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Editor's Note

Welcome to Issue One Hundred and One. We're thrilled to have assembled this mixed six-pack of peculiarities for you.

Calvin Celebuski's "A Legend Is Born" packs lots of birth, death, and surreal humor into a short space, and Devin Taylor befriends a summer squash in his poem "These Things—They Just Happen." T. S. McAdams explores "Creaturehood in Contra Costa County" in his hard-boiled tale of canine cops. Gary Moshimer returns with bowling balls and flatulence in his flash story "Lar-a-bowl," and Alex Pickens takes you beyond the infinite in his playful sonnet "Stardumb." Finally, Terry Tierney explains "That Buzzing in Your Ear" in a flash piece with a scholarly seventeenth-century cleric and bugs.

— Laura Garrison

A Legend Is Born

Calvin Celebuski

The year was 1923. Jazz was still young and so was Jo Jones. With no prior experience, he walked into a rehearsal of the Al Allen Big Band and said to them "If you don't fire your drummer and hire me I will kill each and every last one of you."

"We all thought he was bluffing," Allen said later in an interview with Jazz Monthly "but we didn't want to take that risk." Allen motioned for then drummer Ry Ryan to get up and sit in an empty chair near the horns. "I have no idea why the chair was there, but it was and it's a damn good thing," Allen continued. "Otherwise Ry would have had to sit on the floor and Ry hated floors. He used to stomp on them and scream with rage." Jones took his seat and they began to play. "And man he was already swingin'," Allen said alone in his home when he thought no one was listening.

Then the incident occurred that would turn Jo Jones from a novice, possibly homicidal drummer into a legend and earned him the nickname Papa Jo Jones. About halfway through the first song, Jones began breathing heavily and fell backwards onto the floor. "Ry hated that," Allen said in an interview with Jazz News Times, "because a floor was involved." Jones ripped a hole in his pants and it started. "We all thought he was peeing at first, then we realized his water broke," Ja Jackson, who asked not to be named, said in a personal interview. "I don't know if you've ever seen someone give birth through a penis before," Jackson said, "but it's

disgusting. And the babies just kept coming. And they all knew how to drum."

"That's when we knew we had to have him in the band. Hitting things with sticks is one thing, but giving birth through a penis is another" Allen said in the Jazz Monthly interview.

When asked what to name the newborns, Jo Jones said simply "Joe, with an 'e' at the end."

"We all thought he was crazy," Ry Ryan laughed later in an interview with JazzJazzJazzJazzJazz. "Why would you put 'e' at the end of Jo? It made no sense to us … I guess that's why he's the legend and I'm nothing and no one. But at least I don't have a floor. Fucking floors. I hate them. I HATE THEM."

"Giving birth is completely painless," Jones said in an interview with Ksxx Qwwjkt in 1985. "I have no idea why mothers whine about it all the time."

No one seems to recall the exact number of babies that emerged from Jones's penis, but there was a count. "There were as many babies as there were cities in America so you could probably find out," Allen says. The band members formed a committee to decide what to do with the newborns. A decision was made to ship each baby to a different American city, and, when the time came, they would all fight to the death until there was only one survivor and that survivor would become the house drummer at Café Society in New York City. One particularly notable battle was between Albuquerque Joe Jones and Phoenix Joe Jones in a barn in California. Both were considered frontrunners as both had had great success hunting down and killing other Joe Joneses. At one point, three days into the battle, Phoenix Joe Jones was on the ground, dead. It looked like the fight was over, but, staying true to

his city's namesake, he spontaneously combusted and the fire spread to and killed Albuquerque Jo Jones. Unlike his city's namesake, he did not come back to life afterwards. In the end, Philadelphia or "Philly" Joe Jones was the last Joe Jones standing and thus a legend was born.

CALVIN CELEBUSKI is a Sarah Lawrence College graduate with few accomplishments and fewer things going on in his life at the moment. He has some pets and a webpage at calvincelebuski.tumblr.com, which he has removed most of his better stories from in the hope of getting them published elsewhere. He drums and doesn't know how to use Tumblr.

These Things—They Just Happen

Devin Taylor

I'm walking down the street and
thinking about things and thinking about people
and wishing that people are things.
I go into a store and buy a zucchini
because it whispers to me: I'm happy.
I buy some toothpicks and also a knife.
I sit in the park and stick toothpicks in the zucchini;
it is not a Voodoo doll—but it is a zucchini.
I carve a smiley face; I smile my carving face.
I name my zucchini: Zucchini Friend.
It belches thank you, sir.
With a twinkle, I belch you're welcome, friend.
It barks. I look into its slits. I gush;
I flush red flesh; I know green.
I can't contain my happiness so much
I'm coughing with joy all over my zucchini.

