

THE WORLD OF MYTH



MAGAZINE

MAY 2025
ISSUE: 137

ALI
BATES
BRUCE
COLLINGWOOD
DABROWSKI
DEBRAAL
DRUDGE
MACDONALD-DUNBAR
HARPER
HAWLEY
KYULE
LAW
MALIK
NEOGY
ONYECHE
RUMPEL
SHEFF



STORIES
ART
POETRY
REVIEWS
CONTEST
AND MUCH MORE!

MAY/25

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Masthead

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The World of Myth is published for anyone interested in quality Fantasy, Horror, Humor, Action/Suspense, or Science Fiction and related genre materials. All issues are posted on the Web.



INTRODUCTION

May Day!

By: Stephanie J. Bardy



Stephanie J. Bardy

Stephanie J. Bardy is an accomplished author, poet and editor. She is Editor in Chief at *The World of Myth Magazine* and has held an editing position with them for over 5 years. She is also Editor in Chief for *The JayZoMon Dark Myth Company, LLC*.

Her published works include *Eternally Bound*, *Eternally Bound PCE Exclusive Edition*, *The Chosen*, *The World of Myth Anthology Volume 3*, *Full Moon*

Hello Mythketeers!

It's summer! Or at least I thought it was. Then the cold weather crept back in and the heat needed to be turned on, extra blankets added to the bed and warmer jammies donned. I was not amused. It did chase the blackflies into the woods so there was a brief reprieve from them as it rained for 3 days straight. But today, I am sitting at the cottage, on my screened-in porch, listening to the wind in the trees and enjoying the sun dancing on the water. The birds are singing and I had the privilege of watching a hawk dive into the water for his breakfast. It is still a bit chilly, but it is Ontario, so that is to be expected.

For the last few weeks, I have been traveling and trying to get back onto a regular schedule, as you can see by the lateness of the magazine, my attempt failed. But, here we are, published before May actually ended, and hopefully, I didn't forget anyone's contributions. If I did, I apologize and will endeavor to make it right. The OCC has come down to the final round and I am excited to see who is going to take it all. Congratulations to everyone who has made it this far, and to all who entered in the first place! That takes more courage than I have! Our member of the month is The

Dragonfly Summer by Jayant Neogy. He took a painful topic, the loss of a parent, and turned it into a wonderful story of grief, acceptance, and moving forward in the only way a child could. As an adult who has lost a parent, I could identify with the emotions invoked in this story and it stayed with me long after I had read the last word. Congratulations.

I think sometimes, when we write, we forget that something so simple can be profound. We use the big flashy words, the long descriptions, and endless paragraphs of emotion to convey what is being felt, but sometimes, pain can be written as just that. It can be conveyed through imagery and symbols. I know I can be very wordy at times, and then at times, not say enough. This piece said just the right amount and it painted a vivid picture in my mind. As I sit and write this, there are dragonflies flitting just beyond the screen of the porch. They are making me smile, as this story did.

Now that I have a schedule of sorts to follow, I am hoping I can allocate my time appropriately and do all the things I need to do. Which includes some writing of my own. I have not written anything fictional in a long time, and I feel as if pieces of me are dying inside. I am hoping to be inspired, and motivated. Which I have lacked for a long time. I encourage others all the time to write, I can inspire and motivate others and they

& Howlin: A Werewolf Anthology, Monsterthology 2, Full Moon & Howlin: A Werewolf, The Chosen, Natural Instincts, The World of Myth Anthology Volume 4, Musing From Me, Unwelcomed: Stories of Hauntings and possessions, Penance and The Monster Within: Tales of A Tortured Mind.

She has several short stories to her credit on *The World of Myth Magazine*, and several works of poetry.

She has edited thirty books and all of the works on *The World of Myth Magazine* for the last five years.

turn out amazing pieces, but when it comes to myself, I sit and stare at that blinking cursor, or I lie on the couch staring mindlessly at the T.V. Mad at myself because I am not doing the one thing I love to do, and I wither, a little more, inside. I don't know why this happens, you could call it laziness I suppose. Maybe I'm not even a real writer, because I lack that passion that drives so many of us. Maybe, I am a fraud.

Or maybe it's just me, getting in my own way. Whatever it is, I will get past it, and I will write. It just may take a bit more time.

Wish me luck!

As always, until the next time



Stephanie J Bardy,
Editor of all her fears and pretenses.

Drabble & Flash

Depressive Aliens

*By: Christopher T.
Dabrowski*



Christopher T. Dabrowski

Christopher T. Dabrowski is a Polish writer and screenwriter. His books have been published in Poland, the USA, Canada, Spain, Germany and India.

Planet Xanaxa-5, a diner for

depressive aliens:

Feathered Grypian giggling.

“For the love of roachflies!” he exclaimed. “Are you serious?”

One planet has hairless intelligent apes?”

“Earth.” confirmed the Covidian.

“Are you blowharding me?” he doubted.

“I confirm,” interjected the Gray.

“But they are not so smart. They think we have big black eyes, not lenses.”

“Really?” clucked the feathered one.

“Well, we don't have eyelids.

Insects would constantly fall into our eyes without them.”

“Ah, to have such a food decoy.” languished Grypian.

“Listen,” revived the Covidian.

“How about taking a photo sweet shot and sending it to Earth?”

Drabble & Flash

Aliens In A Tin

By: *Kate MacDonald-Dunbar*



Kate MacDonald-Dunbar

Kate MacDonald-Dunbar is a retired septuagenarian who started to write just over sixteen months ago. She has many hobbies, but writing helps to fill an insomniac's dark quiet hours. She has had seventeen poems and six short stories published, online and in print: Chris Fielden's "Nonsensically Challenged," for charity. High Shelf Press volume XXIII. WinglessDreamer. Spillwords Press. 805 Lit and Art. Funny Pearls. Little Old Lady Comedy. Dillydown Review. The World of Myth Magazine.

I have surmised for a while now that insomnia doesn't allow my brain to file away the day's experiences neatly. Being so tired results in stress and anxiety, coupled with disconcerting dreams. I regularly wake up after only two hours of sleep, deeply disturbed and embedded in a world no one should ever experience. Like most of us, for a nano-second, the dream is very real. Then it's gone. Whatever trauma I have lived through in my nightmare is forgotten. I sigh and start another long day. This time was different. I grabbed a notebook and a pen and frantically scribbled down these words: "In a tin, in a cubicle, badly torn, stitched, hot, dirty, beach, sand." Somehow, I knew these two entities were not human, but they left me with those enticing words. Meaning, what exactly? I cobbled together a dialogue

with such glee. It felt like this was not my story, it was coming straight from the aliens.

One. "Why am I in a tin?"

Two. "You are not in a tin; you are in a cubicle."

One. "I told you to take me to a track that leads to a hot, dirty beach, and you've put me in a tin."

Two. "I had to bring you here. You're a badly torn girl, and you need to be stitched. Anyway, it's not good to get sand in your tin."

One. "Aha, so I am in a tin, I knew it."

Just like that, total brain free-fall! Never before, or since, have I recalled a dream so vividly. I tried to dismiss the experience as the nonsense it undoubtedly was. I tried, but I felt such pathos and longing there. I wanted that hot, dirty beach too.

I attempted to weave a story around these entities, but I had to concede that I could not add to what I'd already written. Purely for the sake of my sanity, I abandoned the endeavor after a few weeks.

Drabble & Flash

In Tents

By: Doug Hawley



Doug Hawley

The author is a little old former actuary who jumped from numbers to words. He has hundreds of stories published in all of the usual genres and four continents (South America, Africa, and Antarctica are difficult for him). He had two short story collections published in 2023.

His home is in Oregon USA with editor Sharon.

<https://sites.google.com/site/aberrantword/hello> website with location and details on hundreds of

“**T**his abandoned road

looks really creepy. Are you sure we’ll be safe camping out here?”

“Not to worry Sally. My gang used to camp here regularly. There are no scary animals. The biggest around here is the chipmunks.”

After Duke set up the tent and Sally fixed food, they went to bed early. “Can you relax now Sally? See, it is completely safe.”

“I don’t think that you have relaxing on your mind, not that I disagree.”

They stop what they are doing when they hear something tearing.

Duke yelled “It’s coming from under the tent and it’s bloody huge!”

Drabble & Flash

Ivie's Bubble Bath

By: Gabriella Balcom



Gabriella Balcom

Gabriella Balcom, who is from Texas, writes fantasy, horror/thriller, romance, sci-fi, and more. She likes traveling, music, photography, great stories, history and movies. Gabriella says she loves forests, mountains, and back roads. She has a weakness for lasagna, garlic bread, tacos, cheese and chocolate. Check out her author page:

<https://facebook.com/GabriellaBalcom.lonestarauthor>

Pouring lavender-scented bubble

bath into her bathtub, Ivie turned on the hot water and grabbed a facecloth. A dark object one-hundredth the size of a BB came out of the faucet with the water. Dozens followed, all concealed beneath the bubbles. Ivie hadn't noticed anything unusual. Humming, she turned off the water and climbed into the tub. She leaned back, but shot upright within moments. "What the...?" She'd felt movement by her leg. Something bit her stomach. Seeing tiny, glowing eyes on her skin, Ivie shrieked. The unknown creatures repeatedly stung her. Losing consciousness, her head slipped below the water.

The End

Drabble & Flash

The Day of the –

By: Allen Ashley



Allen Ashley

Allen Ashley is an award-winning writer, editor and tutor from the UK and is the founder of the advanced science fiction and fantasy group Clockhouse London Writers. Allen's most recent book is the SF chapbook "Journey to the Centre of the Onion" (Eibonvale Press, UK, 2023). Allen's work has appeared recently in "The Broken City" and online at the British Fantasy Society Blog. Allen is proud to be considered a regular contributor to "The World of Myth Magazine."

From *Thrilling Thunder*

Stories

To: John W

Re: Your novel submission

Thank you for sending your work but we will not be taking it for publication.

Editor's notes follow.

From Chuck "Bud" Campbell:

Hey, Johnny boy,

How y'all doing?

It was great to chat with you at the Interplanetary Brotherhood meeting last month and to share a beer, even if your taste runs to warm bitter. You Brits, eh?

Yes, I read your manuscript and like your style, but I had a few problems with it, pal.

So, let me get this straight, John, you're writing a scary story where people get attacked and bumped off by plants? Like, deadly daffodils, killer corn on the cob... I'm not buying it. I get giant gorillas on skyscrapers,

snakes, tigers and such. But let's face it, on the food chain sheep eat plants, cattle eat plants. Even insects and hummingbirds take sustenance there.

OK, you're saying they have a stinger at the top that's gonna whip out and kill a fellow. And they can move sort of like ambulant Venus fly traps. You ever seen one of those? Pretty tiny – the clue's in the "fly" part. And as for walking vegetation...

Something that big is going to need proper tethering roots and we all know what happens when a plant is uprooted.

Yes, I've seen Dorothy stalked by trees in "Oz" and I know them creepers like to entangle Tarzan's bare chest and legs. Kids' stuff. I thought you were more in the field of science-based fiction.

You know, plausible ideas.

Listen, pal, the war's still fresh in everybody's minds. Try something a touch allegorical.

Those darn Nazis as little green men. Not little green weeds, for goodness' sake.

Still, I like the moniker. A sense of fear with "The Day of the".

And then a nice irony with your

Website: www.allenashley.com/

Twitter: [@AllenAshleyUK](https://twitter.com/AllenAshleyUK)

play on the Greek word for love.
Tree-Philids.

THE END

Children's Literature

The Dragonfly Summer

A Child's Flight Through Grief, Wonder, and Healing

By: Jayant Neogy



Jayant Neogy

Writer, Photographer and Traveler, I have a Master's Degree in Engineering from Indian Institute of Technology, Kharagpur followed by 40 years of work experience in India, Germany, Switzerland and the US.

Thereafter, I had over 5 years of teaching and consultancy experience.

As an author of non-fiction, 9 of my books have been published in India so far.

I write fiction for Substack, Medium, Wattpad and Tumblr.

Dragonflies skimmed the water's

surface as their wings flashed rainbow colors. Watching them, Julia waited for Jalkanya to appear, as she was alone. Since her mother's death, this riverside spot had become her sanctuary where she watched mist rise off the river, like the prayers she sent heavenwards for her mom.

Sadly, she remembered how just a few months ago, she had helped her father to scatter her mother's ashes in the river, watching swift currents carry them away.

"They're dancing for us today."

As peace filled her mind, Julia knew Jalkanya had come without having to look. There she was at the river's edge, her pale blue sari rippling like the river itself although there was no breeze.

"Why are they dancing?" Julia asked, as a yellow-winged dragonfly hovered above a lily pad.

"They dance when there's danger afoot," Jalkanya's voice was a distant echo, like water flowing over smooth stones.

The dragonflies suddenly scattered, vanishing as if they had never been. Startled, Julia asked, "What's wrong?" Jalkanya whispered, "Run, Julia! A monster is coming." Her eyes were on the sky.

Julia heard a distant hum that rose swiftly to a roar, drowning out the river's song. A shadow raced across the water as a small plane hurtled by, flying low.

Julia reached out to Jalkanya for comfort, but her hand passed through the river spirit's arm, as if she were made of shimmering river mist. As always, Julia pretended not to notice. Then a loud sound made her look up. The plane had struck the power lines spanning the river.

For a moment, it hung suspended in the wires, then erupted into a fireball, and twisted free. Burning wreckage fell into the river with a splash and a sizzle, to be carried away by swift currents.

When Julia could breathe again, her first thought was, "The pilot will never return. Like Mother, he is gone forever."

She turned to look for Jalkanya, but saw no one.

From somewhere out on the river, Jalkanya's voice reached her, "The river is upset and needs calming. You'd better go home, Julia." Her voice faded away.

Home. Father would be worried for her. He'd been on the river measuring depths all morning. Julia's stomach clenched thinking how close he might have been to the crash.

As she ran home, the river behind her grew calm again. One by one, the dragonflies returned to skim the

rippling water, dancing their secret dance.

#

Alex Ferguson, Julia's father, was designing the bridge foundations when he overheard shouts from the outer office of a plane crash near the river bend.

Oh God! He thought, right where Julia plays.

He grabbed his jacket, heart pounding. "I'll be gone for the day," he told the superintendent. "I must find my daughter."

The man replied knowingly, "Right, Mr. Ferguson. Go to Julia. She's still upset."

They both knew what he meant. Two months ago, the superintendent spotted Julia on the riverbank talking animatedly to no one. Alex learned that Julia often spoke to a "river spirit" named Jalkanya.

Was Julia's obsession his parenting failure? Alex looked at his wife's picture on his desktop, eyes misting. "I've done a poor job of comforting her," he thought. "I've been too focused on my own grief."

Six months ago, he'd scattered Catherine's ashes in the river she loved. Now their daughter spoke to phantoms by the water's edge, creating the companionship she couldn't find at home.

#

Later that evening, Alex watched Julia pour tea. She stirred in milk and sugar, her small hands moving with careful precision that reminded him painfully of Catherine.

"Do you have a friend who visits you by the river, Julia?" he asked, keeping his voice relaxed.

As Julia set down her teacup, it rattled against the saucer. "Oh, you mean Jalkanya?"

Alex said, "Yes. Why don't you invite her over sometime?"

Julia looked up; her eyes wary. "Daddy, she's bound to the river. She's only there when I'm alone. I don't think you'd see her anyway. She turns invisible when anyone else is near."

Alex's cup froze halfway to his lips.

Invisible friends were normal for children, but Julia was eleven, and this started after Catherine's death.

The next day, he took Julia to see Dr. Winters, a child psychologist. While Julia leafed through magazines in the waiting room, Alex described his concerns.

"She spends hours by the river talking to 'Jalkanya', who no one else can see. She hardly speaks to her classmates anymore. It's got me worried."

Dr. Winters nodded. "Let me speak with Julia alone. Then we can talk."

An hour later, Julia sat in the car while the psychologist discussed his findings with Alex.

"Physically, there's nothing wrong with your daughter. Her imagination is vivid, but that's typical for children processing grief."

"But this river spirit," Alex began.

"Ah! Jalkanya? Julia must have heard of the ancient fable of a river mermaid that the ancients claim to have seen on the river. They called her 'Panir Kanya', or 'Jalkanya' meaning 'daughter of the water' in Assamese. She was believed to be benign and comforts children in great grief."

"Is it even possible?"

"That's immaterial. It's her way of coping with loss. Your wife's sudden death has left Julia vulnerable. She fears losing loved ones. She's invented a friend who comforts her and won't desert her."

Alex stared out the window at the parking lot. "I've tried to be strong for her. I thought that was what she needed."

Dr. Winters placed a hand on Alex's shoulder. "She needs to see that it's okay for you to grieve too. Give her time, Mr. Ferguson. Allow yourself time."

On the drive home, Julia was quiet until they approached the river road. "The doctor was nice. He understood Jalkanya better than you do, Daddy."

Alex glanced at his daughter, wondering what she and the psychologist discussed. "Did you tell him about Jalkanya?"

Julia nodded, her eyes following the river curve visible through the trees.

"He didn't say she wasn't real. He just asked questions about her."

"What did you say to him?"

"Jalkanya has always lived by the river and knows things about it that no one else does. The river listens to her sometimes if she pleads hard. She knows how to deal with sadness by calling the dragonflies to dance for her and make everyone cheerful again."

Despite the warmth of the sun, Alex felt a chill. Julia's voice made Jalkanya sound less like an invention and more like a real river deity from ancient folklore.

#

Julia couldn't forget the sight of the plane erupting into flames and falling into the river. For days afterward, she avoided her special spot, haunted by the memory of the crash and the pilot who would never return home. Like her mother, he had been claimed by the river, forever.

When Alex came into her room two weeks after the crash, Julia was busy

drawing. He said, "Julia, do you remember the pilot who crashed?" She nodded and focused on her drawing.

"His wife is coming today for a small river ceremony. Would you like to join?"

Julia's pencil paused. "There won't be... They didn't find...?"

Alex assured her, "No. The current was too strong. Nothing was recovered." He understood her fear. Watching her carefully, he said, "You may like to come, to say goodbye..."

He didn't finish, but Julia understood. She had said goodbye to her mother's ashes by the riverside not too long ago.

She stared at her drawing. It was a swirl of red and yellow dragonflies surrounding a small figure by the water's edge. Finally, she set down her pencil.

Perhaps Jalkanya had finished soothing the troubled river, she thought.

"Yes Daddy, I'll come."

That afternoon, they stood on the small jetty where Alex kept his survey boat. A black car pulled up, and an elderly woman helped a younger one from the passenger seat. The young woman wore a simple white dress with a sheer veil that could not hide her tear-stained cheeks.

As the boat stopped near the shore, Julia whispered, "Daddy, the crash happened much further out, near the middle."

Alex explained quietly, "We can't go there. The current's too strong."

The young widow rose unsteadily, clutching a bouquet of white lilies and a garland of white roses. She whispered words the river swallowed before they could reach Julia's ears. Bending low, she placed her offerings on the water's surface. The current

caught them, carrying them downstream away from the plane crash site.

Julia watched the flowers drift until they disappeared around the river bend. Her heart ached for the young woman who lost her husband, just as she had lost her mother. It saddened her to see the garland headed in the wrong direction, away from the pilot's crash site.

#

That night, as Julia knelt by her bedside for prayers, she kept thinking of the lost pilot and his grieving wife. She whispered, "Dear God, I pray for Daddy and Mother's soul, but especially for the pilot. Please let him get the garland. Things should reach those who they are meant for, like my prayers should reach Mother." Her voice dropped lower. "Please, God, let the pretty lady's flowers find the pilot."

After climbing into bed, Julia thought she heard the faint buzz of dragonfly wings outside her window. She fell asleep wondering if Jalkanya could see the dragonflies at night and if they danced for her when Julia wasn't there.

#

Three days after the memorial, Julia returned to the river. School had ended early, so she headed straight for her favorite spot—a large rock jutting into the water, that created a whirlpool. She liked to watch leaves and twigs caught in the swirling current, spinning before being pulled under.

The day was cloudy, and the dragonflies were missing. Julia sat on the rock, hugging her knees.

Something inside her urged her to wait.

Jalkanya appeared suddenly beside her and said, "I didn't think you'd come today."

Julia smiled. "The river feels different today."

Jalkanya said cryptically, "It's waiting,". Her pale fingers traced patterns in the air, leaving small ripples of light that dissolved like foam on water. She looked tense, expectant.

They sat in silence, watching the water churn around the whirlpool.

But nothing happened.

Disappointed, Julia rose at last, only to freeze. Something caught her eye, bobbing in the whirlpool. She thought it was a branch, but as it tumbled over, she saw it was a leather glove.

Her heart raced as the glove spun again, revealing a severed wrist. The river had swallowed the pilot and returned this small piece of him.

"Oh! I can't bear to see dead things." Said Julia.

"Wait." Said Jalkanya tersely.

"Oh! It must belong to the pilot. How strange that it got stuck here." Julia's voice dropped to a whisper. "But what happened to the flowers?"

As she watched, the glove came around again and turned over in the current. Then she saw it, the garland of white roses caught in the glove's fingers. The pilot had received his wife's offering.

For several moments, the glove and garland spun in the whirlpool. Then the undertow sucked them down and out of sight.

Julia looked around but Jalkanya had vanished. For once, she didn't mind. Then, she heard a whisper as light as a dragonfly's wing, from far out in the river, "My work is done, Julia. The river has answered."

She looked up to see the afternoon sun turn the river into a stream of gold.

"How wonderful. If the garland found the pilot, my prayers can't be lost either. They'll surely find Mother."

As she turned home, a swarm of dragonflies rose from the reeds. Their wings caught the sunlight as they danced above the rippling water.

When Julia burst into the house, her eyes shining with excitement, Alex was at his desk.

"Daddy!" she said, "The pilot got his garland! It was beautiful, although the cut hand in the glove bothered me a little."

Alex looked up, puzzled. "Slow down, Julia. What hand? What garland?"

She took a deep breath and described everything: the whirlpool, the glove with its severed wrist, and the white rose garland caught in its fingers.

When she finished, Alex stared at her, astounded. "You're fortunate to have seen it. A few minutes either way, and the glove and garland would have vanished forever."

Julia pulled out a chair and sat across from him. "Jalkanya helped me to see that if you wish hard enough, good things happen. Just as the pilot got his flowers, I'm sure Mother hears my prayers."

Alex thought of Catherine's ashes, scattered in the river months ago. The current had carried them away, never to return. Yet, the river had returned this small miracle to their daughter.

"Daddy?" Julia's voice broke his reverie. "Can I go to Sunanda's birthday party tomorrow after school? Her mother bakes delicious cakes."

A slow smile spread across Alex's face as he recognized the return of the joyful little girl Julia once was.

He answered, "Sure! I'll send a box of

chocolates with you as a present. Stay as long as you want."

A dragonfly buzzed at the window.

