

*Under the
Hood*

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The Fall of the Seven Earths

Flowers

Under the Hood

The Imprisonment of Jonathan Knox

Over the River

The Emancipation of Jonathan Knox

The Here and Now

The Monksville Chronicles

Novelwriter

Untitled Bigfoot Project

*Under the
Hood*

*The Imprisonment of
Jonathan Knox
A Tale from Cosmic Earth*

Hunter A. Wallace

This is a work of fiction. All the characters, locations, organizations, and events portrayed in this book are either products of the bookmaker's imagination or are used fictitiously. Or both.
Any and all resemblance to Reality is purely coincidental.

...

In other words, it's just words. It's not real. Get a grip.

Under the Hood
The Imprisonment of Jonathan Knox

| Spiral: The Fall of the Seven Earths | Arc: II |
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Acknowledgement

This book contains a plot which was inspired by more than one advertisement from the February 1977 issue of an adult magazine.

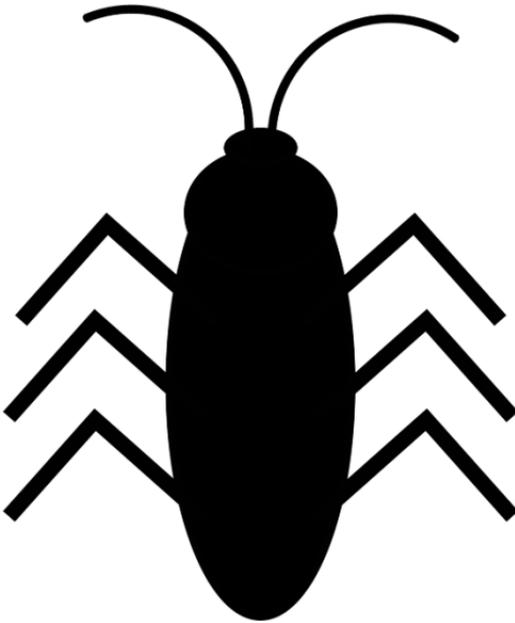
I'm not even playing, boy.

You'll have to figure out which plot that is yourself, though.

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*it's cold tonight. dark,
too*



Bugs

House

Chills scurry up his back, across his drooping shoulders, down his narrow arms like the legs of a cockroach across a gritty basement floor. He shivers. It's cold tonight. Dark, too.

Jonathan Knox sits stationary looking out a window like a gnat caught in a spider's web, shivering every now and then as a cold breeze hits the glass. He can't feel the breeze but he hears the rushing whoosh, tastes the frost, he can damn near smell winter encroaching on the frigid gust. It's a cold, an empty smell. Peaceful, almost, like the scent of falling snow.

But the snow isn't falling yet, nor has the winter that brings it arrived. Sure, sometimes it snows in October, but this October isn't one of those Octobers. Not yet it isn't, but it might be; too early now to tell. It's still the beginning of the month, that special time when nobody can notice the faded leaves falling from the trees like spilled drops of stale paint because they're too busy watching out for the police hidden in the woods alongside the unshouldered streets. See, all cops have quotas to fill, a certain number of tickets they need to give out every month, a certain amount of loose change they need to dredge up from the pockets of the townsfolk because the taxes they pay just aren't enough to cover that big flatscreen the cops need in their station's recreation room, or that new stove they need installed in the station's kitchen because the old one got gross, or that new cruiser that's little more than a sportscar with a paintjob so black you can't see the word *Police* emblazoned on the sides in black stencil letters.

The spectacles slide down Jonathan Knox's nose. He pushes them back with his middle finger, then clutches his elbows and continues to shiver. It's cold tonight. Dark, too... but not as dark as it is inside the house.

It's always dark in Jonathan Knox's home. Morning, noon, night, does not make a difference. Jonathan Knox keeps his upstairs windows tamed with blackout shades and duct tape, not that he's up there very often. He spends most of his time in his basement. There are no windows in his basement, though. There's not much of anything in his basement, aside from his desk. And the darkness.

There is a specific kind of darkness Jonathan Knox likes – the warm kind, like during the summer when the sun sinks below the horizon and the lightning bugs are flying with the mosquitoes and bats swoop low to snatch them clean out of the air without a sound, a tranquil kind of darkness where no wind blows, where there's only the soft humming of the computer's fan. Sometimes he'll sit in his basement for minutes, even hours on end with the monitor off, the lights off, his eyes closed just listening to the soft, mellow hum. The soothing hum of the computer fan in the warm, tranquil darkness of Jonathan Knox's basement... there's nothing more serene in the world.

It's the *other* darkness Jonathan Knox doesn't like so much. The cold, harsh darkness of an empty house, of a cloudy night when the moon and stars don't get to shine. The wind blowing hard enough to creak the foundation. Tiny paws and brittle legs scratching on callous floors of concrete and unstained wood. The ceaseless ticking of the baseboard and plug-in heaters trying with no success to dispel the lingering chill of bill obligations unfulfilled.

Jonathan Knox's home never gets this other kind of dark. Jonathan Knox has air ducts in his walls and ceilings, he's got carpet over his floors. Jonathan Knox's home is the warm kind of dark, just the way Jonathan Knox likes it. But *this* house...

This house is not Jonathan Knox's home. This house, sitting hollowly across the street, this ghost ship sailing upon waves of dead brown grass and cracked, crumbling asphalt... this empty house is *certainly* not the home of Jonathan Knox. A man lives in this house, he used to live there with a wife and a kid but now he lives there alone. Not that he spends too much of his time there, especially not at the beginnings and the ends of the months. Why stay at home when the police station has everything you need? A kitchen, a shitter, a recreation room with a great big flatscreen television, and a whole fleet of cruisers to hide around town in: SUVs, sedans, sportscars alike. All the better to harass the townsfolk with.

