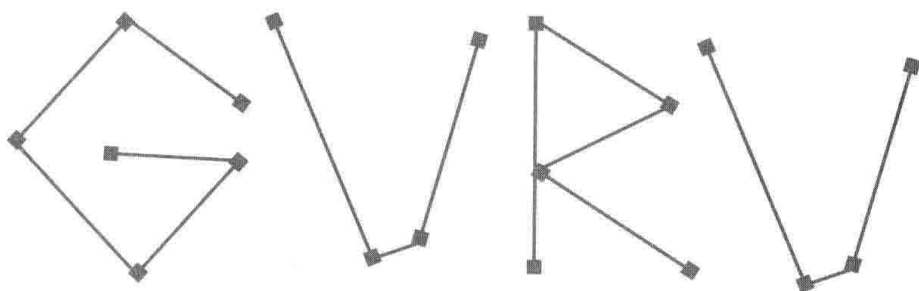
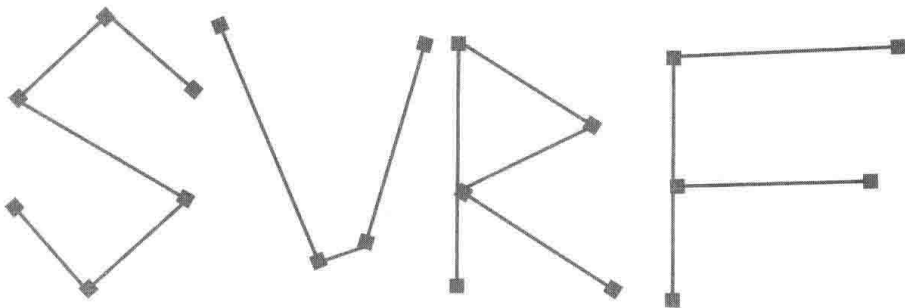


THE SURF  
GURU Stories

DOUG DORST author of *ALIVE IN NECROPOLIS*

*the*



*stories*

**DOUG DORST**



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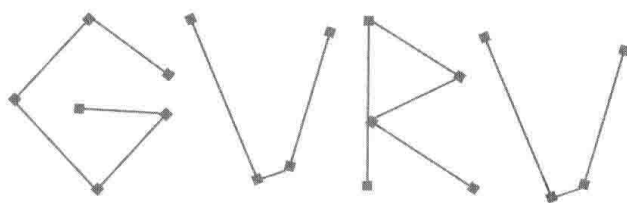
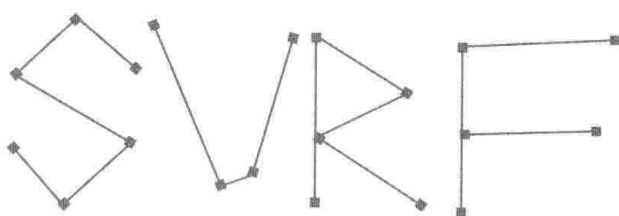
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*the*



ALSO BY DOUG DORST

*Alive in Necropolis*

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*For my family*

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# The Surf Guru



## Elements

The Surf Guru spends most of his time sitting expectantly on the redwood deck of his dull-green, two-story house atop the cliff at Padre Point, a favorite spot for surfers in the know. He watches the surfers and looks out at the ocean. He often sips Chianti as he watches and looks. Sometimes he nods off in the afternoon and only awakens late at night, when the ocean breeze tickles his nose with smoke from the bonfires below.

## His business

He owns a company that makes top-notch equipment for the well-prepared surfer as well as the casual beachgoer.

The name of the company is GOO-ROO, and it appears on surfboards, wetsuits, quick-release leashes, wax, baggy trunks, SPF-50+ waterproof sunblock, fashion eyewear, sport sandals, sneakers, sheepskin ComfyBoots, sarongs, rain gear, board racks, beach towels, fanny packs, umbrellas, neckties, EZ-rinse home hair-bleaching systems, shock- and pressure-resistant ISO-6425 chronographs, antibacterial towelettes, feature films, and dog food.

For years GOO-ROO has been at the forefront of beach technology. The Surf Guru innovates, quietly, as if he were dreaming, and then two MBAs, Chad and Olivia, bring his visions to the marketplace. Everyone who surfs at Padre Point wears GOO-ROO and rides GOO-ROO. Everyone except the red-haired boy.

