

Eldorado

TOBIAS TYCHO SCHALKEN

“From teenage angst to poetry, from artistic slapstick to bitter jokes about human naivety, *Eldorado* has it all.”

Nederlands Letterenfonds

“[Tobias Schalken] has a unique and diverse voice. His organic dialogues have sharp timing.”

9E Kunst

Ten years after *Island* (5 parts), Schalken makes his comic-comeback with **Eldorado**. The contents of this graphic novel range from apocalyptic short stories, to delicate coming-of-age chronicles, to free work. Besides graphic and narrative experiments, *Eldorado* also offers longer stories with text, in which he proves himself a sensitive observer and an acute narrator.

Tobias Tycho Schalken (b. 1972) is a versatile artist. In addition to sculptures, paintings, installations and illustrations, he has been drawing comics for more than twenty years. Together with Stefan van Dinther, he created the innovative comic anthology Eiland (Island), which caught the attention of Wired Magazine and brought the duo international acclaim. Solo, Schalken has published Balthazar, but most of his comic strips to date have appeared in Eiland and in international anthologies such as Lapin or Kramers Ergot.

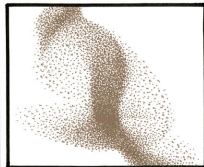
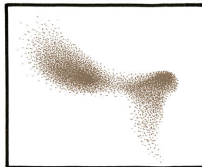
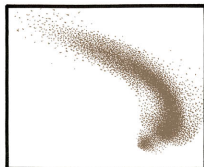


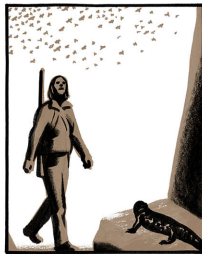
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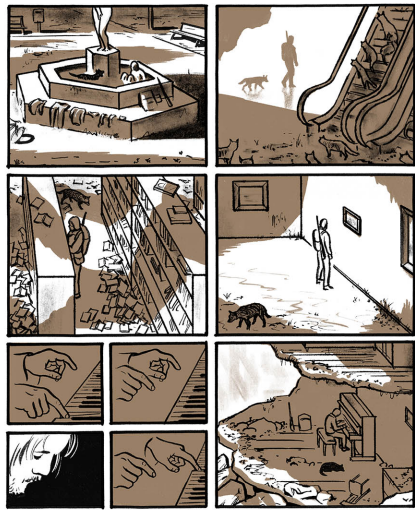
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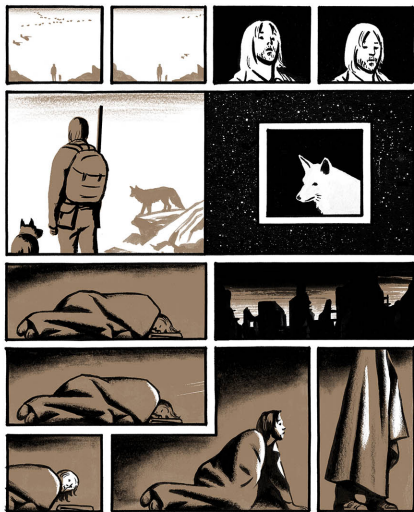


