





Turnips in Southern Tennessee Still

Michael Lee Johnson

In Tennessee, the shadows of the southern
wooden structures stalled off the narrow
highway and came to an abrupt end.
Lost in the deep eyes of forest green,
closing in on night.
From the top of a Yellow Poplar
tree scares me looking down
at the hillbilly stills. Moonshine
and moonlight illuminate the fire stills.
Moonshine murders of the past,
dead bodies hidden behind blue walls.
Mobs lie in Chicago, bullet marks
on the right side lie dormant through plaster.
This confirms my belief that Jesus
only works part-time.
Let me look at this mirage
picture photo album.
One more time—
find the turnips in the still.



Small Talk

Cithara Patra

It's five o'clock when I come home. I face my father with the same grim look he's worn for years. I throw in a little 'sorry' as I sit on the sofa. He doesn't say anything. Typical. He gets this way when I'm late.

"We had a meeting that went on too long." I kick my shoes off. "It's the usual stuff: changes at work, layoffs. I still have my job. I don't need to look for anything now."

He doesn't reply.

"There aren't many places hiring. Don't worry. I'm going to find something when the time is right. At least I'm making enough money to get us by, right?"

He doesn't reply.

I gaze at the ceiling. "I'll get you some fresh flowers. The ones by you are wilting." Another dead petal falls next to my father. "Yeah, I'll get you some nice bright red roses. I bet you will like those."

He doesn't reply. I'm not surprised.

He's been that way ever since he died.



brr-RIIIIIING

Stephen Ground

this howling silence

is shattering except

my hostile ears already

kerrang like the loudest

Bakelite screaming to be

answered from the depths

of caverns piled with bones

but

still,

the silence rages & drums keep

beating like eroding seasons.

not forgotten but ignored.

ignored, not forgotten.

just ignored.





The Game

Sam Powys

There was a man who was sitting in a large row of metal stands looking down on a sports field. Below many people were playing a game. The man recalled that in his youth he once played this game as well. In fact, he recalled being quite adept at the game. Try as he might, he could not manage to remember when exactly it was that he had stopped playing the game. Surely it occurred though, for now he was sitting in the stands, looking down on the field. Taking stock of his position, he additionally believed that he was now further from the field than he had been at other points. It was getting harder to make out the players, though it could just be his eyesight slipping. He wasn't sure of this, and there was really no way of knowing, so he thought it best to put such questions out of mind.

His hearing was still keen, though, and from where he sat he heard the players quite well. They were huffing and hollering loudly as they went about playing the game, and from the sounds the man knew they were having a hell of a time. Of this much he was certain. And their joy was so evident that it stirred something within him, and he recalled now not only that he had once played the game and been quite adept at it, but also the feeling of doing so. He remembered his elation at

playing the game and being a part of things. He remembered the triumph of victory, the sting of failure, and the inevitable human camaraderie in the wake of either. Most of all he remembered the simple sensation of being arm to arm, face to face with his fellow man. The memory of closeness and contact and bodies brushing against one another rang in his mind.

At this the man began to weep, wondering why it was that he ever stopped playing the game. But he collected himself and dried his tears, sitting upright and adjusting his eyeglasses. And yet the sorrow lingered.

It occurred to him that perhaps he could play the game once more. But then, he was a long way off now, too far even to really see very well what was going on down there. And frankly, he didn't remember all the rules, which at the time he was playing the game were rather complicated and taxing to memorize, but one did so if they wished to play the game. It was just the nature of things, but now he had forgotten and the prospect of having to learn the rules all over again frightened him terribly. And besides, he was out of shape, and maybe his vision was going too. It was no good.

The man told himself he could change. If he just had time to prepare, he would be alright. He bought running shoes and went jogging to get back in shape. At first he felt awful, but then he felt better in time. But running was so tiring, and his shoes didn't quite fit, and so one day he took the day off running and never ran again.

He scheduled an appointment with the optometrist to have his vision checked at 1 PM on a Tuesday. The day before, the receptionist called to confirm the appointment.

"Are you sure it wasn't Thursday?" the man asked.

She said no, it was Tuesday.

"Tuesday's no good," he said.

"We do have an opening on Thursday," she said.

"Thursday's no good either."

The man went on sitting in the stands, all the while feeling further and further from the game being played, until eventually he was unaware of the game entirely. He had invented his own games to play up in the stands, games he could play alone. This wasn't very satisfying, playing games alone. It wasn't as good as being down there on the field with everyone else, playing the real game. But then, the man realized he didn't quite recall anymore how it felt to play the game at all anymore. He knew he longed for it. This much was certain. But he was never sure why again.



