

**WAR  
SLUT**

**Also by CARLTON MELLICK III**

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**Punk Land**

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**The Haunted Vagina**

# WAR SLUT

**CARLTON MELICK III**

AVANT PUNK

# AVANT PUNK BOOKS

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## **AUTHOR'S NOTE**

I'm not going to pretend I know the first thing about serving in the military. I'd prefer not to insult you with cliched military jargon and half-assed obviously-researched (dis)information. Without first hand experience, this kind of stuff comes off too forced and faked. And I just hate it when I see that on television or in Hollywood. So don't expect this war story to be realistically accurate. In fact, the soldiers in this story closer resemble G. I. Joe action figures as played with by a nine-year-old on a snow day. Or more like the soldiers in action sci-fi war video games.

But this isn't about realism. Realism isn't my style. This is about the absurd.

- Carlton Mellick III 9/16/06 4:46 pm

ACT ONE

THE LOST BATTALION

## CHAPTER ONE

The officers stopped talking this morning, stopped giving orders, so we're not quite sure what we should be doing.

We've been sitting here, in the snow-packed trenches, Corporal McClean going back and forth to the officers tent for an update but the officers won't even look at him, just sitting in director's chairs with cigars burning down to their knuckles, staring off into the frozen wasteland.

"Something's wrong," McClean says, pianoing his tattooed fingers at me.

That's all McClean ever says.

## CHAPTER TWO

It's been five weeks since we arrived in the Arctic, five weeks of frostbite, five weeks inane deaths.

The war is over. It's been over for months. But we're still out here, and nobody will tell us why.

On our way home, flying back to California, Colonel Dupont pointed his thin lightning bolt eyebrows at us and picked a scab off the wart on his thumb. He did this every time he had bad news for us.

"The war might be over for everyone else," he said. "But not for us."

There was another mission. One of utmost importance. He didn't give us any details. Didn't tell us the objective. Didn't tell us where we were headed. He just told us that the war wasn't over for us yet, and that we could take the stupid smiles off of our faces.

"There must still be some draft dodgers in hiding," the soldiers whispered to each other.

*Draft dodger.* The term makes my skin crawl. They are the final enemy of peace. The final enemy of freedom.

Every man, woman, and child in the world was drafted into the military to fight a war against the draft dodgers. This was years ago, long before I was born, long after all the nations of the world united as one.

The cowards, rebels, traitors, anarchists. We thought we killed them all.

But there were still a handful of them left.



### CHAPTER THREE

“Any word yet?” LeForge asks the Corporal, sitting down next to me with frost on his glasses, adjusting the underwear in his pants.

McClellan shakes his head and LeForge spits a glob of beef rations at him.

“It’s not his fault,” I tell LeForge.

“Bullshit,” the large Frenchman says. “He’s incompetent.”

“He outranks you,” I say.

LeForge flips me off.

McClellan still has the beef goop on his chest, oblivious to the conversation, pianoing his fingers to some kind of tune in his head.

“So what the fuck are we supposed to do?” LeForge asks.

“Stand by,” I say. “They’ll give us orders when they’re ready to.”

## CHAPTER FOUR

A day passes. Still no orders.

Chauney comes out of a shelter with her grenade launcher flung over her shoulder like a backpack.

“Kot is dead,” she says to me.

“That’s all of them, then?” I ask.

She nods.

Only five of us left. Plus the officers.

We face each other for a while, crunching our feet in the snow.

“Maybe we’ll be able to move on,” I say, “now that the wounded have died.”

She shrugs.

## CHAPTER FIVE

McClellan tells the officers that Kot died during the night but they still aren't listening to him. They haven't moved from their seats, smoking cigars and now sipping brandy, staring off into space without a care in the world.

"I'm like a ghost," McClellan tells us.

LeForge kicks the snow.

"What are we supposed to do?" Chauncey asks.

"What can we do?" I ask.

"We can do something," she says.

"What was their last order?" I ask.

"To bury Jefferson," Chauncey says.

"Want to bury Kot?" I ask.

"Sure," Chauncey says.

We bury Kot. It doesn't take very long.

"Now what?" LeForge asks.

"How about digging the rest of our graves, just in case?"

Chauncey says.

We shrug and dig the rest of our graves.

## CHAPTER SIX

Another day passes.

The officers are done with their brandy. Their cigars have burned out against their fingers. Just sitting in their chairs, staring off into space.

I goop on another layer of climate camo. One of my last bottles. We're still dressed in desert fatigues, designed for the climate of North Africa where we had been stationed for the past three years. The only thing keeping us warm is the climate camo—a cream, thick as lipstick, that you spread on your entire body in harsh weather conditions that helps cool you in the heat or warm you in the cold. Unfortunately, it rubs off easily and there's not much of it left.

I'm happy Chaune is still alive. I haven't told her that I've fallen in love with her yet, but I hope at some point soon, when the moment is right. It would have been horrible if she died with the others, before I told her how I felt about her.

She sits next to me, trying to warm her ammunition with her breath. Her thick black dreadlocks spill down from her head and flow over my lap. They must be three feet long. She's woven steel wool into the locks so they resemble chains more than hair.

They normally wouldn't let a soldier, man or woman, grow hair below the larynx, but cutting hair goes against her religious beliefs so there's nothing any officer can do about it. All religious beliefs are protected by law.

I'm the only registered atheist I know. Most people choose a religion, whether they seriously believe in it or not, be-

cause religion has its benefits. You get holidays off with many religions. You get prayer breaks. You sometimes are allowed to receive presents from friends or family.

Chauneey believes in a religion called Dookaduck. All of her superiors think she made up a new religion, which is against the law, but it is a true religion that is still practiced in Africa to this day. Since Chauneey is of African descent, she is allowed to claim Dookaduck as her religion, even though she is only part African. Her father was a Scottish Italian and her mother was African Eskimo. But since her mother was three quarters African she was able to claim that she was mostly of African descent, and they granted her the freedom to believe in Dookaduck.

Unfortunately, the only benefit to this religion is that she gets to smoke a hallucinogenic herb once a year and grow dreadlocks as long as she wants.

Most of the other soldiers make fun of her hair. They tug on the locks when her back is turned or hide insects inside of them so that there'd be a special surprise for her later. But I've always thought her hair was beautiful and powerful. I was attracted to her the second I laid eyes on her.

"Have you seen Sweet lately?" Chauneey asks me.

"No," I say.

I realize that I have a hard-on, and that she's spotted it peaking out between her dreds in my lap.

She laughs. I blush.

I push her hair off of me and scamper away.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

“Where’s Sweet?” I ask LeForge.

He’s got oven mitts on his hands and is doing pushups in the snow.

“Freaking out again,” LeForge says, counting his pushups under his breath.

“Freaking out?” I ask.

“Keeps disobeying orders,” he says. “Throwing tantrums.”

“Whose orders? Yours?”

“Yeah,” he says.

“You’re at the bottom of the chain of command,” I say.

“You can’t give orders to anyone.”

“I can give orders to Sweet,” he says. “Anybody can give orders to Sweet.”

“Well, where is she?” I ask.

“He’s somewhere. Hiding from me, I bet. They always hide from me.”

“It’s because you’re an asshole,” I tell him.

He flips me off while continuing to do push-ups one-handed.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

I search all of the shelters. I lose my hard-on when a wind chills an inch of my neck where the climate camo has already rubbed off against my collar. It'll come back soon enough.

All of the tents are empty, save one. McClean is sitting under a tarp made from a parachute, tattooing his ankle with a sewing needle.

"Seen Sweet?" I ask him.

He shakes his head.

McClean's uniform is always very neat. Not because he is very cleanly, but because he never actually does anything. He comes from a rich family where he never really had to do anything. The only reason he's been promoted to Corporal is because his dad is CEO of a popular sports shoes company.

Despite his last name, he's mostly of English descent. An English Protestant. Just like the Colonel. It's good to believe in the same religion as your superiors. They treat you like family.

Being atheist, I was never treated well by many of my superiors.

## CHAPTER NINE

“Crying Hugh Jake!” Sweet calls from one of the tents that had been empty just a few minutes ago.

“I’ve been looking for you,” I say, entering the tent.

Sweet’s standing there in the nude, penis swinging in the wind.

“How can you stand this cold?” I ask.

“The weather doesn’t bother me. You know that.”

I wipe the snow off of my ass and sit down on the sleeping bag. “Yeah, but that was Africa. It makes sense to walk around naked in that heat.”

Sweet shrugs. “How’s the Colonel?”

“Still ignoring us,” I say.

“So we have free time?”

“I guess.”

“So what do you want this time?”

“Chauneey,” I say.

“Again?” Sweet says. “You’re so obsessed!”

“I’m in love.”

“It’s going to drive you insane, you know that? You should just tell her how you feel.”

“I know, I will,” I say. “Eventually.”

“Sure you don’t want a nice Asian girl?” Sweet asks.

“No. Chauneey. Definitely Chauneey.”

“Whatever you want.”

Sweet’s body brightens into a yellow shine as bright as the sun. I cover my eyes. The glow mutates Sweet’s body from



a man into a woman.

The light fades and Sweet's body becomes ChauneY, standing naked before me, smiling.

She removes my wet clothing and crawls into bed with me, wrapping her enormous dreadlocks around me like tentacles.

## CHAPTER TEN

Sweet is the war slut—a genetically engineered soldier created to relieve sexual tension in combat situations. The war slut is able to change its gender and body shape to match the taste of the soldier it is pleasing. Though I call her a *she*, Sweet is completely genderless. She's usually in the shape of a male during combat situations, but can take any shape she wants the rest of the time. As long as she doesn't impersonate an officer.

War sluts were brought into the military soon after the draft, when men first started fighting alongside women. There were several incidents of soldiers falling in love, incidents of rape, pregnancies, STDs, and a multitude of other problems. So the military started assigning prostitution duties to the more attractive male and female soldiers. They were ordered to sleep with any soldier in need of sexual relief, and were tested daily for diseases. This didn't completely solve the problem, however, because most of the war sluts resented their fornication duties. Many of them were driven to suicide.

The genetically engineered war sluts were developed a little later. They solved all the problems. Not only are they programmed to enjoy sex, but they also can change their shape into any dream lover a soldier can imagine. No need for condoms, the war sluts are self sterilizing against viral and bacterial infections. They also can't impregnate female soldiers or be impregnated by male soldiers.

They are the perfect sex machine packaged within a perfect fighting machine.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

I make love to ChauneY.

She is the flavor of olives and raw hamburger meat. Her eyes are balls of orange and tan yarn. There is also a bit of pepper in there, but that is from Sweet. Sweet always has a peppery flavor no matter what shape she takes.

My climate camo gets rubbed off of my chest as she fucks me; I can now feel the warmth of her breasts, her belly. She sucks the tongue out of my mouth and groans.

I cum inside of her and she lays her weight on top of me.

She zips up the sleeping bag around us, stuffing her massive hair inside. It's like we're in a furry womb, holding each other, heating each other with our breaths.

## CHAPTER TWELVE

I'm pretty sure Sweet is in love with me.

If a war slut can feel love.

We've been friends since Africa. I've been her only friend, the only person who treats her like a real human. She never made fun of my condition, or my tears. We were a good team.

Sweet also likes that I call her a *she*. Because her true form is a woman's. It's not really her true form. She's never had a true form, except maybe as a blob of flesh putty. But she says that she made up a form that she calls "the real me." It is how she sees herself on the inside. Her soul in human form.

