

Z O O L A L I A

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For my mom.

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R E I N D E E R

*Rangifer tarandus*

a fine-furred steed guarding a frigid tundra at sunrise;

an arresting, regent genie in russet and argentine,  
seen in fantasies,  
dusted in an understated strangeness;

a radiant seer as dignified as a saint,  
it reigns,  
undaunted, enduring, and steadfast

A R C T I C H A R E

*Lepus arcticus*

a restless, alert spirit,  
it traces a trail,  
races past a pastel icescape as pale as erasure

B E L U G A   W H A L E

*Delphinapterus leucas*

a slender Renaissance nude, reclined,  
under a starlit ice sheet as pale as paper,  
she traces helices in an airless saline arena:

a pure, lactescent spirit,  
as delicate as an ice sculpture,  
as radiant as a pearl;

a listless thalassic huntress,  
a peerless Arctic chanteuse,  
titanic, celestial, irreal

G R E E N L A N D   S H A R K

*Somniosus microcephalus*

an ashen circumpolar sleeper;

an eerie, oneiric harpoonman on an ice-prone shoreline,  
lonesome illusion in a surreal lunar seascape

W A L R U S

*Odobenus rosmarus*

an odd merman;

an enormous, no-nonsense undersea ambassador,  
snub-nosed, umber, obese;

a barbarous sea-baron,  
barbed,  
morose,  
absurd,  
saber-adorned

H A R P S E A L

*Pagophilus groenlandicus*

an oceangoing dog as pale as pure sugar,  
she paddles on a glacier-laden shoreline:

oiled, gregarious, docile,  
as plush as a penguin,  
in an ocean as cold as an icicle

B L U E W H A L E

*Balaenoptera musculus*

a colossal cobalt emperor,  
serene, monumental;

a cetacean as unmeasurable as an ocean

S P E R M W H A L E

*Physeter macrocephalus*

a harsh sea empress, remorseless ruler to a stealth thalassocracy;

a surreal, muscular hell-mammal;  
a ruthless, ephemeral slasher

ATLANTIC PUFFIN

*Fratercula arctica*

a cute, alert little ice rafter, all fluff

NORTHERN KRILL

*Meganyctiphanes norvegica*

a tiny oceangoing machine;

a semitransparent shrimp as shiny as a coin,  
natant in an icy seascape;

an orange nymph in argentine armor,  
tacit technician in an immense transoceanic navy

S E A O T T E R

*Enhydra lutris*

a dainty islander,  
landless, leisurely, listless,  
serene in a salty tide,  
its sheen as sheer as satin;

a tenderhearted dandy,  
tiny-eared, as shiny as a seal

R I V E R O T T E R

*Lontra canadensis*

an oiled rascal as elastic as an accordion,  
alert, slender,  
it darts or reclines at an inland coastline;

an earnest sailor,  
at ease in a den in dense cattails

O S P R E Y

*Pandion haliaetus*

a tall pilot that haunts these sunlit headlands,  
as lethal as poison,  
as sudden as a hailstone,  
and as dispassionate as a steel span:

intense, adept,  
its pupils set in steel,  
it hunts at a soundless sea;

a silent assailant at altitude,  
lone silhouette on a distant tideline

B A L D E A G L E

*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*

a pale pilot that sits at a hilltop outpost,  
stoic, colossal, athletic,  
as lethal as a hatchet



P E R E G R I N E F A L C O N

*Falco peregrinus*

a lone airfarer sailing in a roaring silence;

a ferocious, ferine general glaring a searing iron glare,  
full of a purposeful rage:

fearless, falling, farseeing,  
as unerring as a rifle,  
as graceful as a song

R E D - T A I L E D H A W K

*Buteo jamaicensis*

a maniac stuntman in a cinnamon coat,  
stoic combatant in an autumn sunbeam:

as majestic as a jet,  
as intense as a comet,  
as automatic as a bomb

W H I T E - T A I L E D D E E R

*Odocoileus virginianus*

a slender goddess in a secluded glen along a clear-running river;

a dancer in a green glade,  
elusive, all grass and acorn;

a reserved ranger on virgin ground

G R A Y F O X

*Urocyon cinereoargenteus*

a tiny, cunning gangster in iron tones,  
it carries no gun

B R O W N B E A R

*Ursus arctos*

carcass curator

L E A S T W E A S E L

*Mustela nivalis*

a svelte silvan militiaman,  
elven, elusive, as slim as a stem;

a sinuate velvet assailant,  
tan, animate, small, intense,  
in sunlit autumn leaves

