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Editor's Note: You Got Your Chocolate in My Peanut Butter

What up. Welcome to Issue Eighteen of Jersey Devil Press. It being March – the month where winter and spring collide in an onslaught of runny noses and terrible weather – we thought we'd take a look at some other unusual combinations.

First on the docket is Lorna D. Keach's tale of murder and knitting, "Night of the Garter." Next up is "Bubble Wrap" by Hall Jameson, artfully combining sentient soap bubbles and emotional redemption. We follow this with "Chimp," by Ann Capozzoli, the quintessential story of little girls and their monkeys. Then it's Brenna Watry's "The Zombie Wish," examining what happens to fairies after the zombies rise up. And, finally, we close with "Laika Wins the Race," by Bryan Hinojosa, a story that combines two of our favorite things: puppies and the apocalypse.

So there you go, five amalgamations you never saw coming. Feel free to read them on your phone.

– Eirik Gumeny

Night of the Garter

Lorna D. Keach

Jerry knew Barbara wanted to kill him, but he really thought she'd try poison or an ice pick first.

He underestimated her creativity.

Barbara was a knitter. She often whined that people underestimated the creativity of knitters. She ran a yarn shop on the corner of Third and Maple, something so boring Jerry couldn't remember what it was called. They spoke very little since he lost his job at SisTerm Networking Solutions. At least they didn't argue about the mini fridge in the garage anymore.

Jerry sat at home all day looking at porn, under the guise of working as a freelance web consultant. Their house had four spare rooms, but Barbara had manufactured it so Jerry only got one of them—his “den” she called it, but it wasn't his den at all. Barbara used his den to store the leftover projects and surplus inventory from her store. Her yarn lurked in the corner behind his computer desk, spilling out of plastic tubs in reds, blues, goldenrods and periwinkles. It was multi-toned, hand-dyed, felted, woven, sparkling silver and soft plushy green. She'd denied his request for a mini fridge in the garage, and now she claimed the only room he had to himself for her spare yarn, so Jerry was confident she was trying to kill him slowly through torture.

Most of the yarn was from Peru.

Barbara wasn't exactly sure when she began to loathe her husband, but it seemed to coincide with his request for a small refrigerator in the garage.

The ladies gathered. Barbara knew Jerry never bothered to

learn the name of her yarn store, but it was called Pachamama's Wool Specialties, open from ten a.m. to three, with knitting classes all the way up until midnight. After midnight, Barbara and her knitting circle took off all their clothes, draping the quipu over their pre-menopausal bodies.

The quipu—a set of bundled knotted strings used for ritual sacrifice. And accounting, but mostly sacrifice.

Jerry sat at his computer, watching porn until well after midnight.

The yarn began to twitch at 1:17 am.

First, a wad of baby-blue wool jerked like a limp tentacle come to life. It started to crawl—slowly, laboriously—over the edge of its plastic tub, dragging along with it a tangle of bright red strings. The goldenrod yarn trailed after it, and then the sea green, until a swell of knotted colors came creeping towards Jerry's computer chair.

Jerry, sitting at the computer with his pants around his ankles, didn't notice. He barely noticed when the first string of murderous softness wrapped around his left leg and started burrowing into his kneecap. It didn't hurt, it just felt strangely warm and itchy. When he finally glanced down, he saw the yarn wrapped around him. It infused him, tunneling under his skin like worms.

He didn't scream. There was very little blood. He just stared down at it, blinking.

But then the yarn coiled up around his legs, squeezing and stretching him, and Jerry tried to shake it off. He batted at it with a panicked hand, but already the yarn was too deep. He jumped up, his heart now racing, and immediately fell flat on his face thanks to the tangle embedded in his feet. Baby-blue, red, gold, green, all of it wove up around him, swallowing his hips. He laid there and gasped, sucking air in shock, as the woolen entity crushed him in a

python-strong grip.

Cardigan, Jerry thought. She's going to kill me by cardigan.

When Barbara finally got home, she found Jerry completely unraveled.

A tangle of him lay on the floor of the den, seeping little dribbles of blood. His skin had been spun into his bones, his organs had been stretched into throbbing purple strings. All of him melded with the Peruvian wool granted sinister life by ancient Incan deities.

As Barbara walked in, the yarn was knotting him up in a simple garter stitch.

"Look, honey." Barbara smiled. "I made you a sweater."

With his dying breath, Jerry groaned, "It's... itchy." And then he was gone.

LORNA D. KEACH lives in Lawrence, Kansas, with her saint of a husband and one irritable cat. Occasionally, she tries to summon Baphomet but that usually doesn't work out very well.