I'm the only person who knows about her true form. Others think of her true form as a large Latin soldier with a thin mustache. But I know that she is really a small mousy albino girl with silvery eyes and short curly hair. Once she asked if I'd like to have sex with her true form, as a joke.

We've been able to separate our sexual relationship with our friendship. It's easy for me to think of her as a different person when we screw, because she'll be in a different form. And when she becomes Chaune, I trick myself into believing she really is Chaune. Even with the peppery taste.

Though, thinking back, if Sweet really is in love with me it wouldn't have been easy for her to view me as somebody else when we made love. I might have viewed her as other people, but she just saw me, her best friend, every time.

And maybe when she asked me to have sex with her true form she wasn't joking. Maybe she wanted to see if I would

sleep with her, the *real* her. Maybe I hurt her feelings when I turned her down to transform into Chauneey again.

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Sweet used to tell me all of the other soldiers' dirty secrets. She told me their turn-ons, their fetishes, what types of people she transformed into for them.

She told me that the Colonel usually had her transform into a Japanese school girl from a picture he kept in his pocket. He normally didn't have sex with her in this form, but would masturbate onto her forehead or butt cheeks while she sucked on her thumb.

McClean was the most unusual. He had a very active imagination and always had her changing into the most outlandish women he could think of. At first he had her turning into simple playful fantasy women such as fairies or vampires or elves. Then they started getting less and less human: a devil girl with hot red skin, a mermaid, a medusa. Then he started getting into furies. He had her transform into bunny girls, cat girls, leopard girls. Then he got into plushies and she had to transform her skin to feel more like the coat on a stuffed animal. Sometimes he would want her to have six breasts or extra arms. Sometimes he would want her to grow her clit to the size of a dick so she could fuck him in the ass. Sweet was very professional about it most of the time. She never turned him down once. But there was one time when she laughed in his face, and couldn't stop laughing until he ran out of her tent, when he asked if she could morph into the Japanese Anime character, Sailor Moon.

LeForge, however, was the worst. He didn't seem to enjoy sex. What he did enjoy was hurting people. The war slut

was designed to take a lot of abuse from sadistic soldiers if that was their thing. They don't swell or bruise, but they can still feel pain. LeForge only had her transform into his enemies. Or anyone he was pissed off at. Sometimes it was the Colonel. Sometimes it was an ex-girlfriend who dumped him. Oftentimes it was McClean. He would order her to become whoever he was pissed off at that day, and then he would beat the living shit out of her and rape her until she bled. He couldn't cum until he saw blood, so he always brought a knife with him just in case. She used to cry after servicing LeForge. War sluts are supposed to be pretty dull to emotion, but LeForge made her cry. Especially on the days he had her turn into McClean and pretended to be raping him in the ass while punching him in the spine or kidneys, or rolling him onto his back so he could stare into his eyes as he strangled him and fucked him like a girl. Sweet refused him only once, when he wanted her to transform into me.

At that point, I should have known she had feelings for me. She was standing up for her love. I could be wrong about all this, but I'm sure she at least thinks of me as something more than a friend. I'm the closest thing she has to a friend, a family, a lover.

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

I didn't suspect Sweet had feelings for me until we were on the airplane leaving Kenya . . .

She was in her true form through the entire flight, sitting next to me, not saying a word. And she was holding my hand. She looked devastated. Once the flight was over, she would never see me again. I would probably get stationed as a sales rep for a cell phone company and she would probably get assigned to a casino or an executive's lounge.

But I wasn't really worried about the end of my friendship with Sweet. I was more bothered by the fact that I probably would never see Chauneey ever again. Before she came to Africa, she was stationed as a sawball player. Sawball is Chauneey's obsession, and that's surely what she'll do once back in the states.

When Colonel Dupont told us that we weren't going home, Sweet almost seemed relieved and excited that we'd still be together for a short time. She held my hand even tighter. Her white curly fro resting against my arm.

I didn't share her optimistic feelings of going back into combat. I was worried.

"Something's wrong," McClean said from the seat behind me.

I felt it too. There was just something unusual about all of this. The Colonel's lack of explanation. The tone of his voice. We were headed into a dangerous situation. And I was worried that we wouldn't make it through this one. Not myself, not Sweet,



not . . . ChauneY.

ChauneY was the only thing I could think about as the plane went farther and farther north. Sweet was holding onto my side, but I hardly even noticed her.

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Next thing we knew we were parachuting into a snow storm in the middle of the night onto blocks of ice somewhere in the Arctic Ocean. We were spread out pretty thin. Most of the soldiers landed in the water out in the dark. We could hear some of them calling out, lost in the freezing water, but Colonel Dupont didn't acknowledge them. He was in a hurry to move forward.

Sweet and I were lucky to be on one of the icebergs close to the Colonel. He was able to throw us a loose motor, even though there were only three of us on the block of ice. There was an iceberg with maybe a dozen soldiers to the west that just stood there, watching us as we put the motors in the water and propelled our ice block away from them.

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Roaring through the Arctic waters on motorboats made of ice, we tried our best to keep up with the Colonel—who was all by himself on the smallest of the icebergs, which made him much faster than the rest of us.

He wasn't waiting up for anyone, zipping through the water as fast as he could, rubbing snow from his bald head and licking the wind out of his mustache. We were the second fastest and could hardly see him up ahead. The bulk of his troops were on one massive iceberg that was moving half the speed that we were, even though they had three motors propelling it.

McCleen was also on the iceberg with us. He stood in the front, shining a spotlight so we could see through the storm. Sweet morphed into her Latin male form. She was at the motor, propelling us forward as water splashed against our faces like a shower of needles.

I was supposed to be Sweet's eyes and ears, but I was more concerned with losing Chaune. She made it safely onto one of the icebergs, but I was worried her group would get lost in the storm.

"Keep your eye on the Colonel," Sweet said every time I looked back to see if she was still behind us, even after we lost sight of him completely.

## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

The water soon became slush and slowed us down. Then the slush became ice and we had to get off and continue on foot. Crackling noises under our feet with every step, but it supported our weight until we made it to thicker ground. Our supplies made us so heavy I'm surprised we didn't fall through.

"Is this land or just a bigger iceberg?" Sweet asked.

"We're in the Arctic," I told her. "There's only ice here."

We found the Colonel setting up camp half a mile in. He was pulling heavy machine guns out of waterproof crates and setting them up in a circle around the camp.

"Corporal," he said to McClean as if he had been by his side the whole time, "secure the perimeter."

McClean obeyed the order, armed himself with a slag-shot rifle, and rushed into the snow storm.

## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

The Colonel ignored Sweet and I, as if we weren't even there. We stepped away from the camp and watched for the others. There were lights in the distance.

"Is it them?" asked Sweet.

I looked closer. There were a dozen and a half soldiers approaching.

I recognized LeForge right away. He was cleaning the snow off of his glasses and flexing his muscles at us. There was also Major Conifer and Lieutenant Chase. Then, holding up the rear, was Chauneey.

Seeing her walking through the snow toward me put my mind at ease. Hair peppered with white flakes, grenade launcher draped over her shoulder, cool and calm as she's always been.

The Major and his men went straight for the heavy machine guns and fired a few rounds into the distance. Then they nodded at each other.

When Chauneey arrived I smiled and she half-smiled back.

Sweet seemed almost angry that she survived, pinching her thin Latin mustache as hard as she could.

"How many made it?" Chauneey asked me.

"Just us," I said.

"Guess there's more draft dodgers left," she said.

"Yeah," I said. "In the one place they thought we'd never look."

Then we went back to war.

## CHAPTER NINETEEN

Another day passes.

McClellan refuses to go back into the officers tent. Just shaking his head at us and hiding in his shelter.

Chauncey, LeForge, and I decide to check on them. They haven't moved in days. Just sitting in their chairs, staring into space.

"Sir?" I ask Major Conifer. "Is something wrong?"

No response.

"Can you hear me, sir?"

Nothing.

LeForge snaps his fingers in front of the Major's face. He doesn't even blink.

"Is he dead?" the Frenchman asks.

Chauncey feels his wrist. "He's got a pulse."

We watch carefully. The Major licks his lips and sighs.

"Major?" Chauncey asks.

No response.

It's like they just don't care to talk anymore, don't care to move, don't care to give orders.

"McClellan was right," I say. "Something's wrong."

## CHAPTER TWENTY

We try to feed the officers. They probably haven't eaten in days. They are dangerously dehydrated. I put a spoonful of green pea mush into the Colonel's mouth and lean his head back. Some of it slides down his throat but most of it foams out into his mustache when I open his mouth for the next bite.

McClellan works on the Lieutenant, Chauncey on the Major.

LeForge just gets in our way. He laughs at the officers and pokes at them and barks in their faces.

They don't try to stop him.

"It's like they're in comas," I say.

"No, they're not comatose," Chauncey says. "They're consciously aware of everything happening around them."

"Even when I do this?" LeForge asks as he whips out his penis and slaps it against the Colonel's cheek.

"Yes," Chauncey asks. "And once they're back to normal you're going to wish you hadn't done that."

"Not likely," LeForge says. "They're vegetables."

"I just told you they aren't comatose," she says. "They know exactly what is happening to them."

"Then why aren't they doing anything about it?" LeForge asks.

Chauncey doesn't have an answer for him.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

“They stopped talking because the war’s over,” McClean says, not making eye contact with any of us. “They had just won the final battle and realized the war is over. For good, this time. There will never be another war ever again. They are career officers. They don’t have anything else to live for anymore. They have no reason to talk, no reason to move. They’ve just given up on life.”

It’s the most I’ve ever heard McClean say.

“They just don’t care anymore,” he says.



## CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

We continue taking care of them for a few days.

A storm is coming in and the only climate camo we have left is what's already on our bodies. I cut up a parachute and sew it to my uniform to insulate my clothes. I've stopped carrying my gun around with me. Couldn't handle the cold metal.

The food is running very low. LeForge thinks we can dig a hole in the ice and go fishing.

"Do you know how thick this ice is?" I ask him.

He just shrugs at me.

McClean continues tattooing himself.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

“Come with me,” Chauneys says.

She brings me back to the officers tent, and puts her finger through a hole in the Colonel’s back.

“What’s that?” I say, bending in for a closer look.

A bullet hole.

“There’s no blood,” she says. “It must be some kind of chemical round.”

“You think that’s what did this to them?”

She nods. “All three of them have these wounds.”

“None of the other soldiers in that battle had wounds like these,” I say.

“I don’t know,” Chauneys says. “Maybe they were just targeting the officers.”

“You were there,” I say. “Did you here any slag-shot rifles?”

“I didn’t hear any before I was knocked out,” she says.

“We should talk to McClean . . . or Sweet.”

## CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

Sweet isn't in any of the tents. Probably hiding from LeForge again. And McClean is being sheepish about answering our questions.

"Did the enemy have slag-shots?" I ask.

McClean shrugs.

"Did you hear them or didn't you?"

"He wasn't even there," LeForge says. "He's a coward. He was probably hiding under the snow a mile away. We should hang him like a draft dodger."

"I was there," McClean says.

"And?"

"I don't know," he says. "I'm not sure if it really happened."

"What happened?" Chauneey asks.

"It's not so easy to explain . . ." he says.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

Since we arrived in the Arctic, there has been only one battle. There have been reports of figures racing through the snowstorms, but nothing confirmed.

