

Things American: NFL Preview

Welcome to *American Short Fiction's* NFL Preview. To mark the beginning of the 16-week season, we've asked writers and editors from around the country to comment on the their teams, through the filter of fiction. Follow the links to see who gets the Barry Hannah treatment and which team is more like Joan Didion's later works than her earliest. As you peruse, you'll see we have multiple approaches to the same teams, with a few surprises in store—if you happen to stumble upon Oakland Raiders erotica or Tim Tebow Biblical Wrath Fan Fiction, well, you've been warned and you're welcome.

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[NFC East](#)

1. Dallas Cowboys

When Jess Stoner asked me to participate in this project, my first thought was “Which writer had massive success from an early age, the glitz and glamor of said success, real star power, Hollywood friends, money, booze and drugs, immediate Americana iconography, and then rather quickly fell apart—became a joke, a nostalgia-driven entity fueled by a mad man’s narcissism and recklessness?” The answer was, simply, hundreds.

But I settled on Truman Capote. The faded star. The southern charm worn thin. Jerry Jones has built a stadium—no, he’s built his own mausoleum (does any Cowboys fan doubt the prediction that he will be buried at the 50-yard line?)—one so extravagant and showy its own video board interrupts the game. Jerry does not care. Like an older Capote, what Jerry cares about is everything but what’s most crucial to his life’s work. Instead of football, Jones is touting the partnership with AT&T. Instead of football, Jones is touting the move of Cowboys HQ to shiny, sleek exurbia Frisco. Instead of writing, Capote found himself on late night talk shows, gabbing about Jackie O’s sister, the women of Manhattan he called his “swans.” Instead of writing, Capote moved with a paranoiac’s fever from continent to continent, city to city, talking and talking and talking about his next project without doing much about seeing it enter the world.

In 1981, when Truman Capote’s neighbor found the writer lying on the steps to his Sagaponack cottage—drunk, urine-soaked, barely coherent—Capote managed to confess: “I drink because it’s the only time I can stand it.” It’s a sentiment many Cowboys fans will live by this autumn.

Andrew Brininstool's short story collection, *Crude Sketches Done in Quick Succession*, is forthcoming with Queen's Ferry Press. His work has appeared in *Barrelhouse*, *Five Chapters*, *Third Coast*, the *Tin House blog*, and *Best New American Voices 2010*. He is currently at work on a novel. [Go to the Top](#)

2. New York Giants

For the last nine years, the New York Football Giants have posted a 53-19 record for the first half of their seasons. Their second-half record is a woeful 30-42, a phenomenon known to Giants fans as the second-half swoon. In spite of the fact that two of those sub-par second halves resulted in Super Bowl wins, what most pundits remember when gearing up for the new season is how awful and uninspired the team looked down the stretch. The lightning rod for this criticism is quarterback Eli Manning, a plain spoken goober with a demeanor so vanilla he makes Wayne Brady look edgy. He is the Stephen King of football, someone who doesn't exactly knock you out with his talent or technique, and whose flatfooted finishes often fail to live up to their brilliant premises. Like King, Eli has been able to avoid stringing duds together and is known for consistency rather than quality. But when Eli puts it all together, the results are magical. "[The Helmet Catch](#)" in SB XLII was his *The Shining* moment and his [perfect throw](#) on the game winning drive of SB XLVI his *The Stand*. In this you're-only-as-good-as-your-last-tweet world, critics are overlooking Eli's inexorable climb up the QB rankings that will put him in the Hall of Fame some day, and pegging the Giants to come in dead last in the NFC East this season. That's a sucker's bet, but it's also life in the NFL. One minute, you're the Super Bowl MVP, the next you're covered in pig blood and embarking on a telekinetic killing spree.

Jim Ruland is a veteran of the Navy, author of the short story collection *Big Lonesome* and host of the Southern California based reading series Vermin on the Mount. *Giving the Finger*, cowritten with Deadliest Catch's Scott Campbell Jr, will be published shortly after the Giants defeat the Patriots in February 2014. [Go to the Top](#)

3. Philadelphia Eagles

The 2013 Philadelphia Eagles starting lineup includes a quarterback who did federal time for hanging and drowning dogs, a halfback who recently called the mother of his child a "bum" and an "alley girl" on Twitter, and a wideout who got drunk at a Kenny Chesney concert this offseason and shouted racial slurs. Their new coach strung his college team along for weeks before deciding to leave for the NFL, and, not long after he left, his former school was slapped with sanctions for violations that occurred under his watch. I'm an Eagles fan, but if this team were a short story collection, it'd be *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men*.

Justin St. Germain is the author of *Son of a Gun*. He lives in Albuquerque. [Go to the Top](#)

4. Washington Redskins

By the rules of fandom, I'm supposed to be a Skins fan since I grew up in Virginia, but I could never get past the team's name. However, somebody's already writing about the Giants, so I'll try to ignore the name and admit that the Skins are currently a very exciting team, and their fans have an impossible-to-beat-down optimism (believe me, reality has been trying in recent years). Since Virginia was Redskins country, the team has always had a Southern feel to me despite being based in D.C. Adding all those things up, including a penchant for ugly names, I'll compare their upcoming season to the stories of the late, great Barry Hannah. Like a Hannah story, the Redskins will be exciting and unexpected with every (down) line. Expect Robert Griffin III to swerve with as much drunken power and swagger as Hannah's prose, zigzagging through the defenders as unforeseeably as those mad Hannah clauses, dangling where you least expect them. The fans, powered by drink, will watch and redden their throats with the screams of newborn vultures—feeling that sense of life that Barry Hannah infuses into his stories—until that inevitable moment of pain and failure appears (and what is a Hannah story without that?), whether the snapped leg of the football poet RGIII or some new humiliation, and they'll collapse in their chairs and weep or amble on down to Farte Cove with the other old football liars to tell their tales about what coulda shoulda happened.

Lincoln Michel's work appears in *Tin House*, *NOON*, *Electric Literature*, *The Believer*, and elsewhere. He is a coeditor of *Gigantic*, and can be found online at lincolnmichel.com. [Go to the Top](#)

[NFC West](#)

5. Arizona Cardinals

I've loved the hapless Arizona Cardinals for thirty-five years now, starting when they were in St. Louis. In that time, they have had thirteen different head coaches and more than twice as many starting quarterbacks. There are some I can't remember at all (some dude named Stoney Case started a game in 1997, and I totally forgot that former Seahawk Dave Krieg led the team for one whole year in 1995) and there are a couple that I still secretly do YouTube searches for (Neil Lomax: your eight years with the team seem Ironman-esque and epic in hindsight. Jake Plummer: I had a man-crush on you until you retired to "play handball"—which I think is code for "move to Idaho and start growing mushrooms."). They're like all the girlfriends that Rob breaks up with in Nick Hornby's *High Fidelity*. And the one true love that got away is our knight in shining shoulder pads—Kurt Warner. You took us so close to glory, Kurt! You showed me (and

desperate Cardinal fans everywhere) the shiny ring and then you (well, it was more like our defense) let it slip away in the final seconds. It has not been the same since you left. You were like Laura. We knew you were good, even great. And then, when you left, we wanted those days with you back so bad. I mean, some guy named John Skelton tried to be our leader for a while, and that shit got ugly.

