

IN FINIT
Y-1 (ONE) 1

(LIKE, FOREVER DUDE)

By

Andrew Arthur

WHY I LIKE IT: *Fiction Editor JOEY CRUSE writes: "Infinity-1," by Andrew Arthur, is experimental, multimodal, and conceptual – all of the things that a growing them needs. Featuring self-made art, wrapping poetics, and a mythological perspective on the origins of humanity, "Infinity," breathes in and out of itself, curating a tale as old as people that have been telling tales.*

There is no main character per se, more a speaker that time travels throughout our humanness. If we have all, or perhaps never at all, heard of the great tortoise that explores our space time continuum, then there are plenty of other origins stories to relish in while reading this piece.

I think what Arthur has done here is create a work that explores how art has always been a part of our genetics. Whether it is literally built into the fabric of the work, told as a tale of a man watching others on the street, or a evolutionary story of how we came out of the muck and into a fish with legs on the land, there are glimpses of prose, poetry, and artistry at work here that I would like to think denote a writer that should continue on writing, a writer that can take an idea and run, a writer with the potential to keep on telling the stories that make us human.

QUALITY QUOTABLE *(for the love of language...)*

I flew into the center of the galaxy and fell backwards into a black star. If you saw me crossing the point of no return, you'd see an image of me freeze and then disappear slowly. And time became different. Perception bends and The Universe morphs, faster and faster. Celestial bodies

will grow, explode, die, collide, before falling back into a singularity. And in that same instant, the black star imploded me into my most basic particles, and I flew in every direction, across every galaxy.

Profess. Overseer

An Introduction to Beginnings

This is what is expected of you:

You will be tested.

Nothing you dislike is real.

You are who you think you are.

This universe is small.

Dream something you've never seen.

About me:

I was born in a haunted house. It was at the bottom of the deep, blue sea.

It's where I learned that some fish live off the food between sharks' teeth.

My home was dilapidated, bare, and rotting. It was just big enough for me to crawl in, lie down, and sleep.

I'd settle into the sand and watch fish swim through a hole in the ceiling. Swiveling bodies above me. Shadows in the blue-green.

I remember caring for different things. Sometimes you hate something when it's a predator, hunting. And other times you're sad for the same thing, being attacked, bleeding and dying.

I lived in my haunted house paradoxically. Hating and dreading the things I wanted and needed.

Most of the time I either felt pain or nothing.

It was dark in my house. There was never any electricity. It's where I learned that there are massive storms out above the open ocean. Bigger and more powerful than most countries. Lightning will strike down upon the crest of a wave and continue down through the water until it reaches the highest point on the ocean floor. Before you can blink, the lightning retracts and returns to where it came from. There is a time, less than a second after the lightning leaves, when there is a complete void in the air and water with absolutely nothing in it. The air rushes back into the empty space to fill the void. All the collisions of the air coming together, reaching back into an equilibrium, is what creates the thunderclap. Water moves slower than air. And as the water rushes back in on itself, it creates a geyser that shoots up high into the air. A tower of water up to the sky, much louder than any amount of thunder.

And that was how I got the hole in my ceiling.

The only way to survive down there was to let the water in. Let it flow through you, so you became it. There was less salt than you might think. But still, I knew it was not where I was supposed to breathe.

I spent my time outside in the blue-green sunlight. I'd walk up a small hill every day to pitch sand dollars in my wishing well, shell fragments adorned around a hole in the ground. There's a stone embedded there, at the bottom of the hill, by my house. I always knew it was there in the ground, but it wasn't until the day I finally had a visitor that I realized that it looked like a little skull.

There was another stone at the top of that same hill. And it wasn't until that same day, after seeing the first one, that I realized that it looked like a smaller skull. On its side, mouth open and eating earth.

Algae growing in the eye socket.

I walked past them on the way to my wishing well, entrenched in my sandy yard, its creases also covered in algae. Flicking slowly spinning shells with my thumb, they would rise up until they stopped and fell. Back and forth, zig zagging, curling up quickly at the ends. Then down in the well and out of sight.

This was only the beginning of my journey, and I was already so tired.

I was promised a different world. And I was promised a different life. One that I understood.

