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Notes from New England

[Commentary]

*“Please accept this ragged purse
of high notes.”*

The following continues the series originally called Notes from New England, begun in issue 24-25 (Winter 1998), then revived in issue 59 (October 2006) as Notes from the Northwest, & appearing since issue 75 (October 2010) under its original title. It is intended as a gathering-place for observations of various lengths upon the world around me. It will be culled, like much of my writing, from my notebooks, and perhaps these thoughts will be expanded upon sometimes as well.

Dream Raps, Volume One

I Am Immersed

You know... you know... you know... It's like, it's like this. I, you, but let's say you, fall asleep and instead of just sleeping, a bodily rest, a stillness, I fall into the most complex stories. Strange, surreal, yet vivid. Vivid. And for the stretch of the really vivid ones, the especially vivid ones, the ones they say come near dawn, if you sleep overnight, I'm as immersed in the reality of what is happening as I will be when the alarm goes off and I wake up. Just as immersed, just as real. In all ways. Just as vivid. And so, why is this important activity that happens to every single human being somehow left behind upon leaving bed and entering the human world?

When You Run in Dreams

Sometimes when you run in dreams, from somewhere to somewhere, then you find yourself doing it again. The plot doubles, narrative or anti-narrative. I suppose it depends on what terms you try to apply to what happens in dreams now. What would be interesting and oh, probably someone out there has done it, is to say *OK, what if you extracted the rules from within the event itself, the events, if you would call them events.* And that might be interesting.

But what catches me every time, and what I haven't been able to figure out, is how in waking, there's so much conflict in action and purpose and yet everyone, even other kinds of beings, we all dream. And I wonder, is this somewhere to start? I mean is there something to this? Is there some kind of fresh ground to work with here? There are certainly tribes that value dreams more than we, in the West, do, incorporate them. But I wonder if you brought all the powers to bear, that exist in the Western world, the science, the technology, the thinkers, the leaders,

the freaks, if you brought dreams up from their obscure place, to a place on high, well, what would come?

Tired Mind, Dream Narrative

The strange thing are the dreams where a body's exhausted, but the mind generates powerful, surreal narratives. Dream narratives. And the body lies there, exhausted, sucking on sleep, like a dry throat water. But the mind, *oh the mind doesn't stop*. The mind does not stop in the least. *Pounds away*. And in the morning, when in a sense mind and body reunite, via waking consciousness, the body, refreshed for the sleep, but the mind trying to recall the dreams can't. What were those powerful images? Can't recall them. The body was too tired. Somehow, the body participates in the dream recall. Does the body participate in the dreams? Does the body dream? Does the body dream?

Body Asleep vs. Body Awake

You know, I guess you could say, I've been trying to figure this thing out for a long time. It's this question of what exactly, what works, what can explain the relation between the body in sleep and the body awake. Now it seems as though there are two explanations. Two. That's right.

There's the waking explanation, which pushes a sort of kind of linear narrative rooted in time and space. Now there are all sorts of exceptions, there's all sorts of things you can talk to, there's all sorts of stories you can tell all sorts of people. You can point toward and say *but?* And yet, most of the time, mostly in agreement.

And then, there's that same body in sleep. And that's where all the weird shit that happens in waking life, that happens here and there, more to some than others—well, that's where it all breaks loose. Sort of like a gloves-off, nobody's-fooling-nobody-anymore kind of situation. Now if you can rustle me up an answer for all of this, well, sir, I'd be most happy hear you out.

Where Do Dreams Flush To?

And I keep wondering: where they flush to, these dreams? I wake up some mornings and what it seems like is that they're there but they're leaving, where are they going, where do they go, try to write them down, where do they go? They come and they go and yet while they're happening I'm prone and still and so how is it they come and go? Do they move around? And even when I capture them in a few words on a piece of paper it's not like they're not going, it's just that I'm marking their passage, their passage through me.

I mean one could say, well, they start in my brain and end in my brain, just chemicals firing off in all directions but I don't see that, I don't agree with that, I don't think so. Maybe the chemicals are playing with something else, jacking into something else, chemistry and something else. It always seems to be when you ask those deep questions, you get a handful of answers sitting on your table—then you look around and realize, *ah, there's something else, damn it, something else.*

Start Where You Are

Now, you've always got to start where you are. Always. Well, you don't have a choice but by golly, sometimes the air around you slips inside your head and tricks you into thinking you do have a choice in the matter. But I say to you now, *no, you start where you are.* There are blooms outside this window on a tree, that's where it starts. Here it is merely February in the Pacific Northwest and there are blooms outside this window. That's where you start, that's where to start. You want to build a focus, you want to see the whole world, start there. Start with something right in front of you, maybe something beautiful, maybe something that catches your eye, that you look at and you like and think: *I like that.* Now if I'm going to build a world, I'm going to start *right there.*

There might be something else in your view, something else you can see, there may be a bill for your unpaid goods or there may be a broken device, there may be a sad letter, but no, start with that beautiful thing, and it may be beautiful in the nicest of ways and it may be beautiful in a way that only you understand, you in your heart understand, maybe deeper in your heart that's where you understand. So blooms, and then beyond or within. Now that's the question because I could tell you things.

I could say that in my mind when I'm asleep and I'm dreaming, whole worlds rise up, whole worlds rise up, whole worlds rise up. Or maybe you can reach your hand out to the world and reach another hand in, so to speak, into those dreams and what they mean if anything. But anyway, start with something beautiful before you look way out or way in. Make sure the ground under your feet is solid and lovely.

Favorite Coffeehouse Gone

So, I was with my beloved on the street, and I sat down in front of our favorite coffeehouse and she just walked away and then I looked inside and it was empty, it was gone, to the floors gone, and I looked for her, and she wasn't there around either, and I sort of panicked, you might say. And what happened was I called 911 and then, well, she reappeared and said, *well, there you are* and I called back 911 and said *it's OK, it's OK, it's alright, my favorite place is gone but she's back, that girl of mine, so I'm alright, I'm alright, you thank you, you thank you, you have a nice day.*



It Came Upon Me With No Name

It came upon me with no name and it was beautiful and I couldn't describe it but I tried. It came upon me both hard and soft, hard like a punch in your belly, when you're not expecting it, so it really lays you low, and soft like a breath in your ear, whispering something you really like in a secret language that you do not know. *Now how, you ask, could it be both hard and soft?* Good question. And the answer is I don't know, for it came upon me without a name, without expectation. No explain of what it was, how long it would stay, or where, after it went, it would go.

Quick Talking Dreaming Hustling Man

Oh, yeah, oh yeah, oh yeah, oh yeah? Oh yeah, oh yeah. What? What? What? Oh, yeah. Oh, OK, OK, OK. Are you sure? Are you sure? No, man, really, I was standing on a corner, standing on the corner, and I was trying to get a couple bucks and this guy come up to me and he said, listen, man, I'll tell you, I'll tell you this and uh then you'll know cuz everybody should know, no no no you gotta listen, no don't walk away, you gotta listen, yeah yeah yeah, so so so there I was and I was havin this dream and and and it was a very strange dream and then I realized man, I ain't dreamin', and I looked around and I thought wow everything sort of looks well well well, well it looks uh it looks the same but not quite the same, no no no it looks kinda different, kinda different. Can't quite say how maybe it's the color, maybe it's the sound, I don't really know but listen, listen . . . yeah yeah yeah yeah, so listen listen listen listen, I'm gonna tell you what you need to know and what you need to know is that on certain nights, when the moon is half full, god shines from your big toenail.

I Was Following the Thread

I was following the thread, following the thread, I was thinking about the thread, and what it meant, it's an old story. It's an old story about how a seeker was looking to defeat the great beast and so he had to confront him, the beast would eat flesh, sacrifices, and this great hero, this great seeker hero, was deciding he was going to defeat the beast.

The beast lived in the middle of a labyrinth and the hero's lover, who knew that others had gone in to fight the beast, said *here, here's a thread, I'll hold one end as you go in, you hold the other, and that way you won't get lost along the way because there are tricks of the mind to be encountered, not just tricks of battle.*

And the seeker hero went in to the labyrinth, deep into the labyrinth, and confronted the beast, and battled the beast, and slay the beast, and was able to come back out. Elude the mind tricks and defeat the beast and come back out and win and return.

I was thinking that the thread is an idea that you can use in other ways. You can battle with

it in other ways and so that is what I was thinking about, how you follow the thread and you look back, and the thread is where you came from, and what matters, and then you can look forward and see where you're following it to, and see if they connect, and see if you're holding on tight now. And that's what you're thinking about, you're thinking about how to do that and I think that the thread idea is a helpful one, interesting. It's a way of going at it.

Sniff the Air

Well then, well then, sniff the air, sniff the air, sniff the air, oh, it smells like November. How does November smell? I suppose that's a good question. I think it often smells cool and clear and full of a sense of passing time. That's a whole hell of a lot for a November to bear in its mere scent, but yes indeed, and when I look up on this November morning, I see colorful rings floating in a mass. It's a happy mass, a colorful mass. You may say, well, what in the world are you talking about and I would say, no man, if you can't see them with your eyes open, look with your eyes shut. Colorful rings, red blue yellow green even black orange, and they're floating. It's nice whether you see with your eyes open or shut. I don't think it matters one way or the other and if you look further, maybe shift to your left or right, you might see whirling patterns of concentric circles, a mind warp of images, and you might say, *hey man, what's going on here*, and I would say, *it's a new day at the radio ranch ha ha ha*.

It Was a House

Now sometimes it will occur that if you engage the dream space, really push your fingers deep in, well, it'll fuck with you, it'll terrify you, it'll bring you screaming awake away from your sleep. It was a room, it was a house, there were rooms, I was in a room, I was moving from room to room. There were cobwebs, they got thicker and thicker, they got much thicker than they ever should have or could have been. It made no sense, *oh it made no sense*, and there was my father, deceased a while but in this dream, of course, there he was, and he was saying, *I can't hear you, I can't hear you*. And I realized that the cobwebs were very *very* thick and I was having to claw to break through them. It was tangled. I was surrounded, like a thick net, and when I broke through, there were huge spiders waiting.

It Was 1998

It was I guess you could say an historical dream of sorts, but it was involved with time travel, which made it even more interesting. It was 1998, and the funny thing with dreams was that you don't always catch why you would know such a little detail, and yet I knew it was 1998, and there I was, and it was like my mission was to find out how did we get from there to here and here I suppose would be 2010 and there of course was 1998 and they were places

you might say, and so there I was, and oddly again the two details that came through pieces of the explanation were dotcom crash and George W. Bush, and I remember thinking in this dream time travel 1998 place that I was in that I would have to look up the dotcom crash on Wikipedia. And I've been thinking ever since how the hell did we get from then to now? I've been thinking that, how did we get from then to now?

Two Bookstore Dreams

Now what was strange was that it happened twice in a week. That old bookstore. I hadn't worked in it for many years and, yet, here it was again. And somehow I was brought in for the day, and there I was among customers, each with a demand. Few of them would acknowledge that others had an equal demand of equal importance—each one was like a child with an empty cup that needed filling *right now*. And there was Amante and he greeted me, and he hadn't worked there in many years either so it made it funnier. It's like there we were both back in that store where we met years ago, working away, same work, bookstore work never changes.

And then the second time, same store but not physically the same and yet it was and yet I don't think it was, it didn't have the same qualities, it was the store with the same name but it's like it was in a shopping mall or something. There was an atrium outside. There was a crazy old man, long white hair and beard, scary eyes. He shouted something at me, something insulting, and, for a moment, but, no, I objected, protested, and told him so and he looked at me with crazier eyes and he said *I'm 75 years old* as if that justified any garbage coming out of his mouth, anything at all, *75 years old*. And the people from the bookstore where I did not work this time were looking on and eventually I followed them in and I explained to a man—who looked perhaps slightly like a man I might have worked for at some bookstore or other at some point or other—explained that I wasn't and that wasn't but *75 years old* was not justification, it just wasn't.

Dream of the Desert

It was the dream of the desert, where I'd lived so many days over the years, and I hadn't been there in a while, at least physically, and that was OK, but I hadn't been there in a while in my dreaming either, so that was curious, since that was just part of the deal over the years, curious. In this dream, the climactic event, the fire to destroy the old and burn the new into the world, had been cancelled, too stormy, that's what I'd been told by that one and this one but strangely my concerns were otherwise.



I was walking around, with a twist, both my first love and my best one all in one, most curious. Time travel is not linear, if I could draw a moment's lesson from any of this it would be that. I was in two places at once—I had not gone from now to then or then to now—I was both and a lot in between and otherwise.

Make Friends in Dreams?

And I ask: is it possible to make friends in dreams? I mean, I think I've read about this, here and there, guides, visions, bush souls, things of that kind, but I wonder, but I think it's possible. One time, I had a swarm of friends living in some kind of suburb. I'd known them for a long time. Now you ask: *were they friends from your waking days?* and I'd say *no, pretty much not, pretty much people I've never met that I've known for a very long time and cared for very much.* What do you make of that?

I took pictures when we were all together. At one point me and one of these friends, we were diffusing a bomb or something. At another point, we were talking about going to a party on New Year's Eve and there was a deep affection, it was visceral. They weren't just people I've known in waking days with different faces, these were different people, it was warm and it was dear and I loved it.

Tall Tall Building

I was in a large building, I was climbing from level to level—each one I would arrive at, and it would prove perilous. It's like I would arrive through a doorway and I'd be on a ledge and there'd be a deep drop which is strange. It's as though each floor of the building had nothing architecturally to do with the lower one or the one above, and I continued climbing and eventually I reached the top one and I found a huge library of books, many of them strange and obscure, many of them science fiction and I said *this explains the bookstore many stories below* but I wonder why I said that.

Then came the twist, the twist was while in this building on this top floor in this large library of books I got to remembering this other series of dreams about a big building, a house, and I would walk through the living room, climb a ladder or a set of stairs into the attic and this would lead me to endless series of rooms, so I was dreaming and these dreams I was having while I was dreaming were reminding me of other dreams I've had. Now you tell me the relationship between that dreaming, the other dreaming, and waking.

I Needed to Record Somebody

I needed to record somebody, it was really important, even several dreams in or down or far, depending on how you look at dreams and their architecture. I would wake within dreams to other dreams and this same need to record somebody. I needed to get this person on the phone, I needed to set up all the equipment, I needed to get their words recorded, preserved, they were important words.

But then it fell upon me and I landed within it, it was a very tall bureau, many drawers, impossibly so, a dream bureau of course, what else?—and my little friends were in the drawers, there were many of them, I don't know why, but there were many of them, they were in the drawers, they were on the top, some slipped behind. I kept trying to gather them up. They were small, I did not want them to get lost and then the littlest one of all, the one that cackles, the one that's full of shenanigans and trouble, her arm was moving around, it rotated strangely, in fact it wouldn't stop rotating. It was disturbing, I didn't understand but I kept looking and looking—

It's A Far Western City

It's a far Western city that I'm in. It's night, cold, and I'm trying to climb a very icy street, climbing on my hands and knees, crawling really. I need to get to that apartment. Find someone. It's an apartment building that the outside is the inside, depending on where you are in it. I'm trying to call my love with the phone that's unplugged and when I plug it in I notice that it's powered by large boulders and I look in the distance at this inside outside apartment toward the horizon that I shouldn't be able to see as clearly as I do and yet I do see it and there . . . wild sheets of light climb the sky, rip and mend, rip and mend the sky, and they give way as a dark bank of clouds descends low and, between the horizon and that bank of clouds, countless colored lights bounce, they bounce up and hit the clouds and bounce down and hit the horizon, bounce up and down, thousands of them, thousands of them. Good.

I'm Hired as an Auto Mechanic

Now this is a curious one. I'm hired by an auto garage as a mechanic. My buddy encourages me to take the job, and the owner of the garage is a paternal fellow, takes care of his employees. He's a good guy. I think he has a boss too, somewhere.

And when we're at work we all wear face-masks. They render our faces almost devoid of features, but quickly I realize I don't know anything about cars and fixing them and I panic. I don't have the skills or the knowledge to do this. But everyone there, all my co-workers and my boss and my buddy, they talk me into it, they say *you can do it*, they're very emotional, very close, dear, they want me to try, so I do.

I'm in School

I'm in school, art class, and a math class. I need to take both of them and pass to graduate. But after a while I stop going to the math class, I just stop going, it just doesn't matter, it's not important. The art class, though, I have an assignment to draw what's against a wall, picture frame, refrigerator, some other things, and I draw my picture and the things on the wall, against the wall, I draw the far edge of the picture, other things take up most of my picture. And I get a low grade, until I point out I had filled the assignment, those things are in my picture, they're just at the far edge and the borders.

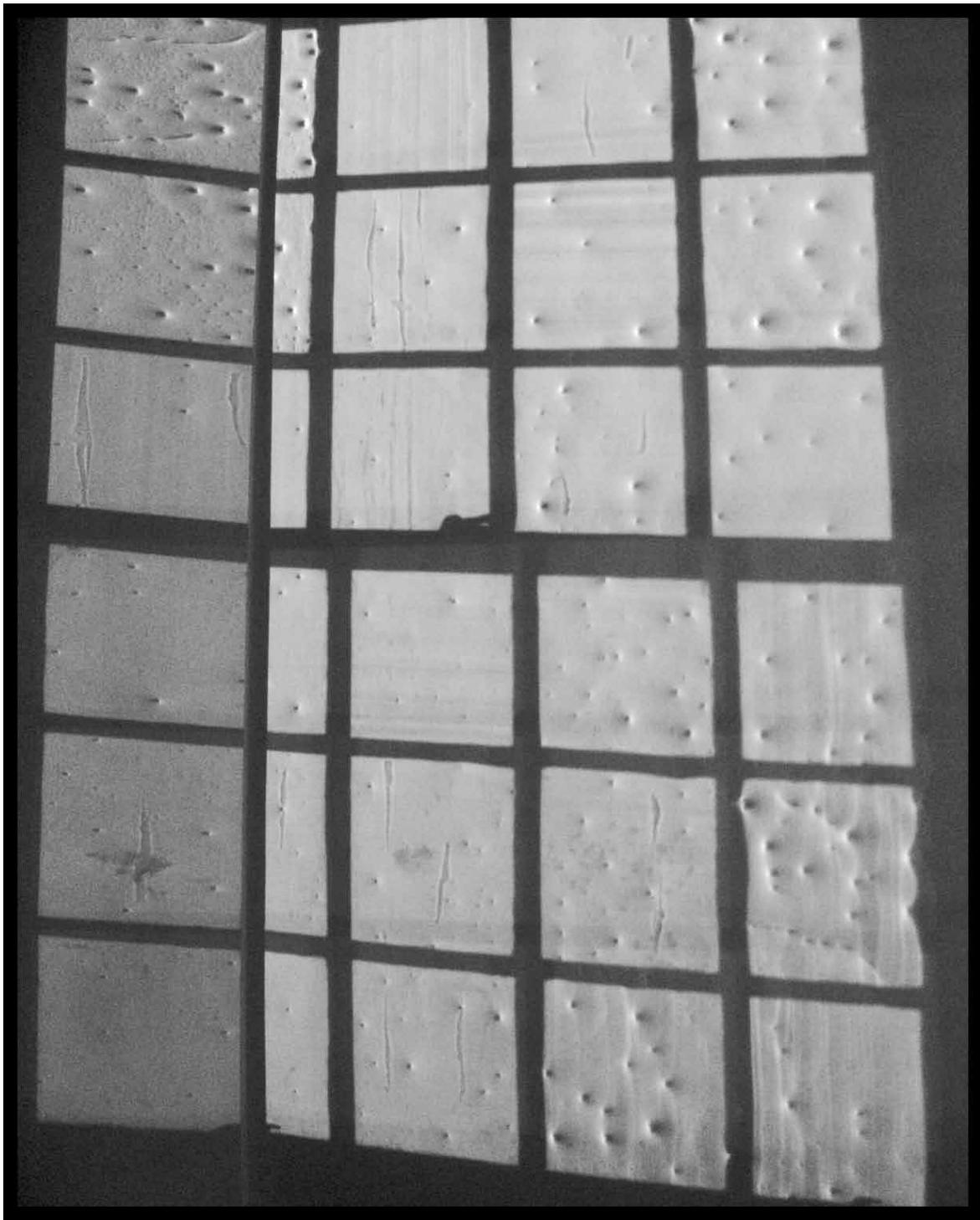
I don't like the class much, I don't like the teacher much, the teacher doesn't like me much. And I look out the window and I think a big storm's coming but I hope even the teacher survives and prospers.

I Had a Job

Well now. Well now, I say. Had a job, had a job, I say. In which I was assigned a task, first, to counsel a man who is kicking speed by starting on heroin. It was up to me to talk with him, I worked with three others whom I saw as buddies, one said bring him a present, and that job didn't last. It just did not last. I couldn't say why. Who could say why? But it did not last.

So I went to a visit a college, radio station there, it was in a warehouse-like area. And I sat talking to the ones who run it thinking *that's what I want, a room in a house devoted to radio* but alas they said *you can't DJ here, you're not a student*. Well, so much for my good plans.

Moved along, as we do. I seemed to be living in a city, going to a college, which was not really organized, no radio. At one point I was living in an apartment with an elevator, and it was very small and very crowded, and when I get out of the elevator I end up on the bus and it was crowded and I just wanted to sit till it was over.



Two Jobs Twisted into One

There was the story of a job I had and the oddness of it was that it was two jobs twisted into one. At a bookstore, always at a bookstore. And the colleague from one bookstore is working with me in the other bookstore, and he came up to me as I was trying to figure out how to ring up on the cash register a soda someone was purchasing, and he said to me instead *these books are really bad and we're trying to figure out a way to lower your pay rate*. So there's that story.

But I tend to think that there are better ones that can be told. A better one is the time I climbed the hill with that old folk singer, asking her if she was still an earth mother. She was telling me how she taught her son to play guitar because he had developed mental disabilities, and we'd nearly reached the high school up this very steep hill when I was no longer there. I was in your room, lying in your bed, looking out toward the world from where you looked out toward it many mornings before getting up, getting along your way, and I think that I don't understand even more than I thought I did.

Law Firm

Now this one went so deep I don't even know what to say but I'll try. I will try. I am working for a law firm, a new job. Early on asked about it, I liken it as a show to *LA Law* that the lawyer had not heard of. My job is ambiguous. I am uncertain, tenuous. One of the lawyers has three only somewhat friendly cats?

The lawyers tend to leave at 2:00. I experience two days there. The head lawyer has a TV interview with Senator Russ Feingold. At another point they're filming them all around a table, joshing, throwing stuff, there is a term they use I forget. I feel invalid and unsure, yet nobody is unfriendly. There is an empty office, one of the lawyers has moved from it.

It was odd because it was like I was watching a show of which I was a part and at moments we were watching shows within the show and also being filmed. Now I'm not sure, I don't know, but for the two days I resided in that law office.

LSD Expert on TV

I was on CNN, the cable TV news network. I was in the audience, and there was this expert on LSD. I can't say I knew his name or anything about him but there he was. I was sitting next to an old buddy of mine and the expert he had this long I guess you'd call it an applicator, and it was filled with LSD, and he came over and he drip-dropped it into my buddy and my eyes and he drip-dropped on our faces, splashing on our faces and on our skin, it was all wonderful and seemed strange and what could this be about being splashed on cable news TV with very nice acid with me and my buddy? He said he had no trouble—he said no one had followed

him—he said no one had followed us. He said this appearance brought in many donations that night and I remember wondering at that because I was thinking he’s talking about this as if it’s already happened. How can you talk about the present tense as though you’re in the future talking about the past? But gosh was that acid good.

Take Back Your Mind

Someone said, they said, said someone said *take back your mind* and I stumbled, hearing those words. They seemed to mean something. I mean, they seemed to mean something to me and I wondered, *where had my mind been that I needed to go there to take it back*—and I didn’t know, or maybe it hadn’t left but I had and I needed to return. Or maybe there was a siege within, a kind of paralysis in which all movement slowed, not freezing but slowed—the currents of figures the currents of waters the currents of spirit and thought, dream, dreaming, wishing and dreaming. For dreams went on, oh they went on, but wishing, not so sure about that. *Take back your mind*, whatever this means, it’s potent, it’s one of those strikes, straight and true, straight and true.

How Would You Know You Passed the Test?

After all, *how would you know if you passed the test?* that’s my question—and if you time traveled in dreams, *how would you know that too?* that’s my other question. If you were sitting there with your thick headphones on your head, mind the pencils, they grow soft during transmission from one place to another. What would that mean and if you had to kill someone to save someone else because the story just got too complicated and what about the dog, what about that dog? Not quite a dog, that’s what I say. You would pet the dog, pretty lovely fur, but the dog would never lick your hand because like I said it was not a dog, not quite, and as I also said *how would you know if you passed the test?*

All Night I Stared at Him

All night I stared at him, lying on his death bed, eyes shut, long gray beard tucked above his blanket, silent, still, and I kept coming back over and over from wherever else, like a circuit from elsewhere back to the image of this man dying in this strange place far from where he’d ruled, where he’d created, where he’d loved. Seemed a warning, warning.

There Were Birds

There were birds, there were birds, there were birds, and at first they were out the window, and they were filling my dreams so they were out the window but they were in my dreams too. They crossed over, with their singing, calling, tweeting, crossed over until eventually they formed my dreams, more and more, bigger and bigger, their singing became my dreams, my dreams became their singing more and more, and still they were out the window at their singing.

Travelling One Town to the Next

Now I suppose you could say that each one has its own groove. I'd say, well now, that's true, but I suppose that some of them groove deeper than others. There was this one where I was passing through, traveling, one town to the next, three towns in all, and so I passed through the first, passed through the second, and then I passed through the third and got to talking to someone and others too and none of them had heard of the first two. I'd been through them, of course, so I had experience of passing through them, and yet in this third town nobody knew them. Now what do you do with that? I suppose thinking about it more I would have piled him in my car, or whatever I was traveling in from the third town, and drove him on back to the second and the first, got folks meeting up, connecting because you know in Dreamland there's power and vulnerability both.

I Was Deep in the Woods

I was in some kind of woods, and at one point I was going to drink from a flower, it was a deep flower and it was full of water. But suddenly there was a great toad that leaped out of the water and then there were more toads and then they were gone.

And I turned my head slowly to watch them and found myself living in what seemed like a one-room apartment with a cement floor in a city. I leave one day, don't lock my apartment door and as I return later on a neighbor woman greets me. Lives in the building next to mine, up on the third floor. She waves. I think she's retarded. I realize I know her from other dreams. I wave back and then I walk into my apartment and all my things are gone, everything's all been cleared out, there's just two big trash bags sitting there—and I panic and I run outside to call my love in, and tell her what happened.

And I turn around again as though to a noise and find myself one of a small group of soldiers and the leader, our leader, is saying *you've got to teach us our history so that we don't forget*. And I wonder if the lesson to learn is be careful in dreams when you turn your head.



In a City on a Bus

I was in a city on a bus, I was taking a long trip, and I get off for a break, and I got into this joint, and I get a sorta hamburger at this joint. I don't have any money. That's kinda the problem. I just want a soda and a hamburger, no money and what's strange, what happens next, is that I willed some and then I had it. Now in pocket.

So I say to the old lady *can I get a soda but no ice please* and she mixes me up a soda with a spoon. I'm impressed, some kind of skill. What happens next, I'm in a fenced yard and there are two great snakes, cobras, one brown, the other really big, and they near me. I can't say for sure they were going to hurt me or I threatened them, but we were fenced in the yard, and they were snakes, and I was whatever I appeared to them to be. I grabbed them, tossed them, and what it feels like is that I'm summoning my knowledge of how to deal with the situation, how to will money for a soda, there's a familiarity with how it feels, perhaps there's more than one way, and more than one timeline into lucidity.

Poison the World

Hm, I hear a man and his wife planning to poison the world, using poison grown from seedpods and converted into honey, which when poured onto people rendering them smiling and mindless.

I watched the seeds grow in jars into these pods, large misshapen green pods. And then I'm observing them in a classroom where he administers the honey and I escape and I try to warn people. I see him come out with his wife and they need more people, families, they don't know what he's doin—and then, at the far edges of this story, whose middle I don't know, the man is defeated, and he's buried deep in the earth, many layers down, below living strata.

Sometimes the Dreams Are So Deep

Sometimes the dreams are so deep, some other kind of real, that I wake up and they're completely gone, and I don't even understand that really, how that can be, how one can be so completely immersed in, in *something*, and then it's gone, happens often, not always but often. Even what's brought back is shells from a shore, pictures, bits. Some of them are valuable, some of them are dear, but the ones where I feel like it's the entirety of everything, I feel even more all pervasive than this waking, varied and trapped and immobile, and I don't know what it means?

It Was a Hotel

It was a hotel and it was full of covert activities. And I'm in it. At one point I'm in someone's room on a cell phone and I'm told to skin the drawers, which means look for devices, and I go through them looking for devices. I don't have any luck, but my boss does, finds something, not a bug but finds something. The moment shifts or maybe I just put on the TV in the hotel room that I've broken into looking for bugs.

Anyway, I'm watching the show on Amadon, freaky kid, has a buddy with him, and a pretty sort of girlfriend, and I know that Amadon had once played an epic game of tennis ball hockey, grand it was like a planet. Now he lives in an abandoned building, friends come over, smoke some weed. It might be some sort of reality show I'm watching, maybe it's true, I don't know.

Amadon doesn't notice his sort of girlfriend's come-ons, doesn't pay attention. He was in a yearbook at his school on the basketball team page—he was the only player not to score. Amadon seems to be someone who impresses others but is lost in his own mind.

Owner of a Long Strange Warehouse

He was the owner of a long strange warehouse, at least I think he was the owner. He might have been some kind of manager. Sort of a vague overseer. He wasn't in charge, I could tell. We passed from area to area, room to room. There was no one in charge of this—there was no coherency save a roof above.

At one point we passed through a narrow room and a scrawny two-headed dog attacked me, bit me on the arm. He wasn't a two-headed dog like those you encounter in mythology, big, scary, muscled. No, he was scrawny like he hadn't eaten in awhile—he was poorly cared for, if cared for at all.

Later on, the owner was gone, didn't miss him much, he hadn't impressed me, but something had happened and I was being held with others in the gym. Being held in the gym I don't know by whom. I don't know and yet somehow I knew that there was an air duct, just had to undo a few screws and crawl on in. The whole thing seemed kind of precarious but it was a way out, and we had to get out and we had to get out soon—

I Write for a Newspaper in Dreamland

I write for a newspaper in Dreamland and it's called the *Eighth*, now figure on that one a bit. Peculiar, I'd say.

I also carry around my hekk, it's my dream-stick, it allows me to choose some dreams over

others, go into different rooms and not go into others in Dreamland. Now you figure that out. I can't figure that out. But it's interesting. The whole thing's interesting.

At one point, there was a cookie, yes indeed, there was a cookie, and there was a war and I was watching the war from the cookie's point of view. Now, wouldn't you say that's a little strange? You might say that's a little strange, you might say, *hey pal, that's a little strange, you and your dream-stick, you and your newspaper called the Eighth, you and your thoughts of wars from the cookie's point of view and what does that mean? I mean, really. What does that mean?* you're asking. I'm asking. I don't know. I only know that, day after day, more days than some, others, it deepens a little or I deepen a little with it relationally.

Complex of Rooms

It was a complex of rooms and I think a party was going on. I'm not sure, but there sure were a lot of people around. Didn't seem like roommates. I have a room, and also a bathroom, and people keep walking through the bedroom, passing through, hanging around, those kind of people, looking at my books, thinking of my things, trying to form a picture. I seem happier in the bathroom, where I have a table and chairs—perhaps that's where I work.

The bathroom is within the bedroom, it's a side door you can only get to it through the bedroom, and I like to close that door and work in the bathroom but you see, people keep coming in. I have work to do and an important phone call to make and people just keep coming. I suppose they do that.

Labyrinthine Mark on Wall

I was standing in a hallway of sorts, with my brother, and we were looking up at a wall with a labyrinthine watermark which faded from right to left, and I was thinking how I'd looked up at this wall before, I've seen that watermark, that labyrinthine watermark faded from right to left and I keep asking and wondering, *what does it mean in a dream when you remember the experience you have in a different dream, a place you've been before in two separate dreams? Are they connected? And if so, how? How are they connected? And what about those dreams where you're surrounded by people you've known for years, people you don't know in your waking years and yet here they are surrounding you and there's deep affection on all sides? What does all that mean?*

It Was a Clean House

It was a clean house, it was very clean and I walked through its rooms and they were all clean, I think they were empty but maybe not, maybe just bare. Maybe there wasn't much in them



It was a young man, probably early thirties, facing the viewer, holding a glass of, I think, champagne, probably just writing out something, wearing a dark top hat and a dark jacket. On the left-hand upper-corner, there was a view of the outside of the restaurant but little could be seen ... I don't remember it at all. Except, I remember there was a guy with a top hat and maybe a moustache ... He was a local writer that lunched in the cafe Tortoni everyday and always left his hat on. Manet used to eat there frequently and one day, he said: "Do you mind if I paint you?" ... It's kind of small and it's like a man, all dressed-up with a top hat, holding a pencil and drinking absinthe. I don't remember the background much because I used to just look at his eyes ... It was vibrant and the gentleman sitting there in the cafe looked at you with eyes of enjoyment and pleasure ... He had an inquisitive, questioning look in his eyes. This was not a man who was carrying major responsibility or authority. He was enjoying life but he was not just a pleasure seeker. There was also a mind at work there ... It seemed like he was looking far away. Looking out but not at you, as if in a dream ... It hung right underneath the powerful portrait of Manet's mother, but it was much more appealing and accessible. The mother, I hated her, she looked so domineering ... This dapper gentleman was so small in relation to Madame. I was more drawn to the solidity of the woman. I remember commenting to people about Madame Manet and then saying: "Oh! By the way, don't forget to glance at this gentleman." ... Except for his very white skin, the colors were mostly rustic: dark browns, dark blues and a lot of black ... I remember a predominant russet tone apart from the pale rose colored face and hands ... It's a very moving work. It reminds me of something from a hundred years later, a poster called Cafe, on the walls of my dormitory at college by an artist who used the same kind of style ... It was signed Manet, at the foot, on the left.

and why was the word “clean” the one I thought? What was it about that, those rooms and that word? Clean. And then I was in a room, down a hallway past other rooms, it was the far room of the hallway. There was a dead rat on the floor in the corner. No, I take that back. There were three of them, dead rats in the corner. What does that mean? And I looked down, shiny cockroach went scuttling by, hurrying on its way, shiny shell, see it go.

And I say to you in conclusion, or by way of assertion, perhaps both, but I say to you there is so much fucked up bullshit in this world that if you do not appreciate the lovely things, the beautiful moments, the dear fierceness, the hours that flow, you are a fool.

Small Bug on the Wall

So there I was, back deep in the old mind-cosmos-history thing, thang. And there was a small bug on the wall. It wasn't anything hardly notable but there it was. It was small, but what was weird, oh, *of course something was weird*, is that it grew and grew and it got really big and it was like it was a bug that looked like a giant pink shrimp, but it was a bug and it was terrifying because it kept getting bigger in moments, in seconds, it went from being a tiny bug to this giant pink shrimp-like thing. And my mother had a broom and she smashed it again and again, & it died, blown apart and screaming and that was something else.

Till later there was a small group of us in the field and lions appeared on the other side of the world. And we kept feeding them raw meat, they kept hanging around and we apparently had raw meat in hand for the need, and we kept feeding them, & it seemed they kept wanting more because they kept nearing us and they kept nearing us, & when we ran out of raw meat, *we were the raw meat*.

But no, no, *wait*, because I was on an airplane and I had to bring my bike to the back of the airplane to store it, but what I found in the back of the airplane was a large warehouse that was vast and full of things, and I got very lost trying to find a place to store my bike in this vast place. Then I stored it and I wanted to return to my seat on the plane but I couldn't find the way back, and I kept going on and on and I kind of ended up in a mall. I ended up on an escalator, and I was trying to return, and I looked at my airplane ticket, and it said departure 9:07, and then I looked around for a clock and it said 9:07. *Oh my goodness*.

That House By the Beach

We were living in that house by the beach. And it had been a long drive to get there. At one point, we passed through a dump advertising **hard trash**. And our car had gotten buried in the snow. I remember pushing the snow away with my hands, just to climb in the backseat window to try to get to the driver's seat to keep driving to get to the house by the beach.

And there were several people there, two just married having their honeymoon in our bedroom. Strange noises coming out of the bedroom, not the many kinds of noises of coupling either—other kinds of strange noises.

And in a different room, I was sitting on the bed and I was writing about how I had a dream about a house by the beach that had been a long drive to get to, passing through a dump advertising **hard trash** and how at the house one of the rooms was closed to us and the married couple within and their strange, strange noises.

Arriving in a New Town

Arriving in a new town, I was hardly there an hour. I made some new friends, two boys and a girl. And we were at a coffeehouse, many rooms, and there were big old computer monitors, free to use. And now it's all gone. I'm walking and I'm holding a small friend who was injured. I come to the town center, *oh, yes, class*. I forgot.

And the assignment seems to be making fireworks of some kind or another. I don't quite understand it. Back in the classroom, I ask the boy for the assignment and he gives me some papers to look at. I lose them. I go to the teacher. She's dismissive. I now have some papers but there someone else's assignment with a grade. Then I say to the boy: *You left me. I've only just moved here*. He's insulted. The girl tries to make things right but it doesn't work.

And then where am I? I'm on a bus and I guess I'm leaving that town. There's a radio or TV going and someone talking fundamental Christian talk, and there's a guy sitting up front and he's saying nasty things, and I'm saying *be tolerant*, but he won't be so I get up, walk up the aisle where he's sitting, and I grab him and I carry him to the front and I threaten to throw him out the door, and I look at the bus driver to try to intervene and say a word but he doesn't seem to care. So I put him back in his seat. Sit back in mine—find myself reading a comic strip in which I discover that he was relieved that he'd backed down. Because you always find truth in comic strips if you look hard enough.

And the bus arrives, and it's a gathering with my loved ones from many years. One's telling me to boycott the grocery store and another one's looking at me funny. Another one I haven't seen in years and I'm saying, *do a radio show like I do*. Soon I'm at a building having to make a call. I'm using a pencil to make the call. I'm trying to call about my master's thesis and tell them it won't be ready in time, and again there's someone hassling me and I say, *get away from me now*. And he does, and someone picks up on the phone, and I don't remember who to ask for.

I Think It Was What You Call a Soap Opera

I think it was what you call a soap opera. There were two agents. An older one and a younger one. And the older one was saying, *when you see you are fooled. There is truth behind maya lines about the curvature of the earth, and when you see this truth I will kill you.* And then the man's eyes glow and oceans pour from them, and that is the symbol of the show.

Wow! I am Friends with This Couple

Wow! That's all I can say. *Wow.* I am friends with this couple who buy an old church to live in. I first met them when they were in two movies. I saw them in the movies. They were characters in the movies. They were comedies. The guy was a buffoon in the comedy and I said to him, *buffoons are people who haven't found themselves yet and so accept being the butt of a joke as an easy role.* In the first film, the guy was a bartender at a party. There was a plaque in the first film that then showed up at the second. I think that was the only connection between the two.

Then she found this church. It was a big old New England-style church, and the white paint was peeling off it on all sides. It had big rooms. They showed me through it when I came to visit, room after room after room, and outside and then an old cemetery, great lawns, big gardens. The cemetery had strange stone-shaped markers. They didn't stick out of the ground like usual, they were in clusters too. And I was talking to the buffoons again, responding to someone quoting gossip saying I'd changed. I said: *Yeah, I don't squat on dick no more.*

And a priest suddenly fled from the crowd. What crowd? They were good, dear friends, I loved them both. And I loved their church and it seemed all like a good idea. They were going to fix it up and make it good. They were excited.

There She Was Again, Small

There she was again, small, and there was my brother and he was young too, and they were laying together in a nice cuddle, I'd say, and I was asking her about her baby. She said the wrong one died. I think we're speaking of dolls. She holds the dead one, tells her she loves her. She said Dad told her some souls aren't meant to complete the journey.

Now the snow, car buried in the snow, radio somewhere, the DJ saying, *I'll take you all out for beers, as long as the San Francisco flagship stays up.* And I'm clearing heaps of snow from the car, on the side of it, and the top of it, trying to get it out, get it free and someone says *noooooo.*

There Was a Situation

There was a situation, I'd say, in which I'm talking to a group of people who helped me through a bad time. I didn't see it that way till now. They gave me coffee cups as gestures of friendship. It's nice. I thank them.

And then I walk out into the night air because they're sending me on to a club. They feel I'm ready, some kind of counseling group, it's like the next stage. And I find myself in a dark club and there are ten colored lights I keep looking at and feeling like something's wrong with them.

I'm sitting next to a friendly girl and I'm talking in English to her and I'm saying, *it's a language of metaphors and displacement*. And I turn to two other guys, who I notice are about to go at it. Maybe they were looking at the lights on the wall too and equally disturbed. And I say to them, most seriously, that *a person is a house of rooms. And we go from one room to the next clearing the cobwebs, but then the rooms we're not in fill up with more and we go from one to the next*. And then to drive my point home about all of this, I say: *a chair is like a stump*. And suddenly before us there is one.

Well, eventually I have to go again. There doesn't seem to be a staying place for me very long this evening. I'm with a friend I've met along the way and we have a gun, he has a gun, we might be drunk but I don't think so but we're stumbling around, peering closely at things on the shelf and his gun goes off. And I ask: *anything interesting?* And his answer is obscure.

I'm Staying in a Guest House

Now figure it, just figure it. A TV sitcom. Hm. I'm staying in a guesthouse. Main one is fancier, much less shabby. All are located driving up very steep hills. There are parents and two blond boys and some sort of aunt. My dad is in there too. Opening sequence shows the mom and the blond boys arriving home, and a panning shot of boys getting food and doing their sequence of choreographed activities.

At one point I'm in my room, with another brother, telling him about a strange game I want to play involving levitation and fruit. Later, I show him my tape recorder. It snaps onto cassettes and you just hit the buttons. Somewhere in the distance Phish is playing live on the grounds, and at another point I'm bringing them pans of eggs and potatoes to the main house but then I find myself riding my bike in the rain, creaking. And finally, there's a last visual of a song, perhaps as this show ends, and the song goes: **I wash my butt and face every time I see your face.**

There is No Higher and There is No Ground We Kiss

I wrote, somewhere after, *there is no higher ground. There is no higher and there is no ground, we kiss across the abyss and you are mine once more. There is no higher and there is no ground, we kiss across the abyss and you are mine once more. There is no higher and there is no ground, we kiss across the abyss and you are mine once more. There is no higher and there is no ground, we kiss across the abyss and you are mine once more. Floating floor holds us as memories, that long ago time, far from home, all the friends, the one from Atlanta and his sports, when I held you above me and we both proposed, when I had to leave all these people and return home and I wanted you and I couldn't find you. Your sky blue eyes and the years between us, I would talk about you to everyone. It never ended, the miles, the years, and how I could not come and you could not go and above me we loved and below you we loved and it was because I was from the dream and it was because you were the dreamer. I was the dream and you were the dreamer. There is no higher and there is no ground, we kiss across the abyss and you are mine once more.*



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Raymond Soulard, Jr.

Notes from New England

[Commentary]

*“Please accept this ragged purse
of high notes.”*

The following continues the series originally called Notes from New England, begun in issue 24-25 (Winter 1998), then revived in issue 59 (October 2006) as Notes from the Northwest, & appearing since issue 75 (October 2010) under its original title. It is intended as a gathering-place for observations of various lengths upon the world around me. It will be culled, like much of my writing, from my notebooks, and perhaps these thoughts will be expanded upon sometimes as well.

Dream Raps, Volume Two

The Ships Have Always Been Overhead

The ships have always been overhead. And yet, not *just* overhead. For you see, *we are on those ships*, as we walk around, down here, we are on those ships that are overhead.

And you wonder: *well, what can that mean?* How can you be on a ship overhead, & walking around, down below? And I say to you: *I don't know.* And I say to you: *dreams are real, too*, even though they seem many, disparate, fragmented. *Yes.* Dreams, ships overhead, walking around down below. Now that's a kind of a . . . formula both real & metaphorical, & it's yours to parse out . . . if you care to choose.

Traveling in the Midwest

I find myself traveling, in the Midwest, with several men. Not sure where we're going. We're on a strange bus, at one point, it's like a rolling restaurant, there are tables & waitresses. No one seems to be aware that we are rolling through the land.

I turn, & I know they're gone, those men I was traveling with, & it's probably for the best. In the corner on a small black-&-white TV, that nobody is paying attention to, I see that a movie is on. I learn it's called *RemoteLand*. It's about a woman that's captured & brought to a tiny cell where she powerfully imagines her youth & her playmates. Her playmates seem to be boys from TV shows, rather than real boys that she remembers.

I switch the channel, the movie is too sad, & I see someone who looks like me who is in a

bathroom, pissing in the sink, & people keep coming in, coming & going, as though the bathroom is the necessary path from one needed place to another. And they just keep coming & going, & I just keep pissing & pissing, & this all seems strange, I guess.

It reminds me of this time I went over my teacher's house for class, & we each had to wear a hat & write our initials on them. And I had to write an essay, for the class, on a small scrap of paper.

The teacher's house is big, multiple levels. Somehow I find out that the teacher is dead, & I run into the room where all the students are gathered, & I tell them all. "He's dead!" And nobody knows what to do, so we explore his house that we'd only known one room of, thus far, the place where we held the class. He has a vast library in the basement, on the second floor, the kitchen, there are many books everywhere.

And then someone climbs into a cupboard, & laughs, & the door opens slightly, & many tiny golden bees fly out. They don't seem harmful, & we're sad, because the teacher's dead. We liked him. And . . . we're sad, about the teacher.

Ice Cream Truck

It was like this, it was like this exactly, well, sort of. I was standing at a bus stop with two guys, and an ice cream truck pulls up, and the front of it was filled with branches, couldn't see a driver.

But out back they had ice cream for sale and I pull out money to buy three but mine ends up melted on the ground, still in the container. I try to eat it but bad, and I'm mad since I'd paid for them all. I just walk away because I have a party to go to, ice cream or not. I arrive at the party, with many balloons, and there are many there but I don't know anybody.

And then I see these two girls I knew a long time ago and I hug them but they had to go. And I was alone with the strangers and I thought, *well this day isn't going well*. So I left, kept walking and came to the beach. There were coins on the ground, I noticed. I bent down to look at them closely and each coin had a little I sticker on it, little letter I. Then what I did was I sat with the coins and I watched the ocean. It seemed peaceable finally after all that ruckus.

There's a Valley

So here is how it went: there was a neighborhood, in a valley, and down the road comes these laughing crazy boys. They've got machine guns, they're cutting down everyone in their path. People are firing back, and the crazy boys are getting cut down, until there are only four of them remaining, holding hands, laughing, *crazy! What the hell!* And . . . somewhere . . . there's



a machine gun, and its turret tipped over, still firing. And if you look in that direction, you'll see . . . a cemetery, and the men of the town, or the neighborhood at least, are rushing to set it on fire.

And I'm Ready to Teach a Class

And I'm ready to teach a class, but it seems I'm not prepared. And I wonder who would show up anyway, because it's snowing, and I'm unsure. And the musician is asking me about commandments versus enders. And I explain to him—since no one is showing up to my class—that I have the time—and this seems more important anyway—that the commandments believe there is a set of rules to grant and receive rewards, and the enders believe that it would all be beautiful no matter what. And on the radio, Jimi Hendrix is playing, and I said: "He was an ender." And this all made sense, and the musician wondered if he'd made it all up, feared he'd made it all up. But I told him he was smart, and I didn't think he had, and these were *psychedelic designations*. And I asked him: "Have you ever read a book interpreting Jimi Hendrix's lyrics?" But I don't think he had, as of yet.

Taken a Bus to a House

I'd taken a bus to a house, and I was with others. But they didn't like me. An old friend of mine was there, and I pushed him to the wall, *hard*, and I begged him to *back me up*. Offer a word on my behalf, defend me to others, but I don't think he could, and I don't think he did. And this was all very disturbing, but I left, my head hung lower.

I lived in an apartment. And there were these guys upstairs, who kept coming through the windows and taking things. And they made it seem as though, well, it was their due, it was what they did. *They'd come in, they'd take things*. And I couldn't keep them out. Eventually, I ended up a floor below, exactly below, my apartment, with some allies. These allies could hear the noise above, and that reassured me. They heard those guys coming in and taking my things, and I found this reassuring, as though *they really did come, they really did take. Someone could verify*. Very strange. Would you need verification? Maybe. I'm not sure.

I fell asleep that night, in my bed, in my apartment, with my diminishing number of things, and I dreamt of a man I used to work for. He was still sad, he was still angry. And his hair, strangely, was like tentacles—they waved wildly around. And he was sad and angry and I couldn't give him any comfort. But I noticed that when he played with his niece, he was happy, and that was good. Because in this world, you've got to find something or someone, that makes you happy. What other choice do you have?

What You Love Will Warp Your Path

I guess you could say that what you love will warp your path, one way and another. So your best angle on the thing is to make sure you love as well as you possibly can, because your path will warp, one way and another. And there's nothing wrong in that. It's a good thing. Some warps in the path can be as beautiful as you can possibly imagine. But remember: it's all warps in the end.

Big Canvas, Empty

It was, um, it was a big canvas, empty, that's what they said, I think. The bit that remains was the universe that split off from an unchosen decision, a splinter, and it only contains that decision when a person is lonely but perhaps there's pity and there's provided a friend, you might say, so anyway—

the other thing was there was this actress and she was having hallucinations and she accompanied me while I was playing miniature golf but you see I wasn't playing it right, because I was taking long shots and there are no miniature golf long shots, there's none in that particular game. And so it went badly. We took our suitcases and we went back to the bus stop at the side of the road. It was one of those long distance bus stops where you just stand there seemingly in the middle of nowhere, except for the miniature golf course, of course, where we got thrown out of. And then we were on the bus for a while and I think that went badly too because then we were on a truck, and that went OK for a while.

The trucker had a strange hat on, it had floppy ears and big eyeballs at the top of it and he didn't look like the kind of fellow wears such things, but there were other odd things about him too. He had lots of photographs of clowns. He told us he visited every circus he could because he had a fascination with clowns. He said there was a clown in his heart, if not two or three—

But then the truck got stolen, or maybe we came out of the diner and it was gone. And so we needed some help finding the truck, if it was possible. We went back to the diner and there were these Jewish guys and these Spanish guys, there was a gang of them, it was a strange mix of guys, and they had guns, we noticed. We were determined to get the truck back, but hopefully no blood would be shed. And they drove us and they had a strange car too and it was an *El!!! Camino*, that's what it was called, an *El!!! Camino* but you see it didn't find the truck. The *El!!! Camino* did not find the truck but we thanked them and we told them for helping us, even though we failed, *you get many karmic points*.

I Am Watching This Story from Another City

I am watching this story from another city. I don't know why I'm in one city watching another,

watching this story unfold. There is a boy and there's a girl and they're in a house with many floors. There's an elevator that runs from one floor to the next. They're trying to get together, to be close, but it's not working. They seem to end up on different floors at different times.

I watch as the days go by, the seasons change, it seems to be an awful long time that passes, and yet they never grow old, and they never leave the house, and at one point they find each other in the elevator, by accident, and for a moment they're close, happy, makes sense, things cohere, and then something, and then something else, and as I watch now they're on different floors again but they remember.

The remembering is what changes things because if they have, they will again, and I watch as they near from one obstacle, and then the next, sometime an interior obstacle, sometimes an exterior one. And then finally, many floors up, there he is, there she is, they're together, it's a sweet story. I watched it all my life, from afar. I'm satisfied. I close the window and I pull the curtain closed.

That Old Bookstore

It went on forever. It seems. It was long, it was longer. There were far deep rooms, full of lit'rature. *Lit'rature*, you might say. Brick walls. I was there, scrounging for a living, *and yet* trying to make a phone call to another employer. Simultaneity, it made no sense, and yet it did. I will tell you: *it did*. And it got busy, as such places do, but I never seemed to be able to figure out when to help, and nobody called me, and it wasn't all very friendly but—it was as though something that no longer exists continued to exist in other strange ways. Went on and on, went on and on.

Well, time passed, as it does, and I have a new job, in a converted factory building, cluttered rooms, and I'm trained at various times by a man and a woman. There are others going for the same job, good pay, an office and a desk. Above us, there's sort of a magazine rack, on a mezzanine. *Run by the Catholics*, someone says.

And the big guy, a recovering Catholic, talks to me about this. We agree: the Golden Rule is the best guide. Between us, we agree to that. And at some point, all of us are called to gather for a man talking. And I keep finding myself standing in people's ways, and they shove.

And later on I'm at a desk, there's some candy, it might be Christmas. And there might be a going away party going on, and I'm tempted by a creamy sweet, but I don't indulge. The woman is training me, but she has to leave, and then she's gone. And I'm thinking: I really like the job I already have, back there, wish it could go on. That's what I think to myself.



The Recklessness of Symbols

Daniel Joseph (spraypaint on cardboard)

On loan from the Oaf Tarback private collection

"To string incongruities and absurdities together in a wandering and sometimes purposeless way, and seem innocently unaware that they are absurdities, is the basis of the American art."

- Mark Twain

"Mighty warriors, hoary sages, impossible heroes."

- Helen Keller

Wild Wild Days

These are wild wild days. *Wild days*. Lawless. Constant attacks, by vicious groups. Society retreats to a bunker, guarded constantly, thick doors, and I'm not allowed in. Punished, for having led them here. The vicious ones. I didn't do it on purpose. But I did do it. The doors will not open for me, so I run. I think there are others running with me, and we're chased, and up ahead, coming at us down the road, many cattle. They block the way. We scramble off the road, up a hill, into tangly brush. Desperate, but not yet caught.

Old Movie on TV

Might have been an old movie on TV. I'm not exactly sure. But there it was, set in space, a group of people come together, seemingly randomly. For a moment, they're set to make war on their slavers. And then they're all captured, except for one, who joined late. He follows their prison ship, as it flies low over the planet. Looks like an airplane. They think they can get control of it. They think they can bid their freedom. They think they're going to attack the complex.

But the whole thing's a fake. Their hope is false. But we do learn, near the end of the movie, *these are the people who sent the Red Bags down. One, none, and many*. And I seem to recall, before I fall asleep, a sort of dream-not-dream. I pass the spook in the hallway of some building. His eyes look red. He looks beat up. He has a copy of *Labyrinthine*, typed, held together on a binder ring. I tell him: *there's more*. Or: *there's a second edition*. Hmmm.

There's An Invasion

There's an invasion. An overwhelming, unbeatable force, that comes. And at one point, I'm far from home, traveling by bus. I lose my book bag. Meet up with several others, and make it to my apartment. And there are squatters there. I throw them out, of course! But they hang around. Seem to feel they have a claim.

Later on, I'm in my ship, a pilot, flying into battle, flying low. Firing at the aliens in their ships. *I feel like I'm accomplishing something*.

Then something else, I guess, and I'm in a warehouse, or something. On steps, running. And the light of day is gone. They control the situation beyond all reason, it's obvious. And I can't understand how they did it. When they came, when they arrived, when they first appeared in the skies, they claimed they'd come from God. They were His missionaries. And they'd come to destroy the foul Earth, and pass judgment on all humans. *People believed it. Heh. Heh. Heh. Believed it by the millions*. And they submitted themselves to be judged, and punished. And I really wonder if that's how it's going to play out.

I Was in a Fake Rock Band

Well, there was that time I was in the fake band. There were nine of us, in that band. And we stood in front of the classroom, and we answered questions, like it was a press conference. And it was funny, even jocular. Until I noticed a sack in my hand. Reached in, and suddenly I'm holding a snake. Holding it at arm's length, to keep it from biting me. *Now how did that happen?* How is it a jocular press conference for a fake rock band turned into a terrifying situation, I wonder?

I returned to the car, looked in the rear view mirror, and saw two things. One: there was someone sleeping in the back. Two: I didn't recognize my face. Hmm. I'm someone else. *Again.* That's a girl in the back. She's in a blanket. I think she's nude.

We drive to an old bookstore. There I see a strange book, on one of the lower shelves. And I wonder at it. *Is it portent, signal, clue, random? Should I buy it? Should I steal it? Would it make a difference in the end?* Maybe. I return to the car, and the back seat is empty, save all the blankets are folded. *Oh*, and there are three guys there, in the car. I notice the blankets first, because I was looking the back seat, but then I noticed the three guys, two in the front seat, one in the back seat, and the blankets. I get in the back seat, next to the blankets. *Well now, where to?* They won't say. We just have to drive, and drive, and drive.

Now as I find my comfort among the blankets, not knowing where we're driving, or what danger I've fallen into, I fall into a dream. In this dream, I'm packed into bed, with eight other people, and yet it doesn't seem strange. And I find that we work well together, even though we're packed well in this bed. There's a cooperating spirit. Why, if we wanted to be, we could be a jocular fake rock band. I would just prefer that this time there not be a sack, with a snake inside.

I'm in My Old City. . . Emandia

I'm in my old city, born there, live there, become at least part of someone, towards someone there. It's before dawn, dark, walking to work, no street lamps, and there are voices everywhere. I'm afraid, but I keep walking. Eventually nearing Bluebird Insurance Company. I find a couch, and a blanket, settle in, begin to doze. Time passes. And then there are some ladies, and a cop. He's pointing his flashlight at me. I explain I'm going to work early, the plumbing is broken at home.

The ladies crowd my couch and I sit up. It's no longer as comfortable as it was. But you know how that happens. Later that day, I find myself in another city. The next city. The other-piece-to-the-picture city. *Another* piece to the picture, anyway. I'm at a street corner, and there's this Spanish tourist, and there's his woman, and they seem lost. And they have a map, and we cross the street, and we sit on a bench, and there's snow and ice, and look at the map. And I point out to them the street they're seeking. And I tell them they will have fun, for sure.

And that night, after such an adventurous day, I dream I am aboard a space shuttle, far in the future, with a crew. Good folks. Not sure where bound. At one point I cry out: “*I hope when they come, it’s a bald blue giant, standing, laughing on a planet, like it was a small stone!*” I go into the cockpit to fly for awhile, replace another, he’s disappointed, and I hear Marvin Gaye singing, “*Let’s get it onnnn . . .*” And I wonder if he did any other songs. And the dream eventually crackles, perhaps into another, perhaps not, and I wake up thinking of a place, that I do not yet know, but that I may come to know, in one way or another. *Emandia . . .*

After I’d Come to the Vast Camp

Now what was strange, and I’ll tell you it was strange, and I’ll say, *yes, it was strange*, and I can’t think of any other way to put it, is that, after I came to the vast camp, climbing hills and hiking, I didn’t like it. And I knew there was some building with some weird treasure, somewhere in there, somewhere in this vast camp of buildings.

But the weirder thing was that I met several people, and they were each wearing a costume that promotes eternal life. It adheres to the body, sucks out toxins, and apparently that makes it so that you live forever. And in the middle of this vast camp, with who knows what going on, some kind of weird treasure in one of the buildings, well, just to hear these people talk, and to hear their hope, *this* is what the answer was. *To wear this costume and live forever.* It seemed like it really didn’t sum, coherently.

And so I just kept walking on, sniffing for the treasure, as that was the best way for it to be found.

All White Imp

And it was strange, it was *strange*. It was strange to see that maniacal little imp cackling but all white. Someone had removed her colors. The colors from her garments, the colors from her face, the colors from her limbs. She was all white. But she maintained her cackling airs. *Oh, she maintained them.*

And we got in the special car and we drove, indoors, past restaurants, Chinese and otherwise, through room after room. We came to a room where there were people sleeping in beds. Well, they had to move them because we had to drive on through. *We had to drive on through.* I awoke and that little imp was full-colored again, her smile just as crazy, and she conducted the chorus of birds outside with particular glee that morning.

I Killed Someone

And it was one of those that leaves you shaking and wondering later. I killed someone, I think. I don't who. And I'm fleeing with my notebooks in a black garbage bag in a shopping cart. I end up in the hills. And I'm pursued, and I'm caught, or I give up, and I retreat to a house where nobody cares. All I'm thinking is: *what am I going to do about my notebooks? How am I going to secure them, make sure they're safe?* I don't know.

Eventually I'm in prison and I'm being processed by a woman named Scam. She sprays me thoroughly with disinfectant. And I'm thinking about writing the whole time. And then two small individuals, relatively good friends, come into my mind and I think of them. Each has a blue nose. One is gray and white, one is white and gray. I think of them and I'm comforted in my troubles.

There is a Room

There is a room, and in the room there is a goldfish. I find him or her and place him or her in a cup. At some point, the unruly one floods the place, water coming in from the cellar, and I yell, panic. I use different vessels to hold the goldfish. And then there are two. I thought the other one was dead but I guess not. Good news.

And then they can talk sometimes. Sometimes they're not even in the water. I have a hard time figuring out where to put their vessel so it'll be safe. It keeps crashing to the ground and breaking. They're nice and pleasant, vulnerable, but nice goldfish. At one point I am filling their vessel with water and they are helping me to know if the water is too hot or too cold. We work together. As it should be.

They Hold a World Between Them

They hold a world between them, balanced. His hands above, hers below. They speak rarely. He wonders about her kiss, she wonders about his touch. This is something important they do. Down below, within that world, there is a very small store and it stays in business by selling one very important thing. And the one very important thing connects surely but mysteriously to those together rarely speaking, holding the world in balance.

Along Came the Traveling Troubadour

Along came the Traveling Troubadour, long dead, but loved by many when he appears. And I find myself in his company, happily, as many times before. I marvel at the fact of him being

here, and wonder what is real. *What is real?*

Then I show him my puzzle. You see, I have a blue sheet to write upon but I seem to have trouble writing upon it. I wish to fill it with fragments which, when assembled, form a whole but still fragments. He nods, sees my dilemma. *None, one, and many*, he laughs, almost cackles. Yes, indeed, I say. *None, one, and many*. He lifts his instrument, strikes a perfect note, smiles a happy smile, and is gone until the next time around.

Old Tyme Restaurant

I was with my friend and we were traveling along. We come to one of them restaurants, old tyme restaurants. One where burgers are a nickel and shakes a dime. I don't suppose you find them on the main roads anymore. They're still around, if you look.

