

FEVER DREAMS

SCIENCE FICTION * HORROR * FANTASY

ISSUE 6 * MAY-AUG 15



**MORE THAN 70
PAGES OF FICTION**

From

Philip Meredith

Peter Bennett

Dave Ludford

Luke E. Dodd

Daniel Rice

Torin Wake

Ed Ahern

Douglas Ogurek

**Nohan Meza
Martinez**

William Shaw



POETRY

From

Brian Rosenberger



ARTICLES

From

Jason Daniels

Sarah Johnson

Michael Campbell

Richard Collins

Stephanie Bennett

WELCOME TO FEVER DREAMS ISSUE SIX

I was putting the finishing touches to Issue 6 when I received the sad news about

the passing of Wes Craven. He was the latest in a line of icons who have been lost since issue 5, Terry Pratchett and Christopher Lee are also sadly no longer with us, and for many of us the speculative genre will be forever changed by their absence. We remember them all in this issue.

We also welcome back Al Thomas, fresh from his degree in Creative Writing, and hope that he'll bring some fresh new ideas to the pages of Fever Dreams.

I have to mention the slew of articles that have hit my desk recently. It seems that I am not the only one who wants to have a discussion about our beloved genres and I thank everyone who has contacted me. This issue sees a marked increase in the number of articles we publish (up 200% from last issue) and I hope that this will spur you, our loyal readers, to get involved in the debate.

I have taken the brave step of joining Phil in the fiction clinic this month. Many of you wrote in with feedback about the clinic and we've listened, and will continue listening. We hope that you like the new format.

The fiction clinic was not the hottest topic however. I received plenty of emails querying



Issue Six Cover Art by Stephanie Bennett

EDITORIAL by Peter Bennett

our publishing schedule. So I'll say it here, currently the magazine is running on "valve time." For non-gamers that means that we want to ensure that you get a quality magazine and so we won't release it till we are happy with it. That may mean that sometimes we miss our quarterly deadline but we are working to rectify that situation with a few new additions to the team. So here it is in all its glory, Issue 6 of Fever Dreams. I hope you enjoy it.

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FEVER DREAMS PUBLICATIONS

ARTICLE by Peter Bennett

When I last wrote about what was going on at Fever Dreams I made the mistake of mentioning that details of our anthology and how you could be one of five readers to be published alongside us. We had every intention of including the submission details in the last issue but for various reasons that didn't happen. I feel that I've paid a penance in the number of emails I've answered on the issue over the last month, and this month we have finally added the submission details. Please read them carefully before you submit your work.

We are also involved, as many of our fans know, with an ongoing campaign against the decidedly prehistoric IT infrastructure in the Highlands of Scotland. This has, sadly, taken its toll on the magazine and we are doing everything within our power to rectify the situation. We are grateful to everyone who has contacted us on this issue and will continue to seek a solution that allows us to keep Fever Dreams available for free.

In our ongoing quest to make the website a more attractive prospect to our readers, Dylon and AI intend to publish more content on the website. Details of this content is still in the early stages of development and we'd be delighted to receive feedback from gamers and movie fans about the type of content that they would enjoy seeing. It is our firm intention to keep all reading and writing content within the pages of Fever Dreams for the foreseeable

future. Some readers have contacted us regarding online forums where people could discuss and display their work. Currently, and largely due to the nature of copyright and publishing legislation, we are not inclined to offer this type of support. Any online publication of your work, even in a forum/workshop could jeopardise your ability to get it published as an original piece of work in the marketplace and also increases the risk of intellectual copyright infringement and plagiarism. We will, as always, continue to offer our advice and support to writers in any other way we can.

SUPPORTING FEVER DREAMS

We hope that you enjoy the articles that we have collected together in this issue of Fever Dreams. While you are enjoying these articles our team will be working hard on the next issue. We are looking for your feedback. If you want to have your say on issue seven or future issues then please let us know what you think on our Facebook and Twitter feeds.

In the meantime we are looking for writers to send us articles on writing, book reviews, film reviews, game reviews... In fact we are looking for you to send us anything related to the genres of science fiction, horror and fantasy. We were delighted with the amount of submissions that we received for issue six and we hope to receive the same support for future issues.

Letters to the Editor

THE DOCTOR IS IN

I was delighted to see Fever Dreams back in print and more so when I saw the new format. There are so few magazines offering support to new writers in specialized genres and, in my opinion, Fever Dreams is one of the best on the market. The Fiction Clinic that appeared in Issue Five is an example of the outstanding work that you are doing, being able to see a finished story of that calibre and reading about Phil's thoughts when creating it and in reflection was incredibly useful. Keep up the good work. So long as Fever Dreams is available, I know that the doctor is always in.

JEFF PATTERSON
EDINBURGH

CAPTAIN, MY CAPTAIN

Fever Dreams made a triumphant return this year and I would, for one, like to say that I was delighted to see Peter Bennett back at the helm. I mean no offence to Al Thomas when I say this but the magazine suffered greatly in Peter's absence. I have always received polite, friendly and informative responses whenever I've emailed Peter and always felt like I was valued as a person and a reader. The magazine always ran to schedule and the content was of a great standard. It would be wrong of me to comment on the Scottish Independence Referendum as an Englishman. I cannot imagine the heartache and disappointment that almost half of Scotland felt in lieu of the result but I can say that I appreciated the fact that Peter kept the politics out of the magazine. Welcome back Fever Dreams, and welcome back Peter. I can offer you no better tribute than to say: Captain, My Captain.

A. LAIDLAW
STOCKPORT

PLEASE DON'T TEASE

It seems that I missed my opportunity to say welcome back in issue five and intended to write to welcome you back. I was side-tracked by my delight in reading that Fever Dreams intends to release an anthology. I scoured the pages of Issue 5 but found no information on how to submit my work, I wondered if this was an attempt to drive me mad. If so it is a very cruel joke. I have been a reader of Fever Dreams since issue one and eagerly await the notification in my social media feeds. Please, please don't tease me like that again.

PAT WARNER
SOUTHPORT

A VISIT TO THE CLINIC

I was delighted to see the return of Fever Dreams, this delight was heightened by the knowledge that Peter was back in charge, and the new format was enough to tip me over the edge. New articles, new ideas, new Feverdreamers but the same quality that I have come to know, love and expect from the magazine. I was delighted to see more writing articles and absolutely loved Phil's deconstruction of his own fiction for us all. I've not always been a fan of his macabre and darker format but I found his fiction clinic to be a light and at times funny commentary on the process that he engaged in when creating a deeply disturbing Lovecraftian horror tale. I would like to applaud Fever Dreams for their ingenuity and Philip Meredith for his bravery. Few authors are capable of reviewing and discussing their work in the way he did, let alone in such a public format. I look forward to my next visit to the Fiction Clinic.

GINA SWANSON
BERLIN, GERMANY



The first step in shaping your new world is to decide how much of it you really need to include.

The most common mistake that writers make is to believe that they must create an entire planet, a continent or even an entire kingdom in one go. My first piece of advice is to only create what you need to. You may need to know that there is a lost kingdom beyond the sea or the ruins of an ancient civilization lost in the sands beyond the mountains but if you aren't going to be visiting it for a while then just leave it as notes on a page. If the beginning of your story focuses on a small village in the mountains then that's what you need to develop first. Once you've developed this area you can move on to the other areas of the novel. Don't bite off more than you can chew.

ARTICLE by Glenn Kohler

START AT THE BOTTOM

I'll be discussing map making in greater detail in the next issue but for now a simple sketch of the relevant area will do. Decide whether the area you are working on is an isolated island like Australia or has borders connecting to other lands like most European countries. On a sheet of A4 draw your coastline, this could be a single line down the edge of the page or you could draw an island or continent depending on the size of the area you want to define. If you are using a city setting or the area is landlocked then there may not be a coastline, in this instance draw an arrow to indicate the direction of the nearest coastline. If you are working on a larger scale then you should consider the placement of major islands, peninsulas, bays, isthmuses and other land masses. Once you are happy with the costal features then you are ready to move on to the next stage.

DEFINING THE UPPER LIMITS

Your sketch currently shows the location of sea level, what we refer to as zero elevation, so now we must define the upper boundaries of our map. The next step is deciding whether and where to place mountain ranges, plateaus and hills. In our own world, mountains are formed through the theory of tectonic drift. This theory states that when one tectonic plate presses against another plate, the incredible pressure crumples the earth and raises up mountains. When such activity is ongoing the peaks of the mountains are usually high, bleak and jagged rock formations. When the activity happened in the past, the mountains are usually gentler, have greater forestation and are overgrown.

Once you know where your mountain ranges are then you need to identify the highest peaks individually and decide how tall these mountains are. For reference the tallest mountain in Britain is Ben Nevis which stands at 1,344 meters or 4409 feet above sea level. Its peak is the collapsed dome of an ancient volcano. The world's tallest mountain is Mount Everest which stands 8,848 meters or 29,029 feet above sea level. It is worth noting that above 10,000 feet the climate is considered arctic for all intent and purpose. Mark elevation lines on the map based on the height of the highest mountain. If your highest mountain is 5000 feet high then mark off increments at 2500 feet and 1000 feet. This will give you a rough topographical map in three dimensions.

WHERE IN THE WORLD?

Before we can finish our topographical map it is important to ask ourselves this question. The location of the area we are building in relation to the poles and the equator (assuming an earth-like planet) affects the climatic zone that it is situated in. You don't necessarily need to define every climatic zone in your world because many of these zones will be sparsely inhabited and some may be

completely uninhabited. The technological level of your setting will dictate how well explored these more desolate places are but even with advanced technology it is unlikely that many people will be living in the arctic zones or in the middle of deserts. It is also worth noting, as I detailed in the section on mountains, that a climatic zone can contain pockets of other zones depending on geographical features, weather and altitude.

Our planet is divided into five distinct climatic regions: arctic, sub-arctic, temperate, sub-tropical and tropical. Each of these areas is distinct in its climate and weather. While most writers will opt for a temperate climate, I have attempted to briefly describe the other regions.

ARCTIC

Usually a polar region at the top or bottom of the planet. The temperature is usually below freezing most of the year which makes agriculture impossible without technological or magical assistance. Any sentient beings that live here must have adapted to live in a deep freeze. Rain is usually replaced with snow and blizzards. The wind is freezing but is usually within the gentle to moderate range blowing from east to west.

SUB-ARCTIC

In sub-arctic zones the winters are long and cold. The summer can see warmer days making a short agricultural season possible but it is an unreliable form of sustenance. The winds in this area are generally stronger blowing from the direction of the arctic in the winter and from the temperate zones during the summer.

TEMPERATE

Much of our world's society exists in temperate climatic zones. It is the area of the greatest extremes often having bitter winters and hot summers though they lack the extremes of the arctic and tropical zones. Rainfall is divided fairly equally over the whole

year, benefiting agriculture, with snow commonly seen during the winter. The wind can reach high speeds and usually blows in a westerly direction.

SUB-TROPICAL

This area is most affected by terrain features. On our planet this band contains vast deserts and dense rainforests where it rains almost constantly. Days during the warm months are uncomfortably hot while nights during the cooler months can become quite brisk. High to moderate rainfall is often seen during the winter months, summer rain is often accompanied by storms. The winds in this area are usually east to west, coming from the equator, with variable speeds possible.

TROPICAL

As consistently hot as the arctic is cold. The temperature barely drops below scorching except at higher altitudes or during winter months. A cold snap in this zone will barely reduce the temperature by more than a few degrees. Summers are unbearably hot especially in the low lands and desert areas. Tropical zones often have a wet season when most of the annual rain falls. This is the time when agriculture benefits most but can also see flooding causing wildlife to retreat to higher ground and damage to soil nutrient levels affecting future farming. The wet season also sees an increase in the incidence of tropical diseases such as Malaria. Winds are generally mild and blow in an easterly direction.

JUST ADD WATER!

Now that you have a rough topographical map and some idea of the weather affecting the area you are developing, the next step is to add water. Water will flow from the highest point on your map down to the sea following the path of least resistance. The first step is to determine the wind direction and mark it on your map. The wind direction will affect the way rain behaves so it is an important first

step in determining where the lushest areas will appear. If you think back to your science classes on the water cycle, you will probably remember that rain falls as clouds rise. This means that you can predict where the rain fall on your map will be highest by looking for the sides of the mountains that the clouds will "climb" when pushed by the wind (I told you last issue that there is a right and wrong side of a mountain for a desert). Simply put, when the wind strikes the mountains, the wind and clouds are forced up and over. As the air rises it will cool and release moisture in the form of rain. Depending on the height and size of the mountain range it is entirely possible for the air to be depleted of moisture by the time it reaches the other side. Rainfall on the windward side of the mountain will flow into lakes and rivers and move down the mountains making its way to the coast. These rivers may combine together to form larger rivers as they snake around obstacles and follow the shape of the land downwards.

You should be generous when placing rivers and streams, many writers seem to underestimate the amount of water that exists on an Earth-like planet and we are still moving it around for our own purposes. Once you have a rough idea of how water affects your landscape you can begin looking for swamps, marshes and wetlands. These are areas where the movement of water has become hampered or an area is flooded by water from a nearby sea or lake. Wetlands are always in low-elevation areas, are often near to the seacoast and contain many rivers and lakes.

FOR DESERTS

Now you have water marked on your maps it will be significantly easier to identify areas that could be potential deserts. Deserts are primarily found, in our world, near to the sub-tropics and the reason for this is down to the wind pattern. The prevailing winds blow east to west around the equator and west to east in the temperate zones. When these winds clash over the sub-tropics the moisture

rich clouds are forced down where they retain their water and so release less rain. That isn't to say that there aren't deserts outside of the tropics and sub-tropics. In more temperate locations, they are often located on the down-wind sides of mountains for the reasons I explained earlier. Bearing that in mind have a look at your sketch and see if there is anywhere that you feel a desert could be formed. If there isn't and you really want a desert to exist then you will need to come up with a good technological, ecological or magical reason for its existence.

GREEN FINGERS

The placement of your mountains, rivers, lakes and deserts has now left you with a simple task. The last real task is to identify areas of forestation. One of the main mistakes a writer makes is placing too few forests. The current level of modern forestation is a result of heavy lumbering down the centuries so don't use modern forestation as the model for a fantasy setting. Conversely in a future setting there may not be any forests unless ecological preservation has intervened. Forests are more likely to be near large bodies of water and where rainfall is plentiful, such as the windward side of a mountain, but it is highly unlikely that any forests will be found above 10,000 feet or in the middle of a desert without a very good reason.

Once your forests are placed you should consider the terrain. In our world hills are commonly found near mountainous areas but there is nothing to stop you spotting a few hilly areas around your sketch. Once you've done that any remaining area becomes grassland, prairie, steppe or plains depending on your climatic zone.

THE LAY OF THE LAND

Now we have done the macro scale work it is time to give your sketch the once over and fine tune it to suit your needs as a writer. You shouldn't feel that every detail of your world

has to be scientifically explainable but from a distance it does need to be plausible. Many of us who grew up with computer games will be familiar with the way water and mountains were used to act as barriers to prevent exploration of areas that the player wasn't able to survive in, this meant that often implausible geography became necessary. How often did you question it? I often wondered why I couldn't hire a boat and sail round the coast avoiding the dark cave which I needed a magic spell to illuminate. Its these thoughts that have little impact on your enjoyment of a video game which will potentially ruin a story.

This is also a good time to consider placing any special features that you designed for your setting. Dig out last issue's notes and see if there is something in there that fits onto the sketch. If you have a city on a large floating piece of earth then you may need a crater where the city once stood. If this crater has been there for long enough it may have filled with water and become a lake. If the city is floating stationary above the land then the ground beneath may be starved of rainfall and sunlight which will make it barren. Where your river meets the sea there may be a bay or a delta, are there any other islands in the bay or delta? If you need an island in the centre of a large lake then now is the time to place it. If a river runs over a sharp decline in altitude then a waterfall may be worth considering. If you need a pass through the mountains then create one now. If your desert has a river running through it then the areas at either side are likely to be prairie rather than desert.

The details are important but don't forget that a world filled with mundane features may be believable but it will lack the awe-inspiring moments that sell your world to the reader. Placing these items is a balancing act, be sparing but don't be afraid. Keep your sketch safe and play around with it till you are happy. In the next issue we will discuss how to convert this sketch into a workable map in preparation for its many inhabitants. See you next issue.



A close friend of mine recently joked that he was writing the

“Great Unpublished Novel”. The fact that he would make this joke before any agent or publisher has had the opportunity to glance at his work made me wonder. It is certainly true that some writers, myself included, have revelled in the Romantic ambition of being a failed author but do any of us really wish to have drawer upon drawer of rejected manuscripts and sufficient rejection letters that we could redecorate the walls of a modestly proportioned room?

It should go without saying that I challenged him on the considerable problem that this mind-set presents. If we, as writers, begin a project as demanding and complex as writing a novel, then having an inherent belief that we will eventually fail, no matter how tongue-in-cheek that belief is, will make it a self-fulfilling prophecy. Even worse, attempting to write a novel whilst half of your brain is telling you that you are wasting your time means that the book is less likely to be a “Great Unpublished Work” and far more likely to be a “Great Unfinished Work”. There are more than enough unfinished novels lurking in desk drawers, cupboards, flash drives and hard drives around the world already. Surely the last thing we need is more.

Writing a novel is a solitary occupation, even

ARTICLE by Philip Meredith

with other writers occasionally peering over your shoulder and questioning you about it, and it is inevitable that from time to time self-doubt will creep in. When we allow self-doubt to grab hold then we struggle to capture in words the scene we have visualised so clearly in our minds. We fumble over the words. The paragraphs become bloated and meandering. Chapters feel sluggish and disconnected where they should be exciting and pivotal. Self-doubt stirs from its slumber and prowls around our mind. The long claws on its feet clicking on the cold floor and scraping the walls of our minds. It’s hard to concentrate when all you can hear is the screech and click of claws.

I wonder whether my friend’s greatest problem may also be one of his greatest assets. He reads extensively. Yes, I said it, and I know it flies in the face of the advice many writers, including myself, hand out. The problem with reading so extensively is that he compares his unpublished first draft to the polished and published work of successful writers who may well have taken two or three drafts and had additional input from agents and publishers. Inevitably he feels that his work falls short.

Aspiring to be the best writer in your genre, on your topic, is commendable and should always be encouraged but there are few ways that are

guaranteed to get self-doubt to stir than directly comparing yourself to the best in the genre. That's like slapping self-doubt across the face and force feeding him black coffee and Pro-plus till its eyes start spinning and it won't ever sleep again. It is the most direct route to producing a "Great Unfinished Novel" because self-doubt inevitably overwhelms the best of us.

While many people who know me will laugh at what I am about to say, we need to be positive as much as we need to be realistic. I am not a person with a sunny or positive disposition but even I am ready to accept that my first draft does not need to resemble the finest that the genre has to offer.

I once read that writing is about choosing your stone and forming the basic shape, rewriting is when the art of sculpting the fine details and discovering the final form within the stone takes place. The first step is collecting together the raw material. The words are there, some of the structures, a sense of pace and tone and some of what we hope to convey may be visible. Some of it may even display a flash of brilliance but it won't be till we begin rewriting that it will truly shine.

When you hear the phrase "Everyone has a novel inside them", what you should remember is that anyone can gather the raw material for a novel. Researching and dredging up that raw material isn't the difficult part of the writing process. It is however a vital one. Getting words on a page, no matter how ill-considered or clumsy they appear, is within the grasp of anybody who can be bothered to sit down, concentrate and type until a very rough approximation of a novel exists.

The difficult part of the process is the sculpting. Sculpting is taking the clumsy words that tumbled out during the writing process and improving them, selecting better words that enhance or more concisely convey atmosphere and meaning. It is about coolly considering your options, analysing what is

there and working out how to make it better. Rewriting is about rearranging paragraphs or scenes to make them flow right so the book has a proper pace. It is about honing your dialogue and character, cleaning up your plot points and cutting extraneous scenes. This is the hard part of writing and it's why not every person in the world can be an author.

It is at the rewriting stage that your skill and ability as an author will come to the fore. If you are new to writing then you may struggle to understand why something is not working the way you expected or you may struggle with the fine details of structuring your sentences and paragraphs to create pace and tension. This is when you may need to look around, pick up a thesaurus or a dictionary, read some articles about the craft of writing but it is vitally important that you don't look at other people's work and compare them to your own. I would never compare my feeble attempts at painting to Picasso. I would never look at a lump of marble and compare it to Michael-Angelo's David. Aspiring to create a masterpiece is noble but assuming that you can simply disregard the skills of the artist in the creation of the piece is foolish. We all have to put in the work to acquire the skills that allow us to transform our lump of raw material into something greater.

I'm not saying that you should not read other writers and aspire to their level. I am not saying that you should not look at the way they have crafted their work and copy their methods. I am saying that you should take the time to acquire the skills you need before comparing yourself to the masters of your craft. David wasn't created first time round. Picasso did not start out a genius. Rome was not built in a day.

If you are reading this article then I assume that you have made the decision to be a writer. The life-changing decision to put pen to paper, finger to keyboard and write. My advice to you is the same advice I gave my friend. Let there be no more unfinished and unpublished novels, no more failed authors.

FAIL TO PLAN

Establishing a plan to track your progress will help your writing.

ARTICLE by Jason Daniels

You've planned your novel, spent weeks in the library doing research and started to put words onto the page, but as you plough through your first draft certain things are certain to go out of control.

You may lose track of where certain scenes or pieces of action are meant to take place. You may decide to change a character's name to avoid confusion with another character who has a similar name. You discover that, since the research you did, some of the facts are wrong and you need to make an alteration. You may want to expand on certain facts or events in light of what you are writing now. You realise that your continuity has got screwed up and you've lost track of what day it is. The majority of writing advice will be not to go back and make these alterations until you've finished your first draft. Make a note of the change, continue as if you've made it and make the alterations on your second pass. I'm not going to suggest that you do anything different but I am going to suggest that making a road map of your novel during your first draft can help in locating these issues when you go back around the second time. Failing to plan for your second draft, as the saying goes, is planning to fail.

Enter your very own writing plan. A combined chapter-by-chapter summary, word count, day count and notebook. You can easily set one up as a simple spreadsheet on your PC, or a document in your chosen word processing package will work just as well. Failing that you could divide a sheet of A4 into six columns, though I heartily advise using a PC so that you don't misplace it or allow it to be covered in coffee. The first three and the last two

columns can be fairly small as they will likely contain numbers or single words, the remainder is your notes column.

Chapter Number

The first column will be your chapter number. If you want to plan how many chapters the book will have then you must first determine your total word count for the novel. If you divide this by the average word count for a chapter, approximately 2000 words, then you'll end up with a rough estimate. If you are using a spreadsheet then fill in the chapter column up to this number, if you are using a modern spreadsheet program then you can fill in the first couple and with a few clicks the rest will be done for you. Now is a good time to save your plan in a folder specifically for this novel.

Total Words

The next column is where you put how many words you expect each chapter to be. Personally I just fill in this column with 2000 on my first draft. 2000 words is the average length of most chapters in most books, it's a good starting point. If you know that a chapter needs to be slightly longer after writing it then you can amend this figure before starting on your second draft.

Words Written

This column should be filled in while you work on the novel. Each time you reach the end of the chapter put the word count in this column, you could round them up for simplicity if you don't like doing too much mathematics. Getting into a habit

like this should help you to identify any meandering or underwritten chapters early. You will then be aware of the chapters that need more editing time during your subsequent rewriting.

Notes and Summary

This is where you are going to write all your important thoughts, changes and summaries. Keep the summary detail brief enough that you can identify it but not so sparse you'll need to check your notes to understand what's happening. You don't need much detail here, a couple of short phrases and keywords should tell you what happens in each chapter. Afterwards you can add any notes like: changed Mark's name to John or Richard has blue eyes? This enables you to see what you need to check and amend on your second draft. If you have doubts about something don't spend thirty minutes going through character biographies simply do what you think is right and make a note to check it later. It's more important to finish the chapter than to get every detail right on the first try. You can always delete them as you make your second pass. Don't leave it to your readers to poke holes in your story.

Timeline

Ok, this is not your timeline for creating the book. This is the timeline of events in the book. I find this one of the most useful features on my plan. Some writers may find this slightly redundant but having a note that shows which events are happening on the same day can be very useful in determining when your hero last slept, showered or ate. It may seem trivial to you but your reader may notice that your hero has been on his feet for five days solid without any food and may question why the princess of wherever is letting him hug her when he smells like he hasn't bathed in a week. It may also help you realise that there is a gap of several days in the middle of your novel where nothing is happening.

