



Secret Sidewalk
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New Section

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By Tom Lichtenberg

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One

When Marcus was eleven, and his little brother Ben was only six,

"What?"

"I can't sleep," Ben would reply, and Marcus knew what that meant.

Usually it was a hot summer night when this happened, and no one was

The sidewalk was hidden between a wall and a hedge, and it was

Nobody ever walked on this sidewalk. No one except for the boy.

This sidewalk turned into a city.

One Hundred Thirty Seven

They reached the corner at Riverside and stood, face to face, and

"I'm thinking of a number," Marcus began, "between one and one

"Twenty!" he shouted and Marcus had to remind him to be quiet.

"Sorry," Ben whispered. "Thirty two?"

Marcus smiled and said "How did you know?" as Ben shrugged and

"Thirty two" Ben repeated, and began to walk off the steps. He

"The Dark Rider came through here not long ago," he said. "You

"Gas," said Ben.

"What else?" Marcus prompted.

"I don't know," said Ben. "I only smell gas."

"There's cinnamon in there too," Marcus replied. "There's also

"I love root beer candy," Ben interjected.

"... and sawdust. and also licorice," Marcus continued, "that's

"Why?" asked Ben.

"Oh," said Marcus, "The Rider is always in a hurry. Ever since

"What day?" Ben pleaded. "What happened that day?"

"The day he became The Dark Rider, of course. Before that he was

Mister Pete

"Yeah, Phil was just a regular kid who used to love to hang around

"Ain't I got enough going on around here without some pipsqueak

"But he ain't doing no thing," Junior Bus would say, "he like

"You show him at your own place you don't like it doing what I
Sure enough, it hadn't been the same since old man Sam fell off
"Scram, I said," he yelled at poor Phil, just a scrawny little
"Come on, I'll help," Levantin said, and called to Manny he'd
"They play like animals," he'd declare, "that never came out of
When he saw what Phil had done he sighed and asked, "Oh boy, a
Phil shrugged. All the pieces of the Honda were still there. He
"It's like Lego's," Phil replied, "I just gotta figure out whi
"You got a lot of junk right here," Levantin told him, examin
"OK," Phil shrugged, and hurried back to Manny's. That was jus

Mrs. Sweet

Mister Pete, which is what everyone had always called Phil's d
Another person would have called the cops but like I said, Mis
This is when the telephone rang and Mister Pete went back insid
"I got a note," he said into the phone, but the lady wasn't in
"I'm afraid it isn't my department?" Lila Sachs intoned, "I'm
"Is there someone I can talk to?" Mister Pete inquired.
"Certainly," Lila told him, and she gave him several numbers, o
"That the lady with the candy cane lights at Christmas?" Ben a
"That's the one," his brother told him.

"She works for the city?"

"No, the State. It's different. She also did the accident that

"What about Phil?" Ben wanted to know.

"Phil who?" Marcus replied.

"The Dark Rider," Ben insisted, "you were telling me how he go

"Oh yeah," his brother said, "Well, it was later when he got b

"He was really big," said Ben.

"Yeah," Marcus said, "really, really big, but he wasn't stupid

So they got back to the house and it was dark already. Roland

Marcus stopped talking, and in the dark and humid night Ben wa

"Just sitting there?"

"Yeah. Just sitting there. The guys outside came in and took a

"Sweet Jesus," Roland said. Levantin waved his hand in front o

"Someone's got to call someone," said Junior Bus, but no one w

"Come on, man," Levantin said to no one in particular. "Let's o

Sugar

"You know how Manny sometimes keeps the shop open late at nigh

"Mrs. Sweet? But what about Mr. Sweet?" Ben wanted to know, an

"There ain't no Mr. Sweet. Didn't I tell you about that? Mr. S
"I get it," Ben giggled.
"So Sugar was a guy who used to be familiar all around this pl
"What kind of stuff?"
"All kinds," Marcus said. "Like everything. But I don't know e
"So what about Sugar?"
"Sugar? Oh, when all his hair fell out? I don't know. Something
"Did you see the new Mercury line?" he asked. Sugar shook his
"They got some sporty models coming out I hear," Drake added.
"Oh I don't know," said Sugar, "those Mercuries are always jus
That's exactly what he said before he started vanishing. It wa
"That really happens to people?" Ben was anxious to know.
"Naw, just to Sugar," Marcus reassured him, "that kind of thing

Sharad

"Wish we had some lemonade," Ben said, "or maybe a Popsicle. A
"Ready to go back home?" Marcus asked. He deliberately didn't
"No," Ben declared. "I want to know about Manny and Mrs Sweet.
"Oh, they had a lot in common, those two. For one thing, they
"What kind of things?"
"Well, like when she hits a skater kid with her Jeep, she gets
"No way," Ben did not believe it.
"I heard him say it myself," Marcus insisted. "One time I was
"What kind of tattoo?"
"Oh, Karly is going to get butterfly dragon things, you know,
Karly was pissed because Phil's sixteen and that's still less
Mister Pete got on the roof somehow and that was where the fire

Emma Biggs

"What's a compound?" Ben wanted to know, and Marcus told him i
Sometimes he likes to mix them up. He'll take a husband from t
"She's got lots of moms and dads?" Ben asked. He was catching
"Yeah, like every woman there is like her mom, and every man h
"Awesome," Ben put in. He liked the idea of always getting ice
"But they have to give him all their money," Marcus said.
"Give who?"
"Sharad," he said. "He takes in all the money they all make, a
"I know her," Ben said, "the lady with the shopping carts"
"Yeah, that's the one. She collects those things, makes weird
"Mom went over there?"

"Not mom, just people from the grocery store she works at. I think she still thinks she is, you know. She goes around wearing a button-down shirt. So she was going to call the cops on Phil because of all the people. Good thing she's so fat, you know. I doubt she even lost a pound."

Sawdust Nation

"I'm hungry," Ben said, and Marcus said if they went home he'd be there. "You said there was sawdust?"

"What?"

"Back when you were telling about how Phil became the Dark Rider?"

