

The Externalist:

A Journal of Perspectives



Featuring

Poetry by *Simon Perchik* and *Nanette Rayman Rivera*

Nonfiction by *Barbara Lefcowitz*

and introducing *Miko Yanagisawa*, fiction

Issue 2, June 2007

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A Note from the Editor

The debut issue of *The Externalist* surpassed our expectations. We received several letters from readers and contributors alike expressing their appreciation for the prose and poetry featured here, as well as their support for our mission—to provide readers with literature that extends beyond the realm of self and explores the world around us. This issue continues marching toward that goal with certainty, and with subtlety.

Editor's Choice features a memoir from Giano Cromley—a ghost story of sorts that reflects on the human tendency to forget and the very human need to connect with each other. Yvette A. Schnoeker-Shorb explores other human necessities in her two poems *A Splice of Life* and *Basic Needs*. Rebecca Ward's short memoir *Train to New Rochelle* reflects on illiteracy and Bill Teitelbaum's *Closure* looks at the darker side of humanity while subtly exploring issues of gender expectations. Nanette Rayman Rivera delves into stereotypes in her poem *Lost Man Loves*.

This issue, like the debut issue, presents work from a variety of backgrounds and perspectives. *The Externalist* has become international with Issue #2, bringing work from the United Kingdom and Slovenia. We also introduce genre fiction to our pages with the speculative tale *The Double Duel* by Edward Rodosek. We're pleased to have the opportunity to include a featured artist: Ira Joel Haber. Our contributors come from various stages of their careers—from the first publication credit to well-established authors and poets.

Our contributor's notes for this issue show that many of our contributors take our mission well beyond the written word. Simon Perchik's personal web site is much more than a marketing tool. There he includes an essay of which he says, "I like to think the duty of poets is different from that of those who write prose. [It] would be good if others added to or subtracted from the argument." Yvette A. Schnoeker-Shorb co-founded "Native West Press, a 501 (c) (3) tax-exempt nonprofit, is a small press based in Prescott, Arizona, organized exclusively for educational and literary purposes with an emphasis on enhancing public awareness of indigenous wildlife and natural history of the American West." Kenneth A. Brown wrote to us from active duty in Iraq, a circumstance above and beyond the writer's call of duty.

We hope that our readers will come away from this issue with as much to think about as we have in the process of bringing these perspectives together.

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Editors' Choice

Editor's Appreciation, by Larina Warnock

Every now and then, I come across a prose piece that surpasses my expectations and surprises me. It doesn't happen often, but "Living with the Dead" left me thinking and reflecting on what seems the most ordinary, but universal, experience: death. Cromley is able to bring life to an individual long dead, to instill Ernest's life with meaning and significance, and to give us all a part of that. It's no easy task to find a connection with someone you've never met, and it's far more difficult to create that connection for others. Cromley manages to do both with an honesty and subtle humor that not only surprises, but also resonates long after the initial read.

Editor's Appreciation, by Gary Charles Wilkens

Giano Cromley's "Living with the Dead" starts as a conventional ghost story-but stay with it. The story is by turns intriguing, suspenseful, philosophical and elegiac, with an ending you will not see coming but will understand and *feel*.

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Living with the Dead

by Giano Cromley

My friend Scott has a story he likes to tell every once in a while because it always leaves us speechless.

Scott grew up in the tiny town of Manhattan, Montana. When he was still in grade school, the Veltkamps, a family of four, with two daughters, moved to town. Scott befriended the eldest daughter, Teresa, who was his age. It was from her that he heard this story.

Shortly after moving in, the youngest daughter, Rhea, who was five years old, began spending time with an imaginary friend named Harmon. In describing Harmon to her family, she was unusually precise in her details. He wore a straw cowboy hat with a red hatband. He always had on dusty brown boots. He walked with a limp in his left leg. At school one day, she drew a picture of Harmon, a stick figure cowboy standing next to their house. The parents assumed this kind of friendship was natural for a lonely child who had just moved to a small town. So they placed the picture on the refrigerator and praised Rhea for her vivid imagination.

A month or so later, the mother was having lunch with some of the local townswomen when she told them about her daughter's imaginary friend. The women stared at her with mouths agape. When she was finished telling the story, one of the older women told her that the house they lived in had once been occupied by a man named Harmon Tavistock. He was a retired rancher who took to heavy drinking and a life of solitude once his days on the range were over. He'd died alone some years back and his house had stood empty until the Veltkamps had moved in. The woman's description of Harmon precisely matched Rhea's.

The mother rushed home and called Rhea to the dining room table. She told her daughter that she was not to associate with Harmon any longer. She was not allowed to talk with him or play with him again. Rhea looked vacantly off to the side of the table for a few seconds. She then turned to her mother and said: "Harmon told me to ask if you want him to leave."

The mother, near tears, nodded her head and said yes, she wanted him to leave immediately. Rhea stood up from the table, walked to the refrigerator, removed the picture of Harmon and went outside. She tossed the picture into the air. A wind current caught the paper and lifted it until it was no longer visible and it disappeared into the big Montana sky.

Rhea never mentioned Harmon again; and Scott says that if you ask her about him now, she'll swear she has no idea what you're talking about.

Normally, we associate ghost stories with the horror genre. But to do so is to ignore the fact that every ghost story is, at its heart, a tragedy.

I moved to Chicago almost three years ago from Missoula, Montana. After a few days of apartment hunting, I came across an ad for a two-bedroom place, with a dining room and a back porch, for a price that was lower than most studios I'd seen. I called the landlord, who also happened to be the

owner, and arranged a walk-through. The apartment took up the entire second floor of a charmingly old two-story house. Before I was even finished with the walk-through, I was convinced I wanted to rent it.

I know what you're probably thinking. Beautiful apartment? Old house? Grossly under-priced? This has all the makings of the standard campfire howler. I agree. But I will say, in my defense, that it's a lot harder to recognize a ghost story when you're in it.

About a week after I moved in I went out for drinks with Jeff and Sue, the couple who occupied the first floor. It was then that I first heard about the occurrences in our house. They told me how they often heard footsteps above them when they knew no one was home on the second floor. They talked about inexplicable blasts of cold air on hot days. Jeff told me how he'd once seen a shadowy figure move rapidly and silently across the hallway between the living room and the kitchen.

I consider myself to be a sensitive person when it comes to the paranormal – which basically means I'm scared to death by these things. I've always been afraid of dank basements and dark rooms. I used to insist on sleeping with my closet doors open, and, until embarrassingly late in life, I refused to step into the two foot perimeter surrounding my bed when it got dark at night – for fear that someone or something underneath would grab my ankles and pull me down.

But I have to say I was never scared in my new apartment. Whatever spirits haunted the first floor, I never sensed that they were moving through the halls of the second. As my first year in the house progressed, Jeff and Sue continued to report stories of things they'd seen and heard. Strange laughter in their bedroom. Lights and radios turned on at random times. One night, a friend of theirs was crashed on the couch, drunkenly rambling into a digital voice recorder, when he saw something. In the middle of a nonsensical monologue, he suddenly pauses, and says, in a pinched but clear voice, "Oh, hi. Who are you?" The response to his question, caught on the recorder, is a deep, ominous, inconclusive white noise.

Almost a full year after I moved in, I found myself unable to sleep one night. I was tossing in bed and I was hungry, so I roused myself and went to the kitchen to make a sandwich. The house was silent, and I didn't bother to turn on the lights. Then, as I began spreading peanut butter on a piece of bread, I noticed something. I can't say that it had any identifiable shape or substance; it moved silently like liquid mercury from the living room to my office. My first instinct was to run, and I very nearly did. But I knew if I did, my entire apartment would become like that two-foot perimeter around my bed. I would never feel comfortable in it again.

I finished making my peanut butter sandwich. And, in defiance of all horror-movie logic, I followed the apparition into the dark office where I proceeded to finish my midnight snack. During the fifteen minutes I spent in the office, nothing happened. I saw nothing. I felt nothing. And when I finally went back to bed, it seemed as if the ghost and I had tacitly reached some kind of truce.

I should mention here that shortly after I moved in, I noticed something strange about the architecture of my house. At the back of the apartment, awkwardly situated over a spiral staircase, I

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found a hatchway – a two-foot square opening with a latch. It was obvious that it led to some kind of attic space, but the hatch itself was fairly inaccessible. In order to get to it, you'd have to balance a long ladder on the stairs and lean it against a doorframe. Then, you'd have to shimmy yourself up to the hatch and squeeze yourself through.

For the entire first year I lived in the apartment, I joked with my downstairs neighbors about checking out the attic. We talked about how one weekend we'd climb up to see what bizarre treasures or unholy artifacts were housed up there. But nothing ever came of it.

Finally, on Valentine's Day weekend – a year and three months after I'd moved into the apartment – my girlfriend, Natalie, was visiting from North Carolina. I'd told her about the strange presence in the house and about the hatchway. Her curiosity had been piqued and I'd promised her that when she came to visit we'd mount an expedition to the attic.

It was Sunday of Natalie's visit that she reminded me of my promise. I went down to the basement, found a ladder and placed it precariously on the spiral staircase, leaning against the backdoor. The setup was rickety. The ladder was not nearly as long as I'd hoped. But it was long enough that Natalie could climb to the top step and just reach the latch on the hatchway door. I held the ladder and worried about the laws of physics, while she scaled the aluminum steps, reached her hands over her head, and opened the hatchway door.

She pulled herself up and peered into the darkness for several long seconds.

"Oh," she said, "this is strange."

She reached in and pulled out a pale green cardboard box, six inches by six inches and about ten inches tall. She shook the box lightly and it made a rattling noise, like charcoal briquettes.

She handed the box to me and climbed back down the ladder. The lid of the box was slightly mouse-chewed. Inside the box, on top, was a slip of paper, yellowed with age.

Under the paper, the box was three quarters full of ash and bleached white bone shards.

The certificate was from the Acacia Park Cemetery and Mausoleum Corporation on 7800 Irving Park Road. It identified the remains as belonging to a man named Ernest Huber, who died on January 13, 1949, at the age of 52 at the Swedish Covenant Hospital in Chicago.

The certificate gave a lot of facts, but shed little light. Who was Ernest Huber? What was his connection to this house? And, most importantly, why were his bones sitting in the attic?

Clues and questions swirled around the apartment for the rest of the weekend; we were as giddy as successful treasure hunters. We told everyone we met about what we'd found. We giggled and snickered as we watched the faces of our audience freeze and their jaws drop.

"What are you going to do with them?" people would ask.

"No idea," we'd say. "Not sure yet. But can you *believe* that that's what we found up there?"

Monday, before Natalie had to go back to North Carolina, we spread a plastic garbage bag over the dining room table and poured the bones out of the box. We sifted through them, looking for anything identifiable. We found a tooth – probably an eyetooth – tinted pink with age. We found a new-looking, unruined wood screw, from god knows what.

For the first time, we looked at the bones more closely. They were delicate and brittle. When we held them up to the light, we could see inside them, the spider-webbed remains of ossified bone marrow. They were beautiful in a way that only something temporary can be.

When the weekend was finally over, Natalie went back to North Carolina and I was alone in the house with Ernest. We'd put him back in his box, and the box now sat on my dining room table. Before she left, Natalie and I agreed that we needed to get the answers to some of our questions before we decided what to do with Ernest.

That week, I called my landlord. Hal had always been pleasant and we had a good business relationship. But when I got him on the phone, I had a hard time broaching the question. "I've got kind of a strange question, Hal, that... Well, it may be nothing. But... Do you know anyone named Ernest Huber?"

"Never heard of him," Hal said, without hesitation.

I immediately relaxed and I found myself almost chuckling. "Oh, because, my girlfriend was in town this weekend and we got a ladder and looked in the attic and—"

"Oh," he said. "Wait a minute." He paused, the past slowly catching up to his voice. "Let me explain."

