

Satellite Rules, Stranded Longings

Dave's on a skeptical jag. He's having a hard time believing the blocky budget hotel where he's been dropped off, its blinky sign pulsing over a vast empty lot, is centrally located, though it hulks very near to the confluence of three rivers, the locus of Milwaukee. Inside, he wonders how flush, name-tagged Kimmy, presiding over the tawdry lobby adorned with dusty plastic flowers, summons cheer without narcotics. Dave had a long day in the forced-air environment of the Convention Center.

Dave's in town for a Harley trade show because, through no agency of his own, he's a sales rep for several licensed products. It's a job that landed on him after being laid off during W's recession. His cousin did it for thirty years, until a heart attack knocked him off his bike. Dave took over temporarily, or at least that was the plan. Most of his commissions come from selling helmets and sunglasses. He focuses on the public good he is doing, making bikers a little safer. He gets to know the shapes and sizes of their heads, the curvature of their brows. It's a kind of intimacy, and a way of caring for others. So he puts on his best impression of a biker, and earnestly sells them on the lines. Truth be told, he's a New York homosexual who likes his quiet, and whose preference for two-wheeled locomotion involves no motor, just a nice bell.

So Dave makes the annual trek to some American city with adequate convention facilities to meet with his accounts, the managers of dealerships in the Northeast. Most of the dealerships are run by aged-out boomers. It's the same with the sales force, all men in their sixties clinging to misspent youths. At 47, Dave is the youngest rep on the national team, so he was welcomed as a shot of fresh blood, though not without raising some eye-

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brows. He spent the first day of the trade show maintaining the charade while checking out the few hot guys in attendance—mostly the grown sons of owners who have taken up the family business. All day, he scoped these sturdy, well-fed young men, and how they fill their jeans. They'd occasionally catch him, and return the most oblivious smiles.

The European dealers skew younger, as the brand's expansion across the sea is a fairly recent trend. Some Euro-studs roamed the floor in their interpretations of Seventies biker fashions, which Dave finds delightful. Despite these alluring subsets, there's no trade to speak of at the convention. The crowd is overwhelmingly straight, and pretty white for that matter, a self-sorting demographic.

When he was on break by the coffee station, in a corner where no one could see his phone, Dave opened the app—one of several mobile platforms for male-on-male cruising. He wanted to see if anyone else at the show is stealth like him. None of the sturdy sons or the Euros were on the app. A few brown-skinned guys showing non-identifiable parts of themselves were, probably waiters from the convention center dining hall.

Once Dave gets to his room, the app starts pinging. He's happily surprised to find several promising pings from not too far off. Living in New York, he's accustomed to pings from close proximities. Distances are measured in feet. In the grid of prospects, some are in the same building, some are next door. Others are on the next block, but in the back of the building, separated by only a hundred and some odd feet, two exterior walls, and a chasm of rear space. Here in Milwaukee, the distances are measured in miles.

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Dave would gladly walk a few miles to break through the strangeness and share pleasure with one of them, or they can come to his hotel, if they can get past Kimmy. It says right there in the Bible in the nightstand ‘love thy neighbor,’ and that’s what he intends to do, with the help of the satellite array encircling us in medium Earth orbit, transmitting location data into his pocket.

Dave checks out this guy who is only 1.4 miles away. The guy is smiling in his photo, and that’s always a good sign. Dave does not appreciate the scowlers. The smiler has dark hair and eyes, and a somewhat large forehead. Dave finds him compelling in an otherworldly way, plus he has a sense of humor. His name is also Dave, so they joke about that. The Daves exchange some photos, first candid, then more intimate shots, like a flip-book striptease. Other Dave looks squat and sturdy, although there might be some distortion going on in the mirror shots he sent? They compliment each other, and ask the ‘host or travel’ question, to which Other Dave specifies that he prefers company. This suits Dave just fine, as it is a clear night, he wants to see something of the city, and he needs air after a day spent manning the sales booth.

