

When the rain washes you clean,  
you'll know.  
--Fleetwood Mac, 1977.

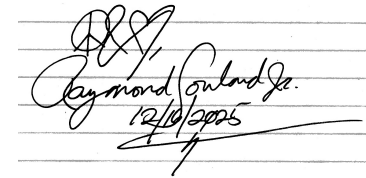
## *Editor's Introduction*

---

This volume is the twenty-sixth in a series of annual *Samplers*, featuring the best prose, poetry, & graphic artwork published by Scriptor Press New England in the previous year.

2024 descended into chaos, a nightmare that will long be the world's reality.

But all is never lost. Art is hope, ever. These pages contest to this.



Handwritten signature of Raymond Soulard, Jr. on lined paper. The signature is written in cursive and includes the name "Raymond Soulard, Jr." and the date "12/10/2024".

Raymond Soulard, Jr.  
Editor & Publisher  
Scriptor Press New England

\* \* \* \* \*



# Scriptor Press Sampler Number 26 | 2024 Annual

Edited by Raymond Soulard, Jr.  
Assistant Editor: Cassandra Soulard



*Judih Weinstein Haggai*

POETRY	by Judih Weinstein Haggai.....	5
DREAM RAPS	by Raymond Soulard, Jr. [📍].....	8
THE LAGOON OF THE AIR GOBLINS [TRAVEL JOURNAL]	by Nathan D. Horowitz.....	56
POETRY	by Martina Reisz Newberry.....	61
RIVERS OF THE MIND [A NOVEL]	by Timothy Vilgiate.....	62
MANY MUSICS [ELEVENTH SERIES]	by Raymond Soulard, Jr. [📍].....	72
POETRY	by Colin James.....	75
WHAT IS THE CREATURE CARNIVAL? GRAND FINALLY! [FICTION]	by Algernon Beagle.....	76
POETRY	by Jimmy Heffernan.....	90
WOLVES [PROSE]	by Charlie Beyer.....	92
POETRY	by Tamara Miles.....	98
LABYRINTHINE [A NEW FIXTION]	by Raymond Soulard, Jr. [📍].....	100
NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS.....		108

## Haiku While on Retreat March 2023

\* \* \*

### *Day One*

return to myself  
feelings re-blossoming  
butterfly takes flight

\* \* \*

alas guava tree  
fruit so slow to ripen  
yet 3 gifts today

\* \* \*

hello lower back  
surprisingly sensitive  
paying attention

\* \* \*

*Scriptor Press Sampler* is published annually  
by Scriptor Press New England  
Email: [editor@scriptorpress.com](mailto:editor@scriptorpress.com) | Web: [scriptorpress.com](http://scriptorpress.com).  
Front cover artwork by Raymond & Cassandra Soulard.  
Back cover artwork by AbandonView.  
Interior graphic artwork by Raymond & Cassandra Soulard,  
except where noted.



*Day Two*

early walk  
lone soul with dog  
two wayward jackals

\* \* \*

along kibbutz fence  
jackal tunnels still blocked  
sly secret routes

\* \* \*

for a moment  
shoulders relaxed  
in pure enjoyment

\* \* \*

*Day Three*

thich nhat hanh  
“world filled with happiness  
help yourself”

\* \* \*

even in laziness  
i go and discover  
so much to admire

\* \* \*

many thoughts  
rowdy and impatient  
calm down as i watch

\* \* \* \* \*



1-12-2023 7:49 a.m.

Stop the Wobble,  
Dance with the Wobble  
There is no Wobble  
Wobble the Wobble  
Wobble  
Probably many more.

Worry the Wobble  
Love the Wobble  
Ignore the Wobble  
Fuck the Wobble

Stop the wobble dance with the wobble there is no wobble wobble the wobble wobble wobble probably many more worry the wobble love the wobble wobble ignore the wobble part of the ancient violence cause response both there are one nun many responses to the wobble to hold the one answer exclusive to all others seems the greatest risk and danger and are are not in or maybe dangerous one way of seeing the WABA ancient violence then bear over there down there little ways. Turn your head just slightly with deep breath slow, slow open your eyes closed and open again. out in the woods. What kind of community led to generators, solar wind sells lots of food buried in the ground. Off the Grid completely. Save. Save, save. saving, saving, saving, saving duck down and low lower crawl stop that look around okay heard this story out there somewhere. Somebody met along the way he says there was someone he knew on the telephone then in person in a coffee house. Shirt dark hair and eyes who is she to me? He looks at me. I shake my head nod and say gone. Not goes on speaks a little softer. The results of choices not me x did not occur and shakes his head it doesn't sound right. nudge him to sit up a little straighter. I try again. I wanted to see and do the right thing. What were these lessons taught, airier and so on. I like him be scrapping my paper and read them in you When this smacks my face thank you I don't know what happened there it happens sometimes. I read from my scrap of paper did it as an unseen voice in another room lingering as music sometimes does. Now I know you for now stand John John. Lift up reach reach reach Zhang Wan okay good ground yes yes okay all right I roll forward into my apartment which has long swathes of male he's about along waiting benches you guys come over when black and one white and black, they live my records and they wish they would stay and play LPS for them all day long, but they haven't to work I do learn them many dishes some arthouse movie I saw I look at them with kindness in my eyes and heart and say I do hope we become friends I leave they sit down Poppy MiniDisc into that little box next to the thermo TV it's a big red button movie is set during the Revolutionary War. A piece of land is seized and then returned and then shift to World War Two. This is reenacted it involves several soldiers on a boat downstream at this time involves shooting in real danger wobba wobba wobba wobba wobba Stop the wobble bands with the wobble there is no wobba wobba wobba wobba probably many more you won't figure it out you can't figure out your hand you can't figure out the sky you can't figure out birdsong you can't figure out sickness you can't figure out grass you can't figure out rest berries you figure though Wabo any old way Pro or wrong her URL?

## Dream Raps

All volumes of Dreams Raps can be found at:  
<http://scriptorpress.com/dream-raps.pdf>

\*\*\*\*\*

"This is a world where nothing is solved."  
—Rustin Cohle, *True Detective*, 2014.

\*\*\*\*\*

### Prelude.

*You know . . . you know . . . you know . . . it's . . . it's like . . . it's like this:*

Stop the **WOBBLE!** Dance with the **WOBBLE!** There is no **WOBBLE.** **WOBBLE** the **WOBBLE.** **WOBBLE.**

Probably many more.

*I, you, but let's say I, fall asleep & instead of just sleeping, a bodily rest, a stillness, I fall into the most complex of stories.*

Worry the **WOBBLE.** Love the **WOBBLE.** Ignore the **WOBBLE.** *Fuck the WOBBLE!*

*Strange, surreal, yet vivid . . .*

Remnant of the **Ancient Violence.** Cause? Response? Both? There are one, none, many responses to the **WOBBLE.** To hold a single answer, exclusive to all others, seems the greatest risk & danger. But tis one way of seeing the **WOBBLE.**

*Vivid . . .*

Then. There. Over there. Down there a little ways. Turn your head just slightly. Lift! Now a deep breath . . . slow . . . slow . . . open your eyes . . . close them . . . now open again. Feels almost like seeing around corners? But . . . not . . . quite . . . yet . . . it's like this . . .

*And for the stretch of the really vivid ones . . .*

Out deep in the White Woods. A kind of commune, a calliope of performers. A lot of generators,

solar & wind cells. Lots of food buried in the ground. Off the grid completely. Talk of a Festival not far. And above there are stars! So many of them! Seas of skies of them! Safe. Safe. Safe. Safe. Safe. Safe.

*the especially vivid ones . . .*

Duck down, low, lower, crawl, stop. Look around. It's OK. I heard this story, out there, somewhere, from someone I met, on that bus, along the way. He said there was someone he knew, on the tele-o-phone, then in person, in a coffee house. Brown hair & turquoise eyes. He looks at me. Asks: "Who is she to me?" I shake my head, but nod & say, "Go on."

*the ones they say come near dawn . . .*

He nods, goes on, speaks a little softer. "The results of choices not made. Acts that did not occur." But shakes his head. That doesn't sound right.

*if you sleep overnight . . .*

I nudge him to sit up a little straighter. Try again.

*I'm as immersed in the reality of what is happening . . .*

"I wanted to be kind, to say & do the right things. What were these? Listen? Talk? Care? And so on?"

*as I will be . . .*

I look at him, & the Mossy scrap of my paper he holds for me, & reads thus in: **"Evolution. Synthesis. Ferment."**

*when the alarm goes off . . .*

"Stand! Jump! Lift! Up! Up! Up! Up! Up! Up! Reach! Reach! Reach! Jump! Land! OK! Good. Ground. Yes. Yes. OK. All right."

*☞ I wake up . . .*

I suddenly come to, roll forward, onto my mattress with the wires poking through, my lovely crimson & electric blue blankets near me, into my ZombieTown hovel, which has nearly endless swathes of my LPs on long, winding benches. My strange folding canvas hung slightly crookedly on the wall next to the window. Shows the sunset over that beautiful Island, by the Wide Wide Sea.

Then sudden comes a knock upon the door.

Oh. These two guys come over, one black-&-white, one white-&-black. I met them one Sunday when I took me & my notebooks over to write at **The Arcadia**. I had my book-bag stuffed full. *Labyrinthine. Many Musics. Bags End News. Dream Raps. Thoughts Pad.* Even some Secret Books for *Creature Tale* & *Great Heroes of Yore* references. Never can tell.

I was also looking for that new kindly Dreamland book I'd heard about, called *Adrift: A Novel*.

They helped me figure out that there was this pretty lady looking at it. Standing with some weird-looking guy. She gave it to me with a nice smile when she was done.

But they were cool to help. And they love my records, & wish I would stay & play LPs for them all day long. Noisy Children. The Pink Floyd. Supernova. All the good ones I collect.

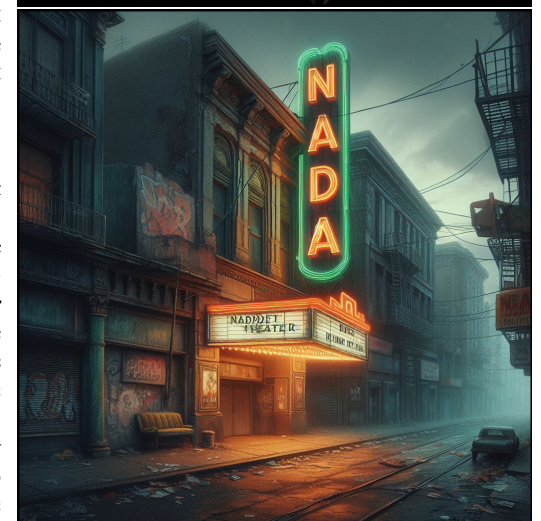
But I have to go for a while. Meeting a guy who has a bus ticket I need. Instead of records while I'm gone, I know they like weird movies like I do, so I tell them about a mini-dizq I just got of this art-house movie I saw down at that weird old Nada Theatre. It's kept up on top of my window's *Alice in Wonderland* curtains, for safe-keeping. Weird neighbors around here.

I leave as they are sitting down, popping that mini-dizq into the little player, next to the DüMónt TV with the Antennar 2000. Hit the big red *Play* button. Found that box cheap from back when I worked at that Thift Shop down the street. I miss that place.

That art-house movie is set during the Civil War. *Called Beyond Oorous*. A piece of land is seized, & then returned, & then the narrative shifts to World War Two, & this event is reenacted, in reverse. It involves several soldiers, fleeing on a boat downstream, & the second time involves shooting, real danger. Fire lances even.

But then it ends with this super weird, super long scene of these huge, silent, grey spirits marching through a tall arching bridge, on a darkened beach, right into the water. Oh, & that strange quote at the end of the credits about living metaphors, & how the interface of memory, dream, & wish produces a kind of Art.

When I return they are gone, but the place looks a little neatened up, maybe, or at least not worse. I see they tried another from my mini-dizq movie collection, *Outer Space City, 100,000 A.D.* Finally solved the problems about gravities & demons that used to worry me so much in its **Battle Black Tech** TV show days. I used to watch that movie twenty times a day. Saved up my coupons to see it, by eating bowl after delicious bowl of *ChocoSmax: Them's the Fax!*



**Nathan D. Horowitz**

But they wouldn't let me in the Nada Theatre to see it that time. Lucky I found that mini-dizq of it later at my old Thrift Shop.

I have my ticket, but not leaving till the sun's up, like the old tune says. My book-bag is packed. Turn on the DüMónt TV, adjust the Antennar 2000. Takes a while to warm up. Crank the heater a few times, & get under my electric blue & crimson blankets, curled around the wire poking out of course.

Now that my friends are gone, the very shy Creatures who sometimes visit my hovel begin to come out, sniffing friendly their hellos. Accept my offer to cluster with me under the blankets, them being cold as ever when outside of the White Woods. White Bunny, Hedgedyhog, Peppermint Bears, Kittees & their Friend Fish. Alvinarah Poesy, & his dear friend Naria Narwhal. Even that cackling little Imp is under there somewhere. They never stay long, but I love them passing through. They're excited about the Rutabaga Festival & Fleastock in the White Woods, I'm guessing.

Lucky us, *Trip Town* is on. That spooky episode that begins with a dark screen & a low voice:

*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.*

**WOBBLE! WOBBLE! WOBBLE! WOBBLE! WOBBLE! WOBBLE!**

*Sometimes the dreams are so deep, like a maze-book you have to try to read / climb your way up / down / out of. . . some other kind of real, yet still I wake up & they're completely gone . . .*

Stop the **WOBBLE!** Dance with the **WOBBLE!** There is no **WOBBLE! WOBBLE** the **WOBBLE!**

Probably many more. You won't figure it out. You can't figure out your hand.  
You can't figure out the sky. You can't figure out birdsong. You can't figure out sickness.

*& I don't even understand that really, how that can be, how one can be so completely immersed in, in something, & then it's gone, happens often, not always but often . . .*

You . . . can't . . . figure . . . out . . . grass . . . you . . . can't . . . figure . . . out . . . raspberries . . .

*even what's brought back is shells from a shore, pictures, bits . . .*

You . . . can't . . . figure . . . out . . . the . . . **WOBBLE** . . .  
any . . . old . . . way . . .

*some of them are valuable, some of them are dear, but the ones where I feel like it's the entirety of everything . . .*

You . . . can't . . . figure . . . out . . . the . . . **WOBBLE** . . .

*I feel even more all pervasive, than this waking,  
varied & trapped & immobile, & I don't know what it means?*

\*\*\*\*\*

## Part One.

### Bus Station

You might see me, in the corner of that bus station, sitting on that bench, with the crack right down the middle. People have stuffed all manner of things in that crack, over the course of time, I've noticed. There's gum down there. Cigarette butts. Cheese Doodles & other wrappers of this kind & that. Old bus tickets. Love notes. Pages from novels. Scores from unfinished symphonies. Thoughts collected together, with no venue to offer them, rolled up, in tight little balls, pushed down there, with the butts & the gum.

I sit next to the crack, with my *Thoughts Pad*. Looking around, near & far. Bus stations are good places to see what's going by in this world. All sorts of reasons people are on the bus, taking the bus, waiting for the bus. One elderly lady with grey hair done up in a pretty pink scarf, multi-colored layers of clothes, sits next to me.

*Are you waiting for the bus? Or are you waiting for somebody to get off the bus?*

Them's always good questions, Ma'am. I don't talk to too many people like you. Not too many people want to talk to me, sitting here, in the corner, next to the crack in the bench, with my *Thoughts Pad*. I mean they kind of look at me askew. If they look at me at all. But you sat down, smiled at me. It's kind of you.

No, I don't need a pamphlet. I'd just stuff it down the crack. There's a few already down there.

No, I don't need whatever is in that little baggie of yours. But thank you.

No, you don't have to freshen up to sit beside me.

No, I'm not sure where I'm going.

No, I don't expect I know where you are either.

But, here we are, on either side of this crack. Look at it. It's a thing of beauty. It's a thing that exists in time, & tells a story. It tells a strange story, over time. *What's that story?* I don't know. Maybe it's just the story of a crack where people stuck their detritus. But maybe there's more to it than that. Maybe, I don't know.

You see, this is what I write about in my notebooks. I've got many notebooks, I've got them piled high, in my ZombieTown hovel. Pretty much all I have are notebooks, black pens, vinyl LP records, & a black-&-white DüMónt TV with an Antennar 2000 on top. Have you seen *Trip Town*? No, I guess not. It's not always there.

But, see, I'm not unhappy, because the past is passed, & the future's yet to come, & every moment is a miracle, of its own special kind.

You agree. You smile at me. Thank you. I wrote that down. Here, I'll write it down for you too. Hold out your hand. There you go: *Every moment is a miracle, of its own special kind.* Something like that.

*Gotta go?* I understand. Thank you for sitting with me. Thank you. *Goodbye . . . Goodbye . . . Goodbye . . .*

\* \* \* \* \*

### Secret Penny

It had been a long day. I had come to a kind of marketplace but, uh, oh, I can't say how exactly. That Roofless Bus? Could be. Been on that bus for a long while. But then it stopped, for a break maybe, at this market. I think it is a market. Many stalls, very crowded.

And I got off, & took my book-bag with me, of course. My tape recorder, notebooks &, uh, everything I had. All of my valuables. You never know, when a bus you're taking, is gonna up & leave without you. That's one of my *Wise Wisdoms*. Perhaps it's even a *Wise Warning*. Who knows?

All of which is to say, I'm walking, from stall to stall. At one, a man, seeming to be covered in roots & vines, but unperturbed, is selling maps of what look like mazes.

Then I come upon this stall that is kind of different from the others, which are really well organized & nicely tended. This one just seems to be a big cardboard box, under a dirty green-&-golden awning. And the box is not sorted in any way. I guess it's just sort of dig in & see what you come up with? OK. I'm game. As long as nothing bites.

So I start feeling around. And there's clothes, & maybe some tools. I don't feel any notebooks, or I certainly would have pulled one of those up. And I don't feel any other kind of books. So I'm starting to feel around with less interest.

But then my hand comes upon something solid, heavy, a little bit cold. And I fish it out of the depths. And, well, it's a watch. It's one of those pocket watches that you see the gentlemen carrying around with them.

Now I'm no gentleman. None would ever claim such upon me. But maybe I can have a pocket watch too? *Why not?* Why not.

So I give this watch some good attention. As I said, it's heavy, & it's a little cold. And it takes a while to find the latch to flip the cover open, & I won't say that I understand *how* it tells time. I'm not even totally sure *that* it tells time. But OK. Maybe it tells something else. Maybe something else is worth telling. I'm keeping an open mind about all of this.

But then, uh, honestly? I notice a little something kind of poking out of it, just slightly under the mechanisms in the clock-face. Whatever it tells, time or otherwise, there's a little something in there. And I kind of tug on it. And the more I tug on it, the more I realize that it's something secret.

And, as I extract it, very carefully, I see that it is what I've heard called, in my travels anyway, a **Secret Penny**.

Now you may or may not have heard of **Secret Pennies**. That's kind of why they're secret. They're not that well known about &, if you happen to come upon one, you're gonna take a while, if ever, to figure out what that **Secret Penny's** secret is.

But OK. Sure. Yeah. I'm now convinced that this should be *my* pocket watch, for a while, whatever it tells. And so I slide the **Secret Penny** back into its hidden place. I notice there are other things, deep down in there too. Little colored strips wrapped in plastic. *How many layers does this pocket watch have?* Apparently a few.

And I looked around now for the proprietor or the proprietress of this stall. But there's none. I mean, really, *none*. There is no one else with any interest in this box.

Now I'm no thief. Though I've been called many things, I'm *no* thief. But there was no one to negotiate with over this pocket watch.

But then I think to myself: *Well, maybe it's one of these things where you take a little something, & you leave a little something.* So I dig in my book-bag, & I find a spare book of poetry. I had an extra. *Wyrld Poems from 1928*. From *that time*. (Best don't ask me about *that time*.) And I place it in that cardboard box, push it on down, so someone will have to fish for it, as I fished for this pocket watch.

I look around one more time, & then I take the pocket watch, & I put it in amongst my many own pockets, one with a zipper for sure. And I begin to make my way along through the marketplace. And I, uh, I just keep going.

Now I will say that, sometime later, I end up on that Roofless Bus again. Though I always say that you never know if *it's* the same Roofless Bus as the last time, or if *you* are the same *you* as the last time. So I'll just say that *an I* ends up on *a bus*. Leave it at that. Another *Wise Wisdom* or *Warning* for use.

Get to my seat in the back row, next to the bathroom. Settle all my stuff back in, book-bag at my feet. I pull out the pocket watch, & start in to studying it very closely. I feel as though this pocket watch has *something* to do with the Wide Wide Sea. Couldn't tell you why. So I get to thinking about the Wide Wide Sea, & also the Deep Deep Sea, which is way below the Wide Wide Sea, where I'm headed. At least I think I am.

Thinking: *well, what about it? What does it feel like to walk by that legendary, almost mythical, Deep Deep Sea, along the Beach of Many Worlds, on its heavy, musical sand? What does it feel like, sensually? How does the air smell? What does its water taste like? Is it ordinary sea-water? What's it like, in the bones, when you're down there?*



Nathan D. Horowitz

I drift off into dreaming, for sure. And, uh, I hold that pocket watch in my hand for a long time. It's very reassuring. Its slight coldness. The weight of it. It feels a little heavier than it should.

\* \* \* \* \*

### Travels with a Secret Penny

So I traveled on with my **Secret Penny**, to the magical Beach of Many Worlds, by the Deep Deep Sea. Been here for a while now. And I felt right away like, well, I could stay here *forever*. Sitting on this colorful sand that seems to make a pretty *hmmmming* sound all the time, under foot, under seat. Listening to the *whoosh! whoosh! whoosh!* of that beautiful Deep Deep Sea.

Thinking to myself: *it could be true what I've heard, that this Beach goes on forever, in all sorts of ways, that one may expect, or may not expect.*

But then one day came when I was sitting quietly on the Beach, like usual, next to my book-bag, all peaceful-like, and I pulled out my **Secret Penny**, & got to studying it again. That's when I heard some kind of **Voice**. And I looked around, & I didn't see anybody, either person, or Creature, or anything else.

And at first I didn't understand the **Voice**. It's like the **Voice** was muddled, or whispering too low, or maybe in a tongue I didn't know. But it kept on going, almost insistently, & so well, uh, I just stood up, not really knowing exactly how to work this.

I put my book-bag strap on my shoulder, harked my hand to my ear, & thought I could figure out which direction the **Voice** was coming from. Maybe if I got closer, I might understand it better.

So I started walking along, & the **Voice** got a little bit louder as I went. Though I must admit that it didn't get any clearer. I couldn't get the sense of what I was dealing with. And yet on I walked.

And after while the **Voice** seemed to draw me toward this **Door**, further back on the Beach. There it was, just like in that spooky book. You ever read that book? With the **Door** that you look at it from the front, & it's there, but if you look at it from the side, it's not? Yeah, that's a good book. I don't remember the name of it though. I read it in the liberry once. I go to a lot of liberries, you might not be surprised to hear.

But I don't think that the **Voice** was drawing me to walk through the doorway of that **Door** on the Beach. I think it was drawing me to keep going a little further past it, to something else that was near there too. So I looked far as I could, harked hand to ear. Something way, way down the Beach from where I had come. *Tall*, I thought, *but so far off*. I just could not tell.

But that's when it all got interesting in some other strange way, because that's when the **Secret Penny** that I had been holding in my hand this whole time, well, it started buzzing & crackling & dancing around in my palm, like *finally* I was getting somewhere that this **Secret Penny** was interested in. And it's like that **Voice** now started again into singing me along my way.

And I'm not gonna claim that I know what happened next, but it wasn't long, not too many steps, following that singing **Voice**, buzzing & crackling & dancing **Secret Penny** in my palm, before I wasn't on that Beach no more. *Not even close.*

\* \* \* \* \*

## Part Two.

### I Hear Scholars Talking

I hear Scholars talking, in this Great Liberry, down near the Great Tree at the Heart of the Many Worlds, about things that Scholars talk about. And I write down their phrases. Let me check my notes here. *Great Grand Braided Narrative. Tangled Gate Mythopoeia. Ripples.*

**Evolution. Synthesis. Ferment.** Used my crayons to write those words down. Don't ask me why. Keep them for special occasions, I guess.

But sometimes it feels like they use these phrases with exclamation points, whereas other times it seems like they use these phrases with question marks. So I can't say I'm really sure *if they* are really sure.

And what's funny about this too is that, along my way here, I had already seen those Scholarly phrases on walls, like graffiti. And sometimes they show up in my dreams, such that I sleep, not often, but yes.

My notes are still a little sandy, I admit. Pretty colors though. I'm sort of between there & here still. But I still have my **Secret Penny**, let me tell you that. Hid safe in my pocket watch, zipped sure in my pocket.

And you know, it seems like, on the one hand, it could be just random things that my strange mind is collecting together, as though a pattern or a story. Maybe even a message for me. But I don't know what *any* of these things mean. I mean, if it really *was* a message for me, it would be in words I understood, right?

What the heck is a *Great Grand Braided Narrative*? What is a *Tangled Gate Mythopoeia*? And *Ripples*? Are these things *important*?

The Scholars think so. I watched them close one day, sitting in my corner of the Great Liberry Reading Room. I didn't come too near, but I watched them close from afar, if that makes sense. I just kept making like I was reading this old magazine with the green-&-golden maze on its cover, & its headline: "What Do All the Artists Do in Heaven?" But I was really watching them.

And they had these piles of papers. Piles of notebooks. Piles of books, big ones, small ones. Some of their books were as small as a fist. Some of them they had to lean against a table, or the biggest windows.

And these Scholars, they seem more like they were addicted to the whole thing, than as though they were just studying it. Their eyes were glazed with ecstasy, but their lips were turned down, like frowning. And I watched them move their papers & notebooks around, almost like just re-arranging them on the tables would bring up new answers.

OK, I admit that what I have in my hands, & it's sandy too, is from them. I distracted them, & then I took what I could, & then I left. I don't know what all this is, but I wanted a piece of it.

Great Grand Braided Narrative? Tangled Gate Mythopoeia? Ripples? **Evolution?** **Synthesis?** **Ferment?** OK. I'm game, if you are.

\* \* \* \* \*

### Artistes of the Sweet

Now I am *not* a Scholar. They don't travel around the way I do, living in hovels, working in Thift Shops, when they can.

And I ride on the Roofless Bus. Yes, I am one of *them*. Now before you get critical, with all of your prejudices & disdains, I'll argue that riding on the Roofless Bus should not be a black mark on *anybody*. *It shouldn't*. I know what they *say*. I've heard the *stories*. Most of them are not true, or exaggerations, or somehow told *wrong*.

But, anyway, I was back on the Roofless Bus. And I was sitting in the back row where I prefer. And I had found this pamphlet. Well, *found* in the sense of *borrowed* from those Scholars in that Great Liberry. *Borrowed* in the sense of *taken*. *Taken* in the sense of *stolen & high-tailed it gone* before they figured out it was me, not a Scholar, who had it.

This pamphlet didn't have a cover, which didn't surprise me, because it looked like it had traveled a long & far way. And not always so smoothly neither. And I can't say that maybe the title page wasn't still back there, & maybe the last page too, when I made my escape. Possibly a page or two missing in between. But I had *some* of it. Some of it was *intact*.

Now I'm one who, though not a Scholar, nor claiming to be one, is never able to resist studying an example of the written word. I'm always curious, whether it be a thick book, or a thin book, a piece of paper, sign on the wall, graffiti. Whatever you may propose, I would say *why, yes*. *Curiosity* is my first, middle, & last name.

So I hunkered down in my seat. The bus was fairly empty, the ride smooth for awhile. And I begin reading through this partial pamphlet, & it's stuck with me ever since. The story of the exiled King. A Great Hero. Pamphlet doesn't tell his name. It doesn't tell you what he was King of. *When, where*.

