



# Sky Saw

*Blake Butler*

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## Sky Saw Blake Butler

*I could go on at what these days were but the truth is I am tired. Would you even believe me if I did or didn't? Could this paper touch your face? I've spent enough years with my face arranged in books. I've read enough to crush my sternum. In each of the books are people talking, saying the same thing, their tongues thin and white and speckled.*

*I don't want to be here. I want to get older. I want to see my skin go folding over.*

*Someday I plan to die.*

Books that reappear when you destroy them, lampshades made of skin, people named with numbers and who can't recall each other, a Universal Ceiling constructed by an otherwise faceless authority, a stairwell stuffed with birds: the terrain and populace of *Sky Saw* is packed with stroboscopic memory mirage. In dynamic sentences and image, Blake Butler crafts a post-Lynchian nightmare where space and family have deformed, leaving the human persons left in the strange wake to struggle after the shapes of both what they loved and who they were.

## Sky Saw Details

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Author : Blake Butler

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# From Reader Review Sky Saw for online ebook

## Brooks says

I started reading Blake's latest the way I started with only two other books: *The Double* by Saramago and *Libra* by DeLillo. Not because of similar styles or content (though someone might be able to find affinities if they looked), but because it felt necessary and rewarding to pay very close attention. I started reading these books factorially, as in: I read section 1, reread section 1 and added section 2, read 1-3, read 1-4, read 1-5, etc. In using this method there comes a point though, as you might guess, where the stimulation is almost TOO MUCH, and you basically have no choice but to BLAST through the rest of it.

*Sky Saw* seems to interact with *There Is No Year* in interesting ways, yet is clearly its own object. The lists are amazing. It seems more overtly self-referential in places, with lines like "I would feel okay if you did not turn the page" and "Right now I can remember I am the father in this book." The numbering of characters worked for me; placing the numbers of Persons 1180 and 811 together yields 1180811, to make one small observation. There are any number of choice phrasings I could quote, like "a billion bodies lost and rotting," "further reams of film frames spooled in congregation," "black cracking igloos of birth pellets," and a man getting "upholstered with new skin and hair."

Along with the self-referential aspect (occasional, not overwhelming) *Sky Saw* seems to move in very specific ways and contain weavings of multiple voices. There is also, though using this word feels somehow wrong, certain brief dippings into a "fanciful" mode, e.g. "a swan, a goose, a chicken--all of them pecking at my head from the inside."

*Sky Saw* contains 2D lard, hidden tracks, representation vs. the real, an acid called ideas, multiplicities, a certain kind of breakfast cereal, mobile houses, stagnant bodies, and the feeling of teetering on the edge of finding something--what else is there?

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## Michael Seidlinger says

Perforate through the light and look into the disgust contained between the covers:

We see a child's veins bloat and stiffen; a war on war itself, anything to be battled made to be already fought; a city where ex-felons are punished by being forced to share their own blood; a woman giving birth dozens and dozens of times, the result of each child being less important than the birth itself; a man that has visited every single house and stolen one important thing; a Cone that isn't a cone at all but rather something sinister, something sincere, the passage of time, aging; replications of the same likeness, plenty of numbers; a woman picking through a wound only to open a new realm; children inside of children; men inside of men; woman again and again fraught with affliction.

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## Ashley Crawford says

Readers who know anything of Blake Butler will already know that he literally doesn't sleep. Instead he writes and he writes with an insomniac fury. He launched onto the scene in 2009 with the all-too-brief darkly

dystopic Scorch Atlas. That same year he produced, *Ever*, a slightly less successful novella. In 2011 he hit us with the utterly brilliant *There Is No Year: A Novel* ([www.21cmagazine.com/Blake-Butler-No-Y...](http://www.21cmagazine.com/Blake-Butler-No-Y...)) and the bizarre self-portrait *Nothing: A Portrait of Insomnia*. 2012 saw the release of the strange little tome executed with Sean Kilpatrick, *Anatomy Courses* and what is arguably, along with *There Is No Year*, his tour de force thus far: *Sky Saw*. Alongside this outpouring he has also maintained one of the most interesting alt literary sites on-line: *HTML Giant*. As mentioned, the man doesn't sleep.

