



## Bokoblin Grindset

Alex Prestia

I'm listening for a call to action,  
a quest to materialize,  
a roadblock on a country road.

The trees beckon forward,  
each bridge is sturdy,  
the creeks peaceful and shallow.

Something rustled the leaves  
it's dark out, I should be scared.  
But it's a raccoon, or a squirrel,  
or any number of things better suited  
for a cartoon than an epic.

I solve taxes and utilities  
and rent. Food is expensive but I'll  
live. The sun rises and sets.  
Each lake I dredge holds no sword.

I'm left batonless and rudderless  
—wondering if playing video games 8 hours  
a day is all that bad— I'm left standing in  
the end game with no quest markers to chase.



## Tabula Rasa

Carl Scharwath

I saw the ethos  
of a generation destroyed-  
mourning the philosophers  
In their artful vision.

The sense datum clouds  
with cries and songs  
of the nymphs welcoming  
new world dawns.

Mentality is, in its way forming,  
a sign of hopeful intelligence.  
Knavish roadblocks obstruct  
triumphant returns to Arcadia.

Asterism fills my sight  
As the false memories  
Of a partial Utopia  
Flood my soul.



## Grey skies

Melissa Lemay

An echo is  
my heart in grey skies;  
floating through clouds  
to a garden of  
bricks  
and  
red  
flowers.

# JUST A GAME

Alex Prestia

Moka isn't my bracket demon, he's more like my bracket imp. He shouldn't, ever, be able to beat me. He's 5'7, 130, and I always think of him as being 16 despite him being 19 now. Every tournament it feels like he's right there in my path, controller resting daintly in his lap; if I should have finished in the Top 16, I lose to him in the Round of 32, if I should have made it to the Top 8, he knocks me out in the 16. Every bracket he's there, gently holding his controller, calmly sitting, being a little imp. Like that one time, on Valentine's Day, when most people didn't show up to Ledo's Bar for our weekly tournament, and by all rights—just this once—I should have won the whole thing, guess who beats me, guess who makes me runner-up with his dumb cartoon-character of a main and his stupid controller in his twinkish lap: bracket imp, Moka.

And let's not forget that his playstyle is lame. Everyone else playing this game plays aggressive, they go in, they force things to happen, but not Moka. Moka spams his projectile, and when you do finally approach he patiently waits, lets you miss, blocks, or does some other bullshit that makes you lose. It's a lame way to play. It's camping. I

play hype, I go in, people think it's cool, it's aggressive af. People like Moka are why we added a time limit for matches. Even then, the timer just makes me have to play more offensive, makes me need to rush him down, because if he has a lead and the time runs out he wins, and he knows that. I just wanted to say all this before I talk about the incident. I respect this scene, and all the players in it, but I think a lot of people have the wool over their eyes on this one. I don't think they really understand what I did or why I did it and, especially, why it was really Moka that forced all of it.

Three weeks ago I played against Moka in the Round of 16. The set was tied 1-1 in a best of three. Next game would win the set. Both healthbars were at about 20%. The whole set had been played around his dumb, campy projectiles, so when he suddenly ran his character forward I didn't believe it. I sat in block, I figured he'd run forward a couple of steps, shoot his dumb projectile at me, and then jump backwards, just like he always does, because he's lame. But instead he runs up, grabs my character and comboed into his super move. Winning him the set in the most horseshit way possible. See how impish this dude is. It's totally anathema to continued development of the game's meta. He's literally setting the game back by playing like this.

So yes, I did yell very loudly, in the middle of the bar, after he won. I did not yell "FUCK" at the top of my lungs like everyone seems to say I did. They misheard. I simply yelled "THINK" because if I had thought a little more, I would have seen through his lame playstyle and won. Like I deserved to.

At the next "Ledo Weekly" (two weeks ago, iirc) I played Keurig in the Top 32. I'm obviously way better than Keurig, he's only been playing in our community for a few months and he's always wearing new AirForce 1's, and he seems to be more of a social guy than a true gamer, but somehow we were tied at 1-1 and on a final hit situation in Game Three. I clutched it out. Keurig attacked, left himself vulnerable, and I finished him off with a parry guard to mid attack. EZ. I only popped off a little bit, like I barely jumped out of the chair, and pumped my fist, and yelled, "Let's go" super quietly. Despite what some other people might be saying, it wasn't a ridiculously big pop-off for a Top 32 at a weekly. Plus, you haven't heard what Keurig said to me later that night. Later, while he was smoking a joint on the bar's

patio (which, by the way, I know it's legal but it just feels like that shouldn't be allowed), guess what he said to me— he said “Ego is a flame that steals oxygen from experience.” Or something weird like that. Like wtf was he even talking about. I just feel like, if this whole thing is about players in our community being salty, or being bad losers, it's totally not fair to just point at me.

I didn't play Moka at that weekly. Aeropress knocked me out in the Top 16, and that's fine cause she usually wins the whole thing, or atleast finishes in the Top 4. She eventually did win the whole thing that week, iirc. Just thought I should mention that she was sharing a blunt with Keurig on the patio when I left. I bet Keurig doesn't talk to Aeropress about egos. Anyways, during my game with Aeropress, Moka sort of hovered nearby, watching the whole game over my shoulder. Afterwards he was like, “You should watch out for her so-and-so, or try and parry her this-and-that because it sets up a frame trap and she had the read on your dashing out and punished it everytime.” Or something like that. He's so annoying. If I had wanted his advice I would have asked for it. Scratch that, I would have gone straight to Aeropress and asked her myself, but I didn't. She's so far ahead of me there's no point in asking; Moka isn't even better than me, so why would I ever ask his advice?

