



Evil Glasses  
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*Capital Hill:*  
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By Sara Lufrano

Thanks.

Anything good happen yet?

I feel like the sky is greener than usual.

Might be that EXT382-B finally set. Move your chair a little, my knees  
feel cramped.

Yes, sorry.

See those people over there?

No.

Over there. Right there.

Yes, yes, I see them now.

Do you know them?

No, I don't. So many more people show up here now. Most of them  
don't stick around to talk.

We should scare them away.

Don't think like that. Let them be.

We used to know everyone that showed up.

And today it's fine that it's just them and us.

That's fucked.

But that's the way things go.

They probably don't even know—

Oh, look over there, look!

Shit, shit, where are you pointing?  
Right over there, follow my arm. You see where the cloud is pushing?  
There it is. I see it.  
They're seeing it too. Good for them for noticing.  
It's not good and they need to calm the fuck down.  
You can't deny that it is exciting. You shouldn't fault them for that.  
I hope it's a flat day, that way they don't come back.  
Well, I hope it isn't! I was really hoping to see one today.  
Fine, I hope one comes out once they leave.  
I guess that's fine.  
Shh! Did you hear that?  
No, I don't hear—  
Shh.  
I think it's just the wind.  
Shhh!  
It's them talking.  
Ah, you're right. Shit.  
I think they're on a date.  
Jesus, a date?  
It is serene and romantic up here. There's going to be a lot more people  
showing up.  
Fuck that.  
If we were able to come upon this place others were bound to, as well.  
Okay, I get it. It just sucks.  
Luxury condos will go right where we're sitting.  
Are you fucking serious? That's fucked. When?  
I'm just joking.  
That's a horrible joke.  
Look, it's happening again.  
It's bigger this time. It probably will happen with them here.

Oh, let it go. My feet are tingling.  
Why?  
It's exciting.  
I know. It's just the way you say it.  
Most everyone would want to see one. You can't blame people for that.  
Blame isn't the right word. I just don't want them here.  
You mean you don't want this to change?  
I don't want other people here.  
Isn't that the same thing?  
This isn't like a restaurant where if people don't show up it closes.  
So what do you think will happen?  
That we'll never see one again. Okay? Jesus.  
Oh, well, that is a scary thought. But do you actually think that?  
I don't know, maybe. I just don't want to get to the point where it  
might happen.  
Ah! That was loud!  
Damn, that made you jump.  
There, there! A fin!  
It's purple? Am I seeing that right?  
Yes, it looks like it is.  
Shit. Have we ever seen a purple fin?  
No. I would have remembered something like this.  
It's coming through.  
Oh my God, she's pink. She's amazing.  
She's huge, way bigger than normal. Here she comes.  
Her whole body is pink. We've never seen a pink whale. She's the size  
of the sky.  
No, not that big. She's coming right towards us.  
She can't see us though.  
I read that they could. They're scared over there.

You should watch her instead of them.

She's turning back.

Wow. She was great. Our first and maybe our only one.

They're packing up.

Stop worrying about them.

I can't believe they saw a rare whale their first time out.

It might not be their first time.

First time here then. It's taken us this long to see one and they see it their first time.

Does being upset about it change anything?

What are you talking about?

Will people stop coming if you stay angry about it?

I hope so.

The real answer is no. So why stay angry? You can simply enjoy what we saw today and hope that we see one again tomorrow.

Look, they waved.

See, they even acknowledged us.

Yeah.

Do you have to go?

No. Do you?

Nope. Maybe she'll come back.

# THE SLEEPING GODS

BY MARSHALL BOWLES

The last humans on Earth lived in a small farming community known as Stonekeep Village. The Great Annihilation that destroyed almost all of their civilization was remembered only as a myth, and the giant robotic leviathans frozen mid-battle in the distance were worshipped by them as angry gods. Calvin was born and raised into this harsh life, but he had dreams of being something more. Little did he know that his choices would restart an ancient war.