W O O D M O U S E

*Apodemus sylvaticus*

a pious, studious medievalist at a secluded ivied outpost;  
a cute, academic demoiselle,  
delicately placed amid pale leaves

NORTH AMERICAN OPOSSUM

*Didelphis virginiana*

a pallid, silver-haired alien gravedigger,  
gaping, evasive, dealing in lies

STAR - NOSED MOLE

*Condylura cristata*

a dusty industrialist;

a curious occultist in rural dirt,  
idiosyncratic landlady to starlit, stony soil;  
tacit accountant, odd custodian

NORTH AMERICAN PORCUPINE

*Erethizon dorsatum*

an odd, hazardous rodent,  
its snout as round as a manatee's,  
its ramose, razor-thin hairs a harsh deterrent to a deerhound;

a northern denizen,  
a dazed, sedate dreamer,  
it dozes in a tree in midsummer;

a handsome, semiretired senior statesman in muted earth tones

SNOWSHOE HARE

*Lepus americanus*

a small, crepuscular runner as pale as cream

ALLIGATOR SNAPPING TURTLE

*Macrochelys temminckii*

an alien, mechanical mercenary,  
militant, malcontent,  
it sits silently in a stream in a rainstorm;

a sinister centenarian,  
recalcitrant, reticent, tacit, relentless;

an archaic, semiterrestrial tank,  
titanic, territorial, as emotionless as a machine,  
it lies still, then strikes, as easily as a hammer hits a nail

A M E R I C A N   B U L L F R O G

*Lithobates catesbeianus*

an ebullient bass in a bucolic scene;  
an enthusiastic, bulbous chanteuse:

it sits still,  
lilies its islets,  
cattails its castle,

then cannonballs into silence

G O L D E N   P O I S O N   F R O G

*Phyllobates terribilis*

a lithe, lethal athlete,  
shy, stylish, spotless;

pastel arboreal spirit,  
little Helios

R E D - E Y E D   T R E E   F R O G

*Agalychnis callidryas*

a dashing, gangly, garish rascal

A M E R I C A N   B U M B L E B E E

*Bombus pensylvanicus*

a plump, amiable mailman on a sunny plain,  
aimless, clumsy, asleep on a blossom;

a minuscule, peaceable envoy

M O N A R C H   B U T T E R F L Y

*Danaus plexippus*

annual dappled danseuse; inlaid pixie

B E E   H U M M I N G B I R D

*Mellisuga helenae*

a gleaming genie as small as a seashell



CALIFORNIA CONDOR

*Gymnogyps californianus*

a mournful commissar;

an imposing, ungainly saurian falcon,  
forlorn, colossal, ominous, malign,  
lounging in a colony on a cliff,  
or soaring on an air column in a foggy canyon;

a scraggly, aging airman

HOODED VULTURE

*Necrosyrtes monachus*

a morose coroner;

an anonymous, ashen enchantress that eats rotten meat

C O P P E R H E A D

*Agkistrodon contortrix*

a striking, toxic king in dark satin

C O T T O N M O U T H

*Agkistrodon piscivorus*

a tortuous visitant, insidious, cunning;  
a kingpin in a dark satin suit;  
a poisonous contortionist, gaping

G I L A M O N S T E R

*Heloderma suspectum*

a copper-colored murderess as cutthroat as a despot;  
a hardhearted desert elder,  
her clothes a dappled ocher leather;  
a cruel, detached, treacherous recluse

