

# Jersey Devil Press



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# JERSEY DEVIL PRESS

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## Editor's Note

We have raindrops in our fur, pollen in our snout, and a Simon & Garfunkel song in our heart. Better still, seven extraordinary caterpillars have laid their eggs on the leaves of our eleventy-sixth issue. Through the magic of spring, each one can hatch inside your brain and flutter over the fields of your imagination on glittering butterfly wings.

What are you waiting for?

— Laura Garrison

# One of Everything

Daniel Galef

In the summer of the ninth year of the reign of Hyperbolus the Faithful, an assassin slipped through the monumental lazuli gates of the palace in Nammi-Shur like a petal slipping under the surface of still water. His hand was stayed even as he brought down the knife, and the fist encircling the fiend's wrist was that of a palace steward, Decimus. In gratitude the emperor rewarded this loyal servant with a boon amounting to one of every thing. The phrase was figurative, a traditional poetic formula; however, the scrupulous monarch now insisted, much to Decimus's gratification, that his gift was to be executed both literally and precisely.

The imperial treasuries were combed for one ruby, one chalcedon, one heliotrope, one diadem, one encrusted ciborium. More exotic treasures were lifted from Hyperbolus' personal collections and from the coffers of conquered neighbors. Unique artifacts Hyperbolus relinquished without qualm. For his retirement, Decimus was constructed by the palace builders one house, possessing itself one garden, one fountain, one labyrinth, one wind-tower, one courtyard decorated with one mosaic of one scene from one poem. This house, a curious contrast between palace and hovel—grandiose without being grand—was further furnished with one bed, one altar, one slave, one reflecting-pool, one window.

There were confusions, but confusion has been the state of the world since the first man had the first two thoughts and those thoughts were at odds. The tabulators of the realm squabbled over

how to award Decimus both one horse and one stable of horses, one wine bottle but also one wine cask, one wife and one harem.

The emperor was consulted, in the secret hope that he would wave away such trivialities and allow them to consider the boon granted. But the emperor was wise, and thought himself wiser. As if listing the names of the gods to a child, he explained: A stable is an artificial composite invented by men who ride and gamble and barter; a stable does not exist in the eyes of Heaven, unlike a single horse. Likewise, a bottle of wine is but a supervening consequence created from altering (by means of a spigot) a cask, which is the natural and complete unit of wine. You may be assured his reasoned conclusions on the harem followed similar logical lines.

Decimus never left the king's favor, exactly, but the sovereign's philosophy grew stronger than his generosity; Hyperbolus commanded that "one of everything" was incomplete applying only to what is pleasant and praiseworthy. So too Decimus must receive one burden, one lashing, one pox—and one death, although the emperor acknowledged that this gift must, as it is for all men, be the last granted.

At last, when it was agreed that every boon and every misfortune had been visited upon Decimus, he still possessed redundancies outfitted by Nature in impudent defiance of the will of the sovereign. Nature was whipped in punishment, and the tabulators again convened. Decimus must have a single eye, a single tooth, a single foot, a single testicle. They thanked the numerical spirits the king had not granted ten of all (as Darius awarded to Mandrocles the Samian), for subtraction was easier than addition. Decimus looked like an old soldier who has

returned, just barely, from war but left a great deal of himself on the battlefield.

Finally, the emperor was struck by the thought that he had circumscribed what Decimus possessed, but not what he experienced. If he had a cup of tea one afternoon, he could not have another the next but instead a cup of milk, or water, or vinegar. Before Hyperbolus began pondering one sleep, one hour, one breath, Decimus fled.

He is a man who has lost all communication with number. Meaningless to him is the distinction between fifty and five, or five hundred. When blessed with a generous alm by a copper merchant, it is said Decimus, having no shoes, purchased twenty-nine. I have watched him boil four grains of rice.

In the bazaar of Ur-Qirash or the dirty backrooms of the Zaggani stables where invalids and poets are bedded on pallets of horse-straw, there are many one-footed beggars who will eagerly claim to be Decimus. Perhaps these are simply liars and madmen. Or, perhaps, in his final confusion, Decimus himself knows not whether he is one man, or a hundred, or none at all.

