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THE NEW ABSURDIST

Anthology Vol.1

Featuring:

Ray Fracalossy
Philip Overby
Ed Clayton
Dave Gorgonzolla
Brutal Dreamer
John Edward Lawson
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Benjamin Coult
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The New Absurdist Anthology Volume 1

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Published by
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This book is dedicated to the memory of:
Ronald Wilson Reagan (1911-2004)
The real man who brought punk rock to America in the 1980's
May God Almighty bless the memory he lost completely
in the late 1990's

The Bable of Convents

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THE SHAPE OF FISH
By Jeffrey S. Callico

I entered the pet store and started looking at the puppies. All of them were asleep; not one of them was awake. There were about ten puppies to look at. They were all asleep in their little cages.

Then I went to look at the fish. But before I could look at the fish I had to pass a lot of pet materials like leashes and pet food and preventatives and collars and tanks and other pet things I didn't understand the use for. The fish tanks were at the end of the aisle. I approached them like a plane coming in for a landing—I was very careful not to approach too fast.

Not many people were in the store, mainly, I thought, because all of the puppies were asleep. Most people, it seems, come into pet stores to look at the puppies. This store currently had no kittens to look at, so that was not a factor. And fish are really boring to look at unless you are a person who is into color schemes and the shape of fish and the like.

I am into fish, but less so than puppies. I really like looking at puppies.

Standing in front of a tank of fish, I watched a red one and a black-and-white striped one and a miniature shark and a guppy. They seemed not to know there were other fish around them, like they were all alone in the fish tank.

Well, I felt alone too.

Just then, a girl came up and asked if I needed help. I thought, Do you think I need help looking at the fish?, but decided not to actually say this to her. She was a young girl who appeared fragile emotionally, so I just said, "No, thanks, I'm fine, just browsing," then she smiled and walked off. I don't know exactly where she went.

I got tired of looking at the fish. I went back to the puppies. Now one of them was awake—a German Shepherd—but had its head between its paws. The eyes were open and it was just staring straight ahead. Not at me, not at anything, really. Certainly not at the pet materials.

I tried to get its attention by waving my hands and kneeling down to get in its field of vision, but it kept staring. It looked very depressed.

I left the store and went home and when I got there turned on the TV and fell asleep and dreamed I was a puppy in a store and that no one ever came to look at me except a small child who wandered in and tugged at her mother's coat and asked, "Can we get it? Can we get it?" and all the mother said was, "No, I hate puppies, they're so messy. Let's go to the toy store, okay?" and my puppyhood continued until I died and they carried me out in a black bag and dumped me into a ravine and the crows came and ate me, leaving only bones and a skull, which disintegrated into the soil and in the autumn was covered by leaves which rotted into a sealant, entombing me forever and ever and ever.

CORNFLAKES
By Ray Fracalossy

While eating breakfast this morning, I am surprised by a bomb hidden in my cornflakes. I quickly examine the box, just to make sure A BOMB is not listed among the ingredients. It's not. I check the front of the box, uncertain if it had stated that for a limited time, a bomb would be included in each package. Nothing. No mention of bombs or weaponry of any sort. I sniff at the bomb. Should I just eat it? A bomb may very well be considered a delicacy in some countries. Hell, I've eaten stranger things.

I listen. It's still ticking. I'm not sure when it's set to go off. I eat quickly. When I finish off the last of the cereal in the bowl, and lick the remaining flakes from the explosive, I let out a sigh of relief. Mission accomplished, I think. Then it dawns on me that I'm still hungry. I look down at the bomb in the bowl angrily, knowing that just because I won the first round does not mean I will be so lucky this next time. I refill the bowl with cereal and milk, sweat beginning to form on my brow. I was so close. I had survived, but here I was tempting fate once again, simply because the only other clean bowl belongs to my roommate. I can't use it. We have an agreement.

Again I finish safely. As soon as I am through, I place the bomb back into the cereal box. I'm returning it to the grocery store where I bought it right after I shower.

I grab a fresh bar of soap and remove it from its package. A scorpion sits atop my spring scented bar, clinging tightly to it. I shower carefully, very slowly, with so much focus that I never hear my roommate return home. When I am through showering, I gently place the soap into the soap dish, dry off and dress. I return downstairs to find my roommate sitting at the kitchen table enjoying a bowl of cereal.

THE DIRT CAT NAP
By Philip Overby

as Emily Vanderbilt

While my cat was sleeping I poured a bucket of dirt on his head, and he didn't seem to mind so I took him in the backyard and dug a hole. I tossed him in the hole and when he woke up, he meowed from underneath the ground, and I kept my ear to grass to hear how he was doing. The more seconds passed, the weaker his meows became. I quickly dug him out and knocked the dirt off of him and gave him some catnip. He seemed happy.

