



FLASH
FICTION
ONLINE



August 2015

Stewart C. Baker, Derrick Boden,
Izabella Grace, & Rebecca Schwarz
Edited by Suzanne W. Vincent

Flash Fiction Online August 2015

Anna Yeatts
Derrick Boden
Izabella Grace
Stewart C. Baker
Rebecca Schwarz

Copyright 2015 by Flash Fiction Online, LLC

Cover Art by Dario Bijelac

Interior Art by Dario Bijelac

Cover Design by Anna Yeatts

Ebook Design by Anna Yeatts

All stories are copyrighted to their respective authors, and are used here with their permission

Flash Fiction Online

www.flashfictiononline.com

No portion of this book may be reproduced by any means, mechanical, electronic, or otherwise, without first obtaining the permission of the copyright holder.

For more information, contact Flash Fiction Online at flashfictiononline@yahoo.com

There's Something in the Air

by Anna Yeatts

HELLO, AUGUST. I live in the South so, for me, August means hot, sticky days and afternoon thunderstorms that roll in, shake the house, and carry out some of that all encompassing humidity. It means palmetto bugs the size of mice and spiderwebs large enough to ensnare a grown man. And of course, August means the last frantic days of summer. Summer assignments are being crammed into the last remaining week. Parents are prowling for backpacks and glue-sticks. And the children are practically vibrating with the last vestiges of summer's energy.

It's a frenetic, transitional time of year. And you can't deny there's something in the air. An impending danger, relationships in flux, the last days of waiting before fall tears through like those late afternoon thunderstorms and clears the air.

Our stories this month have August's feel. First up is "The Last Mardi Gras" by Derrick Boden. I know it's not Mardi Gras, but once you read this one, you'll understand what I mean about the feel — the atmosphere is undeniably real, thick with longing for what was, and hoping for what might be.

Remember those giant palmetto bugs I told you about? Well, they're even larger and more menacing in "Bugs Eat Light" by returning FFO author, Izabella Grace. Appreciate the light while you have it. And keep the flashlights handy.

I'm also pleased to bring another FFO alum back in this issue. Stewart C.

Baker brings us “Concerning Your Recent Creation of Sentient Horse-Things on the Next Planet Over.” Be careful in how you handle old relationships. You never know when a planet-swallowing whale might be involved.

Finally, a reprint from Rebecca Schwarz, “A Note to Parents Regarding the Beginning and End of Time Diorama Presentations for Ms. Miller’s Third Grade Class.” A little classroom humor for all your back to school needs.

Enjoy!

Anna

© 2015 Anna Yeatts

Anna Yeatts is the Publisher of *Flash Fiction Online*. When not eyeball deep in the slush pile, she writes horror and dark fiction of her own. Her work has appeared in *Daily Science Fiction*, *Penumbra eMagazine*, *Stupefying Stories*, and *STRAEON* among other venues. Follow her on Twitter @AnnaYeatts or on her website www.annayeatts.com.

The Last Mardi Gras

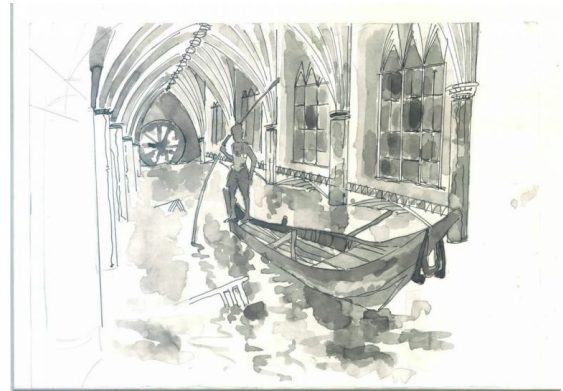
by Derrick Boden

FROM THE ROOFTOP OF THE OLD CATHEDRAL, I had a clear view past the Louis Armstrong Park lagoons, all the way to the steel islands of Mid City. Just like I always remembered New Orleans. Wet.

My boat, a cheap scow with a temper as bad as my dead Aunt Sally, thrashed against the current nearby. Took me all morning to motor in from the Baton Rouge arcology. Standing there on that roof, looking out across that flooded land, I still wasn't sure why I'd come.

