The Battering Ram
Woodstock Day School
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Attn: JD Louis
or
email us at thebatteringramwds@gmail.com

Prose: The Battering Ram gives priority to prose that is between one and three pages long. However, we do accept pieces of up six pages in length if they are of exceptional quality.

Poetry: Up to three pieces of poetry will be accepted per submission. The ideal poetry submission is up to three pages long in full.

Artwork & Photography: Submit up to three different pieces of your work.

Please do not send us your originals. We will not return your submissions.
For more information, visit our website at woodstockdayschool.org/batteringram

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Send all questions, concerns, orders, inquiries, donations, and praises to any of the contact information listed above.

The Battering Ram accepts submissions year round from students in grades seven through twelve. Electronic submissions can be submitted to our email, and submission guidelines can be found at our website.

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Special Thanks To


We truly appreciate your help and support!
The creativity of our peers is captured through the mediums of literature and art. The Battering Ram focuses on combining the two to create an environment for individuals interested in sharing their work.

I think that the unique process of putting together this journal is just as important as the product. The Editorial Board has worked diligently to make this journal happen and each member is fundamental to the inner workings of the journal.

Knowing the process behind the creation of this journal is essential to understanding it.

Here’s a run down of what goes on:

1. We look for people like you.
2. We put all submissions into a packet and read them blindly.
3. The Editorial Board goes through the packet and each person votes on what should be accepted.
4. Associate Editors send out acceptance…and rejection emails (we need lots of ice cream after this).
5. The information goes over to Design & Production and gets formatted into this journal!

This is a super shortened version of everything that happens in the four periods a week we spend together. Along with making our journals, we fundraise by selling bagels (aka Bagel Wednesday), helping with Thursdogs, and holding events such as our annual Story Journey. Fundraising is an integral part of this journal and I’m proud to say that we raised enough money to get a jump on our journal for next year! We are very excited about this, as well as celebrating the success of our second annual Lit Con back in March. The event had a great outcome and thank you to everyone who came and those that poured their time and energy into making it fantastic.

Thank you to all the innovative minds that contributed their work, the submissions we had this time around were exceptional.

And of course thank you to everyone who helped us along the way and to the Editorial Board, it’s been so gratifying working with all of you!

Read this journal on any occasion, whether you’re happy, sad, bored, or indifferent; escape into the world that is The Battering Ram.

Bianca DePietro
Editor-in-Chief
Joe Bassuk

36

The woman (yellow scarf)
long stepped behind the counter
She asked for clarification
One showed fire / the other ice and
the cop chuckled into his milk
  (he had an accomplice)
The girl spilled all over the floor
Eliza Siegel

\textit{Sedimentary Sentiment}

You come on the
Palest of days
When the afternoon dust
“distilled, condensed
They said
Filters in with the sunlight

as sedimentary sentiment that
gathers behind my ears
Under my fingernails

on those carbon copy days where you look in the
mirror
and see nothing but yesterdays and
the autumns you’ve left wilting in the moonlight
Gasping for air

You told me once
with lips crooked and cracked
that I’d have to wait for yesterday

How long?
I’d ask and you’d say
Not very
In a hum whose
shivering,
shimmering,
refracted,
reflected
in the crystal laughter of the
air

three hundred and sixty five
yesterdays [ago]
we sailed past stop signs and
silent martyrs until our hearts
beat in $3/4$

Out of orbit
Out of time

Your sun and my moon
Eclipsed and

\textit{left:} Roots
Bianca Depietro
where the road became a bridge over a dry riverbed, tangled with brush and clinging vines; the bridge of rustic logs, made for trysting, but virginial and untested by lovers; on up the road, past the buildings, with the southern verandas half-a-city-block long, to the sudden forking, barren of buildings, birds, grass, where the road turned off to the insane asylum.

And always come this far and open my eyes. The spell breaks and I try to re-see the rabbits, so tame through having never been painted, that played in the hedgerows and ditches.
Somewhere in the Middle of Chapter Two
(in which a girl meets a boy)

Kate sat on the golden metal bench, eating a boring red apple under the hot yellow sun. She was tired of all these describing words, and wished she could sit outside and relax without having to look at so many different things. The setting was all there: the park with its winding paths, the delicate rainbow of flowers starting to bloom, the birds of some sort singing in the trees, unimportant and out of sight. There was even a breeze, obnoxiously tossing her long yellow locks about her face. Kate did not think the writer understood just how difficult it was have “waist length” hair, or how unlikely it is that it would be shiny, always, no matter what. Kate was already disappointed with her character, and it had been less than two chapters.

She was sitting and twisting the apple stem, “gazing longingly down the cobblestone path” when suddenly a man appeared. He walked with a purpose, his gaze firmly on Kate and the bench where she sat. Within seconds of his arrival, he was beside her, looking at her with the most “shockingly blue pair of eyes you could ever imagine.”

“Hello,” she sighed, wondering what was wrong with her. Sighing implied sadness, or dismay, but she really had nothing to be upset about yet.

“Greetings,” the man said, reaching out a hand. “My name is Zephyr Smith. How do you do?” Oh how cleverly symbolic the name was. Kate took Zephyr’s hand, shook it firmly, pleased to find she had a strong grip. His hand was warm, she noticed, surprisingly so in comparison to her own “chilly fingers.”

“Hello Zephyr, I’m Kate. To what do I owe the pleasure?” Oh goodness, she thought. The dialogue - it’s going to kill me! And if it doesn’t, something else surely will. I bet it will be big and scary and uncreative. A curse maybe, or a shark. Or poison. Poison always does the trick.

“Greetings!” He exclaimed, shaking her hand again. “My name is Gabrielle Smith. You can call me Gabe. How do you do?” He beamed at her with perfectly white, impossibly straight teeth. Kate stared at him, bewildered.

‘Uh, you already said that? Kind of?’ She whispered to the strange new character.

He rolled his eyes and explained

‘Sorry, I guess she meant to put an exclamation point. Apparently I’m excited to see you for some reason. And Zephyr was a silly name.’

‘But isn’t Gabrielle a girls name?’

‘Yeah, must have been a typo.’

‘Oh okay.’
Gabe continued smiling, the sun bouncing off those incredible pearly whites and nearly blinding Kate in the process. “My dear,” he announced, holding on to her hand. “I have a proposition for you.” Kate was not alarmed by the man’s sudden appearance, nor was she uncomfortable with the fact he was maintaining physical contact after knowing her for only a paragraph. Instead her eyes widened with interest. He continued “earnestly.” “I would like you to accompany me on a journey.” Kate gasped in excitement. A journey! How swell!

“A j-journey?” She stammered, suddenly nervous for no apparent reason. “A journey to where?” She was clutching both of his hands now, her own no longer cold.

“To the Far North Lands, where the snow is created. It is a many days walk, through the dark woods and other sorts of dangerous places. But it can’t be done without you, for you, have the key.” Great, it’s going to be one of those stories. Kate’s heart LITERALLY filled up with excitement AND fear, and she thought she might ACTUALLY explode. Kate suffered silently through thecaps lock and Gabe never broke eye contact with her.

‘Gabe, your character is sort of... Hmm. I’d call you mysterious but we don’t know enough about you yet to even call you that. Though I must say you’re quite handsome, practically perfect.’

‘Why thank you miss Kate, you’re rather pretty yourself.’