LeForge and I were left to guard the camp as everyone else went north. That was the last we saw of most of them. The story was that they were attacked on all sides, outnumbered by an enemy more experienced with the terrain. The Colonel, the Major, the Lieutenant, and McClean left the battle to get the wounded (Kot, Wilhelm, Jefferson, and Chaune) to safety. Nobody else survived. Except Sweet, who returned the next morning all by herself.

But McClean tells us something different . . .

"We were all alone out there," he says. "I got a look at Lt. Chase's wrist monitor. The only life signs on there were our own."

"Then what killed everyone out there?" LeForge asks.

"They killed each other," McClean says. "There's nobody out here. The officers are mad. They were chasing delusions, firing at ghosts until they got lost in the snow. They couldn't tell what was the enemy and started firing at each other."

"They've lost it," he continues. "They didn't know what to do after the war ended so they brought us to the middle of nowhere to make up a new war."

He stops and we look at each other. Not sure whether he's joking, crazy, or stupid. Or telling the truth.

"Find Sweet," I tell Chaune. "She was there longest."

## CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

**LeForge:** So we're out here for nothing?

**McClellan:** We're all alone. Stranded.

**LeForge:** I bet nobody even knows we're out here!

**Me:** Stop it. We don't know what's going on yet. The officers all have slag-shots in them that aren't military issue. We think that's why they're catatonic.

**McClellan:** They probably shot themselves.

Chauney returns.

**Chauney:** I can't find her.

**LeForge:** Who?

**Chauney:** Sweet, she's missing.

**Me:** Did you check everywhere? I'm sure she's hiding. She's been hiding a lot lately.

**LeForge:** Hiding from me, I bet.

**Me:** Yeah. Because you're such an asshole.

**Chauney:** No, she's not hiding. She's gone.

**Me:** Are you positive?

**Chauney:** She's left camp completely.

**Me:** McClellan, you're in command now. What should we do?

**LeForge:** What!

**Me:** The officers are down. McClellan is next in line. (To McClellan) Are we going to go out there and search for Sweet or what?

**LeForge:** If McClellan is in charge I'm going to mutiny.

**McClellan:** Nobody is in charge! We're all going to die anyway. We can all die as equals.

**Me:** We need you. While you're still alive, you are responsible for us.

**McClellan:** Then I resign.

**Me:** If you resign you will be considered a draft dodger and we will have to kill you.

**LeForge:** I like the sound of that!

**Me:** (To the Frenchman) You will also be killed for threatening mutiny and for disrespecting the Colonel. The only reason you are still alive is because I'm not yet in charge.

LeForge just barely holds himself back from punching me in the face. He's nearly twice my size. I have no idea why he hesitated.

**Me:** So, Corporal, are you ready to take charge?

**McClellan:** . . .

**Me:** Sweet is counting on us.

McClellan stretches the cold out of his tattooed fingers and half-nods at me.

ACT TWO

THE LOST BATTLE WHORE

## CHAPTER ONE

They call me Crying Hugh Jake because my eyes are always tearing. I tell people it's from allergies.

"Well, why are you still crying then?" LeForge says, straightening his glasses and loading a slag-shot rifle. "There's nothing you can be allergic to out here."

I don't answer him. I'm really not sure why my eyes cry all the time. Not allergies. They just leak.

"We better find the war slut soon," LeForge says to me. "I can handle hunger. I can handle the cold. But I can't go without fucking."

I shake my head at him.

"Otherwise I'll have to start fucking McClean," he says, as the Corporal heads our way.

McClean returns with some gear, his teeth chattering and hands shivering. Most of his climate camo has worn off and the temperature must be strong enough to freeze him solid.

"Maybe we should wait until morning," LeForge says, a chill crawling his spine just by witnessing McClean's shivering state.

"No," the Corporal says. "Sweet needs our help."

"But the slut's flesh is synthetic," he says. "It doesn't freeze as quickly as ours."

McClean hands a box of night vision goggles to LeForge and gives me the Lieutenant's wrist monitor.

"Watch for Sweet's life signs," McClean says.

"She's not on here," I say. "Just seven life signs."

"It's got a mile radius," McClean says.



“How’d she wander a mile away from us?” I ask.  
“Probably got lost in the snowstorm,” McClean says.  
“Well, which direction should we go?” I ask.  
“North,” he says. “We’re less than a mile away from the water so we’d pick him up on the monitor if he went south.”  
“Unless he’s dead,” LeForge says.  
“*She*’s not dead,” I tell them.

## CHAPTER TWO

We suit up for the journey.

“You’re not going to need any weapons,” McClean tells LeForge and Chaune. “There’s nothing out there.”

“Maybe you’re right about the friendly fire, Corporal,” I say, “but those slag-shots weren’t ours. I don’t think we’re alone out here.”

“Suit yourselves,” he says.

The machine guns are all iced over. We’ll have to use slag-shot rifles.

Slag-shot rifles don’t shoot regular bullets, they are designed to shoot transforming projectiles, about the size of tampons. There are several different types of projectiles used for a variety of situations. We are taking four different types of slag-shots. Chaune is taking the slam bullets, McClean is taking the stomach bullets, LeForge is taking the library bullets, and I am taking the saw bullets.

“Aw, I wanted the saw bullets,” Chaune says.

“Jake’s expertise is in saw bullets,” McClean says. “Your expertise is in the grenade launcher. The slam bullets are just for backup.”

“I never get to use the saw bullets,” she says.

“You just want them because they remind you of sawball,” LeForge says.

Chaune raises her eyebrows, smiles with wide chapped lips, and nods aggressively at his assumption.

“I’m sick for sawball,” Chaune says.

### CHAPTER THREE

Sawball is a sport that is played with two teams of six players. Each team member has a hookbat—a kind of longer thinner version of an aluminum baseball bat with a hook at the top of it.

Each team has six man-shaped figurines they call *dodgers*, wooden mannequins painted with their team colors, spread out two-by-two on their half of the court.

The dodgers each have their own personality: there's the artist and the poet, the teacher and the musician, the philosopher and the terrorist.

There is one sawball. It is hollow metal ball divided into halves. Each half has six pegs. Between the two halves there is a large circular saw that extends three inches out of the ball. It is in constant motion and can only be turned off by the referees.

Players can use their hookbats to latch onto the sawball, which turns their hookbat into what they call the *sawbat*. Then they use the sawbat to cut away at the opposing team's dodgers. Opposing players will try to hook the sawbat in order to steal the sawball, or they will use the shaft of their bats to block the sawbat from cutting their dodgers.

The object of the game is to use the sawball to cut the opposing team's dodgers into regular people. How this is done depends on which dodger is being sawed.

The artist dodger will become a regular person if you saw the paint brush out of his hand.

The poet dodger will become a regular person if you cut off his pen.

The teacher dodger will become a regular person if you cut the books out of each of his hands.

The musician dodger will become a regular person if you cut off his middle finger and his mohawk.

The philosopher dodger will become a regular person if you cut the pipe out of his mouth and the brain out of his head.

The terrorist dodger will become a regular person if you cut off the two guns in his hands, and the two bombs on his belt.

At the end of the game, all six dodgers on the losing team's side of the court will look exactly alike.

Points are deducted if a dodger loses a regular appendage. That includes arms, legs, heads, torsos. If a piece of a dodger appendage, such as the paint brush, is not cut off completely then that figurine is still considered a dodger until the rest of the brush is sawed off.

All players are well-armored and are rarely cut with the sawball, but there are some injuries every now and then. Referees will only stop the game if a player is injured, a player's armor is malfunctioning, or the sawball is broken. If a player's hookbat breaks, he must exit the game permanently, leaving his teammates at a huge disadvantage. This has created a high demand for players skilled at sawing aluminum hookbats in half. Though the superstars of the sport are the players who can saw wood quickly and precisely.

Chaune's strength in the game was neither of these, however. She was a mediocre cutter and the musclebound male athletes she would play against were superior defenders and batcutters. But she was one of the best sawball stealers in the game. She didn't do much of the cutting, but she could quickly steal the ball from opposing sawbats and pass it across the court to her teammates.

Sawball has been the most beloved planetary sport for years, making Chaune something of a celebrity. But I don't nor-

mally think of her as a famous sawball player. I just think of her as ChauneY: the Dookaduck girl with three-foot dreadlocks.

## CHAPTER FOUR

McClean insulates his uniform with pages and pages of his poetry.

He's not a very good poet. I've read all ten books of poetry in print and it's not like any of those, so it can't be good poetry.

Libraries are mostly technical manuals these days. There are 10 books of poetry and 100 books of fiction. A new novel hasn't been published in over a century. The only way to get a novel published is if it is better than one of the 100. Though, even if a book is better, how can you compare a new book to a classic?

It's very pointless to write fiction or poetry these days, because of this. Yet you still hear of people doing it. Like McClean. A real waste of time if you ask me. If you want to write something, write for television. With almost 22,000 channels there's always a need for television writers.

## CHAPTER FIVE

We leave the officers in their chairs.

“They’re getting cold,” I say. “Stiff.”

Their blinking eyes tell me they aren’t dead.

“We won’t be gone long,” Chauneey says.

McClean shrugs.

We head out into the blizzard single file. The snow is hard to walk through, every footstep awkward and clumsy. McClean leads the way. Then myself. Then LeForge. Then Chauneey.

The only light emanates behind us, from the officers tent. Looking back, I see three silhouettes through the canvas. All three sitting there perfectly still. They are more like mannequins than real people. Their shadows are cast across the landscape ahead of us, as if they are trying to tell us something with their silence.

“Night vision,” McClean says, and we put on our goggles.

They don’t help much in the snowstorm.

“Use the officers’ life signs as a homing point,” McClean says to me.

His voice is so quiet I can barely hear him.

I watch the monitor on my wrist. The triangle of red dots are the officers. The moving line of four dots are us. There aren’t any other dots.

## CHAPTER SIX

“It’s bullshit that I’m not an officer,” LeForge says to me as we walk. “McClellan was born to be a follower, not a leader.”

“He’s doing fine,” I say.

“The only reason I don’t get promoted is because of my eyesight,” he says. “I’ve never seen an officer with thick glasses.”

“If they thought you were officer-material,” I say, “they would have fixed your eyesight for you.”

“Then it’s because of my French background,” he says. “They never promote people with French backgrounds.”

“You don’t get promoted because you’re arrogant, irresponsible, and disrespectful. The only reason you haven’t been put in front of a firing squad for your behavior is because of your disability.”

He spits over my shoulder and falls back.



## CHAPTER SEVEN

Chaunez, LeForge, and I have all been passed up for promotion time and time again.

The reason I haven't been promoted is because of my narcolepsy. I'm always dropping unconscious at unpredictable times. Sometimes when I'm on duty, sometimes during training exercises. It has made my relationship with my commanding officers a very uncomfortable one. And I've become something of a joke with the rest of the soldiers.

Chaunez has been passed by for promotion most likely because of her hair or because of her weird religion. They take religion seriously these days. If your commanding officer is of a religion different from yours, you won't be treated very well. Especially if your religion conflicts with theirs. As an atheist, I've always been treated harshly by my superiors. But Chaunez has been treated even more harshly than myself. Because her religion isn't only *wrong*, according to officers, it is also horribly *weird*.

LeForge has been passed up for a number of reasons, but the main one is probably his disability. He has a mild case of mental retardation, according to a test he once took as a child. There is nothing that pisses him off more than reminding him of this, as it has been something that has hindered him for his entire life. He's not an unintelligent guy. He might have attitude problems but his attitude is probably the result of his upbringing, how

he had an excuse to get away with anything he wanted as a child.