My old lady sure as hell didn't like the idea, but she's from Boston and still couldn't even pronounce Mardi Gras right. We had plenty to worry about back home, with the power going out every other day and everyone fretting about the next wave of hunger riots. I figured I was the only one crazy enough to show, and seeing as how I was sitting alone up there, it was looking like I was right. Probably wasn't no such thing as the Krewe du Passé anyway.

I kicked a water bin over and gave my old legs a rest. To the East, past the crumbled facades of the Quarter, the remains of the Ninth Ward levees clung to the horizon. The big ones. They were gonna stop the big floods, keep us all safe inside this little bubble we called home.



By Dario Bijelac

And maybe they would've, if it'd been big floods that had come.

Like most things, the end crept up real slow. So slow it was easy to look the other way, especially for all those politicians. Slap another dyke up in Florida, build the levees a few feet higher in old NOLA. Forget about it until next year. The picketers kept predicting a big flood, something to throw in the face of the government. Proof that something had to be done. But that's not how things go down.

No, New Orleans didn't drop into the gulf under one big swell. It was a slow death, like watching your grandma fight off cancer for twenty years. And lord, did she fight. But eventually death caught her, just like it catches everything. The sun was getting high in the sky, so I pulled my old trombone out and greased her up. The slide was like butter, the mouthpiece the only kiss I've ever needed. I trolled out a few notes, then let it wail until the echoes bounced clear down to Lake Pontchartrain.

Most people never understood a thing about this town. Always saying, "Just move higher, you dumb shits." I'm not sure what ties a soul to a place, but I've never felt at home since the day we finally packed up through the second floor window and motored out of town. The arcologies were supposed to be the future, keep everyone fed and indoors where it's safe. But they're soulless hives, and just like a soulless hive they started to rot from the inside. Now the gangs are so bad, sometimes I think it'd be better to take our chances down in Mexico.

My lungs were getting hot, so I stopped for a swig of moonshine.

The Krewe du Passé. Who was I fooling? I'd almost convinced myself to stay behind in Baton Rouge. But then the night before, Big Chief came on the radio. I got the chills all over, felt the movement in my bones. In my heart. I knew I had to find out for myself.

The messages were all cryptic-like, obscure posts and emails. The Coast Guard had the whole perimeter blocked off, and they didn't take kindly to trespassers, with all the oil poaching going down these days. So it was real cloak and dagger. I left before dawn, and still almost got nabbed by a patrol as I was squeezing along the riverbank. You'd think the bastards would have something better to do, like get food to people that need it.

Down Royal Street, the water was lapping against the old buildings. The last holdouts. Hadn't been more than a few thousand of us holed up here during those final years. Even then, there were some good days. Carnival days. Most of the krewes were long gone, but a few stuck around. Rex. Zulu. Krewe du Vieux. Marching our problems away. Until the day the gangs boated into town, shooting and looting. Gunned down the mayor right in the waterway. We all knew it was time to go, then. So we said goodbye to New Orleans, and we said goodbye to Mardi Gras. Sure, they still celebrate up in Boston, and I hear they've got a museum out in California. But that ain't Mardi Gras, far as I'm concerned. Mardi Gras lived and died right here.

It was well past the meeting time, and my toes were getting cold. It was gearing up to be a quiet Mardi Gras, but I could dig it. Just me and my grandma, this old city. I drew my bone back to my lips.

Something caught the sunlight, a little quantized rainbow floating by. I leaned over the edge and scooped it up with the slide of my bone. I held it up to the light.

Beads. I'll be damned. A whole string of them, just like they used to throw. And right through the center, where the sun was starting to blind me, something moved along the water in the distance.

A boat. Then another. And then another.

Like gators through the bayou, they drifted closer, all converging on the cathedral. Some were as small as my scow. Others were large enough to hold a few families. On one deck, a steaming pot of gumbo filled the air with the scent of heaven. From another, a trumpet wailed. A third brought the drums.

And they all came ready to dance. If this was gonna be the last Mardi Gras, we were gonna make it count. We were gonna show our old grandma that she didn't die for nothing.

© Derrick Boden

Derrick Boden is a recovering



software developer that has taken up writing to kick the habit. He currently calls New Orleans his home, although he's lived in thirteen cities spanning four continents. He's an avid traveler and adventurer, and is a sucker for life's simple pleasures: food, drink, friends, and science fiction. He is owned by three cats. Find him at derrickboden.com.

