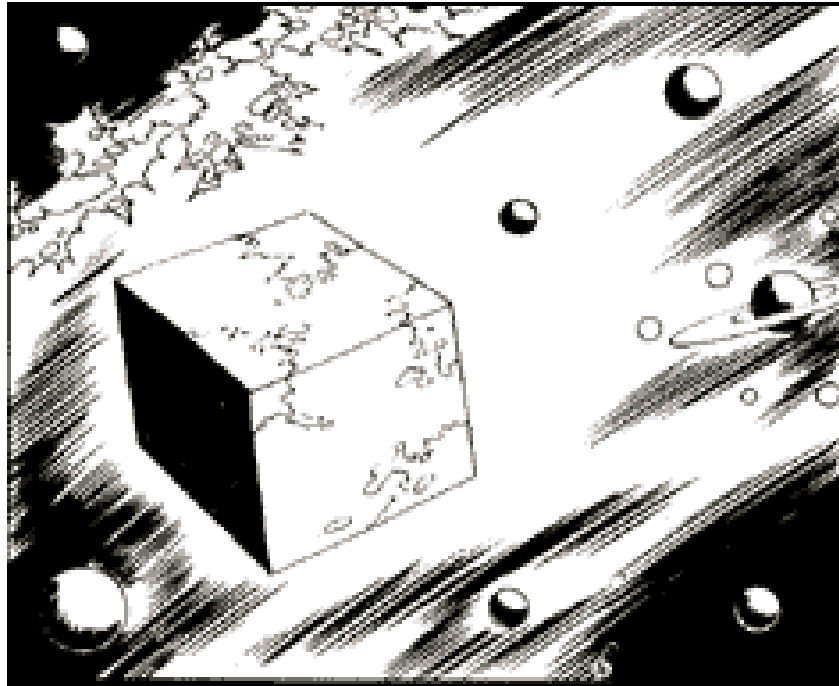


## □ THE SQUARE PLANET □



**Raymond Federmann**

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Instructions: before reading cut each square of words and assemble into a cube

## □ SQUARE ONE □

everything on that planet was square :: it was impossible not to notice it :: for even the planet itself was square :: in a three dimensional fashion of course :: for when I say square I really mean cubic :: since all these squares formed cubes :: or :: boxes rather because often one of the sides of the cube was missing or left open :: we had never seen anything like this before :: a square planet full of squares :: even though we had traveled a great deal :: Angela and I :: from one end of the galaxy to the other :: and had seen many curious planets with very unusual shapes of beings and things :: but never before had we encountered a place where everything was square :: or cubic rather :: without exception :: but I must admit we were not sure at first :: when it came into sight of our

**THE SQUARE PLANET** spaceship :: that we were approaching a square planet :: for in the extremely rapid rotations of the planet on its axis the squareness became blurred :: erased by the speed :: thus giving the distant space observer the false impression of normal planetary roundness :: but as our ship approached and prepared to land it became apparent to us that indeed this planet was cubic :: which of course made for rather unstable and unpredictable rotations and revolutions :: which Angela :: [my lovely traveling companion :: and why not say it outright since it was common knowledge throughout the galaxy :: my sexual complement] :: jokingly called convulsions and convolutions :: even the planet's eight moons were square :: and situated in space in such a fashion that they too formed

## □ SQUARE TWO □

a perfect cube :: the same size as the planet itself :: abstract cube of course :: so that in essence there were two giant cubes :: one concrete the other abstract :: whirling together in space in perfect harmony :: at first Angela and I had a lot of difficulties adjusting to the total squareness and absolute symmetry of this planetary system :: unlike other planets we investigated in the past :: we found this one to be restricting rather than liberating :: and yet somehow enigmatic in its simplicity and the monotonous repetition of its equal sides and corners :: after a while we discovered that these squares in their regularity and redundancy created series of mysterious but related designs :: eventually I explained to Angela :: once we got accustomed to moving among mineral and □ **SQUARE TWO** □ vegetal cubes :: some animate others inanimate :: that the square is the purest form of spatial idea complete in itself :: and as such represents one of the highest orders of pregnant spiritual and cosmic symbolism :: but that explanation did not seem to make Angela happy nor help her adjust to life among all these squares :: [perhaps because she was undergoing at the time a serious crisis concerning her sexual adequacy] :: she seemed quite annoyed by the ambiguous and suggestive metaphorical use I had made of the word pregnant :: no doubt because she had read more in that term than I had meant :: for certainly I had no perverted nor erotic intention when I offered that spiritual explanation of the square :: in any event :: poor Angela and I were extremely uncomfortable on

### □ SQUARE THREE □

that planet :: for it soon became evident to us that squares make for rather hard and angular relations :: and everything here was square :: the mountains the valleys :: the meadows :: the clouds :: even the bodies of water were square :: which was hard for us to accept :: the entire vegetation was square :: the trees :: plants :: flowers :: with square leaves and square roots of course :: animals :: or what appeared to be animals :: were also square :: even those who swam in the water or flew in the air :: so that when looking in the water :: or above in the sky :: we could see all sorts of little cubes rushing by :: [though parenthetically I should mention that this squareness did not affect the taste of their meat :: which Angela and I greatly appreciated :: and this in a necessary way made □ **SQUARE THREE** □ our stay on this planet tolerable :: for a square roast or a square filet of fish is just as good as a round one] :: in other words all of nature was squarely shaped :: but so were all fabricated and synthetic objects :: machines :: furniture :: clothing :: tools :: kitchen utensils :: jewelry :: toilet articles :: etc :: etc :: for everything in that world was created or constructed according to ***The Great Square Model*** :: therefore even the buildings in the cities as well as the vehicles of transportation were square :: and of course square too the living breathing thinking creatures who were in control of the planet :: these extraterrestrial beings had square bodies :: square heads :: square hands and feet :: and all these square parts formed a self-conscious shape :: a mobile body :: which

