

A Tentacle-Guided Tour of DB12

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“In his house at R’lyeh, dead Cthulhu waits dreaming.” That’s what H.P. Lovecraft wrote in “The Call of Cthulhu.” I always thought R’lyeh must have been a metaphor for my brain, because that Elder-God-Octopus seemed to be interred there, staring at me during his undeath.

At the store, buying – jars of octopus tentacles in pungent green liquid? No – Pickles.

In the news: The Octopus Is Smarter Than We Thought – they’re using tools now. Coconut shells cracked in half, carried in their tightly wound tentacles like rudimentary bucklers.

I’ll hope that it was only my imagination telling me they now predict sports games; same as I’ll hope that they’ve all swum far from the Gulf Coast toward the Caroline Islands or eternity.

Have these octopi followed me into *Drunken Boat*? I think I see one, stinking of salt as it clings to the starboard side – yet when I look again – only the raw sea, endlessly churning, each wave a word I can’t translate.

As I navigate the spectral memories of Kristen Nelson’s “Ghosty,” there is a vague cephalopod-feeling in my gut as I attempt to grasp the restrained anger and bitter lament that this person’s shadow had cast on the narrator’s life. Noah Saterstrom’s black and white drawings create the aura that even the living world is phantasmagoric. The perception stays with me as I steer through Mikael de Lara Co’s parable “Man Finds Crow.” It rings of unanswered Friend Requests or misunderstood text messages that have been present in human interactions since the origin of society. The crow feels so human, but I feel like he has a lot in common with my squishy, eight-legged interloper.

I can identify with Liz’s desire for caffeine as she pulls an all-nighter working at a sleep lab in “Intersomnolence” by Wendy Wimmer. She adeptly weaves the mores, jargon, and visceral tastes of our contemporary coffee culture into synesthetic metaphors to further the reader’s empathy with these sleep deprived lab workers. It’s unnerving when morning arrives and one of the patients, draped with wires and electrodes, looks like a squid, but I weakly convince myself that it’s only a metaphorical squid, even though I know that these cephalopods are masters of transmogrification and could out-chameleon a chameleon. I’m easily lost in the narrative once more as Liz adds another entry in the lists of her life.

It’s tough to believe that the bright creatures in “Bugs” crawling through the sandpit are computer-generated. The people are able to interact with them quite naturally as they dig them new paths and pick them up. The part that alarms me the most isn’t when the people accidentally squish them, it’s when I realize that the group who created the project is named Squidsoup.

Human connections abound in “The Conversation” by Karin Rathert, yet why is there a hollow feeling to them all? I’d speculate that Marji’s character feels eerily similar to most readers when she’s on the cusp of rejecting her consumerist life in favor of art and divinity. The ending of her story could be the life we’re all living now – the only witness, our own personal octopi.

I'm reflecting on my own life when I fall into Margaret's: the main character in Karin Gottshall's "Care and Feeding." A single mother trying to make the best of her life as she supports her newborn son Matthew with her job at K-Mart. I feel the vibrations of her heartstrings as she tries to patch things up with the deadbeat father and when she experiences the joy of watching her son play with Legos for the first time. Yet for all this human emotion, there's something that my brain is trying desperately to wrap its thought-tentacles around. There's an octopus staring at me – and I want to give him an answer – but I just stare at him blankly while my thoughts continue to churn.

- Joseph Pascale, editorial assistant *Drunken Boat*