I felt so bad for burying him in the dirt that I gave him a shovel and allowed him to do the same to me. My cat just sat there, looking at the shovel as I crammed myself into the cat-sized hole I had buried him in. He licked his paw and then began nuzzling his head into the piles of dirt. He purred and slid in the dirt until it began to fall down on top of me.

I was so pleased that he exacted revenge on me that I stayed in the dirt. When I began to lose air, I meowed for my cat to let me out. But he couldn't. He didn't have hands. So I screamed and screamed until I woke up in my bed, my cat rubbing a wet rag on my head. He made me sip from a cup of water and then stared into my eyes.

"You're going to be fine," he said and we danced the whole night through.

THE MAGNIFICENT BASTARDS
By headsfromspace

They went out riding in the desert that day, and it was incredibly hot, and they were riding all over the place kicking up terrific clouds of sand and dust, and all the time they were getting thirstier and thirstier, and their horses were sweating like crazy.

But then Nico stopped in the middle of nowhere, just great yellow hills of sand and the sound of the wind whispering through them, and the hot, blind eye of the sun staring down on their boiling heads. “Hey,” he said, “we forgot to bring the gold.” “We’d better go back for it,” said one of the men, a short, swarthy Mexican. “We’re sure going to need it.”

So they all sat there on their dripping horses thinking about the gold and smoking thin cigars, and the cigar smoke was everywhere and the horses were coughing like mad. “What do you say, boys?” said Nico finally. “Go back for the gold, eh?” He was chewing his cigar to bits. The other men, faces shadowed by dusty sombreros, nodded their heads in agreement. They were only paid a dollar a day, so the thought of the gold was very sweet to them, and they wanted it and loved it better than their mothers.

The red, pregnant sun, swollen and hideous, had dropped to the horizon by the time Nico and the gang finally streaked back out of the desert, scattering the gap-toothed prairie women and their illiterate children like ping pong balls as they tore up the main street of town, pulling up their screaming, foam-flecked horses outside the Gold Dust Saloon. Then Nico opened his dust-choked mouth, revealing the black stumps of rotted teeth. “Let’s wet our whistles,” he said. So they all tied up their horses at the trough, and the horses sucked that trough dry in two seconds, snorting happily because the water was so cool and fine.

The saloon was full of drunken cowboys and hookers, and the cowboys had diseases because of the hookers, and they were surly.

“Howdy, Nico,” said Ron the bartender, spitting into a whiskey glass and wiping it clean with a dirty towel. “What’ll it be?” “Whiskey all around,” answered Nico, and the men all nodded and smiled, because whiskey sounded real good. “Comin’ up,” said Ron, and he poured out the whiskey lickety split. Nico and the gang gulped their whiskies and slammed the shot glasses down on the bar. The good Kentucky whiskey burned their dusty throats clean and filled their stomachs with mud. “Set ya up again?” asked Ron. He had a hole where his left eye had been, and in it Nico could see twinkling stars and myriad galaxies and quasars swirling around and around, and it made him dizzy and excited at the same time. “You bet,” said Nico, and the gang all nodded their heads in agreement, glad to be out of the hot desert, and they watched the hookers with hungry eyes.

“By the way,” said Ron as he filled their glasses with a practiced hand, “you all left something the last time you were in here.” He lifted several heavy burlap sacks from under the bar and plopped them down. The air was suddenly filled with the exciting smell of gold dust and greed. “Why, it’s the gold!” exclaimed Nico. “I’d plum forgot about it.” “The gold!” echoed the gang. Huge grins split their hairy, smelly faces. “Well, I guess we got what we came for,” said Nico, finishing his whiskey and wiping his mouth with the back of his strong, sunburnt hand. “We’ll just be going now.” “Not so fast,” said a voice behind them. The voice was filled with death and the familiar rattle of tobacco phlegm.

Nico and the gang turned around on their barstools.

Facing them was Andy, Terror of the Pecos, and his gang of swarthy, leering fools. He was pointing a silver six-shooter at Nico, and its bullets were silver, and he wore a silver belt buckle, and his boots were tipped with silver too. Silver he loved, but gold was his secret passion, and his scrawny wife was sick of hearing about it, and his children, sickened by rickets and scurvy, had sold themselves into slavery to escape his evil obsession. "I'll take that gold," he said confidently. Death hung in the still, quiet air, restlessly waving his scythe back and forth, and the hookers had gone pale, and their garters hung limp upon their shapely legs. "Well, well," sneered Nico, "look what the cat puked up." The two gangs stood glaring at each other, their faces distorted by bloodlust and pock-marks, hands resting loosely on their holsters. Andy scowled. "Give me the gold, Nico." "Come and take it," said Nico, cool as ice.

Quick as a whip, they all began blazing away with their guns, and the air grew thick with gunsmoke, and the hookers started choking on it. "Aaarrrggghhh!" screamed Andy. He was shot full of holes, and all his gang too, and they collapsed on the floor, bleeding all over the place, and the hookers stole their boots.

