

THIS ABOVE ALL;
TO THINE OWN
SELF BE
ZOO.

Vol. I Suppl. α

Winter Solstice 2023

In this issue,
good wishes are given to a specific dog,
and C-suite debates virtual bestiality.

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To Thine Own Self Be Zoo
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WISH KNOTS

Zadam squinted out of the mouth of the tunnel, looking at the cable which swung in the wind, suspended from this cliff face to the next across the vast canyon. The whitecap waves churned far below, and the clouds themselves were in a hurry. Once in a while, the wind cut around to face the mouth of the tunnel head-on, and Zadam's loose-fitting garments all fanned out as though he were some exotic bird affronted. He was glad for the cap he had brought, with the flaps on the sides that drooped down to protect the ears, and the little knit ropes that he tied off under his chin.

Chom sat beside him. He had wrapped the dog in one of their bedding sheets, in the face of the wind, to protect the Chocolate Lab's ears. The dog had seemed appreciative at first, and had wagged, and leaned close against Zadam while in the blanket. After some while though, the dog began wrestling with the sheet to free his legs, and so Zadam had assisted the dog in taking it off and stowing it back in their pack—the pack with both of their traveling things in it, which Zadam carried.

The cable car still wasn't coming. Zadam entertained some comical idea of going across the cable hand over hand. Even if he wore his mittens, his fingers would be shredded before he made it a tenth of the way across merely this canyon, to say nothing of the rest of the way through the tangle of canyons that the cable wound through. And what of Chom, if he were to try to go hand over hand across the cable? No. It was only a silly thought. If the cable car truly wasn't coming, if they truly did

end up sitting here all through this day, as they had the last, then as tiresome as it would be, he would arrange a new car himself, going all the way back through the tunnel to the green woods, and making something of the wood there. If the cable itself was broken in some inopportune place, then he and Chom would not be able to get through to the shrine until it was properly into Winter in some months' time, when the water below would be frozen through, solid enough to walk across.

Another idea came to Zadam. He looked down at the length of white string which he held in his hands, a piece about three feet long. Small stoppers were tied at random intervals in the string's length, little knots, each knot glowing green in the dim light of the tunnel, where he and Chom sat some dozen feet in from the tunnel's end, where the mouth left off on a large cliff face, and a bad gust of wind could have pulled them off down into the water, were they foolish enough to sit with their legs and whiskers dangling over in this kind of blustery evening.

Zadam began tying another small knot in the string, in a gap between two of the existing knots. He pulled the knot tight slowly, slowly, slowly, and as he did, he said to the string, "I hope Chom will find our bed a pleasant comfort to get back to, when we get back."

The new knot glowed green, at those words. Chom wagged. Zadam smiled to the dog.

That was the game of it, while they waited here: finding things to say that were positive hopes for Chom, that would not sound to Chom like immediate promises aimed towards him. Something like "I hope Chom gets a treat" would be mean to bring up, if there was nothing on offer. Something like "I hope Chom gets a big good meal when we get back," was enough for the dog to understand that it was something about him, that there was goodness aimed towards him, but that it was on the condition of them getting somewhere.

Zadam prepared another knot, and as he pulled it tight slowly, slowly, slowly, he said to the string, "I hope Chom enjoys the ride in the cable car."

This knot began to glow green as well, and Chom again wagged.

Wish knots, they were called. A sort of talent, a gift possessed by the people of the Shrine of Levat. Tying a certain knot, whether in a heavy rope or in a thin piece of string, if one with the talent for wish knots spoke a kind and genuine wish into the knot, the knot would glow. The glow lasted for about a month persistently, and then would begin to fade, taking a day or two to wilt away to a mundane stopper. The tying of a wish knot did not cause the wish to come true, nor did the knot offer any judgment of what was done to itself after its creation: it was, in fact, a common trade for the elderly, to create ropes and nets of wish knots to be sold as decorations. Out in the world outside of the shrine, as Zadam and Chom were returning from—or, attempting to return from, waiting to return from—the talent of tying wish knots was useful for proving some association with divinity.

The wish knots could glow in many colors, each with their own unique meaning.

Red: A wish for something good to happen for a parent.

Blue: A wish for something good to happen for a child.

Bright Blue: A wish for something good to happen for a bird of the sky.

Violet: A wish for something good to happen for a quadruped which grazes the field.

Orange: A wish for something good to happen for a plant.

White: A wish for something good to happen for a lover.

Brown: A wish for something good to happen for a friend, a brother, a sister, or a cousin.

Green: A wish for something good to happen for Chom.

There were some other fine color distinctions, a yet-brighter-blue corresponding to a wish towards the weather, and other relations one could also use to arrive at brown, but it was a well remarked upon fact that a pure Green had, for the hundreds of years of the talent existing, gone uncreated, until such a time as Zadam had made a kind and genuine wish for Chom: The first wish, Zadam hardly able to grow facial hair then and Chom just a puppy, had been a wish that Chom enjoy the new toy that Zadam was planning to buy for the pup when he went in to the market that day. Zadam had then brought the surprising green knot to the temple and was subjected to several important

conversations about it, but aside from all of that, Chom had liked the toy very much, a teddy bear whose brown coat matched his own tone of brown Chocolate Lab hair. If there was a greater criteria for creating green, anything more to the category, it yet remained unknown: if anyone made a wish for good to befall this Chocolate Lab specifically, the wish knot glowed green.

Zadam, though once looking at a simple lifetime as a weaver, became something of a curiosity for being the first creator of a green wish knot, even if others proved just as easily to be able to do it, if they too could come up with a true wish for the dog. And so, well provided for by the temple, he began to study oration and philosophy, recommit himself to his religious studies towards Levat, their goddess of storms, and in time he became an ambassador.

He had secured two good trades, previously, with nearby tribes, and for the shrine's use obtained many tools crafted of iron, in exchange for elaborately written upon scrolls which, when burned, would allow those tribes to petition Levat. She was a deity who very reliably answered when called, and in fact often did more beyond what had been asked of her: There were legends of storms that had lasted in one place an entire year round, and legends of roving storms from centuries ago which went around the lands still. Her reputation was ubiquitous, and Zadam, in garments adorned in glowing strings, had found that those first two ambassadorial trade endeavors had gone well.

This last one that he and Chom were now returning from had not gone well.

Zadam turned his gaze up from his three foot string, and pitched his hands above his eyes to look better into the glaring daylight outside of the tunnel: across the vast canyon, a cable car was approaching over the cable.

"They're here," Zadam said to Chom.

Chom wagged, got up, and started pacing back and forth in the tunnel, sniffing variously at the human and at the pack, and the few items of food and comfort they had set out there nearby them, indicating to the human all of the things that should not be forgotten.

Zadam did indeed begin collecting everything up.

He stepped to the mouth of the tunnel and waved for a moment. Then he went back to where Chom politely sat, nearby the pack. He knelt there beside the dog, the both of their heads level with one another, looking at the approaching cable car.