DEVIN TAYLOR is a recent Washington College alumnus with a B.A. in English and minors in Creative Writing and Psychology. His work can be found in *Gargoyle, Five 2 One, Maudlin House,* and elsewhere. He lives in the DC Area where plays his electric kazoo mostly alone.

Creaturehood in Contra Costa County

T. S. McAdams

Before our time, Stagecoach Drive had been a curving line of oak trees and two-million dollar homes, and abutting Briones Park was a selling point, until it became Briones Reservation, also known as the Dog Park, and suddenly it wasn't. The trees were still handsome that fall, even without leaves. And students looking for cheap rent fifteen miles from Berkeley were decent neighbors, more often than not, but they weren't there to do home maintenance.

3501 was just another jumble of hip and valley roofing, bay windows, redundant garage doors and unnecessary brick columns, but the tang of recent paint was like fresh urine on a post no one marked anymore. The bluegrass lawn was perfect, nurtured with just enough fertilizer and very little herbicide. I wanted to strip off my suit for a roll. Instead, Dobhar and I ascended three levels of terraced walkway into the shadow of the house, which stood between us and the late-morning sun. We were surprised when a particolored spaniel answered the door, and she seemed alarmed to find two large dogs on the porch. We were used to that. Her employer may or may not have told her to expect dog cops, but we weren't typical specimens.

Dobhar was mostly Newfoundland with some Rottweiler, taller and heavier than most humans, the scariest dog you'd ever meet. That's why we got the assignment. Dog cops have no authority two steps off the reservation, and Darwin forbid we threaten citizens, but they tended to answer questions in the hope Dob would go away. I'm a shepherd-mastiff mix, nearly as large as Dobhar, but

not so angry. Dob was the only dog in the East Bay with an illegal pet monkey, because he wanted to demean a primate. Naturally, living alone with the creature, he came to love it. That does not mean Dob loved humans or sapient dogs who answer their doors wearing maid uniforms. His hackles rose like a dorsal fin. The Spaniel, half our height already, dipped her head to avoid eye contact. I nudged Dob aside and displayed my meaningless badge.

"Sorry to disturb you, Miss. Officer Sampson and Officer Dobhar. Mr. Lane is expecting us."

"Yes, yes." The man appeared behind her in the hallway. "Thank you, Millie. And thank you so much for coming, officers." He was lean, serious and jowly, like a hairless Weimaraner, maybe sixty years old. His famous father died before my parents were born. He herded us past a dining room and half-landing staircase, into a living room where a large, patterned rug concealed most of a blond wood floor. Sofa and armchairs were leather, dyed unnatural colors for a contemporary ambience, and a vase on the coffee table held an arty spray of bare branches. I could picture a whippet I knew sitting on that sofa, holding a chardonnay glass by the stem, lecturing progressive humans on the growing market for indigenous canine arts and crafts. Dobhar and I stood, dysplasia be damned. Outside French doors, oak trees formed a natural grotto; humans had added a koi pond and waterfall. Lane posed in front of the view. "I'm very grateful that you're here. Of course, the sheriff's office would ordinarily handle something like this, but my family has always felt close to the canine community."

Dobhar growled, "And maybe there are things you don't want the sheriff to know?" We always growled at humans. Humans only recognize four sounds from a dog: there are barking, howling,

growling, and all other vocalizations, including most of those that became speech in sapient dogs, are classified as whining. To get respect from a human, you have to put a growl in your voice, but I didn't want Dobhar overdoing it. The Briones Reservation PD didn't send us to Gerald Lane because Lane Recombinant Technologies engineered sapient canines; more profitable work with vegetables and grains allows the family to make an annual donation, or "reparations," as Dobhar called it, that still provides thirty percent of the Reservation budget.

"If that's the case," I said, "you can count on our discretion."

"It's nothing illegal," Lane said. "At least I—My sister is missing." There it was. I'd been hoping this wouldn't involve Vera Lane. It's not as well known as you'd expect, but she used to run an obedience parlor. There are sapients, the kind who don't fit in on the reservation, who will pay humans to put collars on them, teach them to heel, give them water in bowls on the ground. Most political types say they're betraying their essential dogness, but some say no, they're embracing it, and some say it depends on whether sex is involved. Turns out, the parlors get mostly human clients anyway.