"I didn't say I saw it," Marcus said, "I only said I smelled it."

"I don't smell anything," Ben said. He always had bad sinuses.

"Licorice and root beer candy too," said Marcus, remembering from childhood.

"What's the Sawdust Nation?"

"Do I have to tell you everything? Sheesh. I thought everyone knew."

"Originally they were way up north, but came down here because of the weather."

"Not me. Never," Ben replied.

"These Sawdust people, though, they got really really cold and they smoked trees?"

"They smoked trees?"

"Yeah, pretty much. I think it made them calm or something. They smoked trees."

But after Johan went to jail for destroying public property, the Sawdust people left.

Uncle Bill

You would usually find Roger Bancroft hanging around Original Joe's.

"Mr. Bancroft, are you OK?" she'd ask in that sugary sweet voice.

"You're talking about her boobs," Ben guessed, and Marcus laughed.

"Not just her boobs. The whole thing. Anyway, what are you talking about?"

"So? You're only eleven, and anyway, I'm going to be seven some day."

"OK, ok, some day you'll be a hundred if you're lucky and then you'll be old."

"I'm good now, dear Madeleine," he always said, "now that I've got my hair cut."

Maddy'd go right back inside and Lucky joked about her man. Lucky was always kidding.

"Uh-uh," Ben did not remember.

"Oh that's right," Marcus said, "it was me and Kansas. Never saw him again."

"I remember Kansas," Ben replied. "He was always good to me." Kansas was Marcus' best friend when they were nine. He came from Kansas.

"Got to go now, boy," the Sawdust man said when he saw Kansas. "I'll be back."

"Why don't she come then, Uncle Bill?" he asked, but Bill did not remember.

"What's akimbo?" Ben asked and after Marcus told him he continued to talk.

"Next thing you know that Uncle Bill was right there on our shoulder."

"That the guy who jumped over cars?" Ben wanted to know, but Marcus said he didn't remember.

"I think that guy was Randy or Mike or something. I forget. Anybody else remember?" Ben asked.
"Wasn't dad one of them?" Ben asked.
"Uh-uh," Marcus said. "He liked to go with them sometimes but I don't know for sure."
"Do you think he went off with them?" Ben inquired and Marcus said, "Dad died," he bluntly told him, "You know that. Come on."
Now both the boys were quiet, both sitting on the sidewalk in front of the bakery.
Kansas

"Wake up! Wake up! Marcus! Ben! Come on! Wake up!" Karly was standing over them, yelling. Marcus was the first to wake up. "We must've fallen asleep," Marcus muttered but Karly was stamping her foot. "Come on! There's no time. You have to hurry. Come on," and she was shouting. "What's going on?" Ben asked, and Karly impatiently replied, "It's Kansas. He's back and he needs our help. Sugar reappeared. That was all Ben and Marcus needed to hear. They were off and running. "Where are they?" Marcus asked, and Karly shook her head, a little. "Here, behind the dumpster" and sure enough, there was Kansas. Kansas was if he'd never changed, still nine, if that was possible. "I just found him here like this," said Kansas, after nodding. "My daddy opened the bakery and found him out here," said Karly. "So Karly came out and I showed her," Kansas filled in. "That's all." "Awesome," Marcus said. "It's like a genuine mystery." "Who's that?" The voice belonged to Sugar, who suddenly opened his eyes. "I can feel you," the old man said, surprised. "Let me go," said Kansas, and Sugar, also known as Mr. Sweet, said, "I'm hungry," he said, and without a word Karly ran to and in front of the bakery. Sugar took the offerings and carefully arranged them by his side. "I think I should know what this is," he said to no one in particular. Kansas and Karly and Marcus formed a semi-circle in front of the bakery. "If you don't mind," Karly said, "but didn't you, like, vanish?" Sugar looked up at her, confused. "You mean me?" he asked. "Yes," she persisted. "Everybody says you disappeared." Sugar said, "Young lady," he began. "I've no idea what you are talking about."
Flood Control

That's when Sugar stood up all at once like he hopped directly in front of them. "The heck you think you're doing?" Elrod demanded, followed by Karly. "Well doggone it," Elrod declared, "Look what you done now," but Karly said, "It was all bad timing that Emma Biggs happened to stop in right in front of us."

Emma knew exactly who he was, and screamed.

"Beauregard Sweet!" she declared, "what the hell are you doing

"Marcus," he called out, and Marcus grabbed his arm and yanked

"Kansas flying" Ben said.

"I saw it," his brother replied. "Come on, let's go," and both

"Wait for me," yelled Karly and almost all at once she was in

Franklinia

Even before he reached the end of the alley you could see that

"I ain't never learned it too good," he muttered, and Karly no

"I can tell," she said sympathetically.

"You OK?" Marcus said when he came running up with Ben behind

"You must think I'm stupid," Kansas said, looking straight at

"Nah, come on," Marcus replied gently, helping his buddy to hi

"Why'd you take off like that?" Karly asked and Kansas jumped

"I've got to tell my dad. He said if this ever happened I shou

"If what ever happened?" Marcus asked.

"One of the vanished!," Kansas said. "If one of the vanished e

"Sugar's all right," Karly said, "he looks like he's been in a

"No, no," Kansas told her, "he's one of them, one of the first

It seemed to Ben they ran for miles and miles but in hardly an

"Dad's in here," said Kansas, and he pointed at a sign that sp

"Why's your dad in prison?" Karly asked, and Kansas told her t

"He was framed," he said. "He was set up by LeMaster. He never

"I have no idea what you're talking about," said Karly, who'd

"Your dad is Johan Schluck?" Ben asked, surprised, wondering h

"Yeah, and we've got to bust him out," said Kansas. "Right awa

General Penitentiary

"This is so not going to be easy," Karly said, as she examined

"Is there a door or something?" Marcus asked but Kansas shook

"I've been all around it," he said, "there's no way in and no w

"Maybe there's an underground passage," Ben suggested, but nob

Ben thought he heard some music playing far away, and then it w

"Hey little guys," said Roland, "why the occupation? You claim

Karly stared at Roland as if he were from outer space. The lit

"You own this sidewalk, missy?" he asked again.

