

Suggested episode music: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=usq31bJio5k>

Dunno how i missed it the first time, but he also designed this Alternate Reality game <http://www.collapsus.com/experience.php> ALSO apparently he was the developer of Hunter: The Vigil by white wolf games!

Chuck Wendig

Who is chuck wendig?

From his blog: “Chuck Wendig is a novelist, screenwriter, and game designer. This is his blog. He talks a lot about writing. And food. And the madness of toddlers. He uses lots of naughty language. NSFW. Probably NSFL. Be advised.”

this first piece is a bit of dirty erotica, with a fun twist! So as not to spoil the surprise, the title comes at the end. I've highlighted some standout phrases to help you discover the comedy faster. please note that he uses line breaks like commas.

<http://terribleminds.com/ramble/holy-shit-free-thing/a-radioactive-monkey/>

“Just drink it,” she said.

Slow night. Snow and sleet came down like slushy piss. The bar was empty but for him and her. But this is where Jonny Stoops found himself, night after night, no matter the weather.

It wasn't for the drinks. It was for her.

“It's on the house,” Miranda said.

She slid a highball glass toward him. The liquid within was brown, but not the amber-brown of a good scotch. This was mud brown. Grossly turbid. Like stirred-up pondwater.

Though, it did smell sweet.

“That doesn’t look so good,” he said.

She giggled. “Jon –“

“Jonny.”

“Jonny, listen, you come in here every night, all by your little lonesome, and you sit across the bar and you talk to me. If I’m off pouring drinks, you watch me. I’ve been here for three months, and I’ve seen you here every night. You like me. I *know* you like me.”

“No, c’mon, I’m just a drunk –“

“You’re not a drunk. You barely touch your drinks.”

She was right, but what was he supposed to say? He couldn’t tell her that he was just passing by outside, saw her inside pouring beer from the tap, when something *clicked* inside of him. His heart thumped like jungle drums, his blood shrieked in his ears, a wild sound. He had to come inside, had to talk to her, had to be *near* her.

“You’re a sweet guy,” she said. “I like sweet guys. There’s something between us. Something animal.”

“I do like you.”

“So drink the drink, do me that favor. Maybe if you drink it, I’ll give you a little kiss.”

“A little one?”

“Just drink it.”

He narrowed his eyes to slits, imagined kissing her.

His mouth was wet. His pulse stuttered.

“What’s in it?” he asked. It smelled like bananas and something else.

“Not telling. I call it a Radioactive Monkey.”

“Cute.”

“I know.”

Hand curled around the glass, he pictured her naked. Feeding him the drink. Licking his ear. Hot breath. Rough tongue.

He shuddered, then slugged back the drink.

It tasted like cold, runny dogshit mixed with a mouthful of blood.

With a hint of banana.

She reached in and kissed him on his forehead (*the lips, the lips!* some small part of him shrieked), and then—

...

He awoke, tied to a bed that was not his own. He was naked, a tangle of sheets cast haphazardly across his thighs.

His erection stood strong and sore. It throbbed; a hammer-struck thumb.

He couldn’t remember a thing.

In the half-darkness, he saw Miranda sitting in the corner on a rocking chair. He heard something move off to his right, but his neck and head hurt. What felt like a hangover hung from his brain like a swaying boat anchor.

Miranda was stroking her belly.

“Your seed took,” she said. She sounded... satisfied.

“Okay,” he said, his voice groggy and slurred. He tried to concentrate, tried to remember, but things just weren’t coming together.

“I’m going to have your baby.”

“I’m not ready to be a father,” was the only thing he could think to say. Did her arms look different? Darker? Her breasts, too, seemed cast in the same shadow. A shadow with lines, with texture.

“No worries, I don’t need you. They don’t need you.”

“Good.” His head was swimming.

“But my other babies do.”

Babies?

Something shuffled, off to his left.

She cooed: “My little monkey babies.”

Shapes began moving, converging at the foot of the bed. At first he saw only two, but more moved out of the periphery and into sight.

Children.

No—his mind railed. *Chimpanzees*. Or something like them. Chimpanzees weren’t monkeys, were they?

He couldn’t believe he was thinking about this.

Primates, he thought. *They’re all primates*.

They came into the meager light.

One’s eye hung from the socket on a glistening tendon.

Another had a long tongue, forked; it flicked the air beneath a piggish, thuggish nose and a pair of human eyes.

One climbed onto the bed, using the rope around his foot as a hand-hold. He saw its teeth, sharp and pointed. Lips curled back over yellow fangs.

“They’re hungry,” she said, just as the toothy one clamped its mouth on the inside of Jonny’s thigh. He felt little pain, only numbness, but could feel the warm splash of blood running down and wetting the sheets.

More clambered atop him. Broken monkeys: wild eyes and many limbs.

One bit off his ear.

Then some fingers.

A third—or fifth, or seventh—took a mouthful of his pectoral, sucking the man-breast into its mouth like a whole scoop of ice-cream, the nipple as the cherry.

“Feed, my little radioactive monkeys,” Miranda hissed from across the room. “*Feed.*”

And as she moved closer, he saw her chest and arms were covered with a dense hair. She grunted something, and in her eyes he saw something wild, something primitive. Something *animal*.

Then they ate his eyes, and that was the end of that.

A RADIOACTIVE MONKEY

BY CHUCK WENDIG

Another Monkey themed Story by Chuck Wendig

I DON'T DRINK ANYMORE

BY CHUCK WENDIG

She stands outside the brownstone under sodium light.

The bruises have begun to fade. The cuts – on her lips and chin, across her brow, on her hands – have long-crustured over. She's going to have the limp for a while, but oh well.

The case in her hands is heavy. But worth it. Because it's her way back in.

Jack answers the door. Is he happy to see her? Or just puzzled?

"Amanda," he says.

"I know you love Scotch," is the first thing to come out of her mouth even though she hasn't seen him for years, and she thrusts the case up and hopes he'll take it. "This isn't just Scotch, though, this is the real deal, a, a, a really rare..." She's nervous. She shouldn't be nervous. Given everything. But she imagines the kiss—their first in a long time, the first since everything happened. "I went through a lot to get it for you."

