



the **BEHEMOTH**

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Issue 56 and beyond: Where we'll keep finding amazing stuff.



Still Beholding Behemoths

What is it I've been looking for these past two years? / TED OLSEN

“I don't understand the Behemoth,” I began this magazine by saying. More than two years and 56 issues later, I'm happy to admit: I *still* don't understand the Behemoth. Not really. Not fully.

I still don't understand fireflies, sloths, plankton, or butterflies either. I could tell you a lot more about them than I could when we started this magazine. I appreciate them much more than I did two years ago. I now also more deeply appreciate—even learned to love—awful Leviathans: hurricanes, forest fires, darkness, poisonous medicine, martyrdom. The Cross. But I'm far less likely to say that I *understand* them than I did when we started. And thank God for that.

Approaching awe

This magazine's core biblical text has always been God's reply to Job. When Job wants answers and assurances, God responds by directing Job to behold his magnificent creations, especially his wild animals. He doesn't answer Job's question, but he gives Job what he needs.

As befitting a publication that tries to behold those magnificent creations of

God, we're drawn to science texts, too. And there's one science paper we've returned to time and again: "**Approaching awe: a moral, spiritual, and aesthetic emotion**," a 2003 article from the journal *Cognition and Emotion*.

"Two features form the heart of prototypical cases of awe: *vastness* and *accommodation*," wrote social psychologists Dacher Keltner and Jonathan Haidt. "Vastness refers to anything that is experienced as being much larger than the self, or the self's ordinary level of experience or frame of reference. Vastness is often a matter of simple physical size, but it can also involve social size such as fame, authority, or prestige."

But vastness isn't enough on its own to inspire awe. "Awe involves a challenge to or negation of mental structures when they fail to make sense of an experience of something vast," Keltner and Haidt wrote. "We stress that awe involves a *need* for accommodation, which may or may not be satisfied. The success of one's attempts at accommodation may partly explain why awe can be both terrifying (when one fails to understand) and enlightening (when one succeeds)."

I've returned to that section several times, and it became part of my regular correspondence with this magazine's writers. But it provoked some anxiety in me, too: What happens when your mental structures grow to accommodate that vastness? Can the Grand Canyon still awe its longtime park rangers? Can an entomologist still find awe in a caterpillar's metamorphosis into a butterfly? More ominously: Is the theologian less likely to be thunderstruck by the Cross?

Keltner and Haidt note several "awe-related situations" that we often lump in with awe. Among them: admiration, surprise, deference, aesthetic pleasure, elevation (a warm response to moral beauty). But these emotional experiences don't have the same kinds of effects. Awe makes you **more likely to be generous** and to help others. Amusement doesn't. Awe makes you **less impatient** and more likely feel like you have available time. It makes you prefer experiences over material possessions. It makes you more satisfied with life. It makes you more likely to define yourself as **part of a group** than as an individual. It makes you more likely to **believe in the supernatural** and divine. It also reportedly makes us less tolerant of uncertainty—our brains push back against having our mental structures challenged or negated.

That what the studies say awe does. But awe does more than that. It reminds me that my Twitter feed isn't an accurate picture of what's happening in the

world. It reminds me that there are countless yesterdays and infinite tomorrows. It quiets a pop earworm, then replaces it with a hymn. It drives me to repentance. It fills me with gratefulness. It keeps my phone off. It makes me hug my wife and kids. It makes me talk too much at the dinner table.

I want awe. But surely that can't mean that I stop learning! I can't worry that my mental structures will grow and start accommodating more vastness. I can't stay in the shallows out of fear that the depths will become boring. Nor can I flit from subject to subject, gleaning tidbits of the sublime. Gorging on entertaining bonbons of "amazing facts" will only deaden me to real awe and wonder. (Trust me: I've tried it.) Awe demands slow and intentional beholding. It rewards patience. It often approaches in silence.

But ennui, apathy, and a litany of other evils have stalked me in deep, quiet places, too. I want awe largely because I dread those devils.