"What do you want?" Karly impatiently replied. "Can't you see v

"Oh. Sorry," Roland apologized, and sat down next to Ben.

"Hi little buddy," he smiled, and Ben shyly returned it.

"Anybody want a Popsicle?" said a big booming voice, followed by
"I can see you have a problem," Levantin said, examining the boy.
"We've got to spring my dad," Kansas said anxiously. "He's in there."
"Let me take a look," Levantin declared, and he placed his ear on the door.
"Got to go up," he said, turning to the kids and then, turning back to the door.
"Roland! Turn that damned thing off. I'm trying to listen here!"
Roland shrugged but silenced his radio. Everybody held their breath.
"Daddy!" Kansas cried and jumped into the small man's arms. Jonathan
"So it's true," he said, and looked up at his rescuer.
"Yes," Levantin said. "The time has finally come."

Snowman Fish

Marcus seemed to be talking from under water, and it was something
Ginger always let the boys in free so they could watch the giant
Ginger was smoking as usual outside, a shrouded tangle of yellow
"We got some new guys coming in today," she said. "Roughies and
Marcus grabbed the buckets and mops and handed the smaller one to
This was back before the Hybrid days began, he said, so it was
Russia they found out the diamond was digested and transformed
The secret of the Snowman Fish was never solved because of course
Ben was worried about the octopus because it wasn't moving much.
"I'll bet he wishes he could disappear," Ben said, "and come back."
"Manny's not going to be happy about this," Marcus said. "Somebody"

Rocky the Octopus

Ben and Marcus never got the chance to warn Manny, but not because
Marcus and Ben looked both ways before crossing the street and
"I wouldn't go back there if I was you," he warned them, but Manny
"What do you want from me? How many times I have to throw you out?"
"Yeah, go on, beat it," Mrs. Sweet joined in, and even though she
"I told you once, I told you twice."

Marcus nodded grimly, and that's why Manny didn't even know the

Mr. Brooks

"They were doing it," Marcus said.
"Doing what?" asked Ben.
"It," said Marcus, "you know. What grownups do."
"Oh," Ben said. He thought a moment and then inquired, "you mean
"Like mom and Otto," Marcus announced, "and Sugar was just standing
"How do you know they were doing it like mom and Otto?" Ben wanted

"I saw that tattoo on her butt. I could only see it if, you know,"
"OK," said Ben, placated.
"Sugar didn't so much as flinch and he was watching for awhile."
"Woah," Ben declared. "That's like really big."
"He put his hand on Sugar's shoulder and leaned down to whisper."
"Well, Sugar, he just turned around and nodded, and he started"
LeMaster

Out in the garage, Levantin was just bringing down a Jeep Roll.
"Why do you like that salsa anyway," he demanded after ordering.
"I love every music," he said.
"But you always listen to the same thing," Levantin replied. "Well,"
"Some kind of music is better," Roland said.
Junior Bus came running out and when he reached his colleagues.
"I ain't messing with Mister Pete," said Junior Bus. "Maybe you should."
"He's nothing," said Levantin, "just a shell. It's his boss you should be afraid of."
Ben didn't know why this was so important.
"I thought you said that Sugar wasn't Sugar anymore," he told Levantin.
"Sharad is the kind of man that causes all the trouble in the world,"
Roland leaned over, and casually mentioned to Ben that there were other things.
"He's got to have a gimmick, that's the thing," Levantin was saying.
"Pssst," Ben was tugging on Marcus' sleeve and trying to get his attention.
"What's the Hybrid stitch nation?" but Marcus shrugged him off.
"Later."
"That was when he was just Sharad, only Sharad. Then he heard about the new line."
"That's what I'm saying," agreed Junior Bus. "Listen to me, kids."
Seven Hundred Channels

"Get back to work, you lazy bums!"
It was Manny, tucking in his shirt and standing in the doorway.
"What I pay you for? Standing around talking to little kids? Don't you have a job?"
"Better scram," Junior Bus said to Marcus and Ben, so they too.
"No way. It couldn't be."
"But it was," Marcus told Ben, once they'd gotten clear of the door.
"It was Sugar and she knew it. She felt him standing there. She knew."
"Look, there she goes now," and sure enough Ben saw the bright light.
"That's gonna be something," Marcus smiled, and with the dollar sign on his forehead.
"Hey guys"
It was The Dark Rider, come wheeling up on his skateboard and shouting.
"Hey Phil," said Marcus. "Did you see that Mrs. Sweet?"

"I know it," Phil replied. "I heard that when the cop came up
"What's a beaver?" Ben asked, but the older boys ignored him.
"And she said, don't you even know who I am? And the cop said
"That's a bad word," Ben said, but the older boys ignored him.
"Then he pulled her out of her car and made he walk back to hi
"That the same Amy Biggs that used to go with Junior Bus?"
"Same one," Phil said, "but Junior said she was like really st
"Junior's cool," said Marcus.
"Yeah," said Phil.
"Hey, we saw your dad," said Marcus and Phil shook his head.
"I guess he is," he answered. "I don't really know him anymore
"Super Nintendo?" asked Ben, but the older boys ignored him.
"He was taking Sugar over there," said Marcus and The Dark Rid
"They got him in trailer seventeen," he confided. "All by himse
"Woah," said Ben. "Seven hundred channels."
"Sharad is pissed," said Phil. "He wants to get the secret out
"What secret?" Ben asked and both the older boys looked at him
"Invisibility"
"Duh"
"And coming back," Phil added. "Going invisible ain't so hard.
Trailer Seventeen