Bubble Wrap

Hall Jameson

A foamy swath surrounded Libby—her own personal rain puff. It was a typical Tuesday—the day of limbo—where the week threatened neither to begin nor end, but merely sat quietly. Nothing horrible ever happened on a Tuesday.

She had many pet names for her protector: the persistent mist, the love bubble, the shimmering nimbus, or – her favorite – soap suds, shortened to just “Suds.” Whatever she chose to call it on a particular day, it rarely left her.

Today, Suds was purplish-blue like a bruise. Some days it was dark green; other days it was ochre, or red. She looked through its skin and the world was tolerable; subdued.

Libby plucked a piece of crumpled paper from the trash and smoothed out the flyer that she had tossed earlier. The pleasant face of the man on the flyer looked back at her patiently as she tacked it to the refrigerator. The tagline beneath his photograph proclaimed: *Achieve Ultimate Fitness! Let me be your Personal Trainer!*

She stared at the photograph—his face wasn’t quite right. Even so, it made her feel better to have it on him the fridge until she found The One. Suds shimmered and sighed, draping over her head like a veil.

As she hopped on the trolley there was barely room for the two of them, and Suds swirled around her, agitated. None of the other passengers seemed to notice, even though it tickled their bare necks and mussed their hair. They probably blamed the wind.

The trolley dropped Libby off in front of the building where she worked. Suds tightened around her body as she entered the sterile

concrete structure. It did not like it here, and became compact and tense. Libby didn't mind it though, she felt safe in her cubicle with its beige walls, beige phone, and beige desk. The only thing that wasn't beige was her stapler—it was red: the exclamation point of her workspace.

Suds detested her stapler! It could not mute that red no matter how hard it tried! She did not like the discord between the two of them. She could switch staplers with someone else, but all the other workers had red ones too. Besides, she tried not to talk to the others. They were always whispering about her, eyes flicking in her direction then darting quickly away when she looked up.

She thought they were strange. Suds rubbed her shoulders in agreement.

Libby was hungry after four hours of tabbing through data entry screens and stabbing buttons on the ten-key. She looked at her stapler and it winked at her. She frowned and wandered into the break room for lunch, hoping that no one was there, but two women sat quietly eating pale sandwiches and pickles. Their conversation halted as soon as she entered the room. She hated that!

She felt Suds release, and the room became brighter. She squinted at the harsh lights and vivid colors: the avocado fridge, a poster with a florescent sunrise and the caption *Every Day is a New Beginning*, the aqua bottle of dish washing detergent on the corner of the sink. All of these things hurt her eyes.

She knew that she should have been alarmed when one of the women began to gurgle strangely, eyes bulging, but she was not. The woman started to hack as she tried to dislodge the food caught in her throat. The other woman jumped up and pounded her on the back, looking at Libby with terrified eyes, but she

couldn't move. Suds engulfed them. It was a fiery orange, like the sunrise poster.

"Stop it!" Libby yelled. Both women looked at her, confused. Finally, one horrible retch later, a chunk of pickle freed itself from the woman's throat and landed in a slimy puddle in the middle of the table. The orange cloud evaporated, and the light of the room became diffuse, as Suds settled back around her. The woman looked at the pickle chunk in stunned fascination. The other woman glared at Libby.

She turned and went back to her beige cubicle. She would skip lunch today. The pickle incident had made her lose her appetite.

She settled back into her beige chair and stared at the computer monitor. She should be angry with Suds for its escapade in the kitchen, but she was not. It got bored here at her work; she could not fault it for that. She sighed and looked at her stapler. It winked at her again as if they shared a secret.

Her phone rang and she jumped. She picked up the receiver and heard the excited voice of a man. It was the Private Investigator and he had news. She abruptly hung up the phone. She did not want to hear his news today. She hadn't expected him to work so quickly.

When Libby got home the number on her answering machine proudly displayed a "4." She knew all four calls were from him. She stabbed the erase button and exhaled as the number changed to "0," a safe number with no sharp edges. Much better.

She removed the personal trainer's flyer from the fridge and replaced it with a real estate brochure that she had picked up at the bus stop. *Let me help you find your Home Sweet Home!* was the caption below the picture of a smiling man in a smart suit.

Libby smiled back and sipped her amber tea.

When she reached her desk the next morning her stapler was gone and there was an awkward bare spot on her beige desk. She wondered if the pickle-woman had taken it.

Today the coworkers were whispering more than ever. Psh! Psh! Psh!

Suds tried to block out the murmuring, but only succeeded in amplifying it. PSH! PSH! PSH! The sound swept back and forth across her skull. Her head was starting to ache. Suds tried to massage her temples, but she brushed it away angrily. She got up and pretended that she was going to the restroom; it never followed her in there.

