

missing a kidney and a cornea, but if I keep paddling I can hit the beach for happy hour.

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Okay guys, there's your damn column. It is, as you know, total bullshit, but besides that it also falls short of the word count. I sense this makes you sad, but I have run into some trouble. I have been involved in this cyber currency mining operation for a few months. All was well until last week when Serge (remember him from the party in Belize?) got shot out in front of our office. It was a warning, I assume. They didn't kill him, but he'll walk with a limp forever. It was probably those pricks from Cal Tech. Serge had figured a way into their mainframe and we were using all of that delicious computational power to get rich. They shut us down as soon as they figured it out, and although we covered our tracks exquisitely, Serge's blown out knee suggests we fell short.

Loving my legs as I do I headed north and am currently helping with the harvest at Inniskillin across the border from Niagara. They make maybe the world's finest ice wine, which is why I'm out rummaging through the vineyard with snow up to my ass trying to bring in the grapes before the birds get to them.

Don't want to leave too large of an electronic footprint. Those Beavers may seem like nerds, but they are a vicious lot, capable of unspeakable cruelty. Anyway, send the check to Mario, he'll know how to get it to me

NIGHTMARES'

On the other side of heaven

Written by Brent Smith

"I am living in a nightmare, from which from time to time I wake in sleep."
—Ursula K. Le Guin

"Here in Moicane we flop on the seamy side, but up n'ent, prospector, you sprout all your worth and you woof your wings, so if you want to be Phoenixed, come and be parked."
— James Joyce, *Finnegan's Wake*

On the other side of fantasy is nightmare. It doesn't take much to flip the coin these days.

It's long been that anyone with a dream transplants to California to chase it. The west coast shines from the other side of the fence. As you get closer, you find the sunshine turns to fire.

In spring 2017, Southern California was unnervingly idyllic. Governor Brown declared the five-year drought over, and a 'super bloom' of wild flowers erupted all over the southeastern deserts of Joshua Tree and the Anza-Borrego; blankets of yellows, oranges, and purples not seen in two decades were visible from space and drew thousands of tourists. With early summer came an abnormal onslaught of triple-digit temperatures (in which my daily disposition more and more resembled the homicidal tendencies in Camus' *The Stranger*). By fall, the hills had turned arid, the winds picked up, and the rain never came.

In September I watched my childhood wilderness burn. Hot winds blew through another sultry L.A. night as sweat-soaked Valley people evacuated their homes. From the 134 Freeway in Studio City I could see the blazing glow of the La Tuna Canyon Fire bright against the black mountains 13 miles away. They say it was the largest in the city's history.

A month later, the Tubbs Fire in Sonoma County torched over 5,000 structures in what they say was the most destructive on state record, and in its traumatic aftermath affluent denizens pondered, "What is most important to me?" and "What do I really need to live and be happy?"¹ Two months after that, I watched the hills of the shutdown 405 Freeway burn. The flames of the Skirball Fire licked the Getty Center as a large swath of Bel-Air's untouchables were forced from their homes, even damaging mogul baron Rupert Murdoch's \$30M vineyard estate, built and once owned by Old Hollywood director Victor Fleming.

At the same time, the never-ending Thomas Fire was devouring Ventura County, eating nearly 300,000 acres in its path. They say it was the largest fire in the state's history. The new year finally saw heavy rainfall—like some cosmic joke—and the charred landscape gave way to savage mudslides, washing away homes and swallowing the people in them. When my cousin in Montecito posted images online of the aftermath, I, at first, thought they were of some obscure segment of the Congo River. I soon realized I was looking at the flooded 101 Freeway. It was sobering to be reminded how easily

something so iconic, so unwavering as that stretch of highway I've driven countless times, can be wiped off the map.

The Santa Ana winds stoked every one of these fires. They seem to be a continually lingering presence, haunting the valleys and canyons longer and longer. When I was a kid, their menacing howls through the oak trees at night would only last a few weeks; usually around Halloween.

Now the Santa Anas terrorize suburban hills clear into the new year—an unseen pyrokinetic instigator. It's gotten worse.

The fires are growing in magnitude and frequency. As spring and summer start sooner, grow hotter, and last longer, the more the fires will feed, the more CO₂ gets pumped into the warming atmosphere, and the more chaos we'll get.

The litany of other ecological crises is too dystopic to process. Eyes glaze over at the mention of Miami sinking or Cape Town running out of drinking water. These days make for fitting sci-fi vistas. As technology connects us to each other, digitizing our collective mind, the rapid changes of the outside world clash more and more with our current way of living.

Every stratum of the human world is in chaos, as if interconnected, signaling an epoch of transition from the paradigm we know to a paradigm we may not have a choice but to embrace. Let go or be dragged, as the old Zen proverb goes.

