

light reading series

featherproof



By Jonathan Messinger

EIGHT PERMUTATIONS ON THE BINOCULARS OF POWER

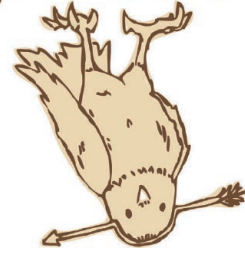
1 A housewife in Winnetka, Illinois gazes out her window after completing a yoga DVD workout. She notices a van with two small windows in back, parked down the street. Each day, for the next two days, she peels back the curtain like a piece of dead skin and stares at the van. On the fourth day, she digs out her husband's hunting binoculars and peers into the van's windows. She can see two men sitting back-to-back. One of them hunches over surveillance recording equipment, large headphones like frisbees clamped on his ears. The other gazes directly at her through a pair of even larger binoculars. They wear Kevlar jackets.

"Fuck it," sighs the housewife. "I'm tired of running."

2 A young girl spends an afternoon staring at the sun through a pair of binoculars, because she has read that is the path to becoming a prophet.

3 A man gives his son a pair of binoculars for his 14th birthday. The boy, unsure of what to do with them, tosses them in a shoebox with old army-man figurines and radio mix-tapes from summers past. The old toys grow uncomfortable in the company of the binoculars as a rumor spreads that the binoculars can peer into their souls.

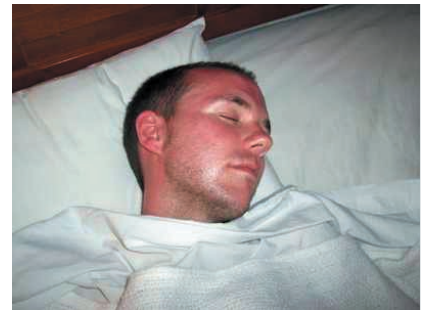
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Jonathan Messinger is the editor of THISisGRAND: Stories of Chicago's Rapid Transit and cohost of The Dollar Store Reading Series. He also serves as books editor for Time Out Chicago, and can be killed by small doses of caffeine.



7 A brother and sister are quarantined in their respective bedrooms to protect them from a vicious plague. The last time they saw someone alive, it was Mrs. Aucone across the street, blood gurgled from her throat and her skin appeared the color of worn dollar bills. The brother and sister talk to each other through their bedroom walls. They play games like 20 questions, trivial pursuit with no board, and invented games like, What Face Am I Making Right Now? The brother confesses all his sins to his sister, who refuses to listen.

6 A squirrel finds a pair of binoculars and carries them to the top of a tree. He becomes the most powerful squirrel in the world.

5 A man and his younger girlfriend watch Guns N' Roses from Row P of section 309 in the upper deck grandstand of the United Center. The man watches the band through a pair of high-resolution binoculars while his girlfriend dances beside him. Their enjoyment of the show is about to end, however, because despite the younger girlfriend's pleadings, he refuses to hand over the binoculars. He does not want her to see how old Axl Rose looks.

4 Jimmy Fallon thinks his pair of binoculars is a tiny military tank.

8 A man and a woman together decide it is necessary to spice up their sex lives. The woman suggests bringing toys into the bedroom, to which the man does not so much agree as not say anything, which the woman construes as agreement. Two nights later, when they know they will both be at home for the evening, they are to each bring one item into the bedroom.



8 The woman brings with her into the bedroom a beaded dildo still in a package that reads: "The Scintillator: You're in for a bumpy ride." The man panics when he sees this, for obvious reasons. The woman opens The Scintillator's packaging and holds it like a glass of fine wine. She sniffs it, tips it toward the man, and tosses it lightly on the bed. She asks what he has brought.

The man announces he has brought with him a pair of binoculars. The woman asks what in hell they're supposed to do with a pair of binoculars in their own bedroom. The man, clearly improvising, says he doesn't know what they're going to do with them... but he can't wait to find out.

For him, he lies, imagination is sexy.

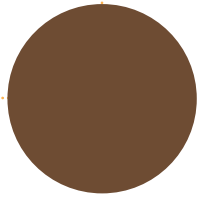
7 The sister does not listen to her brother, who lies and lies because he needs a listener. She sits at her windowsill, a pair of old toy binoculars in her hands and pressed to her window.

"You'll pay for this," he says, and opens fire on a van parked across the street.

1 A husband in Winnetka, Illinois, comes home from a business trip to find a DVD workout tape playing to an empty room. Upstairs, he finds his wife hanging from a door frame, a binocular rope wrapped around her neck as a noose. He stills her swaying body.

2 An old man cherishes his pair of binoculars, spends his evenings on a porch looking at the constellations, his old fingers too inexact now to calibrate a telescope. He's heard that starting at the stars is a path to longevity.

3 An army-man figure in a shoebox under a 14-year-old boy's bed, waits until nighttime. He creeps behind a pile of mixtapes and opens fire on a binocular lens, because he's done too many things that he's not proud of in the name of his country to be judged by some Johnny-Come-Lately Souleiser.



Three days ago she discovered a boy a year older than her with wild hair and the noticeable beginnings of a beard quarantined in a room down the street. The brother begs her forgiveness and she grants it over and over again, finding it easy to dole out because she is not there. She is, to her mind, in the apartment down the street with her boy with wild hair who is looking a little green, a bit like his skin is made of old dollar bills.

6 The most powerful squirrel in the world suffers from vertigo because he doesn't know how to use the binoculars; and he also develops a narcissistic obsession with his own magnified image in the binocular lens. He hasn't eaten for days. Other squirrels grow questioning of his power.

5 The man relents and hands over his high-resolution binoculars to his younger girlfriend and he can instantly feel himself wither in her eyes. But he's wrong. His younger girlfriend is untroubled by how agéd Axl Rose looks. What kills them, is that Slash has still got it.

4 Jimmy Fallon thinks his pair of binoculars could actually be a large military tank for an army of tiny people. He grows very frightened.