Dave is preparing to break out of isolation, take a nice urban hike, and love his neighbor. He mentally rehearses a sequence of actions—getting Other Dave’s address, mapping the location, determining the best walking path, brushing his teeth, fixing his hair, changing his shirt—when Other Dave messages him: ‘So you’re ok with me being dwarf?’ To which he adds the bicep, mouse, and winking man emojis.

Dave feels a flush of embarrassment, which is a weird thing to feel alone in a room. He checks Other Dave’s stats, and sure enough, his height is listed as 4’-9”. This is

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on the tall side for a dwarf, as Dave will learn from the results of a hasty dive into search engine results. There's excitement under his embarrassment; he's never been with a dwarf before. An image flashes of a porn he once came across, a bull-like, street-tough dwarf fucking two full-sized girls. His mind searches for any prior interactions with dwarves and comes up blank.

Dave once hooked up with a guy with flippers for arms, a thalidomide baby. Flipper Man was handsome and owned a brownstone in Chelsea. Dave was surprised when he opened the door, since Flipper Man had not shared his circumstance with him. Right there on the stoop, he understood the photo cropping decisions Flipper Man had made. He imagined all the men in his situation who turned around and ran back down Flipper Man's front steps, and right there decided he did not want to be one of them. Flipper Man had a serious expression. Dave gave him his ass because he couldn't give him arms, riding him while holding on to his shoulders.

Dave hooked up with a Wolf Man in Boston, who lost an arm after a drunken motorcycle accident. They sat next to each other at an AA meeting, and after made out in Wolf Man's pick-up truck. He still has a sense-memory of the electrical discharge that ran up his arm when Wolf Man gently touched him with his mechanical claw-hand. After recalling these past encounters, Dave hesitated to meet up with Other Dave just because he's a dwarf. That would be exploitation—but then he remembered that he'd been attracted to Other Dave before he knew he was a dwarf. He found himself replying: 'Yes I am cool.'

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Dave takes the steps he anticipated taking in preparing to meet Other Dave. The path he's mapped takes him across the Menomonee River along 6th Street; its cable-stayed bridge hums in the night. He walks past the vast museum, where he will soon spend a morning feigning interest, and into the Walker's Point area. At .7 miles, an angry drunk stumbles out of a Mexican place called Conejito's, breaking the solitary spell. Up until then, Milwaukee had given the night to him alone. He wonders if Other Dave is a furious rabbit.

The app shows smaller distances as Dave advances on Other Dave's address, leading him to surmise he's in a gay neighborhood. Other Dave lives on a block of free-standing working-class houses, outside of a looming concrete factory complex with a clock tower. It's a modest wooden structure with shabby asphalt roof tiles and a projecting front porch. The porch steps creak under his feet, and Other Dave appears at the window, smiling, even before he has a chance to knock. Other Dave must have been tracking his approach on the app.

"Hello! Welcome to Milwaukee," says Other Dave in full voice, and as they shake hands, he pulls Dave in for a hug. He burnishes his large forehead against Dave's chest, and Dave finds this arousing, but once the hug is over, Dave's at loose ends. He doesn't know what to say or how to move, and finds himself fixed in space and time, like in a round of Freeze Tag, which Dave always took way more seriously than the other kids.

Other Dave leads Dave in and invites him to sit on a full-sized recliner, while he sprawls on the low sofa, which is a standard size, but with the feet removed. The Daves have a chat; Other Dave works at the factory complex down the street. He's an engineer

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who develops automation processes for manufacturing. Dave tells Other Dave about his work among the biker tribes. Other Dave explains how his interest in robotics emerged from trying to solve the problems of access in a full-sized world. He also mentions that he used to dance shirtless on a bar, pouring shots for straight crowds, to put himself through engineering school. Now Dave is really aroused.

The sexual attraction is palpable. Dave is turned on by Other Dave's compact musculature and the size of his forehead. His brow is broad and flat and perfect in its way, and Dave longs to touch it with his eyes closed, to snug it like a pair of extra large goggles. The kindness in Dave's eyes brings out a dominant streak in Other Dave, who feels an urge to make this full-sizer submit rising in him.