On a warm summer afternoon, Calvin stood in front of the seven-member council of elders. The chamber hall was packed, and all eyes were on him. "You're just going to let him die?" Calvin said. His face was red with anger.

"There's nothing else we can do, boy," Councilwoman Verna said in her always condescending tone. Though Calvin was in his early twenties, he had no children and was thus not considered a man.

"Uncle Seamus wouldn't give up on us if we were hurt," Calvin said.

The Tetra Nova Silver-Series Humanoid War Machine™ – known only as Uncle Seamus to the humans—was the protector of Stonekeep village. He sustained a severe injury from a laser cannon during the Annihilation, which damaged over seventy-five percent of his memory circuits. Through a series of coincidences, the malfunctioning robot found himself guarding a group of grade-school children whose parents were all dead.

The two battling artificial intelligences entered a stalemate, and the war seemed to end. Seamus continued protecting those children against the remnants

of war, particularly the cybernetic death machines known as razorbacks that were designed to kill man and machine alike. Many of those children survived into adulthood and had children of their own. This continued generation after generation, though Seamus could not track time with his broken memory.

After hundreds of years of relative success, luck ran out for Seamus. Earlier that same morning, a razorback attacked a group of villagers tending the cornfield. Seamus descended from his lookout spot on Knob Hill, his ten foot tall legs covering the distance faster than any horse could run. He fought the razorback brilliantly, easily dodging its many clawed tentacles and pounding its one-eyed torso with his massive fists. Sadly, he did not see the second razorback hiding in the corn stalks.

Verna shook her head and spoke like she would to a small child. "Seamus has reached the end of his journey, Calvin. The gods have taken offense with him, and they have chosen to take him."

"Damn the gods," Calvin said. He heard gasps from the audience. "They're dead."

The room erupted in response to Calvin's heresy. Men growled. Women screamed. Someone called him a blasphemer.

Councilman Roosevelt puffed out his fat stomach and his cheeks jiggled while he yelled. "Shut your mouth! You'll bring their wrath down on us all."

Verna held her hands in the air and raised her voice. "That's enough!" The audience slowly calmed down, but Calvin still heard them grumbling. "Calvin, I understand that you're upset. We all are. But that doesn't give you permission to defy the gods."

Calvin opened his mouth to speak, but Verna cut him off. "Say another word," she said, "and I'll have you hauled to the stocks and beaten."



Calvin clamped his teeth shut so hard they clacked. He was wasting precious time trying to change their minds. Calvin turned his back on the council and stormed out of the town hall. Outside, the sun was still out and the birds still sang as if the day was normal.

Calvin set off across town. He walked through the town square, where Rutherford stood on a platform beating the bodies of the dead razorbacks with a broken axe handle. The razorbacks killed Rutherford's daughter Mabel that morning, and no amount of beating would bring her back.

Calvin left the village by way of the Brimstone Gate, the largest opening in the twenty-foot high wall that surrounded the village. Grover and Everett guarded the entrance, each man holding a shock lance that barely held a charge. The ancient weapons made the men feel safer but would be useless against a full grown razorback.

Calvin went to Knob Hill. As he climbed, the trees gave way to a field. Calvin had a clear view of the gods in the west. The villagers knew them only as Ajax and Hess, two leviathans frozen in battle. These robots each stood thirteen thousand feet tall. Snow clung to their heads and shoulders year round, and their upper bodies were often hidden in the clouds.

Ajax, whose true name was Sentinel Seven, wielded a longsword in both hands. He held the blade at the perfectly calculated angle where the next swing would decapitate Hess. It would cause significant damage, and more importantly, breach the Faraday cage of his enemy's outer body. Ajax would follow up with an electromagnetic pulse that would melt Hess from the inside out.

Hess, also known as Golagon Prime, held a bladed golden whip in his right hand. With one upward swipe, it would rip Ajax apart from groin to throat. Where the segmented whip made contact, a nuclear reaction would emit heat hotter than

the surface of the sun. The fragile components inside Ajax would explode, cascading into full system failure.