On her way, she snatched a long sheet of bubble wrap from the shelf next to the copy machine. Once inside the bathroom stall, she undid her shirt and wrapped the bubble wrap around her torso. It felt right against her skin. She felt safe.

Libby washed her hands and smiled in the bathroom mirror, but her reflection returned a grimace rather than a smile.

Back in her cubicle, there was a single, quiet *pop!* as she settled into her chair, but thankfully, Suds didn't appear to notice.

Libby woke feeling sick; listless. Her head was pounding. The little red light on her phone was blinking. She knew it was him. The office was quiet and some of the cubicles were dark. She didn't know how long she'd been asleep. She hated it when she lost snatches of time! Suds covered her like a quilt, snug up to her chin. She decided to go to the walk-in clinic down the block before she caught the trolley home.

Suds respectfully lingered in the waiting room as she went back for her exam. Libby put on a light blue Johnny and boosted

herself up onto the examination table. The doctor checked her throat and listened to her heart. He tapped her arms and legs with a small rubber hammer. As the doctor checked her ears, Libby plucked the badge from his clinic coat. It had a great picture and he was about the right age. The doctor flicked the plastic cone-shaped speculum from the end of the otoscope into the trash. He smiled and told Libby that she was fine, but suggested she try yoga or tai chi to reduce her stress. Libby frowned when she remembered that she had thrown away a yoga flyer just last week; the man on the front hadn't been quite right. As the doctor filled out a prescription for her headache, she wanted to tell him *Of course, I'm fine; Suds didn't come in here with me.*

Libby left the exam room feeling neither better nor worse. She pulled Suds over her head, threading her arms through it like a sweater, and headed back to her apartment. She took the real estate flyer off the fridge and replaced it with the doctor's badge, clipping it to the bottom of her calendar. The doctor looked back at her seriously. His eyes followed her as she moved about the room. Libby looked back and smiled.

When Libby got to work the next day, her stapler was back in its usual spot. She stood in the entrance to her cubicle for a moment and stared at it distrustfully. There was something underneath it. It was a flyer, printed on blue paper, with a photograph of a handsome man on the front. He looked back at Libby with calm eyes and a warm smile. The flyer was for a lecture on forgiveness. The man in the photograph was a psychologist. There was a handwritten note scratched below the photograph. It was from him.

Have been trying to reach you. This is the man you've been looking for, it read.

Libby examined the man's picture. He had a square chin and dark eyes that she recognized as her own. He was perfect.

Libby sat in the auditorium feeling small under the veil of her protector. She felt numb. It was hard for her to be so close to the man. When he asked for questions at the end of the seminar, she surprised herself by standing. She opened her mouth and heard her voice.

"You are my son?" she blurted. She hadn't meant for it to come out as a question. "I lost you long ago..." her voice trailed off. She saw several members of the audience turn towards her in surprise, their faces—pie plates with dark "Ohs" stamped in the center. She could feel Suds wrapping its fingers around her throat, squeezing, attempting to silence her.

The psychologist stared at her in an expression nondescript. Suds had tightened around Libby's windpipe, so she couldn't speak, and her vision was starting to quaver. She started to sink into Suds, yielding to its insistent tugging. She wanted to disappear into its center void where it was warm and comfortable. Why had she come here?

The psychologist now stood in front of her. He took Libby's hands in his own and smiled. He made as if to brush Libby's hair out of her eyes, but instead gave Suds a gentle swipe. He unraveled it from Libby's head and from around her neck. His eyes locked with hers.

"You and I should grab a cup of coffee. I think we have a lot to talk about." His voice was kind, not the condescending tone that she so often confronted.

Libby heard a horrific shriek. She didn't know if the sound issued from her own throat or was merely in her head, but she felt Suds loosen. She watched as it slid down onto the floor and

slithered into the heat vent. She wanted to run after it and pull it back, so she could wrap herself in it.

The psychologist gave her hand a squeeze, and Libby smiled back shyly.

They walked towards the exit together, and she chanced a look back over her shoulder, but there was no sign of Suds. A man in the back row was putting on his overcoat. He reached down for his brief case, and Libby saw a smoky scarf wind loosely around his neck. It was periwinkle blue—a happy color. One end of it floated up and waved at Libby. She gave it a nod and put on her jacket. She heard a quiet *pop!* when she zipped it up and smiled. She walked out into the light of day.

HALL JAMESON is a writer and fine art photographer. She was born in Damariscotta, Maine, and lived in New England for thirty years before moving west in 1997. She currently lives in Helena, Montana. When she's not writing, Hall enjoys hiking, photographing grain elevators, and cat wrangling.

Chimp

Ann Capozzoli

What she needed was a chimp. Then her whole life would change.

