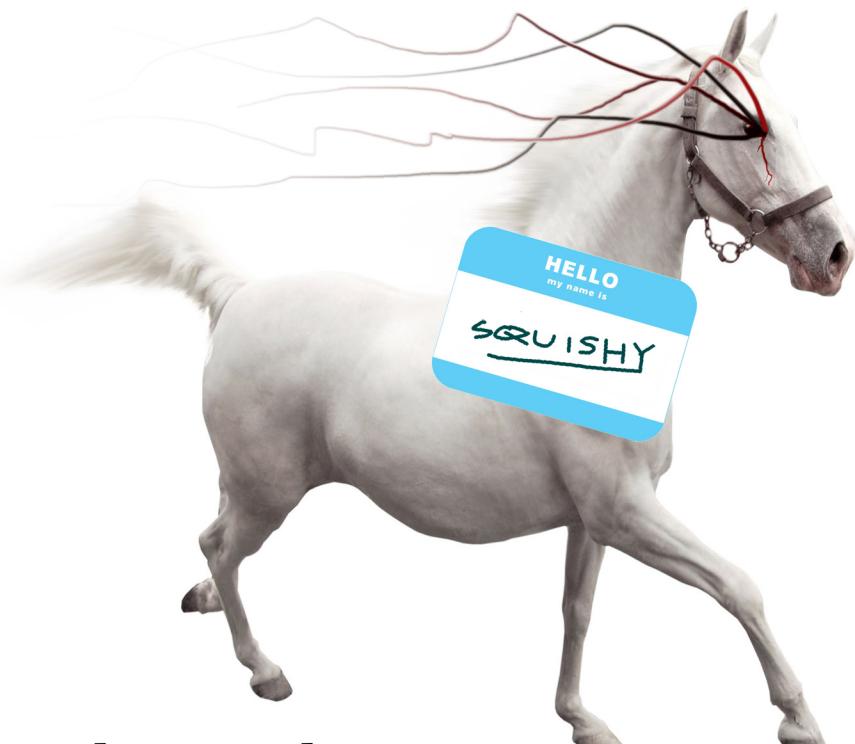


SPACE SQUID

TENTH ANNIVERSARY ISSUE
SUMMER 2015



ISSUE 12 · \$1+



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PROOFING MAGIC



This is our e-book. It's a ripoff at \$3 for 120+ pages of classics. At Amazon.com.

Okay, once more with feeling...!

Space Squid is now a web 'zine publishing a single short story every month, free. If you like our work, go to spacesquid.com and sign up for the mailing list that pops up at the bottom right. Or email squishy@spacesquid.com. If you're reading this, you should be on our list. We send out one e-mail a year on average.

At this point you're surely saying, "How is all this goodness free?" Well, it's not. The cost of purveying, buying, and publishing this fine, pugnacious material from all over the globe comes out of the editors' hides.

As always, if you love something, support it or it will die. So help us. Donations and merch sales are nice (have you seen the freakin' handmade tentacle mugs on the website?!?). There's the e-book and the t-shirts. But let's be real.

We want your souls. We want you to e-toot or blog about us through whatever social media orifice is your favorite. We want you to enjoy our stories, talk about them, comment on them on the site, and post the story link on Facebook. We want your story submissions and your comic strips and your art.

Most of all, we want* our authors' sweet words to be included in anthologies so if you like a story, please email an anth editor about it. You don't need to know them. Just say, "Hey, I really dug this story." It makes a difference.

Thanks, and we hope to see you next year. Maybe we'll even be publishing five stories a month then.

* That and an untainted "best fanzine" Hugo nom (or as we prefer to call it, *best non-commercial publication*) at the 2016 Worldcon. Seriously. Just a nomination.

CONGRATULATIONS!

SQUIDDIES AWARDS! OPEN IT? TURN TO PAGE 12. E-SHRED IT? TURN TO P. 20.



EMINENT DOMAIN

by Bruce Holland Rogers, originally published July 2014 at spacesquid.com

What would have been nice on those six acres of city-owned land behind our homes was another park. We already had two. Another park would have suited the character of the area. That's what we said, loudly, at hearings about a proposed bridge, about the possible sale of the land to a grocery chain, about a planned clinic for disabled veterans. A bridge, a store, a clinic, any of those would have meant obstructed views, more noise, traffic. A park was what we wanted. A park, a green park, and nothing but a park, so help us God.

We didn't know about the cell-phone tower before the metal structure broke above the tree line, but once we saw it, we sued successfully. The city had tried to sneak that one by us, and we weren't having it. Our phones already worked fine. Why spoil our view for a better signal on the other side of the river? Besides, radiation comes out of those things. No one should have to live under one.

What was so hard to understand about park, P-A-R-K, park? One city manager after another proposed that the site was perfect for a school, a hospital, a police substation. For a time, all the new proposals were "sustainable." A bank of wind turbines. High-density housing mixed with a local busi-

ness node.

You want sustainable, how about a park? You put in a sprinkler system, lay sod, mow once a week, fertilize now and then. What's easier to sustain than that?

Then the angels came.

At first, when we saw them in the distance, we thought they were only people dressed as angels with costume wings. Three or four of them stood in the center of the undeveloped land, facing each other, holding something gray and lumpish between them. Well, it was none of our business as long as they took that gray thing home with them when they were done. They had better not litter.

Hours later, there were more of them, and there was a lot more of the gray stuff. They were building. The gray had been formed into three domes with an opening in the top of each one.

Now see here, we thought. Whatever it is you're doing isn't allowed!

Some of us went out to confront them.

Close up, they were not people in costume. The angels were maybe eight feet tall. Their robes were so white that you'd have to squint against the glare as you came close. The skin of their hands and faces was covered in fine feathers: white, black, brown, gray. It was hard to say what color their eyes were. You might look, but then you'd have to look away, and you couldn't remember what you'd just seen.

If they understood our words, they gave no sign. They kept up their single-minded labor, assembling domes with a substance that seemed to grow in their hands as they worked it.

We took out our phones and called the police then and there. We called the city manager, the mayor. Put a stop to this! But the city said it was out of their hands. They hadn't authorized this activity, but they didn't have the means to stop it, either.

Angels work fast. Domes grew on top of other domes. Cell by cell, the structure grew up and out until the mass of gray came to the very edge of our back fences. It rose higher and higher as more and more angels appeared.

Even now, the hive may still be growing. It's hard to tell from down here. High above, we see the white-robed fliers come and go. Day and night they swarm. Doing what? Harvesting and answering prayers? Who knows?

