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*Tetris*

By Justin Taylor

Jennie is sleeping when it comes but I'm awake in my underwear, face slick with TV-light and cool sweat because our air conditioner stopped working days ago. The brown-outs have been ongoing for about a month now, but once the TV networks went down there weren't explanations as to *why*. Then one day, zap— there goes the AC. Too much starting and stopping I guess, from when the power was really on the fritz.

I never thought about what time of year The End might come, but looking back, I think I always knew it would be in the crush of summer.

Some of the other appliances have suffered similar fates but the TV and the Nintendo not only maintain their integrity, they maintain a close working relationship with me and with each other. Jennie is naked and big-boned, I don't mean that as a fat joke. She is tall, solid, broad, pretty, moist: the way that skin gets when the sunlight is indirect but the temperature is high. We've been arguing lately because she says I don't do anything but play Tetris anymore and I always ask what the fuck else she would like me to do.

Sometimes she picks up the Bible that we stole from a motel in Cedar Key the last time we visited the beach. Before all the trouble started. Weird lights in the sky, global politics down the shitter, nobody sure if it was God or America responsible, or maybe if they were working together. The Bible is inscrutable to her, though she's become steadily more certain that it is trying to tell her something. She's mad at me because once I took a religion course and now I

won't help, won't even look at the damned thing. Earlier today I told her (again) that it had been a course on Islam, and that if she wanted to go loot a Koran from the already ransacked Books-A-Million down the street then I would gladly give her my class notes when she got back.

It was a cruel comment, I knew even then, but appropriate in that it truncated the discussion so I could play this game, which has muted colors and I can mute the music, thus exercising degrees of control. Sometimes I lose the game because I get caught up staring into the background— that radiating black that can only be generated by a back-lit screen. When I lose the game the screen fills with snow and I remember what it was I set out to do— finger the buttons on the controller faster and faster and faster till I'm something like Luke Skywalker flying his fighter with his eyes closed and if I can get there then I will have overcome the game and maybe the machine will break and then I will maybe want to do something else.

I tried to explain this to Jennie but she didn't want to hear it. She said that between the two of us I had more experience with religion, because of that one class, even if it was about something else. *At least*, she said, *it's something*. And when I still wouldn't take the soft-sided white book from her trembling hands she called me a whole string of bad names and curled up on the floor with it, beside the couch. She cried into the ball she'd made of herself and once I tried to stroke her hair but she wouldn't be touched so I just sat down close to her and fired up the game. Eventually she fell asleep and her breathing is the only sound in this room, along with the tiny sexual slaps of my thumbs on the plastic buttons.

Again it goes to snow and I lose. This game is designed to end, not to be beaten, I doubt they even programmed a graphic for the YOU WIN screen. Once you hit level 20 the pieces are falling a bit quicker than hand-eye-coordination can trace, which is damn fast.

I play again and at level eighteen reach a sort of ecstasy of self-and-game where we are

as close to one being as we will ever be and it lasts some amount of time unknowable but eventually it ends, the game and the moment. And the screen goes snowy.

I enter my initials on the high-score screen, ranked #1, knowing the list erases every time you shut the Nintendo off, and outside of the window there is a fiery brightness that fills the world like a tidal wave beyond dimensions and it is jelling up the street towards us. I have enough time to wonder whether that thing is moving at the pace of God or the speed of technology and realize that we will be destroyed before I learn the answer.

When people think about the Apocalypse they imagine knowing what it is that will bring them down. Ask the shades of Hiroshima about that one, they've got a few words to wail on the subject.

I put a hand over my face and grimace, but after a while get bored and turn to watch Jennie, whom sleep has loosened from her furious ball. She is stretched out across the floor now and I'm thinking how beautiful she is or how I'd like to touch the sweaty spill of her breasts or that I wish the world wouldn't end before we could make up and die holding each other.

A glance out the window and the fire-bright wall is still approaching. Seemingly ever slower. I notice the watch on my wrist and the clock in the TV have both gone to 88:88. I wonder what that means, if it tips the scales in my mind concerning who/Who is responsible for this Doom. When it occurs to me that Jennie will die in her sleep I almost cry but then I don't. My mind is calmed by watching her steady breathing and there isn't time to make-up, what with the way she gets when she's sulking, and so I'm going to let her sleep through the end of the world that is terminally out the front window, moseying up the driveway, the sidewalk not dissolved but disappeared. The brilliant wall is mystically easy on the eyes to look at but leaves no trace or shadow of what is behind or within; instead it is perfectly opaque, I see it the same

way that Jennie saw the holy scriptures, and also like Jennie, I get madder and sadder and madder again but still I don't look away.