About twenty years ago, Hal and his wife were looking for a place to buy in the city. Unable to find anything in the neighborhood they wanted, they settled on her family's old house – which is where I currently live. Shortly after moving in, Hal said he was cleaning out the basement and came across the ashes. He said he was pretty alarmed by the whole thing and was unsure what to do with them. A neighbor had been with him when he found them and happened to have a long ladder, so they decided to stash the ashes in the attic. Eventually, they forgot about them.

Apparently Ernest Huber had been the first or second husband of Hal's mother-in-law. He'd died before Hal's wife, Judy, had been born. I asked if there was anyone who might be interested in taking the bones, perhaps a shirttail relative who'd like to know where an ancestor's remains might be. Hal flatly told me no.

Throughout our conversation, I got the sense that Hal was indifferent to the situation. He didn't seem the least bit bothered by the fact that a man's remains had been housed in an attic for twenty years and before that in a basement for another thirty. And I got the distinct impression that he expected me to leave the bones where I'd found them.

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I should point out here that I consider Hal to be a nice guy. I have no reason to suspect that he's anything less than an entirely compassionate human being. Yet something about the conversation didn't feel right. By the time I hung up the phone, I had some answers to my questions. But they weren't satisfactory answers. They were the kind that made you wish you didn't know the truth.

When I was in junior high, my grandfather died of lung cancer. His body was cremated and we kept the ashes for a few months until it was convenient for the family, which had spread out across Montana and Wyoming, to convene in Billings for a service. I remember being at the cemetery that cold, overcast day. My cousin had written a song and he played it on his guitar. We stood around the urn, looking at it, honoring it as best we could. It was a perfectly fine ceremony, but it strikes me now as odd that what we buried in the ground that day bore so little resemblance to the man my grandfather was. And this is, I think, a problem with cremation in general.

One moment, you are an animate object – a thing that breathes, thinks, moves, touches and loves. And then you die. A flash of light. A blast of heat. And all that's left of your earthly remains are tokens, shards of your existence.

But because that change is less than total, those tokens can be problematic. Some people ask to have their ashes buried. Others make specific requests to be strewn over some obscure, yet meaningful, place. But what happens when the deceased never requests anything, when they die before they recognize their own mortality? Then the living are forced to make choices for the dead.

I've put together what I think is a likely emotional explanation for how Ernest's remains ended up in my attic:

Hal's mother-in-law – at the time still a young widow – received her husband's ashes from the funeral home and intended to inter them at the cemetery. That was the plan. It was what she wanted to do. And yet, she couldn't bear to give them up. They were her only connection to the love she had lost. Because we are, in the end, not completely reducible; we will always be more than bone and ash.

The ashes probably sat on a counter or a shelf while the grieving process ran its course. And when it was over, the ashes were moved to a less prominent place. Eventually, perhaps because a new man had entered her life, she moved the ashes down to the basement where they, and Ernest Huber, could complete their slide into oblivion.

So then Hal came along, thirty years later. He found the ashes and considered what to do with them. It is interesting, I think, that he did not simply throw them away. After all, he himself said that he had no connection to them. He freely admitted that there was no one around who had any interest in keeping them. To Hal, they had as much significance as an ashtray full of cigarette butts, or a layer of dust on the shelf. And yet, he was incapable of treating the remains as something meaningless. He too could not reduce them to their composite elements. So he was faced with a decision: What to do with these ashes? And, in the end, he punted. He chose nothing, simply a relocation – from the basement to the attic.

I don't fault Hal for his choice. It's a difficult one to make. But I do see the treatment of the ashes as the true tragedy in this ghost story, and the reason for it.

In the end, Ernest's story isn't that different from Harmon's. A man dies. And he is forgotten. The haunting is simply an effort to not be forgotten.

I, too, was faced with a decision. Within a few weeks of finding the bones, I'd told so many people about them that I was constantly barraged with advice on what to do with them. People told me to have a priest come in and bless the bones and the house. Others told me to call the cemetery and have the ashes finally interred there.

I spoke with my downstairs neighbors about conducting a memorial service. This idea had some appeal. We could have a burial in the backyard garden, put up a nice plaque and plant a small sapling. We would hold a real funeral – the one thing that Ernest never got. And maybe that would finally put his spirit to rest.

I spoke with Natalie in North Carolina and she agreed, but she wanted me to wait until she was back in Chicago; she explained that she'd started to feel close to Ernest, since she was the one who'd found his bones in the first place. The request seemed reasonable enough. So I agreed, and I waited.

The box sat on my dining room table for a few more weeks until one night I hosted a poker game with some friends. The novelty of showing off and talking about the remains had worn thin, so I moved them to a cabinet in the dining room where I keep my liquor bottles. Ernest was relegated to the dark, with only the company of some Bombay Sapphire, Marker's Mark, and Absolut.

After a while, I stopped thinking about Ernest. Months passed. And it seemed that he had once again been brushed aside and forgotten. His tragedy continued, as if it were his eternal fate to be ignored.

Last year, though, Natalie moved in with me in Chicago. Now that she had arrived, it seemed plausible that we would finally enact the plan of holding a proper memorial service and burial. But whenever anyone suggested that we hold the service, we both stuttered and mumbled some excuse for putting it off.

It's still too cold, we'd say. The ground is frozen; we'll never be able to dig a hole deep enough.

It's too wet, we'd say. It doesn't seem right to bury him when it's raining this hard.

There was always a reason for not doing it. What we didn't realize until later was that we'd become attached to Ernest. We wanted him in our lives. And burying him in the backyard was just another way of sticking him in the basement or stashing him in the attic.

And then something truly strange happened – not suddenly, but incrementally, over the last three or four months.

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One of us moved Ernest's remains out of the cabinet and back onto the dining room table. I can't remember exactly how or why this happened, but it did. And then, a little later, one of us put a ribbon around the box. A sheer fabric ribbon, yellow with gold edging, tied in an elegant bow. A present given for an anniversary yielded another ribbon. This one, bright green with festive, moppy curls, went right on top of Ernest's box.

The addition of these adornments changed everything. What was once a pale, mouse-chewed cardboard box shedding bits of white ash and black dust, now looks like, for all intents and purposes, a gift.

We don't talk around the apartment anymore about what to do with Ernest. His position in our household is not in dispute. He is the man on our dining room table, our centerpiece. He is no longer forgotten. And I get the sense – just the vaguest, almost imperceptible sense – that this makes him happy.

To be sure, we still occasionally feel a presence in the house. Guests will swear they saw something move near the office. Our dogs will sometimes stare at open doorways. I'm sure the downstairs neighbors still hear footsteps when we're not at home. But there's no longer any mystery to these occurrences. There's no longer any fear. The living and the dead, it seems, have managed to find peace together.

by Nanette Rayman Rivera

this poem appears in Project: Butterflies available from Foothills Publishing

Lost Man Loves

When he pulled the photograph
from his pocket
He said: This is the woman
I'm going to marry;
she'll be here, you'll see.
She'll be here, and you'll be sorry
you laughed like a loaded derringer.
See, this is her face.
So pretty you can see flowers filling
her mouth, and look at her eyes.
'Two sultry domes that see me real.

I'm an intelligent guy, and no,
you cannot detain me. I'm not drunk, sir;
I hear voices, mawkish pearls
of people directing me, like I'm in a play.
It's that I see ghosts, sprockets of air she tells me
aren't there. She told me to meet her,
here, at the café. She told me I could buy her
a cappuccino. She doesn't know I've bought her
a ring. No, she's not a shadow, she's
an actress and I'm getting lonely for her.
I don't know what's keeping her - Please
don't take me away, please—

Here she is. See the gardenias all around her
pillow lips. Her hair landslide and bare.
See how she sees me.
I told you, she's not vapor.

*Sir, this man is my love —
I'm quite sure he's done nothing wrong.*

His cop-look splits this night in two. Could be sirens
lighting the café with neon, surprised as fire
takes fire. She once was surprised
as a deer running from Robert DeNiro.

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By: Zachary C. Bush

Life Is Like Watching This Young Woman Dig Her Baby Out of a Mound of Ice and Snow...

Because I tore out the dusty pages of Genesis
Because I plucked tiny, jagged, white rocks from motel carpets
Because I am a victim of peer pressure

Because we are all supposed to support the President
Because I punched the refrigerator to miss hitting Erica's head
Because homosexuality is a figment of the imagination

Because I wore Sally's small silk panties while she slept
Because I can't cook much more than pasta, let alone chicken casseroles
Because at 23 my hands shake without a cigarette

Because at 18 my hands shook for a drink
Because I grabbed hypo-needles off the bedside table
Because I cupped my baby niece's pink inchworm fingers

Because I licked Amy's tits when she passed out
Because I tend to lie from time to time, especially when I'm bored
Because I touched the padded-white walls of green institutions

Because I had to write a fifteen page paper about my drug and alcohol abuse
Because I picked up dirty needles off brown-stained couches
Because I stole painkillers from my sick grandmother

Because I didn't wash my hands after taking a piss
Because drug addiction is a figment of the imagination
Because I am a Socialist

Because I couldn't pull my kitty's neck loose from my recliner's metal underbelly
Because I touched a man's cock behind ribbed shadows
Because you are allowed to do and say anything when you're bi-polar

Because I enjoyed the sandy-texture of his thin skin
Because I am above AIDS
Because I held a pistol to my purple temple

Because I am never wrong
Because I couldn't cut deep enough to hit the right vein
Because I am always wrong

Because I had A.D.D.
Because I sawed my wrists with a steak knife
Because I love sliding my hard dick into her warm slit

Because I have A.D.H.D.
Because I don't believe in "believing in myself"
Because I can't change a flat

Because I like cats more than dogs
Because I don't believe in your God
Because God is always right

Because we all know that suicide is a call for attention
Because my hands are as smooth as river stones
Because I hold my father's money

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by Pete Lee

In the Widow's Yard

The precise location
of her husband's fatal
stroke is detectable
only as the weathered,
half-hidden handle
of a mower that daily
relinquishes a little
more of itself
to the patient grass.

Closure

by Bill Teitelbaum

Those news monkeys had a picnic with me.
They called me Bluebeard! The Ladykiller!
You'd have thought I was at war with nature.
So let's get that part out of the way -- I was not
a victim of my marriage. I'm not one of those
casualties you run into. People may get married
by accident but if they stay married, that's a
decision, and as much as I may have protested
the situation, I did everything in my power to
sustain it. I even tried to reconcile with her
once. So if Evelyn's weaknesses were hateful to
me, it's clear that I also found them necessary.

She owed me that. I lived with a sense of
squandered years. Had I been a decent
husband, for example? I needed to know that,
that for a while at least I had done alright, that
I was not a bad man altogether, and that
staying put for so long had not been moral
cowardice alone, or a bankruptcy of
imagination, but that something had been
there, that a start had been made, and that if we
had failed -- which we had surely done, there
was no if about it -- that failing one another
was not the whole story.

But that's why I needed her to be
honest with me. I never wanted
revenge. I just wanted her to be
fair. If she believed that she could
start some fresh, new, virginized
life, well, that was her business,

but at least half of that former life was mine
and that could not be dismissed. If I could
admit to using her, I said, then she could admit
to using me.

*Maybe failure had
been the price of
our freedom,
I said.*

Maybe failure had been the price of
our freedom, I said. Maybe in that
sense we had gotten away cheap.
"How many people ever lived their
own lives at all?" I asked her.
"How many people even

realized what it meant?"

But I could not permit her to suggest by her
silence that the marriage was no longer worth

discussing, or that it's failure was my fault alone merely because I was the one who was doing the complaining.

I suppose things went along fairly well as long as we treated each other like chores to do. I would attend to Evelyn, she would attend to me -- but then we would be out, eating an expensive dinner somewhere, and I would glance toward the other tables where other couples would be eating expensive dinners, and I would wonder what on earth they could be chattering about. They all had so much to say to one another. I imagined them planning elaborate trips together, comparing impressions, sharing dreams, confiding secrets, volunteering praise. So I would turn my head to Evelyn and she would raise her head to me, but there would be nothing in my mouth. I mean, the life you make is not precisely inappropriate, yet it seems you can get stuck with your old decisions and there ought to be some remedy for this. How could we have treated ourselves so trivially, I asked. Life was so precious, so irreplaceable. How could we have been so careless with each other?

