

COSMOGONY

by Ron Burch

I am sitting on our porch in the middle of the night. I can't sleep. The stars look like runway lights. Out of boredom, I reach out my hand to connect the distant dots. The tip of my finger hits a hard, flat object. I try again and realize there's something up there. I peel back a piece of the night and it cracks off, splintered, in my hand like a piece of dried paint. Behind it is an old rough wall, built of irregular timbers.

I remove more of the sky until I see thin grooves between the boards. Light emanates from behind them. To my right between the peeled sky, I see a doorknob. I open the door, accidentally ripping away more of the sky -- it's merely perforated paper.

Inside the door a bare bulb hangs in a long hallway, and near the bulb an old portable generator vibrates, clanging noisily. The light alternates with the currents of the rusting machine and, while moving closer to the bulb, I accidentally fall over the generator. I hear a loud pop as the bulb goes out and the generator whines down.

In the dark a man curses. I worry that I might have made a mistake.

An archaic torch is lit, held by a small man wearing a janitor's suit. He hands me the torch.

"Goddamn it," he says, yanking on the generator's cord. "Do you know how long it takes to start this thing?"

