

# Jersey Devil Press

October 2016

Issue 83





# JERSEY DEVIL PRESS

October 2016, Issue 83

ISSN 2152-2162

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## Editor's Note

We are seven today, but we must be precocious, based on the frequency with which people inquire, "What are you, twelve?" But even though it's our birthday, we have presents for you: a supernatural fishy tale, an absolutely true Hollywood story, a surreal case of sartorial revenge, and—because we love you—a hilarious attempt at canine exorcism.

And for the record, while we do not live in a zoo, we welcome comparisons to a monkey on both the visual and olfactory levels.

— Laura Garrison

# Here Fishing

L. L. Madrid

Every Sunday my grandfather fishes at Ripple Pond. It's an old habit, one anchored in boyhood. His mother allowed him to forgo church for fishing, as he was more contemplative by the water's edge.

Today he's wearing a neon orange baseball cap, his favorite for the last four decades. He looks maybe sixty. His age varies from week to week. Sometimes he's as young as eight and others he's the old man I knew. Always though, a toothpick juts from the corner of his mouth, often bouncing as if conducting the current.

During the initial sightings I confronted him, asking why he'd come, but he never answered. He wouldn't even look at me. Instead, he'd wind his reel; grab his tackle and leave, disappearing at the tree line. I've spent six months of Sundays watching him fish.

When I was a kid he brought me here a fistful of times. The first outing he had a can of live worms. I didn't want to bait the hook. The prospect of selecting a worm and impaling it was nauseating. Grandpa's blue eyes narrowed when I'd asked him to skewer the bait for me. He spat, shook his head and said, "You got to do it yourself. Wouldn't be honest otherwise."

Fingers pinching a worm, I slid the wriggling creature onto the hook, pricking my finger in the process. Grandpa nodded his approval and reached into the front pocket of his shirt and handed me a toothpick. We didn't speak again until after I got a nibble followed by a tug. A few cranks of the reel and I had a two-incher. Grandpa had me throw it back. It was my first catch and I wanted

to keep it, but he insisted. My face went hot and words of protest bubbled inside me, but he offered up a rare smile and patted my back.

“It’s not about the catch,” he said.

“Then what’s the point?”

He held a finger to his lips and then gestured out toward the undulating liquid, the shifting variegations of cola-brown, peridot, and slate blue.

We grew comfortable sharing silence. Sitting side by side, our legs dangling from the dock as we both squinted at the sun like characters in a Rockwell painting. I contemplate those long-faded Sunday mornings, listing all the details I can conjure. The little yellow cooler. The entwining scents of pine and coffee. Feathered lures. Goopy orange bait. The whizzing, creaking whirl of the reel. There are neither hints nor harbingers suggesting he would continue the tradition after his death.

I wondered what, if anything, my grandfather remembers. I don’t know why I see him. No one else does. I brought Grammy here once as an experiment. Together we strolled circumnavigating the pond, as my eyes searched the shore, heart sinking. He didn’t show. Sensing my disappointment, Grammy squeezed my forearm. I haven’t brought anyone else.

Now, from under the shade of a great pine, I watch Grandpa rummaging through his tackle box, sifting its contents with just his fingertips. Taking careful steps I approach, my hand clenched tight, encasing an old pocketknife.

Sometimes he knows who I am. Mostly, he thinks I’m a stranger.

Others see him, not people who knew him, but joggers, dog walkers, and occasional anglers. They exchange nods, proof of awareness.

Today, I have a plan. My grandfather's stare holds steadfast on the red and white bobber floating on the water below even as I crouch beside him. I lay a hand on his shoulder; it is solid and warm. At last, he looks at me and I reveal the pocketknife. The one he'd carried since Korea, the knife I've kept on me since his funeral. "You dropped this."

The toothpick stills and there's a glint in his eye. He shakes his head. "Hush now. You'll scare the fish away."