Alex looked past it to see a sunset reflecting on the river, flooding the sky with crimson, gold, and deep purple.

For the first time since Catherine's death, he felt true peace.

He wondered briefly about Julia's river spirit. Was it his daughter's imagination, or perhaps something more—a benevolent presence from the waters that had received his wife's ashes? Whatever Jalkanya was, he was grateful, for she had returned his old Julia.

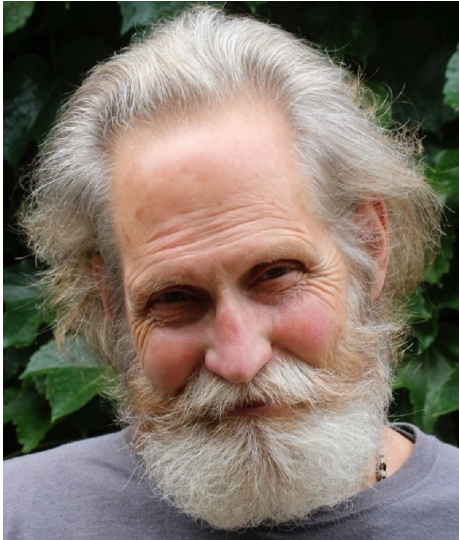
That night, Julia knelt for her prayers as usual. But this time, she didn't ask God to keep Jalkanya from disappearing. She knew the river spirit would always be there when she truly needed her, like the dragonflies that vanished before danger, only to return when all was well.

The End

Children's Literature

The Manure Spreader

By: Jim Bates



Jim Bates

Jim is an award-winning author whose stories and poems have appeared in over three-hundred online and print publications. His collection of short stories *Resilience* was published in March 2021, by Bridge House Publishing. *Short Stuff a collection of flash fiction and drabbles* was published in October 2021, by Chapeltown Books. *Periodic Stories and Periodic Stories Volume Two* were published in July and September 2021, by Impspired. *Dreamers a collection of short stories* was published in March 2022, by Clarendon House Publishing. *Something Better* a dystopian adventure novella was published in July 2021, by Dark Myth Publications.

I watched my cousin with awe

along with a little bit of envy.

"Man, you've sure got a way with that shovel."

Stevie grinned and waved the stump on his right shoulder. "Yeah. When you're born with this bad boy, you learn to make the most of things."

I bent to my task. We were cleaning out my uncle's horse barn, shoveling the manure into the spreader we'd towed into the center between the stalls. Getting the spreader there had itself been an adventure.

Stevie had led me into the shed where they kept an ancient, faded orange, Allis-Chalmer's tractor. "Cool." I said, when I saw it.

My cousin grinned at me. "You want to try it?"

Me? Drive a tractor? I was ten years old and only a few days earlier had arrived on my aunt and uncle's farm. I'd been sent there by my mom from our home in the city where I'd been spending the summer at loose ends learning how to become a juvenile delinquent. In short, going nowhere fast. "You serious?"

"I'm serious, cousin." He punched me in the arm with what I could only surmise was his way of showing me we were buddies. "Absolutely. Go for it." When he saw my hesitancy, he added,

"It's okay. I'll teach you."

"Okay!"

And he did. He showed me how to get the tractor started by turning the key and pushing a button. He showed me how to put it in gear, back it out of the shed, hook it to the spreader and drive it to the barn where I parked it between the stalls. We each had one side to do, five stalls each, and at our age, Stevie was ten like me, everything was a competition, mostly friendly. In this race, Stevie was kicking my ass.

Eventually, I stopped and wiped my brow. I was exhausted. "Okay, okay, okay," I said, setting my three-pronged pitchfork against the side of the second stall from the end. "I give up." Stevie was a stall ahead of me. "Just a second," he said, grinning over his shoulder. "I'm almost done." "Funny." I said, collapsing onto a bale of hay. "Real funny."

Steve whistled as he worked. He used a small bladed shovel and wielded it with his left arm like a magician with a wand. I hadn't seen him in two years and in that time, he'd grown taller than me by four inches and outweighed me by easily thirty pounds. All of it muscle.

"It's all in the wrist," he said, finishing up and sitting next to me. "And the arm, too," he added, flexing it. "That helps a lot." He winked at me.

I used to hate him. He used to be a squirrely little kid who played with his sister's dolls. He liked to read. And he

Most recently, *Periodic Stories Volume Three – A Novel* was published in April 2022, by Impspired. His short story "Aliens" was nominated by The Zodiac Press for the 2020 Pushcart Prize. His story "The Maple Leaf" was voted 2021 story of the year for Spillwords. He lives in a small-town west of Minneapolis, Minnesota. All of his work can be found on his blog at www.theviewfromlonglake.wordpress.com.

didn't like any of the video games I liked to play. He was just plain weird. But I hadn't seen him in two years, and I guess in that time he'd changed. I know I sure had. And not for the best. Earlier that year my dad left home. Mom was having a rough go of it, and I reacted by doing the only thing I knew how to do that didn't require any particular skill - be a jerk. I began fighting with my younger brother and younger sister all the time. Davey, my best friend, and I started smoking cigarettes and I began sneaking out at night, running around with Davey, his older brother Frank and Frank's friend Walt. The night we spray painted a smiley face a water tower and got caught was the night mom said, "That's it, Joe. I've had it with you. I'm sending you to your aunt and uncle's farm. Maybe they can do something with you." "So what?" I yelled. "See if I care!" I added, secretly caring a lot. I stomped off to my room and slammed the door. Then I burst into tears. Damn. Already I missed her. Five days later I was shoveling manure from the horse stalls and hanging out with Stevie. I was learning that he was a good guy. Lots better than I was, that was for sure. I was already sorry for being such a jerk back home. After we'd taken a break, Stevie said, "Let get this stuff spread." "How do we do that?" "Come on. I'll show you." He clasped me on the shoulder. "It's fun." It was. Remember, I was ten, but on a farm, everyone was given a lot of responsibility and spreading the manure Stevie's job. Now it was mine, too. I got in the driver's seat and started the engine. Steve stood behind me, resting his hands on my shoulders. I

drove us through the doors on the far side of the barn and out to one of the fallow fields where we stopped, letting the tractor idle. Stevie reached back and pulled a lever. He tapped me on the shoulder and pointed to the spreader. "When we start driving, that spool with those spikes on it spins, catches the manure and flings it out the back." "Far out." He grinned. "Yeah, it is. Let's go." I shifted into gear and we set to work, spreading that manure. I'll tell you, for a ten-year-old, born and raised in the city, being outside on sunny day, driving up and down a farm field in the country with my cousin by my side whistling some obscure rock and roll song, all the while I'm pretending like I know what I was doing, well, it was a pretty good way to go. I stayed there all summer. We spread manure every week and it was always fun. I cleaned up my act, too, when I went home and was lots nicer to my mom and brother and sister. And next summer, when they invited me back, I couldn't say 'yes' fast enough.

Children's Literature

Three in the Pit of Despair

By: Timothy Law



Timothy Law

Timothy Law is a writer of fantasy, horror, detective and general fiction from a little town in Southern Australia called Murray Bridge. A happily married father of three children, family is very important to him. Currently working at the Murray Bridge Library in the role of Library Manager he has dreamed since his early high school years of becoming a full-time author. Working for a library, surrounded by so many wonderful authors it is difficult not to be inspired to write. Many of his short stories and general musings can be found on his blog <http://somecallmetimmy.blogspot.com.au/> or on [Parenting Express website](#).

The Druid, Fox, should have been called Goat, or so thought the barbarian Bull, the elf was far more fleet of foot, vanishing after the guard before the barbaric Bull even had a chance to rise from the muck he had fallen into.

"Wait!" Bull called out, weakly, the fight and the confusion of the illusionist's spell tiring him more than he wanted to admit. "Wait for me, Fox, you fool... Two minds and one stone or something like that..."

Fox was already long gone though, as was the guard, when Bull managed to make it to the doorway of the chambers of the one known as master. The stairs vibrated with the clomping of heavy footsteps, but Bull could not see any sign of those going up or down the flight, it felt to him as if he were blind.

"More of your magics..." he cursed.

"Well, I was never afraid..."

Down the stairs the barbarian went, taking two and sometimes three steps at a time.

Perhaps you should be afraid...

The voice in his mind distracted him, causing Bull to trip upon his own feet, and down he tumbled, the last few steps. Battered somewhat, but not yet bruised, he saw ahead the figures of Fox and the fleeing guard, both within

mere yards of each other.

"Go, Fox, grab him!" urged Bull, but he did not have the energy to shout his encouragement. "I will join you after just a moment..."

You are running out of moments...

"No..." grunted the barbarian. "I still have a wealth of moments left to spend... My life has been one struggle after another of fighting for others..." The voice in his mind laughed at him, cackled dryly and with mocking humor. It was a sound of confidence.

You think you have earned the right to exchange these moments you gave to others in the hope of getting one for yourself...

"I am owed nothing..." agreed Bull.

"Except for that which I can squeeze from myself..."

He got up then and felt the haze in his mind lessen. It was not gone, but he could feel his muscles were not as drained as they had been a second before. Strength was there, just like it always was. It had been hidden by a manipulator, but self-belief was Bull's greatest asset.

"Here I come, Fox," he promised. "It will be two against one, and together we shall prevail..."

And with that said, Bull ran. He ran as far and as fast as his legs could manage. The closer the barbarian came to the pair in front of him, the further away the guard seemed to get from Fox's reach. Passageways started to look familiar to Bull, and it then dawned upon him where the guard

was leading them.
 "Fox... Slow down..." Bull urged, and again his request was ignored.
 "I am so close...! I almost have him!" panted the druid.
 The rooms beyond the arena, spaces that Bull found so familiar, flashed by, and then they were there... The pit... The sand and sawdust... The smell of blood...
 "What is this?" asked Fox, confused.
 "WELCOME!" boomed a voice from above them.
 "I told you to stop!" stated Bull, his hands on his knees as he tried to suck in as much air as his burning lungs could hold.
 "Where is the guard?" Fox demanded to know.
 "I see the guard... Two guards in fact..." stated the voice of the holy warrior, Dreamer of Luna, Dove...
 "You see false..." stated Bull. "The master has your mind clouded."
 And then, Bull realized, he too was seeing what was not there. The voices he heard were that of his companions, but the figures who stood in the center of the arena with him looked like guards. Then more figures joined the pair, five, ten, twelve, until the barbarian could no longer keep count.
 Who is real? Who is friend and who is foe?
 "I do not know..." stated Bull.
 Good... Then may the battle commence...
 "Dove? Fox?" Bull stated uncertainly.
 "Identify yourselves..."
 "Identify this..." growled one of the figures.
 Bull only just managed to duck in time to avoid the sword swipe aimed for his neck.
 The barbarian kicked out at the figure, hoping that it was not a friend.
 "Uuuh..." said the figure as it dropped

the blade.
 "Dove?" said Bull, confused, as the face of the figure changed into that of his friend.
 Reaching down to grab the sword, Bull discovered it, changing before his very eyes into a serpent which wriggled beyond his reach.
 Dove's face vanished from the figure and was replaced with that of a bearded youth.
 "Wrong!" the soldier laughed before smashing a mailed fist into Bull's face.
 The taste of blood was real, and so familiar. Bull fought back, instinct kicking in.
 "I'll defeat you all and then build me a ladder from your bodies..." he promised. "I will reach your master, and then I will destroy him..."
 "Promises... Promises..." stated the voice from above.
 And then every figure surrounding him in the pit repeated the words in the master's voice. Each face became that smug smile of the illusionist.
 "Fox? Are you here?" called Bull.
 "I am here!" the druid replied.
 For a single second the elf was there, blood running freely from a nose that was growing in size, just as it was turning purple. One of the druid's eyes was bruised black, and Bull wondered how it was that he himself looked.
 "Together then, let us find friend Dove..." suggested the barbarian.
 "Together..." Fox agreed.
 Again, the figure's face changed to that of the holy warrior, and then that of another guard, but Bull chose to trust in his instincts. He grasped the arm of the figure and then ran.
 "What are you do...?" asked the closest target, again wearing the face and using the voice of Dove.
 The pair, joined, struck the figure just below the knees, the pair of forearms not yielding. Working just like a snare

rope, the attack brought the target crashing painfully to the sand and sawdust.
 "Stay down!" Bull demanded as he and his companion rushed onward, seeking another victim.
 "Friend, Bull?" said a familiar voice.
 From the chaos of dust and skirmish, Bull saw the two headed giant. Had his plan to help the monstrosity escape finally failed, or was this just another ruse?
 "What the hell?" a surprised Fox's voice stated. "Bull, do you know this giant?"
 "So, you are real..." said Bull.
 Then the head which had once been small, tiny, but full of whispered wisdom, became that of Bull himself and the barbarian knew he was still dreaming.
 Fox and Dove appeared at his left and right flanks, and Bull ducked down just in time to avoid the punches thrown by both.
 "Stay down!" growled a guard's voice, humorously coming from the lips of the holy warrior.
 "How about you stay down..." replied the barbarian.
 Bull realized that amongst the chaos of the pit, only two out of the many were his friends. The odds were pretty good then, that if he hit anyone, and hit them hard enough, then they would be an enemy and one less thing to worry about. The more he hit, the greater the odds that he and his allies would win the day. An illusion was only as good as the audience which believed in it. Once you saw through the trickery, everything else was logic.
 Bull did not like thinking too much about the problems he faced, but it gladdened him greatly to understand his fists and feet could and would do the talking there and then. So, one by one, the master's guards fell, and ever

so slowly the tables turned.

When the dust finally settled, Bull found himself standing alone. Every face was either that of the druid, Fox, or the holy warrior, Dove, none of them the Etten. That was when Bull turned his face skyward with determination, only to discover that the viewing platform where he had assumed the illusionist would be watching was empty.

"The Master is gone," stated one of the sorcerers, the bewitching beauties who had gotten the barbarian into this mess right from the beginning. "Are you here to punish me for driving him away?" Bull asked, taking up a fighting stance, even though both he and the sorcerer knew exhaustion was threatening to overwhelm him. "Do not be a fool now, when you have just proven to all you are unfoolable..." the beauty laughed. "No... I am here to tell you that the town is freed and that you have won..."

"I trust that a battle is finished, and the victor crowned when I see my enemies crushed, their eyes closed in death or defeat..." Bull stated.

"Some enemies do not wait so long..." retorted the spellcaster.

"And those are the enemies whom I shall continue to hunt... Tomorrow is merely another day..." the barbarian replied. "Should you see the one who is your so-called master... Give him this from me..."

Bull strode with purpose, over the bodies of the fallen whose groans of pain were a lowly moaned utterance, background to the dramatic scene. His fists were balled, ready to strike.

"What is your secret, man, that you see through each one of my costumes?" the master demanded to know.

As Bull had suspected, the sorcerer which he had once banished had not returned. It was in fact the illusionist in another hidden form.

"Don't believe your senses when things simply do not make sense," Bull explained. "I know what isn't right and when I see it, I guess I know it isn't true."

"You are the worst," spat the trickster. "Many have told me that... Even some of my friends..." Bull admitted. "Now step closer as I detain you..."

"WAIT!" boomed the voice of the illusionist, this time coming from above the pit. "What fate shall befall me?"

"I am not judge or jury... I shall not try you for your crimes..." Bull replied. "If those who deem themselves far holier than I choose not to judge you then we shall leave your punishment to those who you wronged most..." It then sounded as though the very pit replied.

"I WILL NOT AWAIT SUCH JUDGEMENT!!!"

From the body of the sorcerer whose face had become that of the illusionist, there came a ripping sound. Light, or more what looked like a crack which sucked light toward it poured into that space, the horror of the scene leaving Bull speechless.

"Step aside, friend, and this time perhaps you will stay down when I so order you to do so," stated the radiant figure of Dove.

Light, like the brightest full moon, illuminated her pale flesh, and that holy light seemed to fill the crack which ran from the nave to the figure's neck.

"Faith will win out..." promised the holy warrior. "Just as long as your faith in me prevails."

"I have seen what you can truly achieve," replied the barbarian. "My

faith in you, dear Dove, is certain..." Dove stepped confidently forward, though it was obvious to all that each slow and steady stride was a battle in itself. As she stood before the master's current guise she reached within the crack and pulled out a tiny, winged imp.

"Let me go!" squeaked and wailed the creature.

"I shall not, foul beast, not until you promise to go back home to where you belong..." commanded Dove.

"I am not of your world so do not need await your judgement!" stated the imp.

"You have already been judged, and your punishment is to be banished from this realm..." Dove calmly replied. "For what trouble you have caused these poor people you are lucky to receive just that..."

"You must catch me if you want to banish me..." jeered the creature.

"But we already have you cau..." Dove began, suddenly confused.

"Beware!" cried Fox, bloodied and battered. "The imp still has one final trick to play..."

The druid was right, but his warning came too late.

The imp bit down hard upon Dove's hand which held it. As the dreamer of the moon god cried out in alarm and pain, the hell pit rodent unfurled wings of flame and soared skyward.

"Come back here and face your punishment!" Dove demanded as she tried to pressurize the wound.

Fox ran to her aid while Bull attempted to catch the imp by its foot. Too many bodies littering the sand and sawdust made it impossible to find a safe path. Quite soon Bull found he was tripped and stumbling, ended up flat upon his face.

"Farewell!" cried the fleeing creature. "I hope that we will never meet

again..."

"I have marked you!" Dove cried back. "I know your true face!"

"I have promised to bring you to justice!" Bull added. "And a promise made is a promise that shall be kept!"

"To be honest..." said Fox, the druid speaking to all who would listen. "I would be happy either way should we never be troubled by such a creature again..."

The aftermath of the battle was a quiet affair, many of the guards deciding to leave quickly when word got around who the master truly was. Those combatants still caged were set free with Dove promising a justice worse than what they had just suffered if she had to return to the township due to any future trouble. The townsfolk, though grateful for their rescue, just wanted to return to life as it previously was.

"Thank you," Bull stated, as the trio wandered the road back toward the capitol, Dove's steed Purity wandering a few strides ahead.

Fox gave the barbarian a sideways glance.

"I'll think twice about tackling you in a skirmish," the elf admitted. "Those fists of yours hit and when they do, they leave more than a mark..."

"What they leave is a memory..."

Dove agreed. "A reminder that someone like you is next time best left alone..."

"But you two are my friends," stated Bull. "As is Purity also."

At the mention of her name, the horse turned and whinnied.

"See!" the barbarian said, satisfied.

"Friends for life..."

"However long or short that such lives as ours may be..." agreed Dove.

"Probably short..." suggested Fox.

"Dark and strange are the times

ahead..."

"I'm confident though, whatever it is the gods send our way... With these fists and you two by my side... Nothing will be dark enough or strange enough to stop us..."

"You would think that" Dove laughed.

"I am taking my leave from you, before more trouble has the chance to find us," Fox said. "I must return home for we still have much work to do."

"Yes," agreed Dove. "There is still too much to be done in the kingdom's heart..."

"Then farewell Fox, that we shall adventure again soon," said Bull, giving his shapeshifting companion a mighty hug.

"May the seasons bring us peace before another storm," squeaked the druid.

"Come then, Bull," commanded Dove the dreamer. "Let Purity take us all the faster."

"Yes, let us ride, to where it is we are needed most..." agreed the barbarian.

Hence the friends did part ways, but the winds of fate had much in store for them still. Those keen of ear could sense the buzzing of a new hive of warriors.

Fantasy

The Memory Keeper

By: Tonny Kyule



Tonny Kyule

Tonny Kyule's hobbies are reading books, traveling and playing basketball.

Currently, pursuing a Bachelor of Science degree in Communication and Public Relations at Rongo University in Migori County, Kenya.

The old town of Kanga was wrapped in heavy fog, the kind that clung to the ground like a secret. It was the perfect setting for a nightmare, with twisted trees reaching out like skeletal fingers. Most nights, the streets were empty, but on this particular evening, Julia felt an inexplicable pull to the abandoned library at the end of Maple Street. The library had long been forgotten, its doors creaking on rusted hinges, and its windows clouded with dust. Rumors swirled about the place; of a dark past, of a memory keeper who had once resided within its walls. They said he could trap people's memories, feeding on their pain and regret. But Julia was drawn by curiosity, her heart racing with both fear and excitement. As she pushed the door open, it groaned, protesting against the intrusion. The air was stale, thick with the scent of mildew and decay. Shadows danced along the walls, flickering in the dim light of her flashlight. She stepped inside, her footsteps echoing in the silence. "Hello?" she called out, her voice trembling. No response came, just the rustle of paper as it slid from a nearby shelf. Julia moved deeper into the library, her pulse quickening with each step. She had to know the truth.

echoing in the dark. "Are you ready to

In the center of the library stood a large desk, and behind it, a figure hunched over a pile of dusty books. The man looked up, his eyes piercing and cold. "You shouldn't be here," he said, his voice like gravel. "Who are you?" Julia managed to ask, though a part of her wished she hadn't. "I am the Memory Keeper," he replied, a sinister smile creeping across his lips. "I collect memories—both good and bad. But those who come here often leave with something more than they bargained for."

"What do you mean?" Julia asked, her skin prickling.

"Memories are powerful," he said, rising from his chair. "They shape us, define us. But they can also destroy us. Would you like to see your memories, Julia?" She hesitated, glancing around the library. The walls seemed to close in, the shadows deepening. "What do you want in return?" The Memory Keeper chuckled softly, a sound that sent shivers down her spine. "Just a piece of your soul."

"No," she whispered, backing away. "Then you will never understand," he said, his voice low and threatening. "You will remain trapped in your own regrets, just like the others." Julia turned to flee, but the door slammed shut, trapping her inside. Panic surged within her. "Let me out!" she shouted, pounding on the door.

"Only after you confront your past," the Memory Keeper said, his voice

face what you've buried?"

Desperation clawed at her throat. "I won't!" she cried.

"Very well," he said, and the shadows around her twisted and churned, forming a swirling vortex of darkness. Julia felt herself being pulled in, her vision blurring as memories flooded her mind. She found herself back in her childhood home, a sunny day with laughter echoing through the halls. But as she looked closer, the laughter turned to shouting, and the warmth faded.

She saw her parents, faces twisted in anger, their words sharp and cutting. "You're worthless!" her father screamed. "You'll never be anything!" Tears streamed down her face as the memory played out, raw and painful. "No! I didn't want to remember!" she shouted, but it was too late. The scene shifted again, pulling her into another moment—a night that had haunted her for years. Julia was at a party, surrounded by friends, laughter ringing in her ears. But then she saw herself walking away, feeling the weight of loneliness. She had left her best friend, Sarah, behind, a decision that would haunt her forever. The scene twisted, and she watched in horror as Sarah stumbled in the darkness, her cries echoing in Julia's mind.

