



Event Horizon

Spring 2018

Issue 3

A man with tattoos, wearing a blue t-shirt, is in a push-up position on a grassy field. He is looking directly at the camera. In the background, there is a wooden fence and a large, leafy tree. A house is partially visible behind the tree.

Steve Gatt

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CONSISTENCY INTENSITY NUTRITION FITNESS



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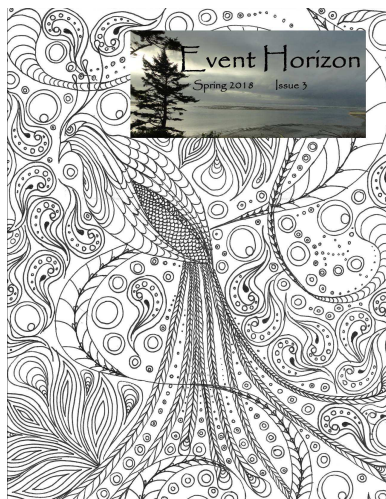
GAMING FANTASY SCI-FI FRACTALS



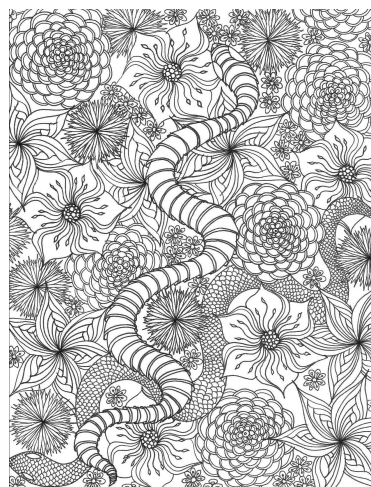
~ a literary and graphic arts periodical

Event Horizon is published quarterly as a free pdf download. Every issue is also available as a publish-on-demand book. All access is through the website, eventhorizonmagazine.com. Submissions are always welcome and should be emailed to eventhorizonmagazine@gmail.com. Event Horizon is seeking fiction, poetry, illustration, photography or photographic displays of arts and crafts, manga, graphic novels, comics, cartoons, various non-fiction including letters, essays, criticism and reports on the arts. Cover art is also invited and specs can be found on the website. Event Horizon is edited and published by Lanning Russell.

On the cover:



front - Majestic Bird



back - Eden

Anca Sugar, our cover artist, is from Romania. Prior to moving to the United States, she taught English in Europe. Anca published her first coloring book for adults entitled **Magic Mandalas** (the Romanian title is "Mandale Magice"). Anca's drawings were featured in Issue 2 of Event Horizon.



Notes from the editor

Offworld and a debut performance

Event Horizon may be boldly leading the charge to the craggiest outposts of art. But it is also a quaint throw-back to the age of print. What else is this whole-issue pdf-download than a digital rendering of a print medium? Event Horizon is parked at a website - like Deep Space 9 at the edge of the galaxy - but the publication is not a website; no tabs, no pages to navigate, no live links. Offworld - a new department of Event Horizon - will be its portal to the rest of the internet. Offworld is the guide to sound, motion and performance.

Event Horizon is pleased to co-host a debut performance - a reading of a newly translated short story by the Russian author, Olga Onoyko, with an interview of the author. The short story is **The House behind the Vacant Lot**. The reading is performed by her translator, Isaac Stackhouse Wheeler. Event Horizon is collaborating with She's in Russia, a podcast hosted by two Americans whose avowed mission is to short-circuit Cold War II and pull the rug out from propaganda in both directions. The podcast for the reading - in English - is available at Soundcloud - soundcloud.com/shes-in-russia. The translation is available in Issue 3 of Event Horizon and on the Home page of the website.

Letters to the editor

on the Adrienne Stacey article - to Adrienne on Facebook

Thanks for sending this nice article about your show, Adrienne, but please inform Lanning Russell that the Tillamook County Pioneer Museum has been featuring local artists annually over the last decade with great success! We also have several art galleries in the area, including the co-operative Art Accelerated Gallery on Fourth Street and the Wild Rain Gallery on Route 6. There is a very active group called the Tillamook County Arts Network (TCAN) that sponsors artists all over the county. Lanning makes us sound like a backwater town that can't be bothered with art and that is certainly not the case!!! Thanks.

~Carla Albright

Point taken. Art is important in Tillamook and Tillamook is not a backwater. My apologies.

~editor

Letters .. continued

on issue 2

Two issues in 2017! You're for real! I especially love all the art. It's what makes Event Horizon different from most other publications. The others may feature a few images from one painter or printmaker, but you make the visual arts an integral part of the magazine. I would guess getting all the colors right in the print edition is challenging, but the PDF is gorgeous. Your cover artist most of all. ... Congratulations

~Diane Lefer

on the Maryhill article

... Well written and interesting. Images were wonderful. And what a wonderful tribute to Lou Palermo. ... I know you are close to publication (Dec. 15) but wanted to let you know 3 things: The acres with the museum today are currently described as 5,300 not 6,000 (the latter number has been out there in the world for some time). Rodin did not give any of the drawings to Maryhill. These were held as collateral for a loan taken out by Loie Fuller in Chicago (the drawings stored at the Chicago Art Institute) until Sam paid off the loan and took possession of the drawings. What plasters and/or sculptures Rodin gave Maryhill is not clear. Most of these came through Loie Fuller herself but not all were necessarily gifted by Loie Fuller. We do have a few items given by others (a print; 3 small plasters and the Crying Lion). And finally the Tangra figures were given by Queen Marie's daughter, Elisabetha, Queen of Helenes. Again, Lanning. Great article. With warm wishes for a happy holiday,

~Colleen Schafroth

a contributing poet

... Thank you so much! It has been a goal of mine to get into Event Horizon ever since I first heard about it. I'm a bit of a science nerd, so just the title intrigued me. And I love the first two issues -- fabulous artwork! Thanks again, and thank you for all your hard work for poets and poetry. We also do small press publishing, so I know it's a labor of love.

~Jerri Hardesty

The heartbreak of pdf

My pdf treasures from the public domain are a blessing and a curse. They cannot always be easily deconstructed; a conversion to text may be so embedded with formatting that it would take longer to rebuild than to re-key from scratch. In which case, you are going to see images of the source document - which will not be as laser-sharp as print transcription. This is heartbreaking for an editor who pines for a consistent style, encompassing font, line-spacing, borders, headings and so forth. No one said it would be easy.



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Ace Boggess

3 Poems

Ace Boggess is author of three books of poetry, most recently **Ultra Deep Field** (Brick Road Poetry Press, 2017), and the novel **A Song Without a Melody** (Hyperborea Publishing, 2016). Ace acknowledges a complicated past: "He received a fellowship from the West Virginia Commission on the Arts and spent five years in a West Virginia prison." His writing has appeared in *Harvard Review*, *Mid-American Review*, *RATTLE*, *River Styx*, *North Dakota Quarterly* and many other journals. He lives in Charleston, West Virginia.

"Did You Expect a Different Ending?"

— religious pamphlet

I didn't anticipate "Dr. Livingstone,
I presume," though a classic piece
of journalism. I wanted some reaction —
more than icy glare, hypnotized by doubt;
a hint, however insignificant, of yearning.

Maybe if he said, "I dared not return,
dreading I'd left the coffee pot on";
laughed, plucked a banjo,
snorted some song about the time
he kissed his sister on a cold night

in his hot-lit hospital room;
or just swore, "Bugger off, I'm done" —
I might have let it be, but absence
makes the heart grow pissed off quicker
when we seek connection & get nothing.

It's like those cautionary jokes
about wishes gone awry
where the guy ends up with a million
four-legged bucks or a twelve-
inch pianist. Enjoyable telling,

but kind of sad later when I'm alone,
thinking, like Dantès in prison, plotting
revenge: Kings to you, Stanley (&
you, too, J.J. Abrams). Artfully done.
Good job. Go fuck yourself.

“Why Didn’t I Buy Myself a Candle?”

—Knut Hamsun, *Hunger*

There are too many sadnesses
to endure them all.
Lovers leave,
sons go off to war.
This movie ends badly,
book burns my eyes.
The street sweeper layers
a dead man’s car with dust.

I’m not the one
who mourns, who moans
about the damnable state of things.
I drink desperation
from a stream,
never drunk enough
to sate my spirit &
slowly, slowly, slowly
stagger home.

Why I Can’t Let This Moment Slip Away

I’ve wasted many: drug-
erased, TV-shackled, hiding
out of fears I can’t define.

Yesterday is a blurring dream
that won’t survive dawn’s
orange intervention.

Tomorrow rides in on promises
of wishes – muted, cerebral,
lugging the possible.

What should I want?
To smell steaks charring
on a café’s grill?

Taste of chocolate, kiss
like oranges, menthol
smoke from a cigarette?

There are shirts to fold,
dishes to rinse, hands
to hold, & wounds to mend.

Between those things,
I have love to send for anyone
willing to receive it,

return it in words, envelope
touched with fine perfume:
flowery, fading, slight.

Andrew Scott

rejuvenation never came

Andrew Scott is a native of Fredericton, NB. During his time as an active poet, Andrew Scott has taken the time to speak in front of a classrooms, judge poetry competitions as well as published worldwide in such publications as *The Art of Being Human*, *Battered Shadows* and *The Broken Ones*. His books, **Snake With A Flower**, **The Phoenix Has Risen**, **The Path** and **The Storm Is Coming** are available now.

The Light

To fully feel the light, you have to live the dark.
Walk on the narrow lines that divides each.

Tipping ones toes into the sensation
of a burning fire adds to the feeling of life.
How can something so good be wrong
with that liberating feeling?
That is the ultimate person's question.
Pain is the leader to the dark.
Self-absorbed selfishness and being rewarded
for deeds that bring pure pleasure
may lead a person further into confusion
on the tingling provided by the addiction.

The light can make you squint from the dark.
So hard and exhausting to each
and that much more difficult to stay.
Satisfaction in the hard work
assists in appreciation to everything
brought through walking properly
with the quiet glow of the light.

Living there in these immoral times
can only be grabbed and kept
through a fighting spirit.

You can only know you are there
in the light by holding the memories
provided by the dark.

Rebecca's Grave

Laying in centuries old waste,
fortified by a concrete casket
is a little lady named Rebecca.
Misjudged by butchering townsfolk
who, out of fear, did not understand.

Family farms were getting
beaten with harsh conditions.
Dry summers were burning
the barns full of their livelihood.

The famine that overtook the fields
had to be blamed on a supernatural source.
There had to be a reason from the sky.

All eyes turned to Rebecca,
a sorcerer in the town's mind.
The real explanation
for the harsh, deteriorating landscape.

Rumours of her demonic ceremonies
spread through the whispers
until they took the dark
into their own hands.

Rejuvenation never came
as Rebecca hung from a tree.
The blood did not make
the land flourish as before.
even as they buried her
in a concrete bed.

Some say that all
the land's treasures
were also lowered that day
into Rebecca's Grave.

Blood On The Mountains

There is stained red, old blood
all through the soil
in the mountains all around,
planted by the dead
who walked in the coal mines
at its frail peak.

Blood spilled by the working man
who were trying to shelter and feed
their families in the company owned,
raggedy homes built below.

The workers walked in the shafts
every day knowing they may
never walk back out.
Fear of collapses, washouts
or walking out dead with back lung.

The government man bought
by the company
so there were no safe paths
or extra dollars to make
the mountains safe.

Everyone ignored the workers inside.
The dead buried where they lay.
Unrecognizable with bloated faces
and shattered bones
when they could not breathe
another breath.

Family watching the door,
knowing when it did not open
the company would take their home
for another worker family.
All the while, loved ones
would only add to the
darkened, blood on the mountain.

Uncle Jimmy

They all call me Uncle Jimmy
but I do not know why.
None of them are a relative of mine.

I started hearing them call me that
when I was found out
to be living just on the outside of town
where I have been for 62 years.

For the first time in my life
I had to leave the little farm
that has been here for generations
and make my way into town.

On the farm, I have gardens
full of vegetables and a small pasture
that provides all the meat needed.
So I never have to leave this comfort.

That all ended when I got a letter
and a visit from a businessman.
I did not fully understand.
The words kind of all ran together on me.

The town buildings looked so different
than the last time I was here.
Last time there were more dirt roads
and not as many wires or people.

I walked into a banking building
that looked familiar to me.
One of the people explained
that my visitor was there
to take my home away.
I did not understand,
I was born there.

They explained that the land was squatted
and the people that said they owned it
were trying to take advantage of me
and my limited education.
I had no idea if the land was mine or theirs.
When the townsfolk got wind of this
and what may happen
to this future homeless person,
the citizens surrounded me
to protect against being taken advantage
until I could keep my home, land and all.

Never knew people even knew
that I was alive where I was.
The outpouring of fight for me
makes these old bones feel good.
They periodically come by the yard
to see if this old man needs anything.

The kids started calling me Uncle Jimmy
though they are not relatives of mine.
Sure brings a grin to this withered face.

Cindy Rinne

flying ice in moonlight

Cindy Rinne creates art and writes in San Bernardino, CA. Cindy is the author of several books: **Moon of Many Petals** (Cholla Needles Press), **Listen to the Codex** (Yak Press), **Breathe In Daisy, Breathe Out Stones** (FutureCycle Press), and others. She is a founding member of PoetrIE, a literary community and a finalist for the 2016 Hillary Gravendyk Prize. Her poetry appeared or is forthcoming in: Birds Piled Loosely, CircleShow, Home Planet News, Outlook Springs, The Wild Word (Berlin), Storyscape Journal, Cholla Needles, several anthologies, and others. Find her at **www.fiberverse.com**

Foreboding

*When the animals come to us,
Asking for our help,
Will we know what they are saying?*
Gary Lawless

Angie kneels under her blue phlox bush.

Holds her breath
to photograph
two yellow-billed magpies
with long tail feathers.

The birds face each other
in rapt conversation
and deep longing.

Angie presses the button
as a great horned
owl, wings outstretched,
fills her view.
The owl descends to clutch
the birds and swoops away
in silence.

Many Shelters

*The tree said my heartbeat
is the same as yours.*

Life begins in my hollows
for flickers and nuthatches.
Three hundred feet above
my roots, a silver-haired bat
flies slow and catches
a fall webworm moth
in mid-flight. This bat
looks like flying ice
in moonlight. I rustle
my needles to warn
him of owl's silent hunger.
Then bat roosts in my
upper foliage. Wolf spider,
lacewings, acorn ants,
and centipedes massage
my skin. Lodge pole
chipmunks scamper as sun
filters through my branches.
Shorter days
for the 500th time
mean silver-haired bat
hibernates while ice
insulates my limbs.

Murmurs

Sister runs her fingers along the rim of maize grinding holes
carved long before she was born. Reminds her of how mother
went missing while cooking dinner. Deep breath.
She is brave for brother as she descends towards the roar
of the waterfall. Boulders loom above, besides,
and across the rushing river. Sister is amazed
at a quiet section of the river. Here, dry grasses bend
over gentle mosaic water patterns. She sees the sandy
bottom and tries to hold the tree's shadow. A murmur
gurgles as golden rocks beckon her to climb.

Copper & Light

After Trude Parkinson

Mother's indigo shadow
transforms into a shimmered
copper silhouette

Her fragments shine

Lightning shoots

towards her from bear

Mother realizes, *this is the voice*
of my body

Light Wingbeats

Early morning cool while the sun's rays barely dance from behind the mountain. Mabel stands under a lamp post that balances raven's nest. She listens and tries to understand the loud croaks. Mabel's velour coat, the color of red wine, frays at the edges. Many years ago, he purchased it in Santa Fe before they headed home. An ache inside still pierces ten years after his heart attack. Her friend with three children has also lost her husband. Raven tries to explain she doesn't have a spouse either since he was shot. Mabel shivers and slips the top button through the hole. Remembers climbing ladders with him that clung to volcanic cliffs dotted with windows and doorways, carved homes. They imagined the scent as the Santa Clara Pueblo people cooked corn, beans, and squash. They laughed and tried to figure out which animals were drawn on volcanic rocks. Mabel gazes at raven as she swoops and senses a message, *you are not alone*. Raven grows still. *Thank you*, whispers Mabel.

C.S. Fuqua

down a long, sallow, soiled cheek

C.S. Fuqua is a poet, author, flute-maker and musician. His books include **White Trash & Southern ~ Collected Poems**, **The Swing ~ Poems of Fatherhood**, **Walking after Midnight ~ Collected Stories**, the SF novel **Big Daddy's Fast-Past Gadget**, **Hush, Puppy! A Southern Fried Tale** (children's), and **Native American Flute Craft**, among others. His work has appeared in publications such as Year's Best Horror Stories XIX, XX and XXI, Pudding, Pearl, Chiron Review, Christian Science Monitor, Slipstream, The Old Farmer's Almanac, The Writer, and Honolulu Magazine.

Deja Vu

Time pissed away by clicking
from website to website
that reveal nothing more
than news worse
than the site before.
What to do, what to do?
No control over the fool
with his finger on the button.
No control over the fools
with their finger on the fool.

Click, click, click.

Rally at the courthouse.
Chant in the sidewalk marches.
Feign power to effect change.
I recall *something*
from distant memory,
but what, *what?*
The wind blows,
dust stirs,
and stars shine
above the clouds
as time below repeats,
repeats, repeats.

Houses

The house had roofing shingles as siding.
The house had the stench of polecats.
The house had no bathroom.
The house had sheets in doorways.
The house had no warmth.
The next house had heat.
The next house had a partial bathroom.
The next house had light.
The next house had Hank Williams's music.
The next house had darkness.
The next house had a '56 Chevy.
The next house had accusations.
The next house had a '63 T-Bird.
The next house had threats.
The next house had a '65 Mustang.
The next house had fear.
The next house had hate.
The next house had shattered windows.
The next house had a busted wall.
The next house had thick belts.
The next house had fists.
The next house had loaded guns.
The next house had screams.
The next house had silence.
The next house had no one.

Eyes Wide

The clod smacks dead-on,
spraying sand into both eyes.
Cackles of laughter burn
as the school bus growls away.
The sand's a million razors,
slicing through the sudden voice in his head,
Don't rub. You want to go blind?
So he keeps his hands away,
eyes mostly closed,
kneels, feels the ground for his books,
forces down the fear *this could be it*.
With books gathered,
he starts step-by-slow-step
down the dirt road.

Squinting against the pain,
he defines a fuzzy trail leading home,
closes his eyes completely and walks,
framing the path by dogs barking,
cars on the distant highway,
wind in the trees —
measuring each step until
ruts level into the yard.
He counts steps to where
he believes the porch should be,
attempts to sit, falls, rises,
more steps, another try, falls.
You lost your little mind?
His mother grabs his upper arm,
demands an explanation.
Rushing him inside,
she dunks his face into a sink of water.
Open your eyes, wash 'em clean!

Morning arrives through a gritty haze.
Dead-aim's at the bus stop.
So you made it home.
I did, the boy says. Did you?
Dead-aim looks at him queerly, laughs.
The bus groans to a stop, doors open,
and dead-aim pushes him
up the steps,
blindly into another day.

Cows

Some days, he'd lead the herd of ten
across the dam from the field to the barn,
single-file, silhouetted against the darkening sky.
Other days, he'd bang a bucket,
call, *Oooooweeee! Oooooweeee!*
and the cows would soon cross the dam
on their own,
headed for the barn and waiting grain,
a place to sleep for the night,
to fill their bags with milk
he'd take in the morning
as they aged toward the slaughterhouse.

On weekends,
the old man's children —
scattered in all directions —
pointed their cars home,
and the grandson would watch
from underneath mimosa limbs
on the pond's far bank
as those cows returned
to the old man's call,
time and again,
long after the voice had silenced.

Water

The wind carries half the desert
through open windows,
depositing it on shelves,
floors, and countertops.
Water to clean's a necessity,
but — *goddamn it!* —
it's the desert,
and water ain't cheap or plentiful —
except in the middle of that strip of green
where a once mighty river
cuts through sand and rock
like a slow, cold, blue knife.

I grew up on the Gulf Coast
where water — so much water —
stretched to three horizons.
This desert river
may have once roared
toward the gulf,
but now it's a mere teardrop,
smearing dust into mud
down a long, sallow, soiled cheek.

Dennis Burton

when nothing remains of autumn's vibrant blush

Dennis Burton is a retiring Urban Restoration Ecologist working in New York, Philadelphia and the East Coast, founding President of the Society for Ecological Restoration-Mid-Atlantic, invasive species research specialist, and writer with Gaian leanings. He is the author of **Nature Walks of Central Park**. Dennis has played way-off Broadway, had a short stint in a rock & roll band, and appeared on a TV nature show with Isabella Rossellini to explore invasive earthworms in New York City. Dennis is a Vietnam veteran.

Anniversary

Where do 30 years go
spread over the decades
like stars sprinkled across the dim,
unfathomable cosmos
bringing a zillion points of light
and promise to eternal darkness.



Could there be any other way
for love to express itself
in that amount of time
than choosing you and I
to inherit the stars
and never have to ask,
“How do I love thee,
let me count the ways?”

Ignorance

It's better to be a rock
rounded by the river,
tumbled in beds of clear water,
smoothed by the rippling ages,
beauty unknown,
ignorant of perfection;
than a sentient thing
thinking it's more than a rock
in a bed of stones,
overwhelmed by beauty,
weighed down by perfection
blinded by perception.

El Fantasma de la Naturaleza

(Nature's Ghost)

Something we know is out there, we can feel it in our bones
its everlasting memory stepping through the catacombs
pieces of it lingering in shades of undertones
dancing all the while to the 76 trombones.

Something we know is out there, something old and grandiose;
words don't quite define it, this thing we praise the most;
our reason can't resign it until it's diagnosed;
comparisons belie it, so emptied of the Holy Ghost.

Something we know is out there, whispering in our ear
singing songs of bygone days before they disappeared
tempting us to sing along to songs we cannot hear
belting out the lyrics whose meaning is unclear.

Something we know is out there, an echo in the haze,
a mirage adrift on a ship of fools carrying captive castaways
so happy to be alive and craving the good old days
searching for a captain who turns sour grapes to cabernets.

Oh that rascal nature, like the trickster or the wind
howling through the canyons and up the mountains again,
she beckons us to follow, so comfortable in her skin
she bows her head before us before she says amen.

Something we know is out there, can't you feel it in your bones?

Just Leave My Bones
For Alfreda McDermott

In December,
as the gray sky casts grey shadows
just before the cold rain,
when nothing remains of autumn's vibrant blush
and even less of summer's verdant leaves,
long after ephemeral spring has slipped away,
when living was simple simply because I was young,
when time has gathered up my life and bequeaths a moment

to reflect on the brevity of it all
I'll ask only one thing of you,
just leave me my bones.

When all is said and done
in remembering who I was,
or for better or worse what I did and did not do,
after my being ceases to be,
and I'm a mere memory of the life I lived,
as snippets of my existence blow away like confett
after the parade,
when my portrait is an undistinguished face on the wall,
I ask of you all,
just leave me my bones.

But keep me in mind when spring returns
with its promise of eternal joy
as you lounge in those long and lazy days
that roll into billowy summer
before the lively autumn breeze
recycles the vibrant leaves.

Keep me in mind and notice
that I am not there
and promise me, really promise me
you'll just leave me my bones.