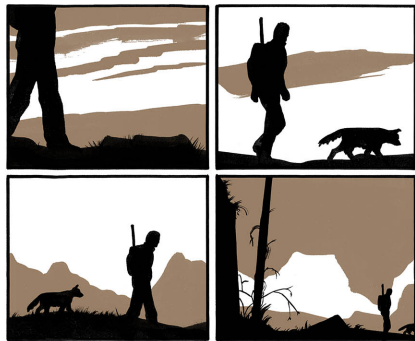






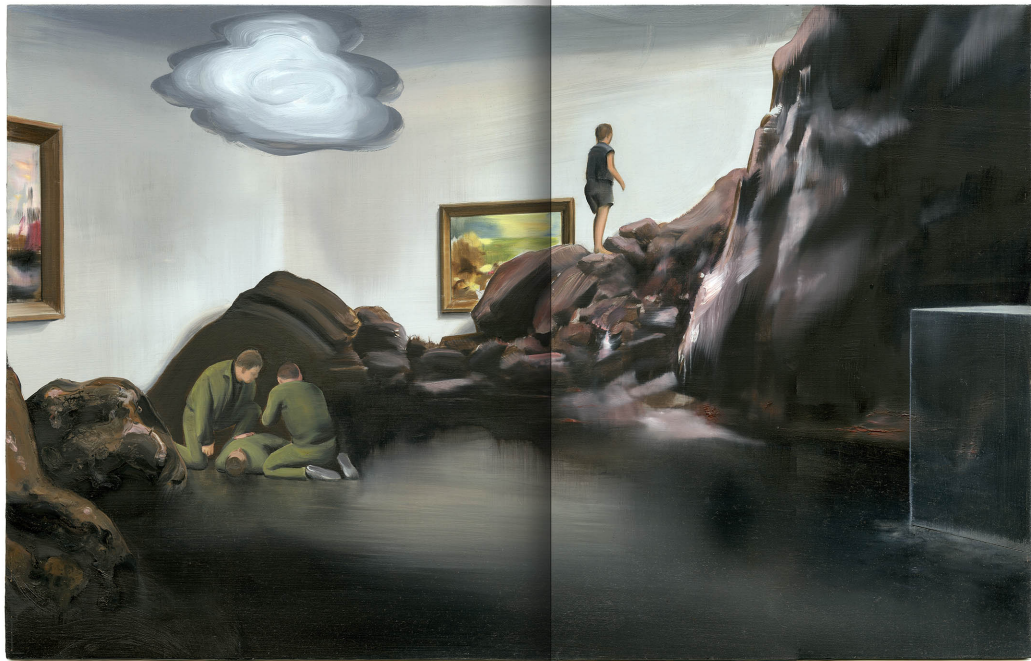




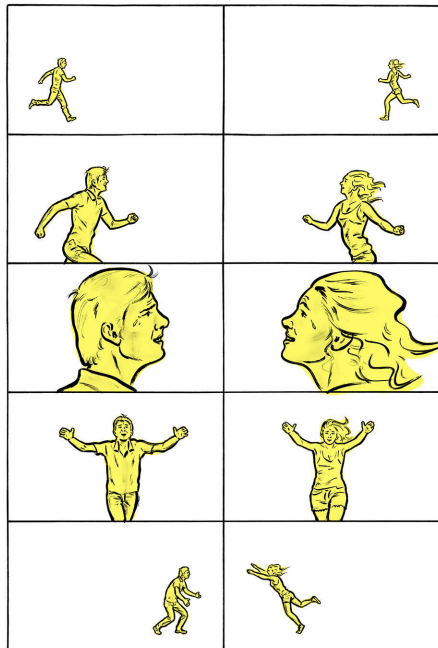


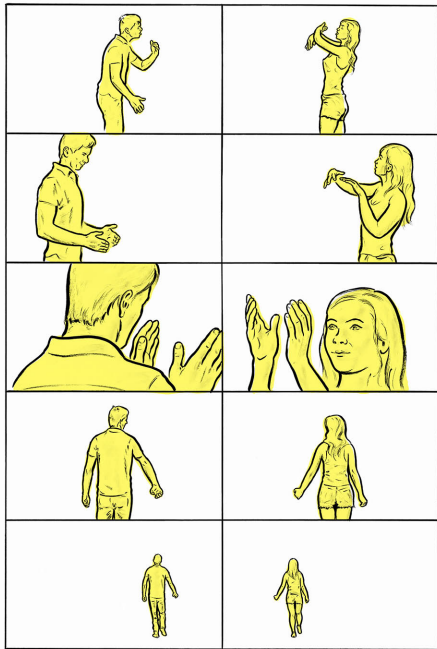
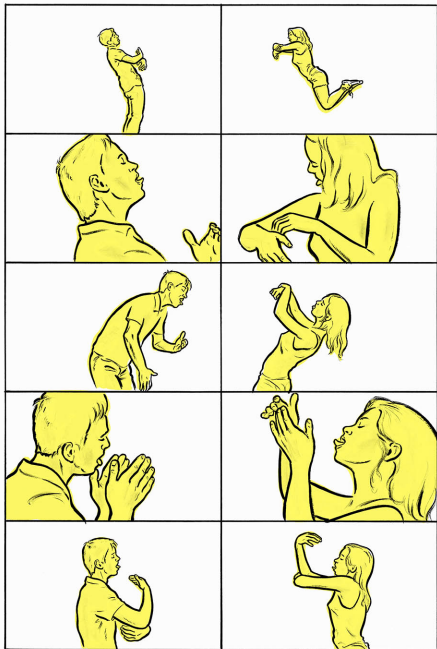