**DANIEL GALEF** exists at the shimmering nexus of art and technology, on the bleeding edge of innovation and a cheesy corporate mission statement. His flash fiction has been featured in *Juked*, *Jersey Devil Press*, *Bewildering Stories*, and the 2020 Best Small Fictions anthology.



## A Pear

Javeria Hasnain

I'm radical. I see a pear growing  
in daylight, and am delighted for it.  
I imagine the soft pear in the thick of  
moonlight, suddenly dewy, desirous  
of a mouth. I imagine said mouth &  
like that, I am back in the warm bed,  
gazing at you the way a muntin gazes  
at the full moon, with its smallness.

**JAVERIA HASNAIN** is a Pakistani poet from Karachi. Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *The Margins*, *Gutter magazine*, *Superstition Review*, and elsewhere.

## Fulfillment

Craig Holt

Me and Jerry sit poolside at the Chester Court Apartments, sharing some good purple kush. Still wearing our blue Amazon tee shirts with the stupid eyeless smile on the front and the word FULFILLMENT on the back, we're listing all the crap holding us back from stardom: no acting experience, absence of formal training, what you might call *major deficiencies* in talent and good looks. Jerry's waving the joint, explaining that the real problem is our lack of industry contacts ("Who in the for-real fuck gets discovered at the El Monte fulfillment center, bro-stein?") when a shooting star crashes into the pool.

That concrete puddle is a pool the way me and Jerry are actors; in, like, name only. Calling it a pool is, as mom might say, *like calling a dog tick a tweety bird*. Shaped like a lima bean, a bit bigger than a hot tub but without the benefit of heat or the fun of bubbles. Mostly, it's a boggy hole where cigarette butts, candy wrappers and Starbucks cups go to die.

*Whoomp! Boom!* Hot water and steam everywhere. The blast knocks me and Jer-bear ass over teakettle off our lawn chairs, soaked and scalded. Our joint dies a wet death in Jerry's hand.

Not a single neighbor appears to investigate the crash—the Chester Court being the kind of place where you run away from loud noises, not toward them—so me and Jerry are the only witnesses as a tiny alien rises out of the pool, all shimmery and weird looking in the billowing mist.

I whisper to Jerry, “Dude! We’re totally getting abducted!” Our Big Break has arrived. Seriously, you can’t buy the kind of press that comes with being taken by aliens. We’ll have podcasts and blogs. We’ll be influencers, sharing our experience with aliens and our opinions about music, politics, and science. Mom, wherever she is, will see my face on the cover of one of those magazines at the Walmart checkout and maybe try to contact me through my agent—which I’ll totally have the minute the little golden alien dumps us back on earth. Me and the Jerry-nator will be *seen* at last.

Jerry totally gets it. He swallows the drowned roach and fist bumps me. “Adios, Chester.”

“Fuck you, Bezos.” (Fulfillment Center my ass; I’m an actor not a robot, Jeff.)

Jerry wrings out his hair. I brace myself for first contact. Will they run experiments on us? Make us breed with their species? I clench my butt cheeks, worried about anal probes. I take a deep, calming breath and catch a whiff of a nasty spicey-sweet smell that’s just like the old lady perfume my mom wore when she was still climbing the pole to pay rent. *Obsession*.

Are we heading into the cosmos with a race of hyper-intelligent strippers?

Weird thing is, the alien moving toward us through the mist looks like, well, an old lady. Short hair, mean eyes, lots of makeup. Her otherworldly shimmer is just a long, drapey, gold sequin dress. Not a drop of water on her, though. No blood or bruises from smashing the shit out of our pool. She’s unscathed except for a grape Laffy Taffy wrapper hanging off the glittery fringe above her ankles. I could swear I’ve seen her before.

She follows my gaze down her dress and curls her lip, mad as if she'd stepped in dog shit instead of taking a scrap of rogue packaging to the ankle. She leans down, flicks the wrapper at me and Jerry.

Straightening up, she looks at us all pinched and judgmental, and juts her chin at me. "Young man," she says in a sniffy accent, "Where am I?"

