

Story Bytes

Very Short Stories - Lengths a power of 2.

Issue #54 - October 2000

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Story Bytes

Very Short Stories
Lengths a Power of 2

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**Story Bytes better
than sound bites.**

The Great Depression

M. Stanley Bubien

Life. It keeps going, and going, and going... [8]

Shrine for Jimi Hendrix

Richard Denner

A diamond guitar spirals out of Sagittarius. A god in his constellation digs the celestial choir. I am invited to participate in an “Alter Show” at The Many Hands Gallery. I get my idea for my shrine after listening to a dude in a parking lot. His name was Ezekiel, and he said that Jose Arguelles had it wrong. The End of the World was not with the Mayan Calendar. The End of the World was in June. Going to blow the month of July away. He said that he had a vision of a 3-D constellation in the shape of a guitar, a diamond guitar that spiraled out of Sagittarius, and I thought of this connection to Jimi because he was born under the sign of Sagg. [128]

Banished to My Room

Ray Van Horn, Jr

I did absolutely nothing wrong, yet here I lay, staring at the shadow of my swaying foot, pretend-kicking invisible invaders on the wall. Somebody is going to incur my wrath, even if it is an imaginary scapegoat. At least he, she or it can't fight back; that is about the only comfort I take right now.

There is no television in my room, only a stereo with a handful of tapes to listen to. I am not allowed to play them, though. I have been commanded to lie here in subdued silence. For some reason I can't explain, it has been deemed that I am to be punished and confined to my bedroom. My friends are outside, and I know they are laughing and mocking me. They aren't locked up like a caged rat with nothing to do save for quietly reading the same crappy books over and over again. If it is punishment my overseers want, then they've succeeded. This solitude is more like torment.

What did I do to deserve this? Scream out loud occasionally, use a little profanity that slaps expressions of shock on my benefactors? Big deal! Of course, if they would tend to my needs when I ask for them, I'd be content and as restrained as an altar boy.

Oh, I'm selfish, you say? Spoiled, even? Try it in my shoes, friends, and tell me how you like being eighty-three and treated like a helpless infant! [256]

Black Death

Brenda Ross

I am a transmigrant, a restless soul doomed to walk from place to place and from body to body unceasingly. My soul is so zygomorphic that even Death is incapable of allowing it to cross the great divide.

The Gods in their ironic wisdom have arranged for me to suffer many indignities.

In the 20th century alone, my tired old soul has been housed within a reluctant concubine as she writhed under the amorous attentions of a middle aged Flemish cockalorum.

And this same soul has been encased in the tortured body of a young airman in a prisoner of war camp.

I have also been propelled from the dying body of the esteemed inventor of advanced Zen meditation into the pimply abode of a shallow youth with the distinguished reputation of tossing the highest flapjack ever at the local pancake house.

In earlier times my soul has inhabited the diverse personalities of a Roman gladiator, an African pygmy and a medieval minstrel. I have been imbedded inside an ugly old hag who sat knitting at the foot of the guillotine as she watched the beheading of the French aristocracy. I led one life captaining a pirate ship, where I ordered insubordinate scruffy crewmembers to walk the plank or be keelhailed under the ship.

The burden of these multiple lifestyles appalls me. If there are lessons to be learned, I seem incapable of learning them. And so, as I lay here on yet another deathbed, once again I plead with Black Death to break the cycle. [256]

A Rough Translation

M. Stanley Bubien

The alien's name was unpronounceable in Earth tongue, and he ("it" would be more accurate, but why trifle with such matters?) watched through the Spaceship's port window.

"What went wrong?" he wondered (a rough translation, the actual words being equal in complexity to his name) as the planet Earth receded from view. He rubbed his beak with a tendril, and reevaluated the Landing for the forty three quintillionth time.

"Study their culture. Learn their language. Brief me prior to the Landing," he had ordered his Underlings, all of whom he'd tendril-picked specifically for this mission.

His Underlings undertook the task with fervor, monitoring audio and video transmissions from planetside, familiarizing themselves with various syntactic patterns and social mores.

"It is perfect," his Underlings gazed upward at him during his Primary Linguistic Briefing. "Our form strikes fear into them." When Unpronounceable single-quacked his beak, they apologized. "Apologies, sir. A rough translation. 'Fear' is an emotion equivalent to respect." Unpronounceable double-quacked his satisfaction as they handed (actually "tendrilled" being the proper verb) him the List of Possible Earthling Responses and Their Meaning.

For the Landing Site, they chose the capital of Earth's superpower: Washington D.C., a city named for one the Earthlings held in great fear. Unpronounceable piloted the Landing, warbling his saucer to rest upon something known as "The White House Lawn" (a moniker neither himself nor his Underlings had succeeded in deciphering). Patiently he waited until his Spaceship stood encircled by a mass of Earth's leaders and underling onlookers.

Unpronounceable slid into position and squawked the order. The ship's stairwell extended and the hatch dilated, revealing his form. A collective gasp rose from the Earthlings. "Ah," he thought, "Certainly their feared leader, Washington, too would have morphed his scales pink for similar circumstances."

But reminiscences such as these were only fleeting. Unpronounceable had come to offer the First Greeting from Another Planet, and duty called.

He began the thirteen-quack Sequence for Silence, causing much of the crowd to gasp and step backward (this fell under “trepidation” on the List). Unpronounceable instantly recognized his mistake, stopped the Sequence, and offered the Earthling equivalent to gain their attention.

“Ahem, ahem, ahem,” he rumbled. A collection of eyelids raised throughout his audience, and the List told him he’d made the proper choice. “Ahem, ahem,” he finished. The crowd swayed silently; rapt, they awaited Unpronounceable’s bidding.

Sucking a gust of the Earthling atmosphere into his nose (and taking great comfort in the fact that he and the Earthlings shared this singular feature in common), he expelled the Greeting.

“Hola. Como Estan?”

Upon the List, the Earthling reaction fell at the very bottom. Two words: “Blank Stare.” And the explanation: “Commonly represents complete disinterest.”

The absolute worse case scenario!

Stairwell receded, hatch constricted, Spaceship leapt spaceward, and Unpronounceable found himself on the bridge slithering in circles. It made no sense. His Underlings had studied every scenario, every nicety, everything!

“What went wrong?” he asked for the forty three quintillion and first time. And the blue-green ball of the planet Earth winked from view. [512]