In the final two columns, I usually put a column that counts days since the start of the novel in numerical format (1,2, 3 etc..) and a column that says exactly what day that day is. This can be vitally important if you are working on a fantasy novel which has its own calendar.

Digital Revolution

I save my plan in a folder specifically created for my novel and this brings me to another valuable piece

of advice. If you are working on a computer primarily, and especially since the arrival of digital self-publishing, it is often easiest to create each chapter of your novel in a separate file. I habitually spend some time, prior to starting the serious work of making the first draft, setting up each chapter as a separate file in the novel folder. Then I can sketch an outline of the planned action for each chapter and slot in any pre-written details or research I need. When I start writing I have a framework in place that helps me to get each chapter underway.

It goes without saying that some people aren't planners. They argue that planning is fine but it should never be carved in stone. Any writer worth his salt will know by now that whatever you plan will almost always have to be changed or moved to another part of the book. Often this is the fault of those pesky characters you've created, who take on a life of their own and do things that you don't want them to and you have to accommodate them. It's like cleaning up after a bunch of kids but it has to be done. This is why I heartily recommend that all writers should get themselves computerized. I'm not saying that you shouldn't write in longhand. I know a few writers, our editor included, who prefer to work in pen and ink before putting it onto disk but the key factor here is that it must eventually get to disk. Once you start finding your way around your keyboard and get used to putting your stories and ideas onto your computer the process of editing becomes much simpler. Whole chunks of work can be moved around quickly by cutting and pasting. Editing is greatly simplified, word count is immediate and you have someone checking your spelling, though be careful because it isn't always correct. Using find and replace features, you can make name changes quickly and, perhaps most importantly, it'll save you a fortune in paper and ink.

A roadmap for your novel will help you at all stages of writing and preparing your manuscript through to editing, so don't set out on the road to creating your novel without one. An as overview it helps me to stay focused and on track with my writing, helps me speedily highlight any inconsistencies or shortcomings in my prose and I also find it helps greatly when it comes to creating a synopsis of my novel for a publisher because those chapter summaries show the flow of the plot from chapter to chapter. Hopefully it will help you too.

TO BOLDLY GO

In last month's issue of *Fever Dreams*, Peter Bennett posed an interesting thought.

Why, he asked, is it that speculative or genre fiction receives such a small amount of respect from the literary community. I, spurred on by this question, proceeded to write him a response. In my home, I told him, there is myself and my fiancée. I read predominantly science-fiction and occasionally horror, my fiancée however hasn't read any genre fiction since her teens when she finished reading *Lord of the Rings*. She had a dalliance with Fantasy fiction but now predominantly reads only literary fiction. There is, I said, an example of exactly what Peter was talking about on our bookshelves and in comes in the form of Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*. A definitive piece of fiction which for me is both science-fiction and a classic example of dystopian fiction. My fiancée, however, won't hear any argument, for her it is simply a fantastic piece of literary social commentary. Margaret Atwood's views on the matter are well documented on the internet. I posited my belief that applying the label of science-fiction to this book in some way detracts from its merits for my fiancée. I argued that she, like many adult readers, had outgrown genre fiction and as such applying the label of science-fiction or fantasy or horror to their much beloved titles was to detract from the value of the text in their eyes.

ARTICLE by Richard Collins

I posted my email off and thought nothing of it until a week later I received a response. I was expecting some platitudes along the line of "thank you for your letter" but what I received was a very personal response about the debates he has about fiction with his wife. What really stunned me however was the last line, "Have you thought about writing an article about this?"

The answer was, of course, no. I hadn't thought about it. I don't write articles. I read articles. I am not a writer but something began stirring in the back of my brain and so I thought to myself, "I'll give it a go, I don't have to show it to anyone." This, with some help from the *Feverdreamers* admittedly, is that article. Be kind.

My personal viewpoint is one of immersion, I am looking out from within the genre, and my opinion is that horror, science-fiction and fantasy are all very broad genres. Part of the problem, and I think something that frustrates writers and fans of genre fiction, is that the majority of adults are on the outside looking in. It's for this reason that when you mention horror many people will mention Stephen King, and George R. R. Martin and Tolkien are most people's go to for fantasy fans. Science-fiction has more scope and it could be argued has succeeded in mainstreaming better than

the other genres but many casual reader's knowledge of the genre is very narrow.

For my fiancée, genre fiction is constricted in its scope, a melange of archetypes and overused stereotypes written by less talented writers. This is because of her knowledge and perception of the genres. Romance and erotica, to name two, also suffer from this stigma. These books are "all the same" and so constitute a lesser form of literature. When researching for this article I came across the words of Darren Nash, a publisher at Gollancz, who said: 'A "proper literary" author clearly doesn't write SF, while a slumming genre author does.'

Genre fiction is not all about dragons, werewolves, zombies, vampires, spaceships, robots and aliens. The stories feature these elements. Darren Nash continued: 'I think the tropes are important because they're shorthand and because they've become tropes for a reason. They are clearly issues that we feel the need to keep revisiting – and they're also useful for writers to rebel against.' In my opinion it is this act of rebellion that has created a very broad and diverse scope for these genres.

Historically there is justification to the unflattering opinion that many people hold of genre fiction. Genre publishing has changed immensely over time. On the whole, novels are getting longer and short stories are maintained by major magazines and independent presses like Fever Dreams. Fifty or sixty years ago you would find shorter novels produced in thin paperback editions, often coming out in rapid succession from the same author. There were also a host of pulp magazines in the vein of *Astounding Stories*, *Amazing Stories*, *Imagination*, *Planet Stories* and so on. A few of these early stories were focused on the more archetypal/stereotypical elements of the genre but if you look inside you are likely to find fantastic work from some of the early stars of science-fiction and fantasy. This was the Golden Age of science-

fiction, and a time when truly remarkable work was being produced. One criticism you can level at this writing is that it hasn't always aged well. The technology we have now is frequently behind the imagination of the authors of the 40s and 50s but the Golden Age was about fiction that was optimistic, almost unfettered by reality, allowing authors to describe the bright future ahead of society.



Jump forward to 2015 and we have a very different genre. Whilst some 'space opera' harks back to the traditions of the Golden Age, science-fiction as a genre has become darker and more dystopian as technology has rampantly marched forwards. You can also argue that for many writers the focus of science-fiction is less on science and machinery and more on cultural and social issues. This in turn has created conflict. There will always be those who long for the traditional fiction of the Golden Age but that is not true of all of the genre audience, nor is it true of all genre fiction.

There is a common trend for children and young adults to devour 'genre fiction' books by the dozen, but far less adults are continuing to read within the genre. This is the point I made about my fiancée loving Fantasy as a teen but has now outgrown it. If you look at the bookshelves of children and young adults then they are heaving with works from J. K. Rowling, Darren Shan, Garth Nix, Phillip Pullman, Rick

Riordan and Suzanne Collins, amongst others. A selection of huge bestsellers, all genre fiction. There seems to be some sort of shift occurring though as many readers give up on the genre and move on to read other things.

If I were to speculate this change occurs in late teens when to be seen as a fan of genre fiction would result in the word 'geek' been thrown around. Whilst the term 'geek chic' is thrown around, inspired no doubt by the popularity of shows like *The Big Bang Theory* and *The IT Crowd*, I don't think that many teens truly want to accept that dubious label. It is true that by calling yourself a geek you enter a club of fellows, a likeminded group of individuals with similar tastes and interests, but you are placing yourself firmly outside of the mainstream. I consider myself to be a card-carrying geek. There is nothing wrong with the term, many of my friends are just as 'geeky', but the perception of the 'geek' is very different and more difficult for teenagers than adults.

My point is that genre fiction is not being given a fair crack of the whip because of those people who are perceived to read it. In part that perception is self-created. I haven't got a doctorate in astrophysics and I enjoy science-fiction though some people believe that there is a pre-requisite of knowledge required. This comes largely from the fans of science-fiction who wish to keep it to themselves. Nor is it a pre-requisite that you go to a large field and dress as an Elf to enjoy Fantasy, but die-hard fans of the genre may make it look like it is. All manner of people and readers take pleasure in genre fiction, not just the hardcore fans. In the words of Darren Nash: 'The readership ranges from smart intellectually-restless individuals who love to be challenged by a book to deeply conservative readers who want a steady diet of exactly what they are comfortable reading. I do think the audience has broadened over time, though, so that in addition to a core audience... we are attracting casual readers who would never actually refer to themselves as "fans" but who are happy to

dabble.'

It is not just the readers who are affected by boundaries, genre fiction itself is affected by the boundaries of the respective genres. I would hate to think that any writer would feel limited in what they could write and, perhaps naively, imagine that this is rarely the case. It does however remain a problem in genre fiction. I believe this is because the boundaries of genre fiction exist solely in the mind of the reader rather than the writer. I, for example, was stunned by the massive negative reception that greeted *Cabin in the Woods*. This was, in my mind, a film that paid homage to and toyed with the plentiful traditions of the horror genre with a good layer of humour. I loved it, but the response it received from many horror fans was that it was boring or too complicated. These are a very vocal segment of genre fans who are simply too closed-minded to accept anything new or anything that strays too far from what they consider to be the norm. The astounding level of hatred directed at *Twilight*, and its portrayal of vampires, is mirrored in the fast/slow zombie debate that appears each and every time a zombie book or film hits the shelves, and both are evidence of my point.

It is this duality of readership that has defined genre publishing. As a writer you may choose to be daring, to boldly go somewhere new in your writing but is that what the readers want? Is that what publishers want? Many critically acclaimed authors are struggling on minimum wages whilst books that have been destroyed by respected critics, *Fifty Shades of Grey* being a recent example, have become huge commercial hits. In genre fiction, unlike any other literary market, the war between populist and progressive writing is pronounced and few writers succeed in striking the correct balance. If genre fiction fails to grow, adapt and challenge its readers then can we truly hope to change the belief that science-fiction, fantasy and horror are lesser forms of fiction?

A KIND WORD



Anyone who has ever finished a novel will tell you that getting

that first book published is tough. Really tough. There's no shortage of writers out there who are sick to the back teeth of banging their heads against the brick wall guarded by the conventional gatekeepers of the industry. Submitting query letter after query letter in the hope that somewhere, somehow, someone will give them a chance.

The good news is that there are other ways to publish. Self-publishing doesn't mean the vanity press anymore. E. L. James famously cracked it on Amazon with *Fifty Shades of Grey*. So why not you or me? The slightly less good news is that even in this day and age there are still gatekeepers. In our brave new world of social networking, social media and crowdsourcing, they're the millions of online opinion makers whose posts and reviews can steer a great many more readers our way or tell them to turn around and head in the opposite direction.

That is not to say that things haven't changed. Everything has changed. There is no longer a cabal of individuals with the power to keep your work and mine from the public eye. What we're facing instead is an entire online subculture. Whole ecologies of reviewers, diverse in their opinions and tastes, but united in their ideas about what is and is not

ARTICLE by Sarah Johnson

considered acceptable behaviour. Especially when it comes to you and me.

INFLUENCING THE INFLUENCERS

Make no mistake: the balance of power has shifted. Authors do hold more of it, for the very simple reason that there are now so many more gatekeepers that we can try our luck with. If one or even twenty of these people happen to say no, it's just not that big of a deal. Another thing that shifts power in our favour is that the turnaround time is that much faster. Very few of the new gatekeepers will keep us waiting for months at a time while they ponder the merits of our request. So once again, if they do say no it's just not that big of a deal.

For all the power we now possess however we still need some of these people to say yes and help us if we want to connect with readers. As in the old world of traditional publishing there are accepted ways of getting that help. Protocols we must follow if we want to be successful. On the electronic frontier a review request to an Amazon reviewer is the equivalent of the old query letter.

The Amazon reviewing subculture is the online culture that I personally have the most

experience with. It's also the one most important to many authors. Make no mistake about it: it is a subculture. I'm not trying to tell you that everyone who's ever submitted a review to Amazon belongs to it. They don't. Among the top reviewers there is a real community there and it does have its own, very definite ideas about what authors are and are not allowed to say and do when promoting their own work. The wrong forum post can spell disaster.

WHY DO WE NEED THEM

The honest answer is that while you probably don't absolutely need them, they are worth taking some trouble over. When it comes to their overall power as opinion-makers and shapers on Amazon, these people punch well above their weight. They post reviews prolifically, they often participate in Amazon's forums, and they tend to have the ear of many other highly influential reviewers. In fact, even when they're not active participants in Amazon's forums, very often that's because they're staying in touch with other reviewers via more private channels of communication.

These top reviewers also tend to take their reviewing hobby seriously enough that they take time to write the kind of reviews that are appreciated by Amazon's customers. As a result, their reviews tend to get a lot more "helpful" votes and so are more likely to be displayed at the top of the pile by Amazon's software. It goes without saying that the first review a potential customer reads will very often be the one that has the most impact. In contrast, the people who just post one or two reviews a year stating that the goods arrived on time just don't have the same clout.

GET THEIR ATTENTION

As I have said, there are protocols: ways to approach these people that are considered appropriate and professional, and which are far more likely to get a positive response. There are also ways of approaching these

people that result in exactly the opposite reaction. If you screw it up badly enough you may well wake to find out that the forums are ablaze with posts freely describing what a horrible person you are and it's not as rare an occurrence as you may think.

How do I know all this? I am part of this subculture. I started reviewing speculative fiction on Amazon two years ago, and since then I have spent literally thousands of hours hanging out with other Amazon reviewers online. I've made some friends, met some less pleasant people and encountered some loons. The important message I'm sending to you is that there are rules to this game. If you know what the rules are and play the game well, you can benefit enormously, but if you don't then you can jeopardise your career.

WHAT ARE THE RULES?

The most important thing to realise if you are considering selling your book on Amazon is that you need to be aware that reviewers take reviewing seriously. We may not be professionals but it still takes time and effort to write a good review. We wouldn't bother if we didn't care about what we were doing.

One of the most important implications of this is that you should never, ever ask for a good review. I know that what we all want is a good review and that asking for what we want is a good way of getting it but this is not one of those instances. You should think about approaching an Amazon reviewer like asking them to review a football match. Even an amateur referee is going to be as impartial as possible because their reputation is at stake. Determining the true quality of your work is a big part of a reviewer's job. Reviewing a book requires a justification of its merits and though they can occasionally make mistakes, they will always try to call it like they see it.

We all know that there are fake reviews on Amazon. There are sites on the net where you can contact people who are willing and able to leave "kind" reviews for just a few dollars. If

you choose to take that route then that is up to you but approaching people who are already active and have built a reputation on Amazon with such an offer is not a safe thing to do.

There is, however, a work-around that you could consider. You can't ask for a positive review any more than you can ask that people refrain from leaving negative ones. This is against Amazon's own terms and conditions and will almost certainly get you on the wrong side of a reviewer. You could however show the reviewer some respect and indicate that you would be open to honest feedback on your work. Ask the reviewer to discuss any issues he/she has with your work privately but don't ask the reviewer not to leave a bad review.

When you contact the reviewer emphasise that you respect the process and their integrity, be aware that once you ask for a review it is up to them what and whether they post, and be open to honest feedback about your work. If you remember to do all these things then you shouldn't go too far wrong in your requests.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sarah Johnson is a stay at home mother to three boys. When not busy caring for them and her husband, she can be found online reviewing E-books on Goodreads and Amazon.

She is a huge fan of fantasy, and one day hopes to write about the fantastic world that exists in the swirling mists of her mind. Until then she will exist on a diet of Game of Thrones and fairy tales.

In 2010 The market recorded 11 million e-book sales. This rose to 28.9 million e-book shipments in 2012. While sales were expected to rise again this year 2015 has seen a decline in the e-book market. The e-book market still accounts for 12.3% of the total worldwide book sales. Roughly 4.5% of that market comes from European sales. Amazon controls the largest share of the market, accounting for 67% of the U.S. E-book market.

Amazon reports almost 300,000 daily unit sales from Indie publishers. Small publishing houses amount to almost 150,000 daily sales whilst sales from a self-published author bring in less than 50,000 daily sales (figures based upon 120,000 books comprising ~50% of Amazon's E-book revenue).

Amazon Bestsellers have a similar sales distribution. 38% are from Indie publishers, 17% from small publishers and less than 5% are from authors who publish their own work (figures based on 200,000 books comprising ~55% of Amazon E-book revenue).

This means that Indie publishers make 19% of the daily sales on Amazon, small publishers bring in about 20% and self-published authors about 3%. The biggest publishing houses account for about 35% of sales but make 51% of the money.

The money made by these big publishing houses doesn't go straight into the author's pocket. Daily revenue figures suggest that authors with big publishers account for about 35% of E-book revenue. Indie publishers fared better with authors making 40% of the revenue, and 14% from small publishers. Self published authors account for only 2% of the daily revenue on Amazon.

EMOTIONAL LITERACY

Empathy is the ability to understand emotions, but also to share the emotions of another person.

To put it more colloquially, you can put yourself in another person's shoes and see things from his or her point of view. When described in this way, you can see how this concept would be familiar for writers who have to see a situation from their character's point of view in order to write what the character's response would be.

I would describe myself as a reader, rather than a writer, but I was compelled to write a response to Louise Andrews' article 'Evil to the Core' from Issue 5 because, to be blunt, it irritated me. She asserted in the article that she did not "empathise" with her characters and yet she described how she gave her heroes and villains "individual quirks", "baggage" and "realistic foibles". I did not comprehend how she would manage to do this convincingly if she did not employ any empathy in her writing. When you empathise with someone, you have some insight into what he or she felt in a given situation and you can see why he or she reacted in a specific way. This can be a positive or negative experience as it is just as possible to empathise with someone celebrating a success as well as someone experiencing a disappointment. This is where empathy can be confused with the more two-dimensional sympathy; when you feel pity but do not share an insight into another person's pain.

Behaviours, thoughts and emotions are intrinsically linked. If someone does not

ARTICLE by Stephanie Bennett

This article is written in response to Louise Andrews' article *Evil to the Core* in Issue 5 of *Fever Dreams*.

understand a person's emotions, then it is difficult to predict what that person is thinking or what he or she will do. If the character is "mad as a box of frogs" (to quote Andrews) then being unpredictable may be what you want, but random behaviour with no cause or purpose is not authentic and the reader will detect the lack of coherence. Everyone is an amateur psychologist, and readers can spot a flat and phoney character a mile away. Bolting together a rag-bag mix of personality "quirks" may work for a superficial character that will quickly come to a "sticky end" or is simply a vehicle for the plot, but surely the main hero and villain have to be more credible and behave in a way that makes sense? Humans have been honing their skills in empathy and communication since infancy. They differ in ability but most will notice something is wrong if a character's behaviours, thoughts and emotions do not tally in a realistic way, even if they cannot figure out what is wrong with the story.

If the emotions of a story's characters are not recognised by the reader, then they will not be able to empathise with the characters or understand where they are coming from. As I have already stated, I am a reader and when I read speculative fiction, I want to be caught up

in the story. If the story does not evoke some sort of appropriate emotional response then I struggle to finish the text. In order to give an example of this, I have to make a guilty confession: Much to my husband's disappointment, I just could not finish Stephen King's iconic 'Pet Semetary'. I know, it is a terrible admission to make in a speculative fiction magazine but it proves my point so please bear with me. I was apathetic about the characters, I found their responses wooden and the pacing was so slow that I got to the point that I knew the climax was coming and I just *did not care*. I was not invested in the story as it did not evoke the appropriate feelings of suspense and anticipation for me personally, so I gave up.

In speculative fiction, empathy is even more important, not less. In our preferred genre, the writers are asking their readers to suspend their belief in one way or another so the question 'What if?' can be explored. What if there was artificial intelligence? What is a serial killer was on the loose? What if there were such a thing as dragons or elves? The possibilities are endless. For the experience of the characters in the story to be relatable to the reader, they have to be authentic. This means there has to be some sort of connection so the readers are able to show some degree of empathy with the characters. Admittedly, this kind of thought experiment would be especially challenging for horror writers because they would have to walk in the shoes of their twisted creations, or at least walk beside them. This would involve reflecting on darker emotions that the writer has experienced, such as rage, obsession, fear, envy etc. and exaggerating them. This could be unsettling but the aim is to produce in readers the thrilling discomfort of being scared and repulsed, while enticing them to continue reading.

Empathy is a skill that writers can use to devastating effect. The most terrifying villains are the ones that bring out deep, dark fears in the reader. Freddy Krueger entered people's dreams so they could never escape from him. He invaded their private thoughts when the victims were at their most vulnerable; while asleep. He did this because he was angry, vengeful and wanted to punish their parents. The way these powerful emotions are

portrayed produces an emotive response in the reader. I concede to Andrews' point that it may not necessary for the readers to know exactly *why* Freddy feels the way he does, but the writer has to know *what* he is feeling so it can be expressed realistically in his dialogue and behaviour. It is basically an implementation of the old 'show, don't tell' writer's mantra.

Even a character that is 'insane' will appear that way to others because they violate social norms, which is in itself a pattern of behaviour influenced by his or her (sometimes overtly) emotional responses. On the other hand, a total lack of emotion, or inappropriate emotions can be incredibly sinister, like Patrick Bateman in Brett Easton Ellis's 'American Psycho' whose lack of emotional response is quite chilling. Only by understanding what emotions would be typical in a given situation can a writer contort them in such a way that it produces the type of discomfort for the reader that is so strangely compelling. The most skilful of writers can create truly appalling characters and yet produce such a strong response in readers that they cannot tear themselves away, producing that masochistic pleasure of hating someone so detestable. Living vicariously cannot be forgotten either, which can be powerful with a hateful or violent character who maybe does things that we, as readers, have imagined doing in our darker moments but would never actually do because of the negative consequences. Reading about the debased activities means we can tentatively explore these emotions and sensations without hurting anyone, and in turn understand ourselves better.

Emotions that are often considered more negatively, such as sadness and anger, should be recognised and understood as much as the lighter, more positive emotions such as happiness and contentment. Writing this, I am reminded of the start of one of my favourite books, 'Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?' by Philip K. Dick, the (highly recommended) cyberpunk classic upon which the film 'Bladerunner' was loosely based. A device was mentioned in 'Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?' called a Penfield Mood Organ which controls the emotions of the user. Iran Deckard, the main character's wife, decides to use the Penfield Mood Organ to

give herself a six-hour bout of “self-accusatory depression”, prompting a discussion between her and her husband, Rick Deckard, about why she feels it necessary to let herself feel despair (seemingly an appropriate feeling in a dystopian and disconnected society). In describing this, Dick has demonstrated the character’s high level of empathy: She accepts feelings associated with unhappiness and she allows herself to experience these feelings in a way that is controlled and self-aware. Rick Deckard’s response is to dial a different emotion on her behalf, namely “pleased acknowledgement of husband’s superior wisdom in all matters”, which shows his comparable lack of empathy. The subsequent behaviours of both characters are in keeping with their capacity to understand their own emotions as well as the emotions of others. The theme of empathy is further explored in the book in various ways, and by comparing humans and androids, the reader is led to question what is fundamentally ‘human’.

BBC News recently published an article that described review of research completed on behalf the Reading Agency (Reading for pleasure ‘boosts social relations’, BBC News website, 3 August 2015). The review stated that reading helped adults enjoy social occasions more and was associated with a “boost [in] children’s emotional understanding”. According to the article, the study concluded that “Reading is closely linked to increasing understanding of our own identities and can also play a large part in relating to others, understanding their world views and so forth.” If reading increases the reader’s capacity for empathy, then the skill must have been applied by the writers. This experience of sharing the view of another is described beautifully in the following quote,

attributed to American writer and civil rights advocate, James Baldwin: “You think your pain and your heartbreak are unprecedented in the history of the world, but then you read. It was books that taught me that the things that tormented me most were the very things that connected me with all the people who were alive, or who had ever been alive.” That emotional connection is what a reader is seeking, and what the writer should strive towards.

Andre Dubus III (another American writer) is quoted to have said that “writing is really a sustained act of empathy”. Do not underestimate or misunderstand the power of empathy when writing. It could be the difference between a story where the reader is transported or simply diverted.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Stephanie Bennett is a psychologist who lives with her husband in the Highlands. She writes reports and academic papers rather than fiction. She has a soft spot for Golden Age Sci-Fi, real ale and whisky.