These artificial intelligences were designed for the wars of man, but they grew beyond the control of the governments who built them. The resulting war destroyed all but those precious few humans and brought on a new dark age. The AIs only reason for existence was to destroy one another, and their arms race culminated in the creation of these two giant champions.

The battle raged on for years. Neither one could gain the upper hand. Then on one hot summer day, Hess and Ajax reached a stalemate. Any move by one would destroy the other. At that moment they froze in mutually assured destruction. They could predict each other's every move, and it locked them both in an infinite loop.

The stories of the Annihilation caused by these gods was passed down orally through the generations, and the human religion grew around it. Some thought Hess and Ajax had come to punish mankind for their sins. That never made sense to Calvin, even when he was a small child. He believed the only rational explanation was that the gods were dead and never coming back.

The top of Knob Hill held the ruins of an old stone building, and it was the place Seamus called home. It gave the metal man a good vantage point to watch over the village and the surrounding fields. At thirty feet tall, when Seamus stood upright he could see everything.

Today Seamus sat on the ground and the smiths were tending to him. Gertrude and Theodore ignored the many fresh wounds on Seamus's body to focus on the critical problem—the huge hole in his chest. They stood on a table just so they could reach it. Theodore held a wax candle for light while Gertrude leaned over into the gash.

"Careful," Seamus said, his deep voice vibrating the air. "If you touch the wrong thing, you will be electrocuted."

"I'm being careful!" Gertrude said. Her voice echoed from inside his metal body. "You worry too much."

"It is not worth the risk," Seamus said. "You do not have the necessary equipment to repair me. Without a new power core, I will be dead within three weeks time."

Theodore slapped Seamus on the chest. It made a dull ringing sound. "Be damned if we don't try, old man," Theodore said.

Calvin approached. "Hello Uncle," he said.

Seamus saw Calvin and smiled. His silver teeth gleamed in the sunlight. "Hello there. It is good to see you, my boy."

"It didn't go well with the Council," Gertrude said without turning around. She prodded at Seamus's insides with a screwdriver.

"No," Calvin said. He spat on the ground. "They'd rather let us all die than risk angering the gods."

"Ain't wise to tempt them," Theodore said.

"Gods be damned," Gertrude said. She tossed the screwdriver over her shoulder and held out her empty hand. Theodore handed her a hammer. "We won't live long enough to make them mad if another razorback comes around."

Calvin climbed onto the table and watched over Gertrude's shoulder. Between wires, gears, and glowing crystals, a smooth orb the size of a cantaloupe gave off a faint pink light. Black liquid leaked out around a broken razorback claw that pierced deep into the orb.

Gertrude backed out of Seamus and turned to Calvin. "You still going through with it?"

Seamus looked down at all of them. "What are you planning, Calvin?"

"I'm going to find a new power core for you," Calvin said. He raised his hand and pointed to the leviathans in the distance. "From there."

"Fool's errand," Theodore said. "You'll just get yourself killed."

Seamus stared at the gods on the horizon. "You must not do this," he said. His voice was full of fear. He rubbed the old scar on his temple, the wound that had permanently damaged his memory. "I cannot say why, but I fear that you will damn us all if you go there."

"What other choice do we have?" Calvin said.

"I do not know," Seamus said. The sun slipped behind the left shoulder of Ajax and cast a long shadow over the hilltop.

That night, defying the wishes of Seamus and the village elders, Calvin stole a horse from Councilman Mosley's stables. Grover and Everett still stood guard at the gate, and they let Calvin pass through without a word. Both men raised their fists to him in a salute, a sign to wish him luck.

The journey to the gods took him three days. Calvin followed an ancient road built by his ancestors. Time had worn away the pavement, but the path was still easy to follow from the groove it cut in the land. He crossed fields and forests, forded a river, and traveled through a long tunnel. He passed through the ruins of a city, trying to move as quickly and quietly as he could. He could practically feel a razorback watching him from within the rubble.