That's where he is now, Jonathan Knox bets. Sitting in the woods on the side of an unshouldered road waiting for an unsuspecting someone to drive by just a little too fast, their windows tinted just a little too dark. Or maybe it's not their windows that are too dark, maybe it's their complexion, the skin on their bones. Either way they'll be pulled over and given the business.

Well tonight Jonathan Knox is going to be the one who gives the business. Tonight, Jonathan Knox is going to make that cold, dark house across the street *his* house. Tonight, Jonathan Knox is going to be the one who sticks his nose where it doesn't belong, and if he doesn't want to get caught, he has to make his move and make it now.

With gloves on Jonathan Knox checks his pockets. In the right is the flashlight, in the left the eyeglass case. He's got loafers on his feet, a pair just slightly too large, and his laptop's sitting on the passenger seat, but he doesn't need his laptop yet. He doesn't need it at all, really, he can do everything he needs to do from his computer desk in his warm, dark basement back at home, but he doesn't want to come back here if at all possible. He's well practiced in his trade, like a cricket when it comes to chirping, but Jonathan Knox is no fool. Mistakes can be made no matter how carefully he acts, but he's getting ahead of himself. The work is still to be done.

No cars coming up the street, no cars going down it. Cannonball Road is lifeless at this time of night, at this time of month. Lots of the town's police officers live out here, Jonathan Knox is sure. Cannonball is a straight shot into the center of town where the police station is. Jonathan Knox has never been to the center of Wuester, nor has he been to the Wuester Police Station. Nor does he ever plan to.

White clouds of steam puff out from Jonathan Knox's nose as he moves across the street. His breathing is swift, almost erratic. He can feel the blood retreating from his hands and feet, feel the skin turning white with frost, feel the aches springing up from the knuckles. The gloves on his hands aren't the kind of gloves that protect from the cold, and his loafers are not snug.

There isn't much of a lawn in front of the house, but Jonathan Knox doesn't risk walking across and leaving tracks. He creeps up the drive', hops from steppingstone to steppingstone, climbs greedily up the steps, and then

he's there. The front door. It's unlocked, just as he thought it would be. Who would break into a cop's house? Without a sound Jonathan Knox pushes it a foot open, steps out of his loafers, slips in like a gnat through a window screen, and rests the bolt on the curved part of the catch behind him.

Cold. Dark and cold. An empty house that hasn't been a home in a long time. He takes his loafers inside.

Jonathan Knox casts a yellow circle unto the floor. Carpet, but not the same carpet as his carpet. It's a thin carpet, a *hard* carpet. A carpet your feet won't sink into. He doesn't look into the rooms, at the walls. He doesn't want to see the inside of this house. It's bad enough that he's in here at all, but he must be in here. He has work to do, and so he shall do it.

The basement isn't hard to find. It's a hollow door, not solid like the rest. The knob is cheap and old, covered in scratches and dents. Turning it is a fight. Rickety steps delve into darkness before him, a darker darkness than the night, than the darkness of a cold and empty house. A sick kind of darkness. A darkness where fungus grows and bugs crawl overtop of it. He puts his loafers back on. Grinding his teeth together with every creaky step he takes, Jonathan Knox makes his descent.

It's just like he imagined it: the floor is rubble, covered in cracks and chunks of debris. The walls aren't better, all patchy slabs of sheetrock with wet stains decorating them like framed pictures. The air is musty, dense with the olid reek of mildew, and the ceiling? All splintered rafters and ratty pink insulation flecked with little brown dots. Mouse shit, if mice even live down here. If they can

even *survive* down here.

Flashlight bitten by the shaft Jonathan Knox reaches into his left pocket and takes out the eyeglass case. Plain brown leather, like his computer chair back home. Every breath he takes is laced with anticipation and subrural decay; he's been in here too long already, his stomach is beginning to sting. Time to get this done.

Jonathan Knox opens the eyeglass case and places his bugs. One in a deep crack in the floor, two in holes in the walls, three buried deep in the ceiling insulation. Six bugs is plenty enough. He has more back home, he could have brought three dozen and still not made a dent in his cache, but six is plenty enough. Standing in the center of the dank basement Jonathan Knox peels off his rubber gloves and snaps his fingers half a dozen times in rapid succession, then quickly wrestles the gloves back on. It's always hard to put the gloves back on, especially when they're sticky with sweat. But that doesn't matter now, the work is done. It's time to go.

Three steps at a time Jonathan Knox hops the stairs, closes the hollow door behind him. He takes his loafers off to move through the house, as to leave no rubble from the ruined basement, and plops them down outside the front door so he may step into them. Closes the front door, leaving it unlocked. Climbs down the few steps, hops the steppingstones, and without checking for traffic races to his smart car in a sprint, his heart smashing against his ribcage, his pulse thumping against his temples, every breath of frozen air spiking his lungs with tiny crystals of ice.

One hand shuts the door. Another fetches the laptop.

It's already powered and logged in, DoorKnox is already running, and a recording is already captured. Eyes wider than a giant squid's, Jonathan Knox rolls a finger across the trackpad and saves the file, then opens it in Windows Media Player. Lip bit between his teeth, Jonathan Knox presses play.

Six snaps in rapid succession, followed by a pair of loafers climbing a distant staircase three steps at a time.

Jonathan Knox closes Windows Media Player, axes the test file, empties out his recycling bin, and then clears the recording from DoorKnox. The laptop bounces to rest on the passenger seat.

The smart car silently whirs to life. Mirrors go looked into, windows go through: no cars coming up the road, no cars going down it. Rubber gloves gripping the steering wheel and a broad smirk spread over his face, Jonathan Knox takes off.