* * *

The spider monkey screamed and kicked her in the face, sending up a spray of sweat.

Another leapt onto her back, hooting and shrieking.

Amanda grabbed the one from behind, used him like a reaper's scythe to knock the other monkey's feet out from under, letting go as she completed the move so they both bowled into one another. They crashed into the corner of the courtyard, knocking over a terracotta pot of reedy *Cyperus papyrus*. The pair of gangly primates clambered atop one another, hissing, and in the deep of their throats she saw the winking red light.

“What is it you want?” Kebir said, stroking the fennec fox that stood on his bony left shoulder the way an angel might perch on a pin. The gun in his hand pointed at her heart.

“I want Delacroix,” she said.

Kebir crossed the space between them. He pressed the gun between her breasts.

“But you don’t know where he is.”

“I know he’s here. In Tangiers.”

Kebir smiled. His gums were puckered and pulled away from the teeth. “If only I would tell you where.”

His eyes went wide as he realized: Amanda had the khanjar knife with its camel bone handle against Kebir’s manhood. Kebir sighs.

“...Delacroix is beneath Benhaddou.”

* * *

“It looks... old,” Jack says. He doesn’t take the case. Her arms tremble.

“It’s not just old. It’s rare.” She smiles. “Rarest of the rare. Like you. Like us.”

* * *

She had Delacroix by his wife-beater, her knee in his pumpkin gut, his blubbery head held over a yawning chasm. Beneath him, giant stone gears boomed and growled as they turned. Stones tumbled into the abyss, swiftly pulverized by the hungry cogs.

“You know what I want!” she yelled over the din.

“I don’t have it! I told you! *Please.*”

Behind them, streams of sand whispered from above: a shard of earth tumbled and shattered. The bodies of the robot soldiers lay half-buried.

The whole place was coming down. All the trip-wires and trigger stones. Leading to this. But she wasn't going to think about that now.

"Who?" she asked. "*Who.*"

"Krüger! I sold it to Krüger." He wept. It gave her pause, this grown man crying so. It was all he needed. His pudgy hand shot out, grabbing a fistful of sand and throwing it in her eyes. Amanda toppled from his prodigious body, her vision watery, blinking away the stinging sand-born tears, and by the time she could again see, Delacroix was ducking down a hidden side-passage, the wall closing fast behind him.

It didn't matter. She had a name. And it explained so much. The monkeys. The robots.

* * *

He isn't taking it. She doesn't understand.

"It's really been a long time," he says. He looks then over his shoulder. What is he looking for? She imagines making love to him again. How sweet it will be.

* * *

Krüger danced around the room with the eyedropper, pirouetting *this* way, waltzing *that* way. He tilted his handsome head back, extending his tongue, and then placed a drop of amber liquid there. Krüger was like a child catching snowflakes. He laughed.

Then: a tap-shuffle-slide over to his wall of super-soldiers. Nine of them. Each a Frankenstein stitching of flesh, plastic, and metal. Krüger grabbed the jaw of one, yanking it downward. He squeezed the eyedropper's bulb and dropped a liquid dot in the soldier's mouth.

Slowly, the cyborg's eyes opened and focused. The half-man shifted in his bonds.

Krüger sashayed to the next in line, whistling.

But he didn't make it. The butt of a rifle cracked him in the back of the head.

He looked up from the ground. Amanda eased the mouth of the .30-30 against his throat.

"You look like hell," Krüger said.

She did. Split lip. Blood from a forehead gash. Worse, she still had the limp from escaping the collapsing tomb beneath Aït Benhaddou. Krüger's tower defenses were top-notch.

"I'm taking Shackleton's Scotch," she said.

"Without it, how will I fuel my beautiful babies?"

She shrugged. "You won't. I need it for someone."

"Do I see love in your eye?"

That old romantic. "You do."

"Then you may have it." He laughed, but then suddenly yelled: "Kill her!"

The super-soldier puffed out his chest, snapping the metal bar holding him in place. The cyborg screamed, a metallic wail—

Bang.

Amanda put a bullet in his eye.

The cyborg fell like a stack of teacups.

Krüger looked crushed. "Sorry," she told him, then kicked him in the face.

* * *

“I don’t drink anymore,” Jack says, retreating a step.

“No, wait,” she says, laughing because this suddenly seems so absurd. “This is *Shackleton’s* Scotch. Lost. Preserved in the Antarctic ice for 100 years. Nobody else is going to taste this. Nobody but you and me.” She feels her heart sink. “You love Scotch.”

The door opens behind him. A little girl no older than three runs out—all pigtails and footy pajamas and freckle-cheeks—and hugs his leg. “Daddy, Daddy, story-time!”

“It really has been a long time,” he says again, and she’s not sure if it’s an apology or an explanation or what. But then he retreats another step, and another, and he and the little girl go back inside and the door closes with a gentle, hesitant click.

“I love you,” Amanda says to the door. She leaves the case on the steps.

Now, in case you were thinking that this guy is a total hack, hold on there, because he is the published author of many writing advice books, such as this one:

<http://terribleminds.com/ramble/>

REVENGE OF THE PENMONKEY



CHUCK WENDIG

WHAT'S IN THE BOOK?

“If it weren’t for Chuck Wendig’s advice, I’d have fallen off the writing map long ago. **This is the book you want stapled to your chest when you march into the battle of authorship!**” – Karina Cooper, author of BLOOD OF THE WICKED

“Chuck Wendig hammers out writing and career advice that’s always brave, profane, creative, clever, and honest. And don’t forget hilarious. You’ll never laugh so hard learning so much.” – Matt Forbeck, game designer and author of AMORTALS and VEGAS KNIGHTS.

It’s time once more for a grim and greasy descent into the penmonkey’s world as Chuck Wendig offers up a gonzo NSFW look at what life is like as a writer.

REVENGE OF THE PENMONKEY takes writers through their paces and karate-chops them in the trachea with a no-holds-barred drill sergeant approach to a writing career. Wendig — equal parts novelist, game designer, screenwriter and all-around freelance penmonkey — gives a candid and hilarious look at what it takes to survive as a modern day inkslinger.