As they waited, Zadam prepared one more wish knot in his string. As he pulled the knot tight slowly, slowly, slowly, he said to it, "I hope they will not kill me."

The knot glowed green. Chom did not give any impression of being pleased or displeased with the words—no wagging, also no concerned glance from those big orange eyes—but Zadam smiled at seeing the knot turn green. It was true: that wish, too, was for Chom.

Zadam tipped his head over to nuzzle the dog once, and then turned and gave the dog a big smooch on the top of the head. Chom wagged, and turned and licked Zadam's face, and the two kissed for a while. They did stop before the cable car's operator would have been close enough to see them, in their position in the shadows back in the tunnel. Not that there was any secret. Chom had bred with many of the female dogs in the Shrine of Levat—it was Chom's pleasure, as well as the pleasure of any owners who wanted a litter descended from the dog who was the source of so many green points of light that hung around the shrine. But it was known that Chom's love mate was Zadam. That the dog's phallus had spent more time inside of Zadam than inside of any one member of his own species. That Chom and Zadam were inseparable, at some times quite literally. The people of the Shrine of Levat were a stormy people, and loud public displays celebrated: uproarious laughter, shouting spitting anger over stubbed toes or pinched fingers, loudly moaned curses over aching joints, singing, dancing, and sexual intercourse, it could all be seen walking around the shrine's streets. Zadam had many memories of being on his hands and knees at dog level, his flowing garments lifted up so that which covered his legs instead hung up around his stomach, with Chom facing the opposite way behind him, their posteriors touching, the two of them on the side of a public street where Chom had gotten to be in the mood to show off to the people, and indeed, many people standing upright overhead above the dog and the bent human passed by going about their business,

and many glanced down to the two of them. Many seemed to be conceiving of good wishes to use later, or indeed spoke them to strings or ropes right there, and with a smile showed their new green lights to Zadam, who would smile back and bow his head in recognition and thanks.

The cable car came close enough that Zadam could see the face of its operator: Oifim, who was indeed usually the one who took the cab out to check for people arriving. The man was built like a bear, and wore a grand moustache that curled upwards to each side like scimitars adorning his smile.

The cable car arrived into the tunnel, and Oifim stepped out, stretching and giving a loud groan which echoed down the tunnel behind Zadam and Chom's backs. Chom went up to the cable car driver and began sniffing him up and down, tail flying back and forth behind him. Oifim stopped his stretch short, and brought his hands down to the dog, rubbing the dog's ears and petting down the Chocolate Lab's back.

Oifim then looked up to Zadam, and bellowed, "WELCOME BACK!"

Zadam answered, "SHE GIVES!"

The humans each slapped their hands against their own breasts and then raised their arms upwards in Vs.

Chom returned to Zadam's side, as Zadam hefted up his pack. He carried it over to the cable car, and began securing it to the small cargo shelf, using the ropes already tied to the car nearby the shelf—there were also ropes within his pack that he could have dug out, if they had been needed. The people of the Shrine of Levat were a people quite glad to carry ropes, and strings.

"How did it go?" Oifim asked.

Zadam answered, "Dreadfully."

"Oh."

Zadam sighed, and then stood from the secured pack, and said, "I'll tell you on the way."

Zadam opened the rear compartment of the cable car for Chom. Chom leapt in, and stood inside on the cushioned seat. Zadam closed that door and secured it, and he and Oifim climbed in to the front.

Oifim asked, "Are you weary from travel?"

"I will push and I will pull."

“Many thanks.”

The two humans both leaned forward, and grabbed the bar which ran across the cable car in front of their seat. Together, the two of them pressed it forward, and began turning the crank, and the car began to move backward on the cable, retreating out of the mouth of the tunnel, soon leaving the tunnel behind as the men pushed and pulled.

“So,” Oifim began, as they were halfway across this first chasm. “Krenna and Ogen’s men had no interest in storms after all?”

“They did, I think.”

“Oh?” Oifim prodded. As they talked, they did not stop at turning the crank bar. There was a momentum to it that made the work easier while the car was already in motion. Oifim mentioned, “They did quite some work getting a messenger to us.”

“They did. But when I arrived to the conference with their ambassadors, we did not get to the point of talking about storms and trade before I left.”

Zadam left the statement at that. He would gladly never talk about what had happened, if no one would ask him.

There was a long ride ahead of them, and he did not think too confidently about his odds of getting through it unasked.

But he left it at that, not saying what had happened.

Oifim asked, “What happened?”

Zadam turned away to face outward, and shouted, “HELLS! RATS! ROT! SHIT!”

The canyon walls spoke back to him in a chorus of his own voice, on hells, rats, rot, and shit.

Oifim suggested, “If you don’t want to speak on it, we will not.”

“I will,” Zadam answered. “It is a story I will have to tell many times in the coming days, at this rate. I may as well find out the words of it.”

“All the time you need,” Oifim said.

The two continued on in silence, as the cable car swung back and forth in the wind, until they had arrived at the wall opposite the tunnel mouth. There they slowed, for a turn in the cable, and

then continued on along the canyon's side, as they would go along for the next mile.

Zadam told his tale.

"Krenna and Ogen are of course quite far. Well beyond the trees that we know, off into lands of hard grass and sand. Little of substance lives there, other than the men themselves who live there. There are no squirrels or birds. There is no possibility of growing crops, and even quadrupeds which graze the field cannot eat the grass there, it is too harsh for them. The men, quite alone as lifeforms, eat the manna of their god Vinyok, a rather tasteless substance, like hard grain, but which can be mashed and then baked into a rather tasteless bread. From the manna, they also ferment beer, so that they might get drunk.

"My mate and I arrived upon the place of the conference one day as the sun was beginning to set, and darkness beginning to rise across the desolate grounds. A circular edifice made of pale stones, large enough that sport could be played inside of it, though not so large that much of an audience could be contained within it to watch them. One and twenty tents surrounded, of various constructions, all small personal dwellings.

"Outside of the edifice, where the meeting would be to take place, several of the men, including the three ambassadors I was to speak with, stood around a large fire. Fires, too, were spawned of a liquid substance from their god Vinyok: they stood there in the desert around a flaming puddle. When my mate and I arrived, I bade him linger behind as I approached first.

"The men greeted me cordially, we all bowed to one another. They gave me bread and water, and uttered assurances that they looked forward to making agreements the following day. I made no objection, of course. I had come a long way to arrive there, the meeting did not need to be done that hour. Maybe if I had insisted it be done that hour, I would in fact be returning with racks of fine rapiers and drums of liquids which generate fire. I agreed to what they suggested though, uttering assurances that I looked forward to the following day as well.

"It became apparent to me that the men were drunk, and that they intended to continue drinking around the fire throughout the night. Though I did drink from their offered water, I had

none of their beer or bread. I told them again I looked forward to the next day, and I began to leave, telling them truthfully that I hoped to set up my tent while there was yet light.