Bugs Eat Light

by Izabella Grace

RUSTLES AND SCRATCHES fill our pitch-black sitting room. Bugs. Digging through cracks in the walls, searching for moonshine to gorge on. I sink back against the sofa cushion, grateful for the wooden boards on the window, and wrap my fingers around Lee's pocket torch. My head aches. The blisters on my socked feet sting and throb. Outside the flat, a distant door bangs. My heart leaps. Is it Lee? Has he come back?



By Dario Bijelac

A wail floats up the stairs. Footsteps echo. A deep, male voice, not Lee's, yells for someone to put out the moon. More steps. A fist slams into our door, and the key chain rattles. I hold my breath. Silence. Even the bugs stop moving. Then the intruder stumbles off down the hallway, growling and sobbing like a lunatic. My belly churns.

Damn bugs. They're destroying everything.

Rage coppery on my tongue, I tuck my dark curls into the back of my hoodie and pull on battered, brown boots. Then I switch on the torch. The thin beam spills across the cluttered room, trembling like a spider's thread. I flick it over the worn rug, metal step ladder and broken T.V. The shadows shudder and stretch.

I point the torch at the framed photograph of Lee and me outside a country pub. Arms flung around each other, we grin over pints of Guinness. Sunlight soaks into everything: our tanned skins, the wooden bench, the grey, stone wall. Strange to think we took it only three months ago on my twenty-first birthday. When the days stretched from dawn to dusk and weren't stuck in perpetual twilight.

I snap away the light and drag my thoughts from summer's golden warmth. Where is Lee now? Is he hiding? Lost? Crazy? Dead?

"Here, buggy buggy," I murmur. "Time to get squashed."

The darkness yawns and presses in. Then a bat-sized moth flutters past my right ear and perches on the torch. As it feeds, the light flickers and dims, and depression slips, like a black cloak, over me. I struggle to stay focused, determined not to give up or slide into insanity. I raise my hand. Only then a kitten-sized spider drops from the ceiling. It lands on my wrist and runs along my arm. I squeak and leap up. Shake it off. Try to stamp on its hairy body. But it darts under the sofa.

Huge black beetles scuttle into the puddle of pale light on the floor. They lap, then gulp. One of them turns its glistening head and chomps off the tip of the torch's beam. I back away, my skin crawling, despair burrowing into my bones. I don't get it. Why are they demolishing light? They weren't zapped by space rays or mutant bug-eyed aliens. So maybe Lee's right. Maybe it's some kind of virus.

Something tugs at my untied boot laces. I glance down at a giant cockroach. It climbs up my jeans. I let it. I let it drain my strength and courage. I let it suck on my will, my reason for living. I let it extinguish the light in me. Until it reaches my thigh. Then I bring up my knee and slam down my hand. It crunches against my palm. I grimace and study the thick goo, then I move to wipe it on the arm of the sofa. But the beetles rush towards me, greasy bodies writhing and tumbling.

I click the torch button, but the light stays on. I click again and again. Still it shines. Something tickles my face. I shriek and slap it off. Goo gets on my lips and cheeks, so I wipe it away with my sleeve and spit. Bitterness seeps into my mouth, burning my tongue and throat. I retch and cough and spit again. Then I

hurl the torch across the room, and the undulating wave of dark bodies chase after it.

The room plunges into blackness. Trembling, I perch on the sofa's edge and count ragged breaths until my pulse slows. Then I sink back, wrapping my arms around my knees. I close my eyes. I imagine Lee beside me. I conjure his narrow, bearded face, lopsided grin, olive and gold-flecked eyes. I pretend to kiss the curved scar over his left eyebrow.

I drift. I dream of the dusky, empty streets that I've searched every day since Lee left. His distant shouts echo off crumbling walls. He yells curses and barks at a beetle-shaped moon. In the shadows, bugs suck at the day's edges and night advances. Outside a country pub, I kick a broken beer bottle. Lee's last words float out of it:

“Do you want to board up that window, babe? I'll go find food. Don't worry. I'll be back before sunset.”

When I wake up, a sliver of grey shimmers above the blacked out window. My belly growls. I stand, grab the step ladder and climb. I stretch towards the light. It smells like sunshine on fallen apples. I press my palm against it, and my pale skin tingles. My mouth waters. I tug at the boards. I yank and rip and dig out iron nails. Blood trickles down my wrists.