On top of all the romantic heartbreak in *High Fidelity* is the more personal pang that Rob feels when he has to deal with the men who are now dating his women. In this regard, the yoga-loving world music fan Ray (played by a grossly long-haired Tim Robbins in the movie) is like Steelers quarterback Ben Roethlisberger. It's hard to unsee that son of a bitch winning it all and hoisting the trophy.

And now Carson Palmer is the new Cardinals quarterback. Another one through the revolving door. Another one who will most likely break our hearts.

[Kevin Sampsell](#) lives in Portland, Oregon. His very first quarterback love was Jim Hart. He is the author and editor of several books, most recently, *This Is Between Us* (Tin House Books, November). [Go to the Top](#)

6. San Francisco '49ers



“There could have been no two hearts so open, no tastes so similar, no feelings so in unison.” ? Jane Austen, *Persuasion*

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7. Seattle Seahawks

Last year's Seattle Seahawks surprised a lot of people: a team coming off a 7-9 season, putting most of its 2012 hopes in new QB Matt Flynn, the recently acquired former backup to Green Bay's Aaron Rodgers. But it turns out that the Seahawks would find a star in Russell Wilson, drafted out of Wisconsin in the third round. Wilson quickly developed into a consistent passer, an unpredictable scrambler, and if color commentary is to be believed, a terrific leader. By the end of the season, the Seahawks had gone from a non-entity in the toughest division to a team that was dangerous enough to beat anyone on the right day.

It's these sorts of surprises that make sports so fun to follow. And, really, these days it's hard to be caught off guard by anything. A movie trailer teases nearly the entire plot months in advance; singles give us the best parts of albums ahead of time. Even books, which have a much narrower publicity machine, are spoiled by expectations. The last novel that truly surprised me was Ben Lerner's *Leaving the Atocha Station*. I had no idea what it was about, or who Lerner was. As it turned out, he's a well-regarded poet, but *Atocha Station*, his first novel, would be a revelation of sorts. It's a quiet story, often as funny as it is sad, about a young poet living in Madrid. Lerner wrestles with meditations on the power of art, truth, and how those things influence our relationships with people. I want to tell you more, but maybe it's better to let it surprise you, too.

This year, the expectations for the Seahawks are overwhelming because, truthfully, anything short of a Super Bowl victory will be a disappointment. Grantland's Bill Barnwell has declared that the Seahawks are "the best team in football" and are [his pick to win the Super Bowl](#). (If you think Barnwell is playing favorites, last year he didn't bet [a single dollar on them](#).) As a fan, I'm thrilled that my favorite team has a shot at the Super Bowl, but I know that it won't be as fun as last year's team, when I was just discovering that potential. Even if the Seahawks win Super Bowl XLVIII, will it be as exciting as last year's season?

I recently learned that Lerner had sold his second novel to Faber & Faber/FSG (a much bigger house than Coffeehouse, who published his first). Can Lerner's new novel ever offer the delight of reading *Leaving the Atocha Station* for the first time? It will have to do so much more, now that success and expectations have robbed him of the element of surprise.

Kevin Nguyen (@knguyen) is an editor at *The Bygone Bureau*, a book reviewer at Grantland, and both at Amazon Books. [Go to the Top](#)

8. St. Louis Rams

The Rams came to St. Louis in 1995, a transplanted team to a baseball town, their royal blue stark against a sea of Cardinal red. I stood in Kiener Plaza downtown and welcomed the Rams with my family, with music and popcorn, with a ticker-tape parade. I was thirteen. I had just read Jeffrey Eugenides's *The Virgin Suicides*. Like the collective voice of the narrators, I felt myself a part of something; standing in the crowd and seeing the first NFL team of my lifetime come to the city, seven years after the Arizona Cardinals left: a team I'd been too young to know.

The Rams did not disappoint us. They were the Greatest Show on Turf. Between Kurt Warner, Marshall Faulk, Torry Holt and Isaac Bruce, they led us to a Super Bowl win in 2000 and to the playoffs until 2005. They were as captivating as the Lisbon sisters, strange and new, their game and skill electrifying. Working at a veterinary clinic in high school, I once checked in Az-Zahir Hakim's dog for a routine appointment, a brief encounter as thrilling as Eugenides's narrators sharing peach Schnapps with Lux Lisbon, or glimpsing Mary Lisbon through an open window.

The decline of the Rams since 2005 has turned many once-fans toward other teams. The Rams who were never really ours anyway, an uprooted team, a franchise that has always and will forever compete with Cardinal baseball. Like the narrators in *The Virgin Suicides*, St. Louisans can only trade on nostalgia, looking back upon several seasons of concentrated glory, an electricity that has waned. We pore over history in the way that the narrators pore over discarded LPs, scrawled notes, an archive of former lives. But there is hope: last season, the Rams went 7-8-1. Just as Eugenides's narrators scrutinize the past to find something unseen, something that will change an outcome, we watch the Rams with habitual faith. Each September, each season: this could be their year again.

Anne Valente's fiction appears in *Hayden's Ferry Review*, *Ninth Letter*, *Redivider* and *Copper Nickel*, among others, and her non-fiction is forthcoming in *The Believer*. She is the author of the fiction chapbook, *An Elegy for Mathematics* (Origami Zoo Press, 2013), and the forthcoming short story collection, *By Light We Knew Our Names* (Dzanc Books, 2014). [Go to the Top](#)

[NFC North](#)

9. Chicago Bears

Jesus Christ, bear down already. We've been here before, done this so many times. Every year when the Chicago Bears start cranking out the hype machine, there is hope. In Cutler We Trust, right? But the reality, sadly, is that we're hanging out in the same old watering holes; we are trapped in the cyclical disaster of Denis Johnson's *Jesus' Son*, and there will be no escaping our

destiny. We will look across the crowded turf, and standing there will be a man with his teeth in his hands, wondering what happened. We will ride for hours to get to the stadium, only to realize that the helpless baby bunnies have died—we crushed them with our enthusiasm, our denial, our ineptitude. By the end of the season, by the end of Johnson's narrative, we have tried to clean up our act; we have survived once again, gotten clean, off the dope that made us believe we could catch the Packers, could do anything more than go 10-6 and lose in the first round of the playoffs. We have a stable job now; we are optimistic again, and is that so wrong? Maybe this year will be the year that it all comes together. The second year of the offense, a few more holes filled perhaps, a little more talent developing at wide receiver, a tight end that can catch the ball—an offensive line that is finally starting to gel. There's always the draft, always tomorrow. What would Cutler do? He'd shrug his shoulders, sniff at your disdain, and climb up on the cross again, to be sacrificed for our sins.