“The men then pleaded, stay, stay, there is a tent empty for you, tonight we shall feast. I assured them that I appreciated their offer, but that I preferred my own dwellings. Truly I more believed my mate would better enjoy our familiar dwellings, and truly I had been away from him for some time by this point and desired to haste back to him to assure him that all was well.

“The men would not give me a polite moment to leave, and pleaded more, stay, stay, tonight we shall feast, bring forth your beast and we will cook it expertly.

“Were it a quick thing to do, I could have been moved to call down storms from Levat upon them at that very instant. Still, being an ambassador, and having come a long way to get a job done that was better done with good impressions, I merely told them, the dog is not an offering, I will not allow him to be eaten.

“They insisted, pleading, you will have to bring it no further, it will be a good taste unto us, we will have a glad celebration as we eat and drink. My responses that the dog would not be eaten were talked over. Though no polite moment was given to me to leave, I turned and left all the same, even as they jeered at my back. I will note I did not see swords among any of them, or I may not have been so bold as to make my exit with my back turned. I returned to my mate, and did not deceive him that I did not like what had just happened, but I did tell him that we would get through it all the same.

“An appreciable distance from any of the men’s structures, I set up our tent. The mouth faced their structures, and my mate and I sat within the tent and watched for any man to approach, though none did. When night fell, my mate and I fled the tent, sealed it up behind ourselves, and retreated far back into the barren lands, until finding a gully to pass the night in in hiding.

“In the early morning, my mate and I began towards the edifice and its grounds once more. Through the night, I had been wracked with tempestuous doubts in one direction and then the other, again and again as a flag in dire winds. I had, by the morning, decided that I would still meet the men as I had

come to, and with talk, smooth over any bad impressions, on either of our sides, from the night before.

“When I came over a ridge, and could see the edifice, I witnessed that no man stirred save for the three ambassadors, who stood at the entrance of the edifice with scabbards.

“Clearly, they were intent on rectifying the last night, by killing my mate at that moment, likely with the assistance of the other men who I believe were not still sleeping, but were lying in ambush, within the nearby tents and within the edifice.”

The two men in the cable car pushed and pulled on the metal bar in front of them for some while without speaking.

As they left the side of the canyon to begin the next crossing, across an intersecting canyon, Zadam concluded, “I did not attend the conference. I turned and left with my mate, believing at that point that the best I could hope to accomplish would be to not lose an asset to Levat. That much, returning him safely, is all that I can say proudly I have done.”

A stronger wind rocked the cable car greatly for a moment, as the two men continued to push and pull.

The car swung, and swung, many times, and then eventually settled to its small rocking.

The cable car driver responded, “You have brought back two assets to Levat: You brought back yourself as well. If such was the conduct of those men, there was no conference at all, and then, no conference you failed to attend to.”

The two men each clapped their nearby arms over each other’s shoulders.

As they got back to devoting all arms to turning the crank, Oifim began to tell Zadam of all the goings on since he had left, promotions, new couples, losses, new structures, new theories on the shrine’s images, new songs, and a new play which he did not tell of in too many details, to preserve the joy of the surprises of it, but he shared that it was worth stopping in to.

Night had fallen by the time the cable car arrived at the shrine. Sprawling over a vast plateau, protected within a yet vaster landscape of canyons, the shrine itself had many arms and nooks and facets, besides all of the homes of thatched roofs and stick walls, and other facilities that had been built on the plateau as well.

Zadam went to the back of the cable car and let Chom out. Chom leapt upon Zadam, and stood on his hind legs as Zadam held his forepaws, and the two of them kissed. Chom then trotted ahead to sniff around.

On the platform the cable car had come to, several ropes hung across the edges of the platform, to mark the dropoff. The ropes were tied with wish knots, which glowed in a variety of colors: often at places of symbolic importance, such as here, the entrance to it all, an effort was made to include every color. Zadam's heart was warmed to see where one of the rope's knots glowed green, the color for good wishes for Chom. They had been away longer than the duration that these glowing knots lasted: someone, while Chom had been away, had sent the Chocolate Lab good wishes.

Zadam grabbed his pack off of the cable car, and put it on.

"Many thanks," Zadam said, to the cable car driver.

"I serve," Oifim answered, and smiled below his moustache.

Ahead, there was a wide stone staircase, leading up towards the main thoroughfares of the shrine. However, beside the stairs, was an unassuming doorway, a tunnel used none too frequently, but which would take Zadam and Chom beneath the bustle of the shrine, and, with the right turns within the tunnel taken, deposit them into the quiet outskirts where their home was.

Oifim stammered, "Oh ah, taking the, that way?"

Zadam, stopped by conversation, turned to Oifim, and answered, "We are weary, more than I had let on before. Whatever tomorrow may bring, it will bring, and we will face it all then. For now, I hope to get us the last of the way to home. Though this passage is a little longer in its turns and doubling back, I worry at what or who might stay us if we march about above."

"Good!" Oifim said. "Yes, I, I was going to suggest—yes, well, good, good. I will not be the one to stay you either."

"You I would forgive for it, you have moved me quite a ways."

Oifim bellowed out a laugh, and bade the two, "I hope the best for the return of these mates to their den."

Zadam bowed, and then made towards the passage, Chom following beside.

In spite of his travel-sore body, Zadam found himself running, skipping, with Chom prancing alongside. Zadam let out cheers, and Chom echoed some of them in barks, as the two made their way through, below it all. “WE’RE HOME!” Zadam shouted, and the halls echoed back an affirmation in his own voice, “home-home-home...”

When the two emerged out into a forest, dark and with the sound of a few crickets around, Chom wagged as he did a big circle around some trees, and then led the way towards their dwelling.

Their home was not anything grand, but indeed much like the others. Walls made from sticks, that the wind may pass in. A roof overhead. And, all that Zadam looked forward to just then, a bed. A bed which he and his mate had spent so many nights cuddled together on, and, although the cuddles in their tent had been perhaps even closer as they cozied in for body heat, it would be nice to be in their den again, as the cable car driver had so rightly put it.

Coming through the woods, Zadam felt confused at something: ahead, something in the night shined brightly, brighter than anything he could recall being in this area—he had thought they were nearly home. He continued to march ahead, until finally, he came upon it: his den, Chom’s den, covered inch by inch from rooftop to floor in nets of green wish knots. The green points of light covered the home, and swept out over the yard, a glowing floor of good wishes to the dog.

There also in the yard, some tables were set out, and many of Zadam’s friends—and a very out of breath Oifim—were gathered. Seeing the arrival of the dog and the ambassador, several of the friends blasted trumpets. Chom ran around between everyone, his body bending to one side and then the next as he wagged so hard at all of the petting and praises and familiar people.

Zadam’s best friend, Caua, stepped away from the excitement surrounding Chom, and towards Zadam, who lingered there at the edge of the woods.