Grunt and squeak and squawk

If I want awe, I'm unlikely to find it in entertaining comfort. I'll need to seek out the unaccommodating. How far must I go?

I'm chastened by two remarkably similar new books that tell of the authors' efforts to negate their mental structures and live under radically unaccommodating conditions. Neither man transformed himself to experience awe. They did so to understand the world and themselves better. And to do so, each tried to temporarily transform himself into an animal.

Thomas Thwaites's project was as much about the exit as it was the entrance. "The future of the world seems pretty worrying at present," he writes in the introduction to *GoatMan*. "Wouldn't it be nice to just switch off that particularly human ability [to worry] for a couple of weeks? . . . To have a holiday from *being human*? Escaping the complexities of the human world and living life with just the bare necessities. . . . Absorbed in your immediate surroundings, eating a bit of grass, sleeping on the ground, and that's it?"

Thwaites's earlier project was to **make a toaster from scratch**. That's *scratch* scratch, smelting iron ore into steel, etc. In the *GoatMan* project, he created a series of prosthetics that let him walk and climb in the Alps on all fours, with a helmet to make up for a lack of horns, flexible neck, and thick skull. He created an external goat stomach that would help him to turn grass into something digestible. (When his plan to use a cellulase enzyme was called off

as unsafe, he came up with a different plan: chew the grass, spit it into a bag that served as his artificial rumen, put it in a pressure cooker over a campfire, and baby, you've got a stew going.) Moving and eating like a goat was only part of his experiment. Much of his book is devoted to his meetings with (very patient) animal behaviorists, neuroscientists, and others to help him *think* like a goat. Which mostly meant thinking less like a human, with "our ability to imagine complex things and our tendency to yap about it." He experimented with electromagnets on his head to disrupt his ability to speak.

Charles Foster's *Being a Beast* is in one way almost the same book. He goes to ridiculous lengths to live as the wild animals in his neighborhood: a badger, an otter, a fox, a red deer. But the two books are radically different. Contraptions and prostheses are the antithesis of Foster's project, not the focus of it as they are for Thwaites. "I want to know what it is like to be a wild thing," he begins his book. "It is one thing to describe which areas of a badger's brain light up on a functional MRI scanner as it sniffs a slug. It is quite another to paint a picture of the whole wood as it appears to the badger. It's a sort of literary shamanism, and it has been fantastic fun."

Yes, and it's fantastically weird, too. Thwaites's *GoatMan* had the feeling of watching someone make good on a bad bet, a gimmick that went too far but that he dutifully fulfilled because he got arts funding for it. Foster, meanwhile, is ever the true believer, fulfilling a lifelong dream. When I read, "I couldn't eat what the red deer eat," I thought, *Finally! An area where Thwaites seems the odder duck*. But then the paragraph continued:

But I knew well every plant that the deer like. I'd smelled them and pureed them and made soup from them and pulled them up with my teeth and chewed them and then tried to vomit them up so that I'd have the taste of a cudding (not a successful or popular activity). Indeed, I'd tried to belch more—to live with my food for longer; to revisit repeatedly, and well into the night, the lunchtime fish fingers and chips.

No thanks.

But at other times, he's almost convincing:

When a badger goes out, its object is to bump into food. This system of incontinent collision with the food makes the badger more a creature of the wood than any other inhabitant. [My son and I] hustled and grunted and elbowed and pushed and pressed our noses into the ground. And even *we* smelled something: the citrusy piss of the voles in their runs within the grass; the dis-

tantly maritime tang of a slug trail, like a winter rock pool; the crushed laurel of a frog; the dustiness of a toad; the sharp musk of a weasel; the blunter musk of an otter; and the fox, whose smell is red to the least synesthetic man alive. But most of all we had what we clumsily called the earth: leaves and dung and corpses and houses and rain and eggs and horrors.

We got these things usually as single words, occasionally as short sentences. If we had noses like badgers' they would have been intricate stories, weaving in and out of one another, punctuated by possibility and frustration.