“Hurry,” Lee whispers.

The wood falls, and brilliance engulfs me. I blink, dazzled.

Lee chuckles. “You took your time.”

Then I realise: the light isn't dying. It's inside the darkness.

I poke out my tongue.

I lick. I gulp. I bite.

© Izabella Grace

Izabella Grace grew up in London and now lives in rural Ireland with her partner and two very naughty cats. She doesn't



mind bugs but hopes she never has to live in a world where spiders grow big as kittens. When she's not bothering leprechauns for their pots of gold, she helps run a cat shelter and writes fiction that has appeared in *Cease, Cows, Every Day Fiction* and *Youth Imagination*. Her seasonal story [The Faerie and the Knight on Valentine's Day](#) appeared in the February 2014 issue of *Flash Fiction Online*.

Concerning your Recent Creation of Sentient Horse-things on the Next Planet Over

by Stewart C. Baker

DEAR DR. HIGGLEBOTTEM,

The board has received troubling reports from a group of hyper-dolphins about your recent activities on Tau Ceti f.

These reports claim:

1) that you have created sentient horse-things

2) that said horse-things have created a society wherein success is measured by the amount of hay stockpiled and consumed

3) that said horse-things have razed forests, drained swamps, re-routed rivers, and otherwise wrecked the planet's eco-system in order to grow as much hay as possible

4) that said horse-things have, additionally, instilled a species of small dog-things with high intelligence but no free will (in direct disregard of the Academy's charter, which flatly disallows the creation of intelligent beings for the sole purpose of servitude)

5) that said dog-things have begun work on interstellar travel for said horse-



things

We would like to remind you that all upliftings need to be cleared for safety and sociability before any work can begin. (Remember Dr. White's planet-eating mega-whales? We're still paying that one off.)

We have not received any paperwork from you, which I'm sure is an oversight, so I have attached the requisite forms to this netsend. Please fill them out and return them—along with clarifications regarding the horse-things—at your earliest convenience.

Yours with respect and tradition,

Dr. Hsieng "Jack" Xao

Executive Chair, Administrative Board

Ancient Academy of the Right Honourable Uplifters

42 Brin St.

New New New London

Tau Ceti e

* * *

Jack,

I don't appreciate your spies snooping on me, and I must confess I'm surprised to hear you compare me to the infamous Dr. White.

Did what we had together really mean that little to you? Even now, I sometimes think fondly on the time we used to spend in the orchard behind the academy, listening to bird-song and each other's whispered promises. But I suppose all you ever really wanted was the executive chairship.

Anyway, I've attached the forms here.

Yours,

Henrietta

(P.S. My creations call themselves "Equans" and "Lupans," respectively. Please do not belittle them with your "horse-things" stuff.)

(P.P.S. How is the orchard these days?)

* * *

Dear Henrietta,

How do you know about our apple problem? We only found out a week ago

that my new strand of intelligent anti-pest blackbirds has been eating all the apples they can get their beaks on.

Anyway, the hyper-dolphins are not “spies.” They are simply a concerned species who happen to have faster-than-light capabilities, and whose song can be transmitted instantaneously across folds in space-time.

I’m sorry if you feel we were comparing you to Dr. White. That was not our intent. (And please don’t bring up our past personal relationship, which is entirely irrelevant to this situation.)

Thank you for submitting the forms. There appears to have been some sort of glitch, however. When I opened them on my end, all they said was “Horse’s Ass” over and over again.

Please re-send them at your earliest convenience.

Yours with respect and tradition,

Dr. Hsieng “Jack” Xao

—

Jack,

Sorry to hear about the apple problem. I’m astonished that one of “your” designs would have such flaws. I know you’re always a very responsible researcher.

I don’t know how the forms got like that. Here’s what they should say:

Horses’ Asses. Horses’ Asses. Horses’ Asses. Horses’ Asses. Horses’ Asses.

Is that clear enough for the esteemed members of the board? Personally, I doubt you could uplift an intelligent species out of a wet paper bag. If it helps, you can stick the words “You are all” before each instance of “Horses’ Asses.”

HH

(P.S. Your theft of my intellectual output while you pretended to be in love with me is irrelevant? That’s rich.)