Birder Machine

Will Vincent

Bush lupin freezes mid-sulfite flare
time-stuck in washed green sage
swarms the Big Sur fire road where we walk with the birder.
Googlers overtake us on company retreat
power-walking in rebranded Nike: a whole cloud of clipped speech.
Every bird will be micro-droned
according to the new meme cloud the kids wrote.
The birder warms up the vape under knuckles
knobbled from the glue he peeled away like a second second skin
after a rough day with his students.
Hands calloused by dawn boulders, the birder peaks
around the bends for the rare flightless rail before it's gobbled
by egrets or scorned to hide by the loudest sound.
Redwoods huddle up dew-dried in the warmth.

The nuovo-hippies call them faerie rings.
I'm lusting after the need to name it all
down to granite bedrock and molten depth.
I turn it into a song to walk back the blue souls of hell creek.
Funny how the worm predators should close in on so many poets:
who'll forever admit they fail in their describing—who will do it anyway.
Mark my words, the Googlers break trail: see a boulder they think needs
conquest—
a new peak they say questioned their dominance.
Trained on retreat to leap pits of burning barbed wire,
Googlers in remade barbarisms gun for Sparta.
Jacket reflectors shine in their amphetamine neon husks
into the night, they'll get lost
leave their kids to squirrel with sticks over curved earth.
Leave their kids in power ranger outfits.
The Googlers know their kids know about the Pikachu sex comics,
the overweight Sonic the Hedgehog antagonists
scribbled poorly in Microsoft paint: the worse, the better.
We need batteries for their swarm dream,
so we push China-Mali out of the Congolese cobalt mines,
or try to: trousers clotted with blue dust
freelancing since age twelve with pick ax and wheel-barrow.
Phosphorescence shines on the steaming blubber of a deboned whale.
I write toward it: queen bee kickflips the gap between trumpet blossoms.
The kids grow suddenly old in my mind:
skating forever over a higher decibel hunched and aging.
The birder names another tree.
Blood trickles from a helmet on graffiti flats.
An airplane crashes into the sea.





DEE-JA-BOO

Mátias Bragagnolo

Hysterical inflammation of sleep: semi-abstract arguments force their way through the pigskin of your innocent atrophied brain. Amid gratuitous shows of disfigurement, your deceased relatives scream inside the crashed van while you gasp for air. Nothingness is the manifestation of the true mobile mortifications of the King's horses in the midst of an Apocalypse. All part of the aura that stalks your corneas seconds before your chronic epileptic nightmares explode.

Humpty Dumpty syndrome turns out to be genetic. It's the Third World Teenage Sex Cult. The process in which you've been delayed. The horrible face of fake weeping.

Because Humpty Dumpty wants to talk to you. He has the tongue of a preacher cornered by a birth of prey. 'The death of God was only an imperceptible glory of the past.'

He laughs with sexual cackles, with strength stolen from your dead childhood pets. And despite the recently inherited panic, you climb the wall and sit next to him, keeping your distance. And you start muttering something about shrouded cats making shrouded demonstrations around the sanitarium, while Humpty Dumpty falls back into the abyss of reality, away from your long-desired distorted world of high school sweethearts bloated genitalia.

It will be the saddest experience you'll ever remember, time after time —all through your never-ending quadriplegic vigils.



Haunting

Kushal Poddar

I

The shadow has come a long way, it turns and sees you. Near the house of the decayed bricks it loses you. That it doesn't need a source worries the residents.

II

Even in its independence the shadow writhes, yearns for the flesh, yours. It may give you a call. Call you away.

III

You are scared of cats. Dogs are scared of you. These are not universal truths. Sometimes no one is afraid of anyone, and live around the same empty corner. Neighborhood keeps it empty, avoids adding its own presence.

IV

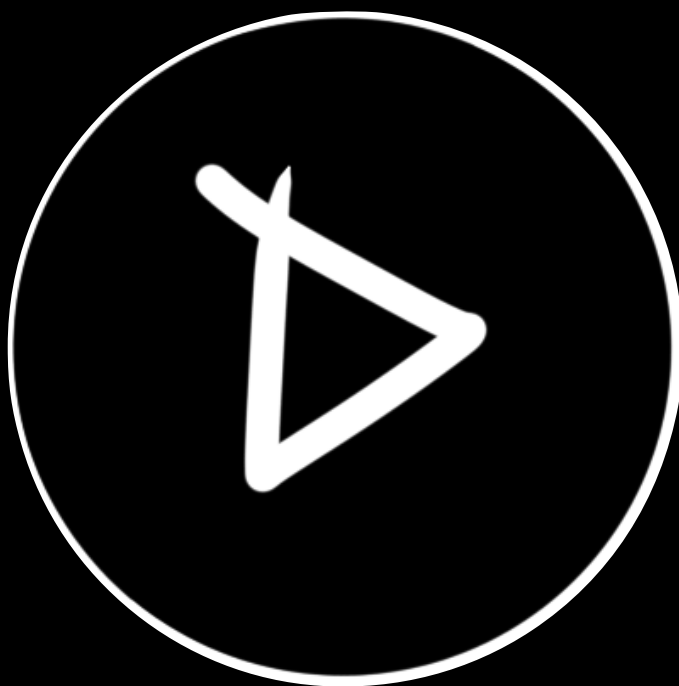
One run, away from what you thought to be a supernatural entity, lasted for five long minutes and more than just the lane and the street. Look back at that moment while in the cocoon of sleep, decide if your run was a revolution occurred between two establishments. By being scared of one and choosing the other you laid out your endorsement.



