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channels or to have a big web presence. I find that really challenging. I don't necessarily like a lot of attention. It would be awesome if the book just did all the work. You know, "I worked on you a long time. Stand up now, please."

S.Z.: *Let's talk about drought. It's happening, and not just in a science fiction novel.*

B.P.: It's insane right now. In fact, I was just reading about how they were going to start enforcing water rationing in San Francisco. Sao Paulo, Brazil is in the middle of the worst drought in 85 years. The city there is calling for rationing. Oregon is in a drought right now as well.

S.Z.: *This summer is the hottest on record since we started keeping track in Portland in 1940. Maybe as far back as 1890 when records were kept in Vancouver.*

B.P.: Nine counties are in a state of emergency because of that drought. When you look at (United States) Drought Monitor — which is a really amazing tool — the headings range from abnormally dry to exceptional drought. All of the designations are a bit grim.

We have a natural tendency to procrastinate as humans in our reaction to change. And a change that happens like drought happens on a geological scale that we just can't comprehend very well until we are already deep into it.

The first person to recognize that humans were changing the atmosphere with carbon emissions was a British guy in 1938. That was almost a hundred years ago. It happens on a timeline, but we aren't reacting in a timely way.

S.Z.: *What is your writing process?*

B.P.: Writing is so tedious. I wrote "Couch" pre-parenthood. When I had kids, I went through a darker period where I didn't write at all. "Sherwood Nation" was a real effort to become disciplined again and to change my biological tendencies, which were to stay up really late at night.

Now I get up really early before everyone is awake and I do my writing then. I write every day.

S.Z.: *Tell me about Project Hamad.*

B.P.: A gentleman named Adel Hamad was a Sudanese man living in Pakistan. He was rounded up by Palestinian officials paid by the United States government to gather possible suspects after 9/11.

He happened to be an immigrant laborer who was working as a hospital assistant. He was taken to Guantanamo.

Our intent (for the project) was to find a Guantanamo inmate and create a real narrative of this life to bring attention to

what was happening there.

He was an amazing ping pong player. He was sort of a prankster. He had absolutely no ties whatsoever to terrorism and was never charged. He spent 11 years in Guantanamo. He lost his eyesight there. He had a family that he had been supporting in Sudan.

At the same time, there was a

legal team in town who represented him as well. Our combined efforts blew up. We were picked up in La Monde in Paris and on Boing Boing. He was eventually released about a year later. He was never charged with anything.

S.Z.: *You're a poet, though you say on your website that you haven't written poetry actively since pretty much the start of Gumball Poetry in 1999. You have also said that poetry saved your life.*

B.P.: Everybody has dark periods and I definitely have experienced some dark periods. I don't know — are they biological or chemical? Sometimes they don't make sense to me. Over time I've gotten a lot better about managing those. There was a time in college when I read Jim Harrison's, "Letters to Yessin." It's a series of 30 poems that he writes to a Russian poet who has hung himself. In the course of these 30 poems, Jim Harrison manages to talk himself out of suicide.

S.Z.: *One of your characters from "Sherwood Nation," Nevel, lets readers know early on that he suffers from depression. "He wondered if he were depressed and whether he ought to see a doctor about getting some medication." Then he turns his attention*

toward digging a furrow underneath his home. What are some of the underlying themes that you address with this novel?

B.P.: I had a ton of fun writing Nevel. His character is one that I couldn't have written pre-parenthood. He's a father. He's saddled with a lot of responsibility. And he has a totally irrational reaction to the disaster that is taking place. I mean he's digging a tunnel, which might be perfect for bomb shelters, but it's not working out for a drought. He can't help himself. It's become a sort of mania. And he certainly depressed and stressed and unsure and immobilized.

It's sort of like the outside world is requiring him to take action and he has no idea what kind of action to take. So when he takes action, it's a totally meaningless action. There is a lot to unpack there.

Another question I am asking is whether democracy as we have invented it, as we are practicing it, can really handle urgent crisis like climate change. And my answer? It's a great system when it's working.

There is a lot of money involved in politics and it's absolutely ridiculous. Short term limits which make for bad issues that may not have at all to do with the longer vision of how we want to live? How do we want to be in this country over the next 50 years? How do we want to treat each other?

Renee (the protagonist in "Sherwood Nation") becomes a dictator. The Romans invented that word.

A dictator was somebody who was elected by the senate to run the empire in times of absolute crisis. They acknowledged that a senate, with numerous voices and arguing voices cannot handle a large scale crisis. A dictator, who can congeal a single vision and a single plan of action, can really handle an emergency in a crisis much better.

One last theme that was important to try out was the idea of heroism. What is the arc of a hero? In this case, Renee does a somewhat heroic act and then the media completely overblow it and make her way more of a hero. And she has this inner conflict trying to figure out where she stands within that range of media and public reception and the act itself. In this case, she decides to rise up as much as she can into that role they created for her.

These moments

by Kenneth Nickell

These moments come nowhere to us. It was an Indian Summer. At 17 I had just bought my own car, a beaten-down Plymouth Reliant, which did not live up to its name. At the same time I had just come home to my father's house after nearly a year of estrangement.

Amidst the monumental, my sister had come to visit, hearing of my unexpected return, very excited having driven across two states to see me. Somehow it was just the most ordinary of things. We had breakfast in my den. I introduced some friends in the area to her and we decided the beach was the place where doing nothing was something to do.

She drove myself and two of my closest friends, even though my rustbox was wrought with reliability. A sign warning of road construction held her view from her, only two seconds away and BAM!

They call it a T-Bone; though it tasted like blood and asphalt. I the proud owner of a "new-to-me" car, was seated at the point of impact; would not walk for six months, nor would I ever drive my first car.

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