"Help me!" Sarah had pleaded, but Julia had turned away, too consumed by her own insecurities. The memory morphed into a nightmare, the walls of the library closing in around her. "Please, stop!" she screamed, but the darkness deepened. The Memory Keeper's laughter filled the air as more memories surged forward—each one more painful than the last. Julia found herself in high school, standing in front of a crowd. She had

been humiliated, the target of cruel jokes. The laughter of her classmates echoed in her ears, drowning her in shame. She felt the heat of embarrassment wash over her, stinging like a thousand needles.

The Memory Keeper's voice whispered in the shadows, "This is who you are, Julia. A collection of failures. A prisoner of your regrets." "No!" she cried, desperate to break free. "I am more than this!" "Are you?" he taunted, and suddenly, Julia was back in the library, facing him. "You can run, but you cannot hide from your true self." In that moment, she realized she had to confront her past, not escape it. "I won't let you control me!" she shouted, her voice echoing with newfound strength. The Memory Keeper's smile faltered. "You think you can resist? Your memories are my power!" But Julia stood firm, refusing to let his darkness consume her. "I own my memories! They do not define me!"

As she spoke, the swirling shadows began to recede, the painful memories fading like smoke. The library trembled, and the Memory Keeper's expression shifted from amusement to fear. "No! You cannot escape!" he roared, but Julia felt a surge of energy within her, pushing back against the darkness.

With one final scream, she shattered the bonds of her past, and the library erupted in blinding light. The shadows screamed as they were cast away, the Memory Keeper's form flickering like a dying flame.

Horror

LureMan

By: Saim Khurshid Malik



Saim Khurshid Malik

Born in Islamabad, Pakistan, Saim Khurshid Malik is an English language student with years of experience in writing, editing, and ghost-writing. He's scripted obscure adverts, run social media for caffeinated clients, and written countless product reviews for exposure. After enduring soul-crushing side jobs and sanity-testing sales gigs, he's finally stepping into the spotlight to share his work under his own name. It's been a ride—and it's only the beginning.

There is a road that cuts through the forest. It has lights, signboards, and a fresh coat of white paint going down the center, yet you never see a car. However, when the pain felt worse that night, a car drove on that road. Faded scars fresh behind the windscreen. The trees flew by as I drove. My family's Crown Victoria groaned under me, old but still running. Everything burned, a red glow trapping me. I shouldn't have been alone, not tonight. But I drove. I didn't slow until I saw lights on the roadside. An old town beckoned, demanding I turn. The pain still plagued, the fire still burned, and I felt my forehead burning. I tried to wipe it away, but all I got was cold sweat. Once I made the turn, the setting changed. No more unassuming trees. Just a single, straight-shot road, the kind that used to feel endless when I was a kid. Shops and Diners flanked either side, some still holding onto their cracked signs and peeling paint. I remembered this place differently, glowing and alive, the kind of town that once lured tourists with cheap food and warm lights. But now, most of the stores are boarded up, their windows covered in grime or plywood. A few had FOR SALE signs leaning

against broken glass. Others didn't even bother pretending they were coming back. It felt like the town had been drained of sound. No music from the bar, no chatter from late-night customers outside the bakery. Just flickering streetlights, humming in the silence. It felt nice, a calm world that existed only for me. That feeling did not last long. I pulled into a fuel station. grabbed my hoodie, tugging it low before stepping out. The moment I stepped out, dizziness hit instantly, the burning worse than ever. I felt blood pouring down into my eyes. I tried to wipe it away, but all I got was cold sweat. I steadied myself, filled the tank, and headed into the shop for something cold. Anything to fight the fire inside. A man with a thick white beard stood behind the counter. I could not see his eyes, but I knew they followed me. Keeping my hood low, I grabbed a plastic cup labeled *Power Slush* and headed to the counter. Making sure to keep one hand pressed against the hood. The man stood to his feet. He was in red overalls and had a large hanging scarf covering his chest. He took a price checker and scanned the drink. All the while, staring directly at me, as if he could see through the hood. "Have I seen you somewhere?" he said. His voice, I remembered it. I felt stuck in place, and my hood slipped.

"Emily?" His eyes landed on the scar, melted wax and cracked clay. A mark I could never escape.

I quickly pulled the hood back, tugging it low over my face.

"I have not seen you in years. How are you holding up?"

I wanted to tell him the truth, that it hurt, that a fire followed me wherever I went, stopping me from living a life. He placed a hand on my shoulder, and, for a moment, I could feel the screaming stop.

"What happened to your father was tragic, but I am happy that you came to see your mother."

I gave him a nod and a forged smile. I had nothing else to offer.

When I left the station, he had refused to charge me for the drink or the fuel. Called me his daughter and told me to drive safely. All I did was mumble thank you and walk out. I knew he was staring at me from the window, worried for me, but I never looked back. I sat in my car and continued down the road.

Not long after, the building ended, and both sides of the road returned to being trees, a forest as far as the eye could see. I remembered driving on this road just once before. Back when I left. I remember feeling free, feeling like the fire was never going to hurt me again. Thinking I was going to be alright.

I was wrong. It never stopped burning. It followed me everywhere, hurting in safe places. Now that I was returning to where it all began, it burned the brightest.

The forest around me had started to smoke. Fire rose quickly, turning every leaf and branch into kindling. Gusts of flame blew toward the road.

I slammed my foot on the pedal, and the car sped as fast as it could. The

old road rumbled beneath me while the forest burned, flames chasing close behind.

No matter how fast I went, I couldn't outrun it. I could feel it getting closer.

The frame of the car grew red hot, the engine screaming for mercy. Fire seeped through the cracks, wrapping around me like fever, using my body like coal.

Then, suddenly, a yellow object appeared in front of the car, and I crashed into it. I just managed to keep the car from keeling over, drifting hard, rubber screeching on the road. When I finally came to a stop, the car sat sideways, covering both lanes. I felt my head covered in ash. I tried to wipe it away, but all I got was cold sweat.

Breathing heavily, my head rested on the steering wheel. When I looked up, there was no fire. Only the quiet, beautiful stillness of the forest night.

I turned to see what I had hit. Lying on the road was a flattened plastic stand with a yellow board. At the top, the word 'STOP' was written in bold red letters. It was a police sign.

My eyes followed its direction to the side of the road. More signs, blockades, and police tape stretched across the pavement. The words 'CRIME SCENE' were printed on multiple objects. Tire tracks led from the road into the forest, ending at a damaged tree.

There, I saw a car, crushed against the trunk, its frame twisted with branches speared through the shattered windows. It looked burnt, and melted down until only the outline gave away what it had once been. The doors hung open, and traces of fire lingered, black ash scattered across the ground.

With a sigh, I started the engine again and drove on, continuing toward my destination.

The road ended in a cul-de-sac, surrounded by large, expensive-looking homes. But they all looked broken down, unkempt, abandoned. It was the one opposite the road that belonged to my mother. A large blue house. At least, it used to be blue. Now the paint was faded and peeling, almost grey. The yard was a mess. Grass and shrubs had grown wild, reaching up the sides of the house and breaking through the gaps in the wooden floorboards. When I stepped onto the porch, it creaked and shifted under my weight. There were holes at both ends, big enough to fall through. I knocked.

The door swung open, just missing me, and a rifle pointed out.

"Who is it?"

It was an old woman with white hair, skin wrinkled to the folds, wearing a bright pink dressing gown. It was my mother.

"Ma, it's me, Emily," I said, stepping out of the line of fire.

Her eyes were forced wide, bloodshot with bags hanging inches underneath. Her pupils moved erratically.

Suddenly, she tossed the gun back into the house and pulled me into her arms.

"Oh, Emily. I thought I'd never get to see you again. It's been horrible, just horrible," she said, pulling me in and slamming the door shut.

"What the hell is happening?"

My mother turned to me, the candlelight flickering against her wrinkled skin. Shadows danced across her face, making her look thinner, older, almost skeletal.

"I've been waiting," she said, her eyes wide and unfocused. "Waiting for the LureMan to return."

I blinked.

"Who?"

“The one who killed your father,” she said flatly, like it explained everything. “He burned him. Burned him alive out in the forest.”

The word ‘burned’ hit me like a metal rod to the chest. The heat rushed back, the red glow creeping into the edges of my vision. A scream clawed at the back of my head. I looked down and wiped my forehead. Cold sweat. But I didn’t show it.

“What do you mean?”

She didn’t answer. Instead, she grabbed my wrist and pulled me across the room. The house groaned beneath us as we moved, the old floorboards cracking under our steps. Every surface was lit only by flame, candles on the tables, lanterns hanging from the ceiling by wires, some swaying gently, as if something had just passed through.

She stopped at a shelf and pulled out a folder. Papers and old notes slipped out and were scattered across the floor. She dug through them with shaking hands until she found one page in particular. She held it up.

A drawing. A crude one. A long man, too tall, his head blank. Flames surrounded him. A stick figure stood beneath him; arms raised.

I recognized it instantly. A childhood tale. A made-up story parents used to scare their kids into staying away from fire. A name whispered at night during camping trips. A myth. Nothing more.

“The LureMan,” my mother said.

“That’s him. That’s who killed your father.”

I shook my head.

“Ma,” I said. “This isn’t real. That thing’s not real. It was a car accident. Dad swerved. Lost control. That’s all it was.”

She didn’t respond.

“The fire was just a fire. No creature. No... thing.”

She sat down slowly.

“But what if he comes back?” she whispered, her voice barely audible.

I walked over and placed a hand on her shoulder. Her bones felt sharp under her skin—brittle and trembling.

“You need rest,” I said.

I gently guided her to the couch and sat her down. She didn’t resist. As soon as her head touched the cushion, her eyes closed. She was asleep. I stared at her for a moment. The candle beside me flickered, casting long, shaky shadows across the room. I returned to the shelf and looked at the drawing again. The LureMan. The name felt heavier.

Leaving her to rest, I crossed the creaky floor and climbed the stairs. Upstairs felt like a different world, clean and calm. Polished redwood floors gleamed under a soft chandelier glow, and sheer pink curtains draped the windows, catching the light like water.

There were three rooms. One belonged to my parents. One was mine, back when I still lived here. And one belonged to my brother.

I stepped into my old room. Something in me relaxed. The posters were still on the walls, stuffed toys lined the shelf, and the bed felt cool beneath my hand, worn but familiar. For the first time in ages, I felt happy. Safe. The fire couldn’t touch me here.

I turned to check on my mother, but just as I reached the stairs, my eyes caught my brother’s room

I wanted to ignore it, turn away, walk downstairs, never look back. But I couldn’t. The fire wouldn’t let me. This time, I had to face it.

I stepped toward the door. The air grew hotter with each step. My hand touched the knob. I turned it and stepped in. Heat hit me, dry and

heavy. Dust and old cloth filled my nose. The wooden floor was warm, like it had been sunlit for years.

Nothing had changed. Posters curled on the walls; sun-faded prints stared back. A console lay tangled in wires, books leaned unevenly, and some edges were scorched.

I moved further in. His bed was made, perfectly tucked, untouched for years. A small black hoodie still hung on the back of his chair. On the pillow sat a stuffed bear, half its face melted, one stitched eye sagging. My hand reached out and touched the edge of the blanket. It was warm. Warmer than it should’ve been.

Then the scream returned. Not loud like before, just a faint whisper. I closed my eyes and saw the forest. Flames dancing between trees. My brother was screaming. The heat crawled over my skin like a second layer.

I walked to the closet and grabbed the handle. It was hot. Burning. But I turned it anyway. Inside, there were no clothes, no shelves. Just black. Drawn on the back wall in black marker, nearly invisible against the dark paint. A figure with long arms, no face, fire curling at its feet. The same one from the drawing downstairs. The fire wasn’t outside anymore. It was inside me.

I shut the door and stepped back. The room felt smaller. The heat pressed in. I turned to leave but froze. In the corner, near the window, I saw ashes. It was a dollhouse or what remained of one. Charred black, the roof collapsed, and toy furniture melted into plastic lumps. I remembered this. Before the fire. Before the screams. Back when he and I still played here, like nothing could ever go wrong. My knees buckled, and I dropped to

the floor. The heat, the light, the guilt, it all hit me at once. The sound of a flame where there shouldn't have been. The feeling of skin peeling. I gasped and crawled backwards until I hit the wall. "I'm sorry," I whispered. My brother was standing in the doorway, just as he had the day before it all happened.

"I'm sorry," I said again, louder this time.

The heat lifted. The light dimmed. The screaming stopped. Silence. I stepped outside and gently closed the door behind me.

I wiped my forehead, no sweat.

"I did it," I whispered, placing a hand over the burnt part of my face, sitting on the floor, leaning against my brother's bedroom door, smiling. I felt at peace.

That feeling did not last.

A sharp bang cracked through the house, loud and heavy, like an axe splitting a log. It came from downstairs.

I shot to my feet and rushed down.

The front door was open, a large, splintered hole torn through its frame. I froze on the steps, scanning the room, until I saw her.

My mother stood in the center of the room, holding a lantern in her hand. Her eyes looked redder than before, too red. Her skin gleamed with a strange shine, almost wet, as if the light was reflecting off oil.

"I won't let him win," she said, voice shaking. "I won't let him take me!"

"Ma, no!"

She threw the lantern to the floor.

The house erupted. A roar made of wood and flame. Fire swallowed the floor in an instant. Windows burst inward, glass raining down like ash. Where my mother had been, nothing was left. Just fire.

The blast forced me back as heat punched the air from my lungs. My legs moved before I could think, carrying me up the stairs. "Stop, stop, stop," I shouted, but it didn't listen.

The fire chased me, crawling up the stairs like it had a will of its own, chewing wood, spitting sparks, screaming with a thousand voices.

Smoke filled the stairwell.

"No, this isn't real," I said, feet planted, staring down the rising flame. "You're not real! You're just in my head. You're just..."

I charged with my hand stretched forward, ready to break the illusion.

My fingers touched flame. In an instant, my skin cracked and blistered, heat sank in like teeth. I screamed and fell. My hand shook, red and raw.

It was real!

I ran and pulled myself through the ceiling hatch just as the fire reached it. Inside, the attic was dry and suffocating. Black beams groaned overhead. Boxes smoldered in the corners. I crawled forward, coughing through the smoke. The floor beneath me glowed red. Fire licked up through the cracks. The walls pulsed. Shadows twisted like ghosts.

There was a small, cracked window open to the night. I reached for a rusted metal rod and swung it at the glass. It shattered, and cold air burst in, slicing through the heat like a knife.

I climbed up into the frame, glass tearing into my jeans. I looked down, I closed my eyes, and I jumped.

I remember the sound of wooden structures shattering. After that, it went numb. I remember crawling out of the rubble. When the feeling came back, I found my left leg no longer responded. I feared looking down. I let the pain paint the picture for me. I made my way to the road and turned

to meet the house. My ears were ringing, but my eyes could see clearly. Tall, thin, more shadow than flesh. His face was deathly white, stretched tight over sharp bones, and his clothes hung off him in folds of deep black, like burned fabric clinging to a corpse. His hands were wrapped in red tape, stained and peeling, as if holding something in. A thick chain hung around his neck, swaying with every breath. His eyes burned a bright, unnatural red, and his mouth curled into a smile so wide, so twisted, it barely looked human. No... not human. Not even close. It was him. The LureMan.

He started walking towards me, each step casting a spell of fear over me. I screamed and turned, limping towards my car. He was slow, dragging as if he had all the time in the world. He didn't run. He didn't need to. I threw myself into the driver's seat, slammed the door, and twisted the key until the engine coughed awake. I looked up. He stood at the tree line, still smiling, eyes burning red, head tilted.

I hit the gas and didn't stop. I drove until the smoke was gone, until the air was clean again. But it didn't matter. I ran.

THE END

Horror

Twyne Interlude: Brun

By: Dylan James Harper



Dylan James Harper

Dylan James Harper is a teacher and writer in Sonoma County, California. Aside from writing, he enjoys spending time with his wife and their pets, eating hot and sour soup, and doing yard work. His favorite flowers are sunflowers.

“W ill you hurry the fuck up?”

The large man barked towards the far end of the narrow train corridor.

Brun narrowed their eyes and starred at the man for a moment. He was big, but they could tell he had gotten too used to dealing with the unthinking undead or people in chains. They could certainly take him and strongly considered doing so by wrapping the chains that bound their wrists around his neck and asking politely for an apology. It wasn't worth it though, as that would make executing their plan significantly more difficult, and it was too good of a plan to waste. Instead, they just tried to look meek and shuffle a bit faster.

They had heard about the bus crash at a safe house near Oklahoma City. An all-girls orphanage had closed on the east coast behind the wall and was trying to fly their kids across the country on the cheapest air bus they could find to their new behind the wall on the west coast. Of course, it had crashed, or possibly been brought down, and the girls had been scooped up by some weird cult that lived between the walls. By the time Brun tracked them down, they had been sold to someone else who apparently had a compound up north somewhere and was transporting the girls via train.

This is when Brun came up with their plan. They had already been growing their dark blond hair out a bit, and the girls didn't have a uniform, or anything so step one was slip into the group as they changed hands from the cult to whoever the buyer had hired to transport them. It was even easier than Brun had thought it would be, and before they knew it, they were shackled in line with the girls making their way down the train. A few of the girls had certainly noticed them, but wisely said nothing. Still, there hadn't been an opportunity to talk with them so Brun had to assume they would all be useless. Step two was also going to be pretty easy. As soon as they got to wherever they were going to be held for the majority of the ride, they would slip their knife out of their sock and get out of their bindings. As expected, the large man, who was currently the lone guard for the group of two dozen girls plus Brun, parked them all in a big empty train car, closing the door behind him with a loud metal clang. Brun quickly pulled out the knife, fiddled in the lock, and quickly released themselves. A few girls nearby gasped, and one opened her mouth, but Brun quickly put a finger up to indicate silence. They moved over to the metal door and very slowly moved the handle. Sure enough, it was locked from the outside, as expected. They went to the opposite side and found another

door. Surprisingly, it did open up and revealed that this was the caboose. A wide empty desert was racing by either side, only interrupted by a few groups of undead now and then that would turn and shamble after the train as it roared by.

"Feel free to leave if you like," shouted the man, who must have heard the door open.

"Nothing but heat and death waiting for you," he chuckled.

Brun rolled their eyes. They guessed that was likely preferable to whatever was at the other end of the train tracks, but it didn't matter because Brun didn't plan on finding out. They went back to where they had released themselves and grabbed the chains, draping them over their shoulders for easy carrying. Then, they motioned for a few of the girls, who had been watching in silence, to come forward. Brun released a few and then motioned for them to get together. Brun placed a few into position until it was clear what they wanted.

The girls lifted Brun up to the ceiling of the car, where there was a latch that opened up to the roof. The gap between cars was far too big to jump, which wouldn't matter any way because the large man would certainly see. Brun motioned to be brought down and then whispered in the ear of the closest girl. Her eyes widened, but she nodded and tapped another girl and the two moved down towards the door to the outside. The rest of the group lifted Brun back up, who nodded at the two near the door before pulling themselves up on the roof.

The two girls started slamming the car door over and over again. The rest quickly covered their ears as, even over the movement of the train, the metal-on-metal noise was nearly

deafening. Brun crept along in rhythm to the slamming and watched from above as the man turned to open the door. As soon as he did, they swung down behind him and before he even realized what was happening the chain was around his neck. He bucked like an angry mule, but Brun held on tight. Two nearby girls bent down and clasped hands in front of him, tripping him up. He hit the floor hard with Brun on top, who kept choking him to make sure he was totally unconscious.

It took Brun and four of the girls to drag the large man to the backdoor, where they rolled him right off the back. Brun was sure to take his gun and head back towards the front of the car. The next car up didn't have a window, but the door was unlocked. Brun opened it to find it empty. They turned around a little surprised to see the whole line of girls behind them, looking ready for a fight. They shouldn't have been so shocked, Brun knew it was like to be an orphan and should have expected they'd be ready for a fight.

They all tiptoed down a few cars until they finally found one occupied. Fix guards were in it, mostly sitting around. A couple were eating by the window, and one was cleaning his gun. Brun checked the gun they had taken from the first guard. It was fully loaded, which was relatively rare. Bullets were hard to come by between the walls and most people who threatened with a gun rarely had to the lead to back it up. Unfortunately, that meant that the guards' guns inside were also likely loaded. Brun felt a tap on their shoulder and looked back.

They could see the girls more clearly now, and the one who had slammed the back door was standing behind them. She had red hair, freckles, and

was the only girl who was close to Brun's height. They were motioning for the gun. Brun looked back skeptically, but relented at the girl's insistence. Brun was never much for guns, and if this girl had any ability to shoot, she'd be more useful than them. The red hair girl then motioned for a few others to join her. They were whispering amongst themselves, before lifting the red hair girl up towards the roof of the car. She gave Brun a wink and then departed beyond view. One of the other girls stepped up and positioned Brun behind the car door and then sent the rest of the girls back into the previous empty car.

Brun finally understood what was going on and offered a thumbs up before the girl could lean in to whisper. They stood up and grabbed onto a bar, handing down as the girl opened the door, shrieked, and then ran back towards the car with the rest of the girls. The guard cleaning his gun jumped up and ran after her, running right by Brun. Brun let him go, which proved to be the right choice as the sounds in the next car over indicated the sea of girls were beating him senseless with the chains that had previously bound them. Another guard followed and Brun used the bar to swing hard, kicking him right as he stepped, knocking him clear off the train.

The remaining three guards got up and started moving towards the door down the narrow corridor. Brun, guessing accurately as to what was about to happen, moved back out of the way of the door as they heard three shots fire off. They poked their heads back around to find the red-haired girl standing on the far side of the train car as all three guards lay motionless on the floor. Brun gave

another thumbs up. Both went back to check on the other guard, just in time to see the girls toss him off the train.

"It's just the conductor now," the red hair girl said aloud.

"What's the plan?" One of the other girls asked, only to be interrupted by a loud high-pitched shriek as the train came screeching to a halt.

Brun and most of the girls were flung off their feet, but the red hair girl caught herself and turned towards the front car. Brun was trying to pull themselves back up when they heard another loud shot, and the red-haired girl crumpled to the floor. Blood was already soaking through their shirt, and their eyes were wide as their hands moved towards the wound. Brun quickly lifted it up and pressed down hard, trying to stop the bleeding as best they could.

"None of y'all move now, ya here?" Came the voice of the conductor, who was holding a shotgun pointed down the narrow corridor.

"I'm alright," the red hair girl whispered, as she surreptitiously slid Brun the first guard's gun.

Brun returned the wink from earlier, before whipping around and firing the gun right into the man's chest. Two of the other girls ran forward and took the shotgun, and another two came to help Brun with the red hair girl.

"It's just rock salt," said the girl holding the shotgun.

Brun let out a sigh of relief.

"Okay, still, let's keep pressure on this wound just in case," Brun commanded.

A few girls helped the red-haired girl up into a seat and wrapped up the wound with cloth from their sweatshirts as best they could.

"What's the plan now?" Asked one of the girls.

