

its head to the side and looking over its shoulder the while, as if to keep the boy checked. She caught the dog up by its collar and got to the boy's side of the road, called out to the children, Don't be afraid, don't be afraid, but they distrusted the moment and did not recompose themselves into a group and instead wavered here and there at wary angles from one another until one of them yelled at the sound of the bus, and then they knotted together again, crossed the road as one. When the bus lumbered around the bend behind her and slowed, the children waved and shouted as though afraid it would not stop, but it did. As they scrambled onto it she yelled, Wait! Wait!, but they did not, and, still collaring the dog, Jamie half-ran toward the vehicle and slapped at the door just as it was closing. The door sighed open. That boy's tied, she cried, and the driver, a woman whose years had left her sorely worn, looked a tired look at the boy and then back at her. 'Course he is, she said.

### From *Demon Theory* by Stephen Graham Jones

CON'S POV can just make out the cigarette through two of the cattle guard pipes. It's still lit. He turns to Seri.  
"Honk the horn," he says, "and keep it honking, no matter what, okay? They apparently don't like daylight or indoors, so maybe noise—" "Con—"

"Just do it, Seri. We made it to the truck, didn't we?"

He nods to her to see if she'll do it, and when she will (rolling her eyes okay) he steps out of the SUV, letting the storm in for a moment, then squats, reaching, his hand with the cigarette almost too balled up to clear the two pipes, but when it finally does, and he's bringing it to his lips, the horn blasts and doesn't let up, knocking the cigarette back into the cattle guard.

"Goddammit, Seri..." he says, closing the door on her for maneuvering room. He gets the cigarette again. In his b.g., through the open SUV window, Seri's head as she leans over is just where she can't see him.

Which translates into won't see him.

Meaning he's alone, vulnerable.

This is emphasized by a rough POV shift, high and angled overhead as he stands, taking a long long drag—the romantic cigarette-cupping pose again, his trademark, his downfall—and then looking up in the moments before impact. He narrows his eyes for what he can see coming at him, and gets large on the screen—near—the storm muted and unimportant all around.

"Trick or treat..." he says, his last joke, and then is hit, hard, and from inside the SUV his blood and brains splatter over the windshield ice.

Seri freaks—"Oh god oh god oh god"—and just when she's at the peak of it, about to slip over into hysteria, the roof of the SUV punches in, the doors jamming, Seri screaming. She thrashes all around, unable to open the door, scaring herself with everything, and finally, accidentally, kicks a foot through Con's still-open window. She crawls out stomach up, crying, and there on the roof is Con's ravaged body, a truly gruesome sight—the first. His cigarette is still in his lips.

<sup>1</sup>Though "splatter" is the common usage, the forensic term for the result of splatter is nevertheless "spatter," perhaps because *Webster's* definition for it (*spatter*) specifies the scattering of "small particles or drops,"

rather than the simple "splashing upon impact" of *splatter*. But of course that "splashing" was just what David J. Schow was looking for when he coined "splatterpunk" at the 1986 World Fantasy Convention (as the fiction version of the oft-maligned "splatter film," presumably, with some of Bruce Bethke's "cyberpunk" thrown in for good measure [from his 1982 short story of the same name].)

### From *Salt Rain* by Sarah Armstrong

Allie shook her head and kept her eyes fixed on the passing landscape as the train slowed and the paddocks gave way to a town. The rain overflowed in curtains from the gutters of small weatherboard houses and tall weeds grew high and luxuriant against back fences. She imagined her mother holed up in a town like this, sleeping in, then eating Chinese takeaway in her motel room.

Only the week before, her mother had gone to Central station and got on the first train to come along. She told Allie that the old rattler took her west, through the new brick housing estates and high up into the Blue Mountains where she could see out over the red-roofed suburbs of Sydney. That evening, sitting up at the red Formica table in the kitchen, chopping onions for dinner, Mae described how she'd got off at Lithgow to catch a train back to the city, back to Allie. She had stood waiting on the cold platform, breathing the diesel fumes and the smell of coal from the mines while the carriages shunted and groaned beside her and she wished she could get back onto her train and coast down on to the western plains, that great free expanse of land, stretching all the way to the desert.

Julia took her seat again. "That was Grafton we just went through. I always imagined it a much bigger place. Funny."

From the corner of her eye, Allie watched her aunt sipping the paper cup of tea. There was nothing of her mother in Julia's long thin nose and rosy cheeks, even though they shared the same blood. Mae was creamy and elegant. Julia was tall and moved like a man and seemed so much older than she was. In Sydney she kept bumping into the furniture and doorways in the tiny house, her work boots loud on the floorboards.

Allie turned away and pressed her forehead hard against the cool glass of the window. The last time she had made the same trip, years ago, it was Mae beside her. Her mother had traced a long finger down the window, along the lines of rain tearing thin in the wind. Allie reached out a hand to do the same. Reflected in the glass was the curved collar of her school blouse that her mother had ironed on the weekend. She shut her eyes, every muscle in her body resisting the motion of the swaying train as it carried her northward.

### From *The Rabbit Factory* by Marshall Karp

I wish I still smoked. Some occasions just seem to go better when I inhale deadly toxins. Like opening Joanie's monthly letter. But I gave up tobacco seven years ago, so I had to resort to other self-inflicted pain. Exercise.

I did forty-five minutes on the bike, managed 114 sit-ups, then hit the shower, slowly edging the hot water from invigorating to excruciat-