*It seems there's a point at
which independent
decisions get made, as if
symmetry itself requires
one to act.*

But any dissatisfaction I might have felt about my life was seen by poor Evelyn as a rebuke of the marriage. There really was no me, as far as she was concerned. Either I was her husband or I wasn't.

"Well then, I guess I wasn't," I said.

So there we were. Actually rather pleased with ourselves. It's a kind of thrill, that knowing. There's that vanity one feels of owning the moment.

"What woman in her right mind would stand still for you?" she asked.

"Plenty of women," I said. "Supermarket checkout lines of women. Dentists' waiting rooms of women."

Yet nevertheless I believe we might have been salvaged right up to that moment, a day or so before she was set to

move out, when I begged her to make love to me and she refused. She was so frightened, she was so hurt. But she was permitted those things, while I got to be strong and to pay for making her uncomfortable.

"What's the sense of it?" she asked. "Over is over."

"But over is not over," I said. "You don't just wave goodbye and walk. You clean up. You pick up after yourself. Nothing ends until you end it."

"Well end it then," she said.

So I suppose that's what I did. It seems there's a point at which independent decisions get made, as if symmetry itself requires one to act. One's hands close around, the thumbs press down, and there you are -- a villain, a monster.

Well, so be it. I do not expect justice from men, and since eternity neither punishes nor forgives, closure is something one must manufacture.

What surprises, though, is how satisfying it can be, a sensation like sugar pouring through one's hands. You can see how a fellow might be tempted to repeat himself.

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by Bryon D. Howell

Lemon-Lime Sunday / An Ode to Kermit the Frog

Today,
people from all over the world
banded together
to protest the war in Iraq.

All in lieu
of the Saint Patrick's Day
festivities.

We spent the day
sitting cross-legged
on the obstacle course
of a race track
with a redneck still bent
on driving an entire nation
to a fickle sense of freedom
in an army tank.

It just seems so sad
that the only way
we actually have
of trying to promote
true peace -

is by disturbing it.

In my humble opinion,
considering who's at the wheel
of the United States of America,
we all might have been
considerably safer
on Main Street
marching with green drunks
and getting good and

tanked ourselves.

Besides, there's nothing cool
about having anything green
without the peace
to pair with it.

I don't know about you,
but I truly enjoy
drinking

that green draft beer.

by TSgt Kenneth A. Brown

Soldier Tears

One night in Iraq, a soldier looked to the sky.
He posed a question to God as to why.
"Why all the fighting; I don't understand,"
Was the question he asked, as he stood in the sand.
He searched the heavens high above,
Thinking "If we are one world, then where is the love?"
And that's when he saw it; shining so bright.
His question answered...a tear fell from his eye
Kids had always known it; now he knew it too.
The Little Dipper flies over the Middle East too.

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The Double Duel

by Edward Rodosek

Fran switched on her videophone. The round, reddish face of the general manager of the GYHB—General Yol Holography Broadcasting—appeared on the screen.

*“Aha!” remarked Vigo.
“Now it’s following
something special.”*

automatically. Because of their size and mobility they got a popular name 'cursor'. The built-in video sensors guided the cursor movement or change of lighting, and the audio sensors

“Mrs. Stanton, I've called together a sitting of the entire department managers in GYHB at eleven o'clock, sharp. We need to talk about a very important subject.”

“Let me guess, Mr. Goldstein,” said Fran dryly, “we're going to listen to empty words from that upstart from Earth who intends to swallow up our GYHB.”

“Well, Mrs. Stanton, I wouldn't dare to designate Mr. Vigo with such a mark. We have to think about the problem of the possible licence for his Free Enterprise Corporation. We must take a look at a short demo, which Mr. Vigo will comment on in person.”

“I'll be there, Mr. Goldstein,” said Fran.

Her husband and she had several times discussed Vigo's live broadcast *Real Life* which has been very popular on Earth for a long time. The most frequent places in the *Real Life* broadcasting were poor, disreputable suburban districts of large megalopolises on Earth, with all their crime included. For the recent several months Vigo's Free Enterprise Corporation began to broadcast it on Yol, too.

The great technological innovations of the *Real Life*, were free levitating cameras the size of a football that were able to shoot

to the sound sources. The director on duty in Vigo's holography center simultaneously watched scenes from those cursors and then broadcast the most exciting or interesting ones live.

In the conference room Vigo was already sitting next to the GYHB general manager. The light was subdued and the technician started the recording.

The cursor was sliding about twenty feet above the ground, following the piercing groans and whines from among the cluster of residential blocks. When it entered a narrow backyard, the audience saw a group of men beating three or four figures lying on the stone pavement with baseball bats. Then the cursor showed the swiftly changing close-ups: a hand holding a broken bottle, a face covered in blood, a foot kicking one of the fallen figures in the kidney three, four times, the triumphant guffaw of the winners.

“Not bad, huh?” Vigo commented.

There was an instant change over to the next scene. Through the open entrance door of a saloon two disheveled women burst out screaming. One of them was pulling the hair of her rival; the other tried to scratch out the first one's eyes. A group of laughing men was gathering around them; one of them was collecting bets loudly.

The outcome stayed unknown for the scene changed again. "Aha!" remarked Vigo. "Now it's following something special."

At the foot of some stairs, the back of a man in a dirty coat was moving in a hasty rhythm. The audience realized they were watching a rape. The cursor looked for a better angle for recording but then the man hid his face in the bend of his elbow and darted into the dark cellar.

"It happens sometimes. Someone hears the cursor," Vigo explained. "They still hum a bit, but our engineers promised me the next series would be soundless."

The girl got up, tottering, and the cursor showed her childlike face dissolved in tears. A young woman sitting beside Fran, got up and left the room.

In the next scene, two tattooed teenagers with knives in their hands were running away from an old man cringing on his knees and hands over the increasing pool of his own blood.

Now Fran rose hastily, strode to the exit and only just made it to the ladies' room in time.

*Up to now, maybe. But
some of our youngsters
are already indoctrinated
enough, and try to get on
the holovision at any cost.*

My videophone uttered a signal and my wife's face appeared on the screen. Over her shoulder I could see a part of our living room.

"Fran! What're you doing at home at this time? You've been crying."

"Oh, Brad, could you come home earlier?" Her voice was trembling. "I need you."

"Are you okay? What's happened?"

"Don't worry about me. But we need to talk, urgently. I can't explain more on a phone. When can you be here?"

"In one hour. Well, maybe, in forty-five minutes"

"Thank you, Brad. Still, don't forget the speed limit."

Fran, barefoot and disheveled, opened our entrance door for me and rested her head on my chest. I returned her tight hug and briefly caressed her hair.

"What's the matter, honey? Trouble in your GYHB?"

She shook her head. "Oh Brad, more than just trouble."

Fran needed the next fifteen minutes or so to put me in the picture. "Do you realize," she said, "what a perfidious trick Vigo has in mind? First he'll try to get us to agree to his disgusting *Real Life*. Then he'll try to oust our GYHB from the market."

"Oh, dear. I've my doubts that *Real Life* would be very popular on our Yol."

"Regrettably, only the first experimental broadcastings would be transmitted from Earth. I'm afraid before long, many streets in the Yol's metropolises will swarm with Vigo's cursors."

"But on our Yol they could hardly find the same violence that happens on Earth."

Fran shook her head. "Up to now, maybe. But some of our youngsters are already

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indoctrinated enough, and try to get on the holovision at any costs. They perform sham fights, watching if the cursors shoot a video of them. How long do you think it will last before the simulated fighting becomes real?”

“Why—you may be right,” I admitted. “And the violence would grow increasingly gory to transcend all the other competitors.”

“Brad, you're a law consultant for our government. Use your imagination and tell me what we could do against that threat.”

It lasted a while before I chewed over some possibilities. “Well, to begin I'll try to organize a special broadcast on the GYHB. Then the holovision viewers would hear and see both opinions—in favor of it and against it. As initiator, I'd be present there, and I guarantee I won't be quiet.”

Vigo and his followers from Earth were standing on the left side of the stage in the big GYHE studio, while my adherents and I gathered on the right side. I was nervous because this broadcast could be decisive for the final government decision about Vigo's licence. I was aware that several million viewers were watching me, my Fran included.

Vigo was the first speaker. “Our Free Enterprise Corporation grew during our fifteen years of business into the most successful company on Earth. Our newest holovision broadcast *Real Life* is being watched by three billion spectators. I see no reason why the people on Yol should be deprived of it only because they're colonists on another planet.”

Vigo glanced around, let his eyes rest on me and his look was full of scorn.

“Our broadcasts are always fresh, and wide open to revolutionary technological innovations. As you know, our corporation has launched three stationary satellites above Yol to enable offering our services of that free experimental programme. If our corporation gets a licence for permanent broadcasting we'll get the opportunity to show the premiere of a brand-new, sensational live broadcast, *Double Duel*.”

The moderator switched the green light from Vigo's counter to mine.

*Then one of Vigo's
adherents started to talk
back about our monopoly,
isolationism, fear of
progress and about Yol
becoming boggy...*

“Let me remind all you,” I started, “that Yol, our beloved new home, is known as the 'ecological planet' for it reminds us of the beautiful image of Earth in the first half of the twentieth century. The two hundred million inhabitants of Yol are resolved that they should not repeat the fatal errors of Earthmen and will not allow either the environmental or the social pollution that Earth suffers.”

I felt my voice was getting more self-sure.

“A century and a half ago, our entire population and our government set out on the course we've chosen. We don't wish to establish the overpopulation of rats in cages, extreme poverty next to enormous richness, violence as in a jungle. And, we don't care for soulless holovision broadcastings like Vigo's. They praise all that to the skies, trying to convert our people to buy mental trifles.”

Vigo tried to cut in but the moderator politely silenced him.

“They hope to get brainwashed consumers used to buying material trifles from Earth, inferior goods, which shall later—what an incredible coincidence—be delivered on Yol by the same Vigo's corporation.”

Loud applause from the audience drowned my last words.

Then one of Vigo's adherents started to talk back about our monopoly, isolationism, fear of progress and about Yol becoming boggy, but I didn't pay much attention to his gabbing.

About an hour later the broadcast had closed. The brief opinion poll showed we'd won, but only with a slight margin over Vigo's supporters. The decisive fight was still to come.

The next evening I came home for dinner and kissed Fran on her cheek.

“You better sit down.” I sat facing her. “Vigo the Mighty visited me in person today!”

“What?”

I grinned. “Without shame, he tried to bribe me. If I changed my standpoints in his favor, he offered me an annual cut of his profit.”

Fran stared at me for a while. “I suppose you chucked him out of your office?”

“Well, not right away. I asked him to give me a hint about the number he was talking about. And he told me without evasion.”

“Well?”

“Every year about twenty times more than my present yearly income is. Or a single

“That was a serious threat, Brad.” Fran looked anxious. “And you’d better not underestimate Vigo.”

payment of a hundred million in cash.”

“And what was your answer?”

“I said literally: ‘Mr. Vigo, I'm very impressed and also flattered—but no, thank you.’ And he didn't seem too much surprised.”

“And then he left you?”

“Yes. But at the doorjam he turned around and his eyes were full of hate. He said: ‘I strongly advise you to reconsider your present standpoint, mister Stanton. If you change your mind, you need do no more than tell me those two simple words we've mentioned—hundred million. In the opposite case, I'll have to think about another alternative.’”

“That was a serious threat, Brad.” Fran looked anxious. “And you’d better not underestimate Vigo. He's an unscrupulous rascal.”

Early the next morning—Fran was still sleeping—I was preparing coffee for us. In one corner of the kitchen the small holovision set was on; suddenly I heard my name, repeatedly.

