

GRUE MAGAZINE

NUMBER 17

SPRING 1995

\$4.50 (\$6.50 CANADA)



CONGRUETIES

WE HAVE GOOD NEWS about the last issue of *Grue*, #16: the story "Who Will Love The River God?" by Emily Newland has been chosen for the Datlow/Windling anthology *The Year's Best Fantasy And Horror*. We extend our congratulations to the author and thank her for sending us such a damned good story.

We're proud to have Norman Partridge back again in the pages of *Grue*; he is one of today's consummate writers of short horror fiction. His most recent anthology appearances include *Murder For Father* (Signet), *Peter Straub's Ghosts* (Pocket), *Dark Voices 6* (Pan - UK), *Love In Vein* (HarperCollins), *Werewolves* and *Celebrity Vampires* (DAW). He's had work in *Amazing Stories* and *Cemetery Dance*, and his novel *Slippin' Into Darkness* (CD Publications) has been picked up for paperback release this year by Zebra. In 1992 Norm received a Bram Stoker Award for his fiction collection, *Mr. Fox And Other Feral Tales* (Roadkill Press).

Don Webb has been with us right from the beginning; his stories and poems have added just a touch of SF/cyberpunk/magick to our horror mix. He has a story collection, *Ecaflow Revisited*, coming out from Black Ice, and he is co-editor (with Mauricio-Jones Schwarz) of an actual bestseller, *Borderland Of Broken Mirrors*. The Spanish version has been on the Mexican bestseller list for weeks and just went into its second printing. He also has a story in the just-released *The Starry Wisdom*, a Lovecraft tribute anthology from Fedogan-Bremer.

Steve Olson has just completed a series of articles for a newspaper in Ft. Collins, Colorado, dealing with public education and its failure to prepare non-college-bound students for the job market. He also writes outdoors articles for a regional magazine in Northern Colorado, and he makes his own beer.

Phil Reynolds work appears regularly in *Deathrealm*, *Silver Web*, and right here. You might also look for him in the 1995 Lovecraftian Horror calendar; he's Miss August.

Brooklynite Chris Pelletiere was inspired by serial killer Dennis Nilsen when sketching his illustration for this issue; Nilsen was the United Kingdom's answer to Jeffrey Dahmer (actually, he preceded Dahmer in the headlines), although Nilsen was an animal lover—he shared his little treats with his dog, Bleep. Authorities had the pet destroyed after Nilsen's arrest; I think they could have been a little more understanding.

Rodger Gerberding's work graces the pages of *Smoke Of The Snake* by Carl Jacobi (Fedogan and Bremer); *Dark Iowa*, *Bright Iowa* ed. by Janet Roberts (White Owl Press); *Shrines And Desecrations* by Brian Hodge, *Sex And The Single Vampire* by Nancy Kilpatrick and *Sex And Blood* by Ron Dee, all from Tal Publications; *Swamp Foetus* by Poppy Z. Brite (Borderlands Press); *Gummitch And Friends* by Fritz Leiber (Donald Grant)—all worthy tomes which you should probably acquire.

Howard Kaplan works for a children's book publisher, lives and writes in

← me!

NADRAMIA

Brooklyn, and enjoys "drawing, stretching and fainting in coils."

Denise Dumars has been breaking into the movie business lately, writing proposals and treatments and generally becoming a real player in Lala Land.

Jeff VanderMeer's latest effort is his own magazine, *Leviathan*.

Jay Bonansinga's first novel, *The Black Mariah*, is out from Warner Books, and has been optioned by Laurel for the big screen.

Donald McLeod's poetry appeared in my anthology, *Narcopolis & Other Poems*; Don also does costume acting, and appeared as the Devil in *The Witches Of Eastwick*.

I first met Wayne Allen Sallee in December of 1985; he brought me a box of Screaming Yellow Zonkers, all the way from Chicago on the train.

Jacie Ragan had a poem in the last issue of *Grue* (#16) and her work appears everywhere else in the horror field, too.