I sit beside him on the damp wooden planks. Dragonflies skim the water like thrown stones scattering the falling sunbeams. When I glance down at my legs I see that his are gone. I am alone on the dock. Next to me rests a solitary toothpick. A sigh of a laugh escapes me and I return my gaze to the pond.

**L.L. MADRID** lives in Tucson where she can smell the rain before it falls. She resides with her four-year-old daughter, an antisocial cat, and on occasion, a scorpion or two. Her work can be found lurking in various corners of the internet and at [llmadrid.weebly.com](http://llmadrid.weebly.com).



# Jefferson Davis's Six Degrees of Separation from Kevin Bacon: The Real Story

Brian Lillie

## *1ST DEGREE*

Jefferson Davis purchased a sock boiler from Stanislav Gamoria, the crazed Prussian inventor who was holed up in Philadelphia for several years in the mid-nineteenth century, waiting for that whole "Gamoria Poisoned Our Water Supply" thing to blow over.

One of the socks that were boiled was a green woolen number that Davis purchased during an absinthe-fueled debauch in New Orleans a few years before the War Between the States started to screw with his nightlife. This sock later fell out of a steamer trunk as it was being transported to Charleston, along with Davis' entire collection of big-eyed silver duckling statuettes. The sock lay in a ditch for several weeks before being eaten by a particularly hungry badger.

## *2ND DEGREE*

The badger's named was "Lil' Bumpy", on account of the fact that he was smaller than the other badgers and had a fairly advanced case of eczema. (This didn't prevent him from being a favorite among the toddler badgers, who would gather around him at the holidays and listen to him tell stories about rutting, looking for food, avoiding raccoons, etc.)

Now, after Bumpy ate the boiled green sock, a strange thing happened: You see, when that sock was originally dyed, a single

snapweed seed got lodged in between some of its fibers. The act of boiling that sock several times cooked the seed, eventually releasing a tiny amount of Protease 15, which has been known to decrease the severity of skin ailments in small mammals.

Unfortunately for Bumpy, he would have needed to be soaked in eighty-five gallons of Protease 15 for five weeks to fully cure his eczema. As it was, the tiny amount he ingested was just enough to kill one of his million or so eczema bumps.

That bump was named Gary.

### *3RD DEGREE*

Gary's death sent a shockwave throughout the Lil' Bumpy Eczema community, as he was the Ombudsman for the right front paw, as well as secretary of the local Lodge. You can probably imagine that his funeral and wake were quite large and well-attended affairs, not to mention rather raucous. Over the course of the evening, all of the eczema bumps in attendance drank WAY too much and ate all sorts of fatty finger foods, which Gary's lodge brethren had brought in abundance. The smell of all these microscopic cocktail wieners and bacon-stuffed cheese modules gathered together in one small area of Lil' Bumpy's right front paw was enough to attract an elderly mosquito named Ms. Eliza Portmanteau.

Because Ms. Portmanteau's vision had deteriorated with the onset of old age (she was, after all, over thirty-five days old at this point!) she could not make out the tiny drunken mourners in their tiny little blobbish black suits, eating their tiny little snacks. All she saw was a vaguely ovoid patch of undulation that smelled like bacon. Thus, it is completely understandable that she thought she

was beholding the ancient Mosquitoan god called Skreeeeeeeeeeeeee, the Bacon-Scented Oracle of Punkratonia.

As she prostrated before the "Oracle", the drunken eczema bumps all looked up and were horrified to see the gigantic, matronly insect crouching above them. All except Pepito, Gary's brother-in-law. He was so drunk that he thought the monstrous creature was really funny, and so he shouted at the top of his lungs, "Hey big mama, why don't you come over to my place for a drink!"

Through her aged ears, Ms. Portmanteau heard Pepito's jape as "From now on, you must subsist only on flower juice!" Ms. Portmanteau went on to form a Mosquito religion called "The Juicers," who strove to give up their bloodsucking ways and live only on the nectar of fragrant woodland flowers. This religion lasted roughly three days, by the end of which all of its converts had died from malnutrition.