She would do her homework the minute she got home from school. She'd help her mother in the kitchen; she'd chop, stir, measure. She'd vacuum, pick up toys, put stray socks back where they belonged.

Being good would be fun with a little boy chimp holding her hand, chattering to her. He'd help her clean the bathroom, scrub the tub. He'd stand on the tips of his long-toed feet peering down into the sink, watching stray hairs swirl in a clockwise spiral around and down until they got trapped in the aluminum basket. She'd explain why, even though he might be tempted to pick up the basket and let the hair wash down the drain, he mustn't.

"You see, hair clogs the pipes. And when that happens, the water can't flow down the drain. It just stays there at the bottom of the sink."

She'd show him the cracked rubber implement propped in the corner of the bathroom behind the door. "We'd have to use the plunger." He'd stick out his tongue and splutter.

"Yes, I know, it's disgusting, but we'd have to do it, and if that didn't work, we'd have to tell my parents and they would have to call the plumber. Plumbers cost a lot of money. Mom and Dad would hate it. They'd yell at us. Take away our allowance. And we wouldn't want that, right?"

The chimp would shake his head "no" so hard his baseball cap would slip off his head.

If she had a chimp, she would never get hair in the drain. She'd even eat marmalade sandwiches.

If only she her very own chimp who would sleep with her, eat with her – but what would the chimp do when she was at school? She could bring him with her for show and tell, but what about the rest of the time? Maybe he'd just have to stay quiet in her bedroom, wait for her to come home for lunch. She'd play with him. Checkers maybe, or Old Maid, or War – he'd catch on to a game of War pretty quickly. Chimps are smart. She'd make a peanut butter and banana sandwich for him, pour him a glass of milk, kiss him goodbye when it was time to walk back to Lincoln Elementary for the afternoon session.

If she had a chimp, she wouldn't even care that she'd never been chosen to be a safety patrol, to wear the white belt with the silver badge, the pride of the street crossing monitor who stood at the corner of Washington Street and Westfield Avenue, holding back a swarm of children with his arms outstretched like an umpire.

She was in the fifth grade already and she'd never been a patrol, never been given the white safety belt to wear, the power to send kids to the principal's office. True, not many girls were. But she was bigger, taller, bulkier than most of the boys. And she could talk loud.

"You sound like a fishmonger," her father would tell her when she got excited or angry or was calling out to someone in another room. "You're eleven years old and you have yet to learn the virtues of the well-modulated voice."

If she had a chimp she wouldn't care anymore about being a patrol. Or, who knows, maybe they'd make her a patrol once she had her chimp. The chimp would change everything for her.

With the chimp by her side, she'd be so happy, she wouldn't need to tease Sally. No matter that her younger sister was a spoiled brat who got everything she wanted. She would be having so much fun with her chimp, she wouldn't even care.

On Saturday, just after lunch, her mother drove the station wagon off to the A&P to do the weekly grocery shopping.

She found her father in his bedroom relaxing, digesting. His head rested on the pillow of the fully-made bed. His forearms were folded over his eyes, blocking the midday sun that streamed through the bedroom windows. His feet were crossed at the ankle dangling off the side of the bed.

"Dad," she said softly.

He lifted his right arm to peek at her from one dark, almost-black, iris.

"What is it?" he asked.

"I have to talk to you about something important," she took a few steps into the bedroom, closer to her father. He lowered his arms to his chest.

"I figured out how I can be a good girl like you've always wanted me to be." She pressed her palms together. "I know I can do it, Dad," her voice was getting louder, words spilled out of her mouth like water from a tipped bucket.

"I only need one thing and I'll be the best girl you've ever had, better than Sally even. I'll be good at school, good at church, good at home. Mom will be happy, you'll be happy..." She was running out of steam, had to stop to inhale. "Wanna know what's the one thing, the only thing I need to be good?"

Her father made a noise in his throat. She couldn't tell if it meant yes or no. She decided to take it as a yes. She opened her arms wide and said, "A chimp! A chimpanzee!"

She clutched her hands to her heart the way she'd seen good girls do on TV.

"Oh, Dad, you'll never regret it. I'll be so good, you won't believe I'm the same girl..."

"No," he interrupted her, crossing his arms over his eyes once again.

She waited for him to say something else. When he didn't, she ventured in a small voice, "So, do you need some time to think about it or something?"

"No chimp."

He rolled over on to his side, away from her.

ANN CAPOZZOLI writes stories that take place in Westfield, New Jersey, where she grew up. She now lives in Kingston, New York, with her husband, two standard poodles and a Quaker parakeet.

The Zombie Wish

Brenna Watry

If you wish hard enough on a zombie, one of two things has been known to happen.