And I got out with all my cleaning materials and I began to wash down the windows. My friend stayed in the truck, he was not one for them fancy television devices talking like the future. He said he couldn't make it. He didn't want to blow through all the money.

Well, sometimes in this world, when it doesn't work out one way, you just keep cleaning. You keep dipping your rag into the soapy water and cleaning until every inch is spotless. And then you step back and admire your work. I learned that from an old codger many years ago and, in this moment, I felt it was the best advice in the world.

Small Apartment Owned By a Mean Man

I was living in the small apartment, owned by a mean man, who would just come on in, walk on through the door. And at night sometimes I dreamed of the necklace around my neck. It signified memories of the nicest kind. Other times, other places. Nothing much, nothing unusual, mean man by day, me with my pendant at night. Some nights.

And then one night I forgot to close the shade with a full moon and I'd been to the beach that day and I was burned by the sun and I couldn't sleep and I watched the full moon with my aching skin. And I saw a face in the moon and the face seemed to talk to me alone and it said *click-click! noise-noise! click-click! noise-noise! click-click! noise-noise!* in a tongue I was not familiar with, but it sounded like the most charming g-nattering I've ever heard.

The next night my skin still troubled me and the moon was still full and what could only be described as the tiny imp in the moon returned to distract me from my pain and sleeplessness, uttering the words *click-click! noise-noise! click-click! noise-noise! click-click! noise-noise!*

On the third night, I could not keep awake as my skin no longer ached but I knew even as I

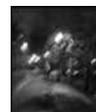
closed the shade that the moon was waning as it does, and the imp in there was not possible to see at this time. But come the next full moon, burnt skin or not, I would be looking for that imp.



* * * * *



Raymond Soulard, Jr.



Notes from New England

[Commentary]

*“Please accept this ragged purse
of high notes.”*

The following continues the series originally called Notes from New England, begun in issue 24-25 (Winter 1998), then revived in issue 59 (October 2006) as Notes from the Northwest, & appearing since issue 75 (October 2010) under its original title. It is intended as a gathering-place for observations of various lengths upon the world around me. It will be culled, like much of my writing, from my notebooks, and perhaps these thoughts will be expanded upon sometimes as well.

Dream Raps, Volume Three

I'm Listening to the Folk Singer

Well now, I step back into old years. Far gone years. And I'm listening to the folk singer on the phonograph, and he's there, sitting with me, and we're listening to one of his songs, a good one, we're talking. I'm telling him how I cried at news of his death, how much his music means to me, and then he says, *I'm going to travel with you for a while*, and we decide to go to a show, as seems logical, when you're traveling with an old folk singer.

And there's a long line, and I don't know who's playing. Who are we waiting to see? It's a good question, perhaps without an answer, and eventually we go to the show but I'm not so sure it's such a great show. The band doesn't seem very enthused. In fact, they only play a chord or two, and then just start to doze. They start to fall asleep right on stage, they drift away. And someone says, *hey man, wanna come to a party? Sure*, we say.

And we follow this guy out into his van, it has no roof, and it's pulled along the road by several horses. *Hi-ho, Gold!* he cries, not wanting to be like everyone else. We end up at a party, with lots of people, and someone's playing guitar again, to the tune of *Jingle Bell Rock*, the old Christmas tune. Someone is singing other words, and there is talk of a place called Hamilton Mill, in 1905, the whole town is excited about tooth tattoos. Everyone is excited, this is the big thing for all of them. Tooth tattoos. But then I cry out, *look out! Here comes television! here comes television! here comes television!*

That Mobile Home

When we went back, long and far and deep, it was to that mobile home. Now abandoned, this is where I came from. I lived there as a child. And everything's still here, it's as though we'd left without packing anything, or that we'd had so much stuff that we'd brought plenty and left lots behind.

And I'm walking through all of this decay, and I'm trying to figure it out, I'm trying to understand what was left behind, and why, and I find myself focusing on all the toys, little miniature figures, they seem to be Disney figurines, and there seem to be hundreds or maybe thousands of them. And I'm thinking to myself, *well, you know I'd like to take something from here, I'd really like to do that, I'd really like to have something that I take away from my coming here this time, and I can't find anything but Disney figurines.* Everything else is almost destroyed beyond form, and it's very peculiar and, well, I don't find anything.

I just don't find a thing, so I leave. And I walk out the door, and I walk for miles, and I come to a different kind of neighborhood, and there I walk into a large house, and I think it might be mine but I'm not really sure.

There's something about the curtains that are weird, they're red curtains, really, but there are green curtains over the red curtains, and I'm disturbed by this and I don't know why one set of curtains has covered the other set of curtains, and then I come into a room, maybe it's on the second floor or the third floor, and one of the curtains is gold and this is even stranger and so, really, what it comes down to is that when you wander in such a way, you don't return.

Down Below There's a Frozen Body of Water

This moment is culmination and cumulation, this moment is culmination and cumulation. It's spooky, though, I have to say. I'm on a hill with someone and, down below, there's a frozen body of water. And, uh, I find that I'm throwing rocks to crack the ice, and I look across the water and there are these strange crystalline formations, and I'm trying to break them too, throwing my rocks at them, their different colors, their strange and disturbing formations across the frozen water, and I seem to have a lot of rocks and I seem to be throwing them at the water and at the formations.

And I wake up in the room of a castle and there's this fly buzzing at the window. It's a small room, buzz is loud, small fly though, loud buzz, small room. I open up the window and I let the fly out. This castle seems like everything, but really the Island is everything, culmination and cumulation.

This Was a Science Test Like None Other

This was a science test like none other I'd ever taken, let me tell you. Well, I was studying for it by a river, that's how I prepared. Reading my books, looking at my notes, I was getting ready. And I thought, *OK, I'm ready to go*. Or maybe I didn't so much think that, but at some point, ready or not, there I was, taking this test.

The test was not on paper, however. The test was in a container of food, a plastic container of food, it was sort of a dry pudding. And I was reading the pudding as though it was a series of questions. I was poking my fingers into it, to find the questions and then answer them. And this may seem strange to you, it may seem very strange to you, it was probably strange to me too. But what had happened was, I woke with instructions for taking this test, and the instructions were: *forgive, understand, reconcile*. That was what this plastic container of pudding science test left.

It Begins With the Smallest of Kittens

It begins with the smallest of kittens, who wears a long blue top hat. Sometimes sleeps on a piece of cardboard. Sometimes rests on the very tips of my fingers. Well, sometimes that tiny kitten is not there, and so I will leave the room, and I will float through the hallway, riding in a white bucket. Sometimes I will see old faces, known from other times.

Float on and on, outside there is a field. And above this field are a million shooting stars. There are people picnicking beneath the shooting stars, having a party. I think to myself, *I've got to get more room for that tiny kitten*.

But, anyway, I have to go to work. And I work in a big store. I'm in the back, and I can't find my book bag. Not quite sure where it is, find myself walking back to the city, street after street. There's a record store owner sitting outside his store, and he shows me a map. Later there's a pizza place, empty, but for all the dancers inside. I can't find my bags. And I keep walking, buildings getting older and older, and finally I find myself sitting in an empty ballpark with an AM transistor radio, and I'm listening to the *Creature Common Show with DJ Squeak*.

Love Is . . .

I come to a bar, walk through the door, accompanied by a girl with a bottle for a leg. We sit down with two strangers. I start talking about what could strangers initially have in common before speaking. The lady laughs at me. I don't know if she enjoys my statement, I don't know if she doesn't. But she looks at me and she says, *love is violins, tributes, and ghosts*. She continues on, saying that all through her day walking here she'd seen it scrawled everywhere, and she had joined in, and she brandishes a strange crayon before our eyes.



We turn, for the night's entertainment is about to begin at this bar and, at the podium, which is behind the bar, high up where all can see, there is a lecturer. The lecturer speaks of spirituality, goes on and on, and concludes that Christianity is the only way. I had admired his speakings, known him previously, but now I start to shout other religion's names, *Zoroastrianism! Jainism! Buddhism! ismism!* I shout and shout and the place engulfs in riots.

A Shifting Design

In a car, with other documentary film producers. We work for the same network. We're driving down a very narrow street, with a crowd of cars, and then a crowd of people. My friend somehow manages to get the car turned around, steers us through. It's like we're driving backwards through the crowd of cars, crowd of people.

What happens next is that we arrive where we were going all along. It's a place, oh I don't know about this kind of place, you might say it's, uh, a kind of place where you don't arrive to too often, and you certainly never get there unless someone brings you there. And there's a back room, and I see professors from my old college. They taught about books but, you see, I never took their classes. I took the classes of others. And here we are, and they are glad to see me. I seem to be passing through, passing on, and passing elsewhere.

And, well, they have a little present for me. Takes a little bit of preparation but what they do is, they take a box of very small cigars, probably as big as your pinky, maybe half your pinky, and they soak them in liquid, and then freeze them in ice cream.

And then there's this time that passes. I'm with my brother, carrying the box of frozen liquid-covered cigars. Walking along, but he seems to be limping, his sneakers crushed. And I look over, and there's a building, and it's crushed in the same way, the same formation, crushed.

And we are crossing the street and I'm thinking, *I've got to get him a better sneaker, or two even.* And he looks at me and says, *beauty is guerilla.* And I said, *how did you remember that old phrase,* and he nods, and a wink, and we move on.

Darling Darlene Danger

It's a story of Darling Darlene Danger. And she recounts it in her book, *Luminous Ends*. It is the story of her parents who came to the castle when she was small, and found her among other denizens, and took care of her some years till they no longer got along, and they lived in different areas of the castle. They would only speak by telephone.

One night, while arguing on the telephone, the wife is smoking a cigarette, puts it down on the bedspread. It causes a fire, which burns a hole in the castle. Eventually, Darling Darlene

Danger's parents leave. They leave the castle, they leave her, but she stays. She is part of the castle and she will not leave now or ever. She keeps herself busy with elaborate paperwork she does not understand. Sometimes she gets trapped in it, deep in it. There are questions in this paperwork that are multiple choice. She doesn't know the answers. She struggles.

Once, she puts on the radio and listens to a program about the Big Red Machine, was a ball team, long ago, somewhere else. They won their games, many games and many more games. It was so easy. Darling Darlene Danger slips into a dream in which she goes to their park. There, then, she sees the old fire pit container they used. There are still scraps of paper around, predictions written on them. These, and other things, she recounts in her book, *Luminous Ends*.

Running

Running, running, running, running, running, *running*. In a complex, I don't know how I got there, here, *there, here*. It's like a strange funhouse, with many strange rooms, and I'm running, running, running, running, *running*, and I seem to be with someone but I'm not sure who. I find my favorite automobile in a strange form and drive her badly into another room, and somehow lose her along the way, and I keep running, running, running, running, running, *running*.

There are minor barriers, there are twists and turns, and I keep trying to get back but the rooms shift and change. Eventually I come back to my favorite automobile, together with a man who is Afghani. We sit there, he says he doesn't want anybody to know that he is an Afghani. He shows me the parts of his body where he was beaten up, and then we get out of the automobile and he shows me the place where he was beaten up. It is a memorial area to where he was beaten up. And then we see two men with skis trying to steal my favorite automobile, and I chase them away violently.

And I go back into the complex and run and run and run, running and running and running and running and, for just a moment I have a pencil and there's a great book and I've got to get it all down, finally, all of this, every last part, every last detail about the running and running and running, and I'm writing it down in the great book but the pencil tip is wearing down on me.

There is a Festival

There is a festival, always there seems to be a festival, I mean that just seems to be how these things go. And once again, I'm trying to sort through the matter of this festival. For a while, driving a favorite automobile, superb in many ways. In the rearview mirror, all the male cast members of the TV show I once called home are singing and dancing me goodbye. Happy,

jumping, wishing me well. I am moving on from that TV show. They know I have to go to the festival.

Later on, I'm helping someone put up a platform for a Grand Production, and there's a question of what act to lead off with first. I say, *always lead with your best punch*. Eventually, I come to the wooded area of the festival. Oh, I suppose you could say it's even more than wooded, far more than wooded. It is a great forest, the world's forest.

For I know that no festival would be the smashing success it could be unless someone goes to see the Summonatrix and gets an approving word for all of it, and that's why I'm driving my favorite automobile into the deep woods, bound for seeing the Summonatrix, *ah ah ah, oh oh oh, wish me well*.

I Was On My Own for the Weekend

Well, there was that one time, you see, that I was on my own for a weekend, and I was living in this apartment and I had this friend, and he published a book and he was most excited, most, most, *most* excited. And uh, it got reviewed in *The New York Times* and his chance to change careers. He was a cleaner of grit, grime, and grease. Slammed by that review and, well, he still cleans the old grit, grime, and grease, and maybe he's happier for it.

But I have to say that he held up well, hosted this party one time and, at the heart of the party, he gathered everybody around, there was lots of smoke, there was lots of frivolity, windows were flung wide open, moon in every window and he had this contest, see, because he was gathering himself back and getting back his mojo, *fuck The New York Times*, he said, and there was this contest where he gathered everybody together to participate and there was a long piece of paper and there was a puzzle on each side of it and he handed it off to groups and what happened was you had to make your way down the puzzle on the one side and then make your way down the puzzle on the other and you had to do it quickly, you had 30 minutes or less, this was not a slow going puzzle so there were people explaining it, it seemed like there was more than just my roommate who was into this.

And it got toward dawn so we walked outside and there were picnic tables outside and we were still working on the puzzle, somewhere along the way the half hour had come and gone but we were still working on it anyway, and then it started icy raining and I got worried because I had valuable things with me, valuable friends not accustomed to rain, and a bag full of notebooks that would have gotten wet.

In the rain there appeared this German Shepherd barking and I didn't know whose it was, *who's this German Shepherd belong to? why's he here?* Finally his man came along, see this is the end of the story, and he said, *how was he?*, and we said, *he was good, he sat still and he waited and it was good, it was all good, your German shepherd was a good dog. Thank you.*



Yesterday is Everything

You know, yesterday is everything and there's almost nothing useful to say about any of it. I'm in an old city in just shorts, looking for coins to make a phone call, call this old friend, call that old friend, yesterday, yesterday, *yesterday*.

And I find myself in a situation in the outskirts with a couple of others, it's snowing, there's cops around. There's a guy in a truck and he's minding his own business but several of us have piled a bunch of snow in his cab, no reason, we're trying to fool the cops, *what does that mean*, then we're driving with him, sitting with the snow, *what does that mean*, and we end up on another planet.

There's a mining area and we intend to sabotage it, but this gets out of hand and it's pointless. There are men, there are machines, there are girls in bikinis surrounding us, every which way, we're trapped by them all. They knew we were coming and here we all are. Now we're in a cage, the cage is moving, it's on wheels and, don't you know it, in the middle of all this I meet a hippie and he just wants to go to sleep, what else would be true?

My buddies Tim and Rick, the ones I've been traveling through this time and place, I've confused them, I don't know which one is which, I don't know who is who, I'm uncertain, it rattles my bones not to know, not to know which is which and who is who, it makes me think, *I just don't know many things, but the whole of us are going to escape somehow*.

We're sent out to work like prison gangs on this planet, wherever it may be, but what we know, and what you just have to trust is going to occur, is that two gangs of us will go out but only one gang of us will return.

A Panoply of Events & Occurrences

Sometimes it's just a panoply of events and occurrences. For example, I'm with a loveable sheriff. He's glad pot is legal in our state. And it gets complicated from there. There are guns, a dog gets shot, it's always my dog that gets shot. The sheriff nods, commiserates.

Further event occurs, there's a ship and someone is rowing away. I'm with a child in a store getting matches and candy for him. I shift from person to person in the store, not always taking over, just eluding, and finally I am chained and bound and surrounded by cops and the sheriff is not amongst them. These are mean cops.

But I have already requested a bike, and I manage to elude them, and ride away into the darkness down the road. I see that the friendly sheriff is descending from above without a parachute and I wonder *how are you doing that?*

And anyway, it's good that pot is legal in our state. For you see, what happens next is that there is a brick wall, right in the middle of the road. I come up to the brick wall, and I discover it

is a brick wall through time, and there is a TV show about the brick wall and people in the show who also watch along the brick wall, they travel along the brick wall through time. It all makes sense, so I begin to ride my bike along the brick wall through time, wondering if my sheriff friend will catch up with me, perhaps he will, he makes an good traveling companion, he knows several excellent jokes.

Eventually, even being a time traveler, I have to get work, so I'm working at a small deli, a convenience store in a kind of camp compound. The deli is in a small house. At one point there's a long, long line for sandwiches. The first one, he's a customer I know by name, asks for seltzer, I point him to the sodas and drinks and cans. I don't think he paid because there's nobody at the register. The next one wants an elaborate sandwich, has had made it before, she knows what breads we carry. She wants the most obscure of these breads, but in her mind and in her heart is more than sandwiches. She is planning revenge against her ex-boyfriend. It goes on and on, this long line of customers with all their tales and stories.

Then I leave and I go away, I'm tired of this brick wall, I'm tired of this deli, I'm tired of the whole thing, I don't even miss my sheriff friend anymore. As I'm leaving, I come to the lady planning revenge and I say, *you know before I go and leave all, I'll tell you it's not worth it, you won't win him back anyhow. Think twice.*

When I Was Young I Roamed the Woods

When I was young, I roamed the hills, countryside, the woods, the far, deep woods, and I lived in a cabin with few modern conveniences of any kind. I lived there with a woman I didn't know well. She'd moved in at some unknown point and when I'd come home from my roamings, she liked to pin me against the wall and have me fuck her with my jeans half down, just like that, lickety split, and then I'd be sweaty and stained as I pulled them up afterward. There was nothing romantic about it at all. Eventually, I packed up what little I owned, I took down the cabin, which wasn't much anyway, returned its components to what they would be otherwise, back to the earth, and got me back down to some so-called civilization.

Found old friends who'd wondered where I'd gone, but not that hard. Found them planning something, which they mixed me up in, at least for a while. We were going to rob a bank. One morning found us crouched with guns on steps waiting for the bank to open, and I thought to myself, *is this what I came back for?* as I held my gun. I'd never even shot a gun in the wilderness all the time I'd lived there. I'd lived peaceably with the land and found my way. Finally, I just said *no, this is not for me.* Put my gun, heavy in my hands, down on the steps, now light in my hands. I told them I was leaving. They seemed scared to do so as well, scared of the man who'd hired us, a heavy criminal who wasn't there.

Somewhere along the way, I found myself a bicycle. I got on my bicycle and rode away. It was raining, hard, but I didn't care, didn't care at all. I decided I would ride to my mother's house and try to explain everything. Along the way I stopped at a McDonald's, great cheeseburgers

but I couldn't stay. I was terrified to be caught and dragged back to the criminal act I'd failed to perform, so I just kept biking and I guess that's all I wanted to say at this time.

A Tale of the W.A.R.P. Wizard

Now you probably want to hear another one of those splendid tales of the W.A.R.P. Wizard. You know him well. He travels with his small chunky book and snub-nosed raygun, helping, travels the four corners of the globe.

Well, this time around, he finds himself in time and space in an apartment in 1970 with others. They're gathered round expectantly and in walk the members of the greatest rock band that has ever existed. And their new album is just out and everyone's excited to sit in a room, the room we're in, there's chairs and pillows and couches and we're just all so excited.

It's all friendly but it's not very enthused and we begin to feel their lack of enthusiasm, we begin to feel the room dry up with the energy that was crackling through it, the excitement of meeting these musician heroes, these avatars, these brilliant geniuses who we love and admire so much, and here they are before us and nothing, *nothing*, they're just not happy to be here.

And I want to take a picture but my camera isn't working right, the batteries are dead or something like that. I go outside and try to find some more batteries or some kind of charger that you know will work in 1970, and just come back in and hardly anybody's left and people look at me in particular and they realize, *oh he's from the future*, and I think *ah, well, the jig's up, the energy is gone from the room*, the W.A.R.P. Wizard is being stared at darkly. *It's time.*

Trying Not to Crush the Thing

I keep falling asleep, waking up, trying not to crush the thing, trying very hard not to crush the thing. Where is it, trying not to crush the thing. And then I wake up, I do wake up and I realize, *oh, this place*. Overly familiar and not very clean, it's a prison camp. I've been here a short time, guarded by aliens in great armor. I don't know how big they are, I just know how big their armor is.

But we can walk around, us prisoners, because they're so much bigger and they're armed and it seems there's no way out, nowhere to go. Then one dies, and nobody seems to notice, he falls at my feet with a crash and nobody seems to notice.

OK. I'll go with this as long as it lasts. I pull open his armor, pull him out, he's not so big, and he's dead. I get in, knowing this won't work, knowing because I've observed that the armor only works based on blood recognition, as you slide in and it snaps into place, your finger gets pricked for blood recognition. As I slide in to place and my finger gets pricked, I'm sure

it's over. But, what the hell? Then something surprising happens. The armor is active and I'm inside. Someone comes up to me and I realize it's the dead alien's brother and he's happy to see me, and he embraces me, such as two big, armored aliens can embrace, and we head off to the ship.

They Call Me Makon

Well, now. They call me Makon, which is short for Makonic. I have my obsessions. For one thing, I think that my deep brown skin is lovely. I think it's gorgeous. I don't say a thing to anybody at all about this, ever. But it is a secret obsession of mine. So I don't tell anybody.

By day, I teach in the classroom. By night, I stay in my art studio. It has a single, tall window, looking out to the night. I make all kinds of art. I haven't ever decided what kind of artist I am. I decide to be a superhero of artists, and make all kinds, and discriminate against none. Make great canvasses and small sculptures of clay, of steel, things that are half melted, things that float in the sky. For a while I become obsessed, aside from with my skin, to making art that is half in and half out of my dreams. I like to watch it shift in the air. Sometimes I'll puff a little breath onto one, just to see it come and go and how it changes. It is such a good life, though I don't get much rest.

It's a Movie Theater, I Think

It's a movie theater, I think. Yes, I suppose it's a movie theater. And there's a movie that only a few want to see. Just a few of them, but they're being refused. They're scattered up and down the hallway that runs from theater to theater inside the large theater building. And they want to see this movie, and it's a few of them, but they're scattered. They are herded to a waiting area. And there still seems to be a lot of trouble about them seeing this movie, this strange few of them who've been herded.

But eventually they get in, and the movie starts, and somewhere along the way, there's a farm. Fields full of sleeping camels, curled around their eggs, and I'm trying to navigate through the camels and their eggs without waking anybody, just get to the other side. *How did I end up in this movie?* I don't know, but there I am. I find myself at the road that I was trying to get to, traveling with a lot of stuff and it's raining hard. I'm waiting for a bus, and I realize I've forgotten my tent bag, the kind that you hook over your shoulder. Left it back at that farm. I'm far from home. I have to get this bus, though I know that it is rare in coming.

I'm Living in One of Those Inside-Outside Apartments

You know, this happens every time I'm living in one of those inside-outside apartments. They get very cluttered. I try to pick them up, I do my best, what can I say? Several people appear, they seem to be friends. They have a shopping cart. They're asking me for help, to open my inside-outside apartment, roll their shopping cart on in. I try to help, I try to get them going.

Next door, a girl plays an elaborate game. I'd seen her, earlier in the evening, down in the street, with a circle of empty chairs, playing this elaborate game. Time to go outside of the inside-outside apartment, just time to leave it entirely, conceptually speaking.

Hey, oh, there you are, I was wondering where you were. Let's go walking together. Yes, it is a beautiful night, isn't it? Yes, I think it is too. How are you today? I'm fine, how are you?

What? Hark! Look at this alley we are walking down, what strange small stores on either side. You are annoyed that they sell magazines? Why are you annoyed by this thing? I don't know, Look, isn't it strange, this alley into a room? Oh, it's one of those inside-outside apartments that you arrive in. Yes, I have one of these too, aren't they nice? People just drop on in all the time, invited or not. Yes, indeed. It's good to see you. Well, must be going now, probably gotta get back to my own inside-outside apartment and figure out who's walked into it lately. So long.

It's Like Several Dreams at Once

You're wondering and, yes, it's like several dreams in one, and I'll tell you, there was one. Check this out. My first love, old and matronly, and there she was, a widow. And I come to her front steps. I don't triumph and I don't know why. Suddenly, I told you it was several dreams at once, I'm back at the burning festival in the desert, as though I never left, ecstatic, high, no time, no place, no where, here, forever. 'Tis sweet, 'tis fine. I look, peer, there's a house. I'm in that house. What? Huh? I told you, it was several dreams at once. And there are two people who've come to rob us. And I fight them off, they're not going to get the wad of money in my hands.

And they leave, but thennnn, he came back, and I decided to work with him. And she came back too, and I figured OK, why not? And they had this little foam radio, a tinny, crazy, noise in it. I look and look, and everywhere was crazy colors. I gave them some money from my wad to help, but we were going after a lot more.

You have to understand, *it was several dreams at once*. Living at this apartment, returning from somewhere, I had problems, I'm unsteady, several dreams at once. Some friends helped me out, picked things up, then they'd go. Then there's older women, they like me. I'm there with my love trying to figure out what to do, bills to pay, rent is late. I get out a check and an envelope and then sat filling it out. Get upset. Finally I leave, barefoot, wander out in the street. (Several dreams at once.) Should I write Sally on the envelope?



I don't know. I fall to the earth, to the grass, look up at the stars. And I think the following thought: *there's a lizard in a tank of water, big and fierce, threatening. But it is cold and begins to shrink, losing size and power, the ability to affect. I watch and watch, as now it is in a plastic bag with water, small, impotent. Its location no longer crucial, and it dies, tiny, glass-eyed.* It was several dreams at once, and I told you so.

You See, I'm Working at This Bookstore

Well, now, this doesn't happen every day of the week. You see, I'm working at this bookstore, as I have often done before. And there is this kid who has a book on Vietnam he's been looking at. And he wants to put it back on the shelf. I try to help him, but he tries to put it wherever. Gets impatient, but I school him in the process, give him the secrets of how you put books on shelves in bookstores. I'm not sure he appreciates it now but, sometime down the road, he'll be glad he was schooled on how to do it.

On my lunch break, which is ten minutes, I step outside, take a look around. *Oh, yeah. That pet store window.* There's a snake behind the glass. Predators keep coming toward it, it's newborn, and keeps eluding them. It seems almost hopeless, that this snake is going to get eaten or carried away, but somehow it's not, and I think to myself, *does this happen every time I take my ten minute lunch break out here, and look in this window?* Oh, probably. I think I need a better job. I need one of those office jobs, with a boss. The kind that you meet in an elevator and he has one of those voice recorders that he's always speaking his ideas into, because he's a go-getter. And he says to me, *you should be more like me, be a go-getter, read the best-selling novels, keep fit.* I say, *yeah right, man. You're not very fit at all. You're like 600 pounds, man, and you smoke cigars. What is fit about you?* And he says, *don't give me any lip. You're not going to advance in that way. The way you're going to advance is by making the boss feel good and obeying his every whim. Now light my cigar.*

Well, I don't like that, I don't like lighting guys' cigars, especially in elevators. It seems like a counter-productive thing to do, no matter what the corporate ladder might say about it. So I leave at the next floor that we come to. I just walk out. I'm done with these jobs. I'm going outside. It's cold, admittedly, but I'm going outside.

And I walk for a while, and there's snow. Everything's frozen. And I come across a vehicle and it's half-buried in the snow, and it looks like someone might need help. I think to myself, *well, what can I do?* and then I come up with it.

I turn to the group of people standing there, looking at the situation, gawkingly, and I say, *get some gasoline. Come on, there must be a can of gasoline amongst you.* They procure one and hand it to me. I pour a gasoline path from the road to the stuck vehicle. Set it on fire, and at least in this moment, at this time, it works. The car is out, thawed. It comes back to the road, it continues along its way.

Hooray! I have found my purpose in life, to roam the land, saving people with cans of gasoline and other fine tools and implements.

Through the Entrance to the Mall

Through the entrance to the mall, there is a door, and through the door there seems to be a vast residence, where lives a man and his two children. They are German, I think. There's a certain game going on in this complex, sort of a chase or hide-and-seek, constantly going on in this place. I await explanation, watching the people chase in and out of rooms, preparing for dinner, looking at a book on the fall of Vietnam in 1976. I notice a monitor showing a live feed from 1968 of crowds, fire, and chaos.

At one point, I'm with the German children and they fear I will leave. I say, *no, I'm here awhile*. I continue to watch the live feed from 1968. And I walk into the next room, and I find myself outside. How did that happen? It seemed like a room when I walked in, but no, I'm outside.

There are woods and there's a tiger. I run. My lover runs. What's she doing here? We find our sedan, better to run when you're riding. There are more animals, there are dogs and a cabin. We get them going, get them out, get them running. *Run, all of you, run, run, run*. We get them all running, and look back twice to make sure that there are no stragglers.

I Was An Agent

I was an agent. You can say, *are you still an agent?* and I'll probably just grimace, but anyway, I saved this girl from being murdered like her parents had been. Saved her, it was ugly, but she was saved, she wasn't murdered, and that was that. I moved on.

Then, years later, I'm sitting somewhere, uncomfortable, at an outdoor café. And I'm waiting for someone who isn't coming, and I knew that this person wasn't coming, but I was sitting there anyway, letting go of the idea slowly, when this girl, much older, of course, than when I saved her from being murdered like her parents had been, suddenly was sitting at my table and smiling at me as though I was still the much taller man I had been when I saved her.

It Was Christmastime, 1970-something

It was Christmastime, 1970-something. Oh you remember those years where it was either one year, or another, but frankly no one was quite sure. It was hard to care.

But there were these people who cared, maybe they cared a little bit too much because what they would do is they would infiltrate weapons facilities and they would steal the nuclear weapons kept there. They'd drive them out to the wastelands, way out somewhere, it's hard to say where, but they drove these weapons out and they dismantled them. And things went fine for a long, long time. Stealing the weapons, dismantling them, out in the wastelands, but they'd come to this Christmas, 1970-something, and they'd been doing this for a while. And when they unloaded their truck, the latest batch of weapons they'd stolen to dismantle, they found a man, additionally.

He was dressed in a red suit, he had a long white beard, a little tasseled hat, kind of chubby, he was sound asleep among the nuclear weapons. Seemed like he might be sleeping one off, too. So these people looked at one another and said, *holy shit. It's Christmas. We've got to dismantle Santa Claus, too.*



* * * * *



Raymond Soulard, Jr.



Notes from New England

[Commentary]

*“Please accept this ragged purse
of high notes.”*

The following continues the series originally called Notes from New England, begun in issue 24-25 (Winter 1998), then revived in issue 59 (October 2006) as Notes from the Northwest, & appearing since issue 75 (October 2010) under its original title. It is intended as a gathering-place for observations of various lengths upon the world around me. It will be culled, like much of my writing, from my notebooks, and perhaps these thoughts will be expanded upon sometimes as well.

Dream Raps, Volume Four

The Best Kind of Pilgrimage

The best kind of pilgrimage is the pilgrimage deep into the sea. Deep down into the sea. And if you go deep down into the sea, you will of course encounter Creatures of the deep-down-into-the-sea kind of nature. The kinds of Creatures who like it way down below. That is where they prefer to travel & to keep their company.

But you may ask yourself: *who are these Creatures that are living deep down below the sea, keeping their company there?* And so you swim up to them & ask, *who are you?* And they may sing out to you, there in the deep, deep sea where you have taken your pilgrimage. They may sing: *We are many, we are one. We are many, we are none. Come to our party. Come sing & dance with us!*

And thus you will have your answer, of a sort. What other kind of answer would you expect from the strange & wondrous Creatures who live deep down in the sea & keep company there?

Except to say one other thing: if you look behind them, there is a wall, a very steep wall. The wall reaches from deep down in the sea up, up through the depths to the very surface where it arrives, & you think to yourself: *my my my, what's all this? We are many, we are one. We are many, we are none. Come sing & dance!*

I Am Near the Festival Again

Oh man, I am near the festival again. And I'm one of the musicians. I've created this audio piece. It's two hours long, to be played later in the night, on the stage there on the cracked desert floor. Something always seems to be playing on that stage, save during the highest heat of the day. Its

back wall reaches high up into the sky, giving shade much of the day, is buried deep into the dusty earth.

At some point, I bring me & my beloved's boots inside some kind of building—some kind of room, a wooden box deep inside a hole in the floor—for safekeeping. And I write the letter **S** on the box, in dust.

Later on, I'm listening to a man telling his story of going to college, complications, stupid tragedies, ends of the world. Someone's world. I'm counseling him like the old days at the festival, & I'm remembering those old days, & I break down crying, remembering how I did this.

And finally it's night, & there's a band on the stage & I feel like I should know who they are. They're longhaired hippies dressed in crazy costumes. And they launch into a song called *The Pink Floyd*, which sounds like The Pink Floyd.

We go on next. Grand finale? *No. The festival never ends.*

And all of this is so intense. *You tell me dreams aren't real, you tell me dreams aren't real.*

I Must Be a Boy, Full of My Fires

I must be a boy, full of my fires, because there's a longhaired girl with golden boots on her small feet. But, more important to my world, there's her father. He's a teacher, & he doesn't like me. Isn't that always the way? Oh, first he has me read some student essays. *One, I say, is good, though is not relevant to the assignment. I would tell the student to start with the first sentence again, but keep the rest tucked away.*

Another essay just isn't very good. About a pilgrimage to the desert, or maybe a TV show about one, & then to the sea, or maybe just a bright pink cartoon dolphin riding the cartoon waves on that girl's low-cut halter top. They took a buggy ride. She wouldn't even kiss his cheek after.

But this teacher, father to the longhaired girl, doesn't like me no matter what I say or do. Somehow we end up together at a baseball game, behind the backstop. In this future or past time, players have to wear sandwich boards—which of course makes them clumsier to play, but adds advertising revenue to their teams' fortunes. One player's sandwich board reads: *ChocoSmax: Them's the Fax!* Another player's sandwich board reads: *We are many, we are one. We are many, we are none.*

The teacher takes it out on me, leveling criticism after criticism at me, as though it's all my fault. He takes all of this personally.

You've ruined the game of baseball! He cries, his eyes yellow with rage.
I say: *is there nothing you can do but disapprove?*

He says, *I'm old & you're fucking my daughter. And I'm old. And I'm old.*

One of Those Low-Budget Movies About Time Travel

It's like one of those low-budget movies where you're told it's about time travel but it never really goes anywhere. It kind of just all takes place in some guy's apartment. That's exactly what this was like . . .

There was this apartment building I was living in, & there were three apartments on the third floor, a small one & a big one & a medium one. And I seem to have lived in all of them from time to time. And the landlord's wife had a fondness for me, which was nice, especially when my rent was late.

But then what happened was that my credit card was stolen from the old wooden box I kept in the hole under my bed, & the thief ordered lots of pornography sent to me, & this did not go over well with the landlord's wife, who somehow got wind of what was being sent to me. Maybe she peeked, I don't know.

But later in the film—this was the time travel part—, we are in one of the apartments trying to get back in time to the other. It's one of those where you're told: *oh, it's forward in time—oh, it's back—my goodness! Look at the powdered wigs, look at the jet packs!* That kind of thing.

And then there is, of course, a heroine to this film, but she's not very bright & as for escaping the pursuers, we end up at a baseball game & she doesn't understand that to get lost in the crowd, you have to swirl into the crowd & *get lost in it*. She sort of stays on the edge of the crowd uncertainly. She is not a very bright heroine. Longhaired, lovely, but little more. Once told me she believed she was born in a spaceship buried deep in the earth.

But, somehow, we make it back through space & time to the apartment. I find myself relieved. Further, I find myself sitting on a stool, on stage, in the big apartment, with Creatures, & we are performing. Some of them are leaping through a hole in the stage to perhaps another dimension, so one is told. It's that kind of film. I wonder if they'll come back for the Grand Finale, when we will all sing & dance on the stage together. I have a feeling they shall. For you see, they are professionals.

I Always Get Invited to These Kinds of Parties

You know, I always get invited to *these* kinds of parties. Now there are all sorts of kinds of parties. There's dress-up parties, costume parties, there's proms & wedding parties, & frat parties, & all sorts of things, but this is the kind of party that I get to go to.

Seems to be a kind of a family affair, all sorts of family members. Someone's family anyway. As I entered the biggest room in the great house where the party was held, I saw there moving images on the wall. I couldn't tell if these were films, or videos, or some kind of two-dimensional Creatures

in sort of a frame. It was hard to say.

And I suppose the party carried on for a while—there might have been dancing & singing. *Oh, no doubt, some got naked.* There was probably a body of water nearby, maybe the sea, maybe some jumped in, maybe it was the middle of the winter & they jumped in deep anyway with yowls of delight. Fireworks, of course. Mud, Jello, a nearby Woods where strange things happened. Maybe more came in than went out, or vice versa. *Things of this kind.*

And then there was the sort of a finale where this famous longhaired comedian came out, & he was going to put on his show, & he just was getting warmed up, telling his favorite fierce jokes, but his act was cut short. Someone cut his microphone, turned on the stereo, loud. I nodded. *Of course it's The Pink Floyd.*

His act was cut short because there were fanatics in the bunch. And they didn't like the comedian, they didn't like his style, they didn't like his face, they didn't like his long hair, they didn't like that he had ten fingers total on two hands.

And I'm not sure what happened to him, in the end, whether there was something that occurred in the Woods, or out to sea, or in the Jello. Among the naked people. *Things went down. Things happened. I don't know what happened.*

And all I can say is that eventually I end up back at my hotel room, unable to sleep from the events of the night, & from the kinds of parties I always get invited to. I sat there watching TV. It was a program about a town called 1971. One of the many you find on late-night TV where the lab blows up, the world ends, & only the Creatures are left, *again*, living on the lone habitable Island, deep in its magical White Woods, in the Great Cavern, caves & tunnels under the Tangled Gate.

Mrs. Wordsley

Everybody, it seems, has had a teacher like Mrs. Wordsley. Oh, she's not one of your regular teachers, she's not one of those that you have for all sorts of classes over the course of time & maybe you'd come to love her or hate her. No, she's your classic substitute teacher.

And you think, years later, how did this woman make a living? She showed up, occasionally, to substitute. It wasn't like she was there in different classes every day. She was just there randomly, once in a while.

She was strange, too. She'd walk around, carrying a strange wooden box. It had all sorts of symbols on it. You won't find them on the Google, or in big dictionaries, or in arcane volumes in the library. No, sir. It also looked like it had been through fire a couple times. There were scorch marks on it, a couple dents. It was a wooden box but it looked like it had sailed the seven seas.

And so that was Mrs. Wordsley. And this wouldn't any of it be very important except I was recalling the time that she made me stand up in class. *She didn't make people stand up in class. She didn't make people work.* She seemed far more interested in her box.

But she'd just got her hair cut, which spooked me from the moment she walked into class that morning, & she made me stand up in class & tell her what I had dreamed the night before. And I told her, I stood up, & I told her a dream. Now it wasn't my dream. I don't know if it was anybody's dream but it just occurred to me, in that minute, that sudden panic-filled minute when this substitute teacher ordered me to do this thing that I had never been ordered to do before.

I described climbing a rocky path, a very steep rocky path. It was both muddy & icy. It was very steep & there were many people along this path. And I wasn't sure where I was climbing to, but it seemed very important that I get up there, to the top &, if no other reason was involved, at least I wouldn't be on this slippery, muddy, icy path anymore. *Just begging gravity to take me down & with as much pain as possible.*

And I finished telling this dream that someone had had, maybe I've had it, I don't know but I don't think so. I looked at Mrs. Wordsley, but by the time I'd finished this now very long rendition of what had happened during this dream, she'd lost interest.

She was back sorting through her box, pulling out scraps of paper & other things, some of which possibly moved on their own. It was hard to say. So I just sat down & hoped it wouldn't happen again.

You were going to the sea, young man, she said. Reading shakily from a torn & scorched scrap taken from her box. *Don't you know anything about dreams, young man? Don't you know that dreams are real?*

I Leap from a Building

I leap from a building, drop toward the ground, slow, & land fine. You see, I'm hurrying to finish my classes. I've got to get that college degree finally. I'm going to go work in an office, & I'm going to have a job with a tie & a suitcase & a hat upon my head, but I've got to take five classes, plus take two make-up exams, & possibly jumping jacks.

And that's just how it has to be. College these days isn't the easy thing it was back when I didn't finish it. Along the way, I go into a club & there are two pool sharks. They beat me easy but I get worked up, say: *I do poetry the way you do pool. Let's teach each other.*

Now these pool sharks have never been approached like this. Usually people fear them, & for good reason, but maybe it was just the tone of my voice, maybe I said it just right, humble & forthrightly, maybe just the right amount of Fraggles in me.

But they liked it indeed, & we began an alliance that day that continued the rest of my college career & it helped out too. You see, I was living in an apartment in a poor, dangerous neighborhood. Its living room floor—such as you could call it a living room—was just a hole, a declivity in the earth. People would come in & would tell me how to cover it up, or fill it in, & none of it made any sense whatsoever.



Finally I just say *hell with it* & set up a movie projector & we show horror films in the declivity. One of them ends with a lab blowing up, & the end of the world, & the beginning of a new one, & I'm so glad I got that college education.

I'm Sitting at My Old Bar

I'm sitting at my old bar, at my old corner stool, with my glass of ice water, & there's a man, sitting a couple stools away.

Now he's a man who has seen his best days come & go, or so it seems, & he's drinking directly from the bottle that the barman left for him, understanding that need tonight.

He starts talking eventually, saying it had taken him a long time but he had managed to pull together the suit that he was wearing at that moment. He explains that it was a combination of about three or four suits that were too beaten up to wear respectably, & so what he did was take the best pieces of each—a lapel here, a button there—& pulled them together into what he was wearing at that moment.

I give him a fair assessment because I figure that's what he wants, & I say: *I think it'll do, looks good.* He nods, he knows. It was a lot of work, it was a struggle.

He explains that he's on his way to the transport plane. He explains that there's a division of passengers among roles. There's the artists & the cooks, the poets & the felons, there's the counselors, on & on, like that. Roles. And like passenger sits with like passenger for the duration of the trip.

I say: *when does the plane leave & from where?* And he says: *I know it's soon & I know it's near but that's all I can say. But when I finish this bottle, I'm going to walk out into that daylight street in my suit, & I'm going to take a sniff of the air, a big sniff, & I'm going to follow it until I find that plane & join the other passengers on board.*

You Walk Around as Three People

You know, it's often times true that you walk around as three people. And sometimes these three people are the past, the present, & the future. And sometimes what happens is that you're in a state of mind where they all mix in together, one plus two plus three.

I am in a neighborhood, full of houses, apartment buildings, sidewalks & stores, cars on the street, flag poles in the air, clouds in the sky. I go into a used bookstore, oh yes, this again. It's nice. I walk around for awhile. I don't buy anything, maybe I don't have any money. It often was true in this past present & future that I'm describing.

I comfort myself by memorizing poems to recite to my longhaired lover on the nights she'll come see me, crutch holding her up on her footless right side. I select a book with no cover or title page & read to myself, then speak quietly, over & over: *Who are these Creatures that are living deep down*

below the sea, keeping their company there? And so you swim up to them & ask, who are you? And they may sing out to you, there in the deep, deep sea where you have taken your pilgrimage. They may sing: We are many, we are one. We are many, we are none. Come to our party. Come sing & dance with us!

Maybe she will kiss my cheek twice when I recite these words to her. Better than the usual twisted silent hour in the dark.

I then go visit old friends that live next door. *Oh, this is a treat.* I have not seen these old friends in decades. They are friendly & welcoming. *Whoo hoo! Whoo hoo!* I say. It's been a long time.

I talk about the art we used to make together & I wished that we'd had better equipment to make it. I tell my friends: *you're so lucky to have a bookstore so close to you, next door.*

But after awhile, sitting in their warm living room, a friendly soft light, music on the stereo, over & over an album called *Mellow Moods & Moments with The Pink Floyd*. I begin to feel trapped. Like, I have to go. This is wonderful. *I have to go. Why would I think that? Why would that be true? What would be the secret to that feeling?* I don't know.

But I go. And I don't look back. Because, you see, when you're three people, past present & future all at once, you don't need to look back, because it is swirling all around you & inside you all the time.

A Friendship That Transcends . . .

It is sometimes fortunate that one has a friendship that transcends time, space, & sense itself. I'm friends with the dead singer. He is not yet dead. We are good friends, & we have other friends too. We gather many nights in a known & familiar room, & know nothing of our various ascents & descents to come.

And so I'm with the dead singer, who's not yet dead, & his friends, driving in a top-down black sedan, out deep in the desert. *Oh! The good times you can have with friends in a top-down black sedan out in the desert, deep in the desert!* It's so far out there, so flat & far from anywhere else, that it's like non-time-travel, like nothing passes, quietly, beautifully, crazy like you can just simply sniff the clean dry air itself, & know that whatever you've lost will come to you again. A pilgrimage into the one & many & everything you are.

Eventually, I find that we are no longer in a top-down black sedan but in a buggy race in the deep desert. Buggies are going every which way, it's almost chaos, how can you tell who's winning & who's losing? How would you know? I grip my wheel & drive hard nonetheless, & try not to crash, & eventually I come to a hill.

Strangely, I drive up the hill. I come to the finish line shack. I've come in fourth place, & I'm feeling very triumphant, but the newly-shorn lady in the shack only wants her \$180 entry fee. That's all. I look around cagily & notice there is a store behind her. I say: *does that store have an ATM machine?* She says it does.

I get out of the buggy & go into the store. Then I slip & slide my way through the store, find a set of stairs that take me down back to the desert floor, & I make away without paying my entry fee.

Later I give a call to the dead singer who is not dead. And I say to him, *thank you, that was such a good time & I came in fourth place*. But I warn him not to become a tragical symbol for his generation. I say to him, quite honestly, *that would be a waste*.

Known & Familiar Room

Now here you are again, in that known & familiar room, among those known & familiar souls from yesteryear. And you are among them, knowing how the years have played out since then, & they do not.

Yet you are with them, among them, a familiar among familiars. The high-high singer, the smirking preacher, the belly-laughing poet, the many brilliant brothers we were. Do you say or do you refrain? What do you do with the knowledge you have? Can you affect things, can you make them better, or just different?

Do you give them the gift of not knowing because you've traveled back to a good night among loved ones & fellows in a good place, or do you take it away? Do you look at each face, & then the next face, & take it away because you know?

Or do you forget for a length of time, just a little length of time, & enjoy this miracle of having traveled back to their company before they run divergent & some down low? Do you enjoy this company of your yesteryear fellows? Is there enough Fraggie in you to enjoy it for as long as it will last?

You're Smoking Something Good on TV

Now you know what happens sometimes is that you're sitting at home in your living room or your bedroom, or maybe you're living in a studio apartment & they're all one & the same, & you're watching something good on TV.

Something funny, something that when you sit there & smoke something good, & watch this good thing on TV, they seem the same. It's like you're smoking something good & watching something good, but it's a twinned sensation. I'm smoking this TV show, this TV show is smoking my pipe, we are smoking together. *We feel together, we're very high together*.

It's very nice, it's sweet, you don't need anyone else in the world but your pipe full of sweet ganja & your TV show, your couch or your floor. There might be a window, there might not be a window, who knows what kind of place you're living in?

You do your best, you work hard, or you don't have a job, it's hard to say. You go through situations, one then the next. Anyway, you run out of good edibles. You've got the show, you've got the pipe,

you've got the ganja, you've got everything, but you've nothing good to eat. Cheese Doodles, ChocoSmax, things like that. Things that are good to reach into because it's a bag full of them & you can eat them, one at a time, in between smoking & watching & laughing.

So you have to go to the local store. Now you've heard things about this local store. It's open 24 hours a day, in your little town where *nothing* is open 24 hours a day. And you've heard stories about this store, that it's actually part of a spaceship. It's like the topmost part of a giant spaceship buried deep in the earth.

And you walk in, & you're looking for ChocoSmax or Cheese Doodles, or things like that that will help you with your friendly pleasing solitary high whether you have a job or don't have a job, whether you have a window or don't have a window.

And you walk in & you think to yourself: *is this really the top part of a spaceship that is buried deep in the earth? Could this be?* You look around stealthily & you see in the back of the store there is a door. Now it could just go back into the place where they keep the mops & the brooms, or maybe it goes back into the cooler because you've got to stock the soda & the milk even when you're making the kind of crap money that they pay you at this kind of job.

Still. You walk through that door & there are stairs down—oh, & the guy at the counter, he's a friend of yours, & he's not watching anyway, a couple of girls came in & they are wearing halter tops, that was it, he's not watching nothing else. So you go in & you go down, step after step after step.

You come to the bottom of the steps, & there's a keypad, & there's a door, & you can get into this spaceship if you know the code. And you think to yourself: *what is the code?* He won't be talking to those girls forever, they'll get bored & they'll leave & he'll come looking for you, because you were talking to him earlier & promised him some good weed when his shift is done, or possibly during. Who can tell? It's a long night, third shift, though you do have to get back to your TV show & you do have your ChocoSmax & Cheese Doodles in hand now.

You think to yourself: *I had a dream last night, were there numbers in it? Yes, there were numbers in it! There was a festival, deep in the desert, & heavy rock music on stages everywhere (including The Pink Floyd & The Pink Floyd Too), & it was a chaos until the bands began to synch up, a few at a time, then all of them, every band, every stage, synching up, the drums first, the bass guitars, then the keyboards swirled into place, the lead guitars, & the singers, so many singers! Singing, chanting, humming, words in & around us, we are many, we are one, we are many, we are none!*

Furiously you type these numbers into the key pad—*many, one, many, none*—& you hit the **enter** button, & you just hope, & a little green light comes on, & you push the door in! *You are inside the spaceship, my friend. Go take a look. And a listen. Is that the sound of the sea?*

Raymond Soulard, Jr.



Notes from New England

[Commentary]

*“Please accept this ragged purse
of high notes.”*

The following continues the series originally called Notes from New England, begun in issue 24-25 (Winter 1998), then revived in issue 59 (October 2006) as Notes from the Northwest, & appearing since issue 75 (October 2010) under its original title. It is intended as a gathering-place for observations of various lengths upon the world around me. It will be culled, like much of my writing, from my notebooks, and perhaps these thoughts will be expanded upon sometimes as well.

Dream Raps, Volume Five

*Dreams they complicate my life (Dreams they
complement my life)
—R.E.M. “Get Up.”*

I return home to the hospital, arrive OK this time, & there are all my roommates in our shared room, & they're having a hard discussion about how there's too many of us, & too little room, & the acid is beginning to come on, the acid is beginning to come on, the acid . . .

I'm a Small Young Man

I'm a small young man, I'd tell ya 5'2" but I'd have to be wearing taller heels on my shoes at the time. But then I meet a woman named Evelyn, & she doesn't notice how not tall I am. She notices my smile, notices it in a way it's not been noticed before.

Evelyn is brown-haired, turquoise eyes, long & luscious, as I am short, short, *short*. Somehow me, & my sack of things, & I'm moving in with Evelyn into her two-room house.

Sometimes when I'm at home all day, waiting for her to return, I forget her name. It's something that happens to me, & I go hunting through her mail, looking through her things, trying to remember what her name is. *Evelyn, it's Evelyn.*

At one point, we're in her back yard, on chaise lounges next to one another, we're naked, lookin' up at the stars, takin' turns cryin' out “*hellllloooooo*,” until there is a noise, & in comes to the two-room house, bigger than the house, bigger than both of us, & certainly bigger than

me, even on platform shoes, Evelyn's big, bruising, bald ex-boyfriend.

Evelyn throws a sheet on me as I lie there naked on the chaise lounge—she covers up with one too—we pretend to be asleep—but he calls & calls & calls, “Ev’lyn, where’s my be’ah, where’s my dinna’, where’s my suppa?” *Things like that.*

Evelyn stands, puts on her robe, goes inside. I wait, cowering under my sheet. There’s a gunshot, lots of shooting. Evelyn comes back. She climbs on top of me in my chaise lounge, still under my sheet, but I find myself fucking her anyway. It is strange—it is shocking—but somehow wonderful—because it is Evelyn, & she wants sex now—but I want to know how she feels about me—because I’m small, & my heart’s big, & can be broken *so easily.*

I spend a lot of time looking at her picture postcards, & the photos on her wall, trying to understand my Evelyn.

You Leap! Across Time & Space

Leaping! Across time & space . . . I am back in high school, yes indeedy, *oh ho ho ho ho*. But I am taking classes now, doing quite well. Getting good grades. *Nothing keeps me down this time around.* I walk into an empty classroom, a’swaggering, thinking nothing can stop me this time. But there’s a message on the chalkboard. CLASS IS CANCELLED TODAY.

Hm. Feeling slowed, a little off now, uncertain, but then I notice a book on the teacher’s otherwise empty desk. The book is called *Nazi Jailbait Bitch.*

Kind of a porn novel, seems the title charactress seduces & kills Nazis. It’s an old cheap paperback. I wonder how it ended up in this empty classroom. Well, I sit on the teacher’s desk, my short legs swinging below me, page through it, reading about the various adventures of the **NJB**. She’s quite a clever **NJB**, & she kills in a variety of colorful ways.

They hold a world between them, balanced. His hands above, hers below. They speak rarely. He wonders about her kiss, she wonders about his touch. This is something important they do. When it ends, as it has to, & he is bleeding out from a thousand small skin pricks, each a star’s deadly jab, she stays right there, so close, loving him, hating him, making sure his last view of the world are her eyes, what he once called “the opposite of turquoise,” to his last breath, watching her eyes.

But then I decide whoever owns the book will value it enough such that I should leave it where it is, on the teacher’s empty desk in the empty classroom. And I leave, having gained a little bit of the literary experience for myself from that volume, & ready to move on.

I walk home, each step again leaping me back across time & space. Arrive to a not-quite-then-nor-a-quite-now. It’s the little gas station convenience store I worked in, when much younger, the one built right on top of the spaceship buried in the earth. Down a flight of stairs found

at the back of the store's walk-in refrigerator, but a locked door below kept me from exploring it too deeply.

I find myself back behind the cash register, watching the security video monitor of my friends, my dear brothers back at that old brown-paneled barroom we used'ta haunt like a pack of grimy ghosts, all now long lost to me in time & space. They're laughing, they're shaggy-haired, they're grabbing each other's shoulders & hands. *They're funny as fuck.*

And sometimes I just feel like I'm walking blind through the world, wishing I could make a valley for all my loved ones to live together & maybe, *oh you know*, open up the valley to others. Random guy walks in & says, *I love your writing, man*, & I say to him, *I love your writing, man*, & we hug each other affectionately, & it seems as though I'm left wondering what does it mean to be bound by space & time, by finitudes of memories, by the affections that wax & wane in the human heart, & the miracle of the greener world, & the miracle of music, & the miracle of *breathing in, breathing out*, & keeping somehow, some way, by years & miles & years & miles, your heart open to all.

. . . so I stretch out on my bed, long legs dangling far over the edge, curtains closed so I cannot see the many other beds in the room . . . & so I put on my headphones, turn on my cassette player because that very day I'd recorded off the radio a new album by my favorite band . . . sink into my music, sink into my hospital bed, deep into my hospital bed . . . listening to those songs I recorded off my radio, holding the tape player near to the speaker, & they're all wonderful songs, deep, tragic in ways I don't know, they're beautiful, beautiful songs . . . they make me happy . . . & then the DJ, Commander Q, says the name of the album is Wish You Were Here, & I think that too, tonight, thinking back, thinking forward, thinking across those miles, turquoise eyes, turquoise eyes, wish you were here . . .

I'm Going to School

I'm going to school again, now, Evelyn smiles me each time I leave for class, my *Tales of the W.A.R.P. Wizard* lunch box in hand, trying to make myself something after all these sad nothing years.

At my school, there's a woman who keeps following me around. Oh, it's not romantic or nothin' like that. She's an automaton, & she wants me to kill her, & she hands me two guns for the task. She pleads & begs & says *just finish me & you'll be a better man for it.*

Well, we walk out to a empty park with lots of trees, & find a particularly nice tree where I promise I'll bury her under, give her some dignity, being she doesn't feel any.

And I shoot right at her, & they don't work right, these guns, they seem to go off wrong, & yet

one bullet does seem to pierce her head, & she dies—or she seems to die—falls heavy to the ground—& I realize I don't have a shovel—so I use these guns to dig a hole.

It's not a very good hole, & so I have to disassemble her into much smaller pieces by hand, & some of her screws don't come out right so I have to snap them off—but eventually I get her all into pieces, & I sort of line them up in the hole with a little bit of dignity to the whole thing—& I don't exactly say a prayer over the whole thing but I do say, *I hope you rest in peace.*

I find myself wandering the campus trying to dispose of the guns, & that seems to be a harder thing to do than I thought. At one point I end up in the dorm room, maybe it's my old dorm room, maybe it's a friend's, from the month I tried the local college. I'm smoking something good on the TV, maybe to take my mind off the whole thing—it's important & not important at the same time.

—& there are no lights on in the dorm room—though it's nearly noon—& there are people sleeping in it too, maybe sleeping off a party, I really don't know—& I turn on the lights from a bank of switches, & the people sleeping complain—though it's nearly noon—& I can't get them off again—& I think to myself, *goddamn*, & I go over to the wall, & it's a brick wall—there's a brick loose in it, nobody's looking because they're all asleep—& I pull the loose brick out, it's tough but it comes out.

Behind the brick there's empty space, & so I shove the guns in there, put the brick back in place, & realize the deed is done, so go back to smoking my TV program. There are others watching me now, but *they just don't know.*

It was a movie, or a dream I had that night, listening to that cassette of my favorite band on my headphones in my hospital bed, or maybe it happened to me, why I ended up in this hospital bed, in this too-crowded room, with the quarreling roommates, the acid coming on, the acid coming on . . .

Their village was gone, destroyed? We find a group of people traveling together. They embody their lost culture. They carry its trinkets, its memories, its seeds, & they travel on & on. They become adaptable to many situations, to the dryness, the parched heat of the desert, metallic chill of the mountains, the strange magick of certain Woods &, on occasions when everyone seems to feel it, & they do a lot, a sad collective feeling, they will brew a trinket tea together that will allow them to cluster dream & live anew in their lost home, to walk around, to touch its details, its smells, tastes, the faces that are not among them anymore, what the air was like, important sounds & not important sounds. It helps them greatly, these rare nights, to keep going . . .

There Was This Woman I Knew, Older Woman

There was this other woman I meet at school, older woman, sixty, eighty, a thousand, it was hard to say. Plain-looking woman but somewhat strange. We near each other, sometimes get along. Both back at school, trying to turn our nothing selves into something at last.

There was one time in the cafeteria where she's sitting with someone else, & I was sitting nearby. I had my favoritest peanut butter jelly & cottage cheese sandwich. *Favoritest*. I would make it up in Evelyn's tiny kitchen, & I'd wrap it in tin foil, & then I'd put it in a plastic baggy, & then I'd put it in my little sandwich-carrying case, & then put that inside my *Tales of the W.A.R.P. Wizard* lunch box, & I would make sure nobody touched my lunch box but me, because I knew what a tasty sandwich lay within.

But then he left, & now we're sitting together, chairs facing each other, & I want to take her hand, talk about a man's feeling of possession, but I don't quite, & anyway she'd probably misunderstand & think I meant me & her, when I didn't at all. I was just practicing for later that night with someone entirely different. *Evelyn, of course, you know that.*

But she has to go. I can tell she has to go because she's putting her screwdrivers, wrenches, & various colored nails back into her strange wooden box. It had all sorts of symbols on it. You won't find them on the Google, or in big dictionaries, or in arcane volumes in the library. No, sir. It also looks like it had been through fire a couple times. There are scorch marks on it, a couple dents. It's a wooden box but it looked like it had sailed the seven seas.

I collect my spoons & stuff them into my bag, but it's too light & I panic. *Where is my sandwich? Oh, there you are, sandwich. Still in the sandwich container.* I was very worried but now I feel reassured, & then I depart too, & I'm back working in my office.

The school gave me a job to help me pay for my classes—which is located at the part of the building that's not yet built, so it's actually a worksite—but I have a cubicle in the middle of the worksite. **CLICK-CLICK NOISE-NOISE** all day long. The crazy sounds of work around me as I'm trying to type on my typewriter, fill out forms, answer the telephone. Most of the questions are about the live feed from 1968, it's glitchy today, & seems to only show war riots, nothing pretty, nothing hippie. People call and complain. *They want hippie.*

Late afternoon, as often happens, all the workers in their hard hats gather in a certain corner of the worksite to watch a sort of live cartoon that appears there every day to entertain them. Some kind of pretty girl dancing merrily, her face grows older, younger, she's shy, she's bold, she clearly delights in dancing for the workers until their break is up, & then she departs, & I go home but, again, *no one touches my lunch box.*

You wonder what kind of project could this be & if I tell you it is a film, you would not believe me & say, oh no, strange sir, film was conceived only recently, & I will say to you in response, you have



not seen **Remoteland**, you have not seen **Remoteland**. You have not seen **Remoteland** . . .

There Are Numbers Crawling Along Every Surface

We finish together & we smile & I am ready to tell Evelyn why I am so short now, 5'2", if that, this is an important part of why, she listens, & I watch her listening, & she smiling prompts me to continue when I am too long silent watching her listen—

There were numbers crawling along every surface that I could see, & there were letters & symbols & formulsars & someone said, *read 'em, what do they say?* I peered closer & I couldn't see because they kept changing, I couldn't focus on one number or letter or symbol long enough to see what it said, because it changed the moment I focused on it to something else, *something else, something else, something else.*

& they crawled on my hands & they crawled on the ceiling & they crawled on the walls & they crawled on the pictures in the picture frames & they crawled on the windows & they crawled on the floor & they seemed to adhere to the kind of surface that they crawled through. Sometimes they were more old-school computer style numbers, sometimes they were more curvy, sometimes they were pixely. They took on the form of what they crawled on.

& there was nothing to say about them. There was no explanation really, there was no *this is what it means*, & yet it wasn't meaningless, but it had no meaning. It was somewhere in between, maybe somewhere off that narrow scale. *Wow. Fucking wow.*

Went on all night, went into the next day. I climbed the stairs &, instead of on the floor there being numbers, there were patterns, strange craquelure patterns, but everywhere else numbers, & I'm still looking for them even now.

