

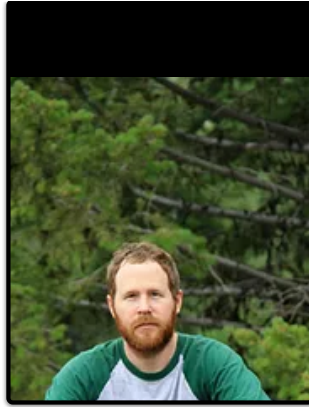
24-hour Operation

Zachary Eddy

Kim Matthews Wheaton
The Promise of Abundance

24-hour Operation

The train arrives in the night, carrying raw ingredients like a poisonous family recipe—alumina ore, coke, pitch, bath, and other noxious toxins. At shift changes, the workers file in past the guard-gate turnstile. *Tell Ma don't wait up.* In the Green Mill—the first decrepit warehouse along the safety walkway leading to the aluminum Potrooms—coal tar is mixed into a vat before it seeps into any orifice it can. The whole plant is outdated and reeks of better days sometime during the 1970s, smokestacks, stained tile on the walls, bauxite dust everywhere. Raw-green anodes convey to the Bakes. In a 28-day cycle, these carbons cook underground in flues, until plucked from the sky by a crane's mechanical bird claw and fed into the industrial mouth of a million-dollar cleaner. The burning, square carbons glow now like 900-pound briquettes, hauled away five-to-a-tray to be rodded with copper. Finally, another open-cab crane monster drops them by twos and threes into the Potroom kettles—row after row of steel catwalks and ringbusses, electrical current and magnetism humming and buzzing—as the cold carbons spittle and pop inside orange-molten liquid. In the football-field-sized warehouses, heat swelters. Crews move up and down the unending line, setting rods to the mark, yelling as they go, blurring into a muggy mirage. In another room new-hires syphon metal out of pots *like two monkeys trying to fuck a football.* You sit at the end chain-smoking, high off the ground in a cruce truck, watching like a voyeur, waiting for the crane to deliver you molten. You wouldn't believe it if someone told you, over the radio, the plant will shut down the following year, and you'll never pour another ingot. That after a few years, you won't even recall accurately if you loved or hated your life there, if the anodes made the aluminum, or you did. To remember it, the way ore dust permeates your soul, and to help decide, you'll write jargon-filled poetry that no one understands, about a millwright slow-crushed by train cars, and occasionally you go home for dinner.



Zach Eddy is a first-year MFA candidate in poetry at the University of Idaho. His work has been published in *The Comet Magazine*, *Mirror Northwest*, *The Confluence*, and is forthcoming in *Manastash*. His poem “Fish Eyes” received first place for the 2017 Wenatchee Valley College Earth Day Poetry Prize. He is a former aluminum worker, and is deeply disturbed by the state of our environment and nation.