One: no matter how hard you're sitting/standing/lying/stomping on said zombie, it will still possess enough motor power to tear you limb from limb and devour your brain before you can croak out any last wishes.

Two: you'll squish it.

I looked down at what was left of the zombie beneath me.

"Madre de Dios! These were my last pair of clean pants."

Its intestines were now a congealing jumble of fluid soaking into the back pockets of my combat pants. Blood spatter was hard enough to get out of the wash. Bile, fecal matter, and decaying skin were even worse. The zombie itself was still twitching feebly, although it wouldn't be able to get far now that the connection between its torso and legs had been squished.

"Mierda!"

"Hey, no swearing."

A woman the size of my hand, missing an eyeball and dripping blood and gore, poked me in the nose.

"Who the hell are you?" I asked, flinching away.

She poked me again, half-decayed wings buzzing angrily.

"What did I say about swearing? I'm your Zombie Fairy, Carlos."

"Zombie Fairy?"

"You made a wish, didn't you?"

"Sí..." I eyed her uncertainly. Sure, she had the wings and the tatty dress (now stained with all sorts of things I didn't want to imagine) and even a wand, but I'd never heard of a "Zombie Fairy" before. Nobody's zombie wish had ever actually come true.

“So what, now that you’re here, do I get my three wishes or something?”

“Psh,” she scoffed. “Do I look like a Zombie Genie?”

“How should I know? Can I get a Zombie Genie instead?”

She was so offended she practically vibrated the other eye out of its socket.

“Zombie Genies cost extra.”

“Extra what?”

“Extra limbs.”

Being on the whole rather attached to my limbs, and particularly in the fine condition they were in, I said, “I’ll pass.”

“Thought you might.”

I ignored the barb. “So if you’re my Zombie Fairy Godmother—”

She cut me off. “Zombie Fairy Godmothers cost extra.”

“Extra limbs?” I asked dryly.

“Brains,” she said simply. “The wishers usually sacrifice someone they particularly loathe. It promotes survival of the fittest.”

“Oh,” I said. “Does that happen often?”

“Not as often as baby sacrifices.”

If my eyes had gotten any wider, my own eyeballs might have started falling out.

“*Dios*. What do they do that for?”

“Zombie Rumplestiltskins. Does your wish involve any sort of money, gold, and/or riches? Because I’ll have to refer you to them, if so.”

“N-no. Listen, how come I haven’t heard of any of this before?”

She shrugged like she didn’t care. “We prefer to keep it on the down-low. It’s bad publicity for humanity at large to know that the fairy population has been devastated by the zombie virus as well. You might start killing us in a panic. Then where would we all be?”

“Uh,” I said, slightly distracted by the halved zombie corpse beneath me, which was currently curling its head upward in a vain attempt to bite me in the crotch. It looked like its head would fall off before it succeeded, but I was still slightly worried, so I fended it off with my finger against its forehead.

“Dead, that’s where,” the Zombie Fairy said, startling me back to attention.

“So, uh,” I said nervously, “are you, uh...” I pointed vaguely toward my brain.

The Zombie Fairy snorted and nearly blew her nose off.

“Are you kidding me? Human brains are revolting. But get me some good, healthy fairy brains, and maybe I’ll slip you an extra wish or two.” She wriggled her rotting eyebrows.

“I don’t know where to find any non-zombie fairies,” I said. “I didn’t even believe fairies existed until just now.”

She folded her arms and shrugged dismissively.

“Sucks to be you, then. You want your wish or not?”

“Sí,” I said. “That’s why I wished on a zombie.”

She rolled her remaining eye, then quickly reached up and popped it back into its socket before it could fall into the decomposing zombie beneath me, which was still groaning and pushing its head toward my crotch.

“All right, repeat after me: I—what’s your name again?”

“Carlos. Carlos Esposito.”

“Good.” She cleared her throat and started again. “I, Carlos Esposito...”

“I, Carlos Esposito...”

“Do so solemnly—ack!” An ax the size of my thumbnail smacked wetly into the Zombie Fairy’s chest.

“She’s wounded,” several squeaky voices cried from behind me. “Get her!”

A small cadre of fairies streaked forward and achieved a midair dogpile on top of the Zombie Fairy, who was keening feebly and clawing at her attackers. I sat stunned, watching until the last

miniature limb dropped into the mess that was the zombie beneath me, who looked just as shocked. He'd certainly stopped lunging for my crotch.

One of the new fairies straightened up, shaking blood off his tiny hands.

"Good job, team," he said. "Any casualties?"

"She bit Joby," someone volunteered.

"No, she—" the fairy I assumed was Joby said, until the fairy standing next to him lopped his head off with a pin-sized sword.

