



# When Earthlings Weep

Michael Barnett



*Mickey Thorn has horribly frightening and realistic nightmares. When he awakes, the nightmare's grip still affects him to such a point that he can't tell the difference between the nightmare he was just having and reality. Mickey knows he is suffering from night terrors...much worse than regular nightmares. What if, instead of bad dreams, this is real? Are monsters actually visiting him during the night? Or, is he losing his mind?*

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**Michael Barnett**

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SATURNA LUNA  
FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 14, 2012  
10:33 P.M. CST

**1**

Mickey Thorn stands on a wide ledge several hundred meters above a clear pool of liquid methane. This lake is so large; it stretches out almost to the horizon. On that horizon are volcanoes of varying size and distance . . . it could be that Mickey's perspective is off. It is extremely difficult to judge distances here, since there is no frame of reference. Mickey has seen the volcano's erupt before on previous journeys. He knows he has been here before, but the details are fuzzy. He has always been surprised to see what looks like clear liquid and steam coming out of the tops instead of lava or smoke.

Just off shore below him, round rocks of varying size scatter across the bottom beneath the surface of the lake, but the depth cannot be determined because the lake is too clear, and the surface is only visible from the ripples caused by falling precipitation. Above, an orange sky casts an orange pallor on all that we see. A just-visible Saturn, with tilted rings, is the centerpiece to the sky above. We are so close to Saturn we can clearly see the rocks and other debris that make up the rings. It is cloudy here with dense, viscous smog, and we can see showers in the distance; but it doesn't rain water here; it is liquid ethane and methane. To his left, is a small ravine, filled with just-rained methane, running to the lake far below. Mickey scans the ground around him and sees the familiar ice crystals scattered everywhere like sleet.

There is a truly extraordinary and breathtaking silence, common to places in deep freeze, which makes the falling sleet sound tinny and crisp, like the echoes of tiny cymbals in a large, empty room. The same varying size round rocks which are in the lake, scatter on this ledge, as well. In fact, we see them, in any direction we look.

There is a movement to his right, and here is Mickey's old friend facing him. There was no sound, or visual display to accompany his arrival—he was just there. How he always seems to know when Mickey will be here, and arrive so soon afterwards, is a mystery to Mickey. His friend stares at Mickey, and as always, he has a lot of trouble staring back. The alien's head is similar in appearance, proportionally, to that of a human; but all similarities to us, ends there. There are no eyes, or ears. There is no nose or mouth. Instead, where these things should be, are deep depressions. Each of these depressions is much too large, by human standards. The two depressions, where his eyes should be, are perfectly round, giving him a constant look of surprise. A vertically elongated hole where his mouth should be looks like a person screaming. Random patterns of dark grey and turquoise cover the skin of his head and neck, with small splatters of white and yellow. In the recesses of the eye depressions, different colors constantly change. Mickey realizes this as the main reason why he has so much trouble looking at his companion. How does Mickey maintain eye contact with a variety of changing colors? The full effect is particularly unnerving to Mickey.

While Mickey is still watching his mysterious companion, all of the colors on his friend's neck and face coalesce into a distinctly human looking flesh color. It holds for only a few seconds, and then disassembles into its previous color scheme. He isn't sure what this feeble attempt at becoming human is all about, but he isn't too concerned. Mickey wonders again, what his companion's world must be like, for him to have developed this way. The alien is wearing a candy apple red suit, which flexes and bends, and reforms like a living thing around him. The material sparkles with thousands of tiny fireflies that race across the surface, and through the material, in seemingly random patterns. Mickey cannot determine their function, but again, doesn't care to know. He wishes the fuzziness in his head would clear. The sense that he is in danger keeps intruding into his mind, but does not cause him to worry. He shakes his head and again looks off towards the horizon.

On an earlier visit here, Mickey asked his companion his name. He responded that, with just two together, names were unimportant, since

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one can only talk to the other. After Mickey persisted, his friend told Mickey his designation was Jengu-3. Mickey decided to call his friend Jen. Jen stands six and a half feet tall, and by earth standards, looks as if he may weigh 200 pounds; or 20 pounds here, in this world. Mickey doesn't know how he is aware of this fact. At the top of Jen's suit, is a helmet. Mickey can't figure out if some hard material, or perhaps a force field, makes up the helmet, because it is so clear, and he sees no reflection on the border. He can see the same strange fireflies running around this surface of the helmet as he did on the red suit. When they first met, Mickey studied Jen's face for several moments trying to control his disgust as he did so. The more he looked, the more his head hurt . . . as if this creature didn't like to being stared at and was punishing him.