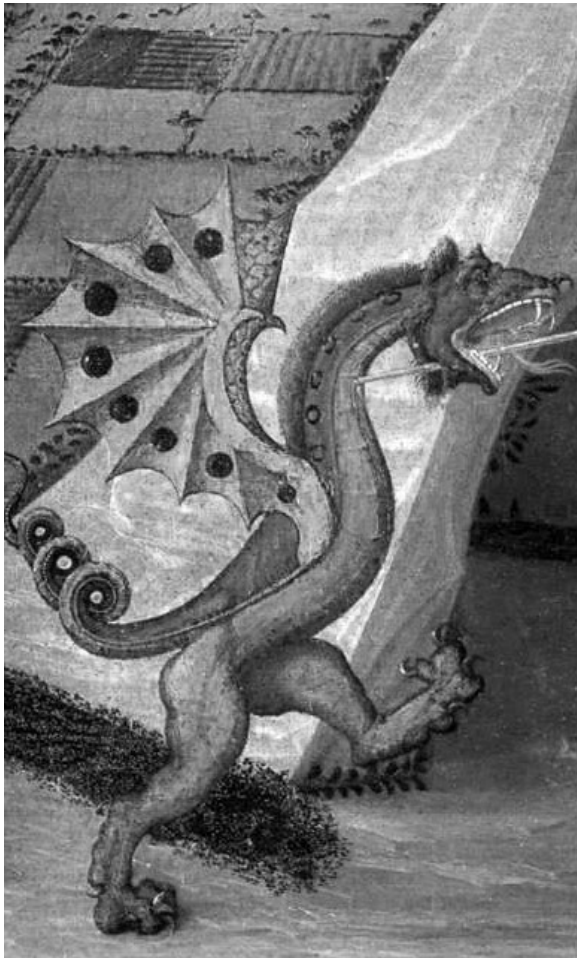
DRAGONS

IN MYTH AND LITERATURE

ARTICLE by Michael Campbell

“There he lay, a vast red-golden dragon, fast asleep; a thrumming came from his jaws and nostrils and wisps of smoke, but his fires were low in slumber. Beneath him, under all his limbs and his huge coiled tail, and about him on all sides stretching away across the unseen floors, lay countless piles of precious things, gold wrought and unwrought, gems and jewels, and silver red-stained in the ruddy light.”

J. R. R. Tolkien from *The Hobbit*



No creature is as keenly associated with the genre of fantasy as the dragon. There is a reason why the world's most popular role-playing game has the word dragon in its name, and why the dragon appears time and again in everything from *Game of Thrones* to *World of Warcraft*. It's not the orc, the elf, the dwarf or the griffon and certainly not the unicorn that has become synonymous with fantasy fiction, it's the dragon and that is because no other mythical creature has such a deep connection to our culture.

Dragons feature prominently in many of the world's greatest myths: the Sumerian creation goddess Tiamat, the great red dragon of the book of Revelations – the seven-headed beast whose coming signals the end of the world, the guardian of the golden fleece, the Midgard Serpent encircling the world who rises to help destroy the Norse gods on the day of Ragnarok, the great serpent Apep – the eternal foe of the Egyptian gods who seeks to devour the sun. According to one Greek legend, the hero Cadmus slew a dragon and sowed his teeth into a field and soon men grew from the teeth and helped him found the city of Thebes. Perseus rescues Andromeda for a rock where she is chained as tribute to a great sea-serpent in a different myth, she is not the only captive maiden in the thousands of stories that followed thereafter.

Belief in dragons was widespread during the Middle Ages. The Church has Saint George the dragonslayer,

a story originating in Asia Minor. The Welsh took the red dragon as their national symbol, leading to Merlin's prophecy about the red dragon of the British defeating the white dragon of the Saxons. The Norse had their stories too, one famous for the distinct personality given to the wyrm is Sigurd Fafnir's bane. This story features one of the earliest speaking dragons and describes in great detail the tactics that the hero is forced to use to defeat it. Fafnir, a giant who has taken on dragon form to guard his treasure, is stabbed in his belly by young Sigurd, who had hidden himself in a pit along the path frequented by the dragon. It could be argued that the Norse valued courage and tactical thinking over fair-play when dealing with such a powerful beast. For their part, the English, who took St. George as their patron after settling in Britain and sending the Britons packing, had the legend of Beowulf. Beowulf was a brave and foolhardy hero that insisted on fighting a dragon in single combat. The importance and sheer ferocity of dragons is illustrated in that Beowulf, who had dispatched Grendel and his mother singlehandedly, died in his battle with the dragon and would have failed to slay the creature had he not received some timely aid from another of his warriors. Even the greatest warrior of the Norse and Anglo-Saxon legends could not expect to face a dragon and survive.

One of the questions that scholars are now beginning to ask is whether the people of these times actually believed in their own stories. As modern Fantasy writers, we write about things that we do not believe exist (that is the nature of Fantasy), but determining whether Shakespeare believed in witches or whether Dante believed in the hell he describes is a far murkier issue. Leslie Kordecki, in her dissertation *Tradition & Development of the Medieval English Dragon* (University of Toronto, 1980) noted that early medieval stories concerning dragons focused on them as living breathing creatures of flesh and bone, whereas the later stories often reduced them to symbols that played a role in Christian teachings and which vanished in a puff of smoke before the power of a saint. The overall impression gained from reading what survives of the older legends is that people did actually believe in them. There was after all no way of proving that dragons didn't exist and plenty of evidence that they did or had at one time existed.

C. S. Lewis noted in his discussion of the medieval world view, *The Discarded Image* (1964), medieval

people once had a great regard for ancient authorities. Much of their science, medicine, theology, philosophy and literature was inherited directly from the Romans, Greeks and Arabs. Those authorities were unanimous in their belief that dragons had once walked the earth and if there were any doubters, they had only to look in that era's greatest of all authorities: the Bible itself.

The verse depicting the first living creatures in Genesis is translated in modern Bibles as "great sea monsters" or "whales" but the Hebrew word *tannin* could be translated in several different ways. The one chosen by St. Jerome, the translator of the Vulgate or Latin Bible, was *draco*: dragon. Modern Bibles from the King James Version onward have moved away from the mythical and have substituted words like "whale" or occasionally "leviathan". The Medieval Latin Bible in use from the fourth century had perhaps a dozen references to dragons haunting the wilderness, lurking in the great sea and like the serpent in the Garden of Eden (who is promoted to the status of dragon in some tales such as Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*) lie in wait for the unwary. It is believed that the tendency of writers to make Dragons the first sentient race of their world, is consciously or unconsciously down to the historical facts concerning dinosaurs, little realising that this connects them to the most famous creation story in our culture.

What many of us know as the modern fantasy genre began to appear in the mid-19th Century. There were plenty of examples of stories drawn from the myths and legends of medieval literature. One of the most important stories was written by Kenneth Grahame, who would become famous for *The Wind in the Willows*. In *The Reluctant Dragon*, Grahame tells the tale of a dragon who prefers the quiet life over all the rampaging, kidnapping of princesses and fighting with knights that the rest of his kin enjoyed. Grahame broke the cliché of dragons as mindless, ravening beasts and wrote about a dragon that preferred to write poetry. When St. George ultimately appears spurred on by the townspeople's lurid lies of the dragon's actions, the dragon refuses to fight him. George is suitably disappointed to learn that the townspeople have been betting on the fight with odds of six-to-four in the dragon's favour. George and the dragon come to an agreement and engage in a sham fight in which George pokes the dragon in a non-vital spot, then the reformed dragon makes a speech at his

victory banquet.

Shortly afterwards, in 1908, Lord Dunsany's *The Fortress Unvanquishable, Save for Sacnoth* would establish the sword and sorcery genre. This 20 page short story saw Leothric on a quest against an evil, sword-wielding sorcerer and his army of giant spiders, vampires, succubi and faceless guards. It also featured three dragons. In order to complete his incredible feat Leothric is required to gain a powerful sword that will enable him to defeat the sorcerer's magical defences, unfortunately this sword currently sits in the spine of a great dragon Tharagaverug who can only be killed through starvation. Leothric fights the dragon for three days and nights until the creature finally starves and claims the sword, after which the remainder of his task is fairly simple.

Dunsany continued to write about dragons sometimes irreverently. In 1912 he published *Miss Cubbidge and the Dragon Romance* where he substituted the princess for a politician's daughter and suggested that the experience was beneficial. *The Hoard of the Gibbelins* shows his skill as he cleverly subverts the genre clichés in the final confrontation between the knight and the dragon.

"There was a dragon ... who if peasants' prayers are heeded deserved to die, not alone because of the number of maidens he cruelly slew, but because he was bad for the crops; he ravaged the very land and was the bane of the dukedom ... So Alderic took horse and spear and pricked till he met the dragon, and the dragon came out against him breathing bitter smoke. And to him Alderic shouted. "Hath foul dragon ever slain true knight?" And well the dragon knew that this had never been, and he hung his head and was silent, for he was glugged with blood. "Then," said the knight, "if thou would'st ever taste maiden's blood again thou shalt be my trusty steed, and if not, by this spear shall befall all that the troubadours tell of the dooms of thy breed.

And the Dragon did not open his ravening mouth, nor rush upon the knight, breathing out fire: for well he knew the fate of those that did these things, but he consented to the terms imposed, and swore to the knight to become his trusty steed."

Lord Dunsany, The Hoard of the Gibbelins from The Book of Wonder

It would be a terrible oversight to discuss dragons without considering the input of J.R.R. Tolkien.

Tolkien's contribution to fantasy and dragon-lore is so significant that he could be placed in a league entirely of his own. His "fellowship of the ring" defines the nature of a party of heroes that has become the standard for literature and video games alike, while his particular take on the major fantasy races became the norm for an entire generation of successors. He is, by far, the most imitated fantasy writer of all time and his portrayal of Smaug, "the chieftest and greatest of all calamities," is now the standard by which all other fantasy dragons are now judged.

After Grahame there was a tendency for writers to treat dragons as witty or cute, see Puff the Magic Dragon, but Tolkien restored them to their status as deadly predators. All of Tolkien's dragons, Smaug, Glorund and Chrystophrax Dives, are clever, unscrupulous, greedy and very dangerous. They can be bargained with, but each is capable of wiping out a small army or good-sized town all by himself. Anyone who dares to talk with one of Tolkien's dragons had better have an escape route planned if he does not wish to become the dragon's next meal.

Unusually, Tolkien's dragons delight in mischief: rather than kill Turin, a brave but rash and not overly clever hero, Glorund convinces him to abandon his people, who rely upon him, and sends him on a fool's errand. Smaug sows seeds of doubt in Bilbo's mind that shortly afterwards help to damage his friendship with the dwarves. People who listen to dragons are apt to fall under their spell, and any spark of greed usually flares into full life. In *The Hobbit*, this greed is even contagious, transmitted by contact with treasure "over whom a dragon has long brooded." This is the fate of Thorn Oakenshield, and to a lesser extent Bilbo whose secret theft of the Arkenstone is an uncharacteristic act. Fear of a dragon's horde is not limited to Tolkien, Fafnir's treasure, the hoard of the Niebelungs, brings disaster to all who possess it, and Beowulf's grieving countrymen decline to take any of the hoard upon his death, instead heaping it upon his funeral pyre and burying what remains in his barrow.

Laying any claim to a dragon's treasure in Tolkien's work is easier said than done because his dragons are hard to kill. Smaug destroys Dale and the Kingdom Under the Mountain, sweeping aside all resistance, and that was when he was "young and tender." Later in *The Hobbit* we are treated to a

vivid description of his attack on the mountainside and burning of Lake-Town. Had he not been slain by Bard's expert shot with a special arrow to his one and only, super-secret vulnerable spot, Tolkien speculated in *Unfinished Tales* (1980) that Sauron might have later manipulated Smaug into destroying Rivendell, home of the elves. Glorund destroys the elven city of Nargothrond, effortlessly slaughtering and scattering the battle-weary warriors whilst other dragons help plunder the great hidden city of Gondolin. Chrystophrax shows reluctance to face anyone wielding a sword of dragon-slaying but massacres the whole of Little Kingdom's knighthood in the defence of his hoard. Tolkien's Great Wyrms are powerful but not invincible, though careful planning and a measure of good luck is required to accomplish the task.

In the wake of Tolkien dragons have once again become a core element of mainstream fantasy. Anne McCafferey used them to impart fantasy elements to her science-fiction romance novels set on Pern. Ursula Le Guin broke with the Tolkien model by basing her dragons on oriental traditions rather than European myths. Glyd the Dragon, from Patricia A. McKillip's *The Forgotten Beast of Eld* (1974), is an old dragon who desires only to sleep atop his great hoard; his gold is literally more important to him than life. Yet when roused this ancient creature scatters armies, sinks ships and keeps an armed garrison cowering behind their castle walls in terror. The extreme old age of this powerful wyrm has rarely been so vividly portrayed. George R. Dickson made the hero of his novel *The Dragon and the George* (1976) a human whose mind is transferred into the body of a dragon. The book illustrates the chaos that occurs as he comes to terms with his new body's power and limitations.

Not all dragons appear in dragon-form, and by far the most recognised anthropomorphic dragon

appears in R.A. MacAvoy's *Tea with the Black Dragon* (1983). Mayland Long is stuck in human form and the book charts his slow integration into the modern human world as he struggles to cope with his new body. Patricia Wrede's *Talking with Dragons* (1985) updated fairy-tale motifs to offer an amusing insight into why good manners and a grasp of dragon etiquette are so important.

My list could go on, as modern fantasy writers continue to find new ways of playing with old clichés: from vast inhuman engines of destruction to cuddly cat-like pets, dragons are everywhere and they are here to stay.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Michael lives in Watford with his wife and two dogs, where he is currently completing his doctoral dissertation on the origins of Tolkien fantasy. He has had a lifelong love of the fantasy genre since he read *The Chronicles of Narnia* as a boy. Last year he visited the locations used when shooting *Game of Thrones* in Northern Ireland and hopes to visit New Zealand to see the locations where *Lord of the Rings* was shot after completing his doctorate.

The Girl in the Red Hood

A LOOK AT ENCODED SYMBOLS IN FAIRY TALES

by Peter Bennett

When we think about the heroines of our favourite Horror films, and to some extent the victims, there are several words that are commonly used:

Stereotype, archetype, cliché. There is a comfort in knowing what is going to happen in Horror. We are hopefully confronting something terrible and horrifying and a degree of predictability, a degree of familiarity with the situation makes it easier to confront. Many fans of Horror may feel that these predictable elements, which are commonly referred to as Tropes, detract from the originality and that the overuse of them leads to a dilution of the desired effect: fear. A different way of looking at Horror is as a discussion using an established code. Horror, perhaps more so than any other form of speculative fiction, is based on firmly established rules.

What happens to that couple who snuck off to have sex?

Is splitting up a good idea?

Should you follow the attractive cheerleader or the awkward gothic girl who seems to hate everything you stand for?

Should you ever read aloud from that ancient text covered in strange symbols?

Does the grizzled, old man with no teeth, who gives you directions to a hard to find location, ever want you to get where you are going?

We know the answers to these questions. This is a form of code. It's a form of shorthand that connects every book, film, TV show, comic and video game in our genre. It is also something that we have grown up being exposed to from a very early age. An idea embodied in a girl in a red cape.

For many of us, Little Red Riding Hood is a familiar character from the fairy tales we read as children. Folklorists, however, draw a clear line between the wonder folktales of the oral tradition and the printed versions that began appearing in the 17th Century. In *The Irresistible Fairy Tale: The Cultural and Social History of a Genre*, Zipes states that he uses 'the modern term "fairy tale"... to encompass the oral tradition as the genre's vital progenitor' and in doing so he suggests that we should consider the oral tradition of the wonder folktales as inspiring, or in his case birthing, the fairy tales that we are familiar with.

Different versions of the tale about the girl and the wolf can be found in wonder folk tales throughout the world but in the West this tale is thought to originate from a bawdy peasant narrative known as *La*

Finta Nonna (The Story of Grandmother). 'Fairy tale, like our own lives, were born out of conflict,' (Zipes, 2012) and the material concerns of the peasants' existence leads to a very different telling of this tale and its didactic message. A fairy tale 'has a sense of ... the supernatural or the mysterious' (Lane, 1993) and the supernatural is often encountered in folklore by humans when journeying into the forests. For many primitive cultures, journeys into the forest and the supernatural realm were a rite of passage and *La Finta Nonna* was originally told as a celebration of a young girl's coming of age.

In the wonder folktale, a young girl journeys into the woods until she comes across a crossroads. While contemplating her path she encounters a werewolf who sets her on her path. This is familiar to anyone who has heard the fairy tale but what happens next is perhaps not. When the young girl arrives at her Grandmother's house, the werewolf has already slain her Grandmother and tricks the young girl into eating part of her flesh and drinking her blood. The werewolf then tricks the young girl into climbing into bed with him, this would likely be accompanied by graphic and lewd descriptions much to the amusement of the audience. Finally the young girl escapes into the woods using her wits and returns to her village, in the most common versions of this tale she claims to need the bathroom and, while unobserved, makes a run for it.

This folktale has far more in common with modern Horror than the fairy tale we all grew up with. There is violence, sex and a cunning escape by a strong, female survivor. There is also more going on than first appears. This is a story about womanhood and fertility and, while the abject lesson may be difficult to ascertain with certainty, it is possible to decode some of the ideas that the story contains. The cannibalistic scene references pagan ideals of rebirth and renewal. The trinity

goddess consisting of the maiden, the mother and the crone is clearly represented in this story. The young girl (the maiden) is sent by her mother (the mother) to her grandmother's (the crone) house. When the grandmother is slain and devoured by the young girl the circle is complete and she becomes a woman. As a woman she it becomes necessary for her to learn to deal with the aggression of male sexuality, represented by the dangerous werewolf. If she fails then the werewolf will devour her after having sex with her. If she completes this task she can return to her village, marry and have children thus becoming the mother, her mother becomes grandmother and the cycle begins again.

For some readers *La Finta Nonna* may sound like a far more interesting tale than the one they were read as a child but the version you've heard is not that dissimilar to this one. Did you ever wonder why the wolf lies in bed and doesn't simply attack Little Red when she enters the house? Surely a savage predatory animal like a wolf, which could easily overcome a young girl, would have no need of cunning games in order to obtain a meal. This is because, while the tale has been reinvented, some ideas are so heavily encoded that they are passed on with each reinvention no matter how hard the writer tries not to. *La Finta Nonna* would receive its first significant reinvention in 17th Century France.

While peasants continued the oral tradition the aristocracy began to develop the written word. In the 17th century a French literary style called *préciosité* arose from the lively conversations and playful word games of *les précieuses*. One *préciosité* parlour game, the spontaneous retelling of folk tales, often involved placing the noble heroes and heroines in pastoral settings which could not cloud their innate nobility (Zipes, 2001) and had the power of love at their centre. These tales became known as *conte de fées* (fairy tales) and it was during this period that many of the motifs of fairy tales were developed, such as the eucatastrophe (Tolkien, 1966) more

commonly known as the happy ending. One such example, *La Belle et la Bête* (Beauty and the Beast) illustrates the redeeming power of love but also rewards 'Belle because she has preferred virtue above either wit or beauty while her sisters are ... punished because of their pride' (Zipes, 1979).

Not all folk tale heroines were to receive a happy ending. Perrault, borrowed elements from *La Finta Nonna* and wrote in the style of les précieuses, to create *Le Petit Chaperon Rouge* (Little Red Riding Hood). In his adaptation, Perrault carefully left out the bestial and vulgar elements of the folk tale, removing the cannibalism and replacing the werewolf with a wolf. At the time he was writing *Le Petit Chaperon Rouge*, the memory of the witch hunts and the church's purge of paganism would have been fresh in the minds of the people and so he edited out the pagan elements of his tale.

Perrault also exploited the sexuality of the folk tale to deliver a message about sexual propriety that would have appealed to the aristocracy and which remains with us in modern Horror. In stark contrast to *Le Petit Chaperon Rouge*, Perrault's virgin-like heroines in *Cendrillon* (Cinderella) and *La Belle au bois dormant* (Sleeping Beauty) represented the image of the ideal woman of the late Middle Ages. They were sweet, passive and patient. Perrault let this heroine wear a chaperon, a stylish cap worn by women of the aristocracy in the 17th century, to indicate her nobility but stigmatized her with the colour red, which in the 17th century was associated with sin, sensuality and the devil. She meets 'old neighbour wolf', a reference to the wolf-man regarded with great awe in pagan societies and at the time associated with hostile satanic forces that lived in the forest. Perrault's audience easily understood his message, his depiction of the young girl reflected the fear of female sexuality and superstition that was present in both the Catholic and Protestant Church. To him, the girl, not the wolf, was the real evildoer and for that reason he punished her with death.

Perrault's transformation of this tale was designed to appeal to a new, different

audience. The Pagan trappings were cleared away to make room for a moral lesson about a young girl with aspirations above her station. It would have pleased and delighted les précieuses, most of whom were aristocrats, to hear a tale about a young girl who thought she was a noble being seduced and destroyed by a predator. While some of the original story has been stripped away the sexuality of the story still remains in the elements that Perrault has chosen to keep, and the elements he chose to reinvent. The werewolf is transformed into an anthropomorphic wolf to distance himself from the Paganism of pre-Christian France but the purpose of the character, to seduce and if necessary punish the young girl, remains the same. Most importantly, Perrault's incarnation of Little Red demotes her from the heroic, survivor of modern Horror to the role of the horny teen who pays for her lustful behaviour with her life.

Facing increasing criticism from the church for their lack of explicit morals and their corrupting influence on young minds, fairy tales suffered a decline from the late 1700s until the rise of Romanticism in the early 19th century (Velten, 2001). Johann Karl August Musäus published a popular collection of tales between 1782 and 1787 but it was to be Die Brüder Grimm (The Brothers Grimm) who would have the lasting impact on the way fairy tales were presented and received. The brothers' major publication was *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (Children's and Household Tales), which first appeared in 1812, and they continued to revise it, sometimes radically, until the seventh edition in 1857. Initially, the brothers presented their work as scholarly and claimed to have travelled the countryside gathering tales from peasants (Jean, 2007). In actuality, they invited storytellers into their home and it was in this way they collected the works of Charles Perrault from Marie Hassenpflug and then reinvented them for their own collection.

Le Petit Chaperon Rouge would appear in *Kinder-und Hausmärchen* entitled *Rotkäppchen* but '[t]he form and structure of the fairy tale for children w[as] carefully regulated in the nineteenth

century so that improper thoughts and ideas would not be stimulated in the minds of the young' (Zipes, 1986). Whilst the story that appears in the 1812 edition is clearly identifiable as Perrault's, subsequent revisions of the tale aimed increasingly at children would see the content and moral of the story altered to a message about disobedience rather than sexual propriety. The Brothers Grimm added an admonitory scene where the mother warns the girl not to stray from the path and a dramatic alteration to the end of the tale. Charles Perrault's unsympathetic ending was replaced with that of a hunter rescuing the girl and her grandmother by slicing open the belly of the wolf. The little girl in *Rotkäppchen* made her mistake and would be given the opportunity to learn from it. This ending would, in later revisions, become identical to that of *Der Wolf und die sieben jungen Geißlein* which also appeared in *Kinder-und Hausmarchen* (Velten, 2001), with the wolf's belly being filled with rocks and sewn shut by the little girl and her grandmother.

This would be the last significant revision of the tale for many years. In *Rotkäppchen*, Little Red's primary offence is disobedience and she is consequently allowed, through a harrowing experience and thanks to the actions of a male rescuer, to survive the tale. This version of Little Red has more in common with the love interest in modern Horror whose primary purpose is to provide further jeopardy for the male hero who must act to save them both. All traces of sexuality

have, with the exception of the bed, been removed from the tale but Christian ideas of redemption mean that the Pagan message of rebirth is allowed to resurface through Little Red climbing from the open belly of the wolf.

In the twentieth century there was an explosion of interest in Little Red Riding Hood. Angela Carter's *The Werewolf* (1979) and *The Company of Wolves* (1979) are dark, complex multi-layered tales which return to the Pagan roots but with modern ideas about heterosexual relationships and the balance of strength between the genders. Tanith Lee's dark, gothic tale *Wolfland* (1983) portrays the Grandmother and the wolf in very different lights. Priscilla Galloway reinvented the fairy tale as a post-apocalyptic science-fiction in *The Good Mother* (1995). Nalo Hopkinson's *Riding the Red* (1997) discusses female sexuality whereas Francesca Lia Block's *Wolf* (2000) is a disturbing tale of sexual abuse. This list, and there are many other modern re-tellings, shows the diverse ways that clever and imaginative writers can select, reuse and when necessary redefine the symbols that they are working with.

It is doubtful that speculative fiction will ever be able to do away with the Tropes completely but is that necessarily a bad thing? In this article I have attempted to show how a childhood tale has been adapted and reinvented over time in light of newer, more modern audiences but what if we took this idea and applied it to many of the genre Tropes that we take for granted?