(P.P.S. The Lupans’ work on interstellar travel is coming along quite nicely. Once they’re done I’ll convince the Equans to free them.)

(P.P.P.S. Dr. White sends his regards.)

—

Henrietta,

I'm sorry if I hurt you when I said I wanted to stop seeing you. I know you were very attached to me. But creating an anti-social uplifted species and accusing me of stealing your work is taking things too far.

I'm reporting this to the planet-eating mega-whales, whom we have rehabilitated into a sort of police force.

Unless, of course, you'd like to take back your hasty words?

Jack

Jack,

It's funny (although not surprising) that you've stolen Dr. White's creation after you used it to get him kicked out of the academy all those years ago.

Also, I forwarded your last message to the Equans and thought you might like to know that the Lupans have succeeded in creating starships and they're coming your way. For some reason, they didn't take kindly to being told their planet was going to be eaten, and that you'd been the one to order it.

HH

(P.S. I've also forwarded evidence of your thefts to the Interplanetary Association of Scholarly and Scientific Law. If the Equans don't get you, they will.)

Henrietta,

I'm sorry I said what I did. And I am sorry I hurt you. Truly, I am.

Please, call off your "Equans" (and your lawyers). I'll call off the whales.

It's a big universe, and there's no reason we can't just go our own separate ways.

Jack

Jack,

Too little, too late, I'm afraid.

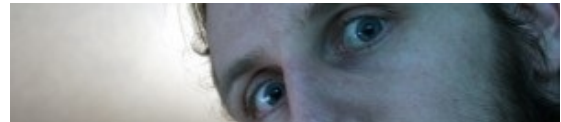
Dr. White and I are on already our way to another system. There's a group of squid-like beings there that show quite a bit of promise.

HH

(P.S. Since some small part of me still cares, I'll tell you a secret: Equan physiology makes apples both irresistible and incapacitating. I do hope you managed to save some before those blackbirds I let you steal from me got loose...)

© Stewart C. Baker

Stewart C. Baker is an academic librarian, haikuist, and speculative fiction writer. His fiction has appeared in *Daily Science Fiction*, *Nature*, and *Flash Fiction Online*, among other magazines. Stewart was born in England, has spent time in South Carolina, Japan, and California, and now lives in western Oregon with his wife and children—although if anyone asks, he'll say he's from the Internet. He would like to confirm that no horse-things, dog-things, intelligent blackbirds, or academics were harmed in the making of this story. Stewart's website is <http://infomancy.net/>. Stewart has no connection whatsoever with the internal workings of Flash Fiction Online. Not even that enormous pile of slush sitting on his house. That's an illusion.



A Note to Parents Regarding the Beginning and End of Time Diorama Presentations for Ms. Miller's Third Grade Class

by Rebecca Schwarz

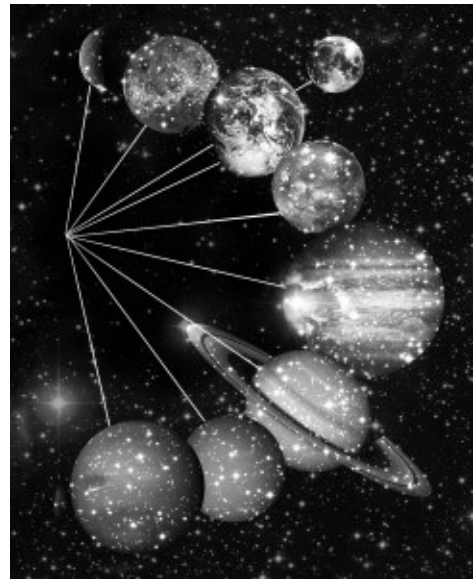
DEAR PARENTS,

It's diorama time again, and I thought I would send home a few notes for parents about this annual project. While your child is encouraged to approach this project creatively, there are a few ground rules that will help ensure success – as well as the safety of the class.

Time:

If your child chooses Eternalism or “brick time” he or she may not use marshmallows, M&Ms or any other food item to illustrate the discrete blocks of time. Also, while space-time may be infinite, the dioramas are meant to be a representation to demonstrate your child's knowledge of the beginning and end of time. Keep in mind that we have sixteen students in the class and all their dioramas must fit on two tables.