*Atlas*, *No Year* and *Sky Saw* read almost as a linked trilogy depicting a world of madness that rivals anything that William S. Burroughs ever penned. *No Year* garnered comparisons with Ben Marcus brilliant *The Father Costume* (the books appeared within a year of each other) with Marcus proclaiming: "Blake Butler, mastermind and visionary, has sneaked up and drugged the American novel. What stumbles awake in the aftermath is feral and awesome in its power, a fairy tale of an ordinary family subjected to the strange, lonesome agony known as daily life. *There Is No Year* is a merciless novel cleansed of joy, pumped full of fear and awe."

Indeed, if that's your kind of thing, *Sky Saw* takes it a few damn steps further. Just prior to *Sky Saw*, I finished reading *Extreme Metaphors*, the collected interviews with J.G. Ballard. It seems all too easy to forget what a searing impact JGB made with both *Atrocity Exhibition* and *Crash*. Throughout, Ballard makes reference to his admiration for the ground-breaking approach also taken by William S. Burroughs, who also, of course, shattered a few boundaries. But then literature in general seemed to slink back into a safe hole a la the likes of Tom Wolfe and Jonathan Franzen. But during the last decade there seems to be a resurgence of experimentation with such writers as Grace Krilanovich, Steve Erickson, Matthew Derby, Brian Evenson, Brian Conn, Matt Derby, Ryan Boudinot, Joshua Cohen and Mark Z. Danielewski, amongst others pushing the envelope.

Like Butler's previous book, *There Is No Year*, *Sky Saw* is essentially narrative in structure but veers strongly into new waters via both pure language mutation and a powerful sense of visceral Surrealism. I'll digress for the moment and recall the works of a number of precedents; Lautreamont's *Maldoror*, Djuna Barnes' *Nightwood*, Lawrence Durrell's *The Black Book*, Bataille, Cocteau, Giorgio de Chirico's *Hebdomeros*, Henry Miller, M. Ageyev's *Novel With Cocaine*, Sacher-Masoch, Strindberg's, *Inferno / From an Occult Diary* to attempt to give this book a safe(ish) nest or context.

There was one point in *Sky Saw* where I couldn't help think of a zombie orgy: "...he saw among the heavy glow how all the space was stuffed with sleeping people, their mottled bodies packed in naked, flesh to flesh conformed and still conforming. Many of them had no faces. Many others had no heads. Even those that did seemed to blur where they were built, their features changing in floods of color and old mud." And elsewhere: "bodies full of sick sound noise and vomit, aching blistered, bumpy, long. The sludge was full of men and they were full of sludge."

And then there are the parasitical horrors: "The men burst men each from their seams, leaking others of them from the holes they carried."

The numerization of individuals – especially the central characters; the father Person 811 and the mother 1180 – whilst perhaps not the most original concept, remains chilling. One recalls Kafka and Orwell, especially in the sense of there being a totalitarian bureaucracy behind the scenes: "in his memory the state said to have erected around each and every neat locale, and were claimed to have caught the brunt of the crap and cancers and what all else some god had dreamed to wear their lives—the state's voice the only clear one through and through him, ordering his veins,"

In all, a terrifying book. A nightmare that rings of horrific truth.

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### **Edward Rathke says**

Thought about giving this two stars because the writing's pretty interesting and the intense body sensations of his prose are top notch, but, I mean, how much does that matter when it's so hollow?

Comparisons to Burroughs are sort of strange and bewildering. Burroughs was a cultural, social, and political critic who was hilarious while being shocking and innovative and playfully inventive. This is none of those things. It's prose, disjointed and cacophonous and sometimes interesting, but with nothing underneath it. It's simply prose. It's writing. This is sort of like the body horror of Cronenberg mixed with the repulsive strangeness of early Lynch but with nothing else there. Only the horror, the otherness

The only other book by Butler I've read was Scorch Atlas, which I enjoyed a great deal. It was intensely peculiar and the prose was similar to Sky Saw, but more directed towards a goal, less disjointed. Scorch Atlas was a vivid and grotesque read that made me want more and more, while Sky Saw quickly became boring and tedious with its repetitions of the weird and disgusting.