Even the handicapped were drafted into the military. Not a single invalid was able to avoid serving. Most of the physically handicapped were given non-combat duties. But the mentally handicapped usually fight alongside everyone else. They got equal pay, equal responsibility, equal respect, but they usually also got extra benefits such as nap time and less severe punishments when they were bad.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

There are some bodies up ahead, half-buried in the snow.

“Is that where you were attacked?” I ask McClean.

“That’s where they killed each other,” he says.

“I want to check it out,” I say.

He nods.

There are at least a dozen of them we can see. They are spread out pretty far. I don’t recognize any of them. Mostly just uniforms and boots sticking out of the white.

“Look for enemy corpses,” I tell LeForge and ChauneY.

ChauneY breaks off and heads east. LeForge looks around at his feet for a few minutes before giving up.

We inspect the area for several minutes. No enemy bodies. Just our men. Examining the bodies of our fallen allies, we find many of them have saw bullets in them. Or library bullets. The draft dodgers aren’t supposed to be advanced enough to create these types of slag-shots.

What if McClean is right? What if there really isn’t an enemy force out here? What if they really did just kill each other?

## CHAPTER NINE

We've never actually been in combat before.

We've been in the army our whole lives, and for three years we were stationed at the front lines in North Africa, but I have never seen combat. I have never known anyone who has seen combat. They always talk about soldiers engaging the enemy on television, but I've not seen anything like that in person. My life at war has mostly just been about organization and following orders and doing things as precisely and perfectly as possible.

I'm not even sure exactly what the draft dodger army looks like. What color is their uniform? What flag do they fly?

"What if there never were any draft dodgers? What if the whole war has been a fake?"

"That's dodger talk," LeForge says to me.

"Well, it's true," I say. "None of us have ever seen them."

"You know if an officer heard you say that you'd be in front of a firing squad right now."

"If the war wasn't a lie then why would they be so quick to silence me for saying that?"

"For questioning their authority," he says. "Why would they make up this war, anyway? It's been going on our whole lives!"

"To give us something to do," I say. "Everyone in the world is in the military. We have been trained our entire lives to be soldiers. We are the greatest military force on the face of the planet. But we have no one left to fight."

“We have dodgers to fight,” LeForge says. “All the people who refuse to join the army are our enemy.”

“We were drafted the day we were born,” I say. “We don’t dodge the draft as babies. Where did all the draft dodgers come from?”

“See what happens without a proper officer in command!” LeForge says. “We start questioning our faith in freedom!”

“Don’t you understand—”

Chaunez cuts me off. Hair dreds coated in white flakes.

“We found something,” she says.

## CHAPTER TEN

We follow her to McClean.

He's bending over a body in the snow.

"Who is it?" I ask.

"Not *who*," Chaunez says. "*What*."

It is some kind of dummy, dressed up like a soldier. Plaid clothing stuffed with cotton. McClean hands me a mask. It is a porcelain face that was on top of the dummy's head.

"Where did this come from?" I ask.

They shrug at me. Even LeForge.

"The officers might have set them up," McClean says.

"To give the men something to shoot at."

"To make them think there were draft dodgers out here?"

McClean shrugs.

"Or the draft dodgers set it up," Chaunez says. "As a scarecrow."

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

We continue on.

There are still only seven lights on the monitor, but the three officer dots are getting very close to the bottom of the screen.

“If there are draft dodgers out here, how do they live?” I ask them. “What do they eat? How can they survive in this climate?”

“They had a facility in Antarctica,” LeForge says. “They can have one here.”

“Desperate people always find a way,” Chauneey says.

After a mile, the snowstorm thickens. We can hardly see two feet in front of us. I’ve lost track of camp and we aren’t sure we are heading north anymore. I wanted to take a compass, but Chauneey said something about how it wouldn’t work in the Arctic. She said there was a difference between the north pole and the magnetic north pole, or something like that.

Only our four life signs dot the center of the monitor screen on my wrist. The snow has hardened into rocky ice here and we’re finding it impossible to move more than a few feet per minute. We pretty much have to move with all four of our limbs, crawling over ice mounds, soaking our knees. Our rifles smacking us in the chin or stomach whenever we slip and fall.

## CHAPTER TWELVE

McClellan collapses in front of me and I kneel to help him up but he isn't getting up. He curls into a shivering ball.

"McClellan!" I say.

The Corporal doesn't respond. His eyes closed tight.

"He's frozen," I tell LeForge behind me.

He's lost all of his climate camo and his pages of poetry have become wet against his skin.

"We need to warm him up," Chauncey says.

She huddles us around him. Even LeForge joins. Probably because he is freezing himself.

We pack together into a bundle of warmth, the snow wrapping us up in a thick white blanket.

I fall asleep.



## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

The snow clears as I wake.

Chauneey pushes out of the white powder and steps away from us. I follow her. LeForge stays behind, holding McClean as tight as he can, like a long lost brother.

The storm rushes away from us, heading north. We take off our night vision goggles. The moon and stars are out. The sky is a dark blue.

“It’s beautiful,” Chauneey says, hugging her grenade launcher like a teddy bear.

I nod and wish I was her grenade launcher.

To the north, the ice is flat. It reflects the sky like water. A frozen lake. The surface might be dangerous that way. The last thing we need is to break the ice and go underwater.

I think Chauneey knows I’m in love with her. Whenever I’m looking at her she always catches me. Whenever she brushes against me or sits next to me, she can tell I get aroused. But she doesn’t ever blush when she catches me, so I’m sure she doesn’t feel the same way. She probably thinks it’s cute that I have a crush on her, but probably doesn’t care enough to confront me about it. It probably wouldn’t be awkward unless she asked me about it.

Being a serious soldier, and being the famous celebrity sawball player that she is, I doubt she’d ever want to have anything to do with me.

She smiles chapped lips at me from behind a dreadlock hanging in her face like a bang. I blush and look away from her.

At first I think it's an illusion in the storm. But, as the  
storm clears ahead, I see it take shape in the distance.  
The smile falls off of Chaune's face. She sees it too.  
A city on the ice.

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

McClellan and LeForge rise to their feet and join us.

“What is that?” McClellan asks.

The city is small. Maybe twenty skyscrapers and a handful of smaller buildings, all the color of ice. There are no lights coming from the buildings. No traffic in the streets. No movement or sounds at all. It just looks dead. Long dead.

“Let’s go find out,” I say.

We wipe off the snow and head towards the city, our slag-shot rifles readied just in case.

“Think Sweet is in there?” LeForge says.

“There’s no life signs,” I tell him, looking at my wrist monitor. “This city is deserted.”

“Life signs can be cloaked,” Chauncey says.

“Yeah, if they cool their body temperatures,” I say. “But out here that would be suicide.”

“Fall in,” McClellan says.

His voice shaking, hands frozen against his rifle.

We quiet down for the approach . . .

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

The moon is bright enough to illuminate the way, reflecting the entire sky against the smooth clear ice. It is like we are walking on a mirror.

McClellan nearly slips onto his butt when he looks down. He steps to the side, pointing his rifle at the ground, then continues on.

I look in the ice to see what startled him. There is a car down there, frozen in the ice. A baby blue Cadillac from the 1950s. It looks to be floating down there in the water, floating in space.

As we continue, we find more cars frozen in the ice. Some closer to the surface, some so deep they look like toys. Many different makes from many different eras in history. One of the cars has its headlights on, brightening the under-ice world for us.

There are more things than cars under there. We see tables, chairs, stop signs, fire hydrants, doors, lamps, dog houses, bookshelves full of books, and dozens and dozens of television sets—all of them turned on with bright static on their screens.

I look at the others and they look at me. But none of us can think of anything to say.

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Stepping through the television static, we arrive at the first of the city buildings. It is iced over. Dark.

I touch it to make sure it's real.

"Be on your guard," McClean says softly.

The streets are the same smooth ice, only there are more items frozen beneath: train tracks, airplanes, phone booths, traffic lights, a football stadium.

We walk through the ghost city. There's no one here. I check the monitor every other minute. No life signs.

"These buildings . . ." Chauneys says, examining closer.  
"They're all made of ice."

I disagree.

"Igloo skyscrapers?" LeForge asks.

She nods her dreds.

There seems to be more life beneath the ice than above. The streets are empty. The windows are empty. Just frozen buildings. The place is haunted.

McClean takes the words right out of my mouth when he says, "Something's wrong."

## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

“Let’s go inside,” McClean says.

We step across the street, slowly so we don’t slip, our footsteps make an echoing clack against the surface that sounds like someone’s drumming on glass.

The door is frozen shut. It does look like it’s made of ice, but I’m sure it’s just caked in ice. It takes LeForge a good ram with his shoulder to break it open. He spills into the lobby and hits a man in the waist.

LeForge screams and punches the man’s head off.

“What is it?” Chaunez asks from the back, trying to see over our shoulders.

It wasn’t really a man. Just another dummy.

The lobby is filled with dummies. Maybe thirty mannequins in poses. Some are at the front desk. Some are sitting on couches reading newspapers. Some are positioned as if they are chatting at the elevator.

“Peculiar . . .” LeForge says, rubbing his chin.

“This isn’t what I was expecting,” I say.

## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

We wander the building. The floor in here is linoleum and it's easier to walk. It's also a bit warmer, but not much. All of the walls and furniture are white. Only the clothes on the mannequins have color.

Chauneey and I separate from the others and take stairs up to the next floor.

"What do you think this place is?" Chauneey asks.

"Some kind of museum, I'd say."

"What kind of museum would they put in the Arctic?"

I shrug. Then say, "Or maybe it was some kind of housing development from a long time ago that was never completed. They put mannequins up to represent people, give a better view of their plan for when investors came to check the place out. It was probably abandoned ages ago after they lost funding."

"What about all those cars under the ice?"

"Maybe there was an accident. The street could have split open and everything fell underwater. Maybe that's how they lost their investors and had to leave this place."

"You don't think the draft dodgers built this?"

I shake my head.

"If there really ever were any draft dodgers they never came here," I say. "This place is dead." I hold up my wrist monitor. "No life signs at all. Perhaps the government recently got information on this place and told the Colonel to take his men to check it out. Just in case there were draft dodgers hiding out here."

“There could still be a dodger base somewhere,” she says.  
“It could be under the ice where monitors can’t read.”  
“I doubt it,” I say.  
“Then what about Sweet?” she says. “You don’t think  
she was taken prisoner.”  
“Sweet got lost in the storm,” I say. “I’m sure she’s dead.”



## CHAPTER NINETEEN

I awake to bullets firing.

The loud ceramic pops of the slag-shot rifles and there's also machine gun fire out there.

What's happening?

"Come on," Chauneey cries, trying to lift me up off the stairs. "You picked the *worst* time to be narcoleptic."

There really are draft dodgers out here!

I look at my life sign monitor . . .

"Wait . . ."

There are still only four life signs.

Chauneey races up to the next floor and breaks out a window. McClean and LeForge are now in the street. Snipers are firing down at them from the roof of an adjacent building.

"You were right," I tell her. "They *are* able to cloak their life signs somehow."

## CHAPTER TWENTY

Chaunez launches a grenade at the snipers across the street and the roof explodes. The top corner of the building shatters into ice cubes that rain into the street.

The building really is made of ice!

“Got ‘em,” she says.