Any dioramas depicting N-dimensional space-time, or “time foam,” must not infinitely generate soap bubbles (it creates a terrible mess).



I would recommend restricting any diorama to 6 to 8 dimensions, even if standard string theory's 12 dimensions are achievable, the results are both difficult to view and, in reality, cannot be contained within the confines of the classroom. Although it has never happened, we would hate to lose a child to another dimension on diorama day.

Your child may not bring nothing and claim that time, the 4th dimension, is "invisible" to us.

Your child may not bring nothing and claim that he or she actually brought two dioramas, one of the moment of the big bang when all matter was infinitesimally small, and the other of the heat death of the universe when things are nearly infinitely spread out.

Neither may your child bring a handful of marbles claiming they represent the moment of the big bang, then throw them up in the air and wait until they all roll to a stop and call that the heat death of the universe. While this demonstration delighted the class last year, it was just that, a demonstration. I will be grading dioramas only. Also, it took days to find all the marbles and they proved to be both a distraction to the class and a hazard to myself.

Eschatology:

Dioramas representing religious views of the beginning and end of time are acceptable – please keep in mind that this is a third grade project and the imagery should be appropriate. For example, the Four Horseman of the Apocalypse are fine, as is the Eternal City, but a depiction of the Whore of Babylon is inappropriate for a third grade class (at the very least any such depictions should bear no resemblance to any member of the teaching staff past or present).

Any scenes depicting the last phase of earth's destruction in Ragnarok cannot involve fireworks or actual fire. (I really shouldn't have to bring this up every year. The school's policies regarding fire and fireworks are clearly stated in the district's Student Handbook.)

A final note:

Last year a student presented a diorama that illustrated my life as an example of the experience of time. I do not know how he found out that I was born via

Caesarian section. Both parents and staff felt that the content of his diorama was inappropriate for third graders. While I did award him points for creativity and accuracy, I did not appreciate the other half of the diorama illustrating my death in a fiery car crash on the interstate.

I have sold my car and moved to an apartment closer to the school. If this has changed the outcome of the end of my time on Earth, I do not want to know it.

All projects are due next Monday and will be judged by the third grade teachers and members of the PTA.

Good luck and happy building.

Ms. Miller

3rd Grade

Originally published in *Daily Science Fiction*. Reprinted with author's permission.

© Rebecca Schwarz, 2014.

By day, Rebecca Schwarz is a mild-mannered editorial assistant for a scientific journal, by night she writes science fiction and fantasy stories. Her work has appeared in *Interzone*, *Bourbon Penn*, and *Daily Science Fiction*. She is currently writing her first novel. You can read about her writing life at www.curiousworlds.blogspot.com.

Support Flash Fiction Online

by Anna Yeatts

Thank you for your continued support of Flash Fiction Online as a valued subscriber. Your contribution goes a long way in helping to pay our authors the professional rates they deserve.

But it takes a sizable financial effort to keep a professional magazine running. Flash Fiction Online has paired up with Patreon to bring you some (hopefully) interesting rewards to go along with the warm, fuzzies you receive from donating alone.

Are you a writer yourself? Interested in receiving a personal critique on your own manuscript from the senior staff, including Editor in Chief, Suzanne Vincent?

Want to see an additional story every month in the magazine?

Or receive an end of the year anthology?

Swing on over to [Patreon](#) for details.

Thanks again for being our loyal family of readers. We couldn't do it without you.

All my best,

[Anna Yeatts](#)

Publisher,

Flash Fiction Online

Also by Flash Fiction Online

by Anna Yeatts



Seven years and 140 some stories after its creation, Flash Fiction Online, under the direction of publisher Anna Yeatts and Editor in Chief Suzanne W. Vincent, is proud to offer you—the frenetic 21st century reader—our first annual anthology. More than thirty stories ranging from Cislyn Smith’s “The Secret Lives of Sea Monsters”, a haunting testament to hidden strangers beneath our very noses, to Eli Hasting’s heartbreaking story of a young man’s incarceration after his best friend’s death in “The

Cell I’m In”. Both professional and upcoming authors in both genre and literary fiction appeared in our issues this year. Enjoy stories from Caroline M. Yoachim, Brynn MacNab, Mary C. Moore, Nathaniel Lee, Kelly Sandoval, and more