"Any more casualties?" the lead fairy asked. No one replied. "Then let's move out!"

"Hey, wait," I said.

All the fairies stopped short and looked up at me in surprise.

"What do you want?" asked the fairy who had chopped off Joby's head.

"The Zombie Fairy was going to give me a wish," I said.

"Before you killed her, that is."

The lead fairy shrugged. "Sucks to be you, then." Then he and the others took off.

"*Mierda*," I said. "Stupid *culo*. All I wanted was some clean clothes. Is that too much to ask for these days?"

I stood up, ignoring the clammy way my pants now clung to my ass and shook the loop of intestine off my Converse.

The zombie, sensing freedom, tried to nip at my ankles, so I stomped its face in. Then I stalked off, muttering, "I guess I could try *un bebé*."

BRENNA WATRY is currently a student at the University of Colorado at Boulder, studying Creative Writing, with an interest in eventually teaching. She has previously been published in *The Copperfield Review* and *Sex and Murder Magazine*. Her favorite stories are those that take a familiar genre, tale, or plot device, and give it a twist. Brenna lives in Colorado, where she is probably the only person there who neither skis, nor snowboards. For more of Brenna Watry, visit her blog at wordywatry.wordpress.com.

Laika Wins the Race

Bryan Hinojosa

There's not much in space; it's a vacuum. You could travel all day and all night and never encounter anything worthwhile in space. And the reason for this sorry state of affairs is the fact that when God was creating everything, He didn't bother to put anything out in space. He never even considered the possibility that humans could make it that far, and who can blame Him? If He had actually thought that humans would one day leave the planet, He probably would have put something out there, made it a bit more interesting. So God, other than some planets and stars and things, pretty much left space empty.

He never really gave any thought about humans in space until, after a few ages of Man had passed, great empires began to assemble. And in the cities of the empires, great towering structures began ascending into the sky. And God saw it and said:

"Wow. Look at that. With their trigonometry and soil mechanics and metallurgy and such, these humans can do anything. Imagine the messes they'll stir up." He paused and surveyed their greatest creations: pyramids and mausoleums, statues and lighthouses. "They wouldn't possibly be able to..." He paused. "Wouldn't that be crazy if these humans made it off the planet? It is possible, now that I think about it. Wouldn't that be something? Wow."

After He had thought it over for a while, God decided that He should do something in the event of a human leaving the planet, something to mark such a grand and singular occasion.

"You know, I think that if someone actually gets off that planet, I'll make the first one up a god. Not nearly as great as Me, of course, but I'll give him all sorts of powers. I'll even give him his own plane of existence to play around with." After devising the

contest, God made His pronouncement: “Whosoever is the first to leave the earth and enter space shall be made a god, like unto Me.” Humans never actually heard the pronouncement, but each and every one was inspired by it. And since that time, even though they were unaware of God’s actual edict, humans have always sought to reach the heavens.

And so the humans built and built, ever upward, inventing all types of odd devices to ascend to the heights: monoliths, trebuchets, kites, aeromobiles, gyrocopters, but, for the time being, God took little notice. When a young scientist in Europe launched a rocket that scratched the boundaries of space, however, God began to watch a bit closer. It would only be a short time from then that God would reward the winner of His millennia-old competition.

Laika was a frisky, carefree husky mix that had roamed the streets of Moscow until she was picked up by a Russian aeronautical engineer. When the scientist caught the cheerful mutt, Laika was more concerned with the man’s sausage than with his motives. She was not even that upset when he caged her, seeing as how he had fed her and all. Some of the girls back at the lab, all of whom loved the sweet husky, named her Kudryavka—Little Curly—but most people just called her Laika—Barker—even though she herself was unaware of such things as names.

Laika remained caged up in the lab for several months, but she was growing fat off of human-food and didn’t really mind all that much. Even though Laika was sad at night when everyone left, she still enjoyed her time at the lab. And Laika loved it in the morning, when first the janitors, then the beloved lab girls, and finally the scientists would file in for the day. Laika was always so excited to see each and every one. She was walked regularly and fed well and her health was a prime concern of the scientists there.

Laika would come to learn that the scientists were building another, far more elaborate cage, a cabin almost, for her. They

placed her inside the cabin several times during its construction process, to see if she would fit. And although it restricted her movements much more than her cage, Laika soon discovered that the cabin featured a time-release food and water dispensing machine and became very excited at feeding times.

One day, the scientists threw a party and all of the lab girls came and kissed her and hugged her goodbye and Laika was shipped off on a thirteen-hour train ride. When she arrived, she was allowed to rest, but early the next day, she was roused, fed, bathed and placed inside her cabin. Eventually, the small chamber was pressurized, and even though she would have been incapable of understanding an idea like air pressure, Laika was still aware that something was amiss and was apprehensive for some minutes. Suddenly, the cabin lurched upwards, quickly. Laika froze, then started barking. Things calmed down and Laika was even allowed a small snack before her journey. After her treat, she dozed off for a bit.