I didn't look at Dob. "How long, sir?"

"It's been a week. Eight days. We were quarreling at the time. You see, I've been working on a cure for cancers in sapient canines." I glanced at Dob then, to see if this changed his opinion of Lane. I think Lane did too. Dob wasn't readable. Lane lowered his voice and said, "Until the latest results, a few days ago, it seemed very promising." Millie the Spaniel did something quiet in the dining room, maybe put flowers on the table. Lane said his sister's boyfriend had cancer, and she wanted him to focus on a cure for

humans. Save her boyfriend first, she told him, then work on adapting the treatment for dogs.

"Even the dogs eat of the crumbs," Dob said. His mother had belonged to the Congregation of Man's Best Friend. He didn't believe, far from it, but he was full of quotes from scripture. I looked over a bookcase to keep from shushing my partner and spotted *The Call of the Wild* in hardcover. I read it during the second of my three years in school. The short course, for giant breeds. Our teacher, a beautiful setter, thought it was wonderful how well Jack London understood primitive dogs, so I thought so too. And maybe he did, but how could either one of us know that?

"There's no legal issue," Lane said. "There's no law that says I have to research human applications first. The biology isn't much different, anyway. But if Vera went public, there are groups that— It would have complicated my position at the university."

Dobhar said, "So you switched to humans?"

"No," said Lane. "I feel bad for Neil, I do. But there are sapient canines just as—family just as worried—"

I said, "How sick is Millie, Mr. Lane? How long does she have?"

Wrinkles contracted, squeezing his features into the center of his face. "A year. Less. The same as Neil."

"How old will she be in a year?" Dob asked.

"Twenty-three," Lane said, looking Dobhar in the eyes. That's not always aggressive with humans. We observed a moment of silence, because Dob and I would never live to twenty-three, and maybe because Millie wouldn't live past thirty, with or without cancer. This was hardly the Lane family's fault. The eighteen to twenty years Dobhar and I could expect was better than the ten-

year lifespan of a natural mastiff. The worst I can say about Lane's father is that he made me realize how short twenty years is.

"She has a son," Lane said. "Gus. I don't know how he'll manage without her."

"I have a squirrel monkey who may live another fifteen years," said Dobhar, who wouldn't. At least he wasn't trying to provoke our patron anymore. I asked Lane a few more questions, starting with his sister's address. Descending the walkway outside, I resisted the lawn again, and watched a wild turkey hen scratching the last grass seed of the year from a clump of oat grass on the reservation side of the street. I heard a robin, but didn't see it. A robin lives about two years, a wild turkey maybe four, so they're gone by now.

A human tried to explain to me, once, what it's like to see "in color." He showed me a pie chart called a "color wheel," and said he saw slices of twelve different shades. I could see ten different slices myself, but it turned out some that were just lighter or darker to me looked *warmer* to him. That's the only way I can explain what some humans see in each other: there must be something warm about them that's invisible to me. Ms. Lane's boyfriend was waiting for us in the driveway, in a t-shirt, jeans and sandals, with a dog, a real dog, a big Rottweiler, on a braided rope leash. The dog started barking as Dob and I climbed down from my old Jeep Cherokee; you know how *familiaris* are around sapients. The boyfriend said, "Lane is crazy if he thinks he can send dogs to search my house."

I said, "Good morning Mr. Petersen." I squinted at the sky, checked my watch, corrected myself: "Excuse me, good afternoon. I

take it Mr. Lane told you we were coming." Vera Lane had a gravel yard, but it was across the street from the soccer field at Diablo Valley College, where Petersen taught Environmental Science, so there was that lawn smell again, like a faded whiff of sunrise. Even now, some nights, the smell of grass makes me think the sun will always come back up. I could smell Petersen's sickness, too; not that I could have diagnosed it. There was one large conifer in the center of the yard, and a bed of scraggly plants bordering the gravel. There was a hitching post on the front porch, though Pleasant Hills is not a horse neighborhood. Image is important in that business, and there's no traditional costume for dog trainers, so a lot of obediatrixes dress like horse trainers, in breeches and riding boots; the iconography took off from there.