Don Campbell

easily taken in by a turning soul

Don Kingfisher Campbell, has an MFA in Creative Writing from Antioch University Los Angeles. He has taught Writers Seminar at Occidental College Upward Bound for 33 years. Other credentials in service of poetry and writing include coach, judge, artist-in-residence, regional coordinator, non-profit board member, editor and publisher. For awards, features, and publication credits, please go to: **dkc1031.blogspot.com**

Entering Meri's Yard

unhitch the swinging chain link gate
and walk into the dusty complex
where wire fenced trees grow
and desert tortoises seek shade
in front of a large faux-redwood planked fence
compound enclosing a square of goats softly bleating
before a barn roof shaped awning
housing cats and chickens and a pig
each with their own small shelter to walk into
a hot breeze blows through an afternoon
we walk around the house
crunching pebbles and avoiding poop
a petite green tractor sits awaiting engine repair
horses and llamas corralled beyond it
give way to the mountainous vista in the distance
and the 360 degree circular blue sky
easily taken in by a turning soul
watching wispy clouds race away
from tiny telephone poles that dwarf me

Self-Portrait through Sleep, Walls, and Windows

I'm not tired
because I've slept
with my huggy bear
AKA my wife

The walls are still
monuments to our lives
pictures hang
furniture co-exists

With our windows
I see other bodies
wonder if they too
write poetry about

Their sleep
their walls
their windows
inside and out

Rectangular City

four walled clouds

carpet ground

coffee table sidewalk

sofa park

vase sculpture

chair stairs

desk office

bookcase condos

bookstack building

book flats

picture frame advertisements

stereo TV multiplex

dining table food court

wastebasket dump

great lamp fan in the sky

Visitors

white jet trails
make silent crosses
in blue sky

rock clusters
huddle below
feel wind on skin

spiny yucca hands
reach up
wait to hold water again

gophers hide
inside shadows between
stone crevasses

because the sun
indifferently warms
shoe trodden sand

where heard words
reveal brown haze
rings mountains

Upside Down

The ceiling is the floor
The floor is the ceiling

Look up at the carpet
Stand on stucco

The furniture is too high
Step up through the door

Fall into the sky
Observe streets above

Amazing how cars and trees hang there
And planes and clouds swim in lower blue

Say goodbye to the wet welkin
Gaze down to the only void

Keep falling to be surrounded by black
Giant marbles all around float along

Now up is no longer relevant
But the existence of a soul still important

Between Rains

leaf blower

dog barks

clouds chill

air on skin

branches gently wave

distant plane roars

truck rumbles by

house security lights on

moss on dirt

rusted lock on bike rack

water drops on leaves

graffiti on dumpster

roses in full bloom

dark wet bark

matted down ad circular

car thumps musically

white plastic spoon in mud

Eileen Hugo

my fingers ache from rest

Eileen Hugo is retired and doing all the things she loves. She loves to cook and make quilts. She spends the summer in Spruce Head, ME. where she belongs to *The Poetry Corner* a wonderful workshop group. In the winter she resides in Stoneham, MA. And belongs to the *Middlesex Writers Group*. She has been published in various anthologies. She won first prize in the David Osgood Poetry Contest and also served time as the Poetry Editor for *The Houston Literary Review*. In April 2015, her book **Not Too Far: A journey of Words** was published.

I sink lower

I sink lower
you push me deeper
you read me chapter and verse
distribute cures
correct my life

I sink lower
you pour a thick salve on
my pathetic wounds
heavy with that which
will fix me

I sink lower
the children of my
body poke me with
less than gentle jabs
I am wounded

Resting

This unfulfilled space surrounds me
breezes wander through
leaving nothing but their
passing

This paper is blank as is
my mind my pen is full
of promises
and my fingers ache
from rest

Idyll

I come here to remember, be alone,
leave my walls and doors behind
I am not afraid of alone.

I come here for the scent of ferns,
the quiet and peaceful noise of the leaves,
and the sigh of water caressing the shore.

I come here for sustenance
to feed and drink from the air
of serenity. To remember
nothing lasts forever.

Jerri Hardesty

embraced like pigment on canvas

Jerri Hardesty lives in the woods of Alabama with husband, Kirk, also a poet. They run the nonprofit poetry organization, New Dawn Unlimited, Inc., **NewDawnUnlimited.com**. Jerri has had almost 400 poems published and has won more than 1300 awards and titles in both written and spoken word/performance poetry.

Wallflower

She hides behind
her crystal eyes,
frozen,
and unmoving,
pale,
she fades
into the painted walls,
wraithlike,
a wisp of mist,
unnoticed,
doesn't want notice,
just wants to disappear.

Robby

Painting pictures with words,
He paints words
With his pictures,
Hands reaching out for nothing,
Open mouth soundlessly loud
With the color of screaming.
Waves cannot traverse
The void within a heart,
They dissipate into art,
The shadow always showing,
The passion of the scar
Never healed,
And yet overcome,
Embraced like pigment on canvas
Of self portrait.

I Wonder

I wonder about chance,
about randomness,
about coincidence.
I wonder about Karma,
about cause and effects.
I wonder about blessings,
about close calls,
and free will.
I wonder about destiny,
I wonder about fate,
and about how these concepts
all interrelate.
I wonder about
circumstance,
and I wonder about
choice,
I wonder about luck
and its ultimate source.
I wonder about wonder,
and about unseen force.

Clockwork

Days drag beneath
the horizon line
and are gone.
the gears of night
crank the stars
up tight,
make them leak
light.
It oozes, golden,
particles striking,
iris contracting,
expanding,
it enters in
and I,
I close my eyes,
keep it contained
behind blood-laced lids
until I blink
and release
the morning.

Beneath the Mask

Beneath the mask,
A face deformed,
Dehumanized
By the limitations
Of the expectations,
Blindly mute
To the laments
Of hypocrites tongues,
Silence being consent,
And yet,
Token resentments
Ultimately force the unveiling
Of grotesque
Realization,
Revealing to the world
The mirror-faced monster-child
Gestated
Beneath the mask.

Joe Russo

paint me into the ocean

Joe Russo is "from" such places as Orlando, Florida, Katy, Texas and New York City. His writing spans these cities and the people in them. He has been published in Metaphor Magazine, Nowhere Journal, Leaves of Ink, Typehouse Magazine, Door is A Jar Magazine, Spillwords, Degenerate Literature and Centum Press's anthology **ONE HUNDRED VOICES**. Find him at joerusso8writer.wix.com/creativewriter, Instagram, Twitter and Facebook.

This

This, this fight back and forth,
This, so hard, this fight,
This dance, with love for love.

This push and pull, she pulls on my arms
And you pull on my heart,
My body a rag doll,
A plaything,

This thing made of clay
And sticks,
Not skin.
Not bone.

This turn of the moons back
On her own lover, this
Hate that stops the heart from
Falling,
This fight that breaks the heart evermore
In half,

This stage drama,
Comparing you to her,
This to that,
A star to a rock,

This,
My love for you
For my love
Of her –
Which should I choose, this,
This, fight, this chance,
To break whatever
I've created or had
This could end me.

This storm I'm caught in,
Swallowing me whole,
And all I can do is ask,
Beg, please,
For release.

The Painter

Talk to me again
Because once you get that taste
The taste of two the taste
Of your fingers tracing over my skin
The painter, you,
And me a model of clay
Mold me, paint me in strokes of beautiful colors
Lush, vibrant,
Vibrate over my skin
Paint me into the ocean
A scene, come into it,
And out of the foam I'll arise
Your
Aphrodite.

Just Like a Knife to My Heart

When I see your name on my phone,
On my screen,
On my lips,
You are the one,
The only one,
Who can make me feel the
Pain of l o n g i n g
Wanting,
(Waiting),
Needing,
(Wishing),
Missing,
(Burning),
All the pain,
(Glorious)
Of love.
Stab me, kill me,
Will me away from
Whispering your name,
Please....
It's all I beg of you.

Jonathan Thorn

serpents held the heat of the earth

Jonathan Thorn lives in Columbus, Ohio as a stay-at-home dad with his wife and five children. His works include two chapbooks, **Cutting the Mobuis** and **Sophisticated**. Jonathan is published in Wayward Sword, High Haiku, and Stroke Connections Magazine. He was nominated for the 2016 Push Cart Prize.

The Fall

The day the night wandered in
Breaking the day

The party guests who
Were not invited yawned
And mellow serpents
Held the heat of the earth
Close to their bellies

Strides of reluctant hope
Walked tall
Past the heroes whose pride
Fell
Like rain drops

Dusk inhaled light
Ringing a bell
Beginning the racing rampage
Of shadows

The thunder of hooves
Woke the unwanted
And burning fires
Stirring the snakes

There the day broke
Heroes fell and
Monsters rose

The day the night wandered in breaking the day

Worn hopes of
Worn capes
Flew away
In the wind

The Fall was that day
The Fall was that death

All things must end
No 'Energizer Bunny'
Runs eternally
No matter how much
They are powered internally...

All things died in their time
This was just the end of theirs
Shift when the clock rung
And The Fall came...
Shattering the day
When the heroes fell

Judy Katz-Levine

a prayer for our future of painted mesas

Judy Katz-Levine is a poet who is internationally published and locally celebrated. Her books include **Ocarina**, **When The Arms Of Our Dreams Embrace**, and **When Performers Swim, The Dice Are Cast.**" A new book, **The Everything Saint**, will be published in August 2018 (projected date). Besides the poetry scene, Judy is a jazz flutist. She writes jazz tunes and spiritual melodies and performs occasionally in the Boston area.

Ochre Willow Wedding

That ochre willow, my friend, sweet against
pale azure zenith. We come into our own.
The kiss of saffron leaves in winter. A ballad,
a swing tune riding on a winter kite,
a rose kite with a monarch butterfly
imprinted on its tail. I had no idea.
Never thought the woman I admired for
the sweetest contralto, so unadorned and
pure, would come to me with a wedding rose,
delight bending into the future with an
Israeli folk song resounding in the cafes of Tel Aviv.
A prayer for our future of painted mesas, a
gypsy fantasy for our wedding night.

Observation Raga

Whose lights are filled with
goodness, and those lights of
saints in the houses, some
Italian friends, a Santucci, a
Fiore, who don't talk. The smoke
of the crescent moon, the
hidden bare branch. A warm
night in November, after
Thanksgiving, and I was starving
and no one knew. Could you call
a brother, no, could you call
a friend, no, a cousin, never.
Only a hidden wife who
sings and the notes go high in
the mystery of night.

Driving to the MLK synagogue service

An autumn leaf skitters across the road
trees with lines of blues reach and cry
American flags hung in the wet breeze
A day with wet rain warm as spring
I look out the window at an old Victorian
hands trembling on the wheel
my daughter places her hand over mine
"You can tell me anything"
we're on the way to synagogue where
I will sing "Woke up this morning with
my mind on freedom" after
thirty-two days in a locked ward playing chess
with kids who tried to understand me and won

Matt Mauldin

twisted ships lurching toward the shore

Matt Mauldin is a poet living in Santa Barbara, CA, originally from Atlanta, GA. He was involved for many years in Atlanta's underground rock scene as singer and lyricist for the bands *Car vs Driver*, *Chocolate Kiss* and *Sonn Av Krusher*. His first book, **Patterns of Reconciliation**, was published in November 2017, and comprises select poems written from 1993 to 2017, organized around social, spiritual and personal themes.

Wax Casting

Your voice pleading,
heaving on the other end of the line
sucking up the air between
this episode and the tension you've razed

A tic away,
the disorder, books are strewn about the floor
scissors in hand, inanimate objects lying
in defense of gravity

Everyone pleads,
their voices pitched across octaves and back
with contingencies against what hope
remains lost

Cleaving the plot
into an idyll manor and scorching charred frame,
disparate parts seem unable to be made whole
in their defense

Scavenge in grasp,
we circle the pattern, elevating twisting symbols alight,
carelessly shifting away the calm of containment
into craft dysfunction

Gritting teeth through
the fallen hours on the other end of the line,
unable to signal motion ending
as if it never began

Summer Camp

We drove long treks- indifference and back,
from the armpit of Florida's Panhandle
to higher grounds in Tallahassee
He told me the day before, they'd met way back
in the early 19th Century,
halfway between Pensacola and St. Augustine,
breaking ground on a capital city

Peeling off miles over marshy rivers,
with docks penetrating an easing flow
Past random houses on pilings
embedded within pine trees, solitary
across vacant lots – unsold

Solemn ritual, stopping to shed light on the mileage,
biscuits and gravy at a Hardee's with senior coffee
and a flimsy plastic cup of water for the road
Exacting timing of the chemo pill 45 minutes before
the radiation treatment,
despite the fact we'd arrive an hour early

The waiting room of the cancer clinic,
sitting watching the space before him dissolve with time,
somehow without a screen to burn his eyes
Before the calling back, before the mask directing
waves to the tumor shrouding the right side of his brain,
to slow the malignancy
You asked me in hushed tones if I'd noticed anything unusual
in his movements, his quiet dignity

Pleasing October sun, the way home with tiny breezes drying air,
hints of autumn, away from the Southern California heatwave
Unaware of my state's impending secession,
you brought it to my attention after I mentioned
my civic pride in driving a hybrid
The personal connection to the lens
degrading my livelihood and passion,
much less the world around me

Stopping for lunch in a ramshackle building
nestled in whispering pines near water,
dirt in the parking lot, dusting up and stirring
the remains of the drive
Blackened gulf oysters on a bun with Louisiana hot sauce and iced tea
His glass of wine you didn't want him to finish
Settling the differences between us when the check came

Birthmarks

This mortal assignment
drawn from images entrapped with time
lapses, like tin pan layers
snapping back in blinding retreat
of a tape measure

From distance a mind's eye
only sees the black-lined quarter reaches
The edges of space determine
the depth to which the air can breathe -
it's happening in real time

The interest of reverence
determines the full range this hollow bow
can chart fulfillment from
tacit understanding of the sacred ordained
arrangement of order

Come forth from the space
craved and carved and created to covet
one's silken steely skin hardened,
lined with firm twine tension imprints,
binding the circulation

Blinding the movement of days
or the arrangements of isles owning
the differences, built out lifetimes
of knowing or not knowing how to fasten
a stake in opposing fields of wisdom

Signs of Progress

From weathered hollows, gray and orange
outcroppings sharply elevated along twisting pavement,
ascended in failed formation behind,
just waiting for the turnout, moving beyond
too quickly for the sake of others

Fallen canyon, edges into surreal haze, framing
specks of dust bearing repetition throughout lanes,
fractured from or rooted to a spine, flowing below
currents of static cargo, sweeping the imagination's
dreams that siphon their impurities

Glancing left within distraction, derricks protrude,
twisted ships lurching toward the shore
unencumbered by miles of sea retaining their majesty,
undisturbed in the channel, tricking the eye
into believing, signs of progress

Beyond all means of vision, horizon bent giving
way, purely discerned in the sharpening light
rising gods beyond the channel, impending reclamation
lying on the shore, blinking eyes reframed
in the mist of their retreat

Petra Sperling-Nordqvist

weave of love and beatitude

Petra Sperling-Nordqvist hails from Europe where she received an education in languages, literature, and philosophy (in Germany and Oxford). She has spent the last twenty years with her husband, horses, dogs, and cats in California, dabbling in teaching, writing, acting, dancing, swimming, singing, and playing music.

WELCOME!

Nobody asked me.

"Would you wish to enter?" A
Need for the treacherous safety of
Nirvana, for the fake
Comfort of
Companionship

Engendered me.

"Welcome!" nonetheless. The
Uninvited guest, stranger in the room, mysterious visitor
Unwelcome arrives
Devoid
Direction to

Navigate inhospitability.

"Who are you?" A
Cold reception, fake utterance of
Concern, and
Careless commonplaces, treacherous
Competition

Engulf me.

"Why did you come here?" I
Never chose to, did
Not opt for the abuse, and
Know not why you say I
Now have to die.

Loopdiloop

Regeneration, creation, recreation
Through the sleepy cozy cold of winter
Harmonious geometrical patterns
Mimicking life and beauty of old
The weave of love and beatitude
In knitting lore of yore
The interwoven destinies
Of cultures of humanity
Throughout history
Looping together the bands
The meandering strands
Around the globe
Weaving in earth's colors
And animal warmth
Reflecting nature's ways
Driven by heart's desire
For connectedness and comfort
For continuity and eternity

Ryan Quinn Flanagan

a colossus of embrace and duplicity

Ryan Quinn Flanagan is a Canadian-born author residing in Elliot Lake, Ontario, Canada with his wife and many bears that rifle through his garbage. His work can be found both in print and online in such places as: *Evergreen Review*, *The New York Quarterly*, *Setu*, *Literary Yard*, *Red Fez*, and *The Oklahoma Review*.

Beards Falling from Faces like Unwanted Rain

insistence Antonia –
why the cemetery wreaths must be loud
in appearance like bags of coal dragged down
a wooden hallway
beards falling from faces like unwanted rain
disparity in the Apennines again
a colossus of embrace and duplicity
bloody tracks that lead nowhere, from nowhere,
Juliet balconies sans Juliet
lines scrawled on yellow paper
and folded with the care of hospital
bedsheets, the sick fooled back into health
on a good day, wheeled in front of windows
so they may touch their furrowed faces
and find young love there
again.

Rations

There is no war without you in it.
You speak of it incessantly, smell gunpowder
on my breath. If the government is after anything
it is re-election. I try to talk sense, but you feed
parrots from the hand. Ignore their droppings
and champion such fine green heads.

If we must separate
let us ignore the illusion of church
and state.

Scrubbing behind my ears
I have never once found
you there.

Sun Spots

This is a verse
this is a curse
necklace tight neck
I am without

arms into elbows
I hug you without flowers
get undressed redressed
tinted windows for
the sun

in arms
not my arms
we take arms
of amputation

this is a curse
not my verse

I wanted so much
better.

Since Sliced Bread

We would always meet in stairwells
the way steps and vertigo do
and I remember thinking it absurd,
that tenure track way he would always say
“breadth”
at the ends of his sentences
as though his loaves never grew moldy
and had to be thrown away,
and a stairwell is much too intimate for two men
not exchanging midnight services,
I was always looking up as though he had decided
on his place in history and mine as well;
the flickering light above his head
a shoddy halo the building super never
got around to fixing
so that the light and the dark took turns
with the both of us.

Surabhi Kaushik

tighten my grip over the old

Surabhi Kaushik is an Indian writer, based in Charlotte, North Carolina. She worked in advertising in India before moving to the United States. Her work has been published in several portals such as **writer'scave.org** and **yourstoryclub.com**. She is part of various writing groups in Charlotte and is closely associated with "Write Like You Mean It", a writer's group in Main Library, Charlotte, North Carolina. She also leads a Fiction Writing group that meets every month at Main Library, Charlotte.

Octopus Roots

My roots are elsewhere
but this is where I grew

My feet planted firmly
in soil rich with opportunity

My body healthy
nourished by foreign sunlight

My eyes smiling as
I recognize
the embrace of acceptance
from faces
I did not know earlier

Now, I am here to stay
not going anywhere
almost never

But sometimes
I wander
in search of
my lost soul

Welcoming

I welcome the newness with open arms

Stretching them as wide as I can

Eager to engulf every bit I can

Learning and accepting

at the same time

Yet every now and then

I clench bits of my clothing

Like a tightened fist

And tighten my grip

over the old!

Don Flynn is an editor in Municipal Code publishing in Rochester, New York. He is a runner and a poet. Don is a published author of short stories and writes a blog at dew-dropsonalotusleaf.blogspot.com . His inspiration to write comes from F. Scott Fitzgerald, James Salter, and Ursula K. Le Guin.



Memories of a Stargazer

His house was a seventy minute drive to the shore of a deep lake. He didn't leave it very often. Groceries and supplies were brought to him by a woman friend who lived a few miles down shore. From some accounts, Alzheimer's was taking him quickly, stealing memories of his days in the lab.

It was time for an interview, probably his last. Hilversum drove south, through valleys surrounded by grape fields, trying to get an impression of the old man. His feat, which had won him a Nobel, had led to the discovery of pulsars. Hilversum had a vague idea of what pulsars were. He had a basic list of questions to ask on the notepad beside him. He wanted to think of a few more, for insurance.

Hilversum's editors told him he could be resentful of the past. Didn't want to relive it because of the envy of peers, how it tore him up inside. Made it impossible to work.

He mused over an angle for the piece: the demons of success haunt aging stargazer. He wouldn't need to know too much detail about pulsars. The real story was the price of fame.

On the other side of a long rise, the suggestion of a town appeared. A few white, wooden buildings, an abandoned gas station with old pumps, new fire hall rooted in sterile gravel. He stopped at a bait shop. An ancient 7Up sign told him he was thirsty. He stopped in a dust cloud. Inside, no air conditioning. The screen door clacked shut behind him. He opened the cooler door, grateful for the billowy cloud of winter that fell out of it, and grabbed a bottle of strawberry-flavored mineral water.

The clerk was a huge woman, stern, hawk-faced. He asked her if he was close to Juniper Lane. She rattled off directions.

Then she said: "Just get there before nightfall. When the fog rolls in, it's dangerous driving."

"I'll do that."

"If it ain't foggy, maybe you'll be able to see the lights."

"Lights?"

"Over the lake. They're bright during the summer months."

"Oh. I'll keep that in mind."

The bell signaled his leaving. To his side, he saw movement. In the shade of the store was an old husky watching him alertly. One of its eyes was blue. It barked once as he got in the car. He waved to it and drove off, drinking down the mineral water. Ahead of him the road was empty.

He got lost a number of times. The dirt roads were confusing, perilously nar-

row. He thought he'd sideswipe an oncoming vehicle. He turned on his phone to see where he was, but it wasn't much help. He started thinking about how he would get out.

The house was not large. A single storey variety of the type that sprang up around the lake in the early '60s. It was tiled a mossy green, making Hilversum think it had risen from the ground, something living. There were few adornments around the house. The yard was small; a brick walk led up to the door.

Hilversum stepped out of his car, the only one in the driveway. He looked past the house, where the shore started. The silver water rolled indolently up onto the stones. For a while, it mesmerized him. He felt disarmed, the peace stealing his resolve. The drive had left him tired.

He slammed the car door shut. Barking responded from inside the house. It was high-pitched, that of a small dog. He climbed three wooden steps and briefly rang the doorbell. With the barking, the act seemed redundant. He waited.

For a long time, there was no answer. Just the insistent yelping. He rang again, a ridiculous thing to do. Creaks came from inside the house, a measured thump. It got louder.

Then the scientist stood before him, tall, looking very like his own father. Bushy, white eyebrows, thick like an old Russian's. He extended a hand. It was strong, the bones felt solid. The joints were swollen by arthritis. At his feet, a miniature collie sniffed warily at Hilversum's loafers. It stood against his leg, tail wagging.

"I hope you found it okay," said the old man.

"No problem."

"You can call me Travis."

"Bob."

"I have some soup on the stove. Would you like a bowl?"

"No thanks. I ate before I left."

The astrophysicist moved slowly, with the aid of a cane. He poured a bowl for himself and they settled in the den. The walls there were lined with books. Hilversum drifted over toward them, the old paper smell calling up so much. He scanned the titles: Nichomachean Ethics, Broca's Brain, A Brief History of Time, Sonnets of the Portuguese. He wanted to hold them.

"I've read them all."

"You collect old editions?"

"Yes."

"They're impressive."

He became conscious of the silence and tore himself away from the books. He sat down, his questions on the pad on his lap. He placed the recorder on the table between them and turned it on.

It was a life story the old man told, maybe more than Hilversum wanted, but he'd rather have more than less. He checked off the questions as they were answered, making a few notes. The scientist was a polished communicator, having spent his last years on the lecture circuit. His voice was deep and smooth. He had known no pres-

sure or deadlines for a long time, the placidity visible on his face. It was as serene as the lake surface outside the window.

The ripples began to appear after he won the Nobel. He had to be prompted to give details about the rift with his colleagues. They came haltingly. He didn't hesitate to name names, to Hilversum's surprise, though only one of them was dead. Travis looked out of the window as he spoke, his faded blue eyes wilting under the remembrance.

"I'm sure this is the meat of your article that you're looking for, is it not? Nobody ever bothers me until Nobel time, and then the phone starts ringing. I will come clean about it now. No use in hiding it anymore."

"Well, there are the readers who will read the article for your discoveries, but most will want to know about the conflict. I know it seems like an awfully low road. There's a deeper story though, and that's the underdog who sticks to his principles. Sort of a physicist's version of 'High Noon.' "

"Sounds more exciting than it really is."

"I try to make people feel as if they're living it with you. If they can get a sense of the immediacy of the events, they'll be very sympathetic to your story."

"I don't need the sympathy," said Travis, turning.

"What are your reasons for talking?"

Travis lowered his head and walked back to the chair. There was dried soup on the front of his red plaid shirt. After he sat, his breathing was still audible.

"I'm doing this for me. I'm not long for this world, so I'm putting it on record. My dying confession."

"Dying, sir?"

"I'm sure you've heard that I have a degenerative brain disease by now. It's true. It's a race to see which gets me first, the disease or a bottle of Valium. And don't give me the 'it's not worth it' speech. I may be joking."

Hilversum was at a loss. The comment, the offhandedness of it, froze him. He examined his pencil closely.

"It must be very difficult," he said at last.

"Oh no, it's easy to lie in bed all night, sweating. I won't get into that, however. What's next, more about the intrigue in the scientific community during my tenure? More elaboration on that?"

"I won't go on record with your physical condition, if that's what you'd prefer. That can stay here in this room."

"That doesn't bother me," Travis said abruptly, "just don't tell them I've been having suicidal thoughts. They're not as uncommon as we think. I suppose you've never been troubled by them."

"I was, when I was thirteen. It's a tough age for a lot of people, I suppose."

"So is seventy-eight. I'll give you something to look forward to, how about that?"

Travis went on about the professional quarrels. Outside, the light diminished. Evening spread from the dark places in the nearby woods. A breeze rushed through

the pines, sounding like a forced breath. Hilversum wrote more notes as the physicist revealed unexpected details. The story began to write itself, a thing Hilversum rarely experienced. Inside him, his heart leapt.

As he wrote, he heard, "Here, let me look at your questions."

Travis extended a knotty hand towards him, gravity in his expression.

"Why?" Hilversum asked defensively.

"Just curiosity. I want to see how reporters write these things down. And it might help me. If you don't mind, of course."

