Scattered Pieces of a Larger Dream

Jason Boog
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"She reflected. 'I prefer stories about squalor.'" J.D. Salinger--"For Esmé--With Love and Squalor"

"Stupid God, what have I done to get a cement forest in a grocery store?" James Schevill--"The Jewish Grocer and the Vegetable Forest"

"But even they scurried to find out. Who is the Harlequin?" Harlan Ellison--"Repent Harlequin, Said the Ticktockman"

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The dirty community center of Jehovah, Michigan (population 635) was filled to a record capacity on a very special Monday evening. Two hundred twenty-five adults, thirty children, and two puppies were present, according to most estimates. Usually Jehovah was not a culturally-minded town, but that night would be different. The Most Reverend Elijah Moon had visited that week, and for two dollars a person, promised to reveal the meaning of life.

All was quiet at 6:04 when the Reverend appeared from the back, and ambled up to the brand new podium built for the occasion. Under his arm was a dusty, slender book, no bigger than a child’s book. He sat down, producing a chipping pair of reading glasses from his shirt pocket. Then he opened the curious volume, and began to read.

"Once upon a time..." the strange tale began, as all good stories do.

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1-Introductory Comments and Attempts at Explanations

Once upon a time, there was a young high school student, who read an impressive short story by Harlan Ellison, one of his favorite authors. Consisting of twenty-six miniature stories, it was entitled "From A to Z in the Chocolate Alphabet." Read it, if you can. It is very good.

The student would like to apologize to Harlan Ellison, and anyone else he’s confused or upset already. But he refuses to promise the reader an easy, structured piece of fiction by any means. Because this is something new, and like a Monty Python movie, completely different.

But I digress.

2-Everything Begins on Penguin Island

Newt awoke on Penguin Island, one bewildering morning. He first noticed that his shirt smelled quite badly. Before he even had a chance to think, one solitary penguin ambled toward him.

"I love you," it said, surprisingly.
"What!" Newt screamed, afraid.
"I love you," repeated the penguin.
"Where am I?" screamed Newt.
"You don’t have to yell, because we won’t hurt you," soothed the peculiar bird.

A second penguin appeared, and also spoke. "We like Neil Diamond music here." It motioned with its beak towards a combination radio and tape player system, resting on the sand.
"What!" screeched Newt, again.
"But we can’t turn the damn thing on!" the penguin exclaimed, bitterly.

More flightless birds surrounded Newt, in clumsy penguin fashion. They all babbled in a storm of unique, odd voices. "Can you help us?" one penguin asked.

"No!" screamed Newt, as he crawled backwards across the sand. "I want to go home!" he sobbed.

"I’m sorry," said a penguin sympathetically. "You can take our boat," it said, pointing to a rowboat beside the combination radio
and tape player system. "We can’t row the damn thing anyways."

"But we will miss our Neil Diamond music," added a young penguin who could barely see over the crowd of taller penguins.

Newt rose excitedly, and dashed for the wooden craft. He pushed it out to sea, and began rowing as quickly as he could. "Goodbye!" Newt screamed, when he was a safe distance from the beach of talking penguins.

"I love you," yelled the first penguin, quite pleased that a real human had come to Penguin Island, for they did not come often.

3-Lonely, Exploding Trees

"If the world doesn’t become a much nicer place by next Thursday, the trees will explode," warned the prophet that had taken to standing on Main Street.

And everyone laughed, knowing full well that trees would never explode. They simply continued with their usual lives, and were angry, mean, sarcastic, and violent for another five days. Unfortunately, they did so unaware that trees had absorbed the Earth’s sadness for quite some time. And by that Thursday, all the hurt from millions of eons of lonely people had bloated the trees to an alarming size.

"Stupid prophet," someone muttered, and then, the trees did indeed explode, scattering lonely everywhere.

4-The Communist Regime’s Middle American Agenda

The Communists snuck into Charlene’s bedroom late one night, and silently stole her television. They also managed to remove her extensive Danielle Steele collection, and her entire Avon product line. By the time the American government realized this terrible deed had occurred, Charlene had quit her job as a Tupperware distributor, planted a garden, and begun singing folk songs.

The government had lost one of its most important members, and the evil Communists had scored another small victory. But even that did not worry the President and all of his men, for there were more capitalists thriving throughout the United States. More than the Communists could ever possibly pollute. It was a pity.
5-Bob’s Dead Smoke
Bob thought about fires for the better part of his life. Most of this concern was directed at smoke, or more specifically, what happened to smoke on its way to the sky. This obsession led Bob to embark on a Scientific Study that lasted for seven years.

When it was finally completed, Bob found he had learned no answers. It seemed the smoke would rise for a few feet, and simply disappear. Bob was forced to give up, but he did decide to name the phenomenon.

Dead smoke, he called it, because life easily murders such fragile things.

6-A Religious Revelation on a Tuesday
One sunny Tuesday afternoon, in June, the man who wrote the Bible visited Steve for lunch. Steve was surprised, as any Christian man should have been.