‘You know it took almost a chapter for her to describe me? I wandered around the park wearing nothing but a name and a locket for over ten pages. Either way I’m glad you’re here- she managed to get me this far without referencing any other human beings.’

‘How is that even possible?’

‘Adjectives... Lots of them. You should have seen the trees on pages three and four.’

Kate jumped to her feet in excitement. “Me?” She questioned with an expression of disbelief. “But I’ve never been needed for anything! And I don’t have any key... I’ve nothing of value but this old locket.” She started biting a nail, nervous again.

Gabe reached over to examine the locket, holding it carefully between his index finger and his thumb. When did he stand up? Kate wondered, and hoped the writer would be a little more reliable in the future. She shivered as Gabe’s fingers brushed against her neck. He peered at the locket, trying to open it.

“Don’t bother,” Kate complained as he tried to pry it open. “It’s been sealed shut since my grandmother gave it to me. She never told me what’s inside it.” Oh how cliche.

‘Ew Gabrielle why are you touching me?
‘I’m sorry, I can’t control it. I guess she doesn’t know how normal people act in social situations.’

‘Ugh fine, you’re better than nothing. Do you know how lonely it is to be the first character?’

‘Actually Kate, I was the first character. I was in the prologue, as a little nameless baby.’

‘That doesn’t count’

‘Does too! There was a prophecy and everything!’

‘Oh, alright.’

Gabe let go of the locket, letting it fall with a thud against Kate’s collarbone. A thud? She wondered. *It made no such sound... Oh well.* She looked up to find her companion staring at her, a new expression crossing his beautiful face. “Your eyes,” he said in an almost whisper. “They’re like the sea on a stormy day. Waves.”
Courtney Van Leuvan

_Cause and Effect_

A notably worthy cause,
caused me to stop.
To ponder the relevance
of these beauteous, shallow features
that draw attention from my inflated ego.

The line between reality
and this false hope of a fantasy
are blurred by the finality
that I am lost.

Lost deep in my wants
I have overgrown my needs
Yet sprinkled falsely,
a vine of guilt blossoms all too real.
And I am left staring

My reflection is no longer conceivable
-looks back – a revelation – believable.
And in the dreamy, dreary mist of my past
I find a sadistic bastard.

clever lies concealed my truth with trust.
The cause running deeper than lust
confidently hides the insecurities
of a sheltered life
without a cause.
The snowstorm started
yesterday, it snowed all night
the world has turned white
Do you think after all this we will look at each other and say it was such a beautiful blizzard?
After all the midnight calls and times I was sure my heart was frozen over or maybe not even there.

Do you think later it could be a beautiful mess?
Do you think we'll make it out alive and even ok?

You think it will end up being something to be nostalgic for?

Do you think that it will be tragic when it is all just distant memories, like blurry photographs in a box in the attic?

When the pain that demands to be felt fades away and the vividness has dulled will we miss it?
Will we stop being the players and become the bystanders who sit in their rocking chairs and watch reruns and watch our hair turn grey?
Will we grow old together and become eccentric and senile and have a snow globe collection?

Is all of it just God shaking up his snow globe?
Is it only him who knows what will happen after the snow settles, how we all end up, if everything is really going to be ok like you tell me?
After all the intense fights (and snowball fights) and pillow fights and pillow talk is there even a fleeting chance you will still love me?
Or will it falter and fade like the snow melts away, and the hot chocolate in my hand looses heat steadily.

Because I don't think that I could go on if you weren't there to make snow angels with me every blizzard.

And I know I will never again find anyone who understands the beauty of a blizzard the way I do.
No matter what happens in this (im)perfect storm there are certain things I can't see or do or feel or say without thinking about you.

I'm wondering as I stare out the window at the exquisite beauty if when I look back on the beautiful blizzard of my youth will we be reminiscing together or if you will be just someone I used to spend snow days with?
“Kom og se.”

Water-darkened hair danced around her as she was consumed by the midnight blue water.

He whispered again: “Kom og se.”

Half-closed eyes and bloated lips graced her face and the salt set into her skin.

He dragged her down into the murky depths of the Norwegian Sea but she didn’t notice.

She had stopped noticing 10 minutes after they had left the Skjaer.

“Kom og se.”

He smiled at her as they reached their destination.

“Kom og se, kom og se!”

With one hand, he gestured to a palace made of rocks and coral.

“Du har sett det. Nå kan du gå.”

He let go of her hand and watched as she floated to the surface.

(Translations-
Kom og se (Norwegian) = Come and see
Du har sett det (Norwegian) = You have seen
Nå kan du gå (Norwegian) = Now you may go)
Lula Rapoport

Paper

your mind peers into the depths of the blank slate
your hand bends the ideas into an inexperienced one
the frustration of your notion it’s not what you envisioned
fistful of vision gone shriveled
rubbish refuse refuse to renew
renew perception helping hand
iron the fabric the fabric of perception
neatly pressed to be worn again whatever you may envision
sewn together by the ink in the plastic
tried on for size remembered
remembered for what it was paper
paper was tree alive
now alive again with perception
Alyassa McPherson

Tridecagon

I. Among the crowded clutter,
a paper’s favorite companion sits

II. creator of ideas,
destroyer of those

III. A dead plant,
but so much more,
created by three differences
combined into one

IV. Imported from far away,
sharpened to puncture,
A writer of secrets and stories

V. Rubber,
once growing,
now,
eraser of things that should not be told

VI. A once born cedar,
so large,
now fits in the palm of my hand.
It is the carrier of all segments

VII. Packaged in piles,
lifeless but lively,
dead.
alive.
pencil.

VIII. Third hue on the rainbow.
So bright.
so dull.
A father reaches for it,
hands it down to his son,
history reveals itself

X. Letters etched with graying ink,
someone reads,
erasing as they go

XI. Left in the rain,
snow, heat
still working

XII. Needed to make mistakes,
needed to correct them

XIII. Used everyday,
taken for granted,
expected to be there.
A pencil.
Lament de la Mente

(iinspired by Ren Descartes’s Meditations on First Philosophy)

i forgot what athazagoraphobia means
and i can’t find another way to say
pathetic
(when i cried on the pages of a thesaurus,
i figured that was close enough)

but my chief complaint
is that when she hung the paint chips on the wall
and asked me to imagine the hue between
baby-blue and seafoam green
i thought of a color i’ve never—
    but it wasn’t something new
    only an idea of blue
    on idea of blue
and i realized that the dimensions of an imagination
are the same as the average recycling bin

that same day i crossed my eyes
and scribbled lies
in “Maker’s Mark”-er on my forehead
because in the course of measurement,
i came upon the ingredients of god:
    • coffee filter shepherd
    • tin can landlord
    • yellow pages provider
    • plastic bottle teacher
    • cardboard father

how can i be sure that the shade exists
until i paint it on my mother’s ceiling and how can i know God
until i touch the seams
where melted material bled through human form?

i’d never felt the way that finite shoots through veins
until i saw the white walls echo
like a lecture on how little
i really know.

right: Box

Lola Cook
Snow Tempest

It's in the Fishbowl

Hello everyone and welcome to my Funeral! I would like to have a moment of silence to recognize my wonderful life– just kidding! Hey guys, what’s with the long faces? Are you not here to get wasted (No, not you munchkins…) , pick up bad habits, and hang out with all of these strange people I have known over the years? Yes, yes you are. And if you don’t like it then leave. (Where are you going?! Hey! Get back here! I was kidding about leaving!) Anyway, I just like to say I love you all, and that there is a strongbox filled with gold in the-

The pastor took a pause and adjusted his glasses.