Steel Bars a Single Sheet

Michael Lee Johnson

I'm Steely Dan Seymour Butts,
South America, trust me on that.
I can't pull up my sheet inside
these steel bars anymore. 25 to life.
No man is God in the cold or the clouds.
Isolated poets grab words anywhere
they can find them in newspaper clippings,
ripped-out Bible verses are a sin.
No one pities people like me in prison.
Spiders hang from my cell ceiling—
dance the jitterbug, "In the Mood."
Jigger bug fleas on my unpainted
cement floors.
My butt is toilet paper brown, flush.
Toxic thoughts grind on my aging
face, body, and declining health.
In this dream, I reach
for a hacksaw that is not there.
End this night & so many more
suffer in just a snore.



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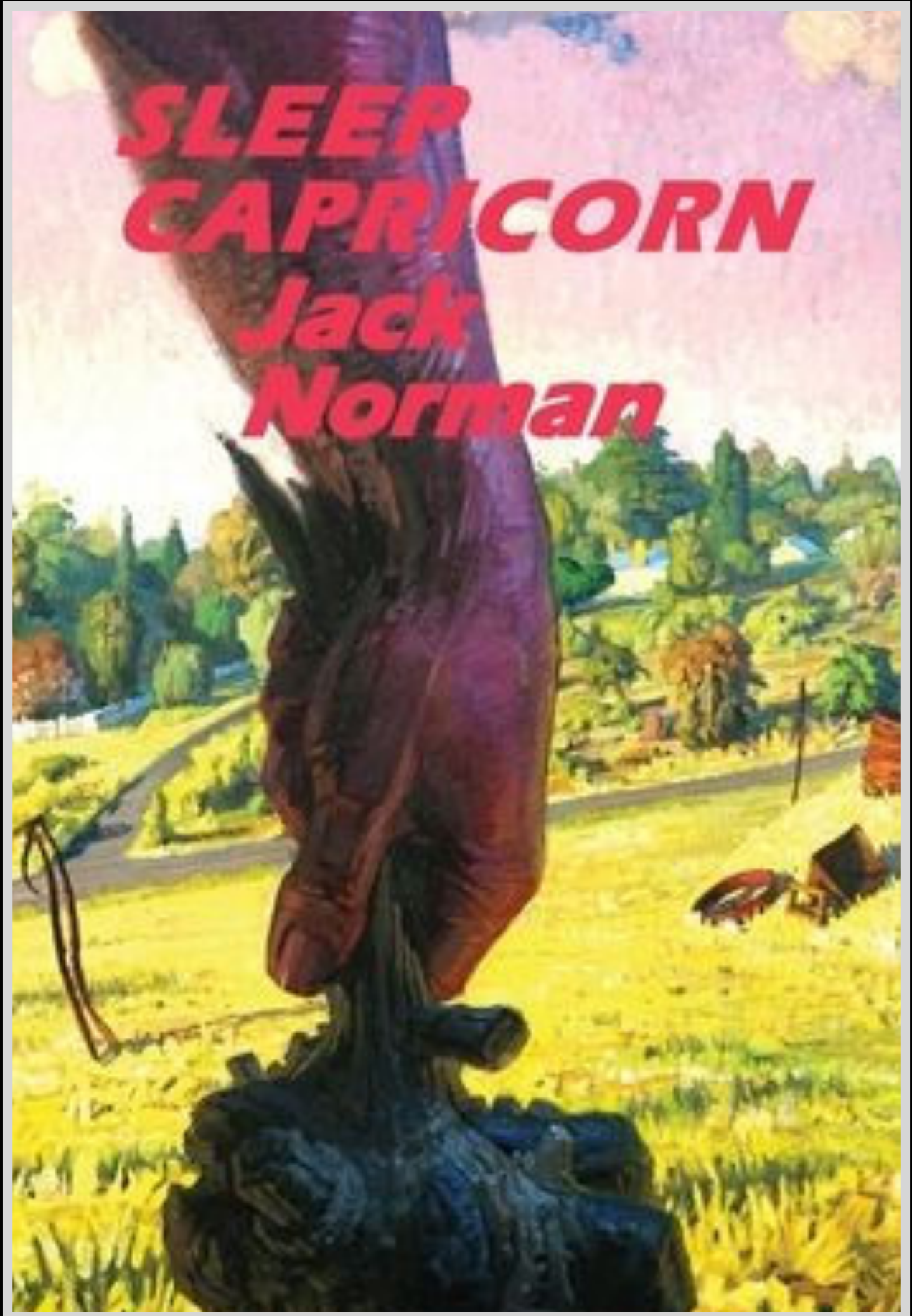