## Power

Some say the Surf Guru controls the tides.

## The red-haired boy

At this very moment, sunset is approaching and the red-haired boy is surfing a three-foot swell. He rides a LoweRider board and wears a Pacific Skin wetsuit. Both of these items cost significantly less than their GOO-ROO equivalents.

The boy thinks his LoweRider board is more responsive than any GOO-ROO board he has ever tried. And unlike his old GOO-ROO wetsuit, the Pacific Skin model doesn't chafe him in the neck and crotch.

In the Surf Guru's eyes, the red-haired boy is not unlike someone who invites himself to dinner and then insults the cook.

## Competition

When LoweRider products first came on the market, the Surf Guru asked Olivia to invite Mr. Lowe to the dull-green house for lunch. He wanted to meet his competition.

"That's impossible," Olivia said. "There is no Mr. Lowe. He is a marketing fiction."

The Surf Guru poured some Chianti into a GOO-ROO coffee mug. "So many fictions," he said, sighing.

## The Surf Guru's wife, cinematically

He met his wife on the beach. He was surfing, trying out a board fitted with prototypes of the soon-to-be-famous GOO-ROO HydroRip fins. She was a sunburned art history and modern thought double-major looking for her car keys in the sand. He came out of the water and found her keys instantly, as if he could see things she couldn't. Six months later they were married.

After ten years she had had enough.

"You are so remote," she said.

"I am not remote."

"Then you are stoic."

"I am not stoic."

"You are no fun."

"The dog thinks I'm great fun."

"You are turgid," she said.

"That is an interesting word. The word *turgid* is itself quite turgid. It is very successful at being what it is."

"Unlike this marriage, which is not successful at being anything," she responded cinematically. She packed up all her things except for her GOO-ROO-branded apparel, which she cut into shreds with pinking shears and piled on the bed. She then took all the dog food in the house and dumped it on the front steps. These were symbolic actions, she said, and she hoped they would haunt him.

Stray dogs congregated in front of the house for weeks.

## Drainage, Part I

He watches the surfers every day, admiring their fluid recklessness, their joy and struggle, their twinned senses of community and territoriality. He pretends not to notice when they glance up at him with furtive reverence.

Some of them are kids, trying to catch a few good waves before or after school. Some are in their twenties, hoping for a breath of freedom before they head off to their jobs drafting contracts or designing urban drainage systems or selling fitness accessories. Some are older than the Surf Guru himself; they are gray-haired and leather-skinned, and they just stay all day.

Sometimes he feels as if he is watching over a nursery school, where children play duck-duck-goose and learn essential social skills. Then those children grow up and return with their own children, passing on the legacy of the waves.

## Credo

All the rivers run into the sea, yet the sea is not full; unto the place whence the rivers come, thither they return.

## Hats

He wears many hats, not altogether metaphorically. His favorites are the fez, the miter, and the mortarboard, but he has many others, from all corners of the globe. When he feels giddy (often, but not always, from too much Chianti), he opts for a hat with a plume—the puckish Tyrolean, perhaps, or the stately shako. When the aches in his fused vertebrae tell him a storm is coming, he dons the biretta, the hat of wariness and watchfulness.

## Drainage, Part II

Chad and Olivia bring him a financial report every Wednesday. The report tells him how much they've spent on manufacturing and promotions, how much has been bled out by his ex-wife and the attorneys, how much he's lost in the latest Wall Street panic, how much he's shrewdly invested in livestock farms and vacation properties he will never use. Included under the heading "Personal Consumption" is the money spent on Chianti, microwavable vegetarian entrees, and hats.

Each week he pretends to read the report carefully. When Chad and Olivia leave, he tells the dog, "It is essential that they believe I care deeply. This is how the world works."

## Fetching, Part I

The dog is uncannily—perhaps miraculously—skilled at fetching.

They share a small but important ritual: The Surf Guru throws a tennis ball off the deck of the dull-green house into the ocean, and the dog scampers away and returns with the ball in under three minutes. Every time. Over and over. “Faster than you can boil an egg,” he once boasted to his wife. “Boil your own goddamned eggs,” she replied.