Tim Butler's work has appeared in *ANSWER ME!*, *Primal Chaos*, *The Black Flame* and lots of other publications. His collection of drawings, *The History Of Formerly Salty Areas*, is available in book form—see ad elsewhere in this issue.

Jessica Amanda Salmonson's areas of expertise include horror fiction and poetry (she's the founding editor of *Fantasy Macabre*, a small press magazine of no little influence in the field, and two mass-market paperback anthologies, *Tales By Moonlight* and *Tales By Moonlight II*), Victorian supernatural literature by women (she edited *What Did Miss Darrington See?*, an excellent collection of these tales) and real-life ghost stories of the Pacific Northwest, *The Mysterious Doom*, where she makes her home. She also operates a little mail order bookselling business; write

for a catalog: Violet Books, PO Box 20610, Seattle, WA 98102.

Dan Murphy's latest efforts have included a non-fiction book, *Fitness For Normal Guys*. Do the people who write for *Grue* seem all that "normal" to you? Hmm.

Brett Bogart's story, "Wolfword," appeared in a previous issue of *Grue*.

I started this magazine ten years ago. In 1985 I bought myself a Commodore 64 computer; at that time, the price for a brand new 64 (with 64K of RAM, about the same amount a calculator has these days) was around three hundred bucks, and you needed a separate floppy disk drive—a hundred and fifty bucks—and a monitor—a hundred dollars. The Juki 6100 daisy wheel printer I acquired was the most expensive item—five hundred smackers. This little system provided the typesetting for *Grue*'s first nine issues, as well as for all my correspondence, mailing lists and bookkeeping. I've used it as a word-processor even as we moved on to bigger and better computers; only in recent months has the Commodore begun signaling to me of its impending demise. I thought it appropriate to commemorate the passing of a gadget that served me so long and so well, that slowly, ponderously but ever-reliably saved and printed every acceptance, rejection, solicitation and thank-you letter, every story and poem; a talisman that glowed companionably at me through oppressive, sultry afternoons typing interminable address labels, through icy winter nights writing rejections while the winds off the Hudson River rattled in the old chimneys of Hell's Kitchen. The Commodore's gritty brown plastic surface absorbed countless splashes of late-night coffee, along with tears of laughter and of bitter disappointment. My Irish Catholic

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Grue Magazine
a slimy little division of
HELL'S KITCHEN PRODUCTIONS, INC.

17 April 1995

Howard Kaplan
80 Cranberry St.
Brooklyn, NY 11201

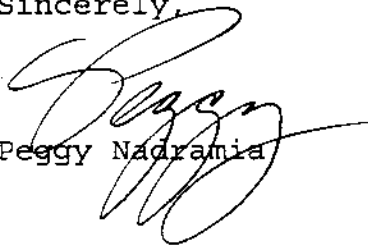
Hi:

Thanks for being a part of Grue #17; we couldn't have done it without you.

Grue is now distributed via a national magazine distributor to many Barnes and Noble Superstores, and via the Tower Records chain. A story from our last issue, #16, has recently been chosen for Ellen Datlow's *Year's Best Horror and Fantasy* anthology.

Thanks for your patience while waiting for your work to appear. I realize it's been a long time since you sent it to me, and I appreciate your consideration while I worked out various personal and technical problems and got the magazine back on track; I hope to keep it there.

Sincerely,


Peggy Nadramia



Food

MR. MIKE'S HEAD
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Mr. Mike clung :
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Food For Monkey's Brain

Howard N. Kaplan

MR. MIKE'S HEAD didn't feel like a head. It felt more like a warm, oversized ping-pong ball attached to a little monkey skeleton covered with flesh. Mr. Mike clung to J.J.'s chest and rubbed his tiny monkey head under J.J.'s chin.

"Boo-boo-boo," J.J. hummed. "B-b-bad cold for monkey's dreams tonight." He rubbed his hands over the monkey's body and they shivered together.