Features 30 essays such as:

“How To Tell If You’re A Writer”

“How To Jumpstart A Stalled Novel”

“Panster Versus Plotter”

“Six Signs You’re Not Ready To Be A Professional Writer”

“Why Writers Drink”

“Word-Karate: On Writing Action Scenes”

“Writers Should Be Motherf**king Rock Stars”

Also features the Second Writer’s Prayer (“The Inkslinger’s Invocation”), a 10,000-word “memoir” called “True Confessions Of A Freelance Penmonkey” and 20+ questions with Chuck Wendig.

Be advised: This is not a book for writers with weak constitutions or delicate hearts. If you blanch, balk and stammer at bad words and spluttering invective, this is not the book for you. If you are averse to a camping hatchet forged from the metals of unrefined honesty cleaving your face and brain in twain, then once again, this is not the book for you. If you want your hand

held? Forget this book. If you want touchy-feely-tickly empowerment? Forget this book. If you find that satire gives you hemorrhoids? Forget this book.

Are you ready to go big and go bold? Are you ready to bleed on the page for your work? Then gaze into the unblinking eye of REVENGE OF THE PENMONKEY, a book of humorous writer-focused essays and articles of booze-soaked, profanity-brined writing advice.

Short story time! This is a soap opera in one act by chuck whatthefuck wendig. This piece is a study in the powerfully evocative imagery of a series of photographs, a favorite of film directors since time immemorial.

<http://terribleminds.com/ramble/holy-shit-free-thing/lethe-and-mnemosyne/>

LETHE AND MNEMOSYNE

BY CHUCK WENDIG

They eased the photos down in front of the old man, who gnawed a lip and peered at them through narrowed eye.

“Please,” his daughter said, pushing the hospital tray full of photos toward him, “you need to remember.”

In one photo, the old man’s father — their grandfather — sat in the cab of a gleaming John Deere tractor in the middle of a bright, broad cornfield, the tractor eclipsed by a giant, fat-necked Rhode Island Red hen with a rose comb on top. The hen was caught mid-gobble, her beak snapping up whole corn cobs right off their stalks.

In the photo after, the old man as a boy sat on his father's lap as the man handed over his farm ledgers to a goat-legged fellow wearing suspenders and a pair of mud-caked boots. Everybody wore smiles.

In the third and fourth photos, the old man as a teenager was gunning a 1952 Chevy Bel Air hard-top across beach sands the color of custard. A mermaid sat on the hood, black ravens-wing hair cascading behind her, her eyes wild, her red mouth laughing.

"Pop," the son said, "they've seen the hen down off of Route Nine, and godsamnit if she hasn't torn the top from the Walsatch's silo. You need to think on how you get that chicken to leave this town again, 'cause this world isn't made for that kind of thing anymore. Think, Pop, think. We need you to remember."

"This can't go on," the daughter says. "Eleanor Walsatch says they might sue. We can't handle another lawsuit."

"Is it a word?" the son asked. "Is that what sends the hen away? Is there something you used to scratch in the dirt?"

The old man looked at the photos one more time, but the truth was, the stroke had left his brain a mess, and no matter how long he stared, he remembered none of it.

This is a response to a story contest on this guy's blog that I rather liked. Most of them aren't worth looking at, I've selected the best one below.

<http://jeremypodolski.com/2013/11/19/short-fiction-rules-of-mortality/>

I won't tell you how I died, and they can't tell you why. The debriefing, though, was harsh. I expected St. Peter and a handshake, maybe a glass of wine and some beef Wellington, but apparently the dead are far from heaven's upper class.

Instead, I got the penitentiary treatment, whisked down a gutter gray hallway by two burly escorts whose violent shoves were so frequent that my obedient march looked more like a drunken gallop. By the time we reached a windowless door, stamped with the word “ANOMALIES” in bold silver, I was sore and ready to spit fire.

The door swung open with no more than a glance from the oaf on my right, who thrust me into an unfurnished room that smelled of overheated circuitry. The enclosure was seamless, like the inside of an egg, and not much bigger than a minivan.

“Go to hell!” I yelled, but they were gone before I could turn around.

I dropped hard to the concave floor in a tangle of tawny arms and legs. After minutes that felt like hours camped in blackness behind covered eyes, I raised my lids to notice I was wearing the same dark jeans as the day before. The pair with the cigarette burn on the right thigh and (fishing into the back pocket on the same side) six neatly folded bills – \$600 in all.

“Huh,” I said out loud. “I guess you can take it with you.”

I was contemplating possible conversion rates for my liquid assets when I felt the floor – no – the whole room moving. My egg-cell pivoted until it was on end, and I slid like a greasy yolk to the wide bottom. The light, which was already an uncomfortable glare, intensified to the point I shielded my face out of reflex, but it did little good. I could barely stand or see.

The first blow caught me by surprise, knocking me off my unsteady feet and causing an awkward fall that forced my chin into my own knee. Pain like electricity shot through my jaw and reverberated off my clenched teeth. Still blinded, I sensed the hand that reached for me, but I had no evasive maneuver to consider. I only tried to brace myself with an outstretched arm. Around it wrapped long fingers like hot knives that seared my skin down to the nerve endings, and I collapsed to the floor in a heap.

“You are not supposed to be here,” said the owner of the hand still squeezing my forearm like a tourniquet.

Although the pain warped my vision as much as the light, my eyes were beginning to adjust. I stole an upward glance, expecting to see a menacing archangel or a creature born of vengeful imagination. Finding an ordinary-looking man leaning over me was uniquely unsettling.

Remaining supplicatory, I growled, probably too defensively: “You think I’m in control? I’m not the goddamn queen bee, here. This isn’t my show.”

“LIES!” His voice projected like a turbine, launching me into the curved wall behind, and I struggled to gain my footing as the room shuddered in the wake of the eruption.

“I don’t think we’re working from the same script,” I said, slowing my speech, trying to strike a compliant tone. “I may have been in the wrong place at the wrong time. Who knows, maybe it was the *right* place at the wrong time. But shit happened, and I’m here. And, to be honest, I’m starting to think this place is a few heavenly choirs shy of utopia. Where am I really?”

The man clasped his hands at chest level, as if praying.

“Let’s just say you’re on a detour as opposed to... the grand tour,” he said, slightly calmer but still smoldering with concentration.