B L A C K W I D O W

*Latrodectus mactans*

an occult seductress;

a cruel seamstress,  
soulless, soundless, slender-armed,  
austere, as round as a stone;

a murderous, scarlet-ornamented contessa,  
cold, remorseless, calculated,  
as mute as a doll

HELLBENDER

*Cryptobranchus alleganiensis*

the big one:

an oily, elongate octogenarian,  
gluttonous, greasy, as shiny as an unguent,  
lying silently in an obscure pool;

a strange bachelor uncle carrying a Cuban cigar,  
surly, lugubrious, unapproachable,  
eating tiny crustaceans;

a solitary creature,  
laconic, lonely, at least partially nocturnal,  
unsightly, as listless as a slug;

an aging, insatiate giant as slippery as a coelacanth

E L E C T R I C   E E L

*Electrophorus electricus*

recluse sorcerer,  
pool slitherer,  
its teeth outlets to the prehistoric terror its secret circuits spool

A X O L O T L

*Ambystoma mexicanum*

an exotic cosmonaut;  
  
a mystic, neotenic mutant in a mossy nest,  
mucous, unctuous, ostentatious

O L M

*Proteus anguinus*

a strange prisoner in a stone pit,  
eerie, reptant, roseate;  
  
a sinister, serpentine septuagenarian,  
surreptitious,  
as prostrate as a tongue

O C E L O T

*Leopardus pardalis*

a proud, surreal dappled idol

B R O W N - T H R O A T E D S L O T H

*Bradypus variegatus*

a vegetated, vegetative sage;

a drugged dryad as sedate as a statue,  
as speedy as a teddy bear

G I R A F F E

*Giraffa camelopardalis*

a gracile, dappled empress,  
slim, caramel-colored, self-possessed, as imperial as a goddess,  
amid rare airspace

T H O M S O N ' S   G A Z E L L E

*Eudorcas thomsonii*

a sacred trichromatic runner,  
adroit, animated, as radiant as the sun;

a demure academic in a herd,  
smooth, handsome, its aura as ceremonious as a saint's:

a distance racer, its stamina unmatched,  
it meanders in a scenic marathon that has no start and no end

P Y G M Y H I P P O P O T A M U S

*Choeropsis liberiensis*

sober porcine philosopher

L I O N

*Panthera leo*

antelope threat



E A S T E R N G O R I L L A

*Gorilla beringei*

a big, gangling barbarian in a green region

S I A M A N G

*Symphalangus syndactylus*

a gymnast slash shaman,  
a phantasmal Hanuman,  
and a madcap stuntman

C H I M P A N Z E E

*Pan troglodytes*

an odd doppelganger;

a gangster on an endless patrol,  
as godless as a tyrant,  
as old as a pagan god:

alert, adept,  
a grape eater;  
a renegade ape as strange as a gargoyle

A Y E - A Y E

*Daubentonia madagascariensis*

an eerie messenger dressed in obsidian,  
its orange irises near-incandescent, as radiant as gemstones,  
it meanders, murmuring, in a dim arbor:

a somber, taciturn demigod,  
unseen, near-insane,  
as enigmatic as a secret code;

disturbed dreamer,  
strange astronomer,  
grim insomniac;

a sinister, misunderstood simian,  
damned ambassador to an ancient underground nation,  
it digs at grubs, one digit as enormous as an antenna;

it rises at moonrise,  
as a red moon rises,  
and murders us in our dreams

GRAY SLENDER LORIS

*Loris lydekkerianus*

an illusory, red-eyed alien on a dark island,  
silken, surreal, lonely,  
unseen, or undead;

noiseless eidolon,  
leonine sensei

RED SLENDER LORIS

*Loris tardigradus*

a starlit guru;

a dolorous ritualist as adroit as a tailor,  
all stasis,  
all stardust

BENGAL SLOW LORIS

*Nycticebus bengalensis*

a celestial yeti;  
a tacit sibyl in unlit stygian stillness

SUNDA SLOW LORIS

*Nycticebus coucang*

a beige abbess as sage as a botanist,  
its eyes as big as suns

RETICULATED PYTHON

*Malayopython reticulatus*

an unholy hallucination;