She shouted, “WELCOME BACK!”

He answered, “SHE GIVES!”

The humans each slapped their hands against their own breasts and then raised their arms upwards in Vs.

As Caua brought her arms down, she made a passing swipe at messing up Zadam's hair.

She said to him, "Heard you had a rough time. We'll save the celebrating for tomorrow, and leave you to bed. Good to see you back."

Zadam made the rounds among his friends, as Chom already had, sharing quick thanks and good wishes.

Many odds and ends of meats and breads were shared with Chom, and the dog ate well. Zadam declined any of it for the time being, and all the more of it went to the dog.

And, true to their word, Caua and Oifim and the rest were soon all departed, leaving the tables on the yard in preparation of the next day, but leaving the mates to their rest until then.

Zadam took off his pack, and set it down outside by the front door.

He opened the door for Chom. The Chocolate Lab went inside first, and sniffed around at the little table, the trunks, the shelf, the basin, and the bed. Arriving at the bed, the dog did not turn away to investigate anything further, but rather, crawled up onto the bed, laid down on his side of it, and looked up at Zadam.

Zadam undressed from his light garments, and crawled onto the bed, and snuggled there with his mate. As a wind blew through the walls, Zadam and Chom were plenty warm in one another's embrace, sound asleep together through the night.

HAL, MINDY, ICE PICK

You assuredly already know what I'm about to say. The basics, anyways. You learn everything you need to know about multiverse theory in middle school, if you didn't already pick it up intuitively from the books you read in elementary school. And all of what I want to tell you doesn't require understanding anything more than the basics. The way timelines work is in a tree structure. Nothing more to it than that. Things are going along for a few days, and then somewhere in the world, something happens to where, if it goes one way then we go on to one universe where it went that way, and if it goes the other way then we go on to one universe where it went the other way.

Some people would argue that universes rejoin: they propose mechanisms such as mass amnesia to account for discrepancies of merging two branches back together, people mostly not remembering anything that would cause suspicion. I want to nip this in the bud right now: universes only branch outwards. Once they split, there's no going back.

There are vast treasure troves of records of these node points, thousands of stories to be told about big historical moments that could have gone one way or the other, and caused big changes from one universe to the other. You've probably heard a lot of the big stories of the big ways things could have gone. But I wanted to tell you a lesser talked about story of one of these node points. Maybe you've heard it, maybe you didn't: if you did, the person telling you about it was probably giggling to himself, and you thought he was pulling your leg. Or he was a

professor, and praying that you and his other students would be mature enough to not all begin giggling about it and turn the would-be informative lecture into a circus. But let me tell you about what is colloquially known as the Hal node.

We begin on a rainy day in a touristy small town in America. There's a lake nearby, and many folks under umbrellas and ponchos speed walking to get under some kind of shelter from the weather. All up and down the street are little souvenir shops, packed with coffee mugs and key chains and you name it that you can buy to say you visited.

One such visitor on that particular rainy day was Hal. He sat at a restaurant's outdoor seating, a few tables tucked into what could generously be called a spacious alley between that restaurant and Souvenir Shop Number 20 adjacent. In front of him was a big plate with three burgers on it, one burger mushroom and swiss, one burger classic cheddar, and one burger chipotle. He had just gotten his food, and was still working on the mushroom and swiss, giving a bite to Hal'vrick, and then a bite to Hal'ig while Hal'vrick was chewing, using one hand to then give a bite of the mushroom and swiss to Hal'stothoron while using the other hand to get Hal'vrick a drink of water to wash his bite down.

As Hal'ig and Hal'stothoron were finishing the last bites of the mushroom and swiss, and Hal'vrick was having some of the Coke they had ordered, the waitress who had served him escorted another diner out to the outdoor seating, there in the spacious alley, which did have a covering overhead to protect from the rain, I will add, if that wasn't apparent enough. This second outdoor diner's name—or fourth outdoor diner's name, depending on your philosophy when it comes to counting hydras—was Mindy.

Once seated, Mindy was asked if she needed a moment to look over the menu, but Mindy said nope, a friend had come here last month and had said you had to try the chipotle burger, and so that was what she was going to order. The waitress—incorrectly, if it's of interest to you, although it wasn't an intentional lie—said that the kitchen had just run out of chipotle sauce. Mindy and the waitress both said their oh-no's over it, and after a brief look over the menu, Mindy ordered a regular

classic cheddar burger and some fries and a Coke. The waitress wrote it all down, and headed back inside.

Hey, even if you haven't heard this story before, you can probably guess the next step of how things progressed from there. Hal'ig called out, "Excuse me, ma'am!" and got Mindy's attention. Mindy looked. Hal'ig offered that he had apparently gotten the last chipotle burger, and said that he hadn't touched it, and that she could have it if it meant anything to her. In her day to day life, Mindy probably wouldn't have taken him up on it. In his day to day life, Hal probably wouldn't have offered. But they were both vacationing, both on excuses to do things a little out of the ordinary, and so Mindy got up, and sat down with Hal. There indeed was the untouched chipotle burger there on his plate.

The two—or four—hit it off right away. Watching as a bystander—as one woman did, Jessica Thom, though she's not a part of this story in any meaningful way—you'd have thought that Hal and Mindy were already life long friends and that they had just bumped into each other. In truth, it was their first time meeting, and in some branches of the multiverse they would never meet again after that day, while in others they would find themselves a part of one another's lives for at least some while afterwards.

The split, the chief thing that characterizes the Hal node, did not happen there at lunch, even if intuitively, after you've heard the rest of this story, or if you have already heard it, you might look back and think that there should have been a split there at lunch too. And I mean, sure, it's a chaotic-looking affair, watching a hydra eat his lunch, but if you are a hydra and have been doing it all your life, it's about as natural to them as chewing for one is to you. It is true that various heads took over as Hal and Mindy were eating lunch, but it wasn't in a chaotic and random way, it was all very calculated and purposeful. Hal'ig, the most brazen speaker, did much of the talking, except for when a softer touch seemed better suited to the conversation, and then Hal'vrick would take over for a line or two as Hal'ig got to eat. Even though Hal had just the one stomach, it was a fortunate thing that a hydra's stomach has the appetite to match his number of heads.

We don't need to get into the personal lives of these people all that much, I mean, the details of what they talked about as they were eating are really neither here nor there. If it's helpful to you to know the general autobiographical details, then fine, but briefly. Hal was in town for his brother's wedding, which had been a week ago, but he was also taking the excuse to vacation in general, beyond just making it to the wedding. Mindy took time off from her job to go on little overnight trips regularly, and she had heard enough nice things about this place to want to check it out, even if it had mostly turned out to be a pretty unattractive tourist trap so far, it was at least nice to get out to new places. And Mindy did very much enjoy the chipotle burger. When the waitress emerged with another chipotle burger after having learned from the kitchen she had been incorrect about the sauce having run out, Hal and Mindy split the second chipotle burger, and by this point they were very sweet on each other.