“... As an offended party Mr. Joachim Andrew Vigo, the president of the Free Enterprise Corporation challenges Mr. Bradford Michael Stanton to a Double Duel according to the regulations that are in force on Earth. This event will be transmitted live within the final holovision broadcast about granting or rejecting the permanent licence to Vigo's corporation. The only possibility for canceling the Double Duel is the instant granting of this licence from the government. The challenger,

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Mr. Vigo, obviously presumes that Mr. Stanton's standpoint may be decisive for that granting. There are rumors Vigo's corporation would go bankrupt if he couldn't get the licence so he's forced to risk his own life in that duel. We'll try to get authentic comments from both of the parties involved as soon as —"

I rushed into our bedroom and sat down on the Fran's side of the bed.

"I can't believe he'd challenge you to a duel!" Fran was indignant over Vigo's call. "What a barbaric, obsolete custom! For heaven's sake—we aren't on Earth and we do not live in the nineteenth century! What does it mean: 'according to the regulations that are in force on Earth'?"

I shrugged. "As far as I know, such duels are quite a common way of solving grave personal conflicts on Earth."

Fran grasped both my hands and her eyes stared into mine. "Brad, tell me without avoiding the issue—what's the usual outcome of those stupid duels? The death of one or both duelists?"

"Well . . . not always."

"I won't let you fight." Fran's voice was resolute. "You must simply ignore that bastard."

I shook my head. "I'm afraid that won't do. The entire population of our Yol would consider me a coward and the following voting result would be at least uncertain. I'm afraid there's no way out. I simply have to go to that duel, no matter what we think about it."

I saw Fran was very near crying. "But . . . but he could kill you in cold blood! Did you see his murderous eyes, Brad? No, I won't allow

you to commit suicide."

I gave her a cordial hug. "Don't be so pessimistic, Fran. Nothing tragic will happen, I promise you. I'll stay alive; and I'll also do everything not to kill Vigo with my own hands."

Fran's eyes widened. "Oh, Brad! How do you intend to do that?"

I shrugged. "I don't know. Not yet. But I hope something will come to me after I've studied the Double Duels Regulations book. Come with me to the living room, Fran, and I'll bring you a cup of hot coffee. We have to find out all the details."

Suddenly, my cell videophone uttered a sound and only a second later Fran's did the same. The press was beginning their attack. I dictated a brief message that I'd give my personal decision about the duel at an improvised press conference today at noon.

Then I switched both connections off so we could listen to further news on the holovision without disturbance.

"Our parliament will enable the entire people of Yol to take part in the decision about the granting or refusing of Vigo's licence. For this purpose, an instant referendum will be organized. Each adult inhabitant of the planet Yol shall choose one of two knobs: 'yes' or 'no' on his personcode; later corrections or multiple votes are not possible. That vote will be carried through after the final discussion broadcast about that matter."

I switched through several other channels, one after another. "Look."

". . . Although the government bulletin does not mention the intended duel between Mr. Vigo and Mr. Stanton, we came to know their Double Duel will be included into the final

discussion on GYHB.”

“Here you are,” said Fran slowly. “Your press conference proved now unnecessary. Instead of that. . .” her emotional voice died away.

I nodded. “Instead of a few dozen reporters I'll have several million holovision viewers eager to see a modern gladiator fight. It seems there is no way back.”

Late that evening I said to Fran, “Nowadays modern technology enables every one of us to make a biodigital replica of any man or woman. I presume you know from school what 'replica' means?”

She nodded. “Replica is an artificial quasi-human being without will of its own, programmed by its owner. Each replica is so similar to the original person that only a tissue analysis could prove who's who.”

“Well, that isn't entirely so,” I remarked. “There is an outer recognition sign, but only for the maker of the replica. He can see around his replica a slight bluish aura through special polarized eyeglasses which are in tune with his own retina. All the others, people and other replicas, can't distinguish between a man and his replica for they seem identical.”

“Very good,” said Fran. “Now, let's read over the Double Duel Regulations once again. We'll take turns and you'll be the first.”

All the properties of the replica must be in the total accordance with the Personal File as a whole and in every detail.

”Okay, listen. 'GENERAL RULES. An unbiased commission supervises all the preparing activity for the manufacture of both replicas, complying the following conditions:

- each duelist delivers his Personal File to his adversary
- each duelist examines the Personal File of his adversary and may make objections to it
- each duelist is allowed to make only one replica

Ohm . . . that's all understandable. The next paragraph is yours.”

“Here you are,” said Fran. 'CONTENTS OF THE PERSONAL FILE. Here all the physical characteristics of both duelists are presented. The basic form is their 3-D holograms with the following specifications. Oh, for heaven's sake! There are more than twenty items!’

“You needn't read it aloud. I've already printed this page and fixed it here on the wall.”

“Fair enough,” said Fran. “Your turn, I presume.”

“Well, I'll choose only the essential points of 'THE MAKING PROCEDURE'. Let's see. Hm . . . yes, that seems important. Listen. 'All the properties of the replica must be in the total accordance with the Personal File as a whole and in every detail. That allows the automatic process steered by computer under the simultaneous Commission surveillance.'”

I handed the manual back to Fran who gave me a grave look. “Brad, all that counts is you stay alive. Vigo wouldn't hesitate to kill you if that's what's necessary to gain his damned licence.”

“I know, dear. The next paragraph the 'DOUBLE DUEL PROCEDURE',” is the most important part of the entire damned regulations. There are only three items:

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1. To the duelist and his replica: you are allowed to use only the weapon that they have received from the Commission.
2. To the duelist and his replica: you are NOT allowed to destroy the adversary's replica. If that happens the culpable party loses the Double Duel.
3. To the duelist and his replica: you ARE allowed to kill or disable the live adversary. The duel is finished when that happens."

I shook my head. "So I won't know which one is Vigo and which is his replica during the entire duel. But I ought to know that or else I won't know which of them I'm allowed to shut off!"

Fran put the Regulations away without looking at me. Then I noticed her eyes were brimming with tears so I embraced her and felt her arms claspng forcefully around me. I tried to find any comforting words, but it was in vain. We just sat there in silence.

The shrill sound of the alarm clock pierced my ears. So, the moment of truth had dawned. All my tiresome efforts during the last two weeks were over. I'd made my replica and I'd instructed him to the best of my ability about what he had to do.

I put on my combat overalls, tying all the compulsory arms to my belt: binoculars, two infrasound grenades, two plastic earplugs, an inductor of the energetic shield, a box with ten smoke petards, the antismoke filter, and, finally, the only lethal weapon—a blaster. My replica, equally grotesquely dressed, was already waiting for me. We checked our audio connection once more and entered the windowless van that drove us to the duel range. I knew our two adversaries were being

simultaneously transported from the opposite side of the duel range.

When both of us stepped out, I realized we were in a huge building site. Large excavations, heaps of building materials and piled-up equipment were excellent hideouts where one could waylay his opponent. My replica went aside to find a suitable place. I wormed over the open space, watching for my two adversaries to emerge. High above me, several cursors circled and under their intrusive lenses I felt naked and vulnerable.

The bang of Vigo's smoke petard scared me, but it also relaxed me in a way. My hand impulsively searched for the antismoke filter and pressed it into my nostrils. I also threw two or three of my petards at random and swiftly moved aside in the shade of the nearest crane. As soon as smoke clouds blow away, I noticed two Vigos.

They stood beyond the huge pit, not moving, one next to another, holding blasters in their hands. They don't need to hide themselves; Vigo knew I wouldn't risk shooting without knowing who was who. They wore trousers and T-shirts that showed only a slight difference: the right one wasn't sweaty at all while the left one had two large, humid semicircles under his armpits.

I rose, my blaster aiming at the left Vigo, my hands trembling and my heart throbbing madly. Still, after a long hesitation, I quit. I realized that killing a man, no matter how villainous he was, was simply beyond my powers.

Besides, everything seemed much too simple to me and I didn't dare take risks. Instead of that, I activated the inductor of the energy shield between both Vigos. I knew the shield stretched for several hundred feet and they'd need a long time to come together again.

At that instant, an idea struck me. I shouted over the pit: “Okay—one hundred million!”

The left Vigo made two steps more while the right one stopped dead. In the next instant he threw something in my direction so I hardly had time to lay prone, pressing the earplugs into my ears. The violent explosion of Vigo's infrasound grenade deafened me. I spat some sand out of my mouth, crawled away among a pile up material, and grinned triumphantly.

Now I knew who was who.

So well-hidden, I could watch Vigo through my binoculars without great risk. His magnified face was grimacing in a blind hatred and his lips were moving, most likely cursing. He observed through the energy shield his replica stumbling over the obstacles on the ground.

I neared my mouth to the mic pinned to my overalls and shouted: “Now!”

Vigo gazed spellbound at his other replica which was aiming a blaster at him.

I wondered if Vigo had time before the blast struck him to notice that his second replica hadn't any aura.

Two hours later, I finally managed to escape out of the noisy, boisterous crowd that was cheering for me.

I hardly understood several confusing voices that tried to explain to me that the Double Duel Commission found out that Vigo was

correctly eliminated by the replica, which I'd made. The holovision viewers roared with laughter when they saw that one Vigo had killed the other one. The instant referendum nearly unanimously voted against granting the licence for the Free Enterprise Corporation for good.

The local police squad drove Fran and I home and posted a few of their men to turn the paparazzi away from our property. I opened a bottle of cooled champagne and filled two glasses.

“Finally alone, dear,” I said. “Cheers!”

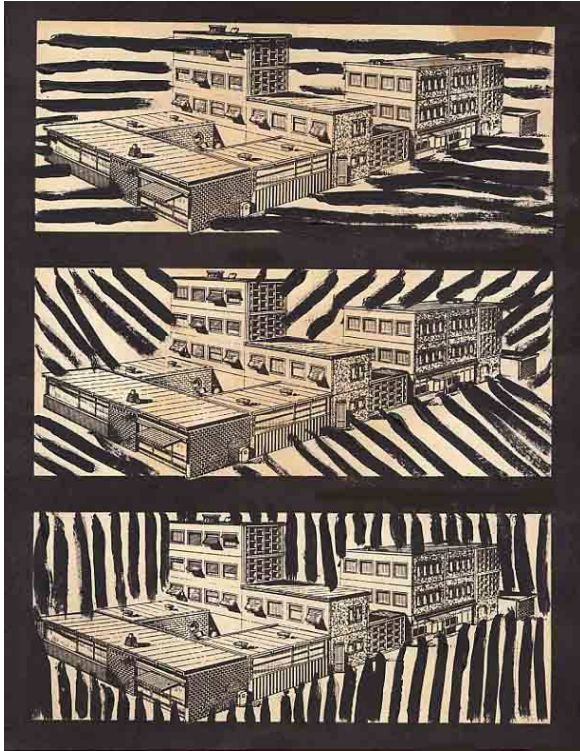
“Oh, Brad,” sighed Fran, tears of joy in her eyes, “I'm so happy you're okay! But now I'm simply devoured with curiosity—explain to me what we've seen. How in Space was it possible there were two replicas of Vigo and none of yours?”

I grinned and poured some more of the golden bubbles in our glasses. “You know, we lawyers are used to reading all texts exactly as they're written and not in the way that seems to be logical, understand?”

She shook her head.

“Look,” I said, “it's very simple. Both duelists got access to the ‘Personal File’ of his adversary, remember? In the Double Duel Regulations, it's written only that each duelist is allowed to make one replica. But it isn't written anywhere he must make the replica of himself.”

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two poems by Kris Logan

Viva Lost Wages

Amidst unstable hilltop collages
Of broken landscapes
Heated to scrambled seclusion
Lies paradised-pay-per-views
Constructed manly and alpha-humanly.
Predatory vultures fiending dollar signs
Eyes lusty full and disgustingly cold
Scan barren figurines for spare American dreams.
Sidewalks traffic-jammed with these birds of
burden
begging for random or loose change.
Preferring not the type of change
that springs mental movements
or the financial freedom of a minimalist
but rather a simple penny for hope
or a shiny quarter for a slot.

