

THE BOVINIAD

BY

THE VENERABLE  
DIPLODOCUS

Translated into English

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Citizen,

of the United States of America

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BOOK ONE - THE INJECTION

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## BOOK ONE

### THE INJECTION

*"But if there came such liquor from my ballock, would you not willingly thereafter suck the udder whence it issued?"*

*-Rabelais*



## CANTO I

*A Venus arrival – Pantamoolian geometry --Exploring the interior – An invocation*

Dream back, my pupils, to a vanished time,  
when rampant did the groves of Venus grow  
with multiplying vines and shooting sprouts;  
when rain in fat droplets fell soft to nurse  
her ranks of teeming moss, and a gauze  
of golden cream enwrapped her like a shroud.  
Confounding was her dance, and incomplete,  
with steps reversed from what her siblings tread,  
whom vast walls of distance had left untouched,  
except for one, third closest of the brood,  
across whom the sons and daughters of Man  
had marched and sailed for an age, even then.  
Through miles beyond the imponderable wells,  
where gravitation's rope can bring all kinds  
to clutch her breast, unbeknownst to themselves  
and unrehearsed, where shrined in starry vaults  
of space she seems a soft and distant ball,  
the bovine blimps of old came drifting,  
unannounced, slow and full of clout unspent,  
perchance to hail from Saturn's moons  
or Pluto's black and tenebrous caves,  
or farther still, beyond the Oort cloud,  
connected hence by wormhole gates,  
although, truth be told, these children of Man

knew scarcely more of the bovines' homes  
than what intent they had in leaving them.

They were seven in number, and made no sign  
to greet, much less strike down, their earthly hosts,  
who in recent past had sailed for the Moon  
to dredge the vast mares of Imbrium there,  
while Venus garlanded with bovines turned.  
The cows were city-sized, set still as clouds,  
and gathered round the known libration points,  
their soft hair warmed by the airless breeze  
that hides in the furrows of celestial paths.  
And from their pale rumps there erupted spikes  
of colossal heights and symmetries,  
like shards of a mountainous alpine range,  
while far away in high cranial realms  
beneath globulous eyes, unwinking and wet,  
there came such miles of unrolled tongue  
to where a bell hung round each neck, never rung.  
Farther on then, on a median plane,  
and down past the udders to hooves so large  
they might trample to dust the very stars,  
or sundering fall to valiant seas.  
And thus gone to become islands of note,  
filled up by men who would gouge them to load  
their vats with keratin and glue,  
while at the ports of less adhesive lands –  
those dreamers, who lacked the means to send  
the merest gift by Venusian post  
might look to the cows in the starlit skies  
with worship glowing in their stares.

Pantamoolians – in time would Man bequeath  
this name to these first of the bovine fleet,  
and proclaim the fourth, which as Delta we know  
to be their chief, if only for her size,  
and the fearsome spikes her valleys made.  
Intrepid folk with a luxury of means  
went forth to explore, quite cautious at first,  
then soon without mishap coming closer,  
their fears vanquished by plain curiosity,  
and questions that would make a schoolmarm blanch,  
so eager to know of the viscera there,  
whether they would match those of earthly stock  
or were fleeting instead, phantom spleens,  
with luminiferous aether inside.  
Swift the able seekers came forth to mount  
their telescopes on all the ventral parts  
where the views of Venus, though much improved,  
were still beclouded in the eyes of Man,  
who with ardor burned as much for her  
as sheep from their herdsman cast adrift.

The inside was next, so often of a place  
the last a guest is authorized to see.  
They chose the tear duct for the first sally,  
but subsequent tours proved the rump  
far better, for mounting the needle and syringe.  
The needle's shaft was wide enough to host  
a ship intact, and gave them the means  
to breach the epidermis in a wink.  
In light of this, merchants arrived in droves,

with scents of profits heretofore unwhiffed,  
of slices to ship back home as gifts  
for those most eager to impress their friends  
with the joint of a starfaring beeve.  
What was the harm, if some gathering crane  
drew out, with its hooks, a pound here or there?  
The cows were the size of dominant towns  
and larded with much flesh to spare.

And so, such as it was, that in the wake  
of such enterprising folk began to form  
new companies arrayed with pleasure ships,  
not so unlike those which had come before,  
but with a mind to spare all pretense of trade;  
instead these came with promises and cheer,  
a chance for men of a commoner sort  
to take in all the sights, to learn the names  
of all the newly discovered places.  
O heed us then, Calliope our muse!  
as we are gathered here to sing the words  
of this our epic tale – of one such trip  
begun with good intent, but out of which  
rich torrents of calamity sprang forth,  
as from a sack with fruit too ripe to hold.