As in their previous visits, Jen now extends an object towards Mickey. This device is remarkably modest, like the ones he used before. It is the size and shape of a chalkboard eraser, except that it is a pinkish brushed-steel. Like before, there are no antennas or dials, or screens, or anything else to tell Mickey that this item is not a simple tool like an eraser. He has no doubt that Jen can read the output, with no trouble. Jen explained to Mickey before that these scanning devices would not hurt him; at the very most, he may notice a strange tingling sensation in his body. He feels nothing this time, and he has no objection to the scanning, even though he doesn't know and doesn't care why Jen is collecting the data. Mickey asked Jen long ago; why he always tested him with devices, and he said that he wished to know how he made the travel. Mickey likes how he says that, "Make the travel," and smiles inwardly at the memory, even though he has no idea what this phrase means.

"Here again. We are," Jen speaks clearly in Mickey's head.

"Yes, we are." Mickey thinks, and he knows his friend can hear him.

His head hurts from this form of communication, and as always, he never goes beyond the small talk. Once, many visits back, he tried to learn from where his friend comes, and the longer they thought together, the more he felt like his friend was climbing inside his head; the pain was excruciating. Despite Jen warning him before, Mickey did

speaking aloud once . . . just once, and immediately the Drogos came. It was necessary for Jen to use one of his cunning light weapons to turn them back. It's ingenious how the Drogos hide in obvious sight. They have shells the same texture and color as the round rocks scattered everywhere, so Mickey doesn't know which ones are rocks, and which ones are Drogos.

Jen once told Mickey that the Drogo should not be able to move as quickly as it does, based on its methane and silicon physiology, and the small energy the Sun provides at this great distance, but they do. He said that every living thing here violated this fundamental principle of low temperature, and low gravity, so he is here to study them. Mickey isn't so sure he believes him on this. He thinks Jen already knows everything there is to know about these creatures. He doesn't remember what Jen told him Drogos eat; a fleeting memory of jewel-like-encrusted crab creatures which quickly scramble from rock to rock is there, then gone. In such a desolate place, Mickey does know movement attracts Drogos, so he remains silent and still.

Sometimes when he and Jen stand here, the *Valshavi* will come. They are both willing to endure all the dangers of this place, for just one more look at the *Valshavi*; somehow, Mickey's mysterious companion knows the names of all the other things here. The *Valshavi* don't come suddenly, but will gradually build, making their appearance much more attractive and powerful. There is nothing in Mickey's experience or memories sufficient to explain the *Valshavi*, except that the experience maximizes all of his senses, and he enters a state of bliss so powerful it locks him in awestruck paralysis that cannot be broken until the *Valshavi* retreats.

"Stronger you are," pops into Mickey's head.

He turns to look at Jen and immediately regrets this decision as he starts to lose himself again, and the pain starts. Mickey now looks away, before it is too late.

He then responds to Jen, "Why do you say this?"

There is an extraordinarily long wait because Jen is fighting to understand what Mickey is saying. Jen's language is backwards, or jumbled; or both, and Mickey hasn't quite been able to combine his thought-words correctly.



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Finally, Jen says, “Because I am. I say it,”

Even when confusion overcomes Jen, Mickey can never tell from his calm demeanor.

“No, that’s not what I mean. Why do you say I am stronger?”

“Not wear suit that protects,” he says simply.

Mickey looks down at himself and is terribly surprised to see that he is wearing nothing but pajamas, and his bare feet are sticking out at the bottoms. He loses his composure in an instant; the full understanding of how inhospitable a place he is in, making his thoughts jumble.

“Regain your suit,” Jen says calmly in Mickey’s head.

If Mickey knew how to do what Jen is suggesting, doesn’t he think he would do it? The absolute cold hits his whole body like a sledgehammer. His body protectively folds in on itself, and he loses his balance. He doesn’t realize his feet have frozen to the rock he is standing on, until he takes a step, to try to keep from falling. He falls, ripping all of the skin from the bottoms of his feet as he does so.

“Before too late. Make the travel.” Jen says again, calmly.

His voice seems to be coming from far away now. Mickey takes a deep breath to scream, and the super cold air enters his lungs—it will eventually freeze his lungs, but that death will not come.

“Your death. Hydrogen cyanide. Make the travel.” Jen says again, this time losing his composure a little.

Mickey’s strong inhalation of air has enough hydrogen cyanide to mercifully, kill him within a few seconds, sparing him the agonizing death by freezing. His alien companion stands there with that same blank look he always has, silently watching . . . silently screaming, but is kind enough to hold his hand towards Mickey . . . as if that’s going to help him now. Mickey’s oxygen starved brain registers one more thing, with fading input from his fast-freezing eyes; before it also dies and his body finally succumbs to this place . . . Mickey’s sudden noise and movements, has drawn a Drogo, which latches itself onto Mickey’s right leg. Finally, as his pain drifts away . . . further away . . . further away; there is welcome darkness.