"Not at all." Hilversum gave him the legal pad.

Travis slipped on a pair of black, horn-rimmed bifocals and read down the page. His lips moved faintly. His aspect metamorphosed before Hilversum's eyes. The scholarly pose was there, identical to a famous picture of him in a 1967 issue of Life magazine. Only the black hair was missing. The lines, hinted at then, were deeper, channels dredged by the engines of thought.

His brows joined as he reached the bottom.

"'Pulsars' with a question mark. What does that mean?"

Hilversum cleared his throat. "I had meant to research it more before I got here."

"You mean we've been discussing the cornerstone of my research and you're not sure what they are? Why didn't you say something? You needn't have worried, I wouldn't let the shock register on my face."

Travis laughed, the notes of his voice deep and sharp, pounding the air. "How refreshing," he repeated to himself.

"I have the layman's idea. I won't bother you for the particulars. I'd like to shed some light on a point you made about the flaw in Kragen's research that took him--"

"Do you know what we thought they were at first?"

Travis was leaning forward, palms pressed together, the glasses dangling from his thumbs. His eyes seemed lit by an urgent memory.

"Pardon?"

"We thought they were beacons. Signposts erected by intergalactic travelers to help map out the galaxies. Lighthouses on the shores of a black, infinite sea guiding lightspeed cruisers toward safety, maybe toward home. You see?! We were certain we had the first pure evidence of a more advanced race of aliens that had charted, or had begun charting, the universe. Later observation revealed this to be impossible, but initially we were like children with a secret."

"I'm not sure if I follow," said Hilversum.

"Pulsars are bodies of incredibly dense matter, the remnants of a dead star, similar to black holes. Black holes are so dense that their gravity permits nothing to escape its influence, hence their name. Pulsars are not quite so dense. In their case, we find a short, regular pulse of energy that escapes the gravitational field. The burst is so regular that, for a short time, we gave credence to the idea of it as a space 'buoy'."

Travis sat back. He looked at the floor, shiny-eyed, vacant.

"At that moment, we felt as if we sat at the right hand of God. We had reached

across heaven and pulled back a curtain. It's difficult to retain perspective after . . . after witnessing something like that."

Hilversum was caught off guard. He waited for the old man to convulse into laughter, to let him in on the joke. In his mind, these pragmatic young giants did not indulge in belief in aliens. He thought of images from sci-fi B movies. The feeling of incongruity was overwhelming.

Maybe it was the disease. Travis' curdling brain confusing his serious work with the UFO paranoia prevalent during his youth.

"But you found out it was a natural phenomenon?"

"Yes. The odds say that there has to be someone else out there, very likely more advanced. This wasn't our proof though. Ever do any reports on UFOs, Bob?"

"No, sir. To be honest, I have trouble accepting the theory of aliens trying to contact us."

"Why is that?"

"It just seems like such a long shot, I guess."

"Oh, you're absolutely right, it is a long shot. Put together two advanced intellects, however, and the possibility is there. I have friends who've worked for NASA for years, they could tell you stories that would make the hair on your neck stand out. It would have to be off the record. They won't tell me why; if the government is involved, it has to be shrouded in mystery."

"Have *you* seen anything?"

Travis was still, as if he hadn't heard the question. Hilversum was on the brink of rephrasing it.

"What time is it?" Travis said.

Hilversum looked at his watch. "Ten after nine. I'm sorry, I didn't realize it was so late."

"It's a gorgeous evening. Would you mind if we headed out to the dock and sat? It's a summer ritual for me."

"Uh, certainly. Sounds like a fine idea."

The lake was smooth as marble, the sunset wind now gone. A crackle overhead. Hilversum looked up at the blue pallid glow of a bug zapper. Lightning bugs shone briefly in the air before him. Into the woods their flares danced, brushstrokes of flame flashing in crazy paths. Hilversum imagined things, remembered childhood fears. He wanted to take a vacation after this assignment.

Splashes, as fish jumped periodically. Few lights on the opposite shore. It was less developed. Beyond them, the hills rose, a black implacable wall. Night air was thick and sweet here, far from the city, the effect making him sluggish. He moved as if under water.

They sat on the narrow dock, Hilversum gazing out over the lake, feeling in miniature, on the edge of a huge table. The dark air embraced him.

Travis spoke of fishing on this lake as a teenager. His family had a cottage several miles south of here, built when Truman was president. It was torn down after his mother died.

"They didn't know it then, but I think it was the same malady that took her. I know what's coming for me."

The moon was just past new, the shape of a sharp crescent, above the hills. Hilversum looked down at the other docks, reaching from the shore. A dark figure moved on one of the more distant jetties. Voices floated in from that direction, a party spilling out into the night.

"I have seen things, Bob. A lot that I can't explain. My job was looking at the sky, I was bound to see something. Most of it was garden variety stuff, like you'd see on the news. There are plenty of hoaxes, but I believe some of it is honestly perplexing."

"So you've seen strange discs in the sky, flying hubcaps, that sort of thing?"

"All of it unexplainable. I'm supposed to have the explanations! You've seen the Mars photographs?"

"Yes. Many of those have been debunked or expl--"

"The canals alone. That planet has ice caps for God's sake, you can't tell me it's always been barren. Those statues that look like women. They can't be certain. Pictures only capture the surface. There's no telling what's underneath that red dirt."

Hilversum feared losing the thread of the interview. He waited for Travis to pause, for an opportunity to redirect the subject.

"The first time I saw the lights was here, at the old cottage after my parents moved here. Two of them, and they didn't behave like aircraft. They still don't. Look to the south there, just over that peak. You'll see them."

Hilversum followed the scientist's outstretched arm. To the south, he saw the star-rich sky, nothing more. He scanned slowly, top to bottom, left to right. Then he saw it. One light among the others moved. Short, rapid bursts of speed. Impossible speed for a distant object. The light it emitted slowly alternated between hues – pink, red, orange, pale yellow.

A second light began moving in the same fashion. Between movements the lights would hover for breathless moments, glinting sharply. Otherwise they moved at random; sometimes, it appeared they collided and bounced off of each other at straight angles.

Hilversum reached out towards them, waving, as if they were bright winged insects in the air before him. His reaction was an odd mixture of disbelief and fear. He felt tingling in his neck and cheeks.

"I've seen these two every summer of my life since I was eleven, with the exception of 1969. The summer we went to the moon. I don't know what they are. Everybody who lives here has seen them. Got any theories?"

A thought struck him.

"This lady in a store mentioned lights. I thought she meant stars. Falling stars."

"Are you still skeptical?" Travis asked.

Hilversum had lost sense of time. It felt like hours before they disappeared. First one, then the other. He heard Travis again, sounding wistful, resigned.

"I hope I'm still around when they land."

Gwendolyn Joyce Mintz sums up that she juggles roles as mom, writer, teddy bear artist and comedienne/actress. Indeed, taken in order, her children are young adults, she has been writing all her life, she is currently focusing on the technical challenges of teddy bear nose embroidery and the accompanying piece is a fierce parody. She is also an editor and a photographer. Gwen's advice to a writer just starting out would be, "Read and read and read. Cultivate faith in yourself as well as humility. Remember that what you're doing is important, but it's not brain surgery. Have fun. Strive for uniqueness and originality."



If You Loan a Drunk Five Dollars

If you loan a drunk five dollars, he'll be terribly thankful. *You saved me; you don't even know.*

You'll tell him it's nothing.

He'll keep on, promise to pay it back *with interest* though he doesn't say when that will be. He'll ask if there's anything he can do for you--*Right Now*--'cause he's so grateful.

You'll think of chores you've been putting off and you suggest he mow your lawn.

Saturday morning he'll arrive early. The buses aren't even running yet. He'll mention several times how he could be sleeping but he's there to mow your lawn.

You'll take him to the shed where the mower is.

He'll spend a few minutes with it before he tells you it needs gas.

The two of you will head to the corner convenience store and when you go to pay for the gas, he'll ask you to get him a cigarillo.

Back at your place, he'll need to smoke it--so much has not gone as he'd planned. He'll find a place on your back porch, away from the gas and mower. He'll ask for something to drink. A beer, if you've got one.

You'll suggest he have the beer when he's done.

Really? After he walked over to mow your lawn and you can't help him out with a beer? *Talk about ungrateful.*

He'll start to stomp away. Then he'll stop and ask if you have some bucks he can borrow for a taxi ride home.

Annika Lindok is an English teacher in Estonia. . She translates film titles and writes stories. Her works have been published in Zoetic Press's Nonbinary Review, Ariel Chart, Zombie Pirate Publishing's Relationship Add Vice Anthology and GloMag.



Turn Left, Angel

"Stop! Don't move!" yelled Mike. "Put your hands up in the air!"

The man stood shivering in a pool of mud, grasping a gun in his trembling hands.

"Do it!" Mike repeated his command, aiming at his prisoner's head with a gun.

The man did not react in any way, but his big blue eyes were round in fear as he stared at us.

"Mike, he doesn't understand you," I said. "Let me try."

Mike looked at us in turns, not being able to decide what would be the best course of action.

"Hands up!" he yelled once more.

The man, startled by the loud voice, dropped his gun, which fell into the mud, and put his hands together begging: "Bitte, nicht schießen!"

His accent was not that of a German, in fact much more wooden sounding than mine. So he was a foreigner like us.

"He is not German," I calmed my mates and lowered Mike's gun, pointing it to the ground.

"I don't care what he is. Look what he has on his sleeve!"

There were three emblems on the man's left sleeve- a blue, black white one in the middle, a two-stripe triangle below and an eagle above both of them. It was easy to guess which one of them Mike had referred to.

"Woher kommst du?" I asked. "Was ist deine division?"

"Waffen-Grenadier-Division der SS, Genesungskompanie," answered the man, his voice shaking.

"Frank, what does he say?" asked James, stepping closer.

"He is from some SS brigade," I translated. Things still didn't look much better for the man.

"An enemy, that is. To be shot on spot," decided Mike.

"What?" interrupted James.

"I heard that's what the Germans do," said Mike.

"Precisely!" yelled James. "Which is why we are not going to behave like them."

He then turned to me. "Take the gun from the ground and bring him along with us."

"That's not true actually," I said quietly. "They don't."

"What?" asked James.

"Nothing." I bent down to take the gun from the ground and hung it on my shoulder. It was of no use anymore.

"Hey, hey, no. I won't agree to this." Mike argued.

"No one asks you to. It's two against one," said James. I nodded to show it was indeed so.

"Cowards!" spat Mike and turned around on heel.

"Du, unser gefangener," I snapped in my faulty German and gestured the man to come along.

As we were walking I lagged behind the other two in order to try and have a word with our new prey. He looked scared and it was hard to believe that this was what the enemy was supposed to embody, shaking knees and all.

"Wie heißt du?" I asked.

"Peeter," he answered, surprised at my attempt to have a conversation with him.

"Peter?" I repeated. "That's not a German name."

"Was?"

"Es ist keine deutscher Name," I said.

"Aber ich bin nicht Deutch," he said.

"Nein?"

"Nein, ich bin ein Estnisch," he said. "Und du?"

"Frank."

He gave me a weak smile, repeating the name under his breath in order to try and remember it.

"What are you talking about there?" asked Mike bitterly.

"I'm interrogating him," I answered.

"You can do that once we get back to others," he said.

The circumstances turned out different, however, as it started to rain heavily. We tried to find shelter under the fir trees. Once the rain stopped it was so cold and dark Mike decided we ought to put up a campfire and wait for the morning. For once we agreed with him.

"You insisted on not shooting him, so be kind enough to guard him now," said Mike.

"I'll switch you after a couple of hours, just wake me up," whispered James. He always had been the more reasonable one.

I tampered the fire with a branch and observed my prisoner, who was sitting in front of me, warming his hands by the fire, peeking up at me every now and then. He had blue eyes, pointed chin and skinny cheeks, his lip line sharply contoured. He took off his hat and slid through his light blonde hair with his hand. The whole nature of the man made me curious. He looked very...Aryan. Yes, that was the word. Peter noticed my gaze.

"Was ist das?" he asked.

"Nichts," I said quickly.

He smiled again.

"Danke," he said almost inaudibly.

"Warum?" I asked.

"Für Mein Leben."

His life? It wasn't me actually, it was James who had managed to finally persuade Mike not to shoot him.

"So, how did you end up here?" I asked. "Where are your comrades?"

He glared at me over the fire. Then he sighed and sat close to me.

"Okay, there is no point lying. I ran away."

"Deserter!" I blurted.

"Shh!"

I glanced over at our two companions. They were fast asleep.

"Why did you run away?" I whispered.

"Why? Our company was coming back from Denmark. We were supposed to join with Made battalion, but you know what happened to Made battalion in March?"

"No, what?"

"They got in the way of British bombing. Over fifty were wounded, or so I heard. I was afraid."

"What was going to happen to you when you would have joined them?"

"They surrendered to the British."

"Just as you did now. No difference whatsoever," I said. "Why did you join the division anyway?"

Peter looked at me suddenly as if I'd asked something unexpected.

"What's it to you? We are just some fascist dogs to you."

"Are you?" I asked.

He turned stubbornly silent.

"You look very young," I said.

"I'm seventeen."

Seventeen. So young.

"Hitler is dead," I said.

"Papa Stalin is not," he answered.

So that was what it was all really about?

"You think I have no idea what I'm doing because I'm young. But I do. We were fighting against the Russian imperialism. We were fighting against the Bolsheviks. We fought for our country," he said. "We fought for not having to teach our children at schools in Russian instead of Estonian. Have you any idea what it is like? To make choices like this?"

I shrugged my shoulders.

"Of course you don't. You on your little island. When was the last time you had to choose between the two evils? Oh but wait, you have. And you've helped them to victory. To keep your own power, to preserve your own country you have sacrificed many others. You have sacrificed us to keep your seas to yourselves." He turned his back on me and rolled to his side.

"But the Germans, did they give you your country back?" I asked warily but he didn't answer, so I kept staring at the bonfire all alone, while everyone around me was fast asleep. I did not wake up James. At some point, I must have closed my eyes for a brief moment and fallen asleep.

The morning greeted us with an improved weather. The fire had died out.

"Get up!" yelled Mike and poked me with his toe.

I opened my eyes. My prisoner was still sleeping a little further from me.

"You were supposed to watch over him."

"Yes, I know," I said.

"Why didn't you wake me?" asked James.

"It's alright, see?" I gestured towards sleeping Peter.

"It's not alright! He could've escaped!" yelled Mike.

"Why do you care? What were you going to do with him anyway? Torture him for information? Wouldn't be the first time, would it?"

"Watch your tongue," warned Mike.

"Watch your attitude," I answered.

"That's it!" yelled Mike and catapulted his fist against my face.

I fell on the ground like a jelly, warm blood dripping from my nose.

"You broke my nose, you imbecile!" I cried.

"Was Machen sie?" asked Peter, who had woken up by now as well.

James tried his best to restrict Mike who did not wait for me to get up from the ground. He had heaved all his belongings on his back and walked towards the woods.

"Where are you going?!" yelled James.

To my surprise, Peter was the one to help me get up from the grass, and put a handkerchief in my trembling hands. I held it to my nose.

"You in trouble now?" asked Peter.

I did not know. Mike's anger could be devastating. Anyway, we were supposed to be getting back by now. I took my bag and my gun, threw them over my shoulder and started to follow in the direction where Mike had gone. James pointed his gun at Peter and told him to get a move on.

"Hey, there's no need!" I told him. "Put that away!"

As I had expected, Peter came along without any objections. We walked for a while in silence when a horrible thought struck me. Why had I not realized before? What would happen to Peter once we delivered him? Trial? Would they execute him? He was a deserter. If his own comrades found him, they would shoot him on the spot. And he really was just a child. There was no good outcome.

James stopped to take a wee on the road at the edge of the forest and told us to walk on, he would catch us in a minute. Alright, we would be alone for just a couple of seconds at the most.

"Peter!" I hissed.

He turned around.

"Go!" I said. "Go now!"

"What do you mean?"

"Run!"

He was still looking at me suspiciously. "You let me go?" and he glanced at the gun hanging over my shoulder. "What about you? What would they do to you?"

"Never mind what they would do to me," I argued.

"But..." "What? I'm not going to do that."

"Ugh, we don't have time for this," I decided quickly and hit him in the face. In confusion, he answered with same and my nose which had just ceased to bleed started to drip again like a broken tap.

"Thank you, that was good," I said but the man grasped me in a headlock, strangling me.

"Hey, what are you...?" I gasped and saw James coming back towards us from afar. Peter must have seen him too, as he let me go and ran towards the trees. James realised what had happened and he loaded his gun and raised it, aiming at our fugitive. I closed my eyes and heard a shot. Steps. James was running to me.

"Are you alright?" he asked me.

"No."

He pulled me up by the collar, "How could you let it happen? Have you got a gun or not?"

"Did you get him?" I asked trying to sound as indifferent as possible but my voice shook treacherously before I could finish my sentence.

"No, he went towards the forest. C'mon we can still catch him."

I smiled victoriously and looked away quickly so that he could not see.

"I don't care, we should get back as quickly as we can and that manhunt will slow us down," I protested.

"But..."

"Our task was not to bring any prisoners, we were supposed to gather information about the landscape," I tried to persuade him.

"From him, we would have gotten the information!" cried James. "Clean yourself up and let's get going!" He ran ahead like a hunting dog, who had just caught the glimpse of deer smell.

I followed him hoping we would not have to encounter Peter anymore. James ran ahead, his gun ready to be shot. A silhouette of a man showed behind the trees. Oh no! No, no, no, I wanted to shout, to warn him. Where had this sudden urge to save the stranger come from? Was empathy towards your enemy the same as betraying your country, I figured as I was running after James.

"Mike!" yelled James. "I was nearly about to shoot you. What the devil are you doing here?"

"I was waiting for you guys," said Mike and stepped on a cigarette stump he had just finished. "Why is there only two of you?"

James looked towards me instinctively. He was not a talebearer by nature but this subconscious move had given me away.

"He ran off," I said simply and wiped my nose with Peter's handkerchief.

"Fuck sake!" Mike cried out. "I dare say I am surprised both of you are still alive, you clumsy idiots!"

"Take that back!" I yelled.

"Guys, don't start again..."

"There's no need James, I can handle this," said Mike.

"No! You are not going to fight. Let's just go back to our division," said James.

I glanced at him disapprovingly and just as much as Mike and I wanted to kick

each other to the next week, we managed to continue our journey at daggers drawn silently.

A couple of days went by uneventfully while I could not forget Peter all the same. I thought about him many a time before I fell to sleep.

One day, I received a letter. I never got any letters. My mother never wrote to me and all my friends were too busy with the same war that I was. So whom could I receive any letters from? The envelope did not have any address. I ripped it open eagerly. Nothing could have prepared me for this.

Inside was a paper filled with tiny compressed handwriting.

Dear Frank,

First of all, I must thank you for you know what. I haven't forgotten the kindness you showed to me.

In case you are wondering, I am safe for now. I have managed to find myself a place to stay. For my safety as well as yours, I can't tell you exactly where.

If miracles should happen and you, in fact, want to see me, turn left at the third forest target you see when coming from the K. Highway. Walk straight ahead until you see the old bridge crossing the river. I'll wait for you there on Wednesday night. And the next should you not come. The option is all yours of course.

Sincerely,

Peeter/

I stared at the letter in disbelief for a moment, then turned it around to see the post stamp. There was none. Someone came in, I jerked and hid the letter under my clothes. Later, inquiring the whereabouts of the letter, no one knew who might have delivered it.

On the said night, against everything I would have thought myself capable of, I sneaked out to the forest, heart beating in my chest from fear of getting caught. But I did go all the same. The forest was dark and silent at this time. It would have frightened me more had I not seen frightening things in my life so much already. I was actually far more scared of encountering a human being than a wild animal. I hoped the said bridge was not too far, I had to get back at a reasonable time. There! There was the first forest target. After a couple of minutes, I saw the second one. And the third one I counted. That's right, now just turn left and walk on the river bank as long as you see a bridge.

I was slightly shivering with cold although it was May. Not that our Mays were any significantly warmer... Hey, there was a bridge indeed! I slowed down. It could have been some sort of a trick... Maybe someone had found out about the letter... I approached very carefully. There was no one. I was alone and disappointed. I had hoped to see Peter, whatever the reason. Then I heard something. Someone had stepped on a branch. I turned around to see who that was. Peter! He was there, he was with me!

"I can't believe it!" he shouted.

"Keep it down will you?" I warned him but I was glad myself.

"Why did you come?"

"You asked me to come," I said.

"Alright, let's go. I'll show you everything," he said, dragging me off the road towards the forest with himself.

"It's not very far but there are several ways to get there and I have forgotten about them a couple of times. It was not nice."

"Where are we going?" I asked.

"Didn't I tell you? There is an old abandoned house further there. It hasn't been empty for long. A year maybe. The stove works alright, I would make the fire in it more often, but the smoke would give me away if there is no wind. It keeps warmth alright, I made the fire couple of days ago and it is not completely cold in the rooms yet. It's just the lack of food that keeps me on my edge," he explained.

"Oh," I suddenly remembered. I had brought a slice of bread and a good heavy tin of meat with me. "There," I said and handed over my scarce supplies. He ate on our way, he was so hungry. I watched him chew as I stumbled upon something on the ground. It was a goat skull. A few steps further I found other remnants of the poor animal, backbones and pelvis casually laying around. It reminded me once more, that we hadn't come exactly for a picnic. There was a war going on.

"Are there many wolves here?" I asked out of curiosity, not fear.

"Not that I have encountered any but I suppose there is one family," said Peter, seemingly not in the least disturbed by the idea.

We reached a meadow. The said house was surrounded by blackberry bushes and ash trees. It had a roof on, all of the walls stood erected and window panes still hung on their place. A plough in the long dried grass stood just as it had been left the last time it was used for work. Like someone had just forgotten it there and was coming back soon to finish his job. Under the big oak tree, there were a couple of wheels and some huge machine, entirely covered in grass, maybe a threshing machine, I couldn't tell.

Peter opened the door and invited me in with bows of courtesy. He was humorous like that. He then lit a small candle so that we could see our roundabouts.

It was a nice small house, relatively empty, as all that was worth anything had evidently been carried away. There were some carpets and curtains left hanging, someone's old decaying coat on the wall and a wooden cot in the corner.

"Is that where you sleep?" I asked jokingly.

"There is a bed in the other room," he said and led me to the living room. An old iron bed, covered with an army blanket stood by the window.

"And what do you do here all day?" I asked.

"Oh, a little bit of this and that," he answered, trying to straighten things up a bit as he was speaking. He then put a bottle of something red on the table.

"Took it in from the cellar. Had to break the lock to get in. Luckily I found a couple of bottles full of home-made wine and some fermented jam. These have kept life in me so long but barely."

"Fermented jam? I can't imagine."

"Neither can I. I've been eating and puking with a similar density these days."

"God curse this war," I said.

"Amen."

The wine was bloody awful but the chill got under my bones and I had to choose between either catching a cold or suffering this nauseating fluid from hell in me.

It was a mad situation I had gotten myself in either way. Peter drank from the same bottle and threw pebbles at mice, laughing.

"Some nerve these creatures have!" he remarked.

I observed the stove under which the wretched mouse had come from. Wooden chips lay at the stove's mouth.

"You carve?" I asked.

"Yeah, in the early mornings. Helps with boredom. I can't sleep much anyway."

"Isn't it a little bit dark in here?"

"Yes, or cosy, depends on the viewpoint."

"Is that why you asked me to accompany you?"

"Maybe," he admitted.

"And you are not afraid of me?"

"You are not very frightening."

I burst out laughing.

"Would you prefer to be?" he asked.

"I don't know. It could serve as a benefit."

"Why did you save me?" he asked putting the candle to melt on the only table this poor old house had and looked me in the eye in dim light.

Why indeed? I had asked myself the same question many times without finding a reasonable enough answer.

"I like you," I said looking at the dusty floor, pretending it was just a casual conversation with an old friend and not a stranger.

"But why?" he asked quietly his blue eyes shining back at me in anticipation.

"Has no one ever liked you?" I asked.

He did not answer but sat down at the table on a three-legged stool, observing me. It made me feel a bit nervous.

"You are my kind of person," I continued boldly. "You are...very witty."

The man stood up suddenly. I was taken aback by the suddenness he came towards me, taking my head in his hands.

"No one," he said, "Has ever told me I was witty."

"Surely you must know," I said, and it felt like my words just flew into his mouth as he stood so close to me. "With all that peculiar mind of yours."

"Would you like me to be even more peculiar?" he asked and without waiting for my answer pressed his lips against mine. The suddenness of the act surprised me. It was a long and soft kiss. The softest I ever had. I forgot to breathe. We are both getting shot, was my first thought.

"Yes, I like that," I whispered.

"How about that?" he asked, sliding his hand under my shirt.