I sat in a chair made out of a coral reef. A sharp, mostly stone, living thing. It grew up out of the ground, around me and took me off my feet. All the sharpest points dissolved into nothing and became a part of me. A dead thing growing, with no feelings.

Now is the best time to be alive, but everything is still so horrible.

I wanted to help. But I also didn't want to leave my house.

An ancient people used to think hell was standing in water up to your chin, which would all dry up when you bent down to take a drink. And I guess there was also fruit on a tree that hung above your head and lifted up whenever you went to pick some.

I ran out of shells, so I'd watch the current flow. Current is like wind except it only goes in one direction. Sometimes the flowing water sounded like people talking.

My home rotted away. Planks would fall and drift. The current took it all. I did all I could to save it because I couldn't do anything.

I needed something. Anything would've been a miracle to me.

The ancient people also thought a man pushed a rock up a hill while smiling.

Over and over, I would think, I hate being alive. I can't wait to die.

“...life is
the answer,
...& I
did nothing...”

But I saw the face of my brother and knew I had to keep going. I know now that water's equilibrium is reached only when it's at the lowest point it can be.

Then, a creature I now know to be an axolotl came to visit me. He crawled up the side of my coral chair and sat on my armrest with a smile on his face, looking white and rubbery. He had three things coming out either side of his head, like feathery pink horns but they were really external gills to help him breathe. He had lungs, too, and he was quick to tell me everything he's ever done right in his life.

He offered me immortality. He added that it would only take effect at the moment just before my death. So, I told him no again.

And I knew it was time to leave. I journeyed along the bottom of the ocean to find The Seer as the axolotl told me he holds all knowledge in his 8 arms. He told me I would see him as an octopus but that was only one of the forms he can take. He was what I would now call a protean shapeshifter.

I don't remember how long I walked, hours or days, marching, but I remember thinking, why does everything have to happen so slowly?

As I walked down farther the light started to fade and the water became dark blue, like the night sky.

The bottom of the ocean is a desert saturated in undrinkable water. The floor was made of soft detritus and debris that made small clouds around my feet as I was walking. All that I walked on was once a living thing.

Then I felt the ground move beneath me, and I thought my journey was somehow over. Moving so easily, being pulled in one direction.

My excitement quickly faded as I looked down at countless leeches, burrowing themselves into the ocean floor, miles away from where they should be.

I floated along their backs, farther, deeper into the ocean, into complete darkness. Their frantic wriggling transporting me faster than I could on my own.

The water flowing in my face was the only way I could tell I was actually moving.

But then I saw a few blue lights. They waved around in circles, barely lighting up the red, satin skin—of something. Was this The Seer? Beckoning me?

I tried counting its limbs to see if there were 8 of them, but couldn't look away from its eyes, as they were enormous and crystalline. I know now that I was looking into the eyes of an ancient sea beast.

That uncanny thing.

Like no creature I had ever seen.

The light it made was faint, but there was just enough to show the fangs at the ends of its legs.

And, as I was taken away by the leeches, the lights went out and the creature disappeared, and the ocean looked darker than it had been, somehow.

I know now it was a good thing that I couldn't see all its exposed bones and teeth as it would've scared me. But the real danger in seeing it fully was that I would've realized that I was

looking at a creature just like me, a hideous but harmless thing. And it would've made me curl up into a ball and just stay there in the dark, letting the leeches bury me.

The wriggling of the leeches stopped, and my feet tingled as they touched the ocean floor again, feeling unaccustomed to standing on them.

But I kept walking. Only hearing the beating of my heart and the sounds coming from inside my head, which weren't comforting.

I couldn't shake the feeling that I was walking in a big circle.

The axolotl said to look as far as I could, and I'll find The Seer underneath my feet. The one with all the answers, who will show me everything.

But I could see nothing. All I could do was walk on the tips of my toes, slowly.

The axolotl also said to be careful because there is always a lower place I can find myself in.

And then I was falling.

I floated down into a trench and my feet sank smoothly into the mud at the bottom.

He created his own light. His faced me and all his legs floating upwards and swaying like fire. White and red emanated from the top of his head and surged to the tips of his tentacles in concentric circles.

I said, I found you. And The Seer stretched his limbs out in every direction and shined white like The Sun.