I can't recommend this. It's just empty. I can't think of anything worse than this emptiness, to be honest. At least a lot of bad books have emotion or some kind of core, but this is just sort of nothing. It's words.

Without a doubt, the most disappointing and worst thing I've read all year.

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### **Derek says**

creative engagement with it here: [http://www.5cense.com/13/artchival\\_ma...](http://www.5cense.com/13/artchival_ma...)

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### **Melissa says**

SKY SAW magnificently contends with the mystery of being alive and how we are expected to stay alive in the weirdness and do or build something with it, despite not knowing what or why. It's a book of survival, but more than that it's a book of our simultaneous sameness and strangeness--how even though we are all the same atoms, bound by blood or meat or rings, we can never fully get inside each other. Not totally. This book feels very fucking true.

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### **M. Sarki says**

<http://msarki.tumblr.com/post/7145309...>

I can't even honestly say the book was OK (two stars) as I really did not like it much after the first forty pages or so. There are actually no spoilers in the review linked to above, and really it is quite impossible to

provide with a work of this nature anyway. I tried hard to give this novel a good going over as it was my first venture into the work of Blake Butler, but it was just not my cup of tea. In that link above this text I explain in full my reasons why.

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## **James says**

I think I would say that this is the weakest of Blake Butler's books. It seemed very unfocused and uninspired to me, and lacking in the structure/purpose one can find in his longer books. It really is one of those books where the description on the back cover is more interesting than the text itself: I got the impression it was going to be a sort of Burroughsian bad acid trip sci-fi dystopia sort of thing, but it wasn't like that at all (if only!). Instead, once again we have a weird haunted house with mirrors that do weird things to people who look into them (just like in "There Is No Year," and this isn't the last time Butler explored this trope as he did it again in "300,000,000," though to better effect). Once again we have a "narrative" revolving around three people: a mother, a father, and a child (again, just like in "There Is No Year"). At least this time Blake gave them names (of a sort), but I find it's hard to exert a great deal of care for characters with names like "Person 1180." Indeed, all the "characters" (if they can even be called that) are essentially bloodless abstractions. I don't feel like Blake cared all that much about them, so why should I? (This is a problem I have with some of Samuel Beckett's work, incidentally). Every now and then Butler conjures an evocative image or a poetic turn of phrase, but it just doesn't add up to all that much.

Ah well, at least the cover art is pretty cool. And one can get unintentional pleasure from reading the wildly breathless/pretentious/over-the-top/hyperbolic blurbs on the back and inside cover: I think my favorites were "As if Gertrude Stein wrote the script for a Kenneth Anger film set inside of a Norman Rockwell painting to be produced for YouTube with a John Cage soundtrack" and "Think David Lynch. In the waking dreamscape where Butler's thoughts spin out of control, he could be De Quincy's opium-eater wandering through a Dali painting by way of a poem by Antonin Artaud."

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## **J.A. says**

"I panicked at the opening pages of *Sky Saw* (Tyrant Books / Dec. 2012), which are filled with this dense, complicated language, fearing Blake Butler would hold me hostage for the novel's duration in a swamp of unclarified narrative, a poetic mire that, while beautiful in its bruising, wouldn't lead me forward through a story. But then *Sky Saw* opened like the mold-blooms of his previous works, and there was a narrative to wrap my eyes around, and the book held me captive in a completely different way."

Read the full review at The Nervous Breakdown: <http://www.thenervousbreakdown.com/ty...>

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## **Mel Bosworth says**

It's a skin sausage stuffed with language in your father's bloody bathtub by ten headless men. It's frothy color spun at your eyes. It's a wild ride for sure, and as soon as you attempt to assign clot to anything you fall off the painted pony. So don't do that. Just spurt, yo. Spurt and air and cream. Maybe smear. It'll come to

you. It's all there, and it eases you off the milk slide and into your meat chair. It's true. It just happened to me.