## □ SQUARE FOUR □

expressed itself in square articulations of sounds which lovely Angela :: who was trained in galactic languages and dialects :: managed to decipher so that we could communicate with these speaking squares :: in other words :: when objects or beings were square as a whole their parts were also square so that everything within everything was a system of squares within squares :: or cubes within cubes :: during our stay on this planet Angela and I had problems getting used to all this angularity :: and what we ultimately called this *inescapable withinness* :: but since we had no choice but to pursue to its finality our investigation of this recently discovered square planet :: as we had been ordered :: by galactic command :: [as a cosmic scientist Angela was to record precise data while □ **SQUARE FOUR** □ I as a space poet had to describe the planet in metaphorical terms] :: we made the best of that squareness to adjust to it physically mentally and spiritually :: but let me assure you it was not easy for Angela and I to sleep :: or make love :: inside a cubic bed whose dimensions were smaller than our bodies :: indeed it required unusual and sometimes painful contortions :: not easy either for us to defecate in a square toilet :: the human anatomy :: especially the rear end :: is designed more for the circle than the square :: and imagine having to eat square lumps of food all the time :: that does not make for easy digestion :: or having to think in terms of squares all the time :: the mind gets caught in corners and impasses and as a result can no longer function freely :: at first

## □ SQUARE FIVE □

we felt totally squarified :: if one can use such an expression :: but gradually we adjusted and after a while found :: if not pleasure :: at least some degree of satisfaction in relating to these squares :: even though we did not really comprehend how they functioned in relation to one another :: it was not until we were almost ready to depart and proceed to our next assignment that we finally understood the great principle that governed all the squares of that planet :: it is true that along the way we had noticed :: it was unavoidable :: that the squares :: or boxes as we preferred to call them :: were all of different dimensions :: some so huge that it was impossible to see how far they extended :: others so small one could barely see them :: and others larger or smaller :: but during our □ **SQUARE FIVE** □ entire stay on that planet we never encountered two squares :: or two boxes of the same size :: this was so astonishing to us that we eventually went around measuring as many boxes as we could in the hope that we might chance upon two identical in size :: this never happened :: what we finally discovered :: almost by chance :: during *The Day of the Great Emboxing* :: as it is called :: an annual celebration of the planet's divine system :: is that all the squares :: animate and inanimate :: form a long series :: stretching from the largest to the smallest :: from the most gigantic to the most minuscule :: and ultimately :: and inevitably :: all the boxes can be contained into one another according to their sizes :: the smaller into the next bigger one :: and so on :: until ultimately all the boxes are inside one great box :: all inside one great square

## □ SQUARE SIX □

:: and evidently there can be only one such box :: one such square capable of containing all the others :: the planet itself :: thus it became clear to us why we felt so uneasy :: so depressed :: in that world of squares and cubes :: it was governed by such a rigid system :: such an autocratic principle :: one could almost call it a dictatorial system :: yes a totalization system :: whereby only one square :: the largest :: swallowed all the others :: and naturally that hierarchy was unmovable :: and irreversible :: it controlled everything :: all physical moral social aesthetic and political activities :: once we understood that principle it made the rest of our sojourn unbearable :: for it occurred to us that perhaps after a while we too would have to fit into that sad despotic emboxing system :: that we

□ **SQUARE SIX** □ we too could become squares within squares :: Angela and I felt great relief when we finally departed :: as we watched through the round porthole of our spaceship that square planet getting smaller and smaller as it receded into space :: its squareness once again erased by the speed of its rotations :: Angela said in a whisper :: it's a hard life on that planet everything there is so hard :: so hard :: I did not reply :: hers was not a question calling for an answer :: it was just a reflection :: a sad conclusion to our investigation :: yes everything there is hard :: I shook my head in silent agreement :: and thought how important it is to have **softness** and **roundness** :: in one's life :: and as we entered the great night of space :: I put my arms around Angela from behind :: cupped her voluptuous round breasts in my hands :: and gently squeezed the softness of her flesh ::

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## Raymond Federmann

Born in France in 1928, Federman emigrated to the U.S. in 1947. He holds a Ph.D. in French Literature from U.C.L.A. His many books include *Among the Beasts* (1967), *Double or Nothing* (Swallow Press, 1971, winner of the Frances Steloff Fiction Prize and The Panache Experimental Fiction Prize), *Take It or Leave It* (Fiction Collective, 1976), *The Voice in the Closet* (Coda Press, 1979), *The Twofold Vibration* (Indiana University Press & Harvester Press Ltd., 1982), *Smiles on Washington Square* (Thunder's Mouth Press, 1985, winner of The American Book Award), *To Whom It May Concern* (The Fiction Collective Two, 1990); *La Fourrure de ma Tante Rachel* (written in French, Editions Circé, Paris, 1996). His novels have been translated into German, Italian, French, Hungarian, Polish, Serbian, Rumanian, Hebrew, Dutch, Greek, Japanese, and Chinese.

He is the recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship, a Fulbright Fellowship, a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship in Fiction and a New York State Foundation for the Arts Fellowship for Fiction. In 1989-1990, he was invited by DAAD (The Berlin Artist Program) to spend a year in Berlin as Writer-in-Residence. During that year, DAAD published in a bilingual edition a collection of experimental poetry and prose entitled *Playtexts/Spieltexte*, and The Stopover Press in Berlin published *Duel/Duel*, a trilingual volume of recent poems.