## CANTO II

*The lineage of Archibald Jenkins – Enjoying a Burgomeister – Patch radius strategies – Descending to the rump – A pair of spikes*

To walk an eiderdown of spotted rump  
with starry night all hovering above  
came early to rise one Archibald Jenkins –  
the son of Alastair son of Aster,  
who was sired by Alfacadabras before him –  
a citizen of Earth, and sometime holder  
of poker hands fair to middling of worth,  
who was dreaming of holidays to come.  
Of all the injections he'd ever worked  
this was to be his last, quite routine,  
with the usual cleanup at the end;  
and then farewell to their bovine host –  
no underlings, hence, to ferret about,  
no invoice stacks to riffle and stamp,  
no work lists, lorries, radios to check,  
and an end of all those budgets to sign  
with those damned low-gravity pens.  
Almost he could imagine home again,  
his fingers wrapped round a Burgomeister,  
so tall and full of froth, a balm for common men  
but also for the great; his feet propped high  
against a window's wetted pane.  
Then he would gaze upon fields, blissfully free  
of cows and men; just the daffodil's smell,

the dawn's sweet breath of grass and thunder,  
such were the pleasures to soon be his.

Now Jenkins ran the rump's injection team,  
his charge the patch radius, to lave and shear  
its bristling hairs before the needle flew.  
Prevailing wisdom had called for a space  
a hundred foot wide, as well as could berth  
some plenteous stack of ten-odd floors  
that gently had toppled on its side,  
but Jenkins, subjected to accounts, and time,  
preferred to make it larger when he could.  
Just a circle of pale and pink, no more,  
though it oft-turned the guts of lesser folk,  
the way it stared right into them.  
No time to lose, a new ship had arrived,  
and all the papers were spreading the news –  
The Daily Charade, The Calcutta Times,  
and a line in Komsomolskaya Pravda, too.  
Even The Cow's Opinion ran a page,  
so rash as to print in twenty point bold  
the names of every passenger aboard.  
Excited readers wanted much to know  
what size the portholes had in all the rooms,  
how soft and fine the water-filled beds,  
and as for tea, was it brewed as they said  
by automatic beverage machines?  
Aside from all these questions, rumors flew,  
of whose wife or pet would accompany whom,  
and where the night promenades would be.  
But those who were members of Jenkins' crew

and even the needleworks team, up top,  
they knew far better than to heed such mills  
of flimsy gossip and propped up guff;  
trips within the cow's interior  
were, if nothing else, a dangerous business,  
made possible only by bilious guides  
well-seasoned in lymph, and blood-swollen tides.

The dawn was coming fast upon the beast  
as Jenkins – with a head of hair buzzed gray  
and uniform to match, his shirt pocket stitched  
with red-lettered pockets informing his name,  
stepped into the elevator cage.  
Some sixty full fathoms it ran  
to join the station and its sprouting hubs  
with the frosted hillocks of the beast.  
He scans the downs with a vigilant eye,  
all its wisps and nacreous cattail clumps,  
with thoughts on gathering his crew, and his wits,  
though unaware still, of assaults soon to come  
from a dubious scoundrel indeed.

A lorry bumbles by, and signs of life  
emerge from the brightening needleworks.  
It looms a bulbous onion in the night,  
graceful in its symmetry but for a pair  
of aerotubes that go streaking out the side.  
Like filaments partitioning the sky,  
side by side, they race above the plain,  
in haste to join the bulb out by the rump,  
with the station and the welcoming docks

that sprout closer to the neck, and from whence  
the newly minted passengers arrive.  
Extruding from the bulb's base comes the shaft  
of the terrible needle, ramrod straight,  
a lance as unwieldable as any  
Giant had ever cast, beyond even  
the thews of Ares in his prime, though well  
he would rejoice to see it pierce  
the tender spot where Septimus Mons  
descends to converge with Upsilon Prime –  
a pair of spikes that cannot be scaled,  
though crews have tried, with miles of fastened rope,  
and hopes not to hazard looks down below  
where white tumbleweeds went frolicking by.



