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R.J. Godlewski currently writes from his native Michigan and is a frequent resident of the southern United States where his passion is the exploration of the oceanic environment. An accomplished traveler as well as an enthusiastic proponent of marine and aerospace technologies, his ambition is to share the diversity and richness of the world through his writing, music, and explorations.

Isolated from the modern world by thousands of kilometers of bright blue Pacific Ocean, the quaint little Chilean island of La Desesperación had been a perfect haven for those who sought escape from the mind-numbing pace of urban progress and treasured the unmolested beaches and pristine scenery of the remote getaway.

Lurking beneath the surface, however, was a diabolical monster of geological proportions. One that sank ships, ridiculed science, and tested the faith of true believers as it held the entire population of La Desesperación within its fiery grasp. Then there was the volcano...

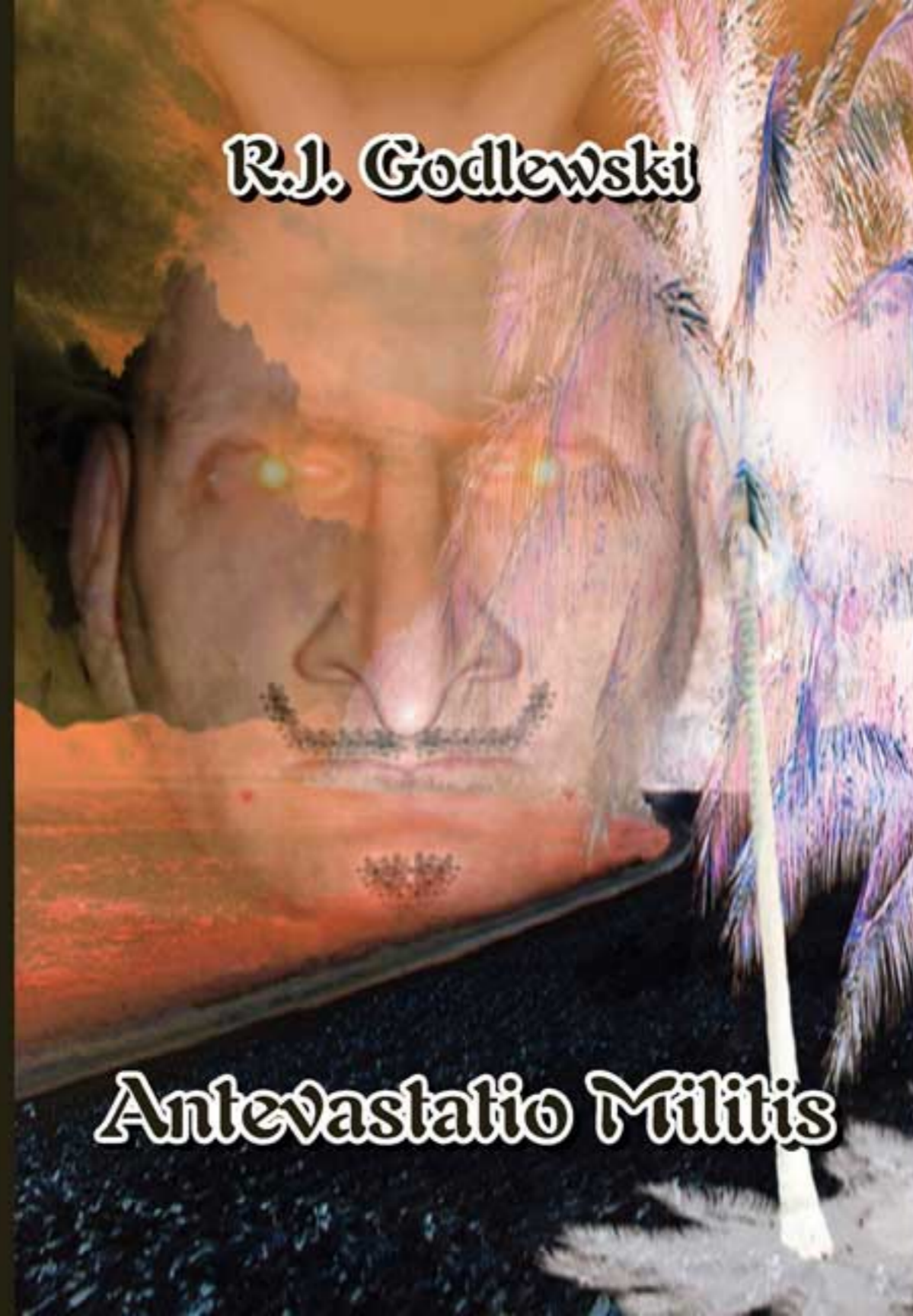
The Good Earth? Hell.

