

New Fiction By Provolone Sinatra: “Atlantis”

written by Guest Contributor | January 17, 2018



[Image Credit: “Image of the Fish God” by Alan Davie, 1956]

My house was built just after the Civil War. It was a humble, delicate abode. The wooden floors always creaked. In spots where support beams had rotted my ceiling drooped. Still, in all its ugliness, it was a place with a roof, with a heater. I was content with the essentials.

One day, when I was dressing Katy for school, a sudden dampness encased the bottom of my socks. Upon investigating I found that water was seeping from the faded fibers of the carpet. I didn't know it yet, but the tension of my universe was building up, delicately cracking the Earth's surface. An ancient reservoir had been ruptured and its contents had begun flowing into my world through Katy's carpet. At the time I thought it was just a broken pipe.

During our walk to my daughter's elementary school I thought only about how the carpet would mold, about how it would cost three weeks salary to replace it, and how I couldn't possibly afford that. As she skipped through puddles I heard a tiny cough in my mind's recesses where a sickness had spawned. A weak wheezing of Katy's tiny lungs struggling to breathe through a cloud of spores echoed behind my eyes.

When I got home from work that afternoon I saw that water had begun leaking from every orifice of the residence. It seeped from the air conditioning ducts, condensed on windows. Muddy water sputtered sporadically from the kitchen sink. Mold had already crawled across the yellowing walls, accenting the peeling paint. By the following night, the water had reached Katy's shins. Her room was entirely ruined but I managed to salvage most of her clothes. Her nightlight, coloring books, and beanie-babies were soaked.

If anybody found out about the state of my home I was sure to lose Katy

again, either to protective services or the clutches of her mother. I hadn't had her for very long and already I was beginning to feel like what everyone said was probably right; maybe I didn't have what it takes to be a father.

"I'm too old for this stuff anyways," she said when I handed her an inventory of what she lost, "mom says that it's time for me to start growing up."

Katy was nine when this was occurring, and in my eyes still young enough to continue indulging in the luxury of childhood if she wanted to. Her mother is thirty-two, she never believed in recreational activities that weren't scholastic in nature.

I never approved of how Katy's mother tried to raise her. The process was calculated, cold, similar to raising a farm animal for show. Katy wanted to play soccer. My ex-wife wanted a show pony. I worked too often to want anything. I guess that's why she left me.

Four months after our divorce Katy's mother relinquished custody on account of her new engagement. She didn't even want Katy for the weekends, just the holidays, and only some holidays—the one's where people take pictures of the whole family. I spent many nights thinking that my ex-wife wanted to have another daughter, one she would raise her way. I imagined her naming that daughter Katherine and teaching her to play the violin and speak Mandarin Chinese. I contemplated who would be more successful, Katy or Katherine, as well as who would be happier. I bet that right now, my ex-wife is rubbing her swelling stomach, thinking to herself: *nobody is going to fuck this up for me*. And that nobody, that's me.

Since the water had destroyed her bedroom I let Katy sleep in mine. That night I fell asleep in a lawn recliner on the back porch. When I woke up the water had risen to my knees, extended infinitely beyond the horizon. Everywhere I looked the world was leaking.

An empty jerry can bobbed in the newly formed lake that was once my back yard and a pair of Katy's pink flip flops floated passively, waiting for her to save them from their muddied condition. A year's worth of littered cigarette butts floated on the surface of the muddy water, emulating minnows that, mindlessly, nipping at algae and balls of bread. I made my way to the house and opened the door; a waterfall caught me in the chest and knocked me to the floor. When the house had mostly emptied of water, I made my way forward to wake up my daughter.

"I don't wanna," Katy said.

I smiled a small, injured smile and poked her cheek. She rolled over and opened one eye. A wet line circumnavigating the mattress shows how high the water had risen over night. I frowned, realizing that I was losing her.

I picked her up and put her down on the wet floor. Water was already collecting and building up again so I slipped a pair of rubber rain boots onto her tiny feet. They were her favorite shoes, these boots, even though they were half a size too small, she refused to stop wearing them. Gingerly,

I led her to the back door.

"Are you okay?" she asked me. I twisted my shirt at the center and wrung it out.

"Yeah," I said, "yeah baby, everything's okay."

"You look tired," she said.

"I am tired, I spent all night looking for what's causing this damn leak." She frowned.

"I don't see anything wrong," she said. Of course she didn't, she was just a kid. How could she tell that her father was drowning in his own home?

The entire trek to school felt like the final steps of emerging from the ocean. I rose my knees high and clunked forward one lounge at a time, with Katy riding on my shoulders, giggling all the way. She didn't mind the increasingly aggressive tide, but children never do. Through divorces, deaths, famines. . . they hardly ever notice a change. She didn't even blink an eye the day I put everything she owned in the bed of my truck and told her that she was coming to live with me. That weekend, I dropped her off at my sister's house.

"It's just until I can figure some things out," I said.

"So I don't live here now?"

"No, you'll come back with me when this is all over."

"When what's over?" I looked out of the window of my truck at the surrounding marsh, and wondered if nobody else had noticed the condition of the world. A few minutes later she looked over at me, her eyes reddening, and said, "Mom told me this would happen. You don't want me anymore." All I could do was grab her little hand. She cried the whole way to her aunt's house.