Nico and his gang were shot full of holes as well, but their blood was dried up because of the desert so they didn't bleed, and their flesh was dry and desiccated by the terrific heat of the sun, so the bullets just went right through them, and their flesh puckered up and closed over the bullet holes so they didn't die, but went right on living and drinking whiskey and spending their gold dust up until about 1900 or so.

After all the killing was over, Nico and his gang sat down at the bar and ordered some beers, for killing was thirsty work, and the sheriff and his deputies arrived just in the nick of time and dragged the bodies away, and the hearts of the men were aflame with pride, because of Nico and how he had stood up to Andy and killed him, and the entire West was soon aflame with the news of it, and the forests were aflame too, but they never found out why.

And the hookers stood around admiring them for being so brave, and the men showered them with gold dust and took them upstairs for sex, and caught diseases from them, which crippled them in their old age.

In the morning Nico called them all together and they sat at the bar drinking coffee and tearing at hunks of delicious jerked beef and smoking hand-rolled cigarettes. "Well, boys," said Nico, "what do you think? Go riding out in the desert again, eh?" "What the hell would we want to do that for?!" they all screamed. Nico just grinned at them and smoked his cigarette down to the nub in one puff. "C'mon boys!" he said. "We're young and strong, and our thighs are like steel. This town stinks like a corpse and my nose aches for the high, clean smell of desert sand."

They all grumbled at the thought of another day in the desert, but they got off their stools, and stuffing their pockets full of gold dust, walked out into the bright, new sunlight blinking and cursing, and mounted their stiff, castrated horses.

"There goes Nico," said the townspeople, laughing and spitting tobacco juice all over the place, "he's a rum customer, isn't he?" They all watched, stupefied, as Nico and his gang went tearing down the street in a cloud of dust, nearly running down the Widow Johannsen who was 82 and crippled up something fierce. "He's cute as a button," she declared, chortling like a loon.

And that's the end of this story, and there ain't no more.

THE BIG RED SUITCASE
By Charles F. McKenzie

"Thou shalt drive into the dark of night with a naked woman beside you"

Trust me, there's more where that allegedly came from but I'm saying nothing. Let's get on with it.

Okay, so I have this girlfriend—or should I say girl fiend—whose name happens to be Lara. My father loves her, probably mostly because of her name—Doc Zhivago is his favorite motion picture—but also because she has a nice set. He's into that still.

Well, so am I, but…

Anyway, Lara's okay. I mean, really, she is. It's just that sometimes she goes off on these tangents. But doesn't every woman?

Take the other day. She calls me up and the first thing she says is "I'm outta toothpaste can you bring some back?" I start to respond and then she says "Oh and my sister's gettin' nutty again. Man this carpet's dirty. Can you believe what they show on TV now? You don't KNOW how bad I want a puppy."

And on and on. You get me?

I'm going to call her Lara the Tangent Babe. (Believe me, she is a babe. It's just the mouth.)

So today I walk in and she's packing. Got that big red suitcase out on the bed and is just packing away. Blouses here, slacks there, brassieres here, panties there, etc., etc. And I'm watching her. I say, "Whatcha doin?" And she says nothing, like I'm some kind of ghost. By this time the suitcase is crammed. "Where you headed off to?" I ask, but still I get nothing. She slams the suitcase shut and latches it up then heaves it past me and heads down the hall, the stairs, past the kitchen and out the door. Gone.

Happy tangents, babe.

UNTITLED
By Odradek

The horse out in the barn, that kicks and screams its ravenous blood tainted fury, its head now is in the doorway. My son comes home from school and he can not get in the door, such is the width of the horse's warm blooded complexities. He stands outside looking through the window trying to understand what is happening to his father. What can I say to him? I must stay here until the horse is gone and there is no way to explain.

HOUSE OF THE DEAD ONES
By Brutal Dreamer

The question again persisted into the night, to be answered only with deathly visions. Hours elapsed before I awoke, but the recollections of what transpired tried to unfold but failed to impress itself deeply into my mind. That was until this night:

The name of the old woman was Agatha or was it Lucy. I can't seem to remember. The minutes here passed very slowly. I was encompassed by a thick mist and a running creek; a menacing evil shrouds the little brook. Nights were dreadfully severe; mornings promise peace from the horrid visions. It was not daybreak and the moon was high, the blackness offered a velvet blanket over the skies and the night spoke. Raising of the dead or even the evil spirits was what I most sought after in my dreams; through devilish incantations.

I saw the woman each night, her countenance exemplified calmness whilst she slept. She cast off the most indescribable feeling of evil; a void that bestows itself in deathly state. The ensuing dreams continued, the elixir of these suffocating visions were most intoxicating. A venomous scowl played upon her lips, such a blasphemous glare.

Each night I veiled my fear, I attempted to be a brave explorer of the realms where the dead never rests; and certainly not peacefully. This devious energy sustained me; my hard labors would soon end, and before too long I'd have the answer to these agonizing dreams that haunted me. Great God! I knew I would have secrets to the undead, the answers to the universal question: What happens when we die?