The whole book is like that, at once repellent and attractive. Beautiful and disgusting. (*Financial Times* calling it “nature writing as extreme sport” doesn't at all reflect the poetic writing style but is a fully apt metaphor for its vicarious pleasures.)

Since I'm a Christian who believes that humans are unique among animals in bearing the image of God, I'm sensitive to claims that there is a massive wrongheadedness about these efforts. This isn't the first time I've read of someone who “ate grass like the ox. His body was drenched with the dew of heaven until his hair grew like the feathers of an eagle and his nails like the claws of a bird” (Dan. 4:33). Nebuchadnezzar wasn't engaged in performance art; he was cursed by God.

But neither Thwaites nor Foster argues for living like an animal permanently—or even temporarily as they did. Both are physical thought experiments, immersive journalism into the lower branches of the tree of life. At the end of his book, Foster (whose earlier volumes on the evidence for Jesus' resurrection and pilgrimage were published by Christian publisher Thomas Nelson) pulls back the curtain a bit. His book is driven, he explains in retrospect, by important questions: Are there any limits to our ability to choose? Do we each have an indestructible, authentic core of what it means to be ourselves? Are we alone in the world? Is otherness wholly inaccessible?

They are the reverse of my own questions. Foster and Thwaites want to experiment with (to borrow the language of Keltner and Haidt) *how far* they can “challenge or negate mental structures” in seeking something far beyond “the self's ordinary level of experience or frame of reference.” I want to know where I can find the kinds of experiences that offer just enough challenge to open the door to awe. I'm a wimp, yes. But I'm also disinterested in the kinds of occasional heroics and drama that warrant book contracts. I want to *live* in awe—or at least live close enough that I keep running into it.

It's remarkable how far Foster and Thwaites are able to go in their quests to become upside down Dr. Doolittles. They grow in their admiration, deference, pleasure, and surprise at what most of us accept as mundane. They see, hear, smell, taste, and touch experiences far beyond our ordinary level of experience. And they learn more of what it is *really* like to be a created creature. But the Otherness of the animal world is always before them—and far into the distance. To borrow from the evangelist's old line, going into a hole in the ground doesn't make you a badger any more than going into a garage makes you a car.

Our ineffable God has made a world at once knowable and unknowable. It will constantly challenge our mental structures if we let it, and we always see its vastness through a glass darkly. But we do see through that glass nevertheless. We can learn what makes **our hearts beat** inside us. We can view mountain ranges on **distant planets**. We know enough about each other to love and be loved. We can have both awe and love. Now we know in part; then we shall know fully, even as we have been fully known.

“Surely I spoke of things I did not understand,” Job finally replied to God. “Things too wonderful for me to know.” He knows more and understands more now, and I'm sure he is still filled with awe each eternal day.

Ted Olsen has been editor of *The Behemoth* and is tremendously grateful for it.





The Biggest Behemoth

A giant parasite has grown quietly, in secret, in a remote Oregon forest.

It's now the world's largest creature. / DOROTHY BOORSE

The largest living creature on Earth doesn't breathe. It has no limbs. If you walked by, you might not even know you were in the presence of a gargantuan living being. Perhaps, however, if you believed in European folklore, you might imagine a pattern to the mushrooms growing at the base of trees and wonder if you had wandered into a giant fairy story.

The largest organism in the world is a huge, old fungus of the species *Armillaria ostoyae* in eastern Oregon's Malheur National Forest. This fungus produces edible "honey mushrooms," nicknamed after their color. It is also parasitic on the roots of several tree species, producing a disease called Armillaria root disease.

The world's largest individual creature was discovered by people trying to solve a mystery. Because it is found in a large area of forest, any pattern to the mushrooms was undetectable. Instead, scientists had observed another pattern in several large patches of dead trees. In each patch, the trees had died of a fungal infection. The trees that were dead the longest were in the center. Closer to the edge were trees that had not been dead as long. At the edge were

trees that were partially diseased. In a ring outside the ill trees were healthy trees. The scientists wondered what had caused this pattern.