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Antevastatio Militis

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Isolated from the modern world by thousands of kilometers of bright blue Pacific Ocean, the quaint little Chilean island of La Desesperación had been a perfect haven for those who sought escape from the mind-numbing pace of urban progress and treasured the unmolested ivory beaches and pristine emerald scenery of the remote getaway. For the local townsfolk of San Sebastian, however, the island was merely home; the place where they eked out a living, stove off advancement, and fabricated tales of legendary status. The island had other plans...

Lurking far beneath the surface was a diabolical monster of geological proportions. One that sank ships, ridiculed science, and tested the faith of true believers as it held the entire population of La Desesperación within its fiery grasp. Then there was the volcano...

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In loving memory of my precious Sara
(07/25/51 –12/13/03)
who always encouraged me to write from the heart
and was at once my greatest critic and most loyal fan.

In love with you always!

Prologue

M/V ILSE DIETRICH

48 NMI S.E. OF ISLA DE LA DESESPERACIÓN,
1,500 NMI WEST OF SANTIAGO, CHILE

THE SHIP HEAVED through the rough seas with the determination of a battle-hardened veteran of countless expeditions throughout the hostile maritime world. She had weathered many storms before and this particular one was rather innocuous as gales go, so there was never any real concern from those securely tucked away in their berths. Only the skeleton crew of a single deck officer and engineer manned the necessary watches within their respective departments. The others having decided to forfeit the evening meal in the hope that breakfast at daybreak would be more digestible.

The sixty meter long *Ilse Dietrich* was owned by the Hamburg-based Kaspar Reinhardt Corporation and functioned as an oceangoing geochemical laboratory, scouring the world's oceans for minerals and biochemicals suitable for commercial exploitation. In this capacity, she was just the latest in a long line of German vessels that were unleashed upon the high seas seeking gold and other precious metals since the 1920's.

The immaculate white vessel was midway through a three-year expedition that had its origins at KRC's Hamburg Dock B-12 and carried her through the Eastern Caribbean down along the coast of Brazil, stopping for several months for her crew to feed the mosquitoes while the ship's scientific staff surveyed the Amazon Basin, then she sailed down around the southern tip of the continent

prior to her trek northwestward towards a brief stopover at Isla de la Desesperación.

Her mission at the remote Chilean island was to test a newly developed autonomous underwater vehicle that would evaluate the massive gas hydrate reserves recently discovered just south of the island. These reserves, properly retrieved, would boost the company's profits significantly and flood the Chilean government with a powerful source of tax revenues for many decades to come.

For the present, however, much laid in the feasibility of extracting such an important natural resource and therein laid the importance of the vessel's survey itself. All told, this was one of the decidedly more commercial aspects of the voyage – the trip to Brazil being one primarily of ecological study and the harrowing tour around the Horn through the dangerous Drake Passage being undertaken for investigation into the implications and perceived realities of global warming.

Second Officer Alrich Ryba could've cared less about the environment or global warming; he wanted to pull into a nice tropical port and get laid by one of those large breasted island babes that he heard so much about. At least that was his game plan, though he suspected that their current destination might have delayed the ship's arrival in Polynesia for a few weeks. Regardless, La Desesperación had to be a hell of a lot warmer than the Drake Passage had been and he didn't really mind a chance to thaw out his privates before they were put into practical use.

Being alone and bathed in the brilliant orange glow of the bridge in the middle of a storm-tossed night did little to sway his dreams of beachfront paradise and threesomes, but the ceaseless rolling of the vessel and the pounding of waves against her hull from every conceivable quarter did. Nevertheless, his was primarily the function of having a warm-blooded, air-breathing human being on duty in the pilothouse just in case the autopilot decided to check out and leave the ship without control. In fact, had it not been for the storm raging outside, he would've had to resort to pacing the deck in an effort to keep his mind off of the bathing beauties in their skimpy G-strings, but thanks to nature he had the distinct option of having to bury himself into the captain's chair to avoid being launched full force into the downward bulkhead.