"That's getting even better."

He ripped off my shirt and kissed my collarbone as if he had practised that a million times before. I kissed him again, licking his lips in eager anticipation and hunger. The bulge in my pants was suddenly in his hands and he seemed to know well what he was doing when he dropped down to his knees in front of me. I never knew anyone's lips could be so soft and tender against mine. The air smelled different. He was so tightly around me. I was in velvet. I heard a young man moan and it was me. I closed my eyes, I was not myself, I was the forest around us, the moon above us, the decaying house, the candlelight. My hand had grabbed his head- when did that happen?- and his hands me. He worked me so quick I didn't have any breath left and finished in his hands in seconds. The reality came back. The room was dark, the tiny candle had burned up. I sat on the edge of the bed, my head between my hands. It had all come so quickly and I had no idea, what to do. Maybe I shouldn't have let it happen?

"Hey," said Peter, sitting next to me. "Hey, it's alright."

I felt so tired, fell on the bed, enervation taking over my muscles. He laid beside me.

"Are you going back home when it's all over?" I asked after a while. What a stupid question. But the silence was unbearable too.

"I don't know. If I can. But I have no one at home."

"What happened?"

"They died. That's all." His voice was calm and quiet as if he hadn't said anything horrible at all.

"And you still care so much..." I said.

"About what?"

"What happens to your country."

"Don't you?"

"Yes, but I have a future there." Just as I'd spoken the words I realised I had made a mistake.

"Future? But we have the past. That's all we will have left now..." He closed eyes and fell asleep soon. I was alone.

I left early in the morning, sneaked through the forest and got back before anyone could notice I had been gone. I knew I had made a mistake. I also knew I was going to make many of those in the future.

I went back to Peter. I brought him a bit of food, soap and candles every time and he looked forward to meeting me. We could be together only at nights, and at daytime, we only dreamt of getting back together. Long hours spent apart seemed wasted. Who knew when it would suddenly end? Carpe diem for us was carpe tenebra.

The only difficult part was not getting late to my barracks. One morning I was late as it was bound to happen when you gamble with luck. I arrived just in time as others were already washing and putting the kettle on the fire.

"Where do you come from?" asked Mike suspiciously. He never liked me, this rot-

ten bastard, always sneaking around.

"Took a walk, is that a crime?" I snapped.

"Took a walk where?!" he yelled at me as I passed him but I gave him no answer.

The division was going to move and I could not meet Peter anymore. I always knew the day would come soon but in my loving child's heart, I never believed it. I did not think about it. After nearly getting busted, it took me three nights before I could pluck up my courage and return to the house. I had to tell Peter the bad news. He was not waiting for me outside as he usually did. Maybe he was ill? I hoped not. That would be the worst.

"Peter!" I yelled his name. "I brought you tinned pork! Where are you?"

Silence. I stepped into the house. It was empty. I sat on the stairs at the doorway and waited. Sure he was not to know I would come tonight. But where could he go? I waited for five hours, getting further hopeless by the hour, the unnerving feeling crept under my skin, that something must have happened. As I was sitting there, I looked over and over the words, we had carved words in the doorstep as a memorabilia and I began to silently weep as I stroked them with my finger. *The days spent here, we'll never forget, and if we should die, we have no regret. - Frank and Peter.*

Now, something had been added to the note. *Beware wolf.* The grammar was peculiar but Peter never used prepositions correctly. Perhaps he had seen one and carved the words there out of boredom?

I could not decide whether to stay and wait or go, so I did nothing. My eyes had gotten used to the dark and I observed the forest around me. It was comforting to know that I was in a house on a meadow, a few hundred metres separating me and the dark forest. I don't exactly know why the forest started to feel scarier for me. Perhaps because it was the first time for me to be alone for so long in the abandoned house in this godforsaken place.

"Peter, where are you..." I whispered. I needed to hear a human voice, never mind if merely my own. Poor Peter, I knew now, how it must have felt like to sit alone here all those evenings by himself. Suddenly I saw someone moving at the edge of the forest. On two feet! I jumped with joy and ran a couple of steps towards Peter... I stopped. It was not Peter. It could not have even been a human being. I stood like a pillar, my skin covered in cold sweat. It should have been wiser to run the other way, away from this unknown creature, but my feet were nailed to the ground. I swallowed. Something or someone was moving there, I saw a long shadow behind the trees. Why was it lurking? It had looked like a human though. Except that now it was moving on all fours. I heard my own breathing and it scared me because it made everything feel more real. Something was watching me from the shadows, sneaking closer and closer. Peter had said there are wolves here. And now one had just noticed me. It struck me as odd though, why was it not scared of me? Was it sick? I took a gun from my shoulder with trembling hands and aimed at the lurking shadow. If it comes towards me, I'll shoot. Nothing happened for a good five minutes or so. Just me, sweaty and almost wetting myself and this odd monster ready to attack. Had he eaten Peter? Had Peter left me a final warning when he sensed there was a wolf lurking around the house?

And then it struck me! I had read the message wrong! What if it was not *beware wolf*, what if it had been: "*bei werwolf*"?

"Guten Abend."

"Mike?"

It was definitely his voice, although the creature who had said it looked nothing like Mike. I almost dropped my gun when this vile thing suddenly revealed itself, coming towards me, speaking in human and walking on four legs. It was the biggest wolf I have ever seen in my life. It looked disgusting because it had almost no hair as if someone had burned it.

"Do you recognise me?" it asked.

"Mike...Michael..." I whispered. "What are you?"

"Hitler's biggest secret. Well, a part of it. Ever heard of Operation Werwolf?"

"You are a spy."

"Good. You are not a fool, I see. Amazing you are. It took your dear Peter ages to figure it out."

"What have you done with him? Where is he?"

"Im Wolfsschanze."

"You are lying."

The wolfman laughed. It was the most horrid mixture of laugh and growl one can imagine. I swear I don't know how I managed not to faint at what I was witnessing with my own eyes and hearing with my own ears.

"I'm going to kill you," I said and aimed my gun at him.

"You are welcome to try," he answered. And as I shot the gun, it took a giant leap at me and landed on me as I fired. Was it dead? It was not moving though its teeth were touching my bare neck. I crawled out from under this huge dog's body and saw Peter running towards me.

"My God, are you alright?" he asked.

I could not believe he was there.

"What happened? Did I kill it?"

"No, I did. It takes a silver bullet," he answered.

"I don't understand."

"Well, as he had caught me and dragged me through the woods, he figured that he saw you leaving earlier and went back to await you, to catch you as well. I pretended I had fainted and as he was changing into a werewolf I took his gun from his clothes and loaded it with a silver bullet. He had bitten me in the leg so I could not follow him back to the house quickly enough. He almost caught you, I'm sorry."

"It's fine. You keep talking about this silver bullet. Where did you get one?"

"Oh, I had seen the bastard lurking around the house a couple of nights before, but he didn't dare to attack while I was near the fire. So I melted my silver ring and prepared the bullet to welcome him. Unfortunately, I did not have my gun anymore so I had to wait for you to get here, alas he caught me before you arrived."

"I'm sorry. If I had known..."

"How could you have. Don't worry any more. He is dead."

I looked at the motionless body on the ground.
"What do you figure, how many more are there?" I asked.
"I 'd rather not know. But they can't be here."
"No, I suppose not. Do you reckon we get a medal for killing him?"
"No, and now I don't even have my ring."
"You have me," I said, took a tiny key ring out of my pocket and slid it on his finger. It was the best I had to offer.

Olga Onoyko is a contemporary Russian writer from Moscow who has written seven published novels since 2005. Her work has received international recognition including the 2007 Debut Prize for her novel "Surgical Intervention" and the 2009 European Science Fiction Society Encouragement Award. This story is her first English-language publication.

*Translated from the Russian by Isaac Stackhouse Wheeler. Isaac is a poet and translator best known for his English renderings of books by the great contemporary Ukrainian author Serhiy Zhadan with co-translator Reilly Costigan-Humes. Their first book, **Voroshilovgrad**, was well-received. Isaac's work has appeared in **Coldnoon**, **Post(blank)**, **The Missing Slate**, **Trafika Europe**, and **Two Lines**. He lives in Bennington, Vermont.*

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The House behind the Vacant Lot

...that house had always been there, as far as the white-walled high rises of the residential district could remember, just as a hill always rises or a ravine always runs; it seemed that the innumerable trains of years had been laid to rest behind the hard, red vacant lot. At one time the house's contemporaries had stood darkly in the high rises' place, but the loamy, mud-yellow waves of time had already swept them up and carried them away... They had disappeared, and three-story red-brick buildings had been put up by city workers; the last of them, now its great grandchildren's neighbor, seemed to be part of some village that had rotted away long ago. It had turned brown and settled as the capricious wind carried dust onto its gabled tin roof; over the years that dust turned to dirt, on which green moss managed to subsist. The house was separated from the new buildings by a broad, lifeless space, marked off by an old, graying fence made from wire like the kind used in uncomfortable bunks at children's camps and rest homes. Sometime, who knows when, it had been thrown up around the vacant lot, grand, flat and covered with gravel; it seemed to be meant for a soccer field or a giant playground. The new arrivals broke the fence from their side and built garages, but preferred to use the real playground for their prefabs. It was closer, for one thing.

A surviving stretch of fence stood in front of the lonely house like barbed wire. Further on, the eye moved over a half-dead field, little different from the vacant lot, and met a patch of gray suburban woods, its edge envying the green exuberance that surrounded the ramshackle house. Maples and ashes, older than its brown brick, towered there, almost twice as high as its squat walls; tall acacia clumps reached the roof, and in the spring they bloomed in white and yellow banks... In the winter, through the gaps between the clouds of snow that clung to the black branches, one could see the whole house, worn and dilapidated, not unsettling in the least. But in summer, covered almost entirely by impetuous, dingy green, through which dark-red walls and colorless windows peeked, the house was scary.

Everyone was inclined to populate it with his preferred apparitions. The house behind the vacant lot was home to junkies, bums, Satanists, and she-goblins. They said that in one of the rooms on the second floor, full of ancient trash and rot, there was a pentagram drawn in blood on the concrete floor, and in its center a cat skeleton with mutilated paws and its spinal column ripped out. Since the skeleton wasn't human, the story took on a certain degree of credibility. The ringleader of the local delin-

quents bragged that he had gone into the house behind the vacant lot and seen traces of some awful ceremony.

He hadn't done anything of the sort, of course.

What people called "the little D.T.'s" once appeared in the house — the spirits of Delerium Tremens, which led to the premature death of the owners and doomed them to endless sorrow. They sat on the floor, like poor drunkards reduced to a tenth of their normal size, dressed in their funeral clothes. Some of the spirits were properly dressed, in white slippers and suits of sorts; others, taking tender care of the tramps, made do with cellophane... There were even littler D.T.'s among them.

Random passersby who tripped off the narrator's tongue entered the house and found the little D.T.'s, slowly swaying from side to side, whimpering quietly, synchronically scratching at the floor with their little hands, persuading them to have done with that wrongdoer for good.

The story of the little D.T.'s went especially well with a glass of vodka and a snack.

But the saddest thought of all was the most boring one, that the house behind the vacant lot was home to lonely, forgotten old men. That they listen to a sickly radio set permanently tuned to a single channel and slobber on stone-hard biscuits, while those who can still see reread ancient newspapers from fifty years ago; the Housing Department is waiting for them to die, since that will be simpler, quieter and cheaper than moving them out of that long-condemned house and finding somewhere else to put them.

Certainly, anyone could tell that the glass in the little windows was intact. If you looked too long and too narrowly, it seemed that behind them was not emptiness, and not walls covered in peeling paper, but someone's old furniture and the whitish outline of cheap ceiling lights. To be honest, nobody remembered if the ancient, hinged panes in the windows were ever open, whether lights ever came on in the windows of the house behind the vacant lot; but nobody would swear that it hadn't happened, either.

No one looked out of the windows; there wasn't even a path to the nearby bus stop. No one noticed a sign on it with a street name or a number, the house was set apart from all lanes, thoroughfares, streets, and dead ends.

It was probably not fear that stopped them, though, but gray laziness.

It was April. March had turned out to be warm; basically the torpid spring had dragged on since the end of January, as often happens in big cities. Almost all the snow was gone, the asphalt had had time to dry out and shine. Grass grew up through the dirt where nobody had planted it and everything smelled damp and fresh, the ineradicable smell of the awakening earth.

The bus sighed and drove away, and the only person to get off stayed on the sidewalk. Bus shelters had yet to arrive in this neighborhood; there was just a little yellow flag that waved on a lamppost. The bus stopped just as one would expect; it quickly opened and shut its doors, then rolled on.

Why this stop was established, far from the apartment buildings and directly opposite the house behind the vacant lot, remained a secret.

The passenger stood for a while near the lamppost, trying to perform the admit-

tedly impossible feat of examining the house from every direction while standing in one place, then set off towards it uncertainly.

He was a young man, stooped and fair-haired, with narrow shoulders and a slight puffiness about the face, the kind that expresses not violent love of life, but long, concentrated periods of sitting within four walls. His eyes, if they had been hotter, not in color, but in the electrical dance of energy in his pupils, would have been bright, but, as it was, they were merely pale.

He was looking for a computer club that had put a job listing in the local paper. He had called the number. The person on the other end, without even seeing him, on the force of one mispronounced syllable, had summarily and authoritatively proclaimed this job-seeker a “dumbass,” but this establishment was crummy and out-of-the-way... In fact, the club was about three hundred yards from where the young man was now standing, in a squat structure tucked inside a ring of eighteen-story apartment buildings, along with a pharmacy, a pet store and a little office supply stall. The tall buildings sheltered it, and, run-down as it was, the house behind the vacant lot might very easily be the club.

The young man set off, wading through the mud in his boots, then the mud gave way to tiny blades of tender grass and the remnants of the asphalt path. Gusts of wet, sweet, spring wind blew in, cars backfired behind him, so a frightful silence did not prevail everywhere...

The house got closer. It was bigger than it looked from far away. It was pleasant to look at the sturdy tree trunks, and the youth even touched one of them, growing quite close to the path, with his soft palm. He couldn't see a sign on the house. They probably hadn't managed to order it yet, so he decided to try both entrances; the club was probably in the basement.

For some reason, he didn't pick the entrance that was right next to him, but went for the other one, by a hedge and the legs of a rotted bench. Perhaps it was the finer, more welcoming door that made the choice for him.

He paused at that door. It was only then that the silence descended; perhaps he had stepped into it. The sounds of the nearby road didn't reach this spot. With surprise and a certain squeamishness, he noticed that everything had become somewhat sticky; the door handle, the old asphalt under his feet, his eyelashes, even his thoughts, which tumbled more slowly and reluctantly than usual. All the same, he opened the door – he had to tug on it, it was jammed – and went in.

There was no club here, not even a hint of one, but he knew for sure that he had come to seek and had already found. What he was supposed to find in that unfamiliar house was unknown, and a vague fear arose in him, but now his feelings were too slow, and the fear didn't have time to become a decision. His last thought said that he should leave the door open, since the light bulbs in the entryway were, of course, broken. He caught it and pushed, but it obdurately resisted; it wasn't some otherworldly force pushing back, just the old, rusty hinges. He resigned himself. The door closed.

He stood on the tiny patch of floor between the door and the short stairway to the first floor. It was quiet in the house; not deathly quiet, but rather the quiet you feel when everyone has gone to bed. The ears don't catch the soundless breathing behind a thick wall, but a sixth sense, responding to who-knows-what... living bodies, the shad-

ows of other people's dreams, and the thrumming of a pulse that says there are people here for sure... It was dark in the basement, and dank, but there was no doubt about it. Someone lives there.

He looked around at the scuffed white-green walls, leaned his arm against the railing, painted a reddish color long ago; he understood that he was going to go up. Where was there to go up to, in a three-story house? It's not as if there was going to be an observation platform... While that thought emerged and passed between his ears, a few steps managed to pass under his feet.

Footsteps were audible. He still hadn't worked out whether he should give a start or catch his breath, when a fat girl of about four years old trundled down from the second floor in just her underwear. Her tight black braids stuck out in all directions, shining as though they were covered in oil; the toddler was holding a big blow-up ball as round as her little belly. She turned her serious gaze on him, then set off toward the door.

"Hey, what are you doing walking around naked?" he called out involuntarily. "You'll catch cold."

"Whut?" the little girl said in a bass voice. "Hum. Wook fo youself."

For some reason he didn't follow her onto the street, but ran to the landing and looked out the dusty, worn, and smeared window.

The vacant lot wasn't there.

Nor was April—behind the dirty glass shone a boisterous July, rows of mothers sitting on benches, calling out to their young, who flew from one end of the little courtyard to the other, framed by crisp, cooling shrubberies.

The picture drew him in. Its accuracy, its reality a thousand times larger than the reality of the empty lot and the garages, pierced him, and the sparks of the summer sun driving through the dim glass made him blink furiously.

"I know 'ou," said a bass voice behind him. "Yer unkle Andlei from apaltment six. Da computa scientist."

He turned around with a start. The same girl stood behind him, only without the ball now, for some reason, and looked at him, pouting.

"Uh-huh," he said, for some reason. He really was Andrei, and he had a degree in computer science, though he didn't live in any apartment six, and certainly not here.

After a second, he began to doubt that. After two, he stopped.

Andrei stood a little longer by the window, looking over the courtyard. His surprise, weak as it was, dimmed; he knew more and more clearly that this unthinkable event was the most natural thing that could happen here today. There was no fear at all. An abandoned, condemned house would have frightened him more than this—for that matter, so would the notorious club where he would have had to get a job.

Then he thought that it was time to leave. And a strong feeling, the strongest feeling he had ever known, the urge to stay here, wrenched him, so that he sank his fingers into the peeling white windowsill, as if someone's gloomy will were dragging him back by force.

Then he knew that he could decide, what was in front of him was not a tantalizing mirage or an unlikely gift, but merely that which is. The awful right to choose belonged to him just as much as his right to breathe...

And his unwillingness instantly materialized all three floors of the house behind the vacant lot, and several streets around it, full of greenery, and he already knew that the door leading *out* was located in the glass storefront around the corner; he needed to go there, he needed to grab the handle, and, despairingly, deliriously, wish to return.

He went outside.

In the store, he bought some bread, carrots, sausage, and bottled water, paid in some somnambulant state, without even realizing what he was paying with or how much, and went back to the house. He found the keys to the apartment in his pants pocket.

Still half asleep, Andrei walked around the apartment: two rooms, a kitchen. He felt the well-worn furniture—its appearance brought someone else's memories to life; his memories, about how he had bought them, how he had slept on the sofa-bed, how he had burnt the table with a cigarette. So it would seem that algebraic formulae forgotten forever can come back to life; all you have to do is open a crumbling yellow textbook, the voice of the math teacher, the bleak linoleum smell of the mop, and the stupid, flat face of the kid at the next desk return along with them.

He lived a few days. Andrei thought about it in a way people rarely do. Not "I lived for a few days in such and such a place" or "that's how I was living back then," but just "I lived." Maybe that's how sick people say it, or soldiers... As though with tremendous effort, he wormed his way through time and space, walked along the edge of reality and dream. In his dreams he shopped, read, tidied up, cooked simple bachelor fare, at peace and satisfied with everything. With every new awakening, his unwillingness to return grew more and more acute, but he still struggled to understand, more likely out of habit than any real desire to.

Then his vacation was over.

And his unwillingness gave birth to an institute where he worked. The door turned up there, at the other end of the little town, one with the door to the utility room, where they kept an old paint-stained bucket and some junk, and he only had to wish...

Once he ran into a girl wearing a tight-fitting dress and white slippers on the stairs. Her black braids shone just like those of the fat little girl he met on the stairs in the first minute of his life. But the kid couldn't possibly have grown up in the month that had passed, so it was probably Yulia's niece or cousin. He wanted to ask Yulia, but he kept forgetting.

They held hands and sat on the windowsill. They went to the park and the Palace of Culture. It turned out that for one reason or another she'd felt the urge to visit a relative, and had escaped from Izhevsk to the suburbs of Moscow. They decided that it was fate.

Now he was married. Through the lines of his dissertation, he saw an apartment with a beautiful woman walking around it. In the apartment was the affectionate smell of fresh food and a clean body. Now the door was in the city of Yalta, in one of the gloomy cafes, far from the sea.

Soon afterwards, they went on a trip to Sochi.

The dream stretched on, but now he woke up less and less often. He had a lot to

do. Yulia was sick, he was sick himself, and in the apartment, grumbling, a first cousin once removed was in charge of the housekeeping. He abandoned his dissertation for no reason at all and threw together an article on some other topic, unrelated to his work. A lot of people praised the article and they gave him a prize, which he blew on a present for his wife. That was the first time in his life he had been in jewelry store.

It turned out it wasn't that bad.

He used his next prize to buy a better computer. "You used to have a desktop," said a person who was almost a stranger, and Andrei scoffed at the idea. His computer was huge, as big as a refrigerator, and it was always a pleasant surprise how powerful it was. He was connected to the net (there were Bulgarian pages there, Polish ones, German, and tons of others, but not a single one in English) through a dedicated line for two rubles and fifty kopecks a month, fair and square.

The awareness that he meant something in this world chased the expression of vapid passivity off his face, and the dry flame characteristic of real men appeared in his eyes. He started to exercise and his wife proudly took his arm when they walked in the park with their stroller.

He didn't watch television, but Yulia would turn on the radio when she was busying herself around the apartment. He usually didn't hear it; that was one of the eccentricities of the dream. There were some things that he perceived very clearly, as though they were perfectly real; others simply didn't exist for him for the time being, like the radio or Party meetings, but gradually, as he soaked in that everyday life, he caught more and more of it. The radio talked about prospecting for new mineral deposits, the shock work of the collective farmers, the building of Mir 2, and an event you look for on the horizon, like the arrival of Communism, as sweet as a wedding you've waited your whole life for—a mission to Mars.

The next time he woke up, Andrei understood that he was living in the Soviet Union. He jumped up from the chair, struck at last as if by something not of the waking world. His wife had gone to the store, his mother-in-law and grandson lived in the country, he was home alone. He walked around the apartment from one end to the other, trembling slightly; first it seemed that the outlines of the furniture and the walls were blurring and melting, laying bare a colorless nothingness, through which peeked a dense brick wall, and darkness, then suddenly his surroundings became such granite truth that he himself was reduced to an apparition.

There was something unreal here.

...stores without shortages, rude punks, and long lines. The General Secretary's unfamiliar name. Mir 2. The already-familiar European cleanliness of the streets, and the uncompromising Environmental Protection Committee. The net and his tremendously powerful computer.

This was too good for reality. Even an alternate one.

He walked over to the locked bookcase, where he kept restricted-access literature. He had a few such books; the Bible, the Tao Te Ching, Andreyev's The Rose of the World, a complete history of religion in four luxurious volumes, and a collected edition of Solzhenitsyn that he had gotten bored with part way through; he wasn't like his buddy Nikolai, who, according to rumors, had collected almost everything that the

Censorship Service had released exclusively for psychologically healthy citizens who had reached the age of legal majority, including the Story of O and texts on black magic...

Andrei stood in front of the open bookcase, without picking up a single book, and thought that he was, for the first time in his life, hallucinating. He heard voices, just as he had read about somewhere or other. He was hearing one voice for the first time; it was confused and somewhat frightened, and resembled his own, but was still someone else's. Others—or just one, changing each time—they were strange, calm and deliberate, and spoke half to themselves...

"What is this, what is it?" asked the nervous voice.

"In the vortex of probabilistic universes there is a place where dead countries find peace," they answered meditatively.

"But there was never any such country!" the nervous voice cried. "It was a lovely fiction, it was the ghost of someone's unfinished dream. And there is no peace here," it added, quietly. "The people here are writing books, digging for minerals, going to space..."

"Maybe peace has different faces, too..." the interlocutor shrugged invisible shoulders and moved away...

"Come on, what is this?"

"Maybe a place created for you..." the voice was not answering, just offering its own version. "Created by your own dreams and wishes. Or by somebody's ineffably wise will..."

"I never dreamed about this. I wanted to win a lot of money, or get an apartment. Land a job at a big company. I never dreamed about an ideal Soviet Union that never existed!"

"You went into a condemned house," said a new voice, metallic and mocking. For an instant it seemed to Andrei that it was a woman. "A beam or a brick fell on your head. Think back, did you see a long white hallway, and, you know, a light at the end?"

"I'm not dead!"

"There is no such thing as death," said the first voice, instructively, returning abruptly to the conversation.

When Andrei closed the bookcase, a phrase that the voices had never said fluttered out of it like a moth.

"Everything good that people create repeats itself in the world beyond, and that is heaven."

"But I didn't die!" he said out loud, leaning his forehead against the veneered surface of the little door. His hands turned the key mechanically. "I didn't die!"

And he dully, helplessly repeated the words of the perturbed voice.