Moka was having a great run that night. He made it to the Semi-finals, where he was supposed to play against Aeropress, but then unfortunately had to leave. Semis and Finals usually don't start till after 10pm, and it was after 10pm, and the bar's kitchen closes at 10pm, and it's Maryland state law that anyone under 21-years-old can't be in a bar if there isn't an open kitchen, and no one ever really followed that rule at Ledo's before but I guess one of the bartenders must have heard that Moka was under 21, and they didn't want to lose their job out of negligence, so they did the right thing and kicked Moka out after 10pm. Kind of sucks that he got kicked out in the middle of one of his best ever bracket runs, but like, we have to protect the community, right? That's what this whole mess is about anyways.

Last week Moka didn't come to the Ledo Weekly. Even though our Tournament Organizer, Percolator, was really good about asking the bar if Moka could come. And they said he could, just so long as he left before 10. To me, it seems pretty salty of Moka not to show up, but I'll

leave that up to y'all. I finished in the Top 8 that week.

Ok, so now we're at the part where I most need to explain myself, because yeah, it looked really bad as it happened; but I think with all the saltiness, and ugliness of other people in the community, which I fully explained above, that what happened at the EveningSun Monthly Tournament will be cushioned.

EveningSun Monthlys, held always at EveningSun Brewery & Gaming, are typically much larger than weekly tournaments and this was no exception. This monthly was huge, over 100 players from around the region. I was hype, understandably. I wanted to show everyone how much better I've gotten and the way to do that was making it to the quarterfinals. That was my goal: finish Top 8.



Moka and I met in the Round of 32. Me and the imp. I can't make this shit up. Plus, we were on stream—so automatically an extra audience of give or take a thousand viewers would be watching the game live on Twitch. Personally, I was playing hot, schmooving. In my first set of the day I'd handily beat Keurig 2-0. I played some rando from out of town in the Round of 64 and won 2-1. I didn't have matchup experience against the character he was using and dropped Game 1, but by Game 3 I was back to schmoovin'. I was ready for Moka. I was going to finish Top 8.

Both Moka and I were playing well that day. He wasn't even playing that campy—not until Game 3—in Game 3 he became that annoying little imp all over again. Final game, final hit, and I held block, just for

a couple of frames, and I swear that my controller, or maybe the game, lagged or something because I definitely wanted to stop blocking, I swear I had input a jump on my controller, I had pushed X, but the game didn't read it and instead of jumping over him I got caught in that cowardly grab of his, and then he finished his super combo and it was over, and I hadn't made it nearly as far in the tournament as I should have, as I deserved to, and everyone saw it on stream. He won, again, in the most lame way possible, and it wasn't my fault and it wasn't my fault and it wasn't my fault that I threw my controller at the TV, and whatever I'll pay for it, and it wasn't my fault I tossed my chair across the room, it almost hit a kid and his father but hey, it didn't, so whatever, and it wasn't my fault I grabbed Moka's t-shirt and shook his scrawny frame around, it was just his shirt, I didn't even touch him. I'll gladly buy him a new shirt if he's going to be such a baby about it.

I appeal to you all, individually because I've been removed from the community Discord already, but with the exact same explanation and request typed to each of you: Unban me from the scene. I promise this is the only time something like this will ever happen, and that I only got tilted because Moka is such an unbelievably toxic player.



## A Polish Octave\*

Nicholas Michael Ravnikar

P Yo gypsy! Yo Snoop! Yo long gong!  
O Plop plop plop. Noon poop. Goons spoon glossy  
L nylons. 's only polyps. 's only songs, 's  
Y only goop. Sloppy spools o' gloppy gloop. Polygyny's  
G psyops polls slyly pool oolong pong's only pogs.  
O Go google "pogs." Google "goo-goo pols." Go  
N Google "lollypopology."  
S Golly, sonny. Googly loss loops long sloops' slog.

*\* The Polish octave is an invented form. A standalone stanza of eight lines, the form requires each line to measure either eight letters, eight syllables, or eight words*

1

*overgrown weed*  
*innocent bystanders*  
*under the trees*  
durian flowers  
shed petals

2

*lock up*  
*of home worthy*  
*antiques*  
the frozen assets  
of a bankrupt

3

*renewed hope*  
*of wakefulness*  
*almond blossoms*  
arch-rivals  
revive ties

4

*cassava eaters*  
*have tilled the earth*  
*working hands—*  
sunset pulls the crowd  
to a rowdy bar

5

*grey harmattan sky*  
*sorrowing old widow*  
*in a portrait*  
winds of change  
a good harvest year



## Freight Train Lullabies

Christina Ellison

We were born in blacktop meadows,  
laze in dandelion-cracked asphalt,  
breathe petroleum into our lungs  
while listening to grackles cackle  
from their perches on streetlight  
treetops and boulder SUVs until  
the setting Target sun transforms  
into a blood moon. Shopping carts  
rustle like shivering leaves.  
Syncopating turn signals blink  
like electronic fireflies. Plastic bag  
tumbleweeds skid down the street  
as freight train lullabies sing us to sleep.

## **eighth of a dollar**

Jerome William Berglund

stalking Complex  
out for carnage, diminutive  
hard to get bead on

rounding that twisting  
Rainbow road I go off track  
plummet like Toonces

gameshark  
for the right price  
rules don't apply

bonus missions  
in Raccoon City, face zombies  
just a bowie knife

mythical Aeris revival...  
after all these years  
still hold out hope



## On Turning 42

Richard LeDue

The old Nintendo games seem further now,  
as the hours spent in front of a TV  
have aged like a sacrifice to a god  
who only answered with sore thumbs  
and bloodshot eyes, but now my minutes  
are measured in poems,  
which are smart enough  
to call such sacrifice “oblation.”



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