

# JERSEY DEVIL PRESS



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# JERSEY DEVIL PRESS

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## Editor's Note

It's spring, and our little garden plot in the Pine Barrens is starting to sprout. Paul Van Dyke supplies the time-traveling turtles, and Marie Marshall reveals the name of the rose. There's a nice border of moon rocks courtesy of Mariah Montoya, and Michael A. Ferro generates a pleasing atmosphere of claustrophobic paranoia.

Grab a trowel, or one of those tiny three-pronged rakes, and join us. There's plenty of iced tea and earthworms for everyone.

— Laura Garrison

# Moonpickers

**Mariah Montoya**

I pick a moon slice from the ground, hover it near my mouth, put it between my teeth like a spongy translucent bone. It tastes like crab cakes, but nobody else would know that. Each slice is a different texture, a different taste.

It's nighttime, and around me backs arch in labor, scooping the illuminating slivers out of pasture grass and sliding them into stained gray buckets. Our silence is not heavy like our buckets, but lacking gravity instead, dismissed of all depth, only wondering when the next sunrise can be and how the sun can possibly rise with a shattered moon that fell to earth and stayed there. We remain hunched, trying to find the pieces and mend them, even as some of the more damaged ones crumble into gritty powder between our fingers.

While sucking on my fourth slice of moon, my neighbor, without straightening his body from its infinite bowed nature, says, You can't do that.

I can do what I want, I tell him, mouth mumbled by the moon jutting out of the corner of my lips like a cigarette. This one tastes like a sour candy.

The moon belongs to the government, the man says.

Around him, people begin whispering, even as their noses nearly brush soil and their hands keep laboriously digging. Some repeat, Moon belongs to the government, others shout, Moon belongs to man. All the while I keep sucking, hearing nothing besides pebbly gray buzzing. In the end this is what true silence

means: when voices around you thrum so loud you no longer hear the pulse of the universe.

The sliver of moon, it eventually dissolves in my mouth, melting into my tongue before the argument between moonpickers ever resolves. It fills me with a swishing sensation, like I've swallowed an acidic ocean—one glowing splinter that I have effectively absorbed, proof that we will never find all the pieces, that our sky will stay darkened like the gap of a missing tooth.

But as my stomach churns and crawls, as I queasily continue picking, I have a thought: if we ever did mend the moon and launch it once more into the sky, we'd remain too stooped to witness. We would, out of habit, continue harvesting shards of *other* things—shells, fallen stars, our own bones. Yes, we would harvest with hoes and shovels and buckets, not realizing that the patched moon was resurrected above us, not realizing that the fragments we foraged were not from the sky, but from us.

Perhaps this is the case now, and the moon is actually beaming down on my domed back. I *try* to look up, I really do, but my neck muscles are too stiff to crane. I remain staring at the ground, my lips inches from a penny-sized shining piece of *something* in the weeds and rocks.

My neighbor says, Hey, get back to work. I reach down, grab the penny-sized moon, and pop it into my mouth like a pill.

Then, in that eternal cavity of night, I keep digging, and we all keep digging, like the sun waiting for permission to rise, or like the world pausing for its stars to find light.

**MARIAH MONTOYA's** work is published or forthcoming in *The Bookends Review*, *Typehouse Literary Magazine*, and *The Molotov Cocktail*. She lives in Idaho.

# Violence on Thursday

Michael A. Ferro

Mondays are wretched but there is little you can do to fight against a Monday; you sit down and you let it beat you, blow after blow until the clock runs out. Thursdays on the other hand seem almost the perfect time for fighting back, for violence. Weeks gather momentum and with Friday still a day away, if the right conditions are present, people snap. Watch the news and you'll see.

It's always unexpected—discovering what weighs most heavily in the origination of a dangerous, cracking individual—be it an interior motive or exterior pressures. The truth usually balances upon the paper-thin barrier between the two, one influencing the other influencing the other.