To answer this mystery, the group looked at DNA. The researchers found that fungal cells in infected trees were genetically identical throughout the largest patch, which meant that the samples came from one giant, largely invisible being, or one “genet.” The other local patches were similar—each represented an individual organism of great size. Over a long period of time, the individual fungus in each patch had spread from an original point throughout the soil, up and under tree bark, into the wood of the trees, and on to more soil and more trees over an increasingly wide-spread area.

The largest genet (Genet D, called the “Humungous Fungus”) is impressive. It is estimated to be between 1,900 and 8,650 years old. This fungus is more than 2.4 miles (3.8 km) across, inhabiting 2,385 acres (965 hectares) of soil. To picture that: It covers more than 1,600 football fields. Estimates of the biomass of Genet D are 7,567 to 35,000 tons of fungal structures throughout the soil and throughout and on tree bodies, making it the largest known organism by mass as well.

This organism has quietly lived in an area of mixed habitats in a national forest in the Blue Mountains that is itself more than 1.7 million acres in size. The large individual, and at least four others found in the same area of the forest, represent only a small extent of the total protected region. Over the ages, such fungal individuals have come and gone, while the surrounding landscape has flickered with a dynamic mosaic of ecosystems—shrubby sage lands, coniferous forest, alpine lakes and meadows.

On a smaller scale, people often observe a related phenomenon: rings of mushrooms called “fairy rings.” Legends from many countries suggest that small circular groups of mushrooms were caused by the dancing, frolicking, or mischief of fairies. On moonlit nights, some stories hold, the dancing of fairies could enthrall the unsuspecting and lure them into a circle from which they might not escape. Other old European traditions have suggested fairy rings are caused by dragons or witches. Fairy rings were almost always viewed as places of danger and mystery, where passersby should fear to tread.

Such fairy rings are similar to the giant Malheur National Forest fungus—the mushrooms are all connected underneath and within the ring by the network of threads called hyphae that constitute the bulk of the fungal organism.

The mushrooms are the outer, and only visible, reaches of an organism with the diameter of the fairy ring. Many fungi periodically produce such mushrooms—visible above-ground portions of the much larger organism. (In huge organisms like Genet D, mushrooms may appear in clumps, not in a clearly discernable ring.) Often these mushrooms are only present for a rainy period of the year, when the mushroom caps develop and release spores. If you have ever looked underneath mushroom caps, you may have seen slitlike gills—a place where spores are held and from which they are released.

Until 1998, no one knew Genet D was a single individual because so much of its body is hidden. Such stealth living is typical of large fungi. If you could separate them from the soil and wood they live in, the myriad of hyphae might look like the threads of a cotton ball. These form a mesh in the soil, taking up nutrients. All the hyphal threads together form the main body or *mycelium*.

The *Armillaria* fungi also have more robust rootlike structures, called rhizomorphs, which look like shoestrings and give the genus the nickname “shoestring fungus.” Rhizomorphs grow through the soil and help the fungus invade new areas. Just like your body has different parts, the fungal individual has the hyphae (forming the mycelium), the rhizomorphs, and the mushrooms.

But unlike your body, it doesn’t have a central control system, a lifespan, or a typical size and shape. There is no heart for fungi. No brain. No childhood. Unless something like a forest fire hot enough to kill soil organisms intervenes, this giant being can just continue to grow indefinitely.

Fairy rings are places of mystery and danger. In our modern world, which views such stories as superstitious, a “fairy ring” is no less unsettling and mysterious: How does one fungus produce both a tree-killing illness and a delicious food? Are they the leftovers of a night of fancy and frolic, or agents of decay and signs of our own mortality?

Because we want trees for fuel and wood products, it is tempting to revile a wood-consuming creature. Fortunately for the trees in the national forest, the fungi represent only a small part of the whole habitat and kill relatively few trees.