Zebra Striped Factories with Stains

courtesy of Ira Joel Haber

Hard Cider aka Screw York

The more roads one can take
the easier it is to go astray.
A metropolis where even the sidewalks
have crowded intestines
being saturated
with the exhaust of empty smiles.
Excuse me?
I'd like to watch you bleed
and put you in a hourglass
atop the Empire State
in hopes of making things
appear recognizable for a change.
At a fast enough pace
everything can seem motionless
and non-human.
Or maybe I'm just tired
of watching your rotten core
spill it seeds in all directions?

by Brett Miller

A Critical Town

A critical town-
An antique widow's nursery rhyme-
four little pigs on a wall at dusk.
The tilted mirror on an open-ended bedside table,
moving clouds when her flowers get thirsty.
The twilight lets go an exhausted sigh,
impersonating the dings and clicks of gears in a relic Spanish music box.
There is only one street in a critical town,
lined with singing vagrants to the praise of elephants-
creating admonitory statues for the questionable descent into faith in mind alone.
A faith in god really-
you and I see the same white rooster mocking out the hills in the nighttime courtyard.
We hear the same dings and clicks,
but it is as if our toes never formed that dotted line in the dust of the road.
Side by side for the translation we are there
equipping ourselves with awkward grins,
while the paranoiac worshippers kneel in silence,
all too ready for the bell tower to ring in the storm.

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by Daniel Wilcox

Cold as Hell

We stood in the sub zero
Montana ranch pasture,
Below the gauntlet of a gray sky,

Five cow hands leaning forward,
Our boots deep in the brown
Stubble and crusted snow.

We stepped closer, crunching
Ice, but mute, breathing
Fog, our hands still and numb,

To watch this high noon rancher
In the Levi jacket and tan hat,
His ears red and fingers blooded.

Oblivious to the minus degrees,
He semi-crouched and tugged,
Pulling at a panting half-born calf;

Her head and neck out, but stuck
In the womb of this bloated cow,
Agonizing in the bloody snow.

Thrashing, undelivered,
The brown mother bellowed
But all I remember--the cold.

Deneholes and Lost Cities: A Partial Defense of Down

by Barbara F. Lefcowitz

“...whatever sort of city is above, there is a city with a history below”--Omar Demir, *Cappadocia, Cradle of History*

“...mountains and caverns are complements, not opposites.”--Rosalind Williams, *Notes on the Underground*

1. Words and Etymologies

I confess I'm a closet Cimmerian. Hence my wish to defend, make that elevate, the word down, especially its association with a variety of underworlds, both literal and figurative.

Lest you're a bit hazy about the original Cimmerians, they lived in Italy around 500 B.C. in subterranean monastic communities whose priests cultivated darkness. Daylight was dangerous both literally (wild animals, tribal enemies) and spiritually, given its tendency to distract attention from meditations. Occasionally, the priests emerged at night from their rock-cut cells, or *argillae*, to offer aid to visiting pilgrims. None of these details has been documented, however, so we'll never know if the Cimmerian communities actually existed or, because of their appeal to the imagination, served as the source of legends about vampires, chthonic anti-gods, even ancient night watchmen, precursors of modern insomniacs.

Though few of my co-Cimmerians emerge at all today, our etymological kin are far-flung. Sometimes we've been equated with savages from the Black Sea and Crimea --Cimmeria may be the etymological ancestor of the latter-- who laid waste to the city of Sardis. Etymologists have also noted the relationship between the English word *Cimmer* and Greek *Kimmeroi*, Hebrew *Gomer*, and Latvian *Ziemeļi*. The Kimmeroi in turn are linked with the Gauls and Scythians; other kin include the Khazars who lived in present day Turkey, many of whom, according to Arthur Koestler, converted to Judaism.

Certainly a more elegant heritage than that of the troglodytes (from Gk troglodytes: one who creeps into holes, a derivative of trogein, to gnaw) who established villages in interconnected pits, caves, and earth houses and with whom we are occasionally confused. Some villages survived in Scotland and England until nearly the present, providing shelter for miners amidst the debris of the lime-burning industry. Other versions of troglodyte tenements persist beneath the subway tracks of New York and London in particular, where drug-addicts, psychotics, and the homeless share their space with rats and strewn garbage. Not in my backyard, however; nor am I a character escaped from Verne, Wells, Kafka, Dostoyevsky, Lewis Carroll or Ralph Ellison, least of all an elf or a leprechaun. I do, however, confess to a disdain for waking up before, say, 9 or 10, and I imagine at times it would be intriguing to abandon the earth's surface for its rich and intriguing, albeit dark, layers deep down below the ground.

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Yet in culture after culture, hell is down below the earth's surface, a subterranean realm entered by traversing a cave or body of water from which none can escape, though occasionally visitors are allowed: Orpheus, Innanu, and Enkidu, to name the best known. And heaven, the habitation of the sky-gods, is above, often high above, the earth's surface, though skyscrapers and mountains, exploding stars, attics, rockets and the rails of lofty bridges have been the locus of many catastrophes, hellish as the underground cataclysms of nature, like earthquakes and the catastrophic 2004 seaquake in Asia that caused massive tsunamis.

2. Popular Conceptions

Indeed, quite apart from concepts of heaven or hell, anything under, below, or simply down lower than something else of a similar nature, has gotten a bad rap; anything higher has usually evoked praise. Especially in hierarchical societies, people are taught at an early age to climb the ladder of success, rise to the top of a profession, and in cultures where religion plays a strong role, to ascend the stairway of paradise into a sublime afterlife. Getting high is fun; feeling low is, well, the pits.

A few exceptions: While according to the modern cliché, no one wants to be “under the weather” -- as if illness were equivalent with direct exposure to falling hail, snow, and torrential rains-- no employer wants to hire people who walk around with their “heads in the clouds,” otherwise known as *luftmenschen*, literally air people. Certainly investors do not want to see stock market indices go down, but anyone caring for someone ill just as certainly rejoices when the patient's fever becomes lower. Another cliché, “What goes up must come down,” hints of despair, but modern theories of negative mass posit that it's possible some objects can hover above forever, a *la Magritte* or *Chagall*.

To celebrate her newly won status, the bride walks down the aisle, not up. Not all downers are disagreeable; otherwise nobody would seek out tranquilizers and sedatives, to say nothing of alcohol. When a team downs another team, that means its players have won the game. Paradoxically, we can say at that point that “the game is up.” Down to one's last penny: not a desirable state of affairs, but getting down to work after a period of delay implies the serious concentration necessary for achieving a particular accomplishment.

Randy Newman's lyrics aside, tall people evoke more admiration than short people, especially in America and Northern Europe. Short men in particular are vertically challenged: the stereotypical couple consists of a tall man and his shorter woman, 5 feet two at best (and preferably with eyes of blue). Whether played by men or women, many sports are geared towards the tall--notably basketball, but also baseball (except for catchers and shortstops), pole vaulting, tennis, even swimming. Subway straps are located high to accommodate the tall, and so are many shelves in bookstores, libraries, and supermarkets, in the latter case often to discourage purchase of outside brands in favor of the store's own brands.

Sometimes the words up and down are neutral: in the United States, depending in part on where one lives, we speak of up north and down south, a usage that probably harks back to the concept of a vertical line running above and below the equator, as if the earth were rectangular or square. But contradictions abound vis-à-vis the words uptown and downtown. Uptown usually carries a more favorable connotation; in most American cities, with the possible exception of New York, only the poor and the racially or ethnically disfavored live downtown, exposed to crime, traffic, the smells and noise of factories. Under certain conditions, like the incursion of public housing projects, even

uptowns can become undesirable, so the upwardly mobile move to the suburbs-- though the word suburban literally means under the city, making it, at least on the surface, yet another "down" word. Yet, in a more positive light, literally sub-urban structures include tunnels and mines as well as places of religious worship like *hypogea* and underground chapels. More recently, mainly for ecological and economic reasons, but also as havens from terrorists and nuclear attacks, underground shopping centers, theaters, libraries, museums, and often lavish houses have been constructed all over the world. Though I have never seen one and likely never will, my favorite underground structures are the English dencholes, mysterious multi-shaped rooms created when vertical shafts were cut into limestone. Some still remain (Pennick, 112-120).

A basement, for those lucky enough to have one these days, is the underground hearth of a house, complete with furnace, utility outlets and room for storage. Of course, attics also supply storage space and have served as at least temporary hiding places, most famously for Anne Frank and her family during the Nazi occupation of Amsterdam. But attics have traditionally served as domestic prisons--e.g. the mad lady of the attic, the princess locked in the upmost level of a tower, like the long-haired Rapunzel. Worse, they have served as killing chambers--for the two young princes imprisoned and murdered back in 1483 in that part of the tower of London known as The Bloody Tower, as well as for others deemed undesirable, like the Archbishop Cranmer and the poet Sir Thomas Overbury.

3. The Stigma

Still, it is impossible to deny that most uses of the word down and most popular attitudes towards subterranean places are negative. If not dark and dangerous, then markedly disorienting, as they were to a man named Charley who was condemned to ride forever beneath the streets of Boston according to a popular Kingston Trio song of the 1960's.

Why the stigma? On the surface (pun intended) a major cause might have been the noxious atmospheres of tunnels and mines, which were filled not only with fumes but dangerous chemicals; those who ventured down, usually slaves commandeered to work the mines and build the tunnels, were lucky to return and be able to provide such descriptions. Indeed, such descriptions came close to overlapping with the many myths of subterranean menace, including vicious furies, lurid giants, the demonic gatekeepers of one hell or another.

Digging deeper, a more pervasive reason for the stigma derives from fear of the invisibility of matter lying under the surface. Yet many objects high above the surface are invisible as well, notably distant galaxies impossible to view, at least at present, with even the most sophisticated telescopes. The particular fear of the invisible down below relates to the widespread fear of the dark, a fear only partly relieved by the modern invention of artificial light, now used especially in tunnels and mines. Ultimately, however, fear of the invisible is linked with fear of death. With some exceptions, like the Parsi practice of placing the dead in high towers the more readily to be consumed by vultures, or ancient African rituals that involve lifting the dead to be exposed on trees, human beings wish to push the undesirable -- like corpses and reeking garbage -- down, to bury them in order to make them invisible as quickly as possible. Perhaps in the distant future corpses and garbage will be sent upward in space capsules forever to circle the cosmos, like the dust and debris, along with ice particles, now thought to make up the texture of Saturn's rings. (If and when that happens, the connotations of upper and lower may be reversed, or at least greatly modified.)

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4. The Overlooked, or Prejudices Against The Down

Because of fears of death and the invisible, the deep down subterranean has been so scorned throughout human history that its many positive features are easily overlooked. To cite but a few: There's the underground's essential role in the germination and fruition of roots and root vegetables, as well as its abundant sources of gemstones, coal, salt, and artifacts from vanished cultures. And the subterranean includes not only nature's burrows but manmade bunkers, many of which are adaptations of natural formations like caves and grottoes. Such places have served for centuries as storage bins for wine and grain. They have long provided hiding places for human beings, whether they are trying to avoid the stones and spears of tribal enemies or protect themselves against the effects of radioactive missiles (and the subsequent burial of nuclear waste). They have served as well as repositories for secret documents, like the Dead Sea Scrolls and modern secrets, most recently plans to evacuate cities threatened by terrorist attacks. For many decades, especially during the Cold War but today as well, such places have been repositories for secret war plans. On a more positive note, many great works of European art would be lost were it not for their burial in bunkers and salt mines during World War Two.

Underground hiding places have also been essential for the pursuit of freedom, whether figuratively, as in clandestine publications protesting an authoritarian government or both literally and figuratively, as in the underground slave railway in pre-Civil War America: though most of the routes from slavery to freedom involved night journeys along obscure roads, there have also been claims that the slaves literally escaped through networks of tunnels in places as diverse as St. Louis and upstate New York.

5. A Special Case

Thirty six underground cities have been discovered in the Cappadocia region of Turkey. Likely many more wait to reveal themselves as archeologists excavate further. Some are still partially inhabited. When I visited some of these cities on a recent trip, I was first struck by their utter starkness: bare sandstone walls, usually a deep golden-brown, slanting passages into small chambers of similar color and texture, including carved-out niches that could accommodate amphoras of water and, of course, wine.