But he was exiled, even from his own great Brother-Heroes. And it says how his exile came somewhat suddenly. Through some strange means. It almost sounded like he was in one place, & then suddenly another. And he wasn't sure how this happened.

But it did say that he lived exiled by the Great Tree at the Heart of the Many Worlds. Not so far from that Great Liberry? Maybe. Anyway, it said that, for a long while, after his exile began, the King didn't go far from the Great Tree, too despairing to move. It took him a long time to just walk around. Even for hunger. Even to find a place to rest.

When sleep came to him, it was more the passing-out kind than the kindly-kind. He was sprawled out on the ground, & it began to snow. Covered him up. Not very deeply, mind you. He wasn't gonna *drown*. But he just lay there, kind of half-woke-up now, but covered in snow. You would think he would leap *up!* Maybe it would be a wake up call to do *something*. But he just lay there, covered in snow, for the longest time, until along came two little brown bear Creatures.

They came up shyly, but not too shyly. They saw this was a people-folks person in need. And Creatures never hesitate to help when people-folks are in need. And he noticed they had little Peppermint buttons on their brown fur? Little Peppermint adornments, jewelries? Very pretty.

And they sat with him for a while. They *hmmm'd* with him. He began to sit up a little straighter. Brushed off some of the snow. Looked around a bit. And what he felt, for the first time in maybe a long while, was a little bit *sweet*.

And I wish this pamphlet wasn't missing its last page, because I sure would have loved to have learned more about what I would call these *Artistes of the Sweet*.

\* \* \* \* \*

### Now You May Be New . . .

Now you may be new to riding the Roofless Bus. Not everyone wants to admit it. Everyone wants to seem like: *oh yes*, I've been riding this Roofless Bus for calendars upon calendars of time. I know *all* about it. I know *all* about the Deep Circuit, & the Deeper Circuit, & all that.

But you know how I can tell when someone has not ridden on the Roofless Bus for so very long? Well, it's two things. First is, they ask for a schedule. Oh, they might not ask the *driver* but they might ask someone they're *riding* with. Someone who looks friendly, even kindly. Not *me*. But I've seen it happen.

The other thing is they'll keep looking up at the . . . *rooflessness* up there, just wondering about it. Is it *damaged?* Is it *intentional?* What happens if it *rains?*

Well now, the answer to your first question is: there is *no* schedule. I don't even know if there *could be* a schedule. It's more like that old tune: *you get up with the sun. You go to sleep with the darkness. You eat when you're hungry. You drink when you're dry.* The Roofless Bus works like *that*. If you can figure out that, you'll never miss it. Does take a while.

Anyway, you see, I had found another pamphlet, more actually *found* this time than really stole, & I just had to show it to someone. I wondered: *is there a Pamphleteer? You?*

I understand, by the look in your eyes. *You're no Pamphleteer.* It's OK.

But look. This one's about something called the *WOBBLE*, & it's about those great Brother-Heroes again. I read about them in that other pamphlet, but I kind of misplaced it, so I can't show it to you. Probably for the best. But I read it over & over till I memorized it really. And it had to do with these great Brother-Heroes, & their great mission, to save the world, or something.

And so I found this one now, & it almost seemed like they were a set? And look here, I read this: "What is the Beast's response to their request for help? And why are they *WOBBLE*d? Is this the help they get, in that each of them is too wounded, & unresolved in their wounds, to save the Many Worlds?"

And here, look at this, near the end: "Does the Princess save the world because her intent is simply selfless? Do they now witness what she did as a challenge to them, to get clear their intent, & save the Many Worlds?" *What does that all mean?* I don't know.

So I don't know who the *Pamphleteer* is. I do know that there's not a schedule, save for that old tune. And I know the question to the *rooflessness* is a little complicated, but you'll learn in time.

But the **WOBBLE**: *is it important?* What happens if you get **WOBBLED**? *What do you do? Do you duck & cover? Do you run? Do you try to rise up tall & try to seem like you're bigger than you are?* How do you address a **WOBBLE**? *Does it speak the English? Does it speak another tongue? Can you hmmm with it?*

*Gotta go?* I understand. This happens a lot. I ask a lot of questions. Not everyone can handle the long trip on the Roofless Bus. If you figure out the schedule, we might see each other again. Thank you, for sitting with me. *Goodbye for now*, as they sometimes say in those fancy books.

\* \* \* \* \*

### Recording My Memories

When you ride on a Roofless Bus, passing your hours, your days, turns of the calendar, well, honestly, your memories start to mudge up a bit, drift this way & that. Start to forget if this is *now*, or if this is *again*, or maybe some *other* time too. I guess I'd heard this idea on that space cowboy radio show I found.

So one time I get off the Roofless Bus, pondering this question of: *how I can keep remembering?* I get off at a stop that I've not gotten off at before. And it's not long before I'm going through this *really strange* place. It looks like it was burnt out by wars a thousand centuries ago.

But then, you see, some time passes. I just keep walking. That's what you do. You just keep walking. And I come to this Yellow Building. And it's not a pretty one. But it's about the only thing standing. And I don't think I want to go inside. I remember a similar building on that space cowboy radio show. And it didn't work too well for that Robot Man & his friend, who entered inside for a while, looking for their old friend the Space Pirate.

So I just keep walking round & round, hoping there's something else. And, well, I'm not sure how it happens. Again, my memories mudge. But I end up in this Thrift Shop. Sometimes I remember that I used to work at one too, near my ZombieTown hovel. But not this one, I don't think?

But, like my old one, if I had an old one, it was filled with things. Along the walls, up to the ceiling, down to the floor. And so I was looking, at this & that, when there was suddenly this strange, tall man. He was sort of black-&-white in style. A striped knit cap slouched low on his head. Long grey overcoat. Brown pants. Tall white boots. Long, long teeth.

And he came over & greeted me, all super friendly & kind. And I assured him I wasn't shoplifting, which I wasn't at the moment, I'll have the record know. *Not* a thief. And so I explained to him, because he was so kindly that, well, I was looking for something to do about not losing my memories on my travels.

So he thought a moment, & then nodded, smiled at me, & started walking up this aisle & down that one. And he found me this machine that had been taped up a few many times.

And he said, "You talk your memories into this," & he showed me how the *Record* button

worked. And then he showed me how the other buttons worked to listen & all.

He then took a slow look at me, smiled, & said, "Most people, they'd need to work this machine this way. But you seem like a fellow who can handle more." And I bowed & scraped & blushed, because he was a nice man.

So he showed me its sort of false bottom. And he said, "Use the buttons in there instead, for recording your talkings, & listening later, & you'll never have to change the batteries, & you'll never have to change out the cassette. This tape recorder will always work for you."



Nathan D. Horowitz

Then he noticed that there was already a cassette in the player's slot. Took it out gently. Handwritten words on it, worn down mostly, but it seemed to read **Sc'o'u'tland**. "This is yours of course," he said with his beautiful scary smile. I nodded, & took it too, though not sure what he meant.

And so, after giving him a hug, which he accepted gracefully, that's how I come to start recording my memories. And it's worked out well too.

\* \* \* \* \*

### Part Three.

#### I Wake Up . . . Or Come To . . . Or Something . . .

I wake up . . . or come to . . . *or something*. Where I was . . . it *ain't* here. *Who am I? I think I remember that, maybe enough. But what happened?*

There was a very White Room. I think that I remember a little. In it, I found this Great Clearing in the White Woods with all sorts of fun activities going on. There was this Talent Show going on. *And someone asked me something about Moss & a Great Story?*

And now there's here. I look around. OK. A *bridge*? It *seems* like I'm on a bridge. It's high up off the ground, which I can see, way down there. And it's, uh, made of *glass*? I can see down there, right through the bottom of the bridge, very clearly. I can feel it, solidly beneath me, or I wouldn't know it was here. But the rest of the bridge spans over me, & beyond, forward, toward an unseen farther place.

It's colorful, *many-colors-full*. Never seen a colorful bridge like this, with a glass floor. *Wow*. And looking back down, through the glass floor, I'm not quite sure what I see down there, but

it almost like there's at least part of a *spaceship*? Man, I don't know.

I sit up. My book-bag is next to me. Thank goodness, whatever's happened. I feel in my zippered pocket. There's my **Secret Penny**, hid safe in my pocket watch. Alright. And I'd say that, about twenty feet ahead of me, there's that taped-up tape recorder that that strange nice dude gave to me at the Thrift Shop. Glad I remember the false bottom that'll make it run forever on one tape. One set of batteries. Just what my budget needs.

I stand up, a little unsteadily. OK. **Bridge of Glass**. Holds me up. I'll do my part. Start walking toward that tape recorder. Bend down. Pick it up. Sit back down again. OK. Still a little woozy, but good. Time to press *Play*. See if I recorded anything interesting, between then & now.

\* \* \* \* \*

### On This Strange Bridge of Glass

So anyway, I find myself on this strange **Bridge of Glass**. I wouldn't even know it was a **Bridge of Glass**, if I could explain some other way how I was sitting way up here in the air, without falling down hard on my *keister*. The **Bridge of Glass** is here, under me, sure but, otherwise, I can't see it.

Above, though, that's a different matter. Oh, the *colors*. Oh, the *swirling, undulating, strange, wonderful colors*. They never ever end. They just go *on & on & on*.

So that's where I am, & I'm sitting with this tape recorder that was given me by that strange nice dude at that Thrift Shop, that I happened to pass through a while back. And then, well, kind of what happened is I woke up *here*, & I don't remember *there* to *here* too well. Just that bit of maybe-Festival?

And I hope that this tape recorder will tell me a thing or two. I study it in my lap, this strange machine, much taped-up. *Sho-mee*, it seems to say on it. *Is that its name?* Or who made it? I don't know. I press the *Play* button.

A crackling comes on. Unpleasant, but it kind of fades out after a moment, & then I hear a . . . **Voice?**

But it's OK, I guess, because it's my own voice this time. I sound strange to me though. A little fast, a little slow. But it's me, fairly certain. Pretty sure. Talking, like this:

"Stop . . . trying to . . . figure . . . out . . . how you got . . . to . . . where . . . you are. You're . . . never . . . going to do it. And . . . it . . . wouldn't . . . matter if . . . you . . . did. What you . . . have . . . to . . . do . . . now . . . is . . . stand up . . . put . . . away . . . this . . . tape . . . recorder when . . . I tell . . . you . . . to . . . & . . . start . . . walking. Walk . . . on. That's . . . what . . . you're . . . gonna . . . do. And . . . if . . . you . . . need . . . explanation . . . if . . . you're . . . wondering . . . this . . . or . . . that . . . stop. Look up at what's there . . . & . . . *hmmm* . . . for . . . what . . . you . . . need. Those . . . are . . . my . . . instructions . . . to . . . you . . . for . . . now. At . . . the . . . end . . . of . . . this . . . sentence . . . do . . . what . . . I . . . just told . . . you . . . to . . . do . . . period. That means now."

*Click!*

Alright, well, I *do* sound pretty sure, even authoritative. And while I'm not much for authoritative types, I guess I must know what I'm talking about. At least I think I do. Heck, *why not?* I stand up. I put the tape recorder in my book-bag. There's a spot just remaining for it, amongst my many notebooks. Book-bag strap on my shoulder, & I walk on.

And nothing happens for a while. I don't know what I would think might happen, but I'm thinking about the advice I gave myself, & the advice seems to be that, when I'm uncertain, to do what I said to do. So I decide to listen to me.

And so, at this moment, I stop, & I look up at all those *wonderful, strange, changing, mysterious colors*. I look deeply into them & I *hmmm* . . .

\* \* \* \* \*

### The Mesh

Later on, OK, I'll admit, I hocked a loogie onto this weird **Bridge of Glass**. I had no other way of knowing it was there. And there was my spit, sitting there. And then, for some reason, I looked up, something distracted me. I don't know what it was, but when I looked back down, it was gone. *Of course*. It's some kind of self-cleaning, invisible to the eye, **Bridge of Glass**. *Yeah, yeah, yeah*. I thought that was funny.

Anyway, I'm walking along, & I have my taped-up recorder in my hands, & I'm not exactly sure when I should hit *Play* again, to get more instructions from me, as I had gotten from me already once. All I had told me was that, if I was confused or uncertain, to look up at the *beautiful, undulating, colorful* roof of this **Bridge of Glass**, & *hmmm*, & that I would just know what to do next.

But see, as I'm walking along, I'm mulling about how back there a-ways, I couldn't say how far back there a-ways, I thought I'd seen part of a crashed spaceship down there way below. But, I mean, maybe there were other things in between too. I don't know. I don't even know how fast I'm walking.

But I *do know* that what I see now down below there look like haystacks. Not any of those kinds you might see in the fancy pictures in the Museum you might go to. If it's "Free Thursday," & after 7:30. Remember that, if you're ever of a mind.

Not like those but, it's like, they're just sort of like *rollicking & tumbling*. I swear they're *moving*, but I know they're not. *Oh!* It's so beautiful. I don't know what *any* of it means. I look up at those *wild & wondrous colors*, & I *hmmm*, & I study & study. And then my thumb hits the *Play* button on the tape recorder.

*Did I do that? Did the colors up there do that? Did my missing loogie do that?* I don't know. But I'm talking again, better listen. Let's be quiet.

"Now . . . that . . . you're . . . walking . . . along, getting . . . used . . . to . . . what . . . you're . . . doing, looking . . . forward, not . . . back . . . & . . . trying . . . to figure . . . allover . . . that . . . out, because . . . you . . . won't, I . . . want . . . you . . . to stop . . . for . . . a . . . moment . . . & . . . godigging . . . around . . . in . . . your . . . bookbag, because . . . there's . . . a . . . pocket . . . you . . . don't . . . know about. Yeah, find that pocket. In . . ."

it, you'll . . . find something of . . . interest. Stop . . . . . this . . . tape . . . now."

*Click!*

So I heed me & go digging around in this book-bag that I've had for *so* long I know its every pocket by heart. And yet, sure enough, down deep within, I find a pocket I do not know. *Whoa*. OK. And I pull out a little pamphlet. Like the ones I had before, that I found (and/or stole) along the way.

And it's kind of water-damaged or *something*-damaged. It doesn't seem like there's a front or back cover, like those other ones. Some of the pages are missing too. Some of them are too blurry to read.

But right in the middle, there's a whole area of text that is clean & clear. And I read it out loud. I don't know why, but I get the feeling that I should.

"The *Mesh* is where the Dreaming & waking actively cross, where there is open commerce & communications. Within the *Mesh*, there is a *cul de sac*, sometimes called a *Sack*, where one can retreat. And one *cannot* be pursued there, nor share this space.

"Question: How does The *Mesh* exist, versus Dreamwalking?"

"Answer: The *Mesh* is a *shared* place, exists *even* when one is not there.

"Question: What about *Cluster Dreaming*? Or when we encounter those not physically close, or even close in time?"

"Answer: The *Mesh* is like the Indigo Trace. It's not men-built. It is, maybe, from where other well-known Dreaming tools are from.

"Question: How does one access it? Who knows of it? How does it relate to the rest of the *Tangled Gate Mythopoeia*?"

*Click!*

\*\*\*\*\*

### Skipping Around in Time

I don't understand any of those questions or their answers, but I can say this much: If you should find yourself on this same strange **Bridge of Glass** that I'm on right now, you may find, as I have, that your travels are somewhat discontinuous. Which is to say, that sometimes there's a feeling of skipping around a little bit in time. It's like, I would feel, & it would only occur to me afterward, that I'd passed along a certain point, but then, in what like seemed to me like later, I'd find myself again passing that point.

Oh, I know, that makes no sense, but I'm just saying. And so what I did was, after this had happened a few times, I sat down, & I opened up my book-bag. I put away that strange half-rain-ruined pamphlet on the *Mesh*, for now, in that pocket I hadn't known was there before. And I just got to ordering & sorting my notebooks. And, well, if you knew me, you'd know I

have *a lot* of notebooks, & I do my best to keep them ordered & sorted, but sometimes it can be a struggle. They are *not* tame.

But I had one in particular in mind, my *Thoughts Pad*, & so I made sure that it was closest to reach, if I wanted to jot down some notes about this kind of *phenomenon* I'm talking about.

Then I turned my attention to my taped-up tape recorder, knowing it had quite a few little secret compartments, little pop-out drawers, & other stuff. I was hoping, &, lucky me, I found an AM-FM transistor radio. Just a little tinny thing. You wouldn't bring it to the Sock Hop, & start playing it for people to dance to, but it was enough.

So I fiddled with it a bit. And some really static-y words came on, sounding like some crazy shouting preacher in a snowstorm:

*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! blur blur blur blur blur blur 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, blur blur blur blur blur blur & 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! blur blur blur blur blur blur*

And then I fiddled with it in the right way. Suddenly I heard: "Good morning, Starshine! The earth says hello!"

*Click!* Enough of that for now.

So, as part of my experiment, I would have it playing very softly, just enough for me to hear. And then, if a song came on that I especially liked, I would write its title down in my *Thoughts Pad*, & I'd listen to that song all the way through, end to end. Singing it, making notes, just being really thorough.

First time I tried, there was 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 . . ."

And then, without missing a beat, the song started again. And what I had written down was different from what I remembered writing down. *Uh-oh. Maybe I'm out of my depth with this*. I started to wonder that honestly. And what did it mean anyway, this *discontinuous* travel? *What could this be all about?*

So I fiddled with the radio a little bit more. And I found a second station that was playing the old time rock & roll that everybody loves. Noisy Children. The Pink Floyd. Even the Pink Floyd Too. And then, just for a little while, I found that space cowboy radio show. And I tried following its story, best as you can follow these kinds of stories.

It's about this leader of a group who turns out has betrayed them all. Sold out their secrets & desires. Deep shock & sadness amongst his people. No solid ground for any of them anymore.

No going back.

And last you see of this guy, he's being rustled out of town, on the planet that they're on. He's sitting in this kind of horse & carriage, kind of hunched over something that he's holding preciously. And he says, very quietly, but scare-scary: "I control the egg."

And then, suddenly, it was something else entirely. And, *man*, so, what does *all this* mean? You know? I mean, I think my tape recorder is trying to help me. *Sho-mee*, I think that its name. But I just don't know about all this.

And I guess it's time for me to once again listen to my instructions, from earlier, & so I get myself all gathered up, everything put away. Look up to those *crazy endless colors* up there, think about my conundrum, & *hmmm*.

*Suddenly, I am rolling & rolling & rolling & rolling & rolling & rolling . . .*

\*\*\*\*\*

## Part Four.

### If You Should Fall Off the **Bridge of Glass**

It is quiet in the White Woods. At least as quiet as the White Woods ever get. But there is also the sound of a **Voice**, maybe more. It is a distant, tinny sound, as though it is coming from far away, & yet a closer look at the scene at hand reveals that there's a scattering of objects, in the grass, among the trees.

One of them is kind of an old tape recorder. It's all taped up, long traveled. And the voice or voices are coming from this little machine. It's turned on.

Let's listen with ears.

"Now listen to me, closely . . . . . If you should fall off the **Bridge . . . . . of Glass**, tumble from it, in one way or another, which is certainly possible, according to . . . . . my . . . . . researches, what you're going to need . . . . . to have . . . . . to do is reassemble your . . . . . possessions. Everything's in your book-bag. That is, in *my* book-bag. *Our* book-bag. You're *me*, further along. Remember that. Make sure that the . . . . . pocketwatch, with . . . . . the **Secret Penny**, is accounted for. Check . . . . . to see if any of the . . . . . pamphlets . . . . . you've . . . . . collected along the way . . . the ones about the . . . . . **WOBBLE**, the one about the King & his fellow Brother-Heroes, the one . . . . . about that Mesh . . . . . are . . . . . still . . . . . around to be picked up. They . . . . . might . . . . . not be.

"This probably . . . . . happened, this tumbling, because you were . . . . . too much skipping in time. That was happening, wasn't it? . . . . . That's my guess. You were skipping in time. This . . . . . can be likened to an LP record, in which . . . . . the needle is bouncing so . . . . . much that it comes to the end without having . . . . . played hardly any of the music. Make sure this tape recorder . . . . . is intact, all of it. Check close.

"You're probably . . . . . not sure where . . . . . you are . . . . . When you tumble off the **Bridge . . . . . of Glass**, you may lose some of your . . . . . memories, for a little while. Don't . . . . .

panic. They'll find you again.

"Now, if you can, once . . . . . you've gathered your things, & accounted . . . . . for them all, as I've listed, I want you . . . . . to look around, & see if you can find someone called the Mechanic. If you were . . . . . skipping . . . . . in . . . . . time, he can help you. He has the tools. He . . . . . has a very strange toolbox, a very . . . . . good one. Usually he's found . . . . . adjusting the doors & passages between the Many . . . . . Worlds, but he can do . . . . . much more than that. Find him if you can. And there's others you can . . . . . find too, that can . . . . . help you, if need be.

"But, for now, see if you can find . . . . . the Mechanic. How? Creatures, of course! They'll be coming along any moment, you can be sure of that. They'll know, soon or sooner, that you've taken a tumble, & they'll be coming by, to take a look at you, . . . . . where you need it. Tell them you want to see the Mechanic. They'll . . . . . give you a good sniff &, if this is the . . . . . right thing to do, they'll bring you to him. If it's not, they'll bring you somewhere else . . . . . even . . . . . better. Perhaps even to visit again your beautiful green plant & Caterpillar Guide, where you . . . . . left. . . . . them . . . . . safe . . . . . safe . . . . . safe safe safe safe.

"Lastly, when you're all . . . . . assembled again, & if you should get back on that **Bridge of Glass**, if this should occur, keep . . . . . tuning the radio on this tape recorder until . . . . . you come again to the space cowboy radio show. It has . . . . . more to teach you about . . . . . your path than you probably know . . . . . right . . . . . now.

"If you're within . . . . . reach of this tape recorder, if it just didn't turn on, & you're nowhere to be found, I want you to hit the *Stop* . . . . . button, at the . . . . . end of the sentence I'm . . . . . speaking, & get to . . . . . doing what . . . . . I told you to do. End . . . . . of . . . . . sentence, period."

*Click!*

I'm groaning, & disorientated, & uncertain. But I seem to be in one piece. And all my things are scattered around, but I don't think any of them are lost. And I have my directions on what to do. *Get everything together. Wait for the Creatures to come soon. Then try to find the Mechanic.*

I don't seem to be on the **Bridge of Glass** anymore, that's for sure. I know where I'm *not*. I'm just waiting, in these quiet, beautiful White Woods. I thought I heard someone earlier. I hope to hear somebody again soon.

*Squeak-Squeak!* The now-arrived grey Hedgedyhog Creature, um, squeaks to me.

"Oh, hello. Can you help me?"

\*\*\*\*\*

## You Are Not Quite Who You Were Before

Did you ever get the feeling that you are *not quite* who you were before? And have this thought for a while, & *not quite* know what it means? So I've been trying to put it together, as I sit here in these peaceful White Woods, waiting for Creatures to come. One handsome little friend did come earlier, a nice grey Hedgedyhog. He gave me a friendly *Squeak-Squeak!* & a good sniff, more than one, & he kind of let me know that he had to go back & get others to tend me too.

And I still haven't had a chance to ask him or his other fellow Creatures about the Mechanic that I'm supposed to get a hold of, to help me out.

But I'd gathered up my things, put them all back into my book-bag. Waiting, like my voice on my tape recorder advised me.

And I think: *OK, well, maybe he's gonna advise me for a while. Somehow, he's in the past, but he's giving me advice about what happens next. I don't know how that works. But lots of things in these Many Worlds work in strange ways.*

But then, it turns out, no. Because the last recording I get to hear from him, I heard just now, telling me there's not going to be any more. And that's what's got me thinking about who I was & who I am & who I'm going to be. They all don't quite match, mostly. Anyway, here's what he says, what I said:

"This. . . . is. . . . my. . . . last recording. . . . to. . . . you. . . . my. . . . future. . . . self . . . . From. . . . now. . . . on, . . . . this tape's blank, & it's time. . . . for you to record. What you dream. . . . about. What you think. . . . about. What you might advise yourself to think about & do, should things. . . . come to that. And you & I aren't quite the same, but we're connected, & that'll be true of you & you down the road.

"So, I can only wish you well. Safe travels. Try to get to the **Bridge of Glass** again. You're not *ljkljsjfdkdkdjdk /.#'l2' djlfjdlyV9ujlfufjyo980lj gtp3rprg. :H0=g. . . .*"

*Oh.* That was it. So I guess it's *my* turn.

\*\*\*\*\*

### I'm Still Waiting

I know those Creatures will be here soon. They come, in their own fashion, after their own time. And since my tape recorder is out of instructions, from my past self, at least for now, I get to digging in my book-bag again. I've come to learn that this book-bag has a mind of its own about how many pockets it's got.

I may have thought before: *Oh, I know how many pockets it's got. And I know what's in those pockets.* But, well, honestly, I'm not thinking that so much anymore, because I keep finding new things. Anyway, I'd rather it be this way, because it's more fun, & occasionally surprising, even delightful.

And, just in case, I remember one of the advices my past self gave me, which was to keep that tape recorder's radio on, & keep checking it, now & again, for that space cowboy radio show.

I turn it on. I don't know what station it is. I don't know if it is a particular station. And for a while, there's this really spooky music that comes out of the radio. No words. Not even sure what it means, just *spooky*, but pretty in its own way. Like a band of strange dreams is playing.

And then I find one of those, you know, pamphlets that I keep finding. They always seem to be torn up. Pages missing, no cover, no title, no author. I guess they have their own troubles too.

But I finally get to a page that I can read. So I start reading &, for the heck of it, I hit the *Record*

button on the tape recorder, like I had also suggested to me to do.

So the music's going on, & I'm talking. *Wow.* You could almost call me one of those big time fancy radio DJs, like on that *SpiritPlants Radio America* I've heard before. I wonder if it's still around. Anyway, I know I'm *nothing* like that, but why not try to have some *simple* fun?

So I read aloud from this battered pamphlet, & it goes: "I wonder about the worldwide conspiracy of men, women, events, places, occurrences. These things are not easy to reck or deduce. *What's real? What's imagined? What's wished for? What's possible? Have the ships always been overhead? Is Emandia real? Nearer than before? Is it all really a panoply of events & occurrences?* I don't have any answers. Not a one. Not yours. Not mine. Not anyone else's. Just a changing set of questions, & a changing set of ideas about those questions."

Well, OK, so I pause for a moment, thinking on those words, which are very strange words, & the strange dream music is still spooky in my mind. And I look around, but there's no Creatures or Mechanic to be seen.

And so I go on tuning around on the radio, just a little bit, just to see if there's any *chance*, you know, any *possibility*. You never can tell with these things. No *SpiritPlants Radio America*, but then lucky me I *do* come upon that space cowboy radio show, where there's the whole usual bunch of shooting with fire lances, or maybe space fire lances?

And then there's the low-voiced narrator, & he's saying: "Something complex, grimy & light both. Far reaching! A puzzle. A broad, deep, weird puzzle. *Worldwide conspiracy?* Some call it that. I don't. I call it a *game*. You see, things will manifest suddenly. *What to do? Keep? Concede? Halfway between free will & understanding? And adhering to the rules. Rules? Common sense? Survival tactics?* Nobody knows all. And you each consider, decide, react, *over & over & over.*"

And then there's some more shooting with those space fire lances. Maybe they're kind of like those space ray guns they use on *Star Track*? Well, I can't say so for sure. But, you know, I'm willing to consider the matter. It just seems like we're in synch. I mean, this weird little pamphlet here & the space cowboy radio show are both talking about the *same thing*. And I'm like, well, *what does this mean?* I mean, *what could it mean? Could it mean anything?* I mean, maybe it doesn't mean *anything*. Or maybe it means *several things?* And I don't know.