Richard Thomas is the author of three books—*Transubstantiate*, *Herniated Roots* and *Staring Into the Abyss*. His over 75 publications include *Cemetery Dance*, *PANK*, *Gargoyle*, *Weird Fiction Review*, *Midwestern Gothic*, *Arcadia*, *Pear Noir*, and *Shivers VI*. Visit www.whatdoesnotkillme.com for more information. [Go to the Top](#)

10. Detroit Lions



“Memories warm you up from the inside. But they also tear you apart.” ?

Haruki Murakami, *Kafka on the Shore*

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11 a. Green Bay Packers

If you grew up, as I did, in the nineties, with relatives in Green Bay—great-aunts who owned cheese heads and season tickets; cousins who worked for the team—there is only one, will only ever be one, answer to the question “Who are you rooting for?” Brett Favre’s 1996 Packers: then, now, always. It may not be fair, but it’s true. As good as Aaron Rodgers’s Packers are now, and in some ways they’re better—(Rodgers is a far more consistent quarterback that Favre ever was, despite his perpetually collapsing offensive line; you don’t hold your breath every time he heaves the ball downfield, knowing the chances of an interception are at least 50 / 50)—there’s something missing. Rodgers’s team is the well-but-coolly-regarded second novel to Favre’s breathtaking debut, the *Autograph Man* to Favre’s *White Teeth*; the *Little Friend* to Favre’s *Secret History*. Rodgers’s team is the brilliant writer in late-career: it’s not that *Democracy* and *The Last Thing He Wanted* are bad—Joan Didion doesn’t do bad, ever—it’s that they’re not *Play It As It Lays*, because part of the beauty and perfection of *Play It As It Lays* is that it’s impossible to duplicate. (A lesson Favre had to learn over and over again.) *Democracy* and *The Last Thing He Wanted* have some similar tricks up their sleeves—the fragmented narrative; the alienated female protagonist—but their execution is rote; brilliant maybe, but not inspired. Read *The Last Thing He Wanted* and then read Deborah Eisenberg’s “Under the 82nd Airborne” and wonder if Didion’s descriptions of Latin American political intrigue don’t suffer in comparison. Wonder if maybe you should fear for the season ahead. Those ’49ers look awfully good.

Miranda Popkey has been on the editorial staff of Farrar, Straus and Giroux since 2011 and a Packers fan since 1995. [Go to the Top](#)

11 b. Green Bay Packers

There are seventeen stories in Paul Bowles’s *The Delicate Prey*, and each is horrific, which fits

perfectly with my fear that the Packers will go 7-9 this season, and spend their bye week struggling to comprehend the unforgiving, indifferent void at the core of all human existence.

Watching the Packers attempt to atone for their humiliating demolition at the hands of the '49ers in last year's playoffs will feel exactly like it would to a) have my tongue cut out (somewhere in the first quarter, probably some read-option bullshit); and b) be abused, tortured, dressed in a suit of tin cans (halftime, rationalizing, saying, "They can turn this around."); and c) be brainwashed and converted into a dancing mute slave clown (third quarter); and d) be made to weep as I hear a few bars of some song, maybe "We Will Rock You," that reminds me of what used to make sense in my life (Green Bay Packers, 2010 Super Bowl Champions).

Then there's Bowles's "The Fourth Day Out from Santa Cruz," which has something to do with the Vikings matchup, I think, at least based on the maritime elements, and my fingers are crossed that this means Johnny Jolly will bite off and ingest a part of Christian Ponder's face. Hard to know for sure, but he does bring great energy and toughness to the team. Welcome back, Johnny.

And finally, based on my calculations, "A Delicate Prey," the title story, can only refer to the Week 17 matchup against the Bears at Soldier Field. How could it not? Bowles's flute player is Jay Cutler, and though it will make me question everything, I will watch indignities performed upon him, maybe use the DVR to go back a couple times, as there will be a certain unspeakable truth in what I see, and at 7-9, something has to get me through the offseason.

Patrick Somerville is an author living in Chicago. He grew up in Green Bay. [Go to the Top](#)

12. Minnesota Vikings

General Manager Rick Spielman is a grandma in the backseat. The long-suffering and steady driver, Bailey Boy, is Adrian Peterson. Christian Ponder is a cat hidden in the grandma's picnic basket that flies into Adrian's face and forces the entire operation into a ditch. Coach Leslie Frazier is the mom in the passenger seat who sits quietly, watching all of this happen, and does nothing. The kids in the back, furiously opinionated but powerless, are the fans. Bobby Lee is Aaron Rodgers. The Misfit is the Minnesota Vikings' 2013 schedule.

Vikings fans, most Sundays this year, we're going to feel like we're being dragged out into the woods and shot. "Some fun!" says Bobby Lee. But it's no real pleasure in life.

J. Ryan Stradal is from the second-oldest town in Minnesota. His writing has appeared in *Hobart*, *The Rumpus*, *Los Angeles Review of Books*, the *Rattling Wall*, *Joyland*, *Trop*, *NFL.com*, and the *Nervous Breakdown*, among other places. [Go to the Top](#)

[NFC South](#)

13. Atlanta Falcons



“In the immemorial style of young men under pressure, they decided to lie down for a while and waste time.”? Michael Chabon, *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay*

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14. Carolina Panthers

The Carolina Panthers announced today that the 2013 season will be sponsored by Douglas Watson's *The Era of Not Quite*, a sad short story collection designed to counterbalance last year's full-page ad in the *Charlotte Observer* by Panther center Ryan Kalil predicting a Super Bowl victory.

Head Coach Ron Rivera waves off the question of an omen, claims last year's ad never happened, was just the result of Kalil acting like Watson's Molly Rivers, who “Held Outlandish Views,” as her obit states. After last season's final game, Rivera (though he denies it) said to Kalil with a sneer, “I'm Sorry I Lost the Scrap of Paper on Which You Outlined Your Plans for the Future,” which Watson then used as the title for one of the saddest stories in his sad collection.

Rivera says he is happy to be back after having been banished for not winning as predicted, which inspired Watson's story, "The Man Who Was Cast into the Void." In it, a man like Ron Rivera says, "It was a lonely business. At least in the void there was no pretending otherwise."

Meanwhile, quarterback Cam Newton reportedly meditates in the locker room and says he tries to picture himself, super hero-like, baring his chest on the road against the '49ers on November 10th, but he cannot see the emblazoned "S". So he tries to envision it at home the following week against the Patriots. Nada.