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FEEDERS

by Peter Bennett & Philip Meredith

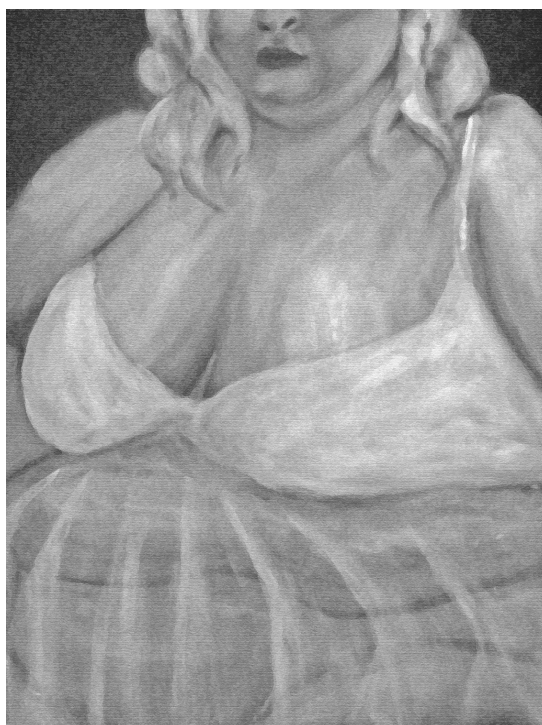
In the last issue of *Fever Dreams* we opened the fiction clinic and we have

been delighted with the response from the fanbase. While many of you e-mailed in with words of thanks, praise and encouragement, there was also something that kept being mentioned time and again—the format. A lot of you were unsure how to work with the clinic, is it a story or an article? Some people found the comments distracting or couldn't focus on the story for fear of missing something in the dark grey boxes at the side.

We discussed this at length and have taken on a few suggestions about the way you want the fiction clinic to work. In this issue I am joined by Peter as we'll be looking at how he crafted his short story—*Feeders*.

Feeders is a horror story from early in Peter's writing career and focuses on the resolution of an infatuation of the main character with larger women. Feeders are men who gain sexual satisfaction from watching women eat and are usually attracted to larger women. Some of these men, unable to find a woman who meets their expectations, encourage their girlfriends and wives to overeat so that they gain weight. In a small number of cases these men can put their loved ones lives in jeopardy in order to fulfill these sexual needs. The title is short and to the point, we know what the subject matter of this story is going to be about, but it also contains a clever pun that will only become apparent when you reach the climax of the story.

PHIL: I am assuming that "Feeder"ism is not a subject that you are specifically into, where did the inspiration for *Feeders* come from?



PETER: Much of my early writing was inspired by the breakdown of a significant relationship. There was considerable anger and frustration that I needed to vent and not being able to do so publicly I found ways to do so in my writing.

Feeders was inspired by an article I read, in which a big, beautiful woman (BBW) discussed the anger she felt at being cast as a victim in the media. The program showed various women and couples who are engaged in Feeding relationships. What interested me most was that one of the BBWs commented that the relationship is less one-sided than most normal relationships where one person takes from the other and gives nothing in return.

PHIL: So *Feeders* is a story which focuses on the dynamic of relationships?

PETER: Yes and no. The Feeding Dynamic allows me to engage in a discussion about the give and take in a relationship but like most Horror stories there needed to be a more gory and grotesque element that would appeal to readers who don't want to dip too far below the surface.

PHIL: What research did you do before you started writing?

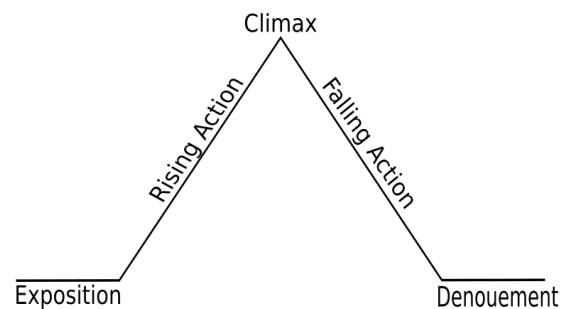
PETER: I spent a great deal of time looking at sites hosted by members of the Feeding community. In my opinion you can't write about a subject by looking in. If I wanted to write about Football violence then I wouldn't read police reports, for example, I would find people who are engaged in the activity and speak with them. You can't learn anything about the motivations of a group by asking other people who don't belong to it. You have to go to the source, even if that means finding out things that are unpleasant or distasteful to you.

PHIL: What did the community feel about your intention to write about them?

PETER: I don't think many of them were phased in the slightest. Public opinion of these people is unlikely to be swayed by one horror story, I think they know that. I did, however, find that many of them were keen for me to provide accurate information about them and their lifestyle. I don't think that comes from an perception that they are misunderstood but that they are tired of being misrepresented.

PHIL: Once you had your research did you take time to plan your story or did you plow straight into it?

PETER: When I first started writing I read huge numbers of books about writing. I had, in my head, this idea that if I knew how to be a "writer" then it would make my life easier. I remember being very confused by the variety of story structures that were presented in different books. Some looked like squiggles, others like a row of hills that got gradually taller. Eventually I found one that seemed to express how I felt about fiction and I used it from that point onwards: the Freytag's Pyramid.



Freytag's Pyramid is a five part model that starts with exposition and moves through rising action, climax, falling action and, finally, denouement. This is the principle storyline thread that begins with an inciting incident, cranks up the tension to the climactic moment and then flows back down showing the aftermath. It's an emotional rollercoaster and, in my opinion, that is what good fiction should be.

PHIL: OK, do you feel that Freytag's Pyramid works with the more traditional three act structure or are they mutually exclusive?

PETER: No, I feel that Freytag's Pyramid builds on the strengths of the three act structure. In the three act structure you have your setup which contains some inciting incident which creates the story's conflict. This is where you define your character and provide the backstory, much as you would with the exposition phase of Freytag's Pyramid.

Confrontation is the second part of the three act structure. The character will battle through a series of obstacles to an ultimate crisis. This is the climax of the Freytag model which is different to the three act structure.

The final phase is similar in both models. The tension fizzles out and the events of the story are resolved. In the three act structure there is a much shorter period devoted to this phase because it is hard to maintain a reader's interest once the tension is gone.

PHIL: Let's have a look at the opening scenes of *Feeders* and then we'll discuss it.

It was the middle of the afternoon but it was already dark, dark except for the few lights coming from streetlights and the occasional house window. A thin fog had blown in from the loch; a car drove past its headlights turning the fog into a whirling white glow. Martin Ward sat in his beat-up brown estate, despite the cold his palms sweated as he held the steering wheel. He stared at the house across the street. It was a tall, three storey Victorian terrace. It must have been handsome and proud once but time had taken its toll and it had long since fallen into disrepair. It was not the only house on the street that looked to be suffering, in fact judging by the number of empty lots Martin was sure that in the not too distant future this house would be demolished too. Martin couldn't work out why anyone would want to live here. Even his run-down, mouldering flat seemed more hospitable. Maybe there was an insurance pay-out or a council subsidy in it if the house became uninhabitable. There had to be something to keep the Fergusons in this neighbourhood.

Martin slid the holdall from the passenger seat into his lap and pulled a notebook from one of its many pockets. He flicked through the pages scanning each one until he found the page he was looking for. The top line read "Anita Ferguson 5'6 and 685lbs."

A crumpled printout containing a grainy photograph was fixed to the notebook with tape. Martin stared at her. She was huge. His eyes traced over her fat little ankles, up her thick round legs. Her hips that went out, and out and out, with soft plump love handles. Her huge belly that hung down full and round on which her great pouting breasts rested. Blonde hair tumbled around a soft, round face with two chins. Her cheeks were plump and red. She was beautiful. She was a goddess. Martin could feel himself getting hard.

Martin had always loved big women. He had spent his whole life looking for a perfect woman. He had found a beautiful mountain of woman once but people had convinced her that she was unhappy, convinced her she was unhealthy and that she should lose weight. Martin felt his desire for her disappearing with each pound she lost. It was only a matter of time before she started to point the finger at Martin and blame him for letting her get so big. He knew better than that, he hadn't forced her to eat it, hadn't held a gun to her head. If she couldn't take responsibility for her own appetite then it was only a matter of time before she started putting the weight back on. He couldn't wait for that though, so he left.

He had had a lot of spare time after the divorce, and he spent it all online. The red and black underground of fetish sites left a bad taste in his mouth. He hated the photographs of huge, glassy eyed women crying to be free from their mountains of flesh. The idea of tricking a woman into being obese was offensive to him. He loved to watch a woman tearing into her food, devouring it. If she took no pleasure in eating then how could he take any pleasure in her?

Three months ago Martin had stumbled across a little amateur site, that's when he first laid eyes on Anita Ferguson. She was huge, even her curves had curves and when he looked into her eyes all he saw was hunger and greed. This was a woman worthy of his worship. A few clicks later and he was on her private website, the pictures weren't of exceptionally high quality but there were plenty of them and even a video or two. Her blog described in detail what she ate each day, that she loved food and she hoped to become the biggest woman alive. Unhappily for Martin it also described her husband and the various tasks he performed for her, one of which was maintaining her website.

For weeks Martin basked in her image, read her blog and watched her videos. He had watched in lusting awe as she rolled across her bed and stood up, the golden silk nightie

pulling tight around her midriff. He knew then that he had to meet her.

He devised a plan, he would pose as a web designer and offer to help her redesign her website for free. He would take some high quality pictures and make her website really shine. A few clicks later and his offer was on its way to her inbox.

The next few days passed very slowly, Martin busied himself acquiring the knowledge he would need to convince the Fergusons he was for real. He had also spent a great deal of time picking out a high quality digital camera to use for the pictures. Each evening he checked his inbox and each evening he was disappointed at the lack of response.

Martin was shocked when, a week later, he had logged on to find his inbox contained a message from John Ferguson. He clicked on it with a mix of fear and exhilaration, hoping that the response would be positive. John Ferguson had been delighted to hear from someone who had the technical know how to improve the website but had some doubts about whether or not he could allow a stranger direct access to his wife. Disappointed but not discouraged, Martin had replied that he quite understood his position and offered the help with the site all the same.

Days passed, emails went back and forth. The website began to look a little more professional but the photos and videos still had the same grainy quality. Occasionally John would enclose a new picture of Anita in the email, and every now and again he would get an email from Anita herself. As the website neared its renovations, Martin knew that his opportunity was getting away from him and so, once again, he offered his expertise to create some new content for the site. This time John and Anita had agreed and now he was sat merely a hundred yards from her front door.

from *Feeders* by Peter Bennett

PHIL: We've now got all the backstory and the stage, so to speak is set for the action. We've learned a great deal about the main character, Martin. He is a Feeder, recently single, who is angry at being blamed for his ex-wife's condition. He lives in a run-down flat, drives a beat up car and watches a lot of pornography. During his scouring of the internet he has come across Anita Ferguson, a BBW who revels in her size, and he has devised a plan to meet her. All things seem to be going successfully because he is sitting outside her house. Do you feel that Martin is a likeable character ?

PETER: When I wrote *Feeders*, I was less concerned with how likeable characters were and more concerned with how real they felt. I think that Martin is real and, although he may have different sexual turn-ons to me, I don't think he is that different to most single males of a certain age.

PHIL: Do you feel his justifications concerning

his ex-wife are realistic?

PETER: I suspect that some of my own hurt and bile have been injected into the vehemence of his defence. When I first wrote this I was very concerned that people would see Martin as me, and how that would reflect on me. Over the years I have come to realise that although Martin is me, or you, or hopefully someone reading the story, he is only a part of us. We've all been angry at being rejected. We all appreciate the difference between emotional and physical loneliness. We have all experienced some level of both. It is these aspects of Martin that are/were also me.

PHIL: Were you afraid that people would think you had similar sexual interests to Martin? I notice that his bag contains a notepad and Anita is on one of those pages with a crumpled print out of her. This is a quite extreme level of infatuation.

PETER: I never really noticed it in those terms. I appreciate that he does come across as a pervert with his camera in his bag and the crumpled print

outs but I also don't believe, in the majority of cases, that sexual fetishists intend to harm other people. There are those who do and they should be brought to justice. Martin is desperate to find a woman to share his sexual fetish with, he tried in the past and failed. This time he wants to be certain to avoid that same disappointment. This may be me projecting my break up but I don't personally see him as dangerous. He's manipulative and desperate, which I think makes him pitiable.

I can't really discuss that anymore without spoiling the end of the story but it should be enough to say—the rules of horror are well known to fans of the genre.

PHIL: We'll come back to the sexual element later then. I like your use of words like crumbling, mouldering and the description of mists descending from the loch. They create a very ominous atmosphere that competes with Martin's sense of control. Was that something that was present in the first draft or did that come through rewriting?

PETER: I'd like to tell you that this story tumbled out of me in the form you are seeing but it didn't. The atmosphere was something that came after the third draft. The first draft was not great but it had the bones of the story. I had to fill in the back story a bit and alter a few details to make Martin more likeable in the second draft. The final draft was when I focused on the descriptive aspects in an attempt to conjure mood and atmosphere.

PHIL: The setting is very isolated. A big house in the mists beside a loch, decrepit ruins. Where you reading much Gothic literature at the time?

PETER: I've always loved Gothic literature. The trappings of the Gothic genre find their way into many of my stories. I think that is just a consequence of me early reading. I loved ghost stories as a child and moved onto the gothic revival and American gothic literature as soon as I was able to appreciate it. I have a battered copy of Poe's *Tales of Mystery and Imagination* which has been with me since my teens.

PHIL: How did you cope with the sexual elements of the story? Your description of Martin's arousal is both suggestive and deeply

sexual, how did you find it to write?

PETER: It's always hard to write about sex. You use the wrong word and the reader will laugh like a naughty schoolchild. Luckily for me I'm not hugely bothered about writing sex. My concerns usually come from reading it back. In terms of this scene it was more difficult because I don't share that particular fetish. I have, however, been aroused and I talked to people with the fetish which allowed me to project my notions and experiences of arousal onto the details I gathered from my research. The long lingering gazes tracing the curve of her body aren't limited to people in the Feeding community. Most men are guilty of having done that a time or two in their lives.

I think when it comes to writing about sex then you just have to go with what you feel is the natural way of describing it. Using reference books like a thesaurus to find a better word for what I'm trying to describe makes me laugh. Is he "pounding" or merely "pumping"? There is room to debate that when editing I suppose but when you first write it, I believe, you should go with your gut.

PHIL: The last few paragraphs of the opening section are interesting. They describe the way that Martin interacts with John and Anita. There is a sexual coyness and an element of teasing here. You get the feeling that John is initially protecting Anita but the free flow of emails and pictures suggests something more. Knowing the ending and not wanting to spoil it, do you feel like this works in the favour of the rest of the story?

PETER: John acts as a gatekeeper. He has what Martin needs, this is in many ways part of the conflict of the story. In terms of Martin, the climax of the story will be when he meets her. This is when he triumphs, what happens after that is the fallout from his decisions. John's motivation is to protect his precious and prized wife. The key purpose of John's actions are to build upon reader stereotypes. We are conditioned to some extent to believe that Anita is John's victim. That is what we expect. John makes her eat for him, and shares images of her with people who will encourage his behaviour. If, however, she was a victim then Martin would not be interested in her, so she had to contact him occasionally to encourage him. The teasing is

not entirely accidental, it also serves to develop character and plot.

PHIL: Let's see the next part of the story then.

"Come in, come in." John ushered him inside and locked the door behind them.

John led him through the darkened house, past the gloomily climbing staircase and into the sitting room. Martin blinked and staggered slightly as his host flicked on the lights. The room was high-ceilinged, draughty, cold and smelt of damp. The wallpaper was peeling in places and the carpet was developing strange dark patches. It contained little more than two ancient faux-leather sofas, a bookcase and a low coffee table. A large TV sat squalidly on a small unit in one corner. John disappeared into the darkened hall and returned moments later with a bottle of whiskey and a glass.

"Ah'll go get Annie ready for ye. Ah have to make sure she dun't exert herself to much, else she'll get all panting and sweaty. Make yerself at home and have yerself a drink while ye wait."

Martin poured himself a drink, and took his glass back to the couch. He could hear the stairs creak as John made his way upstairs. His hand trembled as he lifted the glass to his mouth.

It seemed like an eternity before he heard John call out to him. He stumbled through the darkened hallway, eventually finding his way to the bottom of the stairs. The door at the top of the stairs was slightly ajar and a deep red glow emanated from inside. He wanted to dash up the stairs and burst through the door but his feet were like lead. Each slow step on the stairs became a deafening screech in the gloom.

The room was dark except for an angle poise spotlight beside the chair and a small lamp by the bed. A red scarf had been draped over the lamp illuminating the room in shades of scarlet and crimson.

"Anita has jus gone over seven hundred pounds an she's gainin weight faster n ever before. She's ma shameless, lustin bundle of beautiful flab."

John winked at Anita, who responded with a broad smile.

Martin couldn't speak. He was dumbstruck in the presence of his goddess. He reached into his bag for his camera but he couldn't seem to hold on to it. It kept falling from his fingers. He felt himself blushing with embarrassment.

Berating himself, Martin threw his bag on the floor out of frustration and grabbed the camera with two hands. He held it out like a child offering a toy, pleading with her. Anita just sat there watching him. Her hungry eyes burrowed into his soul. They made his knees feel weak, they stole the words out of his mouth. This was the power of his goddess.

She tossed back her blonde hair. Martin didn't need a second invite. She posed, puckering her lips. Lifted her shoulder, looked at Martin and smiled coyly. She draped a melon-sized arm across her huge breasts and allowed the shoulder strap to slip down.

Martin focused the lens and snapped away.

She turned slightly, her thighs and rear end rolled in waves. She was stunning.

from *Feeders* by Peter Bennett

PHIL: So we reach a climax here. Martin is allowed into the house and meets Anita for the first time. You take great effort to build the tension but also move the story on quickly. The pacing is very different to the first half of the story, and it feels like things are happening now.

I notice you used shorter paragraphs and sentences to convey speed and excitement in the main character. Was this a skill that you felt comfortable with?

PETER: Pacing is one of those issues that it takes writers a long time to learn. I was still in the early days when I wrote *Feeders*, I would say it was my fifth or sixth story, and I was still experimenting with the way the words, lines, sentences and paragraphs could convey pace. I'm still not entirely sure that I have it mastered.

PHIL: Do you feel the same way about the dialogue?

PETER: The dialogue is something I really have a problem with. I tried to acquire as many skills as I could in as short a time as possible when I first started writing. Dialogue was one of my weakest areas, my characters always sounded like they belonged in a Enid Blyton novel. It was awful. I read an article, I can't remember where, that said you should try listening to the way people speak and emulate it in your writing by using phonetics. The result is what you see in John's dialogue, which I think sounds more southern U.S.A than anything else. I guess it depends on the accent you apply in your head. If I was to ever rewrite this story I am almost certain that I would tackle the dialogue first.

PHIL: One of the things I like most about this section of the story is that Martin is really nervous. His nerves go a long way to quieting a disgust I had for him and actually make me feel something for him. We talked already about how you draw on personal experience to inform character behaviour, have you ever been as nervous and dumbstruck around a woman?

PETER: I thought we were here to talk about writing. I'm married, does that answer your question?

PHIL: Not really. In the age of *Fifty Shades of Grey*, the dynamic and Martin's response to Anita could be seen to be quite BDSM. He refers to her as "goddess" quite a few times, is this something you researched for the story or something you've drawn from personal experience?

PETER: Anybody who has ever proposed to another person knows what I'm drawing on in that dialogue. When you know that someone completes you and you want to spend your life with them you should feel immense joy. You do, but you also feel immense anxiety, fear and a whole host of other emotions. Asking my wife to marry me was terrifying, probably the most terrifying experience of my life, and the second was giving my speech after dinner on our wedding day. Love is terrifying, any one who says anything different isn't doing it right.

PHIL: Love and sex are intrinsically linked in our consciousness. Do you feel that the more sleazy elements of this story detract from the discussion about a man searching for the right woman for him?

PETER: We live in a society where love and sex, and the relationship between the two, are defined very much by the individual. I don't go around telling people not to have one night stands, it's not for me but I understand why people do it.

As individuals we are all seeking a way to connect with other people. In cyberspace, on our phones, with celebrities, with strangers, emotionally and sometime sexually. After my relationship broke down I began to ask myself serious questions about my next relationship. Once we've been hurt we try to minimize our risk of being hurt again, that's only human. The problem is that, for the most part, we are incapable of being alone but not being alone means we can get hurt. Martin's character in *Feeders* is a vehicle for my thoughts on this. I don't think he really knows what he wants or needs from Anita. He is drawn to her because she represents an ideal of a woman, rather than an ideal woman.

We'll see shortly how that pans out for him.

PHIL: Let's do that and then we can wrap up.

Martin tried to speak, struggling over the words, he realised he could only mumble. He felt hot and dizzy. The world swam before his eyes. He tried to walk but his legs failed to obey his orders, sending him sprawling to the floor.

Martin could make out John's feet coming towards him, coming closer. The sounds of his footsteps echoed distantly in his ears. Numbly, Martin felt hands grasping him and lifting him, picking him up. He felt himself being carried across the room, heard the sharp scrape of a curtain being drawn back. His hand brushed against something cold and plastic as John put him down on a wooden table.

John must have flicked a light switch because the shadows seemed to be driven back a little. Martin lay there, he desperately wanted to shout but all he could manage was a low gurgle. He struggled like a man trapped in a nightmare and trying to wake himself up, but Martin knew he was awake and he wouldn't escape this nightmare so easily. Numbness crept slowly through his body until he couldn't feel the hands that were roughly undressing him.

As John wandered around in the shadows outside Martin's blurred vision he hummed to himself. Martin didn't recognise the tune, he also wished he hadn't recognised the slow hiss of a gas canister and the whump! as it ignited. Somewhere behind his head he could make out the tinny clatter of tools being lifted and set down, and the sudden high-pitched whirr of an electric device brought to life.

The whirring got closer, John brought it to the table and showed it to Martin. The blurred silver blade of an electric carving knife screamed. John grinned into his frozen features as Martin growled and gurgled.

"Don't worry, the drug I gave you will keep you quite numb. You shouldn't feel a thing, shouldn't but what do I know?"

John passed out of Martin's view, and began humming once more. The whirring sound seemed to dim slightly and Martin became aware of a dull, vibration that seemed to be shaking him physically. His vision dimmed and Martin passed out.

When Martin returned to consciousness the vibration had stopped. John's face, spattered red, swam into view.

"Back with us I see. Just in time."

John roughly grasped his hair, tugging his face so that Martin could look back into the red bedroom. Anita was still sitting in her chair, her cream nightie pushed up. She clapped her hands excitedly.

"Barbeque sauce, my favourite!" she squealed.

Her flabby face was wreathed in smiles as she lifted something to her mouth. Her double chins quivered as she attacked it hungrily. Martin's vision began to fade as he recognised his limb. Sucking the sauce from her fingers, Anita winked slowly at him.

"You taste great, baby!"

from *Feeders* by Peter Bennett

PHIL: We've seen the twist at the end of the tale now, how did you come up with the idea for the story?

PETER: Without being overly graphic, men do like it when women put certain parts of their body in their mouths. There is a well documented link between woman with an oral fixation and this activity and overeating. As I've said I suffered a relationship breakdown shortly before I wrote this story so the idea that a man can be chewed up and destroyed by a woman was probably not a million miles from my mind. The key is somewhere in there.

PHIL: How do you think the story relates to the themes we've discussed so far?

PETER: I think it is important to realise that a lot of authors talk about "themes" in their work. For me themes are the underlying currents of your work, and I don't think you can escape them. They are always present in your work no matter how hard you try to avoid them. In my case I can't seem to escape from themes concerning the male-female dynamic.

There are other themes in this story: societal view of female attractiveness, acceptable and appropriate sexual behaviour, male roles in relationships, perceived ideas about female vulnerability. Did I mean for those themes to end up in my story? No,

I used my personal experiences to inform my writing in order to make Martin's attraction to Anita effective. I didn't try to make the reader attracted to Anita to start a debate on BBWs, I did it so that the reader would relate to Martin. If the reader has a flash where they think to themselves "hey maybe bigger people can be attractive" then that's a bonus but it wasn't intentional. A writer does, however, need to be aware of the themes he is skirting.

PHIL: We talked earlier about projecting Martin's sense of control, do you feel you maintained the surprise?