More importantly, though, fungi—including this species of fungus—play critical roles in ecosystems. In this case, *Armillaria* fungi also break down dead plant material in the soil. If decomposers did not do so, nutrients would be trapped in the dead bodies of plants and animals. Piles of detritus would form,

and trees, saved from death by disease, would nonetheless die from lack of nutrients. If the cycle of tree death and breakdown were suspended, openings would not appear in the forest for new seedlings to shoot up. Life would grind to a halt if we had no way to phase out the old and let in the new. Decomposers also provide food for many soil organisms and bind soil together, slowing erosion and holding water.

Other species of fungi have even more extensive soil roles. Some fungi bind tightly to the roots of plants, increasing plant absorption of nutrients and even helping plants to fight infections. There is something meek about such service, toiling through snow and heat, droughts and fires and blizzards, slowly re-portioning the nutrients back to the very plants that themselves shade and hold the soil, and provide food in turn for animals.

The “Humungous Fungus” began life as a microscopic spore and grew undetected, dwarfing generations of giants like blue whales and conifers as they were born, lived, and died. While it’s not the work of fairies, the stealth behemoth is a testimony to the quiet, unassuming mysteries that hold our world together.

Dorothy Boorse is professor of biology at Gordon College. She wrote on [whale falls](#) for issue 34 of The Behemoth and on [wildfire](#) for issue 55.





Sleeping Willows

How a big God works through small days. / DOUGLAS ESTES

Ws trees go, the willow looks tired. Not so much *weeping* as it is *sleeping*—as if it might need a nap, like an old man slouched over, its burdens too great to continue to lift its limbs. Not so the pine, the birch, the palm, even the oak—these trees always seem to stand upright, solid, well-rested. But don't let their posture fool you—even the birch needs to rest its branches after a long day standing in the hot sun.

This is what Eetu Puttonen from the Finnish Geospatial Research Institute in Masala, Finland, and his team of researchers recently discovered. **As described** in the journal *Frontiers in Plant Science*, Puttonen and his team used terrestrial laser scanning on a pair of silver birch trees—one in Finland and one in Austria—to measure the movements of their branches and foliage. While it has been known for a couple hundred years that plants experience daily leaf motion, this level of observation has never before been possible. Additionally, Puttonen's study, unlike others, focused on just one day, rather than a season. What they confirmed and quantified in detail was that as the sun set, so did the trees; and as the sun began to rise, so did the trees. In everyday parlance, the trees fell asleep at night and awoke the next morning.

Do trees *really* need to rest? To sleep? To some degree this still needs to be

determined. Puttonen explains that water balance within a tree or plant photoperiodism—a plant’s response to light or dark periods—could be the driving force behind the nightly slumber patterns. Yet there is increasing evidence, observational and genetic, that plants follow a circadian rhythm, much like animals. Circadian rhythm in plants is not simply an environmental response—like photoperiodism’s turning of a flower’s head toward the sun—but part of their physiological design. The “why” and “how” of this still needs to be discovered, notes C. Robertson McClung, writing in the journal *The Plant Cell*.

The idea that a tree sleeps sounds odd. We get that mammals sleep, and most animals, maybe even spiders and insects, but plants? Flowers, maybe. Trees we know by their height, their strength, their longevity. Trees we measure in terms of years, often hundreds of years, but not each day morning and night.

At the center of this is the circadian rhythm—the 24-hour cycle that biological processes follow. This rhythm originates within life, within its physical makeup, though external forces such as temperature and sunlight affect the rhythm. People have it, bacteria have it, trees have it; it is perhaps the most important “clock” for human existence. It affects how we learn and how we remember.

Given the importance of the circadian rhythm for human life, it should come as no surprise that this is the clock described in our creation narrative. When God started to work, this work was measured not by the age or the year but by the day. As the author of Genesis puts it: “There was evening, there was morning; one day.” When God ended his work, he blessed and sanctified that day. God seems to measure his creative works by the day.

The same is true when we read the Gospels. Take John: we are often reminded that this book covers a three-year period of Jesus’ public ministry. But it does not. At best, it covers a period of a few weeks—mostly a few notable days in the years of Jesus’ public ministry. The day there was a wedding in Cana, the day of a healing in Bethesda, the day Lazarus rose from the grave, the day Jesus sacrificed himself for the sake of others. Important days. John seems to measure the ministry of Jesus by the day.