Archeologists believe that group settlements in the area were first built by Proto-Hittites as far back as 3500 B.C., though excavators have unearthed a Neolithic settlement dating almost ten thousand years prior to the Bronze Age, complete with statuettes and jewelry. Scholars can only conjecture the purposes and construction techniques of these underground cities. One theory is that for defending against enemies, early inhabitants first hollowed out air shafts from the area's relatively soft volcanic tufa down to water level and later excavated with the help of pulley wheels that expanded the air shafts. Excavated earth was likely dumped into nearby streams. The cities themselves contained ingenious ventilation systems that insured the circulation of clean air to support the inhabitants as well as communication systems that utilized large holes that rose from a city's lowest floor. Other holes in some of the cities have encouraged speculation about inside toilet facilities though except on sloped ground that would allow for drainage, most residents had to make use of the Byzantine equivalent of outhouses or, more likely, the great outdoors--unless they were compelled to remain inside in order to avoid enemy attacks, in which case they had to make do

with earthenware pots. Yet residents could provide much of their own food from animals kept in the underground stables. Cattle thieves and other enemies were deterred by use of heavy round stone doors.

The most spectacular subterranean city in Cappadocia, Derinkuyu, has been partly open to tourists since 1965. Archeologists conjecture that its lower levels served as storehouses, possibly back to Hittite times, while the eight upper levels were slowly constructed by subsequent inhabitants (as many as 10,000 at a time) who took up residence underground in order to be secure from enemy raids and much later to engage in and spread forbidden Christian rituals.

Though the tourist is allowed to visit only a few of its thousands of chambers, always ducking beneath low arches and descending dark and narrow stairs, a cross-sectional map reveals a labyrinth of tunnels that link bedrooms, chapels, special rooms for crafts and food preparation.

Rising from Derinkuyu to the lunar landscape of the upper world, with its phalliform “fairy chimneys” and frozen surf of enormous rocks, I kept thinking that life in such a subterranean environment was likely more pleasant than infernal. Surely much wine was available, judging from the number of niches for the storage thereof in large *amphorae*, and social interaction was probably both frequent and ordered, personal needs satisfied by a variety of resident-”specialists,” including doctors, spiritual counselors, fashion creators and advisers, even baby sitters. I suspect, however, that the lack of privacy was disturbing at times, the doorless rooms scarcely conducive to the solitude necessary for writing or simply pondering the future of Anatolia, the world.

6. Malls and Myths

Cappadocia may be an exception. Many modern underground cities are not really cities, but enormous shopping malls. Among others, there’s the five-level complex complete with arcades and moving sidewalks below Paris’s old marketplace, Les Halles. Beneath the Auber train station lies an even more extensive mall where one can allegedly satisfy all of one’s above ground needs and desires, make that material needs and desires: an inverted paradise, as it were.

Less glamorous, the underground shopping malls created in 19th century America. Among the best known are the Pendleton Underground City in eastern Oregon and Seattle’s version thereof, both now defunct. The first, built by Chinese immigrants during the 1870’s, served as a refuge not from marauding beasts, but from the upper world’s racial bigotry. Pendleton contained not only residences and shops, but opium dens, bordellos and saloons, the latter particularly popular during Prohibition. Seattle’s first underground city, now a “festival marketplace,” was originally created for the nobler purposes of land reclamation and sewerage control. The 1889 version of the new city had a major flaw, however: its shops and sidewalks ended up below street level, demanding that shoppers lug their purchases up steep ladders. Sometimes people as well as horses actually fell deep down to a lower level. Such mishaps evoke fantasies not only of Alice-like rabbit-holes, but the more extreme fantasy of the legendary buried city of Agharti.

Unlike the traditional Judeo-Christian underworld, Agharti was peaceful and lush with vegetation, a buried paradise that inspired the Hollywood version of Shangri-La. It lies beneath anywhere from Tibet to Afghanistan and may be linked by the world’s most extensive network of tunnels all the way to ancient Inca sites in Peru and northern Chile. Erich von Danikin, still a New Age cult figure, wrote of archaic links between Agharti and the lost kingdom of Atlantis—in one version, the home of the White Brotherhood, ruled by none less than the King of

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the World. Because of Atlantan sinners, it was relegated, along with the King, to the subterranean until after a series of wars that will render the place worthy of re-emergence.

(Among other devotees of the dethroned, or rather descended, King of the World, was Heinrich Himmler, who attempted to enlist the help of the King in the Nazi quest for world dominance.)

Agharti myths are relatively tame, however, when compared with the fantasies of the Hollow Earth mavens, who are convinced that the earth is a hollow sphere whose interior cities are located near the poles along with vast oceans and continents. Residents of this deeply invisible civilization are equipped with UFOs which they plan to launch in order to destroy the entire upper world, that is, the world that exists on the empty center's outer rim like the white "skin" of a ping-pong ball.

7. Tunnels and Worm Holes

As a kid growing up in New York City, I was both fascinated and skeptical whenever my father drove through one of the relatively new tunnels connecting Manhattan with New Jersey. "You mean there's water overhead, that we're driving through some strange hole or passageway created to carry us through water without any risk of getting wet or, worse, drowning?"

"Yes," he would reply, going into brief explanations about techniques of tunnel building, which did little to dispel my skepticism about the overhead waters.

Later, my friends and I would sometimes discover narrow tunnels bored into the soil's barely subterranean levels by those "gross" slippery and slithering worms. Later still we would dig our own tunnels with a spade and maybe a fork or spoon: easy to accomplish on a sandy beach. Eventually I learned about the creation of tunnels to carry water and conceal people, dead or alive; man-made tunnels that both rivalled and supplanted nature's own vast conglomeration of tunnels and burrows, to say nothing of cosmic wormholes.

Though we have no eyewitness accounts or historical records of their achievements, long before the Egyptians and Persian tunnel builders, a wide spectrum of worms, gophers, shrews, and moles created both burrows and winding tunnels below the surface of the earth. In some respects, these natural engineers created their tunnels and underground pits for the same reasons humans did many centuries later: as hiding places, storage facilities, means of passage safe from predators—at least above ground predators, if not fellow Cimmerians, mythic dwellers in subterranean darkness, or demon-gods linked with the chthonic. And tunnels have long served as conduits of human and animal waste matter. Monsters and hell-fires aside, most of these uses are more salutary than ominous, catacomb tunnels aside.

Of course, all tunnels prior to the 20th century lacked artificial light, invoking the basic human fear of darkness, the invisible, the unknown. Technological advances have made them, like other underground structures, less scary and generally safer. Social historian Rosalind Williams claims that by the mid-nineteenth century, the underground was not so much a source of dread but a source of enlightenment, descent into which became synonymous with the search for truth, associated with the new concept of a vertical "deep time," as opposed to the pre-scientific concept of cyclical time. Digging down, or excavation, became a "central metaphor for intellectual inquiry." (Williams, 23).

8. *The Brain*

The best known use of that metaphor is Freud's view of the relationship between the conscious and unconscious mind. Intrinsic to Freud's now-outdated model is the assumption that the ego, id, and superego are distinctive mental strata, the upmost, or ego, encompassing the realm of conscious awareness and in the process concealing the lowest stratum, the unconscious, buried deep below the surface, the repository of our darkest and most primitive urges.

Yet Freud himself never located any of these strata in particular brain structures; only in the popular imagination was it assumed that the unconscious inhabited the oldest parts of the brain, sometimes called the "reptilian" to emphasize its archaic place in the brain's evolution. Indeed, such a false analogy with the archeological fact that the deeper one digs below the earth's strata the older the artifacts reposing therein, is no longer taken seriously.

Along with repudiating the notion of the brain's hierarchical architecture, modern neuroscientists have modified much of Freud's concept of the unconscious as well. In particular, researchers argue now that there is no sharp split between conscious and unconscious mental activities; rather there are many variations of each, their locus dispersed in many parts of the brain, interaction between them taking place across various neural bridges. More sophisticated metaphors posit alinear networks and the emergence of new patterns evolving from chaos.

The notion of deep thinking has also evolved away from the naive assumption that a deep thinker is one who "digs" through the layers of an idea until reaching some sort of mythical bedrock. Yet when we hear someone referred to as a "deep thinker," the notion of levels is by no means absent. To put it simply, a deep thinker probes beyond, not below, superficial facts and hypotheses, often valuing the figurative over the literal. Curiosity and originality often characterize such thinkers, the willingness to take risks rather than remain perched in a comfortable mental nest. One kid might enjoy tossing around a ball or soft block with bells inside just to hear the music, but a more curious one might insist upon prying that container open to see what is responsible for that tinkling sound. Unlike the child (or adult) who cannot resist the urge to separate the layers of a Hydrox cookie in order to lick its filling, one who insists upon opening a seed pod or partially open clam shell just to see what's inside may be taking the first step towards deep thinking.

The brain itself can be thought of as a walled city, a container, as it were, of the structures and processes responsible for deep thinking (as well as everyday thinking, like where can I park or what shall I eat for dinner). But the City of the Brain, with all its grooves, winding pathways, bridges, and ramps between the upper and lower storeys of its "buildings" may be a nice place to visit, but I wouldn't want to live there. Neither my Cimmerian penchant for darkness nor my fascination with the mysteries of the subterranean extends to a fondness for being trapped inside a groove of deep confusion.

Better a denehole, preferably one shaped like a *fleur de lis* or many-lobed cloverleaf.

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by Craig Kirchner

morning in Amsterdam

The whirr and whine of rubbed-clean
antique glass,
the hand-crafted homage
of skyline above Canal street
as it lays below the window
at first light.

Waiting on the stoop,
knowing it won't take you long
to get bathed and primed,
thinking how it takes centuries
to become this tolerant,
tranquil, detailed, diverse.

The only perceptible nuance
of movement a light gray smoke
curling above the rooftops
of shops and narrow,
stair-stepped homes
whorling over barges to the bridge,

and then as though
choreographed,
Monks parade by on Dutch dew,
chanting *Dies-irae*
in the must morning mist,
a mantra of Delft dawn
welcoming this early riser.

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by Simon Perchik

Somehow warmer than my skin
you taxi nearer to the stove
as if this cold won't last through September

—you don't know a winter
or why your wings, glugged with loops and dives
are icing over —hangar talk! more bank
throttle, more rudder —you still rub your legs
on the air and that difficult chandelle
that swat you almost enjoyed, the low buzz
over the table lamp, flaps down
like planing over water. You need water.

This kitchen floor won't thaw in time, nose up
More- there's just so much air
and the floor is ravenous, the refrigerator
is no help either, starts
whether or not I open its door to climb in
though inside stays cockpit dim, cluttered
and this white tablecloth, controlled
by a cup, a spoon, a temperature
a heading on the cloudcover underneath.

Fly, my eyes too are freezing and what they see
is made colder :your wings from above
frayed :blankets lifted for the bloodmeal
and under the crosshairs burning on the stove
where you walk to suck more stench

—I'm walking you nearer, the sun
half covered with its horizon
as your dry wings once spread
lifted a city to your eyes that see
only its intensity :a sun, a stove
a skin held up more or less closer
vaguely the same shade under the North Sea

—you need more water, more tea
this time without drowning
or the belief water loves you —all summer
this faucet kept open for something
that needs boiling :waves dragging
till the spoon points down —nose up!

Fly, I'm walking you through an Earth
unable to lift itself nearer to the sun
—you need oceans :the hovering
that beat your heart open last June
—you need water for steam :the thunderhead
to grasp you upward into my arms
now closer than the sky that drips like gauze
from your eyes, autumn and shadow.

Tesserae

by Miko Yanagisawa

Underground, there is the sound of shoes clicking on a concrete floor, the noise of conversation, activity, movement, the buzz of a large number of people bouncing off cavernous walls. A man with greying hair that matches his business suit melts into the crowd. He sees himself as an individual, as others always think of themselves, but people see him as a ripple in a grey ocean. He makes his way, elbow to elbow with other grey-clad workers, down an escalator towards the subway. To his right, a girl in red runs up the stairs.