Bill Cody and Johan met behind a mountain of sawdust seven fee
"They all don't fly," he'd tell his mom, "there's a just a few
"How come they can?" she wanted to know, and he explained it w
"Sometimes you get a mix of things together in the blood," exp
"But that's not all the Hybrid stuff," said Marcus. He and Ben
"They're not like freaks," he said. "They're just the same as y
"How come Kansas can't do it?" Ben wanted to know, and Marcus
"He's learning. It just takes time. Sharad was really mad when
"Maybe that's his prison," Ben advised.
"I don't want to ever find out for myself," said Marcus. "Phil
"Phil thought it was Sharad's own trailer he was in, and maybe
"Karly likes you," Ben declared, as they passed her smile again
"You think so?" Marcus asked, but then he stuffed his hands ba
Buffalo Bill

The problem as Bill Cody saw it was simple and humanitarian. He
"I ain't the Lone Ranger," Cody said, but in his heart he knew
He was loyal, though, and a trooper. He was also the best flye

"I'm going to need some help," he said to Johan. "I can't do t
"What do you need?" asked Johan, who knew he couldn't do much
"We need information," Uncle Bill said, "and we need spies. An
"What about the Brazilians?" Johan volunteered. "They know the
"Not bad," said Uncle Bill. "I was also thinking about setting
"A conference?"

"Yeah, a cult leader convention, that kind of thing. You'd hav
"I don't know," said Johan, "I think I ought to keep out of si
"It's the only way to get LeMaster in the open," Bill replied.
"We're gonna need some kind of bait," said Uncle Bill. Johan s

Rick and Rod

Manny had a bad feeling about it when Mister Pete returned, la
"Closed!" shouted Manny with a mouthful of lukewarm peas.
"Open!" demanded Pete, and he pounded even louder on the door.
"All right, all right," he said, and he opened the door. Pete
"Boss wanna see you," he spat.
"Why you got to be so friendly?" Manny managed to rasp. Pete l
"God damn," he said, struggling up again. Pete was closer than
"You're coming, now," he said and pulled him by the arm out th
"I don't even got my seat belt on," Manny thought as the speed
"I appreciate your taking the time out of your busy schedule,"
"Do I know you?" Manny asked. Sharad glanced back, surprised.
"In here," he said, gesturing toward the trailer. Like every o
The trailers were set a little closer than in most such parks,
"Out," Sharad announced, and the five residents hurried to obe
"What's a blow job?" Ben inquired.
"Like mom and Otto," Marcus said.
"Oh, ok," said Ben.
"So," LeMaster said, after placing himself in the good seat. M
"I hear your boinking Mrs. Sweet"
"What's boinking?" Ben asked.
"The other thing," said Marcus, "now just listen, all right? O
"Anyway," he continued, "Manny did not deny it. And what's the
"It's not hurting me," said Sharad, "and I don't even care. I
"Why didn't you say so?" Manny asked. "I'm always good for tha
"Just want to make sure you understand who you're dealing with
"Beats me," Manny said. "She was going home the last I heard"
"Well, she didn't make it home," said Sharad. "We were waiting
"Um, okay?" Manny was uncertain. "But what if I can't? She don

"If you don't," said Sharad. "Well, if you don't... " God damn it, thought Sharad, what's the use of having power if "I'll break his legs?" offered Pete.

"Ok, yeah," said Sharad, "If you don't bring her, Pete will bring her."
Amy Biggs

When he got to Mister Pete's old house, Manny first had to get Emma out. "Come on, lady, I got to see my boys," he said, but Emma wouldn't budge. "Your boys are messing up my neighborhood," she said, "with their cars. They're spilling out against the ordinance," she said.

"Well, take it up with the city," suggested Manny, "just let me go."

Levantin heard the struggle from the living room and poked his head out.

"Hey lady," he shouted, "You can't block the walk like that. Run."

"What are you going to do about it?" Emma shot back, "that's none of your business."

"It's mine," yelled Phil from the upstairs bathroom.

"Do we got to call your daughter again?" threatened Junior Bus.

"Already here," announced the officer. Amy Biggs had pulled up.

"Come on, ma," she ordered, "get on home with you."

"I ain't going nowhere," Emma replied. "I got my civil rights."

"You got the right to get your ass back home," said Amy, "or I will call the cops."

Emma snorted and seemed about to come up with some other challenge.

"You don't know the trouble I got," said Manny to Junior Bus.

"What's that?" yelled Amy from her car. "Did you say Mrs. Sweet?"

"Yeah," said Manny turning back, "I got to find her right away."

"He what?" asked Amy. "Break your legs? What is this, some fuckin' joke?"

"You what?" Manny came running to the curb, with Junior Bus and Phil.

"She was speeding half naked down the wharf," expounded Amy Biggs.

"Where is she now?" Manny demanded.

"County, as far as I know," replied the officer. "You know a good lawyer?"

"Holy shit," said Manny. "Now I got to pay a lawyer? Why is even this happening?"

"Maybe it's because you're such a nice guy," Junior Bus suggested.

"You watch your mouth you want your job," said Manny, as the car drove off.

Levantin was thinking oh no, not me, I ain't busting anybody off.

"You got that lawyer already," said Junior Bus. "The one that broke your leg?"

"That sleaze ball?" Manny said. "Oh man, I guess I got no choice."

Sparky

Ben realized he had a lot to think about, and wished the flies would go away.

"This is your captain speaking," Marcus said, "your flight crew is waiting."

Ben was listing his favorite colors in alphabetical order. He was

Sparky the bulldog was lying next to Ben and breathing his raw
Marcus returned with a plastic grocery bag full of sawdust.
"This is really primo stuff," he said, "It's juniper and dougl
"I almost hate to burn it," he declared, plopping down next to
"How come Levantin can fly?" Ben asked. That was bugging him a
"It's something he picked up when he became invisible," said M
"I thought Sugar was the only one." he said.
"Oh no," said Marcus. "Didn't I tell you about that? It was ba
Doc

