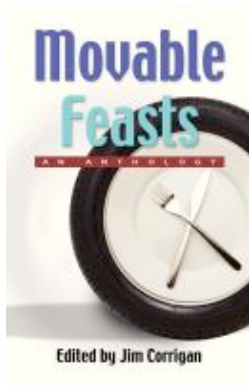


# Movable Feasts

A N A N T H O L O G Y



**Edited by Jim Corrigan**



*Movable Feasts* is a new collection of short stories, most of them by new writers, working in a variety of styles.

## Movable Feasts

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# **Movable Feasts**

*An Anthology*

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## Escher Dines Alone

*Howard Zaharoff*

The waiter brought him a cup of steaming coffee.

“Ah,” Escher said out loud. “Coffee. Excellent for starting a meal. Also excellent for ending a meal.”

“And what will your meal be today, sir?”

Escher watched the cloud forming over the coffee. Just steam, he repeated to himself. But it looked like whirlpools, swirls of grey and orange, white and black, drifting above the mug. *What in Heaven’s name?* he found himself thinking.

Shaking his head to clear it, he opened the menu. There was Goose. There was also Fish. Indeed, it somehow appeared that the goose turned into fish – first bland white fish, then increasingly specific species of fish – a strange effect on a menu.

*I’d love to capture that image*, he thought. He stared at it, trance-like; found himself wondering how a goosefish would taste on the plate, indeed, how one would cook it.

*Perhaps I’d better order something to eat*. He ran his finger down the page. It stopped at an odd entry: Flatworms. He suddenly had an image of pointy triangular heads and two huge eyes. He gave his head another shake to expel the image. *Odd appetizer, flatworms*, he thought. He continued reading.

Yet another entry gave him pause: Swan. He couldn’t recall having ever eaten a swan, or seen one on a menu, and realized he had no idea why swan was so completely overlooked as a food group. *Too tough? Too costly? Lèse-majesté?* Again his mind

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formed a picture, this time of white swans and black swans meeting, merging, overlapping. Where was this imagery coming from? Perhaps when he returned to his studio he could try to recapture several of these stunning visions in a woodcut or lithograph.

His mind wandered. *Swanburgers? Barbecued Swanribs? Stuffed Swancakes?* After several minutes of study he finally looked up at the waiter, who stared back at him. Escher opened his mouth, prepared to order – though not quite sure what it would be, curious to see what his mouth would utter – then stopped with a quick intake of breath: Reflected in the eyes of that waiter he suddenly saw: a Skull. He gasped softly, watching this skeletal image slowly change to ... himself. Well, my imagination is active today, he thought, as he stared, calmly now, at his own reflection in the eyes of the quiet waiter.

“I’ll have the Stilleven met Bolspeigel,” he said, not sure what he’d just ordered. But it sounded fine, even appetizing; at least, it didn’t sound like it contained swans or flatworms.

He sat back as the waiter left to put in his order and watched the hustle and bustle around him. Of the two dozen tables, only half had patrons. Yet dozens of hostesses and waiters in black-and-white attire scampered around, seating new guests, carrying trays, taking orders, pouring water. He felt surrounded by a chaotic stew.

Yet, as he watched, a kind of order emerged: The servers and guests on his left seemed, well, vague, almost cloudy, not quite human, but neither animal nor vegetable either. But as they moved across his field of vision to the right, they appeared to emerge from a fog, shape-shifting into more distinct figures, morphing without fully changing. It was as if their essential being remained the same while their temporal form underwent a



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shift in outward appearance or perspective. Was this a form of transubstantiation? Was he seeing being precede essence, or perhaps essence overwhelmed by appearance?

He had barely begun contemplating these conundrums of perception when his waiter returned with his order. At least, he thought it was his waiter and order. The server seemed more bestial, Neanderthal, not quite the timid human from moments earlier. The food was also different than what he'd expected: a wooden pigeon with a human head on a plate, accompanied by a shiny tipped decanter in which he could again see his reflection: a suited man, bearded, looking askance at a dinner that was wholly non-comestible.

He grabbed the shiny ball and glared, first at his hand with reflecting globe (*met speigelende bol*, he thought), next at his austere image. He did not appear to be a happy man; but perhaps he was happy nonetheless, a joyous being preceding a dour appearance. Still, he was not sure of his next step. But was sure he couldn't dine, not here, not now, not ever on a Bolspiegel.

"Please, take this back. I do not know what to do with it."

The waiter looked puzzled. "But, sir, this is your order." He paused, grasping for words. "Of course you know what to do with it." Another pause. "Sir, it is *your* order," he pleaded.

Escher stared at the strange items on his plate. It didn't matter whether this was his order and the waiter correct, he realized. He could not eat anything this waiter or restaurant had to offer, nor put it on a fork, nor even simply move it around his plate. No, he had to get back to his rooms and reflect on what he'd learned, reflect on what he'd reflected (*himself? his essence? the Bolspiegel's reflection of his essence?*), draw conclusions, then draw his conclusions on wood, or paper, or copperplate, or even stone.

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“Please,” he addressed the apish server, “Just get me the bill.” He paused. “And a cup of coffee.” He let his expression go stone cold. The waiter, seeing the uselessness of further argument, surrendered and removed the food.

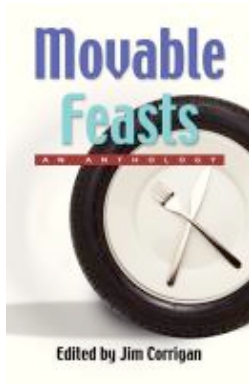
Escher sat in stony silence, not sure if he was observing the activity around him in the restaurant, or sitting with his eyes closed experiencing his own imaginings: triangular-headed flatworms squirming about; fishes with huge eyes and symmetric scales, expanding and contracting; butterflies breaking away from a vlinder scrum and escaping into individual magnificence...

Just as he was concluding this must be his imagination at work (*these images are all in black and white. Don't we supposedly dream mostly in black and white, thereby making it more likely these images are my imaginings?*), they burst into color, from subtle oranges and browns to more vibrant pastels of blue, green and purple.

He was gawking at these strange but compelling achromatic and chromatic forms, and humming a simple tune, when he heard the waiter return. The images faded as the server, again of purely human appearance, spoke softly. “Your coffee, sir.” He placed the steaming cup in front of Escher. “And your check, as you requested.” A thoughtful pause. “Please take your time.” He placed the bill on the side of the table.

Escher smiled at the waiter as he lifted the steaming mug gently.

“Ah,” Escher said out loud. “Coffee. Excellent for starting a meal. Also excellent for ending a meal.”



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