After everything had been calm for a while, the cabin exploded into a horrific roaring and Laika was pressed hard. She felt as if she were falling upward very fast through dry water. The feeling terrified Laika; she urinated; she passed out.

When Laika awoke, she was floating. Even though she was harnessed tight, she panicked. Laika would have urinated again, but she was all dry inside. After some minutes, she became adjusted to the sensation of weightlessness, and even dozed for a bit.

Laika was largely unaware of what was going on. She reacted to the cabin and the weightlessness much as she would react to a cage or a train ride. All Laika knew was that something was going on that she couldn't control. Had Laika some greater concept of the world around her, she might realize that she was floating in a realm unknown to all others except for one.

When feeding time came around, Laika was exceedingly surprised to find that her water and kibble, when they were

released, floated about the room. Tracking down all the pieces of hovering dog food and wandering globules of water while she was harnessed kept Laika entertained for the better part of the rest of her life. For four days Laika gently floated in her harness in her cabin and tried to catch all of the drifting morsels. Soon, though, she was startled as her little cabin gave some strong jerks and then righted itself.

Unknown to her, her ship had bounced off of the atmosphere, which rendered the thermal control system inoperative. Within minutes the interior of Laika's cabin had soared to over 500 degrees Celsius. Laika didn't live long enough to feel the cabin reach 500 degrees, but she was acutely aware that the temperature was rising fast. She began to panic. She urinated. She started barking, howling, imploring anyone, anything to come and help her. She was being killed; she could feel it. She yelped weakly. Her heart nearly burst with each diastole. The temperature of her blood began to rise; her brain started frying from the heat. It is unclear what gave up first, Laika's brain or her heart, but either way, she died in her super-heated cabin.

And it was then that God appeared to Laika.

People say that God created humans in His own image. That's completely wrong; it's almost the opposite, actually. Many humans have just assumed that God looks like them because it's a comforting thought. Other, more imaginative people still assumed the gods looked like humans, but threw on a dog's head or bird's wings or something, just to make things interesting. But Laika had only the loosest conception of self-image, which prompted God to appear to her in the form that most resembled the one authority figure that Laika felt strong emotions for: her mother. Of course, God looked a lot more glorious than Laika's mom, but the resemblance was striking. At that instant, when Laika's corporeal body expired, she saw a big, radiant husky approach her through the murk of death.

God, through a haze of brilliant light and golden flame that emanated from His dogbody, spoke:

"Wow. I never saw this coming. I never dreamed that they'd send up a dog first."

Laika's reaction could be rendered thusly:

"Who are you? It's so good to see you! Hooray! Here he is! Do you smell cheese? I'm so glad you're here! I'm so glad to see you! Do you have food? Hooray! I'm so glad you're here!"

"Uh... sure," God responded. He was in quite the quandary. He had given His Word. But should He *actually* deify this dog? Omnipotence and another plane of existence might be considered a bit of a waste on a dog. What should He do? He looked at Laika. She was as excited as ever. Well, she should be, she's meeting God. Yet He wondered if she got this worked up over a mouse or a piece of bread. Probably more so. What was He going to do with this dog?

"Daughter," He said to Laika, "I am God."

"Yippee! It's so great to see you!"

"... Yes... I created all the world and everything in it, including you."

"Hooray! Do you have food? It's so good to see you!"

"Yes... you've already mentioned that. Anyway, now I'm supposed to make you a god, or goddess I guess, and I'm having second thoughts."

"Great! It's so good to see you!"

"Would you like to... become a goddess, daughter?"

"Yippee! Let's play! I'm so glad you're here!"

"You have no idea what I'm talking about, do you?"

"It's just fantastic that you're here! I smell rain. I'm so glad to see you!"

"I can't believe I'm doing this," God said, "but a contest's a contest."

Then God, with His godly powers, willed Laika to become Her own goddess, in Her own realm.

God ignored Laika and Her realm for a couple of millennia. He almost forgot about Her, actually. More ages of Man came and passed. Then one day, He recalled Laika and said, "Oh yeah. I made a dog into a god once. I wonder what ever happened to that crazy dog?" He had given Her a dimension all Her own, to do with as She pleased. God now ventured towards that place.

The dimension was made up of rolling plains, with many streams and a couple of copses of generic trees. Laikas ran about all over the place. Omnipresence allows for one to be in all places within one's realm; omniscience allows for one to know all things within one's realm. Yet, instead of processing all this info en masse, through one perspective, or perhaps because She was unable to process it, Laika had split Herself into many millions of Laikas, each of which ran around, performing a given Laika task. Each and every Laika, through all her different forms, was just as glorious and awesome as God was, when He appeared to Her.