J.J. and his monkey slept in a cardboard box over a subway grate, wrapped in old clothes and plastic bags. J.J.'s fingers rested on Mr. Mike's chest and he felt the monkey's microscopic heartbeat. Mr. Mike's teeth chattered nervously as he struggled in a dream.

In his dream Mr. Mike lay alone on an ice-covered field with a black sky bearing down in thick, viscous waves that bulged and threatened to explode. Beneath him an equally intense sheet of white pushed him upward. Trapped in the conflicting energies of the horizon Mr. Mike felt himself dissolve between the black sky and the white earth.

"Boo-boo-boo," J.J. chanted in his half-wakened consciousness. "No bad dreams for Mr. Mike tonight." The monkey twitched and turned to let his dream drift to J.J.'s human memories.

J.J. adjusted to the monkey's shifting body and drifted into a dream of his own. In J.J.'s dream the same oppressive darkness bore down between him and the frozen white earth, but J.J. woke up screaming blind to the cold November air. White and black dots exploded before

his eyes until the cardboard box took shape. He pulled Mr. Mike closer to his chest and they slept sharing the warmth of each other's bodies.

J.J. awakened to the smell of monkey's breath permeating the stale air caught in the cardboard box. He stirred, causing Mr. Mike to open his eyes and yawn. This expended a new wave of monkey's breath that took a moment to waft over J.J.'s face.

J.J. felt the urge to urinate, so he turned to the subway grate, pulled back the cardboard and opened his fly. Mr. Mike slowly crawled over J.J.'s body while the man turned. While J.J. urinated Mr. Mike caught extra sleep on his shoulder.

When J.J. finished he rolled onto his back. Mr. Mike crawled to a sitting position on his chest. "We're alive, Mr. Mike," J.J. said as he stroked the monkey's cheek. "Now what are we going to do about it?"

Mr. Mike's teeth chattered in the cold morning air. He pulled the buttons on J.J.'s thin flannel shirt. He squeaked and chewed on a button.

"Food for monkey's brain, huh, Mikey?" J.J. put his hand over Mr. Mike and they squirmed out of the cardboard box.

The sickly orange morning sun struck the two with an uncomfortable burst. They sat and rested against the building beside the subway grate and adjusted to the daylight. Early commuters rushed by on their way to work, some attentive

KAPLAN

enough to notice the emaciated monkey around the bearded man's neck.

J.J. eventually got to his feet and followed the smell of hot muffins down the street. He paused by a bakery on the corner and felt Mr. Mike pulling at his neck.

J.J. reached for the string around his waist attached to the plastic bag where he kept money. He poured the loose change into his hand and went to buy a muffin. The woman behind the counter kept a cautious eye on Mr. Mike as she quickly wrapped the muffin and gave J.J. the rest of his change.

J.J. took the muffin from the bag and cracked it open. He fed Mr. Mike moist chunks from its warm heart. They walked down the street toward Broadway. "Another day," J.J. sighed.

With a newfound strength from the muffin, Mr. Mike shifted to J.J.'s other shoulder and began to stare at the people they passed. He mimicked peoples' faces. He squealed with pleasure if anyone mimicked in return. If someone made a monkey sound he would make a monkey sound and usually both he and the human would feel the surge of connected ancestry. He would squeak approvingly at pleasant-smelling women with soft, probing fingers.

"Some change?" J.J. asked people as they passed. "Any spare change to keep Mr. Mike here warm this winter? Mr. Mike needs a condo in Florida—spare any change?"

J.J. and Mr. Mike earned money by performing in the street. He was already arrested once for not having a leash, so J.J. kept a loose collar around Mr. Mike's neck and had a long line of aluminum chain to hold him in tow. They stood in front of a construction site where Mr.

Mike walked back and forth on the sidewalk, attracting clumps of onlookers.

"Ladies and gentlemen!" J.J. declared from a distance. He leaned against the temporary wooden wall of the construction site and held the leash around his wrist. "May I please have the pleasure of introducing you to Mr. Mike!"