MEDINA LAKE  
FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 14, 2012  
10:33 P.M. CST

1

Staff Sergeant Sergio Torres is driving from his home by the lake to the base to participate in an 11:00 P.M. through 7:00 A.M. disaster preparedness exercise. It's one of the first chilly nights of the fall, especially evident as he navigates through this part of the hill country, so he has his window down and is enjoying the brisk breeze on his left arm and face. He breathes deeply and is happy to smell cedar, which he misses when driving with his air conditioning. As he crests each hill, he can see the bright lights of San Antonio off in the distance. Driving towards the lights out of this darkness always reminds him of bugs moving towards a porch light. He doesn't mind these all night exercises, since he gets tomorrow off. Tonight, he hangs out with his friends; and that isn't too bad of a deal. At least he was able to kiss his three boys goodnight before leaving, so by the time he gets home tomorrow morning, they won't even realize he'd been gone at all. His family has yearly passes to nearby Sea World, so he is excited about taking his boys there tomorrow . . . after he gets some shut-eye, of course.

Sergio is a 25-year-old Latino male from the valley, sporting a brown buzz cut, even though he doesn't have to make his hair this short. He has sparkling brown eyes, which go nicely with his mischievous smile; both of which first caught the attention of his wife, Elaina, eight years ago. He is six feet tall, and just under 180 pounds, and prides himself on his muscles and fitness. He is wearing camouflaged fatigues, starched and ironed with perfect creases. His combat boots sparkle from an hour of "spit shining" before he left tonight. He drives this road so many times and is so lost in thought; he doesn't feel the bumps in the road right away. He immediately slows, thinking he has a flat tire, and then he sees hundreds of dead birds on

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the roadway in front of his headlights; at least as far as he can see up to the rise in the distance.

“What the hell,” he exclaims, more as a statement than a question.

Sergio stops in his lane and gets out of his primer-white Chevy Truck. He leaves his truck running, and his headlights hi-lighting the expansive carnage, while he walks to his front bumper to take a closer look. He uses the end of his right boot to move some of the birds. Most of the birds have no visible injuries, but some have singed feathers and he can smell the sickening stench as it hangs in the still air; and mingles with the better smell of cedar trees, to create an entirely new stink. Some smells just don’t belong together, and these are two of those smells. He looks up to see if there are any power lines running alongside the road, but there is none.

Movement from 50 feet in front of his truck startles him. He walks slowly towards the movement. A single grackle . . . or crow; he can never remember which is the difference, spins in the middle of the road. The wings are pinned to its sides, and the head anchors to a single spot on the asphalt . . . as if glued there. Its feet are at a full sprint, making it run in a circle sideways. Sergeant Torres tries desperately to remember why the bird’s actions are so familiar.

“Oh my God, it looks like Curly from the Three Stooges,” he whispers to himself, more in shock than amusement.

What he is seeing, so mesmerizes Sergeant Torres—the word that comes to his mind is “fascinating”—he has totally forgotten where he is. He finally comes to his senses because he hears something strange behind him. Before he turns, he reaches out his booted foot and sympathetically puts the bird out of its misery. He stands up straight and turns to look upon the strangest sight he has ever seen. He sees a house in the distance pulsating with a faint purple glow, as if a giant luminescent purple jellyfish surrounds it. Merged into the top of the house is a sphere-shaped neon-blue-light, which hums with energy, but he finds he can’t look at it without his head hurting. Periodically, jagged lines run from the sphere in all directions, in random patterns. If he happens to see one of these lines, he sees something beyond—like a breathtaking panorama can be seen between the shattered pieces of a mirror—not quite put back together edge to edge, but left with spaces

between. Before these spaces close, Sergio can see things in other places, other realities, other worlds. He sees strange, colored lakes and jungles, and impossibly high mountains.

In one of the visions, he sees what looks like a black cloud, become aware of him, turn, and come towards him. The closer it gets to him, the more malevolence he feels from it. It has no face, or any other features that would indicate it is alive, yet he can tell it is sentient by the purposeful way it is moving towards him, and the overwhelming feeling it is studying him. Not soon enough, the crack closes. In all of these scenes, he sees strange creatures . . . impossible creatures. Creatures with too many or too few legs . . . too many or too few eyes . . . no mouth, or multiple mouths with too many teeth. He doesn't know how he knows this, but he understands what he is seeing.