Horror

Belle Lake

By: Doug Hawley



Doug Hawley

The author is a little old former actuary who jumped from numbers to words. He has hundreds of stories published in all of the usual genres and four continents (South America, Africa, and Antarctica are difficult for him). He had two short story collections published in 2023. His home is in Oregon USA with editor Sharon.

<https://sites.google.com/site/aberrantword/hello> website with location and details on hundreds of stories.

Duke rushed into his house at

10AM on Saturday. After he shut the door, he bent over gasping for air.

When he finally could speak, he said “Shere, you won’t believe what I just saw.”

“Probably, but why don’t you try me?”

“I was walking by the lake watching the Johnson boy Jeb waterskiing when something came out of the water grabbed him and dove back in the water.”

“You’re right, I don’t believe you. Belle Lake is a fresh water lake that doesn’t have anything larger than carp. I’m not buying a man eating carp.”

“It most definitely wasn’t a carp. I didn’t get a close look, but it appeared to be about ten feet long with large scales and big teeth.”

“You’ve been watching too many crazy movies. Despite movies like ‘Puddle Sharks’ there are no large and dangerous fish in the lake.”

“OK, but I saw what I saw. You may change your mind when Mr. Johnson reports to the Belle police.”

The next day after Mr. Johnson confirmed Duke’s story, a scuba diver attempted to find the Johnson boy. The scuba diver disappeared.

Shere became a believer. Monday night at 3AM she woke up and couldn’t get back to sleep. She logged

into her computer and researched the lake.

Tuesday morning she told Duke that she had a theory. To ensure she could make herself clear, she documented her case:

Ex biology professor Chad Simon moved to a shack next to the lake five years ago after unethical genetics experiments got him dismissed from Obregon University. He had very little contact with the community and rumors pegged him as a typical movie mad scientist.

Four years ago Jerry Danz disappeared while visiting relatives in Belle. The last time he was seen, he was walking towards the lake with fishing gear. A couple of months after that a toddler strayed from a family picnic next to the lake and was never seen again.

A couple of weeks before Jeb Johnson disappeared; a car was abandoned by the lake. It belonged to a man from Chicago who couldn’t be found.

All of the disappearances occurred when the fishing at the lake was bad. Those are the facts. Here’s what I think that they mean. Simon made some monster with DNA experiments. Normally it eats fish, but when the fish supply is low, it is an opportunistic killer.

After Duke had absorbed all of that he said “I’ve got to admit, it all holds up. What’s next?”

“We tell the police.”

When trying to convince the police

failed to the extent of being pushed out of the police station, Shere sent her case to everyone in Belle with emails via 'Nextdoor Belle'. Nothing happened for two days, but no one got close to the lake, or so it seemed. Then the town woke to the horrible smell of rotting fish and smoke from the Simons shack being burned to the ground. Simon either escaped alive or was burned to death, no one knew.

Two days later, Belle News reported that the lake had been poisoned by rotenone and strongly suggested that Shere's Next door Belle email had spurred someone to burn the Simon's house and poison the lake.

Shere asked Duke "Did I really screw up?"

"If you got rid of the lake monster indirectly, maybe you are a lifesaver."

That night everyone in Belle on the disaster call list got a robo call "Get out of town fast. The lake monster is amphibian and left the lake before being poisoned. It is killing anything that it can find."

Shere told Duke "I'm grabbing one thing before we go."

Before they got into their car, they noticed all of the tires were ripped apart. Then they heard rustling in their hedge.

As Shere aimed the .45 automatic she had grabbed on the way out she said "We aren't dead yet."

The excellent marksman fired five bullets between two red glowing saucer shaped eyes a foot apart.

Return To Belle Lake

"How do you feel about coming back to our house Shere."

"Duke all I know is that the Federals say it is completely safe. They checked the burned ruins of mad

doctor Simon's place and didn't find anything alive. Of course there are rumors about remains of his weird animal creations, but nothing provable. The National Guard and FEMA have thoroughly checked out Belle Lake for miles around."

"I talked to a loose-lipped guardsman in town. He says that there was another monster like the one that you killed. Sure glad you are an expert marksman and grabbed the 45 auto before leaving the house. Probably government mad doctors are experimenting with the monster that is a lookalike for the one you shot. You know I have dreams or nightmares about twenty foot long super reptiles?"

"You and me both Duke. But I'm pretty sure that everything will go back to normal, and the horror will fade."

Upon returning from what used to be Duke's usual Saturday walk to the lake, he told Shere "I'm not screaming like the first time I saw one of Simon's creations, but it was pretty upsetting. The nightmare isn't over. I saw something like an anaconda with legs cross the path in front of me on the way home. I don't think that it saw me. I'll start to pack. Why don't you call the Belle Lake neighborhood line to let everyone know that we need to evacuate again."

Shere came back from the phone looking stricken. "Before I could call the neighborhood line, I got a call from the line. I was told not to worry about the monsters."

"But that's good news isn't it?"

"No need to worry about the monsters because both China and Russia have launched a nuclear attack on the USA."

"What can we do?"

"We can hope that we are killed

immediately or wait for death by radioactivity. I chose to use my gun, stick my head between my legs and kiss my ass goodbye. Want to join me?"

The End

Appeared in Black Poppy and Dark Dossier as two stories "Lake" and "Return To Belle Lake" and in Sirens Call as one story.

Horror

The Legend of Wellington Bridge

By: Dawn DeBraal



Dawn DeBraal

Dawn DeBraal lives in rural Wisconsin with her husband, a stray cat and a rescued dog. She has published over 600 short stories, drabbles, and poems in online ezines and anthologies. She tends to lean toward the horror genre because it makes her life seem so much better! Falling Star Magazine nominated Dawn for the 2019 Pushcart Award; she was Runner-up in the 2022 Horror Story Competition, two-time Author of the Month, nominated 2020, 2022, 2023 Author of the Year in Spillwords, Member of the Month in Issues 103 and 115 in The World of Myth Magazine.

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Bobby Shafer always pushed her too far. Zenni grabbed his hands, stopping him from unclasping her bra. "No," she said, pushing his hands away from her. A frustrated Bobby sat back, pouting.

"You're a tease."

"No, you don't know when to stop. I don't want to be a teen mom. Is that so bad? I am saving you and me from screwing up our lives."

"Maybe I want my life to be screwed up. Ever think about that?"

"I'm walking home!" Zenni slammed the door on Bobby's '63 Chevy Nova and marched down Swamp Road amid frogs chirping in the night and the fog rising from the muddy ground.

"Come on, Zenni. You don't have to do that. I'll take you home." Bobby called after her.

"I won't get back into the car with you. I can't trust you. We're done, Bobby Shafer." She marched along the ditch to the Wellington Railroad Bridge, once a train trestle bridge over the Blue River, but now a footpath to the highway.

"Zenni, don't cross that bridge. I can't help you. The car can't cross it. It's too rickety."

"I don't care, Bobby, just leave me alone." Bobby stood at the edge of the bridge and watched his girlfriend

disappear and then heard a blood-curdling scream. He had never run faster, but Zenni wasn't anywhere. "Zenni! Where are you!" he shouted—only the sound of the rushing river below and the bullfrogs croaking. Zenni had become one of the many mysterious legends involving Wellington Bridge.

Bobby raced into town and to the police station. Searching did not produce his girlfriend. In the morning, a dive team searched for her in the deep waters of the Blue River. Zenni Hastings never arrived home, nor was her body ever recovered.

The story of Zenni's disappearance added to a long line of hauntings on that bridge. The first recorded incident happened after Gerald Ackerman was accused of throwing his wife from the train as it crossed over the swamp. Gerald waited until he could no longer hear his wife's screams and went to retrieve the conductor to stop the train. He told the authorities his wife had tripped over the hem of her dress on the platform between two cars, falling over the side.

People claimed to hear the screams of a woman on the railroad bridge over the Blue River many times, searching and finding nothing. When the railroad shut that route from the main lines, the bridge became part of a footpath linking a small scenic road to the highway.

Bobby Schafer lived under a cloud. Many people thought he'd done

something to Zenni Hastings, but there was no proof. Wellington Bridge became a favorite daredevil hangout where kids would tempt the ghosts. Andy Paske jumped from the bridge in a dare and onto a rusted underwater girder that pierced his body, pushing him above the water like a shish kabob. The town hired someone to put a fence across the bridge at both ends, but that didn't stop the kids from trespassing.

Bobby eventually married a local girl, Debra Moss, and they had a daughter, Cora, who was nearing graduation from high school.

One evening, Cora found herself and her boyfriend, Mac, near the old train bridge, just as her father had been with Zenni Hastings. Cora had heard the rumors that her father was the last person to see Zenni alive. She felt a little guilty after promising her father she would never do this, and here she was, parked in front of the bridge with her boyfriend Mac, who pulled her across the seat.

"What's that?" Cora said, pulling away from him.

"What?"

"Don't you hear it? It sounds like a woman screaming!" She opened the door to hear better.

"Cora, don't get out of the car. Let's get out of here. This scenario is freaking me out."

"We can't just leave her!" Cora insisted.

"Get back in the car. We'll call the cops." Mac urged.

"But she could be dead by the time we get help." Cora slammed the door, heading for the bridge, ignoring the keep-out placard under the rusted five-ton limit sign. Another scream urged her to climb over the rubble.

"Cora!" Mac slapped the hood of his car, swearing in frustration, following

her onto the bridge. They were walking quickly when Mac's foot went through the rotten boards.

"God!" he screamed in pain.

"Mac, are you alright?"

"No, I went through the bridge. The whole thing is rotten. Let's go back."

Cora helped Mac out of the hole and went toward the car.

"Help." Cora stopped; she'd heard the woman's plea.

"Helloooo? Are you alright?" Cora called through cupped hands.

"Help," the woman's voice shouted again.

"I'm coming, don't worry." Cora trotted toward the river, leaving Mac behind.

"Cora, stop! I can't follow you. I'm too heavy."

"Mac, I'll be right back." Cora picked her way across the bridge using the old rail to walk on, putting one foot in front of the other like a tightrope walker. Her arms spread out from her sides, keeping her balanced on the rail. Cora thought she saw a round head bobbing in front of her. She could see with what little light the moon and the stars gave off because her eyes had grown accustomed to the dark.

A humanoid with a large head dressed in a long black robe seemed to be approaching her. She was mesmerized by its jerky movements.

A woman in a long dress screamed as she fell from a ghost train; a man had pushed her on the platform. Another woman was torn limb from limb by the wobbly-headed creatures, leaving Cora devastated by the sight.

A ghostly woman appeared before her, reached out, and touched Cora, who was frozen to the rails. Something passed between them before the apparition was dragged underwater by bobbleheads. This woke Cora up, and she was able to break the spell that

kept her in that spot, racing back to the parking lot.

"Cora, get in the car," Mac shouted, relieved when he saw his girlfriend.

"Let's get out of here," she shouted, and Mac headed down Swamp Road, suddenly slamming on the brakes. A woman covered in weeds slowly limped in front of the car. Her arms dragged from the weight of the weeds, turned towards them in a silent scream.

"Don't stop; that thing is dead. Run it over!" Cora shouted. Mac winced and stepped on the accelerator, plowing through the apparition. There was nothing physically there, only someone who'd met their fate on Wellington Bridge. Upon nearing the highway, Cora put her hand on Mac's arm.

"Mac, slow down. I think we're safe now."

"What the hell was that?" She could hear the panic in his voice.

"I don't know, but we saw the Wellington Bridge legend tonight. Evil is bubbling to the surface. I need to tell my father what we've seen. He will be mad at me because I promised him, I'd never go to the bridge, but I think I was spared because they already took someone from my family, and the thing somehow recognized me.

"That's weird, Cora. How do you mean recognize?"

"Creatures with large heads wearing long black robes. They hobble along, but they are strong. They remember the tragedies of this place. A woman touched me, I felt her communicate in my mind that my family had suffered enough, and she let me go."

"That is crazy talk," Mac mumbled.

Cora watched as he chewed at the skin around his thumbnail, something he did when he was nervous.

"I want my dad to know he didn't do anything wrong. He's lived with this

cloud hanging over his head since he was a teenager. We must get to the bottom of this haunting. There is something more than meets the eye. When she got home, Cora stood with Mac before her father.

"Dad, I'm sorry, but Mac and I went to the Wellington Railroad bridge tonight."

"You. What? I told you never to go there, and you promised me you wouldn't."

"Dad, listen, there is something supernatural out there. What happened to Zenni Hastings wasn't your fault. I saw bobble-headed creatures that cause the deaths of people. I don't know why they do it, only that one of the ghosts grabbed me and let me go because it told me in my mind, you had suffered enough."

"It grabbed you. Cora, what the hell? You could have been killed. Can you, for once, put yourself in my place and know what that would have done to me?" He looked at Mac.

"As for you, young man, I want you to leave and don't ever come back."

"Dad!"

"No, Cora, he took you out there. You don't think he knew about the rumors? He wanted to prove something to his buddies. How cool was that to take the daughter of the suspected murderer out to the place where he killed his victim? You don't think he was thinking that?" Mac's face fell in shame. Cora knew her Dad was telling the truth. Mac had done this for bragging rights.

"I think you should go," Cora said. Mac left, knowing this was not the time or place to argue.

"Tell me what you saw." Cora described what happened. The bobble-headed people, the ghost train, and the murder of several

people.

"It's time to put these rumors to rest," her father said.

"What are we going to do, Dad?"

"I will call the University and find an occult and paranormal activity expert. We will get to the bottom of this so-called haunting."

Cora and her father went to Professor Linden's office, who had offered to hear their story.

"Please sit down." The professor extended his hand toward the chairs in front of his desk. "How can I help you?"

"Professor Linden, when I called, I asked you to look up the history of the Wellington Bridge Legend."

"Oh, yes, I have. I found out quite a bit about it.

"My daughter and I have experienced the hauntings firsthand. In 1978, I drove my girlfriend out on Swamp Road, and we fought. She left the vehicle and was walking across Wellington Bridge when I heard her scream. They never found Zenni Hastings. There was no body or any trace of her. For a long while, the town accused me of being a murderer but never pressed charges. My daughter Cora was out at the bridge the other night, despite my warnings never to go near the place. I want her to tell you what her experience was."

"My boyfriend and I were curious, so we went to Wellington Bridge. I heard a woman screaming. Mac, my boyfriend, and I tried to walk the railroad bridge, but he fell through the rotten wood and couldn't go any further. I was able to get to the screams, only it wasn't a woman. It was many men and women playing like in an old-time movie. All of them were killed. I first saw a bobble-headed creature in a black robe. I say that because there is no other way I can

explain it. It seemed like its head was too big for its body, and it wobbled back and forth as it walked. I watched as a woman was thrown off a ghost train, another was ripped apart limb from limb, and several people suffocated in a cave. It was horrifying. When I went to leave, one of the creatures grabbed my arm and telepathically told me my father had suffered too much already and let me go. Mac and I tore out of the area, but a woman covered in wet weeds crossed the road in front of the car. We went through her like smoke, though she looked real."

The professor sat silently for a few seconds, thinking of what he would say.

"I believe your stories. There have been many hauntings of bridges that cross areas that would never be exposed, but for the bridge itself. What you witnessed were Water Nymphs or creatures with encephalic heads. They are demons who rule underwater. On land, they are clumsy but graceful when they float riverbeds, feeding off tragedy.

Nymphs gather where the earth opens a vent, allowing evil to surface. Have you ever noticed that where a car accident has happened, you will see many more crosses at the same location? That is a sign of a portal where evil energy is close to the surface. These creatures thrive on disaster, and they feed on it. After one person has a fatal car crash, suddenly, the apparitions scare other people into crashing at the same site.

"So, you're saying Wellington Bridge is a gathering place for these nymphs who feed off evil and despair?"

"I won't know for sure until you take me to where you saw these things. There must be some catalysts that started the haunting, that is what we

need to find out."

"When can we go?" Bobby asked.

"Now is good for me." Linden picked up a backpack already packed. Cora rode in the back seat while her dad drove them to the bridge. In daylight, things looked innocent. Linden pulled a small instrument from his backpack when they exited the vehicle.

"What is that?" Cora asked him.

"All apparitions have energy; this instrument will detect any jump in energy surrounding us. Where it is the strongest, we will find the evil from which the Nymphs are feeding.

Linden walked before them, watching the needle register the electrical current around them. As they walked toward the river, the meter jumped.

"Wow, it's off the charts," Linden pushed a few buttons, and the instrument quieted.

"What did you do?" Bobby asked.

"I recalibrated it to a higher energy reading. The reading will have to be quite strong to register now." They walked along the stones on which the trestle had been built, continuing down the slope toward the river.

Linden stopped when the instrument squealed.

"This is unbelievable. The strongest disturbance I've ever seen." Kicking some branches and debris away, he uncovered a heavy metal cover.

"What is that?" Cora asked.

"It's the entrance to somewhere that has been hidden on purpose. I don't know if I want to open it, but if we don't find out what it is, those Nymphs will continue to thrive here. We must find the tragedy that drew them to Wellington Bridge in the first place."

Bobby lifted the lid with the help of Professor Linden. The metal manhole cover was stamped 1858.

"This cover was obviously stolen from

the village. There is no water system out here that I can see." Linden passed out small penlights from his backpack, and they peeped into the opening

"What is this place?" Bobby asked.

"I think it was an underground railroad. I did some reading when you called. A woman by the name of Glenna Adams was suspected of moving enslaved people out of the area and sending them north to freedom." Linden responded as he climbed down the ladder. The place was dark and eerie. Skeletons littered the floor.

"Oh God, there are dead people down here!" Cora shrieked. Linden was busy going from body to body when he spied a book on a bench. Opening it, he read from the book.

"This was Galena Rhode's spell book. She was a known witch who must have been trying to banish the evil in this tunnel. The book has been turned to a spell. She called on the Water Nymphs, and it looks like something went wrong. Galena is part of the legend of the bridge after disappearing in 1863 without a trace. The people down here died waiting for someone to come and rescue them. I think someone put a weight on the cover, not letting people get out. They've been entombed down here for over a century." The professor continued to read from the spell book with his flashlight.

"I think I found something to send the dead to where they should have gone if the Nymphs hadn't interfered." In his strongest voice, Professor Linden chanted.

"Oh, Spirits, rise and take your departed to their final resting places."

An eerie glow moved about the room, melting the dead bodies into the ground. "The dead have departed to where they should have gone years

ago. The Water Nymphs have nowhere to dwell now that the bodies have disappeared. We must destroy this room." They climbed the ladder to the surface, and Linden read another incantation from Galena's spell book.

The ground shook, caving in the secret tunnel where so many people had died, leaving in its wake a large crater that began filling with river water. The water rushing into the secret place undermined the bridge foundation. Stones fell from the structure into the rushing water when the screech of twisting metal assaulted their ears.

"Let's get out of here!" Bobby shouted, grabbing Cora's hand. They ran for the car. The bridge shuddered and shook. A span tore from the rock foundation, moving down the river. As the section of the bridge floated away, they could hear the screams of the dead disappear.

"How will I ever clear my name if all the skeletons are gone?" Bobby asked Professor Linden.

"Only time will do that for you. In a hundred years, they will have forgotten you, Zenni, and everyone else killed on this bridge. Time, as they say, heals all wounds."

Action/Suspense

Ruination and Salvation - Part One

By: Gabriella Balcom



Gabriella Balcom

Gabriella Balcom, who is from Texas, writes fantasy, horror/thriller, romance, sci-fi, and more. She likes traveling, music, photography, great stories, history and movies. Gabriella says she loves forests, mountains, and back roads. She has a weakness for lasagna, garlic bread, tacos, cheese and chocolate. Check out her author page:

<https://facebook.com/GabriellaBalcom.lonestarauthor>

Sunday, August 8

“What’s *wrong* with you?” Jim demanded, jabbing keys hard. “*Work, blast it!*” His computer had been going slower than usual the last few days, but he hadn’t thought much of it, focusing instead on what he was typing. The irritating thing froze a few minutes earlier, though, and still wasn’t doing what it was supposed to. Frustration growing by leaps and bounds, he felt like yelling or pounding the keyboard with his fists and wondered if his head was about to start spinning around and around. The idea didn’t seem all that unreasonable at this point, and he bit the inside of his cheek in an attempt to regain some semblance of control. When that didn’t help, he began jack-hammering his fingers on the keys. Minutes passed, a half-hour, then an hour, but he didn’t care, his mind on one thing and one thing alone. The dratted laptop. Once it finally responded, he opened up the Word document he’d been working on, realized it was his old version from yesterday, and gaped, frustration giving way to sheer panic. “No, no, no, no, no,” he muttered. “You *can’t* be gone.” Checking other files, one after another, he couldn’t find what he was looking for, and

breathed faster and faster, his chest growing tighter by the second. Fighting the urge to scream, he stared at the screen, unbelieving and broken. He felt as if an eighteen-wheeler had plowed into him before driving back and forth on top of his body, leaving him crushed physically and emotionally.

All the revisions he’d made on his first nine chapters were gone! His ideas for other scenes, descriptions, and dialogue were, too. In fact, every bit of the work he’d done yesterday and earlier today was missing. Recreating everything would be impossible, because he’d thrown away his notes, and his memory hadn’t been too great for months now. A sieve with extra-large holes probably worked better.

