

Segue

online literary journal

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Segue is published once a year in August. We accept submissions of high quality fiction, poetry, and creative nonfiction between January 1 and April 30 (closed May through December), and writing about writing year-round via email. Before submitting, please read past issues to understand the sort of work we publish, then read our submission guidelines.

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T-Pain and the Robots

"Robot voices" became a recurring element in popular music during the late twentieth century. Several methods of producing variations on this effect have arisen, of which the vocoder remains the best known and most widely-used.

—Wikipedia

Most days he would just stare
into the red reflectors of his toy robot's
eyes until he got dizzy. At breakfast,
he would pretend his Cocoa Puffs
were meteors floating in the Milky Way.
At night, he'd sneak into the kitchen,
steal the aluminum foil,
and wrap it around his arms and legs.
He painted his Little League helmet silver.
Built an interplanetary army
out of old spark plugs and mufflers he lifted
from the auto body's dumpster.
In the summer, when his mom brought
out the fan to shoo away those sticky Tallahassee
nights, young Faheem would sing straight
into the whorl of blades for hours.

T-Pain and the Fistfight

The boys picked on his song, caught
him in moon boots smuggling a shooting star.
If women could squeeze a hard-jelly-bounce
into their chests, slide a chemical slug
into the top lip, then Faheem wanted the vocal
chords of a space ship. He wanted to sing
like *The Jetsons*' housekeeper. He wanted
a smile like a pencil sharpener. But the taunting
cut deeper each day, so Faheem recycled
6 bags of cans & bottles, and bought
brass knuckles for a punch like a robot's.
His aluminum baseball bat was his space sword.
He was only eight, too young to know
about comas. Too young to register losses.
When they finally pried the bat from his
sequin-gloved hand, there were still four bullies
standing, and they beat asteroids into his
blue-black face. They beat him until his lip
opened like a thundercloud, and bled ball bearings
all over the outfield.

Up In the Treehouse

In the summers of our youth
when it was perfectly fine
to drop drawers and swim naked
in a stream off the Kangamangus
as a troop of Brownies crossed
the wooden bridge, I didn't
know "the big deal" till a few years
later when one of us got a hold
of Playboy's fluffy tail
and we had to build a treehouse
for those magazines to perch on
in plastic bags like gold fish—
and this was the beginning
of getting into things
like going down to the boatyard
in the winter where the boats
were hibernating on cinderblocks
dreaming of fire hydrants
and we'd break into those boats
and let the sharp liquids in crystalline
decanters burn our tongues
or we'd steal knives and machetes
and big metal fishing hooks
(that must have been severed pirates'
hands), and for some reason we buried
them behind my mema's house
hoping they would grow
into the sharp warriors of our dreams.

Author Notes

Michael Cirelli is the author of the collection, Lobster with Ol' Dirty Bastard (Hanging Loose 2008), which was listed in the New York Times as an independent press poetry best seller. He also wrote the award-winning teaching curriculum, Hip-Hop Poetry & the Classics (Milk Mug 2004), and is the Executive Director of Urban Word NYC. His new collection, Vacations on the Black Star Line, is forthcoming from Hanging Loose Press.

About the Work

The poems in *Segue* are from my forthcoming collection, *Vacations on the Black Star Line*. That collection, partly inspired by Mos Def & Talib Kweli's "Black Star" album, deals with race and white privilege while paralleling some of the astrological impulses in the album. From these themes, the idea of "other" started to transfer itself onto robots, aliens and space-related imagery. My previous collection has many real life "characters" (emcees, rappers, etc.) and in this new book T-Pain started to evolve as a person that interested me because he seemed to revive this whole wave in popular hip-hop and R&B that uses robotic voices. He became a perfect character of exploration that supplemented many of the nuances in the greater work.

The poems about T-Pain were relatively easy because they are my imagination imposing a reality onto a subject. They are essentially writing exercises. I like to work on concepts and keep pushing the story, but also need to find the balance and include some of my own personal experiences/elements in the work. That is always difficult for me. Right now, the forthcoming collection has about nine poems that are about or mention T-Pain. I think that is enough. The tree house poem is pretty standard as well, and fits in well with the themes of the collection. True stories, which this is, are always easy to write. And true stories where weird things happen, like burying knives and hooks in the ground, always make for good poems.

When my work is challenging, there is never really resolution. There is always more that can be done. As a writer, there is always the initial impulse to write, and the actual final product (which is either better or worse than what was intended originally).

I work with teens on a daily basis, so poetry is about so many things. For them (and me), it can be about saving lives. For my nerd-brain, it can be about high art, or conceptual ramblings, or showing off. But for now, I feel I am too young and novice to really know what poetry is about for me, which may be a good thing.

Michael Cirelli on the Web

www.urbanwordnyc.org