"Yes, well it's true," admitted Levantin, arriving with a bask
"Woah," said Marcus, digging into the basket to pull out some
"How?" asked Ben.
"I had a lot of time on my hands," Levantin said. "When I was
Levantin skewered several of the larger trout and bass and pla
"Doc was only nine or ten," said Roland, laughing. "We were fi
"Crazy," Levantin laughed. "He used to make the termites march
Roland pulled some plastic cups from underneath his white bere
"Watching the waves," Levantin said, "It gave me some ideas. I
"Seriously," said Roland. "You got to pay attention."
"So you know what they say," continued Levantin. "Practice, pra
"And the rest is history," Roland added. "Now let's eat. I'm s
Ben was stuffing his mouth with cherry tomatoes and guzzling l
"I can feel everything," he said, with the biggest smile across
"There's many ways to see the world," Levantin said. "You, my
Larry and Drake

"I always wanted to be a cult leader," Sharad was lecturing Su
"Even when I was a kid, I knew. There was this guy. They calle
Sharad paused in front of Sugar and glared down at the unmoving
"So are you going to help me or what?" Sharad demanded. Sugar l
"What can I do for you?" he asked, and not for the first time.
"You know what I want," Sharad said, "I want to know the secre
"It's catchy," Sugar agreed. He would basically agree to anyth
"I don't know," said Sharad. "It's not quite right. I never se
"I don't know it," Sugar said. "People tell me I went invisibl
"You were gone for SEVEN YEARS!!!" Sharad shouted. "Seven fuck
Sharad slammed his fist against the wall, causing yet another c
"We'll see what your wife has to say about that," he sneered w
"My wife?" asked Sugar, sounding curious.

"Yes, your god damn wife," said LeMaster, "Jalissa. Ring a bell?"
"If you say so," Sugar sighed, and closed his eyes. He figured
City Hall

Bill Cody came strolling up calm as anything to where Levantin
"He wants us to help with Sugar," Roland said, as if their con
"How do you know that?" Marcus asked.
"I know whatever Levantin knows," said Roland. "We're kind of"
"How would he know?" asked Marcus and Roland just laughed.
"That's why it's funny," he said. "Here," he continued, handin
"What's a spleen?" Ben asked.
"Oh, that's nothing a kid needs to know," said Marcus, acting
"Go on, it's good for you," and laughed even harder when the k
"Oh, that's something," Roland said, cocking his ear towards L
"Ooh, that's big," he said to the boys. "Damn big"
A few minutes, after Bill had left, Levantin and Roland discuss
"That's got nothing to do with us" said Roland. "I say we stay
"Too late now," Levantin said. "It's going on tonight"

Hosers

Fog was settling over the secret sidewalk as Marcus told a gro
"It only happens once in a lifetime," Marcus said. "And only w
"Hosers?" Ben was mumbling, struggling hard to keep awake. He
"You can see them at construction sites, hosing down the concre
The Compost people are the last to arrive. They are notoriously
"When Johan was thrown in jail, Bill Cody had to call for a ga

Visar Lim

"They all have special powers," Marcus went on. "The Compost p
"The Hosers have the power of tidiness. This is more useful th
"Then there are the mountaineers, who have the power of magnet
"Visar Lim lived long ago, but his descendants scattered throu
"It seems we've got a lot of stuff going on around here," said
"Yeah, like, where do we even begin?" Minot complained.
"Well, Johan's in hiding, but who is this Levantin? Is he a go
"And Sugar," Minot said. "I thought we already dealt with him"
"Somebody fucked up," said Dekkar. "Obviously"
"Well, it wasn't me," bickered Minot. "I had him placed with t
"Who always fall sleep on the job? Good thinking there"
"Hey. No one else wanted him. What was I supposed to do? And a

"Who gave him the bus map, then?"

"Okay, it's true, I gave him the map, but only as something to

"A bus map is never harmless," Dekkar scolded. "It can always

"Well, now we have the Compost and the Weedies coming in. Who'

"I'll take care of it," Dekkar said.

"Fancy talk," said Minot. "What if they forget their tools."

"I said I'll deal with it"

"Fine"

The two leaders huffed and turned away from each other. Dekkar

Ulrich

Jill Saginaw, leader of the dirt tribe, was the next to arrive

"Poz and Neg!" she cried out, using the nicknames they despise

"Ashes to ashes," Dekkar replied.

"Dust to dust," mocked Minot.

"Getting things done," asserted Jill. "So what's all this I he

"Clans pick their leaders," Dekkar said. "Ones above have got

"No, but who has to take out the trash every time?" Jill huffed

"I don't know what they expect from us this time," she went on

"Johan's not the problem anymore," Dekkar informed her. "It's

"Leakage?" The final tribal leader had arrived. Ulrich Haas, K

"I got some duct tape somewhere," Ulrich said. "That'll usually

"Not that kind of leakage," Dekkar sighed. "Special powers are

"What do you mean getting out?" demanded Jill. "That's a breach

"Exactly," Minot replied. "There's been a breach. A guy who ca

"Didn't we all, at one time?" Jill asserted. "Not you and I, p

"Possible," Dekkar said. "It's possible. There's another matte

"Typical," snorted Ulrich. "You either have 'em or you don't. I

"He's got ahold of Sugar," Dekkar said.

"Oh," said Ulrich.

"Sugar?" asked Jill.

"Sugar," repeated Minot.

Willy

"You see," said Marcus, "that's the problem with super powers.

There was no answer from Ben. Marcus was pretty sure that Ben

"Even if you could fly, you probably couldn't go very far befo

"Unrespectable?" Ben suddenly asked. Hearing the phrase 'super

"Undetectable," Marcus said, "it means you wouldn't know them

"He's got that little dog, Scrappy?"

"Yeah, that guy. He's one of the Hosers, did you know? Except
"What kind of a treasure?" Ben wanted to know.
"The key to the whole thing," Marcus replied. "The key to the
"Whatever," said Ben. He was beginning to get a little confused.
"Okay, never mind," said Marcus, who had a sense of when he was
"So what I want to know," said Ulrich Haas. "Tell me about LeMaster
Kitty Lake

"Oh, you don't want to mess with him," said Willy. "That Sharad
"I'm not going to mess with anyone," said Ulrich. "Not unless
"Well, okay, but I'm just saying," said Willy over his coffee.
"And Sharad ...," prodded Ulrich, a man who liked to get things
"So Sharad was Kitty's lover at first. He wouldn't want you to
"And Sharad ...," repeated Ulrich.
"Oh, it wasn't enough for him to be the manager of a trailer park
"Magnetism!," hissed Ulrich. "Talk about leakage. Damned Limbo
"Hell, LeMaster, he don't even know," laughed Willy. "He's out
"Normals!," Ulrich spat, "you got to spell it out for them."
"Easy as a, b, c," agreed Willy. "But he's gone a little crazy
"Naturally," said Ulrich, "it's the waxy buildup! It's what happens
"It's who we are," said Willy.
"It's what we do," said Ulrich.

