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The Day The Novel Died: A Speculative Work of Experimental Metafiction

Andrew Armacost

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THE DAY THE NOVEL DIED is a speculative experimental/bizarro work of metafiction about a book machine that threatens humanity with cultural Armageddon; it's about love, life, and the massive cultural extinction caused by homogeny or, more specifically, caused by the predatory mass-media and the franchisement of nearly everything.

THE DAY THE NOVEL DIED opens on the Townsville Farm in Greenville, a Midwestern town straining to become a small city. Gavin Townsville, a hardboiled Korean War veteran and smalltime farmer, lives each day in a boozy ennui. His brother Stretch, an octogenarian widower and writer, struggles to confront Gavin's drinking problem. Yen-Yen, a pert young Singaporean émigré, endeavors to keep the Townsville brothers at bay.

Such are circumstances when the recently divorced Patrick O'Dawley, a thirty-something broker, leaves New York to seek solace from his two adoptive fathers, Stretch and Gavin.

As Patrick enters Greenville, he is greeted by strip-malled architectural sameness and a vivisected downtown. Still, his homecoming is a sweet one—at first. But soon enough, he finds himself torn between Folgers, an old flame, and the ever elusive Yen-Yen, whose every glance seems equivocal yet magical. Amid the aftermath of Gavin's drunken tirade on Independence Day, Patrick professes his love, only to discover Yen-Yen's long-buried secret.

The family manages to set aside its differences when Patrick discovers that Rockies Books Inc., the largest publisher in America, will soon build a book machine behind the Townsville Farm. Stretch challenges the machine to a phantasmagoric writing duel and from this point forward the novel is imbued with a distinctly postmodern narrative, one that includes a reworking of Orwell's Animal Farm, a second-person account of a slaughtered cow and, potentially, the end of the world.

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