It was rush hour on Thursday and Catherine was caught inside the cycle. Not only was she trapped somewhere within her own internal cognizance, but she was also quite literally wedged among a sea of bodies at the corner of W. Madison and S. Clark. It was sweltering and she had on a wool women's suit. She could have smacked herself right then and there if she weren't so cautious of drawing more attention. All day long she received plenty of attention; she felt sick to her stomach from the attention, from the hundreds of never-blinking eyeballs fixated upon her. If at that moment there appeared a door in front of her and a game show host told her that she only need walk through that door and she would either receive one million dollars or complete, constant attention every waking moment for one year, she would shyly turn



and walk in the opposite direction with her hands in her empty pockets.

From a few blocks west she could hear the long, drawn-out wail of an ambulance interposed by the echoing sirens of multiple police cruisers. Something had happened close by, but hardly a passing glance was made by anyone in the crowd around her.

Over the tops of many heads—some covered with ball caps, others with wild hair, and still others with no hair at all to protect their domes from the scorching sun—she could see the man. He was taller than the rest and so was she—yet another attention-grabbing feature of hers that she detested. Catherine was used to locking eyes with tall men over a field of hair and hats. The man never broke his gaze and flashed his tiny, pointed teeth as he slithered through the bodies toward her.

Annoyed, she briefly looked down, but by the time she raised her head once more the man was directly in front of her. She felt his hand grab hers and as she pulled it away, Catherine felt *cold, hard steel* in her grasp. Those three words stormed her mind—she knew what it was and recoiled in horror. She looked down and saw the barrel and cylinder, the grip now in her palm. When she brought her head back up the man was nowhere to be seen, having ducked below the surface of heads and slipped away with his wide, shark-like grin.

Inside her thoughts raced while people pushed around her, pressed together like livestock wrestling to make their way into a pen. She thought about dropping the thing but didn't know if it would discharge. She jammed it into her tiny handbag, but it didn't quite fit, the grip sticking out. Had anyone seen? Frantic now, she

searched for a solution, somewhere to hide. If she told someone, how could they believe her?

Just then she locked eyes with a tall Chicago policeman moving towards her.

Born and bred in Detroit, **MICHAEL A. FERRO** was awarded the Jim Cash Creative Writing Award for Fiction. His debut novel, *TITLE 13*, will be published by Harvard Square Editions in 2018. His work has appeared in numerous journals in both print and online at *Splitsider*, *Chicago Literati*, *Random Sample Review*, *Viewfinder Literary Magazine*, *Points in Case*, and is forthcoming in *The Avalon Literary Review*, *The Corvus Review*, *Linden Avenue Literary Journal*, and elsewhere. Additional publications can be found at: [www.michaelaferro.com](http://www.michaelaferro.com). After traveling, working, and writing throughout the Midwest, Michael currently resides in rural Ann Arbor, Michigan.

## Sergeant Cuff names a rose 'Catherine Earnshaw'

Marie Marshall

Strife always comes too soon, to hell with  
single spies! The catlike tread in Whitechapel,  
the single shoeprint in mud, the sky of Norfolk,  
the helter and skelter to outrace a team of Slovaks,  
the inch-by-inch through flock wallpapers fingertip  
to thumb in measurement becomes (in a mind)  
the navigation of deltas; so carefully trace in  
beautiful serifs, italic, on the bald label thus:

*C A T H E R I N E E A R N S H A W,*

and kiss the petals. Sepals, the cupping hand,  
the necessary, a map of theosophism, a magnificent  
ice garnered from the profits of Thornton's of Milton,  
carried in a sweethearts bosom to Sevastopol,  
rumoured in opiate dreams thus: 'm cmng fr y,  
my lst lve, my dmnd, my chng trsr, brth fr m.  
O lobes of the calyx, o stamen, o evening pink,  
o Thorne, style and stem, morning pink, shades  
of skylleap from Nell Trent's cheek to blood

[Cuff, porlocked by the arrival of a telegram,  
"Assistance needed urgent at Rue Morgue,"  
packs nothing but a slim valise and leaps to  
his old calling!] all the time making Thesauri  
of redness to populate his diary prose; he laughs

at his conceit and at the sour syntax of his dreams,  
wonders who's concealed behind the firescreen  
ready in ambush; and yes, he finds to be torn  
between home/rose and the great detection game.