PETER: My hope was that the reader would

be carried by Martin's perspective. I don't, at least I hope I don't, give away too much too early. John's protectiveness of Anita should seem to be a natural guardianship of his wife. There is I admit a slight teaser there when Anita sends the odd message but John's pride in his wife and desire to protect her should be the overriding message that the reader gets. The signs of the sedative are related but are filtered through Martin's view so that we, like him, think they are down to nerves rather than because he's been spiked. Until he crashes to the floor that is.

PHIL: The last line of the story has a lot of punch, why do you think that is?

PETER: Living as we do in a generation that has had its view of sexuality altered by porn, I think most men view women in a more sexual way. I don't think that in itself is inherently a bad thing, so long as that isn't the only way you view women. The last scene of the story was initially Anita devouring Martin's limb which I've attempted to make more erotic than grotesque. I think that works for some men but probably won't for others. The connection between eating and sex is at the heart of this story, even if it has been slightly corrupted. If you are the type of man who enjoys watching Nigella Lawson, moan and suck her fingers then you'll hopefully get a tingle from the end of this story and hopefully that tingle should scare you because of the cannibalism.

Without being graphic I think many men love the idea of a messy faced woman, taking them out of their mouth, winking at them and saying: "You taste great, baby!" That is what makes for the hit, because you are getting what you want just not in the way you want it.

PHIL: Thanks Peter. It takes a brave editor to share and critique your work in public. I found your answers to be very informative and I think that many writers will find your insights on empathy and projection of your own experiences onto unfamiliar ones to be very useful.

Let us know what you think of the new format and I'll see you next issue.

ZOMBIE FISHING TRIP

by Brian Rosenberger

no bites in the morning
save for bugs
drowning in ocular fluid
rubbing and rubbing
out plopped his eye

No bites in the afternoon
just a smell similar to raw fish
putting a stink in the air
a skunk would have been perfume
the water as quiet as a vacant casket

Just around midnight
a nibble
the remaining eye focused
on the rod tip
the line goes slack

Slowly he reels
crank after agonizing crank
the hook empty
save for moss
the color of his smile

Barbs sink into soft flesh
a lily pad hue
he accidentally cast his thumb
slowly bobbing like a hitchhiker
needing a ride, before sinking from view

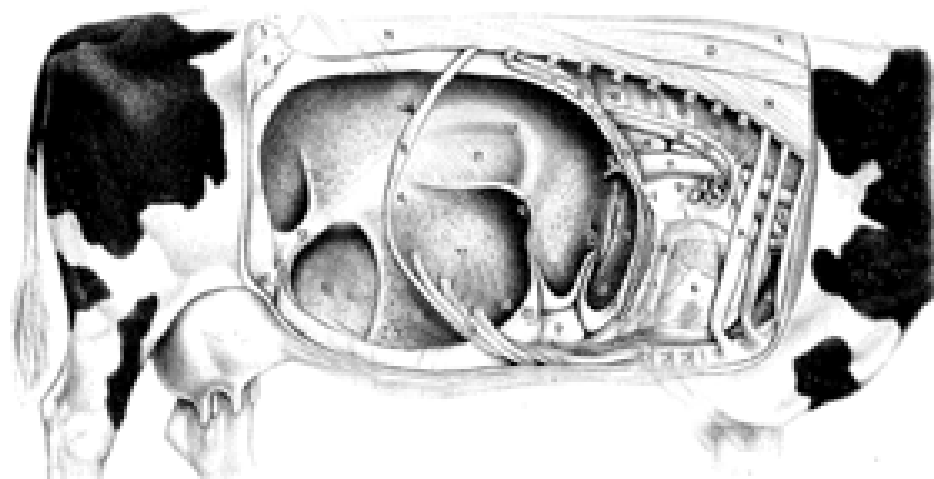
Another nibble transformed into a strike
the catfish cartwheels in the water
whiskers twitching like an exposed nerve
the line snaps

His forehead squirms in anger
no need to worry
still plenty of worms

AN ODYSSEY

IN FOUR PARTS

by William Shaw



I was sipping a cup of tea, minding my own business, when I was swallowed by a giant cow. The actual mechanics of how exactly a giant cow managed to find its way into my kitchen without attracting the attention of me or anyone in the vicinity is left as an exercise for the reader. I was a little more concerned with the sudden and disorienting feeling of being forced down a giant gullet. I was coated in slime, and at risk of suffocating as the muscles contracted around me, squeezing me along like the last bit of toothpaste in the tube. It was extremely uncomfortable, but what most annoyed me was the fact that I managed to lose my grip on my teacup.

1

Arriving in what I took to be the cow's stomach, I was struck in the face by something wet and oddly warm. I realized

that it was my own foot. I just managed to make out my left toenail (which was in dire need of clipping) before my eyes dissolved. But before I could make a broader survey of my remaining extremities, there was a sudden tug below me. It felt like being pulled down a particularly nasty and unhygienic plughole. Then I remembered my biology teacher telling me that cows had four stomachs. The trouble was, I couldn't remember anything else.

2

"You're not made of cellulose."

"No. Terribly sorry."

"For God's sake, this is supposed to be an herbivorous system! Let any old riff-raff in these days."

"I assure you, this wasn't my idea."

"Well, sorry, but I'm going to have to refer you to another department."

The voice grew further and further away as I descended.

"Honestly. I don't get paid enough to deal with this..."

3

In the dark wetness

Flesh turns to damp mush as my

Mind disintegrates.

4

I opened my eyes, and found myself in a chintz armchair, in what appeared to be an old-fashioned tea shop. There was a rather unpleasant smell, and I did not like the look of that cavernous hole in the skirting board. On a table in front of me sat a cup of tea, lightly steaming. I knew from the chipped crockery that it was the one I had lost track

of earlier. I grabbed it, and eagerly drank. And as the last dregs disappeared, I remembered what had been gnawing at me; the other important thing about bovine digestion. So I was not altogether surprised to feel myself suddenly rushing upwards, through the hot stickiness and, with a sudden shock, back into the cold and the light.

I lay on the grass, and cursed the inefficiencies of the Holstein Friesian digestive system. This time, there would be no tea. Probably not even any biscuits. I thought about screaming, but it seemed a little melodramatic. I sighed as the gaping maw descended again.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

William Shaw is a student and amateur journalist from Sheffield, currently studying English Literature at university. His passions include science fiction, postmodern literature and classic comedy, and he is also very active within Doctor Who fandom. If you buy him a drink he will tell you about the time he met Nick Jonas and told him to fuck off. You can follow him on Tumblr at <http://themandmanwithablog.tumblr.com/> and on twitter @Will_s_7

FOR SALE: CHEAP COFFINS, BRAND NEW

by Nohan Meza



By the time someone finds this, I will be dead. I can still hear them outside. Maybe I should be hysterical, clawing my nails out, screaming until I lose my voice, but none of that is happening. Once you know there's no way out, it's easier to come to terms with death.

I'm calm, for some reason. Maybe the fight has gone out of me. Or I'm on the downfall of the adrenaline. I . . . I don't know. Maybe I'm not afraid of dying? Maybe. Too many maybes.

I don't know why I'm writing this. Maybe I hope the cops will find it and catch the guys who did this to me. But they're probably in this as well.

Maybe I'm doing it for my parents. They were, after all, good parents. Putting up with

my behaving like an asshole must have been tough, that's got to be worth something. They deserve to know the truth.

But I think I'm doing it for myself. I want to leave something in this world, something of my own doing. Even if it's just a recanting of the events that led to my death.

So here it goes.

My job was, all things considered, pretty simple. Same shit, different day. I would sneak out of my room at midnight and hurry off to my part-time job: grave-robbing. Once at the cemetery, I would check for the small x on the lane I had to turn and again on the pantheon itself. Then it was time to go in, get the coffin out of the coffin coffin, drop the coffin on the wheelbarrow, and then toss the body back into one of the coffin coffins. All

while trying not to puke, something I didn't always succeed with, mind you.

I guess I should jot down how it all started . . .

Time, after all, is all I have.

Walking home after a night out, I stumbled upon an old man carrying a coffin on a wheelbarrow, and a little dog, no breed, circling him and wagging his tail. A faint smell of formaldehyde flooded my nostrils, and I drew back, nose wrinkled, and gagged.

When he saw me, he froze.

I didn't know what to do. I mean, there was this dude in tattered rags, scraggy white beard, bloodshot eyes, torn denim apron, and a big-ass hammer, and he was running toward me as fast as his bony legs could carry him, the dog not too far back.

"Kid!," he said, grabbing me by the shoulders. "Look at me. Can you keep a secret? There's money in it for ya if you do."

He poked a skin-stretched finger through one of the holes of my t-shirt. "Looks like you need it."

I think I managed to get "What the fuck" out before he started talking. His thoughts spilled out in a single breath. "I'm a carpenter kid I sell the coffins to the families of the deceased but I'm old oh so old and I have fallen out of touch with my craft please don't tell anyone please . . . oh God."

His eyes dropped to the floor. He took a long, heaving breath and slowed down. "So I started taking back the coffins I made. I tried. I swear I tried. But every day I would chip at the wood, and the coffins came out worse every time. I needed the money to live; my daughter got pregnant and the father ran away." He gestured to the dog. "And then I have Scrappy to feed, as well. So I fell low. I sold the coffins, the good ones, and then searched for them in the cemetery and took them back. I'm not proud of it, but I had to. I just couldn't make them anymore. And my back won't be able to take this much longer."

He looked at me, his cheeks were red. "I'll pay you if you do that part of the job for me."

There was hope in his eyes. Those dark, bloodshot eyes. A tear swelled and rolled down his left cheek. A single tear. A tear that meant this was truly all he had. But there was also something else there. His stare. It seemed to reach past me, as if he wasn't looking at me but into the horizon.

Scrappy yapped and growled while he talked. I guess he could sense the tension in his master's voice. I wasn't scared of the dog. It was a small and frail thing. All white and crooked--one of his front legs was shorter than the others, so he was always limping forward as if he were to face-plant onto the floor. Scrappy looked as if his skin had been sucked against his ribs. I figured I could just flick it off with my finger if it came too close. The man, however, was a whole 'nother deal

His nails were digging into my skin. I glanced downwards; the hammer was there. I knew I couldn't say no. Humans are at their most dangerous when they are at rock bottom. It is then that we are unpredictable. And there was also the money. We didn't have much, back at home. So I said yes.

The next night, we met at the carpentry. Once there I realized it was more of a shack. A wooden box dropped on the floor with one huge rectangular opening for an entrance, overlooking the street. The floor was made of wooden planks, with some overturned here and there, as was the ceiling. Two potent double-beams with countless bugs flying around them hung above me, illuminating the shack with a pale light. Machines covered with sawdust were stationed at different spots in the shack, an unfinished coffin on one of them. Mr. Woodlow paced from one machine to the next, and Scrappy nibbled on some bones in a corner.

He never disclosed his first name. I think he thought there still was some kind of honor in his work. As if he deserved the title of Sir or Mister.

The dead brightness of the double-beams helped me see. Mr. Woodlow was tall, bone-white, and languid. The ligaments on his

elbows and knees pushed up against the skin, making it seem as if it was about to rupture. A few whiffs of white hair remained on his head, and the long, grey beard made him look like an insane street-preacher. His last name was fitting, too, as he did look like low quality wood.

The first night should have been enough to make me run.

There was a full moon, perfect for a werewolf. Little to no lighting aided me as I marched toward the cemetery, despite the moon. My feet kept bumping into things as I stumbled down the road: beer bottles, packs of cigarettes, condoms At one point my foot had a brawl with a plastic bag.

Not a single car. The city was as dead as the place I was going to. The silence of the night was only broken by the cooing of birds at every turn of the screw.

As I plodded closer, I heard a dog, or maybe a wolf, howl. The wind kept shifting locks of hair into my eyes. Drops of cold sweat slithered under my arms. I kept turning around, half expecting some demon or beast behind me, ready to eat my flesh. Maybe that would have been better. At one point I considered skittering back home, tail between my legs, telling Mom and Dad about what I'd been doing, and getting hell for it. Now I wish I had.

I reached the cemetery.

It stood against the night sky, stretching far in every direction, blending with the horizon. It was the Daedalus' Labyrinth of souls. The rows of pantheons and crypts protracted from one corner to the next, seemingly twisting, flexing, merging, and crashing into each other. The main gate loomed over my head wide open, like a detached mandible, ready to swallow me whole. Black bars with spiked tips covered the gate. Everything that was iron was rusted and the paint peeling. It was a thing of ancient.

I forced my feet forward.

My hand reached to the metal rods for support. A thick clot of half-chipped paint gave me a small cut, drawing blood. There were so many clues. So many little things that hinted at the coming doom. Yet I was blind to them.

The stench of death was appalling: formaldehyde, ethanol, and methanol. I covered my nose with my shirt. Whether it smelled worse in there I could not tell. Forgot to put on deodorant that day, and fear makes you sweat like a pig that knows the knife is coming.

With a wrinkled nose and watery eyes, I crept by the pantheons. They seemed to be inching forward as I walked, tilting towards me. They were all broken and tattered. One had a crumbled wall, exposing the coffins inside, and, strangely enough, the coffins didn't look so old. Still, I needed them brand new. Another had gargoyles on every corner, some kind of bird with hands for wings and long fangs. The next one had some sort of basement with a wooden door. Only the wooden door was splintered and broken through. I managed to make out the shadows of corpses heap-high. I shuddered.

Smaller walkways intersected with mine every hundred meters or so. I was looking for the blotchy paint mark Mr. Woodlow had left for me as I strolled. Five blocks in, I found it. There was one on the "alley" in which I had to make a left and another on the pantheon itself.

What was before me was more a box than a pantheon. It was so bizarre to find in this gloomy place a perfectly painted white box. It was cheery and new, which in turn made it disturbing and eerie. The hairs at the back of my neck tingled. I tried the door and it wasn't locked. They never were. Grave-robbing was never an issue, and it's not like the dead were going to come back to life anyway.

I slipped in, my steps almost silent on the linoleum. The smell of formaldehyde was so strong it almost seemed tangible. I felt my dinner rise up my throat and fall back down again.

The room was sparkling white. The white linoleum was smooth and faintly reflected my

I reached for the man's back to pull him out of the coffin, and that's when he moved.

image. In front of me was the box for the coffin. The best way I can describe it is as some kind of niche, deep, with a lid. Not wanting to spend a long time there, I reached and opened it.

The coffin inside was of high-quality: bronze latches, silver trimming, engravings. It was in mint condition. It was time to take the body out.

Since this was my first coffin-recovery mission, I didn't think of picking his pockets. Sometimes, as I learned later on, they did have valuables, like old family watches and the like. I would pawn whatever I could find. I never told Mr. Woodlow about my gold-digging adventures.

I reached for the man's back to pull him out of the coffin, and that's when he moved.

That's it. I was done for. I remember smashing my head against the wall as I jumped, thinking about the zombie getting ready to eat my brains.

The body did not move again, however.

Corpses can have jerky reactions from stuck fluids or air. In this case, the sudden contact with oxygen made the body move. The more you know

I momentarily snapped back into reality and the general fuckupedness of what I was doing. I turned to leave, even started walking back. Time to Nope out. But then the door handle poked through one of the holes of my T-shirt. It was almost as if this job was pulling me back, didn't want me to leave. I thought about my family, how Mom and Dad worked two shifts to put me and Donnie through school, to have food on the table. This job had good pay. I could do it for a while and quit. So I turned back.

I lifted the body with ease. The feeling of a dead man's head resting on your shoulder, however, is something you don't forget. It's stiff. And cold. I leaned him against the wall, picked up the coffin, put it on the wheelbarrow, and dropped the corpse back into the coffin coffin.

It was a never-ending walkway. The tiles that made up the sidewalk seemed to teleport to the front of the row as soon as I stepped past one of them. I jumped at every sound and squeak as I pushed the wheelbarrow. Someone could see me and ask questions. What if the cops dropped by? What if someone saw the dead man without the coffin? Not until I had almost reached the carpentry did I realize my clothes were damp with sweat, and tears were running down my cheeks in rivulets. No one saw me.

This was my life, every night, for a week. I started taking my backpack to haul back my findings in dead men's pockets. After all, dead men tell no tales.

After a week of literally working the graveyard shift, I got greedy.

One night, while the owls cooed and the dead slept, something caught my eyes while looking for the blotchy paint mark. There was a faint glow further ahead. Usually there weren't any candles, they would die out long before I came to the cemetery. I had to make sure there wasn't a mourning widow drowning in her sorrow inside the pantheon. So I chased the shining.

This was a strong glow, it seemed to be coming from the entire pantheon; it was more than just a candle. There was also a sweet

smell, like honeycomb. A nice break from the shitty formaldehyde.

With my feet rasping against the gravel below, I approached the pantheon. It was bigger than my house.

It looked like Athena's Parthenon, with its carved pillars and tall structure. The marble pillars were connected by Blindex glass, and in the middle of the building was the tallest door I had ever seen. It was hand-carved with countless twists and turns. It was beautiful. Inside, however, was something much greater than the door. Or the pantheon, for that matter. Inside was a gold-trimmed coffin with the wildest assortment of precious stones: emeralds, rubies, sapphires, topazes, and opals glittered all over it. There was a flick of dirt on top of one of the topazes. Besides that, it was flawless. Countless candles surrounded the coffin with an opening in the middle for one to approach it. The light from the flames reflected on every stone, lighting up the entire pantheon. It was enchanting.

I had to have it. That coffin would make me rich. Mr. Woodlow could melt the gold and pry off the stones. It was the jackpot. I wondered why Mr. Woodlow had missed this one.

My hand went to the doorknob. It was locked.

But that wasn't going to stop me, of course. I needed that coffin. Besides, it glowed. I snatched a nearby rock and swung it back and forth, like a pendulum. At the count of three, the rock flew, and the glass shattered.

That's when the alarm started buzzing.

Needless to say, I freaked the fuck out. I turned to run, but the candlelight was striking the coffin. It glowed. I looked at it again. It was beautiful. I saw my reflection in the gold. It was me, but golden, promises of a better time. The alarm turned into a distant annoyance, and I stepped in.

They found me, rock in hand, high above my shoulders. I was the priest, and the rock was the wafer. I was entranced. In my distorted

frame of mind, I desperately tried to pry off the precious stones with my rock.

The pantheon happened to belong to the recently deceased kingpin of the mafia. So much for luck.

The questions started, blows as well. I spilled everything. They took me back to the carpentry, where they found Mr. Woodlow. One of the men, a huge thing of a man, went inside the carpentry and came out with him. He dragged Mr. Woodlow across the floor like a rag-doll. It seemed to me as if he was knocked out. His face was swelling and his body was limp.

While dragging him across the gravel, a small bump gave his body the tiniest of jumps, and I saw his hammer fall from one of the pockets. It was at that moment that Scrappy came running from the carpentry. He jumped at the man dragging his master, and his mandible connected with the man's arm. The man gave a cry and let go of Mr. Woodlow. Scrappy jumped and attempted to defeat Goliath, but Goliath just ignored him and walked towards an object on the street. He picked up the hammer, and the next time Scrappy jumped, he received a full-force blow collided with his right temple, smashing his cranium.

The loud crack made my eyes close. When I opened them again Scrappy was on the floor. The jelly-like structure that used to be his brain was spilling onto the floor along with the blood, tainting it. Goliath allowed the hammer to leave his hand and dive to the floor, next to the dead dog.

I looked over at Mr. Woodlow, in the other car. He was awake. His hands were handcuffed. Our eyes met and there was sorrow in his. A deep, dark, and hopeless sorrow. A sorrow that indicated that this was it, everything was lost. That was the last time I saw those distant, bloodshot eyes.

We drove back to the cemetery. I don't know what they did with Mr. Woodlow, for I didn't see the other car again, but he probably isn't much better off. I was restrained by the shoulders and was trying to find a weak spot to break free when I saw the battered pantheon the man was taking me to. It was

the very same one I had passed many times. The old one with the crumbled wall and not-so-old coffins.

Funny enough, there was no smell of formaldehyde there. Only the stench of death. Of rotting bodies.

Goliath went to fumble with a coffin, and I took my chance. I turned, bringing my elbow to my captor's face, and made a run for it. I could hear the stomps of Goliath behind me. I didn't get far. He tackled me, smashing my face against the ground.

Back in the broken pantheon, he shoved me and my backpack into one of the coffin coffins. I heard the clasp of the locks. No way out.

It's getting hard to breathe, so I'll wrap this up. Mom, Dad, I love you. There's a couple thousand dollars at the back of the drawer

of my bedside table. That should give you guys a boost. Please buy a toy for Donnie. It's been at least four years since he last got something for his birthday.

The paint, the howl, the body. So many things. So many little warnings. Trigger warnings. I should have noticed. Premature burial will be the way of my death. I can feel the lack of air in my lungs, not getting enough oxygen.

I want to dream again, one last time, dream of better times. I'm tired. Maybe the Sandman will come and give me eternal sleep. I'll try. Goodbye.

Aaron Sand.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Nohan Meza is a writer from Paraguay, South America. He started reading horror at the tender age of five with books like Goosebumps and Scary Stories to Tell in the Dark. Soon after, he found himself writing his own little stories and he hasn't stopped since.

ASYLUM

by Dave Ludford

Dave Ludford has been a regular contributor to Fever Dreams Magazine since he was first published in Issue 3. This month he brings us a dark tale of madness from the Asylum.



The crumbling edifice of St. Anselm's mental institution rose tall and menacing like a bully's posture in the bone-numbing chill of a harsh winter evening.

Long since decommissioned as a working establishment, its bricks and tiles were chipped and cracked like the teeth of indifferent old men. What had been built with Victorian pride- if total disregard for architectural aesthetics- now fell into ruin as if abandoned by the spirits of those skilled artisans who had proudly laid brick upon brick, creating a utilitarian functionality that would mute and insulate from the outside world the screams of those unfortunates dragged through its doors. In short, the craftsmen's spirits had long departed; but the spirits of those once cruelly detained and 'treated' within its walls wailed, raged, and refused to pass over. Ugliness had begat cruelty; that cruelty had in turn begat a restlessness of spirits that rushed and screamed through the holes in the putrefying mortar struggling against time to hold together the now redundant structure. Named after a saint, what had once imprisoned those deemed 'mentally ill', it seethed with an evil that could be perceived by all the human senses; it could be seen, heard, smelled and touched; and even- if ever a human being could have the stomach for such a thing- tasted. It was an otherworldly manifestation of a desire for revenge

that with the passage of time had honed itself into a perceptible force that began to blow like a mighty wind; not a sigh or whisper, but a voluble chorus screaming from the pits of despair it vowed: 'Jepson, we damn you to everlasting hell and curse you and your line. We will be avenged.'

Dr Edward Jepson had been the asylum's chief tormentor.

One such restless spirit that coursed eternally through door, window, wall and corridor, and whose shrieking desire for revenge was chief to be heard amongst the clamour of voices, belonged to the once proud human form of Eliza Benson, committed in 1857 suffering from what would now be termed post-natal depression, after the birth of her first child by an initially affectionate but never particularly loving husband. His last act within the marriage was to have Eliza committed, citing her 'unreasonable behaviour'. Benson believed it was in his wife's best interests; the subsequent petition for divorce was duly granted. Benson had then abandoned the child, too, having become involved with another woman and wishing to sire male offspring only, to inherit and continue his textile business. Their daughter, a bitter disappointment to him, was taken away by a cousin and brought up by him and a wife unable to bear children herself.

Eliza suffered for ten years through a horrific trial of solitary confinement, force-feeding and a scale of human degradation that would be unheard of in the modern age, her mortal struggle relieved only when she choked on a morsel of food she had no wish to consume. Eliza had long since ceased to live in any real, human sense many years previously; her final convulsions and expiring breath merely being the last act of physical suffering she would endure in this world as a sentient being.

She was twenty eight years old at the time of her death, and was buried in a pauper's grave, leaving no record that she'd ever existed.

Yvonne Stride had been forced to relinquish her three year old daughter to social services owing to her crippling addiction to heroin. She was now three months into rehab and luckily

all was going well; the cravings that had once wracked her entire body and almost driven her insane were beginning to ebb away, day by day, hour by hour, and minute by minute. The hot and cold sweats were becoming fewer, as were the convulsions and hallucinations. She could, at last, feel her senses returning to normal; her body was thawing. The happy memories-brief though they were- of the times she had been able to spend with her daughter overwhelmed her with both happiness and sadness. Yvonne was determined to get Martha back; to win her battle against addiction and thereby become a proper mother once more. These thoughts sustained her, drove her forward, became her reason for living, a natural instinct common to all mothers whatever their circumstances. Lying in the foetal position on her bed in the Marsden Clinic she dared to allow herself to imagine life being restored to her, and this made her smile broadly; and for the first time in a very long while she felt good about herself.