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## **Sheldon Compton says**

- Review first appeared at Heavy Feather Review

In Blake Butler's lyrically imagined new novel, *Sky Saw*, due out in December from Tyrant Books, you'll find the his name spelled Blk Btlr on the cover and on each page.

Yes. It's like that.

I toyed with the idea of writing this review without vowels. But I was concerned some might have a problem fully understanding whatever I may have to say of interest on the subject.

Nd 'd sr ht t d tht.

See?

Much like those first exposed to the Beats, there will be folks, including writers, who will not find the ability to see themselves either within the worlds created in such works or envision themselves writing something similar. At such a time, the writer, in my case, must simply view the work for what it was intended to be and not in light of how I, or anyone else, may have approached it.

The author of four prior books—*Ever*, *Scorch Atlas*, *There Is No Year* and *Nothing: A Portrait of Insomnia*—Butler has said in at least one interview this newest book was written in approximately one month.

That said, a few points are worth mentioning early on. Lyrically, it is stunning. For its type, experimental, it is ambitious (though Butler maintains the story is traditional). Any work of more than 200 pages written in such a short timeframe is impressive. However, there were times when though lyrical, ambitious or impressive, the work began to take on the feel of that strange phrase some critic in a moment of struggling must have conjured up—purples prose.

In a fictive world where at any moment rooms can become liquid, humans have lost names or memories of names and are now numbers handed out by a faceless "state" and men live within men for thirty-seven years, Butler invents new ways to present images in nearly every sentence. Where a great deal of everything is dependent upon the never truly revealed "Cone" and a woman is made of glass here and then reduced to puddles beneath her tombstone there and words are writ in the sky and doppelgangers abound, the young and wildly popular Butler seems to look at freshness in language and smile the smile of one with a secret, then proceeds to show readers how fresh and different and beautifully strange three or twelve words in combination can become, such as the following passage:

And still I could not stand beside you in the color of the cone, for each inch of me that wanted and would be cleaning there was ten feet of me that stunk, each rung of each of these connected more rungs in a cribbage system I could by no length of me infer, I did not have the body, no mind, nothing left on which to brand,

suddenly I was wearing all these bracelets and these groancrowns and I was looking down upon the earth, the legions of pixel bodies screaming underneath me and raising with their hands, the curdlife in their eyes forming diagonals that split each into new soil, blood encrusted, cowing, bigger babies squirming in their tendons to get out of their whole heads and making war from underneath, bruises formed in trombone to regale me with acid squench...

Some have called me a Southern storyteller, and it's a pegging I'm fine to have tossed across my shoulder. But, this mentioned, I cannot propose to fully see the entire traditional story Butler says has laid out in this new book. Instead, I immersed myself in the language and evidence of the enviable talent displayed at such a consistently effective level throughout the full-length work.

In an attempt to give a brief glimpse into Butler's most recent imagined world, it seems the all-powerful "Cone" holds tightly to the survivors living in this illusionary world in which Person 1180, a birth-giving machine of a mother bringing into the tortured world a great number of failed children while Person 811, the father, twists and turns inside a house wrapped in one huge acid blotter and filled with other fathers and men upon men. The house in this way becomes a character, an antagonist in and of itself. The theme of rooms and homes taking on as much importance as characters in Butler's work has now become a staple of his work.

But it was the language that kept me turning pages while others, in private blog reviews here and there online, said the "fattened prose" became a burden or a bore. I felt much like Nabokov while teaching (though it's generally accepted he was not the best instructor) telling his students he cared little about their stories, their plots, he only cared about the language.

Such endurance of talent across a full work brings to mind the effort Pound may have been immersed in while penning his Cantos, the obsessive and immediate spilling of words in perfect combination. I think of Eliot and his Wasteland, Joyce and his wake of Finnegans. Fine company, no doubt, I would suppose.