Watson knows Newton's Super Bowl hopes will wander like children into "The Cave" (another sad story in the sad collection) and that they will die there before Newton's metamorphosis into "The Messenger Who Did Not Become a Hero (the final sad story in the sad collection).

What is clear is that the Carolina Panthers' brutal schedule, mixed with Douglas Watson's sad predictions, produce fair to middling expectations for the 2013.

Martin Fulmer was born in Charleston, South Carolina, which makes him an historical landmark, and though he left Chucktown at age seven, he returned when he was eighteen and earned a BA in Biology though he never found a way to use it outside his own fiction. Fulmer holds an MA in English from Clemson University and now studies fiction in the University of Tampa's low-res MFACW program. His work appears or is forthcoming in *Tampa Review Online*, *Connotation Press: An Online Artifact*, and *storySouth*. [Go to the Top](#)

15. New Orleans Saints

The Atlanta Falcons are in town. Deep inside the Superdome, Drew Brees steps into his private bathroom. It has its own generator. \$20 million will buy you a lot of generators; sometimes it'll even buy Drew Brees some privacy. A soft *who dat* strays from his lips. It surprises him. Drew taps his temple. Once. Twice. Harder. He blinks, shakes his head to right the circuit.

As he works the right shoulder, his regular-man-sized hand orbits his body. All smooth, until a slight catch. He pinches his nose shut, then tugs an ear to peel back the E-skin covering the shoulder. He tightens a screw, blinks his left eye three times, and watches the membrane melt back into place. His guts—*still my guts*, he thinks—jostle. This is what he's had to become for these people. A small price, perhaps. This sunken city would have him Swamp King. They lay rosaries, go cups, wilted lilies at the gate of his empty Uptown mansion. He's their savior, their tattoo of choice. He can't pick a name ridiculous enough that they won't name their children after his.

Buried in the Dome he feels the screaming before he hears it. Believers' breath pulses from all sides, holds him together, even as he holds each of them in his mechanical arm, his circuit-board brain. An off-year answering question after asinine question about contracts and greed,

about interceptions and bounties, Jimmy John's and cheating—*cheating*, he thinks, *as if things are ever even, as if there is still a right in this world*. Drew is set on destroy. He places a palm on each Fleur-des-lis, and pushes the helmet onto his head. *Who dat?* he whispers. This time he answers himself sternly: *Who dat*.

Kelli Ford was born in Tahlequah, Oklahoma, the capital of the Cherokee Nation, and now lives in Austin with her husband Scott, daughter Cypress, and dog Sylvia Plath Weaver-Ford. She is a Dobie Paisano fellow and has work in *Fifty-Two Stories*, *Drunken Boat*, and *SmokeLong Quarterly*. You can find her at <http://kellijoford.blogspot.com/>. [Go to the Top](#)

16. Tampa Bay Buccaneers



"And even if they don't find what they're looking for, isn't it enough to be out walking together in the sunlight?" ? Jess Walter, *Beautiful Ruins*

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[AFC East](#)

17 a. Buffalo Bills

Many books could represent the sadness of the Buffalo Bills, a team that lost four consecutive Super Bowls and whose most famous player was tried on murder charges, acquitted, and then wrote a book titled *If I Did It*. But as far as I'm concerned, the Bills can stay terrible forever. From 2009 to this year—a period over which the Bills have gone 22-42— I lost a job, moved to

Florida, published a novel, left a job, moved to California and, most recently, have looked for more jobs. So it's nice to have something I can give up on.

In giving up, I can anticipate the Bills' collapses with the same pleasure I'd anticipate a payoff, or lack of payoff, in a story. I could say that the Bills are like those long, sometimes hilarious passages in *Molloy* that can't get out of their own way. But the fun I get out of the Bills is more like the fun I get from Magnus Mills' *The Restraint of Beasts*, a deadpan novel about a foreman and two metalheads, one of whom I named a character after in my own book, who travel the British countryside, build high-tensile fences and sometimes accidentally kill people.

That trajectory is essentially the Bills' game trajectory: a workmanlike chipping-away before the slightest mistake fucks everything up. It'll happen, you just don't know when or how. Therein lies the joy. With the book and the team, there's a polite, neutral processing of loss that occurs, over and over, until it becomes comedy.

Which is the other thing: the Bills' logo on their throwback helmets is a buffalo that's just standing there – a restrained beast! If I'd never read *Beasts*, I might laugh less at that logo. I also might not have appreciated [this otherwise unimportant play \(1:22\)](#), from a 2010 game the Bills [lost exquisitely to Pittsburgh](#). On 3rd and 18, Steelers quarterback Ben Roethlisberger, facing a blitz, broke a tackle with a spin move that had all the vigor of a man rolling over in his sleep. He then ran, at the speed of walking, uncontested, for about 20 yards. As even-slower Bills defenders pursued him for seemingly a whole minute, my friends and I, watching the game together in Rochester, began to laugh. And the Bills became a little funnier, something I thought I should see more of, as one more attempt to win fell apart.

Bill Peters grew up in Rochester, N.Y. His first novel, *Maverick Jetpants in the City of Quality*, was published in 2012. He currently lives in Pasadena, Calif. [Go to the Top](#)

17 b. Buffalo Bills

Disappointment is endemic to these parts. The Bill's sorrowful history hangs like a pall over the city. They appeared in four consecutive Super Bowls in the early 90s, yet failed to win a single game (once they came within a field goal of victory, but the kick sailed wide right). Perhaps even more pitiful, the Bills haven't secured a playoff berth in more than a decade (thirteen years, to be exact). Many of the team's woes parallel those of Tub, the bumbling protagonist of Tobias Wolff's "[Hunters in the Snow](#)," from his brilliant collection *In the Garden of the North American Martyrs*. Like Buffalo, Tub is used to being the butt of jokes. He seems to have accepted his role as the punching bag of the group—however, even a sad sack like Tub has his limits. Having spent the entire hunting trip being prodded by Kenny, Tub gives the man what's been coming to him (and some). Just as Bills fans maintain hope that this is the year the team will finally assert themselves.

Ravi Mangla lives in Rochester, NY. His novel, *Understudies*, is forthcoming from Outpost19. He keeps a blog at ravimangla.com. [Go to the Top](#)

18. Miami Dolphins

Let's throw out the playoff teams plus the Saints and the Steelers. That leaves us ten winnable games and a legitimate chance at a playoff berth. That's hope.

But these are the Miami Dolphins, only two years removed from an 0-7 start and 13 years removed from our last playoff victory, when Dan Marino started under center. We Dolphins fans know what the precise outcome of our August hopes will be: crushing disappointment in the vein of Richard Yates and the well-oiled machinery of his fiction, how he lulls us into thinking everything beautiful and golden is within our grasps mere moments before bringing the hammer down.