Sudden knowledge of all these places and creatures floods his mind. There are strange sounds in the air, but the sounds don't seem to come from the sphere, but all around Sergio. He tilts his head sideways like a dog will, as he tries to make out what the sounds are. It sounds like a few notes of classical music, played backwards, ending in a flat-sounding cymbal crash, then nothing. Then another set of entirely different notes of music, also played backwards, from somewhere else. He figures that each of these solo performances is very random (he is wrong), and there may be as many as three or four playing at the same time. In the same way, his mind is flooded with knowledge of other places—other universes—he suddenly understands the meaning of the music. The notes are addresses of other places. A breeze picks up, and the strong smell of ozone assaults his nostrils and makes him wince. He remembers smelling ozone before when a storm was raging, and lightning was about to strike.

These other worlds capture Sergio's mind. He forgets the birds, and his work on base altogether, and starts walking slowly towards the house with the pretty lights. One of the fissures between worlds opens and now comes towards Sergio. Before he can react, he loses his mind in this "in-between" space. A smile spreads on his face as a power, which now separates his mind from all reality and everything around, engulfs him.

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To a passerby, Sergio, now frozen in this position with the pleasant smile on his face, would look like a snapshot of a Norman Rockwell painting of a man smiling up at his wife as she serves him a generous slice of hot apple pie . . . or the village idiot. Perception is always about context.

The dead grackle that was doing its “Curly impersonation” suddenly stands up, stares at Sergeant Sergio with a decidedly un-birdlike intensity. It shows no sign of injury; the former head injury has departed. It hops twice and then disappears. Not into the bushes or weeds, but more like, you look and it is there, you blink, and it isn't.

The grackle appears a mile off towards town, at the top of a telephone pole. It stares off down the road, until it sees a car coming at a fast rate of speed.

2

Twenty-three year old, Kelly Peterson is driving to her home in Medina Lake after getting off working overtime at a coffee shop on the loop, where she waitresses. She is just over five feet tall and a hundred pounds. She is a brunette with piercing green eyes and thinks of herself as a cute little bundle, or even a firecracker. She came from an abusive household, and to survive, she learned to stand up for herself at a young age. People she works with have to be careful what they say to her because she can go from nice to “not so nice” very quickly. Unlike Sergeant Torres, Kelly is totally oblivious to the beautiful night just beyond her windows. As she drives this road she is so familiar with, her thoughts are very dark, mostly centered on having to work extra to cover for that damn Stella who was able to leave early tonight. Of course, everyone knows she has an *in* with the manager. She's probably screwing him too!

Now, most of whatever extra money Kelly made tonight will go to her babysitter, so it wasn't even worth it, especially since her tips tonight sucked. Her son, Eric, will probably be asleep, so she can't even get any quality time with him. Her anger level ratchets higher, when she recalls she has to work the early shift tomorrow. She is now

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doing what she always does when she's upset—which is a lot lately—she is speeding. Speeding can soothe her like nothing else . . . except maybe booze; and she forgot to stop and get some beer. Damn!

Kelly's foot pushes the pedal of her old blue Dodge closer to the floor, as this new problem piles on top of the others. Kelly reaches over to the passenger seat and pulls out her pack of cigarettes from her purse, and expertly hits the lighter with the back of her hand, as she moves her cigarettes over to where she can shake one out. She swerves into the other lane, then off on the shoulder, without noticing. The single cigarette extracted, and in between her lips, she impatiently drums the top of her steering wheel, waiting for that damn lighter to pop out. The lighter ejects, and with the practiced hand of an artist, she pulls it out and lights her cigarette. She returns the lighter, and then takes two unusually heavy drags, waiting for the calming effect of nicotine, to float over her. It doesn't happen, which causes her mood to darken further, and her anger to rise even more.

She starts thinking about her ex-husband, which always happens when she gets upset. That son of a bitch, Juquin, never pays his child support on time, and she is damn tired of taking him to court to get what's hers. Kelly is in deep thought now as her Buick continues to accelerate. She thinks of Eric again, and how much she loves him. A smile spreads across her face as her foot relaxes on the pedal and the car begins to slow. She thinks that whatever crap she has to put up with is worth it if Eric has a better life. She looks forward to Sunday, when she and Eric will go watch that Disney cartoon Eric wants to see. Maybe a burger at McDonalds afterwards will top off the day, and put this crappy week behind her. With all these happy thoughts she begins to unwind, and slows to the speed limit.

The grackle leaves the top of the telephone pole and reappears on the seat beside Kelly's headrest in an instant. The grackle begins to whisper into her right ear; at least it seems like whispering to her. Strangely, Kelly is not startled that a large black bird appears out of nowhere and perches on her seat, whispering into her ear . . . or head. A mental link has taken place. The grackle reminds her that the bitch Stella, and her boss, Roberto, both hate her. They are jealous of her superior abilities, but she will never get a raise. All of the raises will go



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