This night I was oppressed with a raging fever, and fear seeped profoundly within me to utter depths of pain; the wind created an uneasiness inside me as the ghostly curtain blew across me and sent a violent chill down my spine. It was a dreary night. With anxiety that amounted to the deepest agony I ever felt; the old lady infused a spark of terror that made my bones ache.

Rain rhythmically beat dismally against the window as if the dead were trying to find their way through the glass. The candle flickered its last few teases, by the dying glimmers of the sputtering flame, I saw her yellow serpentine eyes open; her breath raspy, she convulsed to life. The infusing life in an inanimate being and letting the dead speak, awakened a longing within myself and I bent down to the old woman. I desired these answers with great passion and pleaded for these dreams to give them to me though this old woman.

When I awoke from the dream, I felt a strong inclination to walk outside. I traversed so merrily down a long slender path, over a wooden bridge to a cottage. My heart palpitated fast; and I walked hastily toward the cottage with irregular unsure steps and I was greeted with a warm hug.

"My dear, old woman, Agatha, you came back." a voice uttered. "Dr. Frankenstein was becoming quite worried."

THE MAN IN THE MACKINTOSH
By Ivan Skavinsky Skavar

August 23rd, 1974: 3:25 PM—Santa Monica, California, U.S.A:

An elderly man walks into a convalescent center wearing a dark Mackintosh overcoat, gold-framed sunglasses, an oversized brown bowler hat, and a pair of weatherbeaten tennis sneakers. He shambles up to the nurses station and slams a leather briefcase on top of the counter. A shrewish nurse with a bulbous nose (the nostrils of which are flared) spins around in her chair with a look of disgust spread across her lardaceous face, and starts to shout at the elderly man " Well I never.... Such hideous manners! Slamming a briefcase like that in a public.....", but before she can finish her contemptuous tirade, the elderly man has retrieved a fully loaded Revolver from his briefcase and pressed it firmly against her flared left nostril. A look of panic now erases that of disgust across her face, as the realization explodes in her; that she is about to Die..... She begins stammering; sputtering all sorts of unintelligible gibberish out of the corner of her mouth as the elderly man's frown wrenches itself upward into a shit-eating grin, and he begins speaking to her in Esperanto. "Mi amas vin, Grandajn Naztruojn.....Bonan nokton, Grandajn Naztruojn.....Bonan nokton.....", he whispers into her ear, as he fires a shot into her nostril, sending her neck jerking back violently as her body tumbles backwards out of her chair and spills to the grimy linoleum floor. Blood pools forth abundantly from her obliterated Nasal Cavity, as she flips about convulsively in the grumous puddle that engirdles her. The elderly man, gazing down at her contorted body with sinister glee, strategically fires off another 5 rounds into the nurses spasmodic body, gingerly places his revolver back into its briefcase (as if it were an infant), turns around in one quick swooping motion, and then hits the streets; disappearing into the crowds of sauntering civilians, as if he had never materialized at all .....

FINIS

*Extracted from the Novella "Breakfast with Bin Laden" by Ivan Skavinsky Skavar to be available soon through Nepenthes Press.

EAST END ZOMBIES
By Ed Clayton

They only come out at night. When you turn a corner and you smell death, it's not your imagination.

It's zombies.

In Bethnal Green, they scavenge out of dustbins and skulk along the shadows of the tube station like wounded hyenas. In Hackney, you might see them standing motionless behind the town hall, but they're more afraid of you than you are of them. For all their gruesome appearance, they only want to be left alone.

But a mile down Mare Street, in Leyton, we are definitely on the menu. They're not afraid of bright lights and their greatest weapon is the fact that most people treat them like big spiders, thinking that while they may look frightening, they're harmless.

Mistake.

"You're a long way from Hackney," you might yell as a zombie shuffles away from you; then you can say goodbye to your brain. They're organised in Leyton. They hunt in packs, because they've realised they can't take a man down alone. While fear is their greatest weapon, arousing terror in your prey only gets you so far. You can't chase a healthy man with dead legs, nor wrestle him to the ground with dead arms, but a pack of zombies coming at him from all sides will be successful six times out of ten. Women and children are their main targets. The smaller and weaker they are the better.

A zombie's second worst enemy is other zombies. Food is scarce with the enforced curfew and night watches run by people like me. One stray child's brain doesn't go far to feed a pack of starving zombies and fights over food are a common occurrence. There are many casualties. Occasionally, you might see limbs discarded at the side of the road.

Of course, there are no deaths, which brings me to the zombies' number one enemy.

Me.

*

There are two ways to stop a zombie. Set fire to it. Or cut off its head. If you can do both, that's better. Zombies have been known to continue wandering the streets without their heads, but this is an exception and a sightless zombie doesn't pose any real threat to civilians.