They shared a few kisses there in the alley. Under other circumstances it would likely have been just one kiss, but, faced with what she was faced with, Mindy playfully gave a kiss to Hal'vrick, Hal'ig, and Hal'stothoron each, giving each of them a different treatment—a love smooch, a quick peck, and then for Hal'stothoron a long one to make the other heads jealous for more. It was very effective. Hal'ig invited Mindy to the room he was staying in. He didn't know whether to call it a hotel or a bed and breakfast—it was the size of a hotel room, but not a part of a chain, just four rooms tucked into the third floor of a building up one of the tourist town's streets, seemingly all operated as more of a family business. It felt more like a bed and breakfast than a hotel, even if Hal'vrick and Mindy agreed, as they were on their way walking there and Hal'vrick was describing it, they agreed that hotel probably was the right word in spite of it feeling off a little bit.

Pretty quickly after getting inside into Hal's room, Hal and Mindy were kissing, undressing, moving things to the bed. They had kissed for a little while, and had just begun to properly be having sex, when, in through the window, entered the owner's cat.

Cats are known to cause a lot of multiverse chaos even in ordinary circumstances. Here, in a sexually charged moment,

with a hydra, three branches formed, as the cat began walking along the edge of the bed and startled Hal.

Branch 1: Hal'vrick Fronts

This is, in many ways, the most mundane branch of the Hal node. Hal'vrick, upon seeing the cat, got off of Mindy, and pulled a blanket over both of them.

Mindy was disappointed at first, that things had stopped so suddenly when they were just getting good. But in short order, she had taken the blanket back off of herself, and was lying on her side facing the orange cat, and giving the fella her hand to rub against as he purred. The cat walked back and forth against her hand, tail raised and moving around through the air, perfectly happy to be getting this attention.

"It's just a cat, see?" Mindy said to Hal.

Hal'vrick, projecting his own modest feelings onto Mindy's dismodesty, commented, "You really... don't mind being naked at all in front of him."

Hal had been introduced to the cat, whose name was Ice Pick.

"He's naked in front of us," Mindy remarked. "You can't do it while he's in here, can you?"

"It's a little weird, I'd think we were showing him something he shouldn't see."

"Can I pick him up?" Mindy asked.

"Owner said he usually lets people pick him up."

Mindy picked Ice Pick up, opened the door a crack, and set the cat down in the hall outside, then closed the door, and got back into bed with Hal.

Hal and Mindy continued to make love, and that was about the end of the story for their time together. They both agreed it was fun, and that maybe they'd see each other around while they were both still there in town, but they didn't. Mindy went back to the bed and breakfast she was staying at, and Mindy and Hal went on to each leave the town a couple days later without having crossed paths again.

Branch 2: Hal'ig Fronts

This is the branch that becomes interesting from a legal perspective. It's the reason anyone in an academic context is likely to bring up the Hal node, and maybe that's where you may have heard of it before, if you have. Hal'ig, upon seeing the cat, began thrusting into Mindy with even more of a writhing rhythm, caressing her up and down with his hands, making the act look as sexy as possible to show off to the newly arrived feline audience who was suddenly sitting in.

Mindy, while being very into what Hal was doing, also saw the cat, and offered out a hand for him. The cat began purring and nuzzling her hand, and soon was walking all down the length of Hal and Mindy's bodies as the human and the hydra were making love.

It did so happen—and this was also the case in the previous branch, but it wasn't much of a big deal in that one—that a reptilian woman in an apartment across the street was looking out of her window, into the room with Mindy and Hal and Ice Pick. In this branch, seeing the human and the hydra making love while a cat was there too, walking around next to them, sometimes either of them even petting the cat, well, the reptilian woman began to film the proceedings on her phone, and she sent the recording to the police.

Hal and Mindy finished their lovemaking, and were still on the bed when the police came in and arrested them. Ice Pick ran, and was never apprehended for examination, though he continued to live nearby the area.

It was a pivotal case in bestiality law. At the time, the local laws only stated that any act done with an animal for sexual pleasure was a misdemeanor. Mindy testified that she did not receive sexual pleasure from the animal, and that the animal had only been a part of it incidentally. Hal'ig testified that he did receive sexual pleasure from the cat being there, but that it was so apparent that all parties involved had enthusiastically consented that he did not feel there was any grounds to claim that a crime had occurred. Watching the video that was taken of the events, the judge agreed that there was no basis for a crime here, and he dismissed the cases against Mindy and Hal. The

judge did comment that it may have been a different story if either Mindy or Hal had made their genitals to contact the cat directly, or if they had coaxed the cat into joining intentionally in any way, but that as it stood, it was equivalent to an act of God that their lovemaking had happened to involve a purring body and a swishing tail alongside it, not much different than if it had been windy and a wind had blown onto them from the outside: uncomfortable or exciting was a matter of personal preference, but there was nothing of morality or law put at stake, according to the judge.

Either way, the fact remained that the judge had dismissed their cases, making it clear that the laws were insufficient in some capacity. Some states which had similar laws endeavored to rewrite them with more explicit wording of what did and did not constitute a crime, while other states left the laws alone, and two states struck the laws entirely, one on grounds of animal rights and the other on grounds of personal liberty, both based on public discourse spawned from the popularity of the video, which was widely circulated online.

Mindy and Hal continued to keep in contact, at first simply due to the court proceedings and then for a little while dating one another, but they agreed mutually that they weren't really a good fit for each other's schedules, and stopped dating but with no hard feelings.

Branch 3: Hal'stothoron Fronts

This is the branch that becomes interesting from a magical perspective. Though it's nothing of particular historical note, nothing where nothing similar had been done before or since, it remains an example of magic drawn from emotion. Hal'stothoron, upon seeing the cat, began purring like the cat did. Soon Mindy was purring as well, and the three of them were all there on the bed together, purring and nuzzling and stroking.

Drawing from his intrinsic magical powers, Hal'stothoron began blurring things around in a way that excited and enhanced things for all parties present. He smeared the characteristic of the cat's purring over onto himself and Mindy,

so that they could let out real rumbling purrs in genuine, and not just make silly imitations of the sound. The characteristic of the cat's hair, too, he smeared onto Mindy and onto himself, so that all parties sported glossy and soft orange coats that were nice to pet.

To the cat, Hal'stothoron gave a hominid size and shape, to match the human and the hydra he was on the bed with, and soon Ice Pick was petting and nuzzling with the rest of them. As Hal'stothoron penetrated Mindy, Ice Pick began penetrating Hal'stothoron, all three of them reaching around and towards each other to make it a group activity of petting and appreciation.

The reptilian woman watching from across the street did not assume she was looking at a real cat, nor was she even sure she was looking at a real hydra or a real human. She closed her blinds and went back to her knitting, essentially like she had done in the Hal'vrick Fronts branch.