"Without the destabilizing force of Chaos, we would stagnate intellectually, psychologically and otherwise... Both Order and Chaos must be embraced to attain the psychic balance required for growth."²

Telescopic evolution has left us stumbling in the frenetic Information Age. We are in a perpetual state of revision, like a snake shedding our skin. Today's platforms are already being coded out of relevance. The conditions have never been more fluid than they are now. Old templates are no longer useful. We're living in a world that doesn't yet exist—holding onto a dead world with one hand, and a vastly different possibility in the other.

"We are the traumatized inheritors of a dysfunctional relationship," as Terence McKenna put it; sons and daughters of the western apocalyptic threshold. Our male dominator culture and its excess of ego has pushed everything toward terminal crisis. The word "apocalypse" comes from the Greek word *apokalypsis*, meaning revealing or unveiling. The writing is on the wall.

The vehicle of the fantasy genre is typically used to explore the "other side of the rainbow." Watching a movie, for instance, is always a good distraction from real world woes. Now it's as if we've breached that other side, and those woes—like a compromised water supply or your home burning—tend to distract from the simple act of watching a movie. The real world is more surreal than what's on screen, and satirists can no longer satirize. Conan O'Brien recently lamented, "It's very hard to find a joke that's more absurd than what's actually happening."

Lovecraft's shadow-haunted *Outside* has finally broken through and impinged on our world.

Pessimism should have reached some critical mass by now. You'd think escapism and nihilism would be in vogue, but the fact is we're all very much engaged (despite how much anxiety or neurosis it triggers). But how can we rouse what the Greeks called *ekstasis* (the state of being beside oneself or rapt out of oneself) in the face of a waking nightmare? How can we feel empowered enough as individuals, in the center of chaos, to steer this bad acid trip into a good one?

"Now is the only moment...when we can accept our personal responsibility for the fate of our shared, imperiled world. Now is also the moment when we can choose to put aside petty concerns and to act, instead, as biospheric agents, conceiving our own lives as catalytic processes, applying our energies and intellect for the greater good."³

We have the tools to carve out the world we want to see. Technology is less our savior—as some Silicon Valley zealots would have us believe—and more an outer manifestation of our inner faculties. Social media has afforded us mass telepathy: the exchanging of ideas at light speed across an emerging "global brain." We covet direct experience, as is evident in our watching each other's Instagram stories as much as bingeing Netflix, retreating to the nostalgic fantasy of a time that never was in shows like *Stranger Things*. It's so hard for us to unplug or turn away for good. This goes beyond clickbait.

"The Industrial Revolution took two hundred years. High-speed Internet connections—less than a decade [...] The growth of human information technologies is taking us rapidly toward a time when all human knowledge will be instantly available to anyone on the planet, in any medium."⁴ It's theorized after the Information Age comes the Wisdom Age. After the vast sun of human knowledge is seamlessly integrated into a veritable Library of Alexandria in-the-sky, the wisdom and discernment to use it will follow.

We may never be done trolling each other, but we can still at least put the Internet to constructive use. We see it in third world countries, where revolution is all the time imminent (and infected by first world foreign policy), social networks are used to communicate and organize large demonstrations

¹McConahey, Meg (2018 January 5). Fire Ravaged Residents of Sonoma County Rethinking the Value of Having So Much Stuff. *The Press Democrat*. <http://www.pressdemocrat.com/lifestyle/7812491-181/fire-ravaged-residents-of-sonoma-county>

²Haramullah (1993). Kathulu Majik: Luvkrafting the Roles of Modern Occultism. <http://www.chaosmatrix.org/library/chaos/texts/kathulu.html>.

³Pinchbeck, D. (2017). *How Soon Is Now?* London, U.K.: Watkins.

⁴Russell, P. (2006, December 30). *A Singularity in Time*. <http://www.peterrussell.com/Odds/SoundsTrue2012.php>



in a short span of time. We used to rely solely on media conglomerates to acquire relevant information about our world. Now we need no middle man. As I write, telecom giants are attempting to clamp down on our collective digital mind, while traditional news outlets monotonically amplify reptilian instinct (fear and rage) to either distract or indoctrinate. The good news is that for the first time our participation in the dominator is optional.

After the dot-com bust, the housing bubble, and the Great Recession, our weariness of the tilted Machine left us with mercurial values. A nomadic reflex has been rekindled as we tread water in the gig economy. What's often missing from the millennial-identity discussion is the existential funk of no-future, forcing our attention on the 'continuous present' (à la Gertrude Stein). How could the rigid commitment of homeownership seem appealing in a world of flux?