There are no blind allées, no cryptogrammed  
plaint on "Juwes", just broad Haussmann blvds  
and little back-rue cafés where dwarved painters  
pick out night belles and dancers to immortalise —  
and though Cuff may unveil, or pluck from a  
sweetheart's bosom, the name of the murderer,  
(shake hands with Dupin), a Svengali or a simian,  
he reflects on the ol' delta journey, the long century,  
my rose, my Catherine. On. His. Moustached. Lip.

**MARIE MARSHALL** is an Anglo-Scot in late middle age. She has a humdrum 9-5, and she writes to keep what's left of her sanity. She has had three novels published (one more pending) and two collections of poetry, one of which was nominated for the 2014 T.S. Eliot Prize.

# FTONA

Paul Van Dyke

All I wanted was a pet turtle. I didn't want to start a war, or bend time and space, or save humanity. I just wanted a little friend with a shell who didn't need to be fed too often, and couldn't run away when I started talking about my personal problems.

The thing standing between me and my dreams of turtle ownership was the same thing that stopped me from ever owning roller blades, comic books, a guitar, or t-shirts with clever sayings. My dad said they didn't serve a purpose. Turtles not serving a purpose, boy was he wrong!

This was back when I lived with my parents, before the war, and the black holes, and all that stuff. I'd just finished high school and was waiting to start college in the fall. I had no idea what I wanted to do with my life and possessed no skills that I considered marketable, so I planned to major in business.

I made that plan before I was bestowed with the title of Defender of All Humankind. My dad always said that only bums don't go to college, but I figured after I saved a billion people, I was an exception to the rule. My dad never got a chance to call me a bum, because he was turned into a puddle of goo during the war. Mom keeps him in a jar on the mantle.

But enough about my lack of higher education or a dad, I was talking about my turtle. I was never much of a pet person. Every one of my mom's cats was as arrogant as anyone I've ever met. Sometimes I would look at one of those self-absorbed felines

sauntering around the house like *their* dad owned the place, and I'd yell, "I get it. You're a cat. Get over yourself!"

I thought it was just cats I didn't like, but I spent a summer at my aunt and uncle's house, and their dog annoyed me at *least* as much as three cats. It acted like an attention-starved child, and I swear my uncle must have fed that thing twice a day.

Now that I think about it, I was never much of a people person, either. Dogs have nothing on the neediness of humans. Not only do they insist on being fed three times a day, they also invent needs for themselves like friendship, Volvos, maybe a hug every now and then, college degrees, and people to listen to their personal problems.

One positive about humans: they don't shed.

Fortunately, I was born into the information age and was able to build a happy and fulfilling childhood for myself on the Internet. Chat rooms, search engines, social media, file sharing, MMORPGS, so many ways to connect to the people around me without ever having to leave my room, or for that matter, put on a clean shirt. During the war, I learned that web cams in the future can capture scent, so since then I have always worn a clean shirt while I surf the web.

I was trolling a directory of social media clubs when I made the decision that would forever alter human history. I scrolled over a club called TONA, and I just hated that I didn't know what it stood for. This might sound crazy, but I have a thing for acronyms. I love them. I can't remember what the first acronym I learned was, but since then, I have always seen them as the language of God.

A word compressed into a single letter. An entire phrase packed into a single word. I had a panic attack when I was eleven because I

had a dream where entire acronyms were being compressed to a single letter and linked together to form a super acronym. It didn't stop there though; the super-acronyms became single letters to birth even greater acronyms. This continued until everything—Fortune 500 companies, government agencies, military weapon systems—all the information in the world was loaded into the letter F. Looking back on that dream, I believe a panic attack was a severe under-reaction.

I clicked on TONA—because I just had to know—and a cartoon turtle wearing a cowboy hat and a sheriff's badge appeared on my computer screen.

"Howdy!" it said in a high-pitched voice.

"Howdy," I whispered back to my new friend.

I was then brought to the homepage of Turtle Owners of North America. As a proud North American, I was immediately interested. The site had streaming video from some show called Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, thousands of pictures of North Americans with their pet turtles, and links to informational sites about how to take care of them. I was in love.

