

Tidepools : A Journal of Ideas

Tidepools 2000: Next

In the beginning was the Word, and the word was Next. A word with spines, that X in the middle like a stick snapping in the dark. How many words have an X in them? Right away it makes you wary: *What the hell's that?* Could be Bambi, could be T. Rex. Could be...anything.

A paradox: simultaneously, in parallel worlds if you want to think of it that way, next means both *get lost, Jack; you're done*, and also (to the next) *your turn, and I don't have all day*. It all depends on which way the word is pointed. But it always seems like a sharp point, and it's always prodding you in the back. *No stopping. Next.*

Maybe this explains the vertigo...the vague uneasiness...the full-blown PARANOIA attending this new line of zeros on the world's odometer: next is the thing we can only guess at, the thing that is always coming but never in range. *Whatever it is, Alice, if it comes any closer, shoot it.* Maybe this is why the thought of what's next makes some of us want to pull a blanket over our heads, stop eating cheeseburgers, scan the Bible for an acrostic that will reveal our destiny. *This guy on talk-radio says that the White Horse of the Apocalypse is gonna be Canada.* But the sound of next could also be the sweet crunch of an apple in winter, ripe with the loveliness of possibility: the lover you might meet if you miss your flight, the Spanish pearls that might wash in from the sea.

Whether next holds a threat or a promise depends entirely on what's in your head, but the desire to speculate is irresistible. Psychics, palm readers, and the manufacturers of tarot cards harness this desire to send their kids to college. It's a human thing: rubbernecking at the future, overlooking the road unspooling under our feet.

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