Jesus

Manny had to make a difficult decision, so he locked himself in
Posting her bond was out of the question. Manny didn't have the
But how was she going to find out? The Brazilians might tell. Well,
But he had some excellent references. People were probably just

Candy McCormack

Things started to get out of hand when Emma Biggs decided she
Emma showed up and started pacing back and forth in front of the
The interview went well. Emma demanded that Sugar be released.
"That's my own house," Mister Pete said. "And I can tell you
Candy requested proof. Mister Pete declined. Emma Biggs began
"What are you hiding?" Candy insisted.
"Nothing," said Pete, "There's nothing to see"
"Then why not just open the door?" she inquired.
"It's my home," he repeated, "Mine."
"Free Sugar. Free Sugar. Free Sugar" the crowd more and more wild

"Don't you come any closer," warned Pete.

"Or what?" she demanded.

"I'm warning you," he said.

"Move out of the way" Emma said, and she walked right up to him.

"Ow!" Pete yelled, and he tried to get up, but he couldn't.

"God damn it," he shouted. "I think I've broken my leg!"

Stanley Mole

"What the hell is going on around here?" Sharad LeMaster demanded.

As Sharad reached the trailer, he saw Mister Pete writing in pencil.

"God damn it!" he shouted. "Everybody out of here. You're trespassing."

"Mom! Mom," yelled Amy Biggs. "What the fuck do you think you're doing?"

"I'm freeing the hostage!" her mom yelled back, kicking again.

"Stop it! Just stop it!" Amy yelled.

"Everybody freeze!" shouted a rookie cop, drawing his gun.

"Put that thing away," said Inspector Stanley Mole, and the rookie complied.

"You'll come with me now, ma'am," he softly said, and Emma reluctantly followed.

Lynx

During all the confusion, no one noticed the slight and momentary change in the air.

"Don't be afraid," Levantin said.

"Of what?" replied Sugar calmly. "You? Or them?"

"Of anything," replied Levantin. "I've come to get you out of here."

"But I like it here," said Sugar. Levantin was confused. The silence was heavy.

"You like it?" he replied.

"Yes," said Sugar, barely opening his eyes. "I can lie here all day long."

"They won't be so patient for long," said Levantin. "Your situation is precarious."

"Then let them," said Sugar. "I don't care. I'll tell them I'm fine."

"You can't do that," said Levantin.

"And why not?" asked Mr. Sweet.

"Because," Levantin said, "you've been dead a long time. You must be confused."

"They were talking about Mercury Lynxes," he said. "Wouldn't you like to see one?"

"They killed you," he said. "You were supposed to stay dead. That's the deal."

"I like it," said Sugar.

"No you don't," replied Levantin, "you really don't know how you feel."

"That explains a few things," nodded Sugar. "Like how I can walk and talk."

"It's time," said Levantin. He could hear the voices outside of the trailer.

"Okay," Sugar said, "whatever you say. I think that I know who you are."

"It'll be over in a jiff," said Levantin, and he leaned over to help Sugar.

Mrs. Saginaw

Sharad LeMaster's bad day just got worse and worse. After a night of sleep, a loud banging on the door woke him up. He had taken a break for the night.
"Mr. LeMaster?" the woman inquired.
"Yes, that's me," he replied, "Who are you?"
"I'm Jill Saginaw," she said, extending her hand, then retracting it.
"E.P.A.," she added. "Environmental Protection Agency."
"Yes I know what E.P.A. stands for," he interrupted, "but what do you want?"
"I have a letter here, sir," she said, presenting a form. Sharad took it.
"What is this?" he asked, waving the paper around.
"This property," she replied, "it is yours?"
"Yes, it's mine," he defended, "all mine. Every inch."
"It's condemned," Mrs. Saginaw said simply. Sharad was too stunned to say anything.
"You have twenty four hours," she continued. "You must vacate the property by then."
There was nothing at all he could do. The notice was final. Two weeks to go.

Ricky

At six the next morning, the Lim Demolition company made its arrival. The residents rushed off to find their leader, but Sharad LeMaster was already gone. It was swift. Giant machines like dinosaurs swooped and smashed. The work went fairly quickly. By noon there wasn't much left of the house. Ulrich was thinking of this when a large shaggy man walked toward him.
"It's not what you think," he said. Ulrich looked down, then looked up.
"Who is it?" he asked, but he already knew. Before Levantin replied.
"Of course. I will take him back home."
"Thanks," said Levantin, and he strode off the lot.

Epilogue

Now Marcus was thirsty too. He felt like he'd been talking all night.
"Good night, little brother," he said.
"G'night," mumbled Ben, as the sun began to rise above the second horizon.

From the same author on Feedbacks

Fissure Monroe (1984)

Dawn Debris is hired to find a possibly-radiation-poisoned leg bone of a high society fashionette who only wants to fit in with the new craze of skeletal transplants that's sweeping the nation. A store detective, a street musician, a tedious pundit and a suspicious beautician are all involved as market forces compete in a world where beauty is no longer skin deep.

The Part Time People (1984)

DeBarrie's Stationery Store needed help again. Somehow, the part-time people never worked out. It was a problem. One after another, the part-time people came and went, and sometimes, nobody ever found out what happened to them. The newest one seemed even more hopeless than usual. His job application announced "there's a man who follows me around and ruins everything I try to do".