Petersen saw me examining the yard. "The tree is bristlecone fir," he said. "Along here, I've got sheep burr, Indian mallow and verbena. All native plants. I don't like invasive species." I wondered how that worked, her being an obediatrix and him a sapient-hater. I was fantasizing about Petersen as a suspect, to be honest, and thinking I should find out how he and Ms. Lane met. Like I said, they always have human clients. And humans have been around 200,000 years. No one should be surprised if *we're* a little tentative.

Dobhar said, "I learned in school that humans *are* an invasive species on this continent. I've never been more than a hundred miles from the lab where my species was designed."

"That's a hundred miles too far," said Petersen, then all I could smell was his sweat. He'd frightened himself with his boldness. The leashed Rottweiler redoubled its barking, but no one came to the neighboring windows. There was no one else on the street. The

wedge of soccer field I could see between two houses was empty. I saw Petersen notice these things, too, but Dob and I kept our paws at our sides. The Briones Reservation PD has strict rules governing canine-human interactions. Dobhar merely stepped as close as he could to the man without engaging his dog. You might not think it's possible to loom menacingly over someone from eight feet away, but Dob had a gift.

I said, "I understand Ms. Lane is the property owner, Mr. Petersen, but we aren't necessarily here to invade your residence. We're just looking for indications of where Ms. Lane might have gone. I'm sure you want to know that as well. Officer Dobhar, what does your cousin on the leash have to say?"

"He says something's wrong," Dob improvised. "Something isn't right here, and he's very upset."

Petersen pulled the Rottweiler closer, which improved Dobhar's looming prospects. "Something's wrong? No shit, something's wrong! My fiancé is missing, and you're harassing me instead of Lane's bitch sidekick or her lowlife son in the Kennel and the pack of thugs he brings when he tries to threaten Vera!"

I had told Lane we weren't detectives, that the Reservation PD doesn't even have that rank. Humans always thought we were detectives because they expected beat cops to be in uniform. Humans don't vary much, so uniforms make them identical and intimidating, like ants. But this didn't need detectives. The fiancé part may not have been true: Petersen never could prove that in court. It was a kindness when Lane settled the lawsuit and let Petersen die a homeowner. But the rest checked out. There are no surprises, just things you don't want to know.

* * *

The drive to Dogtown gave us five minutes to argue about the damned Rottweiler. I didn't even mention that he allowed a human to leash him and name him Spartacus. That would have been unfair and beside the point, which was the dog's ferocity, his appetites, his indifference to a ten-year life expectancy. If Spartacus loved a monkey, he wouldn't lie awake wondering who would care for it when he was gone. (It's me, by the way: I got stuck with Fido, who is not really housebroken, and will outlive me as well.) What I said was that Dobhar might want to be a real dog—he hadn't said so, but I could tell, and it irritated me—but Spartacus didn't; he wasn't capable of an opinion. If that was life enough for Dob, he might as well be satisfied as a blade of grass, or as what he would be: carbon and nitrogen and whatever else—we both took the short course—that would dissolve back into the food chain and become a beetle or a mushroom or just living soil. "Congratulations," I told him. "You're immortal!"

I'd mostly been arguing with myself, but Dobhar finally said, "You see what they've done to you? You could have been an animal, and they turned you into a philosopher."

Dogtown—residents almost never call it "the Kennel"—is the northern section of a mobile home park next to the airport. The south half is as tidy as a library, so I guess it only went to hell when the dogs moved in. I'm told humans don't even smell the wastewater treatment plant unless there's a southerly breeze, but even human noses register that dogs with indoor plumbing are

somehow less sanitary than dogs on the reservation. And whatever drives a dog to live there, it's not love of the Reservation Council, or of dogs with the shaky authority of a reservation cop.

Parking my jeep on Avenida Flores brought dogs to every porch. Stepping to the pavement sent everyone back inside, though someone yelled "Rovers" from a window. We found our canines of interest behind the house. Two unkempt Australian shepherds and an unconscious bloodhound sprawled amid drifts of empty beer cans in the shade of an embankment; two folding chairs held a sheepdog in pajama pants, with a shaved torso but a hairy head and face, and a terrier mix in dirty overalls, staring west into the sun at a muddy stream, a field of dirt, and the interchange of the Delta Highway and Interstate 680. If you were looking for it, you could see the terrier mix was part spaniel. He tilted his chair against the house. A missing patch in the brick veneer at his back, the height and shape of a car's bumper, showed dented composite panels. He said, "You want something, Rover?"