They move into the bedroom, and Dave tries something he's been thinking about: he gets on his knees and nuzzles into Other Dave's chest, just the way Other Dave did at the front door. Dave can feel Other Dave's arousal through his pants. They remove their shirts and Dave inhales of Other Dave's armpits, and licks a nipple. Dave admires other Dave's muscular arms, although there's still something baby-like about the proportions. With Dave kneeling before him, Other Dave's dominant aspect is unleashed, and he takes charge.

Other Dave orders Dave to undress with a stern look, then pushes him down into a cross-legged position. He reaches back in time for some of his bar-top stripper moves, and gives Dave a slow striptease, to his briefs. He pushes his crotch into Dave's face, sending Dave into a pheromone-induced ecstasy of cock worship. Other Dave is remind-

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ed that if it weren't for business travelers, he might never get laid. The local gays treat him like a pet.

When they lie down together, the height difference melts away, but not the power dynamic. They make like the Pisces symbol on Dave's low bed. The Daves explode in unison, then Other Dave crawls on top of Dave and lies on him like he's a pool raft. They lie like that for a long while, glued together, all difference fused away.

Other Dave offers to take Dave out to dinner, if they can agree on a night. Dave initially believes it's a sincere offer before spasming with self-doubt. He takes it as polite sendoff, and returns to his hotel a different way, because he doesn't like to backtrack. The return walk takes him right by the Confluence, where he entertains the notion that tonight a GPS satellite is passing right overhead. It's technology invented by the government for military and navigational purposes, and he's applying it to his longing for intimacy. Currents of aggression, exploitation, and lust running along the same channel, he muses. "That's confluence," he finds himself saying aloud to no one, as he raises his face to the moon.

After another airless day of sales rites in the Convention Center, Dave walks the trail along the banks of the Milwaukee River, crossing bridge after bridge. It's a warm evening, and the city's waterways are buzzing with locals on leisurely outings in pleasure boats. Seagulls squawk while riding one boat's upwash, unexpectedly reminding him of childhood days spent on Orchard Beach, and this one day in particular when a bold gull snatched a tuna sandwich out of his hands. The app comes to life as he cuts through various neighborhoods, mapping trajectories as men leave their jobs and seek each other out.

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Dave comes to life too, breathing briny air and seeing new things, remembering fondly his hot encounter with Other Dave. At least his airless day was a good one for sales. He feels right in the pocket with the app, too. He's hesitant to acknowledge his specific longings for tonight, but after last night, he wants to stand head-to-head with a man, and not feel any awkwardness. He'll remember to review all stats tonight.

As Dave enjoys the riverine charms of the city, he runs into two of his associates, and they cajole him into dining together at a riverfront brewpub. They exchange war stories from the day-tales of difficult buyers and big sales that got away—over brats and pale ales. At a pause in the background clatter of the establishment, Dave's colleagues hear the distinctive *ping!* of the app coming from his phone, and confused looks cut across their table. He's pretty sure they're not familiar with it. He's usually so careful to silence his phone around work colleagues. He silently laments the circumscribed life of a stealth operative, biker imposter by day, gay cruiser by night.

He leaves his colleagues to their extra rounds of ale, and checks in with the app. One of the pings seems promising, although it's from 7 miles away. His name is Victor, and it's also a good sign for Dave when app men go by their names, not some invented handle boasting of prowess, or staking a claim on a sexual position. Victor reports that he is just finishing work and needs to travel.

Victor is 25, a lean, tall, good-looking Latino. Dave has grown accustomed to attention from younger guys; he does not especially like being called 'daddy,' but he's grateful that they still call him at all. At least Victor has not used the word. Victor appears in his profile photo in a bright blue t-shirt, and the background is all glossy white bright-

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ness recognizable as an Apple store interior. Dave twinges with lust over the prospect of hooking up with a Genius.

Dave has a back catalog of delectable fantasies about ravaging those friendly, nerdy-hot tech boys he encounters in an Apple store. He can't help mentioning to Victor that he's an Apple fan since the days of the Mac Classic, with the 9-inch monochrome screen and 4 MB of memory. That's when he first started hooking up with men, through the AOL chat rooms. Perhaps this was an overshare on Dave's part. Victor likes older guys mainly because they're nice to him. Most guys his age are way too self-absorbed, at best indifferent, at worst mean. Victor offers to meet him at his hotel in about an hour. He's taking the bus from Wauwatosa.