### CANTO III

*Canned oxygen – Doctor van der Grooven's meddling –The doctor's first volley –Jenkins' return –A truce –Low--gravity pens*

Jenkins is wearing a transceiver strap  
which captivates the drums of merry ears,  
and a speaking tube nestles by his chin.  
He champs down on a slice of canned oxygen –  
tobacco-flavored, his favorite by far –  
which if mixed with spittle forms air in the gut,  
so long as you don't forget to chew.  
He eyes the clipboard, his underlings approach,  
he frowns at all the boxes left to check,  
and watches a machine on rollers putter by,  
with arms that end in soft bristle clumps.  
It drags behind it a fat rubber hose  
which plugs into a rattling, wheezing box.  
The underlings give off signs of concern  
as their helmets blink from the fireflies –

There seems to be some confusion, sir,  
with regards to shaving the patch today.  
The tubs of dye have each been pried open,  
without alarm, by the doctor and his team,  
and they've just now begun to strike their pour.  
The problem is, or so it would appear,  
that they are off the mark by two-hundred feet  
if it were an inch, which means we will need

to tweak the windings of the armature.  
Five degrees may be enough, we can't say  
for sure, but if we turn them out too far  
we'll need to start over from scratch.  
What's more we know little of the skin there,  
if it is cracked, or moist with weeping boils.  
Wyatt here urges for new inspections,  
thinks we ought to uproot our samplers here,  
before the terminator strikes at dawn.  
Twice now this doctor – van der Grooven?  
or so I'm told, has turned us all away.  
We'd talked it all out, me and Wyatt here,  
before we deemed it worth troubling you.

Upon this news the son of Alastair  
felt in his breast a surge of anger bloom,  
for he had heard about this pompous fool  
who styled himself the ultimate judge  
of astro-veterinary fact.  
His holdings on Earth, of wide open farms,  
and dairy bases deep beneath the ground,  
were said to be enormous, matched only  
by an appetite for swollen profits,  
a need to swallow up whatever foe  
might cross his path, and for every man  
of commerce, law, or humble trade,  
who fell ensnared by his sundry tricks,  
there were ten who saw him for what he was –  
a prodigious asshole, as much a fraud  
as any nickel of wood, and of worth the same  
as Jenkins, to the doctor's opinion, attached –

To hell with that blasted lowland quack,  
who thinks he'd govern a cow campaign –  
I'll give him something to govern.  
Go back to your site, scrub down as planned,  
defy any man who gets in your way.  
Any order he brings I'll countermand quick,  
be it signed by Occulists, or the King himself  
of whatever poor, unfortunate land  
this doctor chooses to call home.

Then to his checkboxes Jenkins returned  
with a scowl, biting hard as his helpers bowed  
and scuttled off, their downward-facing heads  
ensconced in bubbles too heavy for their necks.  
The brush machine behind strove mightily  
to keep pace, but alas it found itself  
caught in a most execrable tangle of wires,  
so thick it could not but turn in lone,  
depressing circles, and shaking as it went.  
Then in the distance a commotion came,  
and Jenkins saw come floating through the dim  
a lone, spilling shape in a pumped-up suit  
that hovered several feet from the ground.  
This gave our Jenkins another reason to seethe,  
for such an action was nothing less than  
a violation of jettison protocol –

To wit, that any and all objects must,  
at all times, be connected to the ground  
by whatever means necessary, or,

failing this, to be able to trace a pathway  
from one or more neighboring objects,  
located at a distance of no more than  
one arm's length away, to the ground.  
Furthermore, that any object exceeding  
a mass agreed upon elsewhere here in  
this protocol, must offer means by which  
it can be quickly and conveniently  
snapped into place with other objects –  
like teeth, for instance, or buttons in rows,  
lest in the middle of some routine cleanse,  
let alone the tense crack of injection,  
some unforeseen event happened to arise,  
some change in the weather, or solar flash,  
or flare that could rouse the bovine to fright,  
although at least, so far as Jenkins knew,  
this had never once happened before.  
No floaters allowed, those were the rules,  
imagine the mess if the landscape heaved  
a full fathom high, in a moment, or less,  
and with a doctor, so arrogantly proud,  
as to glide untethered from it all.

For that was who it was that floated up,  
the frizzled white wilderness of his hair  
beneath his helm outspreading like a sponge,  
and at his flank a pair of assistants,  
each wagging forth a clipboard as if  
preparing for a duel, or if not that,  
then to compare who had more rows left  
to check, with all chores assigned to the loser.

Archibald Jenkins, or so I've surmised  
from the sixteen letters sewn into your shirt,  
though I suspect I've heard the name before.  
Six months ago was it? Ah yes, I recall,  
the ship that belonged to the old viceroy,  
all his servants and personal effects aboard,  
denied entry due to safety concerns.  
The temperatures I took are what saved the day,  
despite the wishes of ignorant men  
who would risk injections inside a host  
with a fever of a hundred and three.  
As I recall you all were none too pleased,  
a week's pay I imagine that set you back,  
or was it two? Howbeit, there are times  
when we must put our own comforts aside  
for the sake of our bovine governess.  
Today we chew a cud of a different sort,  
one which I, free of charge, shall identify.  
There happens to be pustules at the site  
that you have picked, we have no other  
recourse but to move it. The needleworks  
agrees it is the wisest thing to do,  
though of course it will bring about delays.  
I intend to use the time to take a sample  
or two, precautions for the bovine's health,  
you see, to keep it free from harm.  
As for yourself, no need to fret I think,  
a man of your talents should find himself  
a host of places with plenty of work  
in scrubbing cow rumps for modest pay.

