

? [CONTENTS](#) **Exception**

? [Art Gallery](#) **By Jason Stoddard**

- 19 September 2005

? [Articles](#) Part 2 of 2

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I walked through the same dead town and through

? [Fiction](#) the same stainless steel gate. Angry gray clouds
marched across the sky, bringing icy rain. I
followed the cobbled road through twists and

? [Poetry](#) turns up into the foothills, expecting an ambush at
any second. But the forest was silent. Nothing but
and the last, before she left him here alone with
It.

? [Reviews](#) the slap of fat raindrops on dead branches.

? [Archives](#) I rounded a turn. A hundred yards ahead was a
more massive stainless steel gate, closed,
perforated with a thousand human profiles.
Through it, I could see the weathered stones of a
fairy-tale castle.

? [ABOUT US](#)

? [Staff](#) In front of the gate stood a man wearing a
sky-blue jumpsuit, his hands clasped calmly
behind him. His fine blonde hair tossed in the chill
wind.

? [Guidelines](#)

? [Contact](#) I remember thinking, *Caretaker?*

? [Awards](#) The cobbles fell away under my feet, spilling me
into a dark pit filled with sharp stainless spikes. I
felt one slip into my leg, skewering bone, twisting
me viciously upwards. Another slipped into my
gut, bringing red-tinged visions.

? [SUPPORT US](#)

Everything perfectly rendered, every detail
exquisite. The hallmark of Arcadia.

? [Donate](#) I screamed myself out.

? [Books](#) I learned many other entrances to the Aficionado's
realm, and many other ways to die. I spent time in
an Infitee shell, hiking around the massive rock
wall from entrance to entrance. Camping under
the chill night sky, wishing for familiar stars.

? [Merchandise](#) Hunting for food in dead towns. Trying every
entrance. Scaling the wall and trying to hike
through the forest. Knowing all the time that the
Aficionado was probably watching me and
laughing, or monitoring the activity of my thread
and using predictive algorithms to infer my
movements.

? [COMMUNITY](#)

? [Forum](#)

? [Readers' Choice](#)

Once, a bright blue envelope sat on the road just

[Before Paphos](#)

by Loretta Casteen

8 January 2007

It starts again. The baby begins to cough and
choke.

[Locked Doors](#)

by Stephanie Burgis

1 January 2007

You can never let anyone suspect, his mother
told him. That was the first rule she taught him
and the last, before she left him here alone with
It.

[Heroic Measures](#)

by Matthew Johnson

18 December 2006

Pale as he was, it was hard to believe he would
never rise from this bed. Even in the darkest
times, she had never really feared for him; he
had always been strong, so strong.

[Love Among the Talus](#)

by Elizabeth Bear

11 December 2006

Nilufer raised her eyes to his. It was not what
women did to men, but she was a princess, and
he was only a bandit. "I want to be a Witch,"
she said. "A Witch and not a Queen. I wish to
be not loved, but wise. Tell your bandit lord, if
he can give me that, I might accept his gift."

[Archived Fiction Dating back to 9/1/00](#)