Angelic robes are as brilliantly white at night as in the day. That is, they glow like stadium lights. If four or five angels are arriving from the same direction, it's like daylight on that side of the hive. This has totally altered the character of the neighborhood. If you hope to get any sleep, you have to buy thick blackout curtains. That's an unfair expense for us to bear, but our lawyers tell us to suck it up, gut it out, deal with it. Sure, we could file suit in some court or other. You can always file. But they tell us we can't expect to win.

So we're trying to make the best of it. If a hive of angels moves into your back yard, maybe your prayers get a boost. We get down on our knees. We pray. Every morning, often throughout the day, and every night we pray. We could ask for anything. People all over the world are beseeching God for cures, for an end to suffering, for peace and brotherly love. Our prayer is such a small thing in comparison. Heavenly Father, hear our prayer. We want a park. •



Are you up to date on your nerd news?

To test you, we've written up this quick twelve-question quiz. Think of it as a *Cosmo* quiz for convention-goers.

Are you on your game? Do you have all the right high-fashion cosplay accessories? Do your boardgaming moves bring all the boys to the yard?

Warning: If you're not up on the 2015 Hugos dustup, you might want to bring up "hugo is sad in 2015" before daring the rigors of the quiz.

We call this quiz...

THE SQUIDDIES QUIZ!

1. **Now that the Hugos took such a beating**, the Nebulas have the hot hand. What should the Nebula Awards Commissioner do to celebrate?
 - a) two words: Romulan ale
 - b) establish a new award to compete with and humiliate the Hugos called "the Squiddies"
 - c) two words: hostile takeover
 - d) panty raid the crap out of the Hugos' sorority house
 2. Which of the following courageous deeds best defines an activist and person of moral conscience?
 - a) signing an online petition
 - b) building a non-profit to support the defenseless and combat ignorance
 - c) helping police maintain order by shooting a pedestrian who looks undocumented
 - d) liking a pithy post on Facebook

- e) bloviate, bloviate, bloviate like your life depends on it
f) burning a Confederate flag in front of the Walmart in Vidor, Texas
3. If everyone in the "Best Fanzine" (or as we like to call it, "Best Non-Commercial Publication") Hugos category withdrew from consideration, following the estimable example of *Black Gate*, who would the award go to?
a) not *Space Squid*, because *Space Squid* is so much above that nonsense. Wait, did everyone withdraw?!? No, seriously, tell us!
4. Choose the analogy which best matches the one given. The Sick Puppies movement is to the Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech as...
a) apples are to apples
b) Dracula is to vampires
c) Dracula is to Van Helsing
d) a pair is two objects
5. You're the Hugo Awards czar. After your awards got disgraced, it's time to pick a new award design to replace the shiny silver rocket. Your best choice is:
a) a shiny silver rocket encrusted with poop
b) a bronze sculpture of an imaginary multi-ethnic group of scifi writers holding hands around the earth
c) a shiny silver rocket ejecting certain unnamed persons into space
d) a gold-plated carjacking diorama
6. You're the Hugo Awards czar. Everyone withdrew from the Best Novel category and you can't even hand the trophy out to people on the street. What should you do with it?
a) mount it on the prow of your yacht
b) wait for a good hard rain; then use it to aerate your lawn
c) attach battery-powered motor; sell it to the porn industry
d) attach model rocketry engine and harpoon line; cast off and sail in search of the white whale
7. Choose the analogy which best matches the one given. The science fiction publishing industry is to mainstream publishing industry as...
a) Deliverance is to Metropolis
b) a nerd is to a banker
c) a Cheerio is to a frosted mini-wheat
d) a cookie is to a cookie monster
8. What's the best #FakeHugoAwardCategory idea?
a) Best Rant About The Death of Science Fiction (@odo)
b) Best Short Story About A Robot Learning What It Means To Be Human And Also There's A Cat (@timpratt)
c) Best Fan-Fiction Rewritten as Original Work (@chookasaurus)
d) Best Stretch to Justify Fantasy Tropes in a SF Novel (@heresiarch)
e) Best Dr. Who Episode AKA Dramatic Presentation, Short Form (DL Thurston @ io9.com)
f) Best Hard SF Plot Based on a Mistake in Wikipedia (@debhoudrekrule)
g) Best Children's Christmas Album (*Space Squid* editors)

- h) Best Non-Commercial Publication (c'mon, Hugo people, *Black Gate* is not a fanzine; a fanzine publishes fanfic)
 - i) Best Christ-Hating Crusaders for Sodom (paraphrased from John C. Wright's blog, scifiwright.com)
- 9) Choose the analogy which best matches the one given. The Sick Puppies fighting for white male primacy is to the American women's suffrage movement as...
- a) heart bypass is to a nose job
 - b) First World Problems are to the Geneva Convention
 - c) a fist is to a hand
 - d) a 2015 Hugo Award is to a 2015 Nebula Award
- 10) Which of the following Vox Day book titles is most ironic? (Source: Wikipedia)
- a) A Magic Broken (2012)
 - b) Quantum Mortis: The Programmed Mind (2014)
 - c) The Last Witchking (2013)
 - d) The World in Shadow (2002)
 - e) The Altar of Hate (2014)
- 11) Which of these is/are not a traitor(s) whose actions cost American lives?
- a) General Robert E. Lee
 - b) the Dukes of Hazzard
 - c) Benedict Arnold
 - d) Benedict Cumberbatch
 - e) Eggs benedict
 - f) all left-wing "CHORFs" (Cliquish, Holier-than-thou, Obnoxious, Reactionary Fanatics) on the planet
- 12) You have a political agenda you want to force on others. Since the Hugos have already been subverted, you need to find another inappropriate medium. What do you choose?
- a) Tweetbots. Always Tweetbots.
 - b) Salvage hundreds of dogs from animal shelters; feed them pamphlets in indigestible pellets and set them loose to crap your words in every major metro area of the U.S.
 - c) Pose as a friend of the family at funerals; deliver vicious screeds at podium
 - d) Hack into MySpace accounts of Nigerian scammers; recruit Justin Bieber wannabes and train them into potent paramilitary force

Answers: 1-d, 2-f, 3-a, 4-a, 5-c, 6-d, 7-c, 8-h, 9-d, 10-e, 11-d, 12-d.

If you got 13 or more answers right, we saw what you did. Step away from the tip jar, please.

9 to 12, you probably had too many jello shots at the Apollocon party.

6 to 8, get out your phone and Like Space Squid on Facebook. Why not. Pathetic creatures.

3 to 5, you might be normal. Sorry.