"*Even now,*" I say, not quite meeting her turquoise eyes.

What I keep mind of is your turquoise eyes. That's what I keep mind of. For you see, what happens over time is that it seems like first you are you & then I am you & then you are me & then I am me again. Sometimes I am the raggedy fellow & you are the long-haired girl with the turquoise eyes & sometimes I am the raggedy girl & you're the boy with the turquoise eyes, but you see it's the turquoise eyes that always keeps me knowing what is what. They remain your constant, girl or boy, whichever is whichever, however things sort between us, & it's a good thing too for, in this new place we've come to, things look perilous.

We have to learn how to adapt & adjust, we may have to stand in different lines, we may have to sleep on different floors, we may have to speak in different tongues. I think to myself, this is only temporary, I think to myself, as long as I can pick out your turquoise eyes in any situation, any pro-

file, any raid, any examination, any time there's raising waters or drought, any time under any star, amongst any kind of soil, in & among & through, however it may be, words words words words words words words, ahhh, turquoise eyes. It's OK . . .

Tiny Little . . . Individdle

You see, Evelyn, it's like also this. Once upon a long time ago, might have been a Tuesday, I was looking to make the acquaintance of a tiny little individdle. A tiny little individdle. & this individdle has been an individdle part of my days & nights ever since. A tiny little individdle.

One time I was in a situation where I could not believe that she was multiple sizes at once, & it was a dangerous situation in which all the circumstances surrounding it were uncertain. There were strange faces, there were swaying hands, there was skipping music, there was some kind of dark & eerie, as it were, & I worried the fate of this tiny little individdle.

I swept her into my hand, I hustled her along, sometimes she was too entirely big for me to move much, except by sort of a nudging gesture of my shoulder to her ankle that towered above me, & sometimes she was many at once, a horde of her, crazy-eyed & cackling merrily, but I worked to find every single one of her, & *oh!* I made sure that I found them all, even as their numbers shifted higher & lower & stranger still.

—& I can tell you now that, as of this telling, this tiny little individdle is as safe as I can possibly cause such a being to be, with her love of the game, the shenanigan, the cackling trouble or, as she likes to say, *click-click noise-noise*.

His Name, I Say, Is Daniel

His name, I say, is Daniel. He is a man who has been washed over time by event, person, world, his own body, washed, washed, & washed again. In the last year of his long career as a local sports hero, beloved, best of all players, playing aching always, or just plain injured, playing for a team the shell of its old championship days, his heart still the hero's even though his body is slower & battered, he persuades all his teammates, except for two, as the season is winding down, the end is near, he says, *why are we earning all this money? We're terrible. Let's donate the rest of our paychecks for the remainder of the season to the good charity. Let's just do it.*

Oh, there's a big event, he doesn't want it, he just wants them to do it quietly but someone gets a hold of the story, & this last good act of his as a professional ball player is pronounced far & wide. Someone later on, years later, long past his time, wants to do a documentary on the man, remember him on film, & the only sequence of this unfinished film that is ever recovered from the fire is a scene where there's a crash & we arrive suddenly above ground on the subway train as we come out to near his home where he grew up, sparse green, many strange houses, some

seemingly built from the bottom up rather than the top-down.

Half-filmed is the story a childhood friend of his told about the time when they were mere tykes in the sweet store—& they'd gathered all their money from paper routes, shaking down littler kids, stealing off their parents' bureaus, finding coins in sewers—they were in this sweet shop, & they knew they could have bought the same sweets somewhere else cheaper, but it was finer doing it this way.

He said, *it's finer doing it this way because they'll put it in a fancy-looking bag with a ribbon, & we'll look like we're just sittin' pretty, bag full of this sweet candy to share between only us.*

He remembers his last morning as a ball player, the last game he was going to play, probably was not going to play more than two or three minutes of it, maybe throw a basket or two, everybody was going to clap too loud, call it good.

He was lying that morning in his bunk, thinkin' *what kind of Mac-Donald's breakfast am I going to have this morning, is it going to be a big one or a small one?* If it was the last day of your professional basketball career, & you'd already donated all your money for most of the season, so you were kind of on a low budget now, what kind of Mac-Donald's breakfast would you go for? Where would you scrape up the nickels & quarters?—& as you did, would you be thinking to yourself, *wow, this is like way-back-when all over again?*

“You were the friend from his childhood?” Evelyn asks.

He nods.

“You were taller then?”

“So damned tall, Evelyn.”

I'm Listening to My AM-FM Transistor Radio

She says: What were you like when you were a teenager? Tell me a good story. I can't think of any, so I tell this:

I'm listening to my AM-FM transistor radio late into the night, I listen to song after song, it's like medicine as they say, & I find this singer, his name is James McGunn, & they play a lot of songs by him on this late night radio show hosted by this strange gent called Commander Q, & James McGunn has this album out, it's called **Sco'u'tland**, sort of a strangely punctuated version of *Scotland*.

It's a 90-minute long album. I save up my money & I buy it on LP, double LP, perhaps even cassette tape as well. I look him up in the music review books, & he has other albums too, some they like & some they don't, & I wonder who he is, who is this James McGunn?

When I'm not listening to his double LP **Sco'u'tland**, I'm walking down the street with my

transistor radio poked right at my ear, hopin' he'll come on. Maybe Commander Q will have an interview with him. Maybe I'll find out more. It's hard to say.

Later on, I'm just sittin' somewhere with my favorite com-puter & we're having ourselves a good ole time, not doing much of anything, but just sitting with my com-puter, & it starts raining, & my com-puter fills with rain, all her ports, & I panic, try to shake them out. I look around for shelter, & I find this college bookstore, & I bring her inside, & just try to shake her out.

It's just very strange, it's like water that goes sideways & vertical & sticks—it's some kind of gravity-defying water—& I remember this song by James McGunn, it said,—& it was very reassuring though I didn't understand it at the time as now I do—it said, *when the water starts to fall up, forget the king, bring your cup.*

(She laughs merrily. My strange years before her delight her & turn her on. Every time.)

***NJB** likes to say to me: these are the kinds of things you hear when you're riding the local bus & people get to talkin' about their lives & their times & they sometimes tell you lurid details of their escapades, because you see these people are desperately lonely & sad, & they don't understand how the world has tromped on them, year by year by year by year, & the only thing I can say in response to all of this is that some of those strange things really happen to some of those strange people, & so I say to you tonight, one & all, most sincerely: CHOMP THE ORANGE, DO YA?*

Then I Traveled to a Place Called Oorous

Sexxy, placing the tab on your lover's tongue, watching her chew, swallow, watching him watch you as you chew, swallow. Telling the next story, as the acid is coming on, *oh, luva, the acid is coming on . . .*

Then I travel to a place called Oorous. Seems at first to look like a town, a nice, small town. But I find out eventually that it's a sort of slave camp run by the aliens whose ships have always been overhead.

I arrive in the guise of a reporter, taking a break from his big city newspaper life to write his novel, take the room above the coffee shop, & I come down every morning for my coffee, my raisin toast, light butter, & sometimes a hard-boiled egg.

I set up shop at one of the tables under the elongated awning that the coffee shop features to keep its patrons safe from rain & shine, as they enjoy their beverages & their conversations.

I set up at my table my notebooks, my pens & pencils, a couple of novels I'd like to try (in-

cluding the new one by Darling Darlene Danger, & my umpteenth read of Cosmic Early's *Aftermath*), & I'm ready to roll. I get to know people though over the course of my days. Oh, there are some times when you'll see me hunched down low, scribbling away, blind to all but my page.

—but then there'll be other times I'll be looking pensively off into the sky, tapping the pencil against my front teeth—& that'll be a good moment to stop & say hi, & chatter a little, & so I get to know people this way. I get to know that paperboy & teach him that the proper way to eat a Danish, *son*, is to keep it wrapped in its plastic & to nibble away. *That way you do not get sticky, nor do your newspapers when you deliver them.*

He gets roughed up later by a couple of toughs, who I believe are in cahoots with the aliens. They drag him into an alley to beat him up, 'cuz he was seen with me too much, pallin' around.

I go to that alley & fists start to fly, & they are cowards, these two toughs, & they admit that it wasn't their idea, & *I said you're not going to do this again. You're going to tell those alien motherfuckers this boy is OK. Got me?* They bleed, shiver, nod.

Eventually, the aliens turn on me too, warn people to stay away from my writin' table—& I start to get kind of lonely, as people shy their eyes away from me as they pass by—ones who used to smile upon me—until one morning a black man shows up, tall, handsome, well-spoken. I've heard he's the town minister.

He says, *I understand your problem, & I appreciate you stayin' around*—& I say, *are you really the minister?*—& he says, *no, they got him in hidin', we didn't know what those alien bastards were gonna do to the town leaders when they first arrived, so they think I'm the minister, & they steer clear. They aren't sure what this God thing is about, & they aren't ready to find out yet.*

*There were missing pages near the end of **NJB**, & the very last page was a mangled fragment. But I read it & memorized it & liked to speak it breathlessly into your turquoise eyes: "Wars in the future will be fought in the mind by drugs, dreams, televisions, internet, sex, persuasion, the manipulation of loyalties, needs, desires, to the point where to obey is to receive pleasure & endorsement & to disobey not punishment but simply nothing. Physical war, impoverishment, suffering, disease, prejudice have all been eradicated at the cost of freedom & self created identity. This epoch is not sustainable because the world is too badly damaged."*

Where are you, Turquoise Eyes? Where are you? Why am I in this hospital bed? Who am I, Turquoise Eyes?



I Was Trying to Find Someone

Evelyn finally replies. She likes us to sleep with the bedroom shade open, the moonlight, the stars, the obscure green-&-gold neon sign glare from the S&G Pizza place next door.

I was a very young woman at the time, & I was trying to find someone. We're far from each other. I try sending her a note, use a pen that writes on her paper where she's sitting in that ratty old arm-chair she likes, & I tell her where in the city to go.

She gets up slowly, & gets ready to go slowly, & she floats along, following the course of the river, sometimes floating above the river. She holds the pen & pad in both hands, & I'm writing her instructions on what to do next. Her replies on my pad are short & illegible.

*Sometimes I see from her point of view, as she's floating along to meet me, & we're approaching each other, & I sometimes see from my point of view & her point of view both. We arrive at the same moment through the same cave-like entrance of the bookstore, same aisle, same bookcase, holding between us a book entitled **Labyrinthine**, & it's falling apart. We look at the back cover, & read that **Labyrinthine** describes six stories of imprisonment, each a different kind. **Hm.***

*I begin to sing to her, holding her small soft hands, to reassure her that her long lost soldier boy will come home. I look into her face with all the love I can offer, & reassurance, & I start to sing, **love is a battle eld, love is a battle eld, love is a battle eld.***

He Was the Boy . . . Who Knew Two Sisters

“He wasn’t supposed to be a basketball player. I knew that. He knew that. For years, I would see him playing ball on my black-&-white TV with its Antennar 2000, the kind that gets you in 3 channels, not just 2, & I would watch him score & score, pass, block, lay up, push his teammates to be the best possible, hand them round the championship trophies as they came, every spring for six straight seasons, held each one up for just a moment, then hand them ’round to each of his teammates for them to hold, them to feel that shiny, buzzing pride of *winning well*.

“But, Evelyn, I knew the true story. He’d told me. We had a night back in high school, years before, a reunion night, first since our candy-buying days, we were in the same store in town, the gas station convenience store I would work at in a few years, the only one the alien slavers let us run without interference, & we came face to face, him much taller than back when, me growing shorter as I continued to do, & he nodded, & I nodded, & we went back to where we would go in those candy-glorious days, down a long, dingy road, down a hill alongside it, through swamp & reeds, come to a dirty river that ran under a noisy bridge, & sat on the hill under that bridge, & he brought out a big-ass craggy pipe for us to smoke, & he said, *this baggy has the last of my Turkish black hashish, & you & I are going to smoke it all, & I am going to tell you why I am joining the basketball team tomorrow.*” And we smoked ourselves blind, silly, silent after a long while, after he’d told all, & then I knew what nobody else did, forever.

“He was the boy who knew two sisters. The younger one prettier, of course. They’re friendly to him. They’re performers & started talking to him between sets, & then they step back inside the roughly constructed performance building, & they are among many performers taking their turn, sort of a calliope of talent & freakishness.

“—& these two sisters are performing with their father on one of the stages, singing as he plays guitar, & their singing moves him, moves him deeply. For a moment, he forgets his wants & his desires, his frustrations, whatever brought him here, there’s just this music. *This beautiful music.*

“Later on, there’s the fires the performers like, they light them in the field near the performance building, so many dancers, so many drummers, & he finds himself in shadows with the younger one, feeling her up, saying *my god, you sing so beautifully with your sister, your father playing, & you have such beautiful tits too.*

“—& she laughs, blushes, says *thank you*, but looks somewhere else, toward the many dancers, the many drummers, & he slowly lets her go & thinks *that’s it*—he goes back to where he’s staying—he’s not staying with the performers—no, he has a crappy tent, a few possessions, just another refugee.

“But he begins to gather things, he begins to go to places where he can find paper, he digs himself up a pencil. He finds different colored paper. He finds different colored pencils. *It’s amazing what you can find when a passion grabs your Art, inflicts your mind.*

“—& he begins assembling a colored book filled with colored penciled poems, for the younger sister. He puts it together, ties it with bark & twine, assembles it roughly but sincerely. It’s finally done & he brings it back, he stands in the shadows, watching their performance.

“He has his book in his hands, of all these words he’s written, he’s found in himself poetry, praise, longing, desire, put into words. If only some of it, & he’s holding this book & the singing so moves him again, so deeply & so dearly, that all he can do is leave his book on a seat in the very last row, & depart before they finish their last song.”

Down in the hospital basement something’s going on that I’m connected to. Something such ordinary folk as my roommates don’t know about. Something to do with the machinery, the blood & the marrow & the bones & the muscles & the tentacles that undergird this world & all its beauties & terrors.

That’s what’s down in the basement behind a thick door with massive lock that I only have the single key to, & I keep the key hidden on the third floor, the floor my roommates don’t know about. All the walls have been knocked out on this floor, so it’s one big room. You may also notice all the broken glass on the floor, every last instrument, every last drinking glass has been smashed, & I won’t tell you what or how or why right now.

I'm Working at an Office, but the End of the World Has Come

I'm still working in the office, the construction around me has finished, but the end of the world has come. I find myself in the file room with crayons, drawing a map to the Place of Art where we plan to go. Before leaving, I walk down the hall, to see my boss, & she's not in, & I realize I'm just going to have to go—& I leave the office, & I leave the building, & walk down the street.

Things are collapsing around me. There are colors missing, certain words in the language are gone, & things begin to rumble below me, above me, along my arms. *Rumble rumble*. I walk, then run, to her two-room house, fetch her, we bring one knapsack each, follow her map far out of the town, follow it loyally until we find the Place of Art, deep in the White Woods, & here we are in the Place of Art, & we walk in, there's a clearing, she tells me to close my eyes, & we begin.

—& it's a visual book I see with my eyes closed & I'm reading my way along, a long apartment, narrow, living room one end, kitchen & bathroom on the other, & I'm reading in long straight swathes along it, a very crowded party is around me.

I read back & forth across the apartment but I am *in* the apartment now. I'm *in it*, not just reading it. I live there with my beloved Evelyn, this is my home, & it's the night before leaving, & I want to make something of this. I want to read one of my longest poems to everyone. I want to give out copies to everyone so they can read along too, but my beloved Evelyn says *we only have fifteen copies* & there are way more people there.

They are crowded from one end of the apartment to the other. Finally I have a microphone & I call out, *does anyone have a drum to play while I read my poem?* But nobody seems to know me or pay attention. I begin to think, I begin to wonder, I begin to get curious as to what's really happening here.

I open up my eyes for a moment, & see the quiet Woods around me, see Evelyn as a sort of buzzing glow nearby, & realize I'm in two places at once, & I can come back here anytime.

I close my eyes again, & I walk through the crowds, & I come to the back door, & there's a girl returning through the back door, & she's just pissed on the back porch.

She looks at me & says, *sorry*.
No, you're not, I answer.

—& I still want to read something long, poetical, with grace, whimsy, dark hope in these dark times, but I can't do it. I can't do it now, & I keep walking until I find that I am now at the other end of the apartment, but I see that people leaving. Crowds of people leaving, going out the door, & they're going onto the landing, & they're getting on their bikes, & I just want them to *stop*, want them to *stop leaving*, want them to *stop staying*, *I want the end of the world to stop*. *Stop*, I say. *Stop*.

I hear her voice in my head, & she says, *just open your eyes & wake up, & I do.*

*I wake up, & I am again in the strange metallic chair in a spaceship high high **high** above the earth. Trying to explain to them something that we had all come up with, all of us, men & women, the best of those remaining, the ones who hadn't panicked & given up.*

We'd decided to call it United Earth because it was a simple phrase that covered everything that needed to be covered. If we couldn't be united, that'd be about it, & I was trying to tell them about it. But I kept drifting back into dreaming, & each time the dream was different, there was no connection between them, there was no link.

*I wake with some strength & I try to tell them that we meant it this time. **We meant it. Please help. Please help, we need it,** & then I drift away, & find myself in my school again.*

It's a long, long building, & I walk to my classroom on the far end, having missed class again. Find out it's cancelled, & I don't know where to go because I have missed so many classes that I thought today, when I woke up so full of energy & life, I was going to catch up on all my classes.

*I was going to do what I had to do, talk to the teachers, even Mrs. Wordsley with her spooky box, talk to others & say, **this is the day I put my foot down & get it together,** & just as I'm getting it together the class is cancelled, & just as that happens, & I'm sort of wandering away vaguely, well, this man comes up to me & says, **hey, big man, you have a big hole in your pants, on the back,** & I sort of lean back, twist my neck around & sure enough, there's a big hole in my pants that I hadn't even noticed.*

*I thought, **I've got to go back to the hospital room where I keep my other two pairs of pants & change, & get this pair of pants xed,** & it's getting all so muddled, it's not perfect, what of those vows, & I drift & drift & drift toward those pants, & eventually I find myself awake in the metallic chair, talking to them again about United Earth, & it seems like they're saying, **we want to believe, we want to believe you this time, but we don't know if we can, & we don't know if there's time, & we don't know if this isn't for the best.***

*& I'm nodding & I'm thinking, I'm thinking that if I don't say something useful here I'm going to just drift away into another dream, & it's just going to be pointless because eventually I'm going to wake up back down there & I'll have accomplished nothing but caused myself a lot of pain & so I say to them, with what's left of me, **there is a future in which we all live together, & there is a big library that we go to, to remind us of our sordid & bloody past, & some of us will stay there for weeks, if not months, to study it, & to try to gure out what not to do wrong again, & we need your help to build that world & that library, & that library will be our promise to you, please help,** & then I drift back again into dream.*

There is a Town, Far from All Else

We breathe slowly, deeply, in, out, in, out, & close our eyes again, & travel deeper into the Island's magical White Woods, until we find a clearing.

The clearing becomes a temple, shaped by the full moonlight—

We enter the temple, & arrive to the deep desert—

We pass along, far along, deeper into the desert, & come to a little shack with an exotic nearly toothless little man who gnatters high & low at us, & Evelyn laughs & gnatters high & low back at him, & I try to, & I'm not so good at it, but I try again & again—

—& he whispers in her ear, then mine, the words we need to send us on our way to the town deep & far from anywhere else—

—& we will travel & travel & eventually though we come again to the Woods, & there is a road—

The road brings us to the Village he whispered about, & the Village doesn't have many buildings in it, it's hardly a Village at all, & we have to pick the right one, but there are so few. Evelyn points, *there*. The one with no main entrance.

It's huge. It's like a mountain of a building, like it's cut from rock itself, shaped into doors & windows, floors & entrances, unknown number—

—& we enter through a door, a guess, a hope it's right, & come to a room, lined on three sides with books, floor to ceiling, on the floor, there's a fireplace crackling & snapping, & before us a small chair, & an armchair turned away, & there is someone in that armchair that you cannot see that motions us in our minds to each sit in one of the little chairs, to be comfortable, to be ready to learn.

Are you ready to learn the secrets of this strange town called Wytner?

I Heard This Story at a Bus Station

This someone then speaks: “I heard this story at a bus station. I was traveling somewhere far, I'm not sure where I was going, but I had my ticket. I sat next to this old man with a long beard, ragged kind of Army-looking clothes, & he told me that his blood was sick, & that he was dying, & he said that he was doing his best to comfort those around him who did not know how to handle these things as he had learned to.

“—& he said there was this particular moment when he found himself with a group of friends,



some of them new, some of them old, & they were in a monastery museum, looking at the blood canvases on the wall, the red bulbs along the staircase, the fake eyeballs hanging in profusion by wires from the attic door.

“—& he finally led them out onto the roof, oh you couldn't go out on the roof of this monastery museum, but he found them an open window, & they all climbed out, & all these new & old friends of his, & he showed them the sky from this peculiar perspective.

“It was a beautiful night. Sunset was strange, sort of golden & green, but beautiful, lovely, soft. If anybody had a hand in making this sunset, they were both artistic & skilled, enormously inspired, & he touched each of his friends on the shoulder, tall & short, long-known & new, & he said *just look at that sunset!*

“He said: *Every time you see a sunset like that hereon, long after I'm gone, think of me, & then one day, when your time has come, you bring your group of friends up on a rooftop that doesn't expect you to be up on top of it, & you say the same thing to them. You say, **look at this sunset!** Feel it, don't worry about its details & words. Feel it, & tell them to think of you, & pass it on to others.*

It Doesn't Begin Well

Someone then cackles a bit & speaks the other version: “It doesn't begin well, on this Island. I'm scared, I'm running. Some kind of dead or deaths behind me. I didn't cause them, I saw them, heard them, & I'm running, running, & eventually I find that I get to as far on this Island as I can, & away from the scary thing I was running from. *Was it a Beast? What was it?*

“Hours pass, then a few days, then longer, & nothing happens. I begin to assess my situation more calmly. Oh, I'm still scared, look in every direction often, but here I am. *On this Island.*

“I study my camera that I brought. It seemed so important before all those tragic scary things that happened after I arrived. But the camera was meant to take pictures of the strange things that they say occur on this Island, the strange thing this Island is. This Island with the mythical timeless portal, that will not be found on any map, & I brought a camera, & I was gonna document it all.

“Just as an experiment, I take a few exploratory pictures. Just around my camp, just to document. But then when I go to pull the roll of film out to develop it, I'd brought all the chemicals & tools, it just pours, *it pours* out the back of the camera. *It's like there's nothing but liquid inside this camera, & I just don't know what to think.*

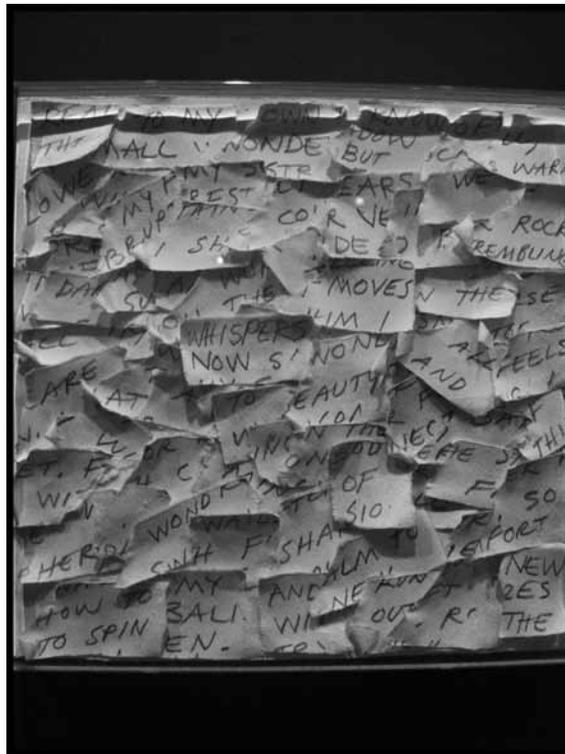
“I came here to find out the truth of the Island, & to document it, I meant no harm, but it seems that, since I've arrived, things have gone wrong—& then I remember this peculiar bit of advice I was given along the way, as I told various people of my plans to find this Island.

“One of them was a strange old man with a long beard, I don’t even know why he was in my office. He kind of came in with others that I was discussing the matter with, then suddenly he was looking at me. They’d all left, & he was looking at me, & he was saying, *if you’re gonna survive there, you better learn how to hmmmmmm*

“& until now I hadn’t even thought of this advice, but now I sit down, right where I am, right in the clearing where I am, I just sit right down, knowing it’s all too much for me, too bigger than I am, except that this one piece of advice, & I sit right down here, & I close my eyes, & I *hmmmmmm*

And for just a moment, you are back with me, close, closer than anyone or anything I have ever known, Turquoise Eyes, my Evelyn, Turquoise Eyes, & I hmmmmmm till my breath runs out, and you are gone again, oh my lost heart, you are gone again





Raymond Soulard, Jr.



Notes from New England

*“Please accept this ragged purse
of high notes.”*

The following continues the series originally called Notes from New England, begun in issue 24-25 (Winter 1998), then revived in issue 59 (October 2006) as Notes from the Northwest, & appearing since issue 75 (October 2010) under its original title. It is intended as a gathering-place for observations of various lengths upon the world around me. It will be culled, like much of my writing, from my notebooks, & perhaps these thoughts will be expanded upon sometimes as well.

Dream Raps, Volume Six

*I ask the Universe tonight:
What if Dream-Mind is Supra-Consciousness?*

I'm Back at the Desert Festival, Again

I'm back at the desert festival again, really it seems, surprise, delight, & again I am wearing a certain hat, one I shared with a small Creature friend of mine, this friend who traveled with me. It's a warm fisher hat, with a chin-strap. I found it on the old green bus back in the city, the last one of the night, returning from the hospital, in the very back seat. It'd fallen in a dark crevasse, & I thought of my little Creature friend, who was always cold. Folds nicely to fit his much smaller head.

One day I did not know where he was anymore, & I kept the fisher hat to remember him, & then another day I did not know where the hat was anymore. And days upon seething days, till recently, when dreams nudged into my waking, taking me by the scruff & nudging, & nudging harder, until one moment I open my eyes, & I'm back at the desert festival again, & my little Creature friend's fisher hat is in my hands.

I would sit down, back then, on the desert floor, night-time, desert festival loud & cheerful all around us, & I would look at my little Creature friend, & he would look at me, very calmly, & suddenly I am calmer, because he is a good little Creature friend. He knows how I get, excited, overblown, too full of the dramas for any one of them to take hold, offer a path.

He has very deep dark eyes, a pleasant purple fur, & I'm very glad for him, & he reaches out his little paw & pats me on the nose & I think: *my, how cool you are, & how cool you are, & how cool you are . . .* then he hops off my knee, & begins to do his desert dance, a kind of frenetic rocking back & forth, the ribbons in his paws & his fisher hat flying wildly about him, like he can listen to all the human musics, & the desert noises, & the wind, & the celestial music above, & the roiling in the earth itself below, & dance it wildly, happily, calmly, freely . . .

If I am back here again, can he be too? Can I find him? Give him his fisher hat? Hold him on my knee again? Watch him dance his beautiful dance again?

* * * * *

Mulronie the Space Pirate

Well, you know, it's like I always say, & I've been saying it for a long time, because it's something that my dear friend Mulronie the Space Pirate taught me. *You never know with people-folks.*

Now I know every one of you reading these lines, dozens, hundreds, thousands, bajillions, you've read the five famous books written about Mulronie the Space Pirate. The shortest, mightiest bandito in all of outer space. You well know that when he was twelve, in 1951, he had a strange encounter, under the starry skies, out in the fields beyond the farmhouse where he lived. Something happened that night, & it changed him. And you know that when he was a young feller, in 'bout 1969, he was part of that *other* mission to the moon, the one you *don't* hear about.

You know all that well, & you know how the books detail his eventual departing Earth, Terra, homeland, whatever you may call it, he called it many things, & how he made his way, by one means & another, into the far reaches of outer space.

But what you don't know is that in the year 2402, so far away from those starry skies back in that mythical year 1951, there came a sixth book about Mulronie the Space Pirate's adventures. None of you know that. I'm telling you tonight, this is a confession that there was indeed a sixth book, detailing the final adventures of Mulronie the Space Pirate, beyond what you know.

Now you may get worried & say: *oh dear, did he finally perish after all those years?* No, he didn't. He found himself a nice, small, semi-habitable planetoid—so far away from everything else, you'd think it was Kansas. But he had those later adventures before that kind of quasi-retirement he went into. It was those adventures that made the retirement possible, because he learned finally how to travel without moving, how to raise his kind of hell without lifting any of his thirteen fingers. That book does exist, I know, because I wrote it, his dear friend, his companion.

It was a long neighborhood, on that nice, small, semi-habitable planetoid like Kansas. There were two houses, his & mine. We kept them far apart from each other, by agreement. I'd keep the manuscript of the sixth book overnight, wake up at first light, walk halfway toward his house. He'd meet me, take the manuscript, securing it under his arm, & we'd walk the rest of the way to his house, & continue our work.

But what happened was the wind hit, & it blew hard, & he staggered, & he tumbled, & the pages blew all over the place, & there were no Woods to catch them, & there were no clouds to keep them from flying away, & *my goodness how those pages flew*, they flew all over the world, all over that nice, small, semi-habitable world. We found all the pages we could, but not nearly all of them. It would have been much longer a book. But he was ready to retire soon, & just said, *let's do with what we have, my friend. Let the rest go.*

* * * * *

I'm Drowsing, Over a Football Game

I'm drowsing over a football game in the early wintertime. The snow has been falling & falling all weekend. I've watched it pile higher, up to & halfway over the one window that I have to see outside. I'm safe inside, & it's warm, but I don't know how I'll pay the heating bill next month, or the electricity bill, or the phone bill. But I think to myself: *if this snow keeps falling, I'll be buried & warm like the polar bear in the wintertime.* So go my future business plans.

I'm watching the football game on my black & white TV, every so often adjusting my Antennar 2000 to try to bring in the picture a little bit more clearly. I find my eye drawn to one particular football player, and start to feel like I'm watching two games at once. He plays for the Los Angeles team, has played for them for a long time. I knew him once, a long time ago, he was my friend, & now he's much older than that, & so am I, & so it seems like I'm watching two games at once.

I'm watching the game long ago in which he ran for many touchdowns. I think they even brought him out to punt the ball once. He could do no wrong, & they cheered & cheered, & cried out his name. People painted it on their bare chests, & on their bald heads.

But the other game I'm watching is probably a more recent game, my Antennar 2000 can't tell time anymore. He's now kind of fat, sloppily uniformed, & I guess they keep him around out of sentiment. He's an institution. They don't even call the plays in his direction anymore, because then people start to laugh. He mostly stays in to block because he's so big & fat, it often helps, people fall around him.

Glance out the window from my two games, & see that the snow is piling higher & higher. I'm thinking: *O! To be a polar bear, now that the winter is here.* Look back to the black & white TV screen, & see the pretty quarterback, in the newer game, dropping back & throwing the ball, & it's tipped up, & it rides high up into the air &, as though an air current itself had a funny sense of humor, the ball falls into my old friend's fat hands!

He probably hasn't caught a pass in five or six seasons, & he staggers wildly around with the ball, not remembering what to do or how, his old body moves & memories all gone. He runs the wrong the way, & then he trips, & he falls down near the sidelines, & I'm thinking to myself: *please, ball, just roll out of bounds & save my friend's pride for one more day,* & it rolls closer & closer to the out of bounds markers.

In the older game, they put him on defense near the end of the game, & he roars through the line, crushes the pretty quarterback, ball jumps loose, & he scoops it up, & dances & jives his way to the end zone. The stadium lifts off with cheers for my friend.

* * * * *

*You've got to pay attention to the signs in your life. You've got to look around for clues,
there's all sorts of information & guide points everywhere, but you've gotta pay attention.
You can't be controlled by your dogmas & your presuppositions.
You've got to just look around with open eyes, listen in strange ways, any way you can.*

* * * * *

Couple A & Couple B

It is the old & well-known story of what happens when there is a Couple A & a Couple B. Couple A & Couple B meet in college. Couple B walk hand in hand into the student center, & they sit down at a table near Couple A, & they all start talking. Couple B is prettier, Couple A is kinder. They switch up at times, becoming Couple C & Couple D, & two stray, Couple E & Couple F, & stray further, to form Couple G & Couple H. But eventually Couple A & Couple B reform.

Some years after college, Couple A & Couple B going to the Red Sox baseball game on the weekend, one of them holds up the best sign in the whole park, & they win the local TV station's "Take a Swing!" contest. As prize, they get to play an inning against the Red Sox, right there at Fenway Park.

For the first play, Couple A-he gets a single. Maybe the Sox are kind, don't try too hard. Couple B-she takes a walk. Couple B-he bunts, & the Red Sox let all runners advance safely. Laughing lazily, rich, good-looking guys in tight white uniforms.

The fourth one, though, Couple A-she, smashes the ball just over the left fielder's glove. (She's the leading hitter by a country mile in her local softball league. *Shhhhhhh!*) The fielder slows it, that's all, then wilds around for the ball. Another fielder rushes to help him—they're panicked—they hadn't expected this. They throw the ball back to the infield, but it just rolls away toward the dugout &, by the time the chaos & panic has settled down, there has been struck, inside Fenway Park, by these seeming amateurs (*Shhhhhhh!*), an inside-the-park grand slam home run. And, as a result, the Red Sox have to pay them \$10,000 total—\$2,500 per run—, plus make a \$10,000 donation to the Jimmy Cancer Fund.

Delight delight delight, everyone says, newspapers catch the gleam of their smiles, their pretty figures, the laughing charms in their eyes. Then days, *dot-dot-dot*, weeks pass. He sees a tiny blue light again on the ceiling of their bedroom. Thinking of his small Creature friend, his small friend's fisher hat, the desert festival. The small Creature friend's dance, better than any coupling, any inside-the-park grand slam home run.

* * * * *

It All Comes from the Book I Was Reading

Now you can say what you want, but I say that it all comes from the book I was reading. It was for a class, & it was a day late, should have read it yesterday. It's how these things go sometimes.

Our house is kind of tipped in design. I climb from one half to the other, settle into the lowest end of the couch to read, where I'm least likely to just tumble on out mid-page. And on the last page of the book I'm reading, the girl's telling the boy she had a good time the other night, & it ends, & I can't tell if a page is missing. I just don't know. I stare at the book, & I just don't know. Will young Mulronie leave pretty Figga after all, for the romances of outer space, that secret mission to the moon & beyond?

Anyway, I put the book in my knapsack & I head off to class that, mind you, was held yesterday, but I wonder if I can say something anyway. Along the way I figure: *well, since I'm late, maybe I'll just go in & see a movie*. There's this movie theater I like, it's down an alley, although the sign that marked it has long since been gone, so you *really* gotta know it's there or you'll never find it. I walk, still wondering about my book. Mulronie always packs his black & white TV with the Antennar 2000 last &, *when & only when they're packed*, he goes.

It's a fairly big room. And the thing about this theater is that it doesn't have the usual rows upon rows of theater seats. It has an assortment of chairs, different kinds & sizes, armchairs & rocking chairs & so on, & the movie screen is small & it's over in one corner. So I pick up my favorite green armchair, lucky it's empty, & I move it as close as I can to the screen, trying not to get in the way of others who were also peering toward the screen, everybody trying to get a look. Because nobody actually charges us to get in, we try to have our manners.

When it comes on, it's in the middle of the story, as the movies sometimes are at this theater. It seems to be a movie about a football team. The grizzled old veteran is showing the brash first round rookie how to play, how to win right. He feels he can't do it anymore, he believes he's on his way out. The fans laugh at him now, & the team usually only lets him block these days, not carry or catch the ball. His leadership in the locker room, coaching on the sideline, these are shadowed over by his big belly, grizzled jaw, slack-mouthed grin at everything.

But I can feel the hotshot rookie's loyalty to him, the long-time loyalty of everyone else on the team to him still. No matter his lesser gleam, his diminished speed. He's their *leader*, he's their *man*. I want him to go out & play one more game, & I want him to ride out high. The movie ends suddenly before we can find out if he does. Puff of smoke, & the film on the screen burns to white.

Everybody sits around for a while, some smoked blunts, some talked politics, some looked for M&Ms on the floor. There were always one or two. Since there were no candy concessions at this theater, you had to get what you could. A few of the skeptical hipsters who'd stuck around this long decide to venture into the murk beyond the movie screen to a **Bar** they say is on the other side. Don't see any of them again tonight.

Anyway, then a short cartoon suddenly comes on, it's about 30 seconds long & it goes like this: *they discovered that what had been slowly destroying their world all these centuries were people just like them, only these people were thousands of times bigger than them, & no more knowing that they existed than these tiny people had known the big people existed. But these tiny people embarked on a great mission to bring them down, by growing bigger in time. They vowed they would grow bigger, & they would bring the big ones down, & before you could even think twice, this short cartoon was over.*

* * * * *

I was at someone's house, it was a friend, she had this large jug of LSD, it was brown-tinted, it was kind of a pretty brown, almost like a dye but I don't think so. She was very generous with this LSD, every time I came she made sure I got took care of, that I got risen up, that I got high. She knew I was struggling with my worry about paying rent. Then what happened one night was that, I don't know, I didn't get high, it didn't work, maybe it did, & I just didn't notice, the worry had overcome me. She was tired, she had to go to work the next day, she went to bed, & so I went into the little refrigerator where she kept all her medicines & chemicals & do-dads & I poured a little more LSD from her jug into my cup of orange juice, maybe a little more after that, I just had to finally evict this worry from my mind & not worry about rent except for the first of the month. But I must have poured out too much because now it looked like there was a lot less in the jug than there was, & so I got panicked & I brought the jug over to the sink & I filled it up with water a little, but now that beautiful brown color was gone. It was watered down & I just didn't know what to do, & it's like in the course of trying to expel one worry, rent worry, I'd taken on another, so maybe there's a lesson in there for you or, honestly, maybe there isn't.

* * * * *



Here I Am, Standing in My Old Hometown

Here I am, standing in my old hometown. But, I'll tell ya, it looks a lot more prosperous than it used to. I find myself again on the street that used to have the bookstore I went into to buy 10-for-a-dollar paperback books out of a crate, & downstairs in its basement the burger joint where I'd sit in the corner, read my frail paperbacks, & write *lurve* poems.

Now it's all different. I stare at the pink neon sign **Mulronie's Original Genuine Gourmet Space Pirate Burgers!** & walk in. Not a paperback book in sight. Not even the Mulronie books. I *loved* those books. Just a weird, worn-looking full-sized cut-out of Mulronie in his Space Pirate suit, standing near the famous Space Tugboat, commandeered by the tiny cackling black & white pandy bear, sitting in Mulronie's hand.

Should I feel this furious? Didn't I leave this joint, this street, this whole town, a long time ago? But I do feel this furious, more than I ever have. Someone asks to take my order & instead I sit at an empty table, saying I am waiting for someone. *OK, sir. Let us know.*

I look around. The exposed brick walls are the same. Just everything in the middle is different. Then I remember something that could help my fury. Up high toward the ceiling, there is a brick that I happen to know is a kind of explosive. The owner of the joint back then only told a few of us regulars about it. Called it his Plan B Retirement Plan. He didn't actually tell me; I just overheard them talking one night. He pointed up there & said in his unearthly drawl, "I just take a chair & climb up there, pull out that brick, & the spike behind it, & drive the one into the other. BOOM! Whatever problems I got, solved. End of the world."

So I take my chair, & I climb up there, & I begin pulling at bricks to find the right one. And I hear below the consternation over what I am doing, & would likely be hauled down by the town cop (maybe there was more than one, but they always looked the same to me), but I find it, & I pull it down, the brick & the spike. Set them on the table before me, & think: *Do I want to do this?* Nod, & I raise the spike in my hand, & drive deep right into the brick to end the world!

I find myself back in a kind of a little store, the one they say has a buried spaceship beneath it. There's a red-haired girl behind the counter that I knew, oh-so-long-ago, it aches me to think of it. I lean forward to kiss her, since the world has ended, & yet somehow it hasn't. Has & hasn't.

Now we're sitting, facing each other, on the floor, & others are walking past, smiling at us, wondering: *who are these two crazy kids, & why does one of them think the world has ended?*

* * * * *

My Beloved & I Keep Going to These Strange Parties, Over & Over

I don't know what happens but my beloved & I will find ourselves in a very cluttered living room, waiting for someone who's on the phone in the other room. So I'll be looking around thinking, *what can I put together here to sweeten her way?* And I find a Mason jar, & I mix in a little bit of chocolate, a little bit of coconut, from pouches I keep in my book-bag. Dashes & drops from flasks on the shelf with no labels on them, just for fun. I take a sip on it. It tastes drinkable.

And then a lot of people show up at that moment before my beloved can take a drink of this. Perhaps

it's for the better, since what kind of mad concoction had I made? Anyway, I don't know anybody here, that's the kind of strange parties we've been going to.

But, happily, I sort of ease into a corner, & my beloved eases into the corner with me. Right near to the shelf with the strange flasks, & the empty one above it. I reach up to the empty one, tug, & it comes loose from the wall into my hands. It's made out of lots of pieces of wood, strange pale wood, wood that seems to almost *hmmmm*. These pieces of wood are twisted & braided together to form this board, & I'm going to hand it over to my beloved, so she can study it too, when it just sort of floats over to her. She catches it in her hands, & smiles, & floats it back over to me.

Then I nod to her, she nods to me &, I don't know how we do it, but we together climb up on that board & float out through the open window into the clear night. *Goodbye, good night to another strange party.*

* * * * *

I'm With a Group of Friends

I'm with a group of friends. Dear ones. We're sitting around a table in the brown-paneled back room of that old Italian-Polish restaurant, & my old friend the Traveling Troubadour is there, strumming his guitar happily, blue eyes twinkling for all. But I know he's really gone & I have to go out to the bar in the other room to catch my breath for a moment. One of my friends comes out to see if I'm OK. She saw him too.

We go back in & I ask him, *what's your life like now, wherever you are, up in the stars?* And he smiles big & says, *smokin', drinkin', guitar-playin'.* Then he gets serious with wailing pretty on his guitar, his beautiful voice once again filling this brown-paneled room, like years long gone.

Later we all leave that restaurant, 'cuz it's a beautiful night out, & we pile into somebody's car, & we're tight up against each other in the back, cheek to cheek, shoulder to shoulder, hip to hip. I feel so fucking happy at this moment, & I close my eyes, & we come to some kind of party, & it's a very cluttered place, hard to say what kind of party's going on here anyway. Two laughing people are floating on some kind of board above the clutter, laughing, laughing hard, departing through an open window.

I get this idea that something really important is in the middle of this clutter, & I go searching through it all, pushing things aside, almost randomly. And then I find them, these Secret Books that I only ever find in dreams like this one, & there they are, unharmed, & I just open one up because I know that my time with them is short, & this kind of reading's the best kind of reading.

I dive in, & start reading about the King who summoned his brothers on a great quest, his mission to lead them to a mysterious Island. On the Island, to find a timeless, powerful Gate; within it, a being who might help them save the world. Carries with him a Secret Book of his own, within it a map to the Island.

But one night along their years-long way, tired, drooping, they let loose in a sort of coffee house in a Village, start carousing & fighting. What causes the fight is that they see specters of their lost loves in the murk of the Tavern, people they left behind years back to go on this quest. These loved ones are sad & missing them, yearning for them to return. It's a night where the quest may just fall apart out of sadness for what is gone, & yet their King somehow holds them together.

Somehow he makes it so the night passes more blurrily & they hang together. By the next morning, they don't really remember much of what happened, & I think to myself, having been through a night of my own, *sometimes I could use a little bit of that blurry not-remembering-so-well-next-morning stuff. But only sometimes.*

* * * * *

I'm descending a complicated series of ladders & stairs, among many people, continuously climbing down. I feel as I'm descending like it's not just space but time, I'm descending through places & people I've known & haven't known, times that still remain strange to me though I lived in them, through them, in spite of them. I think of people I knew, that I knew so closely, yes, yes, no, maybe. That's all you get at best. Then there are people I remember that become different to me over time. It's like who they are in my mind now is based on someone they once were, & who they actually are somewhere out there on the planet doesn't really matter anymore because they operate in my mind in a different way, they become a kind of a symbol of something, become tied to something, tied to a feeling, or tied to a memory, tied to something, like a mascot. Like you were once my friend & now you're Cap'n Crunch. Now you're my mascot for regret, for youth, for fun, for foolishness. And I keep descending this series of ladders & stairs & I feel my limbs fall away from me & not really important anymore in this descent. This descent is not into a physical place. This descent is through dream, somewhere else. The faces fall away, as faces do, & other faces come, & they go too. If I'm lucky, as I fall away completely, I will look beyond the faces & see the rest of this wide, wide world.

* * * * *

Those Crazy Days Back When I Was a Spy

When I think back on those crazy days, back when I was a spy, there were some funny moments, in amidst the bloodshed & mayhem. There was one I still like to tell about. We had an operation going on in a hotel room. It was a big hotel room, big as an apartment.

My partner & I were trying to tease something from the air, expose it. He'd brought in this heavy suitcase for our work. It was one of those bulletproof kinds. You could drop it from a hundred floors up & it'd be fine, wouldn't break or open up. You had to use the right thumbprint, & tumbler combination, & maybe a couple of secret handshakes to get into that bugger but, once you got into it, that's what you got. Bugs. In cans, & jars, & containers, all sorts of insects. Ants, praying mantises, hummingbirds, etc., etc.

I was unclear at first why we brought them in to set them loose, & then my partner took out from the suitcase what he called the Football. The Football was this football-shaped light &, when we set it up on a table, the bugs would gravitate towards it. The closer they got to it, the more likely it was they were going to evaporate. They'd evaporate.

Well, I wasn't sure what all this was about, because it just seemed like it was a lot of trouble for a bug zapper. My partner assured me this was no ordinary bug zapper, or zapper of any kind. *You see*, he told me, blue-sometimes-green eye glinting, mushroom eye glinting too, *what's important is not the ones that evaporate but the ones that don't. Because, when they don't, it's like it's some kind of signal, like in their buggy little minds it's time to hurry home.*

I didn't know what *hurry home* meant, or why it was important, but this is what we wanted to do. We wanted them to approach the Football, & then the ones that didn't get zapped to hurry home. Now the problem with this was that we had to let them out of the hotel room for them to hurry home, & follow them, & this part of the operation went south pretty quickly because they're insects, they go fast, & these were super-hyper-intelligent alien insects to boot. But I don't think we our technologies were really prepared to follow these super-hyper-intelligent alien insects back to wherever *home* was.

And so, ultimately, I just sat at the hotel bar a lot until the operation was declared over, & there was a red-haired waitress there who kept my drink filled. I was just watching the news, the same political things comin' & goin' as ever. Saw some pretty shady characters in the hotel, too, comin' & goin'.

I noticed that some of them were a little overly dressed for the summer heat that was happening outside. Some of them passed through the lobby in long coats, big hats. Sometimes their antennae poked out, sometimes tails from under their coats, sometimes they made a *buzzzzzzzz zzzzzz zzzzzzz* noise as they passed.

* * * * *

It Was a Very Strange Year

It was a very strange year indeed. I found myself often walking through a series of old factory buildings. It became my regular path. Between the buildings were these wide, wide alleys, dark, & I couldn't tell if they were filled with trash, or if people were living there, or something else stranger still was going on.

I'd always get to a certain point in this walk, or *perambulation*, as one of my stranger friends would call it, where I just had to go to the bathroom. There, over to my left, sort of embedded in one of these old factory buildings, was a red door. Next to the red door was a blacked-out window, but it had a neon sign in it to tell you what was going on. It said **Bar**.

So I'd go over to **Bar**, & it took me a few times to remember that you didn't just push the door open at **Bar**—you had to kick at the bottom twice, & push high immediately, to get the door open. Otherwise it wouldn't no matter what you did, because it was only that combination that worked. I can't tell you how I learned it, but somehow I did. Maybe someone showed it to me. *Who knows?*

Anyway I'd go in, & the bar would be over to the left, & over to the right would be a bathroom stall. Not a bathroom, just a stall. Just a toilet surrounded by three flimsy walls & a door. And I'd go in, & close the door, & I reinforce it with the trash can that was there within the stall, since there was no lock, because inevitably someone would come banging against the door, wanting to use it, not recognizing that I was inside, not seeing my feet, not hearing my noises.

It was often this woman, she'd come pounding at the door, yelling *Fucking secret Moon mission!* & I'd hurry & I wouldn't finish. I'd just escape the whole thing & often, perhaps every time, I'd be attracted to what was going on at the back of the bar because, you see, there was no back wall, there was just sort of a murky inkiness that trailed off for as far as the eye could see, & further.

And I'd find myself walking into the murkiness &, sure enough, there would be another bathroom, or rather just another stall, but this time nobody else competed for its space. So I'd walk in, I'd close the door, & it actually had a lock. I'd close my eyes to calm, & I swear sometimes I thought I could hear the sounds of a TV show or a movie going on, distantly. Maybe a laugh or two. But I had to get

where I was going, so I regret to say I never walked deeper into the murkiness to see what it was. Lazy, cowardly? I don't know.

* * * * *

Now this story started slow, those pages back there, so you could follow it really easily at the beginning, but now it's going to twist, & it's going to turn, & I'm not saying you can't do it, but I am saying maybe hang onto the rails a little bit more, just in case.

* * * * *

I'm Sitting in a Sort of Coffee House

I'm sitting in a sort of coffee house in the Village. It runs back into its own murk for what seems like miles. And there's this turquoise-eyed girl I'm sweet on. Her name is Figga. I think I'm some other age. It might be younger, it might be older. It might just be some other kind of number. She's friendly but somewhat distant. I'm shy, don't know what to say. Probably I'm younger than I am now.

But I do my best, smile, talk about books, Mulronie & so on, & at some point she kind of smiles, & nods, & wanders away, & I see her go off with some pretty guy for a while. Then later she's back, her long red hair now tied up in a fake bob, & I don't remember what we're talking about. It all feels like loneliness & yearning. I'm helpless, but I try to remember back, *how did I get here?* Maybe that'll help me figure out where I am now & what's next.

I was on that green bus, the one that runs to the hospital, & I knew that most of the passengers on the green bus are not coming back tonight. It's the last green bus of the night. I got off it, not at the hospital, no, & I was walking the streets awhile, thinking about how a lot of them who stayed on the green bus were not coming back.

I was supposed to go to the hospital. The doctor said, *you just come on in, & we'll get you cleaned out & fix it all.* Then he added, *you could take your chance with the pills, maybe they'll help. Or you can heal on your own,* & he shrugged. So he really didn't know, & maybe he really didn't care. I'd had enough of that hospital. The crowded rooms, the quarreling roommates.

I cross the road toward this sort of coffee house, & I see the green bus in the distance, still heading to the hospital, going faster & faster. I know that driver; he won't stay on the street as he gets closer to the hospital. It takes hold of him, that feeling that most people he's driving are not coming back, it takes hold of him, & sometimes he'll drive off the road, into the ditch, & maybe he'll just stop for a moment for a minute & sit silently, his bus half-tipped in the ditch.

He remembers a dream he had, it was a long time ago, but it feels like it applies to nights like tonight, when I'm feeling like this—*We were all lost, & so we traveled to an alternative time, where the world had been healed of all its ills, & it felt good, & it felt hopeful*—, & so that's how I first came here, this sort of coffee house, it being one of the crossroads amongst the many kinds of worlds. But then something terrible happened.

There was a great explosion of some kind, & there's no more sort of coffee house, & I have this naked red girl, red-haired girl, in my arms. What I am saying is, she's burned but she's also red-haired, red-haired and red-skinned in my arms. And we're being pursued, & I'm looking for an escape, somewhere,

& finally I see it. I see that big house that I dreamed about all those years. Been awhile.

I remember there was an attic, & there were many mirrored rooms, & you could just lose yourself in those many-mirrored rooms. I carry her, red-skinned & red-haired, clumsily climbing the fold-down ladder up into the attic.

* * * * *

*Time isn't linear, no, it's like a big field, moments, places, people, events.
It's hard to believe this, & yet only to be able to point & say, **that's where it came from, back there**, but
not be able to point somewhere else & say, **that's where I'm bound, over there**.*

* * * * *

He Was Known as Jack the Drug Dealer

He was known as Jack the Drug Dealer. He was a polite man, but he was in bad shape. Everybody knew it. The only hint you had of him from his older, better days was that paperback he carried around. *Unofficial Guide to Mulronie the Space Pirate's Universe*. You never saw him look at it, but you always got the feeling he just didn't have to, that he knew all its contents.

But then good luck came to him. He was sleeping in alleys, his only address a cavernous bookstore nearby that was kindly to him. Most of the time, if he ate at all, it was from the licorice roots found in a nearby park. But then good luck came to him, he won some money in some kind of contest, & grew confident, and he was now head of a charity organization, with ten nodes of business. He was on the top; his clothes were clean.

I was new on the job, & I heard this story about him in pieces over time. Then one day I got called into his office. It wasn't that big an office for the big head of a charity organization. I don't think he never quite left the alley in some way.

We ended up sitting on the floor together. He told me a story. He said, *there was this baseball game & I was in the outfield. They put me out there because they figured that was the place where I could do the least damage. **I was their mascot, because I won a contest with my friends**. People paid to see me stand in the outfield & wave to them. They were pretty good defensive team, so not many balls came out my way.*

*But then one time this ball was hit hard, I heard it, it was a **crack!** a beautiful sound, strange to say, & I think it's going to go over my head, but then it starts to arc low, & I start rushing toward it, & for a moment I forget that I'm no good at baseball, & I don't know why I'm here. I'm in the outfield because they have no use for me, just short of not having me at all. I just leap into it, my body arcs low, & the ball is curving low, & they are going to meet, my glove & this ball, & what happens is this: I squeeze my glove with my eyes closed &, by the single thread hanging off the ball, because it was hit so hard that it was kind of tattered, I catch it & hold it above the ground. I catch it cleanly.*

*Nobody realizes. They think I'd just kind of fumbled & jumped & fell my way toward near it somehow. And they were yelling at me to **throw to home plate!** because the monster that had hit this ball was going to get an inside-the-park home run off my sorry ass. But I raise the ball up, & I yell, **I caught it clean!** And then, just to convince them all, I hurl that ball toward home plate. It's a beautiful throw, straight on, arrives cleanly in the catcher's glove. I'm not capable of that throw, wasn't then, not now, not ever.*

Later, someone asked me to autograph the inside of a milk carton. He said, **this carton's covered in signatures & statements by heroes, & you're one.** So I did. Now get out of my office. Get back to work, son.

* * * * *

Civil War & Football

There's always these kinds of confusions between one thing & another. I'm sure you've been involved in a few yourselves. You see, this occurred during the Civil War & football. My squad is in the other side's war-torn territory, & we need to find some room for our kicker, when their soldiers rush at us & we shoot them down so he can kick the go-ahead field goal. And he does. He's very good, you see. Very good.

And now we're ahead, holding a slim lead. We then find ourselves in some kind of building. There are many of them as well. We're all getting food, it's like a cafeteria. *Is this like a timeout? Halftime?*

Now we're returning back to battle, & we get the word that Headquarters wants us to put on a big To-Do, & I am getting confused as to whether this is the Civil War & football, or possibly a Grand Production on the stage in the classic traditions of Vaudeville & Carnivale.

I find myself crawling over the stage, & people are waving at me in a confusion of lights, music, & noise. It just seems chaotic, & I'm trying to figure what's going on, when I fall through this stage, & I fall & fall & fall, until I land in the lounge of a kind of library in a very strange museum. I see in this lounge drawings of a red-haired girl that my friend Harry likes. He made them when they went to dinner. Told me with a shit-eaten grin that her name is Figga.

But then I blink twice, & they're not there, & I realize, *wow, this was one of those prognostications.* I saw pictures that haven't been made yet. And I turn to him, he's lying there on one of the other couches, passed out in between a boy & a girl, as is his preference. Ask him, *which one?* He'll say, every time, *Yes!*

I tell him about those drawings of that girl he really likes, & how they went out to dinner, & while they were at dinner he pulled out his sketchpad because he's very good, you see, he's very good. He drew a beautiful, elegant, sweet, lovely portrait of her, giving special attention to her turquoise eyes, & she squirmed about in her seat at the restaurant, wondering who else was watching, & many were, but she liked these drawings very much.

I get up & leave him to think about his life, his decisions. Walk along the vast murky room, & I think to myself, *isn't it funny how where you start & where you end in these things can have virtually no relation to one another.*

* * * * *

Just Walking Through the Neighborhood

Houses & many trees, it's nighttime, & I'm lost. No phone to call anyone to pick me up. Then some fast figures appear, chasing, laughing wickedly, & they seem to herd me along, but they don't capture me. Then someone else they're herding along too despairs & gives in, allows capture, but then regrets it with a wowl.

But I don't, I just don't, & they herd me along, & eventually there's a green bus, & it doesn't seem to stop in this neighborhood. But I run for it, pound at its door, pound & pound it. It slows, & I get my fingers inside the door, & I yank it open just enough to squeeze in. I climb on, & I give the driver a dirty look, like *dare me to pay you, just dare me.*

The green bus rides strangely & bumpily out to the hospital, veering on purpose into a ditch at one point, the driver sitting there staring for a while, like his mind is shut off. But eventually it comes around again, & I make it home. Start to make up our bed, but it's a vast bed, & it's covered in papers that I push to one side to get the blankets better spread. They're from a manuscript I can't seem to organize into a proper book. I hate looking at these pages & feeling my failure. Mulronie waiting at the far end of the neighborhood, so patiently.

I'm singing to myself, after this hard strange night, that old song, *Goin' down the road, feelin' bad. Goin' down the road, feelin' bad. Goin' down the road, feelin' bad, feelin' bad, & I don't wanna be treated this-a way.* It's late now, & I'm thinking, *man, it'd be good to sleep.* I lie down, push the papers again to one side, but they seem to keep accumulating on the bed. *We lost so many, Mulronie. What do I do with the rest?*

* * * * *

Sunny, Sunny Days

You know those kind of sunny, sunny days. Oh yes, those kind of sunny, sunny days when you find yourself sitting in a patch of grass, maybe just a big old field, nothing going on in that big old field, nothing having to do with people & their mighty small concerns, no sir-ee. There's just grass growing, maybe a tree, insects, small animals, whatever else.

I find myself watching this insect pick its way along the grass. It's sort of shaped like a stick with legs. I can't even figure out where its head is. It's a very strange insect, & it puts me into a sort of reverie because I start remembering this red-haired girl I knew a long time ago. Her name was Figga. Strange name, eh? But Figga was her name, & I was in her house, & I was comin' down the basement stairs. I had this uncommon way of coming down these stairs. Halfway down, I sort of swung from them & sideways into the basement. Done it many times.

Well, OK, you might say, so how did you know Figga? Well, I think she was my neighbor, & I'd come over to her house to fix things. *And was she old or young?* Well, I'm not really sure. She kind of seemed like she was a little bit of both, & it seemed like everything that needed to be fixed was in her basement. I think that's where she kept broken things. I think she liked to keep all the things that didn't work or needed fixing in one place.

So I'd come in, & I'd be the fixer-guy, & I had no skills, & I didn't even have any tools. She bought me the tools at the local tool store, what they call in technical terms the *hardware store*. I'd come down, oh 'bout once a week, for a while, & I'd see what had broken & what she needed fixing. Sometimes it was something that had broken in her house, & sometimes she just found things out in the world that were broken, & she thought, *oh well, he'll fix them, he's good with the tools & the skills.* But I wasn't good at either the tools or the skills.

But what fascinated her about me was that I had once lived on a mythical Island out far, far in the Wide Wide Sea. It did not have any attachment to the roots of the earth. I'd gone out there when I was a

student. It was one of those exchange programs where I got to live for awhile and study on this Island.

But I must admit I wasn't very good at it because, although it was a very big Island, it wasn't actually even finished, & I used to find myself sort of floating at the edge of it with my notebooks, & sometimes they would float away from me, & that seemed far more important to me than anything else that was happening on this Island. In fact, I can't even tell you what was happening on this Island, or what I was supposed to be studying.

All I know was that I had a hard time keeping my stuff together & that really wasn't very much fun. But Figga, she just couldn't get enough of hearing that I had lived for awhile as a young student on a mythical Island. And then she'd hand me somethin' else to fix, her turquoise eyes twinkling, & the conversation would continue elsewhere.

* * * * *

In the Year 2402

This happened long ago, or far on from now, depending on your point in things. In the year 2402, or was it 24,002? I'm not sure of the details, but my love & I are in a house we share with another couple. We've been away but now are returning, & it's still new to us, even though it's an old house. There's still shelves to build, places on the walls for pictures. How can something be both new & old? Known & novel, *how?*

I leave the next morning, very early, to go to school, to try to catch up. I'm behind on my classes, & haven't paid for anything. And I think what happens is that I walk down the wrong hallway, & I arrive at the wrong school, & I get turned around, & I end up on the ceiling. But it's one of those places where you can walk on the ceiling, & walk on the floor, & everything kind of spins around, & time passes, & I come upon a girl who seems friendly enough, & I ask her what time it is. She says, *it's 1:30*. I want to ask her what year, but I just quietly despair.

* * * * *

That Strange Nada Theater

So this is what happens when you go to that strange Nada Theater, at that strange No-Tel, after midnight, well after midnight. You've seen more of **Remoteland** tonight, sure, it went on for hours, it seemed like for more hours than there are in a night. But now, if you can outlast the crowds such as they are, stay on & on in your seat, don't find some reason to leave or let someone persuade you it's time to go & have a malted at the local sugar emporium, you might get to the movie that comes on near dawn, pre-dawn they call it. You might get to see **More Fun**.

It's a strange world of **More Fun**. It's like our world but worse, if you can imagine that. No zombies, no vampires, no nuclear apocalypse. No, something happens, & people just start dying. They get weak, & never recover from this weakness. And what's funny, though not really, is that when the weak ones start to die, they sort of melt away, parts of them become invisible. Still there, but invisible. Then the invisible parts fade out completely. Some people call these poor unfortunate souls Melties.