A bullet pierces Chaunez’s shoulder. She drops to the floor.

I turn around. The room is filled with more mannequins. It’s a kind of restaurant and lounge. I don’t see the gun man yet, but he’s in the room with us.

The bullet didn’t go very deep. Chaunez pulls it out and shows it to me.

“It’s made of ice!” I say.

It’s not a bullet. It’s an icicle.

The sniper fires at us again and misses. The bullet shatters against the wall. I pull Chaunez into the stairwell.

“Take him alive,” she says, handing me her slag-shot rifle filled with slam bullets.

“I’ll try,” I tell her, wrapping my rifle over my shoulder and grabbing hers.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

I crawl across the floor on my belly through the forest of mannequins, under the tables, as quietly as I can. The sniper doesn't fire yet. White table cloth in my face.

Footsteps.

He's coming closer, towards the window. Probably thinks we went down the stairs

Crap. Chauney is defenseless over there. She can't fire her grenade launcher at that range. Better not let him get by me.

The footsteps get closer, passing tables and mannequins.

Once I see the legs, I hop to my feet and fire a slam-shot, throwing the sniper across a table. He takes the display plates, plastic floral center piece, and several mannequins with him.

Slam bullets are designed to knock down an enemy or group of enemies without killing them. After they leave the gun they only go ten feet and then open up into an airbag and punch the attacker down, usually unconscious. You have to get the right range or they'll be as harmless as balloons.

Before I can get to him, a bullet hits me in the face and I fall to the ground.

There's a second sniper.

I race across the floor, crawling, holding my face together. The pain is freezing. Blood gushes onto the linoleum and the socks of the mannequins.

Once I break free of the mannequin jungle, I'm showered

with bullets overhead. I scurry across the tiles and leap into the stairwell, sliding on my belly down a few steps. There's a pain in my arm. It is all bloody, but I'm not sure if I've been hit with another bullet or not.

ChauneY isn't in the stairwell. I look at my wrist. All four life signs are spread out. Everyone fled from the building in different directions.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

In the lobby, I toss Chauneys rifle and ready my slag-shot with saw rounds, knocking mannequins out of my way to get behind the front desk.

My face is pounding. I spit globs of blood onto the floor, next to the clerk mannequins shoes. Pieces of teeth are in the blood. I reach into a pouch on my belt and retrieve a small jar containing a honey ear. I scoop out the gooey liquid and wipe it into my left earlobe.

The honey ear contains a chemical that enhances your sense of sound. It basically becomes an extension of your earlobe and amplifies sound waves.

I can hear the footsteps of the snipers coming down the stairs after me. I can hear gun shots far in the distance.

Examining my wound . . .

The ice bullet went into my mouth and pierced through my cheek, shattering two of my teeth and I think it cracked my jawbone a little. Another bullet grazed my right arm.

The snipers are in the lobby now, walking carefully through the mannequins.

I'm not an expert with the honey ear. Supposedly, with the right training, you're supposed to be able to visualize exactly where your enemy is standing by the sound of his footsteps. You can have the senses of a bat. If I was expertly trained, I could take out these two no problem. I'm almost a master with the saw-shots. That combined with honey ear mastery and they

wouldn't last two seconds.

But, instead, I think I'll stay on the cautious side. I don't want to risk getting any more injured.

They will move on eventually.

I try to breathe as quietly as possible, watching the four dots on my monitor spread farther and farther apart.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

I wake up.

Must have fallen asleep again. I don't know how long I've been out. Not picking up any sound through my honey ear except the sound of my breath.

Looking at my wrist monitor . . .

There's only one red light left. Mine.

Shit . . .

The others might be dead. ChauneY might be dead! Or maybe they just went off the grid. They could have gone back to camp.

I look out into the lobby. The mannequins stare back at me.

No snipers. No draft dodgers.

*Draft dodgers.* I can't believe I doubted our government. They are as cruel and as cunning as the television said.

I have to get back to camp. ChauneY could be waiting for me. Or maybe she's lost in the snow and needs my help . . . I don't care about the others, but if they killed ChauneY . . .

## CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

Outside, the streets are loud with wind. I have to scoop the honey out of my ear so that I won't go deaf. The streets are empty. I don't see the enemy.

There are probably snipers watching this building so I better move fast. Once I'm halfway across the street, a thick blizzard crushes through the city like a tidal wave and knocks me off my feet. I get up and move as fast as I can on the ice. This blizzard might actually be a blessing if it hides me from the snipers.

I get all the way out of the city before they start firing at me. Just one sniper. He misses by about a hundred feet. Might have just been shooting at my shadow stretched far across the glassy ice.



## CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

I stagger through the storm, back to camp, not taking my eyes off my wrist monitor.

I'm still the only red dot.

Back into the jagged ice terrain, I should be able to see their life signs by now.

I continue, pulling myself through the storm. No sign of them. I go for a mile. No red lights.

I have to be going the wrong way. Must have gotten lost in the storm.

The wind peels the last of my climate camo off of my face and my ears feel like they are ready to crack. My eyes watering and creating a layer of ice on my cheeks that feels like a collection of razor cuts.

Red lights. I see them. My face ready to burn off in the wind, but I'll be able to make it back to camp. I fall to my knees.

Only three of them. The triangle of officers.

The others didn't make it.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

I continue on.

I've got to get back to the shelter soon or I'm dead.

I look at the monitor. Just half a mile away.

"What a minute . . ."

One of the red lights is missing. There are only two up on the screen now. One of them must have died.

Another red light disappears from the screen.

"Shit . . ."

Something is killing them. Could be the cold . . .

Only one red light left.

I see the camp up ahead. Don't need the monitor anymore. Don't want to see the last red light go out . . .

## CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

The wind dies down before I reach the camp.

The snow is still falling. Even thicker than before. But now it falls slowly. Delicate powder.

There is only one silhouette casting a shadow through the canvas tent across the ground. The other two silhouettes are missing.

I open the tent flaps with the barrel of my gun to find Lieutenant Chase staring back at me.

He is still in the same spot as he has been, staring in the same direction as before. But now he is alone. The Colonel and Major have vanished.

They must have been killed and carried off. But there isn't any blood . . . Strangled maybe. The enemy might have seen me coming and went into hiding.

"Lieutenant, we have to hide you," I tell him.

He just stares.

I go to pick him up. He's as stiff as a corpse.

I touch his face . . . It's frozen solid. I look at my life sign monitor. I am the only red light. This man is dead.

Wait . . .

His skin. It is not right . . . I touch it. It is made of porcelain. His face breaks off in my hand.

Inside of his head, there is only cotton.

This isn't the Lieutenant. It is just another dummy.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

Whoever left him here isn't coming back.

I warm myself with the lamp. It isn't much but I'm able to defrost before going back out there. I make a scarf out of the Lieutenant's uniform and wrap it around my face. Then insulate my uniform with his dummy's cotton stuffing. It'll also work as a temporary bandage for my face wound.

There's still a chance that the others are lost out there in the snow, trying to find their way back to camp. If they're out there, I'll find them.

Then we'll wipe these draft dodgers off the face of the planet.

# ACT THREE

## THE LOST BATTLE

## CHAPTER ONE

Back into the storm.

I try to collect some more ammunition on the way out, but all of the supply crates have been coated in three inches of ice that I'm unable to crack with the butt of my gun. I've got four packs of saw-shots, but that's not going to be enough. I'll have to collect arms from the enemy as I take them down.

There are fresh tracks of footprints in the snow, heading towards the city. The three who hit the camp. Or maybe it's McClean, LeForge, and Chaune. Perhaps they've found some of the enemy's cloaking devices and I'm unable to read them on my monitor. I've got to hope.

I get out onto the frozen lake and check the monitor. There is a second red light up a head, somewhere in the city.

Someone is still alive.

## CHAPTER TWO

There's hope. It could be Chauneey.

I race across the ice, avoiding the light of the television static underneath. The snow fall has now made it easier to move on the ice. I can now run without slipping.

The enemy soldiers are waiting for me. Their ice bullets crack the ground beneath me and behind me. They can't see me in this thick snowfall. They're shooting blind. Probably using a life signs monitor and aiming for my red dot.

The saw bullets are useless at this distance in the open. The advantage of saw-shots is that they ricochet when they hit hard surfaces, and cut through everything of a softer material (such as wood or flesh), and they do not lose momentum no matter how many walls they bounce off of or how many people they cut through. They can self-propel themselves for two minutes, then the blades will stop moving and they will drop to the ground.

The bullets look like two miniature circular saws, a smaller one stacked on top of a slightly larger one. Like a quarter stacked on top of a half-dollar.

I am quite proficient at firing saw-shots, because I was good at playing pool. The technique is the same. I'm not a mathematical genius like most saw-shot rifleman. I just can *feel* angles. I don't know how to describe it, but I can tell exactly where my bullets are going to hit without having to do equations in my head. I can also usually visualize the path of the bullet for the full two minutes until it dies and lands on the ground. Not always, but usually. I'm also very good at dodging out of the way of the

bullets when they come back at me. I can usually predict when and if they will come back.

Most people using saw-shots tend to get killed by their own bullets. No matter how expert they are at hitting targets in the training sessions, they tend to either miscalculate the projectories under pressure or just can't duck out of the way in time.



## CHAPTER THREE

There are snipers in one of the dark icy buildings ahead, three stories above me. I shoot just one bullet. The gun makes a loud pop and the bullet whirs into the room with them. Their firing stops as the tiny saws bounce against walls and cut through everything in their path. I assume I got them. They are no longer at the window. Can't visualize the bullet's projectory when I can't see inside the room, but I'm sure I got them.

I continue on, into the street. The red dot is just slightly north and a few buildings east. Once I get into the main intersection I am bombarded with icicle-shots from all sides. I dart into the closest building. It's some kind of tavern inside, frozen like the interior of the hotel. Mannequins are sitting in stools at the bar. A bartender mannequin holds a bottle of gin.

Ducking to the floor and peering out of a window, I see enemy soldiers on the street in the distance. Once they are at the proper angle, I break out the glass and fire at the building across from them.

The saw bullet zig-zags from building to building, carving the group to pieces. So far, they're no match for me. Just two bullets and I've killed at least a dozen of them.

I exit out the back door. The red dot isn't moving. Whoever it is must have found a safe place to hide. Or has been captured. After a block I can see the building up ahead where my comrade must have taken refuge. Icicles rip through the snow at me. Many troops are coming at me from the direction I am headed. I'll have to fight through them.

## CHAPTER FOUR

I pass a coffee shop and get just a glimpse of movement from inside. A bullet shatters the shop's window. I drop to the ground. It missed me. Before it can fire again, I squeeze a saw bullet into the shop, then wait two minutes for the bullet to rip him to pieces.

Two minutes pass and the bullet dies. I peak into the window. Lying on the ground, his body was shredded. Many mannequins in the coffee shop have also been shredded. Their stuffing floating in the air like it's snowing on the inside.

I climb in through the window to examine the sniper's body . . .

Shit . . .

I've missed him. I hit only mannequins.

He must have gone out the back door.

But the mannequin I thought was the sniper is holding a rifle . . .

"Tricky bastard," I say to the stuffing-snow.

The sniper must have been wearing a mask to blend in with the mannequins. Clever way to get the drop on me. He moves his leg. He's still alive, trying to get to his feet. I kick his gun away and stomp on his chest to force him back to the ground. Then I rip off his mask.