2 or less, please crumple your answer sheet into a ball and fling it at Matthew Bey! Or his brother Michael Bay, preferably. •



THEN AND NOW

THEN NOW

SENDING A PACK OF HOUNDS TO FIND PRINCELEINGS	GOOGLING
EYES GOUGED OUT BY THE MOUNTAIN	LOST YOUR KEYS
SENDING A RAVEN	TEXTING
VISITING LITTLEFINGER'S ES-TABLISHMENT	SEXTING
NEGOTIATING FOR PEACE	BIDDING FOR FREETRADE GOODS ON EBAY
JOINING THE NIGHT'S WATCH	SIGNING A NEW CELLPHONE CONTRACT
SEDUCED BY THE RED PRIEST-ESS	BIKE STOLEN WHEN YOU WERE CHATTING WITH BUCKET DRUM-MER GUY
CASTLE INVADED BY THE GREYJOYS	GMAIL HACKED BY ASSHOLE FROM MONSERRAT
CUTTING THE TONGUE OUT OF AN IMPRUDENT BARD	DELETING EX-GIRLFRIEND'S CRAPPY COUNTRY MP3S
APPRENTICING WITH THE FACELESS MEN OF BRAAVOS	IDENTITY STOLEN BY MELISSA McCarthy
WINTER HAS COME	NO CELL SIGNAL, NO WIFI

PINKY PATTERPAWS

by I. Horsburgh, originally published May 2015 at spacesquid.com

I'm looking for mice. There's a fair few hiding about the shelves, and it's their turn to shine. We've been through the cycle, piggies, bears, kitties, elephants, doggies, dinosaurs, and here we are back at the rodents. We're Gruffaloed-out, to be honest, so let's see what else we've got.

Here's one about some things living in a mattress in a scrapyard: at first, I'd taken them for miniature lion cubs, but Paddy thinks they look more like hamsters. Let's not confuse everyone. Mice are big, right now. Dressed-up mice, mice a bit rat-like, mice looking for lost mummies – we have to be careful with that, in case Mummy really is out of the picture for some reason.

This might do. Don't

know this one, it's new and shiny; *Pinky Patterpaws*, no obvious author. Nice illustrations, Paddy agrees, but am I sure that's a mouse? Yes, must be, and its eyes are bright candy pink. They like pink.

We know everyone who comes through the doors, all the tots on the estate. It's warm here on these little chairs. The library has under-floor heating so anything you do near to the



ground gets you warm, sometimes too warm, whereas the back room is perishing. This might be a ploy, to keep us from lingering there on our breaks, or hiding in there when our dearest customers like Mrs. Pethick come in to drain the joy out of the day. The building is smaller than some people's living rooms, with our cubby hole grudgingly provided. There are a couple of hard chairs, a lot of boxes, and two inches of desk to eat our sandwiches off. We haven't even got a sink for the coffee cups. Spartans would be aggrieved.

If we were handing out unicorns to ride around the building, Mrs. Pethick would be sure the hooves on hers weren't sparkly enough. She would blame the Council. She's over there, smouldering behind the *Gazette*. She can't smoke in here, but she gives the impression of holding a metaphorical cigarette to emphasise points with, burning tiny holes in the air. She always says there's nothing in the paper. There never is. It takes her an hour to read, complaining continuously.

Most of the customers tend to be very young or quite old, and in a confined space it can be hard work keeping them from annoying each other. Mrs. Pethick makes a point of coming in when she knows there's going to be singing, and then grumping about it. Our jollier old ladies like to join in (the singing, I mean, not the whingeing).

Here they all are, ready for a story: the shy little Montague Sisters; Macey-Jane Renfrew, all huge ears and coke-bottle glasses; the sweet-faced

"TO FORCE FEED THEIR LIBERAL AGENDA. DOVES, NOT STARS, ON THE U.S. FLAG. IMMIGRATION QUOTAS ON WHITE MALES. FORCED ABORTIONS FOR THE RICH. MERGING THE ARMY AND MARINES INTO THE SOCIAL JUSTICE WARRIOR. WHALE WORSHIP IN SCHOOLS. VEGANISM." KATE SHUDDERS. VOMIT? P. 10. "WHY ME?" P. 11.

Khans, who made Valentine's cards for us all; the Brambles, who are all hell bent on getting into the back room, whenever our guard is down. If they ever make it, boy, are they going to be disappointed. It's forever 1967 in there.

'Applause, applause, for Pinky Patterpaws....' I find myself yawning, and somehow, I'm on the last page of the book. I don't even remember reading it. How did that happen? The mums sitting at the back have a bit of a glazed look, but that's not unusual. They're mostly exhausted. The tinies are all looking at me, quite rapt. I've never actually seen the Brambles all in one place and sitting still. There usually seem to be about eighteen of them, although according to the computer, there are technically four, that aren't in custody right now.

Something thumps on the roof. That happens. There may be children around here who owe their existence to the flat roof of the library. It happens again, louder. Paddy goes out to have a look. She's done 'Baby Bounce' and 'Wiggle and Giggle' with every kid for miles around, so she doesn't stand for any mucking about.

'Again,' says Abby Khan. Her eyes have a rosy glow. Must ask Paddy about getting someone to look at these strip lights.

'Applause, applause for Pinky Patterpaws,' I read.

'He batters down your doors,' chant the children. What? They sound as though they know it backwards. I don't even recognise it forwards.

'He scampers through your drawers,' I read. There's a cute picture of a



mousie rummaging among socks in an old-fashioned dresser.

'Victorious in wars,' chant the children, loudly. Where does it say that?

'He nibbles and he gnaws,' I say, pointing to Mousie liberating some cambozola in the pantry.

'All dread his mighty roars,' they chant. I press on, remembering instruc-

tions to ignore attention-getting behaviour (I practise on Mrs. Pethick).

'He snuffles and he snores.' It's now crashed out in the cat basket, using the moggy's tail as a duvet.

'And in his glorious cause, he slays both knaves and whores,' they chant.

'That's enough...' I begin, but really I'm impressed by the way Kai Bramble's vocabulary has come on. Usually, when you ask him not to trash the knitted nativity ('Step away from the manger, keep your hands where I can see them'), you get a hostile grunt and an insouciant swivel of the finger.

The phone rings. Paddy should be there to answer it, but she hasn't come back. I go to the desk, laying down the book on the table. The noise overhead intensifies into a drumming so loud I can scarcely hear the voice. It's paper-thin.

'Laurence, run,' it rustles. Is it *Paddy*? My ears are throbbing.

'He scorns your puny laws.' I look over at the kids. All of them, even the Montagues, have coquettish eyes. The mums are sitting rigid, staring straight ahead. I'm not sure they're breathing.

'This world's no longer yours,' comes the chant. The roof begins to cave in.