A week after the water began rising my backyard was transformed into a swamp. The usual plants of my backyard were drowned, replaced by cat-tails and lemon bacopa. Lilly pads were speckled amongst the tape-grass and pondweed. I could hear the cries of baby alligators echoing across the marsh, the incessant drum of cicadas.

Thick, black clouds rolled in from the East. Rain fell so violently, in such a large mass, that the water rose a foot in only a few hours. When I went inside to check the infrastructure, I found that all hope was to be abandoned. My few belongings floated ever closer to the roof. Water gushed from my cracking walls, streamed from the plumbing, and sprung like geysers from the floor. My house was ruined. Forever. I was homeless without hope. The inter-dimensional pressure building up inside my home gave way completely, releasing great waves of stinking pond water.

I spent the entire night constructing a crude floating device from emptied multi-gallon jugs that I patched to an old raft. Overhead, the moon loomed,

casting light on the moss ridden tree tops. Creatures of the night surrounded the gently rocking dinghy. Frogs croaked. Dragonflies buzzed. It was a tranquil chaos, an apocalypse that calms you when it strikes because you've learned to expect it. I couldn't tell where the water was coming from anymore, but I knew it was coming still. My crude vessel rose while I slept.

The following morning I paddled myself into town because work refuses to pander to disaster. It wasn't a job I particularly hated, the average desk jockey position, but it also wasn't the place I wanted to be at when my life was falling apart. I parked the dinghy up against the wall and I landed on my belly in a shallow puddle on the third floor. My coworkers turned, saw me there on the floor treading water, and promptly turned away.

At my desk, water began leaking from out of my ears. A slow trickle dribbled down my neck and pooled at the floor. My coworkers began to stare. An hour later, water had begun pouring from beneath my fingernails and ruined the documents piled up on my desk. Ink bled across the sopping pile of papers. Panicked, I rose from my swirling chair and bolted for my boss's door. The water came more aggressively from my body now, fueled by the fluorescent lighting, filling the hallway quickly with great waves. I bursted into the office and attempted to explain that my scenario was circumstantial, not-permanent, but instead muddy water streamed from my mouth onto my boss's desk. I tried to talk a second time, but again, a waterfall fell from my gaping mouth. I choked, gagged incoherently, the jutting stream never faltering. My boss had me removed from his office by a team of security guards, even though one guard would have been sufficient.

Defeated, I returned to my float. The world was, by then, nearly completely drowned. Only the top half of my roof showed above the surface of the all encompassing water. Herons perched themselves on my neighbor's roof. Bluegill circled my raft, nipping the surface of the water every so often. I continued paddling passed my street.

I don't know where I ended up when I grew too tired to move forward. Every few minutes I had to empty the raft of the water that flowed from my fingers and ears. Eventually, the town around me was completely lost. The rural landscape around me had sunk beneath ever-rising depths. Looking down into the water, I saw a submerged Circle-K that reminded me of the city of Atlantis. I wondered how lackluster that city must be, a home to only lobsters and cephalopods.

I awoke at sunset, could feel the air density increasing, the position of the water adjusting ever so slightly. Deep beneath the surface something grande was in motion, and it was coming right at me.

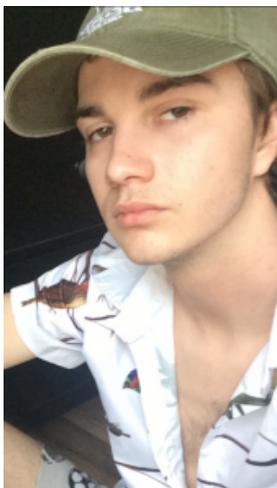
The fish resembled a white sturgeon, but trumped it's size by several hundred meters. I first saw the tip of it's nose, extending into a triangular head that was connected to a narrow, torpedo shaped body. As the goliath passed me, barely skimming the surface of the water, I saw several rows of great protruding plates on it's side. Fanged teeth jutted from its lower jaw.

I knew when I saw it in it's entirety that this deity had existed for

millions of years. It was created with the sole purpose to ruin my life, or at least to attempt to. The monster had slept beneath the planet's tectonic plates, tucked into a primordial stew, waiting for the day that it would rupture the crust of the Earth to drown me out of home and family. As it circled my boat, I wondered why fate had put me here, why this monster was torturing me. Gentle ripples from the encircling goliath rocked my dinghy. I felt like a baby in a crib. The moment was as horrifying as it was calming.

I peered over the side as the boat ceased rocking. Two bulbous eyes, each of them a muddied white beneath the surface, were fixated on me. It's giant fins waved passively in the nasty water. I wondered if that fish had known me for all my life. Did it live with me always? Growing as I did, migrating as I did? A story unfolded in its gaze, a story of an ancient rivalry between human being's and the universe. It was a dual that was born in the moments of the universe's creation, that spanned centuries, stemming back to when cavemen outlived the Megaladon. We were, this ancient fish and I, the two champions chosen to represent our parties.

The goliath stared back for a few moments with a strange intelligence. It's great snaking body plummeted down into the depths. After it disappeared, I felt a violent shaking from deep below the glistening surface. All around me, the water level fell ever so slightly. Centimeter by centimeter. Minute by minute. A hope rose where the image of the ancient fish burned into my chest.



Provolone Sinatra is an emerging writer from the University of Central Florida. He spends a lot of time in an armchair fantasizing about hobbies he admires but doesn't indulge in. One day he'll build a ship in a bottle.