

This is an excerpt from *Imaginary Year*, a work of serial fiction by Jeremy P. Bushnell. Visit the *Imaginary Year* website (<http://www.ImaginaryYear.com>) on Mondays and Fridays for new updates.

67 / HOUSEHOLD DRONES

Thomas is in his kitchen, crouching on the floor, holding a microphone up to the box fan.

The soundwalk that he took with Jakob a few weeks ago went well. They recorded maybe fifteen sound-events within a square mile: firecrackers, bells on an ice-cream vendor's cart, the sputter and brap of a passing motorcycle. The experience of listening so actively resensitized his ears. When he came home he put water on, for tea, and he became entranced by the whistling kettle. He had not previously noticed the nuance and variety of the sound. He pulled a stool into the kitchen and sat there for maybe twenty minutes, just listening.

In the time since then he's been taking special note of the drones that occur within his apartment. The whining pipe in his shower. The chilly hiss of his toilet tank refilling. The white noise of his box fan.

He's been recording these sounds. He's not sure what he's going to do with them. He put the soundwalk files up on his website along with a map of the Chicago streets where they were recorded, but he's not interested in doing the same with these new recordings. In a way they're personal.

He remembers that there's a sound program out there, AudioMulch, that allows its user to make loops. He'd like to make some loops made from these household drones, then layer them: see what that would sound like. He's wanted to play with AudioMulch for

almost a year, but he's held off, mainly because Lydia, his ex-girlfriend, introduced him to the program, and every time he thinks about her he forgets what he's doing and his mind spins off into recrimination and regret. He wishes things had gone better. He wishes he could still see her every now and again. He wonders what she's up to.

No, OK, back to the layered drones. He's been having strange dreams lately, recurring dreams about dimensional travel. In these dreams, there are an infinite number of dimensions, and they all exist concurrently, in the same place at the same time. They each vibrate at a different frequency; that's what keeps everything from colliding. But in the dreams one can travel between dimensions by means of a process of *tuning*. This is what happens: his body harmonizes with another dimension's frequency and the world around him dissolves into another. Then he wakes up, filled with a sense of promise and hope that slips away immediately.

But in the dreams layering drones is the key. Two tones give birth to a third. The music is a means of systematically exploring the combinations, in search of the ones that will open gateways; the musicians are scientists of dimensional travel.

He wonders if there's something to this. Although he doesn't want to disappear as badly as he once did. He actually feels kind of happy these days. Janine called him a while back and the two of them made up. They didn't discuss Clark, but he's okay with that for the time being; he doesn't feel quite ready to try to work through his feelings about the whole deal just yet. They've been getting along OK without discussing it. They've been hanging out, having dinner together, watching movies, like before. No sex, though. She hasn't offered and he hasn't asked. He doesn't want to push his luck.

Still. He feels pretty happy. He's reluctant to acknowledge it, though; he knows he'll jinx it somehow, spoil this dimension accidentally, and be left putting sounds together, trying to break through to some elsewhere, for refuge.