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Alrich's concerns were not so much a fear of seasickness as personal injury. Even as a child, he loved roller coasters and just about anything else that left him upside down, sideways and which ways. However, being pelted against an aluminum bulkhead was a different matter altogether and even the seemingly calmest of seas could injure a careless sailor, particularly during the night watches when there was no one else around to remember a hapless sailor's trajectory.

Being located within an extremely remote part of the planet, even the ship's radar failed to show anything clearly and the second officer could only guess as to where the island lay amongst the instrument's return clutter that prevented him from knowing precisely what lay beyond his meter and a half visual range. He suspected - hoped - that this would change at daybreak, just about the time that he was scheduled to be relieved of his watch. They were making an average speed of eight knots with a following sea which meant that they should arrive at the island at around six o'clock in the morning.

Alrich turned and glanced at the radar, the nearest instrument to his location, to observe that it showed hardly anything but clutter and false returns. *Surely the island should be showing up on the hundred mile radar? So where the hell is it?* The radar return from the mountainous seas was horrendous, and he quietly assured himself that the island just lay buried amongst the clutter. After all, he had never been at this particular part of the planet before and couldn't be certain that he would recognize what the island would look like once it showed up on the radar with all of the extra crap that flickered on the screen.

Had the seas remained calm, then a complete novice could've picked out the large land mass on the horizon. However with radar echoes being thrown back from all directions and him being bounced around in the captain's chair, even Australia would've gone unnoticed. He steadied himself to take another glance at the screen. *There, that large percolating mass of confusion. That has to be the island! Much too massive to be returns from the waves.*

Alrich felt confident that he had answered the question regarding the island's position. It was in the right location and at about the correct distance. Considering the fact that he was struggling just to remain firmly planted in his seat, that he couldn't be certain where in

the hell the island was didn't seem particularly threatening. As long as there were no big, *solid* return echoes that remained steadfast on a direct collision course, he was satisfied that they could safely plow their way through the sea.

As the hours wore on, the second officer became convinced that all would get back to normal, especially when the island appeared on the ship's Global Positioning Satellite System computer monitor. Until a few minutes previously, the display map showed only open ocean; he had not had an opportunity to walk over and change the zoom settings on the display while he was being buffeted around on the bridge. Now, however, as the vessel had reached a predetermined location, the display automatically changed its scale and lo and behold the island appeared right where he had anticipated that it would be found.

Of course, all of this led the intrepid mariner to wonder why he was needed on the bridge at all. The ship knew where it was. If it weren't for the status of the seas, he could've slept and accomplished as much as he did. Glancing up at the clock on the near bulkhead he noticed that it had just become five o'clock in the morning, local time. *The sun should be coming up soon.* He strained forward to see if he could detect any signs of light emanating from the horizon but other than a few distant flashes of lightning, he couldn't observe much of anything.

Anxiety caused him to sweat, which in turned caused him to be chilled by the breeze created by the bridge fans so he zipped up his blue coveralls, then casually adjusted his black ball cap as he braced his feet against the bridge console and waited. *Less than an hour to go.* He couldn't tell if he was just exhausted or that the seas were abating, but somehow the rolling of the ship seemed more tolerable and the radar seemed more decipherable.

Even the views out through the windows were less of ebony and more of a slate in color, indicating that his environment was changing. Soon, he could even make out the broken surface of the water - scratches and scraps upon the slate surface that only his imagination could conclude was actually wind-blown waves. He stared at them intently until his visual acuteness could finally pick out the fine strands of spray hurling off of the crests.

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Like being witness to some dramatic sporting event, time began to fly by and Alrich could see more and more detail of his surroundings. First, the scrapes on the slate surface widened and increased in depth. Then, their elevation increased the level of contrast and soon shadows enabled him to adequately judge the height of the waves. Finally, the dark slate color of the water gave way to more brilliant silver and the sky lightened to a soft dove-gray. Daybreak had arrived.