After checking the TONA site, I made the most important decision of my life: I made the commitment to buy a turtle. I decided I would name him after my favorite band, NKOTBSB. They used to be two bands—New Kids on the Block and the Back Street Boys—until their acronyms merged to turn two washed-up boy bands into a ten-man supergroup. I have never heard any of their music, and I plan to keep it that way. I fear it would ruin something beautiful. I once had a dream that NSYNC merged with NKOTBSB to form a fifteen-man megagroup and an L-shaped

acronym with the N serving as the elbow. That was enough to give me another panic attack.

Later, when I became a turtle owner, I learned that turtles name themselves, and I was an arrogant fool to think otherwise.

I thought about joining TONA right when I discovered the site. I already felt like a turtle owner in my heart, and I was certainly a proud North American. I placed my mouse cursor right over the link to join, and nearly clicked it. I was in a bad place in my life then. What stopped me from clicking wasn't the sense of honor all turtle owners and North Americans should feel; what stopped me was the ugly face of fear. I was afraid the other members would cross-examine me and inquire as to why I had no pictures of my turtle on the site. They would either see me as the fraud I was, or as someone who wasn't proud of their pet turtle. I refused to be either of those things. If I were caught, I would never be able to show my face around TONA again, no matter how many turtles I owned.

Rather than join TONA under false pretences, I formed my own club. In doing so, I started a war that killed a million people and prevented a larger war that would have slain a billion. I became the greatest hero in the history of mankind, but I also had more blood on my hands than all but ten or twelve people who have ever lived. The club was called FTONA.

Future Turtle Owners of North America.

Oblivious to the million lives I was about to end, I spent the entire summer curating my site. As the founding and sole member of the club, my responsibilities were great. I had to do all of the multimedia myself, which mostly consisted of photoshopped pictures of myself next to various species of turtles.



I also wrote all of the site's blog entries. My most heartfelt writing was about a dream I had where I was balancing my pet turtle's shell on my head while little NKOTBSB's short little arms and legs dangled in the air like he was trying to swim through the sky. When I awoke from the dream, my alarm clock was lying on my forehead and I felt the emptiness of being a non-turtle owner.

Nobody read my blog because, like I said, I was the club's only member. I think anyone else who had the desire to become a turtle owning North American had already bought a turtle (or moved to North America.) I liked that nobody else was on the site. I don't think people would have understood the love I poured into my homepage. It was the same love I would show little NKOTBSB when he and I were united in the fall.

The night before I went to college, I wrote my farewell blog to FTONA. In the morning I would be a turtle-owning North American, and could join TONA in good conscience. I wrote in my closing paragraph that spending the entire summer preparing myself for turtle ownership has taught me patience, making me more like the noble creature I would soon own, and if we could all be more like turtles, the world would be a happier place to live.

I had a dream that there was a response to my posting. It was the first response of the summer.

Message: And we would only need to come out of our shells when we ran out of pickles! —N

I awoke with a start, and hit the space bar to take my computer off sleep mode. I knew it was only a wonderful dream, but there was no way I would be able to fall back to sleep until I saw it for myself.

To my surprise, there was a message. I looked at my hands to see if I was holding a turtle. No turtle. I wasn't dreaming. Someone was interested in FTONA!

Message: How did you find out about the turtles? When are you from? —X

I forgave the typo of *when* instead of *where* in the message, because its sender had the class to compress his/her name to a single letter.

My response: I learned most of what I know about turtles from TONA, and I am from North America—Minnesota, to be more precise. Tell me good friend, are you a future turtle owner? —D

I had never signed my name with just one letter before. It felt good. I figured out if my whole family abbreviated our names, we could call ourselves DESK. I made a mental note to broach the subject on the car ride to college in the morning. I actually forgot to mention it after the war broke out, and by the time I remembered, my dad had already been turned into a puddle of goo.

DEK just didn't have the same ring to it.

X sent me a large data dump, and I clicked on what I expected to be pictures of him/her photoshopped next to various species of turtle, but was disgusted to find it was something no turtle-loving North American would ever send.

It was extremely wordy, but over the course of 75 pages, X explained that he was a member of an organization called F-TONA. Future-Turtle Owners of North America.

They were a collection of privateers from a distant future who learned how to harness the time traveling abilities of turtles to send themselves back in time. The data included detailed plans of how they were altering the past for a massive global takeover in the year

2132. I was disgusted. I couldn't believe anyone would make a mockery of turtle ownership.

I sent one more message to X before I blocked him from my profile. In the moment, it just felt like the right thing to send.