Miami Dolphin fandom is more than *Eleven Kinds of Loneliness*. We get to experience our failures sixteen times a year. Second-year running back Lamar Miller is Yates' Vincent Sabella, a young man so starved for acceptance that he ends up failing everyone. Quarterback Ryan Tannehill is short-sighted Ralph from "The Best of Everything," steady and adequate, yet he leaves us unfulfilled, knowing we could have had so much more, that Seattle's Russell Wilson could have been ours forever and ever. Coach Joe Philbin is sad Sergeant Reese: "tough, all right, but he never roared, and we never loved him."

In four months' time the season will end, and ours hopes will be dashed. We'll be reduced then like Yates, sitting in the darkness clutching our bourbons, cursing our collective luck, or lack thereof, and hoping for something better than this. In our darker, more self-reflective moments, however, we'll worry if this is what we deserve.

Salvatore Pane is the author of the novel *Last Call in the City of Bridges*. His work has appeared in *Hobart*, *The Collagist*, *Pank*, *American Book Review*, and many other venues. He is an assistant professor of English at the University of Indianapolis and can be reached at www.salvatore-pane.com. [Go to the Top](#)

19 a. New England Patriots

"Most action is based on redemption and revenge, and that's a formula. Moby Dick was formula. It's how you get to the conclusion that makes it interesting." —Sylvester Stallone

Southeastern Massachusetts is famous for three things: the cape and islands, the once-

wealthy whaling city of New Bedford, and the Patriots' coach, Bill Belichick, that hooded Ahab "who looked like a man who had never cringed and never had had a creditor" now battering Gillette Stadium's hatches in advance of Sunday's opener. The last time an NFL team netted a perfect season was the Miami Dolphins in 1972, the same year Watergate broke. In the intervening years, only a handful have come close again, the Patriots among them in 2007, running aground against the Giants in the final showdown to end up 18-1. Now, less than a week from 2013's blank page, it's out there again, rolling and gamboling in the waves, "hump like a snow-hill," breaching and diving amid the tangle of torn ACLs strung through its teeth like floss, its spike-pocked hide. Another year older, with Brady as his steady Starbuck, Belichick will rally his crew on Sunday yet again. "Do your job," he'll say, "for 'this is what ye have shipped for, men! To chase that white whale on both sides of land, and over all sides of earth, till he spouts black blood and rolls fin out.'" I like to think they'll answer in kind, 1-2-3ing in the huddle: "A dead whale or a stove boat!"

And that somewhere offshore, the white whale will wake.

Katie Cortese's fiction has placed in contests hosted by *Narrative Magazine*, *River Styx*, and *Silk Road*, among other journals. Her work has recently appeared or is forthcoming in *Sport Literate*, *Gulf Coast*, *Third Coast*, *Crab Orchard Review*, *Willow Springs*, and elsewhere. She teaches in the creative writing program at Texas Tech University. Visit her at www.KatieCortese.com. [Go to the Top](#)

19 b. New England Patriots

It turns out that reading Oakley Hall's *Warlock* was a pretty good way to get ready for Year 13 of the Belichick-Brady Patriots. Hall's book, published in 1958, is a sort of Ultimate Western—part satirical, part deeply serious—about a lawman named Clay Blaisedell and his brilliant, amoral, almost universally loathed friend Tom Morgan. Blaisedell is tall and mustachioed, laconic and fair-minded, with great hair, gold-handled Colts, and hands so fast he sometimes doesn't even need to shoot: he just draws and his shocked opponents surrender. He's such a perfect frontier hero, it's actually too much — too much for him to live up to, too much for the town to bear. "Bring his boots and we'll kiss them for him. Like he wants. Like you all do. Bring us his damned boots," says one local gunman, soon to be shot to death.

Blaisedell and Morgan are Brady and Belichick if I've ever seen them. Brady hits the Golden-Boy quarterback notes so perfectly — with his fairytale 2001, his 50 touchdown 2007, his comebacks, his supermodel wife, his, you know, face — it seems silly, or fake, or maybe just unfair. This, and Belichick's extreme, single-minded, supernatural competence, are a kind of test: of whether winning really is what we want, of whether we might actually be happier with good-natured stumble-bums like Flacco and Eli, of whether wanting to be *that good* might be a kind of crime, worthy of punishment. Rooting for the Patriots in 2007 felt like rooting for the sunset, or Lance Armstrong, and I loved it, and loved how much my friends hated it. "As one

half of our nature seeks to create heroes to worship" writes a Warlock shopkeeper, pondering the divisions Blaisedell has created in his town, "the other must ceaselessly attempt to cast them down and discover evidence of feet of clay, in order to label them as mere lucky fellows, or as villains-were-the-facts-but-known, and the eminent and great are ground between the millstones of envy, and reduced again to common size." Go Pats!

Gabriel Winslow-Yost's writing has appeared in *The New York Review of Books*, where he is an assistant editor, and in *n+1* and *New Yorker* blogs. [Go to the Top](#)

19 c. New England Patriots

Last June, Tim Tebow looked over the Patriots schedule and it seemed to be rudimentary, nothing to look at, some tough games (Denver, Baltimore, New Orleans) and some easy targets (Cleveland, J-E-T-S CHUMPS CHUMPS CHUMPS).

He knew that a lot had been said about him— mostly that he had a frequency in his headset direct from God. When he was released for the third time in a year, he reflected on Jesus himself facing many trials and tribulations.

When Coach Belichick gave the bad news, he said, "It's all about football, not spirituality." Tebow claimed there was evidence to the contrary. Take the 2012 New York Jets, he said. "By benching me last year and playing Sanchez it was a hard season for the team. And don't think that Mark Sanchez's every stumbling, bumbling, tumbling fall into his own line could not have been influenced by God."

"Merph," said Belichick.

Belichick refused to assume God called the shots, but when he left the office Tebow circled backup quarterback Ryan Mallett's name on the depth chart with a red pen. "Something will happen to Tom Brady; injury, blindness, amputation, Gisele might even shoot him behind a warehouse—we don't know," he thought. "God is mad and it's not enough to destroy the world because it's football. God produces pain when He's resentful: a 9-7 or worse campaign, no playoffs and misery for Patriot Nation will be had."

So he went home and waited for the losses to accumulate, for the phone lines to open wide for criticism and Boston Sports Talk Radio to hear the name, "Tebow, Tebow, Tebow." "I'm a winner like Flutie," Tebow thinks, "a savior like God and now it's The Season of Sin for the Patriots." Tim Tebow waits, prays for God and the fans to bring him back. "Please," they pray, "for anything but your Wrath."