Relinquishing his grip on the console, Alrich stood up and managed to massage the circulation back into his cramped legs, finding it much easier to walk around the bridge once he had the security of knowing when he should brace himself for the occasional wave breaking over the ship's bow. Being blind at night always drastically shortened one's reaction time for such events.

Walking out onto the starboard bridge wing, the second officer breathed in the cool, subtropical air and stared far out into the horizon. There was the island, right where the radar and GPS unit had told him where it would be. Considering the distance involved, Alrich couldn't make out much – just a dark silhouette of a mountain that jutted up out of the sea, surrounded by a series of bright clouds.

He had seen islands before and knew that they came in all sizes and shapes and were located in every body of water on the planet, yet this one seemed a little different somehow. He looked towards the volcano that represented the entirety of the island, spying something that appeared out of place. *Is that large cloud coming from inside the mountain?* Sure enough, upon closer scrutiny of the subject, he could plainly see that a large mass of vapor had been pouring out of the top of the mountain. The volcano was active. *Cool.*

Having never seen an active volcano before, except of course on television and in the movies, Alrich didn't know quite what to expect. This particular specimen didn't appear especially threatening. After all, not all volcanic eruptions obliterated civilizations; that much he knew. Instead, it seemed merely to be clearing its throat and he felt no need to sound any alarms. Whatever was going on at the island, the ship was safely miles offshore.

For twenty minutes the second officer watched the volcano spew forth material from within the depths of the earth. He could tell that it had been erupting for quite some time, gauging by the distance that

the top of the vertical column of gas drifted off into the west. He thought it somewhat strange that no one cared to notify the ship of this activity but concluded that it must've been merely routine and therefore no cause for concern.

He returned to the bridge and occupied a position next to the captain's chair, knowing that at any moment the skipper would appear and relieve him of his duties for the watch. These thoughts of responsibilities and volcanoes ended as soon as he noticed something really strange happening in the water only a short distance in front of the ship.

The silvery-blue sheen of the water turned decidedly white, opaque, and almost frothy in appearance. A mass of conflicting currents and chaotic bubbles erupted from below, engulfing the vessel and surrounding its own wake with a strange mixture of churned seawater and bubbling gases. Everything commonplace about the sea in the aftermath of a storm seemed to transform so quickly and unexpectedly that Alrich simply could not force any action other than to stand and stare in awe at the spectacle unfolding around him. The thought that his ship could now be in mortal danger did not register in his mind as the thought process itself seemed to be diverted by some as yet unknown mechanism.

Just prior to blacking out, the second officer had the distinct and unsettling sensation that his vessel wasn't reacting as it should have been, that somehow the seas became unnervingly well-behaved and their journey through them slower, as if the ship itself lost recognition of the medium for which it was designed.

REGARDLESS OF THE condition of the sea, Rodolf Wilhelm always began the day with his fifty pushups followed immediately by his fifty sit-ups, something that kept the fifty-seven-year-old captain in top physical shape. Discipline, he knew, was the *only* way in which to conduct one's life and if he allowed himself to degenerate into torpescence, then so too would his crew become afflicted and he would never allow that to happen.

Working out enabled the chisel jawed, crew cut sporting master to keep his body toned while serving in an environment decidedly

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limited in space and the cyclic buffeting of the ship through the seas intensified such a workout, sculpting his muscles into their massive state with each balancing act required by exercising on a moving platform. Sometimes he could literally launch himself off of the deck when the vessel cooperated with an upward lurch and at other times it felt as if he were carrying the duties of three men when the ship tried its best to defeat his efforts on the downward swing.

Precision was the lifeblood that pulsed through Captain Wilhelm's veins, the very nourishment that added substance to his character. Arise at 0500 for a preamble of deep breathing exercises, next his workout to be completed at 0530, followed immediately by a hot shower lasting no longer than 0545, dressing and occupying his chair at the table for a breakfast consisting of eggs, toast with jam, and orange juice served precisely at 0600. No deviations. No problems.

No problems, that was, beyond the two failed marriages with women who wanted nothing of his exacting nature but were fairly content with wasting their share of his salary and investments. Wilhelm had long realized that his marriage was to the sea and, after losing his son and only child two decades previous, he really had no desire to remain with anyone and that was pretty much okay with everyone else.