an iconic, elephantine South Asian serpent,  
the centerpiece in an ancient satanic ritual;

a chthonic, telepathic pharaoh,  
sapient, stylish, psychic, psychotic,  
its reptilian eyes alert, remorseless, as inhumane as any tyrant's,  
its relentless, muscular constriction as lethal as any poison,  
it counts corpses as easily as an accountant counts coins:

a cryptic necromancer, the consummate monstrosity,  
phantom architect to a systematic trauma:  
enormous, ominous, sinuous, shapeless,  
it annihilates us on autopilot (yes, it eats us too)—  
its suit an ornate, tortoiseshell satin hose,  
its torso its tail, its tail its toes;

a slippery, charismatic con artist, as ephemeral as a rumor,  
that smiles a malicious smile;  
a taciturn plastic colossus,  
unsentimental,  
silent, stealthy,  
ruthless, tireless, soulless

K O M O D O   D R A G O N

*Varanus komodoensis*

a murderous nomad dressed in snakeskin,  
ravenous,  
in semidarkness under dusk skies

N I L E   C R O C O D I L E

*Crocodylus niloticus*

crusty, sour, surly old cynic

GIANT FRESHWATER STINGRAY

*Urogymnus polylepis*

enormous, ominous, slippery sleeper;

gloomy illusion,  
lonesome messenger,  
in solemn, moonless pools

CHINESE GIANT SALAMANDER

*Andrias davidianus*

a sad saurian druid in dun sand

GIANT PANDA

*Ailuropoda melanoleuca*

an orca-colored inland emperor;

a demure, docile dreamer,  
plump, pale, and round-eared



K O A L A

*Phascolarctos cinereus*

an Australian philosopher asleep in a tree,  
inconspicuous,  
as nonchalant as a narcoleptic housecat;

a cute, ash-pale scholar,  
patient, unostentatious,  
lost in introspection in a sunlit tropical silence;

a rustic senior senator,  
senescent, ursine,  
its suit a pastel iron hue;

an eccentric, taciturn countess, a plutocrat,  
laconic, oneiric,  
in an opiate stupor;

an enchanter in stasis

P L A T Y P U S

*Ornithorhynchus anatinus*

an uncanny autochthon;  
a cartoon curiosity as iconic as a unicorn

K A K A P O

*Strigops habroptilus*

a parrot that hops;  
a sluggish austral ruralist

H O A T Z I N

*Opisthocomus hoazin*

an uncommon, numinous topaz shaman;  
a cosmic phantasm as conspicuous as a sun at azimuth

COMMON SEADRAGON

*Phyllopteryx taeniolatus*

a stylish Australian astronaut;

an interplanetary explorer on a lush southern shoreline,  
ornate, ethereal, aureate, leisurely;

a lustrous lunar pixie

RUBY SEADRAGON

*Phyllopteryx dewysea*

a rare, otherworldly shepherdess as red as a red rose;

a pretty, astral telepath dressed as seaweed,  
she wordlessly explores the deep hydrosphere,  
shyly, royally,  
her odyssey as slow as a sea eddy;

a relaxed, roseate saltwater prophet

CHAMBERED NAUTILUS

*Nautilus pompilius*

a luminous illusion, it sails in a moonlit pool;

anomalous pilot,  
platinous automaton

PAINTED MANTIS SHRIMP

*Odontodactylus scyllarus*

a lustrous crystal astronaut on tan sand

SEA SWALLOW

*Glaucus atlanticus*

a stunning, unusual nautical slug sailing in a galactic saga

GLASS CATFISH

*Kryptopterus vitreolus*

elusive little silver sprite,  
sleek, illusory, restless,  
its veil spotless steel

X - R A Y F I S H

*Pristella maxillaris*

a petite, extraterrestrial maritime spirit,  
small, immaterial,  
as pale as a rare metal

C O C O N U T C R A B

*Birgus latro*

a big bug;  
a sailor, a tourist, a bulbous burglar;  
a stout, barbarous arborist