Fixture (1984)

When a city commissioned a famous artist to create a masterpiece for their new refurbished downtown, they only forgot one thing: to tell him when to stop. Now his greatest work is threatening to take over everywhere. It's a race against time and space and dimensions nobody even knew were there!

Cashier World (1986)

A collection of stories, including the Legend of the Wandering Cashier, the roadside diner Angel of Death, and the classic tale of the Bathroom on the Bus

Rampant Pheromonix (1986)

When an overpopulated city is exposed to an epidemic of clairvoyance, all hell breaks loose. It's up to the 'wuns above' and Science to fend off the forces of both good and evil in a race against certain annihilation.

Dawn Debris (1996)

When his new idea is stolen, Morris Bevelhead turns to the best finder of lost things in the business - Dawn Debris, Private Eye.

After a hearty breakfast, Dawn finds herself trapped in a sinister conspiracy to save the world through orange juice. Can she pull the plug before it's too late, or will the mega company FedCorTron rule the day? It's a comic book without illustrations, extracted from the one and only 'Cashier World' collection.

Somebody Somewhere (1998)

Some psycho kidnaps his would-be girlfriend, gets chased by the cops halfway across the state, runs out of gas right outside your house, where you and your spouse are enjoying a quiet evening at home, and now you're held hostage at gunpoint and surrounded by police. It could happen.

Time Zone (1999)

This is not your father's time travel. There's no machine, no dial. There's no telling where or when you'll go. The only thing that can change is you. It will make you what it needs to make you. And if you come back, it won't be the same you. You're messing with the nature of things, and the nature of things does not like to be messed with.

Macedonia (2006)

A gang of street kids, an anonymous radio announcer, a detective from the future, a presidential assassination attempt and a frequently mistaken narrator all play a part in this jumble of introductions to an open-source novel inspired by the works of Macedonio Fernandez.

cover painting by Delma Soult

Hidden Highway (2007)

Sharad LeMaster ran away from his own cult, and tried to hide from his followers by taking a desk job in a motel in the middle of nowhere, but when a certain lazy ghost from his past reappears, Sharad is lured into a haunted house and becomes the proud possession of the witch Eugenia, and gets caught between rival black-market magic-potion dealers in their fight over a girl.

Golden (2007)

A man saved by accident from global human extinction is able to travel back in time within the previous century – the only problem

is, he's a black man in 20th century America. A screenplay based on characters from the novel *Time Zone*

Squatter With a Lexus (2007)

Pearson Holmes disappeared a long time ago, leaving behind a potentially valuable safety deposit box. Freddy the Freegan is the first to stumble across the mystery, but soon a whole cast of characters are out to find the key and claim the treasure before time runs out and the contents are forfeit to the state. Who will solve the riddle of the Squatter with a Lexus?

Missy Tonight (2008)

These days it seems like everyone is cashing in on the New Atheism craze, except for lifelong unbeliever Alan Musted. What's a portable toilet dispatcher to do? Crash the party, that's what! Join Alan and his friends and enemies in this ground-breaking work of "atheist pulp fiction", the spellbinding sequel to 'Orange Car with Stripes'

Orange Car with Stripes (2008)

It's the ultimate in atheist sci-fi comic pulp fiction! On a dare, Gian Carlo Spallanzini set out to discover the deepest darkest secret of a person picked at random. He had no idea what he was getting into. Even a fat, bearded know-it-all ought to know better than to leap before you look. Add a crystal ball, a foul-mouthed parrot, and a cranky atheist talk show host and you'll never guess the outrageous mystery behind the orange car with stripes.

Snapdragon Alley (2009)

Book One of the Dragon City Trilogy: Ten year old friends Alex and Sapphire discover something strange on the city bus map, a street that existed for only one year. As they set out to solve the mystery, they encounter the possibility of another world, another dimension perhaps, lurking in a vacant lot, but they are not the only ones on the trail. Who will discover the truth, and who will pay the price? (cover photo courtesy of Michael Gakuran <http://www.gakuranman.com>). Followed by 'Freak City' and 'Dragon Town'

Freak City (2009)

Book Two of the Dragon City Trilogy: It's hard to control your destiny while you're waiting for the bus. The trouble for Argus Kirkham began when a stranger pushed his way through a crowd at a bus stop and pressed a package into his hands. Inside the package were various random items . As Argus and his friends unraveled the clues, very strange things began to occur in this story of mystery and ghosts. Following Snapdragon Alley, and followed by Dragon Town

World Weary Avengers (2009)

The good folks at World Weary Avengers Incorporated had a simple idea - changing the world for the better merely by talking loudly in public. Seemed simple enough, but even with the help of the most sophisticated hand held device ever invented, some jobs are better not left to amateurs. You never know what kind of hell could break loose.

Bobby and the Bedouins (2009)

Mario Flambeau was once a guitar god, a superstar in the psychedelic heyday. Now he's a burned-out wreck. When a desperate producer finds him in a church basement in a band with other derelicts, he has visions of a major comeback payday. Add a drummer with an anger management problem and a preening drifter diva lead singer, and you've got all the makings of a true rock and roll apocalypse

Zombie Nights (2010)

Being a zombie, not so easy. That could have been Dave Connor's six word memoir. "At first he couldn't remember how he'd ended up in that shallow grave; he just knew it was hell to claw his way out, and that the taste of its dirt would remain in his mouth for the rest of his time on this earth" ... Expect the unexpected in this existential resurrection thriller.

Death Ray Butterfly (2010)

Inspector Stanley Mole doesn't mind a hard case, but things have gotten out of hand. There's a killer who escapes to a parallel universe, a 20,000 year old murder, a witness to her own death, a toddler assassin, subatomic-particle sniffing butterflies, and much,

much more. This time it's not just his reputation that's on the line. This time it's more than personal.

Ledman Pickup (2010)

The world's most sophisticated gadget falls into the wrong hands - its own, and leads its creators on a most unpredictable chase. One thing leads to another when this newly sentient package gets lost in transit.