We often don’t do this. When we read the Bible, we often start our clock at Genesis 3, not Genesis 1. We measure our world by the year, by the age, tracing an eschatological arc from the fall of people to the advent of Jesus to the consummation of the ages.

As biblical scholar and pastor Michael LeFebvre explains, “The massive, awe-inspiring scope of God’s creation is mapped across a simple, seven-day week in Genesis 1. The fourth commandment (Exod. 20:8–11) tells us why this is so. As the reflectors of God’s image, we are taught to keep a cadence of six days’ labor and one day to worship as we steward the creation toward its consummation.”

Tree lifespans range from the willow trees, which have relatively short lives—about the same lifespan as a human being—to centuries-old giants like redwoods and baobabs. Yet in the very biology of trees, in their circadian rhythm, they reflect the importance of the day in the cycle of creation. They awake with the sun and sleep with the dusk. Our attention and focus should be likewise—to make the day the primary measure of our lives.

*Wake, sleeping willow, the sun is shining
Up, sleeping willow, your branches twining
Darkness is fleeing, lightness is being
Reach, sleeping willow, glory divining!*

Douglas Estes is assistant professor of New Testament & practical theology and DMin program director at South University–Columbia. He wrote about [recent discoveries](#) for issue 48 of *The Behemoth*.





My Father's World

The rarely seen full 16 stanzas of the hymn that has been a theme for The Behemoth. / MALTBIE DAVENPORT BABCOCK

This is my Father's world.

On the day of its wonderful birth

The stars of light in phalanx bright

Sang out in Heavenly mirth.

This is my Father's world.

E'en yet to my listening ears

All nature sings, and around me rings

The music of the spheres.

This is my Father's world.

I rest me in the thought

Of rocks and trees, of skies and seas,
His hand the wonders wrought.

This is my Father's world.
The birds that their carols raise,
The morning light, the lily white,
Declare their Maker's praise.

This is my Father's world.
He shines in all that's fair.
In the rustling grass I hear Him pass,
He speaks to me everywhere.

This is my Father's world.
From His eternal throne,
He watch doth keep when I'm asleep,
And I am not alone.

This is my Father's world
Dreaming, I see His face.
I ope my eyes, and in glad surprise
Cry, "The Lord is in this place."

This is my Father's world.
I walk a desert lone.
In a bush ablaze to my wondering gaze

God makes His glory known.

This is my Father's world.

Among the mountains drear,

'Mid rending rocks and earthquake shocks,

The still, small voice I hear.

This is my Father's world.

From the shining courts above,

The Beloved One, His only Son,

Came—a pledge of deathless love.

This is my Father's world.

Now closer to Heaven bound,

For dear to God is the earth Christ trod,

No place but is holy ground.

This is my Father's world.

His love has filled my breast,

I am reconciled, I am His child,

My soul has found His rest.

This is my Father's world.

A wanderer I may roam,

Whate'er my lot, it matters not,

My heart is still at home.

This is my Father's world.
O let me ne'er forget
That tho' the wrong seems oft so strong,
God is the ruler yet.

This is my Father's world
The battle is not done.
Jesus who died shall be satisfied,
And earth and Heaven be one.

This is my Father's world.
Should my heart be ever sad?
The Lord is King—let the Heavens ring
God reigns—let the earth be glad.

Maltbie Davenport Babcock (1868–1901) was a prominent Presbyterian pastor who led Baltimore's Brown Memorial Presbyterian Church and Brick Presbyterian Church in New York City. Known for "a remarkable personal magnetism" and for having "lived, or sung his thoughts," Babcock also struggled with depression and died of suicide amid a brucellosis infection. After his death, his wife published "This Is My Father's World" along with his sermons and writings in *Thoughts for Every-day Living from the Spoken and Written Words of Maltbie Davenport Babcock* (Charles Scribner's Sons, 1901). Six stanzas first appeared as a hymn in the 1915 Presbyterian hymnal *Alleluia*.