The sheepdog said, "Hey, Lassie, Timmy's fallen down a well! He needs you, he needs you to—" He forgot what Timmy needed as Dobhar stepped silently into his personal space. I wouldn't have done that job without Dobhar. Cancer took him too, in the end, so many tumors in his stomach he couldn't swallow food, and I retired the day he went on medical leave. Would have been nice if Lane's research had come to something, but I guess it was his time.

"Gus?" I said.

"Gustav," the terrier said, "if it's any of your business."

I showed him my badge. "BRPD. I'd like to talk to you about Vera Lane."

"Piece of work. Daughter of you-know-who, and runs a pet parlor. Keeps a big *familiaris*, Rottweiler, so clients can roll over and submit to it. But listen, Rover, if this is police business, you'd better send the police. Off the reservation, you're not a cop."

"That's a gray area," I said. "When was the last time you saw Vera Lane?"

The Terrier said, "I don't think I have time for you today, Officer Rover."

I said, "Officer Sampson, actually. Maybe we'll talk after I have a look inside."

The front legs of his chair hit the ground. The terrier moved to block the back door. The sheepdog brushed hair from his eyes like a human and said, "We do have rights, you know."

"Off the reservation?" Dob said. "That's another gray area." He made sure the shaven dog was completely in his shadow. I had a good idea, at this point, how it would turn out, and I didn't like it. I picked up the terrier by the bib of his overalls and threw him toward the neighboring house, intending to bounce him off the wall but falling short, past my prime even then.

Inside, there was a sofa, a television, and more beer cans. Someone liked the same brand of corned beef hash I do, and you can probably smell it there today, the way it was ground into the carpet. The wall that was smashed and dented outside hardly bulged inside at all. I've heard modular homes are twenty percent more durable than homes built on-site. The entryway and kitchen were ahead, with smells I didn't want to explore, so I turned left into the hall, where spider webs hung as low as a medium-sized dog could reach without effort. Combing webs and the husks of old flies from my face, I chose the bedroom to my right, toward the

front of the house, a room with two twin beds and a child's dresser, with big knobs and pictures of Robin Hood on the drawers. Robin Hood from the old Disney cartoon, where Robin is a fox. We're not that closely related to foxes, by the way. Their genus is *Vulpes*, not *Canis*. There must have been clothes and such in the closet, but all I remember is a very large ice chest with a hinged lid.

Outside the bedroom window, there was a California laurel, a young one because the bark wasn't dark yet. We have plenty of those on the reservation. It's a hardwood evergreen with thick leaves, shiny on top. Smells like wax and pepper, and has nuts like olives, make you jumpy if you eat them. Nice trees. Native, too. Petersen should have had one. Gustav was behind me, saying something about standing up for family, how humans understand that and we don't. I opened the ice chest.

She was packed in melting ice, knees pressed to her chest to make her fit, with stab wounds in her side and neck. The knife was there, too, just a sharp steak knife with a thick wooden handle. She was in her fifties, more than twice as old as I'll ever get, but there was a little cup on a laurel branch outside, woven of leaves and hair, coated with spider silk: a hummingbird nest as neat as an acorn. She was missing it, and maybe she had never seen one. This was about a week before they found her Volvo wagon north of Mallard Reservoir. BRPD had no part in that, but I understand there was a "World's Greatest Mistress" coffee mug. Gustav said, "We have to stand up for our own," and I hit him, open-paw, knocking him to the floor, which didn't fix anything.

* * *

There's another service some obediatrixes offer, a confusing issue for progressives who want to support both Canine Equality and Right to Die. They call it dog hospice, because euphemism is one thing humans and dogs have in common. What they do is, they pick up old or sick dogs who think they don't have much time left, and take them to the vet—not all veterinarians will do this, but some will, and they always say it's not about the money. The vet gives the dog a lethal injection, and the obediatrix stays to pet the dog and say good boy or good girl, everything will be okay, all dogs go to heaven. The state and the feds have no laws about this yet. Several cities have passed nonbinding resolutions of support or condemnation; Concord has passed both. I don't know whether Vera Lane offered this service, or whether she herself wished for something like that at the end.

Late in the afternoon, Lane's clean glass windows blazed like your windshield when you drive into the sunset, and the blinded drivers following wouldn't see you if you stopped, so you just slow down a little, maybe even close your eyes, wondering what will happen. Petersen was there with his dog, and Lane, and Petersen was yelling at him. Petersen's car was a four-door sedan with a towel on the back seat, so Spartacus wouldn't get it dirty. The turkey hen was still scratching across the street, but the season for grass seed was over.