“Riddles. Beautiful. I suppose that’s why I’m tasting blood instead of gorging on ambrosia or whatever you guys eat up here?”

He took a half-step closer. A surprising hint of lavender wafted from the wide, charcoal lapel of his sharply cut suit.

“Your death was... unexpected,” he said after a palpable pause. “That means protocols were broken. And when protocols are broken, someone is to blame.”

I started circling then, hoping to maintain ownership of my space. “Well, I don’t know who would have the ability or the nerve to sidestep your operation. This is a maximum security outfit. Nobody’s hacking it.”

“True, we are adept at enforcing our rules. Yet, we’ve built our walls around a jungle. So, every now and then a snake,” he stopped to inspect me from head to toe, “may slip between the cracks.”

The temperature of the room was escalating, but not a single bead of sweat formed on the smooth, bronze head of my captor. He simply continued his unabashed stare.

“Whether or not I’m a reptile is debatable, but any crack I slipped through wasn’t of my making,” I said. “I understood I’d be exposed to risk. I didn’t sign on for treachery.”

He grabbed me by the bare shoulders. This time, his hands were cold as ice.

“Then why are you here,” he hissed, “when there is no basis for your demise, no itinerary for your arrival, and no knowledge of your destiny having changed?”

“Listen!” I shouted, whirling out of his grip. “I can’t be the victim AND the villain!”

And I knew, then, that I had him. It wasn’t that my lie was particularly convincing or that it was delivered with indisputable authority. I could just feel the momentum of the confrontation change. I caught a tremor in his steely gaze. A twitch in the muscles of his taut forehead. There was some key connection he failed to grasp, a critical gap in knowledge he could not bridge. He no longer had a choice.

“Go,” he said. And nothing else.

The new corridor I entered appeared endless, but I could tell that it widened as I walked toward a warm light in the distance. I was alone, so I took off my black tank to wrap around the burns on my arm. I doubted they would ever heal in the conventional sense, but I didn’t think I needed to worry about that anymore.

Much of my life had been hijacked by worrying. About others. About myself. About the rules. The worry cripples you, and the rules keep you from ever healing. And you believe that's just how it is. There is no alternative. That's life.

But the truth is, despite what they tell you, there is more than one way to get into heaven.

For the final piece I have selected the longest short story on his website that is available for free. It's called "Product Placement." It's too depressing in its entirety, I've edited out a subplot about an abortion, which included, I shit you not, a fucking [GIGANTOR](#) reference.

PRODUCT PLACEMENT

BY CHUCK WENDIG

<*>

Donnie watched the farm report – well, the farm report was *on*, but who really watches the farm report? – and examined the Flix Bar.

Yellow wrapper, as noted. "Flix Bar" written in blue letters bordered by pink. A little green thing, some kind of alien by the look of it, held up a pair of delighted jazz-hands next to the logo. Big smile, too, on that alien. Purple teeth grinning.

He tore the bar open.

Inside, a dark chocolate brick.

He smelled it. Strong cocoa smell. Or cacao. Or whatever.

"Oh, man," he mumbled through the sweetness, "that's good."

The texture was just right, too. Soft chocolate, wet honey-goo, crunchy flake wafer. He picked a gobbet of candy from a back molar, savoring it, then glanced at the alarm clock next to the bed. Donnie had to move a half-empty bottle of tequila and a pair of dirty socks to see it.

“Ah, crap.”

He was going to be late for work. Again.

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That didn't stop him from grabbing two more Flix Bars from the machine on the way out, of course.

<*>

Bob Horkin, with his smashed-flat nose and puckered butthole eyes, came over and dropped a stack of pink forms in front of Donnie.

“Bug off, Horkin.”

“You gonna get those forms filled out today?”

Donnie gritted his teeth. The guy's voice was like sandpaper on his frontal lobe. “Didn't I just say to bug off? Bug off. Shoo.”

“Gimme one of those Flix Bars, and I'll leave.”

Next to the mountain of pink forms, and only a few inches from the leaning tower of blue forms, sat the two Flix Bars he'd purchased earlier.

“You like Flix Bars?” Donnie asked.

“Always have.”

“Then, no, you can't have one. Go away.”

Horkin made some exhalation of disgust – a *pfah!* sound – and marched off. Donnie didn't need him as a friend. Denying that man pleasure was the only measure of satisfaction he could muster.

“One of those candy bars for me, man?”

Donnie looked behind him, found Tabor bringing the mail cart with the one squeaky, epileptic wheel. Tabor was huge, hunkered over that cart like Godzilla playing pinball. The fact that the cart was painted white and Tabor was about the darkest shade of black outside of a midnight sky during a lunar eclipse, it only enhanced the visual.

“As a matter of fact,” Donnie said, “it is.” And it was, too, no lie. He tossed a Flix Bar back, and Tabor caught it in the palm of one tennis racket hand.

Tabor pulled up an empty chair.

“How you holding up, brother?” he asked.

“Yeah, let’s not talk about that.”

The big dude’s lips formed a surprised ‘o.’

“What?” Donnie asked.

“It’s your breath, man. You don’t need to tell me how you’re doing, because your breath tell the whole damn story. Smells like someone poured tequila on a dead possum and shoved it in your mouth to pickle for a couple days, maybe weeks.”

“I drank some.”

“Some?”

“Most. All. Just eat your Flix Bar.”

Tabor crumpled the wrapper, shot it at a wastebasket and missed. Shrugging, he bit his candy bar in half. It formed a swollen lump in his cheek as he chewed.

“Like it?” Donnie said. “I figured you might wanna try one.”

“Try one? I *love* these things.”

“Oh, you had one before? This was my first.”

“Yeah, right.”

“Yeah, right what? I’ve never had a Flix Bar before.”

“Who hasn’t had a Flix Bar? That’s like someone saying they’ve never had a can of Coke or a Big Mac. You living in a cave in Afghanistan or something?”

“Shut up, I’ve never even *seen* one of these before.”

Tabor pitched the second half of the Flix Bar into his maw and chomped away. He waved a dismissive hand at Donnie. “Whatever, man. You’re still drunk, that’s what I’m hearing you say.” He stood up, swung the chair back under an empty cubicle desk. “Never had a Flix Bar before, my ass. I’ll see you later, Donnie. Stay sane, brother.”