During a long dinner of pickled herring and bread, the man explained generations of belief in a Book he had written. Through an elaborate plot of time travel, tattered-looking scrolls and countless armies of preachers, he had marketed Christianity. Again, Steve was startled, for he was a Methodist himself.

"That's amazing," he stammered, and asked the question anyone in his position would have. "Why did you do it?" Steve said, scratching his head.

The man paused, and ate a piece of sweetened fish. "Because," he said, "there was nothing better to do."

7-An Inspiring Christmas Tale
Donald was excited to visit Santa Claus that year. The jolly old man had made a special appearance at the Mall, and Donald waited in line for nearly an hour. He was alone, and had little to think about, which made the wait seem much longer. But soon, he reached a smiling, helper-elf, just five feet from Santa Claus.

"One dollar, please," smiled the elf-person, just doing his job.

Donald frowned, for he had no dollar. "I don’t have any money!" he said.
"I'm sorry, sir, then you can't see Santa," the elf responded, smiling again.

"But I..." Donald paused, frustrated.

"Excuse me, mister, but other people are waiting," a fat woman yelled in the back. "And you look like you're thirty or something," she concluded.

"I'm twenty-seven," Donald pleaded. "Please, I don't have any money."

Santa's assistant roughly pushed Donald out of line. "I'll call security, sir, if you do not leave." He was not smiling anymore.

Donald sniffled, for the world was not what it once was. He was shaking as he pushed over the giant, flawless Christmas tree, which crushed the expensive Santa Claus and all his presents. "I don't need your stupid Christmas!" he cried, and ran away, knowing deep in his heart that he really did.

A crowd of men and women in tights and jinglebell hats chased after the freakish individual who had broken up their beautiful Christmas enterprise. And from the back of the line, a cute little girl cheered, even though she had never met Donald.

8-The Mars People, Television, and Roy

Roy, just coming home from the late shift at General Motors, found a Martian on his couch, engrossed in a Baywatch rerun. Since it was the middle of the night, and his entire house was bathed in a supernatural light, Roy had grabbed his special, pump-action shotgun from the closet. "What d'ya want, spaceman?" he growled.

The Martian turned, and spoke in its strange, alien tongue.

"BXXTVMZZ," it said.

Roy was sure the creature had meant to kill him, so he fired, in a single, smooth action that might have impressed Rambo himself. Not only did the spaceman explode into a thousand foreign pieces, but Roy also managed to put a rather large hole in his family couch.

"Oops," he giggled nervously, pondering then what his alien guest might have said. And if Roy had been fluent in Martian-speak, he would have heard the simpler, but no less important sentence.

"I pity you," the spaceman from millions of miles away had
tried to communicate to a tactless, but straight-shooting factory worker.

9-The Untimely Death of a Fine Young Consumer

Jerry stumbled into a particularly bad patch of quicksand on his way to the Mall. He'd never seen quicksand in suburbia before, and was shocked. "Oh no!" he said. No one heard his cry, however, for it was the middle of the afternoon, on a perfectly good workday.

Jerry looked around desperately for a vine to grab, like the jungle movies, but he was not so fortunate. Vines were not plentiful that part of the city.

He tried not to panic, but within a minute, was up to his shoulders in the muddy mess. When he was eye level with the sidewalk, Jerry spit out a mouthful of quicksand, and called out bitterly. "What did I ever do to deserve this?" he said, and was gone.

His No Fear baseball cap floated on the surface, long after Jerry’s death, refusing to sink. It could have been symbolic.

10-Jed’s Bad Day

"You know," declared Jed as they finally set the cow down in frustration, "I don’t think this cow will fit through this dang window."

This news was quite disappointing to Jed’s four other farming friends who had come to his aid. It seemed Jed would never get his prized animal inside his house.

"Try the door," said the obnoxious, flea-bitten barn cat.

"Aw shucks," Jed muttered, surprised. The rest of the farmers only laughed uncomfortably, and scratched their heads.

Sometimes the simplest solutions can come from the strangest places.

11-The Mars People Return

The remaining spacemen landed the flying saucer in the middle of a Russian field. Three Communists had watched the landing with great interest, and after some discussion, crept up to the spectacular machine. They greeted the Martians with a few colorfully wrapped gifts, and whispered that they were all comrades.
"MMAWWUY," the spacemen responded, and disappeared back inside the gigantic space ship. When it was gone, the Communists congratulated themselves. They had truly won a victory for their Motherland, as the packages suspiciously resembled a complete set of Danielle Steele novels. But none of the Communists were telling.

12-Likening Apocalypse Unto an Aluminum Ladder

John was a moderate Republican, living in a comfortable Midwestern town. He enjoyed Rush Limbaugh, apple-pie, and easy listening music. He was pretty average looking, and had about seven friends in life. So it was really quite surprising that the universe revolved around John. In fact, absolutely no one realized this fact until it was far too late.