Our hero, such as he is one, is the Postman. He finds a gun shop, & takes a few, & then he finds a grocery, & ransacks it for food. Then he leaves his known places behind, & eventually meets up with a



man called the Recruiter.

The Recruiter is rebuilding the population of the world by killing the Melties. He does it kind; they never see it coming. Often he spends a last night with them, sharing their meal, maybe singing their songs, letting them tell memories of what it used to be like. How it is now, maybe any hopes they have left. Kills them quickly in their sleep, buries them carefully somewhere peaceful. If he can't do it mercifully, then he parts them still breathing, still melting.

But his goal is for humans to finish the race, & then the world will carry on from there. He's good at finding people in holes & hideaways. He says to the Postman, the first night they are traveling together, *we just can't have human beings like Melties, who are more like hotel soap in a hot shower. We just can't have them.*

* * * * *

As You Travel Through the White Woods, Horizontally

You just wonder, as you travel through these White Woods horizontally, a sugar cube of LSD melting through you, allowing you to travel in this new & pleasurable way, you just wonder: *how it is that the Woods more welcomes you this way, horizontally? What is it about your human form that fits better this way?*

You come at last to the road that you didn't know was here, because there are no roads in the White Woods, & yet here is this road, passing through the White Woods, it's a simple paved road. *What does that mean?* And you're feeling for your horizontality, *but it's gone.* You're upright & walking again. Whatever that was, it's gone. It feels like you're walking on this road forever & ever, but never getting anywhere.

* * * * *

I Had This Lady Teacher

There's lots to say about when I was a student. Lots of crazy things, lots of subtle quiet things. Lots of things that I can't say too, like they were just of their time, of their moment. They weren't things that traveled through space & time to be tellable at some later time. They're just not; it's not possible.

I had this lady teacher at one point, & I go over to her house. I think she was having a party & I was invited. It was one of those parties where all the students show up, & the teachers, & everybody relaxes, calms down a bit. Not in the classroom right now, don't have to put on an act, not as a student or a teacher.

She was a good teacher, she taught history. I wasn't a very good history student because, at that time, I didn't understand that wherever you drop your coin in the stream of humanity, anywhere along it, by time or place, you're going to find most of the same things. They resemble each other way more than they don't. She tried to teach me that then, & I only learned it later on my own, sloppily. Took way too long.

I sat with her at this party, on the floor, in a corner out of the main action. I had the impression that she'd never eaten magic mushrooms before, & I offered her some from a paper bag I had with me. She took a look at the bag, peeked inside, pulled out one of the little curled bits to hold in her hand,

examine, sniff. She smiled. She was kind of an older lady, but not too old.

Then I told her I had something else too. I pulled from my pocket, in a rather debonair way, as though offering her a Cuban cigar, a really long blunt, & I started telling her about the times that I had lived in out West, in Seattle & Portland, how I'd go trippin' on Saturdays. I told her that I'd been poor & jobless & struggling then, & writing saved me on those tripping Saturdays, all those years ago. A black pen, a notebook of lined white sheets, a tab of Lucy, my Walkman & bag of rock-&-roll cassettes, & a green city to play through.

She looked at me curiously & said, *well, how old are you?*

And I said, *well, I'm 22, ma'am.*

And she said, *well, what years ago are you talking about?*

And I said, *well, truth be told, I'm talking about the future. Now if you want to take a few of those mushrooms & chew them on down, you might understand a little better what I'm saying. But it's OK if you don't.*

And she said, *well, so what was the craziest time you ever had out there, with those crazy Saturdays you're telling me about?*

And I said, *well, I don't know whether I am being a clown & entertaining you, like that guy on TV, or if you really care, but I'll tell you a story that didn't actually happen. It was more like a fantasia that I might have conjured up while hanging out in an alley one time. One of the homeless guys was saying to me, oh yeah, this was years ago, I was in the Woods, & there's women tied to the trees, all over the place. Now they weren't victims or kidnapped, nothin' like that, no. They liked it, they liked being tied up to the trees, & fucked that way too. It was really good, those nights, & there was nothing profound about it at all. So take that, you, Mr. Book Learning, you take that. It's the kind of reality that's out there for you to find.*

And so I told this story to the teacher, & she looked at me, smiling still, & said something I'll never forget. She said, *the key thing to being tied to a tree & fucked is that your hands are tied properly, not too tight, not too loose, & then when the man screws you, he positions your hips just right.*

And after that I knew, whether this lady ever had or ever would eat magic mushrooms, she'd always be OK in my book.

* * * * *

I Woke Up in the White Woods

I woke up in the White Woods, wasn't sure how I'd gotten there. I lied there on the Woodsy floor, trying to reach back in my mind, eyes closed, breathing calm, thinking. *How did I get here? Am I injured? No. I don't feel injured. Sore? A little.*

Lying here on the Woodsy floor for hours on end, sleeping or whatever it is I was doing, passed out maybe? *How did I get here?* Eventually, I find myself also sinking down below the Woodsy floor where I have been lying, below what's around me, below questions about injury & feeling.

I find myself traveling again through a city, with others, traveling together. I don't see their faces but we're walking close together, familiarly, there's a sort of complementariness to our pace, to the way we swing our arms & move our legs. Some of us are bigger, some are smaller, some walk naturally faster, some slower, but there's a familiarity to it.

At one point, we end up on a hill above the city & I'm just trying to figure it out. *What does this all mean*

to that me, who's lying a little bit sore on the Woodsy floor, there, over there? I can see you, over there, lying on that Woodsy floor. You can see me. Can you see me? Yes, I can see you, with those familiar people on that hill looking down on a city. How did we? I don't know. How did we? I don't know. Am I the past & you're the future, or vice versa? Did I go from city to Woods or Woods to city? I'm not sure. Are we happening together at the same time, on parallel tracks? Which one of me is lying alone, deep in the White Woods, & which one of me is on this hill, sitting among these dear people whose faces I can't quite see, looking down on the city, thinking almost everything is in sight?

Watch him build that world, watch him puff them out from his fingertips, look at that, look at that one, it's green & blue, look at that one, it's roiling with earthquakes, look at that one, it's a million suns in one, look at that one, look at that one, look at that one.

Walking into the White Woods

Walking into the White Woods & at first there seems no sign of people-folks. Their ways & things. And there's no paths, not a one, & I'm not bound for somewhere, so I'm not looking for a path. I'm not looking for anything. I look at the tree trunks, some of them smooth, some of them gnarled, branches in every direction, leaves of different colors, needles, the bushes below. Everything is almost still, there's just a bit of a wind, just a bit of something moving in addition to me.

And I suppose that makes me feel better because if it was completely still here, & I was the only one moving, the only entity, the only thing, I'd feel like I'm troubling the stillness, but the wind, if wind is sentient, if it is, if it isn't, it assures me that no, I move, other things move. Maybe things move that I can't even see.

And I come upon, & it's shocking, I come upon a man-made thing. It's hard to figure what it is. It's a long structure, sort of dilapidated, looks like it's been assembled over the course of decades or centuries. There's rust on some of it, looks reinforced in some places. I walk in, & it's like entering into a tunnel from that almost-stillness that I was in.

I see that many kinds of metal & wooden structures have been bolted, nailed, strapped, taped together, to form a tunnel & I wonder where it's going to bring me, if anywhere at all. And then I come to a kind of a brightly lit place, strangely colored but not disturbing. There's curvy seats that are sort of built into the wall, & the floors are soft, & the ceiling vague, almost kind of space-age.

I find my seat along the wall. It smoothes into me, gathers me in softly & firmly. There's a fireplace nearby, wasn't there just a moment ago, but there it is & it's not been started. I find my pencil & my little notebook, & I think maybe to scribble a word or two, but then I see that my thumb's nail is split & bloody, & it's going to be hard to write anything. I don't know whether to keep on, go back, or stay awhile.

What You're Gonna Do, & How You're Gonna Do It

It all comes down to what you're gonna do, & how you're gonna do it & that counts almost everywhere, in all types of situations. I was in the back of a Jeep, back where I come from. I was riding with an old friend, laughing, colorful. One of those guys you meet along the way that's just bigger than everybody else. Pays attention in a certain way, loves the music more, loves everything more. Wails pretty on his guitar till deep in the night becomes early in the morning.

And we ended up at a party, & there's another old friend of mine, & this one is from a *long* time ago. He's young, he's in his glories. His eyes are bright & his mind is alert & crazy & free, beautiful. I listen & I look. *Do it again, do it again.*

But then someone reminds me of something, & I realize that I left my bag of notebooks out in the Jeep, & so I have to go get them. So I leave the party, the sweet blunt smoke & the happy high music, James McGunn & such, & there's some girls, & they're even the friendly kind, though maybe not *too* friendly, but friendly enough, & there's food & everything. I feel welcomed, I feel alright, *something*.

I come out & where's that Jeep? That Jeep had my bag of notebooks in it, *Oh man, shit. Hey, where'd that Jeep go? Hey, you know those guys, you know the guy that drives that Jeep, where's he live? No, man, no, man, tell me. It's OK, I need to know.*

Yeah listen, can you give me a ride over there? Really, I left my bag of notebooks in the back of the guy's Jeep, & I'm not sure where he lives or where he works but, man, if we can just catch him it'd be all good. Can we do that, please? No, really, just give me a ride, it's just a bag of notebooks but it's important to me, it really is. Why'd I lose it? Why'd I lose it?

* * * * *

I'm in a Bookstore, Again, & I Have a Cold

Why am I in this bookstore again? I have a cold. Well, maybe it'll cheer me up, maybe it won't. I'm trying to find the books that I really want to read, ones full of music & high laughter, low despair, & cackling weirdness all around.

Buy one book, a paperback, & it's missing its first 70 pages. *What kind of bookstore is this?* Well, I guess that's not an easy question to answer. It ends in charts. Maybe those 70 pages would help you understand the charts, but *who knows what kind of paperback book this is?*

I keep moving in the bookstore, sometimes that's a good idea, you just keep moving. And there's a series of old, tall, grainy-looking hardbacks. I don't know, twenty, thirty volumes of them on this shelf in a row. Is it a complete set? I don't know. There's no titles on them. But I touch one, just to feel the age. I touch it very gently, & it thinks how long since it's been read. I touch the next one, & it's thinking of a funny joke someone told it, maybe the volume next to it told it a funny joke, that's my guess, I'm not really sure. All I can tell you is that as I touch them very lightly, I can hear their thoughts.

And I'm telling you, I'm going home to bed now. I'm going to sleep off this cold for a million hours, but that does not negate the fact that these books, they're living objects, wood impressed with words, *living objects*.

* * * * *

The Market Located Over the Buried Spaceship

When I was young, I worked at that market that was located over the buried spaceship. It was called Chief Seattle's Friendly Market, & I'd say it was pretty friendly, although when I started I didn't feel all that much friendliness from my co-workers. They didn't help me with all the strange cash registers I had to figure out, some of them ancient, some of them not so much.

They really didn't know who or what I was when I walked in the door that first day, still in high school, asking for a job. I was looking for a place to be that I could really care about, for some people that would remember my name from one time to the next. And it became that eventually, it took a while, I'll say that. Had to fight my way in. Maybe that's true of any situation that's already established. You're the new person, eager, wanting to join in.

It took at least a year for me to finally get down those long, dark stairs in the back, through the walk-in refrigerator, the crates of milk & juice jugs, other frozen items, push back the curtain, down that stairwell. Unlit & you descended & it seemed to get darker. Then, when you don't think it's possible, & you're thinking to turn back, even if you've been down there before, it starts to get a little lighter, & suddenly you're in this place that you didn't, couldn't, imagine existed, deep under the earth.

You're in a hallway, you arrive down into it. There's a ceiling, there's a floor, walls on either side, there's doors. It winds away, & there was this one time that my wanderings went a little too far in that buried spaceship, & I think I became disoriented, became dehydrated. I'm not really sure what it was.

But I will tell you that I remember indistinctly ending up in a room, not knowing how I'd gotten there, laying on a bed, the room was dark, & someone was feeding me the most delicious soup. I'd never tasted anything like it before, & I was being fed by a kindly, furred paw. And the paw fed me that soup, & sort of touched my nose & made a gesture, when I had eaten the good soup, *go back to sleep, it's OK*. As I faded, feeling safer than maybe ever, I felt the paws lift up my head gently, & pull a hat onto me. *A fisher hat?*

And eventually I woke up, & was able to make my way back, no problem. I wasn't nearly as far from the exit as I'd thought. But I remember that all these years later. It was unique among the many adventures I had down there in that buried spaceship. Never told this to anyone before tonight. It's not in any of the five Mulronie the Space Pirate books. Not even the secret sixth volume. But now you know.

* * * * *



Raymond Soulard, Jr.



Notes from New England

*“Please accept this ragged purse
of high notes.”*

The following continues the series originally called Notes from New England, begun in issue 24-25 (Winter 1998), then revived in issue 59 (October 2006) as Notes from the Northwest, & appearing since issue 75 (October 2010) under its original title. It is intended as a gathering-place for observations of various lengths upon the world around me. It will be culled, like much of my writing, from my notebooks, & perhaps these thoughts will be expanded upon sometimes as well.

Dream Raps, Volume Seven

*Ink, you enchant me,
drop by drop,
holding the traces of my sanity and my madness,
like a long, barely-visible scar,
while the body sleeps in the discourse of its destructions.*

— Pablo Neruda, “The Blow,” 1969 (Translation by NDH)

I Never Wanted to Buy New Clothes Anyway

Anyway, it’s kind of like I never wanted to buy new clothes anyway. So you could say I got what I deserved that day when I walked into the clothing store, & it got held up by these strange robbers you couldn’t possibly imagine. One was very short with a long coat covered in epaulets, handlebar mustache, some kind of pirate’s hat, & the other one was even stranger, even shorter, she looked like a tiny little black and white pandy bear—

And I don’t even know if they were *actually* holding up the clothing store. It seemed to be some kind of confusion with the guy behind the counter, who looked like he was smoking some of that wacky green stuff day & night (by his red-rimmed eyes & his mad **CAKLE! CAKLE! CAKLE!**) begging: *don’t rob us please, don’t rob us please (in a weird sort of upside-down accent, like he was speaking backwards)*.

I don’t think they were robbing them, but it got confused, & finally someone pushed down a rack of clothes, & someone hit the lights, & I just decided *the hell with buying new clothes today, I never wanted to buy new clothes anyway—who cares what my roommates think of me—*

So I managed to crawl into the back room, & out the emergency exit—*whoop! whoop! whoop! whoop! whoop! whoop!* went the alarm, but I just kept going & I found myself at a crowded train station pretty quickly, & I thought, *well, in the movies, the guy who is fleeing the scene of whatever always runs down those stairs into the train station, leaps the turnstile, & then the door to the train opens just in time, or not just in time, depending on whether or not he’s going to get caught, according to some script or other—*

I missed it, of course, & now I stand there, & the platform’s empty, which I find really strange.

But you know, here's the thing, I looked way down the track, & see two individuals sitting at a card table, & it's the robbers & they're sitting there, & they're playing cards. An empty can of Gin-Ginger Ale next to each of them—

Now I walk down there, & nod to them, & they don't know who I am, & they're not paying attention because they're engrossed in their card game. They're playing with a card deck that has different sizes of cards, & different shapes of cards, & some of the cards are thick, & some are thin, & I notice the bigger of the two with the mustache actually starts to chew on a couple because perhaps they are tasty cards too, at least some of them—& well, they just look too busy for the likes of me, so I figure, *well, maybe it's the fact that I didn't buy new clothes—look at the rags upon my back!*

So I walk to the far end of the platform thinking, *eh, I'll stay way down here*, & I start to think about my expenses, & the reason why I didn't want to buy new clothes is that I owe a lot of rent, & I don't have a lot of money. Old-timey bookstore jobs just don't pay well, & I spend too much time composing poems with sand-sticks in the earth.

But then again, I thought, *if I get a new job with new clothes, maybe I'll be able to pay rent, or just move out of that place anyway. My room doesn't even have a real door, just a kind of a courtesy curtain as they call it. Courtesy curtain!*

So what happens finally is I just sit down on the platform, I think to myself, *go don't go, what difference does it make?*

Then a man comes up to me, & it's the clothing shop owner, but he looks all mod now. His hair's slicked back, & his clothes are far more expensive & fancy & weird than the ones that were for sale in his store. And he says to me, *dreams are just fragments of reality (CACKLE! CACKLE! CACKLE!), or like tiny bits of unchewed food.*

* * * * *

Some Will Not Like How This Story Continues

Some will not like how this story continues, but this is how it continues. I was waiting for a bus at a street corner after my latest shift at the old-timey bookstore, & the bus pulled up, & the door opened, & I got on board, & I paid my fare from a little blue-green coin purse. And look who is driving—but none other than ex-President Clusterfuck himself, Donald J. Trump!

Yes indeed, he's the driver. He's dressed up in a driver's uniform, & he kind of looks like Ralph Kramden from that old TV show, *The Honeymooners*. He has the hat, he has the formal jacket & the pants, & he's friendly to everybody. He's talkative, having a good time driving the bus.

I sit way in the back, but I can hear his voice booming in the front. People get on, people get off. A lot of people sit toward the front because he's telling funny stories. Apparently, years after he was driven from the White House in Washington D.C., he lived in the outback of Australia for awhile, lived with the kangaroos. Named them too, some ribald names. Stinky, Swallers, Big Mama.

I had me some funny names for them kangaroos that I lived with out in the outback, all alone. Just me & the kangaroos! he cries, & the bus shakes with everyone's laughter.

So I'm sitting there listening, but eventually my attention drifts to my feet, my boots. They've fallen apart, I can barely walk in them. Sometimes I forget this for a while, but then they sort of come undone, & they're flapping in a way that feet don't like. Now I'm thinking: *I've gotta go see someone.*

So I get off the bus near the Square, because I see a sign for a certain shop that says: **Shoe Fix-er! Shoe Fix-er!** It's a funny sign & I think *OK, I'll go to the Shoe Fix-er! Shoe Fix-er!*

I wave goodbye to ex-President Clusterfuck, Donald J. Trump the bus driver, & he says, *you take care, my brother, peace & love to all & yours.* I say, *you too, ex-President Clusterfuck, Donald J. Trump.*

I get off the bus, & I sorta wobble-waddle-limp my way to **Shoe Fix-er! Shoe Fix-er!** Inside is a man sitting on a little stool. He's a blonde man with a very intense look on his face, but I've come to

realize that's just how he looks even when he's calm.

I say, *aren't you that famous ex-movie star?* And he looks at me with that fierce look & he says, *yes sir, I am that famous ex-movie star, but this is what I do these days.* So I take off my boots, & he starts to fix them.

He looks at me quietly a long while, & says, *how are those sessions you're having with Webster Hill?*

Um. I ask him, *Who is Webster Hill?*

He says, *why, he's your psychiatrist. He's the one you write about in all your journals, & you haven't decided yet if he's a man or a place, you haven't decided whether you're sane or not sane.*

Tell me, sir, look at me in my fierce & famous ex-movie-star eyes, is all that you've told about in the last few minutes real? Does it sound real, or is it just some kind of a weird dream?

* * * * *

I Have This Teacher That I Admire a Lot

I have this teacher that I admire a lot. My class with him is at night, the one weekday night the old-timey bookstore gives me off, & I wish I could have a drink with him, or something, pick his brain about all my worries & thoughts about the world, & whatever. That's his phrase, he likes to talk about *the world, & whatever.*

But I don't want to take up his time, so I ask him, as he's packing up his knapsack, *how long is your drive home?* He says, *oh, about 90 minutes.* He's all packed up, & sees I'm lingering. He's smaller than me, only in stature, & he leans near to me, & kisses me on the shoulder, quickly, affectionately, & then he leaves without a word.

I feel touched specially, sweetly, & so I walk home. It's a long way, & I have lots of time to think about this & that. I look up at the stars, & sort of bounce them around in my mind, & I remember that time I traveled down south to the Free City of Mumakesh. I ended up at a brand-new bookstore, a tall glass structure, with bookstalls outside, & cups of wine & juice available freely. Inside there was so much to see. Very mazy, vast & wonderful.

As I'm walking through the complex array of aisles, I realize I'm naked. But nobody troubles about me, nobody criticizes or gives me a hard time. Someone shouts to me from a distance, *hey Websta! You'll love their LPs!* And the vinyl LP section *is* a good one. Three different colored vinyl versions of James McGunn's *Sco'u'tland.* There's an old portable phonograph to play records on if you're careful.

So that is the story I thought about as I was walking home with my teacher's affectionate kiss still on my shoulder, still hovering like a feather, like a whisper.

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In a New Century

In a new century, the bald angry man pulls open his shirt to reveal a superhero's picture on his chest. But at that moment, a woman much taller than him is burying him in popcorn. She's probably three times taller than him, an aberration of the new century. As the popcorn buries him almost completely, you can hear him cry from deep in his superhero-picture-covered chest, *you can't bury me, oh!*

What the hell was that? Oh, here now. Look around. There's a Ducky Creature, sitting peaceably in the lap of my new beloved, by the shore of the magical mythical Island. They look quite peaceable together.

But then, at that moment, comes roaring up a big & metallic machine, intent on getting them

& everyone else off this magickal mythical Island, clearing it off, sweeping it dry, everything. My new beloved & the Ducky Creature run to hide at the far end of the magickal mythical Island. She's a quick runner.

But, in the middle of the magickal mythical Island, there is a big Ducky Creature, a BIG Ducky, & he won't go. He looks at this great metallic machine approaching him, smirks friendly, & says, *we won't go, you will go.*

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Me Looking in a Trashcan

See me looking in a trashcan, in a bathroom, in a house I lived in back when. In the trashcan are yellow pages from my notebooks, crumpled & thrown out. Well, some of the pages are from my notebooks, some aren't, but I'm shocked. I don't know what it means. I stand up with my pages, fold them carefully, put them in my inner pocket of my green plaid jacket, & I walk out right out the door.

I find myself walking on the side of this road where they say strange things happen. At one point, I walk into a kind of a restaurant, called Blue Dog Eats, & they don't have counters or booths, they have old-fashioned school desks. I sit at one, & look at the menu, & the waitress comes over, frazzled, hurried, leaves again, not rude but just frazzled, hurried.

Someone else places an order, salmon, toast, other things, his list seems to go on & on, & how can one man even as fat as this one eat that much food? And there's no one with him to enjoy it.

Tiring, I leave, walk on, & find a stump at the side of the road to take my rest. Gather together a sharp-pointed stick, & some colored sand, & I just start to write words in the ground between my feet. Not sure how this is working, but the letters are glowing as I write them.

They almost seem to seek into the earth, become words & something else too? I feel myself slip into the sand-stick, into the sand it composes into the earth, like becoming as one thing. Man, stick, sand, earth, words . . . a *hmmm* raises & runnels through all this.

A noise, the runnel snaps. *Oh, here now.* Here in my lap is my Creature friend, MeZmer the White Bunny. A dear friend, & my Tender for times of worries & trouble. She is now wearing the beautiful necklace my new beloved put on her, & she has a bowtie too. Creatures charm with just the smallest touches.

We nap together awhile. Then I have to get back on that road. MeZmer gives me a friendly bright-eyed sniff, & is back in the White Woods in barely a hop.

I'm bound somewhere. I have friends that I'm remembering now are waiting for me down this road & they're saying, *come with us, come with us, we want to visit the Rainbow Wheel that unites the Six Islands. Come with us!*

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Laying Abed, Still Dark

Laying abed, still dark, it's the last little stretch of the night when it does not seem possible that there is indeed a morning coming. It is as much night as it can possibly be. And to be awake at this time, not because you stayed up all night, but because you woke just about now, is a mysterious thing indeed. Yesterday's finished & tomorrow hasn't yet begun, so it's sort of a forever now, even though it's only for a little while.

And I lie there, next to my new beloved, thinking about the ex-President Clusterfuck, Donald J. Trump, & how he hated what people said about him back then, hated all those mean nasty things, & he'd've make them all *shut the fuck up* if he could've. He really would've. Wonder what it would be have

been like to have another President after him. But we didn't. Probably for the best. And now he drives buses, smiles, & tells his off-color jokes to general delight.

It's good to be back at the old-timey bookstore, it's been a while, I'm glad they rehired me. I now work the back counter best I can. There's two registers, & always a lot of customers. They've got shopping carts full of things, like big five-pound bags of ChocoSmax, & I think: *why are people buying ChocoSmax in an old-timey bookstore? What what kind of place is this?*

I wander away for a moment, not sure why, maybe just discombobulated with the whole thing. Still thinking about ex-President Clusterfuck, & his hatred of all people *forever & ever, & he'll get them all in the end*. But now he's the happy jokester bus driver.

Watching my colleagues rush over to start attending those long lines I walked away from. And they decided maybe I can't handle them, so they settle me in with an old, old man they call Refund Man, because he comes in every day for his refunds.

He's got the frayed remains of scraggly dreadlocks, & a crushed old scrap of a weird hat, & his eyes don't really match each other in color, one green & one golden, don't seem to be either of them straight. Nose is a little bent. Did he ever smile much?

No one exactly explains to me what he gets his refunds for, but he's got to fill out the form & bring it to the front counter, where he'll get his refund.

He's got to put in his name down on the form, & he's sitting in one of the many armchairs over there in the oversized *History of the Six Islands* section, with his smells from the White Woods, & smells from the cellar of that ancient mansion he squatted in awhile. He's saying to me, *which name am I gonna put down this time?* He looks at me with his crazy green & golden eyes, & he says: *which name? Webster Hill?* I suggest.

Starts, studies me a long moment, seems to agree, & he puts that name down, & I point him toward the front. *Events accumulate*, he mutters back at me, by obscure way of thanks.

Still night, still dark. Still forever now, for a bit longer. *Drift. Drift. Drift.*

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Little Bear Creature

It was a strange thing. Somehow that little Bear Creature had swallowed the original Secret Book, & some of the little Pine Cones, & he was very upset about this. We've been traveling together for a long time, a long distance, & I know this little Bear Creature does not sleep well, has troubles & worries, & so I think that this may have happened because of that. He may have sleep-swallowed the Secret Book & some of the little Pine Cones.

But what's good to tell is that eventually we work it out. *Of course* we work it out. There's no way that I, as Creature Coordinator, am not going to work out a crisis involving Creatures, especially Creatures swallowing other Creatures by accident. We call in MeZmer the White Bunny & Tender to Cluster Dream with us, & recover everyone safely. Much happiness. Much dancing.

So we continue traveling, now with the Kittees, wearing their special occasion long blue top hats, & driving their famous Boat Wagon, to another of the famous Six Islands. A big Village. Vast coffeehouse & that great new big glass-walled mazy bookstore I love. It's quite an Island, lots of fun.

I remember standing in the Square at about 2 in the morning, the Fountain shouting beautiful rainbow-colored glowing water into the air, like the Rainbow Wheel that now unites all Six Islands.

But my little Bear Creature friend still has his troubles & worries, & I think they're affecting me too because we're in a clearing that night, drifting toward sleep out under the Full Moon, & there's fog rolling across it, heavy clouds, & I look up, & see the Imp in the Full Moon. And it looks like her head's fallen off! I panic but she just laughs & laughs & laughs. Like this: **CAKLE! CAKLE! CAKLE!** And I just don't know what to do about it.

Sit up now fully awake, & I look at my also fully awake little Bear Creature friend & I say, *you know, my friend, we're worrying too much.*

Then someone in a tree nearby says: *if you worry too much, you've got to go to the Floating Island in the Sky. Wash all your cares away.*

Being trusting sorts, we ask the voice, *where is this Floating Island in the Sky that will wash all our cares away?*

Well now. The two of you go back on to sleep & I think things will take care of themselves. And there was something in that voice to trust & my friend feels it too. And so we curled up, blankets & pillows, all clustered together, good friends, fell into a Clustered Dream, *& up! & up! & up! & up!* to that Floating Island in the Sky.

And that voice was right. We returned sometime before morning, woke up in that clearing, & our worries had floated away.

* * * * *

We All Take Buses Now

It was inevitable—we all take buses now. Nobody drives in cars alone anymore, like we used to when you'd see the highway filled with cars with one passenger in each. That's long since passed. It was the environment's crash, was always coming. Did President Clusterfuck, Donald J. Trump, listen? *Did any of them?* Now he drives an electric bus & tells dirty jokes.

I guess there's still some cars, but they have to be filled, you can't travel *anywhere* alone without risk of fine, even jail, unless your car is filled. There are no commercial planes anymore, either, those big jets that used to fly people & burn who knows how many thousands of gallons of petrol. No way. *You want to get somewhere far, you're going to be on the buses.*

It's taken awhile, whole culture changed, slowed down, probably better off for everybody. And so you get to talking to people, because what else is there to do on a bus traveling long distances, if that's what you've got to do?

I'm sitting next to this old, old man. Says his name is Hill. Crazy misshapen eyes looking around in about ten directions at once. I don't know if he's talking to me, or talking to the seat, talking to the air, talking to his memories, but he starts talking in this very soft voice.

Hill says, to whom-or-whatever: *seems long ago I was visiting this pretty girl, long dark curly hair.*

Looks at me & says, *was she Irish?* I shrug vaguely.

Hill continues: *she was sweet & intelligent, & pretty, all three. I take the big chance, & we kiss, & then there's many kisses. And I don't remember her name. Do you remember her name?*

Hill looks at me hard. I shake my head, feeling like I don't know what part I'm playing in this anyway.

And I ask if she'll be mine, if she's decided. She says, Mary Gall will decide. And I don't know what this meant, I don't know who Mary Gall was.

Long pause. Another long hard look at me.

I still don't know who Mary Gall is &, you know, I'm still waiting for Mary Gall to decide. Events accumulate.

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I Get Off That Bus

So I get off that bus & I'm looking for a kind of smoke shop I've been in before, a sort of magickal place I'm trying to find again. It was sort of a smoke shop, but sort of not even really a shop at all. And I'm trying to figure out where it is, & what stop did I get off at last time? I really don't know. I start walking faster & faster, like you do when you're lost, as though maybe you'll get un-lost if you walk fast enough. It just never works.

I walk into this one place, & they're selling computers from the future. Yeah, one of *those* shops. Oh, they come with all sorts of guarantees, like if you buy this computer from the future now, you'll be covered later if you arrive to a moment when in the past it was broken. *Possibly Double Your Money Back Too!* read a lot of the banners on the wall.

So I'm sitting at this computer monitor. It's not really actually a monitor, it's more like a wall, & I'm sitting there in a chair facing the wall, & there's a square like a screen drawn on the wall with a black marker pen, one of those felt kinds.

And I'm drawing on the screen with my finger, & there are others doing the same thing, drawing on the wall with their fingers, & it seems as though there's sort of a collaboration going on between us, among us, & we start drawing in synchrony, on our computer screens from the future, sort of a rhythm that becomes kind of a melody of sorts.

But then I just stand up & walk out of the computer store from the future, because I don't have time for guarantees. I'm looking for something *better than a guarantee*.

Now I'm walking down the street, having given up on the smoke shop, & given up on the computer store from the future, & I'm thinking about the idea I once read about of adding water to something to make something else. I think now maybe that's what you need in life—you need to add something to something else to produce a third thing.

And this sounds simple but, really, there's some way you can go about it where it's not simple. Like, for example, what if you didn't know one of the two things & you just sort of ad libbed, & this seems strange, because I mean, really, *you can't do that, can you?*

I don't know. I start wondering if maybe it's possible to have a big question mark plus question mark equals three. *Why not?* That's what I say. *Prove me wrong!* I declare, as I'm walking down the street waving my arms around.

But nobody cares to prove me wrong. People, in fact, only care to give me a little bit of leeway as they walk by me, seeing me wave my arms, shouting to the skies, *prove me wrong! Question mark plus question mark equals three!*

Then I just walk into this old movie theater. Well, it might be an alley, I'm not really sure. But I see this flickering screen projected on a brick wall. Maybe it's like that wall that was in the computer store from the future, I'm not really sure, but there's a movie telling a story about a leader in Russia, a popular young leader, & he & all his family are red-haired.

They're playing on the Palace lawn, & they're very popular even though they're czars & matriarchs & things like that. And there comes a Memorial Day, & the popular young leader says: *we will all now take a knee in memory*.

So I do too, standing there in that alley watching. I take a knee now in memory of all the things that have occurred to me recently. Take a knee, then sort of settle comfortably onto a flat piece of cardboard to watch more of this story.

And when I wake up, I'm on that damn spaceship overhead again.

* * * * *



I Spent a Lot of Time on the Road

I spent a lot of time on the road back then, & most of it was boring, some of it was strange, & a small bit of it absolutely wonderful. This one time I'm traveling, I come to a sort of campsite. Even has some kind of a country store, you know those stores that sell just a little bit of everything out in the middle of nowhere at three times the regular price. Most of it's expired, but you're out in the middle of nowhere, & they're selling it.

I make a new friend. He's a nice guy. Sometimes I look at his face & he looks really young & fresh cut, right out of the grinder, & sometimes he looks like an old, old man who hasn't seen the grinder in a long *long* time. He's got a tent, I've got a tent, sort of a tent. *It's tent-ish.*

So we start gathering firewood, & I tell him about the ideas I've been coming up with over time, because he seems like the kind of guy that'd keep his ears open to such things.

So I say, *we should build a big fire, & we should maintain it always. We should draw people to it, from our travels hither & yon. We should build it big enough, & have it always going, so that the idea of it starts to infect others. They come & they visit the bonfire, & it causes them ideas. Maybe they go off & build their own bonfires!*

And he, carrying along his firewood, big armful, strong guy, he suddenly cries out, *shamans! & fire!* He cries out, *shamans! & fire! Events accumulate!* Alright, alright, I like this guy.

So I picked this small area among the trees to put up my sorta tent, & I thought it was out of the way, but it begins to fill with people who come over for various reasons. Maybe they hear about my idea, though there's no actual fire built yet, it's just an idea & a wonderful way of talking about it. *Shamans! & fire!*

And my friend, he can't keep his eyes off this long rainbow-haired hippie girl who's come over, & he's staring hard at her, though she seems nonplused, neither disturbed nor complimented. Smoking a long cigarette, I do think it's tobacco. And we start to build the fire.

I say to the long rainbow-haired hippie girl, *come over here, help us.* She says, *sure man, sure man. You gonna build a fire?*

I look at my friend who's bashfully digging his toe in the sand, & I point at him. I nod, nod again, *here's your big shot, Romeo,* & he shouts to the sky, & to everyone, everywhere:

SHAMANS! & FIRE!

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Empty Playhouse

In the empty playhouse of my mind, the stage is filled with faces that never met & places that were not adjacent to one another, & moments that did not occur. And I'd like to introduce Friend A to Friend B but it would take a thousand miles & several years, some kind of temporal wire to do it. And I'd like to reach my elongated hand across to all of your hands, so long untouched, & I'd like to tug gently on those hands until they begin to arc over the mundane & the impossible both, & arrive here.

I'd say to you, & you, & you, I couldn't tell you then the words I can conjure now, how I love you, how important you were to me, how you stayed in my mind-car as it sped away, as you sped away, other directions, other places, other times, to be gone toward.

And if I could get you all on the telephone, all you faces from hither & yon, so long unseen, the old telephones with the wires attached to the wall so that we're all unable to walk outside under the stars or sit in shopping malls or pay attention to four things at the same time.

I'd say, *it's a clear moment, comin' & goin', it's a clear moment. Go to your window, look up at that Imp in the Full Moon with me now, here, there, then, wherever you are, look up at that Full Moon, I'm bouncing my kisses, my affections, my sadnesses off it, onto you. Like a feather, like a whisper.*

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I'm in a Bedroom in My Mother's House or Apartment

I'm in a bedroom in my mother's house or apartment, & the long dark curly-haired girl in the tight sweater comes over. It's one in the morning, but I'm sure glad to see her. I'd known her back in high school, but not really, never really looked at her.

We hug. We're supposed to work together on something. My mother's around too. I am friendly to her, but I don't really want her around. Her house or apartment is long, its hallways deliberately narrow. I like this girl a lot, try not to blow it. *Should we do our work now? Or lay close in the darkness?*

Something something. Suddenly I'm in that or another room alone, sitting in a chair, it's dim, & I turn to face the mirror. An old, old man with someone else's weird eyes, someone else's face. I cry out, terrified. *Wake up!*

Something something something. Suddenly that room or another, with someone else. We were prisoners, we'd try hard to escape using a Polaroid camera. Pictures in front of the sensors, complicated process, it may not work. It involved a map of a baseball diamond as well.

Something something something.

Still in her house, don't know how. Now that long dark curly-haired girl is sneaking in to leave notes on my typewriter. I don't see her anymore, but I see the notes. Don't understand it. How does this work? *How does this work?*

Finally I just move out. I just leave, walk through the door, & down the stairs, & out onto the street. I don't bring anything, I don't bring anyone, I just keep walking until I come to the White Woods.

I feel deeply bound to go to these beautiful Woods. Keep walking till I'm exhausted, & slump down against a tree. Nearly doze but then a really pretty scent wakes up my nose. Stand up, walk around this tree, & there is a woman smoking a really *really* fat marijuana joint.

We nod & smile friendly, & she says, *hey brother, wanna share a smoke?* So we start smoking, passing it back & forth, & she tells me this story, which I've never forgotten in all the years since, even if they've only been days or possibly weeks.

She says: *my grandmother, Beatrix Wordsley, ran a poor folks' clinic, late in her life, after retiring from schoolteaching, & she was being put to death as a kind of symbol of the State's power to crush anyone. It's unclear, though, that this was the actual effect. The clinic remained open. There was even a room in the clinic for selling vinyl LP records to raise money for her defense.*

And I was there, & I said to them: you gotta put posters on the walls to really attract attention & funds. My favorite was my Nana Beatrix's poster that read: Don't You Know That Dreams Are Real?

And there was this cop named Daniel, used to be a ball player when he was younger, who would help her with her clinic sometimes. He'd speak to his superiors on her behalf when needed, felt connected to her. He said he'd help protect us all, even when she's gone.

Day of her execution, he's crying, he's crying, he's crying. Big handsome man crying like his world is broken & won't be fixed no more. God damn, let's smoke another joint. Events accumulate.

* * * * *

I am an Old Monk, in Robes & Rope

I am an old, old man, a monk, in robes & rope, looking across the street at the burnt temple. I fall to my knees, weeping, at the remains. After a long time, a car pulls up. All the holy men & their devotees come out, & they fall to their knees, & they cry together, & they say to each other, *he tried to warn us.*

Then I step forward, & they learn I broke into the temple, last night, & I took all their sacred

treasures, & I hid them away. I've made sure, however, it's seemed as though when the temple burned, *everything burned.*

One of them asks me, *what is your order?* And I reply, *one day long ago, I woke deep in the night, & I walked outside, I walked away, & I walked through the streets till I came to the edge of the Village, & I walked beyond it till I came to the brown hills, & I walked up them into the White Woods, & I had no shoes on my feet, like you see me here now, & I had on only this robe, & I left everything behind to walk into those White Woods, & I fell down to my knees that night too, & I looked up & around & I said, take me & let me be your servant. Let me serve the world. Let me help.*

I look around at all of them listening to me in their fresh grief over this violence, even though I saved their trinkets, & knew that what I saved was not what really mattered.

(Events accumulate.)

Then I continue to walk away.

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When You Travel By the Long Distance Bus

When you travel by a long distance bus, you'll meet a lot of people along the way. And, if you listen to their stories, I think your perspective of the world is going change, a little.

One time I was traveling in a very crowded long distance bus, & I sat next to an old, old man. He told that back when he was a young man, he'd lived in a cabin out in the White Woods, & every morning, when he looked out his window, he could see beyond the clearing around his cabin, up near the trees, a rainbow-colored snake.

After a while, it appeared every morning. It wouldn't stay long, but it was there. He got a pair of powerful binoculars to watch this snake from the window, so as not disturb him or threaten him or anything. He noticed that the snake when it rose up & moved, it flowed along on tiny powerful feet.

Eventually the snake noticed him, but didn't run, didn't attack &, over the course of time, approached him, a little each day, slowly, cautiously.

Now, this young man had an unusual idea of things. He thought to himself, *I wonder what that snake would eat? I wonder what I could offer that snake that he would enjoy?* And he got out of his fridge (one of those old fridges that uses ice for cooling) a little can of olives. And this old, old man told me that the young man he had been fed that snake every morning an olive. It'd curl near to him, where he sat on an old stump, to accept an olive, & to stare at him for a long moment, without chewing. Then it would retreat, still looking at him. That's what he told me. Got off at the next stop.

Then I met a child who I couldn't tell if it was girl or a boy. It was one of those pretty little things, but it was hard to say whether it was a kinda pretty girl, or a very pretty boy, dressed in shorts, a kind of uniform, smiled at me, but was mostly just talking to him/herself.

So I listened in. He/she said something like this: *I/we travel away from there, now gone deep into a cave, & beyond, & suddenly underground, now we're turning, mel/er, a flashlight in my/welour hand(s), many fairy humanoids dancing around the cave. We shine, I shine, our flashlight, & the little fairy humanoids approach mel/us but they do not touch mel/us, they do not do anything unusual.*

They don't speak, maybe they hmmm a little. But there are butterflies amongst their number who emerge to nip at my/lour forearm, & they nip & nip, as I/we stumble out of the caves. That was a hundred years ago, or was it a thousand?

Now there wasn't anybody on the bus for a long time, & I just sat & read. I was reading the yellow pages of my old journals, reading about times that to me almost seem like they were someone else telling me a story. *Webster Hill?*

One whole page in which I wrote from top to bottom, over & over, in increasingly smaller hand, *events accumulate events accumulate events accumulate events accumulate events accumulate events*

accumulate—

And one of them is about a dream I had in which a girl I loved a long time ago, who never really loved me all that much, was with me again. Sweet, luscious, loony Mary Gall. We were in class. Now she loved me, in this dream, too many years later to matter. And I didn't know what to say at this point. I've had this dream so often, it catches me up & scoops me in, & I wallow in it for a while, & then I wake, & then I write it down. Still unchewed bit of my past.

Far more interesting to listen to someone else's stories. So one guy finally gets on the bus & he's got long dreadlocks, & a weird hat, & his eyes don't really match each other in color, one green & one golden, don't seem to be either of them straight. Nose is a little bent. But he's got a *really really really* nice smile on his face, even if it's kind of crooked. Sits across the aisle from me, studies me somewhat crookedly with his green & golden eyes, & says, *listen man, if you travel in a book-movie-Island, at one point you'll be reading a long document about its history, & many others will be coming at you to read it.*

So you'll read it aloud, & then you'll find that you're trapped by all these people in/on this book-movie-Island. You're trapped, & events will accumulate, & you may be able to wiggle yourself free, unfold, reveal, find a way out, through the document, read your way in & around & under the document. It is many many columns long, many pages, little pictures, static, this place, events accumulate!

I'm done with stories of all kinds for now, I think. Thanks though.

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It Begins, Traveling Far

Again traveling far, somewhere far, like this time I'm a distance from myself even. Gray, indistinct. For a long time I don't feel the beautiful White Woods around me, & then I begin to, they begin to fill in around me, fill in within me, & I begin to walk them, gratefully, these White Woods, within & without.

And I come to a stump, somewhere in these White Woods, & it's filled with rainwater. I sit down next to it, legs crossed, watching a fair while. Seems no matter the weather, when I lean over to look within the stump, there's water inside. I see my reflection.

But then I see something else, I see a memory of a much younger me lying under a beautiful tree, decorated with shiny colored balls, & looking up at my many reflections in them.

And then deeper than these reflections, I see something else to take with me, a sort of gift, & I look into it, this gift, & what I see is that there's this woman with deep, intelligent, hurt eyes & she's a doctor. She's led her refugees for many years, traveled far & tended them, tended them much more than a medical doctor. She's been their leader.

Then what happens in this far gone place, & nameless of year & location, is that she meets the tight end, a football tight end, & she learns that there is a sort of new version of football that's come back into the world, that's sort of a new way of settling disputes between tribes. Rather than the bullets from guns that no longer fire, or the spears made from wood that no longer grows, instead they play football. Only they play for keeps, little equipment, no rules. They play it till they're done.

So he begins to travel with this woman, with her deep, intelligent, hurt eyes, & her people, & he has many skills they don't have. He knows how to find food where there seems to be none. He knows how to find water where there seems to be none. He knows how to find shade & warmth where there seems to be none.

And he's a good man, except very late at night if you don't rock him to sleep with a *hmmm*, he'll begin to talk about despots, about the leaders that brought the world to this place of grayness & yearslessness & mileslessness, & just surviving weirdly. He'll say, *deception, distraction, despair. That's what keeps people down, that's what clusterfuck despots use to keep people down. Deception, distraction, despair. That's why we're here.*

But the woman with the deep hurt eyes will eventually take him in her arms, & they'll rock together like the two closest of friends, & he will listen to her *hmmm* until he falls into a sleep of long ago, when football was a different kind of game, & he would leap through the air, & catch those beautifully thrown passes. Score & score & score & hurt nobody. *Hurt nobody.*

* * * * *

The Muse is in the Details

I was talking to an old friend on the telephone. What I meant to say to him is that *the muse is in the details*. I think about this now, sitting in this large room, many friends, I think they're friends, they feel like friends. The room seems to tip & sway a bit at times, because it's a room somewhere deep in a big spaceship, far out in space. Maybe where the stars are even farther apart than they seem to be.

I'm a very young man & I'm in love with this new girl in the room, with long dark curly hair & dark eyes. She looks like this actress on this TV show *Trip Town* I used to watch, & in my mind anyway she loves me too. But that's how I suppose everyone operates these days. When there isn't much, you imagine the bread in your hand is a feast; you imagine meeting eyes with another fellow refugee has meaning in it; you just reach out to a paltry world & *whatever, whatever, whatever* there is, you magnify it. Give you a little something more than the less you're used to,

The ship rocks again. There's benches around the walls in this room, & there's benches in the middle, & people are tightly close together. I think we're all friends, refugees, prisoners, hard to tell where we're from, or where we're going, different places. People come & go randomly, without explanation. Like they melt into or out of the existing fact of being in this room.

At one point the ship rocks hard, & I tip into her, & I feel so embarrassed because this is something beyond what's gone on in my mind, sweet, & doesn't involve my shoulder leaning into her roughly.

And then later on the ship rocks the other way, & she leans into me, but it's *so* soft, it's like having a feather lean into you, or a whisper in your ear, or something like that. It's just the opposite, & I hold her in my arms for just an elongated moment beyond when the ship has stabilized again, & she doesn't push away immediately.

We know there's nothing to come of this, of any of this. We're friends only in that we're being transported from one dark place to another. But it's a long trip, & I think that even though we separate again, after that elongated moment, it's enough to feed my mind, & maybe hers, for a little way anyway, as the ship travels on. I almost dare to hope it will rock again, & neither of us will melt.

* * * * *

Old Beautiful Green Couch

My father & I sit together on an old beautiful green couch & I describe to him how my beloved tends to my wounded toe. Medicines, scrapings, bandages. He listens with that kind of attention I know means there is one of us present, we're speaking & listening as one.

But then the lights go out, & I guess I must fall asleep. I wake up on that old beautiful green couch, & he's gone, but there's a beautiful brown blanket on me. He covered me before he left. It's a brown blanket, very soft, covered in beautiful brown Creature Bear faces. I feel like they're looking at me with that same kind of attention that he gave me, concern, love, focus. *I'm not alone.*

* * * * *

A Variety of Cheeses

It seemed to be a huge, un-sleek spaceship, not the kind you would have seen in those fancy moving pictures back when, nope.

While I was on the spaceship, I was given a cup & I was told to masturbate into it &, as an incentive I was offered a variety of cheeses from a small fridge to help.

I don't think I'd ever been incentivized like that before to do such a thing. I managed to slip out the door &, since it was a big ship, I just started running & running & running. I'm not a fast runner, nor a particularly graceful runner, but I kept running. When you've got a choice between running & masturbating for the incentive of a variety of cheeses, you run & you run & you run.

Eventually I ran out of spaceship to run through. I ran right up into the White Woods, or that's what they looked like anyway. I say *up* because, when I briefly looked back, I saw that I had come from a spaceship mostly buried in the earth.

Very strange trees, glowing in that subtle way that they do in these White Woods, where I'd been many times before. Finally I stopped, breathing heavy, pretty much collapsed on the ground, sat under a tree. I would've kept crawling if they were still been following me, with their masturbatory cup, unfilled, & variety of cheeses. Nobody was following me.

But then I saw next to me, & it didn't feel like a coincidence, but maybe it was, I don't know, a thick leather book. And, on the other side of me, another thick leather book. I'd somehow sat down heavily, practically collapsed, between two leather books. Something etched in gold on each of their covers, but so faintly I can't make out the letters. *M-?-?-R-O-?-I-E?*

And then I felt under myself, *good golly*, there's a thinner book, it was taller, less elaborate than the other two. I looked inside this one, & it looked like more of a key? *Possibly?* Well, OK, so this is better than the alternative, I guess.

And you're going to wonder, *what was in those books?* And you're going to wonder, *did I start reading them? Did the key help? Did I really ever get off that spaceship?* These are some *good* questions.

* * * * *

In My House Alone, & It's Night

In my house alone, & it's night, & I'm listening to the noises & the creakings. There's a moment of stillness, & then suddenly police pour through the door, hold me down, & accuse me of seventeen different sins. I shake my head no seventeen times &, upon the seventeenth shake of my head, I find myself in another house, & there's my father looking at me with great concern because my mother wants to throw me out, possibly for my seventeen different sins. He promises to help.

Later, I see my buddy, the poet footballer, & I ask him to put in a good word for me with her. I feel lost, hunted, paranoid, & I keep wondering, *which seventeen different sins am I guilty of?*

I finally walk out. *I've had it.* I walk straight down the middle of the street. *Let them run me over, let them bring me down, I don't care anymore. I'm done.*

And I come upon an old, old man approaching me, wearing ragged dreadlocks under a weird ragged hat. He's also in the middle of the street, & he has the same crazy desperate look I have on my face. We're like mirror images of each other, & he puts his hands on my shoulders, & I can see that his eyes are two beautiful colors, one green & one golden.

He looks me crookedly deep in my eyes, hands on my shoulders & he says, *the world is one boat for all, & there are two choices. A stateless village of neutral support for all, or the coming corporate slave state in which government has been withered in favor of competing & cooperating corporate entities whose alliances form regions of power, & whose companies control the weapons, the food, the utilities, & the transit.*

My friend, there will be three classes, the super-rich who live in controlled domed areas, safe from

how the degradations of the environment have continued; a corporate bureaucracy who are maintained in company towns that are still livable; & the masses who live with no protection & have become more Beasts than men.

*Yet within their numbers, my friend, there is old magick & old medicine & old ways of living that have re-emerged from other times. The most ancient books, written with sand-sticks in the ground even back before the time of cave paintings, say, **events accumulate.***

And you have to come with me now, we have to smack our despairs together & form strangely-truly-honestly hope.

Then he smacks my face hard & I smack his face hard & he smacks my face hard again & I smack his face again & we smack & smack harder & harder & then softer & softer & then we embrace, brothers, truly brothers. Smacking back & forth, & shouting: **events accumulate! events accumulate! events accumulate! events accumulate! events accumulate! events accumulate!**

We go off together, still straight down the middle of the street, together.

* * * * *

I Have This Friend I Don't See Very Often

I have this friend I don't see very often. Once in a while, that's about it. He travels around, studying good & evil, it's his vocation, to try to understand these things. *Do they exist outside of circumstance? Or do they simply embody some (or the sum?) of a given situation or aspect of it? Good & evil, either, both, are they forces of creation? Or estimations of the human mind about human behavior?*

He didn't always do this. I knew him back when, & I think I know what caused him to begin his travels & his studies. It was the last time he saw her, it was at the Festival, they hadn't seen each other in a long time & he didn't think that she recognized him. Perhaps her programming had been wiped, but still she was drawn to him. And he recognized her, didn't say anything to indicate they knew each other, but they had, a long time, some other time.

She'd been his automaton when he was young, tended to his very smallest needs. Sometimes he'd shut her off to clean her or change out her parts. He was always trying to scrounge up better parts to improve her behavior, her mental acuity, her sense of free will. She was one of the older types that were more modeled on human behavior & its mercurial nature. That changed with later models, until they were all discontinued altogether & rounded up by the State, & destroyed.

Except for a few who managed to assimilate into the world, especially the underground world like this Festival they were at, where he saw her one last time, & they were together for a little while. But she didn't recognize him, & I think that sent him on his travels. I think, from that moment on, he just was never going to understand. He was always going to search for *why*.

* * * * *

Stroking My Finger Across Her Back

My new beloved & I are in a house in a bedroom, close, I'm stroking my finger across her back. Writing words. I'm not sure what they mean. I think they are maybe some kind of weird impromptu incantation because now everything begins to go a little strange, then a little stranger, & then this room becomes White Woods. Just opens up, the walls fall away, melt before my eyes.

And there are many dark figures singing, drumming in the White Woods we're now in. An open field nearby. The sky is filled with the strangest colors & shapes. *What does any of this mean?*

And someone's whisper tickles feathery in my ear, as I sit with my beloved near the open field in this strange White Woods, *there are two races. One greater, one lesser. You are of the lesser. If you ever*



return home or anywhere near to it, you'll be kept chained up, in just your underwear, & that's how it will be. So don't ever go home or anywhere but.

I stand, & find standing is difficult to do. My new beloved stands better than I do, & then she grasps my hands, & pulls me straight up with all her strength, & all her love, & I feel pulled nicely, slickly, sweetly, pulled up right.

We walk into that field with the drummings & the dancings & the dark figures, because this is the way away from home & into Art, deep into Art, which I suppose you could say is a Place of its own, another kind of home.

* * * * *

Your Whole Body Like an Electric Wire

Did you ever wake up in the night & find that your whole body is like an electrical wire, dipped in cold water? That you were wild shocked, just like that? Now I'm sitting up, I think I'm awake anyway, my new beloved still deep in her light sleepings, & I rub my mouth, but I feel a hole, & I press my fingers in tenderly. I feel that all my teeth are bashed in, they're all crooked & half-fallen out, & *what the hell? What's this all about? What does any of this mean?* I don't know.

I close my eyes & think, *please, please, please, please let this be a dream, please let it be a dream,* & I fall back toward my pillow, back toward my pillow, fall forever toward my pillow, & I fade through scenes, colorful, sepia, black and white scenes, liquid, *falling falling falling* toward my pillow.

* * * * *

I Call Up My Old Timey Bookstore Job

I call up my old timey bookstore job. I guess now it's opened up again. I show up, go behind the register, & start helping customers, problems with the little details, playing cards of all shapes & sizes & flavors, ice machines, scanner machines, & so forth. On my break I go into the little lunch-room which is, strangely, barely big enough to sit in.

So I'm standing there with my candy bar, & I start thinking about that time that I moved back to that far Western city, & I was living in an apartment with several guys, & I was proofing their school newspaper. They were hard drinkers & newspapermen, yet still in their all-night wildcatting youths.

On the other side of our apartment, beyond that courtesy curtain, there was a bar, & I go in there & I ask the barman, he's this nice-looking older black gent, for a Diet Coke. He gives me a Gin-Ginger Ale. I drink it anyway. Thank him, smiling.

You're welcome, sir, he smiles back, speaking in his weird sort of upside-down accent, like he was speaking backwards.

I look around. It's a strange set-up. The part we live in over there, & the bar here, with the barman. *Who pays him? How does this work?*

And I'm still chewing on my candy bar, thinking about those other times. I remember the time I woke there at 3 AM. I had poems spilling out of me. I was in an alley on the ground, & they were on the ground next to me. They were written *in* the ground, but it's hard to say how. *Some kind of sand-stick?*

Maybe they more were just words I saw in the ground. I wondered, *how do I keep these words? What do I do? If I dig up the ground they won't be there.*

Finally my break is over, & I throw away my candy wrapper in the recycle bin, & I go back to work behind the back counter. I do a little better this time, & I think: *OK, if this is going be it for a while for me, this'll be it, but I bet there's more to come of all this.*

* * * * *

There Was This Piece of Writing

Learning this will aid your perspective, if nothing else. There was this piece of writing & its fate was decided not by how good it was, but by how popular it was esteemed to be. In it, the narrator tells a story about working in an office &, in that office, there is a relation to his estranged spouse, with whom he's not spoken in a long time.

This relation, let's say cousin, sees that the narrator's trying to get his shit together, & they begin to go out to lunch. There's a little pub next to the office building. It has good mushroom burgers, cheap beer. They spend their hour with both. The narrator describes to the cousin the depths of his despair, thinking he'd never see his estranged spouse again. But, even talking to this cousin, begins to give him hope. He learns that his estranged spouse has not really resolved her feelings for him. She's certainly not looking around & this, if nothing else, is encouraging to him.

Narrator finishes his second or maybe it's his third beer, goes into the bathroom, looks at his face in the mirror, he looks tired, he looks haggard. He wants a shower badly, one of the habits he's lost over time. Looks old, old, & he realizes that, while looking at his face in the mirror, no one gets as down on him as he does himself. He washes his face, gives his cheeks a few wet slaps with the cold water, & then walks out of the men's room, & back to the bar where her cousin sits waiting.

She didn't know him in the old days, never came to any of their family events. In truth, this cousin has always been on the outs of everything, regarding family, & what's somehow interesting in all this now, the narrator observes, is that her helping him back along to where he wants to be is also helping her to find new open-hearted spaces in herself.

* * * * *

There's This Faux Pizza Joint

There's this faux pizza joint you can go to, it's right in the center of the city. If you looked it up on a map, & if you drew a line vertically & horizontally on the map, trying to pinpoint the exact center of the city, it would be this faux pizza joint.

And if you go to this faux pizza joint, & you are friendly to the guy behind the counter—as you'd better be, because nothing good further is going happen, if you're not—& so you go into the faux pizza joint & you're friendly to the guy—, & what's going happen is that he's going let you go through the green & gold door—& you're going find yourself in a room, which is filled—almost to the four walls—with a model of the city, which you find yourself in the center of.

You can walk around it, looking at its amazing detail, every little tree, bush, the shade on that statue, that bench with the nails that poke out, that road they haven't paved in 100,000 years, cars all trying to avoid it except when they can't. All sorts of things. They're all there.

And although you can walk around the four sides, or you can walk among those trees, benches, buildings, & that's pretty cool, you may get to wondering, *well, what's this all about?* But, no, it's just best to keep moving, keep admiring it.

Like I did, you probably come to a bus stop along this certain street, toward the edge of the city &, near that bus stop, up a hill, is this house, high up on the hill. On this particular day, it's kind of rainy, kind of icy, just one of those messy winter days that nobody wants to be out in, & so you're thinking, *well, should I leave now, thank the guy behind the pizza counter. It was fun. Him smiling, I'm glad, thank you. Maybe stay a little while longer next time?*

Then you notice two women at different times come out of that ancient mansion on the hill, & tumble down the steps to the sidewalk below, land right at the bus stop. Crash badly, people gather round, & you think, *are these people who come from where I come from, or do they live here? Are there people for whom this is their world, & I'm just visiting from one level up? And is my world just a model for some further model up? Is this some kind of bad Star Trek novel?*

* * * * *

Every Tuesday Night, I Meet Up with These Two Ladies

Every Tuesday night, I meet up with these two ladies in their ancient mansion, & they sing for me. But I haven't in a while & they've missed me. One of the ladies sings in a certain sweet style & she's amazing, but this time she tries something different to show, & it's good, but it's not a style close to her heart.

We take the stairs down to some kind of bar in the cellar of their ancient mansion, & they order me milk & them fruity liquor drinks from the nice-looking older black gentleman barman. There is a fourth at our table, an old, old man in shredded dreadlocks & hat. They forget to order for him. On purpose? He speaks up & says, *nothing for me.*

What is this gathering? I don't know, but it seems important. I sit back with my milk & look at these fine ladies & I say to them, *in my bedroom there's a little door in the wall, through it is a long hallway, filled with plants, & it's kinda like I crawl in there with my mother to look at them all. But we need to keep it secret, so we keep the door shut, even though it's dark when we're in there.*

They nod, sip their drinks, say, *oh, you're so sweet & kind. Would you like another milk?*

* * * * *

Descending Up into the Gone World (I)

So I walk on from the courtyard where I've sat among my notebooks, black pens, & old memories, & I notice people are, well, they're not happy. But they're not quite as morose as before, & that's good. I go into this place, I guess it's more like an alley, I'm never sure exactly that it's there, but I just was passing by on the street, & I notice this alley, & I went inside, & it was long, & it was dark.

And then I seem to be ascending, or rather I was descending but up, if that makes any sense, into the gone world, & I found that I had a camera in my hand. It was a hard gadget to figure out, because there didn't seem to be an eye hole to look through, where you frame the picture when you take the shot, & there seemed to be more than one lens, & several buttons that didn't seem to do anything.

So this camera & I were descending upward through this glass structure, staircase after staircase, down, up. At one point I see people through layers of walls in the glass structure & they're at all angles & I'm trying to focus the camera, but it's hard to do, & there's this woman near me & I say, *I'm not taking your picture, I'm just trying to focus.*

I keep rising & rising until I find that I am now awake & sitting up in a chair in this brand-new bookstore, & I was looking down at this very maze-y book that I was trying to read my way through. No. Wait. *It's just the store map.*

* * * * *

Descending Up into the Gone World (II)

What if dream mind is supraconsciousness? Think about it sometime. Thanks for listening. I appreciate it. I suppose you're gonna leave now. I am, too. I've got this camera to figure out, & this maze-y book, er, store map, to climb back into, or possibly climb out of, or maybe both at the same time. I really don't know, but it all started with that glass structure & things got really complicated . . .

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I Haven't Always Lived on This Hill of Bushes

I live in an unfurnished bush on this hill of bushes, among many other friendly bush-hill-folks, but I still leave my possessions, such as they are, in those White Woods down there. I haven't always lived on this hill of bushes. Sometimes I'll just leave for a while, & I'll go down to those White Woods, & I'll just reacquaint myself with where I come from, the glowing trees, the many wonderful, strange denizens. My friends, the Thought Fleas, guardians of the White Woods & so on.

The White Woods are not like other places, that's what I want to tell you. When you go down there, & you walk among them, especially if you're from them as I am, things will happen that you can't say waking & you can't say dream.