This weekend had taken what felt like years to arrive, and Jim had been desperate for it the entire time. Short-staffing at his job had led to management expecting — no, demanding — their existing employees to help with the gaps in coverage. He’d liked the thought of overtime and done lots of it, ending up exhausted and drained more times than he could count. His few-and-far-between days off had served as proverbial lights at the end of the tunnel, however, and he’d gotten a second wind the moment he’d left work Friday night. Ever since then, he’d been glued to his computer. He’s been on a real roll, too, words flowing

out of him, phrases and ideas falling into place like clockwork, and that kind of thing didn't happen often. With inspiration swirling unabated inside him, he hadn't been tired. He hadn't slept. He's whole focus had been on story, but now... Slamming down the top of his laptop, he saw the label proclaiming "Personal Property of James Andrews" and scowled. He'd bought it refurbished so it hadn't cost much, only \$179 plus shipping and handling, but it had been his first real purchase in months. Before that, he'd funneled most of his pay to his parents, and while he hadn't begrudged them the money, he'd been so glad when it hadn't been needed anymore. Dad's factory job of forever had come to a screeching halt years ago because of COVID. One of the owners had gone on an overseas trip, becoming sick shortly after returning, and the virus had spread rapidly from employee to employee. Jim's father had been among the first to catch it, his case turning rather nasty since he'd already been plagued with bronchial issues and COPD. He'd ended up on a ventilator at the local hospital. Mom had gotten infected next and lost her job. Although she'd had few if any symptoms, she'd been unable to seek other work following her quarantine period because schools had closed by then. She'd ended up having to stay home to take care of their youngest children, ages eight and eleven. Jim had let his apartment go, returning home to help out his parents. Eventually, Dad had recovered, but lingering aches and exacerbated bronchial issues had prevented him from working. Even if he'd been able to, the factory where he'd worked had gone out of business. He hadn't qualified for unemployment

at first because of a paperwork mix-up, but his former bosses had helped straighten things out. The money had been slow in coming but finally did. Mom had found another job, too. Things had turned out okay overall, much better than they could have, at least, considering that several people in their area had died of the virus. Jim had helped them with money throughout all of that, after which he'd had problems of his own to deal with. He'd been ready to get his own place again, but the one he'd had before wasn't available. It'd been rented to someone else. The rent there had been super reasonable, kept the same throughout the years instead of the owner raising it. Searching for another place had been a constant headache. Oh, he'd eventually found one, but at a higher rate. He'd planned to use his truck to move his things but the engine had gone kaput. He'd been faced with either having it fixed, costing a ton, or needing to pay even more for a different vehicle. Not liking either option, he'd gone with the first, only to have the next thing go wrong. One of the mechanics who worked on his truck hadn't attacked something correctly, and the oil had leaked out. Goodbye, rebuilt engine. At least, he hadn't had to pay for everything to be redone. He'd been forced to rent something in the meantime, though, which had meant goodbye to more money. Remembering that stressful time period, he rubbed his forehead, rotated his neck slowly, then focused on his laptop once more. The main reason he'd gone with refurbished was to save money; he'd wanted to be prepared in case some new crisis plagued his parents and they ended up needing more help. He'd been excited when his new-to-him computer had

arrived, but a fat lot of good that did him right now. "How could I have been so stupid?" he groused, recalling how excited he'd been earlier about everything coming together in his story. What a joke! Anger flaring back up, he glared at his treacherous computer, imagined himself torching it, but shoved it hard instead, and it went flying off his bed, crashing onto the floor. Jim stalked to the closest wall and banged his forehead on it again and again. "Darn! Darn! Ow!" Collapsing face-down on the couch in the front room, he had no energy or motivation to get up, lying there like a dead thing. He dozed off and woke up later still agitated and unsettled. Walking into the kitchen, he poured himself a stiff whiskey, downing it in one fiery gulp which made his eyes water. Alcohol on an empty stomach wasn't the best decision, or anywhere close to it, but this disaster had wrecked him, shattering his confidence and hopes. He'd dreamed of writing a book ever since he was a teenager and had worked on it year after year, but now he wondered if all his efforts had been a waste of time. If so, a huge part of his life must've been, too, because he'd poured his heart and soul into his writing. And he'd done it on his own, without anyone's encouragement. No doubt his family would've been supportive, but he hadn't told them anything. Keeping the most important things to himself was a habit. And, he'd known they had their own issues to deal with. A few months earlier, Jim had joined an online writing group, posting now and then about his progress and setbacks. He remained his own cheering squad, per se, for the most part, but he'd built an online

friendship of sorts with a couple of group members.

He'd truly cracked down over the last two years and put the majority of his free time into his work-in-progress. In addition, he'd worked hard to improve his writing. He'd read everything that sounded useful, including stuff about showing versus telling, varying sentence structure, avoiding info dumps or the overuse of adverbs, giving protagonists human flaws, antagonists good traits, and much more. Many articles he'd read stressed how important it was for writers to get their names out there and build a following, so he'd begun submitting short stories for consideration in anthologies. He hadn't been able to afford an editor, and his earliest works hadn't exactly been prize-winning material. They'd been rejected. Agents had turned him down more times than he could count, but he'd shrugged and kept going. Finally, he'd gotten his first acceptance and framed it, putting it up where he'd see it all the time. Others had followed, and he had a total of eleven currently.

But *this* — losing so much hard work when his story had started coming together — was enough to shrivel a guy up and kill his sense of hope and will to continue.

He grabbed his whiskey bottle and guzzled from it. Although he didn't drink as much as he could've and reeled more from exhaustion than alcohol, he imbibed more than usual and soon conked out on the couch.

End of Part One

Action/Suspense

19 20 21 - Part Thirteen

By: Timothy Law



Timothy Law

Timothy Law is a writer of fantasy, horror, detective and general fiction from a little town in Southern Australia called Murray Bridge. A happily married father of three children, family is very important to him. Currently working at the Murray Bridge Library in the role of Library Manager he has dreamed since his early high school years of becoming a full-time author. Working for a library, surrounded by so many wonderful authors it is difficult not to be inspired to write. Many of his short stories and general musings can be found on his blog <http://somecallmetimmy.blogspot.com.au/> or on [Parenting Express website](#).

Detective Fields took a deep breath before dialing the number for the Holden Hill police station. *What the hell has Ray done now?* If somebody at the South Australian police force headquarters was asking for her by name, it could only have something to do with the case she had been working on in Goolwa. It could only have something to do with her old partner there. “Hello,” she said when reception finally picked up. “This is Detective Sonya Fields, ID number 4763599.” “Detective Fields, thank you for calling back so quickly,” said a young lady’s voice on the other end of the line. “I do not recognize the number you are calling from.” “That’s a long story, and one I fear we probably do not have time for,” the detective replied. “Right... Right... I’ll put you straight through to the Goolwa station...,” said the receptionist. “Thank you...” Sonya said with a sigh. She hated being put on hold, especially when the radio dispatch had said the call was urgent. *Bloody hell, Ray... Why couldn’t you just wait for me to get back...?* But Sonya knew the answer to that already, she understood the drive to solve the clue that would create the breakthrough that would crack the case. It was what every copper dreamed of, it was what every

detective desired. Sonya knew if it were Ray who had left the case wide open, giving her, Sonya, the chance to discover something new while he had been away. No doubt about it, she would have been back at that house in a shot. *Please don’t be dead, Ray... Please be anything else but that...* “Hello? Hello? Detective...?” asked a different voice on the other end of the call as the hold music ceased and Sonya was brought back to the present. “Yes? This is Detective Sonya Fields...” Sonya replied. “What’s happened to Ray?” “I don’t know...” “What do you mean, you don’t know?” asked Sonya, obviously frustrated. “He has taken the jeep, and I can’t leave the station...” “Alright, fine... Who else have you called?” Sonya asked. “Nobody...” the officer said, already seeing the error of this. “Bloody hell... Country cops...” muttered the detective from Sydney, but she immediately regretted uttering those words. She herself had started out as a country cop in that very same station. “I’m sorry...” the officer said. “I am sorry too...” Detective Fields admitted. “I know what it’s like, especially when there are not many of you there.” “So, what do you want me to do?” the officer asked, begging for guidance. “Hang up now and call headquarters...

Let them know I will be there as soon as I can..." Sonya directed.

Detective Fields was somewhat satisfied when the call immediately disconnected, no "yes ma'am", no "right away" ... Her orders had been responded to immediately, without hesitation.

I just hope we have not already left it too late for you, Ray... Sonya thought to herself grimly.

Hanging up the receiver, the detective knew she had a tough conversation ahead of her, but a conversation she would need to begin and end quickly.

"You're going, aren't you," Mike said, his voice soft, full of understanding.

"Yes," Sonya replied. "It's..."

"Let me guess... You need to get back to Ray..." Mike stated.

Sonya searched her partner's face for even a hint of jealousy, but, to her surprise, she found none.

"Were you listening in on me?" she stated, an accusation, plain and simple.

"I could not help it," Mike admitted. "I thought that the call was going to be Ray, but it wasn't..."

"I left him, and he wanted to prove to me that he was fine on his own," Sonya said with a sigh. "But he isn't fine, and I was the one who left him..."

"For our girls... Son..." Mike said, taking his partner into his arms. "You left to save our daughters."

"And now that they are safe, I need to go back..." mumbled Sonya into Mike's shoulder. "You get that right?"

"Hell, Sonya, of course I get it," Mike stated, taking a step back then so he could look his partner in the eye. "I wish I could go with you and give those bastards who took our girls a piece of my own mind."

"I need to prove to myself that I can do this by the book," Sonya said.

"Catch the crooks and hand them over."

"Then you go and do just that," Mike said, firmly. "Me and the girls will be waiting for you when you get back," he promised.

"And maybe then we will be able to take that family vacation..."

The conversation with Georgie and Sasha was just as challenging, if not more so. There were tears, there were hugs, and there were more promises made, but in the end the girls knew what their mom had to do.

"Be safe," stated Sasha in a way that her mom knew she did not have any other option.

"Come back to us in one piece," the younger of the two girls, Georgie, begged.

"I will be as quick as I can be, but this is going to be impossible to wrap up in a day," said Sonya. "You all know that, right?"

Mike looked sad, but the girls, both of them, forced out smiles and nodded.

"We know, mom," Sasha said with a nod of her head.

"I'm going to miss you all," Sonya admitted. "Even you, Gregory."

The boy, thinking himself forgotten, looked up, surprised.

"I don't want no trouble," he said, squashing the slice of rainbow cake in his hand like it was about to be stolen from him.

"We don't want any trouble for you either," the detective replied.

The officer stepped into the room at that moment.

"I'm ready to call the authorities," he stated. "We are following protocol... Like you said... By the book..."

"Maybe hold up for just a little while longer..." suggested Sonya. "Gregory and my girls still need to debrief... Give statements and all that..."

"I can take care of that..." Mike

promised. "We're headed to the police station kids."

"I'll grab a taxi to the airport," Sonya said, mouthing an unspoken *thank you* in Mike's direction.

"Rather than heading back to the city, there is a local place with planes not far from here, dear," said the old lady as she cut Gregory yet another slice of her homemade cake. "I'd be more than happy to take you there."

"You would?" asked Sonya, "That would be great."

"It is decided then," the old lady said.

"I'll grab my coat and my bag, and I guess this is goodbye."

"Thank you, for being so nice," Sasha said, giving the lady a hug.

"After everything we have been through it was nice to feel safe again," Georgie agreed. "I wish you were our grandma."

"Hey!" said Mike and Sonya together.

"What about Granny Tash and Grandma May?" Mike continued.

"They don't make cake like this one does," Sasha said with a smile as she reached for another slice.

"I wish you could be my grandma," lamented Gregory.

"How about I write you out the recipe," the old lady suggested.

"Oh, yes please," said all three kids.

"If it is not too much trouble," added Mike.

"We need to get going," said Sonya.

"How about I drop you off at the airport and then come back for Mike and the kids?" suggested the officer.

"That works for me," Sonya agreed.

After some quick goodbyes, the detective and the police officer took their leave.

"I'll be back for the rest in around half an hour," the officer promised.

"You know that we can't legally keep you on the case, right?" the officer said

when he and Sonya were on the road, headed out of town.

"I hadn't thought about it too hard, to be honest," Sonya admitted. "But yeah, I know what by the book means."

"I'll keep this as quiet as I possibly can," promised the officer. "But when higher ups start asking questions you got to the airport on your own."

"Got it, thanks," said Sonya.

"I hope that you get them," the officer said next. "All of them, detective..."

"Yeah... me too..." said Sonya.

"They're all going to pay..."

#

"We will keep you hidden away, here in the kitchen," Helen told Lisa. "Out of sight is usually out of mind in my experience."

The kitchen was dirty and chaotic, surprising the newcomer.

"What will I be doing?" Lisa asked, her voice tinged with worry. "You don't want me cooking, I'm telling you that straight up..."

"None of us cook here, love," Helen laughed, a gravel going through the garbage chute kind of sound.

"Everything is either schnitzel or battered barramundi... Even the veg is crumbed and then deep fried..."

Lisa cast her eye around the space and noticed the ovens and hot plates looked cleaner than the rest of the kitchen.

"So, I'm peeling spuds?" Lisa said. "I'm ok with that..."

"We will start you off with Bella, she's our queen dish pig..." said Helen. "If you do alright with that then you can prove yourself with a peeler..."

Lisa nodded, still not a hundred percent sure she was doing the right thing.

"Grab a towel," Bella ordered, throwing a half-soaked tea towel in Lisa's direction.

"Eight hours a day for as long as you like," Helen continued as Lisa caught the projectile before it hit her in the chest. "And in exchange you get a place to sleep, three square meals, and our promise that nobody will ever know you are here..."

Lisa thought about what was waiting for her if she ever got dragged back to Goolwa. Would any of *them* think to look for her here? Probably not, Darwin was a pretty big place.

"You've got yourself a dish pig apprentice, I guess..." she said. "Where do I sign?"

#

"Sign here... Once here... And just initial at the bottom of this page..." the receptionist at the airport requested.

Sonya did as she was asked.

"And will it be payment via card or cash?" the young lady asked next.

"I'm guessing this won't help?" asked Sonya, hopeful, as she revealed her credentials.

"Sorry, we're a small company, and it does not help to pay the bills if we give away flights for free," was the response Sonya did not want to hear, but also the response she always expected she would get.

"Does anyone pay cash these days?" the detective asked, casually.

"You'd be surprised..." the receptionist revealed. "We had a cash payment for an overseas flight earlier this morning."

"You have what?" Sonya said, in obvious shock. "These planes wouldn't make it overseas, would they?"

"These people were pretty desperate... Willing to pay top dollar..."

"How many passengers and where were they headed?" asked Sonya. "Can you tell me that?"

The young lady made to reply, but just before she could a young man appeared from the *Staff Only* area.

"Is the paperwork complete, Jennifer?" "Yes, Mister Samuels..."

"And what have we told you about the privacy of our clientele...?" asked the young man, Mister Samuels.

"We are not to give out details, not even to the police force..." stated the receptionist. "Sorry Mister Samuels..."

"Do you have a business card?" Sonya asked, swiping one from the counter and placing it into her pocket.

"Yes... Sorry... No clientele information... At least not without a warrant..." said the young man, flashing Sonya a professional smile.

"Detective Fields..." offered Sonya, filling in the gap that Mister Samuels had left for her.

"Well then, detective," the young man continued, still smiling. "Let us get that payment put through and we will have you up in the air in no time."

"She's headed to Goolwa..." Jennifer said, trying to be helpful.

"Thank you, Jennifer, yes," said the young man through clenched teeth. "I can see that in the paperwork that she has filled in."

"Any idea how long the flight will be?" Sonya asked, trying to peer over the counter at any other sheets of paperwork there.

"You should be there by this evening," the young man promised.

"Perfect," said Sonya with a professional smile of her own.

To Be Continued...

Action/Suspense

In the Midst of Normalcy Part 24

By: Tom Fowler



Tom Fowler

Tom Fowler, 68 years old, retired and lives in Overland Park, KS. Author of several books and numerous short stories. Visit Tom's blogsite at tommyschoice.wordpress.com.

72. The Family Prepares

to Leave

For no good reason other than the irrational and wishful hope the killer may yet give himself away, the detectives hung around after their last meeting with the Colemans concluded. It continued to annoy the veteran detectives that they had learned very little and had no further justification to keep the family under house arrest. Perhaps they would notice something in the behavior and manner of the family as they prepared to depart Tim and Cathy's house for their own homes.

Wishful thinking. Wishful thinking. During the meeting, the detectives noted Stephanie's tortured appearance and demeanor. Jim and Peggy Coleman did not look much better. Jack Edgmon looked pale and drawn, like he needed a good night's sleep (which he did). Mike Coleman displayed a restlessness and subdued anger. The strain of hosting a house full of murder suspects plus the police officers was most evident on the faces of Tim and Cathy. Janelle Burdick appeared miserable and very sad. Her husband, Larry, was obviously deeply concerned about her, for the detectives saw that he never took her

eyes off of her as Baughman spoke. Judge Coleman seemed serene enough, but it was Tim who noticed his still handsome face was not as youthful looking as it was a week ago. The private thoughts and feelings of all, with the exception of Stephanie and possible exceptions of Jim and Peggy, were similar. Even the killer was feeling the emotion of the moment, but for a far different reason. To the family and shortly, to the outside world, the killer was another grieving family member; nothing more and nothing less. The first thing Tim did after the final meeting concluded was check his face in the hall mirror. He couldn't tell if his face had aged visibly as his brother's but it was always hard to critique your own appearance. The family moved slowly, slowly enough to worry Detective Bearce. He hoped none of the Colemans would have a traffic accident heading home. In particular, he did not think Jim, Peggy and Stephanie were in any shape to be driving to St. Louis. But, activity increased as the family moved out of the den. The uniformed officers were dismissed so it was only Detectives Baughman, Bearce and Lt. Quarles in the house now representing law enforcement. The absence of the officers lightened the mood somewhat and soon the detectives heard sounds of activity coming from upstairs. The expected and familiar noises of luggage cases

coming unzipped, drawers and closet doors opening and closing and muffled footsteps suggested the beehive of activity which was in progress. It was good to hear these sounds.

Within half an hour everyone was ready to go. No one wished to appear rude and be the first to leave, so the family met for the last time in the Coleman den and without the presence of the detectives.

Tim and Cathy dispensed hugs and handshakes all around. Bob said goodbye first, telling Tim, "Let me be the first out the door." Offering a sly grin, he continued, "Maybe I can soften the news people up." Tim and the rest of the Colemans thought this was a good idea.

Mike hugged Cathy and shook his cousin's hand, saying, "I'm sorry about everything but that doesn't mean we don't appreciate your getting the reunion together." Tim nodded and Cathy noticed a different yet familiar kind of sadness on her husband's face. Jack came next, saying, "I'll be in touch. I'm going to speak with the detectives one more time before leaving." Cathy and Tim both hugged him simultaneously. For a moment, it appeared he had been swallowed up by his hosts.

Jim, Peggy and Stephanie approached Cathy. Taking Cathy's hand, Stephanie said, "I'm so sorry about everything. I hope we can stay close. Getting to know you has been a blessing."

For the first time, a tear was apparent in Cathy's dominant eye, the eye that always reacted to allergies and emotions first.

Softly, she answered, "Thank you. Please keep in touch." Cathy meant what she said.

Stephanie replied, "I will," and meant it.

Cathy hoped and prayed with all her heart that Stephanie was not Leann's murderer and would recover from all of the embarrassment, fear and sorrow she underwent for the last few days. She wanted to stay close to Tim's cousin and realized their continued friendship depended upon Stephanie's health and emotional well-being.

Jim said goodbye to both of them in his simple, direct way. He did say to Tim, "I'll call you next week. I know this has been harder on you than it has us. I'm sorry this had to happen in your house." Tim nodded another sad acknowledgement. He knew it hadn't been as hard on him as it was Jim and Peggy but it was good of him to say it. Stephanie hugged Cathy for a long moment, not wishing to let her go.

Tightly, she said, "Goodbye again." Peggy hugged Tim and Cathy lightly, softly saying, "God bless you both." Tim felt a compassion for Peggy not bestowed upon the others. He knew it was hard for her to be around persons she did not know well even under the best of circumstances. The events of the last few days were hardly that. Janelle and Larry approached Tim last. Janelle gave Tim a hug and kiss and the same for Cathy. Larry offered a warm handshake to Tim and a hug to Cathy. Wiping a tear from her eye, Janelle said, "There's not much to say."

"I know," replied Tim.

Cathy realized the goodbye procession was very hard on her husband. It was hard on her too. She was now anxious to have everyone out of the house. She and Tim needed time alone. All of the family did and, mercifully, they would soon have it.

A couple of random thoughts ran through Tim's mind. He considered what would be happening to him, as he had admitted his sexual attraction to Leann. Maybe that's why the

lieutenant is letting everyone else go. He's waiting to arrest me in private. This would not be the first nor last fearful thought he and the other Coleman kids would have concerning Leann's murder. His second thought was, after shaking Larry's hand, Larry is not as bad a guy as I thought. It was stupid of me to think poorly of him. He's been good for Janelle.

Soon, all of the family was out the door, Jack being the last out after speaking with Quarles and Bearce concerning his deceased wife's funeral arrangements. That left only Tim, Cathy and the detectives inside the huge house. Baughman intensely watched from the front door as Judge Coleman spoke to Smither. The other Coleman's were quickly accosted by other members of the media, as vultures devour dead carrion. Baughman could only pray that nothing would be said to further sensationalize the case.

Within another half an hour, the reunion visitors were gone, Bob being the last one to leave. The judge engaging in a lengthy discussion with a cable news reporter did not bother Gary as it would were it another family member, for Judge Robert Coleman was a longtime public figure and capable of dealing with the news media.

The sun was bright and hot. Summer had returned to Overland Park. The weather stations were reporting the area may experience the first 100 degree temperatures of the season later in the afternoon. Already sweating after only a few moments outside, Baughman had no trouble believing it. The three detectives plus Tim and Cathy moved to a shady spot underneath the large oak tree in the center of the spacious front yard. Lt. Baughman was just beginning to

deliver some last words of instruction to them when his cell phone rang. The digital display told him it was Chief Gilliland.

Moving to a quiet spot, he answered. Once again, the chief dismissed with formality, stating abruptly, "There's something you need to know."

Gary's stomach tightened as he asked, "What is that?"

"Jim and Peggy Coleman's daughter Ashley was interviewed by CNN. As we speak, the Edgmon murder is becoming national news."

"Great," Gary said, without enthusiasm.

"I'm surprised this didn't happen earlier," replied the chief.

73. John Smither and Tim

Tim and Cathy were alone for the first time in a week; a week which seemed like a lifetime of continuous nightmare. Lunch time approached and they decided to get out of the house and grab a sandwich. Neither of them was hungry but they eagerly sought a change of scenery.

The KAMO van was still parked at the curb. Tim realized the reporters would not leave until he went out to speak to them. He decided to get it over with.

The sun blazed down on his neck as he walked outside and approached the van. Smither ran to meet him. Before he could say anything, Tim asked, "If I speak with you, will you leave? I don't want to be rude, but everyone is gone and there is a whole lot of nothing happening."

"Yes, we'll leave. I was hoping you would come out. I didn't want to have to ring the doorbell."

"I'm glad you didn't."

Smither smiled, "I'm glad I didn't either."

Baughman had told him that Smither was an all right guy. Now Tim understood why. Tim asked, "So, what do you want to know?"

"Just your comments on what's happened during the last week,"

Smither replied, softly. He added, "We're going to start taping now."

Smither signaled his video technician to push the record button.

Tim thought for a moment before replying, painfully aware he would soon be part of a news broadcast detailing a sensationalistic story. He said, "Well, my cousin was murdered, as you know. She was found in the basement by my large poster of Marilyn Monroe." Tim thought it would be a good idea to mention the poster before being asked about it.

"Do you have an idea as to who murdered Ms. Edgmon?"

"No, I truly don't. I had no idea any of us were capable of such a thing. Before you ask, the answer is, yes, I am a suspect."

"Has Lt. Baughman shared any information with you?"

Tim remembered the hair sample being analyzed but wisely said nothing. He replied, "No, he hasn't. As a suspect I doubt he would."

"So, what happens next?"

"You will have to ask Lieutenant Baughman that question. As far as Mrs. Coleman and I are concerned, we simply try to piece our lives back together."

"May I speak with Mrs. Coleman?"

"No."

"Anything else you care to say?"

"Only that the murder of my cousin, right here in my own home, has been horrible beyond anything I can describe."

"What about the Marilyn Monroe

cutout?"