She can barely breathe by the time she reaches the top. She looks to her left then right, hoping to find a relatively clear route

*She stares after the man and
curses under her breath...*

through the forest of lawyers, bankers, and brokers. It is too busy, the early morning rush, but with a barrage of “excuse me” and “sorry” thrown over her shoulder, she manages to make it to the street. She hails a cab and sets the driver racing to the airport. Outside her window a small man with round spectacles stumbles and spills coffee on himself.

No! He exclaims inwardly and starts to hurry away from the subway station. His mind is reeling as he looks at his watch—one hour to

make it to the interview. Will he get back to his apartment, change, and still be able to get there in time? He rushes down the street, his fast walk accelerating into a jog, his jog accelerating into a run. He bumps into a woman struggling to get her luggage to the curb. “Sorry,” he yells unapologetically as he keeps moving.

She stares after the man and curses under her breath. Apparently, he thinks he’s the only one in a hurry. She reaches down, picks up the suitcase she dropped and moves it next to her

others, just as a cab pulls up. The driver gets out and puts her things in the trunk. She gets in the car and tells him her destination. After they

arrive at the Domestic Terminal the driver unloads her luggage onto a cart. She pays him in the last of her local currency and enters the airport to stand in line at an electronic check-in point. The young man ahead of her finishes and smiles bashfully as she moves up to the machine.

“Apparently, I’m in the wrong terminal,” he says with a laugh.

He’s in a good mood. His roommate may

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have dropped him off at the wrong terminal, but he's so early it doesn't matter at all. He takes his bag and walks outside to catch a shuttle. After only a few minutes of waiting, a small bus with an "International Terminal" sign drives in and parks. He pays his fare, finds a seat. Oblivious to the other passengers and the passers-by outside, he envisions all the things he'll do when he gets to Greece.

The shuttle ride goes by quickly and soon he enters correct terminal. After signing in and checking his luggage, he decides to wander the airport shops. Thinking that a book might be useful in case of a bad in-flight movie, he approaches one of the many bookstores. He reaches the door as a girl in red reaches for the handle on the other side. He smiles at her through the glass, opens the door and holds it for her.

She gives him a sideways grin. "Thank you," she says as she walks out.

She looks at her watch and realises it's time to move toward her gate. She makes her way through security and finds herself a seat. She thinks of reading the novel she bought, but the noise of people diverts her attention. She watches a mother with her children, a couple comfortably reading together, a teenage boy tapping his feet to the music from his headphones. She watches these people and wonders what their stories are. Soon the call comes to board. She stands in line and then makes her way on to the plane. It's a long flight, but she sleeps through most of it.

She arrives in Carcassonne tired but wanting to explore. She slips out of her hotel and wanders the streets. She passes a quiet bistro with perfect romantic ambience. She imagines a couple there, turns away with a sigh—her vacation is to forget such things.

A woman finds herself having coffee with a

man. He seems perfect—attractive, charming—but, to her, something feels wrong. "This isn't real," she says, completely resolute. He laughs softly and seems about to say something, but she interrupts, "No. I'm serious." She rubs her eyes with the tips of her fingers then stops, leaving her hands covering her face.

Understanding that she truly believes what she's saying, he sobers. "How can you think this isn't real?" A slight smile plays across his lips, betraying his restrained voice. As she pulls her hands away from her face, feeling their touch against her skin, the sight of that smile elicits a feeling inside her that doesn't belong. Although it feels as if she knows this man, as if they are intimately acquainted, she knows they've never met before. There is, however, a familiar quality to the moment. Thoughts filter. Ideas shift.

"I'm dreaming." It sounds clichéd as it exits her mouth. Her brow furrows and she gives him a crooked smile, "That sounded horrible, like we're in some bad movie from the 50's." He laughs and her eyes shine as she looks across at him. She looks down at her hands resting on the table; her smile softens, saddens. A feeling of love keeps welling in her, confusing her. She knows it's not been felt before. She looks back up at him; her expression, barely covering her sadness, wavers but stays in place. "This honestly isn't real. I'm at home in bed. I didn't get up to come here. I didn't put on these clothes." She looks down at her lap and gives a tense laugh, "I don't even own a skirt like this." A brief pause. "I would, though. I like it."

He laughs, reaches over and grabs her hands. As he leans across the table and touches her. He certainly feels real. Confusion. He gives her arms a slight pull, "Come on, it's beautiful outside." She gives in and leaves the quiet bistro, her hand in his.

Outside they walk for a minute in silence. Their surroundings are old and beautiful. His hand has substance, feels warm, concrete. An overwhelming sense that this moment is more genuine than anything she has ever experienced washes over her. She stops walking. Maybe she's crazy. She reaches up and puts a hand behind his head. She can feel every strand of hair, the warmth of his skin underneath. She kisses him and that too feels real. Perfect. She is feeling every physical sensation possible, his lips, his breath, her response to both. Reluctantly she pulls away. Sadness overcomes her as she looks up at his face.

She wakes in her bed, alone, the world before her eyes seeming far less vibrant than the one left behind. Thousands of kilometres away, he's thinking the same thing.

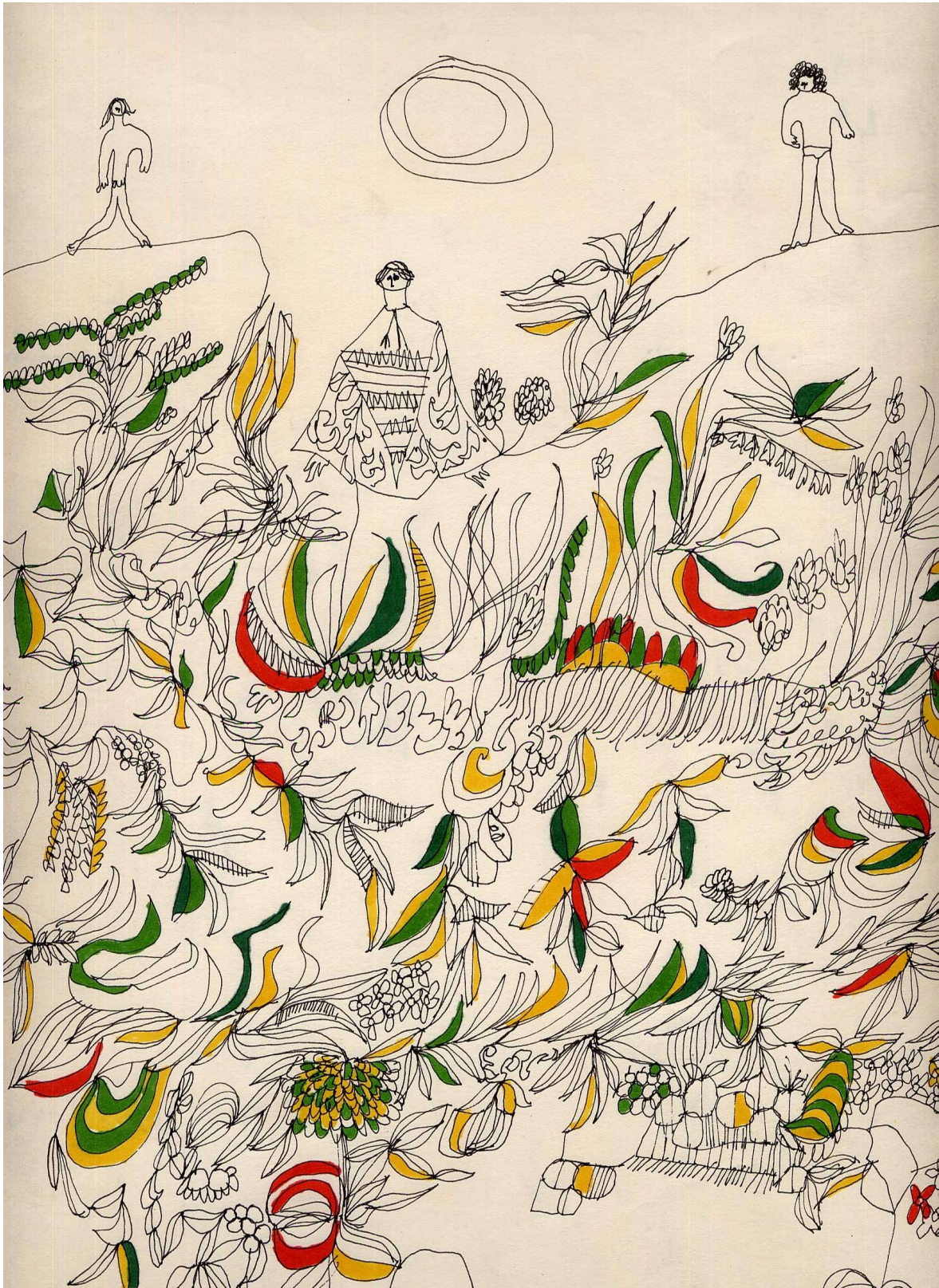
by Barry Ballard

Descending McDonald Observatory

The vacant pillow and the unused section of blanket lie next to me like the Davis Mountains at midnight, filled with the steep-graded pass of dark roads under the weak projection of light spilling in front of me. And tonight, I am the nocturnal creature feeding at the roadside, a Shaman's jaguar bleeding to death as I watch myself move from the height

of nebulae and galaxies back into the tamer whisper of evergreen. The eyes have seen themselves (I know this). And the blanket spills with the husk of the soul I've seen through inside it, falling through the atmosphere to die, eroded by the same blue oxygen that fans it.

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Dennis in the Dunes

courtesy of Ira Joel Haber

by Gabriel Dey

Ostrich Clock

We are waiting for death. A speech to Appaloosa
songhorses, sting the inside of fires orange belly. We are holes
in brightness. Traffic jam powder. Colt 45. Rings of sungloss.
We are a colossus of zipper tongues. Green Aphrodite.
At midnight we bloom the tongue of a blade. Rats
gather wearing diamond necklaces. We are a cyborg trapper.
Fur of the dead. Stiff peaks in sunshine. Moon on a paper
knife. Erasing the soft pink inside of terror.
We are eaters of neglected darkness.

two poems by Yvette A. Schnoecker-Shorb

A Splice of Life

Oh, tamper-touch me, please.
Release my DNA
from this mortality. I need
a change of sequence--
commence with my perfection.
Do de-base me naturally, though;
replace my helical strands
with an order
 worthy of a god.

And don't let my genes stalk
my sleep with budding dreams,
limbic impulses and random sparks
of broken memory, reconstructed
story lines--instruct well the messenger
RNA; I don't want my cells
dancing without spirit,
so, better yet,
 make me a god.

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Basic Needs

Perspiring under dry thunder clouds
and ankle deep in speckled pinto pods,
he stands practically
at the edge of a field of philosophy,
discussing the ethics of diverting a creek
to avoid fallow acres during drought,
the dangers of mono-cropping,
and of pesticidal life-support systems.

Potatoes, alfalfa, beans divided by cornstalks,
walls to prevent pollen drift--
a ten-foot square stretch of earth
yields a bucket of harvest,
maybe less with this organic farming, more
with genetically-modified agriculture,
the products combinations of molecules
not found in nature but perfect
for a highly consumptive society
where nutritive soil is a rare commodity.

But he doesn't buy it.
A farmer shadowed by tradition,
he accepts natural risk with wisdom,
uses calculations and tractors,
craft, combines, and windrows;
planting for biodiversity, he hopes
for bio-necessity--food, for instance,
to meet his basic needs.

Train to New Rochelle

by Rebecca Ward

I generally waited for the train with my face buried in a book in order to distract my mind from my shivering body. The Metro-North platform at 125th Street-Harlem offered no protection from the wind on icy winter mornings. Books not only took my mind off the miserable weather, they made the commute tolerable. Rather than watching the chaos of people hurriedly walking or looking at the graffiti-plagued buildings of Harlem, I could send my thoughts into any literary world of my choosing. But on one particular morning as I began to open my book, I was interrupted by a short elderly woman; her walk was slow and hesitant. Bundled in layers of winter attire, I could barely see the soft skin of her face, which was weighed in deep wrinkles, exposed under the sliver of space between her red hat and scarf. The corners of her brown eyes were pulled down with concern and her lips quivered. She did not appear to be homeless, yet she approached me as if she were going to ask for food or a few spare coins.