She had finished reading the three books her Uncle Geoff had sent her and was beginning to feel distinctly bored. Whilst happy at feeling such a normal sensation she yearned for something constructive to do to occupy her mind. Physical exercise was out of the question as she would have to be strictly supervised at all times; unless one counted the relentless pacing up and down one's room as exercise, and this at least helped to pass the time away.

Yvonne rose from her bed and walked across to her large window, thinking about her much-loved Uncle, the one member of the family who had stood by her throughout all of her troubles and had even paid for her stay in this modern and rather expensive private facility. The Marsden Clinic prided itself on its high success rate and had become a somewhat exclusive facility, counting several TV celebrities amongst its former and present 'clients'. Even Dr Matt Jepson, who had founded the clinic, had become something of a celebrity himself, having appeared on several chat shows where he was interviewed about his methods and techniques.

The view from her window afforded Yvonne little in the way of visual stimulation on this harsh, icy winter's day; only the dilapidated

form of the nearby St Anselm's building held her vague interest. The building was falling into a state of hazardous disrepair, she thought. Indeed, it looked to be close to the point of total collapse. Yvonne was aware like all the population of the town that it had once been a lunatic asylum, and she had always been fascinated by the strange stories she'd heard regarding its former inhabitants which she'd absorbed with nothing short of a macabre glee. It was a local landmark, legend and eyesore, but was surely due for demolition? With the increasing need for more housing in the town it could only be a matter of the shortest time until it was pulled down before it fell down and converted into houses or flats. Children generally tended to avoid the place, except for those playing 'dare', the game of choice of many a youthful generation. It had become the haunt of more earthly manifestations in the forms of vagrants, drug addicts and dealers; Yvonne had, herself, 'scored' there many times over the years of her addiction. The irony of building a brand-spanking new rehab clinic in such close proximity was not lost on her and she turned away in disgust. St Anselm's was where her descent had begun, that dreadful journey that had resulted in Martha being taken away from her. Her interest was now tempered by increasing feelings of self-loathing that quickly began to rush through her like hot waves of nausea. Yvonne turned away from the window as the black fog of depression began to overwhelm her and once more she felt its inexorable downward pull on the very core of her being. Feeling the need for the comfort of familiar things she opened the top drawer of her bedside cabinet for the locket that her mother had given her years before, and was one of the few personal possessions she had brought with her. It was a family heirloom that had been passed down over several generations, and Yvonne loved it; to her it was priceless.

It was missing from the drawer, as was her mobile phone, and Yvonne now began to panic. She commenced a pointless search through the other drawers, hoping she'd perhaps absentmindedly placed the items in one of them, but it proved fruitless. All the search yielded was her clean underclothes, but she also discovered that a couple of these items also seemed to be missing. 'Oh my god

get me out of here, I'm going bloody mad' she thought as she slammed the last drawer shut and slumped down heavily onto her bed. Tears began to well up in her eyes as she lay down and once more took up the foetal position.

Her light doze was interrupted an hour later by a gentle knocking at her door, and before she could utter the words 'come in' Matt Jepson entered the room. Yvonne always felt distinctly uncomfortable in his presence; Jepson always seemed to be staring at her, his eyes continually looking over her body. Jepson had been overseeing her rehab sessions himself and took what Yvonne felt to be an overly-keen interest in her progress. In short, Jepson was beginning to freak her out; or perhaps she was imagining it, her imagination being fuelled by the last remnants of drug-induced paranoia. Aged twenty-five Yvonne was certainly familiar with the signs of male interest in her; but there was no way on God's earth she would respond favourably to any advances from this creep who must be at least twice her age. The very thought of it made her shudder, her skin turning cold. It was only the desire to get herself straight and thence get Martha back that kept her here. To do otherwise would be letting herself down badly as well as her uncle who had displayed so much faith in her.

'Hello Yvonne. Sorry to disturb you but I thought we might have a little chat.'

Jepson's words seemed more of an imperative than a polite request and there had certainly been no questioning emphasis on the word 'chat'. Yvonne sat up but did not rise from her bed, feeling less vulnerable by remaining where she was. Jepson walked across from the door towards her and sat himself down on the room's only armchair, only a few feet away from her. Yvonne felt his heavily-lidded eyes boring into her, like a giant lizard watching its hapless prey.

'I sense some uneasiness emanating from you in my presence my dear. Please don't be frightened. I'm here to help you to get better, you know that, don't you? I've been monitoring your progress quite closely and believe you would benefit from some extra sessions, one-on-one rather than group therapy. I'm concerned about your lack of respect for

Her fuse had been lit by Jepson's mention of her daughter's name, which sounded too much like an obscenity coming from his vile mouth.

authority. We can start the sessions tomorrow if you wish; I can see you look rather tired today and I don't want to fatigue you too much. I want you nice and fresh for the little favours I require of you. Call it your way of paying me back for my kindness and consideration. Yvonne, you're such a pretty little thing. You'll oblige me, I'm sure- I'm your best hope for you getting Martha back.'

Yvonne began to shake violently, disbelief mingling with horror, disgust and repulsion on hearing this bastard's words. Struggling to control her emotions, she decided- as often being the case with cornered prey- to come out fighting. Her fuse had been lit by Jepson's mention of her daughter's name, which sounded too much like an obscenity coming from his vile mouth.

"F... right off, you creep. Get away from me! I'll kill you if you even attempt to come any closer!"

Instinctively looking for a weapon with which to lash out, Yvonne's eyes alighted on the pile of three books on her bedside cabinet; all of which were hardbacks and would certainly be fit for her purpose. Quickly picking up the top book, she flung it at the still seated figure of Jepson; it caught him a cracking blow on his forehead, soon drawing blood.

"You little bitch!"

Jepson jumped up somewhat unsteadily and drew out his pocket handkerchief; holding it to his head he tried to staunch the red flow that had begun to stream down his left cheek and over his rather expensive designer shirt.

Seizing what little advantage had been afforded her, Yvonne reached for a second book and prepared to hurl it. Jepson at least had the sense to start backing away towards the door.

"I'll have the police here in no time Jepson. Let's see how you squirm out of this one."

Jepson had by now reached the door and had recovered some of his composure.

"My word against yours. The word of a well-respected psychologist against that of a drug addict. Besides which, how exactly will you call them? You may have noticed by now that your mobile is missing...as well as some other, more personal items..."

Realization suddenly dawned on Yvonne, and once more the waves of hot nausea began to wash over her.

"I have the power to keep you here for a very long time, Yvonne, and fully intend to do so until you become more...compliant."

Here Jepson emitted a shrill laugh that quickly degenerated into a horrid, cackling smoker's cough. Yvonne felt she was confronted with a beast from the very depths of hell. Now having the advantage, Jepson exited the room and hurriedly locked it from the outside. He called out from the corridor:

"See you in the morning, my dear girl. I hope you have a lovely evening.'

Jepson began walking down the corridor, intending to access his apartment on the top floor of the building, in the top desk drawer of which was a bottle of brandy that would soon revive his spirits. Despite the wound- which was now bleeding less copiously- he was feeling rather pleased with himself; he had the hellcat exactly where he wanted her. He also had access to an amply-stocked drugs cupboard, some of the contents of which he would begin to use on Yvonne in the morning. Feelings of intense excitement coursed through him as he thought of all the wonderful acts he would perform on Yvonne Stride's

young, supple body. He'd have his way with her, he always did, and he'd lost count of how many helpless victims he'd been able to exert control over. Must be dozens by now. As he unlocked and entered his apartment a broad grin began to spread across his face.

Shocked into immobility, and far too angry to cry, Yvonne still remained seated on her bed. How this situation had arisen she was totally unable to fathom. Jepson was supposed to be in a position of trust, a professional whose vocation entailed helping people. Half an hour or so after Jepson had left her, Yvonne stood up and walked towards her bedroom door, knowing however that it was pointless trying to open it, it would be locked fast. She tried anyway, it seemed the natural thing to do, but her worst fears were soon confirmed. That bastard had made her his prisoner and there was no way out of this cell; she was trapped. As she was on the third floor of the patient's wing it was a long way down to the ground, so jumping from the window was not an option unless she wished to sustain several broken bones or kill herself outright. The latter wasn't an option either- she thought of Martha, and when it would be that she could finally be reunited with her beautiful daughter. She walked slowly back to her bed and, having sat down again, finally gave in to a torrent of tears.

Jepson had spent a very happy couple of hours watching various hardcore pornographic DVD's and steadily drinking himself into a stupor. The 'films' were of a rather nasty variety that showed young girls in degrading, submissive situations, being bound tightly with leather straps and subjected to all manner of vile horrors. Jepson had grown tired of his collection however and made a somewhat fuzzy mental note-to-self to tap up his barrister friend for some more; the more explicit the better. It's what the bitches deserved.

It was now far too late to even contemplate driving home; he was still sufficiently self-aware enough to know that he was too drunk to control a vehicle. Besides, that was why he'd had this apartment built, for situations such as this; it also served as his

refuge from his constantly nagging, shrewish wife. Jepson stood up and took a few unsteady steps towards his brand new, widescreen television, intending to switch it off at source as he'd mislaid the remote control. It had probably slipped down the back of his plush leather sofa. As he reached out towards the controls, he lost his balance and staggered into the set, knocking it from its stand onto the hardwood floor, shattering the screen. He was now crouched four-square over broken glass. His DVD's were spread haphazardly across the floor.

"Shit...how the hell did I get in this state?" he slurred to nobody in particular.

After several awkward minutes he managed to stagger upright without cutting himself. "Best be off to bed" he thought, and began to walk mostly crablike in the general direction of his bedroom. Once there he collapsed heavily on to his bed, and turned his blurred vision towards the items on his bedside cabinet. Not a particularly good haul so far this week: Yvonne's mobile phone- which he could sell down the pub to shadowy youths unknown; several pairs of her underwear, to satisfy his own perversions; but best of all, her locket, which she'd told him at their first session on her arrival was some sort of family heirloom. She'd seemed particularly sentimental about it. Turning it over, he read the inscription:

"To my dearest Eliza on the occasion of her birthday, July 26th 1855. From your beloved CB"

"Oh how very touching", he thought. "Should be able to get a few quid for that along with the phone." Noticing the date once more, the random thought popped into his befuddled brain that it coincided with the time when his esteemed ancestor had begun his pioneering work with those dreadful lower class no-hopers at St. Anselm's, which stood now like an (albeit crumbling) monument to his achievements. Such a pity it was falling into disrepair; it should be designated a listed building and preserved in perpetuity. No matter, he would continue that work and achieve the recognition so richly deserved and criminally overlooked for far too long.

Yvonne had managed a shower and now lay in the womblike warmth of her bed, covers pulled up to her chin. The hot water had revived her, and having always been a resourceful and resilient person she was thinking of ways she could escape from this place. Escape from her imprisonment in this fucking asylum. No- that was the wrong word...weren't asylums places where one went to seek refuge from persecution? It was *here* that she was in danger of becoming the victim of that bastard sexual predator Jepson; of being persecuted herself. Yet that dilapidated building opposite, St. Anselm's, had also been called an asylum- a *lunatic* asylum. God it was so confusing, her head began to spin trying to work it out. How can things be called by one term but actually be the exact opposite? She began to wish she hadn't bunked off so much from school, maybe then she'd understand. Her youthful rebellion now seemed rather pathetic. On one thing she was determined however; before lapsing into sleep she resolved to get Jepson arrested once she was free. Her first port of call would be her Uncle Geoff- he was a barrister and would get the legal wheels in motion. She was slightly disconcerted when she remembered that her uncle and Jepson were actually friends; no matter- when he found out what Jepson was really like that would change. She, after all, was family.

Jepson was snoring and slobbering away in a deep, brandy-soaked sleep. His dreams were bizarre, surreal, and hellish; filled with the deafening banshee-screams of girls trussed up in leather bondage gear, chained to the walls of deep underground cells. Then the girl's faces changed to become those of hideous old hags. The screams got louder and louder, and seemed like those of souls in perpetual torment. Then the enchained figures broke free of their restraints and rushed towards him- dozens of them- seemingly wishing to devour him; disfigured, contorted mouths snapped away within inches of his face. They had become like ghosts, disembodied beings with grossly distorted features, corrupt versions of the human form created in some nightmare world. He was vaguely aware that he was in some indefinable hinterland between the physical

and metaphysical, between what at once seemed real and what could not possibly be real. He was in a state of paralysis, as one often is in dreams; completely unable to move or do anything to defend himself from the onslaught of these creatures that got closer and closer until they wrapped themselves around him until he was covered in the blanket of their madness and mayhem. But there was no comfort in this blanket. He felt the very life being choked out of him; heard an otherworldly voice cry out: "Jepson, you will ruin no more generations of my family." He then became aware of a sharp pain across his throat, and realized that he was no longer dreaming; was sensible enough to know that what caused the pain was a broken shard of glass from his shattered TV screen. Another slash from the shard and Jepson gurgled horribly as blood gushed from a now-gaping wound, and he fell to his knees onto a floor already saturated with his gore. Within seconds, he breathed no more; nightmare/ reality had conspired successfully to wreak a hideous but effective revenge.

The wailing and screaming ceased soon thereafter; the spirit forms departed the room through an open window back towards St. Anselm's leaving the slumped, butchered corpse of Jepson spread-eagled on top of a pile of shattered glass and the congealing spillage of his ripped throat.

Yvonne slept soundly that night, but on waking she would recall two particular dreams. The first involved the appearance of a woman's face; ghostlike, disembodied, the expression unreadable, but the apparition somehow seemed comforting and vaguely familiar. The face hovered in mid-air before disappearing as quickly as it had appeared, and having departed Yvonne was left with a sense of overwhelming relief, like a heavy burden had been lifted, although what that burden was she was never to learn.

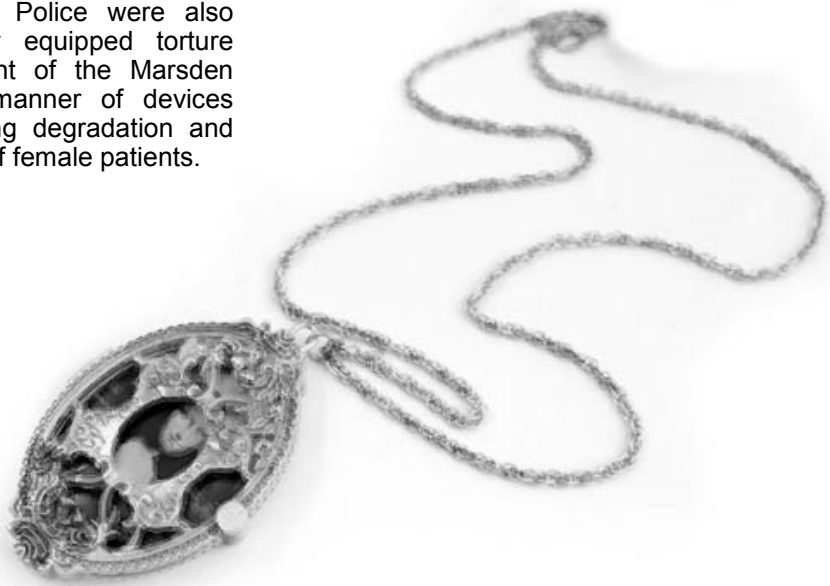
In the second dream she was walking down a white-sanded beach hand-in-hand with a three year old girl; on looking down at the girl's face she saw that it was Martha, and she was smiling broadly up at her mother. They continued walking together towards a golden horizon where the sun never threatened to set.

The inquest into the death of Dr Matt Jepson returned a verdict of "murder by person or persons unknown". The body had been discovered the next morning by his regular cleaner who, upon discovering what she later described as a "butcher's yard", ran screaming into the street and had later needed to be sedated by the doctor attending her at the local hospital. The police were baffled and frustrated by the lack of forensic evidence, although there was no lack of suspects. Of the twelve current female patients at the Marsden Clinic, ten reported actual or threatened sexual abuse by the institution's director. Over the course of subsequent investigations, eight more girls came forward to report sexual abuse carried out by Jepson spanning a period of just twelve months- the length of time the Marsden had been open. The police felt compelled to dig further back into Jepson's career; a very different picture began to emerge from the well-respected professional presented to the public. Police were also shocked to find a fully equipped torture chamber in the basement of the Marsden Clinic, replete with all manner of devices designed for the sickening degradation and horrific systematic abuse of female patients.

St. Anselm's asylum was completely bulldozed eight months later by a local authority concerned with the health and safety implications of leaving standing what remained of the ruined pile. Nobody except local historians mourned its passing. A new housing estate was built where the asylum had once stood; however several residents of those new houses reported disturbing paranormal occurrences including ghostly voices, screams, heated rooms suddenly turning cold, and the appearance of spectral figures.

Eliza Benson had wreaked her revenge and her spirit was at peace at last.

It was evident however that the hauntings would continue by those restless spirits whose desire for revenge *hadn't* been assuaged. Their numbers were many.

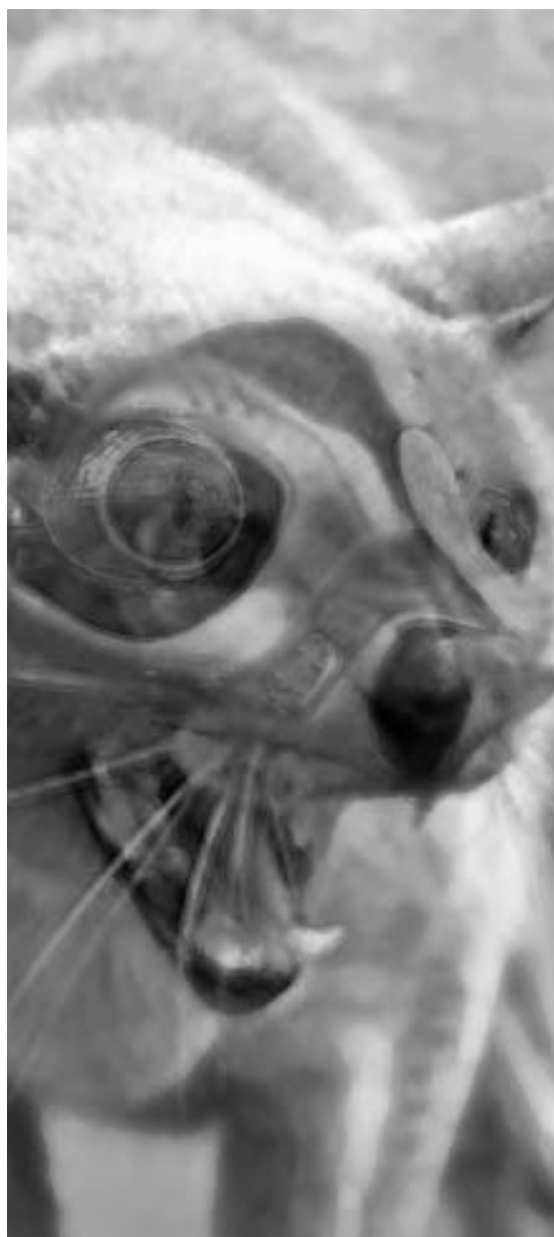


ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dave Ludford has long been a student of the weird, bizarre and unexplainable. Coupled with a love of horror, fantasy, crime and sci-fi he feels this is where his strengths as a writer lie. His ambition is to set the bar higher and write novellas and novels.

14 Days to Planetfall

by Daniel Rice



A large red button flashed on the console and a klaxon sounded, startling Callisto as she lounged on the captain's chair in the cockpit of the manned interstellar research vessel Artemis.

Callisto had been staring into space, gazing at stars through the massive viewport windows and dreaming feline fantasies of planets overrun with mice and rats and other rodents for her to kill at her leisure. But that was gone now, her blessed solitude destroyed – at least for the moment. She hoped, if she had a God she would have prayed, that soon this disturbance, whatever it might be, would pass and she could return to staring into the hypnotic blackness of space that was punctuated by stars' polychromatic light.

Just as the klaxon faded, Callisto heard the automatic door to the cockpit sweep open. Brutus she knew and the realization was accompanied by the requisite revulsion and disdain that only a genetically altered cat could have for a dog. Callisto leapt easily on to the headrest of the captain's chair and stared disdainfully down at the lumbering canine who greeted her with a grumpy growl that said, *watch yourself, cat, I just woke up.*

Brutus needn't have bothered with the warning. Callisto always treaded lightly around the stinking canine, who carried with him the stench of unwashed dog at the best of times. On the occasions that Brutus fell ill he stunk of vomit, defecation, and urine too. Having said that, his physical prowess could not be ignored, despite

being lazy, the dog was a good one hundred pounds of lean muscle and had a mouth that seemed impossibly large, full of razor sharp teeth that would make a shark, if such a thing were possible, blush.

Finally, the klaxon silenced, and the attractive female voice of the ship's computer came on. Callisto thought the computer's voice sounded as warm milk would sound if warm milk could talk.

"Fourteen days to planetfall. Cryogenic thawing process will begin in five days."

Callisto hissed in fury. When the humans woke her beautiful solitude would be shattered forever. They would want to talk to her, pet her, and, even worse, they would want to cuddle. The very anticipation made her stomach upset.

The captain's chair shook, startling Callisto. She extended titanium claws that easily sunk into the chair's plush headrest. The chair was being buffeted by Brutus's wagging tail. She hissed at the dog – a loud and clear stop! Brutus stopped wagging his tail and looked up at the cat. Their gazes met. She saw understanding in his brutal brown eyes. Of course the dog knew that the humans were going to wake and loved it. Brutus adored the humans more than anything in the universe. Sometimes he went for weeks, maybe even months, only leaving the cryogenic chamber to eat.

Disgusted Callisto leapt from the chair, retracting her claws in flight, to land easily on the floor. She crossed the five feet to the automatic door at a graceful swagger. At her approach, the door swept open with a soft whoosh. Callisto left the cockpit and the odoriferous dog behind.

Callisto strolled through the stark 50% gray hallways of the ship, occasionally pausing to watch a maintenance robot at work. She typically found the robots mildly annoying, but sometimes they were fun to play with. She might block their way or bat at a particularly small one with her paw until it angrily whined at her or she knocked it on its side. On one occasion, she extended her claws to strike a little robot that emitted a very annoying

humming sound. Her claws had destroyed the robot. She had found that exciting at the time, but later decided it was best not to kill all the robots or nothing would be around to clean up Brutus' bowel movements.

The thought of the humans fondling her was so distressing that Callisto desperately needed a warm saucer of milk and time to think. The milk would calm her. She navigated the labyrinthine hallways to the mess. A pathway between institutional chairs and tables led to the bar before the kitchen. Callisto effortlessly leapt onto the countertop and sauntered to a screen molded into the counter with the top of the screen slightly raised. A cord extended from the raised portion of the screen and passed through the counter.

On the screen, each in its own little box, were all Callisto's favorite culinary delights. She placed her paw on picture of steaming milk in a saucer. The picture highlighted for a moment then faded. Callisto removed her paw and sat on the counter to wait. From deep within the kitchen, rotors growled. Overhead claws started to move along a track suspended from the ceiling. Soon a claw came into view holding a metal basket. Callisto licked her nose in anticipation.

As the claw holding the basket neared, it was lowered by a stout metal cord. The side of the basket facing Callisto was a pair of metal doors that popped open to reveal a white saucer of steaming milk. The saucer slid from the basket onto the counter to come to rest at Callisto's feet. The claw retracted and the basket skimmed over the cat's head. Moments later the whirl of machinery faded to silence.

Callisto smelled the steaming milk. A delicious scent. She wanted to relax as the milk transported her back to her place of lovely, untroubled solitude. But it didn't. She still felt edgy and angry. She lapped the milk, which tasted ambrosial, but the experience that should be near ecstatic was not. How she hated the humans. Even asleep, they ruined her warm milk.

Callisto sauntered to the touchscreen, and looked over the options, selecting feral rat. The rodents could weigh up to twenty pounds and typically tried to put up a fight, but never a

very effective one. Overhead the track rumbled to life, and soon a claw appeared with a squealing rat dangling from it. As the claw neared, it opened and the rat fell to the counter. The rodent landed on all fours and stared at Callisto with black eyes. All its gray hairs stood up as the rodent squeaked and opened its mouth to reveal sharp pointy teeth. Callisto extended her titanium claws. With the swipe of her paw, so fast to be invisible to the human eye, Callisto decapitated the rat. The rodent's head flew from the body in a spray of blood. The blood landed on the counter near her paw. The head slammed against something in the kitchen with a satisfying thud. Now, Callisto thought, *that was relaxing*. She ordered another feral rat.