'I blame the Council,' snaps Mrs Pethick, not looking up from the Gazette, as a curtain of yellow insulation foam and lumps of chalky rubble descend, obscuring her from view. Dust whirls around us, clogging hair, skin, eyes, mouth with rancid-tasting grit. A chunk of mortar dashes the receiver from my grasp. I fling my arms over my head, crouching, as darkness pours in, the noise of destruction and the chanting rising to meet each other in a hideous conjunction. I can't breathe, I can't see, I can only hear:

'Applause, Applause for Pinky, Pinky, Pinky Patterpaws!' •

HUNTING BIGFOOT

by Kevin Brown, originally published in cuneiform in the Space Squid clay edition, July 2010

Misty morning clings to my face like cobweb, as I fight through soggy woodland and creek marsh, tracking beast-prints soft with rain. I halt at every limb crack and branch twitch, hoping to catch scent of an odor more foul than skunk spray.

My eyes beg for what they have not seen – that twisted child of both worlds, of posture and rage, thought and instinct. Wild to feed the want, I hunt for the first of the last of its kind, sifting deep through the wet forest, in the glow of mindless ambition.

What imagination, it is said, to raise a thicket eight feet high, man-legged and upright, covered with hair-skin, to see it slip every branch and brier with primitive grace, to find its human eyes, their beast stare finding me, finding. •

KATE NODS. "LOOK AT YOU. YOU EAT HEALTHY. YOU'RE STYLISH AND STUDIOSUS. NOT A DRUNK OR A PRUDE. ISN'T IT OBVIOUS??" "THE MARMOTS THINK I'M GAY?" "NO, THEY THINK YOU'RE LIBERAL." "WHAT THE HELL DO MY POLITICS HAVE TO DO WITH MY WORK?!" TURN TO P. 21.

THE LAST GOODNIGHT

by Chris Swindell, originally published November 2013 at spacesquid.com

The sun, small and white and nearly dead, is a pinprick in the sky. If it were alone, even at noon it would look like nothing more than a fat star. But, oh, it's not alone. The firmament behind the guttering white dwarf is a riot of luminous colors, reds and pinks, electric blues and neon greens. It's a small child's painting, all reckless smears and wild swirls, lit up and hung across the heavens.



You disembark from the deepship. Outside, the world is a flat plane blanketed in a billion years of dust. And it's silent. When the local star went from yellow to red, and then boiled away to white, it cast off its outer layers of gas, forming the brilliant planetary nebula that's lighting up the sky. In doing so it also sterilized the surface of this world, vaporizing the oceans and ice caps, and stripping away the atmosphere, leaving it naked in the vacuum.

You leave a trail of footprints in the dust as you walk away from your ship. Looking back over your shoulder you can't help but chuckle. It's so lonely, so pathetic. It's so utterly perfect.

You finally reach a small ridge overlooking what may have once been a riverbed, a roadway, or anything, really. You perch yourself atop it and take it all in: the flat gray expanse stretching to the slightly curved horizon, the sky above, churning with impossible colors.

The human race left this small planet ten billion years ago. Finding themselves alone in the galaxy, they quickly filled the gap. At its height, the Human Diaspora covered twenty trillion inhabited worlds in four galaxies. The races of Man counted themselves in the tens of millions, everything from Fourlanders and Fictives to Mimeoclaves and the Greff; Aabok b'Delquot to the Zzzz, with countless entries in between.

And after all that traveling, exploring, building, fighting, fucking, and dreaming, after all the wars and treaties, famines and harvests, horrors and beauties, there's just you. You are the last, eight thousand years old and scarred and lonely, with the whole weight of human history on your back. You are the last conscious mind left in universe, standing on a nameless dead planet orbiting a dying star.

You lie down on the ground, and like a child, make an angel in the dust. And you laugh again, because it's all so absurd and beautiful and pointless, as you turn off your oxygen supply with a thought.

And as the boiling sky fades to a gray that matches the earth below it, you remember a little poem, some ancient rhyme that your mothers taught you while you were still in the womb.

"Goodnight stars. Goodnight air. Goodnight noises everywhere."

Goodnight. •

IT IS POINTLESS TO RESIST

by Matthew Bailey, originally published June 2015 at spacesquid.com

You want to know how we won the war? It started like this:

"Now, the Model 3500 is good for cleaning your average family-sized starship," the salesman said, "but for a planet-buster craft like this? What you *really* need is the Ultra Deluxe Turbo 3600 model for only \$2,000 more."

The aliens closed their eyes and went silent, which I knew by then to mean they were communicating telepathically. The salesman – Dave, according to his business card – waited patiently.

Finally, the alien known as Kamrost Two opened his eyes. **WE WILL HAVE TO THINK ABOUT IT.**

"Take all the time you need," Dave replied amiably. "Of course, you should know that this is only a limited time offer. And I have to tell you, it would be a darn shame if the Earth Delegation returned before you made a decision. We humans expect alien spacecraft to have a certain grandeur about them. That's how it is in the movies. But you've already admitted that your ship is much the worse for wear after coming all this way. If the public sees the inside of this place and it's not what they expect, they may react indifferently. And if it's awe and terror that you're going for..."

He spread his arms wide. "Fortunately, the Model 3600 can clean even hard-to-reach places like the gun batteries I saw on the way in. It's all because of our patent-pending *reverse-phasing-swivel* technology. I can give you another demonstration, if you like."

Another pause. The lights above the aliens' heads flickered blue and green, a sign that they were mentally accessing the ship's computer.

DO YOU ACCEPT KITHJARI CREDITS?

Dave smiled. "If it's money to you, it's money to me. Now, let's discuss our industry-standard warranty..."

Irving Fleischer came next, from the Helping Hands Mutual Insurance Company.

"You have family waiting for you back home, don't you?" he asked.

DID I MENTION THE STENCH OF FESTERING CRAB BACKWASH? WHAT'S WRONG WITH YOU? YOU TRY TO FORCE DOWN A MEAL OF ORGANIC SOYLENT GREEN WITH A LIGHT RASPBERRY VINAIGRETTE, BUT THE SMELL GETS THE BEST OF YOU. YOUR TOILET TAKES 3 HP OF PROJECTILE VOMITING DAMAGE. TURN TO P. 4.



"Think about their future. They're probably banking everything on your success. But harvesting Earth's natural resources is a hazardous job. What if you don't return? Who will take care of them?"

The aliens were like chameleons, I had noticed, and their skin often changed color depending on their mood. Kamrost One had turned an especially bright shade of orange.

YOU IMPLY THAT THE KAMROST ARE CERTAIN TO FAIL?