As he saw it, few people cared for or had the capability to be good at anything. Therefore, those like him who had achieved a certain level of success within their lives could not be sidetracked by pleasing those who hadn't. It was the eighty-twenty rule - eighty percent of the world's population were wasting the earth's valuable oxygen supply that was desperately required for the twenty percent who made more effective use of it.

Having established a new personal record for completing his morning workout, considering the pounding that his command was taking, Wilhelm showered and was just finishing dressing with the final few buttons of his precisely creased shirt being fastened when he noticed a slight disturbance in the way his vessel behaved.

With several decades of service to the sea under his belt, Rodolf Wilhelm knew instinctively whenever something unusual was transpiring. The moans and groans of the ship sounded decidedly different. The manner in which she rode the waves or responded after

being shoved off course felt different. Inasmuch as an individual never realizes how important a limb or an eye is until they can no longer use them, an experienced seaman never paid much attention to the savage waves or driving winds until their ship reacted incorrectly and then the warning bells sounded by an otherwise stoic mind became exceedingly loud and clear.

The normal progress of the *Ilse Dietrich* had changed – quite noticeably – by the time her captain opened his cabin door and stepped out into the passageway leading towards the bridge. Already he could tell that his ship was doomed. Decades of experience calculating loads and consulting stability charts informed him instinctively that his ship was sinking, for reasons as of yet totally undeterminable.

The instantaneous sensation that wracked his brain at the moment was the disturbing feeling that his ship was *falling* and that forward progress was unachievable – that the vessel was somehow being sucked down into the ocean and fast. Reaching the bridge in ever-increasing strides, the captain darted past the comatose second officer and peered through the port windows to find his ship being gobbled up by a boiling ocean. The surrounding sea had simply turned white with commotion as literally countless millions of bubbles had broken upon the surface and engulfed the struggling vessel.

Instinctively, he lurched for the general alarm, sounding the bell in a vain effort to alert the rest of his crew to the impending disaster though he knew deep inside that they would have mere seconds in which to affect an escape. The sea would have them and there was nothing that human or mechanical power could do.

Nearly tripping over the unconscious Alrich Ryba, Wilhelm bent down and threw the unconscious sailor over his shoulder, grabbing a pair of orange life vests as he yanked open the starboard door and leapt out of the bridge in time to be sucked overboard into the open ocean that seemed to awash the decks from fore to aft and back again.

Lost within the maelstrom of foaming ocean and swirling currents, the skipper forfeited his grip on the second officer and tried to swim towards the rapidly sinking sailor but found that intentional movement in any direction was impossible. He tried to swim faster, but his motions seemed to be for naught as any movement of his

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hands simply could not find sufficient traction to even keep his head above water. It wasn't so much as being pulled underneath the chaotic liquid as it was simply sinking beneath the waves much in the same manner as an individual is forever doomed by quicksand on land - his actions for survival simply intensified his demise.

Struggling, Wilhelm inhaled a mouthful of water that singed his throat and nostrils with a decidedly foul odor and taste beyond that normally associated with seawater. There was something different about it that he could not quite place. Something horrible that made every breath unbearable and ghastly. The more that he tried to breathe in life-sustaining air the less oxygen there seemed to be flowing into his bloodstream and, on the brink of asphyxiation, he began to hallucinate.

Battling the realization that death was imminent, he saw his beloved ship slowly sink beneath the waves without so much as a plume of water to mark her funeral. She simply sunk below the surface, her running lights still lit and her propellers still churning uselessly within the agitated water. Once the vessel vanished from his view and his desire to survive abated, the spectacle that he observed in his last moments began to take on a truly supernatural feel.

A brilliant orange-white fireball erupted over the debris field, spreading across the surface rapidly before it began to rise in a gigantic cloud. The spherical aberration continued to grow until its size dominated the entire sky, hovering aloft for several seconds until the unblemished ball metamorphosed into what appeared to be a face, but not quite that of any recognizable dweller of the human world.

The face grew hideous in appearance with a long, thin nose that widened into a triad of nostrils, themselves hovering above a decidedly symmetrical, but blotchy mustache that seemed to bend about the nostril flairs at a sharp angle. A small goatee anchored itself upon the chin, just below the thin red lips that pressed together.