“What?!” Cried various family members, “Where?!”, “Does it just cut off there?!”

“Calm down everyone,” The pastor quieted the crowd of friends and relatives.

“There is another few pages.” He flipped the first sheet of paper over to the back and continued reading,

Where was I? Oh yes, the gold is in the- WHY ARE YOU READING THIS HOLY MAN!!! OUT!!! HAND THE LETTER TO COLTON!!!! TO COLTON!!!!

The pastor blinked, swallowed, and handed it to the brother-in-law of the dead lady quickly. Colton took the paper, read what it screamed, then understood.

Thank goodness! Now that that is over, I can finally… Oh hello Laura! How are the kiddos?

Everyone groaned; this was getting severely off-topic.

Are they well? How’s Eddie? No, wait! I see him right now; next to Nate, is he?

Everyone turned to where Laura stood with her three children, Nate, Eddie, and Chris. And indeed, Nate was standing next to Eddie. Mixed feelings like fruit salad filled the room; some laughed, some got shivers wondering how she knew, some passed gas and wished they hadn’t eaten bean leftover burritos for breakfast that morning.

I hear some of you wonder how I seem to be doing this; and if you check the sheet of paper in Colton’s hand you will see that he I merely reading the words I put on paper.

Some of the more distant friends and cousins came to check, but the rest of them hung back, they knew her well enough to know that her sense of humor couldn’t be replicated.

Well then, now that that’s out of the way…

Colton trailed off as someone accidentally cut the cheese, that is to say, farted. There was a long pause then the culprit muttered, “Excuse me,” and they resumed.

Who did that?

There was silence again in the room.

Who just let ‘er rip right in the parlor? Anyone willing to admit to the guilt?

People started muttering now amongst themselves; this was getting a little too real, how did she know he would fart by the time that was read?
It was you, wasn't it Sammy?
The red-faced accused looked around and realized everyone was staring at him. He shuffled and mumbled softly.

LOUDER!!!!
Colton read in a booming voice. The young man nodded furiously and started admitting quickly to have eaten leftover Mexican food that morning.

Lovely, now, I have had a secret that I have told none of you about for the thirty seven years I have been alive, (Or the thirty five years I have been talking); I can see the future.

Quickly after that chaos ensued as Colton quickly looked down to the sheet of paper and called out,
Nathan is wearing a blue tie!
The crowd parted and a tall man wearing a blue tie stammered, “W-what?! How-“
Callie broke her diet! She had chocolate cake for breakfast!
A slightly overweight woman in a yellow dress shifted her weight and fiddled with the strap of her dress nervously.
Kyle! Oh, Kyle. You went and wet the carpet, didn’t you?
Everyone’s attentions turned to the small pug in the middle of the room. He panted for a moment with his tongue out for a second then seemed to understand what he had done wrong then whined pathetically, slinking into a corner.
The people all wondered at this, she must have faked her death and written this today! Some thought. Others speculated that he had come back from the dead, or the God himself had a hand to play in this.

I’m just kidding. I can’t see the future.
The crowd paused.

But I do know all of you well enough to guess what happens in your lives; Nathan always wears a blue tie on Thursdays, Callie had her eye on that chocolate cake for a while now, and Kyle always pees on the carpet when we have visitors.
They all relaxed and let out a collective breath of relief.

I know and love you all so much, and that’s how I can tell these things.

Uncles Freed and Jeremiah looked at each other and shouted over the tops of everyone’s heads, “What about the gold?”
The two brothers Nate and Eddie bounced up and down excitedly, “Oh boy! Treasure! Just like in Peter Pan!”

“Where is it?” Nathan-with-the-blue-tie called from the middle of the room, “Surely it is behind the fireplace!”
Murmurs of agreement came from the adults in the crowd; they were all familiar with the natural place to hide treasure in a home.
The treasure you say? Why, I’ll tell you where it is.
Everyone leaned forward in anticipation of the next few words.
It’s in the fishbowl.
Grumbles of disappointment lifted into the air and flew away with the guests and the pastor, until all left but Nate and Eddie. Their parents had gone back to the car to change baby Chris’ diaper, leaving the two brothers, ages five and seven, in the house of their aunt.
“Do you think she was telling the truth Nate?” Eddie asked, as always, looking to his big brother to explain things.
“Yeah, I think there is gold in the fishbowl.”
“Should we go check?”
Nate nodded and started up the stairs, tromping on the carpet with dirty shoes. His brother soon followed. They peeked through doors and viewed the contents of rooms; they jumped through doors as if they were magic portals, and they crashed around as dinosaurs, and blasted through the upstairs as space rangers.
When they had poked their heads through the last door to the left they saw it; a glass fishbowl on the bedside table. They stood in awe for a moment, as one must always do when finding the long-lost treasure of some empire, and looked at each other with sparkling eyes. This was it.
As ninjas they silently crept closer and closer, putting less distance between themselves and the fishbowl. At last they lifted themselves up to see over the edge of the table. There was a note, and it said;
Nate, Eddie: take care of him for me. Thanks, your Auntie Nana.
Hollering and banging, the boys came down the stairs with their prize, “Hey mommy, look!” They exclaimed as their mother appeared in the doorway of the house. “A piranha!” The puzzled mother took the fishbowl from her sons and looked inside; a goldfish swam lazily inside, glowing slightly as the light from the window shone through the bowl.
“This is a goldfish, sweetie.”
The boys were dismayed for a second, and then Eddie said, “Can we at least call him Piranha?” Their mother nodded and Eddie let forth hip hips and hurrahs.
“Mommy?” Laura looked down at her eldest son, who had put his hands on the fishbowl thoughtfully. “Is this what Auntie meant about the gold in the fishbowl?” Laura smiled, took her son’s hand and started to walk out the door, “Yes, I’m sure of it.”
Kendall Wind

Collecting Dust

It's been one year,
I can't help but bear that I won't be found,
As I lay under the furnace.
403, I've counted
How many times she has walked right past me,
Sometimes maybe looking for me,
Without checking below her,
As I lay under the furnace.
The alarm inside me goes off,
For me it's as if a bullhorn was up against my ear,
Yet for her it sounds like a fly buzzing in the corner.
She looks back down at the square shining on her face,
As I look up at her, laying under the furnace.
Tonight, she looks right at me,
But her eyes remain shut.
I now wait multiple hours for another chance to be claimed again,
As I drift off,
Under my furnace.
One night I dreamt a monster snatched me,
Its palm wrapping around my fragile body.
I awoke to that same feeling surrounding me,
But this time, I was in her arms.
Happiness coursed through me,
I was finally found.
She walks with me in her hand,
Past her bed and under her desk,
She drops me into a plastic hole,
The walls too tall, I can't climb out.
I begin to realize, I wasn't important to her,
Now I wish I was back, lying under the furnace.
The Puppeteer

a short burst of fear.
that is what decides.
a mix of fear and excitement.

anxiety rules with an iron fist.
bearing down upon it’s enemies.
threatening to crush us.

it avoids its friends.
saving them from that sensation
of your throat closing up.

holding back inevitable tears
of frustration.
knowing that you have lost
to your enemy.

wwe despise each other
and often in close quarters
we fight. it wins.

working mortals like puppets
iniquitously controlling us
with nothing to lose.

cruel and haunting
a puppeteer.
anxiety.
a manifestation of fear.
Katia Michalopoulos

The Magic Flute

She held a handkerchief over her nose as she walked briskly past them. Her heels stepped delicately over puddles of filth, avoiding the mess.