But I go paging on in this pamphlet, because the music's back. Something calmer this time, maybe kinda by Supernova? Or, what were they called, the Sweatles? And OK, I mean, I guess you could say that space cowboy radio show, it comes & goes.

What happens next is that the little grey Hedgedyhog Creature comes squeaking back. And I'm really excited to see him. He hops right into my lap. And I figure out quickly that I'm gonna have to learn some way to talk to him because, I mean, he wants to talk to me too. But he doesn't seem to speak the same words I speak. Speaks *Squeak*, as it were.

So then what he does is, he nudges me, with his little Hedgedyhog nose, to hit the *Stop* button on my tape recorder, & to turn off the radio. And then he tells me, with the same nose, to hit the *Play* button, & I'm thinking: *what could possibly come on?*

But something does come on, & I swear that it's not my voice this time. It's a different **Voice**, more the **Voice** of someone tall & heroic. Someone who you could imagine on a great quest.

*Not me!* More like that exiled King & his Brother-Heroes.

But all he says is: “It could have been that gam-m-me, which he found himself in later on-n-n. It involved translating into a gam-m-me piece on the board, & then on to multiple level *gtp3rp!* And then into a figure on a TV show *gr.,;H0=,g!* And then long words in a book *t0=,p3r!* And then music into beautiful songs *0.,;=!* And then, & then, & then & *gt0=,p3rtp30.,;=rp!*”

*Goodness!* My little grey Hedgedyhog friend & I look at each other. I don’t know what’s happening. I don’t seem to be doing good at this waiting stuff. But my little friend *Squeaks* kindly, & snuggles me close, as though to say: *just wait a little longer. Don’t lose every last one of your marbles. OK, friend?*

I’ll try not to.

\* \* \* \* \*

### The Mechanic

I’m-a falling asleep right where I sit, I think, I guess. I’m not too sure about a whole lot right now. And I bet that I will have that dream, that I often have lately, of that exiled King & his great Brother-Heroes. Sometimes it’s clear, & sometimes it’s less clear. Sometimes they seem to work at gas stations, & walk the streets, talking to themselves, bumming coins. But sometimes they save worlds, universes. It varies.

But the one thing I can say is that, when I really get into it, it’s best that I’m safe in my hovel, back in *ZombieTown*, because my arms fly about, my legs kick out. I often wake up & I’m just scattered all over the floor, it seems. And I think that’s what happens this time because, when I wake up, panicked, my book-bag is in disarray, & all scattered about. *Thinking: Is my crazy neighbor lady after me again?*

But . . . someone . . . is saying to me, in a kindly low voice: “Easy, buddy. *Easy, easy.* It’s OK. *Easy.* We all have those dreams. Tell you about mine some time. Right now, here. Sit up. There you go. Here’s your stuff. You sure do . . . collect a lot of these little pamphlets, don’t ya? You gonna try to sell me something, are you?”

And then he laughs. And his laugh is gruff, & kindly, & full of layers. Layers of dirt. Layers of gold. Layers of love. I can see, as my eyes come clear, his greased overalls, & the baseball cap askew on his head. I think it says *Travel Angels*. But I’m not sure.

“Are you the Mechanic?” I ask.

Well, now that he’s got me all sitting up straight, all assembled & collected again, he kind of crouches before me. He’s got this big red handkerchief. It’s a red I’ve never seen before. It’s crimson. It’s on fire. It’s dark. It’s light. I’ve never seen a handkerchief like it before. And he’s wiping his hands with it. And he wipes his face a little bit. Even his dark Caterpillar moustache. Gives me a bit of a wipe too &, *oh my goodness!* Does it feel *so* good. I never knew a handkerchief could feel *so* good.

He smiles at me. But he still hasn’t answered my question. Like he’s thinking about it. Finally he says, “Sure, sure. I guess when you add it all up. Take some away. Divide twice. Carry the

three. Yeah. I’m the Mechanic.” And again he smiles at me, but his smile isn’t the kind of smile that’s like: “Aren’t you a troubled soul that I found laying scattered about a tree?” It’s the kind of smile that lifts. It *lifts*, & I bet this smile is one that he shares with many, & he *lifts* them by this smile, & by the rest of him. His magical handkerchief, & all that other stuff that I’m still finding out in the first few moments I’ve met him! He’s put me together, & I didn’t say *anything* useful. So I try to think of something useful to say.

And he waits. His face is patient. Patient like if we waited for hours for me to say a word, he’d still be patient.

So I finally managed to say, with all I’ve got, summing up with everything in me: “I fell off the **Bridge of Glass.**”

He laughs, heartily, but not so much at me as what I said. And then he says, “My friend, *everybody* falls off the **Bridge of Glass**, their first time on it. The question, & the test, & the thing to figure out, by one way & another, is: *are you going to get back on?* And if you’re going to try, I’m going to help you.”

\* \* \* \* \*

### Travels with the Mechanic

So I travel with the Mechanic, for a while. And I’m fairly certain that what we are doing is getting me back to the **Bridge of Glass**. But the Mechanic, well, he doesn’t travel like, you might say, he feels he has to get *somewhere*. No, he travels like, wherever he is at a given moment, is the *entirety* of where he is.

Even as we find ourselves walking, side by side, through these beautiful White Woods, what seems like day after day, & in the evenings we’ll find a nice clearing to camp out, he’s always completely *present*. It is as though every moment brings with it its own unique choice about what to do. And I don’t know how he does it. It’s not like he told me any of this. It’s just something that I feel in his company.

I think he’s taller than me. But, sometimes, it’s like he’s *not*, & I can’t really tell one way or the other. It’s as though even his height is a decision made, every moment. And this is so curious that, for long stretches of time, I’ll find myself feeling quietly tangled in these wandering thoughts. And so then sometimes what he’ll do is, he’ll laugh, his deep, layered, lovely laugh, & just start to tell me a story. And I think these stories are meant to give me guidance, or calm me, or just keep good company with me.

Also listening while he tells these stories are *many* Creatures. I cannot say that I am surprised that the Mechanic draws the company of many a fine Creature. The grey Hedgedyhog friend from earlier, who kept visiting me until he was able to bring the Mechanic around finally, well, he’s *Squeaking* friendly amongst this company. He likes to sit on the Mechanic’s shoulder, sometimes one, sometimes the other. I never see when he switches between them.

Sometimes I see the White Bunny hopping along nearby. And sometimes that shenanigans-loving little Pandy Bear Imp too, cackling merrily now & again. Why, she will sometimes even ride on his hand, & he will show me how an Imp will not gnaw on a hand *if* it’s turned palm down. It’s a good thing to know with Imps.

Many others. Shiny-eyed little fellows. Snow Leopard & Fox & Unicorn & Owl-ell. Giraffes. Bears. They come & go. It's never the same number, for very long, but they're always around.

Anyway, one of the many stories he tells me, it just kind of begins, & I find myself in the middle of it, before I even know that I'm at the start of it. He says, "I came to a party, long ago, at an apartment. Big apartment, many floors up. It didn't seem to be a very big party at first, maybe half a dozen. I was younger then. I don't think you would have called me, at that point in my travels, a Mechanic. I didn't know how to fix *anything*. I didn't know that fixing things *starts* with giving your self a good look in the mirror.

"I think it was at this party, I could be wrong, but I think someone sat me down & said to me, 'Remember, Sonny Boy, along your travels, as they get longer & stranger, that *you* are stronger & stranger than the conflicts you encounter may make you feel. *Stronger & stranger!*' I think that's why I remembered that bit of advice. Felt like it had some kind of weird bite of truth to it, to keep.

"So I was at this party, & I was sitting next to this tall girl I think I liked, at least for the course of the evening. I think her name was Evelyn. Cute. Beautiful turquoise eyes. Collected picture postcards from Thrift Shops. But she had a boyfriend, but he was a mean one, but she'd met someone else recently . . .

"And then I was somewhere else, completely. It's like . . . I was there, at that party . . . & then I wasn't."

"Had that ever happened to you before, or since?" I asked curiously, thinking how this is happening to me too lately.

"It used to happen more often. Because I would find that I was never, really, fully *anywhere*. I was always coming from somewhere, on the way to somewhere else. I was never very often *arrived*. And I think I began to lose my moorings, living this way. It's as though, since I *wasn't* staying, *why stay?*"

I nod, & listen. I think this explains me a little better to me than I had realized.

It grows dark, & we find a clearing. Many Creatures around, clustering near. We enjoy some fresh water, viddles of soup & nuts. And a few smiling nibbles from a little sweet of, um, something that tastes a bit like cookie dough?

Good fire. Full Moon above. I think there's plenty of *hmmmming* & crooning with Creatures, & even a few wild cackles, that night.

And I think the last thing I remember him saying to me, as I'm falling asleep under my blanket, is something like: "You're not far now. I hope we meet again. You're not fixed, but I think you're getting there."

And maybe I dreamed it, but I almost believe he sang me fully into sleep with these words: "All worlds braided. All worlds *hmmm*."

\* \* \* \* \*

## Part Five.

### When I Wake Up the Next Morning

When I wake up the next morning, my briefly-known friend the Mechanic has traveled on his way. And that's OK. He's one *fine* cause that has left one *fine* effect on me. I stand up, gather myself together. Do an accounting. Knit skullcap on my head. Dark blue plaid shirt-jacket about me. Taped-up *T-O-O* necklace, of course. Still works sometimes. Blue jeans, patched high & low. Tough old hiking boots. Book-bag. Tape recorder/radio & who knows maybe this little machine has other talents too? I keep it close.

OK, time to move along, & I maintain this feeling that I'm nearer to the **Bridge of Glass**. I don't quite see it & I recall, though my memory is still a bit muddled, that it was *way* up high, & of course not exactly easy to see. So I just better keep my eyes out in all directions.

There are no Creatures about currently to help me. They probably followed the Mechanic on his way, which I understand. I would do that if I were a Creature. I'm sure that he sniffs *ooh-la-la*, to a Creaturely nose.

So I just walk, honest to goodness. I just set one old hiking booted foot in front of the other, & start walking through these beautiful White Woods that I cannot even pretend to fully understand. It is a strange feeling to know that the very Woods about you are smarter than you ever could be. Brilliant genius trees, & so on, as it were, but I feel that it's OK. I feel welcomed here. No one *objects*, that I know of.

I find, after a while, without at first being fully aware of it, that my eyes are casting upward. And I'm not sure why. I don't see the **Bridge of Glass** up there.

But something is attracting my attention *up*. And maybe it doesn't quite surprise me when I come upon a beautiful tree, special even among all these other many beautiful trees. Special because it has a set of winding steps about its trunk. *Oh boy!* I may have heard stories of these before, but I'm not sure. *Have I ever climbed one?* Probably not. I would have remembered that.

Anyway, I walk up to this tree. Look at those steps as they wind up & up to heights I cannot see. I'm not sure if this is the way up to the **Bridge of Glass**, although it *is* a way *up*. *Is that close enough?* I can't do nothing else but find out.

So I make sure my book-bag strap is on me, solidly, all the pockets zippered. Every other part of me zippered too, just in case, & I begin to climb & climb up the Winding Staircase around that tree trunk. It's not that hard. I almost feel like, once I'm on it, I'm pulled along a little bit. It's as though it's easier to climb this Winding Staircase than it, quite, should be.

But now I am indeed going up & up. And I realize that I'm approaching whatever was luring my attention, & now has it. *It's up there!* And, as I get closer, it sounds like voices. Sometimes it sounds like applause. Sometimes it sounds like music. And I find that I am *gripped* with curiosity to know.

As I get to the top of these stairs, I don't arrive to all of that, quite. I'm close, but I now can see that, just above me, there's a thick bushy area of tree branches. And I can't see through them. Explains why whatever's beyond there is fairly muffled. And I can't know what's going to happen,

if I was just to climb up into them. But I realize that that's what I have to do.

OK. Gripping my book-bag, gripping myself, I climb up to the top step, & then I reach, *up*, & then I grab what feels like a solid branch, & then I pull, & I am pulled. And then I grab with my other hand to pull, & now I am doubly pulled. *And I pull, & am pulled, & I pull, & am pulled.*

And *sloop!* I *sloop* through the mass, & I catch myself as best I can, on the other side. Unbroken. Book-bag *OK*.

And now the voices, the singing, & the applause are *much* clearer to hear. I find myself walking down a kind of a wooden hallway of vines & leaves. And then I see, at the far end of it, there's a big, shiny, glowing, blinking green-&-golden arrow, pointing to the right. I follow down to the arrow, & turn right.

And I come to an open space. A *big* open space. It seems almost as though . . . it's a *party*? But it also seems like there's an area, like a stage maybe? Who knows who or what kind might perform on it? *A party? A live production? A game? Maybe?*

And I find myself standing right there, not moving, almost frozen to move further, when someone calls to me, from a distance, but somehow clearly on the cool air up here, up high.

"Hey, brother! Welcome to TRIP TOWN! Come on in!"

\* \* \* \* \*

### In TRIP TOWN

So here I am in TRIP TOWN. Now I'm not really sure at all what it is I am *in*. You see, I find my seat high up in the big bleachers that seem to be for the audience to this live production. And what I did next was, I dug into my many notebooks because I knew I've heard that word before. I looked in my big notebooks, & I looked in my little notebooks, & all I could conclude about all of it was that *Trip Town* was, or still is, additional to all this, a TV show. I didn't read anything about it in *Many Musics* or *Dream Raps* being a live production that you arrived to up a tree in the White Woods. Just a lot of notes about an episode with a Robot Man & his friend at a Festival, looking for their friend the Space Pirate.

So I wonder: *is this the TV show, still?* Just some kind of strange episode of *Trip Town*? I pull out my Secret Books to read too, & now recall the episode with those Great Heroes of Yore diving through *Labyrinthine*, like its pages were bodies of air or Sea or Woods? *Traveling words like space?* So is this like some kind of *meta-meta-meta* episode, where a TV show invents itself anew as a live production, up on a tree? I'm not sure.

But OK, at least I've got something to work with here. I'm sitting as high up above the crowds as I can sit in these big bleachers, the very back row. Now it might be possible to think that if I look behind me, I might see some signs of the White Woods? Or maybe just a wall? Or something else that I could describe right into this tape recorder, into which I am now recording all of this? Just to make sure that whatever *this* is, I've recorded my account of it. Muddled memory & all, especially.

But I don't see anything back there. I mean, I don't see *anything*, but I also don't see *nothing*.

And I really don't see *something*. So I don't know *what* is behind me on this very back row of these big bleachers.

Then I notice, way down the bleachers, there's another ragged-looking figure, & he's leaned over his notebook, scribbling away, looking around, scribbling away some more. Well, that's OK. There's plenty of room here, & everywhere, for ragged scribbling figures. That's my philosophy. *Not enough* of us, I might add.

And I'm still sort of watching him when the stage, that has been empty up to this point, has some new activity. This shiny, spangled individual, I can't tell man or woman, just shiny & spangled, comes out, & raises his or her arms wide, smiling, inviting us to applaud.

And I hear someone down below, maybe the same guy who welcomed me earlier, shout: "It's the Hostess with the Mostess! Let's give her a good hand, everyone!" We all do. *Why not?* Who doesn't deserve a hand in this world? Very few, I say. And I guess she basks in this applause for an elongated moment, & then says: "Hello! Hello! Hello! Fans & fannies! And many kinds of others! Welcome, welcome, & welcome again, to TRIP TOWN!" More good cheerings follow.

But then, without another word, she gives an elaborate flourish to someone coming out through the curtains onto the stage. Sits on a stool. Not a ragged-looking figure, like myself & my compatriot down there. No, he's dressed in a formal serious way, suit & vest & shiny shoes. He comes out with a strange kind of box, or instrument, in his hands.

And I think what he then recites is poetry. Shakes his instrument a bit too. But I have to say that, for the longest time, I don't know *what* are the words he's saying. And it doesn't seem to be like just one language. It's like he's reciting something in one language, & then the next, & then the next. I'm *amazed* he knows so many. Sometimes he pauses for a moment, & seems to be reading words written on his fancy trousers?

But then I notice he comes round to the language I understand. And he recites a few words in it. But I *miss* it. Then he goes off into other languages. And then comes around to it again, eventually, but I miss it *again*. *Almost* catch it this time. So now I focus completely. So that when he comes around again, *surely* I'll catch it. It'll happen.

He recites, in his strange but lovely voice: "The world is far, far bigger than any work you might do to serve another. A great canvas to fill." He pauses, shakes his instrument a bit. We all wait, breathless. And then he recites: "This greater perspective is the magick & the medicine." And then he goes on, in the next language, & the next one, shaking his instrument here & there. And I get to feeling more certain that he is reciting the same thing, or fairly close to it, in many, many a tongue. He's sending this encouraging message out in every way that he can.

And then, eventually, it's like he runs down, & he's no longer speaking forthrightly. Has stopped shaking his instrument. Something about "bricks of poems"? Then he begins to mumble, something about "tooth tattoos"? Perhaps gets to snoozing right there, sitting on his stool, in his fancy garb, his instrument starting to slip from his grasp.

And the Hostess with the Mostess comes out, & she's already clapping her hands & calling for all to clap along! *We all do!* And she helps this Poet up, him still mumbling, something about "nobody controls the egg," & she leads him gently off the stage.

And we're still applauding, long after both have left, for his sentiments, for his efforts, & for that Hostess. *She* knows how to do this well. I think we're all eager for her to come back out again, for whatever next act is to be featured.

And I do not know what *this* is. And I do not know *what* is behind me, on this very back row. And I do not know *who* that ragged-looking figure is, scribbling far down there. And there are others here too I look at, sitting in various places. Some look almost like they too could be Great Heroes, but I am too shy to look at them for long.

But, *whatever* this is, I'm gonna stay awhile. And *whatever* many things it has to teach, I'm going to *try* to learn them.

\* \* \* \* \*

### The Beach of Many Worlds

I find myself still thinking about that marvelous Poet, & his marvelous words, recited in many tongues. "The world is far, far bigger than any work you might do to serve another. A great canvas to fill. This greater perspective is the magick & the medicine." I hope my tape recorder was close enough to catch them in his strange & lovely voice. I think so, maybe.

Then, for a little while, no one comes on to the stage of TRIP TOWN. And I look around, curiously, at the audience. I notice at one point that my fellow ragged scribbling figure seems to have left his seat. It's like something drew him away. I think I spy him, over in a far shadowy corner of the stage, but I don't know what he's doing over there.

I wonder at all this. I suppose I should wonder more about how all this gets me back to, or even relates to, the **Bridge of Glass**, where I came from a while ago, & where I think I was bound, until just recently. But I don't think I'm in a hurry. I imagine the **Bridge of Glass** will do just fine without me. And my curiosity is too great about what all this is to want to leave just yet.

I notice some activity, too, at the nearer end of the stage, sort of in the wings. I think they're actors, gathered together, talking, looking out at us in the audience. A strange fellow that they all seem to treat with great respect comes among them. He's wearing some kind of a, um, folding suit? He also seems to have some kind of a patch on his ear? And he seems sometimes to lean very suavely upon a very black stick. He's handing them pages. Like a script? They're talking excitedly. And they keep looking out at the audience. *I wonder what's going on?* But I don't know.

Then they all retreat to the back stage, & I don't see them again. And then the curtain starts to open. A beautiful green-&-golden curtain, with maybe just a little bit of crimson lacing to it, opens slowly, slowly, *slowly*. Then wider & wider & *wider*. I've never seen a stage like this before. Not that I've seen many. But I can't even imagine that there *could* be a stage like this. It seems to get *bigger* as the curtains draw back. *Do stages do that?*

When the curtains are drawn back fully, it is a stage of unbelievable size & depth. Is it even a stage anymore? *It's a, uh, Beach? I think I might know that Beach! Is it here? Is it there? Is it both?*

I feel compelled to stand. I don't know why. But I start to make my way down the rows of the bleachers, tape recorder tucked away, book-bag strap on my shoulder. I don't really know if I should be doing this but, when I get to the bottom of the bleachers, I keep walking forward.

Walking & walking & walking, & now . . . I . . . am . . . *on that Beach!*

And I look around, to see where from I came. *Where are those big bleachers? Where's that ragged writing figure?*

*No. I am on this Beach now.* I'm far from anything. There might be something way down there. Something tall. But I don't know.

I start to walk steadily toward that something tall, hoping, *hoping*, that I'll come to someone or something that can help me to understand what just happened. It's the strangest Bridge I've ever seen. Tall, steeply curved. And I can see that there are two figures at the very top. They look so tiny on it. Looks like a, um, Moon Bridge?

And I call up to them: "Hello! Hello!" But they don't seem to hear me. Do I need to climb this Moon Bridge too? I stand there for a moment. *Indecisive.*

\* \* \* \* \*

### Moon Bridge

I find myself back on a Beach I passed through a while ago. I check several of my many notebooks. *Beach of Many Worlds.* These words seem both familiar & far to me at once.

And I can't say precisely how I've come back here. I know I was somewhere else, but here I am. And for a while I was trying to call up to those fellows, on top of that strange Moon Bridge, but they couldn't hear me. And then for a while I just looked up at them, wondering who they are. And then I just sat back down. It felt like the pieces were scattering around again, *mudging* I keep calling it, & I needed to gather them up again.

I go slow. And then, yes, I remember that I *was* somewhere else, & I *was* trying to get back to the **Bridge of Glass**, & I *did* end up in some kind of strange dream theater, high up in an ancient tree. And then I walked from my seat, down *toward* the stage, & then *onto* the stage, & then *into* the stage, & then I wasn't on a stage anymore. I was *here*.

Gathering all the pieces together like that doesn't help an awful lot, but it's *something*. But then I feel something *else*. Something *low* & *deep*. Something powerful, & *it's coming this way*. I feel it rising up & up. I feel it affecting everything in its path, & what roars inside of me is a kind of *terror*.

I lie down flat on this strange Beach, with its heavy colorful musical sand. My book-bag is grasped in my arms. I feel it coming nearer, & *nearer*.

And then: *whoooooosh! whoooooosh! whoooooosh!* Wave, after wave, after wave, of some kind of power I've never known before. It's like being in the middle of the ocean when the waves are tall. And they hit you, one after the next, *pushing you along*.

But this is a Beach. This is *land*. It just *feels* the *same*. I grip my book-bag, & I dig my fingers into the sand, as deep as I can. *Wave, after wave, after wave. Whoooooosh! Whoooooosh! Whoooooosh!* passes over me. Like it says in one of my pamphlets, the whole world seems to **WOBBLE**.

I close my eyes tight. And I try to remember something, *anything*, that is not *this here, this now*. And then I remember something, anything—*did this happen? Did I read it? Did someone tell me about it?* I don't know.

I'm running late to school. I'm on the bus through Elliptical City, late, worrying, & these guys come over to me, dressed in shiny, buzzing, prickly rags of some kind. Their hair combed oddly, if hair at all. And they gather round me, smiling. And they have these little radio headphones, & they want to put the little radio headphones on my head, & play them. And they surround me, & they offer me this radio headphone or that radio headphone. "*Spir-it-Plant-sRad-ioAme-ric-a?*" they try smiling to entice me, but I don't think I know what that is anymore.

And I don't know which classroom I'm going to, once I get there, & did I read the book the class will be about? *I don't know*. The title scared me. *Nazi Jailbait Bitch*, or something like that.

Finally I stand up. I mean, that was the *problem*. They were surrounding me, & I was crouching defensively. I stand up, & they back off a little bit, & I say to them: "I didn't read the book. And I don't know where the classroom is. So I'm not going today. Goodbye."

And the bus just happened to pull up at a stop, at that moment. And I stride straight through them. Had they not let me go, I would have knocked them down like bowling pins. OK. OK.

I open my eyes now, & I'm standing up on this Beach of Many Worlds again. I'm standing straight up, & it's like, whatever *wave* after *wave* after *wave* was **WOBBLING** over me, I don't think it's stopped, but I don't think that it's doing anything to me anymore. But I see it's also starting to depart. The waves are getting smaller. The Moon Bridge nearby has stopped shaking & quaking. It's pretty still now.

I nod, not knowing what that means. I get my book-bag strap steady on my shoulder. Feel in my zippered pocket for my pocket watch & treasured **Secret Penny**. Good & good. Then I walk up to the Moon Bridge, & I study it for a moment. Very pretty. Covered in blooms of many colors.

Take a tentative climbing step or two, to make sure. OK. Step by step, I begin to climb up the Moon Bridge. It's very big. I don't know who those fellows are at the top. I hope they held on tight too. But this seems to be the way I'm going now. This is what's *next*.

\* \* \* \* \*

## Part Five.

### Coming to The Arcadia

To continue. Hobo Jones, sometimes known as Hose Jones, the most advanced Robot Man in the Many Worlds of the Star Spiral, walked with his dear friend Lilianna down that hallway that was not quite *straight*, & not quite *there*, for a very long time. Maybe even *beyond* a very long time. Who can say, with such hallways, how time is *measured*?

And when they were no longer *in* the hallway, it was not because they had *arrived* somewhere. It was more that they found themselves arrived *somewhere else*. It was a great cavernous place, very tall ceilings, *if* ceilings there were at all, & its walls covered in books. Rows & rows of books,

running up to the ceiling, *if* ceiling there was. So many colors & shapes & sizes. Some small as a fist. Some big ones leaning against tables. There are more kinds of books than you or me or any of us could possibly imagine in the Many Worlds of the Star Spiral.

And so they discovered themselves *in* this place, & they also discovered that they knew the *name* of this place, without knowing *how* they had come to know the name of this place. But they knew that the name of this place was **The Arcadia**. And, at some point in their being at **The Arcadia**, they found that they were sitting together, in a corner, on a couple of little stools, green-&-golden colored, & they were looking at a book.



Nathan D. Horowitz

It was one that Lilianna had seen before, from time to time, but had never read, & Hobo Jones had never seen at all. He didn't know that such a book could be. It was titled *The Unauthorized Guide to Mulronie the Space Pirate*.

"It's all about his books," Lilianna explained. "Like an encyclopedia or a dictionary."

Hobo Jones nodded, more uncertainly than he usually does about things, & he paged through this book, which was kind of big & heavy. But its pages were also very thin. Tissue thin.

And he came upon the following passage & read it aloud to Lilianna: "I found myself sitting, fully clothed, in a cold running stream. The carafe of water in my hand is from back there, on land. I dump it out, slowly. Fill again, with stream water. Drink deeply. This time I do not return to the farmhouse. I am ready to move on."

Lilianna was listening carefully with ears, because she didn't know that passage. Hobo Jones read on: "This is the only accounting for himself that Mulronie gave for the strange incidents that occurred to him, out back of his farmhouse, in 1951, that set him on his course toward the far reaches of outer space."

"Is it true?" asked Lilianna, knowing that Hobo Jones' relationship with Mulronie seemed to be a close one.

Hobo Jones paused for a long moment, & then said, "it's true enough, but I don't think the author of this tome understands what it means."

"Will you tell me?"

Hobo Jones adjusted in his seat, next to Lilianna's. Closed *The Unauthorized Guide to Mulronie the Space Pirate*, & said, "I am not so sure I know why we are here, Miss Lilianna."

\* \* \* \* \*

### The Reading Group

Then a curious-looking fellow came up to them & said, "Excuse me, Sir & Madam, perhaps you would prefer this book?"

The curious-looking fellow had a long ponytail, & one or more eyes, sometimes several, all very pretty, sometimes six of them, & each one a different color of the rainbow. He was tall, but not really. Sometimes they had to look down, to see him, & them just sitting on little stools. But sometimes he was tall, in some other kind of way. He seemed to wear a garment that jingled a little, as though some of it or a lot of it was made out of bells.

The book he was holding in his hand was one Lilianna recognized. "That's the one I've read!" Most pleased, she read the title out loud: "*The Unofficial Guide to the Mulronie the Space Pirate Universe*."

Hobo Jones regarded the fellow. "I didn't know there was one of these, much less two."