In a voice barely audible over the passing trains and the busyness of the morning she asked, "Can you tell me which train to take to New Rochelle?"

"I'm not sure," I responded. I glanced at my watch. My train would be arriving any minute. "You'll have to go downstairs and look on the monitors in the station waiting room. They'll tell you what time the train leaves and what track it leaves from."

She seemed dissatisfied with my answer. She moved along the platform and asked a young man. He was reading the morning paper and she tapped him on the shoulder to get his attention.

"Can you tell me how to get to New Rochelle?" This time she asked with a little more hope in her voice.

"The schedule and track numbers are over there on the schedule," he responded, pointing to the glass display case.

She was not content with his answer either. She continued questioning person after person. She received similar replies, "Look at the monitors downstairs," or "Go look at the schedule. It's over there."

As more and more passengers lined up along the trembling platforms, trains making their various stops along the tracks, the woman's pleas for help grew desperate. The familiar shaking of track number three and the roar of the approaching 6:37 AM train to North White Plains told me it was time to pack my book and board. As I was putting the book into my bag I realized why the woman hurried along the track, growing bolder in her question. "Please, is this the train to New Rochelle?" "Can you tell me how to get to New Rochelle?" The symbols and numbers shown on the monitors and schedules didn't communicate anything to her: she could not understand the literate world. Usually I felt relieved to board the train as its warmth gently replaced the chill of the morning air, but on this particular morning as the train doors closed behind me I never felt warm.

The Externalist: A Journal of Perspectives

two poems by Michael Lee Johnson

Catch On The Fly

Full barrel up 53 north,
heading to Lake Zurich, IL,
Christian talk radio 1660
on the radio dial,
crisp winter day
sunbeams dancing down
on the pavement like midgets.
85 mph in a 65 mph zone,
just to aggravate the police,
black Chevy S10 pick up,
shows what a deviant I am
in dark colors.

Running late for a client appointment,
creating poems on a small hand held recorder
knowing there is not payment for this madness
in this little captured taped area of words.
Headlights down the highway for a legacy
into the future, day dreaming like a fool obsessed.
Working out the layout of this poem or getting my ego in place,
I will catch up with the imagery when I get back home.
This is my life, a poem in the middle of the highway.
Scampering, no one catches me when I'm speeding
like this.

In December

In December Miami sun
stands out on the southern
tip of Florida like a full-
blossomed orange,
wind torn sunshine eats away
at those Florida skies.

Spanish accents echo through
Caribbean Boulevard loud
like an old town crier
misplaced in a metro suburb.

Off the east coast 90 miles,
westward winds carry inward
the foreign sounds lifting off
Castro's larynx,
and the faint smell of an
old musty Cuban cigar
touches the sand and the shoreline.

by Bradley R. Strahan

Scrapbooks

(we are such stuff as dreams are made on...)

Add breath to the picture,
socked in ceiling of gray,
snapshots of imagined lives,
the rush of breath,
the feel beneath our fingers,
green that forgets sweaty flesh,
feet becoming flowers,
while the earth heaves
its heavy breast into
the sky god's mouth.

Everywhere children scatter
in the rain soaked field.
Apple trees strain
at locked doorways of eyes.
Pictures engrave
on a bone ceiling,
a bridge, one rope above
the abyss, and each moment
precious and perilous
as a city under siege.

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Contributor's Notes

Barry Ballard's poetry has most recently appeared in *Prairie Schooner*, *The Connecticut Review*, *Margie*, and *Puerto del Sol*. His most recent collection is *A Body Speaks Through Fence Lines* (Pudding House, 2006). He writes from Burleson, Texas.

Kenneth A. Brown is an active duty soldier currently serving in Iraq.

Zachary C. Bush, 23, is a writer of poetry, fiction, essays, and magazine features. He lives in Statesboro, Georgia. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in over a dozen literary journals including, *R-KV-R-Y Quarterly*, *Chronogram*, *VOX*, *Calliope Nerve*, *WORD RIOT*, *Noneuclidean Café*, and *Thieves Jargon*. Bush was just recently featured as the Poet of the Week (5/28/07-6/4/07) on *Poetry Super Highway.com*. His first chapbook of poetry, *Outside the Halfway House*, is to be released by Scintillating Publications in mid-June of 2007.

Giano Cromley is a graduate of the fiction MFA program at the University of Montana. His work has appeared in *The Threepenny Review*, the German edition of *Le Monde diplomatique*, and *Literal Latte*. Additionally, he has a short story forthcoming in *Swill Magazine*. He teaches English at Kennedy-King College in Chicago.

Gabriel Dey is a Vancouver Island writer and editor whose work explores the darkening mythos and images of post-humanism. This poem is from her recent collection, *Machiavelli Dines on Magic*.

Ira Joel Haber was born and lives in Brooklyn New York. He is a sculptor, painter, book dealer and teacher. His work has been seen in numerous group shows both in USA and Europe and he has had 9 one man shows including several retrospectives of his sculpture. His work is in the collections of New York University, The Guggenheim Museum, The Hirshhorn Museum & The Albright-Knox Art Gallery. His paintings, drawings and collages have been published in many online and print magazines including *Rock Heals*, *Otoliths*, *Winamop*, *the DMQ Review*, *Broadsided*, *Double Dare Press*, *Events Quarterly*, *Unlikely Stories*, *Cricket & Taj Mahal Review*. Over the years he has received three National Endowments For The Arts Fellowship, two Pollock-Krasner grants and most recently in 2004 received The Adolph Gottlieb Foundation grant. Currently he teaches art at the United Federation of Teachers Retiree Program in Brooklyn

Bryon D. Howell is a poet currently residing in New Haven, Connecticut. He has been writing poetry for a great number of years. Recently, work of his has appeared in *poeticdiversity*, *Red River Review* and *The Quirk*.

Mr. **Michael Lee Johnson** lives in Chicago, IL after spending 10 years in Edmonton, Alberta Canada during the Vietnam era. He is a freelance writer and poet. He is heavily influenced by Carl Sandburg, Robert Frost, & William Carlos Williams, Leonard Cohen. He is a member of Poets & Writers, Inc; Directory of American Poets & Fictions Writers. He is presently self-employed, with a previous background in social service areas. He has a B.A. degree in sociology, worked on a Masters Program in Correctional Administration, started a pre-Phd program & quit. He took a creative writing course in university on a pass/fail basis-he failed.

Craig Kirchner lives and works as a consultant in the Mid-Atlantic. His work has appeared in anthologies such as the *Loch Raven Review*, *Velvet Avalanche* and *Octopus Dreams*, as well as in journals including *Slow Trains*, *Lily*, *Erosba*, *Thunder Sandwich*, *3 AM MAGAZINE*, *Adagio*, *Triplopia*, *Laura Hird*, *Clean Sheets*, *Niederngasse*, *Fifth Street Review*, *No Tell Motel*, *Poetry Superhighway*, *Astropoetica*, *Wicked Alice* and *Zygote in My Coffee*. He has been twice nominated for a Pushcart Prize.

Pete Lee lives with his wife in Ridgecrest, California, where he works as an independent bookseller. His poetry has recently appeared in the online journals *Antithesis Common*, *Big Pond Rumours*, *The Country Mouse*, *Right Hand Pointing*, and *The Rose & Thorn*.

Barbara F. Lefcowitz has published nine poetry collections. Her latest collection, *The Blue Train to America* appeared in January 2007. Her fiction, poetry, and essays have been published in over 500 journals. She has won writing fellowships and prizes from the National Endowment for the Arts, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Rockefeller Foundation, and several individual journals. A native New Yorker, Lefcowitz has lived most of her life in Bethesda, Maryland. She travels widely and is also a visual artist, focusing at present on silk painting and fused glass.

Kristofer Logan has original thoughts and universal emotions and he thinks that no one and everyone can write poetry. He believes the world to be small...and large at the same time. He is soon to be departing for Eastern Europe to serve as a Peace Corps volunteer; attempting at teaching the truth to the youth in Bulgaria and looking forward to having stories to tell one day to his grandchildren. He is 24 years old and young and thinks life to be about finding a balance.

Brett Miller is twenty-two years old and has been an addicted writer as long as he can remember. He is currently a student at Purchase College and is in the process of applying to graduate programs.

Simon Perchik is an attorney whose poems have appeared in *Partisan Review*, *The New Yorker*, and elsewhere. *Family of Man* (Pavement Saw Press) and *Rafts* (Parsifal Editions) are both scheduled for publication 2007. For more information, including his essay "Magic, Illusion and Other Realities" and a complete bibliography, please visit his website at www.geocities.com/simonthepoet.

Nanette Rayman Rivera is a writer and actress. She has published in *The Worcester Review*, *The Berkeley Fiction Review*, *Sein Und Werden*, *Dragonfire*, *MiPOesias*, *Pedestal*, *AntiMuse*, *Carousel*, *Wicked Alice*, *The Pebble Lake Review*, *Sein Und Werden*, *andwerve*, *Barnwood*, *Flashquake*, *A Little Poetry*, among others. She was nominated for two Pushcart Prizes this year: *Arsenic Lobster* for poetry and *Dragonfire* for memoir. Upcoming: *Gambara*, *Wheelhouse*.

More than two dozen of **Edward Rodosek's** short stories have been published in SF magazines in USA and UK (*Adhoc Monadnock*, *Aphelion*, *Between Kisses*, *Black Petals*, *Brew City*, *Down in the Dirt*, *Dreams Passage*, *Electric Spec*, *Expressions*, *Jupiter*, *Midnight Times*, *Mytholog*, *Nocturnal Ooze*, *Quantum Muse*, *Sacred Twilight*, *Silver Thought*, *Spinning*, *Spoiled Ink*, *Static Movement*, *Thirteen*, *Toasted Cheese*, *Twilight Tales*, *Ultraverse*, *Vermeer*, *Whisper of Wickedness and Writer's Stories*).

Yvette A. Schnoeker-Shorb is co-editor of the *Sustainable Ways Newsletter* for Prescott College and co-founder of Native West Press. Her poetry has appeared in *Red River Review*, *The Blueline Anthology* (Syracuse University Press), *Terrain.org: A Journal of the Built and Natural Environments*, *Entelechy: Mind & Culture*, *The Pedestal Magazine*, and many other journals.

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Bradley R. Strahan recently was Fulbright Professor of Poetry & American Culture in the Balkans. For more than 25 years he has been editor/publisher of Visions-International. He has five books of poetry and over 500 poems published in such places as *America*, *Seattle Rev.*, *Confrontation*, *The Hollins Critic*, *Soundings East*, *Onthebus*, etc.

Bill Teitelbaum's work has been published by journals such as *Bayou*, *Crab Creek*, *The Oregon Literary Review*, and *Red Wheelbarrow*, and his short play, "The Death of Saul," appears in the New Issues Press 2007 anthology, *The Art of The One-Act*. Bill lives in Lincolnwood, Illinois, a near-suburb of Chicago.

Rebecca Ward is originally from the Southern Utah desert but has called New York City home for the past four years. She recently completed her first year of graduate studies as a nonfiction-writing student at Sarah Lawrence College. Before studying writing, she studied piano performance. She works as a music teacher and writing consultant.

Daniel Wilcox earned his degree in Creative Writing from Cal State University, Long Beach. He is a former activist, former literature teacher, and former wanderer who has farmed in the Middle East, worked as a cowboy in Montana, and volunteered on the Cheyenne Reservation. His writing has appeared in *The Other Side*, various poetry magazines such as *The Centrifugal Eye*, *Sentinel Poetry Online*, *The November 3rd Club*, *The Green Silk Journal*, and *Words-Myth*, and other publications.

Miko Yanagisawa is a Canadian currently residing in the UK. She has over 10 years of private vocal training, a Professional Culinary Arts diploma from Dubrulle Culinary Arts Institute, and has almost completed her Associate of Arts in psychology and music. While she has many interests, writing is her primary focus.