Mr. Mike walked in a semi-circle around J.J., sizing up the crowd. J.J. continued: "Mr. Mike hails from exotic Tibet where he was trained in all the fine arts of acrobatics. Show the people how you jump, Mr. Mike." J.J. crouched towards Mr. Mike and said, "Jump!"

Mr. Mike jumped and landed on J.J.'s shoulder. J.J. stood to his full height while Mr. Mike stood on his shoulders and reached up to wave at the crowd. "Mr. Mike as King Kong!" J.J. said. "Now, Mr. Mike will do a most dangerous stunt: a full backward doublesplit reverse somersault!" J.J. bent his knees slightly and Mr. Mike crouched with his paws in J.J.'s hair. J.J. crossed his arms and stretched them far from his body and said, "Jump!"

Mr. Mike jumped and grabbed onto J.J.'s crossed arms. He spun around twice while holding on. He let go and did a full backward doublesplit reverse somersault before landing gracefully on his feet. His tail curled up while he bowed and accepted his applause.

J.J. took his hat and passed it around collecting money for winter. Mr. Mike took coins in his paws and brought them to J.J.. They moved on through lunch hour. J.J. picked through garbage cans with a stick to find half-eaten salads and chicken parts. He had fought for empty soda cans with other people earlier in the year. If business became tight with Mr.

Mike's performances, again, but this time he had a nail on the end of his tail. Business was good. At around three o'clock of candy jawbreakers exchanged his coins for a grocery clerk. He also had a piece of beef jerky that he put in his mouth before taking Mr. Mike to meditate.

Together they sat facing the river. The sun reflected thick orange against their faces. J.J. folded beneath him. Mr. Mike's neck, also facing the sun, his fingertips together regularly to his head. He rested his paws over his eyes and they breathed together. J.J. felt his consciousness rise from the middle of his body. His body was centered, chosen to meditate on the river. A wedge split through his chest and opened like a flower. He stretched upward to touch the sun. He had a similar, smaller sensation from behind his head to touch the sun. J.J. had a sensation of swelling in his throat, but with his head projected from the top of his forehead. Mr. Mike rested onto his head and brought J.J.'s flower ensheathing them together their transparent sphere gently on the Hudson. J.J.'s spinal column length within the stream. A spark of energy in

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Mike's performances, he'd try collecting again, but this time he'd remember to put a nail on the end of his stick.

Business was good during lunch hour. At around three o'clock J.J. bought a box of candy jawbreakers for Mr. Mike and exchanged his coins for bills with the grocery clerk. He also bought two sticks of beef jerky that he put in his shirt pocket before taking Mr. Mike to the river to meditate.

Together they sat on the edge of a pier facing the river. The pulpy glow of the sun reflected thick orange waves of light against their faces. J.J. sat with his legs folded beneath him. Mr. Mike sat around his neck, also facing the sun. J.J. pressed his fingertips together and they pulsed regularly to his heartbeat. Mr. Mike rested his paws over Mr. Mike's eyelids and they breathed together as one.

J.J. felt his consciousness rise outside his body from the middle of his forehead. His body was centered on the spot he'd chosen to meditate on the pier. A veinlike wedge split through the back of his head and opened like a flower. The veinflower stretched upward to the sun. Mr. Mike had a similar, smaller vein stretching from behind his head and it also stretched to touch the sun. J.J. gradually felt the sensation of swallowing, not with his throat, but with his whole consciousness projected from the extension in his forehead. Mr. Mike's flower turned down onto his head and began to swallow him. J.J.'s flower enshrouded the pair and together their spirits mingled in a transparent sphere of light that floated gently on the Hudson river.

J.J.'s spinal cord expanded to full length within the sphere and in a brilliant spark of energy it connected with Mr.

Mike's tiny monkey's spine. Electric explosions radiated between each nerve cell in rapid succession as the man and the monkey rushed headlong into their long forgotten ancestral heritage.