I had to turn away from the blinding light. I looked at my shadow, sharp against the trench wall. It bobbed back and forth even though I was certain I wasn't moving. I know now that it was my spirit shaking. The trench wall was an orange and green rock with jagged, black streaks, making it look like a section of The Earth as if it were being viewed from a great height.

His words were muffled through the water. Spoken from the beak on his underside, which faced away from me. And with my head turned the other way, I thought I heard him say, you're a garden snake. You are green.

The light faded, and I looked back as The Seer swam away, speckled and beige, his limbs trailing behind him. Moving in a spiraled circle, into the briny ink.

I missed my only chance at seeing and was stuck in a barren place. I found myself curled up into a ball, running my hand along the rock face. Content to touch it until it went from jagged to smooth. Or until I finally ended up dying.

Then I was approached by what I thought was the axolotl, who had somehow found me again. I could feel through the ground vibrations from small feet walking toward me. I didn't want to tell him that I had failed but was excited for the prospect of a second chance. But I was approached by what I now know to be an olm, a white salamander without eyes. He told me he was at the end of his long life and that he sensed a being of great pain at the bottom of this trench. I asked if he could help me, if he could share any of his wisdom. He said, nothing I can tell you will be as great as the things you will learn for yourself.

And that was enough for me.

Enough for me to see the face of my mother and know I had to keep going. I thought, this is your life you have to fight.

I swam. Up. With nothing to look at I didn't know how far I had gone or how much higher I needed to be. If I stopped, I'd start to sink. I was tired. I would think, how much longer do I have to do this? It took so little time for me to fall to the bottom.

This world wasn't for me.

But I needed to give it everything.

Then, I started to see a speck of light. The Sun shining through the water, I thought, and I fought harder.

Soon I wasn't struggling against the water as I couldn't feel it against my skin anymore. I couldn't feel anything across my body, and then it felt like I was falling again. Only now it was toward the ball of light instead of back down into the trench, and I landed lightly onto the surface of The Moon. One satellite placed upon another.

So far away. I felt an inexplicable link, as I found a rock at the edge of a crater to sit and rest on, that somehow my home was me. I'll never see it again. I let it be taken.

I looked at the glowing crescent of The Earth and grabbed a handful of dust. I let it pour out the side of my hand and fall through the vacuum into a small mound that I thought would never collapse. I slapped my hands together obliquely to get the rest of the dust off me, but some stayed in the creases of my hands and the valleys of my fingerprints.

Sitting there, I knew I was going to be there for as long as anyone can possibly be. With no food to eat and no air to breathe.

I thought, this is my one and only life. I would've been better off staying where I was. Not starting. That would've been easy.

I might as well explore my new home. So, I stood and looked into the black sky as far as I could see and started walking, like one big scar. I felt lighter there and could move much more freely.

Maybe this new place wasn't so bad, I would think.

I could leap and dance across the desolate land.

With The Sun always out, there were no stars to see. So I was either looking into The Sun or at nothing. Sometimes it looked like the dark was right in front of me.

When I walked, my feet would kick up dust into little clouds that hung just above the ground. And they would fall back down, the same way the sand did under the sea.

As a child I didn't understand how The Moon used The Sun to shine at night, or how there wasn't always an eclipse.

Eventually I had walked the entire way around where I tripped over the mound of dust I had poured out. That sent me tumbling down like a feather into the crater, across and over the softest powder, until I was at the very bottom-center. I laid there baking in The Sun, with no more energy to get up. The walls of the crater funneled the heat to me like a crucible and my body started cracking and splintering. I looked ahead at The Earth, in the shape of a closing eye. There was screaming splitting through my chest and throat, but no sound came out.

I thought, and this is how my life ends.

Singed.

I did all the right things, but no one was there to see. No one to look at me. No one to give me an opportunity. Nobody there to see how loneliness hurt my heart. How it ripped my chest open and tore it apart. All I could do was sit and smile through shocks of hot jealousy.

But the image of my father appeared, and I knew I had to keep going.

The sides of the crater started coming together, forming a hollow sphere with no beginning or end, detaching itself silently from The Moon. Scorched and imprisoned in an orb that blocked all the light, I was pulled harder into its wall as it broke away into open space, before floating into its center, where it took a lifetime for the heat to dissipate.