Wonders Never Cease

Issue 56 and beyond: Where we'll keep finding amazing stuff.

Rather than our usual fare in this column, we decided for this final installment to share where we're likely to seek out "wonder on the web" in the weeks and months to come. (One place we hope to encounter and share specific items is in [our Facebook group](#), which we're keeping open for now.)

Going coastal

Perhaps it's because I grew up in the smack dab center of North America, far from any coastline. Perhaps it's because I now live near the wide expanse of the world's largest ocean. (It's probably both.) **Hakai** magazine is one of my favorite latest finds. It captivates my curiosity, always teaching me something new. It engages my sense of morality by asking not only how we can conserve these marine wonders but also how we can care for coastal communities living within these ecosystems. It makes me think, but it also makes me behold.

— *Rebecca Randall, science editor*

Running wild

Runner's World's [Rave Run](#) continually provides a sense of wonder. The site showcases some of the most breathtaking trails and runs throughout the world. — *Leanne Snavely, marketing manager*

CNN's joyful younger sibling

[Great Big Story](#) is a treasure trove of short, thoughtfully crafted videos about every sort of awe-inducing thing/person you can imagine. If you like *The Behemoth* and you haven't heard of this site... well, say goodbye to the rest of your day. Like *Behemoth*, GBS fills me with hope, excitement, and curiosity by showing how amazing this world is, and how people everywhere forever have been exploring it and somehow making it even more beautiful and surprising. — *Sarah Cameron, assistant editor and marketer*

“‘Rabbit’s clever,’ said Pooh thoughtfully”

[The Rabbit Room](#) hosts a lot of beautiful truths expressed in a lot of different ways (art, music, story, podcasts, comics, and so forth). The site is named for the back room of the Eagle and Child pub, where the Oxford Inklings met to share their stories with each other. (Yes, this is something I have a tendency to “geek out” about, as Ted noticed straightaway when I started working here at CT.) We featured a really lovely Rabbit Room post in *Wonder on the Web* in [issue 43](#). — *Mariah Sky Franklin, assistant editor and marketer*

Eye catching

It's because of *The Behemoth* that I have become interested in macro photos of insects. The detail in [this photo gallery](#) is amazing. — *Jennifer McGuire, art director*

UsTube

I'm a people watcher, and often awestruck by the quirkiness and uniqueness of my fellow humans. YouTube is basically built for online people watching. I

subscribe to a likeable fellow who LOVES swords, even though I have no particular interest in swords, another who **nerds out with woodworking**, and another who spends hours creating **primitive dwellings in his backyard**. When it comes down to it, we are all creators, made in the image of the divine Creator.

Bonus: for an excellent documentary on human ingenuity, check out **Human Planet** on Netflix. And for a beautifully designed reading experience and long-form pieces on science and technology, check out the great things the folks at **Nautil.us** are doing. —*Jacob Walsh, publisher*

Tweets of grace

Mockingbird says its purpose—“connecting the Christian faith with the realities of everyday life”—is grounded in the notion that “none of us ever move beyond our need to hear the basic good news of God’s grace.” As its writers comment on TV, movies, books, articles, and just everyday life, I find myself time and again amazed by how grace weaves its way into every seam of life. —*Mark Galli, editor in chief*

The Behemoth’s parallel universe

Around the time we were planning The Behemoth, Slate editor David Plotz quit his job and became CEO of **Atlas Obscura**, a then-smallish site populated with “user-generated-content” about weird places in the world. I’ve always been a Plotz fan, but now I felt like a brother; his fatigue from constant swimming in news and his desire to help people find evergreen sources of joyful discovery both resonated deeply. His epic success with that site has been a regular fount of inspiration (and, I’ll admit, opportunities to resist envy). “It’s a very naive thing for a person who’s worked in cynical journalism for 25 years,” Plotz recently told **The Washingtonian**, “but honestly, it’s a great feeling to know that you create something magical for people.” Amen.

—*Ted Olsen, editor*