There were many Laika hunters, which chased the many animals of Laika's own invention that ran all about. Some of the creatures possessed feline heads, some squirrel tails, others rabbit ears; there were even some winged creatures. The only things they had in common were that they were all furry, quick, and exploded in delicious blood whenever a Laika caught one.

In one field there were thousands of Laika mothers suckling thousands of Laika puppies on thousands on Laika teats. In another, quite disturbing field, thousands of Laikas were being rutted on by thousands of hearty, fertile mastiff studs. In another field, which at first was quite haunting and then quite dull, thousands of Laikas slept, and if one never heard the gentle humming caused by their snores, one might think it was the scene of a mass death.

When He entered Laika's realm, God was struck by the absence of color and overabundance of smells. The smallness of the place also surprised Him. Laika had limitless space to develop,

yet She had only bothered to fashion about three square miles. He was quite displeased with the state of the dimension.

"I've given Her thousands of years to do something with this place. Hardly anything has been done at all." He looked at the ground. "There's even dogshit everywhere! If She's too stupid to fashion Herself in such a manner as to negate the act of shitting, She could at least create something to clean it all up. Why, there's not even a sun," He said as He glanced at the sky and noted the dull light that came from no discernible source. "I will have to speak with Her. Laika!"

Laika had been largely unaware, or unconcerned, with God's presence until He spoke. At the sound of His voice, all action stopped and every Laika turned toward God, in one, solid motion. He was somewhat taken aback at the sight of millions of Laikas staring at Him, with their soft, brown, puppy-dog eyes. Because they were so ill-thought-out, all of Laika's chasing animals and studs disappeared with a poof when She ceased to pay attention to them.

Then the Laikas' world exploded with sound and action as every single Laika rushed forward to greet God, who they saw as their resplendent mother-goddess. He was overcome with the horde. He tried to speak to the mass, but His voice was overcome in the storm of barking Laikas:

"He's here! Who are you? I'm so glad to see you! Play with me! It's great that you're here! Do you have food? Hazzah! He's here! Let's run! It's so great that you're here!" and so on and so forth, but perhaps in an exponential form of the nonsense.

"Back! Back!" He thundered. "Down! Heel!"

Yet it was useless. He couldn't stop the throng, tails all wagging, tongues all lolling. And the puppy Laikas were worse than the rest. He stomped, He growled. Nothing worked.

God was taken aback. These millions of Laikas had become comfortable with Their many forms. Over the millennia, They had come to know this realm as well He knew His own. God was out

of His element. Even though it was His Will and His Word that had allowed this plane of existence to come into being, it was now Laika's Will that fueled its existence. This was no longer God's country. It was the Laikaverse, and he was not the top dog here.

"Forget this," God said. He rent a hole in the Laikaverse, and zipped through it, back into His own realm. "Stupid dog," He muttered. "Waste a dimension on a stupid dog."

And then God heard a little voice say to Him, "Where are We now? It smells interesting here!"

God looked down. Standing next to Him was the most adorable little Laika puppy that anyone could ever imagine.

"Wow," said God. "This is not good."

The precious little Laika godpuppy looked, sniffed, heard—sensed—the universe, a small portion of which She recognized, and She was overwhelmed. The omniscient dog was bombarded by an unimaginable amount of stimuli and was, by Herself, in Her current form, unable to process it all. In response, the Laika puppy's consciousness fractured, splitting up into trillions of distinct perceptive entities, each willing into existence its own body to inhabit. These individual Laikas spread at thousands of times the speed of light. As fast as divine thought, the universe, our universe, the one our descendents will inhabit, became full of Laikas. On Earth, billions of Laikas burst into existence, destroying most of the living matter on the planet. Although some of those humans who were somewhat able to perceive what had happened thought that having creation overrun by cute dogs was not the worst way to go.

And that's how the world ends, for humans anyway. God is slowly but surely reclaiming the universe back for Himself, but it's worse than trying to exterminate roaches.

BRYAN HINOJOSA learned early on that dreamers go unsalaried, and instead shot for the profession that he saw as the most similar: writer of Things That Are Never To Be. The efficacy of this current plan is yet to be assessed. He has attended school at Texas Tech U (in a desert) and the U of Louisiana @ Lafayette (in a swamp). Mr. Hinojosa suffers from allergies. He thinks it's cliché to worship Bruce Lee, but damn, have you seen that guy? Mr. Hinojosa doesn't necessarily *desire* the end of the world, but would appreciate being able see it go down.