Victor arrives at the hotel after the long trip, the blue dash of his bus having lurched past hundreds of faster dots. He's friendly and talkative, but Dave detects an air of sadness about him. It's later than expected, and Dave struggles to keep alert for Victor's chatter. Victor likes working at the Genius Bar and doesn't mind taking the late shifts, like tonight. Victor is happy to talk about his work at the store because it keeps the conversation away from other subjects. Finally Dave and Victor hit the bed, and it's like a married couple enacting their routine.

Dave is smitten with Victor's smooth brown skin, his lean frame, his meaty ass. Victor just doesn't want to be at home tonight, where there are threats to his peace of mind and his safety. He feels safer with this large, gentle stranger in his hands. His faith lies in the technological solution that brought him to this random hotel room, where no one can track him down.

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The two strangers have a romantic night: hours of kissing, stroking, and grinding. As dawn light leaks between the vertical blinds, Victor lifts his legs for Dave, who fucks a stubborn nut out of him. Between the conversation and the slow-burning sex, they've been up for hours, and Dave is completely spent. Even with a little smile on Victor's face, the dark brown dots of his eyes look haunted. Victor's sadness comes to the fore, and it seems unshakeable. Dave had hoped to sex it out of him, but apparently not. Victor sleeps nestled into him. After a few hours, the alarm sounds, and Dave dresses as silently as he can manage. He leaves Victor sleeping as he groggily makes his way towards his final day of capitalist frenzy.

Dave zombie walks through the morning. On his short break, he runs over to the coffee bar to throw back a double espresso and check on the app. He's leaving the next day, and tonight he needs sleep, so there's really no reason, it's just become a reflexive habit at this point. There's a new guy who goes by 'Swingl'; he's just 51 feet away, according to the app. Otherwise it's mostly the same array of faceless brown body parts. Swingl's profile photo shows him on a motorcycle, geared up in leather, wearing a helmet and goggles. All Dave can make out is his nose, straight along the bridge, but swollen with cartilage. It looks powerful and a little sunburned. Just as Dave is about to scroll on to the next profile, Swingl hits him up: 'Hey Dave,' with an added tongue-sticking-out emoji.

Dave seizes with anxiety. His first impulse is to block Swingl, but then what? He scans the area in a 50 foot circumference, then 100 feet, then an even wider circle, but doesn't see anyone who might be Swingl. He's scanning for that nose, for someone on his

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phone. His heart is thumping out of his work shirt, and it's the most alive he's felt inside this coffin of a building. 'Hi. Who's this?' Dave replies, trying to sound cool. 'How's MKE meet any QT's?' replies Swingl. Dave doesn't know what to make of this. This person obviously wants something of him, even if it's the vicarious pleasure of hearing about his hook-ups. Maybe Swingl just wants to taunt him. Knowing so little about him is unsettling, but knowing there's someone like him among the bikers is electric. Dave replies:

'Been nice—want to hear about it? Have we met?'

'YES please. Nah but yr name's on yr shirt.'

'Ok. What will you tell me about you?'

'Hehe. I'll show U wat's under my 1-piece...'

That's a provocative offer. Dave tells Swingl about his first night in Milwaukee, omitting the detail of Other Dave's stature. It seemed unnecessary, and too much to give away. How many gay dwarves could there be here? Swingl replies by sending a photo of himself zipping out of his leather one-piece. It's cropped just above the mouth, showing Swingl's full lips and thick stubble; there's just a peek of his hairy body beyond the zipper.

Then he tells Swingl about Victor, who he left sleeping in his bed. Dave offers some details about their sexual encounter. Swingl replies with approving 'mhhm's, followed by the tongue emoji. Swingl sends Dave a photo of him stripping out of the one-piece. Now Dave sees a shoulder, a pec, and an ear in profile. It's enough to get Dave to delve into intimate details about Victor: his furry ass crack, his broad feet, his panther-like skull, his underlying sadness. Swingl in return sends Dave a short video file of him

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dropping the one-piece to the ground with his back to the camera and pulsing his juice cans. Dave did not know you could send videos over the app, and nearly swoons right there in the Wisconsin Convention Center.