Message: N says we're only coming out of our shells when we need more pickles.

I then spent the remainder of the night copying the garbage X sent me and posting it on any site I could find. I included the following heading: This whole story is total BS, some SOB with no MFing respect for turtles sent me this. He's an MFing D-bag, and when I say he's an SOB, I mean his mother is in fact a B. Nobody who was raised by anyone other than a terrible, mean B would spread the BS about turtles that this MFer sent me. F him and anyone who is into this kind of S. I love turtles! I love turtles! I love turtles! —D

I don't know what got into me that night. I'm normally such a level-headed young man. I'm not ashamed of it, though. I meant every word, and even though sending that rant and the accompanying data was the final event that doomed a million people to die in the next few hours, I am glad I spoke from the heart.

The problem was that every word X sent me was true. Now that I possess all the knowledge in the universe, it makes perfect sense. How else could a tortoise beat a hare in a foot race? (Note: tortoises can only transport themselves spatially. They are not as advanced as turtles, who can transport temporally as well.) It also explained why turtles are never in a hurry—they literally have all the time in the world.

The F-TONA didn't appreciate me plastering their plans of world domination on whatever sites I happened to click on from my favorites list (I also hope that X didn't appreciate me calling his mother a B.) Their one advantage against their enemies was secrecy, and they were still twelve decades shy of having everything in place. With all the information out there, they were forced to act immediately.

Their response to my posting was a full-scale invasion of North America. The armies of the F-TONA appeared, quite punctually, at 9:00 AM CST sharp in every major city. Pin holes were ripped in the fabrics of time and space as thousands of soldiers wearing purple jumpsuits, carrying a ray gun in one hand and a turtle in the other, appeared out of thin air.

They killed without prejudice, firing ray after ray at the unprepared populous and turning them into fully prepared puddles of goo. Not much preparation actually goes into being a puddle of goo. As long as there's coagulation, you're pretty much golden.

I know exactly how many people died during each minute of the invasion. It's the curse of having all the knowledge in the universe. Knowing that there was no pain involved in the transmutation from human to goo made the statistic no less terrible.

So much goo.

At 9:32 AM CST, the enemies of F-TONA appeared. Each one of them rent their own hole in the fabrics of time and space, and the

hundreds of thousands of pin-prick black holes were stretched and widened by their arrival.

The enemy that appeared was the F-T:ONA. They came from very, very deep in the future, tens of millions of years. They were the Future-Turtles: Owners of North

America. They carried a deep-seated hatred for all of humanity after the millions of years of slavery at the hands of the F-TONA, and they came to cast judgment and deliver wrath upon mankind for the sins they had yet to commit. I guess I understand the turtles attacking us. Other than the purple jumpsuits, we looked a lot like the F-TONA, and didn't exactly set the best historical precedents regarding slavery.

Maybe that's just the turtle lover in me talking.

My dad was driving me to college when the war broke out. We were crossing downtown Minneapolis on the way to the U of M, when a black hole appeared in the road a hundred feet in front of my dad's Volvo. He was livid. Both lanes of traffic were clogged, and everybody was fleeing their vehicles for their lives. At this pace, there was no way he was going to get me to the campus in time for 10:00 AM CST orientation. He laid on the horn and said, "Oh, this is just great," but I think he was being sarcastic.

People always talk about black holes like they're the most wondrous things in the universe, but I didn't see what all the excitement was about. I guess I expected more from reality itself being twisted and crushed upon itself to become its antithesis. Another thing about black holes, once you've seen one, you've pretty much seen them all. I know this because the black hole that appeared was like a match in a sawmill with the thousands of pin-prick mini-black holes. All over the city, anything close enough to a

black hole to be caught within its event horizon was stripped to a particle level and sucked into whatever universe waited on the other end. Black holes were even pulling each other in, and violent shockwaves erupted whenever those little spots of nothingness coagulated like cosmic puddles of goo.

Then he appeared.