I know now that it was a gift to have everything taken from me.

The crater started to fall to Earth accelerating at a great speed. When it made impact, the crater blew apart completely and made a cloud over the entire world. And I was sent flying backwards through Space.

The Moon was only a light gray streak shooting away from me.

Flying between Saturn and its rings.

Then Jupiter, a giant ball of raging storms. I can see now on that giant, diamonds raining down from the sky. The pressure is so great that the carbon in the atmosphere crystallizes before falling and being pulverized. Back into atoms that float out again. A diamond cycle, everlasting.

I was convinced that I'd be taken in by something's gravity, a planet, or a star as my final resting place. But there was something bigger planned for me.

I flew into the center of the galaxy and fell backwards into a black star. If you saw me crossing the point of no return, you'd see an image of me freeze and then disappear slowly. And time became different. Perception bends and The Universe morphs, faster and faster. Celestial bodies will grow, explode, die, collide, before falling back into a singularity. And in that same instant, the black star imploded me into my most basic particles, and I flew in every direction, across every galaxy.

Into infinity.

Events on the Horizon:

Unit ∞ ne

	life is a puzzle
that exists to us	in 4 dimensions
3 spatial	& 1 time
The pieces	only appear for

a certain time
 for a certain amount of time
 for the time being Life is not a spectrum
 it is a ring with the extreme ends
 side by side & connected
 & what was considered the middle
 is really the opposite end
 Life is
 a series of choices
 meant to test you
 It is a race
 to when you can stop
 finally But stopping
 just makes you want to move again
 A person will look at
 dots of ink on a piece
 of paper
 & their mind
 will perceive lines
 connecting them You can't look at
 something without everything else
 being out of focus Your mind
 is a random staircase

the diegesis of your life
 & of your mind
 Most don't get to live before dying
 An infinite number of lives that play out
 the exact same way An infinite
 number of lives
 playing out differently
 Each iteration has
 its own infinity with all possibilities
 A fractal that bifurcates continuously
 integrated vertically but superimposed
 Infinitely similar infinitesimally different
 linked separately bridged through imagination
 metaphysically A silver meta-reflection
 Agmetatem on a wire an atom thin
 As you try
 to sleep in dark
 & quiet rooms your mind becomes
 an echo chamber reverberating the same words
 Dreams allow us
 to experience all lives simultaneously
 & live out the possible outcomes
 that can still be Where you see

with your eye only	& the biggest is as small
as everything you can see	as your insides
Indefinite like any manner	of imagining
how	

Unit Two

I saw a bomb kill without detonating. There was a blue glow as it blasted heat at the scientists who were studying it. The skin on the hand of the scientist who touched the fuel melted off minutes later. And they were all taken to the hospital with sunburns on their insides. The unexploded bomb excited the calcium in scientists' bodies. And, at the hospital, gold caps were put on their teeth so their mouths wouldn't burn as they lay dying.

Unit Three

I could finally see how everything we seek shows us a sparkling dream. They make us think impossible things. Just how it never happens. You will be tested, but it'll happen for you and me. The timing and alignment are only right eventually.

Unit Four

The first thing I saw was The Seer being eaten. By a man. All his limbs were taken and cut up into chunks while he was still alive, and they continued to write around on a cutting board made of dry bamboo shoots. His arms, his eight other brains, were only supposed to be cooked for a few minutes, but the window was missed, and the muscles tightened, and had to be cooked for hours to before they softened again. The chef mixed them with the fat of another animal then aligned into a cube with two knives.

They threw the rest of him away and his rotten head eventually made its way back to the ocean. He seized his phantom limbs tight in his mind as he felt it all happening. I was finally able to hear what he told me when we met, but it's not worth repeating.

I saw a Being begin being.

And now The Seer is me.

Only I could see the way.

I thought I'd be happier.

Unit Five

I saw a man spit on the head of a smiling Buddha, and the Buddha kept smiling.