"There's a whole bookcase!" the fellow said, his eyes gleaming, 4-5-6-4-7 of them. "Come on! Let me show you! I'm a great fan too!" And then he led them, on one hopping foot, or possibly some long stumpy legs, or maybe three or four longer legs, over to a certain bookcase &, sure enough, from high up, right down to the bottom shelf, were all these books on the Mulronie the Space Pirate.

Lilianna pointed out the books that she knew, but there were many more she had never seen. And Hobo Jones could only put his hand on his jaw & marvel. "Who made all these?" he asked the fellow.

"Oh, lots of people," said the fellow. 3-2-4-1-1-1-2 eyes. "Lots of fans around here. Have you been to **The Arcadia** before?"

They both shook their heads no.

"Well, I think you might like it here. You see, a lot of people think that this place is pretty special, even as it's kind of changed over time, you might say."

"Is it a bookstore?" asked Lilianna. She knew about bookstores, a little bit. She'd read about them anyway.

"Well, not as such," said the fellow.

"A liberry?" asked Hobo Jones. He had heard of those at least.

"Well . . ." 2-3-1-2-3-2-3-1-2-3-2 eyes. Perhaps he was thinking. "Sort of."

Hobo Jones again recalled that the reason for their travels right now was that they were going

to see Mulronie the Space Pirate. And he got to wondering if maybe they were lingering a bit long in this not-quite-liberry-not-quite-bookstore place, charming & strange as it was. Lilianna was having a good time for sure.

"Would you come & talk to our Reading Group?" asked the fellow. 3-3-3-3 eyes.

"Well, I don't know," said Hobo Jones.

"But you're Hobo Jones, & you're Lilianna!" said the fellow. 2-1-2-1-2-1-2-3-2 eyes.

They nodded.

"You would be the most special guests we could imagine, if you would speak to our Reading Group," he said humbly.

Lilianna looked at Hobo Jones eagerly. And Hobo Jones, who was so very fond of Lilianna, could not think of a way to say no when she was so excited. He didn't know what they would say, but nodded.

The fellow smiled. Stabilized at two eyes. Three arms. Two legs. And he said, "Oh, the Reading Group is going to be so excited! You're going to be the most special guests we've ever had! Come along! Come along!"

And Lilianna grasped Hobo Jones' hand, smiling like all of sunshine in her face, & they followed that fellow to the Mulronie the Space Pirate Reading Group. Whatever this might be.

\* \* \* \* \*

### Not Mulronie the Space Pirate

So they followed along with the increasingly strange crowds to the Mulronie the Space Pirate Reading Group. It was an event that seemed to be held in a vast open space, one their new acquaintance had called the Great Cosmic Auditorium, before disappearing in the crowds ahead of them. At its sheer size, Lilianna could only gasp, her hand over her mouth, time & again.

Hobo Jones looked less shocked because, in his space travels with Mulronie the Space Pirate, & others, he had seen before at least some of these beings, & the spaceships up there, all gathered from the Many Worlds of the Star Spiral. He was impressed that all these various kinds of folks had come together to appreciate his old friend. Wasn't always so, you know. *Wasn't always so*.

Notes one particular spaceship up there, & in the glimpse he can get within it, there seems to be a strange long-haired figure sitting in an elaborate chair, with what could be a tiny little critter on his down-turned hand. His shipmates seem to be likewise dressed, & remarkably similar in looks.

Then the spotlight reveals a lectern on a stage that all seemed to be gathered around, high & low. And someone is walking out to the lectern.

Now Hobo Jones gasps, because the lecturer is short, in fancy garb, Pirate's hat & tall boots, with many shiny epaulets on his coat. Looks like. Looks like? *No. Cannot be.*

The figure steps to the lectern, waits a moment for the quiet to engulf this large listening place, & then says: “I am *not* Mulronie the Space Pirate.” Then he opens a volume, & proceeds to read, without any further introduction or commentary.

Lilianna whispers to Hobo Jones, “He is reading from the first book. Called *Who is Mulronie the Space Pirate?*”

“Shhhhhh!” the crowds of this Great Cosmic Auditorium politely hush her. She politely hushes.

He reads: “The lights & the music led me deeper into these Woods than I thought there to be. I ran faster than I thought I could, thought any person could. Were there others, hurrying near me? Were they people-folks too? I doubted it.

“I ran & ran till I came to an edge, & hardly caught myself from falling over. Took several calming breaths, & then looked down. *There were stars! So many of them! Skies of them! Seas of them!* I looked down at them, & them up at me, each & all of us curious as could be, about each other.

“But I grew unsure, less balanced, upon the tip of this vastless cosmos. Fell back with a cry, & opened my eyes wide. Morning. *Alas.*”

Very silent, in this Great Cosmic Auditorium, all pondering the significance of this passage. Everyone waits & wonders what Not Mulronie the Space Pirate will say or comment upon next.

Lilianna holds Hobo Jones’ hand tightly, & listens closely.

\*\*\*\*\*

### Great Cosmic Auditorium

And what happened next was this: Not Mulronie the Space Pirate raised his hand, to the top of his elaborate Space Pirate hat, & then he began to tug, tug, *tug* a zipper. And the zipper came zipping down the very front of Not Mulronie the Space Pirate. *Down down down*, right to the ground.

And the very authentic-looking Mulronie the Space Pirate costume fell apart, in two halves, one to the left side, one to the right. And everyone gasped in this Great Cosmic Auditorium, because what was revealed . . . was *nothing*.

*Nobody* knew what this meant. *Who* was that Not Mulronie the Space Pirate? *If there ever was one?*

Their curious acquaintance of earlier now steps to the lectern, trying to settle the crowds low & the spaceships on high, many seeming to be departing. His eyes multiply greater & lesser in number & colors as he cries out, “Friends, coming up next is our long awaited lecturer on the book *Stoned Photography: Proof of the Existence of Professor Stone*. Please stay!”

Well, Hobo Jones grasped Lilianna’s hand a little tighter, & began to weave her through the confused crowds, away from this all. They *do* have business, by the by, with the *real* Mulronie the Space Pirate. Who’s *not* here. Not even *close*, Hobo Jones knows. But this strange bit of show biz did entertain Lilianna. She’s still looking back, wondering. Hobo Jones says not a word. One expects these kinds of foolishnesses from some of the many followers of Mulronie the Space

Pirate. He’d seen its kind before.

Best keep it at a distance, was his view. Mulronie had never even seemed aware that there *were* followers of his. Somehow it never crossed his mind that he would have *fans*, even though he did pen enormously popular books. Hobo Jones knew it was just to *tell his stories*. It was never about the countless numbers who read his books, enjoyed them, & wondered about him.

“For you see,” said Hobo Jones to Lilianna, as the crowds began to thin behind them, & they’re now back to walking **The Arcadia**’s center aisle, nice & wide, by which one could branch off to the books on the side aisles, “Mulronie never really knew that he had fans *all over* the Star Spiral, & many of them he’d never met, never seen, maybe never been to their worlds. He understood that, during his outer space travels, if he helped someone, they would become a fan. *But someone far away? Someone who only read about him?* Perhaps only seen a multimedia production, celebrating his adventures, in one way or another? He just didn’t know about such things, & probably wouldn’t have cared anyway.”

Lilianna nodded, listening now, no longer distracted. “What’s he like? The real Mulronie? You know him well, Mr. Jones. Is he like in the books?”

Well, Hobo Jones walked on, quiet for a moment, gathering his thoughts. “I think he’s taller, & humbler. And I think there are things he wouldn’t put in his grand cosmic adventure books, because they weren’t so grand. And it was OK. But to know the real Mulronie the Space Pirate is to know all those things. Or at least many of them.”

Lilianna nodded. This made sense to her. “Are we gonna get there soon?” she asked eagerly.

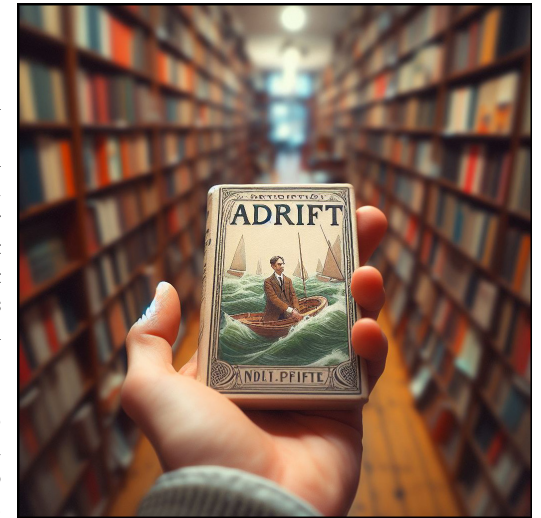
“Oh yes. Once we’re out of **The Arcadia**, it won’t be long at all.”

And so on they walked, down the center aisle of **The Arcadia**. Occasionally, Lilianna was distracted by books. Looked briefly at one called *Adrift: A Novel*. Seemed to make soft friendly noises as she paged through. When she was done, she handed it with a smile to a ragged-looking fellow waiting.

Hobo Jones politely waited too. Very few books held any real interest for him.

But when Lilianna found an illustrated edition of *Peter Pan*, however, even Hobo Jones had to pause & take a long lingering look at a favorite they shared between them.

\*\*\*\*\*



**Nathan D. Horowitz**

## Part Six.

### Coming to the Festival

It was a strange volume. They had found an edition neither one of them had seen before. What was especially interesting about this volume was that it seemed to have handwritten scribbles in it, as though it had belonged dearly to someone, at some point.

They found a round black metal table & two metal chairs to sit at, in a corner. Their chairs arranged side by side. And they paged slowly through the book, as interested in the handwritten scribbles as they were in the well-known text & the illustrations.

It was on the title page where they read, in tiny cryptic hand: “Something small became bigger, & then cosmic in scale, & then obscured some. Still there, half hid.” They looked at each other. Quietly shook their heads. Paged on.

Under the illustration of Peter Pan inviting Wendy & the boys John & Michael to fly with him, out their bedroom window, to the Neverland, there’s another cryptic scrawl. So cryptic that Hobo Jones has to use his advanced Robot Man powers to decipher it. And he reads: “I’m a girl, in this dream, at a bookstore, with two decisions to make. Thinking of that lovely boy, long ago. *Many little kisses.*”

Lilianna gasped. “I know it sounds very strange, Mr. Jones, but I wonder if I’m that girl.” He looked at her a long time, & then paged on.

They came to a full two-page spread illustration in the book, running from the left-hand page to the right-hand page without cease. It bears greater fruit as they look closer & closer. It is some kind of apartment &, as they look, closer & closer, to the wall that contains the front window, they see a crack. And in that crack, there’s a tail. “A chipmunk’s tail?” Lilianna wondered. But before they could deduce this further, it’s gone.

So they followed the tail, & found themselves in a crowded hallway, piled high with dishes, knives, & tools. And this led them to a greater & greater warehouse of rooms. Stretches of desks, stores, furniture. Stairs, going every which way.

And on one wall, sitting observing them from several shelves, were many a lovely Creature. Looking calmly, not in danger. There’s a grey Hedgedyhog, a White Bunny, two bloo-eyed Kittys & lovely Goldfish. Even a tiny cackling little Pandly Bear Imp, perhaps? And others, many others, all watching them. And it seemed like, maybe, this was the back wall?

But then the Creatures were all pointing over there. Hobo Jones & Lilianna followed where they gestured, & they came to a bridge. And below the bridge is a waterfall. And they saw that there were people diving into the waterfall, from somewhere on high, unknown.

And then, for a moment, all became glaring light. Their hands grasped each other tightly but, somehow, they kept walking. And then there’s the sound of cheering, & the glare began to fall away. And they found themselves, it could not be otherwise, in the White Woods.

And the cheering sounds so full of delight that Lilianna smiled, & led Hobo Jones in that direction. The cheering got louder & louder, & they came through the White Woods to a

clearing filled with all sorts of folks! There’s a great stage at the far end of the clearing from where they stand, & there’s several people up on the stage. And everyone’s cheering for them. Everybody’s *happy*.

Hobo Jones & Lilianna don’t quite know what’s going on, but both feel glad somehow that they’ve come to this scene of *utter delight*.

\* \* \* \* \*

### Through the Talent Show’s Green-&Golden Curtain

They have happy come to the Thought Fleas’ Rutabaga Festival & Fleastock. They’re gazing around at the many wonders of the Festival, well known to many, but not to all. There’s always someone who’s not been to the Festival. So there’s always someone being delighted, for the first time, by how wonderful it is. Meeting that cackling, crazy-eyed little Summonatrix for the first time, for example, if she’s about.

They walked around for a while &, as is her wont, Miss Flossie Flea, who keeps an eye out for newcomers to greet, came round to them to say hello. And some time later, after walking here & there in the Festival, enjoying a little bit of Miss Flossie’s famous Rutabaga Soup, well, more Lilianna enjoying than Hobo Jones, who politely demurred, they eventually came to one of the current Fleastock features of the Festival, that being the Talent Show.

Now this is on two stages. The Lower Stage is where one’s *known* talent would be displayed. Then, after a performance, Miss Flossie would come up onto the Lower Stage & invite the performer to go behind the green-&gold curtain to take each a singular path to The Upper Stage, far down the Festival a-ways, learning along the way what one’s *unknown* talent was, & then displaying it on the Upper Stage. In between the two Stages, what would happen would be different for each participant.

Hobo Jones had said to Miss Flossie: “What I wish to know, be it talent or not, is more about what my dear friend Mulronie the Space Pirate meant by: *‘Evolution. Synthesis. Ferment.’* He talked of it so often.”

Now Miss Flossie knew that some people-folks, some Creatures, & others too, might not have exactly a talent they wish to pursue. They might instead have a question. But she also knew that the nature of this event is such that, if they find their answer, it will be via an unknown talent. And so by the time they get to that Upper Stage, they may have both an answer & also a new talent. That’s how she understands this all to work. But she does not fancy herself as more of an expert on the matter than one who is an observer.

And so, with her encouragement, & that of the appreciative crowd watching, they passed through the green-&golden curtain, on the Lower Stage, & Miss Flossie drew the curtains behind them, & from this side they evanesced. And what is before them manifested.

*But where do they find themselves?* It’s not clear. It’s just *not* clear. It’s murky. Is it indoors or outdoors? It’s neither mild nor cold nor hot. And they seemed to be having a hard time keeping track of each other, even though they’re standing side by side.

Finally, Hobo Jones, who has encountered strange things like this before, said, “Miss Lilianna,

I'm going to be very forward with you. And I hope you can forgive me. But I'm going to kneel down right now, & I want you to climb up on my shoulders. Because I suspect that if you don't, we're going to lose track of each other."

Lilianna did not need to be told twice. Hobo Jones kneeled down, & she swung up nimbly onto his shoulders. Gave him a pat to let him know that she's solid. He nodded, & they started to walk along further into *whatever* this murk was.

\* \* \* \* \*

### **Evolution. Synthesis. Ferment.**

They could hear each other just fine. And since Hobo Jones is a tireless Robot Man, carrying Lilianna along on his shoulders was no problem at all. *Especially* if it kept her safe & nearby.

Hobo Jones had said to Miss Flossie Flea, back on that Lower Talent Show Stage, that his dear friend Mulronie the Space Pirate had talked about **Evolution. Synthesis. Ferment** all the time. He talked about strange, recurring swirlings too. And about White Rooms. *But what is this place that they were walking through to all of that?*

He then realized that he hadn't said anything out loud for a while, & Lilianna was probably becoming concerned at his quiet, & so he said up to her, "Mulronie said White Rooms were like places of intention & learning. A little different for each one who passed through one. He also said that when you focus, & walk steadily along, gather your thoughts, & your questions, the White Room you're in might begin to manifest in some way. Though he did also say to me, 'once you start, Hojo, if you stop in the middle, & pause, whatever you built up will begin to evaporate.' I think this place might be at least kindred to White Rooms. If so, I think we have my question, Miss Lilianna. Would you agree?"

She nodded & agreed, & she was also thinking to herself that it would be a lot better if *something* manifested here, rather than just walking through all this endless *murky* stuff. So she said aloud, "Mr. Jones, that's a great idea. I will admit that I don't know what those three words mean in this context, though I do know them from sentences in the dictionary."

Hobo Jones nodded. "I'm afraid I'm not much further along than you are. But I think that Mulronie associated them with the White Room. He told me what little I've told you. Not much, I realize, but let's give it a try."

So, as they walked further along, they began to think about those words: **Evolution. Synthesis. Ferment.** Thinking about them over & over again.

"They sound like a sequence," Lilianna said suddenly, having said the words repeatedly in her mind. "Are they a sequence, Mr. Jones?"

Hobo Jones replied slowly, "I think they could be. Maybe a cycle. Maybe they happen, over & over."

"What we need are more than words," Lilianna said from above. "We need to *see* what they *mean*."

Hobo Jones agreed, & so what they started doing was thinking about what these words might

mean, if one could see them manifested, visibly.

And what's interesting is that the two of them, perhaps maybe not even realizing it, began to *hmmmm* as they went along. Perhaps it was just the place that encouraged it. And, sure enough, colors began to appear around them. **Greens. Reds. Yellows. Oranges. Indigos. Lavenders. Violets. Blues.**

"**Rainbow colors,**" said Lilianna, smiling, looking around.

Hobo Jones nodded. "And patterns. There are patterns forming, Miss Lilianna. Let us watch on all sides, & see what we can deduce. I think we're onto something."

\* \* \* \* \*

### **Hobo Jones & Lilianna Come Upon a River**

Lilianna twice counted **greens, reds, yellows, oranges, indigos, lavenders, violets, & blues.** Perhaps others that she did not know names for. *But what were all these colors? What exactly were they seeing?*

Oddly, the answer came in a way somewhat aslant from what you might expect. What happened was, without understanding the many **colors** about them, they came upon a River. It was flowing right to left in front of them. And, on their side of the river, sort of pulled up safe, was a boat.

It wasn't a very big boat. It had no motor. It didn't even seem to have oars. But what they noticed as they leaned in to get a good look at this boat, is that it was attached to some kind of line in front.

Well, it was unlikely they could go back. A brief glance back in that direction revealed . . . no curtain. So this seemed to be the way on.

So Hobo Jones gently lowered Lilianna to the ground, & then helped her, as the debonair gentlemen Robot Man that he is, into the boat first. And then she sort of held it steady while he clambered in, with his much larger form. They sat down, as there were seats. They looked about. Still the **colors**, but not much known about them as of yet.

Lilianna noticed that the line strung through an eye-hook at the front of the boat. And she said, "Mr. Jones, I wonder if we're supposed to pull on the line to begin our travels, & get us along our way?"

Hobo Jones studied it closely too, & he nodded, & he leaned forward, & he began to gently tug the line, tug & tug, & it fed through the eye-hook. And, as he pulled steadily, the boat began to move steadily. What he noticed too is that if he did not pull, the boat came to pretty much to a halt. So he pulled & pulled. It wasn't very hard. And it traveled them along.

And what's funny was that the farther they traveled along, the more the **colors** that had been ambiguously about them began to come into clarity.

While Hobo Jones was concentrating on traveling along, via pulling the line, Lilianna was studying with her sharp eyes, finger on chin, every which-a-way. And she said, "Mr. Jones, I

do believe that what we're seeing now, on either side of this river that we're on, are patches of Moss. **Colored Moss**, of all different kinds. They're on rocks. They're on trees. Long spreads of them. Look about us, Mr. Jones. Tell me if you see what I see."

Well, Mr. Jones slowed their travel for just a few moments, looked around &, sure enough, it was a very Mossy place that they were arrived. Tall trees, so White Woods of course. But lots & lots of Moss too. He began pulling on the line again, & they resumed traveling.

That's when Lilianna came up with a thought that she couldn't have seen coming from a hundred bajillion miles away. But she said, "Mr. Jones, I think there's something communicative about this Moss. I think this Moss is arranged in what seems to be some kind of a story. And I couldn't tell you one more word of this mad thought yet, but if you'll continue to pull us along, I'm going to study with everything I've got."

And so, for a long stretch of time, they traveled quietly. Hobo Jones kept them moving along, while Lilianna studied, every which-a-way. And then she smiled, & tapped Hobo Jones on his right shoulder, & said, "Mr. Jones, I think I have an idea now."

\* \* \* \* \*

### **Hobo Jones & Lilianna Meet Alvinarah Poesy & Naria Narwhal!**

Traveling through what some call the In-Between of the Thought Fleas' Rutabaga Festival & Fleastock Talent Show, Hobo Jones & Lilianna were now readying to get out of the boat they had been traveling along the River. And the reason why was because while Lilianna had been closely observing the **colorful Moss**, on either side of the River, she had developed an idea.

So first Hobo Jones got the boat onto shore, & then he helped Lilianna to leap nimbly from it. And now they were back on land, which had been not so long ago just murk.

But now it looked like the more familiar White Woods. But maybe not quite white, because there were Mossy rocks, Mossy beds, & Moss-covered trees. There was Moss everywhere. Now there'd been a lot of Moss back at the Festival, back there, *somewhere*. But certainly not *this* much.

And so now that they were standing, Hobo Jones asked Lilianna what her idea was. Well, she put her finger on chin for a moment, thinking of how to best explain. And finally she said, "Mr. Jones, I believe I once read that one can communicate in different ways via Moss. For example, if you came upon a Mossy scrap of paper, & wrote your goals or intentions on it, the Moss would play a part in guiding your direction the way you were looking for. But I don't think that's this, quite. I think that all of this Moss is part of a story. And we had to get out of our boat, & come on the land, to begin to study the Moss, closely, to see what we might learn. Keeping in mind, of course, that we what we want to know about is what Mulronie the Space Pirate means when he talks about **Synthesis. Evolution. Ferment.**"

Hobo Jones smiled kindly & said, "That's **Evolution. Synthesis. Ferment**, Miss Lilianna."

She grinned. "I'm going to suppose that's important."

He nodded. "I couldn't tell you why, but I think it is. As much as you're assured that this Moss is going to help us out. Should we split up, wander around this lovely Mossy landscape, & try

different experimental things?"

Again Lilianna's finger upon chin, thinking. "I'm not sure, Mr. Jones, but I think that that might work. I'm not sure how else we would know, um, how to interact with Moss? Do your Robot Man Records tell you anything about Moss?"

At mention of his Records, Hobo Jones stood up straight, very still. His eyes went spinning around in his head, indicating to Lilianna that he was checking his Robot Man Records.

Then his eyes stopped spinning & he relaxed. "I think there's someone who knows about Moss much more than we do."

"And he's right over here!" said a small friendly voice.

Lilianna & Hobo Jones looked over to the small friendly voice & saw, first of all, that the voice came from a little Creature who look like a Narwhal. Then they looked a little better, & saw that he was sitting in the lap, comfortably, of a beautiful brown-striped Fox Creature. *Beautiful*. He wore a lovely crimson cap. He had long whiskers, a long curly tail, & the kindest-looking eyes.

And the little Narwhal Creature with him said, "My friend here, he's your guy. No two doubts about it."

Well, Hobo Jones & Lilianna walked over. And Hobo Jones, knowing that Creatures may get a little bit spooked by such a tall Robot Man, began to slowly, imperceptibly, walk *smaller*. Lilianna was not terribly tall, so she didn't need to do that. But they arrived, & then they sat down.

The Fox Creature was leaning up against the White Birch tree, so covered in Moss you'd hardly know was it White Birch tree. It was practically a **Rainbow Birch Tree**.

"Hello, my name is Hobo Jones. And this is my dear friend, Miss Lilianna."

"Well," the friendly Fox Creature said, "My name is Alvinarah Poesy, & this is my dear friend, Naria Narwhal."

"He's a Moss Po-et!" said Naria eagerly.

Then Hobo Jones & Lilianna began to talk about why they'd come, & of wanting to learn more about what Mulronie the Space Pirate meant when he talked about **Evolution. Synthesis. Ferment**. And so they'd come to the Rutabaga Festival, & its Talent Show, & now here they were. With Lilianna's idea about a story the Moss might be telling.

Alvinarah listened very carefully, with paw on chin, & said, "You're right. Moss *can* tell a story. And that's what I've been doing, with the Moss, at this turn of the calendar's Festival. I've been creating a story. A Great Story. It's one that I've been learning about from my dear friends Boop, who looks like a turtle but one, & Miss Lori Bunny, of Bags End. And together, with Miss Flossie Flea, we came up with the idea of telling this Great Story, to the Festival-goers, in Moss. Not too long ago, there was a Festival where I taught many how to write Moss Po-ems. I think that idea went so well, we thought this one might go well too."

Now Hobo Jones & Lilianna were *very* impressed by this. And Hobo Jones was looking intensely,

but kindly, at Alvinarah & Naria. He said, “Mr. Alvinarah, & Miss Naria, we very much could use your help, & would be delighted to learn from you all about this.”

Alvinarah nodded & said, “That would be would be fine, just fine. We will all learn about it more, together. But, right now, I’m feeling tired from all of the work we have been doing today. Almost exhausted. Can we take a little rest together?”

\* \* \* \* \*

### What Does Hobo Jones Dream Of?

So now they’re all now sitting, clustered together, against that **Rainbow Birch Tree**. Hobo Jones, being the biggest of them, has collected in his grasp Alvinarah, & Lilianna, & Naria, for comfort.

One might ask: *does a Robot Man dream?* And, if so, *what does he dream of?* Well, I personally don’t think that anyone is unable to dream, whatever kind one might be. I think Dreamland belongs to all, just as the world belongs to all.

And, thus, if we were to peek inside the dreaming of Hobo Jones at this moment, we would see him, strangely, leaning on a very narrow ledge, against a very tall cliff face. And on the cliff face there is a very long black leather curtain. Drapes from high to low. He peeks behind the curtain, & there’s a wooden barred window.

And all of this would be very vivid & strange, but not notable, if Hobo Jones did not peek also, best he can, between the wooden bars on the window, & see, unmistakably, the friend they’ve been searching for. Tis the sad face of Mulronie the Space Pirate! Looking as forlorn as he can possibly be.

And he & Hobo Jones seem to lock eyes for a moment &, though there are no words exchanged, Hobo Jones woke with the distinct feeling that he must find his friend, sooner than soon. He *must*.

\* \* \* \* \*

### Alvinarah Poesy Tells a Story

After their pleasant nap, Naria Narwhal & Alvinarah Poesy showed Hobo Jones & Lilianna what he’d been doing with his Moss artworks. Alvinarah said that Festival-goers would need to touch the Moss, along a path of Moss, to discover the Great Story. And he began to demonstrate, leading them along, with an inviting wave of his paw.

They came to a low stone, with a kind of a **pinkish-indigo Moss** spread on it in a lovely way. And he invited them to touch the Moss, both of them at once if they liked. And they did, & they closed their eyes, & they listened. And what they heard was in the voice of two, braided as one:

*Long ago, in the time before time, was Unitive Time. How this came to be, the oldest books call **Evolution**. What this was, or still is, is a grand mystery. But a small truth within its bigger one is the Star Spiral, that we all know & love, & that contains our Many Worlds, was clustered much closer together.*

And when there’s no more talking, they opened their eyes, & Alvinarah led them to a small

tree, wrapped twirly style in **green-&golden Moss**. And they touched, & they closed their eyes, & they heard:

*We call this **Synthesis**, but do not know how it came to be.*

They opened their eyes again, & Alvinarah now led them to a bed of **bluish Moss**, & urged them to crawl on in to this soft place. They did, & then closed their eyes & listened. And what they heard is:

*Then came a **WOBBLE!***

They opened their eyes again, & looked up at Alvinarah, who’s smiling at them, hoping they’re enjoying this Great Story, told in this way.

Hobo Jones asks a question, but Lilianna doesn’t quite hear it. The story has engaged her, & she’s curious to know what more will be told, but in between her mind somehow lingered back to the words they had read inscribed into that volume of *Peter Pan* back at .