#### *4TH DEGREE*

Twenty-nine years later, in the library of Ohio State University in Columbus, a studious thespian by the name of Kroll Vandebreen was researching obscure Mosquito lore for his role as the eldest larvae, Flip, in Arturo Sandregar's "Death of 215,000 Mosquito Larvae," when he stumbled across a terse passage in Wooton's History of Really Stupid Insect Religions which mentioned Eliza Portmanteau and her ill-starred Juicers. Included was an artist's rendering of Ms. Portmanteau prostrating to an oddly shaped god, which glowed godishly from the paw of a badger. "Skreeeeeeeeeeeeee, the Bacon-Scented Oracle of Punkratonia," read the caption. Aha! This was just the stage moniker Vandebreen

had been searching in vain for. He had already picked out "Kevin" as the new first name that would catapult him to stardom, but now he had an equally impressive surname!

Behold! Kevin Skreeeeeeeeeeeeee!!!

Anyone who knows even a little about Hollywood would be able to tell you that Vandenbeen nee Kevin Skreeeeeeeeeeeeee went on to become one of the world's biggest stars, winning three Best Actor Oscars, and starring in over forty well-regarded hit films, including "Wax Them Horsies," "From This One Place To This Other Place With Bigger Trees," and "Akimbo!"

#### 5TH DEGREE

On His deathbed, Skreeeeeeeeeeeeee managed to write an autobiography before succumbing to elbow cancer. The book, *One Cool Guy*, became an instant bestseller, translated into twenty-five languages, including Chizembop, Eskimo, and Flozberish.

One dark and stormy night, a heavily loaded cargo plane sped above the mountains of Flozber towards the capitol city, Mulzmoondt. Its hold was filled with copies of Skreeeeeeeeeeeeee's autobiography, freshly translated and printed using burnished spinach squeezins, in the traditional Flozberian way. All of a sudden, a finger of treacherous lightning jabbed downwards from the darkened clouds like a second-grade teacher accusing a seven-year-old of stealing her Hello Kitty "Best Teacher in the World" nose hair clippers, striking the plane and effectively busting it in two. Books and molten fuselage screamed away in great billowing wads to crash into the lonely mountains below.

One book, though, remained aloft in a particularly playful current of air, which blew the lucky tome all the way to Greenland before depositing it, unharmed, in the laundry basket of Kjerkl't Ntttkrrsko'trsk, a local sportswriter, who was busy working on an article about that afternoon's National Sodball Championship match between the Grrkkt'l Sassownsk'tts and the Ornjsk Bierntt'llqt's.

### 6TH DEGREE

That afternoon, Ntttkrrsko'trsk slipped on a rogue Mento and broke his leg, while rushing to turn in his story. At the hospital, his niece Tjyerka'ssk visited, and he asked if she would go to his apartment and hang his laundry out to dry, which he had planned to do himself but would now be unable.

Tjyerka'ssk agreed, and when she went to her uncle's apartment, she discovered Skreeeeeeeeeeeeee's autobiography sitting atop the mildly damp laundry. The combination of the colors of the book jacket, the smell of the laundry, and the cavorting late afternoon sunbeams which filled the apartment caused Tjyerka'ssk's head to expand to seventeen times its normal size.

Kevin Bacon stepped through her enlarged left nostril, wiped himself off with a bedspread, and offered to take her out for scones.

A week later, he starred in *Footloose* . . .

**BRIAN LILLIE** is a writer from Ann Arbor Michigan.

# The Salwar

Ramsha Siddiqui

Razia had crept into her husband's private room while he was away. The room had a single shelf lining the wall; otherwise, it was a grey drab room. Underneath the *charpai*<sup>1</sup> were sacks made out of bedsheets, stuffed and top-knotted as if ready to be carried away balanced on a head. She touched the bottles on the shelf, smelling the ingredients, unscrewing lids and rubbing the powder between her fingers. They were usually in an indistinguishable state, all pastes and powders of herbs and roots tightly secured in stoppers. There was also a lockable register where he wrote down his homeopathic remedies and beside it a small metal canister where he kept his degree from Aligarh University; he had wanted to sell it, but she told him it was his only worthy possession. In return he told her that she was very plain apart from her perfectly shaped ears.