The book has already snatched up a starred review in Publisher's Weekly, considered a favorable one at this point, but which says essentially the already established fan-base Butler has enjoyed since his first published works would likely find themselves in a comfortable and satisfying place with Sky Saw. Then, almost as an afterthought, saying for those hoping to dive into Butler's work this latest novel could be a good starting point.

I would kindly disagree. Readers seeking an introduction to Butler would do well to read first Scorch Atlas. Because for all his talent, and for all he and others working on the front lines of the crew of folks hoping to usher in a new and brave way of sharing their worlds on the page, Scorch Atlas is a fine work with just enough of the hallucinatory and just enough familiar structure to work as a primer, if I should be so bold as to suggest one would be needed.

No need in jumping too far ahead with a writer such as Butler only to discard him before seeing what came before, likewise denying themselves the pleasure of anticipating what is sure to be another solid work from a writer with the obsession, talent and courage needed to build new monuments to honor the written word no matter the risk.

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## **Robert Kloss says**

Whenever you get down about things like TV celebrities getting \$4,000,000 advances or fan fiction authors



outselling... everything with their soft-core pornography, remember that Blake Butler exists, and that he wrote this book.

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### **Nate D says**

Open to a random page and you may read:

Through the wall he saw a child--someone standing just outside the plastic skewed with eyes as large as fifty fathers--eyes that grew into other space--rooms where he could see people he knew and had known, growing, eating, making fuck. He felt his body try to shout out through the pane to make it open, to thread himself into this once familiar air, but then the holes making the child's eyes had blinked and fleshed an moved away. In the place his voice had been inside him, then the water moved to fill his skin.

Which to say that it's all beautiful and weird and jarring. And as with a lot of Blake Butler that I've loved in the past beyond the derangement of language are underpinnings of recognizable loss and sorrow: this is essentially the story of a broken home, with that usual metaphorical sense of "broken home" being overwhelmed by the literal and phantasmagorically bizarre. It's the story of a mother-father-child trinity lacking an essential part, the weight of that absence, and of a seeking. This could be a little like *There Is No Year*, another story of rotted and collapsing family home, except whereas that and *Scorch Atlas* are set in a world (apparently) teetering on the brink of total disaster, the initial setting of *Sky Saw* appears to be post-obliteration, in an ill-resolved totalitarian horror-world. Hints of this thread are eventually submerged in the increasingly abstract personal, but they're there, you can't entirely put this down to freakish expression of more familiar, as there is clearly something deeply unfamiliar about this world. So unfamiliar that, flirting as always with the line of overwhelm, this occasionally beats down the senses into a raw image bleed without beginning or end.

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### **Dustin Reade says**

Language-wise, this is a great book. But the endless depression and heavy tone really wears on you after a while. The language, also, leaves you questioning what the hell is going on at times. The whole thing reads like a dream, with a lot of interesting ideas that, unfortunately, don't really seem to matter much. THings happen, people are barely involved, then another thing happens. It is a laundry list of horrible occurrences involving three people that are barely alive to begin with wandering around as if in a daze, half-aware of the horrible things happening around them. were it not for the descriptions and poetics, this book wouldnt have held my attention for more than thirty pages or so.

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### **Jos says**

sky saw is a book, at times, that approaches such concreteness i became certain i could disagree with it.

in the imagination of the work we encounter all the usual images conflated with ugliness--sexlessness and labia and fat, i.e. in the semiotics of the book, in its attempt to appear threatening to the reader, draws upon sexism, transphobia, fat shaming, etc, which simply reproduces and extends the threat those who are always threatened face. here is a book too boring in imagination to engage the politics of disgust it seems to speak.

but oh god it was difficult not to be seduced by the prose. oh god oh god. i hate myself for being seduced but i was seduced and i read. oh god i read.

somewhere the passion according to gh sexes david cronenberg and out of the head of it comes a child whose entire worldview consists of reruns of ren and stimpy. this book is a possible creation that child may, after a deep love affair and rejection of the work of bukowski, could come to write.

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