Wondering if it was some kind of half-remembered episode in those past times when they had traveled as a ragged group, uncertain their intimate alliances. Seemed to be refugees together. The words among them were more game than sincere.

The two of them were then in their room, door shut. What became, became then, noises of all kinds. *Love like a distant feather, not a warm weighty stone in the hand . . . many little kisses . . .*

Lilianna opened her eyes, & Hobo Jones & Alvinarah & Naria were all looking at her. She wondered about his question, realizing she had drifted off.

She put her finger on chin, & said, “When we are finished learning this story, is it possible to learn other kinds of things?”

Alvinarah put his paw to his chin, & said, “The Moss are *amazing*, & I’m not sure if there’s not *anything* they can’t help with.”

Lilianna smiled, & nodded to them that she was ready to resume.

\* \* \* \* \*

### Mossy Fugues

Alvinarah Poesy, the well-known Moss Poet, was noticing something strange about his friends, Hobo Jones & Lilianna. They would touch different patches of the Moss that he pointed out, but it seemed like their attention would begin to veer, & then they would lose themselves in some kind of strange little dreams, begin mumbling. He & Naria listened closely, with paws on chin.

Hobo Jones kneeled down over a **colorful** patch of Moss. **Blue** & **green** & **yellow**. Began mumbling, almost like in a trance: “Some levels, deeper & deeper, & a weird little device, for me to talk to her.”

Then they would turn their attention to Lilianna for a moment, & she would be curled up, near

a stone covered in **lavender Moss**, & saying, “How we are near to each other, again.”

And then Hobo Jones would say, “I’m in a house, half-dark, & I hear a voice, many floors above, crying out!”

And Lilianna would then cry out, as though replying, but not replying, “Pouring songs into various jugs & containers!”

And then Hobo Jones would say, “Sometimes the dreams are so deep, some other kind of real. But I’m no gentleman!”

And Lilianna would then cry out, but quieter, almost replying, but not replying, “I wake up & they’re completely gone . . . Gotta go . . .”

Well now, Alvinarah is not sure about the strange effects that the Moss seems to be having on these people-folks. But surely he needed to know more, talk to Miss Flossie Flea about it all, before letting others experience all this too.

\* \* \* \* \*

## Mossy Fugues II

And so Alvinarah & his dear friend Naria left Hobo Jones & Lilianna curled up among many Moss formations, & went off to find Miss Flossie Flea. To tell her about these . . . *Mossy Fugues*. That is what they seemed to be.

Lilianna is curled up in a **multi-colored Mossy bed** &, in her mind, & beyond her mind, she seems to be in a *Mossy Fugue* of deep & far intensity. She recalls a *pursuit*, of someone, loved from ago, & hence pursued, or being pursued, she could not tell.

It was a long path, *this pursuit*. Sometimes she, or the pursuer, was naked, clothes in a handled paper bag. Sometimes not. Always a sweetness to all of this. *This pursuit*.

But then long after it ended, & long before she met Mr. Hobo Jones, also known as Hose Jones, the most advanced Robot Man in the Many Worlds, she’d wake up, wild, coughing in the night. Remembering those sweet days of *pursuit*, & not knowing if they were *real*? Or *what* they were? Sadness & sweetness, mixture together.

Hobo Jones wondered: *is it his memory or another’s*? He realized, within his advanced Robot Man cogitations, some of what was going on. That when they were touching the Moss, like how they were, it could not be distinguished if it was my memory, or your memory, or someone else’s memory. It’s as though memory was a pool that all shared, down *deep*.

He came into a doctor’s office, him or someone else. There was an old dear friend, now a doctor. Looking at me shocked, & pointing at the blank space, on the wall, next to the door I came in, & he said, “But I put your picture up there long ago, & I took it down long ago. I’d rendered your form most perfect!” *What does it mean? What does any of that mean? Tell me.*

Now I was standing in line, for a show, or exhibition, waiting to buy my ticket, or get my ticket, & what happens then is that my pocket full of **Secret Pennies**, & what-not, *burst*, & everyone

around me laughed, but they helped me to retrieve them all.

Hobo Jones tried to stand up. This was the hardest part, because he didn’t want to. There was something comforting & mysterious about all of this, even though it was also somewhat scary & intimidating. Then he’s drawn back, by a vision of a far off sky, & a great sailing boat, traveling an inverted ocean.

But now both of them were led firmly but quietly, just a little ways away. Sat down, as though sleepwalkers, under a tree. And a strange bald man, with many tattoos, dressed in black faux leather, looked at them & said, “*We have* got to figure this out better.”

\* \* \* \* \*

## We Discover Benny Big Dreams

Benny Big Dreams had come because he’s interested in the *interplay* between Alvinarah’s Moss artworks & Dreamland, his bailiwick. Alvinarah was not around right now, nor his dear friend Naria Narwhal, having gone to fetch Miss Flossie Flea about Hobo Jones & Lilianna, & the *Mossy Fugues* effects this Moss artwork seemed to have upon them.

Benny had come to explain, after his own fashion, *Dream Architecture*. Ever a smirk spread across his face *au natural*, but his message was still clear, & certainly one he’s interested in.

He said, to these somewhat involuntary listeners, “The *Dream Architecture* that interplays with Moss involves the following elements. *Music. Little details. Memory. Narrative. Mood. And something weird.* You will find that, in touching the Moss, & traveling into a dream, those elements, some or all of them. The Moss *connects*, between you, & you, & everyone else, via the Dreaming.”

Hobo Jones roused up, enough, to sit up. He noticed Lilianna was trying to rouse too, & so he helped her to sit up as well, both of them now gazing upon this strange figure, newly arrived to their company.

He looked at them now a little more formally & said, “My name is Benny Big Dreams.”

They nodded, although this didn’t really explain him all that much.

And he said, “I’m a Traveler in Dreams,” & he didn’t explain anything further, but that’s at least something more to go with.

So Hobo Jones said, “Are you, & Alvinarah Poesy, & the Moss, collaborating in some way?”

Benny considered this just for a moment, finger on chin, & then said, “No. Alvinarah Poesy is a Moss Po-et. I am *not* a poet, but I am interested in the Dreaming part of all of this. Which I admit I don’t understand exactly.” And he didn’t explain it any further *again*.

Lilianna looked upon him, perhaps a little more kindly than Hobo Jones, & said, “Do you dream, Sir?”

Benny considered this for a moment, & then said, “I am *of* Dreams. I travel *in* Dreams.”

“Then how can we see you while we are awake?”

Benny said, “Dreamland doesn’t bind me,” & again he said no more. It’s probably not that Benny *wouldn’t* explain more. It’s more just that he just *didn’t* know more. And Hobo Jones & Lilianna seemed to intuit that there were limitations to what he knew about himself.

So Hobo Jones said, “Can this be controlled? If we wanted to?”

And Benny, again finger upon chin, said, “I think so. I’ve traveled the Moss like a tunnel from one place to another, in waking. Perhaps this might work somehow in Dreaming too?”

Hobo Jones nodded, & then Lilianna said, “Alvinarah was telling us a Great Story, & I don’t think he finished.”

Benny nodded. “I don’t think he expected to see how the Moss would affect you both.”

Hobo Jones & Lilianna now stood up, at Hobo Jones’ request. And he led Lilianna away a bit, to talk just between them. Benny nodded & waited.

“Miss Lilianna, we’ve come here to learn some things but, if any of this makes you uncomfortable, we can leave, & go elsewhere immediately.”

Lilianna looked at Hobo Jones & said, “We need to find out what we need to find out, to help Mulronie, don’t we?”

He nodded.

She said, “Then we need to find out more about all of this.”

He nodded again.

They returned to Benny Big Dreams, now standing, & she said, “Mr. Big Dreams, we need to help our friend, Mulronie the Space Pirate. Have you met him?”

Benny nodded, looking a little spooked.

Then Lilianna said, “Can traveling Dreamland by Moss help us?”

Benny thinks about it for a moment, & said, “I think we need to wait for Mr. Alvinarah Poesy, & all talk about this together. But I *like* it, as an idea.”

And so now, more as friends, they sat down together. And, knowing the effect of the Moss, they sat in the grass, not where the Moss was. And they waited for Alvinarah & Naria to return with Miss Flossie Flea, to talk about what might happen next.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Epilogue.

### Miss Flossie Flea Listens with Ears

Finally, happily, Alvinarah Poesy, & his dear friend Naria Narwhal, have returned with her own self, Miss Flossie Flea. They found Hobo Jones, & his dear friend Lilianna, & that Dream Traveler fellow Benny Big Dreams, all sitting together, in a friendly circle, & they joined them.

Miss Flossie was very interested to hear every detail of what was going on, since Hobo Jones & Lilianna had arrived in their boat to Alvinarah’s Moss artworks place, where he’s been working so hard on the Great Story. And she found it very interesting that, because they were people-folks, & because they were touching the Moss directly, something was happening to them other than their experiencing the story of **Evolution. Synthesis. Ferment.** They had started to, but then it seemed that they fell into *Mossy Fugues*, best way to describe them.

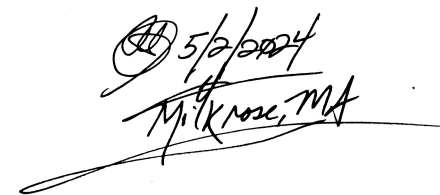
Well, she listened to every word, paw on chin. And Benny Big Dreams said that he felt that there was something here to do with Dreaming & Moss, in some kind of combination, like a Mossy Dreamway or Mossy Dreaming, that could be contrived.

Miss Flossie nodded & said, “This does sound pretty interesting. But I think we had better throw a little more into our recipe.”

Well now, they were all listening with fingers & paws upon chins to her. She is well-known as a kindly brilliant genius Thought Flea. She looked at Hobo Jones & Lilianna, with her friendly kind eyes, & said, “I think that when people-folks experience all of this, they need a certain *hmmm*.” Everyone nodded, including Hobo Jones & Lilianna.

Then Naria Narwhal spoke up & said, “You better keep their feet moving too, just in case!” And so it was agreed as well that not only should people-folks have a certain *hmm*, but that they should learn a dance step or two.

Everyone smiled. There seemed to be good agreement among these new & old friends.



\*\*\*\*\*



Nathan D. Horowitz

## The Lagoon of the Air Goblins

[Travel Journal]

Lago is vibrant tonight. A lot of smiles on the street. Serafin the educator is late to meet me. But life is fine. With the girl who works at this café smiling at me, how lonely can I be?

I'm dehydrated from the sun today. I haven't rehydrated. My hydration's out of wack. It seems an eternity, maybe two, since I ordered a glass of papaya juice. Inside the café, mysterious café things may be happening, involving blenders and workforce and fruit and power. Time's ticking by and it sounds like trees falling into a river. I glance at the red and white checkered tablecloth and remember I've always hated red and white checkered patterns. Serafin the educator said he would meet me here to tell me about the Secoya cosmovision, and he isn't showing up.

A minute after I finished that paragraph, Serafin showed up, as good as his word and as great as he was late. Sporting a white collared shirt and black slacks, the fiftyish intellectual appeared on the street and, smiling, spoke my name like a macaw appreciating a shiny button. He sat at my table and, ordering a grapefruit soda from the pretty waitress, smiled his bright, teacherly smile at me. He had ramrod-straight posture—though that makes it sound painful, he made it look comfortable.

As we began to chat about this and that, a sharp smell wafted over us from the stand of a street vendor. "Burning chili peppers," he said. "It smells bad, but it has its uses. I'll tell you a story about that.

"Halfway down the Nea'ocoyá, below Pantoja, and inland from the river, is Huri Tupu, the lagoon of the air goblins.

"Every time it rained, and the river rose, lots of fish filled the river. They were *sábalos*, big, tasty fish. But when the river fell, they always vanished someplace.

"One day, the Secoyas decided to find where the fish were coming down from. After walking near the river a while, they found a herd of wild pigs. They approached from downwind and speared some of the pigs. Butchering them, they threw the guts into the water to attract the *sábalos*. They began to fish. They saw that the *sábalos* came down—and would later go back up—a very small stream, a creek so narrow that there was no way to navigate up it in their canoes."

The pretty waitress brought my papaya juice, finally, with an apologetic smile. I imagined licking papaya juice off her lips. We would kiss and shift a mouthful of papaya juice between our mouths, hers to mine and back. I shifted my eyes to the juice. It looked great, orange-pink, frosty, and with the straw standing straight up in it. I took it into my mouth and it sent waves of pleasure echoing through me like a promise of sweet life itself.

"Seeing that the fish were entering the river through this creek," Serafin went on, "the people said, 'Another day, we have to see where those *sábalos* are coming down from.'"

That sounded like a good idea to me. Everything did.

"Not long after, a man followed the creek a long way back and found a wide lagoon.

"He heard a rumbling at the surface of the lagoon. A tremendous number of fish were teeming there, jumping up and smacking back down on the surface. Together, they sounded like thunder.

"On the other side of the lake was a huge *monsé* tree that also made a very loud noise, a kind of buzzing.

"After seeing all this, the man returned and told everyone what he had seen.

"The stream leads to a big lagoon full of fish,' he said. 'From there, the *sábalos* descend every time the water rises, and when the water lowers, they go back up the stream.'

"The people said, 'Let's go fishing. We'll use *barbasco* to poison the fish.'

"They gathered *barbasco* roots and pounded them to prepare them for use."

"How do people use *barbasco*?"

"They dig up the bushes, cut off the roots, wash them, and pound them until they shred. Put them in baskets. Go into a still body of water. Put the pounded *barbasco* root shreds into the water. The poison in them paralyzes any fish in the area. They float to the surface and the people grab them."

"I see."

"So the people trekked up the stream to the lagoon and were happy to see it teeming with *sábalos*. They said, 'We'll stay overnight and fish here.'

"They set up a shelter to sleep under and began to prepare to poison the fish. A shaman went off by himself and felt the presence of spirits in that place. Beyond the lagoon, the *monsé* tree gave off its buzzing sound. The shaman looked at it carefully. He perceived that it was inhabited.

"A chief lives here,' the shaman told the others. 'He owns the fish. I'll visit him and ask if we can have some. Don't put the poison in until I get back.'

"Most of the Secoyas ignored him. They started putting poison in the water. The shaman told his little sister, 'Don't eat the fish they catch. We have to talk to their owner first.'"

Listening to the teacher talk, I realized this was what I thought of as a shaman's shaman story, a story that made shamans look good and thus perpetuated their practice. You have to listen to the shamans, the shamans say. Otherwise, bad things can happen.

\* \* \*

"The shaman went to the big, buzzing tree," Serafin continued, "and looked inside. There, he saw dozens of goblins, but they were all in human form. Some of them were weaving baskets. Among these was their chief, who greeted the shaman

and said, ‘We’re weaving these baskets because, later, we’re going to gather *siripia*, juicy little fruits. The fruits are ripening. Soon, we’ll collect them. Come quick and we’ll teach you how to weave different things out of vines.’”

Serafin beamed and sucked grapefruit soda through his straw. Then he said, “The *siripia* the chief was talking about weren’t really *siripia*. They were human eyes, which the goblins were planning to eat. But the shaman didn’t know that at the time.

“The shaman came in and sat down and learned how to weave two baskets, a fan, a sieve, and a drying rack for ceramic dishes. Realizing the usefulness of these products, he learned eagerly.

“The goblin chief said, ‘When you go back to your people, get the shoot of a pineapple plant, the kind with white stripes. Tie it up outside the big hollow trunk of the fallen tree. Bring your little sister. You both can sleep inside the trunk. You’ll be safe there. When your relatives’ eyes are gone, pick up the seeds of a palm tree and throw them in their eye sockets. And to get revenge on us, you can take lots of chili peppers and burn them.’

“When the shaman left the tree and went back to the people, they were fishing, and they were smoking the fish over fires on smoking racks they had built. The people cooked, and they ate, and then they fell asleep an hour before sunset. The shaman’s little sister was with him. She was still awake because she had followed his advice. All people who had eaten fish were unconscious, sound asleep.

“The shaman shook the people, but they didn’t respond. He wanted to drag them away, but there were too many of them, comatose, nearly lifeless.

“The sun was setting, so the shaman and his sister went to the hollow tree trunk, tied up the pineapple sprout with the white stripes, and went inside. A violent wind rose, howling, breaking branches and knocking down whole trees.

“The shaman and his sister heard the roars of animals—boas, caymans, anyapekes, water jaguars, land jaguars. All the ferocious animals of the forest were roaring.

“The water began to rise. The ferocious animals swarmed out of the forest and began to eat the people. The fish that were dead and smoked began to flop around on the drying rack. They came back to life, falling to the ground. The water rose and they entered the water again and swam away, alive.

“The pineapple sprout turned into a dog. All night it stayed there, turning this way and that, barking and barking. The shaman left it tied up so the animals would not approach.

“The site where the fallen tree trunk was didn’t flood, because it was on a little hill. The boas and the other animals stayed away because of the dog.

“When dawn broke, all the water that had flooded the area went away, and the place was as dry as it had been before. The fish were gone, and most of the people were, too: the jungle animals and the spirits had devoured them.

“Only the relatives of the shaman remained. But they had no eyes.

“The shaman’s older sister had eaten the fish and lost her eyes, like their other relatives. ‘Little brother, let me touch your eyes,’ she said. She had long, sharp nails. She wanted his eyes for herself.

“He said, ‘No, stay away from me. I told you not to eat the fish so you

wouldn’t end up like that.’

“He took palm seeds and threw them into her eye sockets. They went right into the sockets and her eyes became normal. Then she turned into a white-lipped peccary and ran into the forest. He did the same thing with the rest of his family. Some became collared peccaries, others white-lipped peccaries. They all ran away.

“The shaman and his little sister returned to their home. It was empty because everyone had gone fishing. They gathered up their things and went to another house in another community.

“There, the shaman explained what had happened. He taught the people to weave baskets, as the air goblins had taught him.”

\* \* \*

“One day they went to see the lagoon and the air goblins’ house in the big tree.

“‘How can we get back at them?’ a man asked.

“They gathered lots of chili peppers and wrapped them up in a bundle of leaves. When they reached the tree, something like a door opened, and another door, and another door, and many windows and doors began to open, and the goblins looked out. With their faces looking down from up above in the tree, they saw the people arrive. On each floor of the tree were doors and windows.

“The people made a fire, and put the chili pepper bundle on it, and pushed the fire and the bundle inside the door that was at ground level. The smoke began to affect the goblins like a fatal virus. They began to die.

“Only the goblins who had eaten people died. Those who hadn’t eaten people fled through the windows and flew away. Because they hadn’t eaten people, their bodies were light, and they escaped.

“A baby goblin fell to the ground. He looked just like a human baby, but with little wings. He couldn’t fly yet. A woman picked him up. ‘What a beautiful baby!’ she said. The people went back home, the woman carrying the baby goblin. He was the size of a toddler. The lady had a newborn baby of her own, too.

“The little goblin grew a bit bigger, and the lady let him look after her own baby.

“One day, the mom said to the baby goblin, ‘Take care of your little brother. I’m going out to work in the garden.’

“The baby was crying a lot. The little goblin didn’t like that. He had long, thorn-like nails, and with them he stabbed the baby in the fontanelle, killing him. When the mother got home, her son was dead. She tried to punish the goblin, but he dodged her and scampered up on top of the house.

“‘Get down from there!’ the mother yelled.

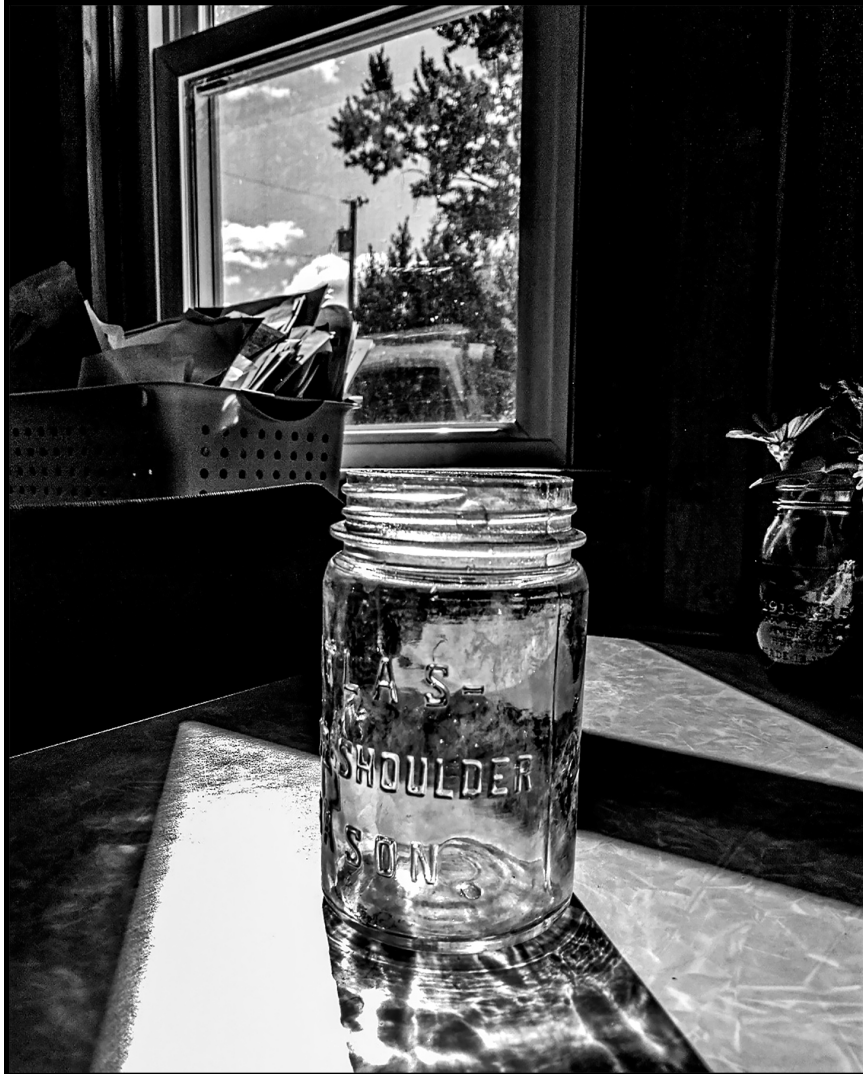
“He didn’t get down. He shouted, ‘Brothers! Here I am! Brothers! Come to me!’

“A powerful wind blew up, making the huts and the trees sway. The little goblin spread out his wings, hopped up into the wind, and flew away like a leaf in

a hurricane.

“In the most remote swamps,” Serafin concluded, pausing to swig grapefruit soda, “the air goblin still lives, even today. Sometimes when people are on long-distance hunting trips, the blood of the animals they kill causes strong winds to arise. The wind passes by, turns around, and comes back. The hunters burn chili pepper, and the wind calms. Burning chili pepper keeps the air goblins away.”

\* \* \* \* \*



Louis Staebler

*Martina Reisz Newberry*



## Bethel

One day, on a walk through  
a not so deserted place,  
I found a deserted church with  
broken folding chairs and  
a plastic lectern. The windows,  
which had never known stained glass,  
were boarded, and there were three mice  
chasing each other ‘round the floor.  
It seemed a perfect place.

Tall on the dirty stage,  
from my notebook I conferred  
my poems. No time limit,  
no faces, noises of shifting  
dust and cars out there somewhere,  
I read for many minutes,  
emoting here and there,  
hands rising and falling,  
singing through some.

I spoke of my doomed country,  
I chanted the names of God,  
I sang of sunup and cream-filled pastries.  
Behind that plastic pulpit,  
I felt no new fears—only those  
I came with—and, when I stepped down,  
a groan went up from all that knew love,  
and were no longer there.

\* \* \* \* \*



## Rivers of the Mind

[A Novel]

*“Purify the colors, purify my mind  
Spread the ashes of the colors  
over this earth of mine”*

—Arcade Fire, “Neighborhood #1 (Tunnels),” 2004.

### Chapter 26:

#### *The Great Realm of the Ancestors*

i.

I rested my head on my pillow, disturbed and exhausted after what had happened through the day, and desperate for rest. A thousand thoughts and anxieties pattered about my aching head. Had John done that to those men? He couldn't have, could he? It must have been . . . that . . . thing . . . with those awful black eyes and those strange hooked teeth, the one who spoke through the white flower.

I could not help but fear that he'd attack me as I laid there; I lost count of how many times I got up to check my locks or to peek underneath the bed. I turned over and over, rocking the mattress like an unsteady boat, straining to keep my eyes shut. It was no use. Midnight came, and I was still awake; my hair matted over my irritated face, my blanket clutched in between my hands over my mouth as I tried to stop myself from sobbing. But I couldn't let it see me cry. I couldn't let it even see me blink.

Though I consciously dreaded shutting my eyes, my bones and my muscles and my heart and my stomach all yearned to sleep, to plop down. Hours passed pacing around the room until I finally collapsed backwards into my bed, my head pounding. Just when I let myself go, I started to think about my family. My grandmother was close to death. They were moving her into hospice. I couldn't bear thinking that she would die and I would not be there to say goodbye to her. Tears started rolling down my face, staining the pillow. Why couldn't I go home?

To stop myself from screaming, *I slide into the language of silence. At once, nothing seems to matter. The room feels emptier, my body not more secure, but more comfortable with the danger all around me. I feel my eyes lean back, and the silence rolls over my arms and legs. I feel it—a real and palpable thing, a numbness that spreads like wildfire.*

*And then, suddenly, the silence seems sinister. It begins to draw me into a sleep, a deep and lifeless sleep. I pull away; the silence pulls back at me.*

*I struggle and struggle to peel myself away from my paralysis until, like someone*

*digging their way out of quicksand, I gasped awake, again in the English language but, even there, I still felt some part of my brain longing to return to the silence.*

What about the Mushrooms? I supposed I didn't know too many other options, so *I switch into the language of the psilocybes. Quickly, the austere white walls of the room shift into red and blue colorized panels, coated with jeweled reflections which seem to flow into each other and out from one another all at once. The night sky—I can see it through the ceiling, waiting for me, cold and distant, yet enchanting. I want to see my grandmother—and I will, I feel certain. I feel certain that I know this without knowing, even if I can't before she dies, then in spirit. Even if it all breaks down, this universe will right its own course and, perhaps, I can visit her even in her dreams, as John had once done to me.*

*The idea enraptures me, and I waste no time shutting my eyes. The jeweled reflections that I had seen in the walls dive in and out of one another, crisscrossing my eyelids like fireflies in mason jars, long and spindly shapes as beautiful as they are hypnotic and monotonous. Austere, drenched in the poetry of simplicity, singing words that have never been written, they stretch into an infinite horizon that in its size and shape seems to cover and exceed the whole earth. My hands and legs become bones wrapped in flesh, and my eyes become lenses that I have grown to filter this all to my spirit—a spirit which lifts from its vessels like so many drops of water—a spirit which holds onto itself and only itself as it lifts into the unknown air. Language has no use—all at once, its machinery melts into base metals, leaving all that I am as something inexpressible, almost forgotten. I lean forward to kiss the universe, and it kisses me back. I am the universe, and it is me, and so much more than me. The crystallizing shapes lose their geometry and refract across dimensions, untying themselves into trillions of photons crisscrossing an infinite plain, over which I soar, breathlessly and lifelessly and dreaming soundly. Canyons and mountains and open fields manifest themselves in the wrinkles of a new reality from all sides, alive with the pulsing vitality of an unwritten and unwritable essence, swirling about like hot plasma. I feel myself become electricity, running through a wire. A sense of form returns to my being—the sights and sounds and smells and tastes become a blur of indescribable colors. My hands stitch themselves back together as a resurrected new body. At last, there is peace.*

ii.