After Hal'stothoron, Mindy, and Ice Pick had all finished, they began licking themselves and each other clean. While in this process of cleaning, they all faded back to their everyday shapes and sizes. Ice Pick leapt up to the window sill, stayed on it for a brief moment, and then hopped away to go about the rest of his cat business on that day.

Mindy and Hal'stothoron, both tired out, settled in for a nap together. They spent their days in town together and continued to date after, though again, it didn't work out in the long run, but there was nothing that caused any bad feelings between the two.

The Importance of the Hal Node Generally

The importance of the Hal node in general is, in my experience in discussing these things, mainly for its utility in illustration. From one point in time, and for quite straightforward reasons, we have three very apparently different outcomes, one with outward-reaching consequences for the general population in the case of the Hal'ig Fronts branch, and all three of them with very understandable, very starkly different outcomes visually. It

is true, certainly, that other nodes have had bearing on the outcomes of wars or the speed of scientific development, and those are, in all respects, more important. But for audiences mature enough to hear about it, the Hal node is among my favorite examples to use to detail the curiosities and delights of multiverse theory.

VR POLICY MINUTES

Persons present are Mr McKinney, Ms Hall, Mr Richards, Mr Schwartz, Ms Foster, and transcriptionist Ms Fuller. Meeting taking place in the Svarga conference room in the Mag Mell wing in the Vanaheimr building with all parties in person. The door is closed with the sound proofing indicator indicating that no sound is capable of exiting the room. Electronic devices have been turned over to Mr Sullivan-Vasquez who stands guard outside. No persons have brought any notes on paper. No persons save for myself transcriptionist Ms Fuller have brought any means of marking notes. The meeting begins at 7:01 AM.

McKinney: “Okay, thank you everyone, for taking the time to be here. I want to begin by saying that everything is ahead of schedule for the next quarter’s content, so a big round of applause to Mrs Harris’s team for helping us with that.”

Clapping from McKinney, Hall, Richards, Schwartz, Foster.

McKinney: “Taking advantage of this extra time that we might have on our hands, we want to start looking ahead to the following quarter. We had already planned big updates on audial haptics.”

McKinney gestures to Hall.

Hall: “Yes, everything in the labs has been, phenomenal, when it’s working. I know some of you have been up to try it out. It makes the immersion in battlefields, doesn’t it?”

Hall gestures to Richards.

Richards: “I have never felt so much like I was there. It doesn’t even seem like a game anymore. The um. The non-

battlefield context demo was also remarkable. The, shouting, argument one.”

Hall: “Yes! Oh you tried that one?”

Richards: “Yes, I know the role fanatics are going to love it. Love it.”

Hall: “Have you tried it?”

Hall gestures to Schwartz.

Schwartz: “No.”

Hall: “Come on up any time.”

Schwartz: “It’s a little outside of my function.”

Hall: “Anyways. McKinney.”

McKinney: “Right, thank you. Big updates for the quarter after this upcoming one are audial haptics, a new 70s disco environment, a new Ancient Greece beach environment, and of course a wealth of new outfits and hair styles as always.”

Laughter from Richards and Schwartz.

McKinney: “But, since we’re looking at possibly an extra month of development cycles, we have the freedom to bring something new and unexpected to the relevant quarter. My understanding, unless something has changed since early yesterday, is that, Richards, you are proposing that we add bestiality content, into the experience.”

Sighing from Schwartz.

Richards: “Correct. That is still what I am proposing.”

Foster leans far back in her chair and begins flicking a fidget device in her right hand.

Richards: “Historically, you know, when we’re racking our brains for ideas on what to add in, we look to our most dedicated fans, one large subsection of those being the modding community. Based on the popularity of downloads and installs of those, it’s a very reliable indicator of what content people may feel is missing from the experience, what fixes they may want, what they feel should be expanded upon. At launch, the very idea that we would have sex in the experience at all was something we had decided against, but, over the years, it became clear the demand could not be higher, and Schwartz was able to get us through the legal aspects of endorsing sex as a part of the as-sold experience with no mods needed. And it could not have been better for sales or for community engagement. But,

obviously we went after, you know, the” (Richards makes air quotes) “biggest slice of the pie first, with straight, gay, and bisexual, vanilla as most people would say, humanoid sexual situations. And we’ve added to it piece by piece, you know, bondage was a very head scratching one to pull off in VR, but, McKinney, the community is generally very pleased with what you and your team managed to come up with for that. And, if we’re looking again at the modding portion of the community, bestiality is the most popular mod category that is not yet actually implemented in the game.”

McKinney: “Most popular that we’re actually considering. I assume we’re not considering underage.”

Richards: “Beast is actually more popular than underage. There was a spike in underage a while ago but generally beast has always been more popular of the two.”

McKinney: “Oh.”

Schwartz has put his head down and is rubbing his temple.

McKinney: “So, I guess, Richards, you are the proponent of this, as the Chief Community Engagement Utopiist. What’s on the table here, what content are we proposing gets added?”

Richards: “Well, at a most basic level, currently animal models in the experience are intentionally sexless, and the first place we would have to begin with is adding detail to the genital regions of existing animal models.”

Schwartz continues hanging head and stroking temple.

Schwartz: “We can do that.”

Foster continues leaning back and using fidget device.

Foster: “That’s fine.”

Richards: “And then we would add in the ability for humanoid models and animal models to interact sexually.”

Schwartz: “No.”

Foster: “Absolutely not.”

McKinney gestures to Schwartz.

McKinney: “Hang on, hang on. Let’s let him get through all of what’s being proposed.”

Hall: “I love it.”

McKinney: “Richards?”

Richards begins counting on his fingers.

Richards: "Adding detail to animal genital regions, adding humanoid-animal sexual interaction, adding animal-animal sexual interaction, adding animal mating routines into environments with animals, adding role sequences for humanoid-animal dating. Those would be the goals for content additions on this topic of bestiality."

McKinney: "Hall, you think this is good?"

Hall: "I think it's great. My department will be bored because I'd imagine we can already entirely use existing sounds for this, but just as someone with friends who play, I know people who would love this."

McKinney: "Okay. There were some objections?"

McKinney gestures to Foster.

Foster: "Detailed animal genital regions or scripted animal mating routines are fine. Both of those together and or any of the other items absolutely cannot be included in the experience."

McKinney: "Give us your perspective on why that is."

Foster: "How much time you got?"

McKinney: "Until eight, if it's important we can go over and I can reschedule my eight."

Foster stops using the fidget device. Foster looks around at McKinney, Hall, Richards, Schwartz, transcriptionist Fuller.

Schwartz continues hanging head and stroking temple.

Richards looks across the table past Hall at the opaque light window.

McKinney and Hall return Foster's eye contact.

Foster: "Adding detailed animal genitalia, or adding noninteractable animal mating behavior that doesn't involve detailed genitalia, would be fine on the grounds of realism and non-erasure, while having both, and or any of the other proposed items, would bring this into the territory of pornography and encouragement of harm."