"Not at all," Irving said. "But between you and me, why leave your family's future up to chance? Think of the peace of mind you'll have when you bombard my planet, knowing that whatever happens, your loved ones will be taken care of."

The alien's skin shifted from bright orange to a softer, more soothing blue. The Kamrost, I had come to realize, put a strong emphasis on family.

THIS IS TRUE...

"Of course, we want you to be taken care of as well," Irving went on. "Which leads me to the subject of disability insurance. Does your home world have provisions to take care of you should you become injured?"

NO...

"Terrible, terrible," said Irving, shaking his head sadly. "Fortunately, we at the Helping Hands Mutual Insurance Company believe that everyone could use a helping hand. That's why, for a very low premium, we can insure a replacement income should you ever be unable to continue with regular employment. This chart here shows the various options..."

When the aliens came, most of us were terrified. At first, we didn't know why they had come, only that their ship was bristling with the most advanced weaponry anyone had ever seen. But when they began to broadcast over every known frequency and medium, the meaning of their unsolicited visit became all too clear.

INHABITANTS OF THE TERRESTRIAL PLANET COLLOQUIALLY KNOWN AS EARTH. WE, THE KAMROST, HAVE LONG OBSERVED YOU FROM AFAR. AFTER MUCH STUDY, WE BELIEVE YOUR WORLD IS HOME TO MORE NATURAL RESOURCES THAN ANY KNOWN PLANET IN THIS QUADRANT OF THE GALAXY. HOWEVER, WE HAVE OBSERVED HOW CAVALIERLY YOU TREAT THESE RESOURCES, HOW CASUALLY YOU CARE FOR YOUR OWN PLANET. THIS INDICATES THAT YOU HAVE AN ABUNDANCE OF RESOURCES ABOVE AND BEYOND THAT OF YOUR ACTUAL NEEDS. DUE TO THIS CLEAR EXCESS, WE HAVE COME TO SECURE THE SURPLUS FOR OURSELVES, WHERE IT WILL BE PUT TO BETTER USE.

WE ARE AWARE OF YOUR CONCEPT OF 'TRADE' AND THEREFORE PROPOSE A MUTUALLY BENEFICIAL TRANSACTION OF YOUR RESOURCES IN EXCHANGE FOR OUR MERCY. HOWEVER, WE ARE PREPARED TO TAKE WHAT WE NEED BY FORCE. YOU HAVE FORTY-EIGHT OF YOUR EARTH HOURS TO COMPLY. PLEASE DO NOT THINK TO UNDERTAKE ANY FORM OF DEFENSE, AS YOUR ARMAMENTS ARE VASTLY INFERIOR TO OUR OWN.

AS YOUR OWN WORKS OF FICTION SAY, IT IS POINTLESS TO RESIST.

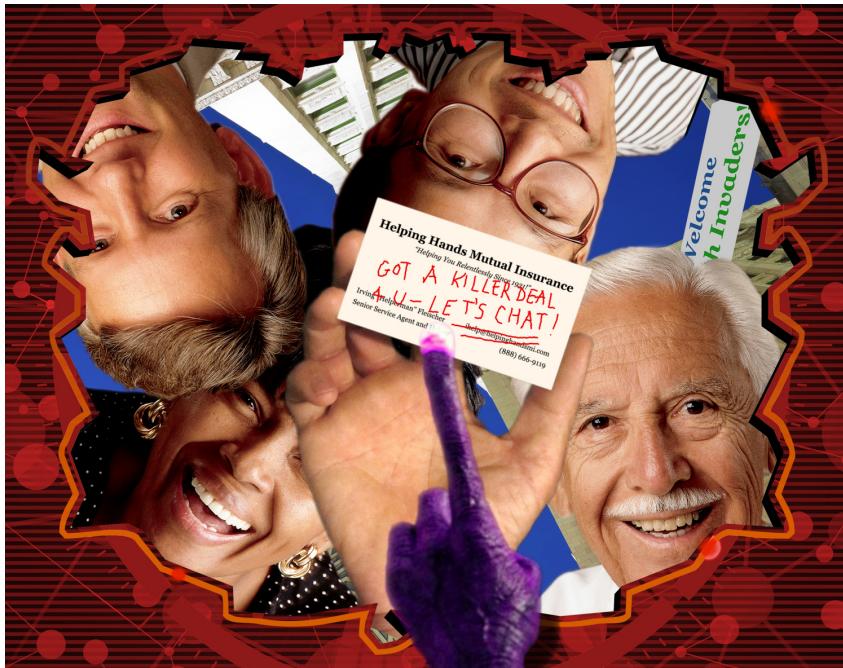
Being experienced in international dialogue, the government quickly dispatched me to negotiate with the aliens. I knew the truth, however: I was only there to stall while the government formulated an attack plan. But while Congress, the United Nations, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff deliberated, the private sector, long frustrated by the fact that there were no more

underdeveloped countries to exploit, saw their opportunity to expand into what they called "a newly emerging market."

They didn't waste time.

The card said, "Bob Brokerman, financial advisor/wealth manager." The logo of a well-known international banking company gleamed proudly in the top corner.

"You could make a killing," Bob explained, keying up yet another PowerPoint slide, "investing in defense contractors. Their stock is about to explode. Our analysts expect that the U.S. government is likely to go to war with you, meaning they'll be putting in major orders to the entire industry. As a result,



corporations like Lockheed-Boeing and Northrop-Dynamics will see their revenue go through the roof. People will be lining up for miles to purchase their stock. Demand will leave supply in the dust. But if you get in on the ground floor..."

Red skin. Anger. I braced myself for a fight.

YOU WOULD HAVE US PROVIDE MONEY TO THOSE WHO MAKE THE WEAPONS YOUR PLANET WILL USE AGAINST US...

"A great way to secure a seat on both sides of the table, don't you think?" Bob replied, not skipping a beat. "If you win the war, you get all our natural resources. But if even if you lose, you'll still come out the winners. Diversification! That's the power of a good investment portfolio, my friends. Hell, with the money you make, you can just buy all our natural resources."

Kamrost One and Two conversed silently. **YOU WOULD SELL THEM TO US?**

"I imagine so," Bob answered. "On Earth, everything can be had for a price. Now, I've brought all the paperwork with me. All you have to do is sign

ON HIS MORNING JOG, STEVEN SPIELBERG SEES YOU FALL; HIS BODYGUARDS SET YOUR BROKEN LEG. "I ADMIRE YOUR PLUCK." YOU END UP WRITING ET 2: ET STRIKES BACK. RAVES TIDE IN. YOUR SCRIPTS RIVAL ALAN SMITH IN QUANTITY AND QUALITY. BUT YOU ALWAYS WONDER ABOUT THAT SQUIDIE.

here, and we can begin the transfer of your assets..."