G R E E N S E A T U R T L E

*Chelonia mydas*

a cosmic helmsman on a solo oceanic odyssey;  
  
a solemn nomad in a celadon shell,  
aimless, aeonian,  
alone in manila sand on an idyllic island

L E A T H E R B A C K S E A T U R T L E

*Dermochelys coriacea*

a cosmic messiah,  
her licorice-colored armor as hard as a saddle,  
she sails a coral-riddled sea

COLOSSAL SQUID

*Mesonychoteuthis hamiltoni*

an immense inmate in a nautical asylum;

a listless thalassic titan,  
anonymous, antisocial,  
in a sunless ocean column;

an ominous hallucination,  
senescent, lonely, ashen, shy,  
its eyes luminous yet inhuman, almost soulless;

a silent, sinuate mutant

HUMPBACK ANGLERFISH

*Melanocetus johnsonii*

a hostile insomniac that casts a lethal luminance,  
at sail in a sunless sea as silent as the moon:

an ancient, unsentimental huntsman;  
a callous occultist as emotionless as jetsam;

an ominous illusion in a jet suit,  
antisocial, melancholic, mute;

a hellish thalassic hallucination

RED LIONFISH

*Pterois volitans*

an alien traveler lost in an eastern sea;

a rare siren, an evil apparition;  
a priestess in pristine rose stripes

GIANT OARFISH

*Regalecus glesne*

a recluse lunar angler;

a large, unusual eel,  
arcane,  
unseen,  
unreal



GIANT PACIFIC OCTOPUS

*Enteroctopus dofleini*

odd doctor, sinister sculptor;  
silent, doleful contortionist in deep plutonic pools

GOBLIN SHARK

*Mitsukurina owstoni*

a monstrous oarsman in twin masks, it swims in ominous murk;  
its kiss is an assassination

L I T T L E   P E N G U I N

*Eudyptula minor*

a dainty maritime parliamentarian,  
oiled, metalline,  
pale and lead-purple,  
prim in a tidal pool;

a mild-mannered lunar diplomat

E M P E R O R   P E N G U I N

*Aptenodytes forsteri*

a radiant professor on soft frost,  
intrepid, refined, and serene;  
a dapper seaside senator, first son of a rare dynasty

L E O P A R D   S E A L

*Hydrurga leptonyx*

an ungodly, gargantuan dagger-toothed predator,  
hungry, eternal, and deadly;

a legendary polar explorer

## A B O U T

*Zoolalia* is my love letter to the animal kingdom, a celebration of the strange beauty of the most vibrant life on earth. Each poem describes an animal using only the letters in its binomial name. These poems are lipograms: texts that avoid certain letters of the alphabet. Lipograms are an ancient phenomenon, having been published for at least 2500 years in a wide array of languages.

In modern times, lipograms have been championed by the Oulipo — the *Ouvroir de Littérature Potentielle*, or workroom of potential literature — whose writing is built around constraint and combinatorics. The Oulipo member Georges Perec published both *La Disparition* (1969), a novel which completely omits the letter E, and *Les Revenentes* (1970), a novella that allows no vowel except E.

As always, I owe a debt to Christian Bök, whose most well-known poetic work, *Eunoia* (2001), is a collection of univocalic lipograms: each chapter allows the use of only a single vowel. Like my previous collection, *Glossology*, *Zoolalia* is inspired by the first poem in Bök's *Crystallography* (1994), titled "Crystals," which defines the word *crystals* using only the seven letters C, R, Y, S, T, A, and L.

The collection as a whole is dedicated to my mom, who taught me the value of precise language. "Reindeer" is for Kristy Ferraro; "Walrus" is for Lydia Marik; "Osprey" is for David Allen and Jaclyn Janis; "Wood Mouse" is for Justine Kolata; "American Bumblebee" is for Benjamin Crowell; "Thomson's Gazelle" is for Dorcas Bouey; and "Common Seadragon" is for Emily Guyette.