“Yeah, yeah. I’m fine.”

“Fine. Uh-huh.”

<*>

It was a curious thing, how alcohol cured a hangover. It’d be like if getting punched in the face a second time helped the pain of the first.

He couldn’t do tequila, though, so tonight it was cheap wine. Tasted like fake strawberry. Came in a box. Perfect.

“I’m going to rot my teeth out of my head,” he said to himself as he unwrapped another Flix Bar.

He started to crumple the wrapper, but then uncrumpled it.

On the back, he read: “Made by Perigree!”

Never heard of them, either. Must be a new company, he figured.

<*>

The fruity wine, now half-empty, was starting to gross Donnie out. The sweet candy treats – four Flix Bars by this point, he was going to have the worst case of acne – weren't helping. He wanted something salty. Maybe pretzels, even though, you know, blah, yuck. Instead, he just sat propped up against the headboard of the bed, flicking through channels, feeling queasy.

Buzzing past a channel, he caught a glimpse of something.

Green alien. Purple teeth.

Wagging jazz-hands.

He flicked back.

“—proud to announce the 50th Anniversary Flix Bar! Inside every special edition Flix Bar is a secret code! Text message the code to this number —“

Sure enough, a number flashed on the screen below the dancing alien.

“—and Flix the Moon Alien might call you back to tell you you're a winner!”

“What do I win?” Donnie asked the television. Being half-drunk and three-quarters queasy, he believed that the television could probably hear him. He was not disappointed. The screen erupted in colors. The alien put a few new moves into his dancing: a little disco spice, a dash of Travolta, a pinch of roller rink panache. It made Donnie dizzy just watching it.

“You win a lifetime supply of Flix Bars!”

“Ugh.” His stomach roiled at the thought.

Wait.

The 50th Anniversary?

“I call bullshit!” Donnie stammered.

No way this stupid candy bar had been around for fifty years. It couldn't have been around for *five* years, much less fifty.

"Screw you, Flixxy! Moon Alien bastard!"

Donnie pitched the remote at the television. It caught the corner, and spun upwards in an erratic mid-air pirouette. It hit the wall and exploded into many pieces.

"Serves you right, remote control."

Sometime soon after, Donnie found himself in the bathroom, throwing up.

Sometime soon after *that*, Donnie passed out in the tub.

<*>

At work, everything hurt. The fluorescent light pried open his eyes like a demon with hands of white fire. The demon tore open his eyelids and kicked him in the pupil repeatedly. His mouth tasted of brine-soaked gym socks. His lips were dry like balsa wood.

Everyone was looking at him. Eyes peered over cubicle walls. Whispers and murmurs drifted around; he caught his name, periodically.

Even Horkin seemed suddenly sensitive.

The pig-faced jerk brought by another ream of forms to add to the still-existing pile resting on Donnie's desk.

His beady stare drifted up and down Donnie, then he laughed, all nervous-like.

"You probably don't need these, right now," Horkin said. He picked the forms back up.

"Your voice sounds like hammers," Donnie said.

“I’ll bring these back later,” Bob said, retreating.

Sometime later, Tabor came up behind him, rested one of those hamhock hands on Donnie’s shoulders (though in his defense, it was as gentle a touch as Donnie had felt, almost as if Donnie would break into little fragments if he wasn’t handled with the uttermost gingeriness).

“Lunch time, man,” Tabor said.

“Not hungry,” Donnie managed.

“I think we need to go out somewhere. Right now.”

“Can’t. Work to do.” Not that he was doing it. Stupid work.

“Donnie?”

“Tabor.”

“You know you’re wearing sweatpants? And a robe? No shirt?”

It was news to him. He looked down. Sure enough, gray pair of sweatpants (with a few chocolate stains on the thighs, thankfully upfront and not behind him), ratty hotel robe, and – whoops – no shirt. Sweat beaded in his meager chest hairs.

“Huh,” Donnie said. “Uh-oh.”

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It was a gray day outside, bleak and bleary and with clouds that looked like hairballs bobbing across the steely expanse. Tabor drove – a hatchback Honda far too small for his hulking musculature – and Donnie sat in the passenger side, lying against the seatbelt strap, moaning.

“I’m hungry,” Tabor said.

“Fine. *Fine.*”

“Where you wanna go?”

“Not hungry. Don’t care.”

Tabor waved a hand. “You gotta eat something. When’s the last time you ate?”

“Last night. Flix bars and boxed wine.”

“Oh, you a health nut, now.”

“Don’t mock me.”

Tabor started rattling off restaurants – local joints, chain places, fast food.

“Fast food,” Donnie said. He needed some grease to hold his body together.

“Where?”

“Burger King. I think I want Burger King.”

“The hell is Burger King?”

“What?”

“You deaf?” Tabor enunciated every word: “What. Is. Burger. King?”

Donnie felt his pulse quicken. He didn’t need this kind of nonsense. His head was fragile already, a Faberge egg held together with spit and masking tape. Tabor, his best friend – and without Tracy, his *only* friend – was turning against him, toying with his tender brainmeats.

“Shut up!” Donnie barked. “You damn well know what a, a, a Burger King is! It’s the place! Where the – the King of Burgers lives! Golden crown? Kind of a gay beard? Big smile? The BK Broiler? Jesus!” He pounded the dashboard with the flat of his hand to enunciate how little he wished to be messed with right now.

“You need to settle down, man. I seriously don’t know what you’re talking about, I am not making this up. Tell me. Is there a Burger King nearby?”

Teeth clenched. He was *thisclose* to screeching like an attacking raptor and pouncing on Tabor with beak and talon (or at least unbrushed teeth and sweaty palms). He sucked in a deep breath. “Burger King. Corner of Redstone and Spring Market. By the entrance ramp to the bypass.”

Tabor frowned. Waited. “Ooooookay.”

“Okay what? What’s the frown for?”

“That’s not a Burger King.”

“It’s not a – well, then, what is it?”

“Man, that’s the *Burrito Hut*.”

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“The Burrito Hut,” Donnie read the sign.