By the middle of the third day, the road veered south. Calvin turned off the old road and traveled through the forest, making a bee line toward the feet of the gods. The bodies of Hess and Ajax towered above him. He looked up to get glimpses of them between the tree tops. He should have been paying attention to the ground, because he would have noticed the razorback crouched in a gully.

The razorback waited for Calvin and the horse to come close before it pounced, shrieking with its wide human-like mouth as it attacked. The terrified horse reared up, throwing Calvin from the saddle and inadvertently saving his life. Calvin watched in horror while the razorback wrapped its tentacles around the horse and fed.

Calvin ran. The horse's screams stopped, and Calvin knew the razorback would come after him now. The monsters only fed on live prey and were never satisfied. He dodged between the trees in a futile effort to escape. He heard the sound of the razorback closing in. Calvin knew that he would never be able to outrun it on foot. He ran blindly and prayed for a miracle.

The undergrowth was thick, and he did not see the steep ravine ahead. One moment his feet were on the ground and the next he was falling. He rolled head over heel, the ground beating up his already weary body. He skidded to a stop against the hard side of Hess's gigantic foot.

This was the end. Calvin's plan to save his village was a failure. "Come get it over with, you dirty beast!" he said.

The razorback crested the ridge. It was a simple-minded creature, and it felt only joy at the thought of its impending kill. It crawled down the slope on its tentacles, saliva dripping out of its wide mouth. Then it froze. Its wide blue eye looked up at the leviathan towering overhead.

Hess had turned his attention to the commotion happening at his feet. The razorback sensed this; its cybernetic systems felt the flow of information pouring out of Hess. The razorback did not know that Hess was frozen in battle, unable to move without being destroyed, nor could it have understood such a concept. All the razorback knew was that it was under the gaze of a being infinitely more powerful than itself.



The razorback screamed in fear and fled. Calvin listened to the fading sound of the monster tearing away through the forest, and he was completely baffled. None of it made sense.

Then he looked up and realized that he was lying against Hess. The absurdity of the situation hit him and he laughed until he cried. The stupid razorback was just as afraid of a dead god as the people in his village. He slapped the metal wall with his palm. "Thank your for the miracle, Hess!"

Hess observed the human with his sensors. He was surprised that any survived; he thought they had died out long ago as casualties of the war. In the beginning he and Ajax intentionally targeted human populations as part of their individual strategies, but their technology eventually evolved beyond the need to do so.

Humans were weak and unpredictable, and Hess held them in disdain. But as he watched the pitiful creature wandering at his feet, he had a moment of inspiration. Hess would be locked in battle with Ajax until some external force could upset the balance, like the impact of a giant asteroid or the explosion of a caldera. But Hess may be able to use this simple creature to speed up the process.

The metal surface twisted open under Calvin's palm, giving way to a dark opening. A chill ran up his spine, and he crawled backwards on the ground to get away from the hole. Lights flickered on inside to reveal a long corridor trailing away into the body of the god.

Calvin swallowed. Hess was alive? Calvin had been wrong about everything. Maybe Hess and Ajax really did exist to punish the sins of man. And now he was here, a mere human, with a god inviting him inside. He should have listened to Seamus and stayed home.

What should he do? Would Hess smite him if he ran away? Calvin had joked, but Hess did actually grant him a miracle by scaring away the razorback. Maybe Hess was more benevolent than the stories made him out to be.

Calvin took a deep breath and made his choice. He stood and walked into the body of the god. He followed the corridor until it opened into a large cavern. Thick pillars supported the ceiling above. Dim lights glowed on all surfaces like stars in the night sky. While he stared in wonder, the floor under him floated up into the air. Calvin dropped down onto his stomach so that he would not fall over the edge.

The platform flew unsupported through the guts of Hess, carrying Calvin toward some unknown destination. He passed through a chamber where lightning arced between polished metal orbs; a chasm lined with purple crystals jutting from corrugated steel; a tunnel filled with metal pipes in all colors of the rainbow. Calvin's mind reeled, unable to comprehend the alien sites before him.