While the authorities are doing all they can to eradicate the infestation of the living dead in the East End, the problem seems to have escalated in the last few weeks and everyone is advised to be extremely vigilant—not to be confused with "vigilante"—mobs of which have sprung up in Walthamstow and Chingford.

I suggest everyone in the East End stay in groups and stay alert. If you can't do that, stay at home.

MOTH TUNNEL
By John Edward Lawson

A formation of ice cream trucks has been observed on the whore-izon. Jeremy watches, nervous sweat breaking out all over his body, the binoculars feeling as they they suddenly weigh a ton. “Yeah...do ‘er,” he blurts, fondling himself as he watches the ice cream trucks having their way.

Then something unprecedented happens. The ice cream trucks blow through the whore-izon’s diaphragm like some kind of sixty-minute Zulu man.

“Bloody shit!” Jeremy shrieks.

Ralphetta throws down her knitting needles in disgust. “What in tarnation is the problem with you?” Then she sees the binoculars being crushed by his grip. “Oh, you been peeking on Mother Nature again, right?”

“To hell with that! The damn diaphragm’s just been penetrated!”

At that moment Ralphetta—and every other woman in Key’s Hook—goes into convulsions. Jeremy temporarily forgets the threat posed by the renegade ice cream trucks and kneels beside his fallen sister. He prays for her now, like most Key’s Hook men are doing, then prays for himself.

Rustling can be heard under Ralphetta’s dress. Strange scrabbling noises that confuse Jeremy further. Before he has a chance to question what is happening, moths escape from under the dress. A flock of moths, thousands strong, billows out, flooding the room, causing him to pass out.

When he comes to things are even worse. His sister is curled up in the corner, rocking back and forth as she mindlessly sucks at her thumb. On top of that, his pockets are filled with loose razor blades. He’s got dozens of nicks and cuts from where they cut through the fabric while he was unconscious.

“Mother may I!” he mutters.

Ferocious roaring draws him to the window once more. He cautiously peers out, then ducks back behind the curtain. Could he have seen that right? He looks again. Moths by the millions are flooding the sky, blocking out the sun in some places. The fury of their tiny wings batting frenziedly has stirred up a rather impressive gust of wind. Refuse flows freely on the brutal air currents, like blood in an arterial maze.

The rest of the men are gathering out by Bob’s Cola; Jeremy joins them.

“What in tarnation!” Caleb shouts.

Several of the men folk agree that they’ve never heard of anything like it. More troubling than the moths, though, is the state of the community’s women.

“I seen what happened,” Jeremy yells, a bit too forcefully. The others eye him suspiciously. “Them ice cream trucks? You know the ones. Always prowlin’ around, tryin’ to find a way over here.”

“Uh-huh.”

“They busted through the damn diaphragm!” He describes their feat of Zulu sex prowess.

“God bless! If’n what you say is true...”

But it’s already too late. The lurid groan of engines is audible. Coming closer. Even more telling is the warbly, out of tune racket of classical compositions dumbed down to

electro-children-come-hither-beep-and-blip-music. Already small faces are pressing up against window panes, fascinated by the sound.

"My God," Toothless Epps cries. "Them varmints get ahold of our youngins and we can kiss the whole next generation adios!"

"Ain't no low-down calorie peddler gonna turn my Little Jimmy into a six thousand pound freak."

"Here here!"

The men shout slogans and clap each other on the back. In a way perhaps this trouble is a good thing. They haven't chanted slogans for quite some time. The only downer is the constant need to empty their pockets of loose razor blades.

Another downer announces itself: bullets fly through the air, battering rams burst through hastily constructed barricades—again, Zulu-like penetration. The children let out three cheers of "Hurrah!" whilst their would-be heroic guardians fall back. In every house catatonic women take no notice of the events unfolding around them.

* * *

"The machine is here!" Maxx Flav crows over the radio. The system comes alive with hoots and hollers, coordinates and attack orders. He presses himself against the radio so that the steady flow of vibrations might gratify him.

"Stop that shit, and keep to driving," Betty says. She's had just about enough of Maxx's poor behavior. Not only that, but he's running low on Orange Push-Ups. At least the stock of Italian Ice is holding up.

Don't you worry...oooh yeah...we're gonna turn these kids into crank monkeys on zombie juice yet...oh my God...oh yes..."

Betty goes up top to bombard geriatric men from the spit ball turret. They scatter like old daisy petals in a tornado. Then the darkness clears, and Betty looks up. What she sees can't possibly be right.

The millions of moths are coalescing into one massive airborne insect, something from Godzilla's worst nightmares. Hurricane force winds lash the trucks, rendering their spit balls useless. Up overhead as the moth creature is the ice cream truck ram plates are rendered useless. Further more, the moth ignores any attempts to bribe it with frozen sweets. Moth rage the likes of which even God has never seen rains down in merciless waves, pummeling the trucks into submission.