Humming an aria from Mozart’s The Magic Flute, she blocked out crying children and the grinding and hissing of machinery.

Not meeting the eyes of the woman asking for change, she slid into the car and had her driver roll up the windows.
Lucas Siegal

Thought Disorder

My mind is soft.  
My skull is drained.  
My thoughts are off.  
The world has changed.  
There’s something wrong inside my brain.  
My mind is soft.  
My dog is acting very strange.  
The distant sound of an empty train.  
My thoughts are off.  
I cannot help but feel ashamed.  
I think I might have gone insane.  
My mind is soft.  
My room is dark without a flame.  
The frantic tapping of the rain.  
My thoughts are off.  
I think I just forgot my name.  
My eyes are popping from the pain.  
My mind is soft.  
My thoughts are off.
Jana Halaska

Don’t Fake the Funk

Dandelions awakenin’
Dandelions they don’t fake it
They don’t fake the funk
Or the soul
When they drink, they don’t even have a bowl
Cold, they don’t complain
Dandy, not seeking fame
Dandelions are too real
I’ve seen them from Swiss alps
To the zoot of a Wroclav chap
Dandelions know what’s good
Ella Goldin

The Isle of the Blest

Sweet summer love
Glow with delight
Hot lazy days
Sunshine so bright

Quiet and peaceful
Midday’s hot crest
Oh how I long to visit
The Isle of The Blest

Toes in the sand
Fresh scented air
Warm salty waves
Wind in my hair
Oh how I long to visit
The Isle of The Blest

But the cost is high
My virtue is low
To be a hero once
Then twice more to go?
Oh how I long to visit
The Isle of The Blest

To swim all day
Sing all night
To laugh and smile
Filled with delight

To watch the moon rise
And watch the sun dip
The water so pure
To have my own ship
Oh how I long to visit
The Isle of The Blest

Do I need to finish the rest?
It’s heaven above
And heaven below
But am I blessed enough to go?

left: Pond
Zenona Darrow
the girls are slamming poetry against fogged mirrors and concrete walls in the bathroom.
two of them are sitting on the radiator outside of the third stall, halving their atoms
by pressing incorrect keys against each other’s skin
just to come down from one too many highs.
one is staring down at her legs,
contemplating whether or not her iris has become a kaleidoscope of its own,
or if the man who ran away with the bulk of her limbs really wasn’t doing her a disservice after all.

a library of unorganized divorce papers is in hiding
on a piece of property a mile out from the sand,
laced with glass and accidental sedatives from a wreck sixty-six weeks prior.
none of the individuals noted on the papers were ever legally married, they just signed a few documents
to let the government know that they were all okay.
the snow between the assistant’s barest feet is prime validation that
the blossoms are miscarrying their tendency for the sublime
because the “kids these days” can’t tell the difference between
what’s beautiful and what’s residing next to poison
at best.

i am archiving books with text printed towards the receiving end of your paper mache venus.
she is thriving off of the inevitable thought process you are urging to do without.
i notice these faux anomalies -
i breath them in with a match resting between my jagged ivory.

i execute myself through a reflection in that fogged mirror.
the snow living in the spaces separating the assistant’s feet has nearly diminished now,
and she is aching to remind me that you turned me into a goddamn insect
and took a few of my legs while you were at it -
narrowing them down to only two,
*just to make me seem more human.*

the voyeur down the street tries to test me -
but he’s speaking from what he *sees,*
not what he *does* apart from his spare time.
when the voyeur calms down with his argumentative banter, i see that the
the weather report just came in through the fibery strings of a dented soup can:
“i keep my pills and your poems in the same drawer, hoping that one won’t cancel
the other out”

as a tutorial,
end; start again.
end. restart; artificial.
restart; unsuccessful.
restart; unattempted.

you’ve extinguished me quite skillfully
without introducing the most destructive element to my existence.
*that takes talent, kid.*
“lo and behold” - (because an expired dictionary of cliches told me to),
your skill is an uncanny set of tarot cards that
i’ve not been unsuccessful in reading
as if it were engraved into my utmost biological substance.

dampen the eyes to pacify the cause;
your insides wrap around
the greatest reveal of the inevitabilities you sought to do without,
and i am no longer an insect surviving off the support of
a couple dozen legs or so.
i view the girl with wide irises through a jagged crack in the concrete,
and the fog disintegrating in his air of dismantled blossoms will no longer suffice.
This is the tragedy of standing next to you and not holding your hand, the gradual coldness as this gypsy wind reads my palm like a subway map:

- life line (green) is long and deep
- but the head line (blue) ends halfway through town

--not a surprise for this metaphorgirl,
this penny face-down in street grime
  (unlucky and left that way),
a raven graffitied in gray on the sidewalk
cawing nevermore and evermore
to faces that fail to stay--

This is the tragedy of being so close and not knowing if I’ll be this close again, physical proximity
  and the impulses of a city
tunnel through my veins
these trains of thought are littered with ticket stubs on the floor
  --tickets to nevermore and evermore--
cluttered with the clawing of memories
and the urge to say too much

This is the tragedy of touch
the agony of the miracle of your hand
the way we fall together
fold together
as if you understand
that the spaces between my fingers
were full of missing
the kissing of your pulse
against my pulse
and the subtle salt of sweat
binding

This is the tragedy of finding you, of holding on through three stops and two flights of broken-escalator-stairs,
  and waiting
  for the cold air
  and the silence
  of four hundred miles
  to teach me
  how
to forget you

*right:* Shadows
Kayleigh Myer
CENSORSHIP is unfair. CENSORSHIP takes away the meaning of art. CENSORED art is not truly art. When you censor art, you are altering art. When you alter its meaning, once you have altered the meaning of the art, it no longer belongs to the artist. It is not his vision. It is a vessel for the imposition of morals and values. Indecent is fine, obscenity crosses the line. Obscenity?

“I know it when I see it”

My point is simple –

Anonymous

(Censorship)

left: Motorcycle
Noah Schneidman
Just a Little Dream I Had

In the city after a day of wandering playful times, we had gone to the theater it was a spectacle. Now her and I returned to an apartment. It had a rooftop garden, so we decide to retire in the sky. In order to make it there we had make our way through a gaggle of kids searching for a secret door in a comically small passageway. The roof was light with the setting sun and fairy lights. We sat at the round table, flanked by plants, and discuses our future. She was going to spend it at some castle near by. I said nothing of my future except that the will be one.

At this time I see the table more clearly. Covered with a green table cloth there are four plates each printed with photorealistic masks, making it feel like there were small eyes peering out. It is a this time that an English teacher appears. We talk about the wonders of city street design and how New York's is the best organized.

She asks,"Does the circus still have elephants?"