Schwartz continues hanging head and stroking temple. With other hand, without looking up, Schwartz gestures to Foster.

Schwartz: "Legally, agreed."

Hall: "Half the use case of the experience is pornography at this point, might I mention."

Foster: "Not like this."

Schwartz: "Exactly."

McKinney: "What is the characteristic difference between this and the BDSM stuff?"

Foster: "Consent."

Schwartz: "Right."

Foster: "Obscenity."

Schwartz gives a finger gun gesture to Foster.

Foster: "How this will come off as an endorsement or an attack on other communities."

Schwartz gives a thumbs up gesture to Foster.

McKinney: "So there are sensitivity and legal concerns."

Foster: "Big time."

Schwartz: "There are."

McKinney: "Are there further legal obstacles?"

Schwartz: "There is not enough of a precedent to say whether this type of content would be allowed in any of the regions we operate in."

McKinney: "What do you mean not enough of a precedent?"

Schwartz: "I mean, no one has tried to make virtual bestiality porn experiences on a commercial scale as big as ours, and I can't tell you that we won't find ourselves without a product when we release that update."

McKinney: "Well, wait wait wait, wasn't. What was your mantra when we were adding gay stuff, initially, and a lot of the bondage? The law is the law, and the law is meant to bend to free expression."

Schwartz: "That is a mangled version of what I said, but yes, it was to that effect."

McKinney: "Is this actually different?"

Schwartz: "The difference is that in this case I don't know. I. Don't. Know. I. Okay. I."

McKinney: "So it's not legal or illegal?"

Schwartz: "Correct to an extent, although it depends on the region. Across all applicable regions, we are inviting legal liability."

Schwartz slides his hand off of his temple, and sits back upright.

Schwartz: "This meeting is not illegal, I don't mean to imply that us discussing the concept of adding it to the software is

illegal. You all can talk about it all you like. What I can do is listen, and then, if we are going to go ahead with this, in my own time, when I have my resources at hand, I can begin attempting to prepare a report on the legal roadmap ahead of us, if we did go ahead with this. I'm not saying the legal challenges would be impossible. I am saying that they are present, and that, professionally, I can't tell you that this is wise."

McKinney: "I've heard that, that's lawyer talk for yes."

Laughter from Hall and then from Richards.

McKinney: "I mean, you sound pretty against it from a legal point of view, is there anything to discuss at all, or is this your personal opinion?"

Schwartz: "I don't have personal opinions Mr McKinney. My professional statement is to caution you that doing this would present legal challenges that I am professionally averse to."

Hall: "I still like it."

McKinney: "Um. Foster, you raised three items."

Foster: "Yes I did."

McKinney: "Consent."

Foster: "Yes."

McKinney: "It's software."

Foster: "It's software we have made a point of making comply with consent or any sexual encounter terminates."

McKinney: "Right, but, since it's software, we have made consent more clearcut to achieve and more lenient to maintain."

Foster begins using her fidget device.

McKinney: "In a simulated scenario, is it so impossible to imagine what consent cues would look like? We came up with it for that deaf mute character."

Foster: "Very different."

Richards: "The community is aware of our consent policy, and the more vocal opinion is agreement with it, but, there are extensive writings people have done outlining how they think our policy on consent could reasonably apply to animals. That people agree to, whether or not they agree it applies to real animals, the general consensus is that in VR consent cues could be made by animals that would align with our policies just fine. I find it persuasive. You know, in, a platformer, you have your first obstacle that teaches you you need to jump, and, piece by

piece, shows you the mechanics and how to figure them out. In an animal dating scenario, we would be able to teach our mechanics of consent, what to look for in the animal, how to obtain it, and just like a humanoid interaction, losing it would end the interaction.”

Foster: “The point of the consent mechanic in the first place is to make players not completely lose sight of how such ideas are relevant to real life.”

Richards: “The community would argue that you would know in real life very quickly if you haven’t gained consent with an animal, based on our mechanics.”

Sighing from Foster.

Richards: “If you haven’t gained consent with an animal or that you haven’t gained consent with an animal, whichever way you feel is prudent to put it.”

McKinney: “The next issue you raised, Foster, after consent, was obscenity.”

Foster: “My vocabulary to describe that point sensitively is lacking.”

Laughter from McKinney and Richards.

Foster: “I know, I know, Chief Sensitivity Utopiist. Obscenity may not be the right word exactly, but, image, impression, very bad. Very nausea-inspiring. I’m. Choosing not to use some words that are coming to mind. Filthy, beyond what a large portion of our userbase would consider acceptable.”

Richards: “That is not what my data finds.”

McKinney gestures to Richards.

McKinney: “Well, hang on.”

McKinney gestures to Foster.

McKinney: “What is the worry there?”

Foster: “It’s the least of my points. But as it stands we have skated above the tide on being transgressively sex positive, and I have reservations that this would tank us into being regarded as immoral.”

McKinney: “Richards?”

Richards gestures to Foster.

Richards: “I will acknowledge that global public perception is more your wheelhouse than mine. My impression of our existing, very large fanbase, is that it would be celebrated. And

be very good for existing user engagement and userbase growth.”

McKinney: “The third item you brought up, Ms Foster, was that this might be seen to be in support of or in defiance of some groups?”

Foster: “Very much so.”

McKinney: “Do you have some examples?”

Foster: “Very directly it would be seen to be in support of real life zoophilia.”

Hall gestures to Foster.

Hall: “I’m gonna stop you right there, I don’t see any reason we shouldn’t endorse real life zoophilia.”

Laughter from Richards.

Hall gesticulates.

Hall: “I’ve got kinky friends! A member of my direct family is a zoophile and he seems cool to his dog wife!”

Foster drops her fidget device.

The fidget device remains on the floor.

Richards: “To Ms Hall’s point, supporting zoophilia is maybe not the worst thing in the world. Like I said, I’ve read a lot of posts of people talking about this. These are. Well. From some I see why you have reservations, I’ll say that first. But a lot of these people, my impression, is that they’re just people trying their best to be decent, in a world that hasn’t given them the tools it gives others, to learn how to be decent. Maybe we could be a part of that.”

Foster: “I disagree with that. And I disagree that this is the most productive use of our company’s time and efforts, if the goal is cultural uplifting.”

Richards: “I disagree. I think it’s a perfect use of our company’s time and efforts if the goal is cultural uplifting. These people are dying of being underserved.”

Hall: “They are. This would be very meaningful to them.”

Foster: “I haven’t conceded anything by the way, but just to get this last point out there to see if I’m completely alone.”

Schwartz: “You’re not.”