Razia walked into the room, she walked over to the charpai. There was a starch white *salwar*<sup>2</sup> laid out, fresh, ready to be worn. She touched the fabric; it was stiff and needed a little sweat to soften it, she thought. As if the strange thought had overcome her, she slid off her salwar in a swift motion, almost lost her balance, and steadied herself on the edge of the charpai. She then drew up the brand-new salwar, swept her long shirt to the side and clutched it on her hip while she worked at the drawstring. As she tied the second knot, a strange thought occurred to her, one of those things

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<sup>1</sup> a traditional woven bed used in the Indian subcontinent.

<sup>2</sup> a pair of light, loose, pleated trousers tapering to a tight fit around the ankles, worn by women from South Asia, typically with a kameez.

no one would really dwell on but it might have just been a *qabooliat ki ghari*<sup>3</sup>, so that before she was finished knotting, Razia disappeared into starched white trousers.

Razia, who was now no longer Razia, or a different kind of Razia, was nowhere to be found when her husband arrived. He was twice her age, and the first time she saw him he had reminded her of a shrivelled-up frog in the June sun: tough and brown and shrunken to the bone. That morning he lay in bed soundlessly curled to his side, while she lay as far away from him as she could, then, turning to face him, she inched closer and studied him. She looked at his furrowed brow and wisps of an unremarkable grey beard and felt a hardening resentment. It was the kind of solid stuff that built in her, but she could not explain it without sounding thankless. So she reminded herself about how he always bought things in twos so there would always be a spare ceiling fan or pair of slippers, but it was his incessant nagging that had become unbearable; taunting seemed to run in his family like a disease. Women's minds, he said, run at zero meter, just look at my wife, she can't even make my breakfast the way I like it. The brother's wife was pleased with this and heaped more food into his plate. One day at breakfast he was complaining about the state of his eggs, cold and unsalted, yet proceeded to chew loudly, smacking his lips with every sip of tea. She picked up her knife and stabbed the toast on her plate but kept looking down. He had begun to irritate her enormously, especially in the bedroom when he touched her clumsily while she cringed at his trembling hands, creased and thick like paws; he wore a look on his face as if he was about to cry or sneeze but couldn't find relief.

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<sup>3</sup> any time when prayers are answered

When Razia's husband came home, he called out for her, but there was no answer. She had been quiet and ponderous over the last few days, and her quietness unnerved him. He peered into the kitchen but there was no food prepared, yet a strange odour permeated the house. Recognizing the acrid, ripe smells of his tonics and bottles, he quickly marched into his private room. He was infuriated, discovering his things out of order—opened and spread and smelling everywhere, he thought, I don't want to have to slap her again, but a young dumb girl needs some sense. When he squatted down to start clearing his things, his eye caught, on the *charpai*, a white starched *salwar*—that was reassuring. He thought she had laid it out for him, maybe she had bought it for him, made it for him, and maybe she was finally getting over the whole incident.

He slid off his blue *salwar* and eagerly grabbed onto the bleach white. He slipped in one scrawny leg and then another; he hiked it up to his waist. He lifted up his shirt, clenching it under his chin, and strained to see the work his hands were doing below his grey-haired belly. He noticed the drawstring was too long but double-knotted it and stuffed it inside, letting it hang against his skinny thigh. Allowing the shirtfront to drop, he then changed into one of his ten identical white kurtas. Strutting around feeling ship-shape, he heard the booming call for *namaz* and left for the neighbourhood mosque. He started feeling an itch in his legs, but he'd be late for the congregational prayer, so he ignored it.