"What about it?" Even though Tim mentioned it first, Smither caught him off guard. Tim was getting annoyed and reminded himself this interview would shortly be on public broadcast. "There has been talk that it had some ritualistic significance."

"Maybe to the killer but not to me.

I'm just a fan who admires Marilyn and her work and thought it would be a nice addition to a man's recreation room." Tim saw Cathy motioning to him from the front door. Tim said to Smither, "I'd better go."

Smither motioned for the technician to stop recording. He asked, "May we come inside the house and tape it?"

"No. I don't want the public to get the wrong idea about my cousin's murder or me either, for that matter."

Smither did not push the issue but stated, "I may want to talk again later."

Tim managed a tight smile and said "I may not." Immediately realizing how that sounded, he added, "But maybe there will be something else to discuss later. Who knows?"

Tim met Cathy at the door and escorted her to the SUV. As they drove away, Tim saw in the rear view mirror the van pulling away from the curb.

Cathy said, "At least we'll have some peace and quiet when we get home."

"I hope so," replied Tim.

74. Cathy and Tim

Tim and Cathy consumed tasteless sandwiches at a local deli before driving around town aimlessly for about an hour. Getting out of the house boosted their morale but, if there had been guests with them in the backseat, they would not have

guessed it. The Colemans were sullen and morose and spoke very little. It was not until after their evening dinner, which had been a light one consisting of soup and iced tea after an afternoon of restlessness and telephone calls from other local media, when they began to speak to one another. Tim spoke first, a second glass of iced tea reviving his spirits. He said to his wife, "I've never been as scared or as nervous in my life as I was last night."

"Me neither," said Cathy, a slight shudder evident in her voice.

"I don't know what we were so afraid of. All the killer had to do was sit tight, as he did, and walk out of here today, which he did. I guess we all had a bad case of nerves last night."

"One cannot count upon the logic of a person obviously crazy." Cathy immediately regretted her choice of words, adding, "Sorry, shouldn't speak of your family like that."

"Under the circumstances, no apology required." Tim had the sad look he often wore when distressed over a family issue. He added, "I don't think Lt. Baughman will ever find him now." "I don't think so, either," said Cathy. The thought of living with an unknown killer in the family saddened and frightened both of them. The feeling that Leann's slayer would be found quickly had disappeared with Tim's family earlier in the day.

"I'm going to be a murder suspect for the rest of my life." Tim was letting down after a week of intense emotion.

Cathy thought it was interesting that only yesterday everyone in the house, both family and law enforcement, seemed to feel Leann's killer would be found soon. It was strange, though, how no one seemed to place much hope in the hair evidence. Now, Tim

boomeranged too far the other way. She reminded him, "Don't forget the hair sample. It may take a while but eventually Lt. Baughman will have a prime suspect."

"Maybe," Tim replied, "DNA tests are not perfect. The hair could be degraded or too small."

"That's true, Tim. But, let's think positive. Remember what my father's favorite saying used to be, 'Everything always works itself out.' I'm sure this will work out too, sweetheart."

Tim managed a smile. "I'm not certain I believe that, but I know you do.

Thanks for your positive outlook. I need it." He looked at her and said, "There's something else I need; a drink. They are no murderers in the house tonight so it's safe enough."

Cathy noted the bitterness in her husband's voice and said, "No, there are not. Let me fix us something." During the next couple of hours, Tim enjoyed three stiff rum and colas and Cathy several small glasses of wine. The alcohol did them good; they were relaxed for the first time since the murder. Tim noticed it was after 9:00 and asked, "Aren't you afraid of being in the house with a murder suspect?" Tim did not ask that sarcastically, although the effect of the rum was obvious.

Cathy placed her wine glass on the end table beside the couch and moved to sit next to Tim, saying, "I think we've been over that before. Let me show how frightened I am of you." Before he could reply, Cathy kissed him. It was a long, deep, sensual kiss and it left no doubt in Tim's mind what his wife thought of him.

It was more than an hour before additional words were spoken. The alcohol and pent up emotion manifested itself in intense and passionate lovemaking. The longtime

lovers were reacting in a very human way to a cruel, unique and unusual act in which the repercussions had been continuous until a few hours ago. Cathy and Tim were incapable of thought. Raw emotion took over and, had they not been long time partners, could easily have gotten too rough with each other. Fortunately – and it was the first good fortune either experienced all week – they knew each other too well for bedroom games to get out of hand. But, in the entirety of their lengthy marriage, it was the most intense evening of physical intimacy experienced to date. Through the fog and heightened emotion of their intimacy, Tim thought, *I hope she truly believes I am not a killer.*

Through her own ardor, Cathy pondered, *Tim simply cannot be a killer. I am staking my life on it.* As Tim placed his hands around Cathy's throat to indulge in another of the many deep and throaty kisses they would enjoy on this night, indeed she was staking her life on the rock solid belief of Tim's innocence and doing it in the most intimate and trusting way possible.

To Be Continued...

Action/Suspense

Through the Echoes of Madness - Part Five

By: David K. Montoya



David K. Montoya

For a good part of two decades David K. Montoya was an active writer, artist and business entrepreneur in the micro-publication world. In 2013, turned his pen in for a microphone and became a podcaster for the following five years—and even did a small stint in independent Hollywood. But, now, he's come home and is ready to begin weaving new tales for this magazine.

Several hours had passed when

Marty remembered he had left his client and friend, Betty, waiting for him to return from his rendezvous. He was arm in arm with a young Hispanic man who looked in his very early twenties, if not in his late teens. Both wore smiles and leaned into each other while they walked toward the area where the guests were housed.

"She gonna be pissed?" the young Hispanic asked halfheartedly.

"Honey, if I know this girl, she'll be passed out on the couch from all that damn wine," Marty said and followed with a giggle. "And Honey, I know that girl, and she a fuckin' wino with a capital slurp!"

They both laughed.

"Then why not let her sleep and we can meet up again after I get off work," the young Hispanic asked in a flirtatious manner. "I would like to see you more, I just *needed* more than an hour lunch."

Again, they both laughed.

"Honey you can butter my bread," Marty said with a silly smile. "But my girl, Betty, gives me that *bread* to butter. I need to keep her happy, so I can stay employed."

The young Hispanic stopped and turned and faced Marty. There was an uncomfortable seriousness about him.

"You should not let a job, or a single person have that much control over you and your life Marty. I could quit this job today and carry on with life as normal."

Marty's face went serious for a moment, and he broke a soft smile and explained, "Says the boy who probably still lives with mommy and daddy. You probably haven't even come out yet, have you?"

The young Hispanic looked away. His seriousness faded into sadness.

"In my culture," he said, his words cracked with emotion. "You marry and multiply... my parents would not understand."

Marty dropped his voice and placed his hand on the man's shoulder while he continued to look away.

"Oh Honey, I wasn't trying to be a bitch. I was just trying to explain that I am alone, with no one to help me and I make a very good living working as her Assistant. That's all."

The young Hispanic looked up. He held a trace of bitterness in his eyes as he looked into Marty's face.

"No harm done... Look, I'm gonna get back to work, and if you are still around great, and if not, I understand."

"I—" Marty started to reply but stopped as the young Hispanic turned and walked away from him. He watched the man until he disappeared from his sight.

"Awkward," Marty said as he wrinkled his face with melodrama and started

back toward Betty's dressing room. Moments later he arrived where he believed Betty's dressing room was located, but there was no sign. He walked closer to the door and thought, *Is my dumb ass going crazy? I know this was her spot, but there isn't a sign, but I do see the tape that held it up there.*

Marty pushed open the door and walked inside. The lights were off, and it was pitch black.

"Betty, did your drunk ass drink too much again and pass out again?"

There was no response, only silence.

"Betty?"

Marty wandered in the darkness for only a moment while he felt the wall until he reached the light switches.

"You better cover your drunk ass eyes, I'm turning on the lights," Marty explained, and then with his fingers pushed all the switches in the upright position.

"Oh JESUS! FUCK," Marty screamed out when he turned on the lights.

Marty found Betty dead, and in a pool of blood. He ran to her side. He stared into her pale white face. Her eyes were closed but her mouth gaped open as she appeared to be screaming at the time she died.

"Betty," Marty cried. He looked at her neck and while he did not want to touch her, he knew what must be done. Placing his finger on her bloody neck he checked for a pulse, but there was nothing, only an ice-cold epidermis.

"Oh my god!"

#

Marty stood and ran to the door and swung it open while he screamed for help.

The door swung open with a soft creak as Kelley Blank stepped into the

sheriff's office, the faint scent of coffee and dust greeting her like an unwelcomed old habit. She wore a navy ball cap pulled low over thoughtful eyes. Her turquoise hoodie was half-zipped over a gray shirt, sleeves rolled up like she was already ready to work.

Kelly gave a short nod to Calaway and Williams behind the front desk, who were next to each other and from what she could guess were attempting to navigate a piece of equipment twenty years too advanced for them.

"Gentlemen," Kelly said with acknowledgment, her voice soft and friendly.

Steven's head popped up from the computer. Reading glasses rested on his nose and he asked with a bit of amusement in his tone, "Holy shit! You're here?"

Kelly nearly laughed out loud but was able to restrain herself. With a groan, Calaway glanced up as well. He did not find his Deputy Sheriff's humor so funny and raised a brow with a sigh that followed.

"He thinks he's a comedian... You're the IT tech Steve was talking about?"

"Sure am." She offered a silky smirk, pulling a flash drive from her pocket like a badge. "So whatcha having a problem with today?"

"Mark is having a problem with the computer internet thingy," Steven explained, his eyes fixed on her. "You know when you're on a screen and you click on the underlined word, and it's supposed to do something? I know you're new, but I was told by Mandy you are the lady for the job."

"I am," Kelly said and tilted her head at Steven. She thought for a short second and as it computed, the result was accompanied by a bright smile.

"Ooh! You are talking about a link on a website, right?"

"I believe so," Calaway said, with uncertainty.

"Okay, let me in between you two and have a look at the computer," Kelly said with a kind smile.

"Absolutely, my dear, we'll make room for you," Steven said and then looked over to the Sheriff and continued.

"Mark did you know that my favorite letter of the alphabet is H, whether it's sturdy or wobbly, I don't mind." Calaway did not respond verbally. He placed his hand over his face and shook his head in disbelief.

As Kelly walked over to where the two sat at the front desk, Steve asked, "What about you, my dear? What's your favorite letter?"

"You do not have to answer that," Calaway said and then rolled another computer chair between them that faced the computer. Steven gestured for her to have a seat between them.

"Thank you," Kelly said and sat in front of the computer. The soft, sweet smell of cotton candy tickled the two men's noses. No one said it out loud, but the temperature in the room shifted. The sheriff's office might've been stuck in analog, but the girl in the baseball cap? She was pure digital.

#

The humid atmosphere stuck to Sergeant Amanda Murray's skin as she walked into the private wing of the Amphitheater. Officers sped past her while she weaved through the chaos. *The call I received was a possible homicide backstage of a small concert... this does not look small. Fuck, I hope this isn't a celebrity case!* As Murray approached the entrance to the dressing room, another officer stepped in front of her and demanded, "Whoa! Whoa! I need

credentials.”

Murray looked up at the officer with an annoyed expression and flashed him her badge and ID.

“Is this enough credentials for ya, Junior?”

His eyes grew wide once he read the name and rank.

“I apologize, Sergeant, I didn't realize you were a—”

“Realize what? That I'm a girl,” Murray interrupted. “I don't have time for this, Junior. Let me in.”

Murray pushed her way into the dressing room. It was cold and emotionless. The fluorescent lighting bothered her eyes. She walked over to a group of officers that had gathered around Betty's dead body, but someone had placed a white towel over it. The blood soaked into the material, which made her think of an old-school ghost covered in a bed sheet.

“Sergeant,” one of the officers said and nodded.

“Lieutenant,” Murray said and offered a similar nod in return. “Please tell me it was just some groupies got into a fight, and one killed the other... and we get to go home.”

The Lieutenant sighed. “Nope.”

“Shit. It's a celeb, isn't it?” Murray asked.

“You can say that.”

“Dammit!” Murray growled in annoyance. “Okay, which rocker got offed this time?”

The Lieutenant reached down and pulled back the blood-soaked sheet to reveal Betty underneath.

“Not a musician this time around. This is a personal speaker by the name of Elizabeth Stride.”

Murray looked at the Lieutenant surprised. “You mean the woman who survived the Kopy Kat Killer a few years back?”

“Yep,” the Lieutenant said with a deadpan tone.

“I just finished listening to the audiobook of her bestseller,” Murray said, surprise evident in her speech.

“Who would kill a public speaker?”

“We have his personal assistant in custody,” the Lieutenant disclosed. “He was already taken down to the station.”

“Do you really think it was him?”

Murray asked and bent over to look at the wounds. “Like a crime of passion or something?”

“Hard to tell,” the Lieutenant explained. “He was found hysterical at the doorway, but he was covered in her blood.”

Murray was about to speak, but was interrupted by a loud, thunderous voice.

“All right people! Listen up! Wrap this up. We are taking over this investigation!”

The small group at Betty's body stopped what they were doing and turned to see where the roaring demand came from.

“Really,” Murray grumbled. “Who called those guys?”

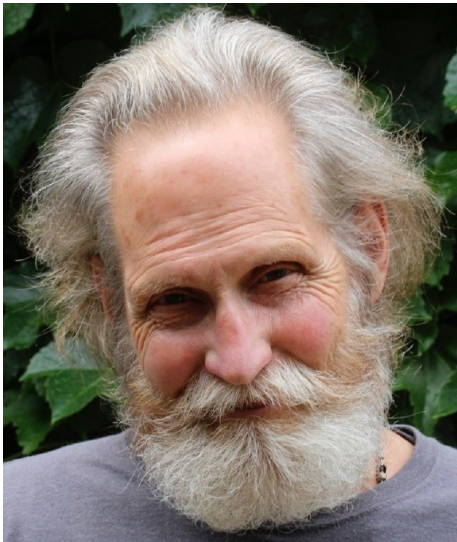
“I'm assuming it's because Elizabeth Stride was a celebrity. It automatically makes it an *FBI* case,” the Lieutenant offered in a calm voice.

To Be Continued...

Science Fiction

The Alien of Orchard Lake Teaser Chapter Twenty-one

By: *Jim Bates*



Jim Bates

Jim is an award-winning author whose stories and poems have appeared in over three-hundred online and print publications. His collection of short stories *Resilience* was published in March 2021, by Bridge House Publishing. *Short Stuff a collection of flash fiction and drabbles* was published in October 2021, by Chapelton Books. *Periodic Stories and Periodic Stories Volume Two* were published in July and September 2021, by Impspired. *Dreamers a collection of short stories* was published in March 2022, by Clarendon House Publishing. *Something Better* a dystopian adventure novella was published in July 2021, by Dark Myth Publications.

The Story So Far:

For fifty years, Ebar, an alien from the planet Rykos, has lived on Earth in the form of a human, Kyle Johnson. When the soft-spoken Ebar (Kyle) gets in a fight (one he didn't start) at his job at a sewage treatment plant, he is put in jail. Unfortunately, Ebar's jailer overhears him trying to contact his home planet. The consensus is that Ebar is crazy. He is put into The System and comes under the care of newly hired social worker Jeremy Slater who befriends Ebar. Jeremy's egotistical boss thinks Jeremy is nuts to care so much about Ebar and makes life hard for him. Jeremy's friend and fellow social worker Julie is on Jeremy's side but suddenly caring for Ebar becomes more challenging when Dr. Andrews decides to take over Ebar's case and make a spectacle of "The Alien." Jeremy and Julie are appalled and decide to take action. They decide to take Julie's RV and, along with her friend, Wren, leave town and hideout along the Northshore of Lake Superior. Ebar agrees to the plan but has a problem. He has to talk to Commander Zenon by the end of the week. He's still not sure what he's going to do but after talking to Jeremy he decided it's the best thing to do, to go North. Even though Jeremy is very nervous about coasted to a stop just outside the entrance. He looked at the sign and smirked, "Cozy Cove. What a stupid

kidnapping Ebar, Wren and Julie put his mind to rest by telling him it's the best thing they can do to save Ebar. Ebar is excited. Being in the RV is fun for him. The drive to Duluth is a bonding experience for them all. North of Duluth they set up camp at Cozy Cove, a beautiful and secluded campground on the shore of Lake Superior. Ebar is thrilled to be there, but Jeremy, Julie, and Wren are still worried that they may not be 100% safe. Meanwhile, Dr. Andrews finds out that Ebar has left the care facility and no one knows where he is. Andrews is MAD! He authorized two hit men, the Onus brothers, to go after him. Near the campground, Ebar climbs a tree and contacts Commander Zenon. The commander offers him a chance to come home. Ebar is conflicted about what to do. Meanwhile, the Onus brothers have discovered where the campground is located and are coming after Ebar, Jeremy, Julie, and Wren.

Chapter 21 Excerpt:

After a meal of two-inch thick bloody steaks and two ice-cold beers each, Clete had made good time driving north from Duluth. They found the campground around seven o'clock that evening.

"That's it," Henry said, pointing to the sign and consulting the signal on his laptop. "The guy is in there somewhere."

Clete pulled off the highway and beard?"

"Yeah. That's him. I got his picture off

Most recently, *Periodic Stories Volume Three – A Novel* was published in April 2022, by Impspired. His short story "Aliens" was nominated by The Zodiac Press for the 2020 Pushcart Prize. His story "The Maple Leaf" was voted 2021 story of the year for Spillwords. He lives in a small-town west of Minneapolis, Minnesota. All of his work can be found on his blog at www.theviewfromlonglake.wordpress.com.

name for a campground." Henry glanced up from his computer. "Hey, it's Minnesota. Northern Minnesota at that. They do a lot of stupid things in this state. Look at their football team." Clete grunted and laughed. "Yeah, they suck big time. That's for sure." He peered through the windshield into the thick pine forest. It was deep in shadow, so he took off his sunglasses to see better. So did Henry. "But help me out here, little brother. Which way do I go?" Henry looked at his screen and then pointed. "Go straight. There's a map here. I'll guide you." Clete pulled slightly ahead and pointed. "There's a paybox." Henry laughed. "So what?" "Right." Clete grinned and kept going. He drove slowly, looking from side to side. "Not many campers. That's good." "Lots of trees," Henry remarked. "Yep. Nice and private." Clete turned to his brother. "We like private, don't we?" "Exactly," Henry said. After a minute or two of winding through the pine forest, he pointed. "See that RV up there? I think that's it." "I thought the little pansy drove a Honda?" "Well, that's what my information said. An old beater of a Honda Civic." He checked the screen of his laptop. "Whatever the case. He's here." "His phone is here." "Right." Henry pointed to a group of people near a picnic table. "But, take a gander. I'm pretty it's that Slater dude." Clete looked as he pulled in behind the RV and parked. "The guy with the

his driver's license." "Who's the other guy?" "That skinny little geek with the glasses? He must be the nutcase we have to bring back." "What are we going to do about the guy with the beard?" "That's up to him."

To Be Continued...

Humor

For Humanity

By: James Rumpel



James Rumpel

James Rumpel is a recently retired high school math teacher who has greatly appreciated spending some of his newfound free time rekindling his love for science fiction and the written word. Writing also provides him with an excellent opportunity to ignore the household chores his wife assigns. He lives in Wisconsin with his forgiving wife, Mary.

In a different dimension, a black castle rested atop a foreboding mountain, surrounded by a starless sky. Violent flashes of lightning created menacing shadows on and about each of the castle's four turrets. Thunder crashed with a ferocity that would threaten to shake the castle's walls were they not formed from the heaviest and sturdiest granite blocks. Within these mighty walls were many chambers, dungeons, and alcoves. Only one room was not desolate and empty. In that spacious chamber sat four imposing thrones, each very different from the others. Seated here were four powerful beings, their identities hidden beneath black cowls and heavy cloaks. A small square table with foldable legs was positioned between them.

One member of the quartet was seated on a throne fashioned from swords and hammers. It leaned forward and rose slightly. "As it is written," bellowed the creature in a low, gravelly tone, "we wait for the sounding of the horn and our summons to travel to Earth, the realm of man, and wreak havoc. Someday soon, we will lay waste to all human civilization but not tonight. This evening, we must pass the time and await the call."

The figure sitting to the right of the speaker shook its head. "You know, War, you give the same stupid speech

every game night. Why can't we just start the game without being so dramatic?"

Pulling back its hood to reveal a pale and skull-like head, a third being spoke. "Can you pass the guac, Famine?" asked Death from his position across from War. "I don't know why you have it in front of you. You never eat any of it." "I'll get it," announced Pestilence, reaching his scab and puss-covered hand toward the sombrero-shaped bowl.

"No, that's okay," interrupted Death. "I'll get it myself."

"What should we play tonight?" asked Pestilence. "Whose turn is it to decide?" "I don't care, as long as War doesn't get to pick," replied Famine. "I'm sick of that stupid card game. All you do is flip over your card and high card wins. It takes forever and there's no strategy at all." War pounded his fist on the card table, nearly causing it to collapse. "Well, it's better than what you pick. Who ever heard of playing *Settlers of Catan* without any resource cards?"

"That was pretty inane," grinned Death, though no one else could tell since his expression was an eternal toothy smile.

"You're not much better," scoffed Pestilence. "Don't you ever get sick of playing Hangman?"

"Well, do you have a better idea?" asked Death.

"As a matter of fact, I do."

Pestilence wiped his nose on his dirt and snot-incrusted sleeve. He rose from his moss-covered throne and walked to a

nearby shelf. He grabbed a black box which he set in the center of the table before returning to his seat.

"It's a game from Earth. It's called *Cards Against Humanity*. What could be better for us to play?"

War stared at the box. "I must say, I do like the name."

"How do you play?" asked Death.

Pestilence opened the box and pulled out the instructions. After reading them to his fellow Horsemen, he began shuffling the deck of white cards.

"Wait a minute," interrupted War.

"Who gets to be the Card Czar first? I think, as the leader, I should be in charge of picking the best answers."

"You aren't the leader of our group," said Pestilence. "The rules say the person who went poop most recently gets to be the first Card Czar."

Famine shook his head. "That's not fair. I haven't pooped in centuries."

"Yeah, and Pestilence usually has some sort of stomach ailment and he's going to the bathroom all the time," added War.

"Okay," Pestilence conceded, "we'll just let Famine go first."

Famine picked up the large stack of white cards and dealt ten to each of the other Horsemen. They each looked at their cards.

"These are disgusting," said War. "I mean this stuff is really sick."

"I like them."

Death shrugged. "Of course you do. You're Pestilence. I agree with War. Most of these are terrible. How can humanity be so vile?"

"Sort of makes you wonder why we haven't been summoned." Said War.

"Let's just play the game." Famine flipped the top card on the deck of black cards. He read the question, "If at first you don't succeed, try _____."

The other three Apocalyptic Riders considered their choices of white cards.

"I just can't play this one," said Death.