J.J. and Mr. Mike swam in the common ancestral pool of their pasts. Their first moment together relived itself when the man and the monkey bathed in a shallow pond in a spare Tibetan forest. Here J.J. cleansed himself of his other life, joining the heightened perception of Mr. Mike.

Mr. Mike came to the human to both liberate and bind his soul from wild monkey's dreams and the raging world of men. He wanted to leave his limited sphere of existence and explore the world outside the forest.

J.J. shed his other life as a young man, going to Tibet to liberate himself from the world of men and connection with their material possessions. In a similar way as Mr. Mike he sought an inhuman spirit to both liberate and guide him when he entered the forest.

When J.J. and Mr. Mike first swam together their minds touched and probed each other on a common liminal frequency. They exchanged dreams and visions and began their search for knowing the moment of pre-existence.

Over time Mr. Mike's wanderlust permeated J.J.'s self-exile and they returned to live in the world of men. Mr. Mike absorbed, interpreted and shared his monkey perception with J.J. through their changing environments.

They traveled across continents and oceans to America, where opportunity for enlightenment seemed endless. Here they performed in the streets, observing all the shades and nuances of mankind while sleeping in subways and meditating by

the river. They tried to save money for a seasonal pilgrimage to the warmer Floridian climate.

J.J. awoke to cool summer air wafting upriver. It washed through his nose and stirred the base of his spine. He shivered. Mr. Mike lay a few feet away from him, twitching spastic monkey's dreams. Their bodies vibrated in tune with the horizon as their minds drew back within themselves.

J.J. felt his arms weigh heavy against the cold concrete of the pier. He opened his eyes. The night's chill was soon to bear down on them, so J.J. pulled himself up and gently lifted Mr. Mike into his arms. They stumbled onto the sidewalk and walked to the street where they performed and picked at half-eaten remnants of other people's meals. By early evening they had walked uptown to Thirty-Fourth Street. They stood in line at the church on the corner for a meal and a bed.

Mr. Mike had to hide in J.J.'s knapsack when they walked through the church's door. J.J. walked to the food line, took a plate, tray and utensils and walked through the food line to the tables. He unzipped the knapsack so Mr. Mike could breathe and fed him scraps of bread and fruit. Mr. Mike was accustomed to the ritual. He carefully kept his paws inside the knapsack and made sure he avoided people's feet under the table.

A sweaty, overweight old woman sitting next to J.J. suddenly noticed the animal in the knapsack. She shrieked, "A rat! This guy has a bagful of rats!" She pulled her fat legs up on the table and led the insane crowd by tip-toeing on people's trays.

J.J. grabbed his knapsack and hit the

floor. He crawled beneath the tables to the back of the church where he stumbled out and lost himself in the darkness of the streets.

When they had walked back to the river J.J. opened his knapsack and let Mr. Mike out for air. Mr. Mike inhaled a polluted breeze from the river and was relieved to be in a safe, quiet place.

"Bad scene, I know," J.J. said. He put Mr. Mike on his shoulder. "I should have known better. We should stay outside until winter."

Mr. Mike gathered cool November air into his lungs and let his mind focus on the environment around them. They walked down the FDR Drive on the river's side while cars sped uptown beside them. Mr. Mike noticed a fire burning in the distance. He pulled on J.J.'s ears and moved him in that direction. They stopped below the mammoth onramp of the Brooklyn Bridge. Three people hovered around an oilcan fire. They stood shifting their feet and their arms, waving shadows in the circle of firelight.

"Who're you?" asked the oldest-looking of the three, an encrusted dwarf-like man.

J.J. started to tip forward, but took a step instead of running. "My name's J.J.. And this is Mr. Mike."

"You're no cop," the thin-faced, elfin woman in the middle said. She shoved her fists into her soiled sweatshirt.

"No. And neither is he," J.J. said as he pointed to Mr. Mike. Mr. Mike smiled and squeaked.

"You've got anything to burn?" asked the third figure. He was a giant, lumbering man. He nodded at the fire.