It's not going to do my reputation any good to admit that I *warned* the aliens against letting solicitors on the ship. I couldn't help it – my basic humanity won out. But every time someone came knocking, the aliens were convinced it was the Earth Delegation coming to deliver their surrender. It is pointless to resist, they repeatedly told me. A short sales pitch later, and Dave, Bob, Irving and all the rest were demonstrating the old maxim that once you get inside the house, you've already made the sale.

"You need legal representation," said Sue Hammond, attorney-at-law. "Frankly, I'm shocked you came all this way without it."

LEGAL REPRESENTATION?

"Absolutely," Sue said crisply. "I think we can convince a jury that you're *entitled* to Earth's natural resources. We're all part of the same intergalactic community, are we not?"

THIS IS TRUE...

"No doubt about it. We may even convince the Earth to settle out of court. No one likes a protracted lawsuit. By the way, have you or someone you loved ever taken the heart medicine Zorolex?"

OUR PHYSIOLOGY DOES NOT CONTAIN THE SAME CIRCULATORY SYSTEM THAT YOURS DO.

"Too bad," said Sue. "You may have been eligible for damages."

A man in a turban and another in a ten-gallon cowboy hat came last. I didn't hear what they had to say, but I could guess. While they glad-handed Kamrost One and Two, I was busy studying a text on my phone. It was from the Secretary of State.

Any luck? it said.

I paled. Had my superiors really expected me to negotiate with the aliens? Was I more than a mere stalling tactic, after all? As yet, the aliens had paid little attention to me, engrossed as they were with the growing parade of "sales representatives" arriving in their docking bay by the hour. But clearly, I had to do *something*.

I wracked my brain for a proposal to make, looking around at the different aliens and the formidable technology they possessed. Most of it was beyond my understanding, save for the newly purchased Ultra Deluxe Turbo 3600 gleaming in the corner. One of the aliens was at that very moment trying to decipher the bible-thick instruction manual that came with it.

And then it hit me.

"You know," I said, when the two oil barons had left, "you can't possibly attack the Earth now."

IS THIS A THREAT?

"No threat," I said. "It's in your best interest not to. Look, if you attack the Earth, you'll cause a lot of collateral damage. What if you accidentally destroy the Helping Hands Mutual Insurance Company? You won't be able to receive the benefits you signed up for. And if KleanTech Industries gets destroyed, the warranty you purchased on your new Model 3600 will be useless. And you better not touch New York, or else you run the risk of shutting down the stock market. That will put a dent in your investment returns. Plus –"

ENOUGH.

I shut up. The aliens conversed one final time. It seemed like hours for them to finish their mental dialogue.

Suddenly, the lights above their head began blinking rapidly. Their skin color turned very pale.

TELL YOUR SUPERIORS, they said, THAT WE WILL WITHDRAW.

Why am I telling you this story? After all, since the aliens agreed not to attack the Earth, I've been feted as a global hero. I'm the man who single-handedly staved off invasion while simultaneously setting off the greatest bull market we've ever known.

I'm telling you because I can't take the guilt any longer. People think we've advanced as a race, because we didn't resort to using nukes against the aliens.

But I know the truth. This wasn't a peaceful resolution at all.

I may not have been the one who let all those salesmen on board, but I didn't do enough to stop them, either. So because of me, the Kamrost have now been subjected to the most insidious weapons of all.

Don't believe me? Well, you didn't see the paper this morning. Trade routes have been opened up to the Kamrost home world. As we speak, a hundred ships are heading their way – each with a different product to sell. Insurance, financial advice, magazine subscriptions, kitchen equipment. Like I said, once you get inside the house, you've already made the sale. And very soon, the Kamrost will know what we know:

It is pointless to resist. •



ENVY

by Regan W. H. Macaulay, originally published December 2013 at spacesquid.com

The woman pauses and heaves a sigh. She clutches a live cricket with her index finger and her thumb. It wriggles for its life, which will end shortly. Not like her life. Not like theirs.

She is the woman at the end of the universe and her time will never come. They are the creatures she looks after: the last of the Moca salamanders, the final pair of Bumble Frungit toads, a single Royal Fish of the New Siam government, and three mammals whose names are long forgotten. There are more – feeding them all is an endless and repetitious task. They are suspended in perpetual time. Immortal. Trapped. And they all eat crickets. That's all that's left to eat.

A Frungit toad laps the cricket from between her fingers. Squish. The toad gulps, swallows hard. The cricket is gone. The woman's envy swells inside her like an angry flame. •

FULL CIRCLE HOME

by P.J. Sambeaux, originally published April 2015 at spacesquid.com

Dan despaired.

He had just watched a depressing French movie about an elderly guy forced to provide medical care as best he could for his wife, who had been ravaged by a stroke.

The subject of old people and their care punched a bruise in Dan's brain. He had one living parent: an alcoholic, dysfunctional mess of a man who seemed to be going through the stages of mummification, though still breathing.

Not only had Dan's father been a drinker, but he had also been a beater. He had beaten his wife when they were newlyweds. He had beaten her through Dan's entire childhood. He had beaten her through cancer. Then the Punch Happy Prick had surprised everyone by outliving his wife by thirty years and counting.

He would never die, Dan often thought while cradling himself to sleep, because evil like that does not die.

But according to the next door neighbor, the Punch Happy Prick was now pissing his pants and confusing the mail carrier with a hooker, and this left Dan with a heavy feeling.

Dan's sadness made way for rage and he angrily pushed himself up from the threadbare couch in his depressing efficiency apartment, stared up at the water-damaged ceiling and then began pacing on the cigarette-burned carpet.

Dan had not been successful in life. He had a miserable job in a cubicle with dingy walls. He had no friends, no girlfriend, no children, no pets, not even a plant. His social life mostly consisted of eating microwaveable meals in front of the TV.

Dan railed at the fact that he was almost forty years old and had little semblance of an adult life.

He felt the Punch Happy Prick was to blame for all of this, which frustrated him and made him angrier. Dan didn't have a relationship with him, but he didn't not have a relationship with him either. This ambivalence only served to make Dan feel even worse.

When his mother died, Dan had wanted to have a showdown with the Punch Happy Prick, a real corker where he said all the things he'd never said and just gave it to the shitty old man like he had always had it coming. Tell him how he'd ruined his mother's life, how sending her to an early grave had probably been the only thing he had ever done that could be described as an act of kindness. Tell him how he had ruined his son's life. How he had caused Dan to have a mistrust of adults that continued even though he was, himself, an adult. How he had given him a shy bladder and a severely depressed outlook on life – all of which were socially crippling.