It’s what the sign said. A slim burrito arch – the giant tortilla dripping fake hot sauce, beans, meat chunks, and for some goddamn reason the giant tortilla had big googly eyes – framed the words.

It wasn’t new, either. The Hut looked weathered. Its purple walls were fading, pocked; someone had sprayed graffiti on the back dumpster. Place was busy, though. Cars lined up in the drive-thru. Parking lot at least half full, and through the glare on the outside window Donnie could see people agglomerating at the counter.

“This used to be a Burger King,” Donnie said. “Like, yesterday.”

Tabor blinked. Eyes narrowed to concerned slits.

“It’s been here forever, you say?” Donnie asked.

Tabor nodded. “Yeah, dude. I eat here all the time. Their Shimmy-Chimi is pretty much the best damn thing since cable television.”

“And you love Flix Bars.”

“You know it.”

“And you’ve never heard of a Burger King.”

Tabor held up his hands like a Vegas dealer, slapped them together as if to show that he wasn’t cheating. “Never, not once.”

“I gotta go,” Donnie said, suddenly.

“I gotta eat,” Tabor countered.

Abruptly, Donnie left the idling car and ran. Somewhere behind him, Tabor’s voice called after him, but it was lost, forgotten. He didn’t know where he was running, or even why, but there was the distinct feeling that something was both chasing him, and he was chasing something.

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That night, Donnie found himself back at the motel room. His legs burned and itched from all the running. He hadn’t stopped running since he took off out of Tabor’s car, which was easily six hours ago. His robe was soaked with sweat. His sweat pants were soaked with sweat, too, though arguably that was their purpose, you know, hence the name.

He looked in the mirror of the bathroom, barely recognized himself.

Bloodshot eyes. Gaunt face. Mouth frozen in a slightly-horrified rictus.

He was seeing things, too. All during the run, he felt a presence behind him. His peripheral vision caught sight of something, too, like a shape running alongside of him, watching him from behind hedgerows and trashcans. The shadow wasn’t

a big thing, no larger than a dog or a dwarf. A midget, maybe. Maybe he was being chased by a midget. A ninja midget. Shit. That didn't make any sense.

His stomach growled.

"Shut up," he told it.

He considered going back and filling his gut with more booze. A bottle of whiskey sat atop the television. He decided it would be a bad idea. A profoundly bad idea. He did it anyway.

Lips on bottle, hot Irish fire charbroiling his esophagus.

He pulled away from the bottle such a sucking *foomp*, and set it back atop the TV.

Then he noticed.

Jack Kenny Whiskey. Blue Label, it said.

Donnie blinked.

There was no such thing as Jack Kenny Whiskey.

And yet, here it was. He'd just had some. It wasn't far from a trashcan filled with Flix Bar wrappers, and Flix Bar didn't exist, either. And Burrito Hut, about five miles away. Goddamn Burrito Hut.

That's where he'd go. Burrito Hut.

"But I just came from there," Donnie explained to himself.

Didn't matter. Here, he couldn't ask any questions of a pile of Flix Bar wrappers or a neck-empty bottle of so-called Jack Kenny Whiskey. At Burrito Hut, though, he could get to the bottom of things. He could ask some questions. Find what they did with Burger King. Was it drugs? In the water supply? A conspiracy was afoot.

He took a few quick deep breaths, slapped his legs to get the blood moving, then broke into another crazy marathoner run out the door, back to Burrito Hut.

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Public drunkenness, they called it.

Which wasn't fair, not really. Donnie wasn't drunk. Any of the lingering buzz from the not-really-real Jack Kenny Whiskey had long since faded when he ran through the front doors of the Burrito Hut.

The bars of the holding cell were surprisingly warm. The whole place, with its cement walls painted banana-colored, and its metal toilet, was actually pretty damn humid. Moisture glistened on the walls. When they threw him in here, alone, the one lady cop told him that the air conditioning was busted.

He took a deep breath. What he'd seen in the Burrito Hut, what he'd glimpsed –

Everything seemed normal, at first. Late lunchers, lining up at the counter. A pair of Hispanics in front of him, and in front of them, a little girl in a side-sprouting pony-tail with her mother busily thumbing numbers into her Blackberry (probably text messaging Flix the Moon Alien, Donnie thought at the time, a thought that would later become alarming relevant). Manning the single-register counter was a rubicund, fat-cheeked teen with a purple paper hat.

Donnie didn't know what he was expecting. He had no script. He felt sick inside. The fast food joint had felt constraining, like it was closing in on him.

He got to the counter, and let fly.

What he said, he didn't precisely remember. Something about Flix Bars. Something about conspiracies. Maybe even something about Tracy. The smell that drifted from the kitchen was a mix of sharp spices and potted meat, a tangy (too tangy, really, to be appetizing) conglomeration of the two.

In mid-rant, that's when he'd seen it.

Behind some kind of massive pressure-cooker – some stainless steel thing with a line of dried refried beans crusted to its side – Donnie saw movement.

It was a shimmering shape, unreal, a specter. Like those blurry shots of Bigfoot or any lake monster, the details were imperfect, almost incomprehensible. A swath of green flashed against a half-moon slice of purple. Movement like fly-wings buzzing, too fast, too strange. And then it was gone again, blinking out of existence. The cooker continued to bubble and steam.

Donnie freaked.

By his recollection, he did a lot of wild gesticulating.

Maaaaybe some yelling.

Not impossible that he said something about aliens, and then spit on the register.

Mistakes were made.

Worst of all, he hadn't noticed the police officer that had come in soon after he did and was waiting two people behind him.

And now, here. Jail. Holding cell. Shit.

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Things got weird around midnight.

Donnie was half-asleep on the cot in the cell's corner, trying to shut out the light (the cops informed him that the lights never shut off, not even at night). He was caught in the throes of half-dreams to go with his half-sleep. Shadows of Tracy visited him, but every time she went to talk he heard a baby squalling somewhere and her words were lost. Something about how it was *too late, too late, if only*. Tabor the Giant came along with his squeaky white cart, except he was easily twice his normal size, and in these partial dreams he kept picking Donnie up and shoving him in the cart, murmuring something about a "mail call." Sometimes, Donnie felt the taste of a Flix Bar in his mouth, or the burn of Jack Kenny Whiskey down

his throat, or the sickly sweet scent of Grade-E-but-Edible Tex-Mex fiesta meat from the diabolical Burrito Hut. Other sensations visited him, too, ones he couldn't explain: the nasal tang of an unknown perfume, tinny electro-pop music like which he'd never heard, the mysterious taste of a falafel (he was certain it was a falafel, though he'd never eaten, or frankly *seen*, a falafel before).