***“Hello, you have reached the Great Realm of the Ancestors,” a booming voice announces. All freezes still. “To remove or inflict a curse, please return to your physical body and visit World 3-B. World 3-B can be accessed through nightshades, the eyes of catfish, and all standard methods of astral projection, except the West Lemurian method. All Fourth World-based visitors seeking to appeal for rain and/or a successful harvest, please return to your physical body and visit World 6H, accessible through any Guardian Plant at the nearest sacred mountain, lake, forest, or stone circle. To speak with your next available ancestor, please remain present, and we will connect you shortly.”***

*The voice pauses. Apparently, I am on some kind of psychedelic, interdimensional hold. It was completely accidental, to be honest, but I don't know how to hang up. “You have 1 venerated ancestor, 6 general ancestors, and 919 specialty ancestors available*

*at this time. To speak with a venerated ancestor, say or think 'venerated ancestor' in the language or emotion of your choice. To speak with a general ancestor, say or think 'general ancestor.' To speak with a specialty ancestor, please say or think 'specialty ancestor.' . . . Alright. Please give us a moment while we search through your 1 venerated ancestors."*

*I wait, awkwardly. I really don't know what to think to the machine, or if I am even thinking to a machine, if that's really what it is, correctly. Existentially, as interesting as it is, it is kind of disappointing that the previous ecstatic moments had actually been a psychic dial tone.*

*"We're sorry, but all of your venerated ancestors are currently assisting other visitors. Please remain in the Great Realm of the Ancestors, and your ancestor will be with you shortly."*

*The voice fades, and I stand there. A person comes up next to me, a shimmering purple form, who looks at me with a faint smile and nods, before looking away. What feels like a minute or so passes before I hear them speak, almost sighing as they do so. "First time here?"*

*"Yeab."*

*They nod slowly, looking back off towards the infinite fractal distance, which seems to sprout with colors and fluid organic shapes. A visual form of hold music, apparently. I am not sure, though. Maybe this is just the default scenery of this particular dimension.*

*"You know who you're visiting?"*

*"A venerated ancestor."*

*"Oh really? Hmm."*

*I gulp, nodding self-consciously. I don't know what there is to be self-conscious about. I am a semi-humanoid mass of blue light, and they are a semi-humanoid mass of purple light, awash in an infinite plain of nothingness.*

*"Not that many people have one of those, you know."*

*"Do you?"*

*"One. Who knows, maybe we have the same one. He served his people well for many years. He died so that they could escape the guns of the invaders."*

*"I've never met mine."*

*"Are you nervous?"*

*"I . . . yeab."*

*"Don't be. It's a very welcoming place. After all one must be generous and kind to be venerated."*

*An awkward silence fills the air.*

*"What brings you here?"*

*"Some people in my town, they want to let a company come to build a resort, so I am coming for advice. Many have stopped believing in the old magic, but there are still those who know and trust the name of my grandfather. And you?"*

*"I . . . just . . . I mean, I fell asleep, and I . . . I don't know."*

*"You don't know? No one trained you?"*

*"No. I was just . . . last night, someone came to me in a dream, and they said to go to this . . . uhm . . . this field. So I went there, and when I got there, the government had torn a hole in the universe. The Mushrooms, the Mushrooms in the field, they*

*gave me the gift of Language. Tonight, I couldn't get to sleep because I was so worried I hadn't gotten to see my grandmother and there's a . . . a man in the place they took me to . . . who wants to kill me. But no one can see him."*

*"Perhaps you were taken to the right place then. Perhaps this is where you needed to go. I remember the first time I came here. I was ten years old. I'd not yet been initiated. I'd been having terrible nightmares every night—a spirit came to me and told me of this place. It told me that I would come here to save my town. I caught only a glimpse. Just a glimpse. But I remembered, and I have been here many times since then. It's always scary, the first time you reach this plane. Most people never make it past the fifth. Not many are taken here as young as I was, either." They pause. "I should add: you cannot tell anyone of this place."*

*"Why not?"*

*"It is sacred." Another long pause. "And strange."*

*"Hmm."*

*"Not to mention, tourists ruin everything." They chuckle slightly.*

*A sudden burst of energy shoots through the astral plane, rocketing through the sky. The purple figure leans back, looking annoyed, or as annoyed as a purple being made of light with only vaguely tangible facial features could look. "What was that?"*

*"The Arrogant Mint, no doubt. They're the only ones who go past Seven Z. I've heard they've reached 527 dimensions beyond this one. They've used up the whole sorting system."*

*"The Arrogant Mint? I've heard that name, somewhere."*

*"From the Keepers of Language?"*

*"The Mushrooms? Yes, I think so—"*

*"They've felt a certain animosity to the Arrogant Mint for quite some time. Or a rivalry might be a better word."*

*"Why?"*

*"Who can say? The Keepers of Language can sometimes get caught on something for quite some time. There's a nest of them in some mountains near where I live who have been thinking about strawberries since before humans discovered clay. Somehow, the topic of strawberries has challenged them so profoundly that they have just . . . not been able to stop for who knows how many years. Communing with these Mushrooms actually inspired a song by the Beatles, I believe. And the Arrogant Mint likely did the same sort of thing—offending their sense of order."*

*"Hub."*

*The Arrogant Mint, in the form of a burst of energy, slams back into the astral plain from high above, crashing through the sky, and then into the ground again. Hysteric laughter echoes across the world in which we find ourselves—as though in its journey to the higher plane it heard some tremendous joke about existence, perhaps even that the level in which we find ourselves is some kind of grandiose cosmic joke. Honestly, the Mushroom part of my mind does sort of think it is kind of an asshole, like that friend everyone has who always posts about how smart they are and likes to humble-brag about how high their IQ is.*

*"They don't grow where I'm at. Only in—" They freeze, as a booming psychic voice that only they can hear enters their mind. "Sorry, I've got to go. Good luck. And*

**don't be nervous."**

**"Thanks. Have fun!"**

A great wind swirls around them, and they take the form of an owl, flying off into the infinite. I wait patiently, allowing myself to become mesmerized by the visual hold music. New words and ideas flutter about my brain. A hall of venerated ancestors. An Arrogant Mint who has traveled to 527 dimensions. A field of Mushrooms thinking about strawberries. Another form materializes, this one a lighter shade of purple than the last one. **"Oh my . . . oh my god . . ."** they mumble. **"Wow—"**

**"Hey, what's up?"**

**"Holy shit—is this real?"**

**"I mean, I guess, it's—"**

Another shape, this one red and white, appears beside me, looking at the two of us with moderate annoyance.

**"Wow! Oh my god! Oh my god! It's so . . . beautiful"**

The red and white figure rolls its eyes, or what I think were its eyes, at least. **"Tourists, am I right?"** it mumbles under its breath. I ignore that, hoping I can help welcome the new lavender figure.

**"How did you get here?"** I ask them.

**"I finally understand! I understand!"**

**"Don't bother asking,"** says the red and white figure. **"Just leave him alone and don't be surprised if you show up in somebody's trip report."**

The three of us sit in a line, not speaking to each other, until I hear the voice return to my ears. **"Hello! Thank you for holding. We will now connect you with your venerated ancestor."**

iii.

A whirlwind rises up around me and swallows me, bending my arms and legs and bones so that I become a brilliant red macaw. My feathers look like trillions of shards of glass, bending and rippling with the wind. My eyes sparkle like gemstones plucked from underneath a river, and my mind bubbles with language, echoing back distant pieces of the universe, the shadows of faraway, and transcendental wonders materializing themselves deep in my mind. The wind rushes, and I feel myself propelled onward towards a field of melting, ever-multiplying colors, winding through an invisible labyrinth, guided only by the wind. I feel myself die, and resurrect, and die, again and again until I crest through the deep turquoise of an alien sky, flapping my wings over an old forest, in the midst of which I see a village, sitting atop a tall hill.

I land on a tree branch outside of the village. A crystal clear stream filled with fat, yellow koi-fish trickles down underneath the shade of the tree, a knotted and solemn willow tree. The village, with its quartz-tiled roofs and zinc-and-sandstone houses, is shaded by tall trees growing throughout its streets, streets that wound in patterns and geometries that my English brain can make no sense of. Up above, the sky is covered by a thick sheet of ice.

The more I try to make sense of it, the more I realize that . . . suddenly . . . I have no gift of Language here. I am only left with the barest qualities of my spirit and my

mind, in a world I know nothing about. I think back to the fear I once had of meeting my ancestor, and I realize that it masks a barely contained excitement, a wonder, not unlike a tourist who has just stumbled across some dusty backstreet café in some country where they do not speak the language, where every single sight and glimpse into the ordinary things around them takes on the timbre of the exotic. I realize that I am a tourist here. I have no place here. My ancestor, whoever she is, probably has, at the very least, better things to do with her time than to service my wide-eyed sightseeing.

Unperching myself from the branch, I metamorphosize, almost unintentionally, from a macaw into a human, and land uncomfortably on the dusty stone path to the mysterious old city. I don't know where I am going—I really don't. By the looks of it, we are under a massive glacier but, for all I know, that is just . . . I don't know, a metaphor for something.

And, suddenly, I am captivated by the question of who awaits me in that city, who my ancestor will be, what they will expect for me to know. My mom always told our family story this way: her grandmother's grandmother came from Veracruz—she always insisted she was "pure Spanish," but her daughter remained convinced she had "at least some Native American blood." So maybe that is where I am, but I can't be too certain.

There's also the story, which my great-grandmother's husband liked to counter with, when she talked about Native American blood, that my mysterious, ambiguously brown ancestor had been Moorish. I wonder if this place is really some kind of ancient city in the Sahara desert, something lost to time. But on second thought, it is covered by ice, so this seems unlikely.

Still, trying to reassemble in the back of my mind the hundreds and hundreds of family stories about migrations from this place to that—from Ireland, from England, from France, from Italy, from Mexico, from North Africa—leaves me with only speculation. I could comfortably fit the sights I am seeing into any of the narratives I'd been handed. I see a woman with a thick wooden mask waiting for me, holding a staff covered in beads and gemstones.

She extends a hand for me, and leads me into the village, which is filled with empty houses with hazy, dreamlike edges. As I take her hand, she begins to speak. **"Iz'unza'en utaria eman zaisu ziur nagoela ul'zen tusula. Pusiko zaitustet ubune'ik eta lagundu zaiskizun tresna."** Her voice is soft yet forceful, with a cadence that sounds like poetry, even though I can't understand a word she says.

Somehow, this person is my grandmother, my great-times-a-thousand-trillion grandmother. I feel at once like I've come home, and also like I've entered a strange and foreign world with which I have no connection. I see . . . I see a dagger in a belt around her waist, and I wonder if she'd ever used it. If my ancestors, even before the Germans and the English and the Irish, had always killed each other. I wonder if the world I'm now in is a world I should be glad no longer exists, or if I should cry for it, if I should want to regain it?

Seeing that I cannot understand her, my grandmother sighs. Disappointed? Angry? Sad? Relieved? And she looks off, trying to discern what to do.

Eventually, she clutches my hand again and, again speaking her strange, pseudo-poetic words, she leads me into a house that is empty, save a single, green-tinged copper bowl filled with a silvery liquid metal.

Taking off her mask, she hangs it on the wall, and reveals a somewhat tanned, wrinkled face, covered in tattoos. She points to herself with her middle finger, and then to her eyes, and then down to the bowl. I look confused. She crouches down so she can mime more dramatically that she had, I guess, seen me in the bowl.

**“Oh, OK, cool,”** I say, awkwardly, not entirely sure how to respond. She laughs at the sound of my voice. **“I mean . . . ”** I hold a thumb up. She clutches her hand in her face and looks appalled—offended? amused? disgraced?—but also like she is holding back a lot of laughter.

Regaining her composure, she fetches a pair of small Mushrooms from a pouch on her dress. She points at them, and then at me, before making a scissor symbol with her right hand to imitate the sound of a chattering mouth. I nod. She pulls me by the arm out of the house, and walks with me back down the long, winding road.

Eventually, we come to the center of the town, where a tall and austere-looking forest sits surrounded by great wooden and stone sculptures of women holding weapons and strange-looking tools. Between each of the towering sculptures—or monuments? idols? effigies?—lie rows of seven brightly flowered trees which support a thick, hemp rope. She takes the dagger from her side and presses it against her hand, making it flow with blood, which she presses against the surface of a tall wooden elk-woman. She then takes my hand, cuts it open, and pushes it against the surface of the same tall being. Satisfied, she takes the Mushrooms again from the pouch, and dips them in the blood, before gesturing to me to close my eyes so she can gently dash each eyelid with blood. I feel—honored? disturbed? un . . . comfortable?—and then she leans my head back to squeeze the juice from the Mushrooms into my nostrils, before doing the same to herself.

The grove of trees around us shimmers with a uniform and austere gold, almost like a school of fish drifting in the current. Up above, the ceiling of ice resonates with a light refracted through a thousand prisms, coming from a distant, powerful, and almost alien sun. Is she . . . am . . . am I? An . . . alien??? What the fuck? What the . . . Or . . . is the place my ancestor comes from just so far away from where I am that the past feels like it's on a different planet?

She leads me down a path, continuing to mutter her poetic and unintelligible words—to herself? to me? to the trees?—until we come to a great crater, a pit with perfectly straight, obsidian walls, into which extends a bridge made of narrow oak planks leading to a garden. She takes a Mushroom from her pouch, crushes it under her feet, and with a sorrowful look in her eyes, drops it into the pit. Down beneath, I can see that, at the very bottom, the pit is full of murky lavender aether, inside of which I can see distant dragons and noneuclidean cities. She lifts a brass cord from beside the plank and, miming with her hands, instructs me to hold onto it while I walk across the bridge. She follows me, doing the same.

The plank creaks and moans as I inch over the immense, mysterious void. My legs and feet tremble, and my heart fills with fire and noise. The woman looks concerned for my safety, or concerned about bringing me here at all, maybe. I have to stop myself from gawking at the adventure of it all: the majestic forest, the mysterious obsidian walls of the pit, the adrenaline rush of stepping out onto the oak plank and walking towards the garden.

When I finally reach the garden, I fall down to my knees. My body almost doesn't

want me to stand. Slowly, though, I manage to talk myself into it, and I rise to my feet. The garden seems much larger than it had on the outside and, upon reaching it, the obsidian pit now only looks about ten feet wide. My grandmother, moving slowly and tediously across the pit, shuts her eyes and hums a song. I look off towards the garden. A tall wooden mask stands on a post, its expression hazy, its eyes half-squinted, its mouth open in an o-shape.

Reaching the garden, my grandmother motions towards the mask. **“Uhami,”** she says.

**“Uhami?”** I repeat.

She laughs hysterically. **“Uhami,”** she clarifies, making sure that I know the right tones. Winking, she takes me by the arm gently, and guides my hand to the nose of the mask.

**“Uhami,”** I repeat softly.

**“Baye,”** she nods, and then touches her own hand to the mask. **“Vasa'en ve-batzailea hantia, ni'e alaba ekabiko tu. Lu behian gaizkia'en aubean tago. Vehiz e'e ilun ma'inak e'aikitzeiko ikasi tue'. Vidal ezasu vere pasar'ea, nahiz eta ez zun bitz e'ite,”** she intones softly, and then takes a fist full of dirt to smear on the mask's surface.

Satisfied that the mask will permit her to speak with me, or to take me further into the garden, she leads me forward to a bush with white flowers. **“E'oke'ia'eni loya,”** she says, making a face that looks . . . constipated? upset? inspired? I recognize the flower. She must know about what is going on—she must have been watching me, somehow, from afar. She plucks one leaf from the flower and points at it, then gestures to show that she sometimes crushes it into a powder, and smokes it in a pipe, if her . . . stomach hurts? Or if she is nauseous, or drunk? And then she takes another leaf, to gesture that she might drink the powdered leaves in a tea, then . . . shut her eyes? And go to talk to spirits. Or trees. Or tree spirits. Possibly spirit trees. I am not sure what that gesture means or how to interpret it. She then takes a handful of leaves, and gestures that it will make your heart pound, your mouth . . . flutter? And your eyes water, until you die. She then makes another series of gestures, shouts, and percussive sounds to demonstrate that the flower is very dangerous, or . . . clever: **“Jobm,”** she said, pointing.

**“Jobm?”** I asked.

**“Baye, Jobm.”**

**“Baye, Jobm, Jobm.”**

**“Tcinti orchitu be'a duzu Jobm gorte a'al isate.”**

Realizing that I do not understand yet, she flings two fingers outwards, then points to another plant, which has leaves that are similar to the bush she's just shown me, but it has clusters of small yellow flowers in long circles, almost like cannons. **“Tcinti,”** she says, before making a circle with her hands and putting her face into it. **“Orchitu,”** she emphasizes.

**“Orchitu . . . find?”** I ask, trying my hand at miming.

**“Fine. Tcinti fine. Jobm. Baye, baye. Pona, pona.”** To illustrate **Tcinti**, she makes a rolling motion with her hands, and puffs on something like a cigarette.

**“Tobacco?”** I ask her.

She squints at me. Had I said a bad word by mistake? She presses her thumb and index finger gently against my eyelids and looks through my memories. **“Cigaret,”** she tries to say, **“Cigaret. Hmmm. Ez . . . ez . . . ”** Exasperated, she tears two leaves from the plant with the white flowers and crushes

them into a powder, before sprinkling it on my head.

*I grow drowsy. I start to melt down in my heels, and fall backwards through the ground into an endless darkness. I fall, and I fall, until eventually, I forget that I am falling, and soon enough, I am in a dream, a world I recognize distinctly as a dream designed to relay a message to me.*

iv.

*I stand in front of my old high school, a brick building with a windowed rotunda in front and a pipework sign with the name of the town. I wait in front of it, clutching a pair of stone tablets. The parking lot, and the entire building is completely empty, but the sound of movement pervades from every direction, like on all sides I can hear people being dropped off, or waiting for their parents, or talking about last night's football game.*

*The sky is grey and cloudy, trembling with iridescent red thunder. I look to the left, almost turn against my own will by some kind of powerful force. My friend Amber, who I recognize by her purple highlights and gaudy dream catcher earrings, walks towards me, her hands clasped together. She crouches down, and kneels her head, before standing and retrieving a cigarette from her back pocket. **"Companion. It is I, your foolish companion, Amber. I present you with a cigarette. Come partake in its knowledge with me beside the sacrificial altar in the high temple to prepare for the coming battle."***

*Amber had, actually, offered me a cigarette in high school, but I said no, because I didn't want cancer. This is a scene I recognized, at least vaguely. I turn, involuntarily, to the right. My friend Lindsey. I recognize her by the fact that she was my only black friend and also the fact that I distinctly remember her wearing that exact shirt when we helped a cat give birth.*

*She also bows politely, before reaching into her back pocket and pulling out a handful of leaves. **"Companion. It is I, your wise companion, Lindsey. You are facing a great evil which requires the help of real tobacco, tcinti, a strong and powerful plant, nothing like the paper tubes offered to you by the foolish Amber."***

*Amber says, **"Lindsey has made an appropriately wise statement, for she is appropriately wise. Forgive me, companion, for the cigarette I have offered you. You do indeed need real tobacco."***

*The principal of the school, wearing a long silk robe, comes up to me, and stands in front of the school. **"Yes. You need real tobacco."***

*Behind me, the bus driver who once handed me five dollars I'd dropped while getting onto the bus, agreed. **"Yes, Meagan. Find real tobacco."***

*All four of them chant in unison. **"Real tobacco. Real tobacco."***

*My heart pounds, overwhelmed by the creeping crescendo of chanting voices all around me. I plummet through dimensions back into my sleeping body. My eyes still shut, I lay there for a moment, feeling rested, but even more on edge than I had been before I went to sleep. I had to move, I kept telling myself, but I couldn't. I couldn't force myself out of bed—I kept going back over it. Tobacco. But real tobacco. I had to find . . . real tobacco.*

*My eyes shot open, and I stared up at the ceiling, watching patterns appear between the dots on the roof tiles like hidden constellations. I searched for the clock.*

It was 3:30 in the morning. I sprang out of bed, hurrying to the door. On either side, a seemingly endless, foreboding darkness filled the hallways. I needed to find my way out. I needed to escape.

\* \* \* \* \*



AbandonView



*Raymond Soulard, Jr.*

## Many Musics Twelfth Series

*"I tell you, there are more worlds,  
and more doors to them,  
than you will think of in many years!"  
— George MacDonald, Lilith, 1895.*

*xxv. Night of the Wobble Moon*

*"When the rain washes you clean,  
you'll know."  
—Fleetwood Mac, "Dreams," 1977.*

Been many & many a calendar page's turn,  
been many & many, since we last walked together,  
been many & many, since we last sat at table together,  
been many & many, to bring us back together, tonight,  
beneath that Wobble Moon, high.

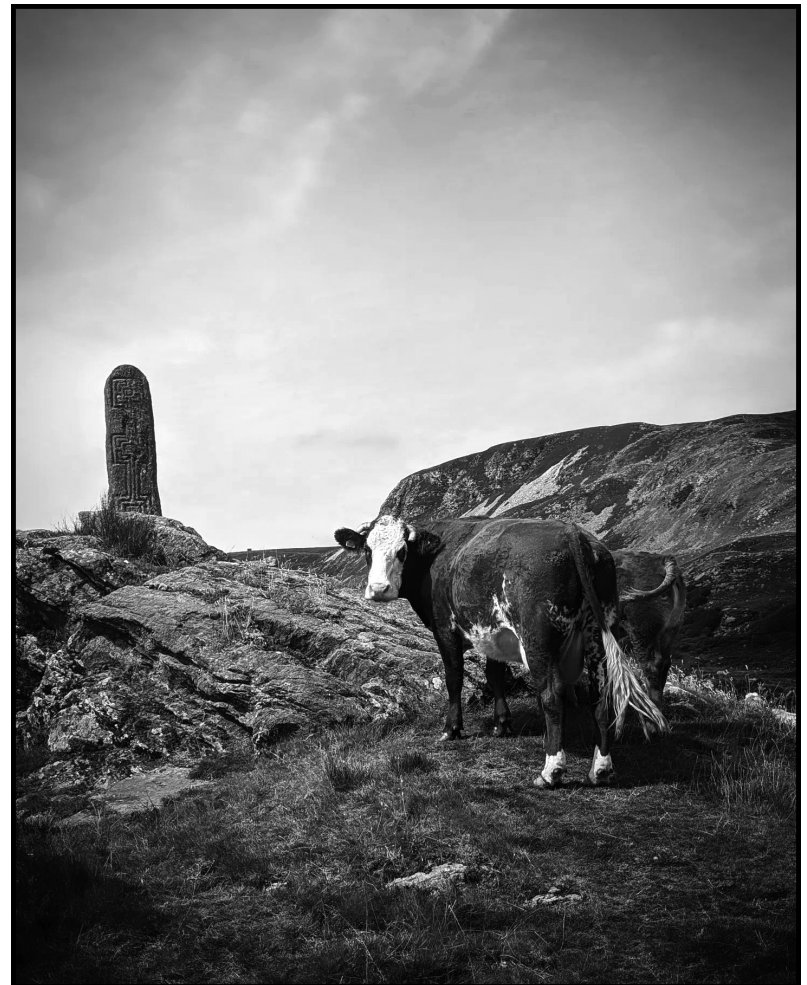
Now many & many a strange story to tell,  
many & many the faces loved, yes, many  
passed by & away, many & many a kind word  
said, & others bled, & still many & many  
led us, pushed us, impeded us, & led us  
yet still together, tonight, beneath that  
Wobble Moon, high.

Many & many a new path trod,  
new twists in the old skein, new recks  
to salve old regrets, many & many,  
come nigh, kept a little, we nodded,

passed on through, many & many a how & why,  
or no how nor why, smile each other,  
tonight, touch & know again, touch & know,  
come tonight, whatever passed, whatever  
to come, together tonight, that Wobble Moon, high.



\*\*\*\*\*



**Epi Rogan**



### Pandering to the Eventual

My northern European relative  
possesses the uncanny ability  
to predict exact rainfall.

We all thought: *what an opportunity.*  
Unfortunately, she qualifies every  
comment with an unappealing cackle.

She is also toothless, and her only  
wardrobe is peasant Dior. Purely  
providing information isn't an option,  
since it must be accompanied by music.  
Violins and harpsichords.

Most of us retreated to the southern cities.  
Not so one of our slimier siblings,  
who failed to consider those unusual powers.

Now his flange substitutes as her weather vane.  
It's going to be dry for the next few days.

\* \* \* \* \*





**"Welcome to X's Creature Carnival  
sof Mysteries & Wonders!"  
Grand Finally!**

**Bags End Book #21:  
What is the Creature Carnival?  
Grand Finally!**

This story and more Bags End Books  
can be found at:  
[scriptorpress.com/bags-end.pdf](http://scriptorpress.com/bags-end.pdf)

Hello Sampler readers,

Mah name is Algernon Beagle & I am the editor guy for Bags End News. Bags End News is a newspaper about mah homeland, a fantasyland called Bags End.

From the outside, Bags End looks like 3 brown-colored laundry bags piled up on a little chair in the corner of our friend Miss Chris's bedroom in Connecticut. And there is one newer Red Bag near them. Miss Chris is 5 years old & has a toy tall boy brother named Ramie, who is 17.

Inside, Bags End is sort of like an apartment building of levels but, cuz it is a fantasyland, nobody knows about its top or bottom. Most levels look like regular hallways, with doors to rooms & other places running up & down their lengths.

Each level is connected to the one above & the one below by ramps that are good for folks with legs & others without. Strangely, the other end of each level ends in a sudden edge, so be warned, should you come to visit.

The Cenacle editor guy, who is a cousin to my friend & Miss Chris's brother Ramie, invited me to share some of the stories from mah newspaper, now & again. He also helped with the typing & some of the spellings, to make this book presentable here. I love English but I still don't spell it too great.

Anyway, I hope you enjoy these stories from Bags End, a place near & dear to mah heartbone.

\* \* \* \* \*

Well, Dear Readers, this long story has involved many of you more than in the usual stories I write in mah beloved newspaper.

While mah Creature Common friends CC & Willy Nil-ly, who is mah newspaper's Apprentice, plus those clever Thought Fleas on mah nozebone, & the Grand Production producers themselves, the Royal Thumbs, usually on CC's hands, have traveled with me firstly in time & space through this Grand Production, many of you Dear Readers have of course been following along from one Act to the next.

It was Act 4 really that I began to hear about how popular this Grand Production is.

It happened after me & CC had helped those nice Creature Bear guys Melbourne & Wendell Berry, & Sophie the Horse Creature too, to unload all sorts of things from the red-&-yellow Truckee Creature, so the Creature Carnival could settle into the Great Clearing in the White Woods.

The last item I saw on the Truckee looked like a big pot.

Be4ore I could think a big or little afeared thought about this, Wendell Berry said in his friendly old Bear voice, "We need to put that somewhere safe 4or the Thought Fleas. It's 4or their Rutabaga Soup."

Again, that strange word & mah strange not crying out "O! Yuk!" Not in the least! I just nodded & knowed that CC was probably looking strange at me too. He knows mah usual ways.

Then Wendell Berry reached into the Truckee's cab & pulled out a pile of papers.

"These are letters 4or you, Algernon Beagle," he said, but not meanly like a good joke.

"From who?" I asked.

"Well, they've been sorta collecting & following you folks, & finally caught up," he sort of explained. Then he & the other fellows got to work hauling all the stuff we had unloaded. I was too shocked to help, & CC sort of led me to a quiet place to look at these letters.

We sat under a pretty group of White Birch trees, like what my dear friend Princess Crissy has in Imagianna, & she tolded me their name, & how they like to cluster

together, sorta like Creatures dreaming.

CC set us up all in his lap, me & Willy Nilly, mah Apprentice, & the Royal Thumbs of course &, when I peered on my nozebone, I could see lots of those tiny little Thought Fleas.

He opened one of the letters I could see had an O & a Z on it, which usually means the Merry Olde Land of Oz.

"It's from Princess Dorothy, Algernon. She says everyone in Princess Ozma's court has been reading about your travels with the Creature Carnival, & that the Carnival is welcomed to make a new visit to Oz any time it would like," CC readed & said. We all nodded at that polite invitation.