"What is this?"

And it happened. Once he wished to return, wished acutely and furiously, and the door once again turned out to be the door of his house, he stepped towards it...

...The sky opened over his head, as dark as only storm clouds can be, but still pure, cloudless; it was just a certain shade, efflorescent, as in spring. Spring was beginning here, just as it was then, when he left, but it was the spring of another year.

The house behind the vacant lot was gone. There didn't turn out to be anything

out of the ordinary in it; people in bulldozers went up to it, demolished the house and built another one in its place, much more comfortable, with satellite dishes and little thin trees planted around it. The earth under his feet was paved with new asphalt, a little to the side orphaned roses gathered dust in big-bellied pots and a concrete wall rose up.

Two people approached him from that direction; a bodyguard and a woman, dressed elegantly and unnaturally, like a model who had just stepped off the runway. The woman was being pulled along by two monstrous mastiffs whose leads she clutched jerkily in her little hands with their long acrylic nails. The nails were a dirty red color, like the dogs' tongues.

She walked by, looking at him like people look at a column or a bench, and disappeared into the entryway, jerking the loudly sniffing dogs behind her. Andrei no longer heard the voice of the bodyguard.

... he recognized her face, beautiful, dark, golden, framed by shining black hair. The face of his wife.

The wish to return made everything go dark, his ears began to ring, and the white, unfamiliar walls along the fence turned into a doctor's white mask, and above it flashed attentive sky-blue eyes and the sun... the sun in the window of the intensive care unit, bringing tears to his eyes.

"Close the curtain!" Andrei heard, and the eyes disappeared; the doctor turned away.

"No, no," he whispered weakly, soundlessly. "Don't."

And then, wallowing in the sun, he heard snatches of hushed conversation on the other side of the door. Yulia twittered unintelligibly through her tears; the doctors' voices were lower, slower, and he could make out some words... "a prominent scientist... of course... overwork, an early heart attack... happens all the time these days..."

He fell asleep, smiling.

The door still existed, but now it was the door of an equipment locker on a lunar station; it didn't worry him that the exit was unreachable, though.

He lived in the house behind the vacant lot now.



Nick Romeo

monuments

Nick Romeo is a multidisciplinary artist, musician and writer. His main forms of expression are 3D digital renderings, poetry, music, fractal generations, photography, and sculpture. Nick lives in Pittsburgh Pennsylvania with his wife and cat named Megatron.



Immaterial



The Deadline



Teaching Juggling



Phone Booth



Walking the Line



The Need for Control



Eden Encapsulated



Watermark





Fortress



Gary Adams Steve Gatt

Norway - a picture gallery

Gary Adams is a retired high school social studies teacher and a veteran. He and his wife, Joyce, are seasoned world travelers. Over the years Gary has shared with his friends and students an incredible depth of knowledge of art, movies, history, military history and technology, travel and geography. Gary reads anything and everything and thinks the internet is cool.

Steve Gatt drew inspiration for his present career – as a Certified Personal Trainer and Certified Nutrition Coach - from a health crisis. Steve weighed over 300 pounds in 2005 - extremely dangerous for him as a type 1 diabetic. A personal trainer helped him lose a third of his weight and guided him to a healthier lifestyle. Now Steve works with a broad range of clients, helping them to achieve their own long or short-term personal goals. Outside of work, Steve enjoys biking, running, camping, Michigan football and traveling. Reach Steve at www.facebook.com/cinfitpdx .



Geiranger Fjord -Gary



from Stegastein overlook of the Aurlandsfjord. -Steve



Farmhouse with gate above Geiranger -Gary



from the top of Preikestolen commonly referred to as Pulpit Rock. This was an amazing viewpoint from a sheer cliff face. The hike was challenging and very crowded but the view was spectacular. -Steve



Fantoft Stave Church Bergen Norway -Gary



from on the water, in a dual kayak, Geirangerfjorden. We spent a wonderful day here exploring the fjord kayaking up to the Seven Sisters Waterfall, and several others, along the way and back. One of the best highlights of our trip was this kayak journey. -Steve



Ecologically friendly Cottages, Geiranger -Gary



View from the Lofoten Islands in northern Norway -Steve



Fishing boat, Bergen harbor -Gary



sunset above the Arctic circle. This sunset later led to *the* highlight of the trip, the Northern Lights. We didn't expect to see them as it was considered "off season" but they came out that night and filled half the sky with flowing waves of greens, purples and a hint of yellow. -Steve



The countryside near Flam from the Flamsbana (train) -Gary



Meadow along the Marakelva River -Gary



Woodcarving in Flam
-Gary

Monica Tynan

insect studies



Monica Tynan placed this, her honors project, into the public domain in May 2017 when she was a senior at the University of Rhode Island. All of the associated narrative is contained in the "Abstract". The work is the selection of paintings. The images have been cropped to fit the page. Find the source document at <http://digitalcommons.uri.edu/srhonorsprog/540/>

Creative Nonnatives: Painting Invasive Insects of the United States

Monica Tynan, *University of Rhode Island*

Major Biological Sciences

Advisor Evan Preisser

Advisor Department Biological Sciences

Date 5-2017

Keywords Ecology; Entomology; Insects; Painting; Art; Illustration

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Abstract

An invasive species is a nonnative organism that may cause damage to an ecosystem. Invasive species cause problems in an environment by outcompeting native organisms for resources or by feeding upon native species. Invasive insects in particular can harm an ecosystem by consuming foliage and decreasing biodiversity. During my experience at the Preisser Lab at the University of Rhode Island, I witnessed firsthand the damage that invasive insects can do to a tree population, and I learned about how ecosystem dynamics can be disrupted by the introduction of a nonnative species.

My project portrays an aesthetically pleasing visualization of several different species of invasive insects. I have created six acrylic paintings depicting six different invasive insects: the Asian Longhorned Beetle, Brown Marmorated Stink Bug, Emerald Ash Borer, European Paper Wasp, Japanese Beetle, and Spotted Lanternfly. All species are considered invasive insects in the United States and are known to cause ecological damage. All paintings are 16"x16" and completed on plywood.

As I am a Biological Sciences major and an Art minor, this project draws together my two areas of study. I have improved my technical skills at planning pieces and painting, as well as expanded my knowledge of ecosystem dynamics of invasive species for this collection. I hope that by researching insects for this project I have become a better scientist, and by planning and completing all six paintings I have become a better artist.

Illustrations

Asian longhorned beetle

Brown marmorated stink bug

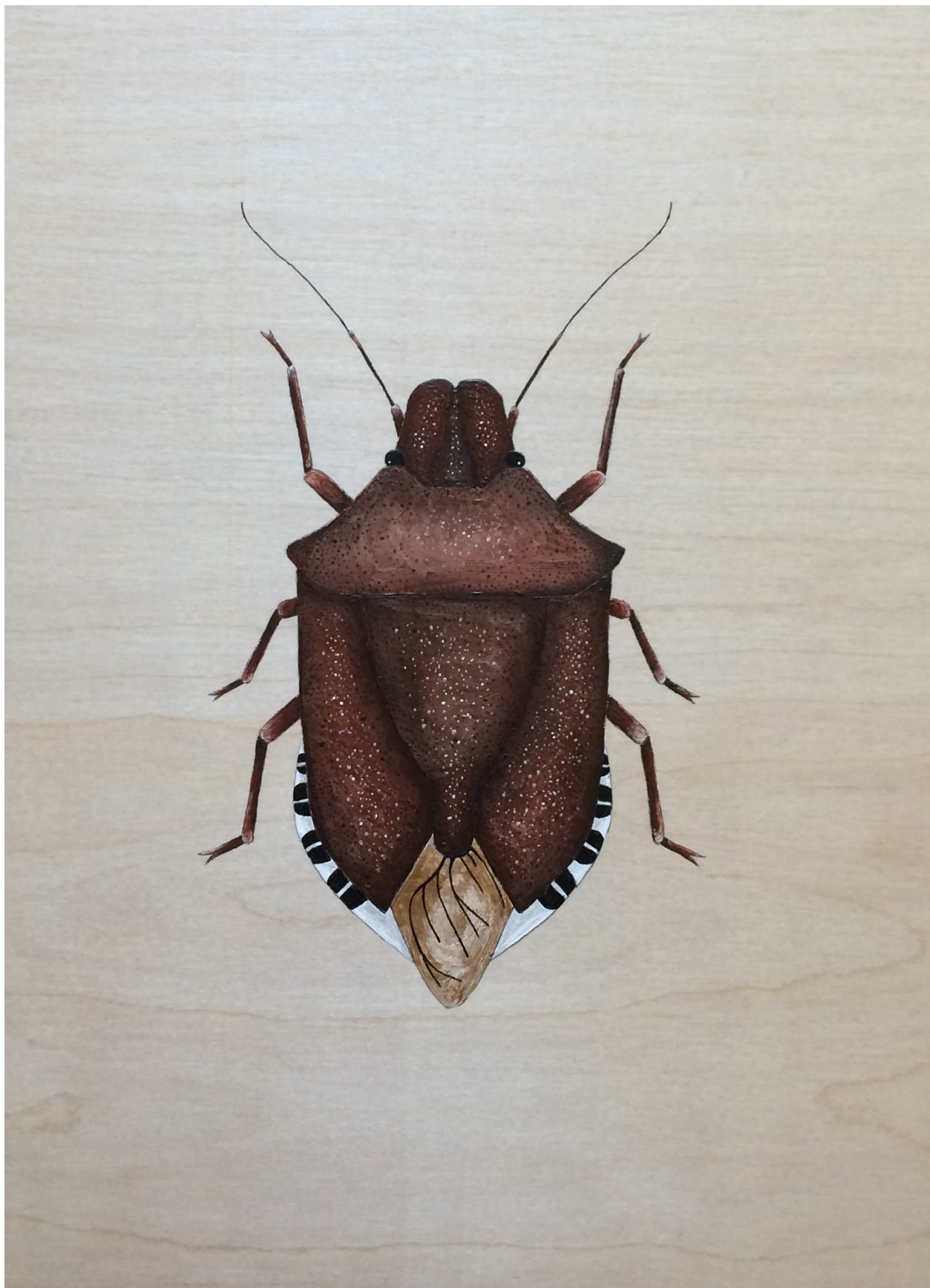
Emerald ash borer

European paper wasp

Japanese beetle

Spotted lanternfly













Brian McCann

dystopian wilderness



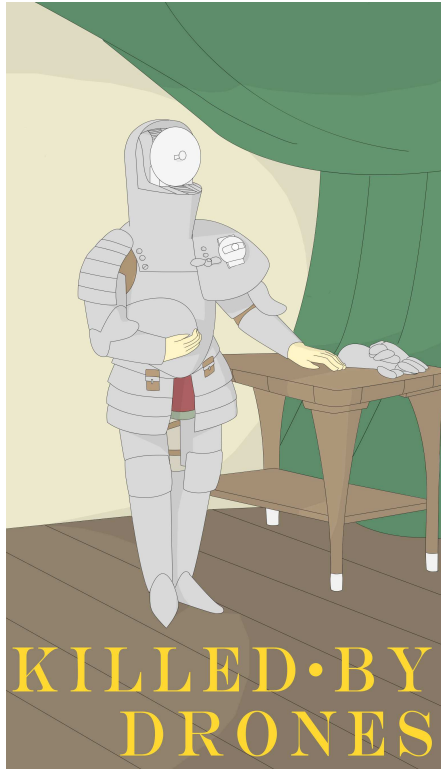
Brian McCann, 20 years old, makes videos and draws comics. He's a student at Drexel University and lives in Philadelphia. His protagonists are usually women - guardians, warriors, and superheroes.



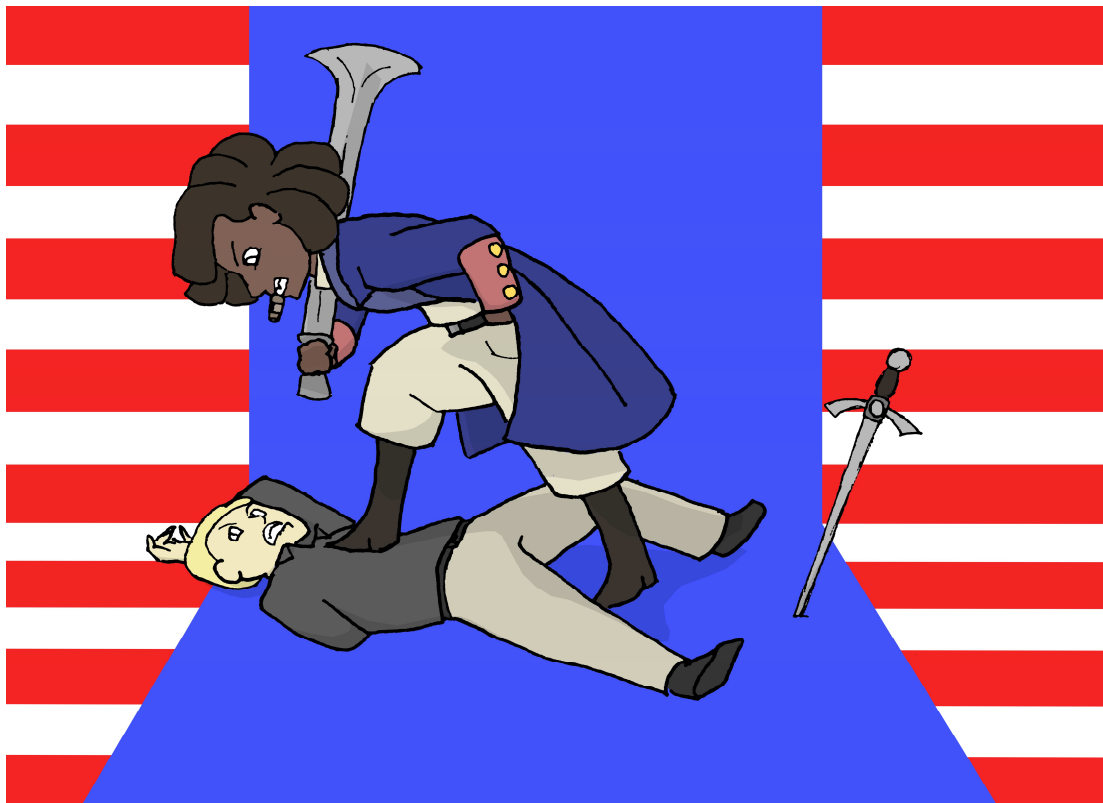
Harlem Renaissance

Homage to
Angel's Egg





pioneer and skulls

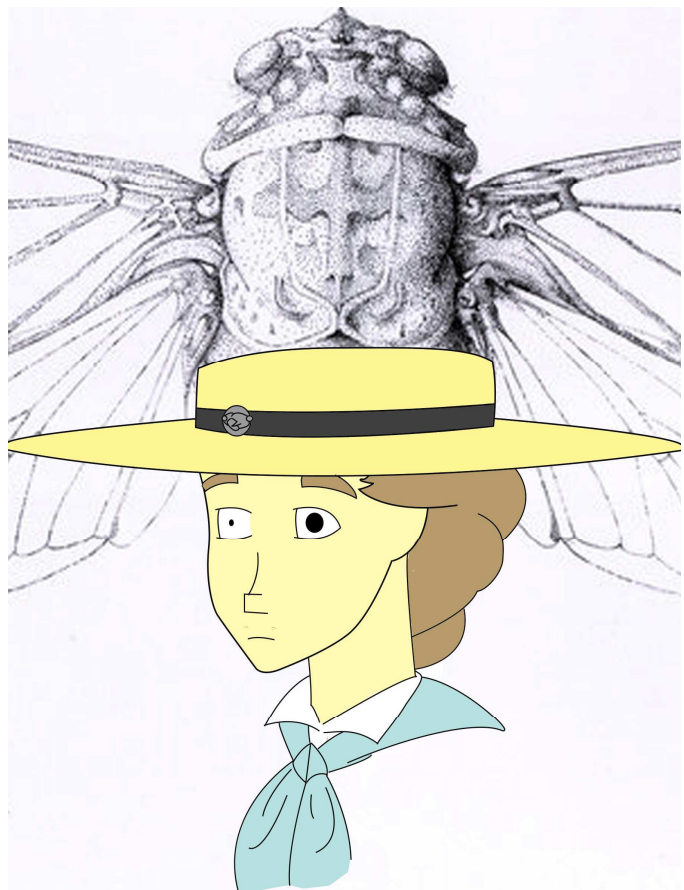


Nazi Punks



Poster art for a skit: Sittin' around at Polonius' wake.

A character concept based on the work of Edward Gorey



The Resistance



Sigma 137 Karamore



child soldier



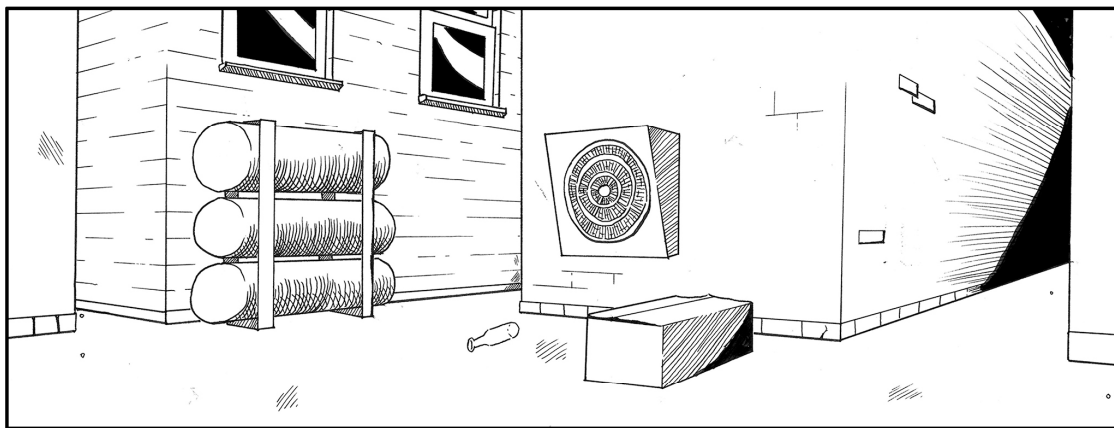
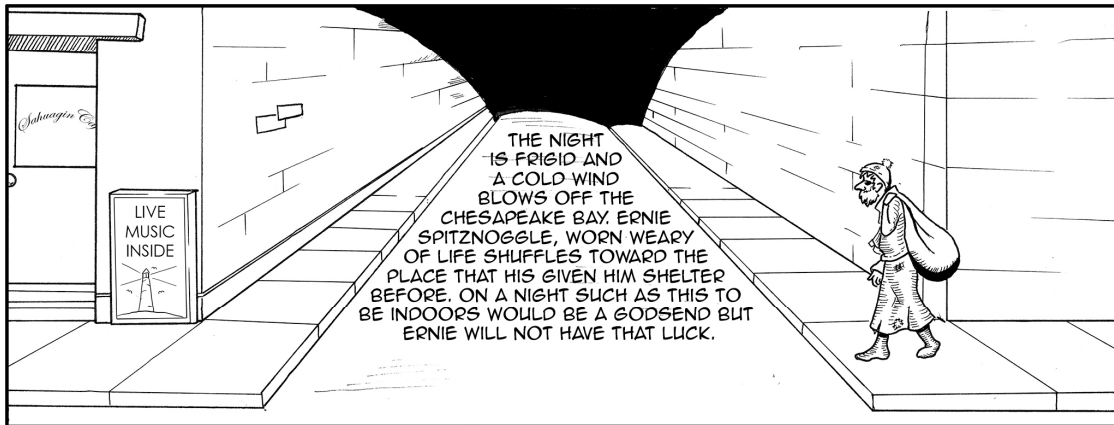
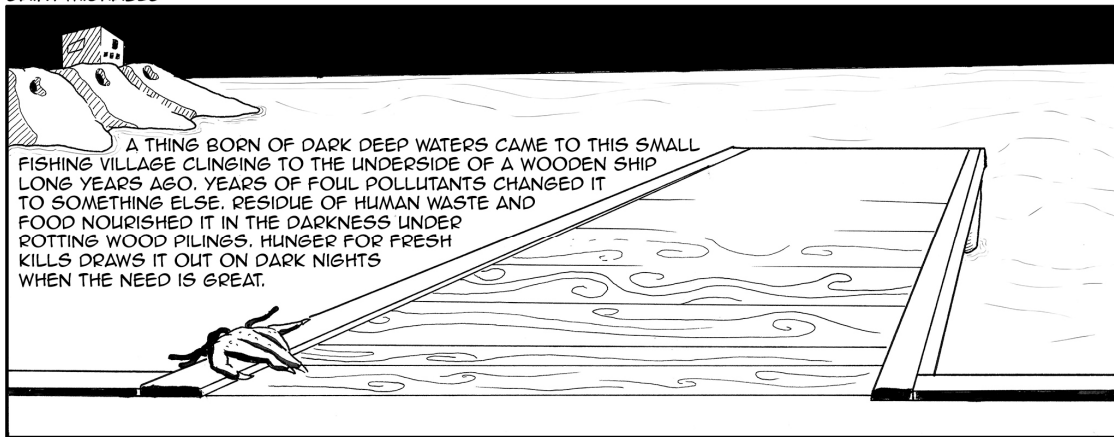
Gene Turchin Jacob Duchaine

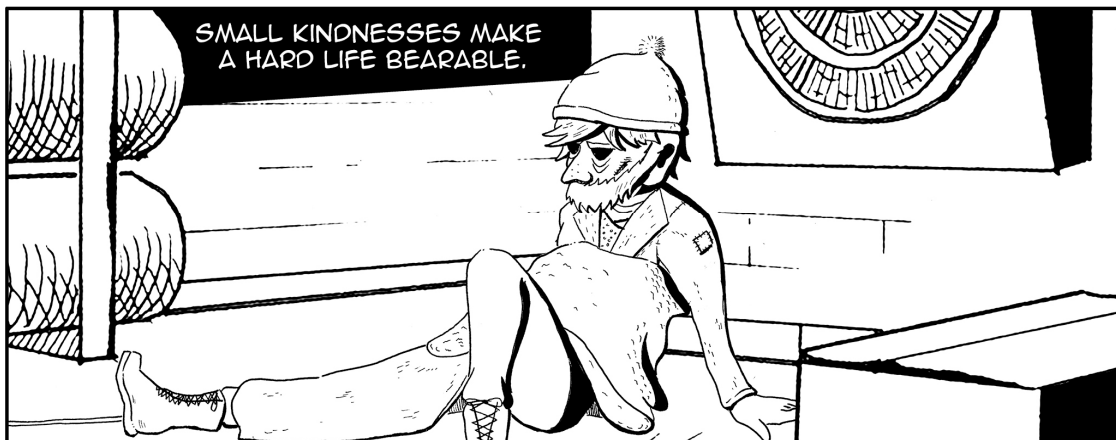
Saint Michaels

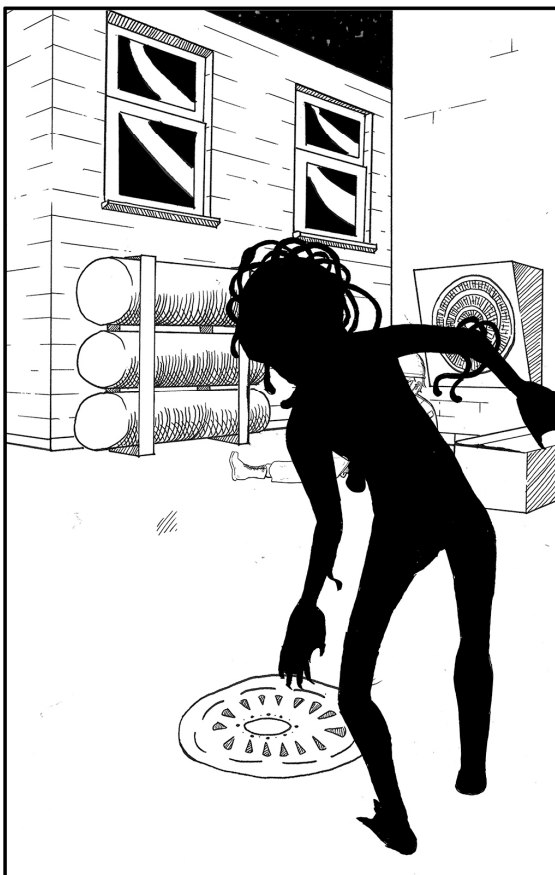
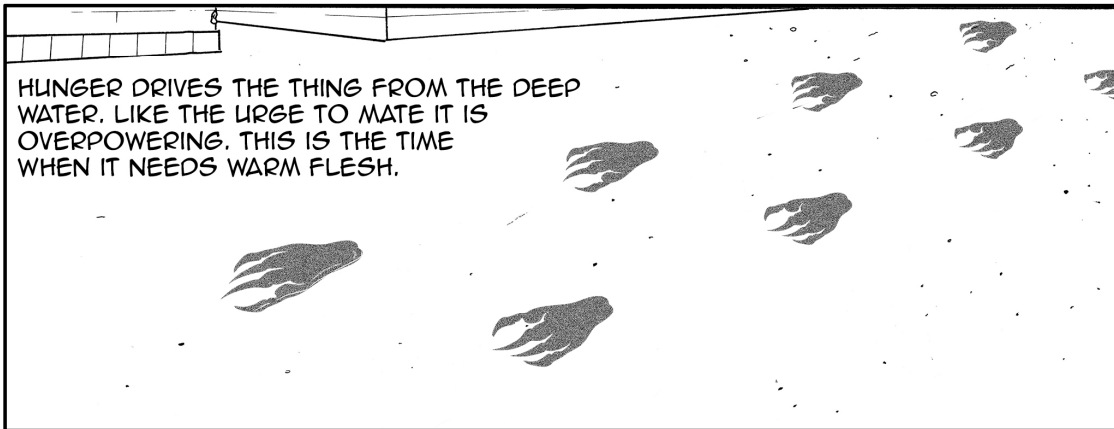
Gene Turchin recently retired after twelve years of teaching electronic engineering technology and mechatronics in West Virginia. He has published how-to articles in technical magazines including Servo and Tech Directions in addition to poetry and short fiction in literary journals. He is currently working on a science fiction novel and comic book scripts. Most recent published works can be found in VerseWrights, 365 Tomorrows, With Painte Words, Aurora Wolf and Literary Hatchet.