Timothy Gager is the author of ten books of short fiction and poetry. His latest *The Shutting Door* (Ibbetson Street Press) will be his first full length poetry book in over eight years. He has hosted the successful Dire Literary Series in Cambridge, Massachusetts every month for the past twelve years and is the cofounder of Somerville News Writers Festival. His work has appeared in over 250 journals since 2007 and of which nine have been nominated for the Pushcart Prize. His fiction has been read on National Public Radio. [Go to the Top](#)

20. New York Jets

I became a Jets fan on January 3, 1987. I was in fifth grade at the time, and stumbled on the Jets-Browns playoff game shortly after the Jets' starting quarterback, Pat Ryan, went down with an injury. I was glued to the screen. Fourteen penalties. Thirteen sacks. Two fumbles. Two interceptions. And a missed chippy field goal that should've ended the game in the first OT. Lounging on my childhood couch in grey sweats with a bag of Cool Ranch and an iced tea, it was a spectacle. When the Jets finally lost in double-overtime—their players milling about the field dazed, borderline catatonic—I felt a distinct throb in my chest. I was too young and too inexperienced to lay claim to genuine empathy for those players, but my heart ached nonetheless.

That said, I have no regrets. The Jets' seasons consume me the way falling into the right book does. I live inside them, stumbling out for food, bathroom breaks and the occasional "Holy Shit." And the book that lives side by side with the endeavor of Jets Fandom is Robert Boswell's *Living To Be A Hundred*. Besides the title, which nails how long I'll need to stick around to see a Super Bowl run, there's the lyrical guts of the book, which snakes its way through love gone wrong, mysterious decision-making, and missed opportunities. Its collection of disillusioned men looking back, realizing everything went to shit after "one perfect moment," is every Jets fan the day Vinny Testaverde tore his achilles in the first quarter of the first game of the 1998 season on the heels of our deepest playoff run in decades. Coming face to face with the myriad reasons "life had turned wrong" is the hiring of Joe Walton, Bruce Coslet, and Rich Kotite, Bill Parcells' retiring, and Bill Belichick quitting his first day on the job. Understanding "what little it took to throw your life off, to turn it upside down" is the Jets drafting Ken O'Brien instead of Dan Marino.

And yet, despite the inevitable disillusionment of each season, the beauty of Boswell's collection and being a Jets' fan lie in the hope and possibility that perpetually exists just out of reach, in the gut-punching truth "that love is more important than happiness."

Giuseppe Taurino is a writer, father and nonprofit lifer living in Houston, Texas. His stories have appeared in *Epoch*, *New South*, *the Potomac Review*, *Word Riot* and elsewhere. He is a contributing editor at *American Short Fiction*. [Go to the Top](#)

[AFC West](#)

21. Denver Broncos

Peyton Manning is my favorite QB; after-church Sundays were for watching him throw the ball to Reggie Wayne and for watching Wayne catch it pretty much every time. Everything was good, everything was okay. When he left Indianapolis, it was like my favorite couple had broken up. I accepted it because I had no choice. If you hear your boyfriend's secret wife screaming and scratching around in the attic, you bolt. Now Manning plays for the Denver Broncos and I watch those games, slowly getting used to the newness. Just like if Jane Eyre and Mr. Rochester split at the end and Jane had a new beau and he was great and all but let's get real. At first I probably wouldn't be able to remember his name or describe the color of his hair in any sort of meaningful way, because there are just some people who should stay together forever. Jane and I were used to the deep-water blue of our soft Colts T-shirt.

But wasn't Charlotte Brontë talking about football when she wrote, "*It is in vain to say human beings ought to be satisfied with tranquility: they must have action; and they will make it if they cannot find it.*"

Football! Life! Favorite players sometimes leave favorite teams, and I have to learn to love again. Just as another Jane would throw us a twist (Mr. Wickham is a rogue!), injuries, contracts, and the business of football do, too. When your football Darcy packs up Pemberley for a quaint mile-high cabin, you pull out your suitcase, unsnap it and go with him. There's something exciting about not knowing what the season will bring. As Austen wrote, "A girl likes to be crossed a little in love now and then. It is something to think of." So I think of it.

Leesa Cross-Smith is a homemaker and writer from Kentucky. She and her husband run a literary magazine called *WhiskeyPaper*. Find more at LeesaCrossSmith.com. [Go to the Top](#)

22. Kansas City Chiefs

Looking at the Kansas City Chiefs' 2013 schedule – filled with playoff teams – leads to my looking back at 25-plus years of rooting for this tarnished franchise, and at Hemingway's collection, *Winner Take Nothing*.

The Chiefs used to be a model franchise: they went to the first Super Bowl and won the fourth. Owner Lamar Hunt founded the AFL; he coined the term "Super Bowl"; he was one of the first to scout and develop African-American players; 14 Hall of Famers played for him.

But they haven't won a playoff game since 1993. And the franchise crumbled throughout the 2000s, culminating in a 2012 season in which General Manager Scott Pioli ruled like a despot –

tapping employee phones, yelling about candy wrappers left in stairwells. The stress and the losing contributed to the suicide of starting inside linebacker Jovan Belcher, who shot his girlfriend (the mother of his young child) to death before driving to Arrowhead Stadium, where he shot himself in the head in front of his coaching staff.

The twenty years of failure and the influx of unsavory players like Belcher, or drug-running Tamarick Vanover, or abusive misogynist Larry Johnson, have turned off a generation of the city's young kids. They now follow the Sporting Kansas City, the local Major League Soccer team. Yet middle-aged men and women still gather at Arrowhead Stadium each Sunday to tailgate.

What I'm trying to say is that there's a disconnect here. The success of the 60s didn't lead to anything except a drip-slow decline. I feel caught between the old waiter and the young waiter in "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place." Do I abandon this team and live a happier life? Do I tread on with bitter fandom? I read "Fathers and Sons" and I feel an acute pain, thinking of my grandfather, advanced in years, who knows this team will only disappoint him. I think of my dad, who was too young to remember Super Bowl IV, who taught me to love this team that will never win anything.

Please, God, rest these gentlemen merry. Because in Kansas City we still operate under the delusion that victory means something. But it doesn't, and it won't happen anyway.

Barry Grass is originally from Kansas City, and now lives in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, where he has served as nonfiction editor for *Black Warrior Review*. His work appears in *The Normal School*, *Hobart*, *Sonora Review*, and *Annalemma*, among others. Send photos of you burning a Matt Cassel jersey to barrygrass@gmail.com. [Go to the Top](#)

23. Oakland Raiders

(Comprised completely of excerpts taken from Badasses: The Legend of Snake, Goo, Dr. Death, and John Madden's Oakland Raiders by Peter Richmond and The Pirates of The Endurance by Angelica Alt)

Three games into the 1973 season, the 1-2 Raiders were a team adrift on the high seas, their ship lulling beneath slack sails. The deck was full of working men with gleaming bodies, tanned and muscular, tattooed with dragons and mermaids and dead men on burning ships. Cora passed others training on the ship's rigging, pulling thick ropes, and her eyes fell on their biceps.