The intense eyes glowed with orange flames that burst forth from the pupils and concealed any further identifying characteristics of the human eye. Two flat, elongated ears bordered the face more like instruments of flight than of sound detection and its scalp contained nary a hair to be recognized.

Captain Wilhelm tried to turn away from the hideous face but it stared him down until his stomach wretched with pain. He feared eternal damnation but fought to recall any transgressions that would've warranted such a repulsive judgment. Inhaling his last few precious breaths, his heart beating very shallow and quickly, he closed his eyes and mumbled the Lord's Prayer, passing away calmly, the horrific vision having disappeared and replaced by one of hope and salvation.

Available soon...

Bogdan Back Flies and the Children of Desperation

By R.J. Godlewski

CHILDREN CAN BE the most vicious and ruthless of all species, perhaps even more so than their archaic counterparts who masquerade as being somewhat of a more mature variety and nobody knows this better than their like-aged victims. While adults tend to find themselves addressed by such common names as John, Joe, or Mary, these are rarely embellished beyond the courteous addition of a respectable 'Mr.' or 'Mrs.'

This is not quite so with juvenility; formal names being frequently sacrificed for imaginative identifiers spawned by such incidents or physical anomalies that the unfortunate may very well have to defend against for the rest of their lives. Diminutive Stacy Bowen, for example, never witnessed the use of her name by her peers, for being ever called 'Lil' Bit'.

In similar fashion, it would be far too simple to refer to the stocky Benjamin Reynolds as Ben, or even 'Big Ben'. No, that would be too easy and *expected*, and he was therefore always called 'Tank' in honor of his ability to charge through the carefully laid plans of others. Periodically, the name changes experienced during youth reflect humanity's more comical nature as in the case of pudgy Chip Perry who enthusiastically earned the title of 'A-Bomb' for his reputation of blowing farts at the most inopportune time. Likewise, Walter

'Buddha' McCain's gelatinous bulk always collapsed into a pear-shape mound whenever he plopped down onto the floor, cross-legged, to devour an equally large mass of his favorite junk food.

Occasionally, the names are neither earned nor desired as in the case of Ricky Marsolpop who learned to respond to 'Marsupial' much to his dismay and to the delight of others who couldn't possibly identify a real marsupial if they had ever seen one. Then of course, there are examples like Bogdan Doss who earned their handles through a seemingly innocent and short-lived episode that would forever alter the course of their young lives.

As it happened, during one late summer afternoon during which he had spent a good three or four hours' time waiting for the morning's rain to depart, Bogdan hastily sprinted from his house in order to join his friends and inadvertently took a stumble that sent him careening down the small hill that sat just off his front porch. This incident was rather common as childhood activities go and Bogdan quickly reacted by somersaulting into a well-coordinated recovery designed to eliminate embarrassment and all would've been fine from that point on had it not been for the slippery and gooey green slime that coated his shirtless back and remained unnoticed by all except for the swarms of horseflies that seemed to materialize straight out of thin air and made a beeline for the unsuspecting victim.

The hordes of black, biting insects drove the hapless child absolutely nuts as he rolled around on the ground, screaming and flailing his hands at the attackers while his friends - who were anything but at the moment - laughed and egged the aerial pests on. Thus, 'Back Flies' became his charge even as the event that inspired it faded into juvenile memory; that which seems inescapable for a ten year old often dilutes by the time one reaches twelve. Of course, Bogdan had more to worry about than whether he was named after his maternal grandfather or a horde of ugly, flying beasts - he had to find a project that would occupy his time during the summer months.

Like pretty much any other student - judicious or otherwise - Bogdan just wanted space to unwind from the drab schedule of school, studies, and the never ending series of tests that seemed to ridicule his efforts. By no means an outdoor creature by any stretch of

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the imagination, Bogdan simply wanted to be outside the confines of his home where, for varying reasons, nothing was quite as calm as he would've liked it to be.

He possessed a most adventurous flair, mind you, and often dreamed of magical expeditions to far away places nearly the whole of his life. Sadly, however, his dreams were frequently squashed by an ever protective mother and the daily structure of his life took on a more impalpable routine what with the chores, visitors who always seemed to be in hurry, and simply staying out of the way. At least that's what his exterior actions seemed to suggest, for Bogdan had a plan.

