

Ode to a Zebra Mussel

George Bradford (David Watson)

1991

“Zebra mussels came from fresh-water seas of Eastern Europe and have no major natural predators in the Great Lakes, which accounts for their spread at a rate of 160 miles per year.

“They showed up in Lake St. Clair in 1987 and rapidly infested Lake Erie to the south...The creatures have already appeared as far apart as Green Bay, Wis., and Lake Ontario...

“The city of Monroe, south of Detroit, rationed water for several days [in December 1989] after a decaying mass of mussels, which are no more than two inches each in length, clogged Lake Erie intake pipes for the city's drinking water system...

“Zebra mussels breed rapidly and interfere with the Great Lakes food chain. Some experts estimate they could cost the United States up to \$5 billion over the next 10 years in damages and resources...”

—The *Detroit News*, 8 March 1990

nature's revenge against commerce

you are taking no prisoners

your ledge is your ledge

and let the rest go to hell

.

great ships dissolve in your collective maw

you shut down nuclear plants (will their

cold stellar warmth let you thrive as they
turn us into refugees?)

somewhere some foul and haunted

tanker flushes still more of your cousins
into this delicious frontier

.

you're only the next wave of

conquerors after all but then

no one would have expected you

the priests read their fish bones their

burnt offerings the gritty

residues of their vats

none of this was supposed to happen

we have readouts to prove it

.

the residues of the residues

of the vats they used to fight you

to poison you and yet their magic

failed (their commerce now long
standing on its own spindly legs
surviving even the candle it burns at
both the world's ends)

.

I drink to you old adversary
gritty destiny eating away at what can
be no one's and no
one

.

you will have your way for a time
your time
sand and stone
shift and settle always lower
and slabs of rock grind down under
this terrible eating
eating everything being eaten by
nothing

fifth Estate

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Fifth Estate #337, Late Summer, 1991

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