. . . it's not a mask.

The porcelain face in my hand writhes. I look down at it. Its mouth is opening and closing as if to talk. I look down at the sniper. His head is filled with cotton. Just like the Lieutenant. It still moves. Its hands feeling around its head in search of the face.

He isn't a human dressed as a dummy. He *is* a dummy. A living doll.

I smash its head and the body goes limp.

As I turn around to leave, one of the surviving mannequins comes to life. It picks up the sniper's rifle and aims it at me. I jump out of the window before the bullet is fired.

I scatter across the ice twenty feet before I realize I am surrounded by enemy soldiers. Getting a close look at them . . . their faces are made of porcelain.

All of them are doll people. This whole city, they are all living dolls.

## CHAPTER FIVE

Perhaps out of desperation, perhaps out of fear, but I now find myself firing madly at the soldiers around me, spinning in a circle to get them all. Saw-shots cut through the closest ones and then cut through those behind them. Stuffing puffs out of their wounds and they tumble to the ground.

I re-load my weapon and look at my wrist monitor. The red dot is still up ahead, waiting for me.

More doll people come at me. Not just soldiers. Now there are civilians—business men, janitors, mothers, children, cooks, butchers—coming out of the shops and apartment buildings, carrying knives, hammers, baseball bats. They are all silent. Only the clacking of their faces against their hands makes noise.

I charge through the street, firing in every direction, towards the building with the red dot. Dozens of saw-shots flying through the air chaotically. I have fired too many to visualize their paths. Mini-saws fly over my head or past my feet, coming from all sides. And I keep firing more into the doll people as I run, slipping on icy patches of snow.

The building is just up ahead. It is some kind of warehouse.

A mad butcher doll, obese with a white apron, comes at me from behind with a large cleaver. When I get to the door, I fire at the wall in front of me and duck. The saw-shot bounces against the wall, whirs over my head, and decapitates the mad butcher.

Its over-stuffed body plops into the snow.

Looking back, there aren't any others following me. They

must have lost me in the snowfall. I look down on the monitor. The red dot is right next to my red dot. My comrade, perhaps Chaune, is just three feet away from me. Separated by a single icy wall.

Yes, I think it is Chaune. I can feel it.

## CHAPTER SIX

The door is locked.

I back away from it, hide behind some steps. Chauneey must have barricaded the door. I can't knock. I could give our position away. Or, if she's a prisoner, I could be walking into a trap.

Better find another way in.

I circle the building. Doll people are out wandering in the streets. Probably searching for me. But they don't look like they are hunting. They just stroll along the sidewalks casually, like they're walking home from work.

Creeping through the snow, I get to a window and peer in. Can't see anybody. It's dark in there. I go to the front door and am surprised to find it unlocked.

Must be a trap.

I ready my slag-shot rifle and enter, dropping to the floor. My wounded jaw hits the ice and sends a stabbing pain through my face. Nobody shoots me.

I stand and go to the next room, to the red dot. It is too dark. Mostly shadows.

"Something's wrong," a voice says from the shadows.  
It isn't Chauneey. It is McClean.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

I go to him.

He's naked, sitting in the dark, tattooing his knees.

His entire body is coated in tattoos. Very scraggy home-made tattoos. A couple look like dragons, but the rest just look like sloppy ink marks. Most of them are fresh, created since we arrived in the Arctic. Large portions of his skin look infected. Perhaps from not sterilizing his needle or perhaps it's ink poisoning.

"McClean?" I say.

He stops tattooing his knees and begins tattooing his back blindly, rapidly poking an inky sewing needle into his skin.

"It's so hot," he says, rubbing his body as if trying to take off more of his clothes, trying to take off a layer of skin. "It's too hot to breathe."

"You must have hypothermia," I say. "You're so freezing you think you're hot."

I've got to warm him up. Maybe with body heat.

I touch his skin. He is hot. Very hot.

The ink There are droplets of climate camo in the ink vial. There's not really any climate camo on his skin, but I don't think it's been rubbed off. I think it's been absorbed into his bloodstream.

"Cut it out," I say to him, taking the ink away.

He reaches out to poke me with the needle, but I snatch his hand and take that away, too. "You're poisoning yourself."

He rolls over and rubs his chest against the ice to cool

down. It doesn't seem to help.

“What's going on?” I ask. “Where were you?”

He just shakes his head at me.

“Where are the others?”

He shrugs.



## CHAPTER EIGHT

After an hour, he calms down. Much of the climate camo sweats out of his bloodstream. His mind has probably been poisoned by the stuff. He's unable to keep his head up straight. He doesn't speak. His only sign of life is when he squeezes my ankle as I try to put his uniform back on.

I watch the window, just waiting for the doll people to attack. Nobody attacks. There isn't a soldier in sight. Just civilians, strolling along the sidewalks like stiff-jointed specters. No expressions on their white porcelain faces. No reason for them to be walking about.

"What the hell are they?" I ask myself.

"Ghosts," McClean says from behind.

I look at him. His eyes are closed and he's leaning against the wall.

"Ghosts?"

He doesn't respond.

I look back at the street. It is now empty.

## CHAPTER NINE

The next person to walk down the sidewalk is LeForge. He's walking casually, carrying his gun, and spitting over his shoulder.

I look at my monitor. There's not a third red dot. He shouldn't be here.

Unless there really is a device that hides life signs . . .

Racing out of the building and into the street, I call out, "LeForge!"

He turns around, sees me. Smiles.

I wave him over. He looks left and right and then crosses the road towards me, pushing his glasses up onto his face.

An icicle pierces across his shoulder before he gets to me. He crouches down and races forward. Soldiers are firing at us from around the corner.

I pull him into the warehouse and empty a clip of saw shots into the street, killing two of them and creating a wall of ricocheting fire that the rest will not be able to cross.

"Holy fuck!" LeForge cries. "Where the hell have you been?"

"I went back to camp," I told him.

"This little shit ran off and left me alone," he says, kicking the Corporal.

"Are you wounded?" I ask him.

He shrugs. There are holes in his uniform but he appears to be fine.

## CHAPTER TEN

“Where’s Chauneey?” I ask the Frenchman as he does pushups on the ground.

“She’s dead,” he says.

“What happened?” I ask.

“I don’t know,” he says, doing sit-ups now. “I found her body in the storm.”

“Are you sure?”

He shrugs at me and starts doing jumping jacks.

“What the hell are you doing?” I ask.

“Trying to keep warm,” he says. “Exercise will keep you from freezing to death.”

“You’re just going to rub off the last of your climate camo,” I say.

“I ran out of that days ago.”

I look at my wrist monitor. He’s still not registering.

“Are you wearing some kind of cloaking device?” I ask.

“Huh?”

“Your life signs aren’t registering.” I show him my wrist.

“How are you hiding your body temperature?”

“Let me see that.” He pulls my arm to his face and flares his nostrils as he adjusts his glasses.

“It’s broken,” he says, giving me back my arm.

“How do you know?” I ask.

“Because I’m standing right in front of you, moron,” he says.

I go back to the window. The doll people are crowding

around the building. Two of them are soldiers, rallying the rest of the citizens in the area to surround us, close us in.

“Shit,” I say. “They’re coming.”

LeForge comes to the window.

“Barricade the doors,” he says.

“Sure we want to trap ourselves in here?” I ask.

“I’m not going anywhere,” he says. “It’s fucking cold out there.”

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

The doll people attack the doors and windows with bats and knives. I reload my rifle with my last clip of saw-shots and fire at them from the window. LeForge supports the door with his body weight. McClean watches the back doors. They are solid iron with a strong lock connecting them together. He takes off his shirt, coils it into a rope, and ties it to the door handles to reinforce the lock. The cold still doesn't bother him. LeForge frowns at the bloody tattoos covering his skin. He didn't realize the Corporal had so many.

My saw-shots slice through several of the doll people at once, but they ricochet in another direction when they hit the wall of the building across the street. It's almost a waste of my bullets.

The front door cracks apart, barely held together by white furniture and LeForge's body. There are spaces where the dolls can get their arms through, stabbing at the Frenchman, grabbing for his flesh. LeForge rips a doll arm off of one of them, and tosses it away. Stuffing pokes out of the arm as it wriggles on the floor.

"What the fuck?" he says, as if he just now realizes they aren't human.

I try ripping off their limbs or heads as well when they try to climb through the window. Don't want to waste my saw shots. I get a baseball bat from one of them and begin smashing their porcelain faces or breaking their hands into cotton fluff.

"Hand me my rifle," LeForge says.

He's unable to bend down to pick it up while holding the

door.

McClellan picks it up and hands it to him, and LeForge fires a library bullet into the arm of one of the doll people. It falls back and thrashes in the crowd.

Library bullets are shaped like tiny books that flap through the air when fired. The usefulness of these bullets is that they will kill a person no matter where they hit, because the bullet continues flapping inside of the person, chewing up their insides. Even if a person is hit in the foot, the library-shot will crawl up the limb until it gets into the torso, convulsing and slashing its way through the entire body for two minutes until it dies.

Usually the most sadistic soldiers specialize in library-shots. Sometimes they are known as Library Soldiers, as I am sometimes known as a Saw Soldier. LeForge fits the profile of a typical Library Soldier.

## CHAPTER TWELVE

LeForge continues shooting their limbs with library bullets, laughing as the tiny books chew through the doll arms, spitting out cotton and chunks of porcelain. He probably wishes they were made of flesh, wishes they could create a gory scene for him, wishes they could feel the pain he was giving them.

He drops the gun and falls back as a volley of icicles pierce into his chest. Blood sprays across the white wood furniture barricading the door. Instead of arms poking through the space in the door, two rifles had poked through and shot him at point blank range. I slam my bat down across the rifles in the door, bending the barrels an inch downwards, rendering them useless. I fire a couple saw rounds through the hole before they can fall back.

LeForge is still standing there, fingering his wounds.

"You okay?" I ask.

He shrugs.

"It's cold," he says, poking his finger into a bullet hole.

"You're in shock," I tell him.

"No, it's still in me," he says. "It's freezing."

He widens the hole and digs out the ice bullet.

"What the fuck?" he says. "I can't feel anything but cold."

I hold back the front door as the crowd tries to rip break through with even more fury. I fire saw-rounds across the room at the doll people crawling in through the window.

"I'm numb," LeForge says, ripping open the skin on his chest like he's ripping open a shirt.

“What the hell are you doing?” I say.

LeForge pulls a wad of cotton out of his belly. He examines it casually. Intestines spill out of his torso, revealing more cotton. He is stuffed with it, like the Lieutenant.

“He’s one of them!” McClean cries.

LeForge shrugs as he tosses the ball of stuffing over his shoulder and turns around.

McClean picks up his rifle.

“McClean!” I cry, as he fires a stomach round into the Frenchman’s face.

The stomach bullet is like a small water balloon filled with acid. It explodes against LeForge’s face and melts his head off of his neck before he has a chance to hit the ground.

“What the hell?” I say, re-loading my rifle with the last of my slugs.

“Move,” McClean says.

“Take the window,” I tell him.

“Move,” he says.

I dodge out of the way just before he fires a stomach-shot through the hole in the door, showering acid onto the crowd.

I go to the window and break porcelain faces with the butt of my gun. McClean takes the front entrance.

“McClean, be careful,” I say to him.

But he isn’t careful. He fires another shot and it misses the hole, splashing against the door’s barricade instead. The wood melts and cracks apart. The Corporal backs up, watching as the doll people break through the melting wood like it’s now paper.



## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

“Let’s get out of here,” I tell McClean, but he’s already out of the back door and running shirtless down the street.

I fire the last of my saw shots as the living mannequins fill the room. Crawling across the floor, I get LeForge’s rifle and pull myself outside.

McClean isn’t in sight. Not sure which direction he went. I look at my monitor. It’s dissolving. I look down at my clothes. They are also dissolving. I must have been crawling through the acid.

“Shit!” I take off the wrist computer and my shirt.

The mob comes around the corner and charges me, stiff mechanical movements with expressionless faces rushing through the snow. I fire LeForge’s slag-shot rifle like a machine gun into the mob, dozens of tiny flapping books flutter through the air at them. They are like butterflies made of razor blades.

The dolls crumble to the ground as the bullets hit them, chewing the stuffing out of their clothes. I fire until not a single one of them is still standing. Then I remove some of their shredded garments and drape them over me for warmth. Examining them in the nude. They have all the parts of real humans. They have breasts, dicks, vaginas. But their flesh is made of cloth, stuffed with cotton. Their faces, hands, and feet made of white ceramic.

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

I don't catch up with McClean in time.

Up ahead, I find him kneeling in the street. He's been shot in the side, bleeding onto the ice, and several of the doll soldiers are standing over him with their rifles in his face. He puts his hands on the back of his head and cries at them.

They lift him to his feet and escort him away.

I dodge into a nearby building. There are several dead mannequins lying on the floor here, riddled with bullets. Machine gun bullets. Only one mannequin is still standing, holding the rifle.

"Attention!" it says.

I know that voice . . .

Stepping closer, I get a better look at the doll man with the machine gun. It is Colonel Dupont. He's still wearing his uniform, but his face and hands are now porcelain.

"Private Jake, why aren't you on the front lines?" he asks. "We must eliminate all draft dodgers!"

He is completely still. Only his mouth is moving, slightly. But it doesn't quite move with his words. Like his voice is being badly dubbed.

"How many men do we have left?" he says.

"I think I'm the last," I tell him. "Corporal McClean was captured by the enemy."

"Very well," he says. "Then we will have to take out the enemy together."

I back away from him.

“Fall in, Private,” he says.

I continue moving.

“This is insubordination,” he says. “Disobeying orders is a capital offense.”

I raise the slug-shot rifle and fire the last bullet at him. It hits him in the stomach. He rips open his uniform and unzips his chest, then pulls the flapping bullet out of him by a razor wing.

“Mutineers are shot on site!” he says, aiming his rifle at me. I jump behind a table onto the floor.

His head shatters before he gets a chance to fire. Somebody hit him with a chair from behind.

I look up at my rescuer. It is Chaune. She is still alive.

“Come on,” she says, waving me over.

I follow her up a staircase to an empty apartment.

She locks the door behind us.

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

“You’re safe here,” she says, sitting me down on a white couch.  
“Relax.”

“I thought you were dead,” I say.

She shakes her dreadlocks at me.

“LeForge saw your body in the snow,” I say.

She shrugs.

“They got McClean,” I tell her. “We have to help him.”

She sits down next to me. “Don’t worry. He’ll be fine.”

“They killed the others,” I say.

She hushes me.

“They were only defending themselves,” she says. “They don’t want to hurt anyone.”

“What do you mean? You spoke to them?”

“Yes,” she says. “They say that they just want to live their own lives. They want to be free.”

“You mean, those animated dolls out there are the draft dodgers?”

She nods her head.

“How is that possible?”

She hushes me again.

“Don’t worry, we’re not in any danger. They’ll let us stay here. We can be together forever.”

“Chaune, what’s wrong with you?” I ask.

She takes off her clothes. Her long dreads brushing against her skin give her gooseflesh, cold metal chains hardening her nipples.

“I know you want to be with me,” she says, climbing onto the table and standing over me. “I know you used to have the war slut change into me so you could pretend you were making love with me.”

She squats down and rubs the wound on my cheek like it’s erotic. She sticks her finger through the hole and fucks it slowly.

“The funny thing is,” she says, “I used to have Sweet change into you as well.”

I pull her finger out of my cheek hole and stare her in her orange yarn eyes. “Really?”

She grins at me.

“I’ve been in love with you for the longest time,” she says. “But you know how it is in the military. We can’t fraternize when at war. Soldiers don’t fall in love. But the war is over now and we’re in a place where we are allowed to love, where we can live freely.”

“Live here?” I ask. “In the Arctic? With these doll people?”

“It’s really not that bad,” she says. “It’s freedom. We’ll be free to do whatever we want. It is a huge price to pay, but it’s better to live badly and be free than live in wealth as a slave.”

She removes my clothes and wraps her body around me, kisses my neck, warms my cold flesh with her hot sweating skin.

“Be with me,” she whispers into my ear.

I submit to her warmth, press my face against her neck.

“Can we survive here?” I ask.

She wipes the tears out of my eyes.

“We’ll be well taken care of,” she says.

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

She sucks my tongue into her mouth, keeping her eyes open so she can stare into me with her tan-orange eyes. Then pulls away and has me suck on one of her dreds like a dick. The hair entwined with metal is rough on my tongue, and it tastes absolutely terrible, but I can tell it turns her on so I pretend to enjoy it. I'm careful not to hurt myself on the small hook that she attached to the end of the dred.

She pulls on the hook so that it slips through the hole in my cheek, and then she pulls on it.

"Look, I've caught a fish," she says.

She stands up and tugs on her dred until I come to her. She pulls me across the room to a table and lays me across it.

"I like this fish," she says, climbing on top of me.

She takes the hook out of my mouth and attaches it to the edge of the table. Then she hooks all of her dreds to all of the edges of the table, like a web trapping me beneath her. With her last two dreds, she tangles one of my wrists around each of them before hooking them to the table.

Then, completed bound by her hair, she slips my penis inside of her and fucks me. The table is cold but her warmth is calming. She closes her eyes and licks the blood from my face, stinging the wound with her peppery tongue.

I know it's really Sweet, but I want to go on pretending. At least until we are done.

## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

The morning comes.

I wake up in a white bed, not sure how I got here.

It's cold, but not so bad. I can walk around in the nude without getting a chill.

Sweet is sitting in a chair, watching the sunrise, watching the doll people stroll casually in the street, cleaning up after their dead. She is still pretending to be Chauneey.

I sit down beside her. Something is wrong. Her skin has become pale.

"Are you okay?"

I feel her skin. It's cold and stiff.

She wipes my hand away.

"It's okay," she says. "It's just the change."

"What change?" I ask.

"We're becoming like them," she says.

She smiles at me. The lips on her face curl her cheeks awkwardly.

I want to ask her what she means by that, but I don't have to. I can tell her skin is turning to porcelain.

I shake my head at her.

"It's the only way," she says. "It's the only way we can be free."

I feel my own face. It is also getting stiff.

"We're going to become dolls?" I ask.

"They can't read our life signs from satellite this way," she says. "You said you wanted to be with me forever. It's a fair

trade.”

“I don’t want to be like them,” I say.

“Trust me,” she says. “You’ll be much happier this way.”



## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Our skin becomes porcelain later in the day. I'm not ready to face the other doll people. Not ready to apologize for the carnage I've caused.

We make love again, in the bedroom, but it just isn't the same. Our bodies are cold. Our flesh feels like fabric. Our heads clack together whenever they touch.

And my penis feels only cotton inside of her.

There is no emotion in her porcelain face anymore. Her facial features just look painted onto her head. And I'm sure my face looks exactly the same. I'm scared to look at myself in the mirror.

I don't understand any of this. Why do these people believe this is a better way of life? They live in the harshest environment on the planet. They have to live within the bodies of dolls. They can't possibly enjoy anything. Not sex, not food, not drink. Their lives can't possibly be fulfilling. Why do these people bother? Why did they dodge the draft? Why didn't they just submit to the government like everyone else?

I'm still able to have an orgasm, but I don't understand how . . .

THE END



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### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

**Carlton Mellick III** is one of the leading authors in the new *Bizarro* genre uprising. In only a few short years, his surreal counterculture novels have drawn an international cult following despite the fact that they have been shunned by most libraries and corporate bookstores. He sings for the band “Popes That Are Porn Stars” in Portland, OR.

Visit him online at **[www.avantpunk.com](http://www.avantpunk.com)**

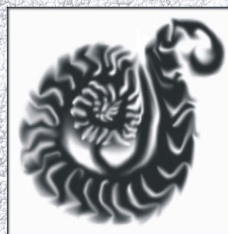
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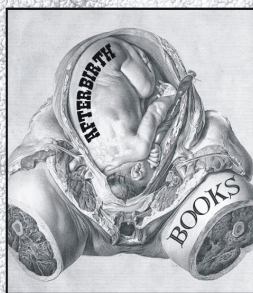
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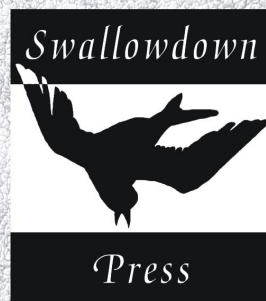
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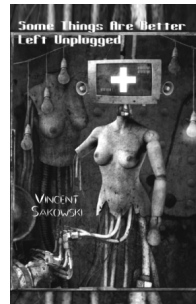
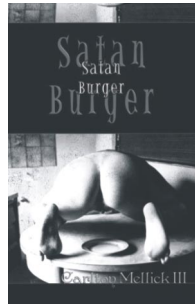
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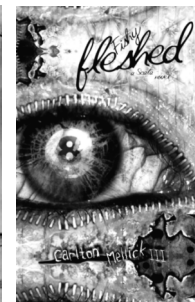
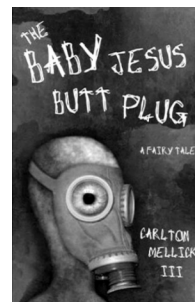


**BB-001 "The Kafka Effekt" D. Harlan Wilson** - A collection of forty-four irreal short stories loosely written in the vein of Franz Kafka, with more than a pinch of William S. Burroughs sprinkled on top. **211 pages \$14**

**BB-002 "Satan Burger" Carlton Mellick III** - The cult novel that put Carlton Mellick III on the map ... Six punks get jobs at a fast food restaurant owned by the devil in a city violently overpopulated by surreal alien cultures. **236 pages \$14**

**BB-003 "Some Things Are Better Left Unplugged" Vincent Sakwoski** - Join The Man and his Nemesis, the obese tabby, for a nightmare roller coaster ride into this postmodern fantasy. **152 pages \$10**

**BB-004 "Shall We Gather At the Garden?" Kevin L. Donihe** - Donihe's Debut novel. Midgets take over the world, The Church of Lionel Richie vs. The Church of the Byrds, plant porn and more! **244 pages \$14**



**BB-005 "Razor Wire Pubic Hair" Carlton Mellick III** - A genderless humandildo is purchased by a razor dominatrix and brought into her nightmarish world of bizarre sex and mutilation. **176 pages \$11**

**BB-006 "Stranger on the Loose" D. Harlan Wilson** - The fiction of Wilson's 2nd collection is planted in the soil of normalcy, but what grows out of that soil is a dark, witty, otherworldly jungle... **228 pages \$14**

**BB-007 "The Baby Jesus Butt Plug" Carlton Mellick III** - Using clones of the Baby Jesus for anal sex will be the hip sex fetish of the future. **92 pages \$10**