Here it is, my big break.

I open my mouth and just... freeze up. My brain short-circuits, fuses blown by too much ganja and the sheer what-the-fuckness of an alien encounter. I flub my lines. Total choke show.

Good old Jerry bails me out as always. Steps forward with his hand over his heart. "Uh, welcome, friend! You have arrived on earth. I am Gerald Hoiland, and this," he pats my back and leaves his hand there, "is my best friend, Finn Calvert." It mellows me out; his hand on my back, him saying I'm his best friend.

He bows so low his long hair drags on the wet cement and snags the ET's candy wrapper.

"For God's sake," she says, "what neighborhood?"

Being propped up by Jerry and talked to like I'm an idiot by everyone else is totally my comfort zone. I find my voice. "Like, Burbank."

"'Like' Burbank?" She scowls.

Geez. Are all space people dicks?

She snaps her fingers at me. "Spit it out."

Fast track to stardom or not, I no longer want to be abducted by this alien. I get all the attitude I need from my corporate overlords, I don't need to fly into the black void of space for this shit.

Jerry smiles, impervious to assholery, a purple candy wrapper and a cigarette butt stuck in his hair. "This is the heart of the City of Angels, space friend. Burbank is all around you." He sweeps his arm in a wide arc, presenting the Chester and the smoggy San Fernando Valley like he's showing the snotty alien the Garden of Eden or the grand prize on Wheel of Fortune.

She checks her dainty gold watch, scrunches up her nose. "Damn it. Stupid drones." The alien buzzkill crouches, arms drawn back like she's about to go full Wonder Woman.

It hits me. Where I've seen her. "M!"

Still squatting, she turns to me like she would to a dog puking up grass. "Excuse me?"

"James Bond. You're his boss, dude. In the old movies."

She draws herself up, comes at me with her finger in the air, "Young man, I have been Ophelia, Juliet, Lady MacBeth. I played Queen Elizabeth. I won Oscars, BAFTAs, SAGs. I—"

Jerry giggles. "Sag."

She glares at him so hard I worry she'll laser his brain out. I swear poor Jer shrinks like half a foot under that stare.

She turns her blue death ray eyes on me again, leans in so close I gag on the peppermint and raw meat smell of her breath. "I am an actress. I am not," she pokes my forehead with a cold, bony finger, "a *dude*."

She blasts off, knocking me and Jerry on our asses again, and shoots across the sky toward Beverly Hills trailing glitter. All that remains of our visitation from Dame Judy Dench is a ruined pool and a whiff of broccoli farts.

There will be no podcasts, no anal probes, no journey through the heavens. I'll get up every morning and go to the warehouse to pack

TV remotes, dog toys, and dildos for same-day shipment to the greater Los Angeles area. To make quota, I'll piss in a Gatorade bottle instead of taking breaks. On the ride home, I'll get high with Jerry. Every night, me and Jerry will sit by the empty pool, sharing a joint while we wait for our next big break, for another star to crash land in our courtyard.

**CRAIG HOLT's** fiction has appeared in *Psychopomp Magazine*, *Exit 7*, *Defenestration* and elsewhere. His first novel, *Hard Dog to Kill*, won the Independent Publisher Book Award gold medal in 2018. He is a former (recovering?) standup comedian, and he is represented by Chip MacGregor at MacGregor and Luedeke Literary. The two things he fears most in this world are sharks and clowns.

# Red evening light and the sky is a tantrum

DS Maolalai

it's a beautiful evening.  
a man in the street  
puts his hand on a wall  
and throws up a whole  
brass section orchestra  
while sun sets its head  
against everything,  
making stubble of dust  
hung with five o'clock  
shadows. the street  
turns its neck like a woman  
with wonderful hair. the trees  
fill with red evening  
light and the sky is a tantrum.  
cars move like cows  
being herded toward home.  
this man, so well lit, throwing up  
some dog's breakfast, a start-stopping  
jazz of trombones — you can tell  
he is digging up  
harder than shovels. you can tell  
his whole soul's  
coming out.

