

JORDAN STEMPELMAN

***from* The Resurfacing of Edgar Rice Burroughs**

When Utan and I found the cold dead sun,  
it was lying on the coffee table in the one apartment  
they still called *apartment*.

It was so sad that my wood no longer felt fear  
from the sun. And so I no longer felt the need to be clever  
or who they sometimes called Runaway.

What do we do now? asked Utan.

He hugged on tightly to the base of my wood, handfuls  
of dead sun in my hands.

“I would sooner mate with a white ape.”

We were all dressed in swim trunks  
for the first time in our lives.

Thuvia looked at Utan and knew he was no longer  
just a horse head. Utan looked at Thuvia,  
the last green man, back to Thuvia.

He puked as quickly as possible, took off his swim trunks  
and put on his suit. The green man slowly approached  
to tie his tie for him.

Utan bore arms. He bore the whole question  
and rubbed what was left of it into Thuvia's black hair.

The propellers whirled. Something like a boat  
flew past them. Flew into the last tree  
and soon exploded.

Utan lied to his roots. One temperate myth after another  
surfaced, frayed, labeled itself 'unfoxed' in orange yarn  
and rose, like small paradises do, as naturally and simply as possible.  
Not very carnal. Not very profound. But like the foreign state  
of placing flowers on one's own grave.  
Our corpse needs our attention too, he thinks.  
The onceskin of Thuvia; the space between my ears  
that signals the place where I slept last night:  
outside in what outside there is.  
If the universe is expanding, I will think once  
and watch it move away and away, part apartment, part  
nothing of moons or near-death sun, the tree  
I've learned to love, going upward, while at any given moment,  
Thuvia, if to call it an escape, must enter it alone.

What calmed us was to think: frost.  
Frost on the upper-liplike fat of the Martians.  
Frost, answering to our challenge  
to cover the ladders and the Helium of all the warlords  
still expecting our love.  
Thuvia stood in the near-warmth of the searchlight  
explaining to herself how she first reappeared  
affected with wood, which felt nothing like a fallen hunk of meteor  
or full heart amok without muzzle or abuse.  
She thought of the muscles one only uses under water.  
The ancient identity of any great ape that died with other apes  
watching, without a struggle, its hands gently holding its very own head.

Does he rub you like that?

Kiss you like that? Our ancestors now ask.

The intellectuals were horrible caretakers. Upside down  
patrol boats, shocked and angry for all the spinning in circles,  
everything just a phone call away.

Let me be your stimulation. Your trusted horrid thing.

But be careful what you do to me. The green men squat just beyond  
the shadows of the rotten skeel grove. A bunch of warrior-artificers  
with their cabins, their one tree, signs of alarm waiting  
like silken scarves wrapped around the heads and eyes  
of furious sleep deprived bulls.

Our universal answer, in this darkness of new darknesses, is  
*because.*

The last green man, stiff and leave-taking, opened his stomach  
by unhinging his breath from an instant. Inside, he pulled out  
the last preacher and the remaining ancestor, the most pretentious  
ancestor he had ever felt inside him. They both had his cunning  
smile and distressed metallic eyes. How *should* I let you go?  
How *can* I silence what was once inside me, now that I now see you?  
He re-swallowed the preacher and lost all attitude.  
He buried the remaining ancestor into the red dust and felt gorgeous  
and operational.  
The palace, high on the cliffs, resumed its slow downward droop.  
He walked towards the cliffs with his stomach ajar. Something he never found  
himself doing and something he would never do again.

**Jordan Stempleman's** recent collections of poetry include *No, Not Today* (Magic Helicopter Press, 2012) and *Doubled Over* (BlazeVOX Books, 2009). He co-edits *The Continental Review*, teaches writing and literature at the Kansas City Art Institute and curates A Common Sense Reading Series.