Instead, Dan had stuttered a few words out and the Punch Happy Prick had called him a pussy. And that was that.

Dan went to a support group for people who had also grown up with Punch Happy Pricks. They understood him. They supported him. They consoled him.

Yet, although Dan appreciated the understanding, support and consolation, after about twenty meetings he began to feel like endlessly rehashing the past was not actually solving any of his problems. Where will it all end, he asked himself sadly, complimentary doughnut in hand.

Going to the support group did not solve Dan's problem, but it did get him laid.

Her name was Heloise. Her father had had anger issues all over her family. She was pretty – dark-haired, dark-eyed, small-boned with olive skin. The sex was weird though, and only became increasingly weirder, increasingly centered on naughty schoolgirl outfits, which Dan didn't appreciate being made to wear.

Two days after Dan watched the depressing French movie, he got a call from the hospital. The Punch Happy Prick had been found wandering the streets at two AM in fifteen degree weather, wearing only boxer shorts, an old robe and one tattered slipper. He had been admitted to their facility with altered mental status and frost-bitten toes on the unslippered foot.

Dan's first (private) reaction was, *How did he not die?* Then, *Why could he not just have died?* Then, *Why is this happening to me?*

Dan refused to visit him in the hospital, or even to meet with the doctors, but once they had nailed him down as next of kin they called him nonstop: The Punch Happy Prick was getting out of bed and wandering the halls at night. He was combative. They would rather not use restraints. His condition was not going to improve. Decisions would have to be made regarding long-term care.

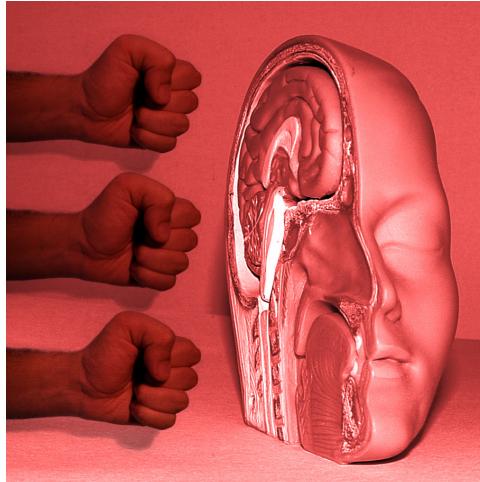
Dan despaired. He called off work and drank till he puked and then woke up and drank more. This did not improve his outlook.

Then he saw the advertisement for Full Circle Home.

Are you the son or daughter of an aging parent? Was that parent an alcoholic? Drug addict? Physically or mentally abusive? Neglectful? Hoarder? And now you're faced with the possibility of having to care for that parent? At your wit's end with nowhere to turn?

Full Circle Home has all your answers.

Let's face it, old people live much, much longer than they used to, than they



should – especially the assholes.

Here at Full Circle Home we offer patented – and completely legal – programs specifically tailored to the abusive parent. Our core purpose and values include:

- Irresponsible stewardship
- Passionate inattention to detail
- Commitment to excellence and innovation in the arts of subtle torment
- Anticipating the needs and expectations of our residents and continuously failing them – we even have a special 'withholding parent' program

Our residents live dull, inactive lives with no ties to each other or to the community beyond our campus. We offer a completely purposeless existence, so our residents can spend their days regretting the past or fretting about the future, rather than enjoying the present.

But what you're really going to like is our memory transference program...

Dan called right away. He made an appointment to see them the next morning.

He found himself sitting across from a perfectly turned out man in a three-piece suit with a fantastically reassuring smile. His name was Gerald.

Dan shook his head doubtfully as he shifted in his seat.

"I don't know if I can put my father in a nursing home. Even though he was an abusive prick, I still feel guilty."

"No, Dan," Gerald said gently. "Guilt is for people who had nice parents. Your father was not a nice parent. Your father was an asshole. That's why you're here."

"I still feel guilty."

"We have some awesome pills for that. Here take one," Gerald said, offering Dan a small yellow tablet.

Dan took the pill. Fifteen minutes later he was feeling awesome.

Gerald had just finished explaining the memory transference process.

"So basically," Dan said, staring at the miniature Zen garden on Gerald's desk and turning the idea over in his mind, "you erase the entire memory of my childhood from my brain, and give that memory to my father."

"That is correct," Gerald replied and smiled. His smile was like a warm ray of sunshine – so kind, so reassuring.

"How is that not against the law?"

"Well, the laws on memory transference are extremely murky. Strictly speaking, if we took your father's memory out and completely replaced it with yours, then we would have to have his full consent for the procedure. However, what we're doing is actually taking your memory and tucking it up there with your father's existing memory. There's no law against that in this county," Gerald said, winking and smiling broadly.

"And what do you replace my memory with in my brain?"

"Ah, that's the most magnificent part," Gerald said. "You get a lovely childhood, full of the fondest memories possible. Your parents were kind and generous people. They completely prepared you to live the most fulfilling life imaginable. Sadly, they both died on the same day peacefully in their sleep at age 86, but they had lived lovely, fulfilling lives. They were ready."

"And my father gets my shitty childhood?"

"He does."

There was a long pause, probably fueled by the awesome pill. A grandfather clock gently chimed the hour. Curtains played in the breeze through the open window. Birds chirped in a nearby tree.

"I'm in," Dan found himself saying.

When the day came for his father to be transferred to Full Circle Home, Dan felt like dancing. He had never, ever wanted to dance in his whole life, but now he wanted to spring around his living room like the ballet dancers the Punch Happy Prick had always said were fairies. And instead of bringing him down, that memory made him feel even lighter, because very shortly he would not remember his father saying that.

Dan was going to be free – something that was beyond his wildest imagination. It was going to be like seeing Punch Happy Prick die, but without all of the guilt and regret – just all of the wonderful. He wouldn't even remember the Punch Happy Prick.

Dan cried tears of joy, another first for him. God bless Full Circle Home, he thought, just bless.

He followed the ambulance transporting the Punch Happy Prick up the main drive, past statuary, fountains, and a vast flower garden in full spring bloom.

The ambulance stopped in the circular drive and attendants dressed all in white swooped in and carted his father off so fast that the only trace of him left was a crumpled candy bar wrapper on the pavement and the lingering smell of old people.

A valet materialized beside him and opened his door. He handed over his keys and the two men shared a warm, knowing smile.