It was late July, when John unwittingly ended the world. He was cleaning his roof, when the ladder collapsed, sending him to relatively painless demise. The very second the aluminum thing came crashing down, the universe came to a grinding halt. The Apocalypse was not some spectacular, religious event, but instead, a noisy accident.

"Ouch," said John, the simple epitaph for mankind, and indeed, the rest of the universe.

13-The Family Stick

He sat alone under the tree, every day. Joey was his name, he thought. He had a stick, under there, and held it tightly with both hands, as he’d done his whole life.

It was a sacred stick, they had told him, forbidding him to ever drop or harm the beautiful thing. Joey stayed there for eighteen years, obeying what he could not understand, and watching the world wander around the tree without him. And every year, that stick began to seem less pretty, and more worn and dirty.

One night, after a lifetime of dreams that danced for too long, Joey broke the family stick. It was so simple, and so easy, he realized after he had done it. He dropped the two twigs that remained, and cried large, tragic tears. The world had become suddenly and utterly
useless. Nothing would ever be the same again, because the broken piece of a tree would not ever need his small hands again.

14-Short, Thematic Interlude of Loud Politics
Once, When the principal was not looking, Willy opened the control box and grabbed the microphone to his school’s Public Address System. Even though it was 11:32 in the morning, and the daily bulletin had already been read, he felt there was something he should say.

"There’s only one announcement today," he intoned, in a very business-like voice, which slowly grew into a speech of impressive volume. "Channel One is a fraud! The malls have bought our souls, and God is just a brand name! Television a lie!" Willy screamed joyfully, just before they dragged him out of the booth. His midday message was ended abruptly, but he’d said enough.

The counselors and principals shook their heads sadly at young Willy, and called the police to take him for a very long detention. It was obvious to everyone they had found a Communist, disguised as a high school student. They led Willy to a silent, flashing police car, as all the five hundred other high school students watched from behind tinted windows.

"We are all lost!" Willy hollered, hoping someone could hear. The policeman only snickered, and closed the door. They would fix the strange, immature boy soon enough. America would fix the whole world, eventually.

15-Everything Returns to Penguin Island
Newt rowed his boat slowly back to the beach of Penguin Island. It slid gently into the soft sand, with a peaceful swishing sound. Quite some time had passed since his dramatic exit, but he had found the island easily.

"It is very good to be home," Newt said, and lay down on the warm beach. He soon fell fast asleep.

The penguins all came out to see their restored friend with great happiness. "I knew he’d come back," whispered the first penguin.
"They all do," hollered the short penguin in the back.
"Shhhh," ordered an older penguin, but it was too late.
"It’s all right," Newt said, sleepily, for he was not an angry person anymore.
"Why did you come back?" asked one penguin.
Newt paused. He had a full beard now, and thick circles around his eyes. And his shirt still smelled quite badly.
"Well," he said. "I’ve seen most of the world lately, in a wooden rowboat, and I’ve decided it’s safer on Penguin Island."
Newt yawned, and smiled sincerely. "I love you," he finished, and began to snore.
The first penguin shook his head. "Life is funny, isn’t it?" He spoke to no one, and everyone.
"It sure is," another penguin agreed.
Newt slept, and around his crumpled, insignificant self, the penguins wobbled through the steps of a welcoming dance that was older than the sun. There would be time for festivities and Neil Diamond music later.

16-Happy Ending
God steered his motorized aluminum boat clear of Penguin Island, and smiled. The world could manage itself without Him for a while. Besides, there was plenty of good fishing left in the big, blue expanse of His personal ocean. And God never had been too fond of Neil Diamond music. He opened his tackle box for a few plastic worms, while His boat puttered by its motorized self, into the proverbial sunset.

17-Conclusions Reached by the Communist Author
This story is humbly dedicated to Ionia County, the young high school student’s personal, cement forest. Also, he’d like to remember the Channel One family, in its tireless efforts to present an entertaining reality to ignorant adolescents such as himself. And most of all, he is not sorry if he offended the omnipotent and corporate Television Generation.

These are the scattered pieces of a larger dream, a single life.
Confused as it may be, this tale is merely an attempt to repair what was left of the author's own imagination. Without those dreams, our freedom becomes quite useless. We cannot live complacent lives any longer, and be satisfied with a world that cannot remember its own childhood. Because our pitiful, unimportant race will not be here forever. And that is all.

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"The End," finished Elijah, as he softly closed the book, and returned his reading glasses to their pocket. He began to exit the homemade stage, as someone in a John Deere tee-shirt stood up.

"Pardon me, sir," the farmer yelled, his brow wrinkled from concentration. "That made no sense!" he stated, shaking his fist.

"And," the Most Reverend Elijah Moon concluded, "neither does life, my friend."

Someone threw a tomato, which missed the speaker by a good three feet. Reverend Moon winked, and promptly disappeared through the doorway he'd entered. In his line of work, one learned to not expect much, and leave quickly. The meaning of life was a tricky thing to sell, and never seemed to help much.

Sadly, there would not be another guest speaker for a very long time in Jehovah, Michigan.

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