They'd played twelve quarters without scoring a single touchdown. The following week they'd face Don Coryell's explosive St. Louis offense. The division title was, suddenly, no longer a given.

"We were struggling," Captain Madden admits now, his peg leg propped on a table in his office south of the city. The first mate had something to do with the problem. Kenny Stabler, after three seasons as an apprentice on the bench, wanted the starting shot.

Stabler took Cora by the arm and she felt her face flush and her body go hot.

"Might as well show you how to wash dishes like a real wench. Pick up a dish from that pile."

She reluctantly picked up a dish, streaked with mashed potatoes. He grabbed her waist with his large, calloused hands and lifted her in front of a vat of water.

"Dunk it in there," he said. "Get it nice and wet."

She plunged the plate into the soapy water.

"Now what?" she asked.

"Take off your panties," he said, his face close, his breath hot on her cheek.

She bent toward the counter. He massaged her bottom in his thick hands, then pulled her toward him. She felt his rock hard member push against her. And she pushed back, allowing him in.

The next week, Stabler led a 17-10 defeat of the Cardinals, and Gene Upshaw gave him the game ball. Stabler started the rest of the season—and the next seven years, bombing, scrapping, dinking, dunking and scrambling on the field as well as in the wenches' quarters and, when the moon was full, on the gang plank above shark-infested waters.

Rachel Yoder edits *draft: the journal of process*, which features first and final drafts of prose and poetry along with author interviews about the creative process. She would like to point out that the really excellent book of erotica titled *The Pirates of The Endurance* is available for the bargain price of \$3.99 at bookstrand.com. [Go to the Top](#)

24. San Diego Chargers



"I bet they talk about me at the dinner table - I give boring people something to discuss over corn."

— Aimee Bender, "Call my Name"

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[AFC North](#)

25. Baltimore Ravens

I'm sorry, but I'm going to tell you how the Baltimore Ravens are like James Franco's book, *Palo Alto*. There's an anxiety that pervades this handsome man's short story collection, and I know this even though I haven't read it. It just sits on my shelf and pleads with me—along with every other self-respecting book person—to look at it and find out if its any good.

Please pass judgment on this book.

Such is the case with my Ravens, fresh off their hard fought Super Bowl season. Will that make them the team to hate this year? Probably not! Like *Palo Alto*, Baltimore (the city and the team) is seen as just cool enough or just harmless enough to ignore. We are wildly successful, we're champions at the top of the game, we have the career you wish you had—but who cares?

Adam Robinson lives in Baltimore, where he runs Publishing Genius and loves the Orioles. [Go to the Top](#)

26. Cincinnati Bengals

In Grace Paley's short story "Conversations with My Father," the female protagonist is a writer visiting her dying father in the hospital. These characters are unnamed. They are intelligent, kind people who are familiar with each other's idiosyncrasies. Asked by her father for a straight story, she tries to write something that will please him and repeatedly fails. Like Bengals founder Paul Brown, the story's father cannot understand his child's failings. He mentions the greats: Maupassant, Chekhov. The child, let's call him "Mike Brown," nods. Simple story. Uncomplicated. Mike would like to please his father. But can't. He avoids it—success, excellence, all logic and reason—because it would take all hope away. Every fan, Mike tells his father, real or invented, deserves the open destiny of the possibility for a championship. If you give them victory, what is there to hope for? Paul Brown narrows his eyes, clenches his jaw. Paul Brown takes the oxygen tubes from his nostrils. He looks out the window, hearing the impatient and mournful murmur of all the hopeful Bengals fans standing in vigil along the Cincinnati streets below. "How long will it be?" Paul Brown asks both them and his son. "Tragedy! You too! When will you look it in the face?"

Michael Nye is the author of the story collection *Strategies Against Extinction*. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Kenyon Review*, *Boulevard*, *Cincinnati Review*, *Hobart*, and *New South*, among many others. Born and raised in Cincinnati, he works as the managing editor of the *Missouri Review*. [Go to the Top](#)

27. Cleveland Browns

Look. You don't need me to tell you these stories are going to be sad. Tearjerkers, mostly, and horror stories. This season will have its comedic moments and one or two of these games might even be thrillers, but come on, you live in Cleveland. You know what's coming. Unless we make it to the playoffs, the season will close at Heinz Field, with a season-ending, year-ending showdown against those true storybook villains, the Pittsburgh Steelers. We all know this is the only game that really matters.

No matter what, though, this is the book we read again and again. It always ends the same way: in sadness, in frustration, in Burning River Pale Ale flung on the floors of Cleveland bars. We keep reading, though, with hope. Everyone beats us in football, but NO ONE beats us in optimism. There's always next year, folks. New chapters are being written as we speak.

Aubrey Hirsch is a proud native of Cleveland, Ohio and the author of *Why We Never Talk About Sugar*. Her work has appeared in journals like *Third Coast*, *The Rumpus*, *Hobart*, and *Whiskey Island Magazine*. You can learn more about her at www.aubreyhirsch.com [Go to](#)

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28. Pittsburgh Steelers

I lived in Pittsburgh for seven years as a student. When I finished I returned home, 120 miles north to Erie, PA. I got a job, could finally afford season tickets, and bought them. For five years I drove four hours round trip to every Steelers home game. In that span the Steelers won two Superbowls, and appeared in three. They became the only team in NFL history to win six Super Bowls. Six! One for the thumb and one for the *other* thumb!

Jerome “The Bus” Bettis cannonballed through defensive tackles at the goal line. Hines Ward leveled earth-shattering blocks on (occasionally unsuspecting) wide receivers. Big Ben threw pristine fade routes into the outstretched fingers of a pre-accidentally shot Plaxico Burress. Plax didn’t have to worry about carrying a gun to the club in Pittsburgh. No clubs!

Joey Porter’s pit bull and mastiff escaped and killed a neighbor’s miniature horse! If that didn’t spell ferociousness, what did?

And then, slowly, it began to wane. Our once ironclad run game morphed into a carousel of fumble-happy backs. Our fiercest and fastest receivers retired or went elsewhere. Our once fearsome defense aged and got injured.

“That world! These days it’s all been erased and they’ve rolled it up like a scroll and put it away somewhere. Yes, I can touch it with my fingers. But where is it?”

Fuckhead asked it in *Jesus’ Son* and so it is. But the collection this year’s Steelers remind me most of is Dan Chaon’s *Among the Missing*. A few standards remain. Big Ben with his supposedly-curbed criminal tendencies. Troy Polamalu, his endorsement-snagging locks flowing out behind him. Dick Lebeau, ageless defensive icon. *Among the Missing* they remain, throwbacks to a better time.

Godspeed boys. Something tells me this year, we’re gonna need it.