CC opened up another one. He readed & laughed. "This one is from Miss Kassi. She says she hopes our trip is going well, & that the Creature Commonards are looking 4orward to the last Act!" Everyone agreed with that too.

He opened up a third. "This is from your teacher, Mister Owl, Algernon. He says he hopes you are learning all about the different ways of folks in different places."

I nodded much. "I always do, but I think his teachings help me too."

Then I guess we must've dozed off 4or awhile together, because it was nighttime when we waked up. CC was piled high with letters from guys who were in the earlier Acts. He scooped them up 4or me nicely.

I have often rited be4ore of the talented Creatures, & the Carnival show we saw that night was just full of their talents! The dancings & singings & hoppings by all their wonderful selves!

But it was later that I got to see something I have not rited about be4ore.

Nobody was left on the stage because everyone was in the grass together. It was pretty friendly & com4ortable, & I didn't expect any more happenings.

But then CC brung me & Willy Nilly & the Royal Thumbs & the Thought Fleas on mah nozebone toward something going on in the center of the Clearing. As we got close, I saw it was those Treasures from the Creature Common! They're red-striped balls, but sorta magickal too.

They had their, um, staff of 3 orange balls there too. And some other balls too, I think. All kinda arranged in a pattern, I guess you could say.

And among them was a Treasure staff guy who was not a round ball like the rest. He looked like a white

curly-haired Monkey Creature fellow. Like that nice brown-furred Jumping Jacoby, but 4or curls & colors.

CC said, "That's the Everlovin' Preacha' Poppy!" I nodded & watched.

Everlovin' Preacha' Poppy talked in happy Squeak language, like some other guys I know do, & he started dancing a long-legged dance among the Treasures & their staff. I wasn't sure how this would go, but everyone around me was cheering happily, so I watched some more.

And I suppose it would not surprise many of you Dear Readers that the cheerings sounded like hmmmm too. It's like the Treasures sorta hmmmed & lifted a shadow of Preacha' Poppy up & up & up into the sky full of stars!

He was dancing be4ore us & also up in the stars above, & squeaking happy all the time too.

Well then MeZmer the White Bunny hopped & danced among the Treasures, & her shadow was now up in the stars too! And Jumping Jacoby himself jumped into the fun, & then a lot of those Talented Bears, & it seemed like the Treasures were sorta making it so more & more of us could do this. The hmmmm was even deeper than I had heard it be4ore, like there was drums inside it?

I think the hmmmm-drumming got CC started dancing like the rest, & I could even feel a shadowy part of mah own self now floating up in the stars too, with all of those dancing Creatures. It was like I was looking at me way down below, looking at me way up high in the stars!

I have iterated be4ore, Dear Readers, tho not 4or dancings like this. It was like having a dream about yourself. Sorta.

I suppose at some late hour the dancings & the hmmmm-drumming concluded, because the next thing I knowed was waking up early morning in CC's grasp, & many were clustered all around us. And I could see that there were many Creatures & also many other kinds of I guess White Woods dwellers in these clusters.

Everyone soon waked up & sort of friendly began to get along their ways. I walked around with CC, smiling & saying hello to folks. I am pretty sure you Dear Readers who visit the Carnival will probably have a good time like this too.

I thought we would travel with the Creature Carnival next to Act 5, but it happened another way. Not surprising.

CC smiled at me & said, "I have somewhere I'd like to show you, Algernon."

Well, I was game, & I guess not Willy Nilly nor those Royal Thumbs nor the Thought Fleas objected, because CC led us out of the Clearing & deeper into the White Woods, hmmmming as we went. It was a long while of this travel, & I was glad he knowed the way because there was no road or nothing else to go by. Just pretty & mysterious White Woods.

Then suddenly we came to a little Hut. Its outside was colored a sort of glowing white, like MeZmer & mah Carnival invitation envelope.

"This is my very own hut, Algernon, 4or when I come to the White Woods," CC explained.

I nodded & we went inside. CC's hut was just one room but looked comfy 4or him.

There was in the corner a nice old armchair, almost like what I got on Milne's Porch. Next to it was a tall filing cabinet. And on the walls were many fine pictures & drawings of Creatures, including that smirking clever Bella & that tricky little Pandy Bear Rosa!eeta! And Thought Fleas too!

And there was a little bookcase filled with books. And another armchair & a weird sorta fireplace painted on the wall, but warming too somehow. And a kind of chest next to the comfy CC armchair.

CC brung us to his armchair, & we sitted in a close friendly group.

"This place sure is nice, CC," I said.

CC nodded, but like he was sleepy, & I guess it was catching because soon we were all napping together.

I woked, or thought I did, because something was tickling mah nozebone. I opened mah eyes, & seed it was a little button. In mid-air? Then I seed it was attached to a thin wire that ran up to the ceiling above us.

CC was awake too. Looking up like I was. "Up there is the Attic," he explained. I nodded, thinking he would tell more.

"It's our way to Act 5," he said, like he had 4orgot- ted that he hadn't yet tolded us, which he hadn't.

I tried to think of some useful words. "Let's go!" I said, hoping 4or the best.

CC smiled big & got to work. He stooded up, put me & Willy Nilly in the other armchair, & moved his arm- chair out of the way. Then he tugged on the button wire, & pulled down a door, & unfolded a ladder from this. Then he gathered us up again, & we climbed up the ladder into

the Attic.

We crawled along 4or a long time, & it was dark & quiet & nothing I guessed to fear.

Then it was like the darkness got lighter, & there was kinda like the sounds of cheering far away, but get- ting closer.

Finally, we just crawled right into the light. Took me several blinks to figger why it seemed like we were in a familiar place, & the guy smiling at us was too.

It was Pillow Farmer Jones, but he was much younger & less beaten up by everything. His office was too, which is where we had come now.

I was gonna talk but then realized mid-try that this was probably long ago too, & I should just let CC do the talking.

"Welcome, my new friends! Come along to the show!" he said, & helped CC up, & led him & us through his younger farmhouse, & out to what I guessed was the back yard? I had never seed it be4ore.

And there were the Creature Carnival tents & booths & Creatures & everything! I guessed this was not the same as where we'd just been. This being Act 5 & all.

And there were many Pillows as well as Creatures in the walking around or, 4or some, bouncing around crowds.

Farmer Jones talked to us some more. "We have groups of our Helpful Pillows trade turns so that some are al- ways taking care of our clients. Make sure your newspaper articles mention that," & he smiled us friendly.

Now your old pal Algernon is far from the smartest cookie in the jar. O, wait, um, O Cookies! Yuk! But even I could figger out that he thought we were reporters come to write a story about his, um, Helpful Pillow Farm. Now I am some of that, & Willy Nilly sorta too, & CC rites but not a newspaper, I don't think, but suddenly we all had pencils in our paws & hands, & were riting notes! CC sneaky did this somehow 4or us from one breath of Farmer Jones talking to the next.

We eventually came around the farmhouse to where the Pillow fields were. It's interesting to say that Pillows grow in clusters like Creatures nap. I tried to remember if that changed later on.

But then I thought: how are they coming & going from the clusters & roots to enjoying the Carnival?

I decided I had better not ask though. I just kept mah pencil & notes close as we kept on walking to another

side of the farmhouse I had not seen, & here was where the show was going on.

But it wasn't like any of the other shows I had seen in the earlier Acts. At least the performers weren't, cuz many of them were Pillows.

CC brought us to a side of the main audience. I think Farmer Jones would have given us an up-front view, if we wanted it for our reporting pleasures, but CC founded us a spot where we could see but less be seen too. Smart guy. Who knew who was in this crowd of Pillows & others?

Oh yah, that too. Unlike the hard days later, & the better ones later still, it looked like non-Pillows were welcomed at the Helpful Pillow Farm.

It took me awhile to figure out the show itself. CC helped too.

"I think it's a show about the 6 Islands, Algernon. In the center of the performance space, there are 6 Pillows clustered together, like the Creature Islands. You can count them."

"I believe you," I said quickly, never too sure of mah numbers telling true.

"Now look up there! See that great green Sea Dragon? Look at all those Creatures leaping from him, & coming down! There's a Hummingbird, an Owl-ell, &, a, um, Blondy!"

Wow! One of mah Bags End folks! But I guess Blondys probably get around more than most.

Anyway, we watched them descend down by wings &, um, floating, & then 5 of the 6 Creature Island Pillows spooked & bounced far away!

There was more to come but just then Farmer Jones showed up to us again.

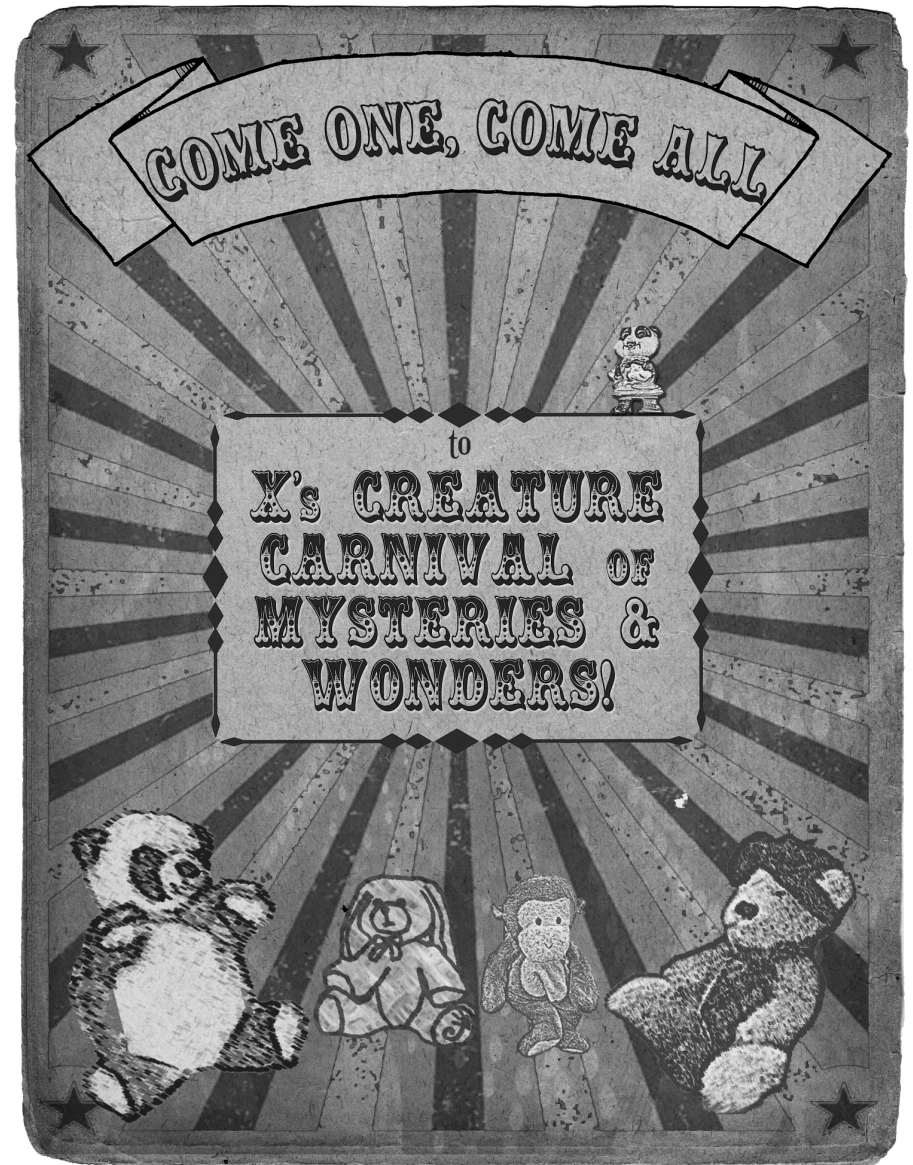
"I am sure you reporters are very busy, & so I thought that we should do our interview now," he said, all smiling & eager.

Interview?

But CC just smiled & nodded & we left the performance to talk.

Walked through the mostly empty fields above the Farm where I have been many times before. Never this weirdly tho.

CC gave me & Willy Nilly a look like: "try to do like I do." So we tried.



Interview With Farmer Jones!

CC - Your farm looks very prosperous!

FJ - Thank you. We work very hard.

CC - Your Pillows help people-folks? To dream better, more hopeful?

FJ - O yes! Well, we try. It isn't easy. People-folks are sad & tough too.

WN - Do you feel frustrated sometimes?

FJ - Sometimes. And I wonder if I should go back into the world & try to get us some help.

At this point, I tried to blurt out, "Don't do it! It won't work out good!" Because this was true. But CC sorta tossed me up in the air & said, "Look! This reporter wants to be in your show!" Farmer Jones just laughed. I got the point.

CC stood up with us & thanked Farmer Jones for his good show & interview.

"Tell them they are all welcomed. The Carnival comes around a lot, but people-folks are always welcomed here!"

So Farmer Jones smiled & waved at us, & returned to the Helpful Pillow Farm, & we walked the other way.

Then CC stopped & said to me in arm, "Algernon, can I borrow your Pine Cone Necklace?"

"Of course, guy," I said friendly. He found us an Oak tree to sit under, & set me & Willy Nilly together in the grass near him.

"Are you gonna talk to the Thought Fleas on mah nozebone?" I asked. "Or record your thinkings?"

CC shooked his head. "It has another trick, Algernon, that we need now."

"What's that?"

"Watch!" And he talked into the Pine Cone Necklace. "R.E.M. was the best band ever in the whole wide world!"

It was a blink, or maybe less, but suddenly we were somewhere else again. A room with green light. Soft cushions on the floor with strange designs. Funny pictures on the wall.

"O!" I cried. "Princess Crissy's Secret Room!"

CC nodded.

Then I had a glum thought. "Is it long ago again & she doesn't know we're here?"

CC nodded again. "It's OK, Algernon. You want to get the story right, don't you?"

I nodded, still glum.

Then the Royal Thumbs spoke up. "It's many kinds of lessons to learn in doing this Grand Production."

I nodded, but listening.

"We had to learn how to tell the story best in each place."

Nod.

"And the audience has to learn the many ways to be an audience along the way."

"OK," I said finally. "But Crissy & Boop are so smart. How do we be here to watch without them knowing?"

Now CC smiled full. "Do you remember the Dark Creatures, Algernon?"

"Yes! They were really nice."

"That's who we need to see."

So CC picked up me & Willy Nilly, & he had the Royal Thumbs already, & the Thought Fleas on mah nozebone, & he led us out of the Secret Room.

Lucky it was nighttime, or maybe that's because it was Act 6, but I guessed it was a good time to be finding those Dark Creatures.

It seemed like once we came out of Crissy's Secret Room, it was the Royal Thumbs who were leading us along, like they knowed where to go in this Beast of a Castle.

I figured to talk about now what I knowed of the Dark Creatures of the Castle.

"We gotta close our eyes to see in the dark places here like they do. They will guide us along too, if we ask nicely."

I thought that was helpful to know, & didn't seem off script to say. We all closed our eyes & moved slowly along the lightless corridors we were in.

"You Royal Thumbs has better be ready for some lost audience members in this Act!" I said to them, as they were still leading the way as CC carried the rest of us along.

"Don't worry, Algernon Beagle," said the Royal Thumbs. "The Dark Creatures live in this Act & will care for all. Here they come!"

"O, & CC, they might float you in the very air itself, so watch out!" I warned again. It had been fun the first time despite mah usual hard relationship with gravity.

CC laughed & we suddenly turned into a room that was darker than ever to mah peek, but eyes tightly shut I could see OK.

And there were indeed a lot of Dark Creatures in

the room. It's hard to describe them because they look like shadows with bodies. Led by the pointing Royal Thumbs, & encouraging Dark Creatures, we eyes shut tight walked across the room to what looked like a big glass door that opened up to a balcony view high up on the outside of the Castle! I had never seen this balcony before.

I noticed there was a comfy-looking armchair by the railing, & CC & the Royal Thumbs brought us right over to it. Nearly as nice an armchair & view to see as mah Milne's Porch. Nearly.

"Look, Algernon Beagle!" CC & the Royal Thumbs & Willy Nilly & maybe some of the Thought Fleas on mah Nozobone said together.

And we all saw the Creature Carnival Caravan rolling up the green-&-golden hills near the Castle!

Was this long ago? It must have been. Crissy had never talked about a big Carnival visiting. She doesn't always tell stuff tho.

I have to say, watched from this high-up balcony & all, I could see how hard & fast the Creatures worked to put up their show. By the time the Full Moon light was becoming early morning time, every tent was up, every wagon was parked, & every booth was ready for all comers.

"But all who lives in Imagianna is Crissy & Boop, & I guess you Dark Creatures," I said to the ones with us.

"Crissy is their Princess, Algernon," said CC.

"You mean the same one who iterated them from the Island Cavern all those Acts & calendars ago?" I asked.

CC nodded. "That's why they came to see her," he explained.

I thought, & nodded. Then thought twice more, & nodded once. "I guess what's good for the iteree is good for the iterer too?"

CC nodded & smiled.

"So they came to visit her & Boop in their new home?"

"And they have kept coming every turn of the calendar since," said a new voice behind me, but I knowed it very well. And I knowed better that you can't fool that voice's, um, person.

It was Princess Crissy & also her bestus buddy Boop who is not a turtle but looks like one.

I felt like a sneak & a thief & like I had started a rumble or something.

But Crissy was smiling way too big at me for being angry. Then she put her finger to her lips like *shhhh*, &

she & Boop sorta skootched in with me & CC & Willy Nilly & the Royal Thumbs & the Thought Fleas & the Dark Creatures. Good thing many of them were scrawny little Creatures.

"Why are we shushing, Crissy?" I asked, but quietly tho.

"Because I am down there too, & it's a really good night for the Creature Carnival," she said, smiling & hugging & still whispering.

I guessed it had to be some of that old tricky smile Crissy magick she got from her sister, but it's like we could see from our high-up balcony perch right into the best performing going on down below.

They brought out all the best performers too. Those rarely-seen La Petites Thumb put on their escape artist extraordinaire performance by diving, I swear, from a strange little, um, Tugboat in space? With an Imp as Captain? "TooT! TooT!" she cried from above, & cackled merrily.

And these Thumbs, all twisted up & bound together by ropes, sorta leaped! from this Tugboat & started hurtling down-down-down toward the big tent, & there was a hole in it, & when they appeared again inside the tent, they were all loosed up & landing with such pretty grace!

And then, amazing to see but true, Princess Crissy walked into the center of the 3-ring performance areas, & for a moment she stood there, looking around at all the Creature performers near her, & the ones in the audience, & it got very hushed in the tent, like important in a way Crissy usually doesn't.

Then she talked. "Like I kept you in the Great Cavern with me, & also sent you along the road as a great Carnival to entertain & comfort, mostly people-folks, but not all, so now I iterate you again from here, one as this Carnival traveling ever on, & the other as a group I bid to find a new home. A Common, for all Creatures to be welcomed. For everyone to be welcomed."

Then she raised her fingers to the air & drew it slowly down & down, & voices, the prettiest voices of all, began to hmmmmmm & hmmmmmm & hmmmmmm, till another Crissy gesture, & everyone began to join in, & it's like it got deeper & bigger & softer & quieter all at once. *Dear Readers, I have never experienced anything like this!*

After what seemed like whole lifetimes or more, I know it sounds like I am one of those wild Exaggerator folks you hear tell of, I found mahself back with nowadays Crissy, & here was CC, & Willy Nilly, & the Royal Thumbs,

those crazy brilliant genius Grand Producers, & even . . .

"Hello, Algernon Beagle! Remember us?" shouted many many funny little voices on the very tip of mah nozebone.

"Um, hi, guys," I said, but looking down saw no Carnival was there at all.

I looked at Crissy & CC & all, & just said, "Wow."

I think those nice Dark Creatures had left, humble & nice as any Creature I know.

Without much need 4or help, CC carried us, & we followed Crissy back, but strangely not to her Secret Room.

We were now in her Throne Room, & she was sitting on her Throne, looking at us.

She looked uncom4ortable, no matter all of us old friends with her.

"What is it, Crissy?" I asked.

"Tell us, Princess," said Boop.

She smiled at all of us. "Well, now you know more of the story of the Creature Carnival. Its travels & reasons."

Then I asked the question that was puzzling me. "Why did you make the Creature Common & then have it so far from you, like you tolded me?"

She smiled, still not very Crissy-like. "I wanted them to have a new home, it had been long enough just on the road. Now they are under the Tangled Gate, in the Great Cavern, & traveling as the Creature Carnival, near & far, & also at home in the Creature Common."

"And what else?" I asked, tho I can only say it was more like a sniff with words.

"Having a home, Neighbors, a place in things, 4or when I call on everyone to do something 4or me."

"Do what?" Why was I terrified of what her answer might be?

She looked at me calmly tho, till I breathed with ease. *Thank you.*

"I want to re-unite the 6 Islands," she said.

Did I pass out? Next thing I knowed I was in that nice Creature Common Saturday Room, with CC & Miss Kassi & all those nice Creatures looking at me.

I think the final Act of the Grand Production occurred then. And in the Great Clearing, where something very strange & dear to me bubbled in a big Soup pot, & tiny little charming fellows fed every cold & hungry guy & fella in the White Woods. O! Yuk? Hold off 4or now, please.

I sort of remember very talented dancing Bears, &

that White Bunny, & Jumping Jacoby, & an encore of those La Petites Thumb even.

On the Bags End Auditorium stage, Sheila's Kool Jazz Band blew Miles & Trane & Bird & all those funny-named jazz guys, as others leaped & danced & sang along.

In Dreamland, Benny Big Dreams showed off his new trick of double & triple stacking dreams until they seemed to be having each other, & you only needed to sleep & watch.

On the Dream Pillow Farm, which used to be the Helpful Pillow Farm, Farmer Jones showed Betsy all the good newspaper stories there had been about the Farm, until he decided to leave back then. I think that Betsy & Jones waked up peaceful together for once. I can say 4or sure that she isn't in Bags End right now.

All this was going on in the best of good fellowships, in the greatest of Grand Production styles, but I sat there, dazed, Dear Readers. It's where I sit now, all of this going on, all these good friends & talents, but I am whispering these words into the Pine Cone Necklace I will hang on a hook, 4or a little while anyway.

Wondering, Dear Readers, dear Neighbors, what did Crissy mean? What does it mean to re-unite the 6 Islands?

I need to know.

I need to find out.

The End, 4or Now.



\* \* \* \* \*



*Jimmy Heffernan*

---

### **Tunnels Through Time**

Our primary approach  
Is to investigate burgeoning entanglement  
Or rather: nonlocality in space

This of course insinuates  
If it does not expressly posit  
A total interconnection of all objects in the cosmos

This means that space and time  
Are emergent forms, not absolute  
In a word: they are illusory

So it is conceivable that  
I am in touch with a cesium atom  
In Alpha Centauri

And indeed, all the other atoms  
In the universe  
In nonlocal feedback

But this is really a spatial configuration  
When we introduce time  
Things get crazy

If the cosmos is interconnected intimately  
In time as well as space  
Then the universe is almost certainly conscious

Don't you see?  
If time can be transcended  
Then it can all feed back to the present moment

The moment to which we have access  
So Nature can "see" through time  
And what is this but awareness?  
A tunneling from the immediate future  
Back into the present

This is how implicate frames stack  
And re-fold  
To unfold again instantly, over and over

So a universe nonlocal in time  
Is superconscious;  
The question then becomes:

Is it possible to tune into this network?

If the answer is yes  
Then mankind has a very great deal  
Of radical discovery

Ahead of itself

\* \* \* \* \*



Charlie Beyer

## Mad Jack [Prose]

*v. My New Micro-gang*

After a week, Mother was at her wit's end. The bums were sleeping in the living room and occupied the bathroom for hours on end. One of them was a clean freak and took hour-long showers. So much so, that the water came through the floor and dripped into the room below.

"There will be no more *showers!*" declared Mom. "Get these bums out of my house or I'm moving you out along with them!" she shouted. I was not sure if this included me, but I knew it included Dad.

Miraculously, a van showed up that morning driven by a bleeding heart liberal, en route to the border 120 miles north. Four of the AWOLs loaded up, but the most confused and delusional one hung back. He apparently had *no* identification, and risked being jailed at the crossing.

Dad proclaimed that he would help obtain papers, and that Bob could stay with us until the bureaucracy was straightened out. This was fine with me, to have a live-in friend, not much older than me, and considerably less intelligent. This meant I could control him like a slave out of water. *Cool!* Meanwhile, the rest of the POWs rode off to unknown fates, a few still wearing Dad's pants.

So it became my lot to amuse and companion this renegade from his national duty. I had always wanted a Frankenstein monster as a child. After consuming Mary Shelley's novel at age 12, I set off to the graveyard with my shovel.

So this Bob thing was almost like an answer to my prayers (if I was ever to pray a solemn word). Kinda like a big doll who agreed to anything and had a sweet disposition. Always there to empathize with, always offering drugs of any kind he may have, cigarettes, weed, booze, but only the light stuff a teenager could get their hands on.

This was in contrast to my best friend, Scott the Red, who was dark and brooding, ready to attack at a moment's notice, complain humorously about everything, and hoard whatever the other shared. His Dad had dropped dead from his red-haired mother ragging on the beleaguered fellow. Then she had married her lover, Frank, who was what some used to call "Black Irish."

Frank was a lover-man and the escapee from two other marriages. Frank had three kids and Scott's mom already had two. Together they made a sixth mutt that was both red and black. My best friend Scott. Home life was Mother tearing at her hair and eating lots of little yellow pills. "Mother's little helpers," they were called back

then.

Frank brought home a fat paycheck from the electrical union, and the clap from his many affairs. Consequently, there was much screaming and dish-smashing in the kitchen. The older girls went out looking to get pregnant, and the boys tried to become drug dealers. Scott the youngest just raised hell.

I could feel the aura of anger when in Scott's personal space, a jagged cloud of pain around him, black with glowing red spots. At times he would whip out a stiletto and hold it to my throat to make his point on some trivial subject. I rewarded his moves with blazing boredom and, though terrified inside, I calculated that he would not cut his best, and maybe *only*, friend. Bob, on the other hand, would go into a state of quivering shrieking terror, and whimpering to the great satisfaction of his tormentor.

But, as Scott could react without fear in situations requiring a hardheaded 'tude, including defending me, who was the cogitating pacifist of the outfit, Bob also had his talents. Between Scott's protection, my calculating brain, and Bob's Gift, we made a reasonably dangerous micro-gang.

Bob's Gift became apparent in the kitchen one day. Scott's Valium-sodden mother had just baked a pile of chocolate chip cookies. As we greedily gathered around the plate, Mother announced, "You may each have *just* one cookie. *Just one!*"

Of course we acquiesced, and gingerly took *just* one cookie under the watchful and watery eye of Mother. Retreating to our lair in the basement, Bob shook his sleeve, and half a dozen cookies fell out.

"How the hell did you do that?" we asked.

Simply put, Bob had lightning hands. I had always wondered how pickpockets did it. It is, in fact, a fact that "the hand is quicker than the eye."

SowegotapairofboltcuttersfromScottsdad'sshopandwentoutat2a.m...*sonofabitch* . . . *sorry* . . . to steal paper coin boxes. After much gyration in the basement, we got the quarter box open, and the coins spilled out all over the floor.

Gathering them all up in front of us, I noticed that Bob's pile was larger than the rest. Grabbing his and readjusting the "take," I saw that Bob's pile was still bigger.

"What the hell, Bob?"

"Whaaa?"

"Why is your pile bigger than ours, when we are looking at the quarters in plain sight?"

"Uh, I dunno?"

Scott reached for his knife and got it halfway out with a death look in his red coal eyes.

"OK, OK, it's cool, man. *It's cool.* I'll show you."

"Show us what?"