So saying, the doctor smiled at his second,  
while behind him and the rest, all the land  
was waking up, and all the workers too,  
with eyes on scaffolds they had trained to climb,  
and fingers flicking on their searchlight glows,  
as lorries trembled past bearing clumps of hair  
and tatters of cream-colored skin.  
Then Jenkins came up on that floating quack  
whose second and third like factory drones  
still wielded their clipboards in their hands –

You crackpot milker of idiot kine,  
you must have caught a fever yourself;  
come bend over here for a moment then,  
and allow me to take your temperature.  
Hear this, we've an injection to make  
today, and this here patch is what we'll use;  
for years I've combed this spotted rump,  
and not once have I changed my radius.  
You say you're an expert, you've petted the beeves  
of pastures back on Earth, but how do you know  
if this one is even alive? I say, get away  
with you and your tricks, and forget about  
trying to foil my plan, lest I report you  
for floating around like a blimp,  
and have them check your certificates.

The good doctor seemed to recoil at first.  
It was not every day he beheld such gall  
let alone from a gum-chewing lowbrow ape

who wouldn't know a cow from a spotted horse.  
But he fanned out his fingers before him  
in a gesture of truce, then nodded twice  
to his retainer, who came forth at once  
with a form from his clipboard untucked –

I here submit to this fine custodian,  
who obviously knows more of the bovine's ways  
than one who has toiled for nine long years  
in the astro-veterinary arts;  
alas, I suppose it was all for naught!  
But know this, Jenkins, I shall have no part  
in this injection you would undertake,  
and with no concern for the animal's health.  
I cannot be held responsible here  
for accidents caused by incompetence.  
I have given advice and expected no fee.  
Come, Bartholomeus, hand over the form  
which shall absolve you and me, and my staff,  
of any and all wrong-doing this day,  
let our foul-toothed friend sign away his career,  
and let us hope that his decision, though rash,  
doesn't claim any innocent lives.

Without a word Jenkins took up his pen,  
and fought back the urge to throttle his foe.  
The papers were in carbon triplicate  
and he saw all at once the spaces and marks  
that called for his name to join them.  
He cast about with an impatient eye,  
and searched for a surface on which to write.

The doctor noted his folly, smiled, and then,  
with a shameless preen of his puffed-up suit,  
he turned around and offered his back,  
as if forgetting how high up he was,  
where the spaceman couldn't quite reach him.

Oh, but of course, he laughed, then flipped a switch  
and settled on an air of condescension.  
Jenkins wroth just chewed his lip, anxious of  
the time he had already lost, and yet,  
despite his scribbles the ink would not come.  
He shook his pen and tried it once more  
but still the tip ran dry; he swore and squeezed  
the stylus in his grip, but no sooner had he  
given it a furious shake, than a pizzle  
of livid black ink squirted forth.  
Wyatt called out but it was too late,  
the ink unperturbed by gravity stormed,  
drenching and ruining those tailored seams,  
and the doctor remained none the wiser,  
his back still turned, gloating on the battle  
he thinks he has won that day, while Jenkins  
behind him signs with a bit of style,  
flourishes of great long cursive lines,  
and stifles a laugh, pausing to remark  
how there aren't any laundromats in space.





## ROGUELIKEFICTION

### THE BOVINIAD

DIPLODOCUS is widely acknowledged as one of the last great poets of post-antiquity. To date very little is known about his life. He is thought to have studied under Pangloss as a youth, and scholars generally agree he pursued a doctorate degree at Gluon University in early adulthood, though he is thought to have departed prior to completing his studies due to health concerns. Shortly thereafter his *Zoohilly* and *The Triumph of Rimbrandt* may have appeared, but it was not until he had almost certainly reached old age that *The Boviniad* was first published, the work on which his fame predominantly rests. Scholars have identified the first five books of *The Boviniad* and attributed them to Diplodocus, although there is evidence he may have written more books beyond this canonical quintet.

NATHAN D JERPE lives in Atlanta, GA. He is the author of the computer role-playing game Legerdemain and is considered one of the eminent translators of Diplodocus' works. For more information about him visit <http://roguelikefiction.com> or subscribe to <http://twitter.com/nathanjerpe>.

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