With that, Swingl is gone. He's blocked Dave. Dave regains his composure and spends the afternoon scanning the lumbering crowds for that nose. So many large bodies, like a beast herd raised for butchering. Dave feels anxiety about how the silos of his existence could have crumbled today, and may still crumble. Yet it's liberating to imagine what life would be like if his colleagues were to know. Maybe he could still do his job.

Dave decides to lay off the app that night, after this risky interaction. He takes an aimless wander along the Riverwalk, then drifts off into the unknown, past brewery complexes and over train tracks. He comes upon a farmer's market. The vendors are closing up for the day, but there's a cheesemonger's table under a striped canopy, and the goods are still out. The table is manned by two strapping young activist/farmers with full beards. They are so earnest about their organically fed animals and their small-batch approach. Dave falls in love with the hipster cheesemongers, and laments that he found nothing in this life to be earnest about when he was their age. These young men make things every day. He buys a little wheel of sheep's milk cheese, which he is told is 'buttery, with a salty finish.' He has no idea when he will have occasion to eat it.

In the afternoon, following that museum tour, Dave makes his way to the airport, with his branded backpack on this back, wheeling his branded rolling luggage through long corridors, carrying his artisan cheese in a brown bag. He recalls the perky museum guide from this afternoon's tour with annoyance. After walking the group through the

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company's technological advancements by the decade, she blabbed about how leveraged and recognizable the brand is, how it's in hundreds of product categories—outdoor furniture, golf clubs, phone cases. Then she said something Dave found most irksome: “Yet it still represents a spirit of rebellion to our customers!”

This public relations pablum made Dave want to zip out of the one-piece of his own skin and announce to the pack of big bodies obediently following Miss Perky that he'd been secretly hooking up all over town, even pulling in trade letting them think he's a biker. He doesn't care who knows anymore. He even hooked up with a dwarf! A brown-skinned Genius! And two cheesemongers! (Okay, that didn't actually happen, a little exaggeration). In his incoherent and internal fury, Dave interrupts her spiel, bursting out of complacent silence. To the guide: “I cross more lines than you can draw, Miss Perky.” To the other tour-goers: “One of your sons showed me his ass.” Back to Miss Perky: “How's that for technological advancement? How's that for rebellion?”

Dave was relishing his moment, imaginary though it might be, as he trudged through the airport. The internal dialog muted the grinding of his luggage wheels against the terrazzo and the metronomic swing of the bag of cheese, and took him out of time and place. All he could manage was to follow the arrows pointing towards his gate. It seemed like he was rolling through the same corridor on a loop, past the same black chairs, past the same digital screen, blinking the same departure data.

Then a sight in the distance knocked Dave back into the present: a Harley-clad posse boarding Delta flight 4445 to Detroit. Repeated on two young men talking to one another, and there once more, on an older man who surely must be their father, was that

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nose, large, straight, and ample. Just as they're handing their tickets to the gate agent, Dave yells abruptly, something you really shouldn't do in airports these days:

“Swingl!”

One of the young men, in a pair of sunglasses Dave sells, cocks his head in Dave's direction, grinning, and gives him a biker salute, its trajectory arcing along the space frame and landing right in Dave's throat, before disappearing into the jetway. Dave is struck with a wave of self-consciousness for his outburst, and scans the terminal for TSA agents. He sheepishly makes his way to his gate and throws his luggage and himself on the carpet, as the odor of jet fumes overwhelms him. He doesn't even notice that his flight is listed as delayed. Every time he gets someone next to him—in a wooden house, in a hotel room, in a terminal—it's like the satellites rule, and his longings get stranded deep in the exosphere. Dave takes a bite of the cheese as its tang releases from the crumpled bag. It is warm and runny, its taste conjures a vision of grass pastures dotted with ovine clouds, with a finish of the unattainable.