A TALE OF TWO VACUUMS
(WITH APOLOGIES TO CHARLES DICKINS)
by: Richard McIlravy-Ackert

It has often been said that Nature abhors a vacuum. Until about 5 years ago, I would have treated this statement as so much ethereal mumbo-jumbo. How can Nature abhor a vacuum, when space is a vacuum? We are surrounded by vacuums of various sorts, and therefore this statement’s relevance eluded me. That is, until I bought a Dirt Devil Vacuum for my apartment. In the space of three days, I went from a nascent marveler at the depth of a philosopher’s statement, to a full-blown, rabid proponent of his observation. Not only did Nature abhor a vacuum, now, so did I. Not all vacuums, mind you, but one in particular.

To begin with, I must admit that I did not place a great deal of stock in the advertising I had seen regarding vacuum cleaners. For example, at the time, Mr. David Oreck was just beginning the endless touting of his “amazing hotel upright, the Oreck XL...” I heard ads about the powerful suction one might expect, and observed a seemingly incapable miniscule vacuum picking up a bowling ball. I thought this demonstration to be somewhat obscure, however, as no matter how hard I looked, I just didn’t seem to have an abundance of loose bowling balls laying around my apartment. What I did have was an abundance of normal household dirt, dust bunnies, Dorito fragments, and assorted cat hair. Faced with the challenge of ridding my apartment of these nuisances, and having just suffered through the demise of my fantastically-expensive Electrolux, off I went to my local discount store to find a suitable, albeit less-expensive, replacement. “Ahh,” I mused, “here is a Dirt Devil upright at a fraction of the price I previously paid. Surely, this marvel will do all I need it to do, and I can take the money I save and purchase more Doritos.” The Dirt Devil proclaimed it was durable, easy to use, efficient, and of course, it was made by “Dirt Devil” so it had to be good. The model in the store seemed easy enough to maneuver across the tile floor, and since there was no outlet easily accessible, I also assumed the Dirt Devil was a reasonably quiet cleaning instrument. I eagerly went to the check-out with my new vacuum, parted with my $100, and strutted to my car, pleased with the money I had saved and with the imagined soon-to-be spotless condition of my apartment. This is where the dream fell apart.

When I removed my Dirt Devil from the carton, I noticed it was in several pieces, and that I had to put it together. Somehow, this fact was overlooked as I held a box one-third the size of the floor model while in the store. Undaunted by such a trivial matter, I launched into assembly mode and soon had my Dirt Devil completed and ready to do battle with those dust bunnies. Not so fast. When the machine was turned on, my cats unanimously leapt from their dead sleeps and clung to whatever was at least three feet off the floor. The panic-stricken look in their eyes was rivaled only by my own look of disbelief. Initially I thought an F-16 Jet Fighter had landed in my living room. Actually, the F-16 would have been quieter. This vacuum was so loud, I couldn’t even hear myself yelling my own incredulity.

Then, exuberance overtook rational thinking and I tried to vacuum the carpet. After just two passes over a corner of the rug, smoke began to rise from my Dirt Devil, and I heard a snap. As I moved the vacuum forward, I saw the drive belt lying on top of the dirt I was attempting to suck up. So much for the beater bar functioning, at least for tonight. By now, the store would be closed and my dirt secure for another night. After replacing the belt the next day, I once again attempted rudimentary vacuuming, only to discover the suction was far less than the noise level promised, and the bulky vacuum head wouldn’t fit under most of my furniture. I expected this thing to suck the carpeting right off the floor. Instead, it merely flicked the dirt from one part of the carpeting to another. Perhaps something was stuck inside, I reasoned. Perhaps I should empty the bag-less dirt collector. Now, whoever convinced the chief engineers at Dirt Devil to go along with this idea should be selling ice cubes to Eskimos. When you attempt to empty the dirt collector, you must first remove the permanent filter, which in turn, re-introduces the dirt to the environment you are trying to clean. Changing the oil on your car while it is still running would be easier.

On the third day, I vacuumed a little too close to the
wall and the cord winder broke off. My wife was forced to turn the room lights on and off to get my attention while the vacuum was running. My cats had turned my drapes to strips of similarly-colored material hanging around my windows.

That was enough for me. I returned the Dirt Devil and carefully considered my options. Buying $100 worth of Scotch had it’s merits, but in the end, I opted for another vacuum. After all, the Dorito fragments were piling up. Scanning over the available choices, I noticed many vacuums had “viscious” names, violent monikers. “Dust Buster.” “Grime Grabber.” “Scum Sweeper.” Was I purchasing a vacuum, or a death ray for germs? My eyes settled on a rather nondescript black and white carton. A sensible name promised sensible results: The G.E. Canister Vacuum.

My second selection turned out to be everything my Dirt Devil was not. My G.E. canister vacuum offered a quiet motor with plenty of suction in place of the ear-splitting cacophony offered by the Dirt Devil. The G.E. featured an easier to maneuver power nozzle that fit under most of my furniture, places the Dirt Devil had only dreamed of going. In addition, my G.E. vacuum has a wonderfully efficient cord Rewinder (which to date, hasn’t broken off), a disposable bag that collects the dirt and keeps it contained, and a drive belt that handles my carpet with ease. It was as if someone watched over my shoulder, observed all the problems I faced with the Dirt Devil, then engineered and manufactured a solution to each problem and embodied them in the G.E. vacuum. It’s been three years since I made the switch from the Dirt Devil to the G.E., and I am delighted with its performance, value and durability.

In the world of dirt and grime, “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness...” Care for a Dorito?

I am academic royalty. I notice the outline of a door or window, perhaps previously used but now boarded and blended into the wall as inconspicuously as possible.

Around the angular room are fleeting glimpses of light from half covered windows, lending brief flashes of reality to a room that looks removed and distant. Papers and random electronics create entropy around the edges.

There is a soundtrack of hands brushing against paper while pens and pencils spill words.

A symphony of human bodies accompanies the stifling warmth of this place and the faded anxiety of my soul. I find relief in the scent of cheap perfume and musty, sedentary air.

The shadowy colors meet around me; the tiles of the

The Desert

by: Nicole Hanus

The desert air circulates humid light;
Dreary death of life in the warm climate.
Road signs signal uncertainty of a pleasant night,
All good that was is now a disastrous sight.
Caution is gone when frailty elapses,
Dust settles around by the setting sun,
Leading hopes into the darkening light passes,
Never knowing which road will lead to someone.
Leaving will not return me to normalcy,
Life will never return to its past state,
Life will keep moving forward slowly;
Painfully prodding to keep me awake.
Every corner dawns the light of the old,
Every corner fresh blood will travel this road.

A Sense Of Self

by: Hilarie M. Dahl

They are tiramisu walls that surround me, creamy and lightly textured.
I am guarded by a sentinel of computers posted on pale, average tables as though