"Get me a deck of cards."

For the rest of the night, we watched as Bob turned one card into another, disappeared cards, pulled any card we could call from the deck, and astounded us by dealing himself a hand of aces. Things that would have him filled with lead at a Wild West saloon. And I knew just the place.

*vi. Anarchist House*

When we woke well in the afternoon, and after a pint of Mad Dog wine for breakfast, we headed up to the Kranes' house. This was a 50-year-old house that had never had a moment of repair or maintenance. They were proud of their unruly vegetation. Whereas the other houses in the neighborhood had the usual trimmed lawns and flower-beds, this house was buried in trees and brush up past the second floor. A few dislodged grey boards were peeling off the house, and could be seen through the trees.

Inside was hardly better. There was a sudden blast of cat shit smell. The many cats themselves sat on the shredded furniture like contented little meatloaves. Others patrolled the floor, rubbing their ringworm on our pants legs. Bums . . . *bbuttwipe* . . . *sorry* . . . and drugged-out people slept in the old stuffed armchairs, waking with the cats' ringworm all over their faces.

Calf-high rubbish to wade through on the floor, and grit rounded out every corner. Yet a well-oiled mimeograph machine, as big as a small car, sat in the center of the so-called "living room." It was used to mass-produce political handouts for us kids to distribute at rallies or concerts. It was the only thing here in working order. With boxes of paper neatly stacked around it, it was like a new locomotive in a garbage dump. I wondered *how* this mass of iron was wrestled in here?

In this house lived an anarchist family of four brothers, all criminals, of course; a 500-pound Communist intellectual father; and a mother who resembled a longshoreman with her one-inch haircut, no neck, and broad shoulders. As the gas company had shut off the house some years ago, she frequently sent us boys out on cold evenings to steal firewood in the neighborhood.

A few of the brothers and my micro-gang headed up the worn steps to the upper rooms. The stairs and walls were black with age and grime, so a person could hardly see where he is going, giving the impression of walking into a black hole.

Then suddenly—

"*And where in the hell do you think you are going?*" the mother yelled up at us, sounding like dragging a steel chair over a blackboard.

"*Awww, shut up, Ma! We'll be upstairs!*" shouted back one of the brothers. Rudeness was a fine cultural amenity in this home.

With a left turn we came into a bedroom with no furniture. There were three brothers, two hangers-on, and the three of us. We scared the cats out of there, and settled in for a few joints. When the giggling had subsided a bit, Bob pulled out a deck of cards. Scott and I sat across from Bob, so there was no possibility of handing off cards or other fishy business. At first we played for dimes and pennies. Everyone won normally, Lady Luck making her rounds of the table.

After twenty minutes of just "fun" play, I got a pretty nice hand. So I betted a buck, which was big money here. Some suckers went for it, and Bob gave me more great cards, even though I was five cards down in the deck to him. I didn't know how he did it, even though he had explained it to me before. Surely a savant thing.

Eventually I raked in twelve dollars with a full house. When it was Bob's turn to deal again, Scott made fifteen dollars. A few hours and a few joints later, we had

over fifty bucks. Excusing ourselves, we headed downtown to the non-stop cheapo movie theater, The Royal.

Here they showed Westerns twenty-four hours a day for a 75-cent ticket. Bums came in here to drink, smoke, and sleep. The seats were raggedy and the lights never dimmed out. Bums pissed in the aisles. Some say that when they put a drain down in front of the screen, Puget Sound turned to salt.

We were hardly better. We brought in sandwiches, two bottles of wine, and packs of cigarettes. Here we spent the next six hours in wanton gluttony, smoking, and drinking. Throwing garbage at other bums down in front of us.

*vii. Mom's Credit Card*

One time I stole my mother's credit card. In those days, it was a big deal to have a credit card, and it was my mother's prized possession, having obtained it without my spend-crazy father knowing about it. Now I realized we were poor, and I could not actually spend a nickel on the thing, but I had a plan.

At that time, a credit card was just a piece of plastic with letters and numbers embossed on it. There was no computer connection . . . *BunnyBarf*. . . *sorry* . . . The card was "swiped" on a funny little machine that made an impression on a receipt. The receipt was layered with carbon paper and, when a sale was made, the purchaser got the top copy and the retailer kept the carbon copies to cash in to BankAmericard later, which would then send a bill to my mother.

We went downtown to the old Frederick and Nelson, a massive block-sized department store. On the third floor, you could buy tickets to the upcoming rock shows and the like. The Doors were coming to town for a concert, and the tickets were \$35 each. A fortune at that time. I bought ten tickets on the credit card, and was handed ten slick-looking tickets.

Then Scott made a fuss just down the counter, claiming the price on some item was way out of line. He said that he was gonna *kick somebody's ass!* The clerk became all flustered and tried to console him, but his anger was everywhere. I got the nod from Bob, so I calmed down Scott with a crocodile smile, and then we beat a hasty retreat.

In the bathroom on the ground floor, Bob pulled out a mass of crumpled carbon paper. I inspected each of the slips till I found the one that bought the tickets. Bob had, in a flash of his lightning hand, cleaned out the box where the sales clerk kept all of his copies, a standard shoebox. There were a dozen other receipts there too, so other people would not get a bill for that fur coat, the extra underwear, or their Doors concert tickets.

We headed out to the University District where we returned the tickets for cash, giving this or that reason for not being able to attend. \$350 in criminal cash. I was congratulated for a theft well masterminded. I pitied their puny cerebral power. Now that we were rich, we headed off to the drug dealer's place. Later, I slipped the credit card back into Mom's purse.

Our drug dealer (one of many) was a Vietnam vet. He had his guts shot out by some Communist shrapnel, which further reinforced my loathing to go to Southeast

Asia. By having no guts, he could hold no food in long enough to digest nutrients out of it, so he was scrawnier than a willow tree. With no small intestine, the doctor gave him a prescription for pure opium liquid drops.

We *craved* the opium. For this, we were constantly stealing things, stereo sets, radios, silverware, whatever we could get our hands on. We would exchange this booty with this skinny vet for joints soaked in opium. *Damn they were good.*

I'd drive us through dark roads in the hood as we smoked them, getting Bob more and more frantic until, like I recounted earlier, we could get him to charge into a convenience store with guns blazing. I made sure we were *never* actually carrying guns, including Scott, who had murderous intent on a minute-by-minute basis.

Over the many months of that spring, Bob became one of my best friends. Always had an ear for listening, always had some odd angle on the subject, always *there*. Always willing to get into any adventure, criminal or otherwise.

My whole being was set up to crave a few close friends, as my relations with my parents was orthogonal. I had no other confidants in my life other than these equally confused post-pubescent teenagers. I had never known friendships so deep, and we swore to stand by each other's side through thick and thin. Unknowing how thick this life really is.

### *viii. Induction Center*

In time, Bob met other criminals to go out and rob the world with. Scott married the gangster's moll, who liked to hang with the "bad boys," and I took off to a college fifty miles out of the city to try and change my life with education. At this time, there was a numerical draft based on your birthday at 18. My number came up as 37. This meant that I would be shipped out to 'Nam within two weeks . . . *Alligator . . . sorry . . . HmMMM.*

I had an appointment to be inducted into the Army. To prepare, I drank shit wine, never changed my clothes or washed a fleck. I pissed myself and slept in the gutter. After a week of this, paint would peel when I walked by. I vomited on my shirt and left it. My shoulder-length hair was matted with filth, and stood rigid on my head. In this condition, I entered the induction center.

I firmly resolved to flunk all the tests. First a written test, wherein every round hole I put in a square peg. If a math question, I answered in letters. If the answer was up, I was down. To some questions, I swore and made lewd comments. Not that I ever do such a thing.

Jock fools were all around me, snickering and giggling at my nasty appearance. They were, in their crew cuts, and clean tee-shirts, lettered jerseys, all salivating to go shoot little jungle "Nips." Soon we were filed out to the physical examination.

But I never got there. I was shuffled to a side room with a military psychiatrist. In there, I answered questions stupidly, my face drooling, my languid body nearly sliding out of the chair from spineless teenage torpidity.

When asked how I felt about guns, I replied, "Guns? I love 'em! Give me a gun and I'll shoot everybody in uniform! I'll start with the assholes closest to me! Go on! Give me a gun!"

The headshrinker closed his notebook with a sigh. He was getting familiar with recruits being insane and disqualifying for the military. He was not going to waste resources on nut cases when there were so many gung-ho fools begging to go. Others of my ilk had worn a rotted sheepskin, chopped off a finger or a toe, and tattooed "Fuck You" on the side of their hand, the side that was presented at every salute of course.

The notebook closed and the exit door opened. The gung-ho were prancing in front of the hernia checker, their tightly-whities lined up bun to bun. I burst out the front door into the freedom of sunlight. The freedom of a 4-F designation: "unfit for military service." Of course I actually was, fit that is, but *the hell* if I was going there.

Meanwhile, the happy recruits filed out of the induction center and onto a bus that would take them to Fort Lewis. Then take them to Asia where their new lives would end them up dead in black plastic bags.

I waved and laughed at them, going to their doom, and they were still mocking me, giving me the finger. But I was free on the city sidewalk. I had the last laugh by miles.

### *ix. The River of Life*

I cleaned myself up and moved to a small town with a local college, with dreams of eventually getting into the University. But my dreams were crashed due to my errant youth that had neglected education and grades. Consequently, I had a GPA of 0.12 or lower. I had to prove I could be a smart student before they would let a city ghetto rat like me into their small town community college.

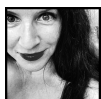
I got a moldy motel unit in an abandoned resort on a cold lake. The former business was under a canopy of cedars that held in the damp vapors from the lake. No mice infested the old units, only weird voles, which were some kind of miniature Lovecraftian semi-aquatic scurriers.

In this oubliette of damp and dark, a fire blazed up in me to escape the confines of my past, and the conventional path laid out before me. I wanted to excel in the new, the unknown, the undiscovered, the riches of the earth. I wanted to escape the hoodies of home. To escape a criminal future.

I studied diligently, checking out and reading every book in the community college library, from cloud structures to chemistry. From history to hepatology. When I could, I'd drive out of town to a place where I could pan gold. This inspired a new avenue of study: geology and mining.

In a year, I got into a major University, then another, then another. I ran two businesses and graduated late at 32, by then having two kids, a wife, a mortgage, and a hundred unrequited dreams. Life moved a million miles from the hood and petty crime. Bob did not escape, but was now a full-time thief and drug dealer. From somewhere, I heard he was busted for armed robbery, but never heard more than that. Whether or not he had ever been my best friend, or just another parasite, or a lost child, he was forgotten by me in the river of life.

\* \* \* \* \*



Tamara Miles

**Litany**

Tomato seed, apostle whom the Earth loved most.  
Mustard seed, for all the faith we need to move mountains.  
Apple, who tricked us and got our names on the board.

Aloe, the balm of Gilead for all the hopes we had.

Blueberry, a memory of ancient verse and creed.  
Cinnamon and cardamom, the scents and flavors of the *Baghavad Gita*.

*I am the taste in water, O son of Kunti, and the radiance of the sun  
and the moon.  
I am the sacred syllable Om in the Vedic mantras; I am the sound in ether . . .*

Carrot, to help the blind lead the blind.  
Dandelion, escaped by the prophet Daniel just in time when he dreamed  
that he was both lion and den and interpreted that to mean he was alive.

Daisy, counter of blessings and he loves me; never, though, he loves me  
not. For he that is without love is a clanging cymbal.  
Elephant ear, who fell from too much pride. Let this be a warning, brethren.  
Eucalyptus, for when we are inflamed.

Spinach, a favorite of Samson and all strong men, but not Delilah.  
*The Philistines be upon thee. The Philistines be upon thee.*

Sassafras, to get to the root of it all.  
Mint, to sweeten the breath of the gods before they kiss us, deeply,  
and do not apologize for it, because they know the rules of poetry  
as laid down by Burns.

*The honest and beautiful and truthful first object of poetry is a longing for sex.*

Gardenia, the most fragrant chapter, at the southern end of all our troubles.

Hosta, whose name is everlasting, and Heather, for abundant love.  
Iris, for all the mothers we grieve in white, blue, and purple.  
Jonquil, lover of self who drowned from looking in too deeply, too soon.

Lantana, who can take the heat from forty days and nights in the desert  
before we come to the promised land.

Lemon, for keeping our hands clean and therefore holy,  
but only after digging in the earth.  
Milkweed, to bring butterflies and appreciation for small winged graces.  
Nettle, because it stings and awakens us again to necessary pain.

Pansy, for diversity.

Rosemary, for Ophelia and all those suffering from romance  
and death wishes, to help them remember the going under,  
the sweet drowning.

Rose, thorned beauty, because we keep touching anyway,  
though we come away bleeding, because the scent of love is powerful;  
it lingers.

Queen Anne’s Lace, a veil, for being loved like Christ loved the church  
and gave himself up for her.

Sage, for the wisdom of Solomon, who remembered his first love  
and built temples in her honor.

Verbena, for sleeping with the sainted poets and angels, and after our lov-  
ing, sleeping sweetly and soundly, but not without dreams.

Willow, for those who weep and are comforted, now or in a coming age.

Yarrow, lover of bleeding heart liberals and once again,  
the poets, who will never stop the flow of blood or tears until the Revelation.

\* \* \* \* \*



Raymond Soulard, Jr.

## Labyrinthine [a new fixtion]

Part Twelve

"I tell you, there are more words  
and more doors to them!  
than you will think of in many years!"  
George MacLennan  
Lith, 1878

xxxiv.

I arrive somewhere with a kind of pop! from somewhere else, or maybe several somewheres else.

Shake my head thrice to clear, helps a little. Find myself sitting in an old wooden armchair, cushioned beneath me.

A room. Empty but me & the chair in which I sit. A door in the wall I face toward. *Was I trying to find someone?*

I stand OK. Walk to the door. Take a slow breath. Turn handle. Locked.

Um. *Am I locked in on purpose? Or does nobody know I am here?*

What else to do but cry out? "Help! Help! Help, please!"

I call & call & call. Then, *wow! wonderful!* Door handle turns & pushes in. I step back to see who.

But what I see more greatly than who is *what* is beyond that who. Tis somewhere *very* large, a room or series of rooms vast & tall, & books of all sizes & shapes & colors on bookcases that seem to reach into the sky of the unseen roof—

I look & look, gape-mouthed—

"You, my good sir, are suitably impressed," says he who I've walked by somehow to behold better.

I look back at him & nearly recall but not quite.

Bald man strangely wearing an earpatch. Dressed in clothes, a kind of suit? Whose elements seem, um, *folded* into each other? He carries in his hand a kind of walking stick? Black onyx. *I nearly recall, but don't.*

Holds out his handsome hand. "Nnnnolan," he seems to say, with a charming yet thoughtful smile.

"Raymond," I say, less unsure, & yet unsure why?

He nods, grins for some reason.

I look around now, wonderingly. "Could this be . . . ?" I ask, unaware aloud.

Nnnolan grins even more, if possible. "You know The Arcadia?"

I nod uncertainly. "I, er, created it. Arcadia Bookstore & Cafe. From several bookstores I worked at back when. Coffeeshouses I loved & wrote years of hours in too."

He nods, listening close. Leads us to a corner table. Black metal table, surface perforated with circles & diamonds & other shapes. I nod, remembering.

"It's called The Arcadia now," he says, studying my face for reaction.

I nod. "That makes sense." Leave it at that.

Sips his tiny bubbling drink. My tall paper cup of diet soda, with straw, in my hand like long there. Nod to that too.

"So . . ." he leads me politely.

"Yes?" I answer vaguely. Sip.

"Where to?"

"Where?"

"And why too?"

I sip, wonder why him & all this now. Still . . .

Talk without plan. “Where does a narrative of narratives go next? Even bigger? Much smaller? Go back & re-invent it all yet again?”

He nods. Gestures around us. “Like this?”  
I nod too. “Forward or back? Or both?”  
“Both?” he suddenly looks at me sharply.

Confused, I don’t reply. Then nod.

Sips bubbly drink again. “OK. So that’s what you do.”  
I nod. “Seems so.”

He looks at me precisely now. I wonder that earpatch. “Some Artists don’t like to look back. Some do almost nothing else. Maybe it’s easier to choose.”  
“I don’t.”

“So The Arcadia is like what you do, otherwise?”  
“I think of it like accretion more than anything.”

He sips, thinking. Drink bubbles & bubbles.  
Looks up at me, shockingly handsome smile, even quite handsome now.

“OK. Yes. I can learn from you. If you would enjoy my company.”  
I nod.  
So tis.

Finish my soda with a sucking slurp & stand. Notice my black bookbag next to my chair. Good. Then notice that my soda cup is full again. OK . . . good too?

Nnnolan stands too. His bookbag is much smaller, more like a stylish leather pouch. I can’t tell how old he is really, so unsure what he might learn from me? Ah well. A companion will be nice.

The floor below our feet is wooden; looks well-worn. Long here. Tis nice. And whatever that ceiling up there might be . . . seems almost shrouded in clouds? Or is that a glass roof & those clouds visible through it? Just hard to say from so far below.

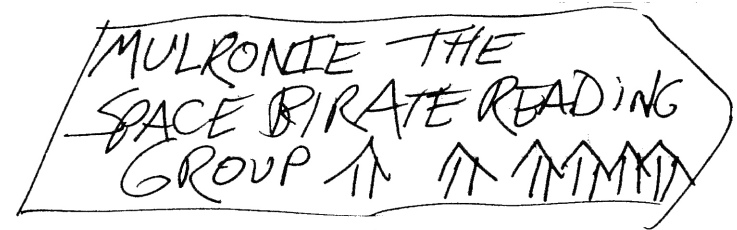
Then we hear a strange sound. “TOOT! TOOT!” And the oddest-looking spaceship passes overhead. Looks like one of those tugboats you might see in harbors? But a spaceship?

Then a much larger ship passes over & this one looks much more science

fictional. Like that old TV show?

“Why can’t I remember?” I growling mutter to myself.  
“Remember what?” asks Nnnolan curiously.  
O. I had forgotten about him for a moment. I shrug. “Let’s keep walking & figure out why we’re here.”  
“OK!”

We come to a sign:



“I read one of his books!” Nnnolan exults. “The one about the trial, I think.”

I nod. I should know that name *way more* than vaguely, but I don’t.

Spy another of those black tables & motion Nnnolan over to it.

I look hard at Nnnolan for a good minute. “You annoyed me at first for reasons I do not know.”  
He nods unhappily, & unsurprised.

“But it was really that I could not rightly remember you. That’s on me, not you, whatever it means.”  
He nods again, more curious than unhappy this time.

I try to smile sincerely at him, fail. Take a deep breath. Try again. A small one comes out.

Lift my heavy black bookbag on the round black metal table.

“I need the notebooks in here to help. Go & have an adventure here. I am sure they are not hard to find. Then come back with one of your bubbly drinks & let’s see what we see then. OK?”

He thinks. Nods. Smiles. Then thinks again. “Am I in there? Who I am?”

Looking at my bookbag.

I shrug. "Maybe. I'll tell you if I find anything. Now get along."  
He nods again. Stands. "You'll be here?" he asks, nearly falters to ask.  
I nod. Pat my bookbag. Gesture him run along for now. He turns & walks slowly, then more surely down the central aisle, which branches off fairly frequently to side aisles of books.

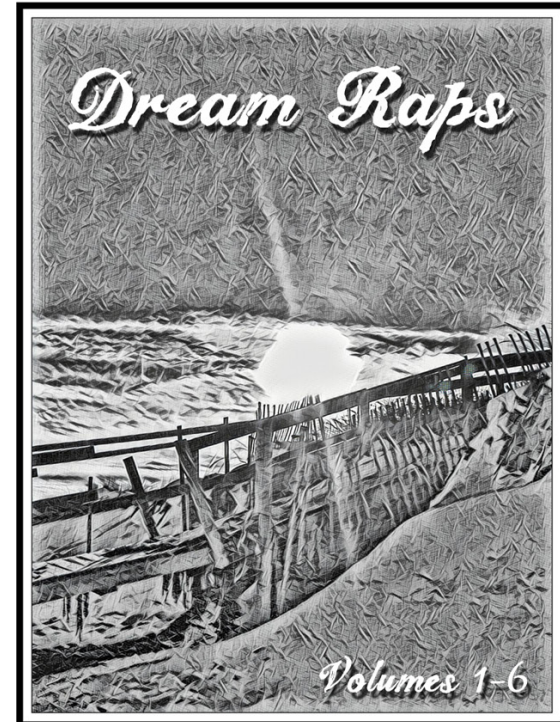
Good. OK. Maybe not having a companion for a while is what I need. Me, black pens & notebooks. And a self-refilling soda cup.



\*\*\*\*\*



*New from Scriptor Press:*



*by Raymond Soulard, Jr.*



SCRIPTOR PRESS

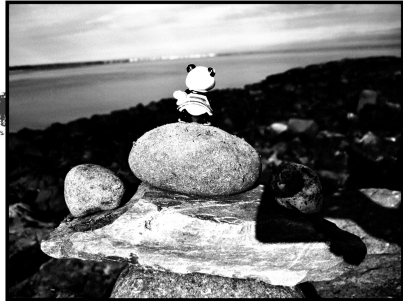


NEW ENGLAND

ScriptorPress.com

# Scriptor Press

Independent Publishing Since 1995



Scriptor Press is an independent press founded in 1995 in Cambridge, MA. Scriptor Press publishes the quarterly literary magazine *The Cenacle*; the *RaiBooks* literary chapbooks series; & an annual *Sampler* of selected works. It also hosts the quarterly meetings of the Jellicle Literary Guild.

Visit us online at [ScriptorPress.com](http://ScriptorPress.com)  
for more information.

SCRIPTOR PRESS



NEW ENGLAND

## WITHIN'S WITHIN: SCENES FROM THE PSYCHEDELIC REVOLUTION

Music. Poetry. Rant. Mindfood.

*turn on . . .*

*tune in . . .*



**Live Saturdays on the Web:**

[spiritplantsradio.com](http://spiritplantsradio.com)

**Show information:**

[scriptorpress.com/withinswithin](http://scriptorpress.com/withinswithin)

## *Notes on Contributors*

---

**AbandonView lives** in the American Rust Belt. More of his work can be found at: <http://purigare.tumblr.com>.

**Algernon Beagle** lives in Bags End. He is the Editor guy for Bags End News. More Bags End writings can be found at: [scriptorpress.com/bags-end.pdf](http://scriptorpress.com/bags-end.pdf).

**Charlie Beyer** lives in New Castle, Colorado. More of his work can be found at: <http://www.therubyeye.blogspot.com>.

**Judih Weinstein Haggai** passed on October 7, 2023, on the first day of the Israel-Hamas conflict. Her 2004 Scriptor Press RaiBook, *Spirit World Restless*, can be found at: [scriptorpress.com/raibooks/spiritworldrestless.pdf](http://scriptorpress.com/raibooks/spiritworldrestless.pdf).

**Jimmy Heffernan** lives in Salt Lake City, Utah. His poem in this issue is included in *Multiverse: A Book of Poems*, was published in January 2024 by BookBaby.

**Nathan D. Horowitz** lives in Baltimore, Maryland. Book 2 of his quadrilogy *Nighttime Daydreams (Bat Dreams)* was published in 2019.

**Colin James** lives in western Massachusetts.

**Tamara Miles** lives in Elgin, South Carolina. More of her work can be found at: <http://tamaramiles.wixsite.com/sylviasdaughtersays>.

**Martina Reisz Newberry** lives in Hollywood, California. Her poetry appears Her poem in this issue is included in *Beyond Temples*, published in April 2024 by Deerbrook Editions. More of her writings can be found at: <https://martinanewberry.wordpress.com>.

**Epi Rogan** lives in Cork, Ireland, though she is originally from Alaska. Her fantastic photography. More of her work can be found at [instagram.com/peorgan](https://instagram.com/peorgan).

**Kassandra Soulard** lives in Milkrose, Massachusetts. She gazes at ceilings to pursue her strange, marvelous philosophies.

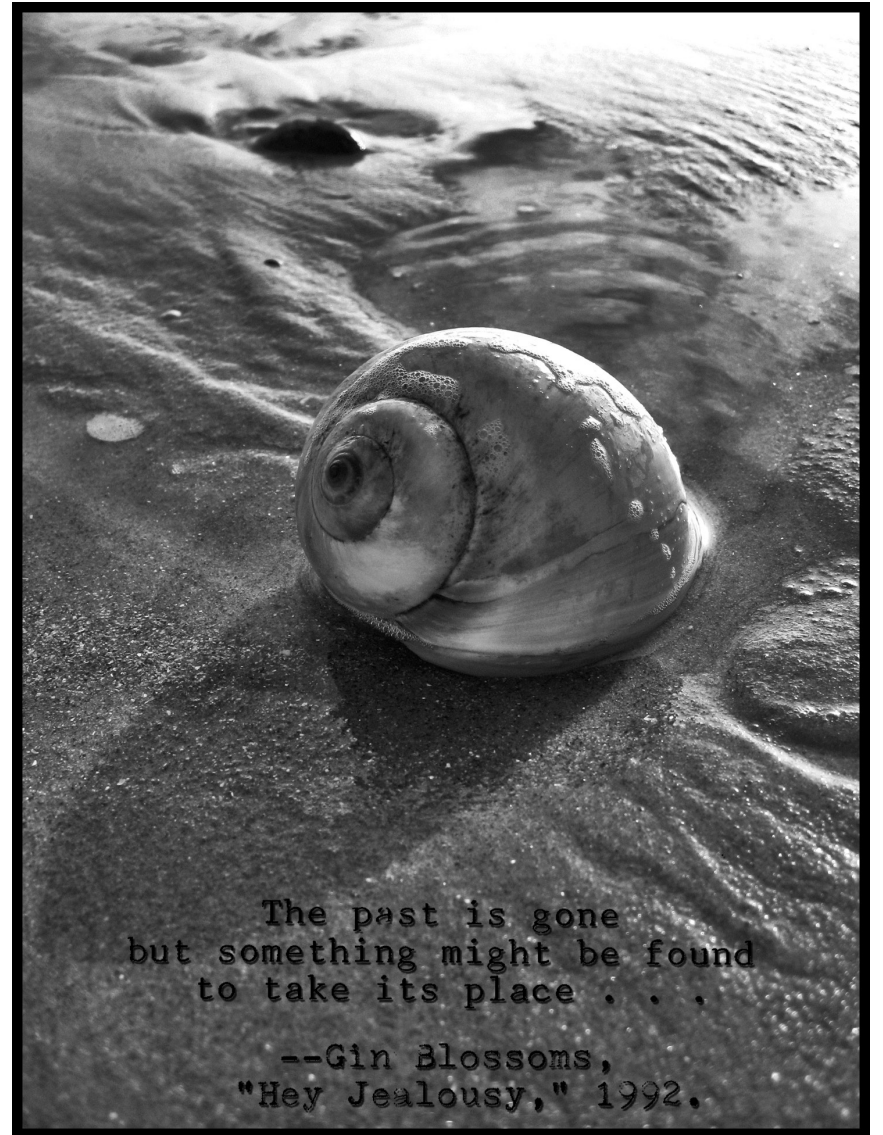
**Raymond Soulard, Jr.** lives in Milkrose, Massachusetts. This series finally catching up, to my joyful glee.

**Louis Staebler** lives in Bowling Green, Ohio. More of his work can be found at [instagram.com/louiestaebler](https://instagram.com/louiestaebler).

**Timothy Vilgiate** lives in Colorado Springs, Colorado. The radio version of *Rivers of the Mind*, an amazing work in any form, can be found online at: <https://riversofthemind.libsyn.com>.

\* \* \* \* \*





The past is gone  
but something might be found  
to take its place . . .

--Gin Blossoms,  
"Hey Jealousy," 1992.



SCRIPTOR PRESS



NEW ENGLAND

2026