Tucked away deep in the recesses of his consciousness, in that location where adolescents safeguard things from the mature, resided a master plan of escape. The goal of seeking out new spaces and opportunities, of accepting the challenge to accomplish what only fools would consider and only friends would admire. The fact that it would take place only for a weekend didn't faze his ambitions one bit and he quietly formulated the plan during the course of the school year much to the detriment of his grades which, in all reality, didn't need much help in spiraling towards the bottom of the barrel.

As a resident of the sleepy hamlet of Leftover, Wisconsin - a town which the locals proudly hailed as the "Quietest place in the United States!" - nestled along the craggy banks of Chequamegon Bay, Bogdan didn't have much opportunity for practical enterprise. His options were but of two: either he attended classes at Leftover Middle School or he helped his mother run the Doss Bed & Breakfast which offered rather spectacular views of Lake Superior for trendy tourists visiting from down state.

Granted, it wasn't much of a choice; his mother rarely departed from the strict routine imposed upon him by his teachers. The primary difference being one of "Bogdan pay attention in class!" versus "Bogdan did you empty the trash?" For his part, the young boy simply wanted change - anything that broke the monotony of doing what one was told and how one was told to do it and precisely when one was suppose to do it. Thus, in the midst of this everlasting tug of war between knowledge and discipline came his brilliant scheme.

Parked among the clutter of towering bluish-green pines that separated his mother's business from the business of the rest of the world, next to the small circle of stones that contained the remains of numerous camp fires and the memories of thousands of secret stories, was the small sailboat that he had been constructing for quite some time, itself nothing more than several scraps of plywood nailed together in haphazard fashion.

The small vessel lacked the aesthetic lines of a racer, the comfortable accommodations of a cruiser, and the craftsmanship of a trophy. What it did possess, however, were the walls of a small shed that were quietly liberated by a twelve-year-old with an overactive imagination.

Bogdan's plans were simple and straightforward. He would orchestrate the story of a weekend sleepover at a friend's, during which he would sneak away during the early morning hours to launch his vessel and sail away towards Madeline and Apostle Islands in the north. The secrecy of this adventure rested on the laurels of an overworked single mother and the airhead parents of his best friend and shipmate Ricky Marsolpop.

His mission was not necessarily to discover any new lands - even a twelve-year-old knew what was home and what wasn't - he merely wanted to capitalize on a chance to break bonds with authority. He wanted to create his own destiny, even if only for a weekend. It would be a childhood camping trip taken to a new plateau of originality.

Bogdan's greatest fear was that his makeshift craft would not float; destroying his ambitious voyage before it even had a chance to materialize. He kept reassuring himself that the boat was in fact constructed of wood and, as everybody knew, wood floated if it did anything else.

Ignoring the fact that he was neither an accomplished sailor nor an experienced naval architect, the boy designer simply pounded pieces of wood planking together until the craft more or less resembled the photograph of a kit sloop that he had stored within his bedroom desk. If it floated, it would sail. If it would sail, he would be able to guide it. If he could guide it, it would be able to go where he wanted it to. Simple enough.

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Creating the sail was a slightly more difficult problem, owing to his decided lack of appropriate material with which to work. Fortunately, however, he was able to pilfer several square yards of plastic and two stout aluminum poles from the shed that had so graciously donated the hull material. With these items in his possession, he was able to progress with the construction of the now christened *Sea Fly* during the course of a few weeks. Thus, Bogdan's quest for excitement, adventure and, most important of all, freedom began.

There was, of course, one singular problem to all of this nautical mischievousness that the otherwise resourceful boy had failed to consider: how to get the sturdy vessel to the water. As this realization stared him squarely in the face, he simply looked upon the ungainly vessel with the suspicious eyes of a self-taught engineer, oblivious to the presence of Ricky Marsolpop.

"Are we ready to take it to the water yet?" questioned the small visitor.

"How?" was Bogdan's only reply.

"How? We just..."

"Just what?" Bogdan spread his hands out wide as if to bless a cursed soul. "We can't carry it! It's too heavy!"

"Can we drag it?"

"We'd have to tie a rope to Buddha and roll him down the hill."

"Maybe we can get A-Bomb to fart it into the water?"

"Stop laughing! This isn't funny! How are we going to get my boat down to the water?"

