Volume One

Issue 1

The Oort Cloud Review

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With

Jacqueline Feldman *on a Sister*
Sam Jennings *on Three Sonnets to RED*
Sam Kriss *on Medusophany*
David Lamb *on Bibliophagy at the Bodleian*
Eugene Lim *on His Memories of OuLiPo*
Josefina Massot *on a Newly Discovered Poem by Borges*
Marco Roth *on Adults as Seen by Children*
Kristen Roupenian *on "Cat Person" and Its Genesis*
Ryan RUBY *on Reconstructing a Manuscript Smoked by Bakhtin during the Siege of Leningrad*

Plus

a Letter to the Editor from D. Graham Burnett;
New Poetry from Ange Mlinko;
Book Reviews from Benjamin Breen *on Jewel Philpot and the Lost City of Ebla, and from* Edwin-Rainer Grebe *on Cetacean Philosophy*;
and More!

Fall 2026

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Letter to the Editor

Dear Mme. Le Goff,

Greetings. I don't think we have met. I am writing you regarding the *Oort Cloud Review*, which I understand you are now editing. Please forgive me if I am confused about where things stand with this new publication, but I write in the hopes of some clarification — and with a number of genuine concerns, as well.

Briefly, then, I should say from the outset that I am not, myself, in any way directly associated with this prospective publication. I have your name from a colleague who serves, currently, I believe, on your editorial board: Eigil zu Tage-Ravn (with whom I worked several years ago on a book project). Indeed, it is from Eigil that I recently received a troubling note, sketching the table of contents of your first issue, and giving me a précis of several of its contributions. It is on the basis of this information that I feel compelled to write you, and to express my serious misgivings.

There is backstory to all of this that I suspect you do not know, and I want to make sure you are not getting tangled up in inappropriate matters — matters with potentially significant adverse implications for your career, but also, much more importantly, for the safety and well-being of others.

The core issues are financial. More than a decade ago, I was the recipient of a reasonably large grant from the Lockheed Corporation, for a research project that involved the study of "Irony". Broadly speaking, this interdisciplinary initiative had as its objective an investigation into the national security implications of this rhetorical and cognitive power. We won the funding on the strength of the promise that a global "irony-monitoring" system might be created (we called it "the Ironic Cloud") and used to monitor shifting patterns of social unrest, veiled contempt, and sophisticated insouciance. At the time, our initial "Letter of Inquiry" leaked,

and was mockingly published in *Harper's Magazine* as a kind of satire ("Irony in the National Defense," *Harper's*, [July 2009]: 13–15). The joke, however, was on others, as we ultimately did receive an initial three-year commitment of funding of just under one million US dollars.

The initial phase of the work was not classified. However, a set of early collaborative successes in actual "weaponizations" of ironic speech led to an expanding array of programs, several of which were pulled over into DARPA, and required "L-Clearance", etc. A few of these programs were also overtaken by an agency, or entity, known to me only as "P5".

Why am I telling you all of this? Well, one of the people involved in this work a decade ago might be familiar to you under the moniker "JSR". I do not know whether you have made his personal acquaintance, but as for me I got to know him very well. An extremely bright and polymathic person, if also a *little* unstable. I have considered him a friend for some time, although he has now gone AWOL, and there are money matters at stake.

To cook it all down, this JSR lost his security clearance in 2017, and has been formally disconnected from the ongoing classified defense-sector research on irony since that time. However, three years ago he approached me with an idea for a journal, which he said would serve as a kind of test-ground for a new, powerful form of "hyper-irony," supercharged by information technologies of a sort that remained entirely theoretical when we first received the grant in 2009.

I was intrigued, since he has always been such a maverick character, and capable of delivering in surprising ways, despite his mercurial streaks and serial irregularities. Upshot, I actually went to bat for him back at Lockheed, and secured a significant chunk of funding for the project, which was *extremely* expensive (he asserted that he needed a ton of computing time on some very powerful machines, in addition to a satellite project that I never really understood).

And now I fear something has gone awry. For one thing, JSR has missed the last three reporting deadlines in our review process. The funds that were in escrow also appear to have evaporated.

I already had a very bad feeling about all of this. But then I received Eigil's note about this *Oort Cloud* thing, and my bad feelings literally burst into flame. A whole bunch of this stuff that your journal seems to be about to publish is, if I am understanding the game of whisper-down-the-lane here…. HIGHLY CLASSIFIED. It would be an absolute DISASTER if this material found its way into the public domain.

This isn't the place for me to unfold the ways that our research into advanced, offensive irony led us to frightening discoveries. But suffice it to say, irony operates by opening a small "tear" in the fabric of consciousness. What is said and what is meant are sundered in ways that quite literally *bring into being* an essential "alterity"— something other than what "obtains" finds its way into the accessible world. The mapping functions that maintain the conformal relations between thought and things "glitch" under these circumstances. Disorientation can result, as well as geyserings of conceptual "free play." Sometimes this is fine. Even great. "Creative," or whatever. But it turns out you can really *push the envelope* in ways that (shockingly) mirror, in the mental realm, the dynamics of nuclear criticality in the physical world. Which is to say, you can make this stuff go BOOM!

What I am trying to communicate here is that you have taken over a project that is, frankly, in violation of Federal Law. Not only that, somebody owes Lockheed Martin a half a million dollars for which I am ultimately responsible, and I think you might know who that is.

First step: Don't publish this thing. Second step: I would recommend that you get a lawyer. Third step: Please be on high-alert regarding JSR; when and if he shows himself, use caution, and let me know? Do *not* go to regular authorities in connection with any of this.

Not kidding around,

D. Graham Burnett



EDITORIAL POSTSCRIPT

While we would never doubt Burnett's claim of "not kidding around", this does not change the fact that we have no idea whatsoever what he means to say here. It all sounds serious indeed, and we've decided to publish his letter so that no one can claim we covered up his warning to us. But doing this much seems to us sufficiently to discharge our responsibility, and we propose now simply to get on with things. — *The Editors*