The men recoup, wiping the fear and befuddlement from their eyes. When they see the mighty winds rebuffing their children from approaching the ice cream vendors the men allow themselves a smile. Maybe there is a glimmer of hope after all.

"Yes!" they squeal. "Knock our kiddies on their hind sides!"

Betty makes sure to pelt them with Snow Cones as her truck passes, cursing the day she decided to test the diaphragm's mettle.

* * *

Necessity proves to be the moth of invention, routing the ice cream trucks and causing the men of Key's Hook to salivate at the thought of patenting and licensing their new protector. Unfortunately for them the moth beast has other plans. Amid cheers of "We

did it!" the men realize that the moth has not altered its aggressive posture; indeed, the glare it turns on them is far more hateful than the one it presented to the ice cream trucks.

The moth beast descends, cleansing the streets of scheming men. Left to their own devices the town's children flee into the wasteland, desperate in their search for a white whale with four wheels.

THE BANANA SUIT
By satan165

Things were not well in Rhinegold. Crime had overrun the once proud city and its people cowered in fear; awaiting the next evening news statistic. They were too small to ever have anything bigger then the Triple A minor-league baseball team, so maybe—secretly—they were eager to seek out this number of ill-repute which was the only quantitative example of their small town being #2 in aggravated assaults. At least they were in the top 3 for something.

Dave Barber sat listening to Hall and Oates and drinking Martel VSOP as he did nearly every day after his nightly shift at the chemical processing plant. Certainly the working conditions at Alberpul Polymers were unfit and he kind of figured with a decidedly non-professional diagnosis that he would be dead of stomach cancer within the decade, from the constant exposure to Tamrar7, a space-age non-stick solvent which he had no idea to what end it was used. His $327 dollar salary weekly was enough justification for the hazardous environment in which he sweat profusely 6 days a week.

Dave began to think after hearing "One on One" for the 7th time in a row—it was time to make a change. His mind's eye wandered to the box of extremely unstable C-4 under his bed...he considered a vicious bombing which would take his own life and poison the other townsfolk from the noxious gasses produced from such a explosion. He cared not for the sparing of innocent life as he sickly and without remorse decided that it had been approved by a higher authority to speak a piece about the poor treatment him and his fellow employees had scathed over them every day (nearly) while slaving for their meager pittance.

Dave walked to his closet.

He removed the yellow jumpsuit ("banana" he liked to refer to as the pigment of this jumpsuit; "yellow" was certainly not descriptive enough of the loud volume this obnoxious get-up amplified to any of those that caught a glimpse).

He added a bit of his trusty Dial soap bar to its 17-inch zipper and with a loud tearing noise, violently closed said zipper up to his neck. For a moment he considered the irony of using this cake of animal fat and other additives; probably the infamous Tamrar7 which he correctly guessed laced his lungs would find a much more practical occupation in the tiny tines of this zipper.

He laced up gigantic black boots and stomped his way out of his humble coach house and wandered to the downtown area of Rhinegold and took a self-appointed and created post at the corner of Forest View and Fullerton.

There he stood for many hours, only to smile back sarcastically at the many townies that graced the intersection and gaped at his wild ensemble.

The color yellow ("banana") signified his hatred for the system that exploited him and his innocent co-workers, all of whom also only risked the health at Alberpul only to support their family with little more then 3 bowls of wet oats a day. He knew that blowing up the HQ would have been unfit and morally wrong. Those reasons didn't prevent him from doing it; it was the open option of being able to don this banana set of coveralls and show truly how he despised his management.

And how were they to know? "They" being the management, media and local public that witnessed his anger and hatred as he calmly stood (then eventually sitting, and

sleeping) at the major intersection in this relatively tiny metropolis -- a group of groups who he knew, who he would will to understand, the wrong conditions in which he exert himself everyday, by transporting to the warehouse huge smoking containers of the aforementioned deadly and carcinogenic powder which often spilled and bubbled out onto his work denims and face and hands.

After 17 hours, a young man had the gall to approach Mr. Barber and ask him what he stood for.

"I stand for righteousness and all that is correct and conducive to happy living."

The young man considered this. He responded,

"I stand for all that is evil. But I cannot deduce the reason you choose to use a yellow jumpsuit to show your opinion."

"The jumpsuit is not yellow; it is banana. For a color is only that which appeals to the eye, my banana garments make their case for not only the eye, but also the taste buds. While it does not taste of banana, hopefully that fruity description can show you my desire to make a change!"

The young man considered this then spat into the gutter with a guttural moan. He leaned forward and took a giant lick of the man's chest and arm, both of which were covered with the banana jump suit.

"But I find that it does, indeed, taste of that tropical fruit. For what does that mean, and how so does it affect your original ideals, those which you wished to make me understand in order to "make a change"?"

Dave Barber was crushed. He never took the time to taste his own jumpsuit. Tears formed in his eyes.

Dave Barber and the young inquisitive man embraced for a moment and Dave shuddered with sadness.