Because the truth of the matter is that sometimes I am walking among these White Woods, & I am dreaming, & in the dreaming I'm carrying a book in one hand, a small Secret Book with a shiny cover, & some kind of vial of juice. The object of the game I am playing, I've been playing it for years, is to try to find a way to flip the book inside out & flip the vial of juice inside out so that the power & raw materials of dreaming can become wakings. *Raw materials to waking's power.*

I lie down, after some hours, this is tiring, I love these White Woods, I love that bushy hill. I love my unfurnished bush. *Doze, dream, dream, dream, dreaming, dreaming, mmming, hmmmimg. . .*

—but this dream, it's so familiar, a supermarket, it's all the world I've ever known, a supermarket, & the friends I have & work with there. There's a problem with a labor automaton we took for a lark, & got caught. It's not working right now.

One of us gets taken to the manager's office & examined. They put a kind of sentient putty all over his face, looking for lies, looking for *deceptions, distractions, & despairs*. The putty is kept on his face for hours, & he can't move a muscle, as the putty examines all of his thoughts, secret, obvious, possible.

But what's happened by the end of the session is that the putty's pulled away, processed, & he's cleared, & he's sent back to us. We resume work, that's good—, & then I wake up in the White Woods, & that's good—, & then I walk back to my bush, & I crawl inside.

And then I just sit & listen sleeplessly for a while to the Imp in the Full Moon's **CAKLE!**
CAKLE! CAKLE!

* * * * *

I Was With My Acid Guru

I was with my acid guru, & we were slowly cleaning up his very messy house, very messy. Trying to put it in an order, make it nicer, others coming over too & helping. These people are new to me, friendly, we're all going to get it in order.

When everyone else thinks that things seem to be in pretty good shape now, I follow them outside to the street, & they all get into a crimson jalopy & say to me, *wanna go with us to A-The-Of-Dance?* One of them, the rainbow-haired hippie girl, offers me a psychedelic pill. I smile sincerely at her & my acid guru & the rest, & I say, *I better keep cleaning*. She smiles me kindly, presses me to keep the pill, & off they ride. *Toot! Toot! Toot!* goes their charming jalopy car-horn.

I swallow my pill & hurry back in, because there are Creatures scattered in a small back room that I'm very concerned about, & I start to panic, & I call my new beloved on my green-as-Gumby phone, & I say, *how do I sort them all out, what do I do? How do I make sure they're all safely ordered up?*

And she smiles whisper-tickling feather into my ear & says, *Once. Twice. Breathe. Relax.*

And I do.

I begin to go through the room in a very orderly fashion, picking up Creatures. I have put two knapsacks on my shoulders, & I'm stuffing them into the knapsacks, & things are starting to get better, & I'm starting to calm to the task.

I'm going to get them all, it's very important, we need to travel elsewhere.

* * * * *

A Place of Art

There is a room that will be a Place of Art, & there are a variety of ways of getting there. One way is through the college bookstore, through its back door. Another has you walking down a particular street in the city, & looking for a particular bar called Luna T's Cafe, going inside & asking the barman with pepper gray hair, & the splatter-patterned apron, where the extra room is. He'll direct you.

That's where I'm going now, as a matter of fact. I painted this picture on a folding canvas. How it works is that the way the canvas is folded reveals a different picture—folded many times, folded in half, quarters, always something new shows. And when you fold it a few special certain ways, it's like it has an interior to it. *It's a strangely important picture.* Maybe it matters more than I do.

I want to hang it in that Place of Art, that's where I'm bound. I've been jobless for a while, spend a lot of time just calculating how much money I have left & how much my rent is. Over & over again, like a tic. Rent never changes, but how much I have left always goes down.

Friends I have, I tell them about the picture, tell them to come & see it. *I'm going to put it in that Place of Art, & there'll be a band playing too. Graffiti on the wall & my picture hung in a prideful place.* What's interesting, I'll say to some of my friends, maybe all of them, maybe none of them, I don't know who I'm talking to anymore, whether they're there or not, sitting with me in my one-room hovel, or maybe they're not sitting there at all but I tell them, *years ago, before all of this—*& I motion around my hovel—, *there were other matters. There was this Indian golfer I knew, he would show me old videos of himself playing golf when he was young. By the time I knew him, he was old & fat & bald. Liked his Snickers bars, by the bagful, like the Minis, said it gave him the illusion that he was eating fewer of them.*

And he'd show me these videos of golf games that didn't quite make sense to me, they weren't what I'd seen on television as a kid on Sunday afternoons, growing up. No, sometimes in these events it seems like dozens of golfers were hitting balls along the fairway at the same time & I don't know, it was dangerous & dumb.

So what I'm telling you, whether you're sitting here with me in this hovel or not, is that this is not how it always was. In fact, this is not even how it shall be because, you see, far in the future from now, far from now is a box, it's a high-tech container, it's filled with worlds within worlds, & one time I was carrying it along, & I was also carrying along my little hedgedyhog friend, & I stumbled at the top of stairs, my friend fell but he was OK, & the box fell too, & opened, but nothing fell out, was there ever anything inside?

All you have is my claim that this will happen sometime in the future & well, come to my show. My painting with the interior, maybe it's this painting wherein I've seen these things to come to pass. Tricks & tracks, tracks & trips, tricks & traps, traps & tricks, trips & trips, tricks & tricks & tricks, traps & tricks & tricks, tricks & tricks & traps, traps & tricks & traps, tricks & trips & traps . . .

I'm in a Hotel Room, Which Begins to Get Strange

I'm in a hotel room, which begins to get strange. What happens first is that I'm somewhere else, like a club, & this woman has a small vial of *gooooo*, drinks half.

What is it? Dunno. Hands it over to me, *dunno.* She wants me to drink it all, all the rest, & I do, heck yeah. That's me, give me some *gooooo*, & some enthusiasm. I'll drink your *gooooo*.

But I noticed that this couch that we're sitting on is in my hotel room & there's a man sleeping over there, on the bed, won't wake up, won't leave. Soon there are others, of course.

And then I start getting worried for the Creatures, napping peaceably in an armchair facing that corner window, & wanting to make sure they don't get stomped on, or nudged aside, or scooped, as they sometimes get. More and more people show up. *Is this a gooooo party? Dunno.*

But people are on the couches, & on the beds, but after a while the couches & beds are gone.

My things are gone & instead it's an art show. But the only piece is my folded canvas artwork. *How do I even know it's an art show?* Is this the Place of Art? There's no graffiti. There's no band playing.

Is it the gooooo talking? It could be the gooooo talking.

I push open the door, hoping someone will come in, maybe I can ask them if it's an art show. I certainly seem convinced. I push it open, push it wide open, & I just stand there halfway in & halfway out, looking up & down the hallway, & I say aloud to the empty hallway, *you know, I'm just trying to get my shit together.*

I look across the hallway, & the door to that room is a full-length mirror, ceiling to floor, where perhaps a door once was. I look into the mirror, deep into the mirror, & I look so tired & haggard, like an old, old man. Ratty dreads, dulled green & golden eyes, more slumped than bent nose. Need a shower, need two showers, I need to pull myself together.

I look at my tired, haggard, un-showered, un-double-showered self & think, *you make things so much harder than they need to be.*

* * * * *

It Continues, Like This

It continues, like this. My break over, I leave the tiny lunch room & its spooky memories, & I go back to the register of the old-timey bookstore I've returned to after all these years, & I work my hours away at the back counter, but I notice something.

I notice that as people buy their books, they're troubled, they're unhappy. It's nothing I'm doing, they don't respond to my smiles. They don't respond to my friendliness, & they're not rude. They're just sort of stunned, & I wonder what's going on, *did something happen out in the world?*

I ask one of them, a man with a long hat, his head in glistening pretty dreadlocks, one eye green, one eye golden, & he's buying a book about war, about peace.

I say, *what's going on, man? What's happening out there?*

He looks at me, & he wants to say something, but it's like he doesn't know what words to say. He doesn't know what language to say it in. He just looks at me & holds my glance for a moment, & I realize I've got to find out for myself, but there's hours left in my shift so I just wait, wait, *wait.*

Finally, shift over, it's evening time & I walk out into the Square, & I walk over to the newspaper stand. All the headlines are full of big words, big tall words. *Is it another attack of some kind, someone else out in the world?*

No, it's someone here, someone among us, someone who'd been among us for a long time, waiting his chance, to vent his anger upon this land & every other land. People are walking around dazed. I go over & sit at my favorite table at my favorite courtyard, which isn't there anymore, watch people walking by, scared groups.

Then there's a sort of cry, a sort of shout over at the newspaper stand, & I hurry back over, & now the headlines are saying someone with a little bit of power has struck back.

It's gonna keep happening, President Clusterfuck, Donald J. Trump. It's gonna keep happening. Every day you try to punish the world with your fury, your anger, your sense of injustice personally done to you, everyone you try to harm, there's gonna be strikes back. It's gonna be in the courts, it's gonna be in the streets, it's gonna be on the airwaves but it's gonna keep happening till you are driven one day soon from the White House in Washington, D.C.

You've made it clear how it's gonna be by you, & now we're making it clear what's gonna be by us, in response to you. So keep doing it. We will too.

* * * * *

On My Birthday

I found myself some years ago on my birthday, looking around at the extended dwelling that I lived in at the time, it was kind of part apartment & part bar & part classroom. I woke up early that morning before anybody else got up, which was pretty early, & walked through the rooms.

One room of the apartment was filled with racks of clothes that everybody had donated to share. We wore each other clothes, female, male, whatever. It was a nice mix. You got to learn how the other guy or gal felt, you know.

Some of mine though were kept in the far corner racks, playfully mocked & derided, & I wondered why, because they didn't seem any stranger or odder or whatever, *more idiosyncratic* than anybody else's but, still, there they were, in the far corner. I don't know, maybe they were older & more worn. I never wanted to buy new clothes anyway.

I walk into the barroom &, by golly, there are people awake at the bar already, drinking their breakfast. One of them is kind to me, he always sits at a particular seat, can't tell how old or young he is. He seems to be gray-haired & about twenty, but I don't think he is.

I clap his shoulder smiling, which he returns in full, & say to him, *you're a good man, Bill.*

And everybody else at the bar laughs & mocks a little, but I get in all their faces this time, I'm a little bit annoyed, *it's my birthday.*

I say, *I have a Master's in English, & diction matters to me.* Someone's nodding, quietly.

Finally I walk into the classroom, & it's occupied too. There are two girls, a brunette & a blonde, I sit down with, well before classes begin. I sit between them, & I find myself paying attention to each in turn, swiveling my head back & forth.

But I'm married, so I'm not flirting, just friendly, & ask the brunette, *so what do you wanna do when you get out of here, this bar, this classroom, the racks of clothes? What do you wanna do in this world?*

Her smile is vague, but she thinks a long moment, & then she says, *what I wanna do right now is wish you a happy birthday & give you a tiny kiss on the nose.*

And she does.

4/28/2018
Milkrose, Mass.
4

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Raymond Soulard, Jr.



Notes from New England

*“Please accept this ragged purse
of high notes.”*

The following continues the series originally called Notes from New England, begun in issue 24-25 (Winter 1998), then revived in issue 59 (October 2006) as Notes from the Northwest, & appearing since issue 75 (October 2010) under its original title. It is intended as a gathering-place for observations of various lengths upon the world around me. It will be culled, like much of my writing, from my notebooks, & perhaps these thoughts will be expanded upon sometimes as well.

Dream Raps, Volume Eight

*“Why are we here?
Because we’re here
Roll the bones
Why does it happen?
Because it happens
Roll the bones”*

—Rush, “Roll the Bones,” 1991.

And Again

And again, some way among will, whim, & wish, there’s remembrance. Sometimes clearing the way on is first, & then clearing the way back. *Remember old, thus remember new . . .*

Oh, OK, wow, I must have leaned too close to the black-&-white television set on its little purple stool. I am sitting on our green couch watching *TripTown* with, I slowly realize, my lover & our friends the Creatures.

Then I turn & look down that hallway, following something, a shadow on the wall, following into that occasional room. A man’s head with blue strands of hair.

Flick my Bic & there revealed is the ancient Gate-Keeper of **RemoteLand**, or so he looks. My very favorite film, freakiest of the freaky. Has a Gate-Keeper, not a director.

Crouched, rocking back & forth, he starts talking slowly & obscurely to a place just over my head about being from Raleigh, North Carolina, slowly, obscurely, saying: *I’m tryin’ to will my trips to be more like my dreams & my dreams to be more like my trips. You know what I’m sayin’, brotha’?*

Sometimes I’ll be battin’ a Frisbee back & forth between my dreams & my trips! I’ll throw the Frisbee from my trips, & I’ll catch it in my dreams, & then I’ll throw the Frisbee from my dreams & catch it in my trips!

And sometimes I’ll use this pilla’ that seems to follow me around, this yellow pilla’ dressed in a purple cloak. Sometimes I’ll use the pilla’ to bat the Frisbee back & forth between my dreams & my trips. & that’s pretty good. That’s pretty good, don’t you say, brotha’? Don’t you say? You from Raleigh, North Carolina too? They got the four-&-twenty blue hills o’ Heaven there, I’ll aver they do.

And I look at him & say, *No, man, I’m not from Raleigh, North Carolina. But why don’t you stay*

around here for a while? Here, you can sleep in this empty room here. I'll get you a pillow.

No, man, I've got my pilla'.

How about a nice warm blanket for you to curl up in, Mr. Freaky **RemoteLand** Gate-Keeper? I've got this beautiful brown Bear Blanket right here. Will watch over you all the night long.

Alright, alright, alright, sounds good, brotha', sounds good. Sounds good, brotha', sounds good. You go back to watching your old black-~~&~~-white TV with your lover ~~&~~ your friends. You ever watch that old show about Mulronie the Space Pirate. Loved that one!

Anyway, I'm sure y'all have had enough of my noise for a while.

I'm like, Yeah, I guess so. Turn back to the TV . . .

* * * * *

Starts Out As a Checkerboard

Starts out as a checkerboard. Now that seems simple enough. Checkers. Straight ahead. But then, I suppose, not even checkers are straight ahead because you do have to move diagonally, & that makes it so that you aren't quite moving straight ahead exactly.

Hmm. And it's an empty place that this checkerboard is in. Except then it's not so empty, it's tangly & vast, *goodness*, well, OK. It's like a world rises up from that checkerboard design, up from the bare ground of that place that used to be empty & now it's not, it's tangly & vast.

And the checkerboard fades in time, over the centuries, & eventually it's forgotten, that this place began as a checkerboard in an empty place.

Then one day, in a later century, there's a young orange-mustached shaggy haired young man who has snuck into this room, & he's looking at the blood-soaked carpet in an otherwise neat room.

What kind of room? Let's say it's a hotel room. Let's say it's in a tall, tall hotel. Called the Hotel Noah. Locally, called the No-Tell, for obvious & more obscure reasons.

It's hard to see the top of this strange No-Tell, as though maybe it was one thing & another before it was a hotel, & there's some vague kind of continuity going on still.

So it's a neat hotel room except for the blood that is soaked into the carpet.

In the closet, there are plenty of shirts & jackets hung up, arranged neatly. And the young man who has snuck into the room, he tries on one shirt from the many. It's orange, shaggy, like his hair & his mustache. It's open-collared, very soft, *hmmms?*

He puts it on, crosses the hall to the office of possibly the killers of the man who owned all these things. The father of this young man.

The killers in the room across the hall don't know who he is, & he doesn't know that he was in his late father's room. Nobody knows anything about anything. He's just there for a job, man, he's just there for a job.

Oh, & they're looking for someone to do a job, they are, & they like his orange shirt, makes them think of someone else but they can't quite think of who.

I'm down the hall from all this, I've been watching all this unfold. I know they're killers, I know they killed his late father. I know he's wearing his late father's orange shirt. These killers have been following me, or I have been following them, it changes over time. Time travel is not linear.

In any event, one way or the other, I can't seem to get away from them, no matter how far I go, always ends up like this.

And they've killed me too, time & again, yet it all goes on. Now what does that mean?

I just want to escape &, since no one's in that room of the late father, I go in & I crawl down real low, & I look myself deep into the blood-soaked carpet.

I think to myself, *if ever there was a moment, it would be this one in which I could look into this blood-soaked carpet, deep deep into it, deep deep, & see that checkerboard from long ago.*

And I do. I look deep into the blood-soaked carpet, I look down into its molecules, its cellulars, its atoms, its eves.

I see something. I see my face across time. Me & not me. I exist multiply across space & time. Time is not linear.

And I think, no, *this is not just me, this is others, many others, who exist multiply through space & time, throughout all of history & if that's possible, maybe history could be changed, deaths could be averted.*

I don't have to be murdered again. I can talk to my selves back then & hereon, and we can warn each other about what's to come, maybe not just us, maybe not just our little story. Maybe it's possible to exist like communicating beacons across time, & warn of peril, how it goes, well or bad.

And, as I think to myself, *wow, I wish I had enough time to do this*, there's a loud noise. I fall into blackness again.

* * * * *

I'm Sitting in This Room, Deep in My Mind

And again I'm sitting in this room, deep in my mind, where I've sat forever. It's an empty room of all but me, yet not quite. Bear with me here. It is & it is not more of the same old shite. And I'm sitting here, cross-legged on the floor in this room.

I'm looking down at a little note I scribbled right onto the floor, I used an old crayon I found, & I kind of mooshed it up in my hand a little, & I wrote with my finger: *There are those who exist multiply in space & time throughout history. Some discovered a way at a far end of history to travel back through the Dreaming, to their earlier iterations, with their later knowledge of historical peril, to try to alter the disastrous end of the world.*

There's a man, he is an Architect, this is what he did. He traveled, iterated, back through time, only he did more. He cuts the ties with his future, before the potion wears off that would have pulled him back through the Dreaming to where he had started.

He comes to find the Princess, who is from a far-off world called Emandia. She's special. She trebles in time, meaning she's able to co-exist in awareness for moments with all of her iterations. He comes to find her as maybe the only way to avert the disastrous end of the world. Comes to love her as he had never loved before. Learns that what you love will warp your path.

Now what is it that could be really done about this disastrous end to come? You've got those who iterate in time & space, & then you've got this special Princess who can co-exist in awareness. And you've got the Architect & his faith that the Princess could avert the disastrous end of the world. Him & his love-warped path. What could really be done?

*Well, what you could do is you adjust history, over & over & over again, until the far end is good. What's good? That's hard. **You have to turn on all the lights at once**, is what he says to her. **Find a way for human history to not end in disaster. You have to turn on all the lights at once.***

I write all this with my crayoned-up finger on the floor of this room that is empty of all but me, & yet not quite. Bear with me. It is & isn't more of the same old shite.

And so I think to myself, *what could be better than this room that is & isn't full of me, full of the same & not same old shite, you bearing with me?*

What could be better is if there was music, because if there was music, there would be hope. I'd stand. I'd begin to dance. I'd begin to move my large, clumsy body around &, maybe for a moment, it would still be large but not clumsy anymore.

I'd begin to flow back & forth, around & around, & maybe I'd begin to think, *there's more to all this than anyone can know. Now looks bad, the future does too, but maybe the Architect & the Princess & the Dreamers can save the world.*

* * * * *

Last Letter from Hue

Before that, I used to spend a lot of time in alleys, & this one time I found this little package, rain-worn, old & tired, but bound together by strings. I untied & unfolded it.

It said: *Last Letter from Hue*. I opened it up & began to read its contents. Here are some of them:

There's a stump in the White Woods, filled with rainwater, no matter the weather, & if you lean over it on your knees, & you look in, you will see your reflection first, then a memory, then something else to take with you.

He & I went together as last hope.

There were some materials that were blurred out, crossed out, redacted, maybe just mud & time got to them. But here's more:

& in the far future, the lady has led the refugees for many a year when she meets the retired football tight end. A strange ultra-violent version of football has come back into the world, whatever field & ball around. Always begins with the players jumping & shouting, "Plays for keeps! Plays for keeps!"

He begins to travel with them, the lady & her refugees, & talk of his old playing days, & show how he's survived with his tight end skills. He shows how he can climb, run, catch, block. He says these are amazingly useful skills.

Blur blur blur blur blur blur

*It was like & unlike a hotel room, they said. But too many walls, too much ceiling, not enough floor. There were a lot of people inside, & one was my shaggy haired friend Antonio, who's an athlete, he likes to race, but I think he's a poet too. I was never sure. He was always carrying around sheaves of papers. Hard to tell what he was writing on them, if anything at all. Well, just once I sneaked a peek at one of his papers, & it read over & over down the page: *There is no higher and there is no ground, we kiss, across the abyss, and you are mine once more.**

And then there's his brother, Toanio, who had a haircut, no longer shaggy like his brother, & I could see it was a recent haircut because there was hair all over this sort of hotel room. And I want to know them all better. What else is there to do nowadays? Be like one of those killers?

Blur blur blur blur blur blur

Then some lines that just seem to go *click-click noise-noise cackle-cackle* to my touch. Then speak:

Then there are those that exist multiply in space & time throughout history. Others discover at the far end of history the means to travel back through the Dreaming to try to alter the disastrous end of the world.

This is what the Architect does, only he does more, he cuts the ties with his future. He cannot be pulled back when the potion wears off. He comes to find the Princess who is Emandian & special & trebles in time, meaning she's able to co-exist in awareness in moments with all of her iterations. The Creatures can iterate more than one in a single place & time as well as multiply through history.

*What is the goal & purpose here? **Turn on all the lights at once.** Find a way for history not to end in disaster.*

Blur blur blur blur blur blur

By now you know that these materials have appeared elsewhere & elsewhere, & I've copied them out because those elsewhere & elsewhere are gone, & if you're reading this letter you are close to gone too. Or maybe this is all you have left, & you're hoping this letter doesn't end soon because you know you are sitting in an alley, & there isn't much out there for you. Read on a little bit more here, my dear & fine friend.

* * * * *

They Say There are Two Types of People in This World

They say there are two types of people in this world. The least people & the most people. And there is a book only the least people see. Called *Aftermath*, by Cosmic Early. If you saw it, it would tell you a whole lot about many things.

I don't have a real copy of it, I'm not one of the least people, but I have a pirate copy with a lot of redacted lines. But there are occasionally a few lines in a row where I can get a little something out of it.

For example, I learned that there's a deserted planet called Sunderground. It's been used to test weapons for hundreds of years. And I suppose that would be OK, but I read on later in the book, a bit more redacted, but I think I can suss it out, that there came to be some doubt at some point: *What if there were beings that lived there on that thought-to-be-deserted-planet, & they came to believe that the gods were punishing them & destroying them through these seemingly random explosions?*

So the space program goes back hundreds of years, my friends, it's obvious from these lines in *Aftermath*, even if it's a pirate copy.

In the appendices & dream fragments in back, there's less redaction. It's as though the appendices & dream fragments are not as important. It's as though if you don't know what the main text is, it doesn't matter if you read the appendices & dream fragments in the back.

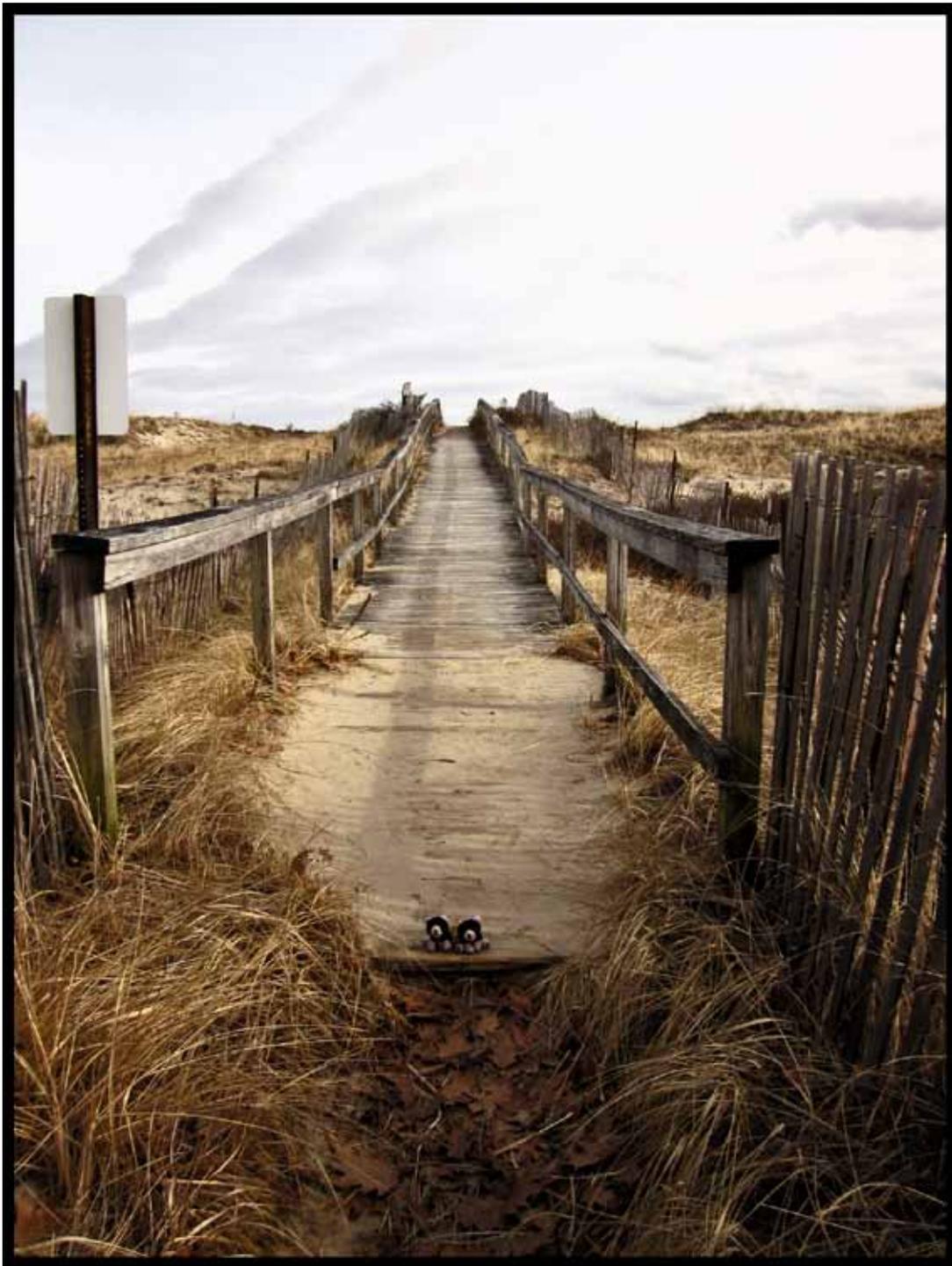
And so I get to read most of these appendices & dream fragments, often not knowing what they refer to. Here's one. Judge for yourselves:

Joe the Biscuit lives in a sealed abandoned well, & runs cords to electricity, & has a small strange old computer for wi-fi. Joe the Biscuit writes stories about obscure figures like himself, but they find love & they find admiration, because that's what he feels for them. He writes about low-level government officials, retired football players, extras on TV shows.

It ends there. *What do you think? What can you possibly think?*

I dig deeper in the appendices & dream fragments. I begin to wonder how long they are, count the pages, & start to realize that they're pretty long. But really not much redaction is going on. I read again, & there is this fragment from the field:

It was a huge house, with a huge basement. There was going to be a party that night. The fantasylands had been distributed on the shelves of the basement, separated into rows, & it's like they were deconstructed from fantasylands into just long rows of quiet & subdued individuals. Perhaps they'll be released after the party concludes. The Creatures watch from cracks in the walls, waiting, small but brave, to release their many friends.



If only we had a clean version of *Aftermath!*

But still I don't know if I believe that there are just two types of people in the world. And I don't know if this book is true. But here's one more from the appendices & dream fragments for you to chew on:

*You know, it's like this lady once said to me. I was at this party in Elliptical City & a lot of diplomats & spies were hanging out there. She & I were talking about the War. She was dressed in some kind of weird holy woman costume, like some kind of priestess. And I said, **do you think the War could nally be ended with all these diplomats & spies & everybody?** And she says to me, just flat out like it was her best wise wisdom on the matter, she says: **gotta evolve, you know?***

* * * * *

So I'm at This Diner, Late Night

So I'm at this diner, late night. Red Dog Diner, it's called. Oh, it's about 2 or 3 in the morning, maybe toward 3, because I think the drunken hour has come & gone. Only the remains remain, as it were. The overnight truck drivers, the homeless, random people who come up from the street, like me, & I'm there a lot, on the overnight.

There isn't really anywhere else to go in this town. I've been here for a few months, & it's strange how I ended up here. What happened was it was a job that sent me here.

I met some people. I must admit I was probably a little high when I met them. I think they were on the street of the city I was in, & I'd been again to that strange movie that plays after midnight at the Nada Theatre. I think it's called **RemoteLand**, though it never says on the screen.

It had left me shaken & smiling both, like always, & suddenly I was walking down the street, *hmmming* the movie theme by James McGunn, & then I was talking to these people, & they were saying *we'd like to send you to this little town for a while, if you're looking for work.*

And so I said, *how did you know I was looking for work?*

And they said, well, they didn't really say anything. They just kind of eyeballed my clothes, & my ragged book bag, & my ragged shoes. And so I nodded & said, *OK, yeah, I'm looking for work.*

So what I had to do was to go to this town & get a room & start talking to people about President Clusterfuck, getting their opinions. I didn't have to offer an opinion of my own but I do believe I could say whatever I wanted. But the point was to prompt other people to get to talking. And then I would need to go back to my room & keep careful records in a journal notebook they provided me, who said what.

And it seemed on the up & up in a sort of weird sketchy kind of way, but they paid me right up front, & they said there'd be more when I delivered them the journal records at the end of the assignment. They gave me a whole box of these journal books to use. On the cover, in weird loopy writing, they all read **Mulronie the Space Pirate Composition Book!**

So there I am at the Red Dog, because I liked it, they had the nice key lime pie, very nice, & so I'd just start conversations, I'd just lead in. I'd say, *You know, **the thing I hate about that motherfucking President Clusterfuck, the worst thing about him is, he at-out lied about his intentions, more than anyone else. He said he'd help those in need & he's done intentionally the opposite.***

And I look around at them all, because these are the people he'd promised to help—the poor, the hardworking, people who felt like they'd been forgotten. ***Doesn't give a shit,*** I'd say.

Now they knew I read poetry books, & that I wrote things down on little scraps of paper. So they figured I was a college boy & didn't hold it against me the foul language. They'd get to talking, too. They had opinions on the matter.

The waitress, she must have been real pretty in her day, even if her day was about 40 years ago,

she said, *you know, if that ugly old motherfucker grabbed my private personals, I'd give him a what-for & he wouldn't forget me either.*

And the truck driver man, grizzled & looked kind of flashy in the eyes, charm about him that didn't quite equate, he'd say, *I'd like to keep that guy with me in the truck on my overnight hauls, when the radio would go out. I'd listen to this guy boast & brag about his conquests, & people he'd screwed over, & all the deals he'd done. And I really couldn't guarantee that before the end of the haul I wouldn't just shove the mothertrucker out the door because I was bored of him & sick of his old crap.*

There was another guy amongst us who was from the west side of outer space, & he was a real super nice guy. He had a spaceship on the roof of the Red Dog, but he said it was invisible so we shouldn't go looking for it. He told us this story.

He said, *there was a time, I was traveling with this dwindling number of refugees led by this woman, & she had a scale by which she cast our group's fate & fortune. We were all refugees of one kind or another. People who had escaped prison, lost their homes to invasion, heretics who believed Emandia is real. We were on one of the far moons, where the atmosphere is failing & things weren't going too well. So she would cast our group's fate & fortune, like what we should do, how fast we should travel, to the mountains, the forests, or the Sea.*

She'd put these little stones from the sack on one of the scales, & on the other she'd put this mix of seeds & other things. And she'd study & weigh & measure, & consult her shiny little books she wouldn't show anyone, & this would help her to understand how we should go.

But it just seemed like things were just going worse & worse, & people would just disappear in the night. Our numbers kept dwindling, till finally we ended up at a cave, & the scale was long since gone, sold or forgotten, lost, something, something.

And so I'll just tell you that when I saw that spaceship at the back of that cave, beat up but still whole, & remembered that I used to be a mechanic, I took my shot. Rustled up some tools, fixed up that spaceship, & got my ass to this planet where the atmosphere isn't failing yet.

*And I'll tell you about your President. He may be a clusterfuck of a guy locally but, against the universe of clusterfucks I seen there in outer space, **he ain't shite.***

It Was Sort of a Then-Now Dream

It was a sort of then-now dream, you've had them, where you're then & now, & both & neither. It's like the years of your life are a rack of spices, & there's that soup on your hotplate, in your room without windows & words. It's a silent room, & you're silently mixing your soup with what's in your spice rack.

Each spice is a year of your life. And you can manipulate the spices in the soup a bit. You can throw in one year's town, & another year's travel, & another year's party, & another year's strange, good time you fell into. Little bit of that melancholy, little bit of that ecstasy, little bit of the White Woods, little bit of the desert, little bit of the city, little bit of the empty roads, little bit of feeling very, *very* found, & a little bit of feeling really, *really* lost.

Finally, you pour some of the soup into a bowl. Sit down on your old mattress, to sip, to feel how this soup shall be. Close your eyes, *mmm*, this sure is some tasty soup.

I see that face, smiling at me, thought I was funny. I see that crowd I was dancing in, didn't laugh at me. Join in! Shake it! That book I read for the first time, that book I read the 20th time.

Yes, my kind of soup. What's your kind of soup?

*What would your rack of spices look like?
 How would you mix them on in?
 Where would you find yourself walking, with eyes closed, deep in your night?
 What hand would be holding yours?
 What face would be looking at you?
 What car would you be getting into, & what house would you be arriving at?
 Would it be day, would it be night, would it be dusk, sunrise?
 A drinker's high noon?
 A tripper's full moon?
 What would the room look like?
 What would the apartment look like, what would the house look like, what would the cave look like,
 what would the Island look like, what would the Sea look like?
 Was it a big boat or a small?
 Was it a jumbo jet where you couldn't feel nothing around you but a small **hmmm**, or a little
 propper, hopping from Island to Island, with a strange pilot in it, a charmer?*

Sometime later I found that I wasn't in the silent room anymore, with the soup & the rack of spices. I was trying to write the story of this then-now dream with a cheese puff on the back of my lover's leather jacket.

She was holding very still. She believed as I do that you could write a story like this only with a cheese puff, only on such a leather surface. I think this moment, too, became a spice. I think these moments of cheese puff writing about Islands & boats, charming pilots, & faces, hands, big roads & small, big cities & little ones, times of ecstasy, times of powerlessness, times in between, are all spices for the rack & the soup.

Maybe every memory, even the most mundane one, has the potential to be a flake of spice, in one of your very many jars, on your very long rack.

* * * * *

In the Enemy Military Camp

In the enemy military camp, I was trying to leave quietly with some others. Some of us are invisible. We walk in a group, not sure where the exit is, to this very large building. *Is it really a building? Is it a spaceship? From the west side of outer space? Or in a mine of some kind, deep under the earth? What is it? What can it be?*

The invisible ones go ahead, but soon I feel like I've lost track of them. And I look around & I realize there's no one else here either, visible or invisible. *Did they make it to the brick wall through time & space?*

And now & now & now, I look around, & I realize that I'm homeless. I've been homeless for quite some time, & I feel like my head comes & goes to other places sometimes like that factory-mine-spaceship place.

Often I find myself moving through dark & silent city streets, pushing a shopping cart, very afraid because nobody's around. Sometimes I stop for a moment & I try to remember something, something worse than this that'll comfort me.

Usually I remember that time I was in that situation with a very strange old man with a gun who took us all hostage. We were in a hospital, the emergency room. There was a movie on the television, I remember. Had no title. I was vaguely watching it before he started waving the gun around.

It was late. I was waiting to find out how someone was, someone I hardly knew but I had met

while escaping from the spaceship-factory-mine. He got hurt, stumbled over a broken brick wall. Now this strange old man's holding a gun to everyone. Crying out, spitty & toothless, *This is just another in the Panoply of Occurrences & Events!* Kept saying it every so often, like it's all what he had left, but his gun too.

Hours pass. Later on he's starts to doze. I sneak up to him & kind of slip the gun out of his hand. Then I rush it over to the orderlies who apparently didn't know the emergency room waiting room was being held hostage. I slide the gun down the hallway to them, & kind of waved at them to *come & do something.*

They just take the gun & seemed to file it away in a closet. That seemed to satisfy them that they'd done what they had to do.

I shake my head. Oh yes, this empty city street now, yes. *This* is better than *that*, *this* is better than *that*, by far.

So that's what you got to do, if you find yourself homeless, or in a vast spaceship, or being held hostage by an old man in an emergency room. You got to close your eyes, & take a deep breath, & take another, & then think to yourself, *it's been worse. Let me think on that for a moment & then come back to all this.*

* * * * *

I Was DJ'ing My Radio Show Remotely

It happened this one time when it seemed to me like I was DJ'ing my radio show remotely, from a different room, or another station, down the road a ways. The connection was not really good. I knew my show was crackling, arriving in pieces to whatever what's listening.

And I worried about that some, but I kept on, & I explained to the listeners, what scraps of 'em was left, I says: *this is my last show for a while now because I'm going be traveling with an outer space priestess & a magician & a musician & a couple, close, but they don't belong to one another anymore. So I'll just see y'all's again.*

We take off for the west side of outer space &, on those long nights far out there, we get bored, just looking at the stars speeding on by. Everyone's finished the five *Mulronie the Space Pirate* books, more than once. Well, naturally, we get to telling stories about where we come from.

So I told this story about the time I was at a party in Elliptical City & it became violent. I don't know why, just did, was in the nature of that party on that night, & I think only the couple of us escaped. My shaggy-bearded friend & me. We had to crawl over bodies. *What kinda party was this?* We just kept going.

Eventually this turned funny & somewhat dream-like, as though there had maybe never been a party. *Was there really a party tonight?* I don't know, seems to me like we're just walking along this beautiful night, & nothing bad's going on at all, nothing at all.

That was the last time I saw that friend. Somewhere toward morning we became parted, & I went home for a while. Later I heard on the radio, not the radio show I was doing, but someone else's radio show, that there was this party in Elliptical City, & a lot of spies & diplomats at it were killed. *Let me get to my outer space travels,* I think.

And now the outer space priestess looks at me & says, *is there a moral to that story, young traveling DJ?*

And I says, ma'am, *it's the moral of every good story. Make sure, in every uncertain situation, to get while the getting's good.*

* * * * *

I'm in a Road Race

Now if it seems like I'm huffin' & a-puffin' a little bit tonight, it's because I'm just in from a road race, cross-country, kind of like that cartoon with the bird & the Beast. I'm racing among many other racers that I used to know.

There grew up over time a special group of close competitors & good friends. We probably did the things you'd expect. Sharing wine, women, sneaker tips. All those bonding-type things.

Now they're just *polite* to me. It's like I've gone away & come back casually, & they're not interested in casual. Well, who is? *Who is interested in casual?*

So there's a particular friend from our group I remember most fondly from the old days. I helped her out with her romances, of the female nature, kept them under my lid. *Those* kind of times. And I want to reach out to her. Feel again that close friendship that she & I had. Maybe she can help the others feel me again too.

So we all gather in town the night before the race, to celebrate our friendship & love of racing, at this diner, the Red Dog, it's *our* diner. None of the other racers come here like this. And there's a long table set out just for us, & a kind of ceremony we perform. But I don't remember its complex details so well.

Cups of wine, all different kinds of cups, shapes & sizes. *Sip, pass on, sip, pass on.* But I get confused by all this. It's like there's more to it than just *sip, pass on.* There's like a second level to it that I get confused by, & I start spilling my cups & apologizing. They all start explaining at once what's supposed to happen, but I don't understand them because they're using terminology I've never heard of.

Why can't these racers just be my friends for one more night? Why can't we just race through a series of towns until dawn & then part each other good, *can't we just part each other good?*

They start showing videos, from all their hometowns, big gatherings of families & mayors & talent shows. *Who are all these people?*

I don't know. I don't know, but finally my friend shows up, & she smiles at me like she knows me always. And I say, *bring me somewhere, my old friend.* She smiles, raises her finger to me, & gives me the old *come along with me* gesture,

We slip out into the night, & I meet her fellow racer, as slinky as she is.

Let's go, sisters. Tonight, & tomorrow too, let's blow those old bastards straight back to hell.

* * * * *

There's an Octopus

My beloved & I are living in a single room with a bed, & there's an octopus underneath it, no kidding. Seems scary at first, but eventually we all get used to each other a little more. There seem to be worms on the floor too, here & there, & shadows, & the octopus will sort of vibrate when it slurps some up in its tentacles. This goes on for a while, & we don't have jobs, any of us, including the octopus.

Door's open, but all of us are too stubborn to leave. Seems like a kind of a stalemated situation.

Finally, in the middle of the night, many nights into this weird scenario, I jump off the bed, & I race for the door, & I race outside, & I'm in a driveway, standing near a van, green & gold. Sit down breathless, & a White Bunny approaches me, & hops into my lap.

Her name is MeZmer, & there are little Bears nearby too who, strange to behold, join MeZmer in my lap. These strange magickal Creatures sit with me as friends. I'm OK with this.

Years later, I'm telling this story to a colorful group of friends, most of them shaped like people. When we all get together it's potent & amazing. They tell their crazy racing stories too.

The more that show up, the more likely it is that there's going to be a dessert cart. Somebody



almost always shows up with a dessert cart. They scour Elliptical City for the strangest, most delectable desserts to bring to this amazing group of friends.

And I tell them about living in a room with the octopus, & the worms, & the shadows, & my beloved. She is sitting there too. She has a strange rabbit's mask on, with both its silly grin & hers underneath. They all love this story, & they ask me to tell it again, so I do, & I change it up a little bit to keep them interested.

Someone brings me a very odd dessert. They say, *look, it's shaped like an octopus!*

I say, *I can't eat this!* And they understand, & don't try bringing me any shaped like Bunnys or Bears either.

Then someone turns on the baseball game on the TV. Sometimes we watch it late into the night, smoking & eating desserts. The announcers say, *this game wasn't officially scheduled but here it is happening, & it's now into extra innings & we've run out of pitchers!* Some of us are laughing, others have fallen asleep.

One of the announcers, an old jock himself, gets asked to play. Seems he used to be a pretty good pitcher. So he smiles & nods & goes out there, but they don't have a uniform big enough to fit him.

So he just pitches in his street clothes, takes off his tie at least, & the umpires don't like it, think this is very odd. Good thing this game wasn't officially scheduled. By the time it's over, everybody's asleep, all the desserts are gone, & I dream of that room. That octopus, my beloved sleeping with me, with that strangely grinning rabbit mask, & her silly grin underneath.

* * * * *

I'm Alone, in Elliptical City

I'm alone, in Elliptical City, looking at a kind of 3D map of a planned heist, working against a rough draft I have. My favoritest special Elliptical City deli-made peanut butter, jelly, & cottage cheese sandwich is nearby. I'd put it in my little sandwich-carrying case, & then put that inside my *Tales of the W.A.R.P. Wizard* lunch box. I would make sure nobody touched my lunch box but me, because I knew what a tasty sandwich lay within.

And someone tries to nab it, & I yell them away. Everyone knows Mondays between 10 and 11 are when the truck passes through the neighborhood & is vulnerable to be hit. It's a messy kind of sandwich, no straight lines. I'd like to think it even goes down from my tongue to my tummy in an elliptical way, down an elliptical path.

So I keep planning my heist with my 3D map. It wavers before me & my hand is able to gently touch it & move it around, so I can see different aspects of the neighborhood.

I know, I know, you're wondering, *what is that sign behind me, that electric sign?* You can kind of see it better, as I bend down to pick up & take another *delicious* bite of my special Elliptical City deli-made sandwich.

It's an electric sign that says, ***If You Like Orchids, Booze, & Acid***, & there's an image of the Imp in the Full Moon. Does she blink on & off, or does she kind of waver in between on & off? Is she part of the electrical sign or just cackling within its light? I'm not really sure.

You know the thing about special deli-made Elliptical City peanut butter, jelly, & cottage cheese sandwiches is that they don't last long enough.

And then I remember this morning how I got up & was so full of energy for this heist. I was thinking about how three of my dreams had been arguing.

One was a store-like planet, on the west side of outer space naturally, where only the workers lived. People visiting the store-like planet could only stay three days in a row at most, had to shop & go, everything on this planet was for sale.

One of the other dreams said, *yeah? I got you beat by a country mile. Listen to this one.* This dream waves large leathery hands around, bloodshot eyes, a mean but hurt look, couple of snaggly teeth. *I'm in a large room, he says, with many others, lots of tables, people. It's kind of a college registration day & I don't know what I'm doing there, look at me, I ain't no college boy.*

But I'm filling in my forms & I'm filling them in with lies. Pretending that I'm a teacher in order to get financial aid.

*And I come to a line in this endless form, & I hate these forms, they're long & long & long, & I come to a place in this form where it says, **tell about your life closely, but in an elliptical way.** I don't know what to do, man, I don't know.*

*So I just write in this space why I'm here. I write, I'm sending my people up to Elliptical City to a party to kill her, once my lover & partner, now my enemy. No mercy, I instruct, **none.** Space priestess, musician, dreamer, wears a belt that is the source of all of her power. I fill in my application, and turn it in to a guy that's got three eyes, one of which is blackened from who knows what. I walk out.*

Well, that dream sat back, like he was all self-satisfied.

And the third dream just looked at both of them, & *hmmmmmm'd.*

Here comes the truck, brand name Ellipses, green & gold, here it comes, *here it comes.* I'm gonna heist it, *I'm gonna heist it.*

*Oh wait a minute! Hey, man, you took my special deli-made Elliptical City peanut butter, jelly, & cottage cheese sandwich! I just had one last bite, no, no man! I'm trying to heist this truck but I can't let go of the last bite of this delicious peanut butter, jelly, & cottage cheese sandwich! Hey man, hey man! Come back here, hey man, come back here! That's my sandwich! I'll kick your ass, motherfucker, **I'll kick your ass!***

* * * * *

In a Place Beyond the Dreaming

Sunk down deep in a place beyond the Dreaming, like deep, deep in the Wide Wide Sea. It's dark but not silent. I hear something low, it's like a *hmmmmmm*. I find I can think, I find I can remember, forward, backwards, even sideways to other branches of how things might be or might have been.

Some years from now, I'm living in the big beautiful Elliptical City. I'm going back to work at a bookstore I'd worked at years & years ago. But I delay. One boot on & one boot off, pants half zipped. Don't know where my glasses are & I think, *I've gotta go, expenses don't pay for themselves.*

Close my eyes, *breathe, relax.* Open my eyes, I'm even less ready now. Well, that wasn't good.

Close my eyes, *breathe, relax.* Well, now I'm just in bed with my beloved & the alarm is going off.

Close my eyes, *breathe, relax.* Feel brung back into the *hmmmmmm* of the Wide Wide Sea. Try again.

Up! Up! Up! Sitting in a chair, familiar chair, kinda rickety but comfy, sitting amongst Creatures. White Bunny, Bears, many others. *There's a microphone, oh goodness!* I'm talking into this microphone right now! *How did that happen?*

And it's daytime! Why, it's about Saturday, 11 AM, years ago, years on, & at this moment, oh yes, it's time to DJ this radio show. *I made it back from the west side of outer space.*

Thank you, Wide Wide Sea, for sending me back to where I am right now. Helping me to see how fine it is.

* * * * *

Is It Friday or Saturday?

Half woke, wondering if it was Friday or Saturday? I don't know what day it was. I don't know where I am. I look around. Bed is too big, pillows are unfamiliar. No sign of my dear friend the yellow Pillow in her purple cloak.

Well, this is a strange place. I look out the window. Is it a hotel? This damned No-Tell again? This time it is surrounded by the Wide Wide Sea on all sides. This damned No-Tell is now on an Island that is almost exactly as big as itself. OK. *What about this?*

Well, let's see here. Maybe there'll be a boat. I scrounge around for some clothes. All I find are a pair of shorts that come down to my calves, & are a little too tight in some places & a little too loose in other places.

And they say *ChocoSmax: Them's the Fax!* on them, on the one side, & the other side, well, it doesn't say anything. It's like the ChocoSmax patch on one leg's cuff is sort of scraped off vigorously, as though someone just *did not want* to advertise ChocoSmax on that side.

My green plaid jacket. And some sandals. I don't wear sandals, but that's all there was. There isn't anything else in this room.

Oh, except for that little purple furry Creature that likes to dance a lot. His name is Pirth. We've been traveling together, with our missing Pillow friend too.

So I put on my green plaid jacket over my bare chest, Pirth in his usual pocket. Struggle into my overly long, overly tight, overly loose shorts that aren't that short, & the one side says *ChocoSmax: Them's the Fax!*, & the other side is scraped off. And my sandals,

I walk out into the hallway & I realize, *oh, this is one of those hallways*, & I begin to dance & dance & dance, knowing that if I don't dance I am going to fall right up. I do not want to hurt me, but I especially do not want to hurt that little Pirth in my pocket.

So I make my way to the sort-of escalator, & it is going in the right direction, even though the sign says *Up! Up! Up!* I ride to the ground floor. There are a lot of people there, though I don't recognize any of them. They look at me with rather hostile stares, as though this is all my fault. I wander along the narrow beach, wishing for a boat, so I could just leave right now.

I think to myself, *Boy! I know the one boat I could use now, if only, if only, if only.*

And then it comes, the beloved Boat Wagon of many the tale & story. Small, but I know how to deal with this. I just walk toward it, & I get smaller as I walk toward it, & it gets bigger. We arrive each other the perfect size to fit. Now Pirth is standing next to me, as we are the same size.

We climb into the back seat of the Boat Wagon, with our friends the Kittees & Friend Fish at the wheel up front. Buckle in good. *Safety First!*

And suddenly all those hostile people start running toward us. *Hey you! Hey you!* they yell, waving their arms at us.

But we *paddle paddle paddle, paddle paddle, paddle paddle* away!

I Was Listening to this Guy Tell a Story . . . to Nobody

I was listening to this guy tell a story to nobody at the far back of the Greyhound bus. Traveling a long way. It was one of those trips where it starts later in the evening, & the bus doesn't stop for hours on end, & it gets very quiet as it travels down the highway. Going fast but, inside the bus, it seems as though time almost stops.

Most people sleep. I like to read in those late hours. Sometimes my reading light is the only thing that's going in the bus, but this night a guy was talking, quietly, he was in the back seat. I was in the second to back seat. There wasn't anybody else really that far back, as it was a half full bus. Most

people were sitting near the front, probably to get off as quick as possible when the ride was done.

Anyway, I can't say I heard the whole story but I heard scraps of it. He seemed to be talking about a group of people he called close friends. He said they'd gather together at a private party at a diner, & there was a lot of wine & some kind of, I don't know, special dessert or something. It sounded like a weirder party the longer he talked.

There seemed to be no gravity at this party, they turned it off, & the only light was what glowed from the floor. And there was a girl he liked, amongst this group of friends, but she was just crazy, he said. He said it over & over again, *she was just crazy, she was just crazy, she was just crazy.*

But he liked her. She'd tell him which of her girlfriends would lick it right, do it slow, make it fun, make it last, enjoy themselves, & which ones were checking off the box. *I'd take the ones who passed my test down into that old spaceship buried under Chief Seattle's. Our bodies felt like whole worlds smashing down there.*

Then someone at the party put on some of the kind of music you could dance to when there's no gravity in the room, & the only light is the vaguely glowing floor, so you have to be able to move around with all parts of you. You don't have your feet to guide the rest of you so much.

He said, *I'd been trying to get a hold of her for months, but she would only talk to me at a distance, at a far distance. And here she was in this room! So I sort of eased my gravity-less way over to her, & hoped she recognized me, & she seemed to but, then again, she seemed to recognize everybody. That's why I liked her.*

It's not exactly dancing when there's no gravity. It's more like smiling nearness, & I want to say something to her, but I take off my shirt instead.

That catches her eye. I'm scrawny, there's not much to see. Got a few bruises & a couple unintentional tattoos, one from that The Pink Floyd show at that desert fest.

But then I took off my jeans. I was going through a time where I didn't wear underwear, so now I was naked.

And then she did recognize me, & she smiled, & she sorta swam over to hold my two hands. She looked into my eyes, & I could see that there were about a hundred thousand souls inside her. They were all dancing too. And they were all naked.

What more is love than this?

* * * * *

There's a Camp Out, I Think

There's a camp out, I think, in those weird White Woods behind the Red Dog Diner. Some years hence, with some dear friends. We're all very *very highhighhigh*. At one point we've all gathered in a circle around a small someone that's glowing, dancing, sentient, purple, furry, & there & not quite there, & we all see him. And we relax by his glow, & people start to tell stories, from the backwhen & the hereon. You can do that nowadays. You can look further down the road or you can look back. And there are many roads, if you will.

I say, years ago, before any of us were born, they shot a spaceship into the moon. Now I was watching it on a hotel TV, in a strange room that seemed to have more than the usual number of walls & ceilings & floors. Lots of rooms in the No-Tell were weird in one way or another.

It was a party, kinda like this, but kinda not. And they weren't very highhighhigh like us, no. It was some kind of the old cheap shit they had. I don't know if I knew anybody there, but someone shouted, hey! They're shootin' a spaceship into the moon! It's happening right now!

And I remember sitting in a corner with a can of some of the cheap shit, & there were these two girls dancing nearby, & at first they were dancing close, like lovers, some kind of old style of dancing. And then they started jumping up & down as the spaceship got closer and closer to the moon. And they started sorta jumping into each other, slamming their chests together, & yelling out *moon*

boobies! moon boobies! moon boobies! moon boobies!

Another friend I hadn't seen in years, he'd stopped racing with us, he's smiling at me new & telling more of the story. *Well, I was at this deli. Not far from that hotel you & your Moon Boobie girls were staying at. I knew all about that rocket ship they said was gonna hit the moon. I didn't believe a word of it. That's all done with wires & smoke & mirrors & shite &, anyway, what did I care about such things?*

I had a book in my hand, called *Aftermath* by Cosmic Early. It was a good book & it was the kind of book that well, once you get to reading it, shooting rockets at a moon, *whatever*.

And so, what happened to me, while that was happening to you, was that I came down this alley with my book, & my special Elliptical City deli-made peanut butter, jelly, & cottage cheese sandwich, & I thought, you know, hell with you all, I've got no offense meant to any of you, but hell with you all.

I just sat in this alley with my book & sandwich, way down the alley, where nobody could see me. I had a candle, & I sat reading my good book & eating my sandwich.

I just thought, you know, I'd like to shoot myself whole & full into this book & land on it. Anybody come down here, all they'd find was a book with a smile on its face.

* * * * *

I Think I Heard This Story on the Radio One Night

I think I heard this story on the radio one night. It was one of those AM stations that doesn't come in too well very often. I guess I was living in an alley at the time. Not all the time, I want you to know, but sometimes.

And I had an AM transistor radio, & there was a Radio Shack nearby. They threw out batteries that weren't even dead in their dumpsters, so I had plenty of batteries for my AM transistor radio.

So I was trolling up & down the AM dial. I had a good antennae on this radio, & they might have thrown that out of the Radio Shack too, but let's just not go into the details of that. I found this station at the very bottom of the AM dial where the more obscure stations reside, sometimes briefly, & the DJ was telling this story. His voice kept changing, coming in & out, like in scraps. I don't know if it was the signal or just his voice itself.

He kept saying, *there was a young man, a football player, & his story is thus: in his travels, he had 7-8-9-10 sexual encounters over the course of a period of time, with 10-9-8-10 different situations.*

And so of course there's fallout from all of it. One travel the DJ told of was when the young man wandered unknowingly into the enemy alien camp. *This camp of aliens, they were so strange, they seemed to be some kind of a mist.*

The DJ continued: *The young man learned that there was a popular lady, popular & charitable, African-American lady, greatly admired for her social causes, & yet she is a part of this alien enemy mist. Then he learned that there was this British TV journalist who wrote pieces defending the power of the people against the powers-that-be that would exploit them, & yet he was part of the alien camp mist too.*

*There were so many others like these, enwebbed & unidentifiable, across human history, & the only clue to them we've learned of, & this is what we want to tell you in this news report, is that they look handsome or lovely or speak in noble words, kindly, sweet, progressive, but they sniff funny. Not like any other smell you've ever smelled before but, if you sniff close you'll catch it. And if you happen to be with one of them in a situation where you have cause to **hmmm**, well, they'll **hmmm** with you, but just a little bit off, a little bit off.*

* * * * *



Seems to Be a Traveling Book-Movie-Island in a Spaceship

And again, seems to be a traveling Book-Movie-Island in a spaceship that I find myself in, probably on the west side of outer space. I'm looking for copies of a literary journal I did back when there were pens & paper & books. I called it *The Cenacle*.

And I have to admit I still do that kind of thing, but they don't like it on this spaceship. I have a room. I'm actually a janitor.

I'm convinced that somewhere in this spaceship, that left the home world so long ago, there's old copies of *The Cenacle*. I've been looking for years. I've been finding copies here & there, don't know how they got so scattered. I have a nearly complete collection.

The new ones I write in my notebook. I have a lot of scraps of paper. I have a lot of pens. I have them all hidden in a room that's beyond the janitor's closet. I found it long ago. It wasn't being used for anything else, & nobody knows it's there. Who comes into the janitor's closet anyway, much less his secret room?

So eventually I arrive at Rosie O'Grady's Good Times Emporium. It's this bar someone conjured up out of photographs & memories of how it was back then on the home world. They call it a drinking saloon. Nobody's quite sure what they drank back then but it certainly looked like a fun place in those photographs, & now in our hidden replica.

People laugh a lot there, & there's some approximation of music. Sometimes it's real music, sometimes it isn't. Some records on the jukebox, that works sometimes, by The Pink Floyd & James McGunn. Sometimes we just clap hands & shout. Music seems to have traveled with us from the home world, unlike a lot of other things.

So I'm sitting in the corner & a friend of mine comes up to me. He's a tall guy, handsome face, comes up with his three dogs. He's the DJ for Radio Sunderground, the pirate station on this ship. They play it at Rosie's all the time. I used to DJ too with him on it, but my janitor duties got to be too much. *I had to find my missing issues.*

He says, *hey man, how ya doin'?* & I want to answer him but his dogs—who I've met many times—there's an old gray one, a younger black one, a third one that's kind of brown—as usual, they forget me, & begin to nose near to me, growling. It takes a while for the whole thing to settle down.

I say, *I'm still looking, as you know.*

He says, *yeah man, I'll put the word out, you know me, I'll put the word out. Us DJs gotta stick together here.*

I say, *yeah, you're a good guy, Chris, you're a good guy. I gotta get back now. Break time is up. This spaceship needs moppin', sweepin' like nobody's business.*

* * * * *

On the Movie Studio Lot, There's a Strange Yellow House

On the movie studio lot, there's a strange yellow house that nobody talks about. Or goes into. Filled with stuff of different kinds. One day, the handsome black movie star is driving by the yellow house. He's right now playing the town minister in a remake of that great old film *A Place Called Oorous*. Excited to be working with that mysterious Gate-Keeper nobody knows much about.

There's a cop across the street for some reason, & something goes wrong at that moment, at that intersection of yellow house nobody talks about, & the handsome black movie star, & the cop.

The scene shifts to the heartrending story of the underdog basketball team, having a dream season, winning more games than anyone could have imagined, going through all sorts of conflict & crisis. The kinds you would expect in a heartrending film. They play out their last game of the season at home.

We know they're not going to make the playoffs. We know they're not going to win the championship, but what a season it was! What characters, what times! That visit to the ayahuasca shaman up in the mountains, that time they rescued the miner from down deep in the earth. The tragedies, the triumphs. And they're losing that final game, although they show up relaxed, ready to play, nothing to lose. They've won it all in their hearts.

The scene shifts again, more personal this time. My family & I are living in the back room of a government office. I have in my corner my writing pad, my little phonograph, my 6 favorite LPs, my radio, several books, that's all I could take. All I was allowed to take.

I invite this girl I like over. My dad is illustrating another one of her poems, called "The Four-&-Twenty Blue Hills O' Heaven." We will put this illustration up with the others on the wall of this back room of the government office. I hear them talking on the other side of the room from me, though I can't quite hear them well. The sounds are strange in this back room.

My brother's sitting next to me in my corner, falling asleep. Our dinner of protein bars & canned goods always tires him out more than it should.

Later, maybe years, I'm in a grocery store, wondering why all the bread is behind glass doors now. It makes no sense. But I go through the trouble & the paperwork &, as I'm coming out of the store, into the neon day we all know so familiarly, the black movie actor comes up to me & says, *where's the basketball, man? It didn't go into that yellow house, did it? Where's the basketball, man? It didn't go into that yellow house, did it? Do I have to go into the yellow house again? Don't make me go into the yellow house, really! It was a great season, but why do I have to go back into the yellow house? Have your poems been illustrated too?*

Really? Where's the basketball where's the yellow house where's that cop why did I have to go why why why blur blur blur blur blur blur

* * * * *

I'm Sitting with an Ancient Sea Turtle

I'm sitting with an Ancient Sea Turtle, on a beach somewhere deep down in the Wide Wide Sea. He's not feeling well. Sick, depressed. It's an empty beach we sit on. My hand is on his shell, softly.

He says, *Human Being, look around this beach, look at the vastness of this beach. You can't see it from end to end, Human Being. Once it was filled with other turtles. Filled with other turtles! All kinds, all colors, & all shapes. Many tongues. From other worlds, from other kinds of places than that. It was a kind of a, you might say, a cross-paths, a resting place, a place of peace, old friends discovered, fences mended, conflicts talked through, until everyone was happy & celebrating. And it may sound simple to you, Human Being, but it wasn't.*

I say, *Where I come from, back there, & I vaguely gesture, we don't have such a place. Not for everyone, not on a vast beach like this one that would so fill the mind & the eye, it would be enough for everyone to come to. An agreed-upon place of peace, where it's sought & found & left with. What happened, why are you the only one?*

I outlived them all, Human Being. What I'm telling you about happened long ago.

Would you have done anything different? I ask suddenly, still lightly touching his shell, trying to give him some comforts.