Inside the mosque he settled his damp feet on the straw mat spread across the marble floor.



“Allahuakbar.”

Razia, who had stitched herself anew into starch white, slowly began her tightening and tautening; she began shrinking around his scrawny hairless legs. The white shrunk up so that his ankles started to become visible. He felt this strange occurrence taking place and thought she hadn't soaked the unstitched garment to let it shrink, and now it was shrinking on his body, from his own sweat. Except the prayer room was cool enough, and he wasn't even sweating. It was breaking his concentration, and with his hands across his belly he stole a quick glance downwards—the devil's imagination has gotten into me, I must concentrate.

“Allahuakbar.”

He quickly bent down to catch up with the rest of the congregation. Razia was enjoying herself now. She chafed the dangling sack of his balls and started to choke his flaccid penis so that he gave out a sudden yelp. The whole thing looked like a tuskless elephant, currently endangered. As he bent with his hands on his knees, he itched and scratched there, digging his trimmed nails as far as he could. While fifty or so foreheads greeted the mat in prostration, he quickly rubbed and scratched where Razia tightened the most. The elephant had started to sweat, and if it could have, it would have delivered an ear-splitting trumpet that would cause the congregation to scatter barefoot. He was terribly anxious now, and his eyes were watering from the pain—he broke his prayer; he would offer his penance-prayers, but he just had to get the damn thing off—so she hadn't forgiven him after all, and there was some black magic in this; he was sure of it. At the doorstep of the prayer room there was a muddle of slippers and sandals, but he didn't care right now to find the shoe that fit. He

slipped out into the street, panting and jogging while someone called out to him, but he ignored the concerned voice.

There was a movement around his waist; the drawstring unknotted, snaked its way across his tufted belly, and wrapped around him tightly as he shrieked. The garment had now shrivelled itself right down to his lower half, paralyzing any further struggle. It was clear to him he could no longer move, although he was close enough to his house down the narrow, pitted street. Neighbours had started gathering around his fallen figure. His legs would soon start to swell and he trembled—his body half curled and half stiff, had started to fall numb before he was laid onto a stretcher and driven away.

Razia was left in the stiff white of the garment that had to be cut and peeled, shred and scissored till every little bit was finally torn away. She felt she had astonished her husband to his rightful decline, and that now she could rest happily in her tatters.

**RAMSHA SIDDIQUI** is currently doing her BA in liberal arts from Beaconhouse National University in Lahore, Pakistan. She enjoys writing surrealist poetry and dabbles in short story writing to survive against depression. She also enjoys traditional forms of Islamic art, Qawwali, Punjabi poetry and is fond of surrealist artworks and fiction.

# Double-Strength Demon Dogs

Robert Roman

Fantastic Freddie was the only altar boy from the Red Brick Alley. He was always consecrating Ritz Crackers and trying to make us eat them like communion wafers. He light-fingered incense from the sacristy, and he blessed water from Old Lady Tully's spigot and flicked it in our faces before we played Mutually Assured Destruction in the woods. When you asked if he wanted to become a priest when he grew up, he said no, he wanted to be a ninja. How stupid. He was way too big and fat to be a ninja. If anybody could get a job as a ninja, it was me, because I was small and compact, and I was the fastest, strongest, agilest sixth-grader on the North Side of Pittsburgh.

"Listen up, Ringer. You'd better hurry and sign up with the altar boys. The Apocalypse is due any day, and you need to work off some sins," Fantastic Freddie said to me for the millionth billionth time.