Unit Six

Infinite worlds are layered on top of each other separately. Most didn't get a chance to live before dying. One I particularly liked was similar to the world I had lived in. It started hundreds of years before my potential lifetime. People visited a land that one might consider to be slightly more primitive. They were greeted by the natives, and the explorers offered back the same traditional greeting since they were the visitors. They sat on the ground with the natives and didn't mind getting dirt on their pants. The visitors showed the natives technology they had never seen before to make their lives easier. The visitors learned how the natives lived as well. While most of the visitors went back, some felt at home in the new place and asked if they could stay and live with the natives as they grew fond of the open landscape and the smaller population. And the natives let them. They built houses they were accustomed to living in and spent time learning the local language and added to the community. Some of the natives were curious about the explorers' home when shown renderings of the villages and creatures that

populated the surrounding areas and decided to go back with them. And the explorers let them, and they didn't need put them in chains.

It happened slowly over time on most every continent.

People eventually found the people they needed to.

It never occurred to them that there might be anything more than The Earth and stars because that was all they needed.

Unit Seven

A thousand years after his death, Jesus came to Earth again.

He was killed for blaspheming.

But Heaven is just a place in our minds we put people in.

And God is just a section of our brain we've never seen.

The afterlife would be exhausting. What is time in an eternity? How long has this eternity been happening?

Unit Eight

There was a time when humans stopped evolving.

Oceans would rise.

Rivers would dry.

Living on a razor's edge of time.

The present moment is the shortest amount of time there is. Too short to be measured. And it's where they lived.

They had everything they would ever need, but they let it all go extinct. It seemed easy to save, but no one wanted to do anything.

But the Universe is just a room we seek.

Unit Nine

I saw people blasting off and around the Earth at nearly the speed of light to jump ahead in time. The only way to travel back in time was to go far into the future, when their reality can replicate that of the past. The people on Earth saw it as a continuous streak of light for centuries, countless lifetimes of people who never knew a sky without it. The select few humans exited the shuttle after a few of their weeks, with everyone they knew, as everyone else they had known was no longer living.

But it was just a vague past they found in the future simulations, generally showing them what life was like before cameras. Before cameras weren't something people stopped and stared at. Can you imagine?

The people wanted to go back to change things. Not see things. It was just like watching a movie. And then they had to start another life in a world they didn't recognize. This place was confusing to them with so many changes. They yearned for their own time, back in the past. Back when things were simpler. But things were only simpler because less was known to them. It was the same world, only with more to see and more to hear and more to touch.

Things would change, but they would pretend it was always that way.

Most of history is behind them.

Unit X

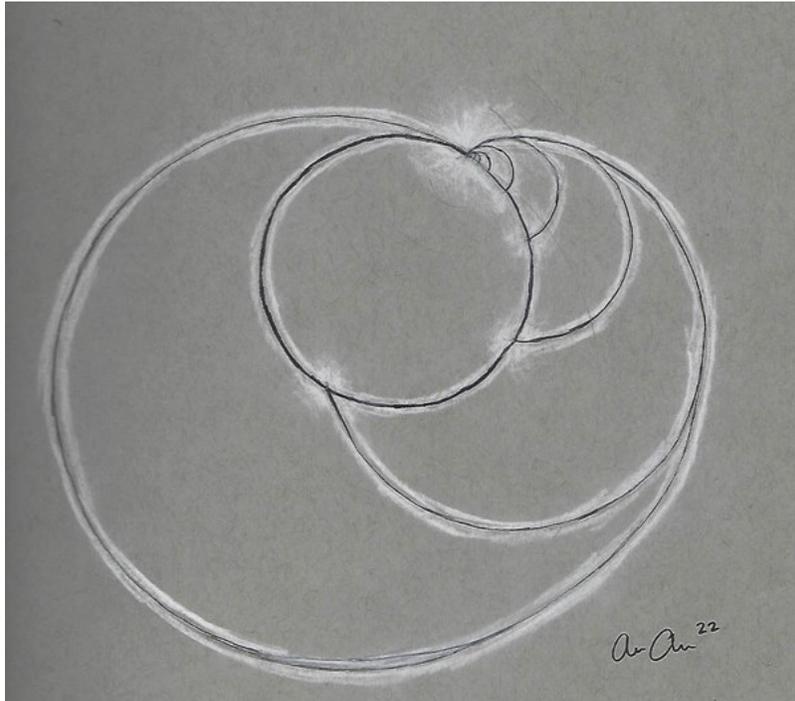
The olm visited again. He presented me with a torn piece of brown fabric. Through it I could see a lion, sitting and roaring in snow.