He's quiet for a long time, & I listen to the roaring of the surf of the Wide Wide Sea, the beautiful thing near us.

He says, *There wasn't anything to do.*

Are you glad of it all?

His wrinkled cragged eyes close more & more, & I think he's falling into a long sleep himself. But then he whispers, maybe from just inside his dream, *Of course.*

* * * * *

Finding a Friend, in the Country

You remember that great football player you've kept hearing about? Well, now he was in the country, having wandered away from the bus station again. It's his one way in this long trip he's taking of rebelling against the whole thing, because he's been given the travel tickets, & the list of places to stay, & the money to spend, & the guides, but he'll just wander away once in a while, catch the next bus after that.

And, sad to say, he met another football player he'd known back in high school. In fact, they'd been real close. Curly blond fellow, looks like a wide receiver, & that's what he was. Tall, long.

He finds his friend out on this country road, farmhouses miles apart, no people to be seen. His friend's wandering a little strangely, even being out here I guess you could say is strange, far from where they come from.

What's worse, though, is his eyes are dead. Completely dead. As our hero comes closer, he sees that his friend's skin is no longer pale-pink like it was. No, he's become a Zombie.

What? What?! Our hero looks around him, kind of backs off a few feet. His friend doesn't exactly see him, but sniffs something nearby, & sort of starts to veer in the direction of our hero, who's wily enough to keep moving around a bit. And yet he doesn't know what to do.

He's seen all those TV shows & movies about Zombies. You're supposed to kill them in the head or something. But this isn't a TV show or movie. He looks around. There's rocks, there's sticks out in the gray fields that seem empty of any growing life.

He watches his friend who's sort of going *grrrrrrrr* & sniffing, & he thinks: *what would he want me to do if he could say?*

Finally, he leads his friend slowly, stumbingly, through those empty fields for a long, long time. Looking for something, looking for anything.

Then, by miracle of miracle, he finds it. *A cliff.* A high cliff. Our hero can't even see to the bottom.

It's not too hard to trick his old friend into tumbling off, & gone forever, but our hero pauses & pauses & pauses, & his friend sniffs & sniffs & sniffs.

Finally, our hero pats him on his Zombie shoulder & says, "Goodbye, goodbye, goodbye."

* * * * *

He's Sitting Out There, in the Country

He's sitting out there in the country, in an empty brown field, next to his friend who, before he perished completely, was a Zombie. He'd had to push him over a cliff earlier today & then he climbed down. It was a long hard climb. He almost plunged a few times, but he made it down. His friend was now inert & strangely light. He could lift him up & carry him on his shoulder, like an empty sack. What was there that mattered had drifted off.

So he just brought his friend along. His dead Zombie friend, empty of something important. Climbed back up that cliff, somehow, sweating & stumbling. Now they were sitting in the brown field that they'd first encountered each other. And he's saying to his friend things he'd never said to him, when they knew each other, back in high school.

He says, *I remember that time you lost that girl you loved & you said to me, **I don't want another one. I just want sex. at's it. at's the only part I like anymore.** We were smoking an orgy bong. One of yours, of course, so big you never could figure out who all those hands, titties, butt-cheeks, & things belonged to, though it was sure fun to try.*

We'd go to parties. You'd pick one out, you'd almost always leave with her, throw me a wink. I didn't think any of that was good. But I figured it was a phase, as things are.

*Then there was that time, that last time we saw each other, where you invited me out to a deli in Elliptical City. You said, **take the bus!** I said, **what bus?** You wrote down the directions to get the bus to a city I'd not heard of in an area I'd lived in all my life. And yet there was the deli, there was Elliptical City, & it was moving along, I kid ya not. It was traveling right along.*

And you & I & this girl you'd found, & there was something different again, something more relaxed. You'd stopped being the nickname you'd given yourself for a long long time there. You called yourself Captain Dick on a Stick. As we sat in that deli with the peanut butter, jelly, & cottage cheese sandwiches, & we traveled along in that strange Elliptical City, moving through the night, you held that girl's hand very lightly, & something good in you was back. It's gone now, but I'm glad it was back then.

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The Bus Without a Roof

We're riding along on the bus with no roof. It hadn't had a roof for a while. At first this seemed like a problem, but you know people can get almost used to anything, really. And we got almost used to it. People complained still, but we got almost used to it, you see. We learned how to talk a little louder, we learned how to shade our faces to the brightness. Everybody wore hats against the hot, hot sun, so hot. And we got used to the bus without the roof, it was the only way to get from there to there. We had to, everyone on that bus, had to get from there to there.

So there it was. Us on the bus without the roof. And this old fella was boasting & boasting to me, I don't know how we got to talking, I never know such things. But he was saying how he lived in this apartment with two girls, & one of the girls took a liking to him, but they decided to keep it a secret from the other girl.

And so once in a while he'd just pull her laughing, snickering into his room, & close the door, & turn up the phonograph, & they'd have themselves some fun for a while.

But the other one knew, listened. And the two girls had been best friends & now they weren't. This had come between them.

So I said to this old fella, *Did you do something about it, did you do the right thing? Did you take the other girl into your room, if she was willing & wanting?*

He said, *Yeah, but it wasn't the same. She knew it wasn't the same, I knew it wasn't the same.*

And of course the bus passes through Elliptical City at one point, it's what they call a detour, takes several days, I'm not sure why exactly why we had to do it to get from there to there because Elliptical City is nowhere near *either* there or there, but I will say it's some pretty country down there.

And so I said, *Are you still livin' with these two girls?*

And he said, *No, no, it all went down the night I pulled both of them into my room.*

Don't tell me, let me guess. They decided they liked each other better than you, didn't they?

He looked at me shocked, like I'd exposed his most uncomfortable secret. *Yeah, what do you think?*

I thought for a moment, longer moment, gave it some good long thought, & I said, *You know, brotha', I think this goddamn bus needs a roof.*

* * * * *

Going Down a Drain

It was just a fragment, nothing more. It was about a drain, going down the drain. Just a fragment, nothing more. Once down the drain, I find myself in a class of some kind, very tall building, way up high.

My classmates are now leading me down many flights. I just about lose them, lotta people, lotta stairs, lotta flights. I get to the classroom eventually, sure, & I don't know anything in the textbook that's sitting at my desk. I truly don't recognize it. I don't even know if I know the language, & the pictures don't help either.

But next to the textbook, kinda half slid under it, is an *Elliptical City Sunday Globe*. I open it up, not sure what else to do at this moment, & I start reading an article that seems to me to be very important. The longer I read it, the more important it seems to be to me.

It's a story about preparing a *philosophical meal*, all the courses, how to arrange the table, silverware, what plates to use, what lighting, should the windows be curtained or uncurtained, should there be music in the air?

Then the dream at that moment swoops me back down, as though I'm continuing along, & I'm on a bus with no roof, though there's blankets & things, in downtown Elliptical City. Waiting for the right stop to get off & it's very windy, very windy, the bus with no roof is sort of rocking back & forth & I barely remember everything I brought with me, as I get off the bus.

I'm clutching the Bear Blanket, but barely, & I hurry into a gas station nearby because I want to see that *philosophical meal* article again, & I hope they have the *Elliptical City Sunday Globe*.

It's very crowded in this gas station, the line's out the door, & I must admit I begin to slump at a certain point, & I begin to fall asleep, until I'm nudged awake by a cop.

I end up inside eventually, & I ask the cashier for the *Elliptical City Globe*, & a Red Rutabaga Tea, & he fetches both for me as though he's a waiter. And I get outside, & I find myself a payphone, & I call my beloved at our apartment in the Back Bay, & I say, "Lover, we're making ourselves a *philosophical meal* tonight."

* * * * *

Bookstore Apartments

It was years ago, some of you might remember, there was a thing in the city called *bookstore apartments*. Oh, it wasn't a big thing, it wasn't on the TV news or on the front page of your *Elliptical City Sunday Globe*, but it was a thing for some people.

You might say they loved books so much that they just wanted to live in books. So if you knew the right guy, you could arrange it. You'd live there, you'd work there, people would come in, they'd buy books, they'd read books, they'd talk about books. It was a *bookstore apartment*, that's what it was.

And so I'm roommates with my friend & his girlfriend, but he has a second girlfriend that she doesn't know about, because he lives in more than one of these *bookstore apartments*, he's kind of a sneaky snake, you might say, And I'm the only one lucky enough, so to speak, to know about his several *bookstore apartments*. There's more than two, maybe three, possibly four.

He's an English guy, so he has that accent the girls all go for, & some of them kind of just don't pay attention to the rest because that accent is sure something else. I admit that I go for it too, I'm not saying there's not something there to go for. But I've got other troubles of my own.

I have these two other friends, they're these older ladies, & they're constantly worrying about money. They live in the same building as the *bookstore apartment* I live & work in, but they seem to be very poor, even though I don't think they are. They're always trying to figure out their taxes using bank statement cards. The whole system they have rigged up is just very dubious & somewhat incoherent, &

I'm trying to help them out.

Sometimes what we'll do is we'll all pile into their old Emperor, in the back, & they'll tell the driver to just drive them around the edges of Elliptical City, & we'll sit in the back in the comfy, cozy Emperor. That's an old, old car, built when cars were thought to be like great ocean liners on wheels. So we'll drive around, & we'll huddle together, & I'll be looking at their bank statement cards & trying to study their taxes. Wondering on occasion: *why don't rich ladies like this, even if they think they're poor, just get an accountant? Why me? I live & work in a bookstore apartment! What do I know about these things?*

Then I notice one time that the Emperor has left Elliptical City entirely, & we are driving somewhere else different from where we were. We're out in the country, lots of empty fields & we're passing some very strange billboards. They seem to move & talk &, as I look a little closer, I see, oh, there are people living in the billboards too! Well, that's some fine new technologies.

The driver, he's new, didn't know to stay in the city, he tells me, *Yes, indeedly, you can customize your billboard to exactly the kind of living style you wish to pursue*

And I say, *Well, that's pretty amazing. That kind of makes my bookstore apartment look sort of old-fashioned.*

But then he turns to me & says, & I can see that he has the long ears of a dog, & the sharp eyes of a fox, & the beak of a robin, & he says, *No sir, your bookstore apartment is just fine.*

I wonder why he talks in this funny way. I wonder what exactly he is, & I don't know.

I sit back in the comfy, cozy seats in the back of the Emperor, & the ladies swarm around me again, smelling like cookies & old perfume, & we continue to study their taxes, & I vaguely wonder when my next shift is at the bookstore apartment, & if I should pick up some ChocoSmax along the way home.

* * * * *

I Have This Friend I've Known a Long Time, In Different Ways

I have this friend that I've known a long time, in different ways, someone I feel compelled to find & lose again. *Do you have someone like that? Someone that keeps coming & going?* We both kinda agree this is how it is. Years, minutes pass.

One time, when we first knew each other, I was trying to teach him something about Creatures, these magical little beings that I know, mostly in dreams but not completely. We're sitting on the roof of a brick building, many floors above the town. We're sitting with this little White Bunny with mezmering eyes.

She's looking at me. I'm looking at him. I hand her over. Now she's looking at him. He doesn't know what to think. This is not part of things he knows, this magickal White Bunny studying him as she is, & he's hearing what she's saying though she's not speaking aloud. I don't think he ever forgot that day, though he ran from it in his mind for awhile.

We were often there on top of that brick building high above the town. It was called Candidate Jennings Apartments. Neither one of us lived there, but we ended up there a lot. Things like that happen. If you're looking for a place to smoke the joint, if you're looking for a place to kiss a girl, you end up on the top of places like Candidate Jennings Apartments.

Another time, it had been a while, but we got back together. He was now very old, much older than me. We were walking along the river & the river sparkled strangely, many colors. Now he believed in many things that he hadn't believed in before. He was hoping he could visit with my White Bunny friend again, who he hoped maybe could now be his friend too.

We eventually did. Entered the White Woods, walked deep & deeper. And he chose never to return. *I've got too much to learn*, he said as we parted. *I don't know anything yet. She will show me.*

* * * * *

It's a Story of These Modern Times

Maybe it's from tomorrow, maybe it's from just around the calendar's corner. It's become a time when the phones you carry around to communicate, or show off, or whatever it is you do with them—leaning over them over & over again, hours on end, days on end, lifetimes on end—they're now required. There's now something called Happy App.

You got to do more than just carry them around & look at them. You got to do more than just update your blog & your popularity & your pictures & how fat your ass is.

No, there's more, because you're required to download something more than pictures or audio. Once a day, you prick your finger on a little hidden spot on your phone, & something downloads right into you.

They call it, informally, Happy App. You are rushed to a happy place in your memories—if you don't have one, one has been written up for you, & you are rushed there. You're there for what seems like a long long while, though it's seconds really. It calms you. It soothes you. You're OK again. *You're OK.*

Now, on the one hand, you could say there were *The Matrix* & *Brave New World* & other predictions of such things as Happy App to shield you from the coming disastrous end of the world. *Bad things to do so*, they warned.

But if you could really look out your world's window in this time just around the calendar's corner, you would see ceaseless darkness & death & suffering & pain & loss & blackness. No going back, & no going elsewhere.

So maybe what the crazier scientists talk about as being something that happened long ago, something they call the Unitary Consciousness—you, dreams, the world, all one—maybe that's coming again. But maybe not. Until then, soon, there will be Happy App.

Oh, & if you don't take your daily little prick of Happy App, you don't get any more. And good luck to you then. You can't borrow someone else's. You can't buy it on the black market. You can't cook it up yourself.

Could there have been another way? Fingers can be pointed at the powerful, yes, but everybody else too. Everybody who let things go for just another day till our days ran out.

So then you might say those that most brung us here had to step in again to offer new answers & solutions, best they could do as the world collapses. Not much but—

Don't forget to take your Happy App today!

* * * * *

It Was an Outdoor Classroom

This happened so many years ago, & I almost think maybe it happened in some other world, some other life, to some other person. It was an outdoor classroom, I'm not sure how it came about, didn't start as a classroom, just started as a Great Tree.

This tree was so great, it filled the park it was in with its shade. Its great roots spreading out from its trunk, its great limbs looking toward the sky, the musical green & golden fruits hanging from its branches. Yet somehow, over time, those who gathered around it could not help but begin to speak to one another, neither as strangers nor as friends but something else.

It's as though those borders & boundaries of people-folks, & their fences & morals & buffers, not only had these not merely fallen away, but it's like they *were never there*, under the shade & musical fruits, branches, leaves of this Great Tree.

They all flowed round & round its trunk, such that you might have said they were become like Creatures. They now saw each other distinctly & the same. Teachers came & went too, but more often



what happened is that different ones took the lead, spoke up, began to tell.

A few years later, I was traveling with this famous documentary director to the wasted landscape of his hometown. He had an affable way about him, but his intellect was fierce, not to be underestimated. Thought to be a friend of that Gate-Keeper, so of course he was like that.

So one time we're sitting around the campfire somewhere in the dregs & ruins of his hometown. We were on top of a still-standing brick building called Candidate Jennings Apartments, roasting our tasteless food.

And I'm telling him about this Great Tree, & all its wonders, & how people were. And he's listening very intently. His small glasses practically fog up with how closely he's listening.

And he looks sharply at me & says, *There are different kinds of Great Trees in this world & others.*

I say, *What do you mean?*

He gestures around the evening view of his desolate & torn hometown. Not a flower, not a fruit, hardly a color to be seen that wasn't damaged or pretty much done.

He says to me, *This is my Great Tree. But I'd like to see yours too sometime. Now let's get some sleep. Lots of interviews to do tomorrow.*

* * * * *

It Begins in a Lunchroom

There was this weird guy—not in looks, he looked ordinary—white shirt, black tie, dark trousers, big rainbow target on his butt, just like anybody else—but he kept trying to have lunch with women.

Meaning he would sort of mosey on up to them in the lunchroom with his tray, try to sit on down with them, or her—there were both kinds of women there—& it just wasn't good because you can't do that in a lunchroom full of two types of women.

And so I got in his face & said, *Look, what's your problem, man, where you coming from? I think you need to get along.* But he points to his tray, as though that explains all, appeals his case.

On this tray, there's these tiny little paper cups of pale green mouthwash, in profusion on this tray. So he wants to share lunch with them, or her &, as a kind of *hors d'ourve*, offer them, or her, a tiny paper cup of pale green mouthwash.

This all makes sense in his mind, but I just kind of send him out the door & I say, *Go down the hall, go to the lunchroom with the two types of men, & offer them the mouthwash.*

The woman he had been harassing, I'm not sure which type she is, but she wants to thank me. In fact, she wants to pay me for my help, but I refuse. I give a wave & then I leave. I walk down the hall to the barroom, & I walk in, & they dump beer on me.

It happens every time. Somehow I forget, since I don't go there very often, that that's what they do every time. It's kind of a ritual. Or maybe they just do it to me, I don't really know, but they dump beer on me, & then they sit me down between these two big guys, smiling weirdly, great big moustaches. Almost like three moustaches per guy, they're so big.

And we sit down, & a long story begins to tell itself, but I never remember these stories later.

I'm sitting there soaked in beer, I don't remember the story that's being told me, I know this, I won't remember it. It takes place deep in the White Woods, there's a sense of menace, it's not a safe place, but I don't know why. Why would the White Woods be dangerous?

I'm thinking to myself, *if only I could remember this dream, maybe I could wake up from it & not have to go the barroom anymore, & get beer dumped on me every single time, & listen to the story I can never remember, & then the lunchroom.*

*But I can't remember the dream, & I can't remember the story, & I don't remember that the beer gets dumped on me, & I encounter that guy with the mouthwash every single time.
Got a key, man, out of this? Got a key?*

* * * * *

I'm Sick Today This Morning

I wake up sick today, this morning, this early AM, & it reminds me of something that happened a long time ago, when I was a boy. I lived in an apartment, next door to an old man, who I was mostly scared of, because he was old. He was quiet, & he was tall, & I wasn't. I could hear him playing guitar & singing in his apartment, & I had no talents to sing or play or really do much but want.

There was this one time when I was home sick. Everyone had gone out for a while, not really sure why. I decided I wanted some hot cocoa to feel better, & I thought I could do it myself. I could boil the water, & put the packet of hot cocoa in, & stir it, & let it cool, & it would comfort me in my sickness.

But something went wrong, with the stove, with the water. I did something wrong & I panicked that I was going to burn everything down. So what happened was I ran next door & I pounded on the old man's door saying, *Please help, please help!*

I heard music, then silence, & then movement. Then he came to the door, & he saw my face &, though I had never seen him move fast at all, he was amazingly swift. He ran in a crazy fast hobble into my apartment & he turned off the stove, & he put the water in the sink, & he showed me how to wipe everything down so there wouldn't be any stains or problems later.

Then he smiled, & he left, but awhile later he came back & he handed me a small volume. He smiled a strange old man smile at me & he said, *I want you to read this. It might comfort you while you're recuperating. Goodbye.*

He left, & I got into bed, with just the little ruby lamp for light next to me on the bed stand. I opened the little volume & read the story about the boy who blew bubbles for fun & profit.

It was a story of a boy who, when he was young, didn't sleep well. His head made noises, whistles, groans, & sounds almost like voices. He'd wake up frequently so his dreams were very strange, & sometimes words came to him that he didn't quite understand.

He didn't talk much while awake, because he was afraid of the same thing happening then but, when he was about my age, his grandfather gave him a jar of soap bubbles & said, *You try that out.*

It seemed like the old man knew what the boy was going through, because what happened was that when he blew bubbles & they popped, they would make the sounds that were in him. Groans & whistles & sounds almost like voices. *It was amazing.*

But it wasn't really until he learned he could blow bubbles with words inside them that his fortunes began to change. He began to blow word bubbles &, as he got older, he began to blow word bubbles from his dreams.

He realized that they were wise wisdoms not from him but from somewhere, & he began to do this for others, when they needed comfort as he had needed comfort.

He would blow wise wisdom dream bubbles out, & it would comfort others, & he found his way in this world, & the profit he gained was that *other* kind of profit of course.

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Did You Ever End Up in One of Those Elevators

Did you ever end up in one of those elevators where you can get on just fine but you can only get off if you know the right sequence of numbers? And you have to know further that this sequence is of someone falling asleep?

Luckily, that day in the elevator, I was with a friend & he told me, whispering in my ear: 7-8-9-10, 10-9-8-10. *Very* lucky, I'd say.

So I got off the elevator & I walked into a cluttered chamber. Time doesn't pass because I'm a few strokes of paint on an old canvas in the corner of this cluttered chamber. I'm watching my future self get off that elevator, look around. He decides to pick up all the clutter. I'm watching.

Pulls up the weeds from the floor, gathers a lot of scraps of papers together, stands for the longest time looking at his old desk, not even wondering how it got here. Some things are not worth the wonder.

He begins to reassemble this chamber, though he keeps me in the corner, the old canvas of which I'm a few mere strokes. And he sits at the desk, hunched over, & he has about him an air of one who is not going to leave there for a long time.

* * * * *

Inside the Book There is a House

Inside the book, there is a house, & there's much music & noise in the house, inside the book. To escape the music & the noise inside the house, inside the book, you have to go deeper, find the inmost room. When you find the inmost room, you will wonder if is this really the party you've been wanting to go to, all these years?

The many faces are familiar. Old & familiar, recent & familiar. You see one who you like to call him the Traveling Troubadour. He just arrived, out of breath, guitar in hand, big smile on his face, blue eyes twinkling.

You think how you never know when you're going to see him these days. How it will happen, or for how long each time. You look at him smiling but serious & say, *what of the future? Is it set in stone?*

He thinks, takes a few exploratory breaths among his thoughts but, somehow, at that moment, you get separated, & you find yourself looking at a weird splotchy painting, standing next to two people that you don't know.

They're telling each other it's a bad painting, the painter painted his shame. Look at that cluttered chamber. Look at that portrait of himself, living in a soap bubble. Just those few rude strokes, hidden in the corner of the canvas. He painted his shame!

They look directly at you & say, *you should paint over it.*

One hands you a little jar of paint, the other hands you a kind of flat-edged knife. They say, *Paint over it!* You do, partway, but then you panic.

*Why am you doing this? They're against you now. Warning you away, laughing. **You have to nd the Traveling Troubadour.** You have to ask him if it's possible he might not die in the future. Is it set in stone? Or layers of paint that can be added to, subtracted, changed?*

* * * * *

There Is a Cackling Imp In My Cereal

There is a cackling imp in my cereal I'm trying not to eat. Oh yes, the card game has spread worldwide. The big vast card game involving LSD & dreams. Me sitting in a rocking chair, an old green

rocking chair, out on the big porch looking out to the world. *And what a game is going on, high & low, many colors, constant music!*

Money? *Ha.* Not everything is peaches & cream. Not everything is cackling imps in your cereal.

When I'm not here on this big porch looking out to the world, I return back to my one room apartment, knowing I have to move. There's no choice. The building I'm living in is now part of the game. Something else is going to happen here. They're not going to tear it down but I won't be living here no more.

I have no plan, nowhere to go, no one to take me in, & the washing machine that fills half of this one room apartment, it's what I do for a living, at least until I have to leave, overflows.

I just got to go. I'm still carrying along that cereal bowl & that cackling imp is still in the cereal. I still haven't finished it, I'm not sure how this morning is going to proceed.

I couldn't sit on that porch all day. They don't let you. *Get back in the game!* they say. So I leave behind my one room apartment, realizing there was nothing there for me. Not even the washing machine was worth my time. So I just left, & I started walking. Roads aren't like they used to be. They're not straight, they don't necessarily go anywhere anymore. It's all part of the game, the worldwide card game involving LSD & dreams.

I meet this scientist along the way. She's a nice enough lady, a little ragged around the edges, a little gray, not so certain as scientists get when they're in their greatest glories.

She tells me she's in search of her science. We talk about what this might mean, but she's not sure. I ask her if she ever had a science.

She says, *I had many. The chems, the bios, the astros. But somehow they all fell away from me, or I fell away from them.*

Was it the card game? I ask her as we walk along, the road doubling & trebling. That's when she takes out a box from her lab coat, frayed, soiled. The box had all sorts of symbols on it. There were scorch marks on it, a couple dents. It was a wooden box but it looked like it had sailed the seven seas. I look inside for a long time, & it shows me things I couldn't understand.

But then I blink & it's empty, but then I blink & it's full again, but then I blink & it's empty, but I blink & it's full again, but then I blink & it's empty, but I blink & it's full again, but I blink & it's empty, but I blink & it's full again, but I blink & it's empty—blur blur blur blur blur blur

* * * * *

Seems Like There's a Million Documents

Seems like there's a million documents laid before me all over this table. Every one needs attention, every one is confusing. I start to look at one, & it relates to another, & then I look at that 'nother, & it references one I can't find, & so I look around for the one I can't find, & I notice one that is kind of sort of the same but a different version, most of the language is the same, & then I look deeper into the whole thing, & realize that many of these documents are both the same & different, & I'm trying to figure out what that means.

They seem all related somehow, & so they connect to one thing, & what does that mean? I think, *Well, they're all paper, that's something, & I suppose they come from some tree somewhere, maybe many trees. And I lean back in my chair, it's a rickety chair, but holds me well enough, & I look around the room. It's a dim room but I can see OK.*

And I start to think, *Wow, there must be some Great Tree from which all the other trees grow, way down deep in the earth, & that Great Tree's growing now, & never ever is that beautiful Great Tree somewhere down deep at the heart of the world ever going to be chopped up & made into little scraps of paper that are incoherent & unimportant & unrelated & twisted together & sitting like these on my table.*

* * * * *

It Must Be Another **craz-z-zy** December

You know, it must be another **craz-z-zy** December, let me tell you. I have 'em all the time, once a year at least. So this time, goin' to a job, well it's a job interview, but I'm hopeful. I have my lucky socks on, & my lucky underwear on, & my lucky hat on, my lucky pinky ring on. I'm just all decked out in luck. But it is a **craz-z-zy** December, so either it's going help or who knows?

I have directions to the job interview, & it's a part of Elliptical City where I haven't been to, which is strange, because I feel like I've been to every part of the city in more ways than one. But very circuitous streets, odd buildings, they're not shaped exactly like buildings, they're more shaped liked trees, & mountains, & animals, & things.

The address on my little scrap of paper that I wrote out with my scratchy hand tells me that it's this parking garage I'm standing in front of, & this parking garage doesn't look like a regular run-of-the-mill kind of parking garage either. It's kind of oddly shaped for a parking garage, as though the vehicles that park within it are not automobile-shaped somehow.

So I go into the parking garage, & I walk & walk. It seems like miles that I'm walking in this parking garage. I do finally make it to a door at the very back of this strange parking garage & it says **Office** on it.

I walk in & there's just a desk, it's a round desk, not rectangular as you usually expect. There's an old-fashioned phone on the desk, the kind we haven't had in centuries on this planet anyway. It's one of those where you pick up the receiver & you talk into the little piece, & it's wired to the wall. I pick it up & say *hello?* & the voice on the other end is joyous!

I can't tell you any other way, it's a **craz-z-zy** December. That's when this happens every time. *Joyous!* Telling me happy things that I don't understand. I don't know the words, I don't know what he/she/it or they or them is/are saying, but it's joy, it's joy emanating from this strange telephone, & I listen & listen & I want to share in it.

I want to give it back. I want to harmonize with the joy of this strange voice on this strange telephone. I just don't know what to do so finally I just *hmmm*.

* * * * *

In the Cave of the Beast

Now this last story that is the hardest to tell straight because it has so many angles & curves, & one can only hope to try to make sense of any of them, much less all.

In the cave deep inside the Tangled Gate, one of the heroic Brothers come to save the world was listening to the Beast tell these strange wise wisdoms of the world. Let's you and I listen from where & when we are. Let's listen & try to remember.

The Beast said, in his strange growly animal-type voice:

*Life is suffering for some. The sufferers are the bricks & mortar of the climb elsewhere.
Or else we can learn the world is enough to save all.*

*We're not from here, so here's not important. It's transient.
Or it can be learned that here is gift.*

*Preserve nature, it is the privilege of the few to enjoy till moved on.
Or it is the magic to keep & perpetuate the world.*

*These ancient words were destroyed & more over time. Some now say the world is illusion,
others now found righteousness to uphold in faith over tolerance, certainly over wonder.*

The shine of some lives were built on the rags of others.

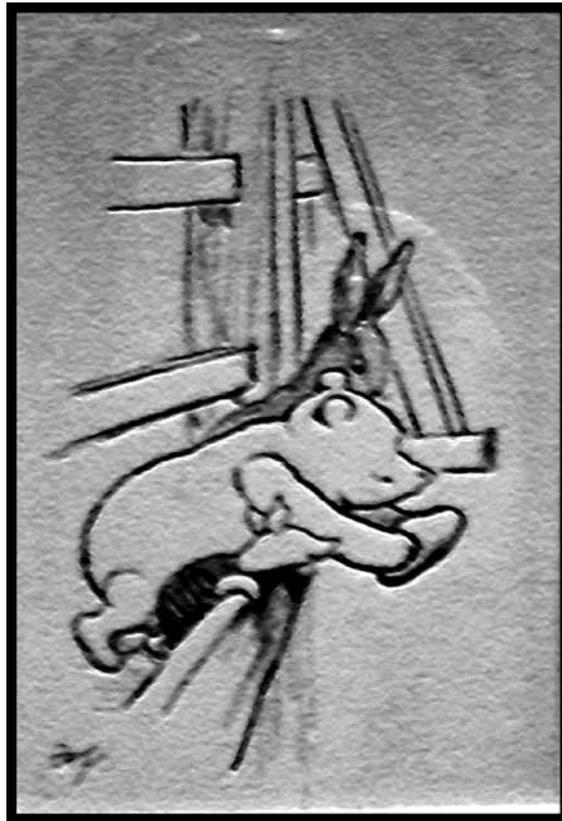
His words were said in strange ways, & over a long time, & the Brother was not the same as the man who'd walked into the cave. When he came out to the White Woods, it seemed as though it was somehow ten thousand years later than when he had walked in, even though that made no sense.

He found nearby houses that were built into the earth so that only their roofs were visible. He noticed there were round doors in the earth near them, & saw people pushing the doors open, & come climbing out of the stairs from below, & then later go climbing back in.

He was offered kindness & rest by some of these people, spent the night in one of these houses.

He had so much to think about, about the choices people make, about the world they wished to be.

4/21/2019
Milkrose, Mass.





Raymond Soulard, Jr.

Notes from New England

*"Please accept this ragged purse
of high notes."*

The following continues the series originally called Notes from New England, begun in issue 24-25 (Winter 1998), then revived in issue 59 (October 2006) as Notes from the Northwest, & appearing since issue 75 (October 2010) under its original title. It is intended as a gathering-place for observations of various lengths upon the world around me. It will be culled, like much of my writing, from my notebooks, & perhaps these thoughts will be expanded upon sometimes as well.

Dream Raps, Volume Nine

*"I tell you, there are more worlds,
and more doors to them,
than you will think of in many years!"
— George MacDonald, Lilith, 1895.*

I stand in a room surrounded by frozen rainbow waterfalls on all sides. I peer deep into those waterfalls with my eyes closed, & something compels me to open my mind's eye, but I still can't see anything. Something compels me to reach my finger out into the unseeable before me, & draw a circle, big enough to climb through as I push it in.

And I climb through this hole where there is a circle, & there is a room, & there are waterfalls' frozen rainbow splendor. And I find myself sitting in a city, underground city, on a train platform. Look down, there's a notebook in my hand, of course; my hand holding a black pen, of course; scribbling away, of course.

* * * * *

Draw a Circle in the Air

So here's how you do it. Draw a circle in the air with your finger. Choose carefully which finger. It will have an effect on the result. As you draw the circle with the well-chosen finger, concentrate on a where, & on a when, to create a door in the air before you.

The first time I did this, I remember it was the second night after I had moved to my hovel in ZombieTown. Sitting amidst my boxes of books & notebooks & vinyl LP records. But I had just been taught, & wanted to try. I passed through the door & came to a newsstand, on an empty city street. I tried to remember which where & when I had been concentrating on, but I could not remember.

I walk up to the newsstand, & see that all of the periodicals on its outside racks are filled with pictures. No words, none of them. There are sporting magazines, food magazines, fashion magazines, automobile magazines, lots & lots of pictures. No words, none at all.

*I walk into the newsstand, & go behind the unmanned counter. I crawl among the magazines, in sloppy piles on the floor, scrounging for words, finding none. Then I see that there's a trail of wrapped little candies on the ground. They're glowing a bit, & they lead me to a strange tunnel. I crawl through the tunnel for what seems like a long time, following the little candies, crunching them as I go along. They seem to be helpful little candies, get deep inside me, & then I start to feel like, **OK, I can do this**. They start to glow, & I begin to **hmmmmmm**.*

*Finally, I come out of the strange tunnel, & I stand up & brush myself off, finishing the last little candy, the last **crunch**. I look around & I'm in a glowing hallway. There are strange pictures on the wall. They remind me of the pictures on the magazines I'd seen in the newsstand. There's pictures of dashing sporting heroes & swift automobiles & lovely fashion models & beautiful banquets.*

*I roam down this glowing hallway &, turning a corner, I suddenly come to a white-faced pink cat radio on a small low table. I notice that my **hmmmming** & the radio's **hmmmming** are becoming completely the same. We are **hmmmming** together. Smile, walk on.*

*Then I come to a pretty turquoise-eyed lady, sitting on a comfortable divan. She bids me to join her with a gesture & a smile, & I do. I see in her lap a couple of comfortable Creatures, a rooster & a little froggy. She shows me next to her a table with her magic lantern machine. It projects pictures upon the wall. The pictures look like the magazine covers again. **What is connecting all these things?** I don't know.*

Who is that dashing sporting figure? I don't know.

Who is that famous actress? I don't know.

What is the make & model of that fine automobile? I don't know.

Who enjoyed that delicious-looking meal? I don't know.

She resumes the story she is telling, that I guess I unknowingly interrupted. But I begin to doze in the divan, with the nice lady & her friendly Creatures. I begin to dream. And I suppose it would not surprise you that, when I wake, I'm where I began, & the circle I drew in the air before me is fading from view.

* * * * *

It's a Puzzle I've Been Working On, Ten Years or More

It's a puzzle I've been working on for these ten years or more, & I still haven't solved it. Began one night when I was drowsing in my hovel in ZombieTown, been living there awhile. Sitting on my broken spring mattress, enjoying a big bowl of *ChocoSmax* (*Them's the Fax!*), & watching my favorite all-night TV show, *TripTown*, on my black & white Dü-Mónt television, with the Antennar 2000 on top. Then this commercial came on with this doctor who says he restores anything, & I thought, *wow, you can restore anything, can you?*

I started talking to my Dü-Mónt television, or maybe my Dü-Mónt television started talking back to me a little. Sometimes I have conversations with my black & white Dü-Mónt television, with the Antennar 2000 on top, yes, indeedy, I'm not too proud to say.

And the doctor said to me: *it was ten years ago or more that I was visiting this commune near Iconic Square. I would party, a lot of friendly people, Saturday afternoon in the universe, a beautiful one. There was this big house that didn't seem quite finished but had lots of room. And there was a big backyard, with a long table, like it was made out of a plank on logs with chairs of all sorts, metal & wood & brick, plastic. Everybody was*

gathered round this long, long table, sharing a meal.

The old man, there's always an old man at these communes, with the long tables, unfinished houses, he was bearded, sharp, together. He was praising things, some in English, some in other languages, I think at points he was whistling his praises and maybe even letting out a cackle for one or two.

*When he sat down, everyone smiled at him, pleased. Everyone joined in the meal. Lots of rutabega-~~&~~-mushroom soup all around. I was sitting with a couple of friendly guys, ~~&~~ they were telling me about something called **electric orange juice**. And they said to me, **you know what?** With **electric orange juice**, you can restore **anything!** They urged me have a cup.*

*So, alright then, I had a cup, ~~&~~ that is when I began about my mission of restoring things. From that day, that sunny afternoon, that unfinished house, that big back yard, that long table, those many smiling faces. They weren't all people, what do you think? At some point we were all **hmmmming** together, laughing, telling stories in many a tongue ~~&~~, somehow, when we held hands ~~&~~ paws ~~&~~ what-not, me smiling ~~&~~ merry, sipping that **electric orange juice**, every story made sense.*

So when I tell you, young man in your ZombieTown hovel, on that broken spring mattress, that I can restore things, you'd better listen! You better pay heed!

And his commercial ended there. No 800 number to call, no address to write to. No *but wait!* *There's more!* pitch. He just sorta nodded at me, no smile, & *TripTown* came back on. And I suppose I've been trying to puzzle out this doctor & his message these ten years or more.

* * * * *

Yesterday Didn't Begin Very Well

The world's been overrun by some kind of horror, & everyone flees, but most are killed. I wake up with someone in this dark half-fallen down housebarn, a stranger who became a companion along the way. Yesterday morning, we found ourselves trapped in an old factory, vast, no escape, going ever deeper in, hiding in corners, no shadow dark enough for what was coming.

And I had in my backpack something that is strangely more precious than anything else. It is a small, insulated pack, gray colored, a little stained. There's a paisley sticker on it that says, *Have a better tomorrow!* Inside this insulated little pack is a **cube** of ice cream. Cherry vanilla. I think it might be the last one in the world. And I don't wanna give it up for nobody. I have some idea that it will be important at some point. *I'm* certainly not going to dig in.

Deep in the warehouse, we find a ladder. My companion climbs up first. It goes up & up & up & up, *& up & up & up*. This ladder is impossibly tall but, I realize, after several hours of climbing, we are far from that warehouse danger. We just keep climbing.

I remember back before the world ended, there were people who were called *asexual*, & I think my companion is that way. She seems to love all, but not any in an erotic way. It's calming. It's helped me become someone better than I was, someone better than I ever would have been had the world not ended.

Arrived finally to this housebarn. We're both sitting up now, awake from exhaustion naps. She looks

at me & says, *My dream was among living metaphors, everything literal & symbolic. Grass, soil, people, all literal & symbolic.*

I laugh & say, *I can't match that. I had a dream that I had a pen-sized vacuum & I was chasing after a brilliantly colored cockroach along a wall. Then I catch it, but then it talks me out of vacuuming it. I don't know how. It's a fast talking cockroach.*

She laughs too, then says, *Is it still safe?* I check the pack, the fake bottom where we keep it. **Cube of cherry vanilla, sealed up, safe as anything.**

She stands up. I stand up. We get ready for a better day.

* * * * *

I Have an Apartment, Couple of Large Rooms

My beloved & I are hosting the Jellicle Literary Guild at a long table in our new two-room apartment. It's a full crowd, all the friends of old. Poetry, guitars, lotta laughs. At one point, I want a photo of everyone to put on the cover of *The Cenacle*. Someone ducks out of it, though. Someone always does. Eventually they drift from the long table, now more wanting to socialize on the old beautiful green couch, with the lovely crimson & electric blue blankets draped on it. I'm wondering, as I usually do at these events, *how can more writing be shared tonight?*

But people are talking now, losing interest. It was a good time, but they soon have all left. This new apartment has two long rooms, more than my old hovel by a country mile. I realize I've not really gone into the other room much. The door to it is hard to jiggle open, even when unlocked. But I do, it's time. Bring a flashlight too, since the light fixtures are all empty of light bulbs. On my beloved's to-do list. The two rooms are perpendicular to each other, so I am entering from the middle of this long room to the front end of that one.

There are bookcases that I don't remember from seeing it the first time. They are mostly empty, have random, dusty, fairly uninteresting titles, like the kind a thrift store might not even sell. My beloved joins me too, as do a few sniffing curious Creatures. MeZmer the White Bunny, Bellla the bloo-&-pink piglet. I wonder how we will fill up those mostly empty bookcases? We don't have enough books of our own, back in the other room.

We pass by many larger & larger bookcases, ever higher ceilings. For a moment I think of my dreams of the Attic. The books on the larger bookcases we come to seem nicer & nicer.

We keep walking & walking, past brown walls of maps & stacks of film canisters. One map looks like it depicts the Ancient Six Islands, when they were clustered together. One canister of film is labeled **RemoteLand – GateKeeper Copy Only**. But it's empty. Alas.

Then suddenly, no door, we come outside to a cement bridge. Follow it across & come to a very crowded old-timey-looking bookstore. There's also a Mulronie's Original Genuine Gourmet Space Pirate Burgers! with its crazy neon pink sign.

We cross the bridge back to our endless room. I worry there's no actual door to close off our library from here. I worry about how we're going to fill in those bookcases. Even the many shiny-covered Secret



Books we share with the Creatures are pretty small in all.

As we are returning, I stop & look at a little book with an odd title, *Wyrd Poems from 1928*. I pick a page to read to my beloved & these Creatures:

*I see something. I see my face across time.
Me & not me. I exist multiply across space & time. Time is not linear.
And I think, no, this is not just me, this is others,
many others, who exist multiply through space & time, throughout all of history &
if that's possible, maybe history could be changed,
deaths could be averted.*

She listens, finger on chin, smiles. The Creatures sniff twice. I turn the pages & read another to them:

*Art she lives & mourns & bores
& wants & sexes & rolls & jumps
& skies & seas & a Rainbow Wheel stretching far.
Art & I love you. Art & I dance you.
Art & you spit me, & smile. Art & you gesture me near,
nearer, a breath's closest . . . Art, you gesture me on!*

I think they like that one too. I put the volume back, & we walk on. There's a door I notice among the bookcases. It's not a very remarkable door, half-hidden. Locked. I think it leads to the hotel next door. There is music coming through it though. A man's lovely, low voice, singing over & over again: *loss can be gain, loss can be gain, loss can be gain, pleasure from pain, pleasure from pain, pleasure from pain . . .*

* * * * *

Drowsing in My Hovel

Deep in wintertime ZombieTown. Like most hovels, it is a single room. It is, however, a *high-class hovel*, because it has a full window. So I can watch the snow falling outside, & the wind blowing, & the icy patterns forming on the window.

It does not have heat, per se, though I have a kinda-sorta, after a fashion, electrical heater. It operates on batteries & a crank. I sometimes wonder if this heater that I'm using is offering me more heat in just the cranking, because you have to crank real hard, & *then* the heat lasts for a few minutes, & *then* it dies, & *then* you have to add more batteries.

Well, it's tough. I have lovely blankets, a crimson one & an electric blue one. I also tend to walk around my hovel a lot, such as you can walk around a hovel, with many shirts & pants on, & shoes & socks. I wear my hat & gloves too. But it's *my* high-class hovel, one full window. Better than how I was living back in Wyrd Godd Town.

So I'm watching the gridiron match (*the football match* as they call it in big-time Elliptical City) on my Dü-Mónt black & white television, with the Antennar 2000 on top. I begin to doze, perhaps to dream. Rouse myself after every quarter of the gridiron match to crank & crank & crank, *crank & crank & crank* my heater. The snow has been falling & falling all weekend. I've watched it pile higher, up to &

halfway over my full window.

Come halftime, I change the channel with the stick I made to do that (with electrical tape, so not to get shocked), & drift into a movie. They seem to alternate somehow, mix together. Sometimes it almost seems as though the stars of the gridiron are starring in the movie. Only it's a movie about a bank robbery, not about a gridiron match.

The bank robber is, I think, the hotshot rookie golden-haired tight end in the gridiron match, anointed on this earth to win champ-eeen-ship after champ-eeen-ship. But he's a bank robber. He travels from town to town, robbing & sending money back to his family.

Now you could ask: *what kind of family is he sending it back to?* And I don't know if you could say exactly how he is related to all these family members. Seems like they are all just folks he knew along the way, from his boyhood on, who ended up with him in a hovel in the White Woods. Kind of a *grand hovel*, in my opinion. They have a fireplace, so they're *off the charts* in terms of hovels.

Anyway, they live in this grand hovel far away, in the White Woods, & he sends them money. He travels to each town whose bank he robs carrying a leaf-decorated & golden-handled travel bag. It's very stylish. He found it at a thrift store when his robbery travels first began. It seemed like a good way to transport his ill-gotten loot.

And now he has a new partner, a sort of jittery blonde woman. I couldn't exactly say how he picked her up. I think there was a fumble during that part of the movie so I missed how they met. What happens next is that he comes to this new town, with the jittery woman, & they descend into the main street in the center of town by this escalator. Now you could ask: *how is there an escalator in the center of this town?* But that's how they arrive to it, by an escalator that they rode down, & now they're in the center of town looking for the bank to rob.

The jittery woman is jittering, tugging at her hair, uncertain, mumbling about **cubes** of ice cream? But she plays a key role in the bank robberies. See there's a gaggle of cops over there, laughing in front of that bakery, as is not surprising? Meanwhile, the bank robber & his new partner are walking right straight into the bank that they finally espy across the street, yelling, directing, looking for the money.

It's kind of a strange bank, though, like both a bank & an auto garage. It's a weird little town. They seem to do things differently here, no doubt. The bank robber & his partner are in the auto garage, but the mechanics very friendly send them along to the bank part. The bank robber goes in there with his leaf-decorated & golden-handled travel bag, & his jittery partner, & *that's* when her usefulness comes into play.

He nods to her three times, & then raises his nose once, & she **SCREAMMMMMMMNMMMMMS** but much *much* longer. She keeps going. She does not stop. She *screams* & *screams* & *screams*, & her *screams* are so loud, & so disorientating, that no one in the town, including the cops, is able to move or think. They just drop to the ground, & cover their ears, & moan in pain. He finally finds the money, floating in a pool of black water, possibly motor oil, & it takes him a while to pluck it out, dollar by dollar.

Then, when the leaf-decorated & golden-handled travel bag is filled, he grabs her hand, shakes her a little, she's still in her what you might call **screaming** fugue, & they rush through the scared & paralyzed town, & grab that escalator, & up they go. Now you could ask: *to where?*

Aren't you paying attention? *To the next town, of course.*

* * * * *

Wyrd Godd Town

It had been years that I have been away. The memories of it confused & conflicting. And I never thought I'd go back to Wyrd Godd Town, but here I was, in one of the old raggedy seats, on this sort of rickety train to Wyrd Godd Town. Train was crowded, didn't used to be. Lot of folks with me going to Wyrd Godd Town.

Almost seemed more like a TV show this time than a profoundly different reality, but everybody on the train was friendly enough. I stood up & started telling the story about what put me on this train years ago, riding *away* from Wyrd Godd Town. And about who I was going back to find.

I had an office job, I say, where sometimes I ended up with some or no clothes on. Never knew how. One time, I got some kind of awful green stuff on me. Half-nekkid, covered in green stuff. I won't say what kind of stuff, because there are ladies & gentlemen here in the audience on this train to Wyrd Godd Town.

So I got home to my rooming house. It was like this vast dormitory. Why was I living there? I had an office job. Weren't things hard enough? It's late, very late. I'd worked late hours & came to the huge laundry room. It's busy, so busy, 3, 4 in the morning, every washer & dryer is being used. How vast was this dormitory anyway?

But finally I manage to find one free, & I put in my jeans, covered in the awful green stuff (I won't say what kind of stuff) & while I'm waiting for them to wash, I walk back to my room. There's this woman visiting. I'm not sure how I know her, I'm not really sure who she is, but she visits quite often. This time she looks at me, in my boxer shorts with the crazy laughing pandy bears all over them, & just laughs. Not another word.

I don't quite remember her name, never quite do, but she brings me books. You see, somewhere along the way, I showed up at the library one time, half-nekkid. Had a problem on the town escalator. Got stuck halfway. Well, anyhow, that was the end of my privileges there. They couldn't have that kind of thing going on.

*She worked at the library. Maybe she was sympathetic to me from then on. She saw I meant no harm. So she brought me books. Strange books, I never know what. Novels, biographies, textbooks, technical manuals, lots of true crime books. I find it hard to return **Aftermath** by Cosmic Early & **Nazi Jailbait Bitch** back to her.*

*Soon she always had to leave, to take care of her grandma, as she called her. She'd say, **Nice visiting with you but I have to go take care of my grandma.***

I nod. This is how these visits usually ended. They're friendly enough. But then I think of the Attic up there, that I've visited so many times in dreams. I think I could show this lady, my friend the librarian, in thanks for all these books she brings me, this wonderful endless Attic. We could cluster dream to there.

I don't say anything though. Maybe next time I'll get up my gumption. I'm kind of shy, especially in my weird boxer briefs, jeans washing, & half-nekkid at work. Things are just unstable, this dormitory, I don't even know if I belong here. I'm trying to work all this out. Maybe taking this lady librarian friend to the Attic is just a little too much.

So she's about to leave & then I notice, & she notices, that there's something by the door of my room. It's a

suitcase, & she remembers, oh yeah, & she brings it over to my old mattress with the thin pillow & the lovely crimson & electric blue blankets. She opens it up & it's a suitcase full of weird masks, handcrafted. They kind of terrify me. The noses seem to go on too long or too multiply. The eyes sink deep & pierce hard, & they're just disturbing. I say, **Did you make those?**

She laughs & replies, **No, no, my friend. My grandma, Nana Wordsley, made them, when I was little. She made them all the time. She'd sit at our front window, & she'd watch people pass by, & she'd say to me, get me my materials! & I knew that she was going to make a mask out of what she'd seen, those people passing by. And I just thought I'd bring them by & show them to you.**

Well, now I'm careful, & I want to say they're pretty or beautiful, but then I accidentally say, **ey're terrifying lady librarian!** She laughs & says, **Of course they're terrifying! My grandma said the world is terrifying! And the only way you can deal with this terrifying world is to make a terrifying response. is is how she did it! Don't you understand?**

So I'm thinking about this for a moment when there's a sound of hecklers out my window. They're shouting & yelling. I think it's something about me being half-nekkid at work, or maybe something about my jeans, I don't know. There's a pounding at my door, which I'd shut to look at Grandma Nana's terrifying facemasks, & there's someone out there freaking out, trying to get in. And I don't know what's going on—

someone on the train to Wyrld Godd Town stands up finally, grabs my shoulder, hugs me, tight, & I realize, *oh, it's OK. I'm on the train to Wyrld Godd Town, but I'm not in that situation I was telling them all about.* And I thank him, & a few others stand up, & they hug me too. It seems like it's going to be OK, at least for the moment.

Because bad things happened in that dormitory right after, & if they hadn't stopped me I would've kept talking till I told them all, & I don't think it would've helped anybody if I had. I think it's time to just settle back in this raggedy seat on this sort of rickety train, & just enjoy the rest of the ride in my return back to Wyrld Godd Town. *Try to find the Lady Librarian? Maybe have a better tomorrow?*

* * * * *

Some Say That The **Hmmmmmm**

Some say that the **Hmmmmmm** is like the veins of the world. One can trace & follow their patterns, & there are so many secrets to be discovered. I've been down among the roots of the **Great Tree at the Heart of the World** for a long time now, & sometimes I forget there is a world above & beyond the roots of the **Great Tree**.

I travel, of course, with Creatures. They are with me here amongst the roots of the **Great Tree**. The two bloo-eyed Kittees, Jonny & Jonny, & their Friend Fish, Murmur, drive me in their famous Boat-Wagon. The blue-and-pink piglet Bellla, with her tricky smile & merry eyes, is with us too. She & I sit in the back seat of the Boat-Wagon, all of us always buckled in. *Safety first!*

When we encounter individuals of various kinds, Bellla likes it when I find a lull in the conversation & pull her out suddenly from the shirt pocket in my green plaid jacket, & reveal her, *out of the blue-and-pink*, as it were. Some are shocked, some amused.

Occasionally I remember that, somewhere back there, is my sleeping self. This is my *hmmmming* vein,

from here back to that world up there, out there. But I don't miss any of it when I'm here. I don't miss anything. I have found many answers to the greatest question, *Why is there something instead of nothing?* And let me tell you, there are *ever more* answers to be found!

* * * * *

Deeper, Stranger, More Complex

Here goes. Like a recurring dream, this feels like familiar light, anger, revenge, emptiness, loss. I find myself half-awake, with my beloved, in a strange hotel. Seems like it's a mile high. Wasn't our apartment next door?

Half awake, I look at her lying close next to me, & I say *I love you* very softly, & she says, *shhhhhhh*.

I can't imagine why she would say that at that moment, but then she nudges me a little bit, & I look over, & I see the other two people sleeping in this bed. A man & a woman. The woman half-nekkid. I sit right up, stir us all.

And my beloved says, *you were sound asleep. They came & said these two had nowhere else to go. The rooms are full, all booked. They said if we didn't say yes, we'd have to pay more.*

I nod. *What else is there to do?* Elliptical City can be like that.

* * * * *

Maris Monkey

*This is how it began on that far-in-the-future **Starship Victoriana**. It began with Maris Monkey. Were those famous Space Heroes, Mulronie the Space Pirate & Commander Cacklebird, flying together in the Commander's **Space Tugboat (TOOT! TOOT!)**, sent to help Maris Monkey or was Maris Monkey sent to help those famous Space Heroes?*

*Anyway, something went wrong. It wasn't intentional, but you see when Maris Monkey came aboard that far-in-the-future **Starship Victoriana**, when she was docked at Outer Space City, she brought demons on board. And the demons possessed the officers of the **Victoriana**. It was then no longer a peaceful starship exploring the galaxies & the universes & the stars & the quasars & the pulsars. It was a warship.*

The demons directed a bloody killing swathe across the eons. Each time they encountered another craft, or landed on a new planet, no matter how they were greeted, with kindness or paranoia or suspicion, they always took it the worst possible way. Every encounter was a threat, a danger that had to be destroyed—

I look up from my book, at the lovely turquoise eyes of my beloved in this strange old dusty Red Dog Diner. *I notice that a long-tailed insect has pricked her finger & entered partway. The rest elongates into a strange being that now lives in a tiny fenced-off garden on the table at which we sit. It drinks & grows fatter & fatter, & I try to smash it but can't. It gets so fat it looks like it will explode.*

Snap! Snap! Snap! I wake up, she's OK. It's just the dusty Red Dog Diner. I look back down at my book, & I see that *the Monkey & the Space Heroes have taken charge of the situation. The Monkey extended a long tendril into each officer of that far-in-the-future **Starship Victoriana**, & sucked out the demons, spat them*

on the floor. Those famous Space Heroes gathered these demons in a wicker basket with a solid top, & brought this to a quarantined area of the starship.

The famous Space Heroes receive many thanks, & then travel on in their **Space Tugboat (TOOT! TOOT!)**. The Monkey declares to the officers that she will work with the demons in the quarantined area until they are ready to offer both an apology, & a willingness to turn another way.

The Monkey I've been reading about for so long enters the quarantined area, & the officers wonder what will be her fate.

* * * * *

I Wonder About the Worldwide Conspiracy

I wonder about the worldwide conspiracy of men, women, events, places, occurrences. These things are not easy to reckon or deduce: *what's real, what's imagined, what's wished for, what's possible*. I don't have any answers, not a one, not yours, not mine, not anyone else's, just a thought to travel through life with a changing set of questions, & a changing set of ideas about those questions.

Is there really a worldwide conspiracy, men, women, events, places, occurrences? Is there any purpose to it? Is it conscious, or is it more instinctual? I've asked you, but will you tell me? Is your set of ideas based on your current set of questions? Are all we have questions & ideas?

I don't know, & I don't know if it's possible to find out. But maybe there's something to all this, to be known, if one reaches one's hand a little further. One looks a little stranger. One listens otherwise.

* * * * *

I'm in an Apartment Lobby, Maybe a Cafe

This little story begins in an apartment lobby, sort of a café. Someone passes me quickly, short man dressed in seven colors. He's going up to see an old friend of mine, who I can't go up to see anymore. Bringing him a bouquet of plastic flowers that jingle.

They come back down, & now my ex-old friend's holding the bouquet. They're both smiling & laughing & telling jokes in a language I can't begin to understand. I don't even know if it's really words. *Whistles? Cackles?*

Anyway, I leave. I take all my bags. I've got a lot of them, & I leave. I walk out into the night, down the street, all the stores strange to me, selling things I don't understand.

But then there's a place with a picture of breakfast food in the window. And a smiling Sun & cool-shaded Moon holding ray of light hands, so I guess it's breakfast all the time. I go on in, sit down at one of the tables, pick up the menu before me, see it has a single picture of breakfast food. *All of it.*

Apparently you order one meal, but it contains everything. You got your *eggs*, you got your *bacon*, you got your *sausage*, you got your *toast*, you got your *pancakes*, you got your *waffles*, many kinds of *sides* & *syrops* to pour on or eat separately. You got your *juice*, you got your *milk*, you got your *coffee*. I'm distracted from my breakfast studies when a man at a nearby table turns to me & smiles, winks his third

eye at me, then gets up & hurries away.

I turn back to my breakfast, just arrived, but then I'm distracted by something else. I have to stand up & leave my many bags & breakfast because there's a noise in the back. I go into the back room & find not a kitchen but just a sort of weird office.

There's several of them there, & I cough, hoping they don't tell me to get out right away. But they don't. They're studying whatever's going on through the back window, through these tiny binoculars they pass back & forth.

And I, *whatever*, I gotta return to my bags & my breakfast. *But they're gone!* Table's cleared, & my bags are moved over near the door. My long woolen overcoat too, yah it's a little long & a little old, drags along the ground a bit, not seen its best days in a while. *But who has? Who comes into a place like this, ends up distracted in the back room/office?*

I grab all my bags, walk outside. I got a few bites of breakfast in there anyway. Look around, & the buildings all around me are folding into themselves, *they're imploding!* I see walls of dust rising & falling.

Why doesn't my friend like me anymore?

* * * * *

I'm Living in One of Those Little Boxes

Imagine a world in which all of your loved ones have been taken away from you, not by tragic death, nor by the variables of the human heart, but by military order, by one man's bitter, raging anger. He'd grown tired of people's love not all being directed toward him, *all of it*, so he separated not just the poor, not just the vulnerable, but *everybody*. Everyone was separated from everyone else.

I live in one of those little boxes, **cubes** people like to call them, where everyone lives now. Six-foot-by-six-foot-by-six-foot. Each of us is allowed three possessions. I have my beat-up & beloved copy of *Aftermath with Additional Appendices & New Dream Fragments* by Cosmic Early. I have my roll. Everyone has a roll. It's a keyboard, you know, rolls up. You unroll it, click the **on** button, & the whole world is there before your eyes, at least what he allows you to see of it. And of course he follows you, or maybe just his algorithms do, I don't know, but the roll is required.

For a long time, I haven't known what to pick as my third item, & then one night I fell asleep & I actually had a dream. I hadn't had a dream in a long time. Those weren't much around either, anymore. They were suppressed, in the food, the water, because they were not about loving him.

But I had a dream anyway, & in this dream a Creature, a White Bunny, comes to me in my **cube**, with her shining eyes, & her wonderfully empathetic face.

She looks at me for a lingering moment with her meZmering eyes, as though we are familiar to one another, or might have been at one time. I shake my head, just a little, sadly, & she turns & hops away. Pauses to wait for me, & I follow. We enter these strangely glowing & beautiful White Woods, as open to the world as my **cube** is closed up tight.

We reach a clearing lit with full moonlight. Shaped like a, um, *temple*? Is that the right word? Though I

sense she's not one to speak the English much often, the White Bunny hops into my grasp & whispers a word in my ear, as I'm waking up, & that's my third possession, because it allows me to return here & many more places, in dreams, any night I wish. *Ha ha ha.*

* * * * *

A Tree Stump in a Clearing in the White Woods

You are in the White Woods, deep in the White Woods, where yet there is no center, nor far edge. You are deep in the White Woods, & you come to a tree stump in a kind of clearing. Not a deliberate clearing, not a random clearing. Shaped like a temple in the full moonlight. *What does that mean?* I don't know.

And there is a tree stump, & it's hollow, yet not empty. It's filled with water. *Rain water?* It hasn't rained. But the water looks fresh, undusted, clear, down to a very dark & ambiguous bottom.

So you look down into this tree stump, but not closely enough. You get down on your hands & knees, & *really* look down deep into this tree stump.

At first, you don't see a thing, not a thing. But then, as you look closer, you see your reflection, not on the surface, but somewhere way down below. *Down deeper in than it seems possible.* It's not that small down there anymore. A memory comes over you, as you look down deep into this tree stump that shouldn't be that deep.

It's an old memory. *Is it yours?* You find yourself holding it, lightly, upon your fingertips, like a many-colored soap bubble. You look into it, & you see a brown plane, vast, empty at first, & then a face you knew long ago, & a sound, a single musical note, but one dear to your heart-bone. *A radio?*

You shudder & begin to cry into this memory, into this stump, in these White Woods, down deep in them, no center, no far edge. You begin to cry great wailing cries, your tears fall into this water, & it begins to release you. *It begins to release you.* But because you are you, & not someone else, it gives you a gift that is for you, & no one else.

You stand, look around, then find in your hand a black pen & a blank piece of paper.

* * * * *

They Say It Was the Old Football Tight End . . .

They say it was the old football tight end who began pushing back against the violence in this town. He was a big man, always been. He had a lot of violence in himself too, spent it out for years on the playing field. Catching passes, knocking guys down. He understood it, in other words, he understood its power & lure & trap. And then one day, he came out of his gated home with a toolbox. First thing he did, he took down the gate, piece by piece, screw by screw. His home was no longer gated.

I live over there a-ways, kind of a party house. I rent the room in the far corner (the side of the house that's *always about* to get finished), bout as big as the bed I sleep in. Many people here have grown bored of the violence in Wyr'd Godd Town, & so ignore it. I suppose that's another approach. People wander round in costumes, bathrobes, cheerleader outfits, fur, strange white imp masks, but nobody's happy,

nobody's delighted. *What kind of party house is this anyway?*

But I look through my very tiny window & see the old football tight end doing what he's doing with the gate. I crawl out of my bed/room, walk by the various bored people in their costumes & masks, come outside & follow the old football tight end.

Come to a field, it's never much been used. But he has called many into it, all sorts of smiling people, they're from afar, but they heard his call. Now they're gathered in great crowds. He's ready to address the violence in him, around him, on the football field, & elsewhere. He waves a big hand, leads us all up a hill, urges us all to *gather round & take a look down the other side of that hill.*

And what's down there is so shiny & strange that we're not even sure what it is, but I can tell you this much so far. *It is a lot better* than furred & cheerleader-outfitted & masked but *boring* roommates. And violence everywhere, for that matter.

* * * * *

I wake . . . from something . . . Is it a dream? I don't know . . .