J.J. stepped closer to let the warmth of

the fire burn his face. "No," he said. "I have some beef jerky, if you all want a piece." He reached into his shirt and drew out the sticks of jerky. He broke them apart and gave a piece to everyone. "Don't that thing eat monkey?" the old man asked as he sucked his jerky.

Mr. Mike stared at the dwarf and quickly chewed his own piece of jerky. "Mr. Mike keeps me alive, friend," the old man said. "He's part of me."

"He looks like a rat with a ta-elfin woman said.

"He's very talented," J.J. said. "Show the people what you can do, Mike."

On cue, Mr. Mike slid down the dwarf's shoulder and crawled up the body of the giant. The giant giggled as Mr. Mike pulled from his arms to his shoulders and pulled out bits of jerky that J.J. threw into his

"Do some somersaults," J.J. said. In response Mr. Mike stood on his hind legs on the tall man's shoulder and did a full somersault onto the old man's head. The dwarf grunted nervously. Mr. Mike slithered down his back and monkey's arms clinging onto his ragged clothes. "Fucking rat," he said. Mr. Mike spun on the ground.

Mr. Mike crawled up the elfin woman's back and pulled on the top of her head. The elf laughed at the sight. "He's a cute little bugger. Are you in show business?"

"Sort of," J.J. laughed as Mr. Mike crawled back onto his shoulder. "Perform in the street for change."

"Don't we all..." the elf-woman said with a strong sense of being profane.

The group silently stood around the fire, shifting back and forth to the sound of crackling debris. After a long p

the fire burn his face. "No," he said. "But I have some beef jerky, if you all want a piece." He reached into his shirt pocket and drew out the sticks of jerky. He tore them apart and gave a piece to everyone.

"Don't that thing eat monkey food?" the old man asked as he sucked his beef jerky.

Mr. Mike stared at the dwarf and quickly chewed his own piece of jerky. "Mr. Mike keeps me alive, friend," J.J. said. "He's part of me."

"He looks like a rat with a tail," the elfin woman said.

"He's very talented," J.J. smiled. "Show the people what you can do, Mr. Mike."

On cue, Mr. Mike slid down J.J.'s shoulder and crawled up the body of the giant. The giant giggled as Mr. Mike leapt from his arms to his shoulders and caught bits of jerky that J.J. threw into his mouth.

"Do some somersaults," J.J. said.

In response Mr. Mike stood on his hind legs on the tall man's shoulders and did a full somersault onto the older man's head. The dwarf grunted nervously while Mr. Mike slithered down his body, his monkey's arms clinging onto his foul and ragged clothes. "Fucking rat," he said as Mr. Mike spun on the ground.

Mr. Mike crawled up the small woman's back and pulled on the hood on her head. The elf laughed at the sensation. "He's a cute little bugger. Are you guys in show business?"

"Sort of," J.J. laughed as Mr. Mike crawled back onto his shoulder. "We performed in the street for change."

"Don't we all..." the elf-woman said with a strong sense of being profound.

The group silently stood around the fire, shifting back and forth to the sound of crackling debris. After a long period of

silence the elf-woman said, "Don't you fools have a place to sleep?"

"No. We're going to stay outside until winter and then head down to Florida."

"Hitchhike?" the tall man asked.

"Yeah, or walk. It doesn't matter as long as I get there."

"I've known lots of people who've froze to death," the old dwarf said. "You just get numb and all the life is sucked out of you. It's better than being sliced open by a punk or crackhead."

"That's the truth," J.J. waved his head.

"We take turns sleeping and watching the fire," the elf turned to a steel pillar a few feet behind them. "There's a mattress there, so you can rest for a while, and we'll wake you for your turn."

J.J. smiled, said thanks, and went to sleep on the damp, vomit-stained mattress. Mr. Mike sat for a while with his back resting against J.J.'s shoulder. The monkey watched the three people by the fire with weary eyes that soon shut themselves with exhaustion and sleep.

The dwarf, the elf and the giant stood beside the oilcan fire and spoke in harsh whispers.

"Let's slice them and take their money," the dwarf said.