I knew the stinking Soviets were itching to pick a nuclear war with us, and America's new president, Ronald Reagan, wasn't about to chicken out. I had nightmares about the end of the world all time. The nuns at Saint Augie's were always talking about megatons, and radiation sickness, and places in Japan where people's skin melted off and eyeballs exploded and shadows got deep-fried into walls. I worked on my fighting skills every day, and my little brother, Jaggerbush, had tons of supplies hidden all over, so we were ready for Armageddon. But I wasn't much for joining things, especially the altar boys and their stupid costumes, and I didn't admit it to anybody, but being up on the altar gave me the

creeps. It made me feel transparent so everyone could see inside me and see all the things I'd done wrong and all the bad things I wanted to do. But after the nuclear bombs exploded and made mushroom clouds everywhere, knowing some altar boy magic tricks might come in handy against the Soviets since they didn't believe in God.

"Maybe he doesn't want to join your hocus-pocus boys," Jaggerbush said. He looked like a crooked stick figure with his long skinny arms and legs, holding the metal handle of his red wagon, staring up at Fantastic Freddie's fat head. Even his hair looked scribbled the way it stuck up all over the place.

"Shut up, Jaggerbush," Fantastic Freddie said. "You're just mad because Father Morgan excommunicated your butt."

"Father Morgan the Organ made an escape goat out of me," Jaggerbush said.

"Isn't eleven too old to be riding around in a little red wagon?" Fantastic Freddie said.

"Isn't twelve too old to be pulling your pants all the way down to your knees just to take a whiz?" Jaggerbush sat in his wagon, "Increase energy to the Wave Motion Engine."

He drifted down the Red Brick Alley slower than one mile per hour. His squeaky wagon wheels sounded like a top-secret space alien radio signal beaming in from the galaxy next door. Fantastic Freddie stuck his fingers in his ears, the big fat baby.

Antonio came walking down the Red Brick Alley dribbling a red dodge ball with one hand and carrying a plastic gallon of purple juice in the other.

"Let's play Murder Ball!" Fantastic Freddie said.

"I told Ding Dong I'd deliver his newspapers for him," I said.

“Throw them down the sewer and tell him you got jumped,” Fantastic Freddie said.

I couldn’t do that to Ding Dong; I gave him my word. Plus, I needed the money, comic books were up to fifty cents apiece.

“Watch out, that’s Killard territory.” Antonio took a swig from his gallon of purple juice. “Even you ain’t bad enough to take them on, Ringer.”

From their scrawny old Grandma down to the newest one who ran the streets in nothing but a dirty diaper, the Killards were nastier than stepping on a rusty nail. You couldn’t keep track of how many there were since they all looked alike with their red hair and freckle-faces. They never played with anyone except each other, and they’d fight you for no reason at all. The girls were as bad as the boys. One of them had yanked a handful of hair right out of Antonio’s afro. She would’ve plucked him bald if I hadn’t been there to drill her in the eye with a football.

I climbed up Veteran Street with Ding Dong’s paper sack slung over my shoulder. It was steeper than Mount Olympus. Every house on the left side of the street was way up at the top of a long set of steps, and all the houses on the right side were way down at the bottom of their own sets of steps, and most of the yards had chain-link fences so you couldn’t even take a shortcut across the lawns.

“Hey, cuz, you collecting today?” Smoothie Spoony said.

I looked him dead in his spoon-shaped face to let him know he didn’t sneak up on me. He was a tall sucker, but he didn’t have any calf muscles at all. I was tempted to say yes just to see if he’d really try to jump me. I bet I could scoop him up and body slam him, even though he would’ve been in high school if he hadn’t flunked

so many times. But I had a job to do, so I told him the same thing I told him every time he asked if I was collecting, “Nope, Ding Dong collected yesterday.”

After I climbed up and down a billion steps, I finally made it to the last loop of the paper route. We called it the Street That Time Forgot because it didn’t have a street sign and the asphalt was all tore up and the city never bothered to repave it and no kids lived there. The houses looked like they were about to lose their grip on the mountainside and slide down through the woods into the East Street Valley. I had one last paper to deliver before I could head back to the Red Brick Alley for some Murder Ball.