**BB-008 "Fishyfleshed" Carlton Mellick III** - The world of the past is an illogical flatland lacking in dimension and color, a sick-scape of crispy squid people wandering the desert for no apparent reason. **260 pages \$14**

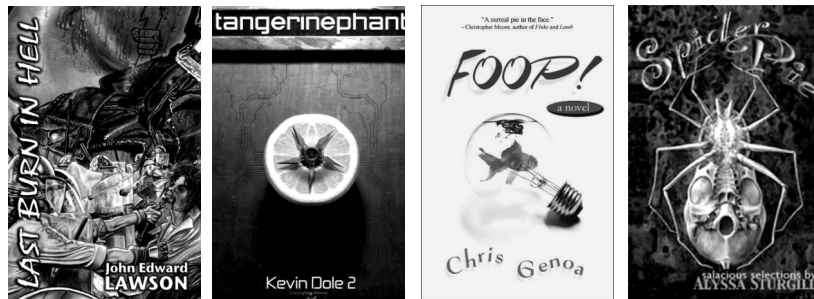


BB-009 **“Dead Bitch Army”** Andre Duza - Step into a world filled with racist teenagers, cannibals, 100 warped Uncle Sams, automobiles with razor-sharp teeth, living graffiti, and a pissed-off zombie bitch out for revenge. **344 pages \$16**

BB-010 **“The Menstruating Mall”** Carlton Mellick III *“The Breakfast Club meets Chopping Mall as directed by David Lynch.”* - Brian Keene **212 pages \$12**

BB-011 **“Angel Dust Apocalypse”** Jeremy Robert Johnson - Meth-heads, man-made monsters, and murderous Neo-Nazis. “Seriously amazing short stories...” - Chuck Palahniuk, author of *Fight Club* **184 pages \$11**

BB-012 **“Ocean of Lard”** Kevin L Donihe / Carlton Mellick III - A parody of those old Choose Your Own Adventure kid’s books about some very odd pirates sailing on a sea made of animal fat. **176 pages \$12**

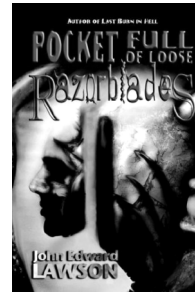
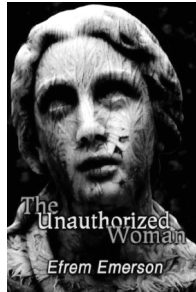


BB-013 **“Last Burn in Hell”** John Edward Lawson - From his lurid angst-affair with a lesbian music diva to his ascendance as unlikely pop icon the one constant for Kenrick Brimley, official state prison gigolo, is he's got no clue what he's doing. **172 pages \$14**

BB-014 **“Tangerinephant”** Kevin Dole 2 - TV-obsessed aliens have abducted Michael Tangerinephant in this bizarro combination of science fiction, satire, and surrealism. **164 pages \$11**

BB-015 **“Foop!”** Chris Genoa - Strange happenings are going on at Dactyl, Inc, the world's first and only time travel tourism company. “A surreal pie in the face!” - Christopher Moore **300 pages \$14**

BB-016 **“Spider Pie”** Alyssa Sturgill - A one-way trip down a rabbit hole inhabited by sexual deviants and friendly monsters, fairytale beginnings and hideous endings. **104 pages \$11**

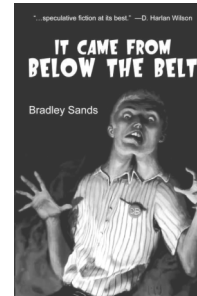
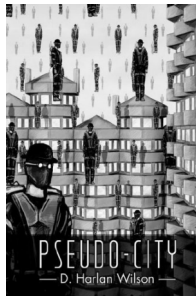


BB-017 **“The Unauthorized Woman” Efreem Emerson** - Enter the world of the inner freak, a landscape populated by the pre-dead and morticioners, by cockroaches and 300-lb robots. **104 pages \$11**

BB-018 **“Fugue XXIX” Forrest Aguirre** - Tales from the fringe of speculative literary fiction where innovative minds dream up the future's uncharted territories while mining forgotten treasures of the past. **220 pages \$16**

BB-019 **“Pocket Full of Loose Razorblades” John Edward Lawson** - A collection of dark bizzarro stories. From a giant rectum to a foot-fungus factory to a girl with a biforked tongue. **190 pages \$13**

BB-020 **“Punk Land” Carlton Mellick III** - In the punk version of Heaven, the anarchist utopia is threatened by corporate fascism and only Goblin, Mortician's sperm, and a blue-mohawked female assassin named Shark Girl can stop them. **284 pages \$15**



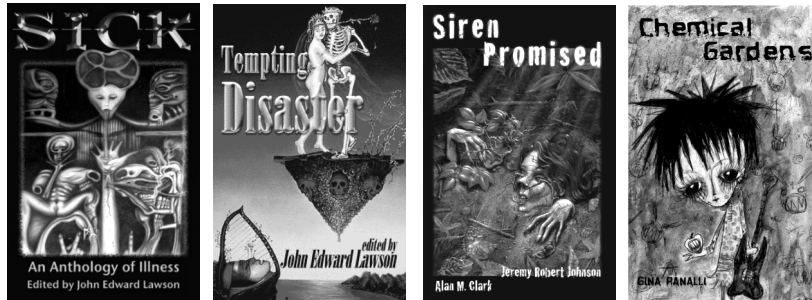
BB-021 **“Pseudo-City” D. Harlan Wilson** - Pseudo-City exposes what waits in the bathroom stall, under the manhole cover and in the corporate boardroom, all in a way that can only be described as mind-bogglingly unreal. **220 pages \$16**

BB-022 **“Kafka’s Uncle and Other Strange Tales” Bruce Taylor** - Anslent and his giant tarantula (tormentor? fri-end?) wander a desecrated world in this novel and collection of stories from Mr. Magic Realism Himself. **348 pages \$17**

BB-023 **“Sex and Death In Television Town” Carlton Mellick III** - In the old west, a gang of hermaphrodite gunslingers take refuge from a demon plague in Telos: a town where its citizens have televisions instead of heads. **184 pages \$12**

BB-024 **“It Came From Below The Belt” Bradley Sands** - What can Grover Goldstein do when his severed, sentient penis forces him to return to high school and help it win the presidential election? **204 pages \$13**



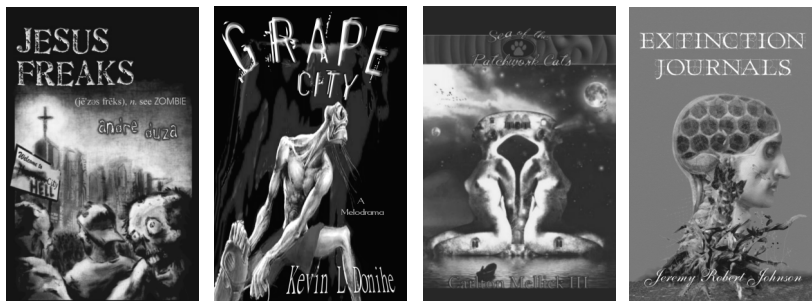


BB-025 **“Sick: An Anthology of Illness”** John Lawson, editor - These Sick stories are horrendous and hilarious dissections of creative minds on the scalpel's edge. **296 pages \$16**

BB-026 **“Tempting Disaster”** John Lawson, editor - A shocking and alluring anthology from the fringe that examines our culture's obsession with taboos. **260 pages \$16**

BB-027 **“Siren Promised”** Jeremy Robert Johnson - Nominated for the Bram Stoker Award. A potent mix of bad drugs, bad dreams, brutal bad guys, and surreal/incredible art by Alan M. Clark. **190 pages \$13**

BB-028 **“Chemical Gardens”** Gina Ranalli - Ro and punk band *Green is the Enemy* find Kreepkins, a surfer-dude warlock, a vengeful demon, and a Metal Priestess in their way as they try to escape an underground nightmare. **188 pages \$13**

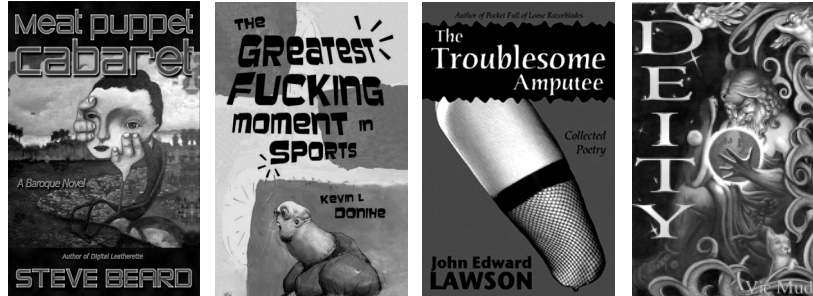


BB-029 **“Jesus Freaks”** Andre Duza - For God so loved the world that he gave his only two begotten sons... and a few million zombies. **400 pages \$16**

BB-030 **“Grape City”** Kevin L. Donihe - More Donihe-style comedic bizarro about a demon named Charles who is forced to work a minimum wage job on Earth after Hell goes out of business. **108 pages \$10**

BB-031 **“Sea of the Patchwork Cats”** Carlton Mellick III - A quiet dreamlike tale set in the ashes of the human race. For Mellick enthusiasts who also adore *The Twilight Zone*. **112 pages \$10**

BB-032 **“Extinction Journals”** Jeremy Robert Johnson **104 pages \$10** - An uncanny voyage across a newly nuclear America where one man must confront the problems associated with loneliness, insane diets, radiation, love, and an ever-evolving cockroach suit with a mind of its own.



BB-033 **“Meat Puppet Cabaret”** Steve Beard At last! The secret connection between Jack the Ripper and Princess Diana's death revealed! **240 pages \$16 / \$30**

BB-034 **“The Greatest Fucking Moment in Sports”** Kevin L. Donihe - In the tradition of the surreal anti-sitcom *Get A Life* comes a tale of triumph and agape love from the master of comedic bizarro. **108 pages \$10**

BB-035 **“The Troublesome Amputee”** John Edward Lawson - Disturbing verse from a man who truly believes nothing is sacred and intends to prove it. **104 pages \$9**

BB-036 **“Deity”** Vic Mudd God (who doesn't like to be called “God”) comes down to a typical, suburban, Ohio family for a little vacation—but it doesn't turn out to be as relaxing as He had hoped it would be... **168 pages \$12**

BB-037 **“The Haunted Vagina”** Carlton Mellick III - It's difficult to love a woman whose vagina is a gateway to the world of the dead. **132 pages \$10**

BB-038 **“Tales from the Vinegar Wasteland”** Ray Fracalossi - Witness: a man is slowly losing his face, a neighbor who periodically screams out for no apparent reason, and a house with a room that doesn't actually exist. **240 pages \$14**

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BB-040 **“And Your Point Is?”** Steve Aylett - In this follow-up to LINT multiple authors provide critical commentary and essays about Jeff Lint's mind-bending literature. **104 pages \$11**

BB-041 **“Not Quite One of the Boys”** Vincent Sakowski -While drug-dealer Maxi drinks with Dante in purgatory, God and Satan play a little tri-level chess and do a little bargaining over his business partner, Vinnie, who is still left on earth. **220 pages \$14**

#### COMING SOON:

“Misadventures in a Thumbnail Universe” by Vincent Sakowski

“House of Houses” by Kevin Donihe

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