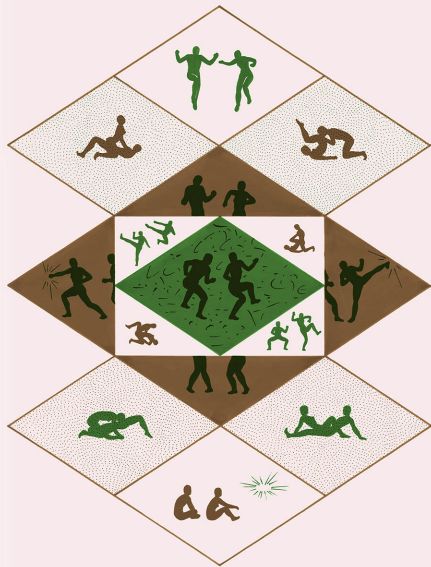


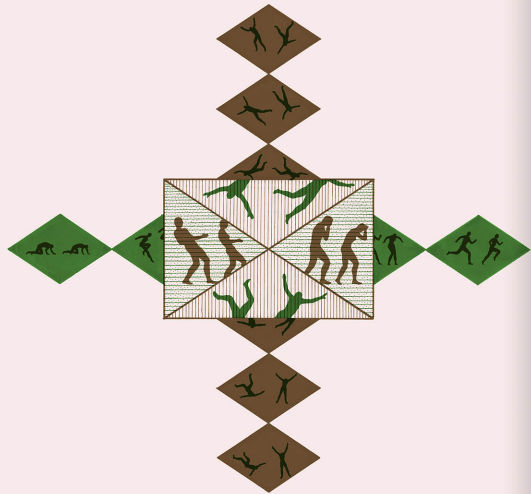


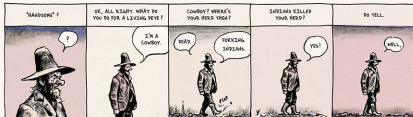














For quite some time now, another family has been living in the house I was born in. Just after we moved I used to bike past it and see them go in there like it was perfectly normal. Maybe it sounds a bit weird, but in the beginning I felt really betrayed. Apparently our house didn't care who lived in it. Its doors were just as open to these strangers as they had been to us.



The lights of home

Maybe I was hoping that something of all we'd been through there had stayed. I dunno - that the house would remember us or something.



I now live with my mother in an upstairs apartment behind a hardware store. I have my own room with a view of the parking lot, which sounds more boring than it really is. Spectacles galore! (An author with writer's block would kill for such a view.)



My mother slept in the living room for a spell but has now moved her bed into my sister's old room. She's also put up an office there for her translation work so she doesn't have to do it at the kitchen table anymore.

My sister moved to a room a few months ago. She's studying biology on the other side of the country.

I'm sure she deliberately chose the university farthest from us. When she was still living at home we almost always fought, but now I kind of miss her.



My father lives in a refurbished farmhouse close to his new work. It's too bad he doesn't live nearer. When he still lived in the city I could drop by whenever I felt like it.



After we moved, mom said I could choose something to go do. My father is a major Glenn Gould fan so I thought: wouldn't it be great if he comes to pick me up one day and there I am, playing the piano in the living room.



Once a week I took piano lessons from an old Polish lady, Mrs. Stwosz, whose handwritten ad I had seen on the bulletin board in the library.



It's not so bad at my dad's. Especially in the beginning it was just like a bachelor pad. I didn't need to clean up; he didn't either.



Now I realize what a stupid idea that was; but back then I didn't have a clue how long it takes to learn things.



The lessons should have been an hour but were usually only half as long.



But after a while it got on my nerves that he never had anything to eat except for what he liked. So I was happy when he got a girlfriend. Everything got better organized after that.



It took something like five or six lessons before I realized the stunning woman on the photo in the living room was Mrs. Stwosz when she was young. And when after that lesson she shuffled through her kitchen with the stepladder and I saw how old and fragile she had become, I suddenly had trouble holding back my tears.



Afterwards we would go from the piano to the small camping table in her apartment's cramped kitchen.