**DS MAOLALAI** has been nominated nine times for Best of the Net and seven times for the Pushcart Prize. He has released two collections, "Love is Breaking Plates in the Garden" (Encircle Press, 2016) and "Sad Havoc Among the Birds" (Turas Press, 2019). His third collection, "Noble Rot" is scheduled for release in April 2022.



# Aerophobia

Evan Vandermeer

I promised myself  
that when this plane lands  
I will have something  
to show for it, and given  
these first rumblings  
of high-altitude turbulence—  
the seatbelt light  
having just lit up like a Christmas tree—  
I better hurry  
and get something presentable down  
before it's too late. At least  
I can lose myself (thank you,  
little pink pill) in the movie  
playing on the back of the headrest  
directly in front of me. Without headphones,  
it's a largely silent film, largely because  
I've seen it enough  
to hear the music and dialogue  
in the back of my mind. And now,  
the flight attendant wheels up  
and offers an array of non-perishable snacks:  
pretzels, wafers, or cookies, and like a fool  
I choose the pretzels (a sad  
last meal), but my wife is kind enough  
to offer me one of her cookies, which

I eat so quickly in a single bite  
she can't help but comment  
on my inability to savor anything  
but coffee, the only thing  
I'll slow down to enjoy. Right then—  
as if on cue—Will Ferrell's character  
takes his own first sip of that black nectar  
and grimaces in pain, almost as if  
he had swallowed a thumbtack.

**EVAN VANDERMEER** is an emerging writer with published poems in *Grand Little Things*, *Analecta*, *Kingfisher*, *Modern Haiku*, *bottle rockets press*, and *Wales Haiku Journal*, and more has been accepted for publication in forthcoming issues of *McQueen's Quinterly*, *hedgerow*, *Presence*, and *contemporary haibun online*. He will graduate in May 2022 from the MA English program at Indiana University South Bend, where he lives with his wife, Megan.

## Five haiku

Michael Dylan Welch

near the end  
of the spooky story  
her raised eyebrow

school trip—  
the zoo gorilla  
masturbating

poetry conference—  
an opinion  
from outer space

tractor beam malfunction—  
a turquoise mountain lake  
hovers above us

red pines—  
our pup tent squashed  
in the giant footprint

**MICHAEL DYLAN WELCH** has been writing poetry since he was a child, and never got over it. He lives with his wife and two children in Sammamish, Washington, where he's president of the Redmond Association of Spokenword, curator of SoulFood Poetry Night, and served two terms as Redmond poet laureate. He's founder and president of the Tanka Society of America, founder of National Haiku Writing Month ([www.nahaiwrimo.com](http://www.nahaiwrimo.com)), and proprietor of [www.graceguts.com](http://www.graceguts.com), devoted mostly to poetry. His poems and essays have appeared in hundreds of publications in more than twenty languages. Michael also enjoys travel, photography, books, racquetball, and skiing.

# Directions for Surviving an Urban Legend

Karen J. Weyant

Learn early. At those fourth-grade slumber parties, pretend to fall asleep when your friends start playing

Bloody Mary in the upstairs bathroom. Ignore their chants of her name, their screams, their stories.

You don't want to even imagine what they believed they may have seen. Later, when you start driving,

check your backseat before you climb into the driver's seat. It also wouldn't hurt to check under your car.

If you end up parking (which you shouldn't do) with your boyfriend and you both hear scratching,

a raspy scrap across the roof or the side of the car, don't open the door, even if you feel a tug on the handle.

Drive to safety. Turn on the radio. The news about the escaped prisoner will be all you need to know.

And never, ever pick up a hitchhiker, even if it's raining or it's cold. Even if she looks innocent and sad,

and that dress she is wearing is way too thin.  
Even if, she, in the headlights, looks a little like you.

**KAREN J. WEYANT**'s speculative poems have appeared in *Caesura*, *Cold Mountain Review*, *Devilfish Review*, *Eye to the Telescope*, *Gingerbread Lit*, and *Strange Horizons*. She lives and writes in northern Pennsylvania.



## On the cover:

### **“Marguerite Leucanthemum”**

**ANJA** is a photographer and  
artist in Germany.