Unit Eleven

Let me show you a two-dimensional rendering.

A sprawling dreamscape.

Something easy for you to see.



A map of one night.

Your life.

Of all eternity.

Unit Twelve

I saw that men and women were the same, they're both capable of everything. It's just that they're allowed to show different things, opposite things. And they mistakenly thought that it all came from inside them. It only appeared that way because they'd been told that lie for so long. But some people need winners and losers. Even if there isn't a game at play.

Unit Thirteen

I could see how hard it was for people to be honest. Honesty can hurt everyone: the speaker, the listener, the thinker.

Unit Fourteen

I saw The Earth as a hive. A cell. Each part's movement was orchestrated. Everything is predetermined by who the people were. Everything has a body and soul. Their connections were many. I could predict the times they acted within themselves, as well as the times they didn't.

The inhabitants were all upset because their lives were only nearly perfect.

How many more things do you need to live perfectly? Is it something you hold in your hand or something you hold in your head?

Is there a difference?

Unit Fifteen

Can you see?

Your optic nerve becomes a black hole once you've left your mind starved for long enough.

First you see a mandala made of white feathers, which is you looking at the nerves at the back of your eye. Then it merges into a morphing green-white ring.

Your third eye has a tear duct on either side. You try to pry it open with both forefingers and both thumbs, until you get tired and stop. Then it opens on its own. Trying to see what you aren't doing.

Unit Sixteen

There was the head of a sunflower hanging above a dinner table. The seeds dried and fell. And from it something new was able to grow.

Unit Seventeen

A man who believed in another's fantasies went fishing one day. He was one of many that saw the world in only one way. He hooked a giant salmon, sitting in his boat on the river.

The salmon fought hard against his line and the man pulled back on his fishing pole with all his strength, bending it severely. Suddenly, all the slack went out from his fishing line and before he could blink it was flying back at him. There were little metal weights he had put on his line. They flew back at him at such a great speed, right into his eye, like a bullet, exploding it into a liquid. He felt intense pain that he tried to blink away. With only one forward-facing eye he couldn't perceive any depth for the rest of his miserable life.

No longer a predator.

Unit Eighteen

My hope is that I gave you the tools to create for yourself. To see what I could see. I hope we're the same. And that we meet some day.

Unit Nineteen

Everything will end normally, which is what makes it scary.

See you.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: *The bulk of this story came to me over the course of a week or two. I was working on something else when the first couple of lines just kind of popped into my head and the rest streamed out, which is rare for me.*

The ocean and outer space both have an ancient and universal quality to them that I find inspiring. Most people throughout history have lived near a body of water and anyone who can see has looked up at the night sky. We also originated from both places, but they are still two of the things we know the least about. I like to think of my style as a mixture of ancient and modern so that's probably one reason why they appeal to me. A lot of what I write is existential and the question of 'why are we here?' is an ancient one that we are still trying to answer and will likely try to answer long into the future. So, the story is an allegory or parable or fable (I can never remember the difference) describing a search for meaning in one's life. Why we put stock into certain things over others, as well as some fairly subtle allusions to climate change.

It's formatted like a class syllabus for a couple of reasons. Firstly, I imagined that the narrator was experiencing time in a more transcendent way halfway through, where things are more stacked on top of each other simultaneously instead of happening linearly, so I thought the multiple discrete units would help to portray that a bit better. Also, it's a part of my novel (which I'm still shopping around). My novel is told in first-person present tense, and I have found that it is pretty limiting to what I can realistically include, so the syllabus is a way for me

to bring in different voices and discuss things that I otherwise couldn't, and to keep things from being too one-note.

AUTHOR BIO: Andrew Arthur is a writer and artist based in Silicon Valley, who used to work in special education before Covid hit. This past winter he received an MFA in Creative Writing from San Francisco State University. His concentration was in fiction, but he also took numerous classes in poetry and helped publish *Fourteen Hills*, the grad student-run literary journal, while also interning at *Journal of the Plague Year*. His work can be found in *The Collidescope*.