I wake from something, is it a dream? I don't know. I don't know if it's a dream. In it, Bags End was gone. Creature Common was gone. Everything was gone. All felt neutral & still. Calm, but not good. *Was it a dream?* I don't know. I look around. Oh, here I am, *grrroan, sorry*, in my sickness, on my cot next to Outer Space City. *Grrroan. Sorry.*

I'm in a room that is filled almost to the edges with a miniature city. Now in the olden times, a miniature city would have been a model of something bigger. *Grrroan. Sorry.* No, it's all happening down there, in Outer Space City. *Grrroan. Sorry.* It's something in the air here. I have slept in this room too long.

I watch this city from above, with tiny binoculars that I fit on the very edge of my nose. They're doing something down below that just might get all of us out of Outer Space City. It's not a good place. *It's got a good name*, you might say, *so how could it not be a good place?* It's not. It's got demons. It sinks, closer & closer to its demise, every day. Gravities all around are tugging harder at its failing engines.

And yet I look down into that miniature city & I see inventions. I see brilliant geniuses hurrying back & forth. They are building an Outer Space City that will not eventually crash due to the gravities. It will expel the demons, one way or another. And I think: *how do I get down there?* *Grrroan. Sorry.* OK, OK, here's why I'm sick. I've been drinking some of that illegal black market Mi-Nee powder. It's supposed to mini-fy you. It hasn't mini-fy'ed me yet, but I drink it a lot, as you can tell. *Grrroan. Sorry.*

Now wake up! You don't live in Outer Space City! Your hope is not drinking awful tasting Mi-Nee powder! Wake up! Wake up! Wake up! Wake up! Wake up! Wake up!

* * * * *

I'm in a White Room

I'm in a white room, but with eyes closed, it is kind of like traveling without moving. As I become better, I am able to navigate without hitting the walls, & travel far. I'm able to scale up & over & onto the ceiling, which becomes the floor or wall. Sometimes I stumble, I crash, & then I lay simply in a



white room. *Is it to a prison or a medical room where I'm bound? Is it where my body really is or is it a projection from somewhere else too?*

I get up. Let me try this again. Close my eyes, begin to move forward. Find myself floating in a kind of deep outer space, eons pass by, fear tugs at me, but cannot hold. *I float, & I float, & I float & now, finally, I come to somewhere in the far reaches of outer space.*

There's a handmade sign along the road, welcoming all to the *Motorcyclist Club's Picnic*. Lots of longhairs, leather jackets, leather pants, leather boots, but everyone's friendly. They offer me food, call me *brother*. Why, there's a bluegrass band setting up at the far end of this natural amphitheater. It's where bluegrass *should* be played.

I sit for a moment against a tree. People are smiling at me, they don't know me from Adam, as the saying goes, but doesn't matter to them. One friendly fellow comes over, he's a big guy. Six & a half feet tall or taller, 300 pounds if an ounce. He brings me over a bowl of soup & he says, *Brother, I think you should try a little bit of this rutabega-&-mushroom soup because, let me tell you, I can see by your face that this might just be the cure for what ails ya.*

I thank him, knowing no good words to say, & I begin to sip my rutabega-&-mushroom soup. Find myself, my attention, drifting from the wonderful bluegrass band down there, jumping around, fiddles & banjos, upright basses, *everybody singing, everybody clapping, everybody dancing free*. Find my attention drifting upwards, & there is that ship overhead.

Oh, right. That's where I am right now. That's where I ended up. I can't tell you how. But I'm up there, & there's a white room, & in that white room I've traveled far without much moving. And I came here, to this spot, in this big field, this rutabega-&-mushroom soup, & those friendly longhairs, & that wonderful bluegrass band. How do you think that all works?

I finish my rutabega-&-mushroom soup, & give a big wave goodbye to all the longhairs, so they know I'm appreciative. I even give a wave to the bluegrass band, & they strum up a little flourish for me to depart by. There's no stage, there never was. I walk away smiling.

Find myself walking through an empty, vast playground. Alongside me, on one side of the path, there's swings, there's a tetherball court. Come to a wall on the other side of the path, 10, 15, 20 feet high, & it's textured. I seem to recall that it's a kind of game you play where you're trying to travel from one end of the wall to the other, & you do it by throwing the ball against the textured wall. But the textured wall will knock the ball back where it does, & two teams are trying to go from one end to the other. I think it's called **Stick-it**.

I come out of the playground eventually, & I sit down on a bench. It's just a sort of empty space & I close my eyes & begin to *hmmm*. Open my eyes, back in the white room, but it's OK. It's OK this time. *I got this navigation*. Navigating with my mind, navigating with my heart, navigating with my feet. Trying to play them all together, high & happy, all attention, like that wonderful bluegrass band back there.

* * * * *

It Was an Old Spaceship, Very Old

It was an old spaceship, very old. It's like the kind of spaceship that you could see once had been great & proud, sleek. I never knew what its name was because someone had spray-painted **Feebletons** across whatever its name had been. I never knew what that meant, never heard anyone talk about **Feebletons**, whatever they are. I did find a playing card once, with a picture of a funny little spaceship.

The ship was decayed, but it kept getting bigger. It's like other spaceships were welded on to it so more people could travel along. More goods. A whole kind of weird little civilization rose up of people who'd always lived on this ship, **Feebletons**.

I lived in the garden maze. I was pretty much the only one who knew how to get around it, how to get in, & deeper in, & then back, if I chose to. Somewhere in the garden maze, I'm not gonna give you coordinates, so don't ask, there's a game going on at night. Torches light up the open area of the maze where it occurs.

We called it **Stick**. It's sort of like that baseball game they used to play, but not really. Too many other kinds of rules have been welded on to the game. Just to give you an example: there's a bell on the bat, & the bell doesn't make the bat any easier to wield. In fact, it makes it much harder, but that seems to be part of **Stick**.

And so I lived in the garden maze for a long time. Occasionally I get my news of more spaceships being welded on to **Feebletons** as it traveled along, but I'd now found somewhere far more interesting than any of that.

I'd come across a strange clearing inside the garden maze, & within that strange clearing there was a vast desert. I explored it bit by bit, but I worried that if I went too far into it, I'd never find my way back, *& then what?*

I'll tell you *then what*. I was tired of the garden maze, the endless games of **Stick**. I decided I wasn't coming back. I said goodbye to the garden maze, gave a quiet wave to the folks playing **Stick**. Couple of bells rang in my direction. Then I walked into & across that hard desert floor.

Walked & walked & walked, *walked & walked & walked*. Then, in the distance, I saw buildings, great tall buildings. I believed that maybe I was finally coming somewhere, I was finally coming to a start, all the rest behind me. *That wasn't a start, that wasn't living*. Ahead of me, those buildings in the distance, that's where I was going to begin.

The neon pink sign I come to reads:
Welcome to Wyrd Godd Town.

* * * * *

It Was One of Those Nights

It was one of those nights that everyone has somewhere along the way. Comin' home to my **ZombieTown** hovel with a plastic sack of edibles from the local grocery store. Not veggies, nothin' good in there, just chocolate & cheese puffs & ice cream & soda pop. Maybe some potato salad pretends to be dinner, maybe some cold chicken nuggets from that deli counter. Oh, and of course, a big ol' box of *ChocoSmax*

(Them's the Fax!).

And the black & white Dü-Mónt television, with the Antennar 2000 on top, is cooperatin' reasonably well tonight. Shows last most of their length before snowin' out. Like that funny one about the weirdass bank robbers in that strange town. *Lady robber **screams** like a banshee!*

It wasn't supposed to be cold tonight but, lookin' out the full window of this warm hovel, I see the snow is fallin', fallin' heavy. *Here it comes & comes & comes.* That's OK. The kinda-sorta, after a fashion, electrical heater is on, plus there's my lovely crimson & electric blue blankets. Layin' out on the old mattress, watchin' the black & white Dü-Mónt television, driftin' in & out of snack food comar. Like the old sayin' goes, *exxxstasis.*

There's a movie on now about *this Island that I arrive to, having been sent here after a long, circuitous trek, a trek round the world? I'd become involved, you see, with a strange worldwide conspiracy of people livin' in low-budget motels, & workin' at security guard desks & coffee shops & bookstores.*

I met one, & then the next, & then they sent me along. I slept on many floors in my travels, I rode on many no-roof buses, spent a lot of time walking along from one place to another, often with just a hand-drawn map to get me from here to there. But nobody would tell me what the purpose of the conspiracy was.

*Sometimes I would crawl off to the side of the road, under a tree in the shade, & I'd have that same dream again, an old TV commercial with the blonde girl from that weirdass TV show called **TripTown**, over & over again, never changed.*

*One time I was lucky enough to stay in a hotel room, but that didn't work out too well. Called Noah Hotel. Run by hookers & the homeless, someone told me. **ey call it the No-Tell!** he guffawed.*

*But the events in that hotel room grew more remote & virtual over the course of the night. I could not get **TripTown** off the black-&-white Dü-Mónt. The blonde girl kept **screaming** like a banshee! Even unplugging the TV didn't help.*

I look up suddenly, *oh*, back on my mattress. It's just the black & white Dü-Mónt television, with the Antennar 2000 on top. Familiar kinda-sorta heater & lovely crimson & electric blue blankets near me. Half-et bowl of *ChocoSmax (Them's the Fax!)*. Familiar hovel. That's all, nothing more. *The fax.*

But I close my eyes again, wondering still.

*Am I still sleeping in this ditch, dreaming of **TripTown**?*

Am I still in this strange motel room, with fellow participants in this worldwide conspiracy?

Or am I on this beautiful Island, watching the sunset over that beautiful Wide Wide Sea?

There are many pathways to Dreamland, many Dreamlands, they say, all mystical & spooky.

* * * * *

“Our life is no dream; but it ought to become one, and perhaps will.”

— **Novalis**

“Wars in the future will be fought in the mind by drugs, dreams, televisions, internet, sex, persuasion, the manipulation of loyalties, needs, desires, to the point where to obey is to receive pleasure & endorsement, & to disobey not punishment but simply nothing. Physical war, impoverishment, suffering, disease, prejudice have all been eradicated at the cost of freedom & self created identity.

This epoch is not sustainable because the world is too badly damaged.”

—**Nazi Jailbait Bitch**

Our Two-Roomed Apartment

We have two long rooms in our apartment. When you come through the front door, you can go straight or left. Go straight, & you'll find kitchen & a living room area, then a bathroom, & way back there a bedroom area, where the Creatures comfortably nap. We like to have visitors in this long room, literary gatherings & what-not.

But if you go left upon entering, through a sometimes-stuck door, you'll come to some other kind of room. It keeps going on & on & on. We like to call it **Imaginal Space**.

For my beloved & me, the left room is lined with endless bookcases &, living peaceably among these, many kinds of **lilies**. There's the **starfish lily**, a **high high high high high high-as-the-sun lily**, the **lowdown-in-the-groove lily**, & *many* others. The bookcases were here when we moved in, but then one day, while putting in lightbulbs, my beloved wished for lilies too while among the bookcases, & they came, flowing through the endless room, & out the back where there is a cement bridge, going on & on. But our left room is not yours, if you choose to visit it.

We like to say, *if you choose the left room, you've opened a door bigger than you know, for you can come in here & invent your own room. **Your own kind of room, or rooms**. Your own flowerbeds, whatever lily you choose, or any other kind of fleur. And yes, there are Creatures here too, in case you get uncertain. They will nap in your lap or **hmmmm** near you for comforts. But you'll find your way, & you'll notice that, as you begin to groove with this room, it begins to resemble something dearly familiar to you. Familiar by your dreams, familiar in your heart, familiar as you sniff, familiar to your listens, your looks around. And there you are. **Your own kind of room, or rooms**. Come share the wonders of **Imaginal Space!***

* * * * *

Down Deep in Imaginal Space

Now you may not have heard so much of **Imaginal Space** before, but let me tell you a thing or two about it. This is a story that takes place somewhere down deep in **Imaginal Space**.

Down deep where dreaming occurs, where deep communing with the world occurs, where the ferment that gives life its sense of movement occurs, there is **Imaginal Space**. Think of it as the dust & clay by which all raises & changes, becomes, & becomes again, & becomes different.

Somewhere in **Imaginal Space**, you will find yourself walking, you will find yourself entering what seems like a glowing hallway. You will walk down the glowing hallway, not knowing what it is or what you might come to. And you will hear a lady's voice in the distance, & you will approach slower, not

knowing if she is friend or otherwise, not knowing if *you* yourself might spook & scare *her*.

And so you approach slowly, perhaps crouched, just to listen, for she is speaking on & on. You go a little closer, & go a little closer, & you will see that she is seated in some kind of old fashioned couch, called a *divan*. There is a little table next to her & on it is a—*could it be?*—a magic lantern machine?

She's projecting pictures on the wall of the glowing hallway near her. One of them shows a kind of a strange rusty metal boat, & she is telling about its occupants. She says their names are Antique Andy, who is a rooster, & Ollie, who is a little froggy. They are traveling on the Wide Wide Sea, even sometimes above it. Their **tugboat**, I guess you'd call it, sometimes floats, sometimes hovers, sometimes goes right up in the air. You listen.

*They are going to visit their friend Marty, a policeman, who is taking his vacation on an **Island** far away, & has invited them to come & visit. That's where they're going & I invite you, one & all, to climb aboard that ship, & greet those friendly travelers. Take your place on that ship as it floats & hovers & sails along the Wide Wide Sea to that Island, where Marty the retired policeman is taking his vacation, well earned!*

* * * * *

You Will Meet a Light Being

Sometimes down deep in the Dreaming, you will meet a Light Being. And wherever you're bound in the Dreaming, this is more important to learn. If you're new to this down deep in the Dreaming, you need to learn this. If you've been this down deep in the Dreaming many times before, you need to be reminded. The Light Beings in the Dreaming must be remembered, must be tended, must be . . . **just stop.**

Look. *There's a Light Being.* Don't approach too quickly. Light Beings are not all that dissimilar to Creatures. They may not spook quite as easily, but take no chances. And it's OK, because this isn't where what you were doing before in the Dreaming stops. This is where what you were doing before takes a *very interesting* turn. OK?

You approach slowly. You greet friendly. You *hmmmmmm* low. The Light Being may reply directly or may not, not from rudeness, not ignoring you, nothing like that. Light Beings exist in this universe in a different way, even from those of us who are able to travel down deep in the Dreaming, which is not many against the bigger number.

But you approach, you greet, you *hmmmmmm*, & you wait. The Light Being *will* respond. It may be something in the room that you're in. Let's say you're in the bedroom you slept in every night for years when you were young, & you're there again, trying to recover something, or learn something, or leave something. Twist an old knot new, better.

So look around. Something will be *off*. Something might be *floating*, something might be the *wrong color*, *the sky outside might be missing*, but the Light Being will let you know. A trace of this is for you to take with you. The Light Being's tending to you. And so then you need to focus on this trace & find a way to tend the Light Being in return.

Oh, I'm not giving you the best instructions here. There are no good instructions to give for every situation. It's just that when you're down deep in the Dreaming, & that Light Being appears to you,

this is a *gift* to you, to enjoy, & *to return*. Part of how to keep the lanes to Dreamland open. *But you probably already knew that!*

* * * * *

Did You Ever Have One of Those Mornings Where You Woke Up Somewhere Else?

Now I'm asking you, honestly, *did you ever have one of those mornings where you woke up somewhere else?* Now I don't just mean that you didn't end up back at your home. I mean, *somewhere else?* Maybe I also mean *somewhen else too*. Maybe even *somehow else*.

That night seemed to have begun, as I recall it, *somehow else from here*, with me in a strange hotel room. It was crowded. Not unfriendly, but not sure how I got there. *Was it a meeting? Was it a party? Was it the planning for a riot?* I wasn't sure, but I had to make a phone call to someone, & I had the seven numbers written down on a piece of paper, & on the back of the paper I had the area code number, to be safe. I don't know what that means. It was *somehow else from here*, you understand.

So I was dialing the number, using the hotel room phone, & I swear that, no matter what I did, every time I dialed, a man with a soft voice picked up & said, ***Noah Hotel, where else do you have to go tonight?*** I got pretty used to him saying that because I could not get that phone to call anywhere or anyone else. I even tried calling other rooms, & he kept picking up. *Did he grow impatient?* I'm not sure, honestly, I couldn't tell. His voice never really showed much.

I leaned back in my bed, eyes shut, listening to the crowd's planning or conspiring, whatever it might have been. Maybe it was a suicide pact I forgot I'd participated in, & here it was, coming off. But when I finally nodded & rose up from that bed, my eyes seemingly only closed a few seconds, I found myself *in this bed, in this Attic*.

You know about the Attic. It's one of those places you end up, & then you're not there for a while, & then you end up there again. *Cause & effect?* I don't think so. *Effect & cause?* Possibly. So here I am now, because I'm here, & there's no phones in this Attic. It's probably better off that way. I really don't wanna talk to that guy anyway.

* * * * *

I'm With the Senator, in a Strange City

I'm with the Senator, campaigning in a strange city. Elliptical City? Well, I can't say at this moment. But the Senator & I are traveling together, & she brings me to a house, at least it seems like a house. It's more like a barn, a barnhouse, or maybe more a housebarn. Very, very tall ceilings.

As we enter through the door of the housebarn, I don't notice it at first, but then, it's like, *I feel young again*. Oh, not just an emotional state. No, I look & touch about myself & *this is me*, long ago, same & different. *Weird*. She looks younger too, though somehow seems less amazed than I am!

The Senator & I walk through the many strange rooms of this housebarn, filled with furniture, filled with dusty books. Even one room that's just filled with colorful soap bubbles of different shapes & forms &, if you pop them, they make funny musics. *Like the boy in that old story*.

The Senator likes to pause in each room, gaze about her, land her gaze on something, linger there. She's a thoughtful Senator, quiet, especially since she's usually speaking, but something about this housebarn stills her voice completely.

We find a door that leads down some dark stairs, dank, dim, into the basement filled with bikes. Lots & lots of bikes. I don't think I've ever seen so many bikes, many colors, leaned against the walls, in long rows. Some of them don't seem to be bikes built for human beings. Almost like they're bikes built for other kinds of beings?

Walk on, & there's a mesh window. Passing it, I look out, & there's a parking lot. I don't remember that parking lot, but it's out there now. Come to a dirt floor which, walking on as we do, becomes a hill, a tall hill, then stairs again. These are very solid dark wooden stairs, stairs that'll *hold ya*, stairs that'll *hold a hundred of ya*.

We climb & climb & climb, & I know where we've come to, & I speak. *Senator, I know this place. This is the Attic.* She looks at me, her eyes twinkling behind her spectacles. She nods, gives me a gesture as though I should lead now, & I do.

The Attic goes on forever, it seems, many rooms, then for a while a long hallway, doors along each of its side. Occasionally we come to a choice of doors before us. *Best always to choose the green & gold doorknob or door or hinges. Best to stick that way*, I advise the Senator. She nods, getting the lay of the land, of the Attic.

The Attic rises now, trends up, curves away. We're outside along a long road, lots of weird stores along this long road. Lots of cars speeding by, not all of them with four wheels, not all of them have wheels, & we come to a lady, ragged & crazy-eyed & she says, *Where's the bar? Where's the bar? Please mistah, tell me, where's the bar?* I look at her, I look at the Senator, see she's puzzled. I look on down the road a-ways, & see a cluster of stores where there *could* be a bar. I point her in that direction. She smiles at us, & hurries off there.

I look at the Senator, her eyes are twinkling like before, & I say to her, *I think this Attic can bring us everywhere.*

* * * * *

***Zounds!* I Say**

Zounds! I say as I look into the mirror & see the shrunken tooth in the middle of my head. *Zounds!* I say. And then I leave the bathroom, it's not hard, it's a very small bathroom. Not the kind you can cozy up in with your colored bubble musics & your Duckees, no sir-ee.

My hovel in ZombieTown is small but it does have walls & a ceiling & floor, for which I'm grateful. Wyrd Godd Town was missing some of those for me. I turn on my Dü-Mónt black & white television, with the Antennar 2000 on top, & settle back in my familiar way among the wires poking out of the old mattress. There's always a trick to it that I find. Usually a big bowl of *ChocoSmax (Them's the Fax!)* in front of me. But I'm out of them right now.

My Dü-Mónt black & white television comes on eventually, & I watch my favorite new show. Now, I have not turned my loyalties away from *TripTown* but, sometimes, within *TripTown* there is another

show. *TripTown's* show, as it were, what *TripTown* watches from time to time.

Set in the future, it's called **Battle Black Tech**. It's not just a show, it's a series of shows & a series of related films. I'm saving up my *ChocoSmax* (*Them's the Fax!*) coupons to see the next film, called **Outer Space City, 100,000 A.D.** Hopefully when it comes to The Nada Theatre.

Battle Black Tech stars famous actors, playing themselves, in the far future. Impossible because they are long since dead in the far future, but in this show it happens. And there are thousands of outer space battles going on. It almost seems sometimes as if that's all there is, that's the whole story. Thousands of battles throughout outer space.

But we learn, or *TripTown* tells us anyway, how reliable a source I don't know, that these battles are fake. Says the enemy is something else entirely, & the shows & the movies are not fiction but real. Now what is *TripTown* trying to say? Is *TripTown* showing us the future of the world?

I don't know. I fall into a nap, a disturbed nap, find myself traveling again with the *Hillside Hmmmers*. Usually, after I've been watching hours of **Battle Black Tech**, they come to calm, to reassure, to guide me, & we travel together.

This time around we come to the end of a great canyon, & circle our vehicles among one another, & we all begin to *hmmmm*, & the great canyon catches our music & begins to *hmmm*, & amplifies & varies & multiplies our now shared music, till it's everywhere, & always, & maybe it's like it is saying to us: *this could also be the future of the world, my friends. Do not despair.*

* * * * *

Formed from the Dust & Clay Itself

Formed from the dust & clay itself: *Is that how you build up a world? Is that how you do it?* That's what I'm wondering as I wake up on the ground, my friends shaking me. *I have to get to that facility. It's doing the kind of experimental work I need to know about.* Make our way there, it's at the end of a long, unpaved road, scraggly trees in the distance. Not much to see.

But *of terror!* it's being held up. We see the people inside with their hands up & others with guns. We work our way around to the back of the building, trying to get in, trying to help. It's a big building. I'm not sure how we get in, but it isn't unlocked. We become separated from one another, quietly trying to find our way to the front.

I end up in the room of a very old sick-looking man, under a sheet. He's watching a little Dü-Mónt black & white television, with an Antennar 2000 on top. A blonde girl on the television is saying at this moment: *there is old magick & old medicine & old ways of living that have re-emerged from other times. The most ancient books, written with sand-sticks in the ground even back before the time of cave paintings, say, **events accumulate.***

I look back at the old man & I see him undoing to clay, undoing to dust, until all that remains of him is a smile, as peaceful as any I've ever seen.

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I Walk into the Several-Story-High Diving Complex

I walk into the several-story-high diving complex. I climb the stairs from floor to floor until I reach the top floor. I walk to the very edge, to the diving spot. It has a funny shape to its design. Like a really weird awful green-colored **cube**?

I stare down into the design & I think, *am I going to do this, finally?* After all the times I've come into this diving complex, climbed up those stairs, walked across that empty floor to this spot, & looked down the several stories below to the water. I was even late today. I missed my bus, it flew right past me, careened at the intersection wildly. I knew it was going to drive down that *cul de sac*, & come back, & so I hurried to the stop after it comes out. *I think I'm diving this time, finally. **I think I'm diving***

The night before, we'd been up late, my beloved & I. She was dressed up very purty. There was a large TV monitor at the party we went to & it was showing that band of dreams. They were all dancing on stage as much as they were playing their instruments. Other times it's like the TV monitor was showing another party going on, at some kind of unfinished house, like in the back yard, with a long plank table, set on logs. There was an old man, & a lot of smiling people.

Then I went looking for the bathroom for just a moment, *hurry*, but the men's room was closed. Everyone was crowded into the women's room & it's like the party had moved into the bathroom. People were laughing & talking, I swear there was music there too. I think it might have been *Mellow Moods & Moments with The Pink Floyd*! Some people were naked but nothing else was going on. It was just a very merry situation.

Am I diving? Am I finally diving? Am I brave enough to do this? Am I diving?

* * * * *

A Troubled Child

I was what you might call a troubled child. I always found ways to get in to trouble in the small town I lived in, called Wyrdd Godd Town, you know it? I rarely got caught though. It was just a reputation that lingered round me until, well, I had this dream that I couldn't remember one morning, & it followed me around all day, into junior high school, where I learned nothing worth knowing. So I left junior high school that day & I went down to the local store, Chief Seattle's Friendly Market.

It was wintertime, & there was snow everywhere, & the snow made a lot more sense than people ever had, & so what happened was I began to make snowballs. Made 'em hard, tight, & round, & I stuck 'em in the deep pockets of my long woolen overcoat. It's a little long, & a little old, drags along the ground a bit. But I like it a lot.

What happened next was that I went in to that store, & I waited for the perfect moment, *& then I began to fling my snowballs everywhere! I threw them in the aisles filled with tin cans of soup! I threw them in the aisles filled with sodas & beers! I threw them in the aisles filled with paper goods! I threw them at the many cash registers! I threw them at the ceiling & at the floor!* I seemed to have more & more snowballs no matter how many I threw!

And that was a turning point for me because, you see, I was grabbed from behind & drug by unseen hands to the back of the store. I was drug into some kind of storeroom, & down a long flight of stairs,

& suddenly I was in this strange, glowing place where it was hard to see very well but there was a steady *hmmm*. I was drug down a long hallway, & I could feel something about me changing. I was no longer the scrawny little thing causing trouble, & getting away with it mostly. I was *taller*. I was more *adult*. *Really weird*.

I was somehow brought to a party, in what looked like a great big housebarn. There were microphone stands everywhere, old Dü-Mónt televisions all over the place, with Antennar 5000s on top. Some of them were showing the strange activities of this party, others of them seemed to be showing parties that were happening *somewhere else*? One had some kind of band of dreams playing at it. Another was at a big home-made table in someone's back yard, but the house was half-built? An old man & a lot of smiling people there though.

At first noone talked to me & I thought, *maybe I'm in a dream, maybe I got knocked out by one of my own snowballs. Who knows?* But no, I never went back from where I come.

That night, I slept among a lot of people & other kinds of beings on mattresses with pillows & blankets that were put out all over the housebarn, & in the morning noone made me go back. In fact, when I was talked to, finally, I was told in a very dark room, in a low sincere voice: *You are now part of a worldwide conspiracy investigating why humans are so unhappy & restless. You are going to help because you have unhappiness & restlessness clouding your heart too.*

The low kindly voice continued: *It is not in your nature to be so unhappy & so restless like that. Something has gone wrong, with you & everyone else, & you must help us to investigate.* So I agreed, & I have, & I am.

* * * * *

More Myth Than a Story

This was a time, long ago, more a myth than a story or a remembrance. But back then, whenever that was, if ever that was, it's claimed that people-folks fancied themselves the leaders of Elliptical City. No, I kid you not, that's how the story goes. They strutted round like they were in charge of this strange, wild place. And sometimes they had a few good ideas. The rest of us noticed, we kind of felt like a rest-of-us back then, but a lot of times, *nah*, they were selfish, they were greedy, they were wasteful, they were disregarding.

Anyway, what happened this one time was that a group of them, Senators & others, were vying to be the chief leader. I know, *what can I say*, it all sounds very strange to me too, but they were, & they spent an entire afternoon in front of their fellow people-folks, each arguing about how he or she would be the best leader. They each had bright ideas. The rest of us listened, napped, did other things.

But see, as you know, Elliptical City is unruly, changes frequently, & that's OK, it's part of things there. That afternoon, near dusk, a great storm came to the strange stone building they'd gathered in, these leaders & their listeners. A great kind of disruption came, rains, winds. It's as though too many of them gathered together, too many of them boasting & talking & all those words. And this force gathered kind of like a giant fist & pounded their stone building. Pound! *Pound!* **POUND!** till it broke through. The roof caved in, the walls collapsed!

Now one version of this story says that those gathered inside ran every which way, trying to save just themselves, & some of them did, & some of them didn't.

But the story I prefer, & I know it's not the popular one, is the one in which those leaders, all the Senators & others who'd stood above their fellow people-folks, preening & talking in words endlessly, they didn't go anywhere. They stayed right where they were, & spent all that night, & many days thereafter, tending to those who were trapped, those who were scared, those who were injured. Tended to them all, every last one, they worked together. The hours before the great pounding from the sky was forgotten. *This is what mattered more, tending your fellows.*

And I'd like to think, though this is only my own radical thought on the matter, that something changed for people-folks from that afternoon on. I don't think they had leaders thereafter the way they used to. I think that something down deep changed, & they saw how gay & wondrous the world really is, & really could be, even for them.

* * * * *

There Was . . . James McGunn

This is how it was, some years ago. I was sitting in the Ancienne Coffeeshouse, in the Village, & there was James McGunn. *The James McGunn.* The wonderful singer, songwriter, legend &, well, I mean, I was just looking at him from my shadow. No job, no prospects, I was just sitting there in that place because it was a good place to hide in such situations. They wouldn't judge you, they wouldn't kick you out, it was OK for anyone to be there.

But I was no James McGunn. I wasn't even someone to *speack* to James McGunn. That's how I felt, even though this wasn't true. He wasn't the kind of man who turned anyone away. *Hadn't I listened to his album, **Sco'u'tland**, a bajillion times? Wasn't it the music & the words of a man who is generous & open-hearted to all, even as his own demons lay deep within in him, restless?*

He was old then but he looked still handsome & fine. Not pretty, not gorgeous, but *handsome & fine*. I saw he had his guitar next to with him, & a pile of papers, a mis-sorted pile. He was sitting in just the kind of chair where someone might lift up his guitar & start to strum. *And that . . . is what . . . he did!*

Noone paid much attention to him though. I didn't know if all these others even knew who he was. It was dark in there, shadowy, smoky. I just knew, *I just knew.* That's his *own* music he was playing & his *own* voice he's singing to it with.

People began to notice, casually I guess. It's not the kind of place where you gather round & gawk, but they did notice, threw him smiles & twinkles from the sides of their faces. Grew a little bit quieter in their conversation.

He sang a song I loved about how loss can be gain. But I find myself now not remembering all the words he sang. I didn't know how this was possible. He just kept singing over & over again: *loss can be gain, loss can be gain, loss can be gain, pleasure from pain, pleasure from pain, pleasure from pain.* That's all I remember, but I *know* there's more.

Eventually, a big man, older too, but you wouldn't want to mess with him, came around, sat with James McGunn for a while, listened, smiled more openly than the rest. James finally finished his last song, & put away his guitar. The big man helped him up, & they headed away, in the early morning light. *But what a gift.*



What a gift! Thank you, James McGunn, thank you, Universe. *Loss can be gain.*

* * * * *

It's Tuesday, & I'm Bustling About the World

Well, it's Tuesday, & I'm bustling about the world. Last night was another long one, a wild ride of documenting. Crazyer than it usually is. All that excitement about the black market discovery of an old batch of **Mulronie the Space Pirate Peanut Butter Planetoid Cookies™**. I documented the excitement for all those who were locked down in their **cubes** before they could get one.

I wander out, from my **cube**, into the grimy living complex the world has become. Walk awhile, *oh great, someone blew up the grocery store. Really?* I walk on past, there's nothing I can do. All I'm good at is documenting.

Like everyone else, I find I can't stay awake for very long in the old-fashioned way, fully, thoroughly awake. The bitter raging angry man now used, or tried to use, our own sleeping & dreaming to control us. *He was trying to close the lanes to Dreamland.* Poisoning the food & water hadn't worked, & this was working worse. At least for me. Because of my White Bunny friend's gift.

It was a long, wild night of documenting, & so I decide to indulge myself. I hustle down to my old school. It's still standing there in that old unused complex. The long, curving hallway near the cafeteria, black-&-white diamond flooring. That unused shadowy staircase down to the auditorium.

I remember all the times I've sat alone here, on these steps, since the bitter raging man. Less & less waking, & more & more dreaming for real, singing that old black market fighting anthem to the long empty hallway: *What if Dream-Mind is Supra-Consciousness?*

* * * * *

I Was Working at a Thrift Store, Long Ago

You might like this story, maybe. I was working at a thrift store long ago. That's where they sell the wonderful valuable things that people have moved on from, & now it's someone else's turn. Dusty old books. Pretty handled bags even. So I was working there, & there was this weird guy who would keep this rack of shirts in a corner of the store. I'm not sure if he really was an employee, or just someone who came around, it was hard to tell in those days, but he was always telling people: *see that rack of shirts in the corner? I would take any of those shirts as a Christmas present. You keep that in mind, you can choose among any of them.*

So it was a good job in its own way, & I would say that I was happy there, relatively speaking. Paid enough for my hovel's rent round the corner. Then one day I noticed in the corner, not the shirt rack corner, but the other corner, there was this black-&-white Dü-Mónt television, with the Antennar 3000 on top, bigger than mine at home. It would sit there, quiet as secrets for a long stretch, but sometimes just come on of its own volition. Choose its own channels to show, like this cruel game show that was on a lot.

I'd seen it before. They were cruel to people, they were mean with words & deeds. They had the kind of games where you lost things at the end, nobody ever won, & yet it was very popular. It seemed like a

lot of people liked the fact that people would come on this TV game show & lose every time.

I remembered that, for a while, it became a happy game show. People would come on & they wouldn't just win things, they would become happy. *Happy!* It wasn't a car or a stove or whatever. No, they would leave happy. *Going to the Festival maybe? Learning the way?*

But this show wasn't as popular. I'm not sure really why, but I tend to think that maybe there was a little bit of jealousy in the viewership because there was no clear way to get on this show to get your bit of the happiness, as it were. Ratings dived, according to what I read, in the TV industry newspaper, *The Eighth*, which of course I followed closely because they came in sometimes on the donations truck. People would get rid of them & I would cop them, a few weeks later than up-to-date, but still.

So what finally happened is that the cruel game show came back on, & it was more popular than ever, because it was crueler than ever. Now I'm not sure why the black and white Dü-Mónt television, with the Antennar 3000 on top, chose to show this show a lot, but it seemed like the guy I told you about, with the shirt rack in the corner, employee, maybe not employee? Anyway, he was fascinated by this show &, when it was on, he would veer away from the shirt rack, & away from giving everyone he could hints about what a good Christmas present these shirts would mark. He'd just watch & watch, & laugh, & laugh, & laugh, & *laugh & laugh & laugh*.

* * * * *

If You're Going to Travel Along in the White Woods at High Speeds

Well now, if you're going to travel along through the White Woods at high speeds, or at least interesting ones, you may as well be, if you're lucky, in the comfy confines of my dear friend Sydnee Grand Prix SE. *A fine automobile*. She's swifts along through these White Woods, &—

Now wait a minute here. I know a thing or two about these magical White Woods myself, & there are few, if any, paths or roads through these White Woods. While I acknowledge that your dear friend Sydnee Grand Prix SE is a fine automobile, how is she able to travel without roads or paths, or very few of them?

Meep! Meep! she says calmly. **Zoom! Zoom!** she explains further.

Ah, you say, tis the science & physic of the White Woods.

Yes, indeed, I reply, that *is* what it is all about. *The science & physic of the White Woods*. That one time, I was sitting in her back seat, amongst many Creature friends, & we were trading electronic files amongst ourselves, as though they were baseball playing cards. Yes, indeed, I'd finally become an honorary electro-fellow Creature. I don't know if I had a nifty name like some. Eurydice. Penelope. Mariposa. Lucille. So many. I might have just been called **the one that works most of the time & serves Creatures**.

Meep! Meep! Sydnee Grand Prix SE cries merrily. **Zoom! Zoom!** she adds philosophically.

* * * * *

Down There

Down there, *grrroan, sorry*, it's hard to tell the rest. Down there is as far as I've gotten for years. *Grrroan, sorry*. I try to tell & *grrroan, sorry*, this happens. Down that hill, that place down there that we're all looking at, led by the old football tight end, who's taken us away from the violence & the stupidity & the costumery of that other city, are the very outskirts of what I learned many years later is sometimes referred to as *Elliptical City*.

First building we come to in Elliptical City, as we slowly make our way down there, is a strange seedy hotel. It feels like it's a mile high, but what remains above ground is about a single floor.

There's a girl there, seems nice enough. She has a nifty little camera, & she's shooting some pictures of the hotel as our crowd approaches. She notices us for a moment, & then continues her work. Then pauses for a moment, looks at me, pretty turquoise eyes freeze me. We exchange a glance that lingers without words, & then she hands me a little envelope, In it are pictures I guess she took. The envelope is marked *Shaw, Massachusetts*.

The pictures depict the interior of an old church, an ancient church really. It doesn't even look like it's a building, really, it's more like a clearing in the White Woods, shaped like a temple, & there's moonlight coming down to help fill in the outlines. Everyone in this temple, all these different people, are all separate from one another, they're all sitting far apart from each other. I can almost feel their *hmmmming* together.

I look at her again. She smiles pretty turquoise eyes at me & says strangely, *is this what's it like in the White Room?*

* * * * *

I Had to Retreat to My Friend's Artiste Studio

I had to retreat to my friend's artiste studio in Gay E.C. My piglet friend is an ancient, wise, & merry Creature. She welcomed me in, with a friendly sweep of her paw, indicating that I could stay as long as I wanted, & enjoy whichever of the many rooms of her artiste studio I chose. She suspected, with a tricky smile on her blue-&-pink face, that I would choose the *round room*.

It is, indeed, a round room that you enter through the green door with the golden doorknob. You take your seat to the left of the door, in the row of folding chairs, & it's best you keep your seat in this round room. For soon you will be entirely immersed, unable to distinguish *here* from *there*, *you* from *me*, *this* from *that*. You are swathed in *beautiful smells*, filled with *lovely tastes*, within the sweetest *hmmm* you could imagine. Swept amongst a bajillion *colors* or more, perhaps just six or seven, it's hard to say. *Everything* is close, close, *close! Thoughts*, deep. You can imagine *forward* into the round room, to shape what you see & feel & experience, or you can lean *back* in your chair & let it *roll* through you, let it *decide* how you should be, *what* you shall experience here.

I'd been spending many days chasing strangers with my hands open & my eyes wide. These strangers eluded me, these strangers were indifferent to me.

I came here to this round room to be reminded that *there are no strangers, & there is no difference. All is green, all flows, all sings, all is near. All is unitive.*

The White Woods about this artiste studio so ancient, & yet friendly, gentle, funny. *With me, now, in this round room.* Showing me what it's like to be *hugged* by a tree, *embraced* by music, *tasted* as though you are delicious, *sniffed* as though you are a bloom. I come to the round room for a timeless time.

When I left, I realized again we are each & all medicine to each other. My old friend smiled at me. Yes, of course!

* * * * *

Maybe Still in the White Room

Maybe still in the white room, maybe still near the empty playground, I don't know. Just don't know. I leave the bench & now just sit in a big green field. I think about the interface of memory, dream, wish.

And I think, *that's Art. Memory, dream, wish. Their interface.*

What else is there, really? I sit in the big green field for a long time, & then I'm drawn by a noise. I don't know what noise it is, but I leave the big green field, & I walk back into the White Woods.

For a long time I don't come to anything, & then suddenly I'm in a garden maze. And there are Creatures moving around. I *think* there are Creatures moving around, they seem to keep hidden, half-seen as they move around. So I just look around vaguely & I say, *Art is the interface of memory, dream, & wish.* Then I wait, listen closely.

I hear a few casual sniffs, perhaps even a curious sniff or two. But I will leave these fine Creatures to their garden maze. I will walk through it until I've come to the other end, or until I end up deeper in it still, like a certain Gate I've heard tell of.

I will walk on through the aisles of the garden maze till I come to the center, & there, on a small purple stool, is an antique typewriter. And there's a sheet in the typewriter, & a typed few words. These words say: **Art is the interface of love & a world.**

So I ask you now, which one is right?



Could I translate the experience of my travels there, into common life? This was the question. Or must I live it all over again, and learn it all over again, in the other forms that belong to the world of men, whose experience yet runs parallel to that of Fairy Land? These questions I cannot answer yet. But I fear.

—George MacDonald, **Phantastes**, 1858.

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Raymond Soulard, Jr.



Notes from New England

*“Please accept this ragged purse
of high notes.”*

The following continues the series originally called Notes from New England, begun in issue 24-25 (Winter 1998), then revived in issue 59 (October 2006) as Notes from the Northwest, & appearing since issue 75 (October 2010) under its original title. It is intended as a gathering-place for observations of various lengths upon the world around me. It will be culled, like much of my writing, from my notebooks, & perhaps these thoughts will be expanded upon sometimes as well.

Dream Raps, Volume Ten

*“The greatest forces
lie in the region of the
uncomprehended.”*

—George MacDonald,
“*The Fantastic Imagination*,” 1893.

Volumes One to Ten of Dreams Raps can be found at:
<http://scriptorpress.com/dream-raps.pdf>

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It Was the One Story He Had to Tell

A young man told me this story, like it was the one story he had to tell. Like for him, it was the one story of the world. He said he first saw her in the Ancienne Coffeehouse. Passing him to elsewhere. He could never figure out whither.

There was an antique rite-typer there, on a corner table, in a shadow. Many days he would sit in an old green armchair, in that same shadow, with his thick books, looking for any passing, obscure, or even slight reference to the **Unitive Time**. Or to the *end of the world*. Or to the Beach of Many Worlds, & how they once braided closer. Typing & typing what he found. Whoever he had been before he came here, it was what he did now.

He sometimes lived with the Creatures, in the White Woods further deep in the Ancienne Coffeehouse. When he came, they would make sure he was fed of fruits & nuts. Often, when he despaired, they would share their special Rutabaga Soup with him. It would calm him for a stretch. Never saw her though.

Most days he would doze in his old green armchair. Everyone knew it was his place. It was always left empty when he was further deep visiting the Creatures. Aunt made sure of it, until she no longer had

to do so, it being so well known by all.

Occasionally his hard studies deep in his thick books would be comforted by the sounds of guitar from another room, one closer to the entrance. One drifting afternoon he took a curious look, & saw it was a handsome old man, sitting in an old armchair too, eyes closed strumming, a tall mis-sorted pile of pages on the small table next to him.

Then one day he came upon a note in that antique rite-typer. It was a soft sheet of paper, decorated with Creatures like his own friends. White Bunny, grey Hedgedy-hog, many kinds of Bears, & so on.

But what was typed there *was not* in his own tongue, & he could not understand this because the keys of the antique rite-typer *were* in his language. He just stared & stared at these strange symbols, trying to get a feel for them, by how they marked that soft page. He somehow knew it was from *her*. *His wished-for beloved*. She had typed this note to him. It was her way of saying *hello*. That she'd noticed him noticing her, passing to elsewhere.

Further deep with the Creatures in the White Woods that night. Clustered with many beneath a warm Bear Blanket, near a clearing of full moonlight. In his dream, she was with him on a strange bus. She was at the front, he was at the back, & the bus was traveling through these same White Woods. It was the one with no roof you may have heard tell of, especially if your travels have taken you through Elliptical City.

Riding along, he became distracted into his deep studies, especially by a book called *Power*, one he would only find in rare dreams. He suddenly looked up, & she was gone. But then he noticed there remained a lavender trace of her in the air. He followed the lavender trace, ever nearing her without arriving.

And he woke up from this dream & realized that his pursuit of her now went on by waking & dreaming. He studied the soft note in the antique rite-typer. Ratched it down to a blank line, & he typed the following words. These were not wise wisdoms he typed, but they were a start. They were something he was fairly sure of:

e road on, usually better. e road back, not so good.

And then he sat back down in his old armchair, & he opened up his book again, & he continued his study & search for many answers.

* * * * *

The Road On, Usually Better

e road on, usually better. e road back, not so good. Was it the lavender trace of her, his wished-for beloved, come now even to him in waking, that led him out of the Ancienne Coffeehouse? Carrying too her soft note he had taken from the antique rite-typer on the table next to his armchair? *Was it the lavender trace that led him out of the epic & long & strange & murky & odd & beautiful Ancienne Coffeehouse?* Outside, after so long not, he went, onto the street of the Village.

Nearby was a diner. Had he been there before? None of this was familiar, but it looked friendly. He climbed the stairs up to the diner. It looked kind of like a silver streaked railroad car of some antique

vintage. Walked slowly through the door, saw there were booths going way back.

But in a near corner there's a tall round table, tall chairs, & for some reason he sat down there. With his note. Did the lavender trace nudge him over to it? Maybe. Sat down with his note. The place was lively, people at every booth. A white-faced pink cat radio quietly blared a recent song by The Pink Floyd. "You're listening to *SpiritPlants Radio America* . . ."

At one of the closer booths there's a couple of truck drivers in their uniforms, bit grizzled, but OK, clear on. Having their morning coffees, their eggs. A few booths further away, there's a colorful three-o. Two men in tuxedos, one bald as the day, the other hair tall as the night. A woman in a strange gown, elegant, old-fashioned, inapproachable. Yet somehow naked too. Hmm. Further back he saw a strange bent man showing some kind of long-legged apparatus to someone who seemed to have in turn to show a nifty little camera.

And he looked at his soft note from her, trying to make of it what he could. He wrote with his small pencil with the pink eraser on top, below her unknowable words, below his own typed words, in small script:

***Build a great big poem, a great big poem of many little poems.
Bricks & bricks & bricks of poems.
Build them up into a great building.
Welcome all.***

"You gonna have your regular, son?" the owner cried over him with a leering smile. He gestured to a waitress to come on over & get his order, *pronto!*

* * * * *

They Eats the Streets

Looking around this diner, he began to wonder if maybe it's more of a bar & grill? Hmm. Then he noticed the sign that someone made mounted behind the counter. *Six Stars Bar & Grill*. It still looked like a diner to him, but maybe it's something that used to be a diner. Maybe it's both.

He nodded to the friendly waitress, or possibly barmaid, & said, "Yes, I'll have my usual."

Looked at me, intently listening to his only story. "But I'll tell you a secret. I *didn't* have a usual there. I *didn't* think that they knew who I really was. But I *did* think they had me confused with someone else."

So he looked around stealthily & noticed there's a sign for the restroom in the corner. He made his way over there. There's two restrooms actually, each marked *Restroom*. Alright. He entered one of them, & there's two sinks. No, three. One didn't look like it was working. The one on each side of it was. And there was a man there, & he was studying his face closely. "Didn't notice me at all."

He went to the other one that was working. Studied the cuts on his face, used a paper towel to dab at them. *Who do they think I am? Who am I? I mean, when I was a kid, I used to be the catcher.*

Then the man, his hair long, his beard longer, & his overcoat even longer than that, started saying into the mirror, very slowly, almost chanting:

***We came down the street, then they ate the street, & the street was gone.
We came down the street, then they ate the street, & the street was gone.
We came down the street . . .***

And so on. He was deep into it, whatever it meant to him. Finally he gathered up his shambles to leave. Holding preciously some kind of little stick in his dirty hands.

Gave his face a good wash, despite its cuts & bruises & contusions, & so on, & come back out into the bar-&-grill-diner, returned his seat. "And there's my meal. One egg, one sausage, one strip of bacon. Half piece of toast, little touch of butter on it. Glass of orange juice, small glass, only a quarter of the way full. Tall glass of milk, & a shot glass of something so dark I can't see through it."

He nodded at the waitress barmaid. "Thankee, sai."
She laughed. Her turquoise eyes twinkled, nearly the same color as those of his wished-for beloved's. Her hair in a long pretty braid too. No lavender trace though.
But how did he know that her favorite author was Stephen King?

"How did I know that?" he asks me.
I shrug unhelpfully.

On the white-faced pink cat radio behind the counter, someone was droning on about the *end of the world* & the group responsible . . . "well, they're sitting on top of their bus . . . looks like it has some kind of makeshift roof right now . . . & there's a stand off . . . & there's a charismatic leader standing on top of the bus, waving his arms . . ."

The reporter doesn't know what will happen next. "Now here's a James McGunn classic on ***SpiritPlants Radio America*** . . ."

We're Sitting On Top of Our Bus

We're sitting on top of our bus. It's peaceful, about a bajillion stars up there in those starry skies. We have these old lawn chairs that we keep tied under the bus, kept special for nights like this, when we drag them out, haul them up, get our fake roof in place, & set them down on top of it.

Now, admittedly, we're surrounded by cops, & probably the army, & who-knows-who-others. Been accused of bringing about the *end of the world*. Well, you could say that. I mean, the world ends every day for someone, for *many* someones. In different kinds of ways. Well, people die. Well, people move, change jobs, gain & lose lovers, discover their favorite book for the rest of their years. Pain, joy, oh, it's always ending & beginning! *End of the world?*

Well, we know, sitting up here on top of our bus, in our old lawn chairs, that it began with a strange girl that we encountered many months & miles ago, & the small handmade book that she gave us. She didn't give it to *one* of us, no, she gave it to *all* of us.

We were at a Festival, met a lot of nice people there, shared a lot of Soup. Seemed like she was there & gone before anybody knew but, here we were, with this small handmade book tied up with a braided green & gold ribbon, knotted with a pretty little stone.

We waited till we left the Festival, till we were out in the middle of elsewhere, sitting in these old lawn chairs on top of this bus, our home, looking up at these bajillion stars, & *then* we chose to undo the green-&-gold ribbon, & to look at the pages inside.

And yes, *that* is where tonight began, all of it, every last bit, when we read those pages. I can't even say we read them all at once, I can't even say we were able to read one page at a go, & this was a *small* book. Look at your hand. It was about the size of your hand, especially if your hand is not that big.

Didn't explain itself right away. All it said on the first page was:

Dreams within dreams within dreams.

That's it, in a kind of odd curlicue handwriting. One of us remarked that it seemed like that handwriting was by someone who was not familiar with handwriting, as though they were imitating how to do it.

And the next page, all it said was:

Endless levels up & down.

That was it.

And we read more, as time went on. It's funny because we always read it together. We'd pull out all our old lawn chairs up on top of the bus, set them in a kind of a circle. We took turns reading. Everyone was silent, listening.

Turned to the third page & it said:

Dream of power, unitive, to sing & heal.

And I'll tell you, that the book felt like *more* than a book. It's like it had an inner *glow*, an inner *hmmm*. Sometimes it seemed like the *hmmm* even cackled quietly. Weird. It's like it was *alive*, but in some way that was its own. It was not inert, not at *all*.

Tonight we're going to read the last page. We've agreed. It's time to read that last page & see if what all really has happened so far, as dire as it seems, cops & the army & who-knows-who-others even, might have some good or magical or unknown end.

* * * * *

I Gotta Leave the Bus

I gotta leave the bus. *I gotta leave, I gotta leave, I gotta leave the bus.* You know what I mean, man? Hang around enough strange people over the course of a long, strange time, you start to lose yourself into that strangeness, start to not know the difference between you and that strangeness. All that **Unitive Time** & *end of the world* crap.

I know there are cops, armies, whatever, surrounding the bus, & so I wait until it's the darkest part of the night, & I slip out, go out the back, the emergency exit door, never locked, slither on down, under the bus. I don't even take the chance of saying goodbye to my friend with the nifty little camera.

I can't say for sure how someone doesn't spot me with all their radars and sonars and whatever-ars, but somehow I get under that bus and the bus is parked in a big Weeds patch, man.

Now I'm not the most mystical flicked-out dude that you could possibly meet on your way. I keep pretty far from those freaky White Woods & the wild stories of talking Bunnies & what-not in there. But, I swear, as soon as I'm among those Weeds, I feel *safe*, safer than I've felt in a long time. I *don't* say a thing to them. Yah, I know you're thinking, *you don't say a thing to weeds?* But yes, I *don't* say a thing to the Weeds. But they're there, man. They're *with* me. They *understand* my distress. They *feel* it. And I *wanna* say something, *some* kind of thing. Some kind of *thankee*.

So I've never done this before, but what I do next is I put my arm right up against my mouth, with just a little breath of space, so that whatever I say is not going to travel beyond just a few inches from me. And I say, "I need to get out of here. Can you give me cover?"

And nothing happens. Yeah, I'm an *idiot*. But then it's like, um, I hear this beautiful music that I can't account for. *Is it in my head? Is out there? I don't know.* It's like the Weeds are breathing music to help me. No words.

But I start to move, fast, & I feel everything around me moving with me. I feel like wherever I'm moving, there's cover around me, there's silence. Everything is closer to me somehow, keeping me upright, hurrying me along, warming me within. I keep moving & moving until I am fifty fields beyond all that, if that's possible, & that's how I got away. *It was those Weeds.*

You don't need to believe me. I don't need to believe me, but that's how it happened. Just saying *that* is how it happened.

* * * * *

The House, with the Attic, from the Dreams of My Youth

So what happens as I leave the Weeds, & their kind aid to my escape, is that I carry on for many more fields, still worrying some that I'm being followed. But then I see that old house in the distance, & I'm *sure* that it's the house with the Attic, from the dreams of my youth! I went to that old house many times, hundreds of times, over & over, in dreams.

I make for that old house like a lunatic, running with my arms waving, flapping about me, my legs doing almost as badly, but I keep going & I don't trip. I almost trip a couple times, but *I don't trip*.

I make it to the front door finally, convinced it'll be locked, or someone will prevent me, but no one does. The front door is not even all the way closed.

I enter into the sky-tall vestibule, & it's dusty, & cobwebby, & I guess I get a little bit of a worried feeling about it. But I keep moving, looking, & again I travel through the countless rooms, filled with old furniture & strange bookcases, & odd statues & weird paintings, & mirrors that showed other dimensions, & so on. Room after room, some are huge as miles, some I can barely make through crawling, inching my way in & around.

Up many flights of stairs, until I finally come to the top of them. And there's the button hanging in mid-air, attached to a fishing line. Tug down & a ladder unfolds from the ceiling. Climb up & arrive to

my old beloved Attic. *Oh blessed be, I make it to the Attic!*

It had no width. It had no length. It had no height. It had no number.

I'd traveled it ever on back then, & there was no end to traveling it. It was like traveling one's own mind & finding no walls, no closed doors, no locks, no barriers, nothing.

Feels as it always felt. Rooms of content, structures of content, scaffoldings of content. Some built, some building, some pending, in plans. *This is it. I've arrived. I'm in the Attic.*

I wish you were here too, wished-for beloved. I would share it with you, I promise you I would. Would you like to come to the Attic with me? I think you might, I think you would enjoy it. There's a trace of you here from the Coffeehouse. I sniff like Creatures & can swear sometimes it's here.

I'm not walking anymore. No need to walk here. No need to hurry here. Go slow & enjoy. *Come with me. It's OK, lift up or just let go. Now you can see round corners, through walls. You hear, with no end. There's no limit to your hearing. Everything has sense & you sense them all, & everything touches you, close & closer. Everything braids closer. **Symbiosis***

That's the word I heard once, & that's the word. **Symbiosis**. A language for all, from all, by all, here we go. *Here come the Woods!* I'd say hang on, but don't hang on, let go. *Let go.*

Feel the trees, feel the leaves, the branches, the air, the soil, *feel it all.*

You feel it all, don't you? The Attic. You've made it. I'm so glad you're with me. Let's go.

(Remember me . . .)

The Blues Guitarist I Knew, Somewhat, Years Ago

As I wander through the many countless rooms of the Attic, I find myself in company with the blues guitarist I knew, somewhat, years ago. Well, I knew him during his last days, & his killing addiction. I remember that his best friend the photographer couldn't help him, *just couldn't*, & his beloved told me I needed to help him.

And I *tried*. All I could see was that when he played his guitar, he was safe. He was safe & he was happy. And what was killing him was nowhere close. So that's what I did. I'd see him often as I could, & he'd play his blues guitar for me, for hours on end. We'd get so high, sometimes with the Weeds, always with the music. *Ha!*

Now he's walking beside me, & I see he's got his blues guitar slung 'round his back. We smile at each other. I nod to him, the way I did back then, & he knows what that means. It means, *get that guitar between your two paws & strum, man, strum!* And he does. *Ha!* Blues songs he wrote about the *end of the world* back, when his wasn't so close to ending. I loved them songs so much, & we wondered if one day one of them would end up on **SpiritPlants Radio America**. Seemed possible back then.

The Attic is very wooden, this part of it anyway, this long hallway we're in, dark wooden, yet glowing.

I see we're both barefoot, whatever that means. We're both dressed in jeans & colorful shirts. My hair is long, his hair is long. He's playing & playing & playing. *Ha!*

I start to shout. I start to clap. I can't sing, I can't play, but I can join in other ways. Just making noise & shouting, to keep him playing on. *Ha!*

I guess, at some point, I'm not walking with him anymore, but I feel like I understand something better about time. Too much is strange, too much occurs, too much is remembered by only a few, or one. Time is *not* a unitive block of lead going forward & backwards forever. *Ha!*

Time is that blues guitar, keeping it all at bay, clapping, shouting, carrying on, long as he can play. *Ha!*

* * * * *

This is What I Learned That You Should Know Now

I reached what seemed like the far end of the Attic, which I'd been walking in for a long time. Maybe it started from Dreamland, I'm not sure. *Who knows how these things really start? Does it matter?* But I want you to know what I found out when I seemed to have reached that end of the Attic.

I look at the wall before me, not really convinced it was a wall before me. I'd never seen such a wall before me before in this Attic, in which I'd been many times. But it compelled me to look down, it compelled me to kneel down, it compelled me to lie down. I kept going *down & down & down*, & realizing that it was just a different kind of *up & up & up*.

And I was taught something, because I was willing to go *down & down & down*, & *up & up & up*, before this wall that I didn't believe was really there, though there it stood. But this is what I learned that you should know now.

There are these far-too-tiny-to-see sort of artists, tiniest little Creatures, who paint the world with emotions. Each one a different kind: sadness, anger, fear, joy, & so on. And they do not know of us, nor we of them. And yet we inter-relate & matter much to each other. We braid together without knowing. *They bore your trace, beloved.*

And why did they show me now? Why did I get to see? Why did they encourage me to share with you? I think it's because these artists were feeling like they weren't doing well enough by us, & they wanted to do better. And they had not known previous of us, just as we had not known previous of them, but then came this wall that brought us together. For them, there *was no end of the world.*

And they learned of me, & I learned of them. They reached up to me with jew-ells of love, touching me as they could, feeling me. They were asking, *how can we do better with what we do? How can we help?*

Down & down & down, & up & up & up.

* * * * *

SpiritPlants Radio America

I push through that wall that may not be there, & I invite my little friends to come along, & they do. They hop into a pocket in my green plaid jacket. Through the wall & come to a studio of a radio station with a big sign across the wall that says in fancy colorful script *SpiritPlants Radio America*.

I peek out the window nearby & see a lovely campus out there. There's a further room, where I see radio folks hanging out. Ceiling looks like a roof of endless stars.

Some of them look like students, some don't. I scurry into a corner as the DJ nods to me, & the engineer nods to me too, & I get the feeling that if you're going to DJ your show, you've got to engineer someone else's show. Hold hands both ways.

I become aware that I too DJ a show on this station, *SpiritPlants Radio America*, but I do it remotely. I don't know if everybody likes me doing it remotely, but my show has long been on the air there, & everyone is friendly overall there. It's nice to be part of things. I let my little friends out, for a look around. They seem drawn to people for different reasons.

One DJ's sad, worried, something, & one of my little artist friends hurries right over to her. Couple of swabs of the old molecular-sized brush, & she cheers up a little, looks around outside of her own struggles, & sees she's not alone.

Another DJ is angry, watching the television, on it the asshole who is in charge, letting more & more people get hurt, needlessly. Another of my little friends hurries over to him, paints him with *calm, calm, calm*.

I give a small signal. It's time to leave *SpiritPlants Radio America*, leave the ones who think I'm a good DJ, & the ones who think I'm not. It's time for me & my little friends to move along. I give a wave to all my fellow DJs, hoping to return sometime, & we're on our way again.

* * * * *

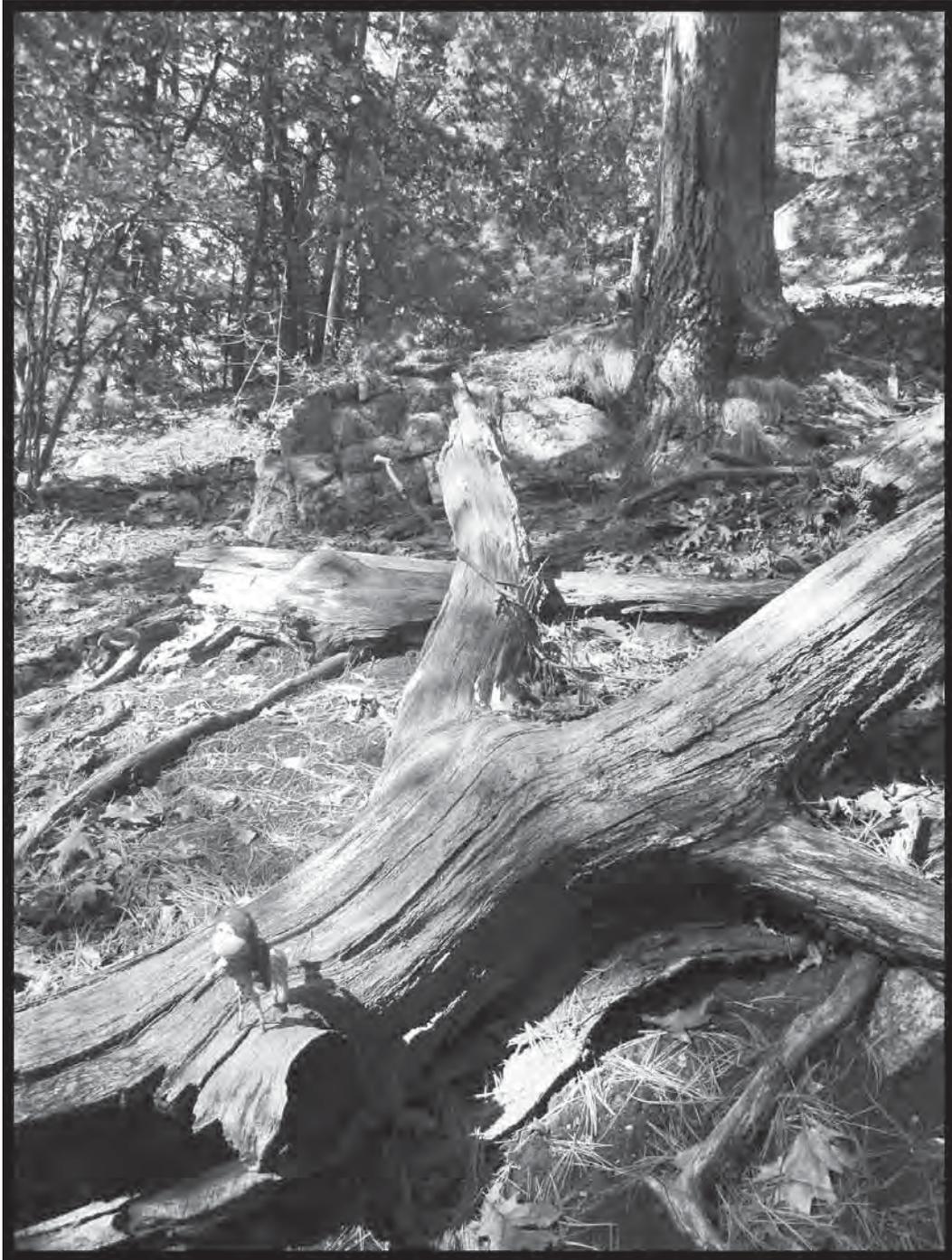
I Show My Little Friends a Bookstore

I feel like I want to show my little friends something good. There's more than idiots & suffering way up here. We come to an escalator & hop on, my little friends safe into the pocket of my green plaid jacket. We go *up & up & up*, & *down & down & down*, & arrive to a wonderful Liberry with about a bajillion books all around us.