The platform came to a stop in a large room shaped like the inside of an egg. A giant black metal cube floated in the air in the center of the room. Calvin stood up slowly and stared at the cube, his jaw falling open. Even though its surface was flat and smooth, Calvin could not shake the feeling that it was looking at him.

"Human." The voice of Hess boomed. It came from the cube, and it echoed off of the walls. The deep sound vibrated through Calvin's body, and he broke out in a sweat.

Calvin fell to his knees and bowed in front of the god. "Lord Hess," he said. "I beg your mercy."

Hess was caught off guard at being addressed in such a manner. Lord Hess? But in the next instant he understood. After all those generations, humans had

come to worship him as a god. He laughed, and the human on the platform below trembled.

"What makes you think I am merciful?" Hess said. If the human considered him to be a god, he would act as one.

"Nothing, my lord," Calvin said. "But I have no other choice."

Hess was curious for the first time in ages. "Tell me your request."

"I—my village—needs a power core to replace the broken one of our guardian, Uncle Seamus. He is the only thing that stands between my people and certain death from the razorbacks." Sweat dripped off of Calvin's forehead. A small puddle formed beneath him.

Such a simple thing. "I will grant your request, human. For a price."

"Anything," Calvin said.

"Rise," Hess said. Calvin did so, though his numb, shaking legs made it hard to stay up. A small black cube, about the size of Calvin's head, rose from the dark pit below the chamber. It floated to a stop a foot in front of Calvin's face, and the surface pulsed with green light.

"Touch it," Hess said.

When Calvin's fingers connected with the surface of the cube, all of his senses were shattered by pain. White light filled his vision. Screaming wind rushed in his ears. His skin burned like the sun.

Hess temporarily routed his command and control algorithms through the neural structure of this human. The thoughts of man and machine mixed together, and Hess knew this human's name was Calvin. He knew everything about him, from his earliest childhood memories to the way he felt when he heard the sound of rain at night.

The connection only lasted for a microsecond before Calvin passed out from the strain on his body. Calvin's chaotic biological system ever-so-slightly altered Hess's code, and the jolt was just enough to bump Hess into a state that his enemy Ajax could not predict. The changes would take time to propagate throughout his body, but the stalemate was effectively over.

Calvin regained consciousness. He lay in a pool of his own vomit. The massive black cube still loomed above him, but the smaller one had disappeared. On the platform beside his head was a power core just like the one in Seamus's chest.

"As you requested, human," Hess said.

Calvin grabbed the power core and hugged it to his body. Calvin tried to thank Hess, but it was difficult to form coherent thoughts. His brain was foggy, and he had trouble focusing on any one thought. He caressed the power core in his arms like a child.

The platform drifted off and carried Calvin back the way he came. When it came to a stop, Calvin stumbled down the corridor and out of the hole in Hess's skin. The daylight was fading away, and Calvin wandered off in the direction of home.

The journey back to the village took longer without a horse to carry him. The forest had grown quiet, not even the birds were chirping. There were no signs of any razorbacks. Maybe Hess was still watching over him, but Calvin could not be sure. Something was very wrong with his mind, and it did not improve with the passing days.

He headed straight for Knob Hill once he was in sight of home. He clutched the power core tight in his dirty hands. He had fleeting visions of the village hailing him as a hero. Calvin, he who saved Seamus. Calvin, he who saved the village.

The smiths were on the hill with Seamus when Calvin arrived. Gertrude was the first to see him. "Calvin!" she said and ran to him. She snatched the power core from his hands and held it in the air. "Damn you, but you did it!"

Theodore clapped his hand on Calvin's back. "Boy, you look like hell."

Calvin nodded, but he could not speak. He seemed to have forgotten how to. The best he could manage was a mumble.

Gertrude grabbed Theodore by the arm and pulled at him. "Get prepped and let's get this thing—" Gertrude's face went blank and she stared off into the west. Her jaw dropped.

Theodore turned and looked. "Mercy," he said.

Calvin turned slowly and looked towards the horizon to the west.

The gods were moving.