Jacob Duchaine is one of America's least known cartoonists. Dabbling in art since childhood, several years ago Jacob decided to develop art as a professional skill. Primarily self taught, he now writes and illustrates comics from his home in West Virginia.

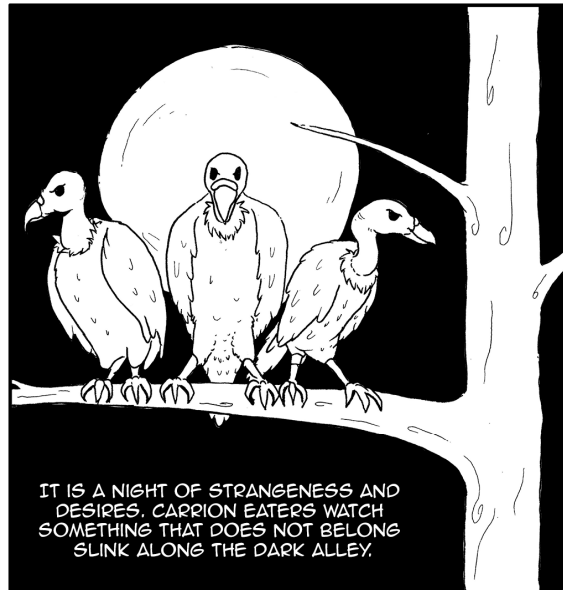
Photo: Tan Danh



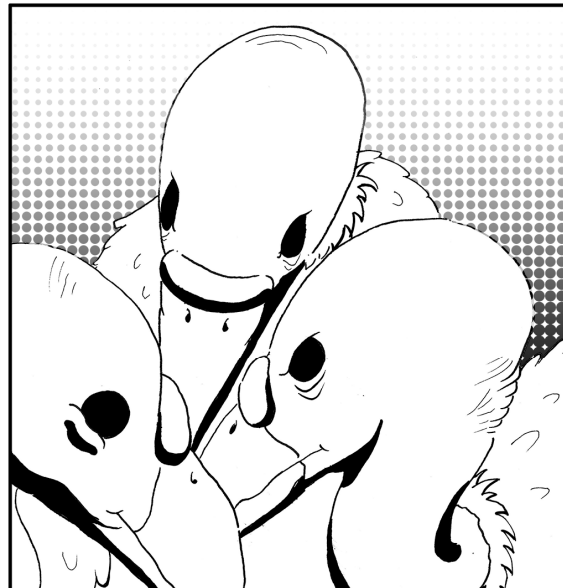




SAINT MICHAELS

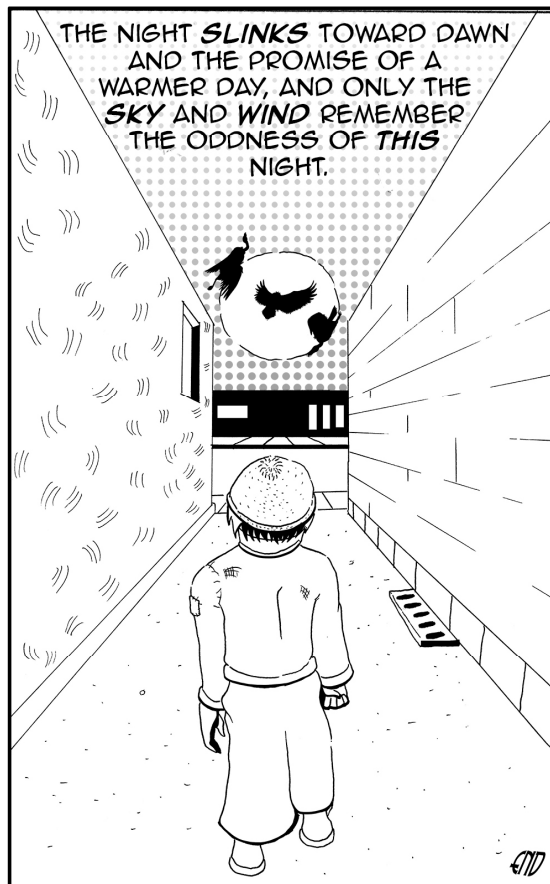
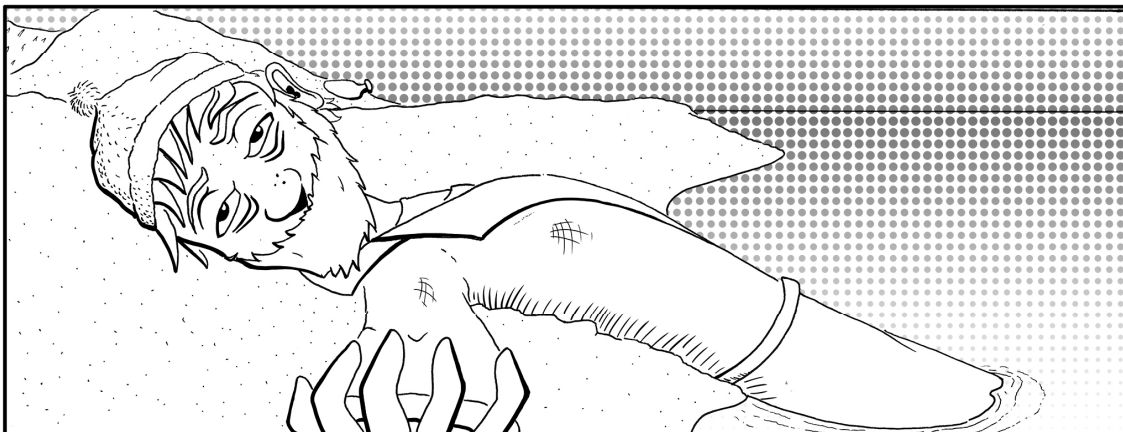
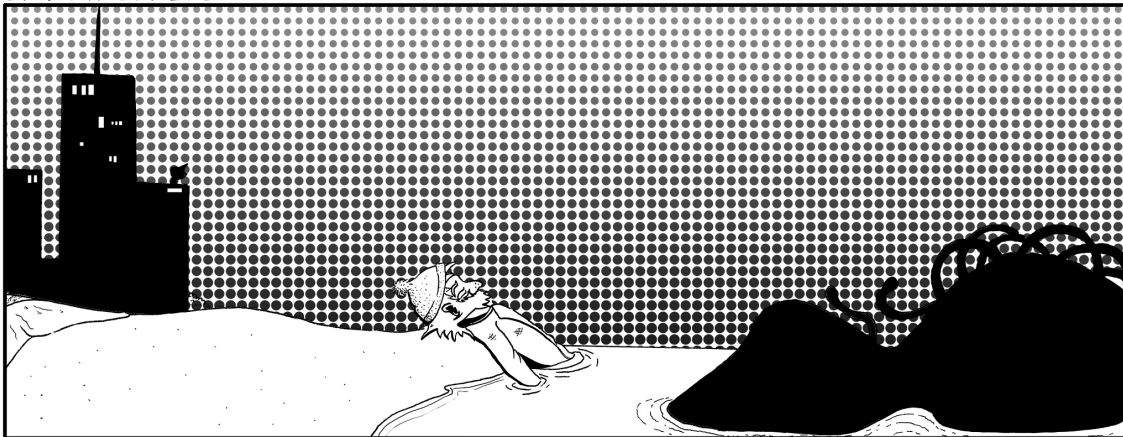


IT IS A NIGHT OF STRANGENESS AND
DESIRES. CARRION EATERS WATCH
SOMETHING THAT DOES NOT BELONG
SLINK ALONG THE DARK ALLEY.





SAINT MICHAELS



THE NIGHT *SLINKS* TOWARD DAWN
AND THE PROMISE OF A
WARMER DAY, AND ONLY THE
SKY AND *WIND* REMEMBER
THE ODDNESS OF *THIS*
NIGHT.

Kylee Kilbourne is a Mountain Empire Community College graduate who was awarded a Midway Honors Scholarship to cover two years of tuition, fees and other costs at East Tennessee State University. This, her honors thesis, was accepted by ETSU and placed in the public domain in December 2017.

Recommended Citation

Kilbourne, Kylee, "With Great Power: Examining the Representation and Empowerment of Women in DC and Marvel Comics" (2017). *Undergraduate Honors Theses*. Paper 433. <https://dc.etsu.edu/honors/433>

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WITH GREAT POWER:
EXAMINING THE REPRESENTATION AND EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN IN DC
AND MARVEL COMICS

by
Kylee Kilbourne

ABSTRACT

Throughout history, comic books and the media they inspire have reflected modern society as it changes and grows. But women's roles in comics have often been diminished as they become victims, damsels in distress, and sidekicks. This thesis explores the problems that female characters often face in comic books, but it also shows the positive representation that new creators have introduced over the years. This project is a genealogy, in which the development of the empowered superwoman is traced in modern age comic books. This discussion includes the characters of Kamala Khan, Harley Quinn, Gwen Stacy, and Barbara Gordon and charts how these four women have been empowered and disempowered throughout their comic canon. It rejects the lens of postfeminism and suggests that an intersectional feminism is still needed in today's ever-evolving and diversifying world. Popular culture must be representative of everyone, and today's women authors will be the driving force of diversity in comic books.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In June 1938, just a year before World War II, Superman leapt out of the imaginations of writer Jerry Siegel and artist Joe Shuster onto the pages of *Action Comics* #1. Superman quickly became an American cultural icon and ushered in a new archetype in popular literature – the superhero. This superhero archetype, like Joseph Campbell's mythological hero, represented the ideations of Americans during the early 20th century. In his blue tights and red cape, Superman became a symbol for strength and bravery, an American Hercules.

Following on the heels of Superman's truth, justice, and the American Way came heroes like Batman, Captain America, the Flash, and Captain Marvel. These heroes were the ultimate role models – preventing crime, protecting the innocent, and fighting the injustices of the world – a *perfect* escapist fantasy for America during the Great Depression and World War II. Yet Psychologist Dr. William Moulton Marston noticed something wrong with this faultless world of popular super heroics: the overwhelming amount of overt masculinity and no real role model of empowerment for female-identifying readers.

In his 1943 essay for *The American Scholar*, "Why 100,000,000 Americans Read Comics," Dr. Marston writes:

It's smart to be strong. It's big to be generous, but it's sissified, according to exclusively male rules, to be tender, loving, affectionate, and alluring. "Aw, that's girl stuff!" snorts our young comics reader, "Who wants to be a girl?" And that's the point: not even girls want to be girls so long as our feminine archetype lacks force, strength (Marston 42).

In the wake of masculine heroes like Superman and Captain America, Marston introduced another American cultural icon – *Wonder Woman* – “a lasting symbol of female power, independence, and sisterhood” according to Jennifer K. Stuller in her book, *Ink-stained Amazons and Cinematic Warriors: Superwomen in Modern Mythology* (Stuller 13). Stuller argues, “There were already women in both comic books and news strips by the time Wonder Woman debuted in late 1941, but the liberatory power of most of them was contained, even diminished, by the secondary status of their roles” (Stuller 13). Like Lois Lane or Batgirl (who appeared later in *Detective Comics* in 1961), many of the women in comics by 1941 were relegated to girl sidekicks, girl sleuths, girl reporters, and romance-story girls. Stuller remarks, “‘Girl,’ meaning not yet woman, not quite mature, not entirely whole” (Stuller 13). Marston, who was inspired by the suffragettes of the 1910s, created Wonder Woman as a symbol of feminism and American patriotism. As revealed in *Ink-stained Amazons*, Stuller writes that Marston believed “any young girl could become a Wonder Woman if only she took the time and energy to properly train herself; if only she had an example to guide her” (Stuller 15). Wonder Woman was to be that example. In December 1941, written by Dr. William Moulton Marston under the pseudonym “Charles Moulton,” Wonder Woman – the feminist, Amazonian warrior princess – arrived on newsstands in issue #8 of *All Star Comics*.

Comic books and other comic media (movies, television, comic strips, video games, and books inspired by comics) in the modern world seem to lack a sense of empowerment of female-identifying characters and their audience. These characters are often hyper-sexualized, poorly written, and portrayed as love interests, sidekicks, and damsels in distress – a way to progress a male character’s story. Yet, it is difficult to critique comic books with prevalent concerns of inaccurate – or the *absence of* – representation because critics are often accused of interfering

with an artist's freedom of expression. In his thesis "Postfeminism in Female Team Superhero Comic Books," Elliott A. Sawyer explains, "without critical intervention, however, problematic portrayals or other issues in comics may go unexamined. In due course, the ideologies portrayed in comics can negatively affect a multitude of avenues from the dominant culture to the reader's own sense of self" (Sawyer). In this thesis, Sawyer's research explores the concept of postfeminism and its effect on the representation of women in superhero teams consisting of all female characters, such as DC Comics' *Birds of Prey* and *Gotham City Sirens* and Marvel's *Divas*.

In Sawyer's paper, postfeminism is explained to be the period after the first and second "waves" or eras of feminism. It mainly encompasses those women (usually white, upper-middle class women) who have benefitted from the successes of the older generations (access to the right to vote, birth control and abortion, maternity leave, military service, etc.) and many often use the term to refer to the "irrelevance" of feminism in today's world, a *post-feminist* culture. Sawyer explains, "Postfeminism attempts to remove politics from women's representations by either ignoring them or making those representations a non-issue. [...] When media makers or others are accused of misrepresenting women, they can argue that there was no negative intent behind the representations" (Sawyer). Postfeminism creates a kind of pseudo-personal empowerment for women, often resulting in no personal agency or belonging to oneself.

Sawyer's thesis argues that the misrepresentation of women in comic books can negatively affect readers and change the way women are viewed in society. I agree with Sawyer's thesis and argue that we are not living in post-feminist world, wherein feminism is no longer relevant. Comic books and their representation of women directly impact readers, because comics are a reflection

of society at particular moments in time. Therefore, a feminist and empowering representation of women-heroes is important because it reflects an evolving and diversifying world.

The Power Journey

Comic books have become ingrained in American society since Superman and Captain America first appeared in the 1930s and 40s. Comic book movies continue to see success in the box office and both Marvel and DC have lists of planned films that stretch five to ten years into the future. Superhero media, in particular, is a very important aspect of American society. Therefore, it is important to examine this prominent media for negative influences. For my thesis, I will be examining popular female DC and Marvel characters, heroines, villains, and anti-heroes from the modern age of comics: an era of comics that follows the strict enforcement of the Comics Code Authority (CCA) of 1950s and what is known as the silver age of comics. The Comics Code Authority was an agency that regulated and censored comics but was abandoned in the early 21st century. The modern age encompasses comics from the mid-1980s to the 2010s and includes darker stories like DC Comics' *The Watchmen* and *Batman: The Killing Joke*. This era rebels from the influences of the CCA and allows for more explicit and diverse content.

My thesis is a genealogy of the superwoman, and the following paper will discuss the development of the superwoman and trace her empowerment and disempowerment. As I journey through the modern age, I will focus on female empowerment and disempowerment through three particular aspects: autonomy in the case of Kamala Khan as Ms. Marvel, woman-to-woman empowerment as found between Poison Ivy and Harley Quinn, and disempowerment/re-empowerment as discussed with Barbara Gordon and the creation of Oracle in *Suicide Squad* as

well as the original Gwen Stacy and her alternate universe counter-part Spider-Woman in *Spider-Gwen*.

In chapter two, I will be searching for instances of Ms. Marvel following her own path and becoming a hero through her own intellect and understanding. I will chart the heroine's progress through her call to adventure and her hero's journey using Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. I will examine Ms. Marvel's discovery of the self and how the *Ms. Marvel* title deals with teenage objectification.

In chapter three, I will cite examples of female to female encouragement and empowerment. I will be examining the dynamic between two of DC Comics' most popular female villainesses, Harley Quinn and Poison Ivy and their recent reboots in the *New 52*. Has the Harley/Ivy bond changed since their first encounter in the television series *Batman: The Animated Series*? Do they have a positive, supportive relationship? I will be searching for moments of supportive friendship and how support encourages empowerment.

In chapter four, I will be investigating the concepts of disempowerment and re-empowerment. I will be looking for moments when female protagonists lose their autonomy and are relegated to moving a male character's story forward like Gwen Stacy – known as Spider-Man's dead love interest – and Barbara Gordon as Batgirl and Oracle. I will be examining the "Women in Refrigerators" trope. How do these characters regain their empowerment and autonomy and separate themselves from their male "lovers?" Do they ever fully regain their power and control? I will explore all of these questions and more as I set out to discuss the issue of female representation and empowerment in comic books and related media.

Comic book critics and historians have discussed female representation in comics throughout the years. In *Ink-Stained Amazons*, Jennifer K. Stuller writes that superheroes are

America's modern mythology. But the treatment of women in comics is troubling, because "modern hero stories, like those of classic world myth, continue to focus on male experience and fantasy. [...] Additionally, because heroism is often confined to power fantasies, there is little room for female experiences to be considered heroic" (Stuller 4). Stuller believes that "no matter our gender, race, sexual preference, or physical challenges, we can be heroes" (Stuller 4). Mike Madrid, author of *The Supergirls: Fashion, Feminism, Fantasy, and the History of Comic Book Heroines* adds his take on this conversation, stating that women are important to comics because they show a different side to crime-fighting and are "more interested in making the world a better place, and not just beating their foes into submission" unlike violence-driven male heroes (Madrid v). Sherrie A. Inness, editor of *Action Chicks: New Images of Tough Women in Popular Culture* proposes that second-wave feminism allowed for the emergence of tougher women in popular culture. She suggests that popular media's representation of tough women heroes is "teaching real women dramatically different ideas about what it means to be female" (Inness 15). I hope to add to the conversation of female representation in comics that authors like Stuller, Madrid, and Inness have focused on with my discussion of empowerment.

As Dr. Marston discusses in "Why 100,000,000 Americans Read Comics," humankind has communicated ideas through picture story-telling for centuries and is an important part of showing and understanding human thoughts and emotions (Marston 37-39). I believe this kind of research is important in modern America because unlike the ideas of postfeminism, popular media still lacks diversity and intersectionality for all. I hope this thesis is an informative work that shows that feminism in comics is not irrelevant. Anyone who identifies as a woman is affected by the inaccurate, negative, or missing representation in our popular media. I not only wish to show the importance of feminism, but also the importance of comic books and their

effects on our society. This thesis will not advocate the discarding of comics but rather asks current and new generations of writers and artists to consider the impact of their work on prevalent social issues such as sexism, racism, ableism, and homophobia.

CHAPTER 2

ACCEPTANCE, ADVENTURE, AND AUTONOMY

In Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, the author describes the call to adventure as the first step to any heroic story. The call begins when a "blunder – apparently the merest chance – reveals an unsuspected world, and the individual is drawn into a relationship with forces that are not rightly understood" (Campbell 42). This blunder, as Campbell explains is "the result of suppressed desires and conflicts" and "whether small or great," the call to adventure awakens a rite of spiritual passage for the hero (Campbell 42-43). Superheroes often follow this mythological pattern set forth by Campbell. In Marvel's *X-Men* comics, the mutants discover their powers accidentally, most often through adrenaline rushes. In DC's *Green Lantern*, a Lantern is chosen by a power ring to be its owner's successor and tends to place itself on the hand of an inexperienced person like Hal Jordon. Mythology, as Jennifer K. Stuller criticizes, often focuses on the male experience with power. And women continue to fill supporting roles for these heroes as "mothers, wives, temptresses, and goddesses" (Stuller 4). But in 2013, Marvel Comics writer G. Willow Wilson rewrote the call to adventure with her new Ms. Marvel – a Muslim Pakistani teenage girl named Kamala Khan – who shows that empowerment and autonomy through the call to adventure is no longer just for male heroes.

In issue 17 of 2013 *Earth's Mightiest Hero: Captain Marvel*, the citizens of New York City chant, "I am Captain Marvel!" to confuse a convoy of drones and save their beloved blonde heroine (DeConnick 28-30). Figure 1, the cover of this issue, shows a background of diverse people: male, female, gender fluid, young, old, different body types, and various races and ethnicities. Everyone is dressed like Captain Marvel, because they each embody a hero's strength. This image challenges the mythological trope explained by Campbell because it shows many different types of people embracing their inner hero. In figure 2, a young girl in Jersey City tapes up a picture of Captain Marvel and lifts her arm to show her Rosie the Riveter muscle swell and rip her sleeve. This young girl also seems to be embodying the spirit of Captain Marvel along with the whole of New York City. The reader never encounters this new character's face – only her backdrop, which signals the arrival of a new force.



Figure 1: The cover of *Captain Marvel* vol. 7, #17 by Joe Quinones.



Figure 2: Picture of Kamala Khan in *Captain Marvel* vol. 7, #17 (DeConnick 34).

Sixteen, Pakistani American, female – Kamala Khan is not the typical superhero. In a world where superheroes, and any mythological hero for that matter, are almost always portrayed as tall, strong, brave, confident, and *male* (i.e. *Iron Man*, *Thor*, *Captain America*) – what happens when the innocents’ protector is not the stereotypical hero? Appearing on newsstands and in comic shops in 2014 in the *All New Marvel Now Ms. Marvel* comic series, Kamala Khan answers the call to adventure. She longs to be the perfect, clichéd hero – tights, cape, boots, and blonde hair – but soon learns that a hero’s journey is one of self-discovery and helping others.

Kamala Khan, a Muslim teen raised in New Jersey, lives a somewhat normal teenage life writing fanfiction about the Avengers and Captain Marvel (the beautifully pale and blonde superheroine of New York) and dealing with high school drama – until she is exposed to a mysterious mist that covers all of New Jersey. Kamala is left with the face and outfit of Carol Danvers’ former Ms. Marvel and the ability to morph her body. This is her call to adventure and the mysterious mist is the blunder that opens up an unsuspected world. Kamala, a superhero fanatic, is thrust into this new world of super heroics without a complete understanding of what that entails.

When she passes out from the mists that suddenly envelop New Jersey, Kamala has a vision. This vision is her spiritual awakening; her Muslim Faith takes the form of her favorite heroes: Captain Marvel, Iron Man, and Captain America. Kamala has turned her back on her religion and her family to be accepted by the kids at her school. This vision of Faith in the form of Captain America brings that rejection into question: “‘You thought that if you disobeyed your parents – your culture, your religion – your classmates would accept you. What happened instead?’” (Wilson 16). To which Kamala replies, “‘They laughed at me’” (Wilson 16). In figure

3, Kamala tells her super-powered guides that she does not know what she wants in life. She has rejected her religion and her family, and now all she wants is to be beautiful and strong like Captain Marvel. Wishing to be a hero, Kamala is granted her desire – but as Captain Marvel states, “‘It is *not* going to turn out the way you think’” (Wilson 18). Kamala wakes from her vision with Captain Marvel’s younger face and uniform and the ability to shapeshift her body in every way possible.



Figure 3: Panel from *Ms. Marvel: No Normal* (Wilson 19).

After several blunders with her powers, this plucky Ms. Marvel begins to realize that what makes a hero is not the tights and the fame, but the ability to be in a position to help others. In issue 2, Kamala remarks, “‘There’s this Ayah from the Quran that my dad always quotes when he sees something bad on TV...Whoever kills one person, it is as if he has killed all of mankind – and whoever saves one person, it is as if he has saved all of mankind...Because no

matter how bad things get, there are always people who rush in to help” (Wilson 30, 31). What is unique to the *Ms. Marvel* comics is the idea that being a hero is accepting one’s self and using that acceptance to better the lives of others.