“Oh they must!” We disused we might as well head down to the harbor to investigate the circus. The sun had started to rise. There is something so splendid about seeing the morning hustle and bustle of the traveling bubble people. Pausing briefly at a triangle for pedestrians, floating in the middle as colorful cars from the 1920’s fly by. We had stop so the English teacher could tell a story about the signal street sign that could point you in the direction of any place you needed to be, but not always wanted. The English teacher left at this time fading away, he needed to be somewhere. We went on our way, narrowly being misted by a rouge white car, to the circus.

There it was, The circus on a backdrop of shipping boats it was nestled in to the harbor. It felt like circus always do, flung into a place yesterday but looking like it had be there for ages.

We enter going in under the North arc. The place was already packed. In front of us there is a tall man in a pressed blue shirt and brown trousers out of the back of which flows a long lion tail. He has come to the circus with a small boy, trying to gain back the fun they used to have. We falledow the pair into a tent showcased the skills and inventions of all mankind. On our left there was a man all in white sitting in a creat full of ivory handled throwing knives. The trick was that you would stand on the chalk “x” mark and he would throw a knife at you, it would fly by your head landing in the wood above the cart of mangos behind you. The lion man at the prompting of the kid, drops a coin in the provided bucket.

“Do you think he ever messes up?” I say to my companion.
“Well we’ll see, won’t we.” She replies, with a laugh, always laughing. Thud! The knife lands in the wood. The man in white scampers up and over to retrieve his trick. Upon a closer look I see that the knife’s blade is in fact retractable.

We move on still looking for elephants. Peering between curtains we see a wide assortment of circus paraphernalia. From animals to jugglers and an electric chair, showcased the by the inventor themselves. No elephants in sight.

We hear a commotion behind us. Turning around we see that the lion man is being harassed by two monkey faced men. They keep flicking his tail. We can see in his eyes that it bothers him, why doesn’t he do anything. Being stronger he could easily beat them physically. No what’s stopping him are the two armed sentinels marking the monkey faced men as the king and his brother.

The lion man would have been fine had it not been that now the king went for the kid. Never mess with a lion’s kid. The lion man whipped around letting out a growl that would stop a stamped. The monkey king looks up.

“You touch me, and we get to find out if that chair really works.” Pointing to the electric chair with a laugh. The Lion man knows the risks, but chooses not to listen. Lunging at the royal baboons. His throws them back in to the mango stand with a crash.

The two sentinels grab him by the arms. The king stand dazed he gives a signal to the sentinels. The Lion man it dragged back to the chair. The king laughs, wail his brother grabs the screaming kid. The king leans into lion man and spits in his face. In a moment the Lion grabs the King and with a blink they have switch places. Bolts of electricity fly out of the king still laughing.

The lion man must run. He and the kid are gone before the body stops to twitch.

We are told to leave the circus. On our way back to the apartment we see a wheezy man argue with his past self about why opera wouldn’t take his baggy old cloths. Back now, the kids have found the secret door. We rest on pillows and talk about Spider-Man and MJ. Trying not to think about the day. Until we pop away.
R.P. Sante

Love Poem

When you left me, it felt like a kick.
I'm melancholy and sad when I am your brick.
I have nothing better to do
Than be sad about you
I can't move on, ma chérie,
Your love, when I had it was ripe as a bri- I-I mean berry. Yeah. A ripe berry.
Wyatt Garratt

Stygian Queen

Here, we'll run through the dark
Just sit and think, wait for a spark
And you'll lean against my side
In our place, where Death resides

We'll watch the clouds go by
Shiver, smile, sigh
Enchanted by my lies
Warm dark eyes

Sitting on an old stone tomb
The feel of skin, to be in bloom
When the darkness spirals down
There are none to make a sound

If I die on this stone
At least I won't die alone

In our minds, there we stay
To keep the realer things away
We sit here, in unseen throne
Each defiant and unknown

From our lips,
Made not to confess,
 Comes nothing more
And nothing less.

left: Overlapping Goddess
Freeda Handelsman
Eternity

Courtney Van Leuven

His lungs deflate
Slowly
  Painfully.
As water enters his system
a remaining breath escapes.
He screams
  only to feel his eyes
finally close.
A rude awakening
when he realizes the pain is
  Endless.
For he cannot die.

right: Flowers
Kayleigh Myer
Margaret

Never to die but never to wake
She took the pill without question
A gift from a shady man
Her greed had consumed her
The desire controlled her
And like all the clichés
Her quest for power has led to her downfall

Never to die but never to wake
She yearned for immortality
Her plans of power reached far beyond one life
The course of humanity was hers to control
If only she survive the test of time
She had to find a way to best old age
And continue her rein

Never to die but never to wake
She searched the lands for someone with power
Power to solve this age old enigma
Right under her nose, a wise man hid
Waiting and bidding his time
All knows her greed, all knows her madness
And all knows she was no match for the old man’s cunning

Never to die but never to wake
He left the shadows for his one fatal strike
A pill to make her immortal and in return her kingdom
The old man with not long to live, the waiting will be short
Of course she took the pill without so much as a doubt
He promised immortality as soon as she falls asleep
And to her chamber she went

Never to die but never to wake
She fell asleep in an instant; the pill began to work its magic
Silently waiting for her new beginning, a smile on her lips
And time moved on without her, but never did she age
Entombed in her chamber as the dust collected, kingdoms rose and fell
Finally she has achieved her goal, to beat Father Time
In a sad twist of fate, her dreams became true as she could only continue to dream
Never to die but never to wake.
Love is like a goopy sack of potatoes. 
Because it’s full of girlish things like kisses and holding hands, 
It’s gross and icky. 
And I saw in a movie once the ogre tossed the princess over his shoulder, 
Like a sack of potatoes.

Love is like Oxygen. 
Because when there’s nothing else left and nothing left to go on, 
You have it. 
And the greatest thing you’ll ever learn, is to love, 
And to be loved in return

“Love is like box of chocolates”
I don’t know. I think that’s how the quote goes…
Or how it should be
Why can’t I have my pick of boys?
I would love to have a Valentine.

Love is like the file cabinets at work. 
You open one up, and you see the person. 
You read the files. 
If you don’t like it, shred it. 
If you like it, digitize it.

Love is like Baseball. 
Sometimes you hit a home run, other times not. 
Relationships are like that, 
I guess. 
What should I know? I’m just a kid.

Love is like a box of doughnuts. 
You eat too many, you get fat. 
There are a lot to choose from though. 
So pick the right one. 
And stick with them like icing to the bottom of the box.

Love is like the cookies in the cookie jar. 
They are right there, but you know they are forbidden 
Your parents will catch you. 
But the sugar is too sweet to resist.
And you take one.

Love is like a mirage.  
You think it’s there, but it’s really not.  
They’ll fool you, they’ll trick you…  
And when there done,  
They’ll leave you to the carrion birds to pick at you.

Love is like a bunch of flowers.  
It’s pretty for a while; then it just fades away.  
Or you wake up and all the petals have dropped.  
Leaving you with the bare stems of nothing,  
Breaking away in your hands
You're a so, m.
Katia Michalopoulos

The Cave

Your voice begins to slip away from me.
We’re lost in a cave, in which there is no light.