Spartacus started up when Dob and I got out of the Jeep. Gustav, crowded in the backseat with the ice chest, waited for me to pull him out, because I had engaged the child safety locks. He hung back when Dob and I crossed to Lane, and I hoped he wouldn't

run. I could catch him, I thought, but I'd be sore the next day. Finally, Dobhar said, "She's dead."

I said, "I'm sorry, Mr. Lane. It seems Gustav thought she would keep you from saving his mother."

Petersen dropped the leash, and Spartacus went straight for the terrier, either because Gus was afraid, or because he was the smallest. Spartacus may not have had a rich inner life, but he did enjoy tearing into a smaller dog. Lane stepped forward as though he might try to do something, but Dobhar put a paw on his shoulder. "He that meddleth with strife," he said, "is like one that taketh a dog by the ears." Because of the glare, I don't know whether Millie watched all of this from a window. Spartacus may have been destroyed later, or Petersen may have paid a fine, or maybe nothing. It wasn't our jurisdiction.

Lane couldn't keep it all as quiet as he would have liked, mostly because of Petersen. There were vigilante incidents in Dogtown. That wasn't our job, either. Vera Lane's funeral was news, which is how I know six or eight sapients attended wearing collars and howled as they lowered the casket. A few humans howled as well, probably outing themselves as clients. Five months later, I went to a ceremony for Millie. It was off the reservation, at Oakmont Memorial Park where Lane plans to be buried himself. She was combed and powdered and blow-dried, and I wondered who did that. You never see open-casket funerals on the reservation. No one except maybe a taxidermist specializes in grooming dog cadavers. Human theologians are divided on sapient dogs in the afterlife, so the minister just commended her to "eternal rest."

Lane replaced Millie with a human majordomo, and his lawn is still free of bald patches and dandelions, but it smells like salt and

bleach. I don't know what he researches these days, if he researches anything. He has promised he'll take this monkey when I die. He promised me, as I promised Dob, that Fido will never be euthanized, even if he suffers. I don't know whether he'll keep that promise, and I don't know whether he should, but I suppose he'll give Fido the little Spanish peanuts he likes and plug in his Curious George nightlight every night.

T. S. McADAMS lives unobtrusively with his wife, son and bullmastiffs in the San Fernando Valley, where he is not working on a screenplay. His fiction has appeared in *Beneath Ceaseless Skies*, *Madcap Review*, *Santa Monica Review* and *Pembroke*.

Lar-a-bowl

Gary Moshimer

I'm slapping my new purple high-tops over Lebanon Mountain on my way to Lar-a-bowl, where my father is working on a perfect game. He called me on my purple phone all excited, pins crashing in the background, his mouth garbling peanuts and groaning with nerves.

"I have to get over the mountain. Can't someone pick me up?"

"No can do. They're all here. I've forbidden anyone to leave."

My mother is visiting her sister in Pittsfield, or she would be helping me out for sure. My old man is still bitter I didn't try harder at bowling, me being his only son. So, I have to stick out my bad thumb, the one with the permanent bowling injury from when he tried to make me champion of my grade school. The bone is warped.

The thumb catches me a granny with streaks of blue and white in her hair and shirt. She drinks from a whiskey bottle and smokes a long cigarette in a bone colored holder. "Mae." She pokes out a skinny blue finger for me to shake.

"Doug."

Turns out she's headed for Lar-a-bowl also, but for a different reason. She's going to light her farts out behind by the propane tanks.

"You can't do that. You'll blow the place up."

"Nah. It's outside. You only blow up if you're in a confined space and there's a leak."

"You'll go on fire, at least."

"Nah. I have these special fire-proof pants. And long wooden matches."

"Wow. Can I take pictures?"

"Most certainly, my new friend."

"I have to watch my father, though. He's working on a .300 game. He's never had one."

"Not to worry. I have mucho gas! Chili burritos! Dried apricots! I'll be there all night for your pleasure!"

She speeds down the mountain, no brakes. I think I will die with this old woman, that my old man will never forgive himself for not sending someone for me. But she's an excellent driver. Deer leap out and she swerves expertly and yells, "Fuck you all, nature! I'll burn your ass with my ass torch!"

I'm thinking this is going to be a great night.

Lar-a-bowl is the bowling alley owned by the Larabee propane company. Out back they have their tanks and trucks in a fenced-in area and it always smells like rotten eggs. There are big NO SMOKING signs all over and I point this out to Mae.