*Roarrrrrrrrrrrrrr!*

A gargantuan dog sprang out from between two parked cars and made me jump so high I swear I would’ve been able to grab a basketball rim. I’d had run-ins with some vicious wild dogs before, but this was the biggest, meanest monster I’d ever seen. He wasn’t a Boxer or Great Dane or Rottweiler or Doberman or Pit Bull or Akita. I’d say he was a combination of wolf and radioactive fallout.

I stood my ground and barked right back at him. He stunk worse than a prehistoric creature from the bottom of the ocean. He lunged at my face. I swung my newspaper sack and caught him in the jaw. He tore the sack out of my hand and whipped it into the street. I stomped my foot at him. He snapped his teeth at me. They looked like broken forearm bones. I peeled the Hell out of there.

He took off after me. He was too quick to juke out. I dove headfirst over a wooden fence into somebody’s front yard. While I was in mid-air, he ripped one of my Pro-Keds right off. He leapfrogged the fence, too! The last thing I wanted was to be locked in a yard with that man-eater. I flipped myself back over the fence

and punched the gas. I didn't dare look over my shoulder for fear of losing speed until I made it to the top of the hill.

The monster stood in the middle of the street, snarling and barking with his acid slobber flying everywhere, daring me to come back. I picked up a rock and threw it over his head to scare him off so I could get my poor Pro-Ked and deliver Ding Dong's last paper. He jumped in the air and caught it in his mouth like a Frisbee. The rock hit his teeth with a *clonk* that made me wince, but he didn't seem to mind at all. He was some type of mutant, and not the good kind. I needed reinforcements.

I took off my tube sock so I wouldn't ruin it and hopped all the way home on one foot.

Back in the Red Brick Alley I told Jaggerbush and Fantastic Freddie and Antonio what happened.

"Sounds supernatural. I'll be right back," Fantastic Freddie ran home.

"No way," Antonio said. "You won't catch me messing with any demon dog." He took his red dodge ball and purple juice and ran home.

Fantastic Freddie came back with a black beaded rosary wrapped around his fist like brass knuckles and his book bag strapped to his back.

"Let's see if this unholy creature can stand up to the power of the Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church."

"You plan on exorcising him?" I said.

"That's right. I'm going to send this mongrel straight back to the pit of hell that spawned him."

Jaggerbush laughed and knelt one boney knee inside his wagon and pushed with the other foot scooter-style toward Perrysville

Avenue. His squeaky wheels beamed their loud radio signal up into space.

Fantastic Freddie hummed "Onward Christian Soldiers" as the two of us headed back up Veteran Street. If he could pull off a victory against the killer dog, it'd be a miracle. I'd ask Father Morgan the Organ to sign me up with the altar boys first thing at school tomorrow morning.

The Street That Time Forgot was dead quiet. No sign of life.

"There's your high-top," Fantastic Freddie said, pointing at my Pro-Ked sitting in the middle of the street like a hunk of cheese in a mousetrap.

"Go get it," he said. "I'll cover you."

"With what?"

"The power of the Holy Spirit," Fantastic Freddie said. "Reveal yourself, hell hound!"

The dog burst out from behind a car like he was waiting to ambush us. He looked even bigger than before. Some radiations were known to make you grow at ultrasonic speed.

"By the power vested in me by the Diocese of Pittsburgh, I command you to exit this canine," Fantastic Freddie splashed holy spigot water in the sign of the cross at the dog. The beast didn't slow down one bit. Fantastic Freddie threw his book bag in one direction and took off running in the other.

"Satan leave this pooch!" he did a second-base slide under a Dodge Omni then shimmied all the way underneath. I don't know how he made his blubber fit. The dog jammed his snout under the car like a great white shark attacking an underwater cage.

"Demons begone!" Fantastic Freddie screamed.



I unzipped his book bag. It was full of stuff a priest would take on a house call. Crosses, vials of water and oil, stoles, a missal, one of those gold plates with a frying-pan handle they stuck under your chin when you received communion, and other stuff he swiped from Saint Augie's.

Fantastic Freddie yelled from under the Omni, "The power of Christ compels you!"