As he looked up he noticed a woman in a salmon-colored suit approaching. She smiled and waved. He smiled and waved back. It was so friendly here.

"Hi Dan, if you just want to follow me this way," she said and they walked into the building at a relaxed pace.

I am free, Dan thought. I am free.

Dan felt... inspired for the first time in his life. He quit his shitty job in the dingy cubicle. He broke things off with Heloise and burned all tokens of weird affection from their relationship. He moved out of his depressing efficiency apartment with the water-stained ceiling and the cigarette-burned carpet.

He started doing the things he had always wanted to do. He went to the Culinary Academy. He traveled abroad. He began painting. He cooked for a living and then painted at night until his art career took off, just like his awesome French girlfriend Vivienne always told him it would.

He and Vivienne kept an apartment in the city and bought a charming home in the country where they entertained their many friends. They had emotionally and physically satisfying sex. They eventually made beautiful babies.

Dan only wished his parents had lived long enough to meet them. •

FLASH FICTION (ABOUT THE FLASH!)

by Steve Gillies, originally published November 2013 at spacesquid.com; art by ckrickett (fiver.com/ckrickett)

I hit you as hard as I can and you won't go down so I have to do the thing that I'm good at. I have to run away.

I run out of town as fast as I can. Fast so fast I run up the side and over a moving train in a nanosecond so fast I hit the beach and kick up minor sandstorms so fast I hit the water with feet that don't stay on the surface long enough to break its tension. I cross oceans bigger than continents in the time it takes you to blink so that by the time you've noticed I'm gone I'm already running through Portugal where kids play soccer with pasted together balls of newspaper and the streets smell like cinnamon, coriander and pari pari, I'm past Spain before anyone thinks to raise the red flag, through Greece before the man in Zante's wine bottle even touches his lips.

A father shouting at his child to look before he runs out into the street. A brush gliding through a woman's hair. Money changing hands. Dirt and rocks and nobody going outside. Bright pink bright orange bright blue robes and not sticking around to see if anyone will burst into song.

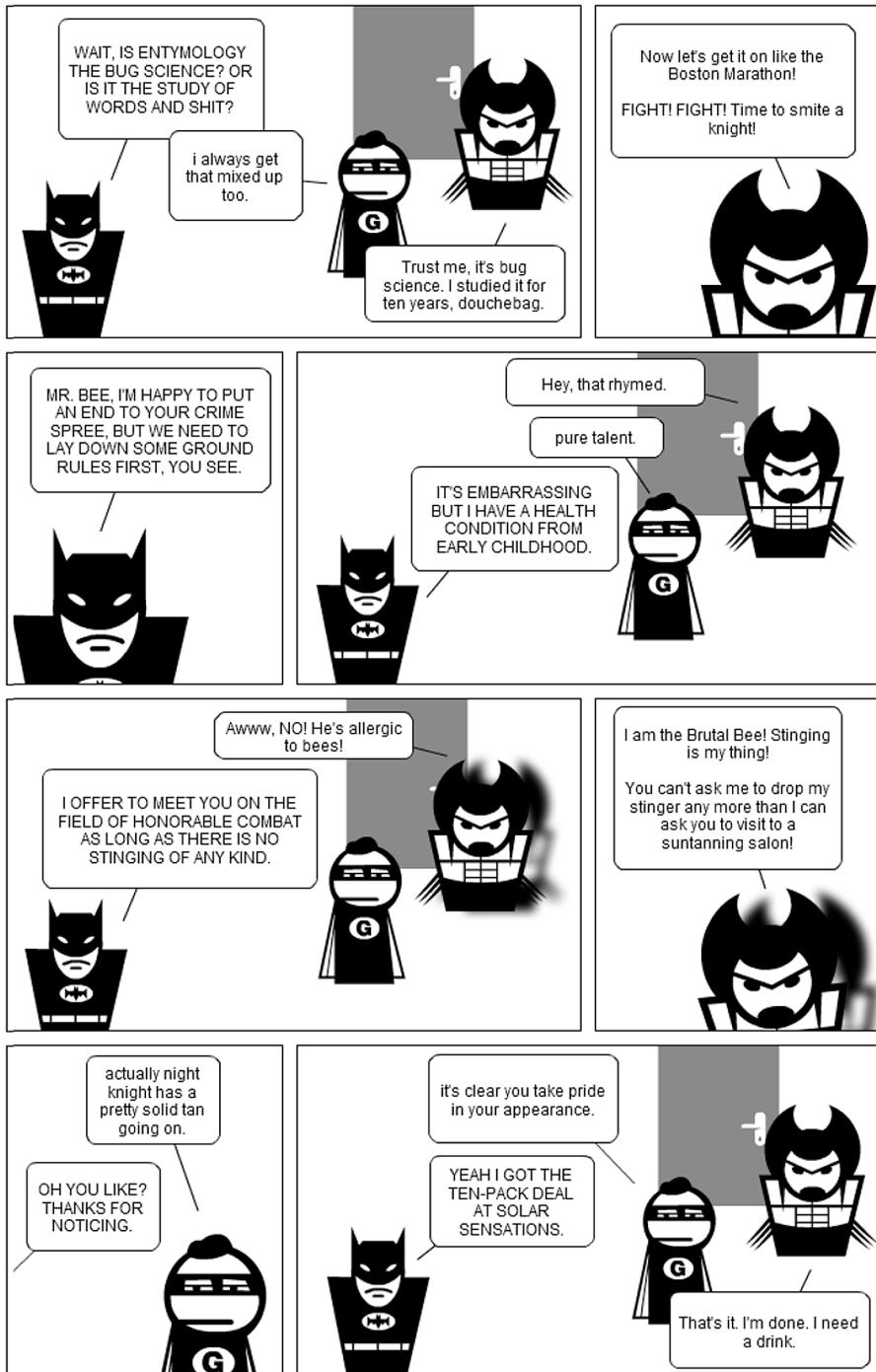
China, a second or two. Deserts, mountains, plains and a waterfall more beautiful than you could ever know. Cities too dense to really navigate. In Beijing three men robbing a tourist won't ever be able to say what exactly hit them. In Shanghai a woman who has lost her son in a crowd somehow, inexplicably finds him returned to her cradling arms.

I want to do more for people. I want to see more. But I don't stop. I can't stop. I'm a man in a costume. I'm a blurry red line. I'm a force of fucking nature. And I keep going through seas and oceans and Japans, through the West Coast and heartland of an America they keep telling me is something to see, but I don't see much of it, I don't see much of it at all. I can't spend too much time with regrets, though. I have too much to do. I have to focus on the task at hand, which is running all the way around the world so that I can punch you even harder. Right in the face. •



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