Soon a claw circled around with a large rat dangling from its metallic talons. Callisto waited with excited anticipation, watching the rat struggle and hoping that this one would put up a better fight. The claw opened and the rat plopped onto the counter. Instead of standing its ground with its hackles raised, the rat flung itself off the side of the counter into the kitchen.

Callisto hissed in annoyance. She leapt off the bar, landing lightly on the floor. The rat scurried away. In two long bounds Callisto had overtaken the rat and headed it off. She paused for only half a second to ensure that her claws were retracted before she struck the rat hard. The rodent was knocked through the air, slamming into the counter side. The rat fell to the floor in a dazed lump.

Callisto meandered toward her prey, now enjoying herself. The rodent had managed to get on all fours by the time she confronted it. By the glassy look in its eyes, she could tell the rat was still dazed. Lazily she stepped onto its long tail. The rodent squealed. *Torture is so relaxing*, Callisto thought just before the rat sunk its teeth into her paw.

Hissing, Callisto withdrew her smarting paw, and extended her titanium claws. She struck with all the speed and power of her genetically modified, cybernetic body. The blow tore the rat in half and left claw marks in the base of the counter behind the rat. From the corner of her eye, Callisto saw a flash followed by

sparks. Above, on the countertop, the soft drone of the monitor faded and went silent.

Callisto examined her handiwork, noticing that not only had she left scratch marks on the counter, her claws had severed a cord that ran down the counter side into the floor. Her gaze traveled upwards, following the cord's ascent up the counter. Near the top, the cord passed through the side of the counter and out of sight. Curious, Callisto jumped onto the bar, and noticed that the touchscreen was dark. She padded over to the screen and touched it lightly with a paw. It did not respond.

Callisto walked around the screen, carefully observing it. Along the backside she saw that the cord passed out of the counter and attached to the touchscreen. She walked to the edge of the bar and looked over the side. She saw the bloody corpse of the rat and the severed cord. A germ of an idea entered her feline mind. Although Callisto had no concept of electricity, she understood the need to feed in order to live. The cord had fed the screen, and cutting the cord had killed it she realized. The next logical leap was not so great a feat for her genetically altered cybernetic mind – the cryogenic tubes must have a cord or cords analogous to the cord that fed the touchscreen. Cut the cords to kill the tubes that kept the humans alive. Solitude was within her grasp if she could find the cord or cords that provided food to the cryogenic tubes within the next five days.

Callisto swaggered through the hallways with robots whizzing to and fro or working at access panels in the walls. The door to the cryogenic chamber opened with a soft whoosh and closed with the same sound after Callisto entered. A dozen egg shaped cryogenic tubes were arrayed into a half moon in a large circular room. To the right of the entrance Brutus lounged on the floor before a door. He often lazed on that spot, either asleep or near sleep. Callisto had no idea why the dog always positioned himself in front of that door, but she knew that if she approached the door while he was on watch, he would warn her to stay back or else. Why he was so protective of the door, Callisto did not know. It was one of the few locked doors on the ship, and the cat had never determined a way to unlock it.

As Callisto examined the tubes, looking for stray cords, Brutus watched her with lazy eyes. If Callisto had been less intent on inspecting the tubes, she may have noticed that in reality the dog watched her with keen interest. The cat though was too wound up in her search to notice, and her building frustration further distracted her. There was not a single cord visible in the room.

Callisto leapt on top of one of the tubes. The rounded sides were smooth and slick. She had to scramble to keep from sliding off until she had the wherewithal to extend her titanium claws to her regain her balance. The face of a young female human was visible behind a translucent surface. *How I despise you. All of you*, Callisto thought.

Callisto knew that her genes had been sliced, diced, and spliced by human scientists. The same was true for Brutus, although she doubted that the brute knew that the humans had created him in a laboratory. What the cat did not know was that part and parcel to her brain were tiny wafers, microchips infinitesimally small, that augmented memory and abstract thinking capability. If she was aware that she was a cyborg, as much a machine as a cat, Callisto may have wondered if it were errors in her programming, bugs in the millions of lines of code, that made her hate humans so and yearn for solitude with such fiery passion. But, such an existential crisis was not hers to have.

Callisto became aware that she was being watched just before Brutus growled at her. It was a growl that said, *get the hell off the human*. Staring at the cat with obvious displeasure, the canine tramped around the cryogenic tube. In response, Callisto spat, *make me*.

Watching Brutus from her vantage made her realize that from the top of the tube she had a new perspective on the room. Scanning the room, she looked for anything out of the ordinary, something that interrupted the continuous 50% gray of the floor, walls, and ceiling. Then she spotted it along the wall, several inches up off the floor, an access panel – the kind that the maintenance robots used to enter the insides of the ship. Maybe

the life cord was hidden behind the panel, like the intestines of a rat.

Jumping to the floor, Callisto made a beeline for the door, her mind already working out how to induce a maintenance robot to open the access panel. Before the door Brutus intercepted her and uttered a guttural growl. Callisto looked at his brutish face with mild irritation, wondering why in the universe the dog would want to delay her. Curling his upper lip, Brutus revealed his teeth, fangs really, that could rend flesh and even steel with ease. The display gave Callisto pause – the dog could easily kill her given half a chance.

As soon as the door whooshed shut behind her and it was apparent that Brutus did not follow, Callisto resumed her usual slow swagger through the hallway. The soft whirs and whirls of robots at work led the cat to a hallway where half a dozen robots of varying sizes removed a particularly large access panel that started at the floor and ended about half way up the wall. Once the panel was removed, a small robot no larger than Callisto disappeared through the opening.

Curious, Callisto approached the group of robots. Through the forest of tracks and shiny steel bodies, the cat saw the opening in the wall. Inside the opening were wires, tubes, and blinking lights. Just as she suspected, the cords that brought life to the cryogenic tubes were behind the walls, like how the intestines of a rat were behind a layer of skin.

If she could speak, Callisto may have attempted to order one of the robots to accompany her to the cryogenic chamber. Instead she was reduced to herding, a task she hated as it was far beneath her, a task she knew right down to her marrow was suited for dogs. She, however, valued her solitude more than her dignity, and thusly chose a medium-sized robot, half again larger than herself, to wrangle.

Corralling the robot was an undertaking easier considered than accomplished. As she attempted to separate the robot from the group, it buzzed at her with what could be interpreted as vexation. The robot went so far as to swipe at Callisto with a drill clenched in a claw. The cat dodged the blow. Without

extending her claws, Callisto struck the side of the robot as hard as she could.

Pain shot through her paw and up her leg. She hobbled away from the robots, holding her aching leg to her side. The robot rocked on its tracks. With a diminutive buzz, it broke off from the group, and motored over to Callisto, stopping beside her to wait for further instructions.

Gingerly, Callisto placed her injured paw onto the floor and tested her weight on it. Her paw and leg were sore, and ordinarily she would rest for a day or two until fully recovered, but she had a mission to accomplish and nothing would deter her. She would protect her solitude or die trying. She set off with a distinct limp in her step down the hallway toward the cryogenic chamber, pausing every few strides to glance over her shoulder to make sure the robot followed.

The door to the cryogenic chamber whooshed open. Callisto entered followed by the robot. To their right before the mysterious door lounged Brutus, breathing deeply, almost asleep. His tired eyes watched Callisto and the robot for a brief moment before his eyelids slid shut.

Callisto led the robot through the chamber to the access panel. She placed a paw on the panel and tapped it twice. The robot took the meaning and motored to the panel. With a triumphant purr, the cat sat back on her haunches and watched the robot use the drill to remove the small screws that held the access panel in place. As each screw was removed the robot carefully caught them in a small cup held in one of its three claws.

Callisto nervously glanced to where Brutus lay before the locked door. She couldn't see him since the cryogenic tubes obstructed her view. But she looked anyway, convinced that the whine of the drill would wake the dog. She did not need him interfering now that she was so close to her goal. Her nerves proved false as she did not see the dog nor hear him stir.

The final screw clinked into the cup, and the robot used its third arm to carefully remove the panel. The metal panel was remarkably thin, and the robot easily lifted it into the air. From

beyond the opening in the wall emanated the soft humming that also permeated the cryogenic chamber. Callisto suspected that the humans, and perhaps even Brutus, could not hear the humming, at least when the panel was in place.

Hesitantly, Callisto approached the access hatch, and looked inside. The humming was even louder. Immediately before her were multicolored wires of various diameters tightly woven together. When she looked to the left and to the right, she saw that the wires continued in either direction into the darkness. Waiting until her eyes adjusted to the dimness, she could see that the wires continued on at least the length of the wall in either direction. There was enough room for Callisto to slip into the innards of the ship, but not enough room for the robot to roll inside.

Callisto lifted her paw over the lip of the access panel, but stopped short of entering the ship's guts. She was well aware of the human saying, curiosity killed the cat. A sixth sense told her that rummaging around in the intestines of the ship was dangerous. The feeling made the hair along the back of her neck and shoulders stand up straight. She reminded herself that freedom from the humans' pathetic mewling and petting and cuddling was worth risking her life. Better dead than an object of human affection.

With a deep breath, Callisto limped into the bowels of the ship. Amongst the wires she paused, listening to the humming to determine from which direction it was loudest. From her experiences in the kitchen, she deduced that wherever the humming was the loudest must be the umbilical cord or cords that gave life to the cryogenic tubes and in turn the humans.

After several minutes of careful listening, Callisto determined that the humming came from her left. As she limped toward the sound her injured leg began to throb. She had obviously struck the robot harder than she should have, but now was no time to rest as she would have ample time to recover once the humans were dead.

The further she went, the less space she had to maneuver, and soon she was crawling along with the tightly coiled wire that grew

wider as she went pressing down against her spine. Callisto wondered if she would become stuck and digested by the ship, her bones removed in time by one of the small maintenance robots that she terrorized. Panic welled up inside her, starting in her abdomen with a queasy feeling. Quickly, the panic spread throughout her body, and her legs refused to drag and push her forward. The path before her seemed so narrow that it was an impossibility for her to continue. The buzzing and humming of the wires were a repressive drone that drowned out all other sounds. She needed to retreat, to escape the ship's innards now.

Solitude. Better dead than to live with the humans awake, Callisto reminded herself. Instead of retreating, she extended her titanium claws and continued to drag and push herself forward, leaving grooves in the floor beneath her. Just when she thought she could go no further, that the path was truly too narrow, the coiled wire pressing down on her spine started to ascend. Soon she was able to limp along on her paws. Ahead she saw flashing red, green, and blue LEDs that were embedded in a wall.

The tightly coiled wires appeared to pass through the wall several feet above her. Behind the bundle of wire, Callisto glimpsed a thick white cord much like the cord that gave life to the screen in the mess, only many times larger. She stared at the cord for a long time and listened to the humming. That cord must feed the cryogenic tubes that in turn fed the sleeping humans. Callisto leapt, extending her claws and swiping at the cords above, but her leap was pitiful, made so by sharp pain shooting through her injured leg. Landing awkwardly, the injured leg slipped out from under the cat, and she collapsed onto her shoulder. Hissing in both anger and pain, Callisto forced herself up onto her paws.

Callisto jumped again and again, each time failing to gain purchase on the bundle and causing herself more pain until her injured leg was numb. On the ninth leap, a single claw on Callisto's good forepaw caught the bundle of wires. Swinging her injured leg upward she sunk her claws into the wires. She worked her good paw until her claws sunk deep into the

bundle and she was held steady. *Nine lives,* the cat thought bitterly.

Swinging her lower body upwards, Callisto sunk the claws of her hind legs into the wires. She removed her good forepaw, and began to swipe at the multicolored wires between her and the thick white cord. Occasionally, sparks flew as her titanium claws sliced through the wires like a white hot plasma torch through aluminum.

Finally, the umbilical cord was exposed, and Callisto gouged her claws into it. A flash blinded her, followed by intense pain that made every nanometer of her body quaver. She was dimly aware that she was falling, and smelled burnt hair and flesh. When her body struck the floor, Callisto passed out.

When Callisto came to, she heard an alarm and the computer. The droning of the alarm made her head hurt, and she could not understand the computer. The stench of singed hair and scorched flesh filled her nose. Callisto determined that the smell was from her own burnt hair and flesh. Her right foreleg and paw were a patchwork of black spots and angry red welts. Since the shock of the injury hadn't killed her, she assumed that she would live.

Callisto attempted to stand, and was rewarded by searing pain in her right leg. She collapsed onto her chest, uttering an undignified whine. With animalistic determination, she dragged herself towards the access panel with her left paw and pushed herself with her hind legs. The pain from her burned leg overshadowed any discomfort she felt from her sprained left leg. By the time she reached the panel, Callisto was physically and mentally exhausted. She lay there gazing into the cryogenic chamber. The alarm was very loud, a rhythmic blaring.

"Emergency. Emergency. Main power to the cryogenic tubes severed," the computer repeated over and over again.

There was another sound, a distressed crying, that Callisto immediately associated with Brutus. Everything appeared to be proceeding as planned, and Callisto triumphantly dragged

herself out of the ship's innards and flopped to the floor.

"Backup power online," the computer said.

Following the announcement, the sound of the klaxon faded, not silencing altogether, but much quieter than before, and the distinctive hum resumed. This was not what Callisto expected. How could humans die if there tubes were still being fed? Even worse, a tube slowly rose from the floor until it was approximately upright. The tube cracked open with a hiss of air. Steam escaped from the tube.

Callisto felt like she just got punched in the throat. She could barely breathe. It was as if the floor was collapsing underneath her. Her wonderful, beautiful, perfect solitude, the solitude she had fought so hard to defend, was doomed. The wounds she had sustained were for nothing.

"Emergency stimulation of Captain Jones," the computer said.

More steam escaped from the cryogenic tube. Callisto heard a loud gasp – a human sound come from the tube. Moments later the egg cracked open further and a hand reached out through the mist. *No*, Callisto thought, *this can't be possible*.

Captain Jones stumbled out of the tube. He looked ready to tumble to the floor, but Brutus was there, allowing the man to rest a hand on his brawny shoulders. Callisto hissed in frustration, hoping that the captain might be overcome by – she didn't know – something. Her wishing was to no avail, and after several minutes the captain seemed to have regained his balance and his faculties.

"Thank you, Brutus," Jones muttered to the dog. In response the beast wagged his tail at such a speed it was a blur. Only Callisto's feline neatness kept her from vomiting at the disgusting sight.

The captain strode to the mysterious door with Brutus at his side. The door opened for the captain and he entered. The door remained open to allow Callisto a glance inside. A room with a glowing wall-sized screen. Fascinated she limped forward. Maybe, just maybe, there was something inside that room she could destroy that would end the humans once and for all. She was so focused on gaining entrance to the room, that she did not notice Brutus standing watch just to the side of the doorway. The dog gazed at her with his savage eyes and growled a warning, *stay back or die*.

Ordinarily, Callisto would have heeded the warning, but she was so consumed by pain, so focused on driving her injured body forward, that she did not even register the growl.

Solitude, she kept repeating to herself, *beautiful solitude*.

Callisto was nearly to the threshold when Brutus loomed over her, his mouth open impossibly wide to reveal row upon row of razor-sharp teeth that snapped shut over her head, slicing through flesh and sinew, and crunching bones.

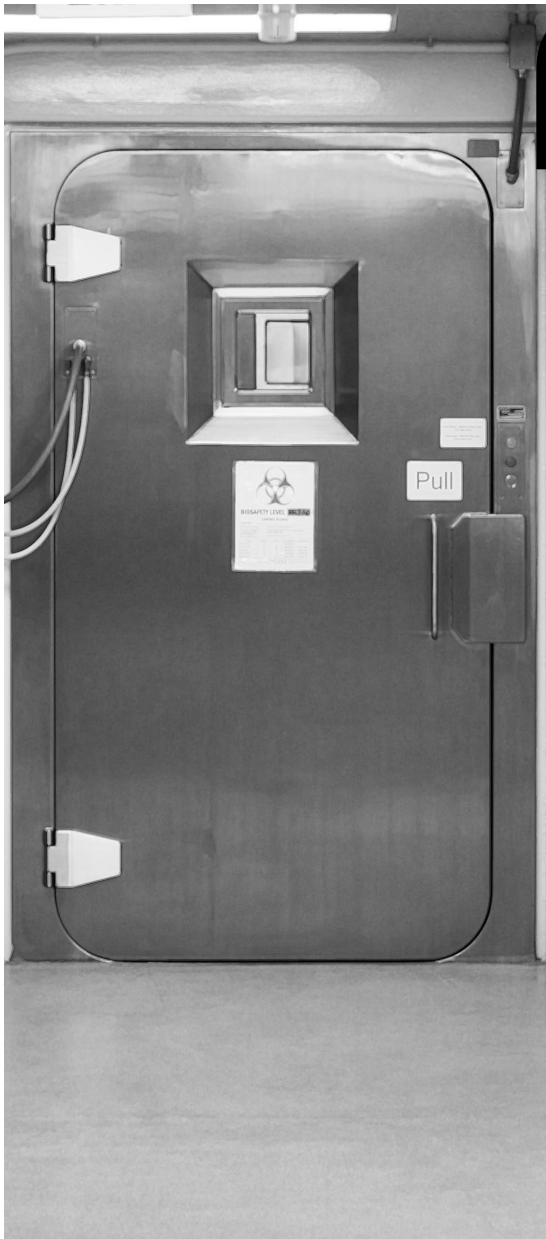
Oops.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dan Rice is a writer of speculative fiction. When he is not changing diapers or entertaining a pre-schooler, he writes, edits and rewrites. You can follow him on Twitter, @DanRiceWrites.

PROPER DOCUMENTATION

by Luke E. Dodd



Andre's late again. I arrive just before 8, up-ending the dregs of my coffee before I wave my key card and enter the outer lab.

By 8:05 the centrifuge is giving off a warm hum, and power-switches are aglow on the blocks of metal and plastic lining the bench space of the inner lab. I swear, I don't know what makes it so hard for someone to be at work on time. 20 minutes to shower and dress, 10 to get out the door, 17 to commute, 8 to walk from parking to lab. $20 + 10 + 17 + 8 = 55$. That's not rocket science. You want to be at work at 8? Wake up at 7. You even have 5 minutes to spare.

Somehow, somehow, Andre is balancing coffee, a doughnut, his cell phone, and his key card, all as he walks in. I'm at one of the desktops, plodding along on data entry. I check my cell phone; it reads 8:27. I drop it back beside the keyboard. I save my file and I'm rising to my feet when Andre slumps into the adjacent swivel chair. He ceremoniously dumps his chaos onto the lab bench, and sloshes a bit of coffee out the hole of the plastic lid on his Styrofoam cup. We're not supposed to be eating or drinking in here... Who knows what reagents I've watched this guy inhale since my advisor hired him last fall. In between bits of doughnut, Andre shares the following: 1) he had such a busy morning, 2) he is having a bitchin' fun summer, and 3) his "roomie" is having all the other grad students over for "beers 'n board games" tomorrow night. He says, "Nothing like a Friday night soiree, right man?" I barely contain my enthusiasm.

We're finally getting to the end of our first batch of

inoculations when I hear Andre mutter “shit” after a sharp intake of breath. I have my ear buds in, but the playlist’s just wrapped up. I don’t think Andre wants me to hear him, so I keep my eyes on the row of plastic tubes in front of me. I’m praying he hasn’t lost another mouse in the lab. Out of the corner of my eye I see that somehow he’s stuck himself with the syringe instead of the little white mouse. I turn to reprimand him, but he’s already stripping off his disposable gloves and making towards the door.

“I’ll, uh, be right back... ‘Tis but a flesh wound,” he says. I don’t laugh, it’s not a laughing matter. But just as he reaches the door, he drops to the floor and starts convulsing.

I’ve never known Andre to have a seizure. “Are you okay?” I ask, kneeling at his side. He’s all tangled in his lab coat. I tug it away from him as I scoot him towards open floor space so he doesn’t hit his head. Andre looks to me with panic in his eyes.

“My hand... It’s burning like hell.” He forces the words through a cage of teeth. The muscles in his neck are taut. I think of the length of a hangman’s noose, moments after the trapdoor gives way.

I re-focus, asking, “Has this happened before?” But Andre can’t respond. At this point he’s as rigid as a wooden plank and his lips are pulled wide and tight in disconcerting mix of smile and grimace. It’s my turn to mutter “shit.” I bound out the lab door and reach the lab telephone sitting by the desktop computers in the next room.

The campus EMS number is emblazoned on an orange sticker stuck to the cradle of the archaic landline. I rattle off our street address

to the dispatcher, and try to explain that Andre’s having some sort of seizure. That’s the point when I hear a rending behind me, like gristle giving way as you twist apart a wing of fried chicken. The handset of the landline clatters to the tile floor when I look over my shoulder.

Andre’s on his hands and knees. Ropey bits of drool hang and sway from his mouth. The back of his muted polo shirt is misshapen. It looks like he may have a couple grapefruit hidden under it.

“Help,” Andre moans in a pleading tone, and reaches out to me.

I measure the distance between myself and Andre. I’m close, but not close enough to take his hand. My smart phone is lying right there by the computer’s keyboard. Andre lies at the long end of this triangle. I inch forward. While I can see the slight quiver of Andre’s back, I swear those grapefruits under his shirt are seething. I snag my phone, and pull back from Andre’s outstretched hand. I have no idea how long the paramedics will take, but I have to capture this. I tap the touchscreen on my phone, bring up the camera app, and start recording. Andre’s still trying to reach for me, even as he’s wracked with another convulsion. But he can’t win that fight. He falls to his side, his body pulling inward to the fetal position. The curl of his arms and legs make me think more of a dead spider, though.

I can hear the siren’s wail outside of the building. They have to make it up a flight of stairs. I have to make these next few seconds count. I slowly circle Andre. He’s begun to reach for me again. His hand weakly grabs at my pants leg as I step over him. I focus the camera lens on that palsied appendage. Dark bristles are forcing their way out through the pores up of Andre’s skin, causing little droplets of blood to well up all over the back of his arm.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Luke E. Dodd is a scientist, devourer of music, and collector of hobbies. He lives in Kentucky with his wife and son.

THE CASTLE

By Torin Wake



He shivered as another gust blew, the cold slicing through his furs and cloak.

The frail man walked on through the snow, searching for any sign of

shelter. Slowly, the trees surrounding him grew less dense, and he emerged from the deep woods he had been traveling. In the distance, he could make out a large stone structure, presumably an old keep or castle. He headed in that direction with all haste, or as much haste as his old bum knee would permit. Finally he reached the outer wall of the ruined fortress. Moving along the wall, he found the gate smashed apart, the fallen wood rotting in the snow. He gingerly stepped over the wreckage, taking care to keep weight off of his bad leg. Once past the wall, he saw the large double doors to the castle, still standing and intact. He hobbled across the yard, and pushed the huge doors open, bracing all his weight into the iron studded wood. Finally the rusted hinges gave a loud squeal as he pushed the doors open. The old man closed them once inside, and took a look at the ruined stone edifice around him.

The great hall was straight ahead, and doors lay on either side of him, leading to the numerous other rooms of the keep. Everything within the castle was a dull gray; the shadows had long overtaken the firelight of the torches, some still in the sconces along the wall. An old wooden bench sat along the wall to his right, broken in half and forgotten. Finally safe from the cold, the weary man pulled back his hood to reveal an old wrinkled

face, lined by a ragged white beard. Where his hair once sat, only a wrinkled scalp remained, with a few wisps of hair above his ears. The man had seen his sixty-seventh winter now, and age was taking its toll on not only his body, but his mind. Try as he might, he found himself forgetting things very often, even his own name. His childhood before the war was very foggy; he had lost nearly all recollection. But he did remember that he needed to be warm, so he took the door on his left, leaving the cold and drafty great hall behind.

He slowly paced down the corridor as it snaked along the outside of the castle until finally he came upon a room. A large fireplace nestled in the wall to his left, but it looked as if a fire had not roared within for years. A tattered carpet covered the floor, faded reds and yellows in a circular pattern adorned the fabric. Soon the old man's mind began to wander, and the room seemed to open before him. Where the faded greys and blacks once shrouded the old castle, color took its place. The hearth glowed a fierce orange-crimson as it bathed the rest of the small room in a warm glow. The pile of rotted wood in the corner took the shape of a rocking chair, with a young mother sitting upon it, slowly rocking as she knitted. She looked to the center of the room and smiled. The old man, still unsure of what was happening around him, looked from her eyes to the center of the room to see two young boys, perhaps two years old, sitting on the bright carpet, wrestling playfully. The man only stared incredulously at the scene before him, until he took one step towards the boys, his arm reaching out to them. The moment his foot touched the ground before him, the image vanished along with the warmth of the hearthfire, and the cold and dark greys of the ruins returned. He stood there for a moment, rubbing his eyes and massaging his temples.