"Why look for trouble?" asked the elf. "They're harmless."

"I wonder what monkey meat tastes like," said the giant. He looked at the man and the monkey sleeping on the mattress. Mr. Mike twisted in spastic monkey's dreams.

"Like rats, I bet," said the dwarf. "Lots of bones and little meat."

"He probably has some money on him. The monkey act must pull lots of change," the giant swayed over the fire. "I say we slice them."

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The three shifted to the crackle of the fire when the dwarf noticed something wrong.

"My money!" he hissed. "My money pouch is gone!"

The elf and the giant each checked for their bags of change and bills. "That monkey," said the elf. "He took our pouches when it was crawling all over us."

The giant growled. "Let's slice them."

"No. Burn them," said the dwarf.

The elf smiled and helped roll the oilcan to the mattress.

J.J. woke to the piercing shrill of monkey's screams. His own screams mixed with the monkey's as they twisted in the flames. The dwarf, the elf and the giant ran in random directions trying to catch Mr. Mike, whose inhuman monkey's wail shot through the dark like a siren.

J.J. rolled blindly on the ground, his arms and legs flailing with mad spasms. Through the liquid haze of heat he caught the image of Mr. Mike's flesh burning away. The monkey ran to him through the fluttering, boiling air, and threw his smoldering monkey's body against J.J.'s chest. J.J. drew up and wrapped himself around the tiny monkey's skeleton and felt himself slipping inward to their last moments of separate consciousness.

Mr. Mike pulled himself up to J.J.'s ear and whispered the last pulse of his life. They rolled together into the ocean. In the cooling liquid steam the two merged into one being.

Images and mental sensations roared between their brains. Mr. Mike felt his entire being thrust through a narrowing tube of nerve muscles. J.J.'s whole

consciousness and memories shot through the opposite direction. Their lives and instincts stretched out as the same stream of events that came and went in sporadic bursts of energy.

Together they swam in the primordial pool of being. They reveled in their liberation from time and space. The energy flashes quickened while the man and the monkey lost themselves in a celestial ecstasy spawned at the dawn of creation. They blindly raced toward the original point of nothingness. The terror of darkness, suffocation and death that lay before all knowledge and history suddenly struck them at the core of their being. The joy of mingling their spirits was shattered by this unbearable fear of not knowing—of not being able to sense themselves as being alive in the universe. Their spines surged intense white energy before they tore apart in a brilliant explosion.

J.J. pulled himself out of the river. He coughed, heaving spasms of blood, holding his sides cracked with pain. He felt himself transformed as his eyes slowly focused to watch Mr. Mike's body float downriver to the ocean. He fell to his knees and wailed helplessly to the indifferent evening air.

J.J. got to his feet and stumbled to lean against the steel pole by the FDR Drive. The dwarf, elf and giant had fled to lose themselves in separate dark corners of the city.

J.J.'s body suddenly spasmed with energy. Echoes of monkey's screams resounded in his ears before J.J. collapsed on the scorched remains of the mattress.

J.J. dreamed agonizing half-monkey's dreams where he ran, intensely alone,

across a frozen white evolved of twisted monk melted like burning film o sky above him. J.J. he squeak and sputter with h life. The sound turned the J.J. felt himself falling. / his body jolted him awake

The sun reflecting burned his eyes. J.J. stood his face. His hands smel flesh. He strained to st: against the steel pole. He as his heart fluttered to body Mr. Mike's spinal glowed iridescent with human flower. Their en other as J.J. slowly stum sidewalk.

J.J. walked to laundry behind the Veteran's hos Third Street. He fou wooden stick and poi debris. He retrieved a s jacket, pads of cotton a: covered his body with wrapped his face with st

J.J. walked down the scraps of breakfast food passed. He lurched forw feet on the sidewalk, un statue of Atlas support Fifth Avenue.