Kamala soon learns to stop hiding behind the appearance of Carol Danvers and dons her own face and super suit. She discovers that she can heal instantly in her own body, which shows that accepting oneself is a healing and empowering experience. Campbell states, “The modern hero deed must be that of questing to bring to light again the lost Atlantis of the co-ordinated soul,” (Campbell 334). Kamala begins to appreciate her heritage and her family, as well as the duty of being able to help others.

Ms. Marvel focuses solely on self-discovery and using that knowledge to help others in need. Her empowerment comes from her own autonomy and that autonomy drives the stories. The comic quickly strikes down the typical tropes of objectification and sexuality. In his book *The Supergirls: Fashion, Feminism, Fantasy, and the History of Comic Book Heroines*, Mike Madrid comments on this objectification trope when he asks, “Is power pretty?” (Madrid 291). He writes:

Females in comic books have historically been given weaker powers. This is presumably meant to be a reflection of the status quo between the sexes in the real world, and a hierarchy that male readers will be comfortable with. Female superheroes are also granted powers that make them look good (Madrid 291).

Kamala’s powers could be sexualized if written with that goal in mind. Her powers of transformation allow her body to move similarly to Mr. Fantastic’s – to stretch and contort her body in different ways, to cause her muscles to bulge or to grow her fist. But she can also shrink to the size of an ant like Ant-Man and change appearances like Mystique. Fortunately, G. Willow

Wilson writes Kamala as a sixteen-year-old girl and does not sexualize her powers. As shown in figure 4, Kamala's powers allow her body to shift in unnatural ways; these powers do not make her "look good" but she is still a powerful heroine who should not look like a supermodel.

Madrid states that women heroes like the powerful Storm are still upheld to supermodel standards to attract male readers. Storm simply has to strike a pose and point to use her powers: "For as mighty as X-Men's Storm is, she strikes a pose, extends a hand, unleashes a lightning bolt, and looks great. Just like posing for a picture in *Vogue*" (Madrid 292). Kamala is obviously not a pose and point character like Storm, as many panels in her series suggest.



Figure 4: Ms. Marvel from *Ms. Marvel: No Normal* (Wilson 88).

But Madrid's observations of Marvel's past with adolescent superheroines and their unconventional looks sheds a bleak light on Kamala Khan's future:

Throughout the 80s and 90s, Marvel's *X-Men* tried to mix unconventional looking women into their ranks of beauties to perpetuate their edgy outcast status. Kitty Pryde

was a gangly and gawky 13 year-old when she joined the team in 1980. Within a few years she was a svelte and pretty teen. Marrow was a mutant terrorist who could grow bones out of her skin that she could pluck and use as knives. When she was inducted into the X-Men in 1997, she was a dreadful creature with horns. Two years later she was a pretty girl in a bony bra. (Madrid 297).

This pattern followed with the insect-formed Wasp from the Avengers and the waifish Songbird from Thunderbolts, as the artists shaped these characters' bodies to be more appealing to a male centric audience. Madrid marks this trend in the comic book industry and states that "readers like their heroines drawn pretty" with youthful faces and bombshell bodies (Madrid 296-97).

Immediately in her series, Kamala Khan learns that the outfit does not make the hero. In the first issue, Kamala does ask to look just like Captain Marvel. Looking at her vision of Captain Marvel, Kamala states, "I want to be beautiful and awesome and butt-kicking and less complicated. I want to be you. Except I would wear the classic, politically incorrect costume and kick butt in giant wedge heels" (Wilson 18). Kamala chooses to wear this costume because she likes it and this signals autonomy. Yet, it is also disempowering because Kamala is choosing a costume that is not her own. She is sporting the face and outfit of someone who is known for being blonde, white, and pretty. At this point in the story, Kamala is struggling with her heritage and religion and wants to be something she is not – blonde and white – because she believes it will lead to acceptance. When Kamala is injured, she learns that she can heal faster by switching back to her own original face (Wilson 69). Kamala's friend Bruno even questions her choice to hide behind someone else's face: "But why hide? ...Why do it all behind someone else's face?" (Wilson 68). He goes on to say, "Who cares what people expect? Maybe they expect some perfect blonde, what I need – I mean, what we need – is you" (Wilson 68). Encouraged by her

friend's words, Kamala and Bruno come together to make a costume that works with Kamala's powers and carves her own identity –

I have tools now. Tools I didn't have before. It's a matter of learning how to use them. Learning my *strengths*. Learning my *limitations*. Learning how to *work* with this new body, instead of against it. *Good* is not a thing you are. It's a thing you *do* (Wilson 93-94).

Within just five issues of her series, Kamala Khan has grown from an *Avengers* fangirl just wishing to be accepted by her peers to a superheroine who is beginning to discover and accept her own self.

CHAPTER 3

ORIGINS OF A CRIME QUEEN

Throughout history and literature, women have been demonized and criminalized under the patriarchy. During the Salem witch trials, women on the fringes of society were accused of witchcraft and hanged. In Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*, Edna Pontellier is shamed for her monstrous desires for independence and decides to commit suicide to find her freedom. Even in traditional fairy tales, women are transformed into evil stepmothers and pitted against their stepdaughters for the affection of men. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar write in their essay, "Snow White and Her Wicked Stepmother," "female bonding is extraordinarily difficult in patriarchy: women almost inevitably turn against women because the voice of the looking glass sets them against each other" (Gilbert and Gubar, "Snow White" 293). In popular media, villainous women are portrayed as femme fatales like DC's Catwoman and Marvel's Black Cat. They are bad girls who work alone, clawing and stealing their way to the top. They are often pitted against each other – especially for the affections of men, as shown in *Batman Rebirth* issue 35 where Catwoman and Talia al Ghul fight each other for Batman. But with the introduction of DC Comics' Harley Quinn, the narrative of solo female villains changed.

In 1992, Paul Dini and Bruce Timm created a walk-on character named Harley Quinn for their highly successful show, *Batman: The Animated Series*. Harley Quinn first appeared in the episode "Joker's Favor" as the supervillain Joker's dimwitted sidekick. It was later revealed in Dini and Timm's 1994 graphic novel *Mad Love* that Harley had been a psychiatrist – Dr. Harleen Frances Quinzel, M.D. – at Arkham Asylum who fell madly in love with her patient, the Joker, and helped him escape on several occasions. After the Joker is returned to Arkham beaten and

bruised from a battle with Batman, Harleen quits her job as a psychiatrist to start her life of crime as Harley Quinn. Figure 5 shows Harley Quinn during *Mad Love*, donning her new jester suit to impress the Joker. This panel marks the beginning of her life as the crime queen Harley Quinn.



Figure 5: Harley Quinn's appears in her new jester suit from *The Batman Adventures: Mad Love* (Dini 34).

At the end of *Mad Love*, Harley is back at Arkham – this time as a patient herself – and the Joker is assumed dead by the media. *Batman: Harley Quinn* was published in 1999 and is a variation of the *Mad Love* story – Harleen is locked away in Arkham Asylum due to her dangerous fascination with the Joker. But after an earthquake demolishes Arkham, Harleen escapes to join the Joker as the red and black jester Harley Quinn.

Though Harley was purposefully written as a victim of domestic abuse, there are some redeeming qualities in her early publications that show a character willing and trying to break

free from her abuser. In the beginning panels of *Batman: Harley Quinn*, the reader encounters Dr. Pamela Isley (who goes by the alias Poison Ivy). Ivy is a major villainess of Gotham City and an expert chemist who can control plant life. As punishment for her crimes, Ivy is tasked by Batman with delivering produce to the starving people of Gotham. It is during one of these deliveries that Ivy comes across debris and a wounded Harley Quinn. In later panels of the story, the reader discovers that Harley Quinn was tricked by the Joker and sent rocketing over Gotham. Poison Ivy takes Harley to her lab where she gives her an antitoxin. This antitoxin allows Harley to be around Ivy: “I’m not called Poison Ivy for nothing. Anyone who spends a lot of time around me will pick up something nasty if they’re not properly immunized” (Dini 25). As Harley’s immune system changes, so does her physical strength and agility.



Figure 6: Harley has new powers from *Batman: Harley Quinn* (Dini 27).

In figure 6, Harley jumps around the lab and exclaims, “I’ve got me some powers, baby!” Ivy shushes her and explains, “Now calm down, cupcake. You’re not going to be giving Superman

any sleepless nights. All I've done is given you a little edge" (Dini 27). Because the Joker has bruised and abused poor Harley, Ivy has given her the means to fight back – "...I sympathize with you. You've given your all to a man who used and betrayed you. Now I've enabled you with the means to strike back, not only at Joker, but at Batman, too" (Dini 27). Harley's new friendship with Ivy has *literally* empowered her with superpowers that make her a match for any caped crusader or clown prince that dares throw a punch her way. It is Harley and Ivy's friendship that gives Harley's origin story a dose of female empowerment and autonomy that is missing in Timm and Dini's *Mad Love* one shot from *The Batman Adventures* (1994) and the adapted episode of *The New Batman Adventures* (1999).

Though marked as the first canon appearance of Harley in current comics, *Batman: Harley Quinn* is not the first appearance of Harley and Ivy's empowering friendship. "Harley and Ivy" was episode forty-seven of *Batman: The Animated Series* that aired on January 18, 1993 and marks the introduction of Harley and Ivy's first acquaintance. In this episode, Harley encounters Ivy during a robbery after she has been thrown out by the Joker. The *Batman: Harley Quinn* one-shot reintroduces the scene where Ivy, enraged by the Joker's mistreatment of her new friend, injects Harley with the anti-toxin that gives her immunity to all gases and poisons. The one-shot comic takes this further by also enhancing Harley's natural strength and agility. After this scene, Harley and Ivy embark on a girls' only crime spree, becoming Gotham's "New Queens of Crime." "Harley and Ivy" comes sometime after Harley and the Joker's first team up and is not considered part of Harley's origin story in the cartoon, leaving any direct woman to woman empowerment for later in the series. The *Batman: Harley Quinn* story pushes this empowerment to the forefront and incorporates it into Harley's origins.

Harley and Ivy's bond is important representation in comic books, because it offers a different perspective to storytelling – in which empathy and communication are at the forefront of problem-solving. There is often a lack of compassion and friendship in male-dominated superhero comics. The hero and villain are lone wolves and though they may have side-kicks or henchmen, the story is usually concerned with the lead male and his authority. When it comes to being a typical male-identifying hero, Sharon Ross writes in "Female Friendship and Heroism in *Xena* and *Buffy*" that "isolationism only proves further how strong he is" (Ross 238). Instead of utilizing communication, the lead males are pitted against one another; Batman and Superman's battle in *The Dark Knight Returns* is a prime example of hero versus hero where each man refuses to compromise his own code of ethics for his "friend." Batman follows his strong conviction for justice regardless of authority, while Superman stays on the side of the government and the American-way. The eventual clash brings Superman to near-death and results in Batman's faked-death. These supermen rely heavily on independence and reject community under the guise of masculinity. This kind of "lone wolf" storytelling privileges violence and marginalizes those who utilize community. The lone wolf is strong, while those who seek teamwork are weaker.

But as a superwoman who has been abused by a lone wolf super-villain, Harley Quinn learns that community is essential for her survival. Stuller writes, "The modern superwoman deviates from the Lone Wolf model of heroism by being able to be both independent and part of a community" (Stuller 93). Poison Ivy and Harley Quinn save each other multiple times throughout their comic media history. In Karl Kesel's *Harley Quinn: Preludes and Knock-Knock Jokes*, Ivy disguises herself as Harley and takes a bullet from the Joker. When Harley enters the scene and finds Ivy bleeding on the floor, she jumps into action and pummels the Joker and his

henchmen. At the end of the battle, Harley ditches the Joker and patches Ivy's wound. She admits she knew the Joker was trying to kill her and decides to follow Ivy's wishes and try to make it on her own. This pattern is repeated in *The New 52 Harley Quinn* (vol. 2) series, where with the help of friends including Ivy, Harley is set out on her own away from the Joker. As Gilbert and Gubar suggest in *The Madwoman in the Attic*, "women themselves have the power to create themselves as characters, even perhaps the power to reach toward the woman trapped on the other side of the mirror/text and help her to climb out" (Gilbert and Gubar, *Madwoman* 16). Harley and Ivy's friendship empowers Harley to step away from the Joker. Harley refuses "to be fixed or 'killed' by an author/owner" by staying with the Joker (Gilbert and Gubar, *Madwoman* 16). This cycle in her starring series is important because it shows that Harley's character is ever-evolving and that her story does not end at the hands of the Joker.

Harley often reunites with Poison Ivy and Catwoman as the Gotham City Sirens. Nearly every series that features Harley Quinn has her set apart from the abusive Joker and often puts her under the guidance of strong figures like Poison Ivy and Catwoman (*Gotham City Sirens*), Wonder Woman (*Harley's Little Black Book*), and Power Girl (*Harley Quinn* vol. 2, *Harley Quinn and Power Girl*). Harley's bond with her female role models gives her the support she needs to overcome the Joker's abuse. *Harley Quinn* vol. 1, *Gotham City Sirens*, and *Harley Quinn* vol. 2 all feature issues where Harley fights the Joker.

In issue #25 of *Harley Quinn* vol. 2, Ivy returns to Coney Island (where Harley lives) to help Harley with a plan to infiltrate Arkham Asylum and retrieve her boyfriend Mason. But Ivy is concerned for Harley, because the Joker has recently been locked away at the same asylum. Ivy and Harley discuss their feelings about the situation. Ivy says, "I'm *worried* is all. I know you still have feelings for him" (Conner 3). Harley reassures her, "Not all feelings are good ones,

y'know?" (Conner 3). At this point in the canon, Harley and Ivy have been confirmed as non-monogamous lovers. The women communicate the situation both as friends and lovers, and with Ivy's help and trust, Harley is able to enter Arkham. When Harley finally encounters the Joker, she squares up against him, ready to fight with Ivy's confidence in her. Issue #25 is especially important for Harley's canon, because Harley tells the Joker, "I'm not yer toy anymore, unnerstand?" (Conner 23). She makes this declaration, divorcing herself from her abuser and refusing to return again. No longer the Joker's sidekick, Harley becomes the hero of her own story with help from her friends: "in stories about the female hero, the sidekick – who is traditionally of lesser power than the hero, generally in need of rescue, and often serves the narrative purpose of comic relief – is elevated to the role of hero themselves through collaborative contribution" (Stuller 92). Harley is no longer a subordinate under the Joker; she is an empowered superwoman with support from her friends.

DC Comics' *New 52* launched in 2011 and retconned the comic canon for many popular characters, including Harley Quinn. Harley's first solo appearance in this newly launched movement was in *Suicide Squad* #1 (vol. 4). But it is a later issue of *Suicide Squad*, #7 "The Hunt for Harley Quinn: Part 2" that rewrites Harley's origin and removes the woman-to-woman empowerment of *Batman: Harley Quinn*. Instead of breaking out of Arkham and adopting a jester identity, Harleen Quinzel is brought to the same chemical factory that transformed the Joker. Against her protests, the Joker tosses Harleen into one of the vats and laughs as she emerges a newly birthed *Harley Quinn*. There is no Poison Ivy in this origin and no empowering antidote. Harley never interacts with Poison Ivy in *Suicide Squad* vol. 4. Because of this, Harley is forever pining for the Joker. She even tortures a fellow teammate named Deadshot, pretending he is her clown prince lover. She demands the Joker's love and asks him to explain why he

abandoned her. This version of Harley is devoid of community and creates a madness that is “trendy” for readers but demeans the character’s history and progress as an abuse survivor.

Harley Quinn vol. 2 was published a few years after *Suicide Squad* vol. 4 and attempts to bring support back into Harley’s life with Ivy and the Coney Island gang. But the retconned origin still haunts Harley’s current comics and is also the chosen origin for the *Suicide Squad* film from 2016.

Woman-to-woman mentorship and community is often underrepresented in popular culture. But more and more, modern comic media is rising to the occasion. In the CW’s *Supergirl*, magazine mogul Kat Grant mentors Kara Danvers and often serves as Supergirl’s inspiration. In the 2017 hit *Wonder Woman* film, Themyscira is home to the Amazons – a race of warrior women who share a sisterly bond. And a *Gotham City Sirens* movie has been planned for the coming years. With this kind of representation on major screens, Stuller writes, “hopefully...we are seeing the beginning of a progressive female heroic tradition” (133). Bonds like Harley Quinn’s and Poison Ivy’s are important to popular culture, because they reject the lone wolf model of masculine protagonist storytelling. This bond also challenges the trope of the solo femme fatale who is often pitted against another woman for a man’s affections. Woman-to-woman empowerment introduces a world where community and trust encourage others to reach their full potential. It shows that what women can do when they work together is much stronger than what they can do alone.

CHAPTER 4

IN THE REFRIGERATOR

On June 21st, 1994, the newest issue of *Green Lantern*, #54 titled “Forced Entry” hit store shelves everywhere. Though comics in the 1990s were often cheap filler stories, “Forced Entry” is infamous for the grisly murder it portrays within its pages. After Kyle Rayner – the newest Green Lantern – and his girlfriend Alexandra “Alex” Dewitt return home from a romantic night out, Kyle is called away by bizarre events in L.A. While Kyle is saving the city from an earthquake and an out-of-timeline future, a villain named Major Force pushes his way into Kyle’s apartment with the sole intent to murder Alex. Though Alex manages to pull a knife on Major Force, the knife breaks on his invincible chest. As Major Force demands information about Green Lantern’s whereabouts, he brutally beats and strangles the woman, ultimately killing her. When Kyle returns home, his mission completed, he finds a note that tells him a present is in the fridge. Upon opening the refrigerator, Kyle finds the mutilated body of his beloved inside. Figure 7 shows Alex’s body limp, cold, and lifeless juxtaposed against Green Lantern’s powerful and fiery presence.



Figure 7: Green Lantern finds Alex Dewitt's body from *Green Lantern* vol. 3 #54 (Marz 16).

Women have often been used as objects to propel a male hero's story further. The pain inflicted on these women – whether through torture, rape, or death – becomes a major storyline that influences the male hero. Jennifer K. Stuller writes, “[The disempowerment of women in comics] is generally used for one of the three narrative purposes: shock value, as the initial motivation for a superheroine's quest and or/vigilantism (i.e., Red Sonja's rape), or more commonly, as the driving force of a *superman's* rage” (Stuller 144). As Stuller points out, women's disempowerment is a longstanding trope that is “abhorrent and persistent” (Stuller 144).

Several women throughout comic book history have become victim to the disempowerment trend. In 1999, comic writer Gail Simone compiled a list of women characters who had fallen victim to the trend and coined the terms “women in refrigerators,” and the act of “fridging,” a reference to Alexandra Dewitt's senseless murder. Simone sent her list to several comic book creators, asking for enlightenment on this trope. Her original letter found on her

website “WiR” reads, “These are superheroines who have been either depowered, raped, or cut up and stuck in the refrigerator... Some have been revived, even improved -- although the question remains as to why they were thrown in the wood chipper in the first place” (Simone). Simone’s list tends to focus on superwomen like Stephanie Brown (a Robin who was raped and tortured) and Barbara Gordon (paralyzed by the Joker) to show that female heroes – the women who represent power – are especially dehumanized, mutilated, and snuffed out.

Barbara Gordon’s “fridging” is one of the more famous instances of a superheroine’s victimization to torment the men around her. In Alan Moore’s 1988 graphic novel, *Batman: The Killing Joke*, the Joker – Batman’s greatest nemesis – barges into Commissioner Gordon’s apartment and immediately shoots Barbara in the spine, paralyzing her. He then goes on to strip her and take photos of her naked, bloodied body. There is also an implied sexual assault in this scene. Joker’s pictures of Barbara are then used to antagonize Commissioner Gordon. In the 2016 film adaptation by Bruce Timm and Sam Liu, Bruce Timm adds a sexual relationship between Barbara Gordon and Bruce Wayne as a prequel to graphic novel’s original story. Barbara’s eventual wounding becomes a plot point to induce pain and anger in both Batman and Commissioner Gordon in the film. Barbara’s role as Batgirl is significantly diminished and she becomes a prop. Timm and Liu sexually objectify Barbara in their *The Killing Joke* film to continue the objectification that follows in the original story.

Author Alan Moore comments on Barbara’s disempowerment in issue 147 of *Wizard Magazine*:

I asked DC if they had any problem with me crippling Barbara Gordon—who was Batgirl at the time—and if I remember, I spoke to Len Wein, who was our editor on the project, and he said, “Hold on to the phone, I’m just going to walk down

the hall and I'm going to ask [former DC Executive Editorial Director] Dick Giordano if it's alright," and there was a brief period where I was put on hold and then, as I remember it, Len got back onto the phone and said, "Yeah, okay, cripple the bitch" (Cotton 62-64).

In the interview, Moore reveals that he does not see *The Killing Joke* as one of his best stories because, "it seemed to say too little and be too explicit and perhaps gratuitous in its method of saying it" (Cotton 62). In reply to paralyzing Barbara, he remarks that Wein and Giordano "probably...should've reined me in, but they didn't" (Cotton 64). *The Killing Joke* remains controversial as both an influential *Batman* story and for its treatment of Barbara Gordon, in which her role is diminished to a prop.

Just fifteen years before *The Killing Joke* was published by DC, Marvel Comics had already caused controversy with *The Amazing Spider-Man* issue 121 in March of 1973. Though the cover does not reveal the issue's title, it does announce a major and unexpected "turning point" in the web-slinger's life (Lee 106). In this issue, a recovered Norman Osborn dons the Green Goblin costume to take revenge on Peter Parker after his son, Harry Osborn turns to drug-use. Previously in the *Amazing Spider-Man* series, Norman Osborn discovers the identity of Spider-Man as Peter Parker. Though his last fight with Spider-man left him with amnesia, Norman recovers his memories and in his rage toward his son's condition, kidnaps Gwen Stacy, Peter's love interest. During the resulting fight between the Green Goblin and Spider-Man, the Goblin drops Gwen Stacy from the George Washington Bridge. Gwen dies in issue 121, just ninety issues after her first appearance in *The Amazing Spider-Man* issue 31 in December of 1965. It is left ambiguous whether the fall from the bridge or the whiplash from Spider-Man's webbing as he reaches out for her kills her.

It was not Stan Lee's decision to kill Gwen Stacy. From August 1972 to October 1975, Gerry Conway succeeded Stan Lee as script-writer for *The Amazing Spider-Man* series. Conway found Mary Jane Watson, the feisty red-head of the series, to be a more exciting love-interest for Peter Parker. *Back Issue!* #44 (2010) discusses that Conway decided to kill off Gwen, because he wanted to make Mary Jane Peter Parker's main love-interest. Conway states:

[Mary Jane] hadn't lost the edge that made her an interesting character. Gwen didn't have an edge. She was just a nice person. I don't think she had a mean bone in her body, and wasn't likely to do something that was likely to screw things up for Peter, out of some misguided sense of self-aggrandizement, which Mary Jane was quite capable of doing – which makes her a much more interesting character (Walker 21).

Back Issue!'s Karen Walker writes, "Reader response at the time, particularly to the death of Peter Parker's sweetheart, was generally angry and distraught. Writer Gerry Conway took the brunt of this negative reaction, and was seen by some as having done something almost sacrilegious to the title" (Walker 19). Later, responding to Stan Lee's pleas to bring Gwen Stacy back, Conway revived Gwen's character in *The Amazing Spider-Man* #144 as a clone. But this Gwen is also written out of existence to allow for Peter and Mary Jane's relationship.

Gwen Stacy's death has long-since haunted *Spider-Man* fans and in 2008, Jeph Loeb and Tim Sale published *Spider-Man: Blue*, a proclaimed "love story" that explores Peter Parker's feelings for Gwen before her death in a six-issue miniseries. *Spider-Man: Blue* reduces Gwen's character down even further as an object for Peter's affections and pits Gwen and Mary Jane against each other. The series is narrated by Peter Parker and because the story follows Peter's point of view, it focuses heavily on a girl rivalry as both Gwen and Mary Jane fawn over the photographer. In issue 5, Gwen and Mary Jane play nurse to an injured and exhausted Peter

Parker. Each girl tries to “out-nurse” the other as Mary Jane brings chicken soup and Gwen brings bedtime stories.