Dave walked away into the distance and the young man reminisced on the times they had had together; be them only 5 minutes worth of memories, he was none the less stricken with a bit of melodrama and bitter happiness.

Dave Barber stopped at his house and picked up another bottle of Martel VSOP.

He was never heard from again, although a man was sited quite drunk holding a bottle of the premium cognac a couple blocks from his residence not 15 minutes later, then again the next week. But after that, he was never heard from again.

MILKY AGITATION
By Kevin L. Donihe

William Ezra Thoreau poured a tall glass of milk. He returned the jug to the refrigerator and closed the door quickly so that the things inside couldn't escape. William brought the glass with him to the kitchen table. There, he unfolded his newspaper and read articles about dead people and whirling things in the sky.

A thick, German accented voice broke the silence: "Please don't drink me."

William looked down at the milk. "Talkative today, aren't we? Can't you see I'm trying to read?"

"I don't have eyes," replied the milk.

"Sorry about that; I had an aunt who was blind." William returned his gaze to the paper. "I'm still going to drink you, though."

The milk glass vibrated madly. "Please, sir! Please don't make me beg!"

"For God's sake, could you just—"

"I'm willing to offer you anything!" The milk paused. "Anything short of sex!"

William smirked. "I'm afraid it'll have to be sex, love."

"But—"

"It's the only way." William unzipped his pants, leered. "God knows the old wife doesn't inflate me, not since I put her in the basement."

For minutes, the milk remained silent. Finally, a small, reedy voice said: "If that's what it takes, then . . . okay. But I'm a virgin, so please don't be rough."

William laughed. "I was just joking. What kind of sex could a glass of milk offer?"

"Milk Sex."

William's face folded into a grimace. "I don't want to think about that. Besides, you're male milk and, if I have sex with you, that might make me gay."

"If I can't give you sex, then what *can* I give you?"

"Nothing. I'm going to drink you." William paused for effect. "Then, I'll wash your glass."

"But you can't, sir! You just can't!"

"Wrong. I can and I will. Drinking is easy, you know. All I have to do is pick you up and gulp you down."

The milk sobbed and sobbed and sobbed.

"I've drunk milk before—tons of it—and I've never seen a glass so neurotic. In fact, you're the first glass to even talk at all. What's got you so worked up, anyway? Why are so you crazy?"

Condensation dripped from the glass like tears. "Because… because I'll die if you drink me."

"You're milk," William stated. "Milk is neither alive nor dead."

"Oh." The milk fell silent.

William returned to reading his paper. This week's centerfold was particularly suited to his tastes. He spent some time ogling her flaccid breasts and green skin before moving on to the obituaries on page A9.

"Really sorry for disturbing you."

William glared down at the milk glass. "What part of 'neither alive nor dead' didn't you understand?"

The milk said nothing more.

Satisfied, William returned to the newspaper. As he opened the paper to the Sports section, his knuckles clipped the milk glass, sending it to the floor.

William heard laughter both on the way down and following the crash.

Out of spite, William got down on his hands and knees and licked the spill from the floor. He didn't stop until the milk was gone and his tongue bled.

This made him feel good about himself, but he died a few days later—died after a laughing shard of glass pieced his intestinal wall.

THE SCREAMING OF THE FISH
By Vincent W. Sakowski

I once had a friend who had a fish-bowl for a brain. So needless to say, he had a rather large head. But he carried it well—powerful neck muscles built up over the years—and he carried it with pride.

He changed the water regularly—he liked to keep it fresh. But he also frequently lost a lot of it, particularly since he was an avid jogger. Despite his strength and poise, sometimes that water would bounce right out of there. He never worried about it though, or complained about the loss. The water kept him cool inside and out. There wasn't anything he could do about the evaporation, but he always carried a full water bottle just to be safe.

The two goldfish in the bowl didn't seem to be too crazy about him jogging every day; especially with all of the rocks from the bottom getting stirred up, swishing around and scraping their sides. Way too many scars over the years, but what could they say?

My friend kept them well-fed, and they certainly got their exercise. And even though they were stuck in a relatively small home, they did get to see a lot of the sights. Especially since my friend liked to jog a new route everyday if he could. He enjoyed new scenes himself.

Naturally, folks thought he was a pretty strange sight, and since he usually passed some new people each day, word about him traveled fast. So, he was often sought after, and although there was little he could do about video cameras and photographers, he never granted an interview. Neither did he pay any attention to the occasional rude person who would call such lame remarks as:

"I see you have a little water on the brain today, buddy."

And: "You mind if I go fishing with you sometime?"

And: "Do you want me to feed your fish while you're away?"

It didn't matter who was doing the shouting, and it didn't matter what they were shouting out. Or if his two fish could actually speak and they could tell him all about the unpleasantness of bouncing around in the bowl swimming for their lives and how his knee joints were getting rubbed raw and how he was developing shin splints and if he wasn't careful how—

None of this would matter because he wasn't much of a listener. In fact, he couldn't hear anything at all—no ears. He could only feel the pressure of their voices . . . the pressure of the sounds . . . and the pressure said enough. And he was quite happy not to know any more than that.