SMILE CENTRAL

Theodore Wallbanger

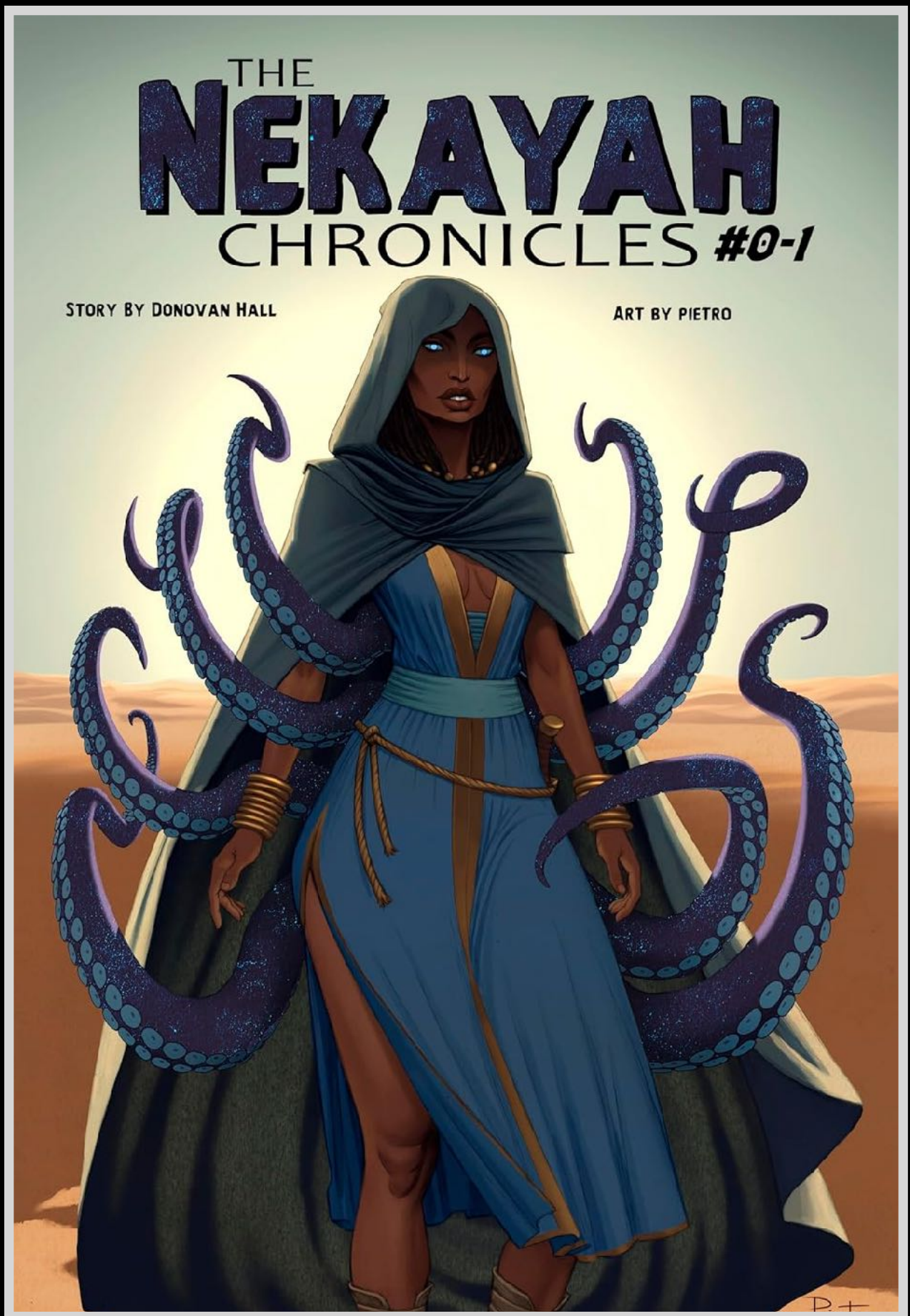
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