I mean literally
We’re in a cave.
And you fell down a hole.

left: You’re A Saint
Anonymous
A likeness we share of differences
within each other
Locked out from an unchanging life
The lies of myself I have created
I forgot who I really was inside
We are ever changing
I Miss You

Back in 1945, I wrote a poem for a boy.
The poem was about the grim reaper,
some fictional character I hadn’t realized looked almost like the boy.
I gave it to him in the winter,
after days and nights and weeks listening
to the crow outside my window.
Sometimes it sounded like it was telling me
what to write:
“Erase That”
“Add This”
“Don’t make your love too obvious”

The boy
didn’t say anything else besides
“this is lovely”,
eyes heavy and wet.

Two weeks later we found the skulls,
hidden in the muddy dirt like someone placed them
carefully,
afraid they’d break.

Today in 2013, I write a poem for a boy,
but this time it’s inked in red.
It is about a boy who looked like the grim reaper -
A gun -
A graveyard.
I gave it to him in the winter,
his tombstone cold like black ice
as I put the paper down,
pushing away an almost-dead rose.
And even though I knew he couldn’t
say anything,
I still wanted to hear him say
in his 14 year old voice –

“this is lovely.”
Blank Spaces

Let’s you and I sit for a minute
to find out what happens when you
let the conversation dry out,
and crumble away.

We are so afraid of that silence.
That silence, when the laughter dies down.
Where we fidget, and struggle
and we wait, until someone
hastily finds words to fill in
the uncomfortably close blank spaces
which press in on us until we
break them apart.

Can we not sit comfortably
with no sound between us
save our breathing and
the clipping whir of the ceiling fan?
Without feeling the need to hide
that beautiful silence
with forced verbal exchanges
and laughter that doesn’t reach our eyes.

right: The Shire
Sammy Struzzieri
Look. Look closer.

Hanging off the cross bars, sliding off the serifs, hiding in the bowls and crevices of these words and letters there is a chess match. The players are two men in suits, one dark olive, the other pale vanilla; one mustachioed, the other barefaced; one grinning like a madman, the other smiling softly and silently.

*Turn the page, then turn back. Look closer.*

Prancing out of prepositions, dancing in the verbs, peeking out of the o in noun, there lies a game of cards. The players are an envious snake and an albino mongoose alternating rounds of bestial combat and a civil, if slightly passive aggressive, exchanging of jacks and knights and queens. One is sporting a stovepipe top hat, the other a crown.

*Close the book. Open it again. Look closer.*

Lurking in the gluey binding, tittering behind title text, beating its fists on the cover, there is the euphonious clash of gladiators. Their screams fall in and out of harmony and discord. and although they are clad in armor green and white, the rest of them is indiscernible. They are massive and godly and deafening, yet here they are. Caught in the pages. Everything perfect. Everything just...

"...So, do we kill them?" superpowered Cassandra Pilgrim said, her words echoing like the drop of a hanged man. All that could be heard was the hum of the volkswagen and the roar of the river running alongside the road. The party of four all drew in a quiet breath as the criminal silence gave its final kicks.

"No. No! Of course not," said Jason Leftbridge, superpowered and sat in the back seat. "Right...guys?"

"I don't know, Jay," said unsuperpowered Nick Smith, his eyes on the road, his right hand intertwined with Cassandra's left.

"We can't just...we can't...Nick, how could you even-"

"I said I don't know, Jason."

"I think we should." Like a lovely (although unsuperpowered) necromancer Danielle Hannigan resurrected Lady Silence once more. The three other passengers all knew the weight behind her words, Jason especially. Shortly after the two had first met, Dani was captured by Wallace Osterhagen. Wallace Osterhagen, superpowered Wallace Osterhagen, was the Rat King, the leader of the extremist Rats, the Loki to the Volkswagen Avengers. As Jason thought about her endlessly and memorized the sound of her message machine, Danielle tried to out Osterhagen's malevolence to the world so mesmerized by the emerald eyes she was immune to. Before her capture, she was Lilacs After Sunset to Jason. After her escape she was something different. He didn't know what, other than that it said "I think we
should.” when confronted with the question of ending people’s lives. And thus, the silence. And thus, the almighty...

Silence could be felt in the upper right corner of Wallace’s mind. It was adjacent to whispered mysteries and only a couple of neurons away from the spat infidelities of his followers. He always made notice of those when he was touring the caverns of his eyes and mind, so he often stumbled upon the silences on his way. Was he surprised to see the Hudson Girl, together with Danielle, the one that got away? Yes. The Hudson Girl had saved the sailors aboard a ship he attempted to destroy and had the nerve to do it in front of one of their camera phones. Although Wallace cared little about the aging immigrant workers aboard the cursed boat (some small part of him, several million neurons back, was even happy that they lived), the Hudson Girl’s ensuing viral stardom overshadowed the Rats declaration of power, and that was the root of his fury. To see her paired with the girl who could have unmasked him to the world, ruined his plans to unite the people of earth under the Rat, yes, it surprised him. Dare he say it, it even scared him. Mousing over their minds, he felt something different than the usual click of thoughts. There was a pulse. Something, a voice, told him that the time of Rats was coming. He had felt the tides of war, he had heard the drums, but the sudden imminence was unexpectedly terrifying. In the months since he found his powers he had changed much. As his talent for control grew, his ambitions grew with them. There was that voice, that great green voice, guiding him, making him stronger, but underneath everything was Wallace Osterhagen, a boy with fire in his eyes, but a boy all the same. He would not let that boy stop him. He may have been scared. He may have been surprised. But he was definitely...

"Prepared" was Trina Kissinger’s middle name. Actually, it was legally “Danger”, but she’d left that behind a long time ago. It was fitting when it meant she was a danger to herself. She was a true New York vagabond, sneaking into museums at Night and avoiding her evermore abusive father by day. Her father. She didn’t like to think about her father. She didn’t like to think about what she did to her father. The more her power consumed her, the more “Danger” felt like a warning, like some cackling Fates’ teatime joke. The other Trina, the Queen Trina Danger Kissinger of the Mystical Land Praeteritum, had lived in her mind for 17 years, populating playdates and the scribbles on the sides of Math Notebooks. But no longer. Trina had cut the Danger to cut the Queen. She had been failing, until Wallace.

He found her covered in mud, in the middle of a storm, having had just obliterated two policemen. She only ever remembered bits and pieces when the Queen reigned in her consciousness, but she knew enough to feel as destroyed as the whining police car crunched like a can a couple hundred feet away.
He brought her in. With his help, she had regained control. Those eyes of his, so like the verdant hue of the Queen's royal garb, sedated the imaginary monarch like elephant tranquilizer. Perhaps most satisfying of all, she felt her other half's power equalizing, flowing into her. She couldn't yet vaporize a fifty foot radius, but more and more she could materialize her thoughts in front of her, an ability previously found only in her most adrenalinized moments, when the Queen emerged.

And as he helped her, she helped him. She had heard of the Rats and she had envied their acts of zealous justice. Wallace, as the Rat King, was ready to make the world a better place, and he was willing to do whatever it took. When he revealed that to her, when he told her her part in his plan, her loyalty grew manifold. She was going to be his Champion. The Tyrant she had been, the murderer, would fade away in the glory of the World of Rats.

She wasn't just a Champion, though. He was so magnetic you couldn't help but follow him, but as they grew closer, Trina sensed he was desperately lacking in terms of friends. And so that's what they'd become, spending long nights talking about their utopia and their plans on bringing everyone there.