"It makes my skin crawl."

"You don't have any skin," said Pestilence.

"That's how bad it is."

"You know, I'm a harbinger of the end of the world, a carrier of utter destruction but I still can't play some of these cards. Give me a minute to try and find one that isn't depraved."

Eventually, each player found a card they were willing to play and placed it in front of Famine. The Card Czar picked up the three cards and shuffled them. He flipped over the first.

"If at first you don't succeed, try *An AR-15 Assault Rifle*."

Everyone looked at War who smiled.

Famine grabbed the second card.

"If at first you don't succeed, try *Dying*."

This time everyone turned toward Death.

Turning over the last card, Famine read, "If at first you don't succeed, try *A Brain Tumor*."

"Well, who wins?" asked War. "You have to admit mine fit the question very well."

"No, it didn't," shouted Pestilence.

"Mine is much more apropos."

"Apropos?" screamed Death. "Yours is just plain stupid. It's not even an action. You can't choose to get a brain tumor."

"I can."

"Let me think," said Famine.

"A rifle is the perfect answer to everything."

"Dying solves every problem."

"Well, a brain tumor is a way of dying."

"So is getting shot by an AR-15."

"I said, let me think."

With each comment, the decibel level rose. Soon, all four Horsemen were

yelling at the top of their lungs. War banged his sword against his throne and threatened to break Death in half.

Pestilence hacked up a wad of phlegm and spat it at War's feet.

The argument got so heated and loud that none of the Horsemen heard the horn blast emulated from above.

"I need it quiet so I can think," screamed Famine.

"What's there to think about," bellowed War. "My answer is the best."

"The best at being stupid," chimed in Pestilence.

The horn sounded a second time, but once again, none of the riders heard its blare.

Death clapped his skeletal hands trying to make enough noise to counter War's rhythmic pounding of his sword. "Why isn't dying the best answer?"

"Because it's not creative at all," replied Pestilence between heavy wheezes brought about by the exertion of the argument.

"If you don't all shut up, I'm never going to decide," announced Famine.

Famine's ultimatum only made the others shout even more loudly.

The horn played for a third and final time.

"Wait a minute. Did you guys hear something?" asked Death.

"Yeah, I heard two stupid answers and one really good one," clamored War.

The heated argument continued, showing no signs of abating. The horn did not sound again. The time had passed. The Apocalypse would have to wait for another day.

Humor

G0n3

By: Timothy Law



Timothy Law

Timothy Law is a writer of fantasy, horror, detective and general fiction from a little town in Southern Australia called Murray Bridge. A happily married father of three children, family is very important to him. Currently working at the Murray Bridge Library in the role of Library Manager he has dreamed since his early high school years of becoming a full-time author. Working for a library, surrounded by so many wonderful authors it is difficult not to be inspired to write. Many of his short stories and general musings can be found on his blog <http://somecallmetimmy.blogspot.com.au/> or on [Parenting Express website](#).

“W h3r3 h@5 1t g0n3?” T1m

the St0ryt3ll3r cr13d.

“Wh3r3 h@5 wh@t g0n3?” @5k3d

10110111011110, th3 gr3m!1n.

“My 5h0rt 5t0ry...” grumb!3d th3 wr1t3r.

“Y0u’!! n33d t0 b3 m0r3 5p3c1f1c,” @n5w3r3d th3 gr3m!1n. “Wh@t f! @v0r 5t0ry 15 1t?”

“Wh@t d0 y0u m3@n, fl@v0r?” 3nqu1r3d T1m.

“Oh s0rry,” !@ugh3d th3 gr3m!1n.

“Y0u c@!! 1t g3nr3... W3 st0ry c0nn01553ur5 r3fur3 t0 such @5 th3 t@5t3 0f @ t@!3...”

“1t w@5 @ F@nt@5y 5t0ry...” T1m 5@1d w1th0ut n33d1ng @ 53c0nd t0 th1nk @b0ut 1t. “0n3 1 wr0t3 y3@r5 @g0...”

“50 50rry...” 10110111011110 r3p! 13d. “1f th@t’5 th3 c@53 1 pr0b@b!y @t3 1t y3@r5 @g0 t00...”

“@t3 1t [!]” T1m 3xc!@1m3d. “Y0u pr0b@b!y @t3 1t, 0r y0u d3f1n1t3!y d1d?”

Th3r3 w@5 @ br13f p@u53 @5 th3 gr3m!1n p0nd3r3d @nd th3 wr1t3r 1mp@t13nt!y w@1t3d.

“1 w1!! n33d 50m3 m0r3 d3t@1!35, ju5t t0 b3 c3rt@1n...”

“1t w@5 @ 53qu3! b@53d 0n @n @dv3ntur1ng p@rty wh1ch 1 h@d n1ckn@m3d 3p1c F@1!...”

Th3 gr3m!1n’5 5t0m@ch gurg!3d, @

v3ry l0ud rumb!1ng 50und.

“Yum...” 10110111011110 s1gh3d.

“1 !0v3 f@nt@sy... 35p3c1@!!y 53qu3!5.”

Th3 wr1t3r gr0@n3d th3n. 1t w@5 @ v3ry 51m1!@r 50und t0 th3 gr3m!

1n’5 tummy, but h@d @n 0bv10u5 t0n3 0f h0p3!355n355 t0 1t.

“D0n’t b3 !!k3 th@t,” 5@1d 10110111011110. “1f 1 d1d 3@t th@t st0ry... @nd 1 @m n0t @t th3 5t@g3 y3t wh3r3 1 c@n c0nf1rm e1th3rw@y...”

“Ju5t 5p1t 1t 0ut... W3 @r3 fr13nd5, y35?” 5ugg35t3d th3 @uth0r.

10110111011110 s1gh3d.

“5ur3...” th3 gr3m!1n @gr33d. “But y0u h@d b3t3r 51t d0wn...”

“@h@ [!]” T1m cr13d, p01nt1ng @ f1ng3r 0f @ccu5@t10n at 10110111011110. “50 1t w@5 y0u [!!!]”

[Error 5379... Data missing... Believed to have been eaten...

47932 Syntax... 6543378...

5@1d th3 t1ny cr3@tur3 w@v1ng 1t’s c!@w3d h@nd5 v1g0r0u5!y 1n pr0t35t. “@nyw@y... @nyth1ng y0u th1nk y0u h@v3 @b0ut m3 0n r3c0rd 1’!! ju5t 3@t m@t3...”

[Error 5371... Data delet... Inappropriate use of foreign terminology...

47342 Syntax... 2323378...

“@nd y0u 5h0u!d b3 f33!1ng qu1t3
 @5h@m3d f0r u51ng 5uch t3rr1b!y
 t@5t1ng pr053...” 5ugg35t3d
 10110111011110 5t3rn!y.
 “1 kn0w... 1 kn0w...” !@m3nt3d th3
 wr1t3r. “Ch1!d3n r3@d th353 5t0r135
 50m3t1m35... 1 n33d t0 w@tch wh@t
 1 5@y @nd wr1t3...”
 “1 g0t y0u c0v3r3d... Th15 t1m3
 @nyw@y...” r3@55ur3d th3 gr3m!1n.
 “But 1 c@nn0t pr0m153 t0 b3 th3r3
 3v3ryt1m3 y0u l053 y0ur c00!...”
 “1 und3r5t@nd, @nd th@nky0u...”
 th3 @uth0r r3p!13d, humb!y.
 “Y0u @r3 50 m015t w3lc0m3,” 5@1d
 10110111011110.
 “D1d y0u ju5t s@y m015t 1n5t3@d 0f
 m05t?” l@ugh3d th3 wr1t3r.
 “Y3@h,” @dm1t3d th3 gr3m!1n. “1
 h@d @n 1 5tuck 1n th3 b@ck 0f m1
 thr0@t @nd 111t ju5t 50rt111 0f
 p1110pp3d 1111n th3r3...”
 “@r3 y0u g01ng t0 b3 0k@y?”
 “1 th1nk th3y c0uld b3 500000m3
 000000f th3 l3tttttt3r5 fr0m y0ur
 m1551nnnnng 5t0ry...” s@1d th3
 gr3m!1n, turn1ng @ 5!1ght 5h@d3
 gr33n3r.
 “Wh@t 0n 3@rth c0u!d y0u p0551b!y
 m3@n?” @5k3d @ v3ry c0nc3rn3d
 T1m.
 “1 w0u!d pr0b@b!y t@k3 @ 5t3p 0r
 tw0 b@ck 1f 1 w3r3 y0u buddy...
 Jtryjm... HhhhHHhhrrrrroooooo...”
 blurt3d 10110111011110... M@yb3
 duck 1nt0 @n0th3r r00m f0r ju5t @
 s3c... 0r 1 c0uld...”
 “Wh@t 15 g01ng 0n? Ju5t sp1t 1t
 Out... Y0u’r3 w0rry1ng me...”
 “Y0u d0n’t w@nt m3 t0 5p1t
 @nyth1ng...” w@rn3d
 10110111011110. “1 h@v3 0n!y 533n
 th15 h@ppppppp3en 0nc3 @nd th@t
 w@5 0nc3 t00 m@ny...”
 “C@n 1 d0 @nyth1ng t0 h3lp?”
 @5k3d T1m, n0w d33p!y c0nc3rn3d.
 “Ju5t g3t Out 0oof th3 w@y...”
 “Why?” @5k3d th3 wr1t3r. “Wh@t’5
 g01ng t0 h@pp...?”
 “dhschsdhcvkdvkdsjvdljvldkjsvkl...
 dcjhdscjdsjdl... dhcfdshfcdskh...
 rejfdvdf... bvfdivgsdfr... HIHLL
 SGFVGRFGFFDG VGFGRSDVFG...
 hdshl...” v0m1t3d th3 gr3m!1n, @!!
 0v3r T1m’s !@p.
 “0h... W0w...” g@5p3d th3 wr1t3r.
 “1 th1nk w3 f0und y0ur m1551ng
 5h0rt st0ry... 0r @t !3@5t 50m3 0f
 1t...” 5@1d th3 gr3m!1n w3@k!y.
 1t’5 5t0m@ch rummb!3d @g@in.
 “@r3 y0u 5ur3 th@t y0u d0n’t n33d @
 d0ct0r?” T1m @5k3d, qu1ck!y 5huff!
 1ng b@ckw@rd 1n @n @tt3mpt t0 try
 @nd d15t@nc3 h1m53lf fr0m
 @n0th3r 5pr@y 0f r3gurg1t@t3d
 w0rd5.
 “N@h... 50m3 r@w ch1ck3n w1!! d0
 th3 tr1ck...” r3p!13d th3 gr3m!1n. “D0
 y0u h@v3 @ny?”
 “Y3@h... W3 @r3 5upp053d t0 h@v3
 1t f0r d1nn3r t0n1ght, but 1’d much
 r@th3r y0u h@v3 it...” T1m 5t@t3d,
 h1s 0wn f3@tur3s turn1ng p@!3...
 “5m@rt...” @gr33d 10110111011110.
 “1’!! g3t 1t f0r y0u r1ght n0w...”
 pr0m153d th3 @uth0r, r@c1ng
 t0w@rd th3 k1tch3n.
 “T00 l@t3 [!]” 5t@t3d th3 gr3m!1n,
 b3f0r3... “bcascsabcsakcsa...
 eefeejdfcdjld...
 aasseeerrrderrrrffllloooppphhhjj...
 fgjjkgjkgghihil...”
 “1 gu355 w3’r3 !ucky 1n @ w@y th@t
 1t w@5n’t @ n0v3l...” 5@1d T1m @5
 h3 f33b1!y 0ff3r3d th3 r@w p0u!try
 0n @ p!@t3.
 “Y0u’v3 g0t th@t r1gh...
 GGJKgkhjkjhkhhl...
 hkhkfskelflegrewwqq...
 xsadaffefllkefkefk... THEvjkl...
 ENDfgggttrdfdokjuikkk...”
 [Program runtime error... Syntax
 55432111... Graphics Card not coping
 with the visuals...

Reboot?

Y/N?]

Y...

Humor

Wednesday, 30th April 2025

By: Sara Ali



Sara Ali

I'm Sara Ali, an academic by profession but a writer by passion; who lives in her own world of words.

The day to be written in gold in all the Trudeau family diaries. As we returned from the airport, navigating through post-rush hour traffic and silent sighs of relief, it was almost surreal. The car hummed with the kind of peace we hadn't known in days. Yet, stepping back into our home, we could still feel him. His spectral presence lingered like a strong aftershave—stubborn and slightly judgmental. His phantom slippers remained neatly aligned by the door. The cushions on the living room sofa still bore the deep imprint of his imperial posture. And somewhere in the air, faint but unmistakable, echoed his voice: "No cardamom in my tea?" Guys, that is Joseph Trudeau, my Uncle Jo, for you. Let me take you a bit in flash back, and then you'll definitely relate with what I'm talking about. It all began the day after the wedding, a magnificent affair filled with laughter, glimmering lights, and precisely the kind of organized chaos that leaves everyone emotionally bankrupt. The last of the guests had departed, the newlyweds had been waved off with moist eyes and overly enthusiastic smiles, and all we longed for was one blessed moment of

silence.

But Uncle Jo, arriving like an unexpected plot twist in a slow-burning drama, had other plans. With a regal sweep of his tweed jacket and the unshakable confidence of someone who had clearly mistaken himself for royalty, he announced: "I'll stay on for a few more days. It's been so long since we all spent quality time together. And anyway, who leaves right after the wedding? That's so transactional."

Thus began our descent into a realm of passive-aggressive purgatory. Every morning at precisely 5:45 AM—no alarm needed, just a biologically ingrained sense of entitlement—he would rise and commence his daily inspection of our lives.

"Still no tea? Fascinating. In my day, tea was ready before the sun considered rising."

The kitchen became a battleground. He would prod at the pancakes with the intensity of a food critic hosting a scandalous exposé.

"This is your idea of healthy? In culinary terms, I'd call this gently inconvenienced flour." This censorship continued to the milkshake, sourdough bread, lunch menu, afternoon tea, soups and salads, dinner menu, in short... each and every diet (or lack of it).

Uncle Jo's nosiness knew no bounds. He surveyed our home like a bored auditor: questioning the number of power sockets in each room,

commenting on the curtain choices ("Grey? How delightfully drab.") and asking cousins about their job prospects with the subtlety of a sledgehammer.

"So, you're still in marketing? Not software? Hmm. Very bold of you."

His taunts were masterfully camouflaged as banter—dripping in sarcasm, laced with unsolicited wisdom, and delivered with the kind of smile that made you want to scream into a cushion.

And yet, like devoted extras in the tragic comedy of his stay, we smiled.

We nodded. We fetched hot water bottles and brewed obscure herbal teas. Even the family dog, who once barked at strangers, simply gave up and stared out the window, dead-eyed.

We tried everything—cryptic hints, dramatic yawns, fake calls from airlines, even a short-lived rumor that our Wi-Fi was down for maintenance for a week. Uncle Jo remained unmoved.

"Oh, that's fine. I needed to detox anyway. Besides, I've had my own data to secure privacy."

Words... Words...Words!!

But then... miracle of miracles... today, he left. We escorted him to the airport like victorious soldiers returning from war. Security waved him through with suspiciously cheerful efficiency. Someone in the terminal may have actually applauded. We didn't stay to confirm—we were already sprinting towards the car.

And now, back home, in our peaceful, Jo-free sanctuary, Ella, my sister dared to whisper:

"Did he... leave his phone?", as she pointed at the plugged-in device at the corner table.

We all froze.

Could this mean...

????

Poems

From a Hilltop Cemetery

By: Jake Sheff



Jake Sheff

Jake Sheff is a pediatrician and veteran of the US Air Force. He's married with a daughter and a crazy bulldog. Poems and short stories of Jake's have been published widely. A full-length collection of formal poetry, "A Kiss to Betray the Universe," is available from White Violet Press. He also has three chapbooks: "Looting Versailles" (Alabaster Leaves Publishing), "The Rites of Tires" (SurVision) and "The Seagull's First One Hundred Seguidillas" (Alien Buddha Press).

A painful dream has smuggled fear
Into compassion's shelter, but
The warmth of wishful thinking's not
Too dear at Sunset Pioneer.

The soul of souls, its one voile ear,
Would say my heart is far from suede;
Get your red thoughts in a green shade
Up here, at Sunset Pioneer.

When spindrifts spread their coastal cheer,
Each castle plays the spendthrift; me,
I chase a cold divinity
With beer called Sunset Pioneer.

Caliginous and cavalier,
The stringy quarrels yesterday
That I exhume when I display
A tear at Sunset Pioneer.

On such bare heights, the light falls sheer.
Decay would marry this here land
If only death could understand
What's clear at Sunset Pioneer.

The crickets' chirps all disappear
Behind the dropping temperature.
That rolling thunder's embouchure
Will veer at Sunset Pioneer.

Afraid of goodness, one's career
Is gathered to one's kin before
One dies. At pessimism's core
They sneer at Sunset Pioneer.

The dead all sing from midnight's rear;
On what comes after being now
They binge. Don't even ask me how
They flee at Sunset Pioneer.

Who makes the music none can hear?
(How repetition leads to change
Is strange.) These graves all rearrange
Our sphere from Sunset Pioneer.

The loosestrifes whisper as two deer
Step worshipfully through the trees;
The moonlight's footloose mystery's
Severe at Sunset Pioneer.

In purple robes or clouds austere,
The sky maintains its dignity
Above the gray solemnity
Each year at Sunset Pioneer.

That absent-minded chandelier,
A gnomonic constellation, burns;
Its pleasing odor makes the ferns
All jeer at Sunset Pioneer.

The fox's fixed ideas cohere.
My joy annoys my ideal self
(His coffin's focus fixed my shelf
And spear at Sunset Pioneer).

Poems

A Writer's Day

By: Gabriella Balcom



Gabriella Balcom

Gabriella Balcom, who is from Texas, writes fantasy, horror/thriller, romance, sci-fi, and more. She likes traveling, music, photography, great stories, history and movies. Gabriella says she loves forests, mountains, and back roads. She has a weakness for lasagna, garlic bread, tacos, cheese and chocolate. Check out her author page:

<https://facebook.com/GabriellaBalcom.lonestarauthor>

I stare at the computer screen,
position my fingers on the keys,
but time passes and passes and...
my brain has shut down, it seems.

Frustrated, I tackle chores and crud,
and some possibilities occur to me.
I go to jot them down, but — *poof* —
my mind has gone blank, it seems.

I eventually envision the perfect story
replete with drama, suspense, intrigue.
I scribble madly, but later I find only
blank pages. I was dreaming, it seems.

Thinking hard, I wrangle another plot,
throwing down the bare bones, at least.
Rough or not, I've made some progress.
Alas — not saved. File's empty, it seems.

I'm off work again now and free to create
the next hopefully bestselling something.
But where's my inspiration? Motivation?
Blast it! Why — [why] — can't I conceive?

Time passes and an idea finally takes root
in my mind, so I type madly on my laptop.
What I'm creating will need some tweaking,
but it'll be more than adequate, I do believe.

When at last my day winds down to an end,
I look back over that which I've produced.
Some of it is naught but twaddle and drivel,
but the majority's good and I'm so relieved.

Beauty radiates from most of my work
and it's solid to the very core. Touching.
Gritty. Sublime. This day I no longer rue
and I'm so happy with what I've achieved.

Poems

Cat Poem

By: Timothy Law



Timothy Law

Timothy Law is a writer of fantasy, horror, detective and general fiction from a little town in Southern Australia called Murray Bridge. A happily married father of three children, family is very important to him. Currently working at the Murray Bridge Library in the role of Library Manager he has dreamed since his early high school years of becoming a full-time author. Working for a library, surrounded by so many wonderful authors it is difficult not to be inspired to write. Many of his short stories and general musings can be found on his blog <http://somecallmetimmy.blogspot.com.au/> or on [Parenting Express website](#).

Three cats in a rocket
No one dared knock it
We just sent them on their way
Said we'd see them in a week and a day
So, they flew from our sight super quick
Waved us away with a simple tail flick

The first place they passed
Was a moon made of cheese
Slinky cat Felix begged
"Can we stop, please?"
"We shall," replied Ginger
Followed by an exclamation of "Merlin's disease!!"
To turn such a ship was much without ease

The feline trio next passed the planet of War
Mewling number three wanted to get off
Sick of flying, he begged for no more
The other two cats had to prevent his opening of the door
Squished flat, that cat
Poor Whiskers spent the rest of the journey on the floor

As they came back our way
They had nothing to say
Still hungry
After a week and a day
Seeking some dinner
A dish with which they could play

Running low
Going so slow
They all ended up
In a big pile of snow

The felines, all three
Got dumped in the sea
With fried fish on their minds
They rubbed their paws together with glee
No thoughts about home
They had all forgotten about me

But I recalled them all oh so fondly

After a day and a week were done
They'd all three had enough fun
Back home came the trio
Landing with a three, two, one
To spread out on my bed
And soak up that warm sun

Ginger, Whiskers, and Felix
Having survived their adventurous fix
Dream with full bellies
And a bag full of tricks

I hope and pray
They will go back one day
Back to the moon where the mice do play
To the place where the cheese tastes of freshly reaped hay

Then on to the sea
Will go those pussycats three
Where a rainbow of colors will be waiting for thee

Poems

Elegy

For Emma's Father, 30th Sept, 2024

By: John Chinaka Onyeche



John Chinaka Onyeche

John Chinaka Onyeche is a Nigerian writer of colour (BIPOC) and historian from Etche in Rivers State. A graduate of history and diplomatic studies. He serves as a poetry curator with Port Harcourt Literary Review. His writing can be found in various journals, including; Charles University, Prague, Rio Grande Valley International Poetry Festival, Akpata Review, Rigorous, Ebedi Review, Overtly Lit, Middlebury Institute of International Studies, McNeese University, Pier Review University of Brighton, Tilted House Journal, Akewi Magazine, and Brittle Paper. Best of Net, 2022, Pushcart, 2023.

Connect with him on Twitter
@Apostlejohnchin or
<https://linker.ee/RememberAjc>

My world crumbled again.
My words scattered amidst the news,
holding nothing to express the vacuum.
I watched it happen;
I stare as birds pick them up.
Words after word left my thoughts,
one after another,
another after one.
To fix a father's absence
is like fixing a broken glass;
it leaves you with a trace
as one on whose shoulder
Is saddled father's clothing
and father's shadows rest onwards.
I found no words to elegize
your demise in the Harmattan season.
This breeze blinding with chill,
while no clothing for what is remaining.
I elegize for this sun set too soon.
The water is still holding a mist –
where and how should we find you?
When and what should we do now?
This and that are the words left
in our tongues as we grieve.

Poems

Persephone, Funeral Home Assistant

By: Steven Bruce



Steven Bruce

Steven Bruce is a writer and multiple-award-winning author. His poems and short stories have appeared in numerous international anthologies and magazines. In 2018, he graduated from Teesside University with a master's degree in creative writing. An English expatriate, he now lives and writes full-time in Poland.