Raisinheart (2010)

Three stories of a lonely youth. Jimmy Kruzel's bad luck is that his worst enemies are always his best friends, or is it the other way around, and that sometimes his darkest hours seem to come right after the dawn. In tales more bitter than sweet, Jimmy finds that you can attract more flies with honey than you can with vinegar, but really, who wants to attract flies anyway?

Tiddlywink the Mouse (2010)

A collection of oddly surreal stories for unusual children, featuring a mouse and his friends - a squirrel, an elephant, a limpet and a fish - along with an assortment of mischievous clouds and cowardly mushrooms.

Unwritten Rules of Impossible Things (2010)

What if someone - or something - stole one of your days? Just one, and you didn't know why, or what they had done with your life in that time? Young Philip Galvez and his friend Marcus Holmes found out for themselves when they decided to discover why there was a giant stuffed moose in a house down the road.

Renegade Robot (2010)

It's the end of the world as we know it, when the dreaded Singularity finally occurs and happens to be captured, live on tape, by agents of the Frantic News Network, which freaks out, as usual, and causes a lot of trouble for the mild-mannered nanobot exterminator who happens to get caught in the crossfire.

Inspector Mole and the Frozen Stiff (2010)

Inspector Stanley Mole doesn't mind a hard case, but things have gotten out of hand. There's a killer who escapes to a parallel

universe, a 20,000 year old murder, a witness to her own death, a toddler assassin, subatomic-particle sniffing butterflies, and much, much more. This time it's not just his reputation that's on the line. This time it's more than personal.

(Also distributed as 'Death Ray Butterfly')

Bookstore Lore: The Stupidest Questions Ever Asked in a Bookstore (2010)

The original collection of "Most Stupid Questions Ever" with an introduction by Chris Haight, and collected by generations of bookstore workers from downtown San Francisco, California. Advisory: These are not your friendly neighborhood bookstore clerks!

Phantom of the Mall (2011)

The settlers were dispatched to a distant world to prepare the way for the great migration. Everything went according to plan, a little too smoothly, perhaps. Now there's only one thing missing in New Town, just a minor detail. Dystopia in G Minor. The Phantom of the Mall.

All Geeked Up (2011)

Gadget lovers beware! Those amazing devices in your hands and pockets today will seem primitive and trivial very soon. That day is fast approaching. Already the greatest minds of the generation after the next are hard at work, dreaming up trouble beyond all imagination. Tomorrow's little black boxes will turn the whole world upside down.

From their humble beginnings as inventors of a handheld device with mind control potential, the tech-folk behind World Weary Avengers, Incorporated moved on to develop such gadgets as the one capable of recording an individual's very personality and replaying it back into another. Devices with even more sinister potential are only the tip of the iceberg. Only a small band of software quality assurance engineers stands between these audacious software developers and your very soul. Would you trust such as these with the future of mankind? I didn't think so.

In 'World Weary Avengers', the beginning of the end, old friends Tom and Chris decide to change the world by radically simple means. In 'Ledman Pickup', one of Tom's rare new devices is let loose in the wild, as the gadget seeks to make its own way in the

world, on its own terms. 'In Constant Contact' continues the saga of inventions gone wrong, when professional friends lead to nothing but trouble.

Attack of the Sexy Teenage Vampires (2011)

Safety in numbers? Don't kid yourself. There's nothing more dangerous than a crowd. Even when it's not a mob, it's hiding certain elements, concealing dangers. Anyone could be an enemy.

Anyone could have their sights on you. Do not relax. Do not feel safe. You are being watched. You should know it and beware.

Jimmyland (2011)

A screenplay based on the story 'Phantom of the Mall'. The settlers were dispatched to a distant planet to build a colony to house the future of mankind. They had everything they needed, except a backup plan in case things went horribly wrong, and there was no way home.

Rainbow Country (2011)

A stage play. When Thalia Jennings inherits a mountain resort from the father she never knew, she discovers it to be much less - and infinitely more - than she ever imagined.

Sexy Teenage Vampires (2011)

You live long enough you see everything. That's what old Bill told himself. Working down in the underground train station all those years he figured he'd pretty much seen it all, until they showed up, first one, and then the other. A love story in black and red.

Return of the Sexy Teenage Vampires (2011)

Some bad things happen mostly during rush hour. People are careless. They're tired and not paying as much attention as they should. They fail to see things that are right in front of them. They see other things which aren't even there. They hear the noises of the crowd but later wonder why their arm is bleeding in this short story, the sequel to the original 'Sexy Teenage Vampires'

Dragon Town (2011)

Argus Kirkham, age 39, finds himself dragged unwillingly into an inexplicable situation when an old friend, international

correspondent Sapphire Karadjian, is assigned to cover a strange mystery, a volcanic sinkhole which has swallowed an entire football stadium, and from which a weird and nameless young girl has emerged, hair and clothes on fire, with a message for Argus. Book Three of the Dragon City Trilogy, *Following Snapdragon Alley and Freak City*.

In Constant Contact (2011)

The good folks at World Weary Avengers are at it again. Now they've come up with a device that keeps you in continual contact with a "professional friend", someone guaranteed to always be there, whenever you need them, to be whatever you need them to be. Now it's up to Kandhi Clarke and her team of test engineers to make sure it does what it's supposed to, and not what it's not, before this latest tech-astrophe is let loose on the world.

The New Guy In Moon Base Twelve (2012)

They weren't exactly the crew the President had in mind when he announced his plan to build a permanent base on the moon so the Chinese wouldn't do it first, but there they were, a boring collection of peaceful, happy settlers who couldn't even get a decent reality TV show rating. Life was perfectly dull until the new guy arrived. Now if they could only find out who he was and where he'd come from.

The Book's Review Of Itself:

In the hands of a more traditional writer, this could have been a full-fledged novel replete with well-developed characters enduring dramatic interpersonal conflicts portending dire consequences for all mankind. Instead, it's just another silly, light-hearted satirical sketch of the kind its characters have come to expect of their author. Of course there are the usual larger meanings lurking beneath the surface, but you'd have to drill a little to build something out of them. The book may have one possible answer to that infamous question, "can't we all just get along?" Well? What if we could?



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