He stood before the s to the chattering monk head. Images of the wo him from pictures dis companies in the build J.J. walked a full circle his eyes fixed on the fac bearing the weight of th

He stepped forward of the statue and made noise with his throat. /

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across a frozen white plain. Shapes evolved of twisted monkey's faces that melted like burning film on the slate gray sky above him. J.J. heard Mr. Mike squeak and sputter with his last breath of life. The sound turned the sky black and J.J. felt himself falling. An explosion in his body jolted him awake.

The sun reflecting off the water burned his eyes. J.J. stood up and covered his face. His hands smelled like cooked flesh. He strained to stand and leaned against the steel pole. He inhaled deeply as his heart fluttered to life. Inside his body Mr. Mike's spinal monkey flower glowed iridescent within J.J.'s spinal human flower. Their energies fed each other as J.J. slowly stumbled toward the sidewalk.

J.J. walked to laundry and waste bins behind the Veteran's hospital on Twenty-Third Street. He found a bat-sized wooden stick and poked around the debris. He retrieved a soiled laboratory jacket, pads of cotton and bandages. He covered his body with the jacket and wrapped his face with strips of cotton.

J.J. walked down the street, picking up scraps of breakfast food from trashbins he passed. He lurched forward, dragging his feet on the sidewalk, until he reached the statue of Atlas supporting the Earth on Fifth Avenue.

He stood before the statue and listened to the chattering monkey sounds in his head. Images of the world flashed before him from pictures displayed by travel companies in the building by the statue. J.J. walked a full circle around the statue, his eyes fixed on the face of the demi-god bearing the weight of the world.

He stepped forward to touch the foot of the statue and made a guttural, animal noise with his throat. An instinctive pull

drew him up around the statue's shoulder.

J.J. sat on Atlas' shoulder and raised his stick. An exalted monkey's knell poured through his lips as J.J. climbed on the back of the statue. The heavens surrounded him and J.J. reveled in the knowledge that Mr. Mike still sought to supplicate his hunger for discovery and enlightenment.

At the same moment several police cars came to restrain the maniac covered with bandages; J.J. lashed at them with his stick and was quickly thrown down and held by the pack of police. They took him to the hospital where he was given doses of Thorazine to calm him down. There wasn't room for him in the hospital because of overcrowding, so he was sent to a holding tank in the police station. Here he learned obedience and how to be other men's animal.

Inside the cage of the holding tank J.J. was beaten and physically violated by both the inmates and guards. He never resisted and no human sounds came from his lips. One night he was held down while the word "slave" was carved with a razor on his face and down his neck. His blood dried thick black lines on his skin. Still he made no sound.

A month passed and J.J. was released along with other excess John Does with the help of a public attorney. He fell through one of the million cracks in the labyrinth of city bureaucracy and soon returned to the streets. He wandered aimlessly throughout winter until he lost all perception of the outside world. He listened only to the chattering monkey's voice in his head.

In the midst of a torturous snap of winter frost J.J. climbed onto the shoulders of Atlas to expend his last breath into the deaf ear of the statue.

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Snow and ice pummeled him as he gripped the cold metal neck. J.J. drew himself inward, reaching forward to touch a glowing white sphere on the horizon of his familiar monkey's dream.

J.J. no longer ran between the black sky and icy ground in the dream. He stood on the shifting earth and reached up to touch the glowing sphere in the sky. He saw it held a tiny monkey's spinal flower. The sphere pulsated, exploded and

absorbed J.J. as he died.

J.J. woke to the sound of cheerful monkey's squeals. He floated gently in a familiar mountain pool. Through the sparse circle of trees Mr. Mike appeared, exhuming lengthy monkey's stories. He joined the man in the water and they swam together, sharing long-forgotten ancestral memories. J.J. embraced his ancestor and together they explored the Land of the Dead.

Topiary

children wander through
the courtyards
mindless of the darkness
stimuli-starved minds
slaver at their passage

like bats released from secret holes
their robes enfold their
tiny guests
swiftly sliding back to the
candlelit altars

the flowers of the
monastery
wither under the burden
of secrets God
has forgiven

-- Holly Day

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your worst

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