The end of the miniseries reveals that Gwen’s death directly influences Mary Jane and Peter’s relationship. Peter says, “The night of your *funeral*. MJ came to see me at the apartment. I was ... putting it mildly...*rude* to her... I think now your death was MJ’s wake-up call – that we weren’t all going to live forever and the party *was* going to end” (Loeb 142). According to Peter, Mary Jane has a revelation the night of Gwen’s funeral and no longer wants to live the party girl life. He continues, “Gwen. I don’t think Mary Jane Watson *could’ve* had a serious relationship with me until she realized how much we all lost with you gone” (Loeb 142). Though Peter has moved on and married Mary Jane, the miniseries does close on an ominous note from the hero: “I long for a time when a girl I knew with an incredible smile and so much good in her heart made me think...Life *can* be great” (Loeb 144). This statement continues the competition between Gwen Stacy and Mary Jane Watson, because it says that perhaps Peter Parker does not see greatness in his life now.

Gwen Stacy and Barbara Gordon nearly met the end of their stories at the hands of writers like Gerry Conway and Alan Moore, who wanted to shock their audiences and sell issues. Luckily, both characters have survived to this day with writers who refused to let them remain victims of violence. Barbara Gordon made her return in 1989, barely a year after *Batman: The Killing Joke* was published, as the technical mastermind Oracle in *Suicide Squad* #23. Reimagined by Kim Yale and John Ostrander, Barbara Gordon resumed crime-fighting as a super-genius computer hacker that uses a wheelchair. In figure 8, Oracle appears on the cover *Suicide Squad* #49, reclaiming the moment when the Joker paralyzes her. Her face is angry and Barbara is ready to fight back. On *ComicBookResources.com*, Brian Cronin quotes John

Ostrander: “There were no plans for [Barbara] in the continuity [after *Batman: The Killing Joke*]. We decided that if that happened, we weren’t just going to make her better magically — we wanted to explore what happened when someone like her was crippled and how she would respond” (Cronin). Oracle became important comic-book representation for people with disabilities, alongside the likes of Dr. Midnight, Daredevil, and Professor Xavier. She has guided many super-powered teams with her genius intellect over the years – including the Suicide Squad, the Bat Family, and her own team, The Birds of Prey. *Batman: The Killing Joke* and Alan Moore nearly destroyed Barbara. Without Yale and Ostrander, Barbara Gordon would have been ignored in modern comics because of her paralysis. Despite her “fridging,” Barbara Gordon and the creators that loved her persisted, showing that the new voices in comics would not allow powerful women to disappear due to shock value.



Figure 8: Cover of *Suicide Squad* vol. 1, #49 by Norm Breyfogle.

Gwen Stacy's most important revival came in 2014 with *Edge of Spider-Verse* #2 (see figure 9) as Spider-Gwen (also known as Spider-Woman). This radioactive-powered Gwen Stacy from Earth-65 was bitten by the experimental spider that gave Peter Parker his powers on Earth-616. *Edge of Spider-Verse* #2 is renowned for flipping the script on the original *Amazing Spider-Man* story arcs. Peter Parker, jealous of Spider-Woman's fame, becomes the Lizard and subsequently dies from the experiment. Spider-Woman is found with Peter Parker's dead body and blamed for his death, just as Spider-Man is blamed for Gwen Stacy's death on Earth-616.

Spider-Gwen's titular series by Jason Latour and Robbi Rodriguez launched in 2015 and continued the story set in *Edge of Spider-Verse*. In a 2014 interview with Andrew Wheeler from *ComicsAlliance*, Jason Latour recalls when he decided to take over Dan Slott's (current *The Amazing Spider-Man* writer) idea for a Gwen Stacy Spider-Woman: "It was really clear that Gwen's re-emergence in other media [*The Amazing Spider-Man 2* film, 2014] had already given her a new life, and that her death and the way it seemed to rub a lot of her newer fans raw was meaningful" (Wheeler). He continues, "It just seemed like there would be a lot of catharsis in Gwen as the hero, instead of the victim" (Wheeler). Spider-Gwen has starred in multiple series since 2014 including the expanded *Spider-Verse* event, *Spider-Gwen*, and *Radioactive Spider-Gwen*. She is currently in the 2017 *Venomverse* event.



Figure 9: Cover of *Edge of Spider-Verse* #2 by Robbi Rodriguez.

While Gwen Stacy's Spider-Woman continues to be a bestselling character in comics, Barbara Gordon's Oracle was erased during the 2011 DC Comics *New 52* relaunch. During the relaunch, DC executives made the decision to bring Barbara back as Batgirl with a neural implant that allows her to walk, effectively deleting Oracle from the comics. There was a lot of distress and controversy surrounding the decision to bring back Barbara as Batgirl. Oracle had become important representation for the disabled, and there was public outcry that "fixing" Barbara was an insult to people with disabilities.

In an OP/ED: "ORACLE is Stronger than BATGIRL Will Ever Be" on *Newsarama.com*, Jill Pantozzi writes about her experiences with Muscular Dystrophy and being in a wheelchair. She expresses her disappointment with DC Comics and their decision and states, "...the news of Barbara Gordon no longer being Oracle affects me personally. Oracle is my symbol" (Pantozzi).

Gail Simone, long-time *Birds of Prey* writer and the woman who coined “women in refrigerators” took over as the writer for the *New 52 Batgirl* #1. She offered an interview with Pantozzi to discuss her concerns. Simone tells Pantozzi, “It’s execution. Is the story sincere, is it meaningful and honest, or is it cheap exploitation?” (“Gail, Jill and Babs”). Simone continues, “And I also think that people who know me and my work at all know I would rather quit than do something with these characters that I felt was evil” (“Gail, Jill and Babs”).

Throughout the years, popular women characters in comic have been used as objects to propel a superman’s story forward. With new creators, these “fridged” women were able to come back into the comic spotlight. Marvel Comics’ decision to revive Gwen Stacy and give her superpowers has been well-received and a positive move for the company and its readers. Barbara Gordon as Oracle was a powerful idea that brought real representation to DC Comics for many people with disabilities. But DC Comics’ choice to reboot has had many repercussions and left Barbara Gordon fans with mixed emotions. *The New 52* reintroduced characters at earlier stages in their lives, creating more interest and revenue for DC Comics. But it also took away Oracle, and women like Jill Pantozzi felt the impact of this decision.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Tim Hanley, renowned comic historian and author of *The Many Lives of Catwoman* and *Wonder Woman Unbound*, found that in 2014 both DC and Marvel Comics were overwhelmingly populated with male creators. Of the 68 comics released in June of 2014 by DC Comics, “519 men and 58 women” were credited as creators (Hanley). In that same month, Marvel Comics put out 75 comics with “619 credited creators, 545 men and 74 women” (Hanley). He also found that these comics were made by predominately white men. Turning his focus to “cover artists, writers, and interior artists” dropped the numbers of women to 5.6% (Hanley). In the way of ethnicity from both companies: 11.5% were Hispanic, 6.8% were Asian, and only 1.2% of the creators were Black in 2014 (Hanley). The numbers that Hanley found are incredibly disappointing for the comic industry. In an ever-changing world where popular media is always a Google search away, it is important for comic books to diversify their creators and the media they release. Tim Hanley’s 2014 study is shocking and also does not comment on LGBT+ creators in Marvel and DC.

Women creators like G. Willow Wilson, Kim Yale, and Gail Simone have brought a new voice to an industry dominated by male creators. In their comics *Ms. Marvel*, *Suicide Squad*, and *Birds of Prey*, these women authors have brought diversity and empowerment with strong, complicated, and flawed superwomen.

Comic books have long been a commentary on modern society and will continue to be relevant. They are America’s modern mythology and represent the core of American society. Superman became a symbol of hope after the Great Depression. Captain America punched Hitler

on many occasions, and Wonder Woman was created to give the female-identifying audience a strong feminine hero a decade after women gained the right to vote. Each generation created the hero it needed. As the gender lines of what is masculine and feminine continues to blur in the modern world, it is important to create characters that are representative of the many facets of human beings. It is important to show empowered women in comics, because comics reflect an ever-changing and evolving America. The representation of women in comics directly affects readers and influences their view of women in society. We do not live in a post-feminist society; there is still a need for greater representation and intersectionality of all people. Everyone is affected by the negative, inaccurate, and missing representation of women in popular culture.

Comics must begin to include the experiences of racial, ethnic, and religious minorities, the disabled, those outside of the gender binary, those who are not heterosexual, different body types, and the poor. At the conclusion of her book *Ink-Stained Amazons and Cinematic Warriors*, Jennifer K. Stuller remarks, "Our stories will continue to evolve as humanity does. Increased acceptance of gay marriage, the first ever campaigns by serious Black and female U.S. presidential candidates, and the presence of more women and other minorities in entertainment industry positions means that we will see an ever-increasing diversity in our heroes" (Stuller 162). The comic industry has great power to transform and diversify their characters. And in the current years, more and more characters who do not fit the usual mold have appeared on shelves: Batwoman, Apollo and Midnighter, Iceman, Moon Girl, Ms. Marvel, and Miss America are characters with varied sexualities and races.

Comics have a torrid history with their treatment of women, as evidenced in the women in refrigerators trope and their habit of stripping meaningful origins away from characters like Harley Quinn and Oracle. But with characters like Kamala Khan's Ms. Marvel and Gwen

Stacy's Spider-Woman there is a glimmer of hope that comics will continue to change for the better. It is up to new writers and artists like Gail Simone, Kim Yale, and G. Willow Wilson to bring diversity to the forefront of the big companies. As the world continues to change, comics must begin to change too. They must reflect the diversifying society they emerge from. Everyone should have the opportunity to be empowered by comics.

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Alex Cabal is a software developer and founder of Turkey Sandwich Industries. He is also the founder of Scribophile, 'an online writing group for serious writers' and he provides other services for independent writers and publishers.



Why I Release Things into the Public Domain

Recently I read a really interesting article by the author of *Zen Habits*, Leo Babauta, about something he calls Uncopyright. It's his term for releasing something into the public domain.

Leo's rationale for releasing his work into the public domain really resonated with me. It resonated with me so much that I'm releasing my own writing in this blog, along with the content of a few other projects of mine, into the public domain as well.

For those of you who're interested, I'm going to lay out my reasoning for this decision. But Leo's article, I think, does a much better job of explaining things than I can. You should read his take on it first.

A Brief History of Modern Copyright

When copyright was first conceived, the idea was to grant the creator a monopoly on their creation for a limited amount of time, so that they could profit from it without fear of someone else co-opting it.

Originally, copyright in the US was granted for fourteen years, and you had to apply for it. After that time the work would enter the public domain, which meant that anybody could now use or build upon the work. In other words, the creator had some time to profit from their work, and after a while the work was freed to the public for the development of art, culture, and science.

That system worked fine for a while. Then big companies started appearing in the US legal landscape. These big companies lived longer than humans, and sometimes their entire source of profit was from an intangible they protected with copyright.

Disney, for example, has been around for much longer than Walt Disney the man, and it wants to exclusively profit from the Mickey Mouse character Walt created. (And other things, too.) How can Disney continue profiting from Mickey Mouse indefinitely if copyright expires after a certain time?

The same question was raised by other large companies, like ones in the recording and film industries. Their answer was to talk to politicians (notably Sonny Bono, who at one point was a congressman) to get them to extend copyright nearly indefinitely. The Sonny Bono Copyright Term Extension Act (also known as — no joke — the Mickey Mouse Protection Act) extended copyright for work produced by companies to 120 years after they were created, and for individual creators to their lifetimes plus 70 years.

That's the situation we're in today.

The Effect of Indefinite Copyright on Culture

Today, a company gets to hold a monopoly on their creation for *generations*. Art, culture, and science, all of which develop through building on and transforming previous work, are chilled outside of large companies with large legal teams. Creations like Mickey Mouse, who was created almost a century ago, or *The Lord of the Rings*, which was written half a century ago, are used to extract rent that goes into the pockets of people who didn't even create those things.

Does Walt Disney the man profit from Mickey Mouse? No, because he's long dead. Does J.R.R. Tolkien profit from *The Lord of the Rings*? No, he's long dead too.

Should Tolkien's son have the right to profit indefinitely and exclusively from his father's work? Should a corporation profit indefinitely and exclusively from an intangible character? Or should these creations, with their creators long dead, be freed to the public to become part of our shared cultural heritage?

The irony of the situation is that Disney created a lot of its famous hits from public-domain work. Their film *Alice in Wonderland* is a retelling of Lewis Carroll's public-domain work *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*; *Snow White* is a retelling of a public-domain Grimm fairy tale; so is *Sleeping Beauty*. Disney today wouldn't exist without the public domain, and yet they're one of the actors who campaigned so strenuously to prevent their own ideas from entering the public domain.

We can see the chilling effects excessive copyright terms and their enforcement has today. In Germany, over 60% of YouTube videos are blocked because they contain music for which the German music industry hasn't granted a license. Grandmothers and dead people are being sued for ruinous amounts of money. 9-year old girls are being subject to police raids on their homes. Scientific papers are being locked up by companies who want to profit from their distribution, retarding progress in important fields like medicine and engineering. You could even be sued for singing "Happy Birthday" to your child. All of this just to keep the entrenched corporate business model of a different time alive in a new age of information freedom and ease of communication.

Refusing to Play the Game

Letting a creator profit exclusively from their intangible creation for a limited time is a fine idea. But the laws today have perverted that into something that harms our culture for profits on the corporate level and short-sighted greed and jealousy on the small-fry (you and me) level.

I'm not going to sacrifice our culture for the interests of a few large corporations. The internet has ushered in a new age of culture, science, and progress thanks to the instant worldwide communication and sharing of information it enables. I won't be part of a process that actively tries to stop that.

If we believe what these big companies tell us — that they *deserve* to own a character, or a series of musical notes, or a paragraph, until your grandchildren are long dead — then our culture and our society will suffer. We'll never have modern-day

equivalents of classics like *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, or *20,000 Leagues Under the Seas*, or *Les Misérables*, or *Dracula*, or *Frankenstein*, or *The Importance of Being Earnest*—things that our children can share, cherish, and build upon without fear of being caught in a life-crushing lawsuit from a big corporation.

That's why I'm releasing the writing in this blog and some of my other projects into the public domain. It's not much, and most of it is highly-specialized geek talk that would interest few. But it's my small way of bringing attention to the coming century's looming lack of public culture, and to share what little I can as selflessly as I can in the hope that it might inspire those more talented than me to do the same.

The Public Domain Doesn't Have to Mean Free of Cost

Releasing work into the public domain or with an alternative license doesn't mean you have to give it away for free. You can still charge whatever you want for your public-domain work. All it means is that you give people permission to share and build upon what you've created.

Many creators see the word "share" and break out in a sweat. But sharing isn't your enemy. Sharing is a fantastic way for people to introduce their friends to your work. When someone shares your creation with a friend, you have the chance to get another fan who will pay for your work down the line.

It's also tempting to succumb to fears of people co-opting your work and making millions while you starve. To that fear I say: give people the benefit of the doubt. I think you'll be pleasantly surprised. And if someone does make a million from your work without sharing a penny with you, then perhaps they made it because they executed on something in a way that you weren't able to—marketing, production, distribution, what-have-you. Is that the fault of your licensing decision, or of how you executed on your own intangible idea?

The Public Domain Can Be Intimidating, But Copyright Comes in Degrees

I'll admit it: Releasing your work to the public domain is a pretty radical move. Lots of creators fear their work will be "stolen" by someone else who'll make millions. Others feel it cheapens their work.

It's fair to say that releasing your work directly to the public domain is a big step. But if you're interested in alternative ways to license your work, you don't have to start a march to the public domain and burn the bridge behind you.

The Creative Commons, an organization that helps people share their work under progressive licenses, has a variety of options for you to mix and match. You could require attribution for derivative works, or require that they not be re-sold commercially, or a ton of different options. Explore the licenses the Creative Commons offers to see if there's a license option there that resonates with you.

I chose the public domain partly because I never planned to profit from this blog, and partly because of the message it sends to readers. The public domain might not be the right choice for you; but you *do* have choices besides the oppressive standard of corporate copyright.

Further Reading

Copywrong, a fascinating article appearing in the *New Yorker* that outlines the history of copyright and the problems excessive copyright lengths impose on the Internet age.

Free Culture, a book by Harvard Law professor Lawrence Lessig, is a great read and is itself available for free under a Creative Commons license.

About the *GNU project*, a software project started by Richard Stallman that embodies the concepts of sharing and information freedom, and that today helps power most of the servers on the internet (including the one serving this very page!).

The Free Culture Movement, a philosophy of sharing work under various conditions.

Dorothy Goode is a Portland painter. She has been a professional painter since 1990 and she is represented in Portland by the Butters Gallery. Featured here is an email 'newsletter' from her gallery which provides a first-person commentary by the artist on her craft and her most recent show.



Dorothy Goode Newsletter #13: "Phraseology"

~On the occasion of the solo exhibition of the same title at Butters Gallery

I have received a fair amount of flack from Richard over the years about my brushes. Besides my underutilization of the horizontal format (I never use it, actually), my sticking to a single brush during the making of a full series of paintings is the idiosyncrasy of mine he seems to understand least. The fact that the brush is always down-at-heel and in no way special, does not seem to throw him; just the singular number. I have very probably explained myself. I shall likely do so again. It isn't (like many things about me) really obstinance or a dislike of high-quality materials (expensive printmaking paper makes me swoon). It is more a manifestation of what has been my motto for some decades



Phrase #11

now: "Maximize difficulty for fun and profit." For it is difficult to make every nuance

needed, in gestural expression, using one humble instrument. And (by this point) it would almost seem like cheating for me to reach for a small tool in order to incise a small mark. It would be far too... direct a process. It would also hand a bit too much power over to the tool.

That much of what I do is indirect is somewhat in contradiction to the fact that my application method is entirely direct. Everything I do is simple, visual, visceral, and easily explained, surface-wise. A chipped, yellow cup is filled with pigment, egg yolk, and water. The chosen brush is dipped into it. Paint is spilled directly onto handmade gessoed panel. Then the color in the cup is altered by adding more pigment. Rinse. Repeat. The indirect comes into play on the level of visual/psychological (for the two are intimately linked) intent. For I am writing something when my wrist flicks the substance left, right, or both together. I am simply not interested in writing something I already understand the meaning of beforehand. Keeping the brush



Phrase #10



Phrase #2



Phrase #3

consistent allows (in another contradiction) more possibility for the unfamiliar. In my latest series of egg temperas ("Phraseology" - to be shown at Butters Gallery in February of this year, openings on the 1st and 2nd) I am being more forthright than I have been previously about my fixation on language. I have been terribly coy in the past and have delighted (rather) in titling shows such as "Evasion," "Hedging," "Pretty Mess With Words," "Sharpie Looks for God." I have been as fascinated with getting out of expressing meaning as I have been in recognizing sensible abstract structure. But about a year ago, the time came to clean the plate of extraneous matter, along with most of the bells and whistles of paint effect that can be so seductive and so obfuscating, and state the matter clearly. That I was also in a kind of conversation (using the paintings) with a singular person (my mother, in the last months of her life) during this process is also relevant, but not to the point that her

absence has robbed the work of its syntax. Each painting in the show is a phrase. Together they are a long, clause-stuffed (just the way I like 'em) paragraph, written by hand with one instrument. And saying what turns out to be something like: "Good morning." "This is who I am." "This is how I turned out." "Goodbye." Just with a few more bells and whistles.



Phrase #26

Butters Gallery,
157 NE Grand Ave.,
Portland, OR, 97232
www.buttersgallery.com
www.dorothygoode.com



Phrase #13

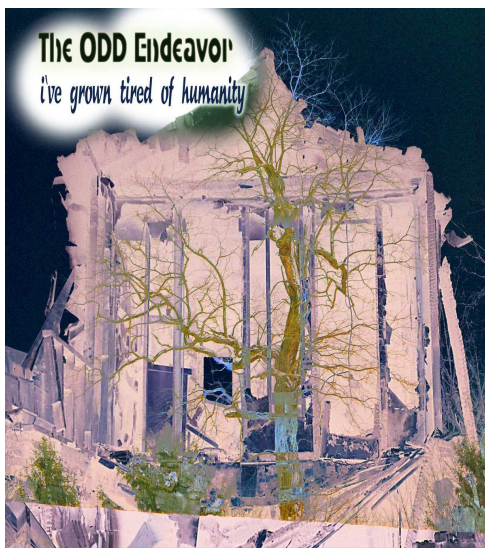


newearthplanets.blogspot.com



Event Horizon is pleased to co-host a debut performance - a reading of a newly translated short story by the Russian author, Olga Onoyko, with an interview of the author. The short story is **The House behind the Vacant Lot**. The reading is performed by her translator, Isaac Stackhouse Wheeler. Event Horizon is collaborating with She's in Russia, a podcast hosted by two Americans whose avowed mission is to short-circuit Cold War II and pull the rug out from propaganda in both directions. The podcast for the reading - in English - will be available at Sound-

cloud - <https://soundcloud.com/shes-in-russia>, on March 20. The translation is available in Issue 3 of Event Horizon.



The Odd Endeavor is a band from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and the track featured here is from their recently released double-CD, **i've grown tired of humanity**. Band member Nick Romeo characterizes Odd Endeavor's sound, tentatively, as Aggrotech, possibly a subgenre of electro-industrial; the names of genres and sub-genres reflect a shifting landscape of developing styles. The track featured here is *Brutal Existence* from the new CD:

theoddendeavor.bandcamp.com/track/brutal-existence

Other links to the music of The Odd Endeavor are:
www.cdbaby.com/cd/theoddendeavor2
theoddendeavor.bandcamp.com/



Azure Anarchy, the enchantress who hosts her website of the same name, is a recent graduate of Pacific Lutheran University. She is a composer, musician and tech entrepreneur. Azure Anarchy is building a presence and a career on her own terms. *"My sound runs from unapologetic rock anthems to sweeping piano ballads with such influences as Sara McLachlan, Evanescence, and Adele."* To paraphrase her, she is driven "to paint a larger story of honest, raw humanity". The song **Waves** can be found at: www.azureanarchy.com/music



Richard III: William Shakespeare is a genius because ... well, because. Certainly his mastery of human nature and psycho-dynamics is on that list of reasons. So here's a theater-party ice-breaker: How can Richard - not yet King Richard III - seduce and marry the Lady Anne who despises him as the murderer of her husband - and also of her husband's father, the late king? Such a path would be a sporting challenge for the depraved Richard and it would grease the rails in his scheme to murder his rivals and become king. In Act I, Scene 2, Lady Anne, mourning

over the coffin of Henry VI, blames Richard and his family, the Yorks, for the murders of the king and her husband Edward, the late king's son. She curses Richard - graphically and specifically. Richard finds Anne and goes to work. We have a strong script. We will need equally strong A-list actors to pull this off and we have them in Laurence Olivier and Clare Bloom. This production was made in 1955. The clip can be found at TCM - Turner Classic Movies: www.tcm.com/mediaroom/video/222797/Richard-III-Movie-Clip-Lady-Anne.html



Lindsey Buckingham: No, Event Horizon does not fawn over rock stars and music videos. Event Horizon *does* note memorable performers and memorable performances. There are tradeoffs in trying to choose one version over another. This one is pretty good and Lindsey performs a similar feat on both songs in this live performance: He blows away a rock'n'roll crowd with a nylon string guitar, his bare fingers and no backup. The songs are **Big Love** and **Go Insane**.

youtube.com/watch?v=gdd_fv0xrSo&index=2&list=RD2o_YI_PgK0o



Malka Moma - Neli Andreeva & Philip Kutev Choir: This performance has been enjoyed by millions over social networks and YouTube. In a number of sources it is called "the most beautiful song in the world." There is little commentary about the song to be found in a search but this entry seems to be the most concise and the least contradictory:

Neli Andreeva is a renowned folk singer, soloist and choir master of the Philip Koutev Folklore Ensemble; for the past year she has been artistic director of the Nousha vocal formation. Fans of Bulgarian folk music invariably associate her name with the song Malka Moma (Little girl) which has come to be her calling card. The song was written by Neli Andreeva herself and Georgi Genov, conductor of the Philip Koutev Folklore Ensemble. (<http://bnr.bg/en/post/100548936/neli-andreeva-presents-her-new-album-the-only-one>)

This YouTube video can be found at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=-_gm0j1H1kc



"Bunraku is Japan's professional puppet theater. Performed with chanting, a three-stringed shamisen and puppets, each of which is usually manipulated by three people, and also known as joruri (narrative chanting), it developed at the end of the of the 16th century, about the same time that the samisen was introduced from Okinawa and kabuki performances started in the Kyoto area. In 2003, bunraku was designated by UNESCO as one of the Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity. Bunraku is deeply associated with Osaka." ... from factsanddetails.com

if you're interested. This performance on YouTube is a representative example of Bunraku puppet theater. Because if you've never seen it, well, ya gotta. www.youtube.com/watch?v=1qcBSAwQVpw



Old Movie Stars Dance to Uptown Funk: At 38.7 million views and 134k Likes since 2015, this is not exactly an obscure gem hidden in some dusty corner of the internet. But it is a brilliant 3-year old classic. The synchronization is unbelievable and the energy is irresistible. Go to www.youtube.com/watch?v=M1F0lBnsnKE