He emerged from the black hole blocking my dad's route. He was about the size of my hand, and he was in no hurry. He had all the time in the world, which looked like it might not have been much time at all. The thousands of screenshots and photos I'd seen did the real thing no justice. He had a little shell that looked like a leaf wrap burger bun, and tiny little feet. He wore a little golden crown on his head that was not only adorable, but also marked him as the king of his noble race.

My dad screamed at me when the backdoor of the Volvo opened. He told me to get back in the car so he could drive me to college. He didn't want me to grow up to be a bum with only a high school diploma who was unable to show my face in public; he wanted me to be a proud college graduate who drove a Volvo and didn't need to cross the street in shame when an educated man walked by. This wasn't the first time I'd heard this exact speech; he used to recite it to me as a bedtime story until I was fourteen. He was about to get to the part about how no man without a college degree could ever honestly say he lived a productive life when a stray beam from a ray gun turned him into a puddle of goo.

He lived a productive life.

I didn't even look back. All I could focus on was the little turtle with the crown on his head as he slowly went about his business of

exterminating the savages who had imprisoned him and his kind for so long.

Lots of puddles of goo.

When I came close enough, I realized he was talking. His voice was strange, like a man without a tongue who was in a hurry to get his point across. The turtle wasn't speaking in a manner in which any human had ever communicated; his brain was far too advanced to waste energy explaining every detail of every little thing with a long, drawn out, stupid language.

"B!" he bellowed, "B!"

I understood perfectly, and tears rushed down my face as the truth and beauty of his message sank in. It was like a supernova compressed into a single syllable.

"V," I answered.

The F-T:ONA began to weep as well.

"K," we both said, almost at the same time. That made us laugh.

My hands were shaking as I picked the little guy up and placed him upon my head like a crown. A throaty joyful noise came from his mouth as he moved his arms and legs in a swimming motion.

The black holes closed, and the Turtle War came to an end.

I pulled out my smart phone and added myself to the TONA roster, then I took a picture of me and N standing among the ruins of downtown Minneapolis.

North America was devastated by the 42-minute-long war. All across the continent, productive citizens had been turned into puddles of goo, and it would take months to clean up the sticky mess they left behind. The NYSE dropped 4000 points before closing bell, and the global markets tanked in the following week. Businesses were closed for weeks as owners and employees

scooped up their lost loved ones. It would take years to rebuild all the infrastructure destroyed by the black holes, and retrain new workers to replace the ones who had been turned to goo. Those could have been years of industry and innovation driving humankind into the future, but instead it would be wasted getting us back to where we left off. The SEC called the Turtle War the single worst financial atrocity in human history. I am thankful my dad didn't live to see the world become so unproductive.

We rebuilt though, no thanks to the turtles. Other than traveling time and eating pickles, they really *don't* do much of anything. Even after the reconstruction and stabilization of the markets, we never got back to where we left off. After so much death, everybody seemed to care less about money and more about one another.

The Future-Turtles had to stay in our time, because the future they came from was destroyed by the new decisions we were making. The pressure my dad put on me as a kid had nothing on the responsibility that comes with knowing my every move will ripple out into eternity. Now I'm really careful not to step on bugs. At first, I was worried the Future-Turtles would also be destroyed in some weird time/space paradox, but after N taught me everything there was to know about quantum physics, I realized how silly I was to think that.

Since I'm the only human fluent in super-acronym, I have been appointed UN ambassador to the F-T:ONA. It's not a bad gig; I get to spend a lot of time with my hard-shelled little buddies, and according to the turtles, I'm the most reasonable human being they have ever met. I just wish it didn't take so long to explain what N means when he says, "ü!"



**PAUL VAN DYKE**'s fiction and non-fiction has appeared in several literary journals, including *Water~Stone Review*, *Revolver*, and *War, Literature & the Arts*. He is a host of Write On Radio at KFAI FM in Minneapolis, where he gets to interview authors from all over the country every week. He is currently working on a memoir about his experiences in Iraq, and a novel about professional wrestling.





## On the cover:

### “Rope”

**CHRIS BEETOW** is an illustrator living in Wisconsin. When not working in her studio she can be found outdoors, usually doing something dangerous and ill-advised. Her work is available at [chrisbeetow.com](http://chrisbeetow.com).