Eugene Cross is the author of *Fires of Our Choosing*. He lives in Chicago. Within a month of moving there someone stole his Steelers license plate. He congratulates that person as they now have an awesome license plate. [Go to the Top](#)

[AFC South](#)

29. Houston Texans

Get The Look: The Houston Texans

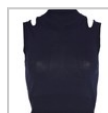


To speak Bud Adams's name is to incur the wrath of many a Texas football fan. Yet, one cannot discuss the history of the Houston Texans without so doing. For it was Adams who smote the Oilers, turning them into something strange and new - and banishing them to Tennessee of all places. Titans? The only quality they share with those Greek Gods is a base and prideful nature, destined to ultimately unseat them from their place on high. The Texans, AFC South champions, two years running, adhere to a staunch code of tradition. Before each game, a band comprised of nearly 50 members incites the crowd to near madness. If this does not succeed, they employ such brainwashing tactics as the repeat viewings of a bull - their mascot - ripping an opponent to shreds. These berzerker methods endear them to their fans, especially on Battle Red days, wherein the Texans players don blood-soaked jerseys to strike ungodly terror into the hearts of their enemies. A proud people and attractive people (Case Keenum and real-life-Tim-Riggins, Brian Cushing's splendor cannot be looked upon directly), the Texans and their fans are quick to remind you that they are no fools. When those involved sought to change the team's theme song to a track by Nickelback, they were met with such virulent opposition that it was never mentioned again. Every time Chad Kroeger cries, a Texan gets a first down.

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[Rebecca Jane Stokes](#) is a writer living in Brooklyn, New York. She's a staff writer at *TheStir*, and contributes regularly at the Barnes and Noble Book Blog, *The Toast*, *The Hairpin*, and [other places](#). [Go to the Top](#)

30 a. Indianapolis Colts

The fact that my beloved Colts managed to stumble into two franchise quarterbacks, with only one season of abysmal play separating them, means that I quite possibly may be fortunate enough to pull for the luckiest team in the NFL. I will happily slog through sixteen games of QB Curtis Painter's Indiana locks wobbling in the wind slightly more than his passes on a ten-yard out pattern, if it earns my team the first pick of the 2012 Draft & the chance to draft yet another goofball quarterback wunderkind in Andrew Luck.

However, there is transition here: Peyton Manning, king of horseshoes, Oreo cookies, and giant foreheads, is gone, and in his place is the heir apparent, although he is not our Peyton, now the breaker of other horses elsewhere. There is excitement, certainly, but there is also fear—the Colts overachieved last season, and so perhaps we are staring at a letdown—that our progress isn't as magic as we perceived it to be.

Laura van den Berg's collection, *What the World Will Look Like When All the Water Leaves Us*, is about past lives leading to new ones: the idea that there is comfort in not understanding the vastness of it all. That an 11-5 season is a fine mark, we have a Super Bowl, it was lovely, but there is a new world out there; that perhaps we should be chasing monsters instead of flowers; that despite all the wonder we thought we had, we have little to show for it; that perhaps it is time to say goodbye to comfort and embrace chaos; that a series of bildungsromans is what a football team should be; that raw change is good, and that all good things need to be rebuilt.

Brian Oliu is originally from New Jersey and currently lives in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. He is the author of *So You Know It's Me*, a series of Tuscaloosa Missed Connections, and *Level End*, lyric essays based upon video game boss battles. He could've been a Giants fan due to his mother's rooting interests & his geographical location, but the kids who wore Dave Meggett jerseys were mean to him. He chose his father's team, the Jack Trudeau-led Colts, instead. [Go to the Top](#)

30 b. Indianapolis Colts

The NFL season is a serialized novel comprised of sixteen chapters—and if I'm lucky, an epilogue. My favorite author is Indy Colts, and I've been reading her for years.

I love the three hours a week I spend inside each chapter; I love how the commentators remind me what's at stake, what dramatic questions should propel my reading, what motifs and themes I should watch for. I don't mind a bossy third-person narrator. I love the novel's plot twists and impossible-to-predict outcome. I love the setting: a field of green, an indigo sky, a magical yellow line.

But mostly I love the characters. For a long time, my favorite was this super smart, Gumby-headed quarterback who couldn't seem to catch a break. For years, every one of Indy Colts' novels ended with him walking off the field in defeat. I almost stopped reading. And then one year—one glorious year—my protagonist defeated his antagonist in the playoffs and the sky rained blue and white confetti and the novel had a happy ending.

But then tragedy struck: the author killed off my character.

I didn't read last year's novel by Indy Colts because all my favorite characters were gone. But God, I missed her so much. I missed how her novels made my life just a little more interesting and exciting. And so I'm going to start her newest and read the first chapter vs. the Oakland Raiders.

But what I'm really going to be waiting for is chapter seven, when my favorite character, the quarterback, returns to haunt the castle he built, and the entire state of Indiana will be confronted with its guilt.

It'll be better than *Hamlet*.

[Cathy Day](#) is the author of *The Circus in Winter* and *Comeback Season: How I Learned to Play the Game of Love*. She teaches creative writing at Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana, and blogs at [The Big Thing](#). [Go to the Top](#)

31. Jacksonville Jaguars

There's this author you've heard of and don't care about and have never read and will never read and this author has a new book coming out. Welcome to the Jags' 2013 season. [Go to the Top](#)

32. Tennessee Titans

From an early age, I loved two things: Texas and crushing disappointment. So it's not surprising I became a Houston Oilers fan as a kid. In Texas, you either rooted for them or the Cowboys, and Dallas fans always seemed too happy. The Oilers, though — there was a team that thrived on disappointment. They once blew a 32-point lead to Buffalo, which my city's local newspaper covered under the headline — this is true — "What A Bunch Of Losers!" That was fair, but I *loved* those losers. The Oilers were like characters out of a Larry McMurtry novel — cheerful but doomed, authentically Texan, uncompromising to a sometimes-annoying degree. They were Sunny and Duane from McMurtry's *The Last Picture Show*: making a series of inadvisable decisions, but charmingly so, fighting to survive, and unsure of what to do when they actually won a big game. Of course, they left Texas in 1998, leaving the cosmopolitan city of Houston for the state that ruined barbecue and country music. I haven't watched the NFL since then, pointless athletic grudges are the one thing I can't fumble. I have no clue how the Tennessee Titans — it hurts just typing that — are going to do this year, but in the spirit of forgiveness and moving on, I hope they bring their fans the same joy that their predecessors brought me as a child. (I'm just kidding. I hope they choke on every one of their losses. And go Texans. I guess.)

Michael Schaub is a writer and editor for Despair.com, and a freelance book critic whose work has appeared in NPR, *The Washington Post*, *The San Francisco Chronicle*, and other publications. [Go to the Top](#)