"You need to live long enough for me to come see you."

She gives me the thumbs up. In the weird overhead light her blue stretchy pants look pink. I raise my ruined thumb.

Inside, I find my father has just four strikes to go. He's staring at the ball return waiting for Wade Butz to bowl in the next lane. Wade is an old prick. He grabs his crotch and thrusts it at my father, then throws a loud gutter ball because he's so far behind it doesn't matter.

"Top that, Dickweed," he says in a loud whisper. I can tell he's had a few beers.

Lloyd Thomas, a friend of my father's, complains to the manager, who is acting as an official. "Dammit to hell, Perce! Reel that son-of-a-bitch in!"

Perce says to Wade, "Let's keep this civil, or I'll have to ask you to leave."

Wade spits into his own hand towel and I snicker. He gives me a look to kill, for being the son of his bowling nemesis. Then he spits one more time, this time on the lane, and then packs up his ball and heads out of the building.

Everyone sighs relief and my old man gets to concentrate. He takes a knee and says a mumbling prayer to the bowling gods. He gets up and throws his thundering curve, which kills the pins. I see that each pin is Wade's head with a dumbass look of surprise. So I know it's clear sailing.

He nails the last three and the crowd closes in, slapping his back. I sneak out.

I hear the plume before I see it, along with shithead Wade's voice. "Ya wanna kill me with that? Ya wanna kill all of us?" Another WHOOSH! "Come on. I'm still your old man. Give me some sugar, baby."

I peek around the corner. Wade's on his knees and Mae is bent over some feet before him, in farting position. Suddenly she can't get the match lit; her hand is shaking. Wade jumps up and tackles her, throwing punches with bad intentions.

I run and jump on his back and chop his neck. He laughs and throws me over his head, but I land right under Mae. I grab the match, give her a squeeze, and use her as a fire-thrower, blasting Wade. His shirt goes up, and then his hair. Screeching, he stumbles back into the fence, where the lone tank at this end of the lot stands. That goes up too, blasts off like a rocket. I crawl towards Mae and find Wade's hand with his fucked-up pinky ring.

Everyone's outside now. Officials want to evacuate, but people want to stand and watch, their faces aglow. My old man climbs up onto a fire truck with his arms in the air. I chant: "Jer-ry, Jer-ry, Jer-ry!" and the crowd takes it up. I get up there with him, and Mae follows. Someone brings a beer and my old man cracks it and it foams all over. Mae grabs it and guzzles. I smile so hard it feels like my face is on fire.

It's a wonderful night here at Lar-a-bowl.

GARY MOSHIMER has stories at *Pank*, *Word Riot*, *Smokelong Quarterly*, *Monkeybicycle*, and many other places. He lives near Lancaster, Pa.

Stardumb

Alex Pickens

Snorting stardust and cracking hyperspace
Tearing up time continuums with a drag race
Running rings around Saturn and blue Neptune
Speedsters shootings stars of hydrogen fusion boosters
Slingshotting out of groovitational fields until our smiles
Stretch tight across our skulls, and smoke leaks out
Of the amplifiers and nostrils with our doobies askew
Later we'll get loose and hang from Orion's belt
And make wishes and flick coins into black holes
Watch them stretch while we down another moonshine—
Wake up in Laughing Sam's Astroid with some android
A few stars misplaced, nebulae-brained, with stretched face
Space is dark and empty, but we laugh when they tell us
Because where there are supernovas there is stardust.

ALEX PICKENS graduated magna cum laude with a B.A. in English and a B.S. in economics from James Madison University. His poems have been published in *Tuck Magazine* and *Gardy Loo* and his screenplay *Black Friday* was an honorable mention at the national 2017 Screenplay Festival. He is currently working on a novel and another screenplay and writes poetry when he is mentally unstable.

That Buzzing in Your Ear

Terry Tierney

Imagine a cloud of insects descending around you, flying into your nose and ears, crawling on your skin, biting and licking, adding your DNA to their distributed database, a super computer swarming around the earth like atmosphere, with billions of transistors, diodes, resistors and other discrete components, and each component type an insect species connecting to one another like a wireless mesh. Their buzz fades and swells, endless logic gates open and close, carrying more instructions than any human brain can comprehend, their timeless organic mind holding artifacts from the origin of plants and fish, the birth and death of dinosaurs, the arc of human history, their sphere of knowledge expanding like the universe itself.

