**Mouth of River, Jaw of Flame**

Gaven Wallace

Burning straw flares with crisping flagrance—natural violence. A jaw of flame is opening wide.

The mouth of the river that runs through the forest boils. Underneath the raving surface, schools of migrating salmon scatter, rush in current, leaving their now-coddled eggs upstream. The further they travel, the more seasoned the water. A kiss of ocean salt chaps their lips, a blackening of sweet pine-pepper cakes their slimy scales, slowly smoking their gills in a sauna of bubbling mud. The water stews, stirred with the wooden handles of falling branches.

A few salmon, to escape the heat, trash to shore and writhe within sand. Breaded with sediment, the salmon are flipped twice and fried, thirty seconds on each side. The forest is drooling; melting pools of amber are dripping down shafts of bark, deposits of perspiration puddle at their bases, pouring from the reserves of now-dehydrated pines. Salmon are slapped on their sides. Unblinking eyes garnished with thistle follow the forest’s burning tongues.