So when Wallace had come to tell her that it was time, she simply reminded him of her new middle name. And underneath those powerful eyes, he grinned. They hugged.

"You're getting better at that."
"Thanks," Wallace said, still smiling. It was scary, but it was time. He closed his eyes, and felt the Rat Army all around him. Many of them would die. It was a shame, but they were rats. Their strength was in the...

"...Swarms of them, Jason. There are going to be swarms of them." Dani said, her eyes closed and her head leaning against the window. "You haven't seen his followers. They'll do anything for their King. They will die to kill us."
"Dani..." Jason said. Her name still felt perfect on his tongue. Contradicting her took the utmost strength.
"Jason, I think she's-"
"Nick, let me-" He felt much more comfortable interrupting Nick. Best-friends were like that.
"Jason, I just think-"
"Guys." Cassandra spoke like iron. Over the past few months, she had become somewhat of a leader. Her thunderous determination had united them, trained them, given them a strategy. The question of killing had come up before, but it had always been conveniently shoo'd away and forgotten. They could all hear it murmuring in their mind, a small part of the potpourri of feelings that came with the buildup to the event. This event. It was important, they all knew it, Cassandra and Jason especially. Even now, the river grew louder the closer they got to their destination. It had gone from a growl to a roar. "Jason, talk. Nick, you gloriously
handsome devil, shut the hell up for a second.”

They all laughed quietly. Dani even cracked a half-smile. Cassandra and Nick’s relationship had anchored the Volkswagen Avengers in a way; their devotion for each other had grown into a devotion for the cause. They’d almost lost each other, and Cassandra’s powers had emerged as a means to be together again. After a brief residency in Cassandra’s home town of Carolina Beach, Nick’s parents had moved to New York, and she had flown across the coast to reunite with him. There was a power in that. Incredible power.

When they finished laughing, they just sat there for a second, enjoying the warmth they felt in their stomachs. Jason sighed.

“Go ahead, Jason,” Dani said, looking over at him. “Please.”

Okay. So Wallace Osterhagen is evil,”

“I think we’ve established that,” said Cassandra.

“The rest of the world hasn’t. Why?”

“He’s got powers, Jason. Like you,” Dani said.

“Well, yeah, but he’s not Mysterio,” Jason paused. “Spiderman villain. Hypnotized people a lot. He’s not him. Sure, his powers cloud over the bad things they do, but people like the Rats because they seem like they have good intentions. They claim they’re fighting for a better world, and the world is crappy enough for people to believe them. But they’re not. They’re...they’re just redistributing the crap-piness—”

“Jay. Stop saying that word.” Nick said.

“Sorry. Right,” Jason smiled. “Thanks. Okay. Osterhagen helps people sometimes, saves them, even, but there’s always crossfire. He doesn’t pay attention to the little people. It’s like, you lose a pawn, oh well. But those pawns have lives and families and stories to be told someday. The Rats are Wallace’s pawns, and by killing them we’re...Okay, I’ll say it. We’re no better than he is.” Jason averted his eyes from the rest of the passengers. After a few seconds, Dani spoke:

“Jason, Wallace says he wants to help people, but it’s all a lie. It’s one of his mirages. If he keeps going, he’ll rule the world. That’s why we’re here. That’s why we have to stop him. You’ve seen those message boards we hacked into. Whatever this new plan of his is, if it goes through, we might be doomed. We have to take him down, whatever it takes. We have to match him.” The car sped down the street in silence while Jason thought about what he was going to say. Finally, he opened his mouth.

“We can be warrior-heroes, we can charge valiantly into battle and squash the little ones beneath our feet. Or, we can be superheroes.” Jason paused. “That’s our choice.”

“Not all of have superpowers,” Dani said.

“No, but you have power.” Jason put his hand over Dani’s. “Besides, Batman didn’t have superpowers either, so—”

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Danielle leaned over and kissed Jason on the mouth. Cassandra and Nick let out a...

...Cheers rang through Wallace’s ears. He stood in the principal’s office of Hawkroot Academy, the upstate New York boarding school that had been the home base of the Rats since their humble beginnings. Wallace first discovered his powers when apprehending the previous inhabitant of the office, a pedophile who Wallace had bent into turning himself in. He was a hero to his fellow students, and that admiration was very easily morphed into zealous loyalty. After controlling the students, he controlled the teachers, who grew disinterested in the military state their place of work was becoming. No one asked questions because Wallace erased those questions. As the Rats grew throughout the world, Hawkroot remained a secret. And this was the room where it all began.

“RATS!” Wallace howled. The crowd answered, louder.

“RATS!” Wallace returned, somehow even louder. And yet, the crowd bested him once more. The sound was deafening. Wallace smiled. One last time, perhaps...

“...Rats.” Nick slammed on the breaks. Jason and Danielle broke away from each other.

“Rats as in ‘Aw, rats, we’re out of gas?’” Jason winced.

“I would never stoop to such obscenity.” Nick’s grim tone offset the effectiveness of the joke. He pointed toward the horizon. “Rats.”

The green forest shook like it were being throttled. It could have been a burst of wind, a hurricane. It wasn’t.

A fist slammed against Cassandra’s window. She screamed and swore. Heads whipping to the origin of the sound, they realized that while they were focussing on the horde in front of them, another much closer one was emerging from their starboard side. A baseball bat came next and glass was sent cascading into the air. The air was Cassandra’s domain. In half a second, the shards slowed and froze, before being fired back at the crowd. There were screams as they imbedded themselves into the the body parts most vital for swinging weapons and charging an enemy. None of them were lethal, but Cassandra saw many a face contorted in pain. One was a boy, no older than 14 or 15. She grimaced for a moment, then stopped. They had trained for this.

“Right back window, open! Jason!”

Cassandra shot a burst of air at the Rats, holding them off for a moment. Nick rolled the window down, Danielle sank in her seat and Jason squeezed her hand once before jumping out in perfect spiderman style. As the swarm began to get up again, Jason ran at them fast, too fast to be human, and beleaguered them with punches.
“Nick! River, now!”
“River-ing!” Nick yelled, and plunged the car into the water. It swirled around them, filling the car with weightlessness. Dani and Nick felt the water beating at them, daring them to take a breath and give host. Bound by their seatbelts, they would only last a few more seconds. Cassandra panicked. *Do it now,* said the pulse, the voice that had been with her this whole time. *Now.* Then, Cassandra opened her...

"...Eyes are the gateway to the soul, they say," said Wallace, sitting in the forest with Trina. The plan was almost ready. He had felt so sure, so powerful in front of his Rats, but now he was scared again. When he looked at Trina, when he thought about all that she was, when he thought about what would become of her after the plan, what she didn't know...He was, for the first time in a long while, unsure. He didn't feel like a Rat King. He felt like Wallace Osterhagen. "What do you think about that?"

"I don't know," said Trina, as he knew she would. "My mom was into that kind of soul stuff, but I lost a stomach for it pretty damn soon."

"I've always thought my eyes were empty." Wallace said. *Do it,* said the Rat King.

"You're eyes are beautiful," Trina said. Did she mean that? Or did he just tell her to say it? *Do it now, boy,* said the Rat King.

Wallace gulped. This was it. He put out his hand "Ready?"