Fra Giuseppe Verno first discovered the language capability of insects in 1634. An entomologist and contemporary of Galileo, he hid his friend from the inquisition in a large glass jar in his study, instructing Galileo to wear black robes and lie face down with his arms and legs folded under him like a beetle, knowing the church's fear of vermin would keep him safe. Staring through the curved glass and up at the holes punctured in the lid, Galileo found his inspiration for the telescope.

Once the church allowed Galileo to return home, Verno found his own inspiration in the bottom of the jar, peering through the concave glass at the fleas and ants living in the slivered wooden

floor and rotting straw. Moving the jar aside, he reclined on the floor and listened to them closely, realizing the insects communicated in a unique form of speech, a sophisticated whirring of wings and scratching of burred legs and antennae, among other signals.

He replicated their speech using membranes of brushed silk and cellulose, and he represented the signs in three-dimensional graphics that resembled cuneiforms, scraping them precisely with a brass stylus in beeswax. Entovox or Ento, as he came to call the insect language, became his life passion, though he likened his level of fluency to that of a first year novice learning Latin.

He told Galileo and others that Ento could not be translated into any human language because of its multi-dimensional nature. An Ento dictionary would resemble air, translucent and unreadable by human eyes, unless one was as fluent as he was. Unfortunately he wrote his resulting treatise in Ento, and no one else has ever acquired the skill to read it.

He later learned that each insect species communicates with its own dialect, though they are all intricately related, implying the existence of an unspoken Uber dialect, Verno called Super Ento, and his detractors called Super Fly. The Uber dialect explains how flies and wasps, for example, might find and share the same decaying goat.

But Verno's ultimate epiphany came when he observed a swarm of gnats circling his finger as he pointed toward the heavens, the cloud ascending as he pointed higher and descending when he lowered his hand. Surely there was no time for verbal communication among members of the swarm even with the speed and efficiency of the gnat dialect of Ento. He reasoned correctly that

the words of Ento were mere containers for ideas, and the content of the words could change with context, forming new words or signals, like metaphors or self-modifying algorithms. The swarm communicated as one entity, the individuals forming a larger, comprehensive being and a new inclusive language. Furthermore, the swarm might encompass other swarms and other species of insects, forming a greater cloud, a greater being. For this insight, Verno himself was exiled.

Although recent scholars have not yet reproduced Ento, some researchers such as Connor Brin describe it as a lower level computer language, lower even than assembly or binary code, involving the quantum mechanics of atoms and subatomic particles. Dr. Brin compares the various insect dialects to higher-level computer languages like Java and Python, and the insects themselves to computer hardware in a vast data center. The capacity for language and the ability of the language to adapt to larger swarms and changing environments echoes a primary goal of human artificial intelligence. The swarm programs itself.

Scholars debate whether or not Verno understood the computational implications of his discoveries. A disgraced cleric living out his life in a tiny village east of seventeenth-century Florence, Verno continued etching Ento symbols in beeswax until the Great Heat Wave of 1669 melted his work, along with the candles in his chapel, the bindings of his books, and the seals of his correspondence and diplomas. He retreated to the forest where he

fasted and prayed, his knees sinking lower into the mulch season by season, leaves and twigs piling around his ardent figure until he was hardly visible, except by his billions of followers, whispering the language they shared.

TERRY TIERNEY has stories coming or appearing in *Fictive Dreams*, *Longshot Island, Eunoia Review, Literally Stories, SPANK the CARP* and *Big Bridge*. He has poems coming or appearing in *Valparaiso Poetry Review, Front Porch Review*, *Third Wednesday*, *Cold Creek Review, The Lake, Riggwelter, Rat's Ass Review*, and other publications. He's also rewriting a sixties novel. His website is terrytierney.com.

On the cover:

"Untitled"

ADIKA BELL is a self taught visual artist from Tacoma, Washington. The majority of his focus is portraiture, but he has a wide range of styles that vary from still life to abstract expressionism. Adika has a poetic use of bright and contrasting colors that have a way of telling a story by themselves in his artwork. Inspired by the lack of exposure and African American representation in the art world growing up, Adika desires to paint the beauty of blackness in addition to his heroes and legends as well as his experiences. The African American image is something that he embraces and celebrates, capturing often-overlooked elements of black people in an attempt to counter-balance how we view ourselves in art and as artists in America and worldwide.

Find his work at adikabellart.com.