## Neap tide

The red-haired boy, frustrated by the calm surf, slaps the water with an open palm, demanding one good set before he calls it a day. Moments later, as the sun nicks the horizon, a head-high wave rises from nowhere. He positions himself expertly, catches it. He drives down the line into a heavy roundhouse cutback, then glides through a string of graceful turns in the pocket.

The Surf Guru applauds, quietly, with his fingertips.

## Fear (the largest eyes of all)

Sharks rarely venture into the bay. They prefer the darker, bruise-blue waters off the coast, where fear is easier to come by.

## Bobby Cordero is molting

*Three years ago:* It is a cold, rainy morning, just past dawn, and Bobby Cordero, a regular, has Padre Point to himself. Even the Surf Guru is gone, convinced by Chad to make a rare promotional appearance at the GOO-ROO Aloha Cup at Waimea.

The wind is up and the waves are big. Bobby needs to clear his head, and this is the way to do it. He rides double overheads for an hour and feels his spirit rise up and dance a rumba with the sea. He is oblivious to his hangover, to the rent he can't pay, to all those accusations of squandered potential, to the green-eyed girl who won't return his calls. He is also oblivious to the fin rising and falling in the surf behind him.

Bobby catches a set wave, but drops into it too late. He manages to carve off the bottom into a floater, then elevator-drops and loses his balance; he pitches into the water and is driven face-first into the sand. There is a slash of pain in his ankle, then a wrenching tug. Then fire in his legs and side, a glimpse of thrashing gray and a flat black eye, a strange warmth bathing his body. A crushing blow to his chest that squeezes the air out of him, and with that a mysterious clarity: he remembers that he should yank on the shark's gill slits, a trick he learned from the *GOO-ROO Surfer's Survival Guide*. He grabs and yanks, loses hold, grabs and yanks again.

Then he finds himself on the beach inside a ring of wide-eyed, shrieking people, and he calmly, sleepily stares at the cuff still fastened around his ankle, at the rubber cord

that trails from it, at the clean slice where the leash was bitten through.

In the hospital, they have to cut open his GOO-ROO wetsuit. They try to sew him up, but Bobby has lost too much blood, and he dies on the table amid rags of black neoprene. One doctor tells the local news it looked as if poor Bobby was molting.

The Surf Guru returns to Padre Point immediately and arranges a ceremony for Sunday afternoon. He spends thousands of dollars on flowers—hyacinths, lilacs, and mums. With a single phone call to the city council, he has the road that runs along the cliff closed for the day. Everyone comes. Some weep. Some vow revenge against all things selachian. Some throw flowers off the cliff. Some of the flowers fall into the water; some come to rest on the cliff side.

The Surf Guru watches the ceremony from his deck. He wears the Greek fisherman's cap, the hat of sorrow and solitude.

## Survival of the fittest

The *GOO-ROO Surfer's Survival Guide*, priced at \$16.95, is also available with the Surf Guru's autograph on the inside front cover for \$19.95. Even though the autographed version has sold 750,000 units, only three purchasers have complained in writing that the autograph looks suspiciously like a dog's paw print.

The red-haired boy does not own the *Survival Guide*, but he knows that if a shark ever attacks him, he should yank on its gill slits. "It's intuitive," he says.



## The Surf Guru, upon rising this morning

Surfers fill the bay. A hundred GOO-ROO boards twinkling. A hundred black wetsuits with GOO-ROO stamped in screaming green across the chest. It is an ordinary sight, but today he is taken aback. So many pieces of himself, spread across the water, carried by the waves like so much flotsam.

He eats a big breakfast. He worries that he has been losing weight.

## (For a poodle, maybe)

The Surf Guru's wife once bought a cable-knit doggie sweater at a church craft fair, but the dog bit her when she tried to force its legs into the sleeves.

Later, he and the dog played fetch with the sweater until it fell apart. From inside the house, she watched them with mercury eyes.

## Two voices, Room 613, the Empyrean Hotel & Casino, Reno

— We shouldn't do this.

— *I'm not his wife anymore. Legally or otherwise.*

— That is an excellent point. Still, it doesn't feel right; he trusts me.

— *You deny yourself. Everyone around him does.*

— I don't understand.

— *Is that really all you want? To be his lackey? That's your destiny? Your dharma? Your raison d'être?*