She sets the flowers.
Brushes lint from suits.

Persephone shuts the viewing room door
and leaves mourners to their goodbyes.

In the staff room, she drinks stale coffee.

In spring, she reaches for sunlight.
In winter, she hardens,
cold and clean as bone.

Once, the earth bloomed for her.

Now, she lines up urns.
Dusts the plaques.
Watches her black nail polish flake
like ash.

Poems

Safe Haven

By: Gabriella Balcom



Gabriella Balcom

Gabriella Balcom, who is from Texas, writes fantasy, horror/thriller, romance, sci-fi, and more. She likes traveling, music, photography, great stories, history and movies. Gabriella says she loves forests, mountains, and back roads. She has a weakness for lasagna, garlic bread, tacos, cheese and chocolate. Check out her author page:

<https://facebook.com/GabriellaBalcom.lonestarauthor>

Everyone needs safe harbor,
shelter from the rain.
All of us need a true haven,
a respite from deepest pain.

Christ can be our mooring.
He says, "Come. Believe."
He is our Redeemer,
and will never leave.

We all need protection
from life's slinging hail.
He is here to help us,
to ensure we not fail.

Loving Him may not
make for an easy way,
but we can gain strength
to live every single day.

The End

Poems

Waiting

By: John Drudge



John Drudge

John is a social worker working in the field of disability management and holds degrees in social work, rehabilitation services, and psychology. He is the author of seven books of poetry: "March" (2019), "The Seasons of Us" (2019), New Days (2020), Fragments (2021), A Long Walk (2023), A Curious Art (2024) and Sojourns (2024). His work has appeared widely in literary journals, magazines, and anthologies internationally. John is also a Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net nominee and lives in Caledon Ontario, Canada with his wife and two children.

Minutes
 Pool like water
 On the edges
 Of an instant
 As the air grows thick
 With anticipation
 And the clock's ticking
 Is swallowed by the silence
 That gathers
 Like dust in the corners
 While the world continues
 On the edge of a breeze
 Trembling
 As light becomes sharper
 Revealing clearer lines
 To fill the hollowness
 Of desire
 Pressing inward
 Stretched
 Across the frame
 Of a moment

Art Gallery

Dry Brain Survival Kit

By: Christopher Collingwood



Christopher Collingwood

Chris was born and raised in Sydney Australia. He completed university in Sydney and graduated with a degree in business studies. Chris has devoted his spare time to writing, with works published in Not One of Us, Andromeda Spaceways, Hexagon, Shoreline of Infinity, Jersey Devil Press, State of Matter, Qualia Nous Vol 2 anthology, Smoke in the Stars anthology, and illustration in The Sprawl Mag 2.1, Apocalypse Confidential, , Sublimation 1.3, hyphen punk, Suburban Witchcraft, Snoozine, among other dimensionally unstable places.



Art Gallery

Below the Floodlight

By: Godstime Ismail



Godstime Ismail

I'm a passionate comic book colorist with a love for bringing stories to life through vibrant hues. With a keen eye for detail and a knack for creating captivating palettes, I add depth and emotion to every panel. From superheroes to fantastical worlds, I use colors to enhance the narrative and create an immersive reading experience. I love working on comic books so much.



Art Gallery

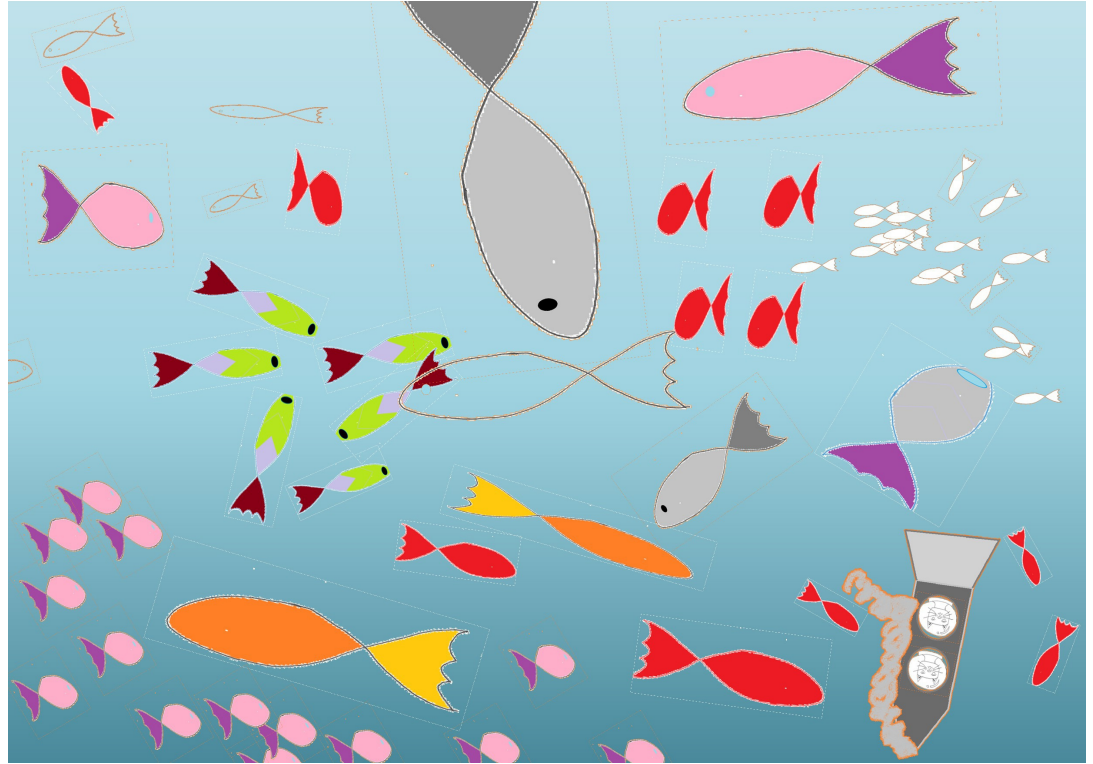
Cat Crash

By: Timothy Law



Timothy Law

Timothy Law is a writer of fantasy, horror, detective and general fiction from a little town in Southern Australia called Murray Bridge. A happily married father of three children, family is very important to him. Currently working at the Murray Bridge Library in the role of Library Manager he has dreamed since his early high school years of becoming a full-time author. Working for a library, surrounded by so many wonderful authors it is difficult not to be inspired to write. Many of his short stories and general musings can be found on his blog <http://somecallmetimmy.blogspot.com.au/> or on [Parenting Express website](#).



Art Gallery

Eyes of the Crimson Sigil

By: Idris Yusuf



Idris Yusuf

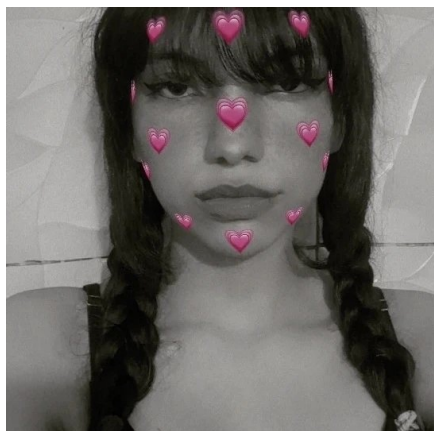
Idris Yusuf is during the day a teacher of art and in the evenings a professional artist from the country of Nigeria. He has a long standing history with *Dark Myth Comics* actively working on forthcoming projects due out soon.X



Art Gallery

Kiss of the Killer Clown

By: Tatiana Salete



Tatiana Salete

No information provided.



Art Gallery

What the Duck!

By: Ed Bickford



Ed Bickford

Ed is an illustrator that lives in Kansas City, Missouri with his wife, three kids, and two dogs. He has been drawing since he can remember. He has a degree in illustration and has self published comics and attends comic book conventions around the US. His dream is to one day make an obscene amount of money to drink coffee and draw monsters all day.



Movie Reviews

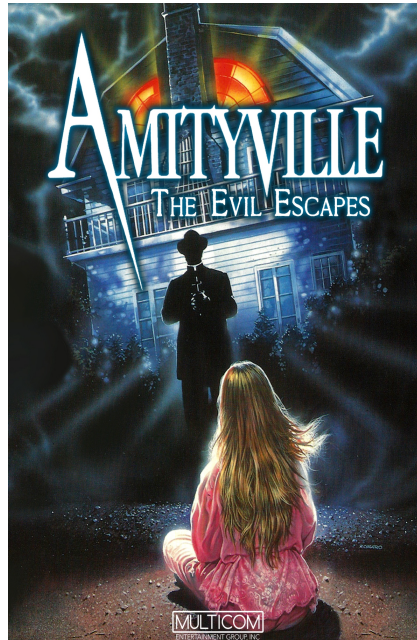
Review of Amityville 4: The Evil Escapes

By: *Sarcastically Cynical Sally*



Sarcastically Cynical Sally

Sarcastically Cynical Sally spends time watching endless movies with her boyfriend Moviegoer Grim. She enjoys keeping a running commentary on how she would do it so much better but doesn't actually want to put in the effort. She has a mouth that could get her into trouble, a heart just as cynical, but every now and then you will see her shed a tear over a movie. Whether it's because it touched a place inside her, deep, deep, deep inside her, or it really is that bad, no one will ever know.



Well, I have been left to my own devices for movies. *Moviegoer Grim* has kicked me out. He had enough of me ragging on his movie choices and told me I could pick my own darn movies. So, here I am. Now, I am a lover of a good movie, which sadly, the world seems to be lacking in new ones. I am a lover of critiquing bad movies! Which, gleefully, the world has a plethora of! I am also a lover of watching movies so bad they are good at being bad. If you have ever watched a movie like that, you know what I mean. I can't describe what 'so bad it's good' means. It's an

experience.

Since I have been left to my own devices, I have watched neither good movies, nor bad movies. Just one absolutely horrible movie.

I am a huge fan of anything Amityville. I soak it up. Unfortunately, it is all documentary stuff because beyond the first movie, and the remake with Ryan Reynolds, they haven't made a good one since.

Trust me, I've watched all 16 that I can find. Yes, 16.

In order...

The Amityville Horror – 1979

Amityville II: The Possession – 1982

Amityville 3-D – 1982

Amityville 4: The Evil Escapes – 1989

The Amityville Curse – 1990

Amityville: It's About Time – 1992

Amityville: A New Generation – 1993

Amityville Dollhouse – 1996

The Amityville Horror – 2005

The Amityville Haunting – 2011

The Amityville Asylum – 2013

Amityville Death House – 2015

The Amityville Playhouse – 2015

Amityville: No Escape – 2016

Amityville: The Awakening – 2017

As you can see, it has been a few years since the last one, so they are due. God save us all.

The one I will be...dissecting is the 4th one. Now, first I have to say, none past the first one and the 2005 Ryan Reynolds one, have anything really to do with the original story of the Amityville house. They have taken the

demon aspect and spun an entirely different story. As with the one I am discussing...dissecting...this month. Amityville 4: The Evil Escapes. This was made for T.V back in the late 80's, so I wasn't expecting much when I went into this one. I did expect something remotely decent as it has Patty Duke, Norman Lloyd Fredric Lehne and Robert Alan Browne. None of those are slouch actors. They have some great works in their repertoire. But it is the Amityville movie's and by the time I reached this movie, I was not holding my breath. As I said before, it takes the demon aspect of the Amityville haunting and runs with it in its own direction. Straight to a remote California mansion via a very ugly, apparently very ancient lamp that came from the original house and was sold in a yard sale. Like that is believable, but I digress. Once the lamp is in place in its new digs, it begins manipulating the young daughter by pretending to hold the spirit of her dead father. If done correctly, it could have tugged at your heartstrings and pulled you into the movie. But alas...no. Now the family already has issues. Which makes for great demon fodder. It's their favorite meal! Now enter the young inexperienced priest to save the day. Sound familiar? Yeah, it is every demonic movie trope all wrapped up in one. Then they continued it for 12 more movies! Different writers, different directors, different actors, same crap.

Again, I digress. With the original Amityville house now demon free, they have no more use for it in the movie and pack up the demon in the lamp and move it to California. Craving the soul of an innocent young girl. Chaos and the typical demon stuff ensues, until the climax at the

end. The lamp fights back but as with all these types of movies, good wins over evil. The lamp does use the child to do its dirty work, which, I will admit, adds a creep factor. Nothing is creepier than demon kids. If I drive by a cornfield and a kid steps out, I ain't stopping!

Anyway, the lamp has a surprisingly low kill count for a demonic movie, and the jump scares are lackluster at best. The special effects were cheesy and if I could have tapped out, I would have. But there are articles to be written, so here we are.

Do I recommend? Sure, if you have to numb your brain for a painful procedure or need something stronger than melatonin to put you to sleep. Other than that, it is another useless piece of cinematic drivel in a universe that could command much better stories.

Keep watching...or don't, I don't care.
Sarcastically Cynical Sally

Tim's Timeless Treasures and Reviews

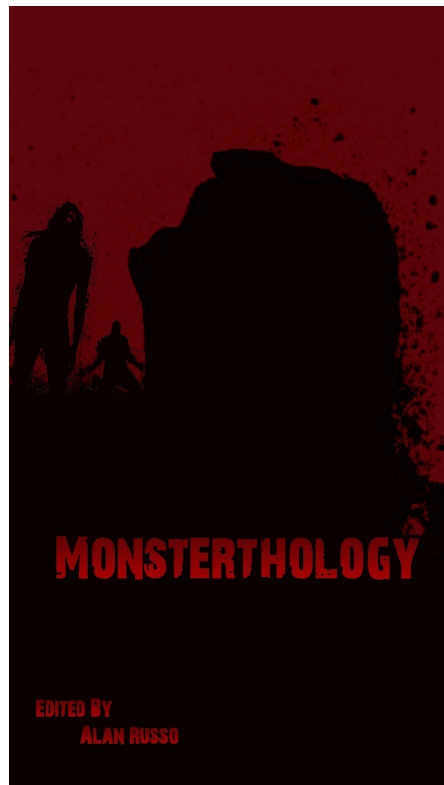
Review of Monsterthology Edited by Alan Russo

By: Timothy Law



Timothy Law

Timothy Law is a writer of fantasy, horror, detective and general fiction from a little town in Southern Australia called Murray Bridge. A happily married father of three children, family is very important to him. Currently working at the Murray Bridge Library in the role of Library Manager he has dreamed since his early high school years of becoming a full-time author. Working for a library, surrounded by so many wonderful authors it is difficult not to be inspired to write. Many of his short stories and



Alan you genius. Turning your idea for a film all about monsters into an opportunity for a group of like-mindedly passionate writers to create the first Zombieworks anthology about monsters, a cleverly titled

Monsterthology. I bet this was not too challenging a sell to your friend David K. Montoya...

I can only imagine the conversation:
Alan – Hey Dave you know how much I love monster movies and wanted to create my own?

David – Yeah... Yeah... Al... That ship has sailed though mate... I'm sorry...
Alan – Not necessarily, Dave... Hear me out...

David – You've got my attention...

Alan – What if we produced an anthology... A monster anthology...

David – A Monsterthology?

Alan – Exactly...

David – You had me at hello...

Alan – But, I never said hello...

And so, the first ever Monsterthology from Zombie Works Publications, was born (at least as a concept). With just how much I know both David and Alan love old school horror stories, and the movies that have arisen from such tales, I'm certainly surprised that there is not one single story in this anthology from either of them. What is discoverable between the zombie spattered front and back cover of this unearthed gem is a wealth of brilliant, clever, and often frightful tales of terror from fifteen of the most talented writers of this dark and

general musings can be found on his blog <http://somecallmetimmy.blogspot.com.au/> or on [Parenting Express website](#).

disturbing genre. Kicking it off we get a very Frankensteinian nod to the search for eternal life and the quest to determine if God is real. T. Fox Dunham bares their scientific soul with 21 Grams, truly unexpected, and beautifully written. What are we willing to sacrifice to achieve the greater goal? Following such a disturbing story is no mean feat, and Alan has chosen well from the menu with Joe Mogel's Dinner on the Town. This one had my fangs chittering with infectious laughter... Or was that just gas? A monster story like no other I have ever read...

Jay Wilburn reintroduces us to an old favorite, with his story Absolution. Faith is tried and tested, and here we wonder does it truly pass or fail? Hunger, absolute hunger, can be the one thing that lasts forever. The great master of mystery and suspense, Tom Fowler, again embraces the creatures of the night, but in a more modern setting. Who do you trust when the very people you should be able to rely upon, the very core of society, seem to be only happy to look the other way? And is there something about that landlady...? She seems way too sweet and way too nice...

Sara Saint John takes us back to the glory days (or should that be gory days?) of the silver screen, introducing us to the late great, Bela Lugosi. A Hungarian actor of great talent and repute, this master gets awfully close to losing everything for the sake of a role. When Sara's talent as a storyteller and Bela's talent as an actor combine, true magic is the only likely outcome. One Strike for Connor by Joseph M. Monks examines the strong bond between brothers, asking us as readers how far would we go to make miracles happen. How far is too far? When

science is used to the most extreme point what remains when the smoke clears?

In the Felix Redemption by Robert Goodman we discover sometimes when boy meets girl and girl meets boy we get lucky. Some relationships save lives. Cages for catching monsters always underestimate the monster.

With James S. Dorr's Stink Man we hold up a mirror and wonder are there real monsters who walk beside us? One can never truly know what a neighbor is happy to do (or eat for that matter). A lesson in what it means to be human, and what can possibly happen when we tease and bully the wrong person.

The Monster by Brandon Cracraft tests the boundaries of belief regarding what makes a monster truly one. Humanity's misunderstanding and our ability to believe everything that we hear certainly helps to create monstrosities. When the mob approaches, can a single voice turn hysteria aside?

Leslie Munnely focuses upon the greatest night for monsters in her tale titled Halloween. A teen party turns out oh so right... Or maybe oh so wrong... A couple of girls looking for fun end up with more than they bargained for.

J. Gerard Michaels gives us not one monster but two, and in truth a whole horde of trouble in Dracula's Horde. My favorite line out of all the stories is in this one... "Oh, and Cord? Bring your sword."

Dawn Ius is well versed in writing monster stories, getting her start at the age of eight. All those years of practice shine through in Death Echo. Here, memory weaves a sorrowful tale, questioning who the monster is and why.

Franklin E. Wales and Michael Patricks combine their writing prowess and come up with No Kind Return, a terrifying tale of security detail, journalism, and the power of words. Not one for the squeamish, but fine if you find you have your organs on the outside.

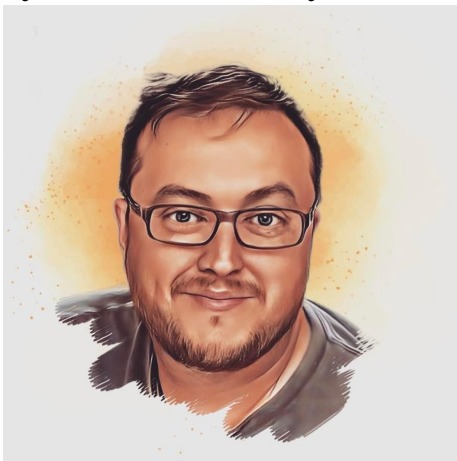
Dr. Martin D. Hill gives us the funniest and craziest story out of all of them in Also It! The Other Thing from Another World! Who do you trust amongst a cast of stereotypes where anyone could be IT? "You ain't from around here, are ya?" rings in my mind as one by one you question what you hear, what you think you know, and in the end, you just question everything. Finally, Tim J. Finn explains the true concept of being careful what one wishes for. The end of the world is coming as the past is born again into present times. Beneath those bandages, a monster is tough, strong, and frightfully ambitious. Who then do we turn to when gods walk among us?

Sixteen authors, fifteen stories, and each one just as intriguing, thought provoking, and entertaining as the story before. Alan Russo you are like Doctor Frankenstein himself, your vision coming alive as you pull the lever. Such an entertaining anthology for anyone seeking a haunting tale on a dreary night. Five lightning bolts out of five for this one. Dave, mate, you sure know how to back a winner.

COMMENTARY FROM THE FOUNDER

Well, how do you do?

By: David K. Montoya



David K. Montoya

For a good part of two decades David K. Montoya was an active writer, artist and business entrepreneur in the micro-publication world. In 2013, turned his pen in for a microphone and became a podcaster for the following five years—and even did a small stint in independent Hollywood. But, now, he's come home and is ready to begin weaving new tales for this magazine.

Hey Boy and Girls welcome back

to my soapbox formally known as Commentary! This month has been crazy for me, as the beginning starts with my forty-eighth birthday, Steph and the kids made it so special for me thank you from the bottom of my heart!

Things in the world of business, we (as the company, not family) decided not to continue with the audio advertisement from the Hollywood producer. As it turns out, running the same ads for more than a month actually hurt our overall downloads, and so we decided to step back take a breath and will try again soon, but with a limitation of one month at a time so not to burn out our audience. Also this month we saw the announcement of the Top Five Contestants for this year's Open Contract Challenge: Speed Edition. I would like to hear from all of you who have entered and those competed, what you liked as well as disliked in this accelerated version of our beloved competition.

I will say that overall, the turnout was great, we are waiting to see who claims the Grand prize and how well that is received before we move forward. The idea of offering both a Speed Edition and the standard competition next year is on the table, but we need to see how this turns out to make the decision on that. In the realm of Dark Myth Comics, we are currently working on a Comic Book Anthology, titled *Chronicles of the Unknown*, which will have multiple short stories ranging in a variety of different genres. The idea came when I got the anniversary edition of Detective Comics #29 the first appearance of Batman, and I was surprised how many other stories were in it. They all had other themes and characters, with no crossover. I wanted to do a book like that. Then I got to thinking that I knew a bunch of Indy creators who probably had some comics they wanted to promote, so I knew that was the direction I wanted to take. I am looking at a September release. As I am working on putting together a deal with shops around the country, that will get put directly into people's hands. Finally, the last thing I want to talk about is the lack of submissions we

have been receiving these last few months. Now, I have a lot of you on social media and see that a bunch of you are publishing elsewhere. While I am sincerely excited to see your work spreading to a wider audience, I have to wonder why your focus is no longer wanting to submit to The World of Myth?

So, I would like to invite all of you to drop me a message and tell me why. Be as straight forward as possible, if you feel that our reach is not wide enough let me know, if you are unhappy with the product somehow let me know, and if you feel that your writing is too good for the magazine I want to know that too.

I want to make The World of Myth Magazine the best it can possibly be. So, please let me know what was the cause of you leaving as a contributor. Don't worry about hurting my feelings, I have thick skin, so be truthful and lay it on me.

Okay, folks that is it for me this month, I have a gazillion and a half things to get done today, so all of you take care of yourself and keep creating!

David K. Montoya



Founder of The World of Myth Magazine And Other Stuff Too

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