I grabbed the ball-and-chain thingy Father Morgan the Organ waved around to stink up the church with incense. I swung it in circles over my head like Thor's hammer and let it fly at the dog.

*Ka-Thump!*

It smacked him in the ribcage. It didn't hurt him, but it distracted him from Fantastic Freddie. He stampeded toward me. I scampered up onto the roof of a beat-up old pick-up truck. The dog launched himself up the driver-side door snapping his teeth at the air then slid back down.

Fantastic Freddie poked his head out from under the Omni. The dog roar-barked at him. His head disappeared like a turtle's.

"My God, my God," he cried, "Why have you forsaken me?"

The beast ran circles around the pick-up truck like such a hellion he slid out of control as he rounded the corners, his claws scrapping and scratching the asphalt.

We were both trapped. The dog was too much for us. Ding Dong's paper sack lay in the street with the last paper still inside. And I was still short one Pro-Ked. The bottom of my bare foot was black as tar. God had failed us. Or at least the Diocese of Pittsburgh had.

"Heavenly Father protect us!" Fantastic Freddie yelled from underneath the Omni.

A super loud squeak blasted through the sky. The dog slammed on the brakes and his pointy devil ears shot up in the air. Jaggerbush came torpedoing down the middle of the Street That Time Forgot in his trusty wagon. I stood up on the roof of the pick-up. The dog charged up the hill toward him barking and snarling. Jaggerbush and the dog plowed headlong toward one another, and neither of them looked like they were playing chicken.

A split second before impact, Jaggerbush threw two handfuls of dog biscuits up in the air, the kind that were shaped like little bones. The dog parked on his butt and took his good old time licking up the biscuits, and Jaggerbush rode his wagon all the way down the hill until he was out of sight.

I jumped down onto the pavement and scooped up my Pro-Ked and pulled it on my bare foot without tying it. I snatched Ding Dong's paper sack and delivered the last newspaper. I grabbed Fantastic Freddie's fat foot and yanked it with all my might. He popped out from under the Omni.

"I'm risen!" Fantastic Freddie said. "Thank you, Lord!"

A platoon of redheaded, freckle-faced kids with dirty, white undershirts came trudging out from between the trees down at the end the street. Killards!

"Hey," the tallest one yelled. "Who said you could feed our little puppy?"

Me and Fantastic Freddie laid tire out of there.

I made it to the top of the hill in record time. The Killards were too busy petting their mutt and taste-testing the dog biscuits to chase us.

Fantastic Freddie said, "Rejoice Ringer. I'll tell Father Morgan you helped me defeat that evil demon so he'll let you join the altar boys."

"Your stupid voodoo didn't work one bit."

"You have to join us. Your immortal soul is in danger."

"Morgan the Organ already promised me I'd never make it to Heaven with my record."

"Don't forget about the altar boy summer picnic."

"Why would I go to some dumb picnic?"

"It's at the wave pool in South Park."

Hmm, I always wanted to go to the wave pool.

**ROBERT ROMAN** was born in Pittsburgh, PA; taught incarcerated teenagers in Baltimore, MD; studied fiction writing at Johns Hopkins and UCLA; and currently writes America's favorite Hangman puzzles. He's had stories published in *Six Three Whiskey*, *Eclectica Magazine*, and *The Nervous Breakdown*.





## On the cover:

### “Infanta”

**STEPHEN O'DONNELL** is a mid-career fine artist.

His work is widely collected both in this country and abroad.

Entirely self-taught, he is

best known for his self-portraiture, paintings which most often employ a great deal of gender ambiguity, historicism, and a rather droll humor. His work—both literary and visual—has appeared in the literary magazines/journals *Nailed*, *Menacing Hedge*, and *Gertrude*. He is married to writer and graphic designer Gigi Little. They live in Portland, Oregon with their dog Nicholas. You can find his work at [stephenodonnellartist.com](http://stephenodonnellartist.com).