And then he saw them.

Moon Aliens, like Flixy.

Seven of them.

Except they weren't cartoons – he caught a glimpse of pinched reptilian flesh, and white fangs stained with grape-colored smears – and they came at him, hands reaching, stubby fingers wagging in the humid jail cell heat, and they shimmered as if seen behind a gauzy haze of heat rising off a blistering highway–

And Donnie wondered when this dream would move on and give way toward something even stranger.

But the dream did not move on.

Green hands that smelled of metal and chocolate covered his face.

He tried to cry out.

The lights went out.

And that's when things got *really* weird.

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Lights coruscated all around him. Each flash felt like it cut straight to his cerebral cortex, burning an image into his brain.

He saw flying babies zip past him. Cherubic grins. Fat faces. Curious hands reaching for him as they zoomed by.

His guts felt like taffy.

And it felt like someone was trying to pull that gut-taffy out of his body through his mouth, ears, and anus.

Then – a *pop* sound, preceded by a faint sucking noise, like the one Donnie’s lips made when he pried them free of the Jack Kenny bottle.

All was dark, at least for a little while.

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“Some people do not react well to change.”

Donnie lurched upright. His head swam, vision dipped.

The room was long, narrow, with walls of steel and a faint blue light suffused throughout. At the margins of the room, Donnie saw several of the Moon Aliens shuffling back and forth, grunting like piglets with slop in their mouths and noses. The Flixies chattered back and forth, sometimes clacking their empurpled teeth.

At the far end of the room – the end Donnie sat facing – was a pull-down screen. At the other end of the room blinked the winking eye of a projector.

Projected on the screen was an image Donnie couldn’t quite parse.

It seemed to be a generic gray and black 9-Volt battery with a pair of googly eyes, like the ones glued to a cheap arts-and-crafts doll. The fake eyes looked this way, and that.

“I’m on drugs,” Donnie whispered.

“You’re not on drugs,” the battery said. He knew the battery said it because with each word – each syllable, really – the battery pulsed with white light.

“You’re a battery.”

“I am merely an image you would understand. Were I to show you my true form, your human mind would explode into a thousand personalities and leave you wailing in a pile of your own fetid mess.”

Gently, Donnie stood.

“I’ve lost my mind,” he said.

“You’ve not lost your mind,” the battery asserted.

The Flixies chuffed and snorted in what might have been agreement.

One of them casually ate what appeared to be a chimichanga. Another displayed its beckoning jazz hands.

“That’s a chimichanga,” Donnie said, wide-eyed.

“Yes,” the battery confirmed.

The room was silent for a little while, except for the snorfling breathing of the two dozen or so Flixies shifting from one stubby green foot to another.

Swallowing hard, Donnie said: “A little help here? If I’m not high, and I’m not crazy, then –?”

“As I said, some people do not react well to change. These people – like you – are the ones who cannot properly compute the dimensional shifts.”

“Dimensional shifts.”

“Yes,” the battery said. “The subtle alterations to the fabric of your reality are performed through delicate dimensional shifts. Ninety-nine percent of people accept these changes without thought or concern.”

“And I’m part of the one percent?”

“Yes.”

Silence again as Donnie regarded the googly-eyed battery. The battery may have regarded him in return, but it was hard to tell, what with the googly-eyes and all.

Suddenly, Donnie snapped his fingers. “Flix Bars! I bet they’re part of the subtle alterations of dimensional, you know, whatever. Right?”

“Yes. Flix Bars, Burrito Hut, Jack Kenny Whiskey, Ganymede Electronics, Vaginex Creams, Lung Sui-Wu Cookery Sets, Cowboy Tom’s Microwave Falaf –“

“Okay, okay, you can stop. All those products are now in our dimension? And they weren’t before?”

“Yes, but not just your dimension. We established a product roll-out covering four hundred Earth-based dimensions, as pioneered by the Perigree Corporation, which is owned by the Jimza Conglomerate, which is owned by the Meiner-Schiften People, which is owned by –“

“All right!” Donnie barked. “This is a little much for me to handle.”

“Sorry.”

“It’s fine. Why are these products now in our dimension?”

“Money. More dimensions means more sales. More sales, higher stock.”

“I’d like to just go home, now,” Donnie said, and it was true. He didn’t feel well. He was dressed in a robe in some alien ship or dimensional box, and he really didn’t belong here. He said as much to the battery.

“No,” the battery pulsed. “I’m afraid we have to destroy you.”

“But –!”

“What we’re doing goes against the Quantum Code as established by Earth Seven in the Year of the Dragon, 1976. We cannot have you blowing the whistle.”

Movement to his left and right. The Flixies shuffled cautiously toward him, purple-smear teeth glowing weirdly in the bluish light. Some of them held knives that could've doubled as Satanic gynecological equipment.

“But – why? Why did you even bother to bring me here?”

“All sentient creatures deserve knowledge.”

“But by telling me this, that means you have to kill me!”

“Yes. Knowledge has its price.”

The Flixies pounced. Hands grabbed at him and dragged him down. Teeth clacked and chomped at one another; some kind of mad language. He saw the glint of a blade moving toward his heart.

“Wait!” he cried. “Let’s make a deal! *Please!*”

The Flixies stopped, as if hearing an unspoken cue.

“You can offer us nothing,” the battery declared.

“No,” Donnie stammered, “but you can offer *me* something.”

“I do not understand.”

“If you grant me a favor, then you’ve got me on the hook. Suddenly, I’m in your pocket! I won’t tell anybody anything if I’m in your pocket! That way, you don’t have to destroy me! Killing me is probably illegal, too, right? Some, uh, Quantum Code violation?”

The battery seemed to think about this.

The googly-eyes narrowed.

“Yes. It is a violation.”

“It can be a mutual pact. A deal. I’ll keep quiet. Just help me with one thing.”