"Millennials are redefining the American family. Millennials are delaying marriage and childbirth at rates never seen before. This cultural shift will have a near-term impact on housing: millennials may not need the same space, permanence, and practicality that most Americans want out of their housing."⁵

It's everywhere that 'millennials are killing everything.' What that hopefully means is the consumerist spell and the grip of the economy of false needs is slipping. We're not buying starter homes, or cars, or diamonds; we don't work for companies for more than a few years; we don't play golf; we've abandoned fast-casual food chains and we can find love on our phones. American tradition curses spontaneity, often because spontaneity is a hotbed for new templates.

Take the ubiquity of festival culture—not just in America, but around the globe—as some subconscious yearning for structural change, and for a communion that's so glaringly absent in late-capitalistic life.

"The essential political insight I took from Burning Man was our capacity to reorganize society around principles quite different from the ones we have now. We can create a post-postmodern civilization where the pursuit of art, ecstasy, play and spiritual communion are central to its purpose [...] It was challenging to survive in that high desert, scorching hot during the days, frigid at night. The fact that everyone had to endure the elements was part of the journey. We had all chosen, intentionally, to experience this near-emergency. This brought us together and bonded us."⁶

Who says our only two choices are between a hippie commune and a 401K? As hurricanes, earthquakes, droughts, flash floods, and wildfires continue to displace communities, we could potentially tap into our fluid habits to come up with premeditated solutions. "We have the capacity to build durable, modular, carbon-negative housing units that can be shipped across the world, or potentially manufactured in each locality using 3D printers. In these instant settlements, people will need to grow their own food and produce energy on-site."⁷

Instead of hearing news of projects like ReGen Villages (developed by Stanford engineer James Ehrlich); instead of evoking the prescient words of Tom Petty, "You see, you don't have to live like a refugee;" those with political power are talking an eternal Happy Days rerun where everyone's on their own and refugees are left out to dry. What's

taken center-stage is the fantasy of nativism and getting back to "the way things were."

When our planet can no longer accommodate the static suburbanization of the developed world, the American Dream is as anachronistic an Americana relic as Manifest Destiny, and one we are still ravenously seeking to fulfill. We're a man-boy clinging to an adolescent identity, in denial that he's stayed too long at the party.

Even "sustainability" is at best a corporate buzzword, and at worst a prolonged effort to keep us alienated and in competition with each other. If L.A. traffic tells us anything, it's that none of this is sustainable. Shedding of old skin reveals the new. What's being demanded of us is breakthrough, not the rehashing of stale, Reagan-era value systems that have exacerbated our current predicament.

As enabled consumers, our gluttony has us eating ourselves. But there's something darkly apt about that, like the ouroboros—the snake eating its own tail—representing the cyclical nature of the universe: creation out of destruction; life out of death.

In fantasy myth, the other side of the rainbow is always perceived as the domain of the Other, the astonishing abyss from which the unknown aspect of our soul will emerge. In reality, a rainbow has neither a beginning nor an end. A rainbow is a circle—infinite. "The first thing to do is to consider Time as officially ended," Sun-Ra affirmed in *Space Is the Place*. "We work on the other side of time."

AFFIRMATIONS'

Dispatches from queer communities in Trump country

Written by Michael Podell

"After driving for days through all that flat Texas land, all of a sudden the freeway turned into a bridge and there I was, suspended above the water, passing this big sign that said Jefferson Davis Parish, with all these half-submerged trees sticking out of the totally still water. I was just like... oh, I'm definitely somewhere different now."

"Bald cypress," Diane said with an even drawl, a smile, and a nod. "Pretty aren't they?"

We were sitting in the cozy but spare meeting area of the only LGBT! organization to have a physical meeting space in Mobile, Alabama. Diane is a lifelong resident and trans woman who coordinates a support group for other trans people around Mobile. I was put in touch with her via the organization's website, before I set out on a cross-country drive documenting often overlooked queer communities a year after Trump's election. I didn't have any solid expectations of Mobile, just a vague uneasiness, courtesy of everyone's reactions when I mentioned I'd be stopping there. A black trans woman I met in Houston laughed when I told her I planned on visiting Mobile, and offered a pointed, "Oh, I'm from that area...good luck, honey!"

Diane is 54, and came out as trans this past September. She is one of three children: her older brother transitioned last year (and is now her older sister) and her other brother is an openly gay man. Diane waited so long to come out because she "felt like her parent's last good kid." She had a wife and has a son, and up until a few months ago, led the life of a heterosexual, Bible-study

⁵Fromm, J. (2014, October 2). *Will the Millennial Generation Kill Home Depot?* <https://www.forbes.com/sites/jefffromm/2014/10/02/will-the-millennial-generation-kill-home-depot>