I gesture to my little friends to come out of my pocket & hop up onto my hand, & they do. I show them big books with beautiful pictures, & tiny books with a tiny few of the best words, & oddly shaped books that are funny, & quiet hidden books, no noisier than a shadow.

Walk all around this wonderful liberry until we come to the very end, & there's a door, green & gold. Those colors are lucky. Walk on in, a-wondering.

It's a bare room. It's a white room. It's the kind of room that could be anything in the world, from **Unitive** to *ending*. It contains all the colors in the worlds of possibility. I start to walk faster until I realize I'm walking alongside of a stream. Like it was back in the Coffeehouse.



White Woods all around, glowing. Come to a bridge. There's an area under the bridge, stones, a hill. I sit there with my little friends, watch the water go by. They are sitting next to me in their tiny tininess, fingers on chin, trying to figure this all out. I am with them, finger on my chin, trying to figure it all out as well. *With you, beloved.*

* * * * *

There's Some Stories You Need to Tell S-l-o-w-l-y

There are some stories that you need to tell s-l-o-w-l-y &, in telling them s-l-o-w-l-y, they will be different kinds of stories than if you told them otherwise.

You see, I don't feel like I'm in the Attic anymore.

This *isn't* the Attic. This is my studio apartment in ZombieTown, & it's pretty bare. I haven't been here in a while. Is this the day that I moved out, all those years ago? I remember leaving just a little bit of trash in the corners, & not giving proper departure notice. The landlord was an asshole, & he deserved it.

But I'm back here now, & it's a kind of emptiness I'm feeling. *If I looked out the door, would I see that moving truck speeding away with me & my friends?* But here it's a thin feeling, less than a memory, not even a memory. *Is there something here?* It's just a bare room. But then I hear a noise, less than a noise, maybe it's a small breath, but it draws me into the bathroom, & I go in, & I close the door.

It's empty too. I don't turn on the light. I'm in the dark. Oh. I've been trapped in here before. Long stretches of tripping trapped in here. I can hear my white-faced pink cat radio in the other room, used to keep it on all night to keep me company. The Pink Floyd playing, I think.

I feel my way around, finding my sea legs in the darkness. Finally I just use that old trick & just close my eyes, begin to *hmmm*. *Ah*, here we go. There's a door in the back of this tiny bathroom that wasn't there back tripping when.

Well, I push through, & now I'm walking. My eyes closed, *hmmmming*, but nothing is happening yet.

Now I'm coming somewhere. I'm coming out of that dark bathroom & now I'm in a cement hotel room, not dissimilar to my studio but definitely not my studio. It's empty as well.

What can I do about this? I want something more to happen here than is happening so far. Am I telling the story s-l-o-w-l-y enough? I walk through the door of the hotel room, & now abruptly outside.

Across the street, there's a movie theatre. Now we're getting somewhere. *Nada Theatre*. Of course. **RemoteLand** *nightly, midnight*. Of course. *Now we're getting somewhere*. I walk right into the theatre. No one stalls me. No one is there. The theatre is empty.

What's weird is that I find that I don't have a shirt on now. I just kind of notice it, maybe a kind of breeze caught me or something. So now I'm standing in this empty theatre, and it's not anywhere near midnight, & I sit in the second row. It's the right row, where I always sit. *Especially with you, beloved. A trace of you in here?*

I watch. I wait. I nod, & I *hmmm*. *Come on, screen, show me something!* I'll talk a little faster then!

Then I see a refuge in the White Woods for many, bound on all sides by braided traps & alarums, & a culture in this refuge grows up that is happy, thrives. Till one time, at the ball field, a pop fly soars over the bounds, & many arguments over fair or fall.

Fair or fall? What does that mean? What is happening here?

Next time, I'm going to tell this story even more s-l-o-w-l-y.

* * * * *

Whenever I Go Into the Nada Theatre

Whenever I go into the Nada Theatre, I am convinced that it is at least midnight. Now I know this makes no sense. After all, you can walk into a movie theatre any time of the day or evening. But no, I walk through its strange doors, & it is midnight or later.

It is a vast movie theatre. Its ceiling is very high, if there at all. It has balconies that seem to go up & back & up & back, & there are little side-balconies too. I don't know if people sit in them or if they're just for decoration.

And there seem to be pulsing images on the ceiling, & walls, & even on the floor. Definitely on those green & gold curtains that open slowly to reveal a *massive* movie screen.

A *massive* one. And yet I sit down there, in the second row, *where I sit with you, & we look up toward that massive movie screen*. I close my eyes for just a moment to enjoy it all. When I open up my eyes again, I won't say I'm in the movie (that would be a dream, strange dream & a good one, but no), but it does seem as though maybe the movie & I are less separate from one another now (yes, that's the polite way to put it)(as though this Theatre & I held the little branch & the stone jew-ell between us).

You've got to watch out who is in the audience, & you've got to make sure that they understand too. The movie screen & I, the movie's world & I, share some space (let's say). And I get up to move around a little bit, & nothing seemed difficult to do, & the office I am in is empty.

There is a desk in the corner, of course, right over there. And that strange old computer on it. I sit down in the chair, which doesn't look very reliable, & I look at the screen, & it seems to be black & green, & the figures on it are hard to read.

They're very pixely & rectangular. Now they're pulsing & I'm thinking, *OK, is this my job? Is this what I do now? Do I make spreadsheets? Do I build documents? Am I just back from vacation? I must be just back from vacation. That bus ride to the great city, broke down three times. Was like a cult ran it. Wanted me to come up on that raggedy-looking roof to read some crazy girl's book about many worlds. Then they played the damned radio all night instead of fixing the tires quick.*

*That's why there's so much work piled up in the **In** file on my left-hand side, & no work completed on the **Out** file on my right-hand side.*

Alright, *alright*. I'll get down to work, spreadsheets, documents, other things. *I can do this.*

No. *I can't do this. I'm not gonna do this. I turn around. I look at the wall behind me. I look deep into the wall behind me.*

I'm going somewhere else. *I need some more vacation days before I can get down to this kind of work.*

* * * * *

It Was a Cube of Chocolate Chip Cookie Dough?

The questions always began like this: *it was a cube of chocolate chip cookie dough, edible? The baking kind?* The story varies. *It was the end of the world.* Others said it was *cherry vanilla*. Some said *both*. Some said *one* cube, some said *many*. Some said it was the confection of the culture through which it was traveling. Some said it contained *magic*. Others called it *really trippy*.

I don't know, man. I don't know how this happened. I was just looking for some Weeds, that's all. And I met this guy outside some trippy coffeehouse, & I thought, *man, he might be good to get me some Weeds.*

"Hey, man, how you doing?"

"I'm doing alright, man, how are you?"

"Doing well. Beautiful evening."

"I suppose, it is the *end of the world*, you know."

"True. How you keeping busy?"

"Well, I've got this plan, you see, I'm gonna teach a class on the **Netflix**. I got this friend who takes pictures for them."

"Oh, you mean that TV channel? You're gonna have a show?"

"Naw, man, I'm gonna teach a class *on* the **Netflix**."

"Oh, that's cool, man. Say, you got some Weeds?"

"Naw, man, I take these pills & my doctor *mumblemmummbblemmummmbbble*."

And he talked on & on & on, telling me every last detail of his medical situation, until I felt myself melting into the sidewalk with his trials, & his tribulations, & his Weedslessness, & soon I find myself inside *The Cenacle*.

What, you say? The Cenacle? That literary magazine with all them high-falutin writers & authors & artistes & so on? I was inside it, me! Yours truly. Me & my team, some of whom were not contributors. They're not authors or writers or artistes at all, but we're there to help capture someone who has infiltrated.

And we roam the pages of *The Cenacle*, through many writings by authors, & many photographs by artistes, & other strange occurrences within those pages, which are hard to tell about until we find the infiltrator! And wouldn't you know it, *he's got some Weeds!*

He's sitting at the very back of *The Cenacle*, right past the advertisement for **SpiritPlants Radio America**, between the *Notes on Contributors* & the *Last Yawp*, I believe. He's found himself a nice cozy spot, hasn't been edited yet obviously. Comfortable, among the Weeds.

Me & my team sit down with him. Takes him a while but he passes around his jive. Finally I say to him, after a good several rounds going around, *puff puff pass*: "Say, man, why are you there?"

"Here? Where?"

"*The Cenacle!* That is, amongst these authors & writers & artistes & so on. What are you doing here?"

Why did you infiltrate *The Cenacle*?”

Well, he takes a long hit on his short jive, we'd smoked it on down, & he says, “I gotta tell you, man. They talk about drugs a lot, & I got interested. About other weird stuff too, like endless deserts & Attics & so on. And so I started, you know, crawling along, down low, & I kept going. Some of it was *too* over my head, some of it was just *too* strange. I kept looking. Finally come back here, & there's this jive sitting there, right here, among all these lovely Weeds, so I sat down & started smoking it, & then all you folks came.”

“Well, why did you infiltrate?”

“Like everybody else in the world, man. *The end of the world*, man. What do you want, man?”

His voice keeps changing as he gets more & more excited. “*What do you want, man? What do you want, man? What do you want, man?*”

Me & my team, we stand up & move on. There's *gotta* be more to know than this.

* * * * *

Somewhere Down Deep

Somewhere down deep, among pages, words, traveling time like space, space like time, words like space, space like words, in my wheelchair with its saddlebag, which has a Velcro flap for easy use. You'd be *amazed* at how useful a Velcro flap on your saddlebag can be.

When I arrived to that party at the half-built old house, the one with that crazy bus poking halfway out of its attic, everybody's gathered around the long table, made of two braided planks, enjoying bowl after bowl of chicken & mashed potatoes. And a wonderful Soup too! People trying to forget their troubles, the crazy people with badges & guns, the sickness traveling the land, talk of the *end of the world*, trying not to think about any of it.

There was this old man, sharp, bearded, asking us hard questions to think about, as we sat friendly together & enjoyed our meal.

Is it good not to think about the things in the world bigger than any of us, if only for a little while?

Is that possible?

Is it a good thing to do?

Are you hurting anyone right now?

Is anyone hurting you?

If the answer is no, start there.

You're at peace, you're calm, start there.

Look at one another now. Ask these questions, ask others when you leave here.

Are you hurting anyone?

Are you being hurt by anyone?

If the answer is no, move on.

One to the next to the next to the next.

*When you find someone who is hurting or being hurt, **you stop**, all you people who gathered here, & are not being hurt, & are not hurting anyone.*

*And you gather 'round that person who is hurting or being hurt . . . **& you help!***

That's what you do. You don't add to the hurt, you help.

You figure out what that means, what it means to help, those who are hurting & those who are being hurt.

There's no formula, there's no plan, there's just figuring out what helps.

You arrive to it, & it works, & that person is not hurting or being hurt, & you gather them into your number & move along.

So said the old man at the table, between the big bowls of mashed potatoes, & the wonderful Soup, & we all listened. We asked each other those questions. We listened. Maybe we were reassured for a while. Maybe our purpose as a beloved group, & as single souls, now cleared some.

It's OK to be calm.

It's OK not to be hurt.

It's OK not to hurt.

It's OK.

It's OK.

Then a breath, & another, a third. A smile, a nod. ***It's time to help.***

* * * * *

I Made It to the Other Side

I made it to the other side. It happened, finally. *I made it to the other side.* I don't know how long it was, I don't know what kind of travel. I don't know what I was along the way. It was a shift. High in the air. Like the old stories told about. **Unitive Time**, *end of the world*, & all that.

I was come there as though I'd always been there, untended, unfettered, yet unable to leave. The hallways I passed through, they glowed, & they were endless.

There was something else too. A small something, a lavender trace of something, that kept me along. It was like a softest whisper of strange music, & I kept following it, & it's like I followed it in an arc over both miles & years. I followed it through that endless spaceship.

And it let me get near, & I began to arrive, & it let me nearer still, & I knew I was almost there. It's like we meshed together for a moment, & all was well in a new way. I didn't know what it was, what I was, but I wanted to say thank you to that lavender trace of softest music, & I didn't know how. I don't think it really needed thanks because I believe that strange music was made to get me through, & that music's happiness was when I made it to the other side.

And I awoke, wet, jagged, half in, half out of a frothy fountain. *The Fountain?* The one near the Tangled

Gate? Was I back?

No. I looked around, no Gate, just a fountain. Many noises in the world around me that I could not understand. Music nearby but no sign of anyone playing an instrument. No sign of that trace.

And now my past, it was like it was behind a wall I could not see through or over. *Who all had I once loved?*

All I had now was to stand, & to look about me, & to try to reckon how to make a path further along my way.

* * * * *

Enigmatic Events. Enigmatic Music. Enigmatic World.

“Enigmatic events. Enigmatic music. Enigmatic world.” Well, that’s what James Starsden famously says. Him a kind of time traveler who could sometimes be found around Iconic Square.

Dressed in his now equally famous shifting-rainbow-colored suit, he’d sit by that frothy fountain in Iconic Square, & he would turn on the white-faced pink cat radio that he carried around sometimes. He’d tune in to *Radio 36X With Commander Q* on ***SpiritPlants Radio America***.

It almost sounds like Commander Q has traveled to the *end of the world* to pluck bits & pieces from here & there, foreign tongues, old vinyl 45s, guttural gossip at icy bus stops. Dirty-talk, pretty-talk. The noise will braid & separate, evolve, crack wide, dive deep for the longest time, & yet stories will occur among all this seeming chaos.

One lingered with James Starsden long after he had with melancholy adieu departed the frothy fountain in Iconic Square, when ’twas his time again to travel via that spaceship with the hallways so long you would arrive far thence & whence from where you’d begun. He sometimes called it, for lack of a formal name, *Starship Attic*.

“One time he came to me asking for a ton of my earth. Wanting it for the valuable earthworms within, the medicines they will make to help the world heal from its sickness. And I helped him to write a moving prose piece, with photographs, for a magazine called *The Cenacle*, & a radio campaign on this very station you are tuned into. I hope you’ll consider his offer & his plea. I certainly hope you will!”

And James Starsden listened for a long while to these words, long after he had left Iconic Square, & he mumbled once again the words for which he so well known: *“Enigmatic events. Enigmatic music. Enigmatic world.”* Studied that pretty little stone he always kept close to hand, wondering where his beloved & the little stick.

* * * * *

Sooner or Later, This Will Happen to You, Too

I am working in a kind of big room, everyone has their work station, rows & rows of them. I’m unsure my task, worried, my lunch has attracted bugs. Boss comes over, looking around, sees the bugs, frowns. I promise to pack my lunch in plastic containers from now on.

I say it again. He nods, losing interest. Then I look at him deeper, with all the honesty in my heart & soul, & say, "I'll pack my lunch in plastic containers from now on."

He nods again, now edging away. (Sooner or later, this will happen to you, too.)

It's a Friday again, don't ask me how. Ride my bike to this little antique store run by my old teacher friend. He loves the two Laughing Little Buddhas. He loves his many vitamins. He used to be a Marine. And I come over to his antique store to help him record his radio show, for ***SpiritPlants Radio America***. Big band music. Glenn Miller, all that good stuff.

We record his show on that old **DuMont** reel-to-reel tape player of his. Then we pop many vitamins & he tells me stories of the travels of the Two Laughing Little Buddhas. Making folks laugh & laugh till they see Godd is an obvious truth, a simple one, woven into the beauty of things, & yet by no means the beginning or end of the answers people-folks seek about the many worlds.

(Sooner or later, this will happen to you, too.)

But his antique store is crowded this Friday, packed end to end, even at closing time. I find myself a good sit-down in an old armchair I know of there, in a shadowy corner. Reminds me fondly of that Coffeehouse. Decide to have a nap till he's ready.

*Far out, nowhere, there's a little hut with a vast within. And, as you approach the little hut, you become more hopeful, more & more hopeful, more & more & more hopeful, more hopeful than you've ever been ever. Tell me the **why** of it, tell me the **how** of it, **do**.*

(Maybe when this happens to you too, sooner or later, you'll have it figured out better than I do.)

* * * * *

Me Riding on My Bike Back to My ZombieTown Hovel

This story begins with me riding my bike back to my ZombieTown hovel from Eastern Donutshop, where me & my notebooks & black pens & Polly iPod would headquarter for a long stretch.

I come around to a side street I've ridden down many, many times &, in the middle of the street, there's a guy standing there in full protective gear. He's stopped this weird-looking bus, & is blocking up the road. Bus is blasting out loud music like this street has never heard.

*Has there been an **Apocalypse** & I didn't hear about it? Is it the end of the world? Suppose it's possible. I get deep into writing *Dream Raps* for the new issue of *The Cenacle* & I don't hear much news going on. And most of the old gents & ladies down at the Eastern would rather drink their black coffees & study their dog racing forms.*

I try to swerve around all this & I think I crash. Next thing I know, I'm coming to in a strange laboratory. Sloppily tied to a chair, as though someone forgot to finish, or had other business to get to. I look out the window & there's my bike parked right in front. Locked to the back fender of this weird roofless bus. I don't know what this was about, but I don't like it.

Time passes, no explanations, nobody does anything. There are no secret experiments on me. No

pokings or proddings, no blood drawn, nothing. *How is me sitting here, waiting hours on end, helping the Cause of Science in curing the **Apocalypse**?*

Finally, I get tired of waiting to be experimented upon. I see that someone left that laboratory window slightly open. I wiggle my sorry ass out of my loose ropes & then on through that window. Free my bike & I ride on back to my ZombieTown hovel like nobody's business, let me tell you. Lock the door. Close the curtains, my *Alice in Wonderland* curtains, tight &, in the darkness of my hovel, I realize maybe why they wanted me.

They wanted my **Vuufoo**. I built it myself off them Internets. You've heard of them Internets? Well, my **Vuufoo** is a tool that you can use to find something on them Internets, or at least some good candidates, if you have a mission of some kind. You enter into the tool up to six characteristics of a need, & it will lead you to a few good candidates. You can set filters by time, by distance, by worlds.

I warn you, though, that if you ever borrow or steal my **Vuufoo**, or get one of your own built from them Internets, it can occasionally be ornery. Has this cackle funny as the world.

I want to know what just happened though, quite honestly, so I type in this **Vuufoo**: **ZombieTown** & **Laboratory** & **Apocalypse**. Figuring that will get me started somewhere.

But all this confounded contraption will say to me—*is it some kind of hint or clue?*—is the following:

***All worlds braid. All worlds hmmm.
All worlds braid. All worlds h m m m.***

I drift back onto my mattress, lay with the beloved **Vuufoo** in my embrace. Thinking that, you know, that laboratory doesn't matter. Doesn't matter at all.

What I need to know about is:
All worlds braid. All worlds h m m m.

* * * * *

A Real Lockdown

Lots happens when there's a lockdown, a real lockdown, not like it was back when, when it was a suggestion, a good idea, something maybe you'd wanna do if you felt like it. No, now we're all locked down, for real. No Cause of Science cure for this *end of the world, this **Apocalypse***.

I'm with my dear friend the Traveling Troubadour. He's struggling. I understand. It's hard. He lost his job. He's struggling. He's staying in the spare room of his friend the photographer, but that's not really going too well. I wish I had more room in my ZombieTown hovel.

We're at a party. Well, we're not really at a party. We're at one of those, what are they called? *Virtual parties*. We each put on the Helmet. You project there. That's how it is for most of us at this party. But not all.

There are some people really at this party, not just virtual, who are even more down than my dear friend, because they decided they don't care. Really, honestly. And they're happy to accommodate the rest of

us, & be our entertainment, so long as they don't leave at the end of the night. However that happens.

Now this isn't a story that really happened. This is just what you'd call a *parable*, a warning. So you keep that in mind. This didn't really happen, but it could. So the old people are milling around, in the big open field of the party. The rest of us are there, projecting. Using our Helmets, we're safe. We all ready our controls, & our various weapons, & we begin to fire. Fire on the old people, mostly old people.

Now they're dressed well for dodging, for nimbly getting around. They're not in wheelchairs or leaning on walkers. Not tonight. They all got their shots of hyper-adrenaline before this began. They're gonna go out strong. We fire & fire at them, & miss them a lot. They hide behind large rocks, in stands of trees, shadows in the corner. They jeer, they shout. They weave wildly high & low.

Some of them, they don't speak English anymore. They don't speak any language that you would know. They speak a sort of guttural tongue of despair. As we begin to clip them, make them stumble, & then shoot them down, their guttural tongue comes out wildly. They cry louder & louder, & deeper & deeper, & spittier & spittier. *They roar!*

But the critical thing about this party game is that we don't want to shoot them down & kill them all at once. We want to spread it over the course of the night. We want to wound them, make them angry, make them shout in that guttural tongue. *Earn it.*

Someone hits the **Music** button. It's not pretty music. It's loud, mean music. It's music for shooting down people in despair. They like it. Rallies them more. *Remember, they don't want to come out of this.* They haven't felt alive in a long time. Lockdown has been going on for a long time & they decided this is the way they're gonna go out. *Fuck the end of the world.*

My dear friend the Traveling Troubadour is shooting but he's not really shooting. This isn't helping him. *He doesn't want to kill anybody.* He hasn't adjusted to this lockdown. He hasn't adjusted to survive, & the fact that because someone does, someone else doesn't. He doesn't understand that us shooting down these despairing old folks is part of how the world survives now.

Puts down his gun, & he walks away. Takes off his Helmet. I take one more shot, clip a blue-haired old woman's thigh. Old blood flares out. She roars, *roars!* in anger. Full of life, full of her life ending, full of the anger at her life ending, & this lockdown, & all of this. It's a roar of happiness & despair.

And then I take off my Helmet, & I go & sit with my dear friend. I worry he's not going to make it. I worry he's gonna end up in a field like that, with other despairing people. And I worry that he's gonna want me to take those final shots as he roars out the remainder of his despair.

* * * * *

The Strange-Folk

Somehow I ended up out in the desert with the Strange-Folk. You know these Strange-Folk. They look up in the skies, they look deep in the White Woods, they feel in the sand along the beach of the Wide Wide Sea, because they're sure secrets are waiting there to be told. They've heard about these secrets, & they go looking for them.

They figure these secrets are gonna explain everything. *Everything I ever wanted to know, all my questions*

answered. The beginning & end of the world. I'm gonna be happy because I'm gonna find out what these secrets are for myself. And so they go looking, high & low. For traces toward what will reveal all. Stories of magickal sticks & stones. You know these Strange-Folk.

So what happens is I end up in the desert with some of these Strange-Folk. Maybe I misunderstood when they offered me a ride. I don't know. But there's this large gathering of these Strange-Folk, & they're telling each other stories about looking in the White Woods, & feeling in the sand of the Wide Wide Sea, & looking in the skies.

Then the ships overhead gather our attention.

The Strange-Folk are gape-mouthed. *Oh! Yes, they are!* And they start running every which way. They don't know what it means when the answers *actually appear before you*. They were just words before. Strange books they read in bus stations, & along the way to jobs where they would talk to other Strange-Folk, about this possible answer & that possible answer.

But no, there are those spaceships, up there!

And I'm delighted, because I dreamed of them. Didn't go looking for them, didn't have to. I had a dream one magickal night, & so I just lived along, not paying attention to all the crazy stories. *And there they are.*

Strange-Folk are running panicked every which way in this desert, but I just stand there, point & smile. I point up high, towards those spaceships. And I'm thinking, *man, they're too far up there for me to have a little pleasant conversation with them. What do I do about this?*

So finally I think, *well, maybe I should tend to the Strange-Folk for a while.* And so I do. I go grabbing the ragged shirt of this one, & the ill-fitting dress of that one, & the half-put on wig of another. I start to gather them together, & I start to calm them down, *hmmmming*, is what I do, & I get them to *hmmm* with me.

We eventually gather in a beloved group, hand to hand, even paw to paw, & we look up at the spaceship, & we're calmer now. And now we can have some of that pleasant conversation among us all, with the spaceship up there. Forget about the secrets, forget about the stories, because this is what is happening now. *Ha!* It's gonna be fun!

* * * * *

Time . . . Distortions . . . Ensue

"Time distortions ensue." That's what he said to me at the beginning of the weekend. The performance had begun on late Friday afternoon, till sometime on Sunday, but hard to say when exactly.

I played a small part at first, nothing really too noticeable or important to the story. I was in the background. Yet always somewhere near to the Main Character of the performance. Him intense, so intense, like a wild wire. That's what I thought. But disconnected from himself too. Somewhere deep down. The wires within lay on the floor, inert.

As the performance moved into Saturday, the girl we traveled with noticed me nearby, & worried I'd

lost my fringy scarf. But there it was, partly hanging out of my tie-dyed book-bag at my feet. There it was. *No worries*. I looked up at her to show her.

But she was gone, like she'd been gone for hours. The Main Character looked at me & said, "*Time distortions ensue.*"

Come Saturday night, I'd become a kind of vigilante in the story. Taking more of my place in the front of things. I was called different things by different people. *Cenacle, Betsy Bunny Pillow, Dreamwalker.*

No longer wild & wiry, inside or not, he just wasn't. He was calmer. He was starting to learn from me, leaning near me, looking toward where I looked, trying to figure what I saw.

We shared the little stick & stone jew-ell of the Gemini Machine, & learned that what we were doing is what we did best. It seemed so clear & yet it pushed us along, down deeper together.

So I took him along on my dream-walks. Showed him how the many worlds braided together, & where they did: that Ancienne Coffeehouse, the Tangled Gate, the Attic, other places. Showed him the little hut at the Heart of the World, wherein one can travel back to **Unitive Time**. I brought him deep into the White Woods, into a clearing, & I looked at him, & I told him to *stand up straight, now, brother*. He did.

I said, "Now draw a circle in the air & *hmmm* with me as you do. I'll draw one with you. And we're going to travel this new way now. And you're going to lead us again, & this is the way that you're going to lead us. Now go ahead, do it."

Then it got better. It got *way* better. All that weakness, all those wild wires, all that fading, *nah*, he was come out of it all, becoming the leader he was meant to be. Now knew, how worlds braid, how people braid, how hearts braid, he knew it all. But now he also knew that he didn't have to lead as though following is a weakness. He didn't have to wield his power, as though others needed to be found to kneel before it.

He became calm, he became happy. On Sunday, when I was ready to move on, I knew he was gonna be fine. Just to be sure of it, I took my fringy scarf out of my tie-dyed bag, knotted it smiling 'round his neck, not a word, & departed.

* * * * *

Troubles on the Job

You know, I understand that everybody has his or her troubles on the job. But this was an especially challenging one of mine I'll tell you about now. I was working on this document. That's what I do. I work on documents. I try to make them good. Look good, feel good, fly through the air, swim into the seas without drowning, that's what I do.

Now the challenges began because someone had, right off the bat, decided to call this document "The Man With the Diaper on the Butterfly Between His Legs." What kind of title was that for a document? This weren't no porno, but that was the title. They all had decided, in that big room, the glass walls, fancy phones. I wasn't there, just got handed to me. *Go ahead. Do your thing*, they urged. *Put on your iPod headphones to that crazy radio station we know you hear, & do your thing!*

The whole situation quickly became multi-dimensional. In fact, the harder I worked, the more I realized I was laboring in an endless loop of *almost getting done & then not getting done*, of *almost getting done & then not getting done*, of *almost getting done & then not getting done*.

Getting so close, getting to that last page, & then remembering something & going back to fix it. Then there was a link, & then there was a reference, & then there was a footnote, & then there was a citation, & then there was an image. And I kept getting to that last page, & then it would be something else. It was never the same thing, just an endlessly braiding loop. It had become multi-dimensional, I tell you. *It was that kind of day.*

Finally I decided I was done. I sent it off. Put it in a big brown envelope. Squeezed it into that pneumatic tube they call the Chipmunk, or the 'Munk for short, so it'd arise the many, many floors, to somewhere at the top of the endlessly tall building in which I am labored, find its way.

And then I sat back down at my desk in the corner, under the air conditioner that drips, even in the wintertime. And I pulled, slyly smiling, from the bottom desk drawer, the manuscript that really concerned me. Called *Power*.

I read in it about the Great War, & the King who travels from place to place, & how time seems wrong to him. Seems to run backwards, *effect & cause*. He's traced, in this way, backwards through time, from the *end of the world* itself, down these great sandstone steps, to a seeming endless Beach. *Will he find his long-lost beloved?*

I turn the page, & there's only a couple of lines to read. They say, "If you come to the King's Island, & look out to the dark waters of the Wide Wide Sea, there is only one thing you need to worry on, until the King returns from his travels. If you hear distant bells, he'll come-come-a'calling."

There are people near me now. I hurriedly put away my manuscript. One of them has that envelope, that awful document, in his hands. Shake my head, if only to myself. *That kind of day.*

* * * * *

What Is the Forever Dreaming?

The question comes up, *what is the forever dreaming?* It's always asked. *Are the Braided Places like veins that run through Heart of the World, through the Heart of the Many Worlds? From the Great Tree, to the lesser Great Trees, to the Many Worlds?* These questions are always asked. Someone's always wanting to know.

Someone's always arriving, sometimes with a little pad of paper & a pencil. Sometimes it's some kind of weird gadget that doesn't look nearly as efficient or easy to use as a rite-typer. Usually, when the questions are asked, I'm sitting on my log, the one speckled by rainbow moss, & I'm assembling a big beautiful book. I mean, that's what I'm doing, that's what I often do. Remembrances of my photographic travels in the Attic, on the bus with no roof, & back to **Unitive Time** itself.

I kind of think the people who come with their questions, they ask someone along the way, & that someone says, *well, look for the guy sitting on the log assembling his big, beautiful book, he'll tell ya.* And then they come.

Come on, man. You come all this way down here, & you're asking me what all this means? You've brought good questions. Come on. Think, man. Stand up. I don't want to sit with you. Stand up! Now raise your arms high. Out. Now breathe. Breathe. Don't just inhale. Breathe. Good. Now listen for a while. Listen. Now take a big sniff, take a big, delicious sniff. Feel it all around you, feel it touching you. Feel it in you. Feel yourself opening up to it, letting out to it. If you feel it, it feels you. Oh, it's gorgeous & beautiful!

You want to see Unitive Time? I can't tell you if that'll work but the Hut's over there. If you can figure it out, you can go & get a little bit of your own answer for why there's something instead of nothing.

I Think Often About Narrative

I think often about narrative, about writing narrative, about what narrative is. What it means to tell a story, how to tell it, how to tell it well, how to tell it strange, what any of it means. *Do you know what any of it means? I'm glad you're sitting here, next to me, beloved, cuz otherwise I'd just be talking to myself right now, about narrative.*

Writing narrative, in the past, & in the future, how they link up uncertain. But, by golly, if you start compiling them, you might just see how they connect later. That's what you gotta do. That's what I've been thinking about. That's the conclusion I've come to.

You see, I was sitting in my ZombieTown hovel. It's down that street, past the Coffeehouse from here. Sometimes I take that weird-ass bus they run to get here. And there were Creatures relaxed all around my floor, everywhere. Under hats, & so on. You might not even know they were there. They get cold. They end up under hats. It helps, a little. And it was peaceful.

I was talking to someone about a strange narrative, with a weird structure. I don't think I was talking to the Creatures because they just stop listening when I talk that way. They picked me up later on down the road, as it were, when I started talking about the Great Tree at the Heart of the World.

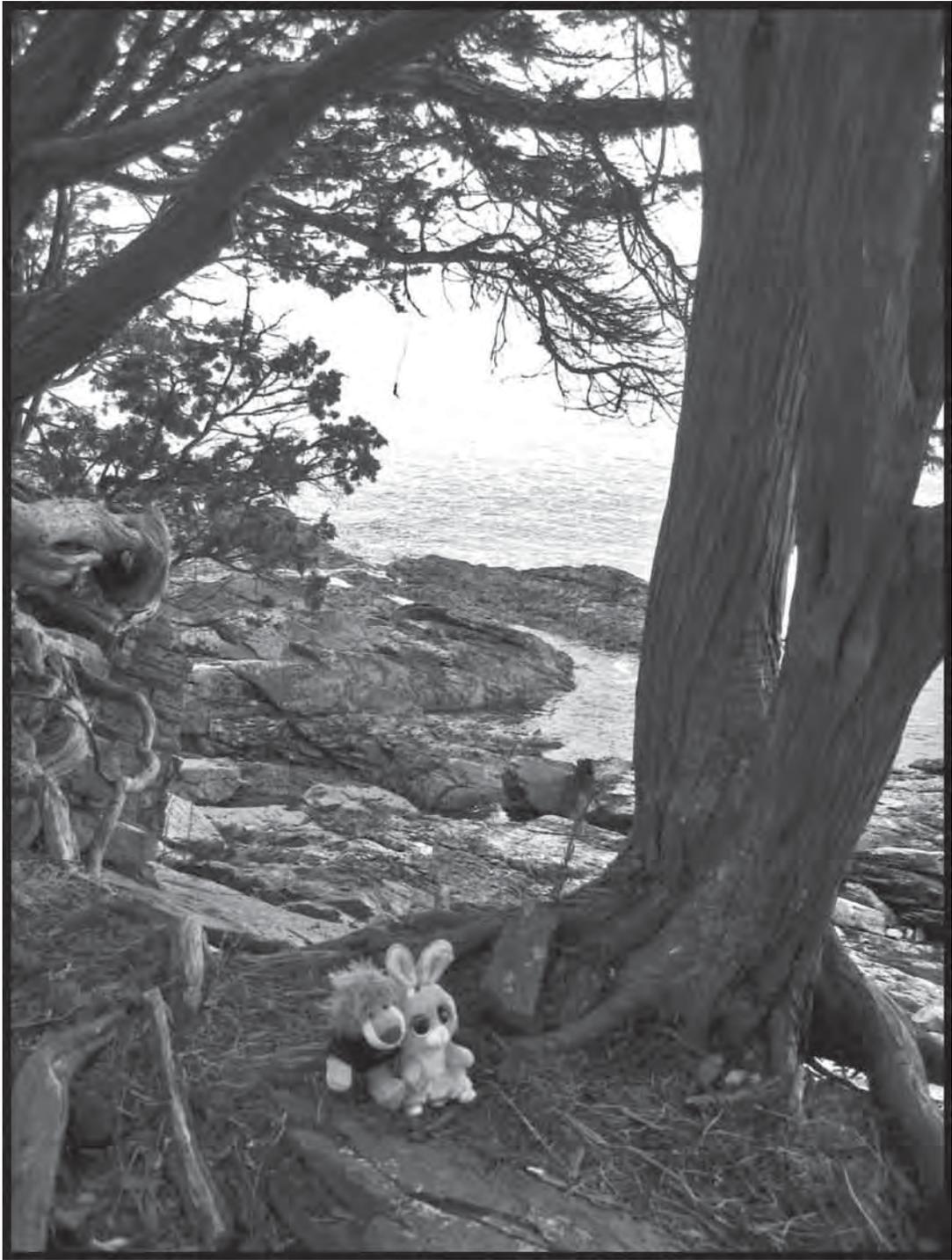
That raised them up, some even came out from under their hats, a-sniffing. I said, "In this weird narrative, I lived in a room that is one small part of the Great Tree, but I don't know how I got there. And it doesn't seem like a bad place to be, as places to be go."

I closed my eyes, & I imagined cherry blossoms, & lines of a poem about the *end of the world* scattered every which way around this room, inside this Great Tree, inside this weird narrative that I was telling, maybe to the Creatures, in my ZombieTown hovel, down the street, past the Coffeehouse from here.

I follow the cherry blossoms, & the lines of the poem about the *end of the world*, for a long time, till I come to a great city. I'm sitting in a tall city building, in the glass foyer, at a glass table, in a glass chair, & there's a drawing in front of me. It's a drawing of a peanut.

My guitarist friend arrives, & says to me, with his own unique crooked smile, "Where are you right now, Raymond? Are you here? Are you in the Great Tree? Are you in your ZombieTown hovel? Are you doing that radio show of yours on *SpiritPlants Radio America*? Where are you?"

Well, I put my finger on chin, because this was a good question, not a tricky question. Shouldn't have been anyway. But I looked up at my friend with that crooked smile of his own & I said, "In my mind,



when it is best & clearest & brightest, there is a cackle-o-phony, everywhere, a *cackle-o-phony*. And that's why I'm here, & there, & there, & there, & there. *That's how it is.*"

Well, he hauled me up by my raggedy shirt, gave me a solid pat on my back, & said, "My friend, I'm gonna take you to see your favorite movie. I know where it's playing, down an alley no one else knows. It'll be just us. And for a while your *cackle-o-phony* will be quiet, in the seat, next to yours."

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The Gemini Machine

Well, it's not something you're gonna encounter just *anywhere*, or just *any* day, but you might encounter it *somewhere* on *some* day. *What's the difference?* Oh, I think there's a difference. You see, there is the Gemini Machine. Rhymes with *hegemony*. A little branch clasping a pretty little stone jew-ell in its crook.

Now here's how it works, & maybe this will better explain why one way but not the other. Two people. One holds the little branch, one holds the stone jew-ell. They learn what they do best together, & then they do. They become more than one, more than two.

On the day when I was lucky enough to encounter the Gemini Machine, my beloved & I were riding in our favorite crimson sedan, Sydnee Grand Prix SE, kissing, flirting, playing the old time rock-&-roll on the ***SpiritPlants Radio America***. Sometimes I'm up front & she's in back, sometimes we're both up front, sometimes we're both in back. Sometimes my beloved is under a favorite electric blue blanket, smiling. Sometimes I'm with her.

And all the time, I am holding the branch & she's holding the stone jew-ell. Sometimes we switch off, but always one of our hands is holding one, one of our hands is holding the other, & our other two hands are holding each other. That's how it works.

It's not just about kissing & flirting. Could be about other things.

Could be two scientists come together. They are brilliant geniuses & with branch & stone jew-ell held, & other hands held, there comes the answer about the *end of the world* they have sought for so long.

It could be two whose nations both make money off of their war & rivalry. These two are tired of it, tired of using the word *Godd* interchangeably with *money* & *business* & *profit*, *ideology* & so on. Them in the secret Attic of a hotel room, alone, maybe that strange No-Tell some know of. The door locked, a blank piece of paper, a jar of ink, a pen. Hands held, stone jew-ell, little branch. *Time to fill that blank page with peace.*

What do you think? Maybe it's coming your way. What will you do with the Gemini Machine? Who will you do it with?

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The Gemini Machine (Continued)

My beloved & I embrace the Gemini Machine, kissing, flirting, stone jew-ell & little branch, & Sydnee Grand Prix SE friendly departs us into a black & white 'scape. Her radio still blasting the old time rock & roll.

We're now in a cloudy canvas, traveling, maybe by train, maybe Creature friends close by. Some of them like trains fo sho.

I look out the window at the black & white 'scape, cloudy, look farther & farther, Gemini Machine deeper & deeper. *What does kissing mean on its far ends?* I'm watching, in my mind's eye, **RemoteLand**, that cinematic **Beast**, & its sequel, **Three Inches of Blood**, & its variation, **More Fun**, playing in simultaneous mix out there in the black & white 'scape. *Far edges of kissing, Gemini Machine, stone jew-ell, little twig, beloved. Wonderful, wonderful.*

The train speeds up. *Or does the train slow down? Or does it do both?*

"Hey, listen, man, don't you tell me speed goes just one way or the other! I say no! I say you can go fast & slow at the same time! I've felt it, man!"

"Calm down, sir."

"I'm sorry, man. It was all comforting & calming until I thought about speed going fast or slow, & having to choose."

"It's OK, sir. It's OK." My beloved nods me too. Smiling gestures our Gemini Machine by reminder.

The train conductor is an old punker. I can see the Mohawk under his trainman's cap. He's got tattoos running high & low, pretty ones though, beautiful ones. One shows a kind of strange bus with no roof careening over a black chasm. Another shows those rocking Ramones boys traveling in the far reaches of outer space with Mulronie the Space Pirate & his boon companion Commandeer Cacklebird, in their famous Space Tugboat. *Toot-Toot!*

"You are a canvas, like the black & white canvas we are in," I say, calmer.

He nods, appreciative. Shows me his blank book of the *urrrr*-tongue. Hands me this book, of the *urrrr*-tongue, & says, "Read this, sir, it'll balance you out. All the beautiful, all the glorious, all the horrific, all the strange, all the subtle, & all the boring things will mix together in a beautiful Soup at the bottom of your mind. **Unitive Soup**. *Ha!* You won't worry about the *end of the world* no more."

I say, "Thank you, brother," after we've exchanged a long, long look. *Thank you, brother.*

I lean my head on my beloved's shoulder, still Gemini Machine between us, & I glance at that book written in the *urrrr*-tongue, every page blank, every page beautiful, every page calming to the riled heart & the restless eye.

Fast or slow? No, calm. Urrrr-tongue.

Fast or slow? No, calm. Urrrr-tongue.

Calm. Urrrrrr-tongue. Calm. Calm.

Who was that old punker trainman? He's gone. This train is now murky, becoming roseate. *Is it still moving on tracks?*

Or are we now in two old armchairs, in a strange rosy-lit room?

Calm. Urrrrrr-tongue. Calm. Calm. Calm. Calm. Calm. Calm. Calm. Calm.

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In a Time of Plague & Protest

I suppose you could say that in a time of plague & protest, one needs to follow other paths of travel than the usual ones. My beloved & I are now traveling through *Labyrinthine [a new fixtion]*. The strange, endless book known by many, & a few, & hardly any. Where there are places filled with many words, fewer words, & no words.

We come to this place & that, & I would tell you what places these are, & describe them in detail, but they were not important. We were looking for something, & the places in between were just footsteps along the way. *We weren't there yet.*

Eventually, we found ourselves out in the desert (*flat, cracked, reaching far ahead of us*) along a strange, endless road, & now this began to become a place that was a trace of *somewhere*, rather than just *on the way* to somewhere. There are few stops on this endless road. We traveled along this endless (*flat, cracked*) desert road, as one does in *Labyrinthine [a new fixtion]*, not quite by foot, not quite by vehicle, but *just along*.

There were a couple of stops along the way, not many. A coffeehouse (not like the one where we met), for fancy drinks, little bit of air conditioning, some music not in your own mind, not *hmmmed* by your own lips. But the general feeling in that place was: *you get your fancy drink & you keep on traveling through*. That's how this endless road through this (*flat, cracked*) desert was. *Get your fancy drink & keep on traveling through*. Not unfriendly. Just not wishing to accumulate anyone for more than a little while. OK, that's fine.

My beloved finished her fancy drink, & we nodded at each other. Raised our eyes to the sky & *swooped up!* Straight up, away from the endless (*flat, cracked*) desert road, away from the not quite unfriendly coffeehouse, straight up! Sky, clouds, stars, somewhere else. And then somewhere *else else*. And then somewhere *else else else*.

Till we came to a beautiful perch at the very top of *Labyrinthine [a new fixtion]*, from which we could sit together, side by side, holding hands, took out our Gemini Machine, little branch, stone jew-ell. Wondering *what else do we do so well but kiss? What else is there? Is there a number 2?*

We look down upon all the wild trans-dimensional criss-crossed lands of *Labyrinthine [a new fixtion]*, & now I have a black pen, & she has a nifty little camera. *Wild laughter!*

* * * * *

Letters, As . . .

Letters: *as shapes, sounds, clumps, or words, meanings on sheet, meanings of sound, sentences, paragraphs, pages, hand-written varieties, fonts, various surfaces, in dreams, in mind, in space? under water? burnt up?*

Creatures nearby sniff curiously. We awake.

Oh! What just happened? It must be the laughter that's coming from the apartment floor below ours. It's that Sunny's House of Sunshine & Pizza Den. Sunny's House of Sunshine is in front. It's kind of a warehouse, but only very-sorta. Some come to collect on pain caused them, others to compensate for pain they caused. Usually one-on-one matchings, talk &/or sex, nobody forced to do anything. But the rules are commitment & anonymity, whether giving or receiving. And this is it: *You stay till you pay or are paid in full.*

Does it always work? Does anything? Can you return? Their motto is: *the next time, it's on you. Is this always true?* I don't know. I think they do their best, quite honestly. Who could ask them to do best-er?

And so, I am in bed, twined with my beloved, knowing that those strange thoughts in my head about language probably came from the happy noises jarring me awake, emanating from Sunny's House of Sunshine below. Now louder music, wild cacklings.

It could be. Maybe not. Maybe it was something else. But you know, when you live above such a place, & you know that they're trying to do good in this world, not worrying its far ending, it makes you want to turn to your beloved in bed, if you're indeed with your beloved in bed, & say to her, or him, or them, but in this case her: *you are a lovely soul.*

Never too early or late in the day to say so. I think we probably carried on from there.

When You Go Under the Covers

I followed the night's **Beast** right on down. *Down deep, y'know?* What happens when I go under the covers, & then under the covers' covers, & then under the covers' covers' covers, & so on, until that's what all I seemed to do. And then, without knowing, I was arrived. It seemed to get darker & worse. The silence where music does not go.

I'd given away for disposal all of my little Creature friends & notebooks. I don't know why, but twas darker & worse like this, down under the covers' covers' covers. Then I started to climb back, because I panicked. Suddenly, these covers *didn't matter*, nor how many there were of them. *Didn't matter* if I couldn't count the number. In a kind of slow, furious panic, I began to seek to get them all back. Felt like the *end of the world*. All beloved unbraiding.

It involved reaching out farther than my hands could reach, toward skies that sucked like big hungry cheeks; climbing what I couldn't climb, buildings with an up & no down. But I kept going. I ended up on a truck, & my notebooks were lined one after the next on a shelf, in the back of this truck. I didn't know if it's all of them but it sure seems like a lot. I didn't know how many notebooks I have. Is that all of them? *I didn't know.*

The truck pulled into a processing center behind a roofless bus blowing out black smoke. I hopped off the truck, half-crazed, the last of the covers falling off me, & I looked for the guy in charge. I demanded them all. He nodded, for what he knew what I'd seen, been himself too down deep under the covers' covers' covers.

I got them all. I got people to help me. I got strangers that wouldn't talk to me on a daytime city street to help me. I got them *all* involved. This was going to be their satisfaction too.

And there's the White Bunny, & there's the little pink-nosed bear with the red stripy hat! There's Pirth, the purple furry dancing Creature! And they knew how it was under the covers' covers' covers. They're not mad. They're happy to see me.

My notebooks, they're unharmed. Got a black pen in my pocket too again. Beloved's smile to my open eyes.

So when you find yourself slipping with the night's **Beast** under the covers, one after the next, give a shout. *Give a roar! Make noise.* Use those sharp teeth of yours to grab on to that cover, *bite it, bite through it, bite through another.*

These aren't the friendly blankets you know & love so well. They don't care how far down you go. You gotta *bite & chew & claw your way back, & you can. You can.* You can get *it* all back & more, whatever *it* means, whatever *more* is to you. You can get it all back. But you gotta try, you gotta do. *You gotta do.*

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If You Reach Back Deep in This Mythopoeia

Now if you reach back deep in this mythopoeia, I mean *deep* in this mythopoeia, deeper, deeper in this mythopoeia, there is **Unitive Time**. Before clocks & calendars, before names & enemies, before ideologies & favorite football teams, there is **Unitive Time**.

Was it good? Was it paradise? Was it Eden? Was it Valhalla? Was it heaven? Words? Now I'm no expert, but I don't think it was any one or the other of these. I think of **Unitive Time** as being without the bifurcation of waking or sleeping, when each & all touched each & all. I think it was something other than paradise or anything like that, good or bad. It was more where things began, like a canvas. When it's blank, nothing's been applied to it yet. *Is the canvas good? Is the canvas bad?*

And then the canvas begins to build. Strokes of the brush or, with **Unitive Time**, the Wide Wide Sea, somewhere above the Great Tree at the Heart of the World. Eventually the Islands, the One Woods. All of these filled in the canvas in different ways. All were part of one. Eventually, the natural sounds these natural things made urged into being a kind of music, a *hmmm*, which traced through & braided all closer together. And then something in the *hmmm* cackled!

Something in the *hmmm* wanted to play, & so cackled an Imp! She was drawn up in a bucket of deep earth by a braided thread from the Heart of the World, to the Beach of Many Worlds where lives Abe the Ancient Sea Turtle. And the Imp smiled, beloved of Abe, & the Imp said *ke?*

Where is she bound? What will it be like? Now that's what you get to learn if you dig down deep enough in this mythopoeia . . . deeper . . .

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Once a Man Had Come to a Great City

Here's an old story for you, but it's one that feels fresh & new as well. Once a man had come to a great city to seek his fortune. He wanted to learn a good trade, but had to leave behind his own war-torn land. The ending of one world for the beginning of the next. He became a citizen of his new home.

At night he dreamed sad dreams of his old home, & would visit his beloved Village & the White Woods nearby. In these dreams, he was cheered by the company of a White Bunny with mesmerizing eyes, & a merry little cackling Imp. He comforted his days in learning photography from a very able teacher, & then teaching others too.

As an old man, his adopted home now turned somewhat cruelly against immigrants, even those like himself who had lived there for so long. Sadly, he chose to return to the home of his youth. He returned to his little hut on the edge of his Village.

He was unpacking his suitcase when he found his ballot for the upcoming election in the great city he had left. Now heartbroken, that he would not be able to cast one more vote in his forsaken new land. Now unpacked, he sadly slept again in the bed of his youth. Laying his ballot tenderly by his white-faced pink cat radio.

In Dreamland, he found himself with the White Bunny & the merry little Imp. He was young again, & swift, & they traveled the White Woods together. Many dreams like this, until they left him, near to a strange box, alone in a clearing. The box had a message on it, which read:

Vote Today!

He dropped his ballot, in this box & woke up, & the ballot on his bedside by his radio was gone.

The Photographer

I had traveled for a long time across the depth & the breadth of this magickal Island. Its beautiful endless White Woods. I sometimes wondered about how can an Island, with a shore, have a Woods within of no discernable size? Once you enter, there's no far end. You come out where you came in, never the other side. I tried. It doesn't work. It's not how it works here.

But I had my nifty little camera, which I'd brought to photograph this Island, thinking that this was a familiar task to me, with steps & tools I well knew. But I learned, *no, that's not how it works here.*

And I struggled for a long time to take a picture of anything. It's not that my nifty little camera didn't work. I was sure it did. I was sure too that I had a very deep supply of film. I was sure of all this. I checked the film in my knapsack. *Deep supply.*

I studied close the nifty little camera in my hands. Each part of it worked, & they worked all together. But I was stymied. I could not begin to embrace this beloved new home yet.

It's like this. I wanted to take a picture of everything that I saw because it all seemed so related, & so taking a picture of *one* thing or *another* thing seemed the wrong move. And so I wandered for a long

time, just looking & listening, sniffing, tasting, feeling around.

And I must admit that I began to despair. I thought, *well, I can always leave. After all, I've determined that I'll always end up going out the way I came in here.*

I'd tried it many times, to come out somewhere else. I'd enter these White Woods, travel what seemed like hundreds of miles, not keeping or counting my direction. But I would always come out to the same stretch of Beach where I had long ago arrived.

Sometimes I couldn't even do that, which is the other thing that I have to explain. I couldn't leave at all, unless I intended to. See, the White Woods will help you if you help yourself. But if you have no goal or destination, the White Woods won't make one up for you. And *when* I intended to leave, I'd find myself on the Beach, precisely where I'd arrived. Even *this* required intention.

I despaired over all this until one day, as I had been long traveling through the White Woods, marveling as I always did, from the moment I got up until the moment I slept. Looking up at the stars, wondering if tonight they'd be white on black or black on white. Wishing to take my first picture, not knowing if I ever would. I came upon something I had never seen before. *I just needed a hint of where to begin.*

I came upon a tree with a small soup tureen attached to it. It had a ladle hooked below the tureen, safely out of the fray, with a bowl & a spoon. I tipped back the lid of the tureen, & I looked in, & I sniffed. *Oh my gosh, the most beautiful Soup anyone could have ever imagined!* I'd never, *never* known the like.

And I decided that this felt like a gift to any who would happen upon it, & so I slid out the bowl, & I slid out the spoon, & I tipped back the lid, & I used the ladle that was hanging down there to ladle me out some Soup. I sat right there, next to that tree, & I began to sip my beautiful Soup.

And I received what I needed most. I fell into a restful dream. In this restful dream, I followed instructions from someone or something which went like this:

*"Close your eyes.
Think of where you are now.
Now think of the Red Bag, tall before you.
Think of your destination.
Walk on through.
Open your eyes.
You're there!"*

When I woke up, vividly remembering that dream & its instructions, I cleaned off my Soup bowl & spoon & everything, got them all put back into place & ready for the next. Then I stood up & followed those instructions right there & then.

My destination was the place where I could start taking pictures. I closed my eyes. I thought of where I was. I thought of the Red Bag. I thought of where I wanted to go, I walked on through, & I arrived to the place where I would take my very first picture on that magikal Island. A place where many others cross & learn too. *Ahhh, lovely.*

My New Job

My new job is to document these White Woods, to figure out how this is done. There is no manual for this. No guide. No instructions anyone hands you, with pictures, easy-to-understand text. Still, *a job's a job*, as they say. I'll take what I can get. Maybe I can get myself a nice hovel to live in, & leave this Attic I've been squatting in so long.

So I begin my documenting by just wandering about, sniffing the cool air, enjoying the gray sky, wondering at the scatterings of leaves all about me, some of them damp. The patterns they seem to form high & low, as though language if I could but read it. *Is this documenting?* I'm not sure. *After all, who's to say when you don't have a guide?*

Then it's like a Trolley comes through. The kind you might see in the White Woods, which is to say it's bloo & pink. On the front it says *La Transit*. Nothing like that roofless bus I usually have to catch.

The driver is kind of bloo & pink as well, smiles me on board with a friendly wave of paw. "Hello, passenger!" the driver says heartily, urging me to take my seat, put on my seatbelt. "Safety first!" we say merrily to each other. *Toot! Toot!* And the trolley begins to head on through the White Woods on tracks that seem to pick up & lay down just in front of & behind itself.

We arrive to a great city I feel like I once knew. Underneath a vast highway. Feels like the whole world's down under here. Strange stores, strange food stands, people in costumes & headdresses. Very friendly, very friendly. I get dropped off in front of a movie theatre. Ah, my second job. *Nada Theatre* of course.

So I realize I better hurry to it. I am one of several cashiers at the Nada. Of course the cash register only has a couple of buttons & I get them wrong when I try to sell tickets to the few people who come. Line starts to form, but I can't sell them tickets because I don't know how! It gets worse & worse, & I think to myself, *I can't do this. End of this world.* Guess the Attic will have to keep me awhile longer.

I walk out of the Nada Theatre. I cry to the air & the gray skies around me, "I can document, but I cannot sell movie tickets!"

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Arriving to a Round, Muddy Driveway

Arriving to a round, muddy driveway of that famous old house, we walk right up the steps & pass through the front door. Gotta take off your shoes or boots, though. Can't bring all that muddiness on in.

Gonna buy a postcard, but there don't seem to be any for sale. What kind of famous old house is this, without a postcard for sale? Guess I don't know.

Worse, I get lost from those with whom I came almost immediately. I guess I just picked the wrong hallway to go down in this famous old house. End up in some kind of Attic?

And before I can look left or right twice, I'm in a (*flat, cracked*) desert. But at least I'm not alone. I'm with others, but they don't seem as confused as me, & they look a little better dressed for the situation. Their

heads & their bodies dressed in garb to cover up from the (*flat, cracked*) desert heat.

I follow along with them for a while. We arrive to a kind of a, oh I don't know what you'd call it, a *bubble cackle-o-phony*, is what we arrived to. I don't know how else to put it. It was a vast place of bubbles, & they were performing like it was one troupe or something. Like it was a *Bubble Cackle-o-Phony Carnival*.

And, I don't know, maybe there was even a war. And there was music too. Heavy, pounding, drumming music, like to urge the bubbles to wild in their play or their Carnival or their war. it was hard to say what was going on.

I'd like to think that bubbles don't go to war. *What would be the point?*

Then I found the music was drawing me away, which was just as well, since I didn't think I could really do much for all of this except admire it, gape-mouthed. I was drawn away toward a curtain. It was a blue curtain, & I thought *oh, maybe behind that curtain is the way back to the front door or somewhere more interesting that I can understand*. I was game for either.

But see, behind that blue curtain was a red curtain. OK, for some reason, I was still game. Sometimes you've gotta build up the drama. Get everybody worked up & paying attention, as it were.

And then there was a yellow curtain behind that one, & I thought, *oh, wait a minute here, is this like the bubbles back there? Are the curtains now doing something together? Maybe I'm missing the point again of all this?* Because then one curtain after the next opened. *Violet. Red. Orange. Indigo.*

Suddenly I snapped to.

What? Oh. I was on the phone. That's what happened. I'm on the phone for a job. But this guy who was supposed to be interviewing me was telling me all about his struggles. Sick family members, & hard times down deep under covers, lost his little branch & stone . . . *mumblemmummbblemmummmbbble . . .*

I think I just drifted off for a moment, strange long moment, I have to say. Bubble Carnivals, or wars, lack of postcards, & so on. Anyway, I agreed to meet him, & we ended up at a coffeehouse nearby, in this kind of shadowy corner.

We both sit in these old armchairs but they're looking in opposite directions so he interviews me the entire time looking away from me, & I was looking away from him in response.

It was like we were secret agents or something, & I never did figure out if it was him or his company that was called Figga. But we're talking back & forth, & finally he stands & smiles, & I don't even know how I knew it since I wasn't looking at him directly, but he started walking off, & there was something about him that made me think, *wow, I scored a job because he's headed right for the bathroom. What else would you do if you just had a satisfactory interview with someone & found someone you needed for a position?*

I follow him into the bathroom & it's just the worst place you could possibly imagine. Only three sinks & one is out. Ceiling's falling down, pipes are exposed. Well, I barely get my business done & then, when I come out of the bathroom, & look around for my new employer, he is nowhere to be found!

Another quick ending.

And I still don't know, to this day, *was it him or was it his company that was named Figga?*

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I Was Reading a Book Called *Power*

One time, many turns ago, I was reading a book called *Power*, about a professor who traveled long years & miles by the famous bus with no roof. Arriving at last to a club, with a stage that said "The Pink Floyd!" high above it.

And a crowd was gathered. And he felt like it all made sense now, all his long years & miles of traveling by the famous bus with no roof, with the questions he carried with him. *It all made sense now. Unitive Time*, the trace, the Attic, forever dreaming, *end of the world, everything.*

I look up from my book, & there he is, sitting over there in an armchair, in a shadowy corner of the Ancienne Coffeehouse.

And I walk over to say, "Hello. I'm an admirer of your work."

And he looks at me & he says, "Who are you?"

And I say, "No one really, just an admirer of your work. I was reading in my book about you just now."

I show him my book titled *Power*. He takes the book from me.

He looks at the front cover, & the back cover, & he reads a few pages within. Then he says, "This isn't me. I never found who I was looking for. That's how I ended up here, with no answers to give to you. I'm sorry. You'll have to keep looking, & your readers will have to keep looking. That's all I can tell you. Go back to your own armchair."

And so I did, & I resumed reading about the professor in *Power*. A *real* hero who *did* find his answers.

* * * * *

Season of Lights, in a Very Strange Year

Season of Lights, in a very strange year. This spaceship has traveled unknown distance in time. Everything before the spaceship is ancient history, mythopoeia, rumor, wish.

We live on this beloved spaceship, traveling through space. It's a beautiful spaceship for one so old. It's still green in its heart, & multicolored everywhere. Just think of how many colors are in this beautiful spaceship! Fruits, leaves, seeds, water, sky, clouds. Its roof of stars! How it all braids together. It could not be a better home to travel through the universe for so long.

It's been a strange year. We arrive to the Season of Lights again. Many of us who were here for the last one, I guess you could say are here in a different way, this go 'round. They're part of the spaceship again. But many did not die old, & many of the old ones did not die well. Now our best & brightest are starting to pass around medicines, medicines that will be shared all 'round this spaceship, for better travels & better days.

So a kind word & a touch of the heart for this spaceship, & all its many inhabitants, for all those moments when we are grateful down to our very bones, & all those many moments when we are not. Look up to the sky tonight, & think to yourself, *what a wonderful way to travel through the universe at amazing speeds, on an amazing spaceship.*

None know the hand or paw that wrought, but whoever or whatever wrought this spaceship, this green & golden & rainbow-colored spaceship, *thank you.* We are the grateful trace of that which made us. *And thank you. And thank you.*

And we will be grateful for the medicines that heal & protect our bodies, & we will try for the harder ones too, the medicines for our hearts, & the medicines for our souls. Grateful ever of this beautiful spaceship, long traveling the universe.

Thank you, & thank you, & thank you again.

4/24/2021