“Tell me this thing,” the battery demanded.

So Donnie told him.

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The baby cried. The sound was joyous.

Slick with goo and red as a sliced beet, the little tow-head wriggled and sobbed and clenched his corn-sized toes.

Tracy looked spent, utterly so, but her face was beaming nevertheless. A nurse swabbed sweat from her glistening brow. Outside the window of the hospital room, Tabor’s big shape and shadow could be seen dutifully pacing, the task of a good friend.

The presence of his new son was going to be a big change. It’d require real responsibility. Donnie knew he was wearing the Big Boy Pants – the *Daddy Pants* – now, and that nothing would ever be the same.

But he was ready for the change.

The talking battery be damned.

Of course, the deal had some complications. Tracy had already had an abortion in this dimension, the battery explained. The baby was gone. To comply with Donnie’s request, they had to pluck another Tracy – the most similar Tracy they could find – from another Earth and, well, *trade* the two of them. It was fine. The battery told him that neither Tracy would know. Both would be happy in both continuums, whatever a ‘continuum’ was.

The nurse gave Tracy the baby. The doctor handed off the umbilicus.

Once in Tracy’s embrace, their son stopped crying and seemed to settle into a kind of happy gurgling.

Donnie leaned in and stroked her brow.

“What do you want to name him?” he asked Tracy.

She thought about it for a moment as a single happy tear rolled down her cheek.

“Flixxy,” she said, finally.

Donnie started to laugh, it was funny, though *uncomfortable*-funny, but then he saw a faint shimmer around his new son, and the pink babyflesh became for a moment a strange hue of Iguana green, and he saw a flash of purple teeth reaching for Tracy’s breast beneath the sheet. Then the shimmer extended upwards to Tracy, too, and he saw her smeared teeth and green skin as she smiled.

Then it was gone. The haze dissipated, and his wife and son were back again.

A little voice in his head told him to run, *run. Break into a hard run and never come back.*

But he suppressed it.

“I like change,” he croaked. He shuddered. “Change is good.”

At least they gave him that lifetime supply of Flix Bars.

Drawing a deep breath, he reached toward Tracy and their new son, Flixxy.

MORE CONTENT: Note that I did not preserve the line breaks just because that would have made the doc about 20 pages longer

<http://www.escapistmagazine.com/profiles/articles/Chuck%20Wendig>

So I figured that for some reason I hadn't had enough of this asshole. Apparently he is a contributor to everyone's favorite website THE ESCAPIST. What follows are some choice sentences from his articles because reading the whole thing would just make us all sad.

Good stories live in the complexities and corollaries born of more nuanced moral choices. Sometimes, you just have to get in the car with the child molester.

Real moral choices are rarely so simple and do not present obvious outcomes. The Fed-Ex guy doesn't show up and offer to give you an extra package if you'd be willing to kick a puppy.

Dear Game Industry, I regret to inform you that you have failed your Zombie Aptitude Test, or the ZAT. You got a score of 10 out of 1600. You received those ten points because you spelled your name correctly and because you drew a little doodle of a chibi zombie at the top corner of the exam. Your failure is the result of the fact that you chose to answer every question on the ZAT with the multiple choice solution, "d: Shoot zombies with guns." Consider for example the question, **How do you survive the zombie apocalypse?** You answered, "Shoot zombies with guns." Or the question, **What is the true threat in a zombie apocalypse?** You again

answered, "Shoot zombies with guns." Here's another good one: **What makes zombies scary?** Your answer? Ding ding ding. Give the test-taker a kewpie. "Shoot zombies with guns."

If it ain't broke, they'll say, **don't fix it**. And that makes sense from a financial point of view. The logic is if I and a million others buy and enjoy a game called *Star Nipples: The Quest For Curly's Comet*, one assumes I enjoyed the game's mechanics, characters, and storyworld. When the time comes to write and design *Star Nipples II: The Wombat Directive*, the mission is clear: Give the audience what they want. They came for the star nipples, so by god, **give them star nipples**. Certainly some changes are appropriate - they adjusted the transition between levels of the Star Nipple homeworld because reviews complained that they took too long to load, and since everyone so adored your robot droid sidekick "Curly" from the first game, they decided to raise him from the mechanical dead and give him new powers and weapons. Like a robot Jesus.

It was then that our eyes met and maybe, just maybe, we **really** fell in love for the first time. It was chocolate and peanut butter. It was beer and hot wings. It was Master Chief and Cortana. Gingerly she handed me the controller. "Are you thinking what I'm thinking?" she asked. "I am," I said. Unusual, because I wasn't thinking about sex or bacon or, I dunno, sex-bacon. "I'll handle the jumping and the button-mashing. You handle all the **thinking**."

You're doing it wrong. Playing videogames, I mean. That's okay; I was doing it wrong for a long time too. This is how I used to do it: I'd sit on the couch, ensconced in blankets (if wintertime) or bare-chested and lightly dusted with Cheeto pollen (if summertime). I'd have coffee and/or an alcoholic beverage close at hand. I'd clutch the controller with a grim, arthritic grip, my eyes facing forward - utterly hypnotized by whatever game played on the screen in front of me. It was purely a solitary affair. If my wife (at the time, girlfriend) came in, I might ignore her. I might nod in her general direction. Were she to make a small suggestion - "Did you try pushing that

boulder?" - I might snarl and hiss like a spitting cobra. Or, like a child trying to learn how to do somersaults in the backyard, I'd vomit forth a petulant scream: "**Don't watch me! I'm doing it by myself!**"

Punching the Baby Seal of PC Gaming

See this baby seal? So cute! A blobby white puffball straight out of a Miyazaki film. Oh, look! The widdle baby has rolled over on his back! He wants us to rub his belly-welly! The way he wiggles! The way he makes those precious piggy grunts! I'm not going to rub his goddamn belly. In fact, I'm going to punch him. I'm going to punch him right in his widdle mouth. I don't want to. I'm **driven** to. My rage cannot be contained. You fill up a glass too full and the water spills over. This baby seal is adorable as shit. And I'm still going to punch his lights out. Because *Crysis* just locked up on me again.

This last piece would make a wonderful introduction, in my opinion.