Until the day he died.

My friend died while jogging, of course. He tripped over somebody's Chihuahua, which happened to get off of its leash. So even though the dog was barking, and the owner was trying to call it back and shouting at my friend at the same time—and even I was foolishly trying to warn him—my friend didn't hear a word, he only felt the sudden agonizing pressure from all around. It caught him totally unaware, confusing him. So he tripped over the Chihuahua, and he fell, and man did those fish fly!

Just as the fish-bowl was shattering on the sidewalk, the Chihuahua scurried over to the flying fishes and it snapped one right out of the air. The dog chewed that goldfish as quickly as it could, likely hoping to get to the other one before it got too dirty on the

sidewalk; not that the dog still wouldn't eat it anyway, mind you. The second goldfish laid there flopping around in its own small way, gasping, gills contracting, watching its schoolmate being gobbled up. What else could it do?

Without wasting another moment, I scrambled over to the second goldfish. I popped it in my mouth, hoping that the moisture would keep it alive, until I could squeeze it into my friend's water bottle, or into a glass of water, or a fountain, or—But it was still flopping around in my mouth—so much so that I accidentally (or perhaps instinctively?) swallowed it.

As the goldfish digested, I got a real taste of my friend's memories . . . his life . . . particularly before he met me. And although I'm not sure if I understand him any better, I'm just really glad that he kept his fish-bowl so clean.

MY UNCLE HAS AN ORANGE CRAYON
By Gorgonzola the cheesemonster

My Uncle has an orange crayon. He has had it for a few weeks, but not before last Tuesday.

It was on that day that I called him and asked if I could come over and see it, but he said it had not arrived. I knew he was lying and told him so, but he hung up on me, a sure sign he was wrong. I had to see for myself, so I went to the grocery store to make sure. There, on a peg hook and on sale was the bird I had heard about. I just knew he was lying.

I confronted him with a letter, and I feel bad about that now for my words were harsh and dangerous, but looking back I see that it was something he had to do.

I changed my mind and decided to ignore him, no... better that I ignore his crayon only. That will punish him the way he should be.

The next time, I will lie to him. He will then know what it feels like to have a father for a brother.

PICKETERS
By D. Harlan Wilson

A group of picketers was picketing against groups of picketers that picket against the act of picketing against everything except the act of picketing. They marched up and down the sidewalk gesticulating and hollering and waving big signs over their heads. The signs read: "GO HOME, PICKETERS THAT PICKET AGAINST THE ACT OF PICKETING AGAINST EVERYTHING EXCEPT THE ACT OF PICKETING!!!" Funny thing is, there are no picketers that picket against the act of picketing against everything except the act of picketing. Never have been. And so the group of picketers that was picketing against picketers of that nature was essentially picketing in vain.

PINK MILK
By Benjamin Coulter

perfect darkness. absent of thought. no identity. no knowledge of self. no feelings. no memories.

all of a sudden his mind snapped back into reality. he was in his room, in the dark, lying on his stomach on his bed. alone. the lights were off, but his mind had not yet registered this fact. he looked over at his alarm clock and it exploded. he figured that that was supposed to mean something, but what, he didn't know. all he knew was that now he didn't know what time it was.

he rolled over and threw his legs off the bed. he stood up, lost his balance and landed back on the bed. he rose again, this time more slowly. he took the three steps toward the door and paused, forgetting how to open it. after several moments of pondering he turned the knob and pushed. fuck. nothing happened. he turned the knob the other way and pushed. shit. he pushed harder. still didn't move. he flipped on the light switch, hoping that the light would somehow offer a solution, and thought about the problem some more. then it hit him. pull. so he pulled. damn it. then he turned the knob and pulled. success.

he walked toward the steps, and, forgetting they were there, proceeded to fall down them. he hated it when that happened. after screaming a few profanities, he got up and went into the kitchen. taking a punch bowl from the cabinet he dumped in about two cups of sugar, then filled it over the top with cheerios, and added some milk, which caused the cheerios on top to fall out of the bowl. oh well, someone will clean it up.

he took two bites and thought it tasted boring. hmmm, how to spice up cheerios? aha. after searching through several drawers he found what he was looking for. a steak knife.
he returned to the table and sat in front of his cereal. pressing the blade of the knife into the palm of his left hand, he slowly applied pressure until the skin broke and blood began to drip down onto the table. he moved his hand over the bowl so that the blood could fall in, turning the milk pink.

pretty pink, he thought. pretty pretty pretty pink. pink pink pink pink pink. prittay pinkaroo.

but it didn't really help the taste. so he took the knife and slit his wrists. his parents would later find his lifeless body at the kitchen table, his face floating in a punch bowl filled with cheerios and pink milk. and they were furious. the bastard left the milk out.