Foster: “Thank you, Mr Schwartz. Last point, point three part two, about how this will negatively impact other groups. There is a longstanding history of hateful talking heads making the

argument that homosexuality, transgender, what have you, will lead to so much social collapse of morals that soon enough bestiality will become permitted. Given our reputation currently of being transgressively sex positive, we would be giving credence to all of those alarmist proclamations, tacitly saying they were right, undermining positivity on things we do endorse.”

Hall: “I don’t see it that way at all.”

Foster: “Is this your area of expertise, Ms Hall, Chief Sound Utopiist?”

Hall: “All I’m saying is my zoo friends are trans, they love themselves, I’m a lesbian, I love them. I think you’re coming from a place of giving those intentionally harmful talking points too much credit.”

Foster: “This would be a disaster caused by our company.”

McKinney: “What if.”

Hall: “I don’t. Sorry McKinney. Quickly, let me just say. Ms Foster, I don’t want to discount your perspective either. My trouble is your perspective seems to be harmful to people I care about in a way that I’m surprised to hear coming from you, expert on sensitivity. But, sensitivity doesn’t mean your job is to be a pushover, it is to stand up for the sensitive, many different varieties of the sensitive, each of which have their own sensitive areas, I know that, and, that’s what I’m wanting to acknowledge. I just wonder if there’s. Never mind. I apologize for my tone, that’s all.”

Foster: “Thank you, I appreciate that.”

McKinney raises his hand.

Hall: “Would you be willing to meet with my zoo friends, if they would be willing to have lunch some time?”

Foster: “No.”

Hall: “That is a blatantly disrespectful attitude from this company’s sensitivity expert and I will be making a big deal out of that.”

Richards: “McKinney, I think, has an idea.”

McKinney waves his raised hand.

McKinney: “What if we did everything with made up animals? A dragon-dog mix, a cybernetic horse, golem sheep or something like that? Would that work?”

Foster: "Yes."

Richards: "Yes."

Hall: "Yes."

Schwartz: "Yes."

Clapping from McKinney.

McKinney: "I'll get to work on the drawings and the design considerations. Richards, email me which animals we most want versions of."

Richards: "Dogs, but I will send you a more complete email with fantasy motifs that might be of interest as well."

McKinney gives a thumbs up gesture to Richards.

McKinney: "Foster, please please please send me an email of stereotyping or cultural appropriations to watch out for here."

Foster: "Already composing it in my head."

Laughter from McKinney and Richards.

McKinney: "Hall, you think our current suite of sex noises will work?"

Hall: "More than likely, but I will ask my expert friends on the matter."

McKinney: "Legal, any concerns with this approach?"

Schwartz: "If Ms Hall promises not to sample any sounds from real life material of bestiality, no concerns."

Hall: "Fine."

McKinney: "Alright! Very productive, glad we got there. Let's get at it, team."

Meeting ends.

POEMS

This Body

This morning I woke up
and stayed in the blankets for a while
all warm and comfortable.
When I got up I saw pre shining
in my penis hole in the sunlight
and I thought about this body.
I thought about how this penis
has been licked by a dog,
multiple actually.
I like that I can say that
of this body part. That whenever
I'm using it, even masturbating alone,
it is a penis that has been licked by dogs.
Not even just for the memory of the pleasure,
although, I thank those dogs for that,
but even just for the knowledge that
it happened, that sweet dogs are what
this penis has been used for, for them to lick.
It makes it a joy, a point of delight,
to use something again that has been used for that.
I thought of these hands—
both, though mostly the left—
that have held a dog's penis
and his hot and slick knot

more times than I could hope
to remember individually.
I thought of these lips
that have been licked by a dog's tongue.
I thought of this breast
which has snuggled countless times under blankets
against the bristly yet warm,
soft, breathing,
coat of hair on a dog's back.
I am proud of how this body has touched other bodies.

Instruments

I have a lot of things
that aren't really mine.
I don't mean that I stole them.
I mean that I have shelves and shelves of books
about straight humans
whose only want is to fall in love with other
straight humans.
I have a Holy Bible
but I am not Christian;
I got it to learn about others,
and it has turned out
to be interesting for multitudes of reasons,
but it is not mine.
I have dozens of CDs and tapes
about straight humans
whose only want is to fall in love
with other straight humans.

It makes me feel so far away sometimes,

those being the things
that most easily become my possessions
in this world.
Things that are not mine.
Things that are not about what I want to see:
humans and animals falling in love.
It's out there, of course.
Online, you can find stories,
spiritual discussions,
and songs
that are the creations of zoophiles, for each other.
If I went to a lot of effort,
maybe I could fill a room
with pooch smoocher books and tapes—
a lot of it probably bootlegged.
But I can't go to pick up groceries
and impulse buy a cozy zoophile romance
the same way I could for cis het human romance.
Most of my things
do not belong to me.

I would be so bold as to say
that the rest of the world is missing out.
If I have still found interest and meaning
in all of these things that are not mine,
others might like a cozy dog romance too.
But I do, mainly,
feel for myself here,
and for other zoophiles like me
who feel so far away from everything.

One thing that helps
is that, also among the things that I own,
are instruments.
An electric guitar, a bass, a keyboard,
this pen,
that can make these things I want.
It doesn't change that most of my things
don't belong to me,

but it helps to have stopped feeling shame
at the idea of making things that do.

Someday I do hope to have a bookshelf
filled with the works of zoophiles
who have also found pens
and actually gotten publishing contracts
and been widely distributed
enough for me to find
and buy on an impulse
when I go grocery shopping.
Or, it would be cool if we printed them ourselves, too.
Kind of like zines but with entire paperback books,
with cool covers by zoo artists,
art of humans and dogs kissing right there on the cover.
Mailing these things around to each other.
I think that could be fun.

Figurine Man

Jacob Bride sets his mug of coffee down on the side table, and sits himself down in the rocking chair on his back porch. He looks out at the open desert. Takes a big smell of the fine dirt in the air. From the side table, he picks up his sharpened knife and a block of basswood. He looks down at his hands as he works, though his mind's eye is jumping ahead. He whittles off the corners, molding the basswood block into a shape that is curved, organic, reminiscent of something living.

From out of the wood, Bride uncovers a belly, blocky and angular at first, thicker at the ribcage, skinnier below it. A foreleg rests tucked close to each side of the ribs, a head with a long pointed snout above, a tail below curved off to one side. He carves out the beginnings of the image of her hind legs, splayed apart.

With the rough shapes done, Bride retrieves his glasses from the side table. In doing so, he also remembers his coffee, and has a long drink of it now that it has gone from piping hot to warm.

Glasses on, Bride holds the wood closer to his eye level, and leans in and around the work as necessary. He carves the lush fur over her ribs, and the thin fur over her stomach. He carves the mound of her vulva in heat, each valley, each minute bump, and the swirls of fur below at her rump. He carves each paw pad, each tendon on each leg, each rivulet of the thick coat. He carves her ready and excited expression, looking over herself to whoever is standing before her.

Bride sets the figurine on the side table. She lies splayed on her back, awaiting.