Trina smiled and Trina held his hand. It was too much. Her smile was too much. He couldn't do this, he couldn't do any of this. All that he had done was...terrible. He was a monster, he had to stop, he had to stop now-

*NOW, BOY,* said the Rat King, said the Great Green Voice, said the Man in the Suit, said the Snake, said the Gladiator: NOW.

Wallace squeezed her hand tight. She began to glow. Trina's power, her imagination, was being channelled through Wallace's vast network of minds reaching powers greater than ever before. She was smiling, she was laughing. Then she screamed.

"Wallace, she's waking up! It's the Queen! Wallace, please-

"I am the Rat King."

The forest exploded. Wallace was dead. Trina was dead. And the Rat King and his Queen of Praeteritum walked like...

Gods and superheroes frequently overlapped, Jason thought as he watched the Volkswagen rocket out of the water encased in a great globe of water. I mean, you had Thor from Marvel, that Jack Kirby New Gods series from DC, and EV-ERYONE’S tried to do a Hercules comic at some point or anoth-

His thoughts were interrupted by a mammoth orb of water that sent him
reeling to the ground. As he looked up, more of these massive raindrops were being pelted at the Rats.

“Sorry Jay!” Nick yelled from an open window, his voice slightly muffled by the gurgling shield surrounding him. He didn’t have much to be sorry about. But Cassandra, her body glowing bright white was a little busy at the moment.

“Dani?” Jason called up to him.

“She’s fine!” Nick yelled back. He stuck his head back in the volkswagen. She was still sitting slouched in the back seat, cradling something with a dark leather jacket. Before Nick could look closer, the air cracked and everything went dark, then green, then dark. A noise like the splitting of worlds send the Rats to the ground. Nick stuck his head out the shattered window. Floating 1000 feet above the ruins of the forest was a gladiator in green armor. Nick looked to Cassandra, too. He saw the girl that had saved him back at Carolina Beach. He was lost, lost in the water, and she brought him to shore. He saw the girl he met in dreams when they were apart. He saw the girl who whisked him off his New Yorker feet. He saw the girl he loved. But he also saw a gladiator, all in white. It was time. He looked at her. Take Jason and Go. I love you.

As the car alighted on the ground, Nick saw Cassandra as a speck in the sky, carrying another speck. He also saw dozens, upon dozens of Rats. Nick fixed his posture. He stood strong, but he knew he’d never see his Hudson Girl again. One of them, the young boy with glass in his knees, leapt for him. He never reached his target. With an ear shattering bang, the boy fell to the ground. A bullet buried itself in his chest. He squealed and was silenced. Dani emerged from the car, pistol drawn from the jacket that had hidden it. She points to the sky.

“This is not our battle. Go home.” she said. The Rats looked at each other, and they looked at the bleeding boy on the ground. In his fading eyes they saw themselves and they saw the blood on their hands. With that, Dani pushed a very stunned Nick into the car and they drove to the...
...The ground grabs at Jason's feet. He's normally fast, so fast, but now he can hardly moved. The Rat King stands feet away from him, his teeth grit, his eyes ablaze with cold fury and tears. He had felt the loss of his Queen. He had felt it like a million nails on chalkboard, like a million minds being violently ripped from his own. He had felt it like the loss of his only friend. But all is not lost for the Green Rat King. The Hudson Girl is a fool. She had overexerted herself, leaving her poor friend alone. He's a strong boy, and one that embodies the ideals of his armor well. The Rat King can see all of this in the boy's mind. It is the Rat King's mind, now.

A volkswagen breaks through trees.

Jason can move again. He tries to go for his opponent, but he keeps running in circles, faster and faster and faster. *Fall on your sword, boy. Fall on your sword.*

A volkswagen speeds through forest.

Jason feels sick. He can't take much more. He's lost. He's failed. He sees Spider-Man lying broken on the ground, his mind no longer his. His will, his world, his web-shooters broken around him. *Fall on your sword, boy. Fall on your sword.*

The orchestra crescendos. A 1997 Volkswagen Beetle smashes into the Rat King's back. The Rat King is sent flying. Jason, free of his own feet, is also sent flying. The Rat King slams into a tree. He is still alive. Jason lands in a big puddle of mud. He is saved.

Beginnings and endings aren't present in the place where the two gladiators play their game. So although she only entered on the day she died, Trina Danger Kissinger has always existed in the paper omnipotence. She calls it Praeteritum and has crowned herself Queen Trina Danger Kissinger's successor. She's started calling herself Queen now, and sometimes she finds a little girl also named Trina Danger who loves dinosaurs and museums. She lives in the real world, which is a shame, but the Queen is always there to visit when she needs it.

When she's fighting for her kingdom, the Queen is always exploring. She peeks into the Praeteritums of other boys and girls, and the darker, livelier Praeteritums of adults as well, although those are much smaller in terms of square feet. She does this for all eternity, so one day she happens upon the center of all Praeteritums. It is a chess match, it is a card game, and it is a match of gladiators.

"Hey, hey you two!"

The players make no notice of her.

"I know you two. I remember you. You're the voices. You guided us. You gave us our powers to play your sick little game."

The players look over, turning their ever changing heads slowly.

"Over and over again with you two, that's how it works doesn't it? Good versus evil, blah blah blah. Immutable and unstoppable. I've had all of eternity to
figure it out, and I must say,” Queen Trina Danger Kissinger snaps her fingers and
the masses of her imaginary armies line up behind her. “I am not amused. Maybe
I can't kill you,” The forces of good and evil begin to back away. “But Wallace was
just a kid, and you deserve Hell for what you did to him.”

The masses charge.

She triumphs.

Jason gets up slowly, wiping the grime on his jacket. A splash of water
sends him to the ground, sparkly clean. When he opens his eyes again, he sees Cas-
sandra, laughing, tangly haired and alive. A small sphere of water still floats in her
hand. Carrying her like a Disney Prince is Nick, grinning like a goofball. He takes
out his camera with a “Smile for the Camera!” and Jason is blinded by the flash.
When he opens his eyes again, he sees Danielle walking out of the volkswagen.

“I was driving, you know.” she says, cracking the first real smile he's ever
seen her give.

“I guess we're square, then?”

“Yeah.” They kiss for a perfectly long time. “I think you have to kill him,”
she says, motioning to the Wallace Osterhagen sprawled twitching against a tree. “I
think that's how this works. But you're not going to, are you?”

“His mirage is gone. The world knows who he is, what he is,”

“And if they forget?”

“Then the Volkswagen Avengers will have to remind them.” Jason says.
They kiss once more. He grins. His origin story is ended. Now the real fun begins.
Here lie the wanderers, the ones without rest.  
Here lie the thinkers, the jailers, the best.  
Here lie the ones with the stones in their shoes  
who let themselves lie, but never to lose.  
Here lies the girl, the sneerer, the cruel,  
Here lies the boy, who thought he was, too.  
Here lies your maker, who did try to see  
if he could indeed make you  
the best you could be.  
Say goodnight to your soldiers,  
and all their good work.  
Visit their battlefields,  
where they no longer lurk.  
Goodnight to the leaders,  
Goodnight to the slaves.  
Goodnight to the smithies,  
getting up from their lathes.  
Their weapon is broken now,  
shattered by fate.  
You must really be going now,  
lest you be late.  
But one final goodnight,  
will bring rest to them all,  
farewell to the one  
who tried to cushion  
your fall.

Casey Hall

Goodnight

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That's All Folks!