I would get a glass of syrup and Mrs. Stwosz would take a drink from a labelless jug which she kept on top of the cupboard.



She used a small wooden stepladder to reach the jug, would climb down to fill the little glass she had ready on the countertop and climb right back up again to replace the jug on the cupboard.



Then she would immediately drag the stepladder back to its place next to the boiler.



The next lesson I couldn't stop looking at the photo. And from the photo, to Mrs. Stwosz, the way she looked now. I just kept on looking and couldn't get over how cruel it was.



How cruel it was that time only moves forward and never back.



I wanted to get up and hold her but I stayed in my seat, fiddling with the stainless steel clips which held the plastic sunflower tablecloth in place.



Mrs. Stwosz would take a nip from the jug and I would get a glass of syrup and a long, twisting straw, shaped like a complex sailor's hitch.



After a while I quit protesting and started to enjoy watching my syrup stream through all those curves while Mrs. Stwosz regarded me with bleary eyes and recounted strange stories with a trembling voice.



She had been married to a Russian nobleman and had lived in unimaginable luxury. He did, however, beat her.



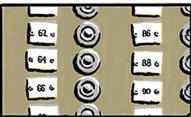
At first, I felt pretty insulted about the straw. I was really too old for that.



Her mother died young and she had traveled with her father all through Europe. She had been a prodigy and had performed all over for the 'beau monde.'



She would tell the most dramatic tales with deadpan humor, make all sorts of innuendos about the sexual exploits of the men who had crossed her path and pull faces at unexpected moments to enhance her story. I would often be in stitches, which caused the syrup to come out of my nose and drip onto the sunflowers.



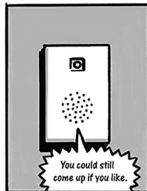
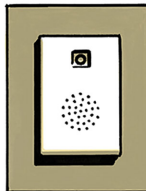
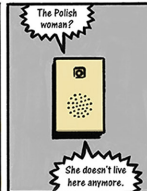
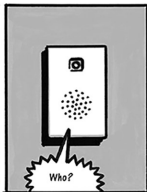
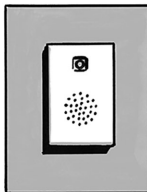
Each time, before starting to drink, I would place it demonstratively next to my glass but after each lesson she would give me the syrup with a straw in it all over again.



She had a clairvoyant border collie that barked at photos of dead people but not at photos of people who were still alive, and that had gone for help after she'd tried to skip over a low wall and had broken her ankle.



I loved going to those lessons but when, after a year, I still couldn't play, my mother made me stop and sent me to hockey classes.





One time, just after I turned 14, my father and I drove to the coast to get some air and to eat fresh fish in the renovated lighthouse we'd once been to years ago with the whole family. I had such happy memories of that day.



On the way home a storm started. It was still early in the evening but it suddenly got so dark it looked like there was an eclipse. It was raining cats and dogs and the windshield wipers couldn't wipe fast enough even on the highest speed.



We parked on a grassy strip on the side of the road overlooking an area with community gardens.



The rain rattled on the car's roof as we waited for the sky to clear. We sat in silence but not awkwardly; more like staring together at a campfire.



Suddenly a large sheet of corrugated iron, carried by the wind, landed with a bang right next to the car.



My father and I looked at each other and started laughing as if the falling sheet was the punchline of some complex joke.



After we'd stopped laughing we talked about what good music is; about a planet where the days are longer than the years; and about why people tend to believe in conspiracy theories. We talked about my future; about mom; about granddad, who was dead, about his stories and the way he told them.



Once the downpour had passed we rode on and immediately took a wrong turn. Dad tried to conceal his annoyance when I couldn't find where we were on the map and I thought: if he hadn't waited with fixing the adaptor we could have just driven home with the GPS.



When we were on the right way again we tried to pick up the pleasant conversation.



We acted cheerfully, told jokes, but the moment was gone and after a while dad concentrated on the driving and I turned to watching the landscape flow by and occasionally twiddling with the radio buttons, hoping to find a good song.



It was already dark when we could finally see the city from the ring road. I could see my reflection in the car's window and beyond it, in the distance, the apartment buildings, their windows alight, like beacons from some different, more substantial world. And, for an instant, I could imagine what it could be like to be a ghost. To perpetually drift through stillness. To see the lights of home but to never actually reach them.