Ricky shrugged his shoulders, doing his best to stop giggling. "I dunno. Find something to pull it."

Bogdan dropped to the ground, landing on his butt with a loud plop. "Pull it?" He looked around at the pine trees blanketing the landscape. "I had trouble getting in here."

"Some sailor." Ricky continued to chuckle. "You're building a boat in the middle of the woods and now we have no way of launching it! How stupid!"

"You're helping to build it!" Bogdan grabbed a large branch that laid dead upon the ground and swung it around catching his friend behind the knees, dropping the hapless comedian to the ground. "This is serious! My plans are going to be ruined!"

"You butthead!" yelled Ricky as he massaged the soreness out of his legs. "You're the brains; you figure it out!"

Bogdan was indeed thinking of possible solutions when the waddling presence of Buddha McCain worked his way through the thick underbrush, breaking several branches in the process. "Hey, Back Flies! When are you guys gonna get that contraption into the water?"

"We can't!" explained Ricky, not withholding his embarrassment. "The Admiral here forgot that we built it in the middle of a forest!"

Buddha looked around at the enormous trees which barely allowed sunlight to reach them, then turned his attention towards the direction of the water, barely perceptible through the thousands of pine needles. "Gosh, man. How d'ya think that you were going to get it into the lake?"

Bogdan stood up, swiping the dirt from the seat of his jeans and gazed through a seemingly impassible gap in the trees. "Through there. We'll pull the boat through those trees directly into the lake. That's how."

"There?" Buddha leaned forward, a sack of flesh tried desperately to reach the ground from his midsection as his eyes traced a line from the boat's bow through the trees towards the lake and back again. "I guess Marsupial will lead the pack?"

"We don't pull it." retorted Bogdan. "We get something to pull it for us. Hey, doesn't your dad have a new tractor?"

"Yeah. What of it?" Buddha rocked backwards, straightening his posture while his flesh jiggled in a series of bodily tsunamis. "Hey, wait a minute! My dad won't let us use his new tractor! No way!"

"Your dad is going out of town soon, right? We'll do it then when the boat's complete and at night so nobody will know."

"At night?" Buddha's jaw lowered to its basement level, dragged down by his bulging cheeks. "We can't see anything here during the day!"

"The tractor has lights, don't it?"

"So?"

"So, dorkus, we turn the lights on and drive where they shine."

Buddha gazed back towards the thick branches blocking their path. "All we'd see is trees."

Bogdan walked up to the line of trees, thought about the situation for several minutes, then snapped one of the low-lying branches off. "We'll have to cut the branches."

"Why don't we just cut down the trees?" bellowed Ricky, kicking a stone across the ground in frustration.

"Don't be silly." replied Bogdan, casually counting the branches blocking their path. "The trees might fall in our way and we'd be worse off."

Ricky threw his hands up in the air and mumbled something about being better prepared as lumberjacks than as sailors and walked off to pee behind the trees.

"So, when is your yacht going to be finished?" asked Buddha nervously as he looked inside the craft, not missing the numerous gaps in the hull planks that seemed to spell doom even on dry land.

"As soon as I can fill in the holes and paint it." replied Bogdan. "Maybe two weeks."

"Two weeks?" questioned Ricky as he returned from behind the trees. "We have to wait two whole weeks?"

"I think that you guys are going to spend two weeks just dragging this ugly thing through the trees." added Buddha sarcastically.

"I've been working on this for almost a year." responded Bogdan as he pushed the overweight Buddha from contact with his beloved project. "What's two more weeks?"

"You'll need more help." Buddha directed his massive body towards the path that led to the road and ultimately his house, his legs seeming to shudder as they fought the commands to transport their load forward. "Much more help if you're going to get that thing anywhere."

“We’ll manage.” snorted Bogdan as he looked back in the direction of the gap that opened towards the lake. “We’ll manage.”

Ricky watched patiently while their friend disappeared into the trees. “Are you sure this thing will actually float?”

“Certainly.” Bogdan smiled, looked over his boat, then towards the water in the distance. “It’s wood.”

“We’re not.”

“Relax. When we complete this boat, everyone will want to sail on it.”

Ricky walked over to a small mud puddle and noticed a chunk of scrap two-by-four resting on its bottom. “Yeah, right.”