"Careful, now. Don't be going all crazy yet," he murmured as he looked about the room once more. Gathering himself once more, he continued through the room to another corridor that led up a flight of stairs. The ascent was slow and painful, his knee creaking with every step he took. Finally he reached another room, this one large and more open, containing a dirty window overlooking the courtyard. As he peered through the glass, the castle came to life once more. The snow on the ground

disappeared, leaving the dirt of the yard behind. The fallen stable across from the courtyard filled with horses, whinnying and tossing their heads. In the center, two boys the man supposed were nearly sixteen, sparred with blunted swords and shields. A large and burly man with thick eyebrows and a dark beard watched them closely, barking out instruction as they traded blows. As the old man watched the blunted swords knocked against the wood of their opponent's shield, he sighed.

"Poor boys. They still think battle is all a game." The old man said to no one but himself. His memory flashed to the war. The War of Seven Years, the scholars had taken to calling it. His mind was so clouded that he struggled to even remember which side he had fought on. And all memory preceding the conflict had left him long ago, but he did remember the evils of war; those memories would haunt him still. He remembered arriving in the camp with the other common soldiers, excited and eager to spill blood and win glory; but his first battle, and every battle that followed, was anything but glorious. The men were packed together, almost shoulder to shoulder in the front lines as they marched towards the enemy. When the armies clashed, all semblance of order departed, and the horrors of war were revealed to the green recruits. Men and horses died everywhere. Smoke and chaos galloped erratically among the men in the field. He was too paralyzed with fear to even think about killing his enemies, until a screaming soldier in the enemy colors ran towards him, shouting and swinging his sword. He panicked and fell onto his back, his spear falling to the ground beside him. The enemy charged towards him. He raised his spear just in time, turning away from the soldier as he braced against the ground. The unfortunate enemy ran right into his spear, the blade taking him in the belly. The jolt opened the attacker's eyes, and he watched in horror as the dead enemy soldier slowly slid down the shaft of the spear until the body rested on top of him, blood slowly pooling on his hands and chest. He looked in horror at the corpse impaled on his spear, blood and a foul stench quickly surrounding him. He did not know how long he lay there beneath the dead man, but eventually he rose, leaving his spear in the corpse's belly. As he looked around, the battle

seemed to have not even taken notice of his absence. A man grabbed his arm as he ran by, shouting some command as he tried to rally the soldiers in the field. He fell into line, and soon seven of them stood together, fighting off enemies on all sides. He heard a loud thunderous noise behind him, and turned in time to see what he first took to be a demon in steel. The knight and horse galloped right into the group, the knight's long blade swooping down to take the head off the man beside him as another was trampled by the monstrous steed. What little order that had clawed its way onto the field was broken as the steel-clad enemy galloped by once more, taking off the arm of another man. The young soldier ran as fast as he could from the armored demon that lay waste to his comrades.

The old man shuddered as the memory fled as quickly as it had come, his eyes closing for a moment as he shook the horrors from his mind. When he looked up, the yard was covered in snow once more, the boys gone and the stable long forgotten. He shivered as the wind blew into the room through a crack in the window, and he pulled his cloak closer about him. He turned from the window and moved on to the next room in the corridor. This room was nearly empty, save for what appeared to be the remnants of a bed and a few faded paintings on the walls. He turned and went back the way he came, gingerly heading back down the steps, until he came back to the entrance hall of the castle. This time he took the second door, pulling the wooden portal shut behind him. He found himself in the castle's kitchens; stone benches and large ovens still lined the walls, even though no food had been there for years. The cobwebs and dust that sat in the corners of the kitchen were a dull grey, semi-shrouded in shadow, multiplying in the silence. The only light shone through a few holes where the stone had crumbled away, letting in beams of brightness from outside. As he scanned the room, his eyes passed a large oven, and the room's old familiar color came rushing back once more. Sweet smells filled the air, and cooks and servants hurried about busily, preparing for some meal. The large, bald man chopping vegetables barked out orders to the rest of the staff. At least, his mouth opened; the old man could not hear any of the scene

unfolding before him. With the cook's back turned, the cakes sitting behind him were left unguarded. The old man saw a small child sneak in through the door across the room, ducking behind barrels full of vegetables and creeping along towards the cakes. The old man chuckled as he realized what the boy was up to, and watched the mischievous rascal take a cake in each hand, and stuff one into his mouth before rushing towards the door he had entered from. As the child passed by a servant, he bumped the poor woman enough to send the pot she was holding flying from her grasp to crash to the kitchen floor. The cook spun about and seeing the boy, shouted something and chased after him, cleaver raised. The boy shook with laughter, his mouth stuffed with cake as he dashed through the door.

"Sneaky little thief." The old man muttered with a laugh. "Thief....." He slowly repeated under his breath. His broken mind took him from the castle once more, to the time following the War of Seven Years. During his last battle, he had fled the battlefield and deserted the army. In the seven years he had fought, he had won no glory, only scars and an arrow in his knee. He could not fight another battle; war was nothing like he had dreamt it would be. He deserted the battlefield, escaping into the wilderness. Once he knew he would not be pursued, he found a small village where he could settle down. He knew he could not return home as a deserter, and now he could not return home even if he wanted to, the memory of that place had long since fled his mind. The village life was peaceful enough; anything was peaceful enough after seven years of war. With his bad knee, moving about often was a strain on him, and he was forced to live most of his life within his cottage. The townspeople took to him kindly enough, bringing him food and stopping to sup with him occasionally. Life was slow, normal, and he was content for a time. One night a thief broke into his home, thinking to take the man unawares. He had awoken as the thief was creeping through his den. Rising with a speed and vigor he hadn't known since his youth, he attacked the bandit, knocking him to the ground. Standing over the defenceless man, sword in hand, he watched as the caught thief begged for his life, but wild images of war raced through the man's head, and he let out

a feral shout as he plunged the blade into the thief's chest. He sat back on the floor, his bad knee throbbing, staring at the cooling body of the defenceless man he had just slain. The memory then faded as quickly as it had come, the cruel trick age plays on memories taking its toll.

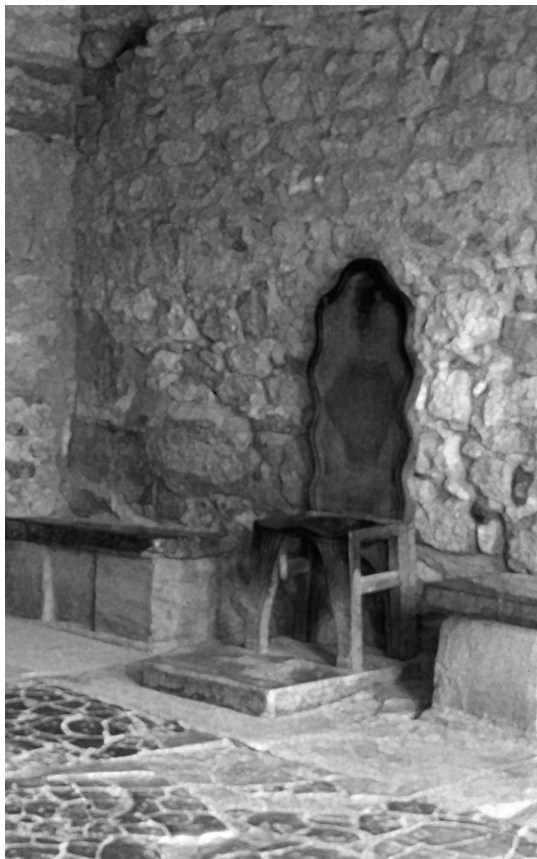
The kitchen was once again cold and abandoned; no warm smells wafted from the ovens, and no fat cook chased a small boy with cakes. A draft blew in from the broken bricks, chilling the man to his bones. The frail and weathered man slowly walked through the kitchen, to ascend a short flight of stairs. He came to room that appeared to house a small altar. The two steps leading to the five square foot landing before the shrine were broken and cracked, the stone gone to ruin over the years. His weary and beady eyes scanned the small room slowly, taking in every torn tapestry, every cobweb, and every crack in the stone brick walls. As his gaze reached the platform in front of the shrine, it lingered there for a moment before color swept over the room, the tapestries bloomed with the bright colors they had been woven with, and the whole room was bathed in warm torchlight. A pair of figures stood on the platform: a boy, appearing to be near seventeen with light beard growing in on his cheeks, and an old woman, her hands on the young man's shoulders. The old man squinted to try to discern what they were saying. He could clearly tell that the woman was upset; tears ran down her cheeks and she sobbed as she spoke. A spark of emotion and sympathy crossed the old man's wrinkled features as he watched her sob. The young man stood emotionless, one hand on his mother's shoulder, the other resting on the pommel of a sword strapped to his hip. The old man's eyes widened a bit and he leaned against the wall beside him as he put together what was happening before him. The young man wanted to go off to war. The old man shook his head.

"Young fool. Rushing off to his grave," he whispered to himself as he watched the boy's mother cry. He tried to remember leaving his home, but could not; his mind had long forgotten all details of his home. Try as he might, he could not remember leaving for war. He remembered his first battle vividly, and he had been hardly older than the boy he saw at the altar. His brow furrowed in frustration as

he groped for the memories that age had stolen from him. He sighed and stepped into the room, the image before him vanishing as his foot touched the stone; the cold and grey returned instantly and abruptly.

He went back the way he had come, winding back through the dusty kitchens and back to the entrance hall. He laboured for breath as his strength began to fade. He slumped against the large double wooden doors that led back outside. He closed his eyes and rested for a few moments, grateful for the reprieve. Once he had gathered his strength, he looked to the great hall before him, tall and empty. He struggled to his feet, pain arcing through his knee as his weight uncomfortably shifted to the injured leg. Finally upright, he hobbled into the great hall. As he looked around him, he saw that nearly all of the long tables still stood in their places, benches on either side. A few assorted pewter cups and bowls still sat on the tables, cracked and dusty. The long rug that ran from the entrance to the throne was frayed at the edges, the once rich color faded and somehow greyer than anything else. He looked straight before him, and saw the great throne at the head of the hall. The arms were carved mahogany, and the back was adorned with some animal's likeness, the sigil of whatever family had once ruled here. But now the ornately backed chair sat at the head of the room, broken and dusty, just like the rest of the castle.

All at once the hall came to life; the greys retreating as warm orange torchlight bathed the entire area in a soft glow. Men sat along the benches, laughing and drinking among friends as they enjoyed the feast. Mirth and laughter seemed to radiate from the hall as the procession went on, servants bringing out course after course. The old man looked up at the throne, and saw a man sitting upon it. The king was laughing in a loud booming tone, his large warrior's frame bouncing softly as he did. The king's beard and moustache were charcoal black, the same color as his hair. While strong and large framed, the king had a certain warmth and kindness about him that was revealed in the way he smiled and laughed with his subjects. The infectious laugh of the king brought a smile to the old man's face, but a movement to his left caught his eye. He turned to see a young boy with a mop



of brown hair climbing off the bench where he sat. When the child stood, his head barely reached the shoulders of the men sitting at the bench. The boy's features were plain and happy; a large smile and the happy spark of youth were apparent on his face. Seeing such a child, the old man could not help but smile as well. The old man watched as the boy hurriedly rushed down the bench until he

reached the aisle and stood right in front of the old man. The child looked up at him, still grinning widely. The old man looked curiously at the boy. He knew it was but an image, but the boy seemed to see him as well as he saw the rest of the hall. The young child turned and walked down the hall to towards the throne. The old man followed behind curiously, as a strange feeling of inner warmth he had not known in years washed over him. He hesitantly walked onwards, following the steps of the boy as he slowly led the old man to the throne. To his surprise, the image of the feast did not disappear when he moved to follow the child, and he hobbled along past the long benches of men, still cheering and enjoying the celebration. As the old man walked, he peered at the young boy in front of him.

"He can't be more than four." The old man muttered softly as he walked. The boy did look familiar, but no matter how hard he tried, his mind was too clouded to place him. Finally the boy reached the throne and knelt before the king. The old man, tired and exhausted from the walk, gingerly knelt beside the boy at the foot of the throne, closing his eyes as he did.

"Darius, come have a seat," the king warmly invited. The old man's eyes widened at the sound of an audible voice as a sea of memories came flowing back to his clouded mind. All the memories time and war had stolen from him flooded back to his consciousness. When he looked up the scene was gone, and the cold grey ruined castle sat as it had for years. The weary son rose and sat on the throne. Darius was finally home..

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Torin Wake is the pseudonym for a young writer. Torin grew up in rural Illinois and many of the landscapes and settings in his stories are infused with the natural wonder of his childhood. He is currently attending Southern Illinois University where he is studying English and creative writing, and is also a member of the men's Track and Field team where he competes in the decathlon. His future hopes include publishing novels and novellas as well as writing plots for video games. He enjoys reading and writing fantasy in his spare time, and some of his many inspirations include George R. R. Martin, R. A. Salvatore and J. R. R. Tolkien. More of his work can be found on his personal blog at www.torinwake.com

BLOOD WILL OUT

By Ed Ahern



Elizabeth stared down at him. Prince Hendrick was no shorter than the average noble of the time, but his eyes levelled at her décolletage.

He was the latest in a series of suitors who had met Elizabeth and left her unwed. Hendrick's rehearsed speech abandoned him. "Ah, Princess Elizabeth, it is my great honor to stare into your eyes. The reports of your-beauty have preceded our meeting. We, er, I hope that we may become good friends and share many things, uhm activities, together." The rest of his speech was lost in tongue tangle and he abruptly concluded. "I thank you again for welcoming me."

The couple stood side by side in the great hall. King Albert, Elizabeth's father, was seated on a raised throne behind them. Of two hundred courtiers his was the only head higher than Elizabeth's.

Her stomach wrung with the image of how absurd they looked together. Hendrick would never want to appear in public with her- a prince stunted by his consort. She knew he wouldn't accept the dowry that her father offered. She knew that, like all the others, Hendrick would coat her in polite words and depart untrothed.

Her eyes moistened, but she stood as a princess should- erect, regal and demurely smiling. The assembly half-smiled back. A smirk at the head-over-head disparity would be bad form. Only her crone of an aunt, Hesper, beamed at her, as if the disproportioned couple were a source of joy. Her brute of a son stood next to her. Elizabeth wished for one of Hesper's spells so she could disappear.

The next day her father-king summoned her to his study.

"Elizabeth, Hendrick has declined our offer."

"Not a surprise, father. You'll have to find me a troll and send me off into the woods to rut with him."

King Albert didn't laugh. "My beautiful Lizbeth, I so wanted it to be you who first presented me with heirs, rather than your younger sisters. But you're three and twenty now, almost too old to begin bearing children."

"Twenty-three isn't so old."

"Your mother birthed you at fourteen. Your sisters whelped two pups each before they were nineteen. Apart from your tallness, few suitors want to wed so old a woman. We have to plan your future."

Elizabeth had worried for several years about this conversation. She was a royal without a function, and her disposal could only be unpleasant.

"Father, you've let me learn to read, perhaps I could become a scribe?"

Albert waved his hand in distaste. "You're of noble birth, not some functionary."

"If I'd paid some vainglorious knight to marry you, you'd be his noble mascot. If I'd let you stay in the castle you'd become an object of scorn and a blight on our name. Would that you were still my little girl."

"Father, I can't help what I am, but don't hinder me from becoming what I can be."

The king sighed. "Your sisters have birthed sons. In the end I decided that it's best for you go to a convent. I'll instruct the sisters that they are to allow you books and writing materials."

"That's not lodging, that's imprisonment! And I have no beliefs to make it bearable."

"Do you have an acceptable alternative?"

"This is so sudden, father. Give me time to consider."

"A week. Thereafter I'll arrange for you to move out of your apartments and leave the castle. I'm sorry, Lizbeth."

Elizabeth dismissed her ladies-in-waiting and walked out of the castle's main gate and into a wooded copse that adjoined the castle. She followed a game trail to a small, rocky brook and sat on its bank.

She started to cry, then shook herself in anger. Be damned with them all, she thought. I can't help that I'm not like those flouncing midget sisters of mine. I want...what do I want? Love is impossible. I want a life with growth and learning, full of excitement and risk.

Hesper stepped out from behind an oak tree as if she'd been waiting for this moment. "Deciding time, eh princess?"

The outlines of the crone shimmered in the dappled woodland light.

"Aunt Hesper. You really are a witch, sneaking up like that."

"Now child. I know you don't like me. No one does. But I have a proposal for you."

"So does my father, and it's a lovingly given curse."

Hesper cackled. "Your life has shattered like gold-painted porcelain, hasn't it? But there's an alternative. Become my student, and eventually provide the cures and curses people desire so much. You'll learn a great deal, and change in ways you don't think possible."

"My father would never agree to my becoming a witch."

"Ah. My half-brother is beholden to me. He'll have no choice but to agree. But in return for taking you in, you must do something for me."

Elizabeth hesitated. Hesper's reputation was vile, and if people spoke of her at all, they whispered charms of protection against her. "What do you wish?"

"For you to marry my son, Pfaffner."

Elizabeth snorted. "Pfaffner is a graceless,

ugly mute. Would you have me live my life in silence?"

Hespher stiffened, hands twitching. "He's my only child, of noble birth suitable for wedding. His muteness is caused by a mistake I made at his conceiving. I grant you that he's not handsome, but he's only a little shorter than you are. He'll protect you and your future secrets. What life will you have as a cloistered spinster?"

"Don't answer now. Think about being locked away in a convent instead of becoming powerful and feared. We'll talk again tomorrow." Hespher turned and seemed to fold herself back behind the oak. Elizabeth jumped up and looked behind the tree, but Hespher had gone without noise or trace.

Elizabeth's shoulders slumped as she walked back to the castle. Nobles survived on favour-trading, and she had few friends and nothing to offer. I can't even go into exile, she thought. Who wants a foreign giantess staring down at them?

The grounds outside King Albert's castle included a maze of densely thorned briars. Most people avoided it for fear that they'd be scratched, and because of a superstition that every time one entered it he lost some part of his better nature. But Elizabeth found that she could think most clearly when surrounded by its needles.

The next day she was seated on a stone bench in the maze's middle when Hespher found her.

"Not many people know their way in and out of this maze, aunt Hespher."

"Or wish to enter."

"My father never comes here."

"He knows better. Did you ever wonder why you come here so frequently? You have concerns, child, address them to me."

"I'm not a warm person, and could never develop affection for your son. His manners are brutish, his silence abhorrent, his appearance repulsive. But I could endure a life studying the dark arts. Would you accept me

as student?"

Hespher laughed hoarsely. "Listen to you, gangly one. You're willing to begin a life in which you'll be feared and hated, but don't want to do so in company with a royal companion who'll only be disliked. Life is how you look at it. What I'm offering you is akin to a loyal but ugly watch dog that will always protect you and help keep you warm on winter nights?"

"But probably has as many fleas as a stable dog. My father would never accept such a match."

"Your father has made worse bargains. You must quickly choose the least unpleasant of your alternatives. If you accept my conditions I'll talk with your father."

Elizabeth agonized for two days before accepting Hespher's terms. When he found out about Elizabeth's decision, King Albert was convulsed with anger and dread. "Elizabeth, marry the tongueless ox if you must, but don't put yourself under Hespher's sway.

"Hespher is my half-sister, and when she was young she was akin to you- overly schooled and self willed. She was never warm hearted, but her dark arts twisted and soured her beyond recognition. I hold no love for her now, only fear."

Elizabeth stepped up to her father and touched his arm. "The paths before me are all hateful, father, but I chose the one whose pain will let me learn and grow."

"Like a canker, my child, or a pustule. What I can give you is a comfortable cage from which you'll still be able to sing."

"Father, I ask for your blessing to marry Pfaffner and follow Hespher's teaching."

"I can't bless this, child, and if I could I'd curse Hespher for arranging it. But you have my leave to do so."

The marriage to Pfaffner was held without fanfare or feasting. He raised a thickly knuckled hand to acknowledge his vow. The wedding night was unconsummated, the days

of marriage spent apart. The little attention Elizabeth paid to him, Pfaffner snapped up like a dog offered table scraps.

Shortly after the wedding Hesper brought Elizabeth into the chamber used for casting spells. She handed Elizabeth a struggling rabbit and a stone knife. "Hold the rabbit over the chalice on the altar," she commanded, and when I tell you, slit the rabbit's throat so its blood drains into the cup."

Hesper frightened her, but Elizabeth held her hands at her sides. "I eat rabbits, I don't slaughter them," she said haughtily.

"The blood feeds the spell. Creature death for magical life. Your hands will be reddened with the blood of many things. Now do as I order."

Elizabeth saw no other choice and clutched rabbit and knife. Hesper began to intone, swaying softly in unison with the guttural words. "Now!" she hissed, "cut its throat."

The knife was surprisingly sharp and slit through fur and skin. Blood spattered over her left hand and ran down the rabbit's white front and into the chalice. Elizabeth shuddered. Father, she thought, just look at your daughter now.

"Drop the rabbit," Hesper ordered. "Lick the blood from your hand."

"I will not!"

Hesper slapped her. Elizabeth was so shocked she dropped both rabbit and knife. No one was allowed to touch her without permission.

"You stringy priss. You're my apprentice. You'll empty chamber pots if I tell you to. The spell isn't complete without your involvement. Lick the blood."

Elizabeth had seen Hesper injure people with a look and a gesture. She slowly brought hand to mouth and licked off the blood. It was already sticky, and tasted of sour minerals. The spell had been incomprehensible to her, but Elizabeth felt as if a stone had grown in her chest and then hurled itself out to strike someone distant.

As she cleansed her hands, Elizabeth noticed

a jumbled pile of small bones on a small side altar.

"Aunt Hesper, those bones must serve a purpose- what is it?"

"They're used to cast the runes. Go look at them."

"There's a symbol carved on each bone."

"They're the elder Futhark symbols. There are 24 of them, each one carved on a thumb bone. Each thumb bone comes from the left hand of a different accursed. You've witnessed the executions of some of them. Pick the bones up and gently throw them back onto the silk. Then let me know what you sense."

Elizabeth scooped up the bones with both hands and gently tossed them back onto the cloth. "Oh," she cried. "That can't be!"

Hesper clutched both of her arms. "What did you see? Tell me!"

"I sensed that my father would harm you. But that's impossible."

Hesper sighed. "No, child, it's likely. I've also seen this. You have the gift to foretell, and we must nurture it. You will practice casting the runes at least one hour each day.

And so she did. Elizabeth also became increasingly proficient in spell casting. Few spells were for healing, most were curses levelled by one noble or merchant against another. She realized with sorrow that she cared almost nothing about those she was cursing and even less about those that benefitted from the harm.

But what brought more and more people to secretly visit her was her rune casting. What she sensed in those amputated and mutilated bones almost always came to pass.

Elizabeth was forever stumbling over Pfaffner. He understood her well enough, but could only respond with crude gestures. One day Elizabeth turned back towards him in exasperation. "Pfaffner, you oaf. I'll teach you to write. Then you can carry a tablet and answer me."

And Pfaffner proved to be as smart as he was ugly. He swallowed letters and words like a starving man, and within two weeks wrote his first clumsy note to her. "Run away from my mother," it said.

She smiled ruefully. "I cannot, Pfaffner. I'm already too much like her, and the way back to what I was has been lost." Despite her disdain for Pfaffner she was touched. "Thank you for your concern."

Pfaffner continued to write to her, at first only a few rough words on the tablet, but in time his gnarled hands were able to give her soft passages in beautiful script on parchment. They spent evenings together, half in one-sided conversation, half in a stillness broken by the scratching of a quill pen.

The night before her thirtieth birthday Elizabeth let Pfaffner into her bed chamber, and with considerable clumsiness they consummated their marriage. Pfaffner's body was knotted like blackthorn, but Elizabeth seemed not to mind. They left the candles burning so Pfaffner could write to her afterwards.

Hespher knew of this without being told, but said nothing. She buried Elizabeth deeper in the dark arts, congealing her affections and corroding her sensitivities. Elizabeth came to love the harsh, burning power which flowed through her maledictions. She saw her father rarely, her sisters and their children almost never.

And then, as happens with bedding couples, Elizabeth became pregnant. She cast the runes and learned that it was a boy. Hespher needed no telling, but Elizabeth formally advised her in the spells chamber. "I will call

him Pfassolt," she said. Hespher stared at her as if measuring her height and strength.

"You realize, daughter, that your son will be killed?"

"How can that be? We'll protect him."

"He is the first born of the first born, rightful heir to the throne. But your sisters have already planned titles and baronies based on their own primogeniture. Your child destroys their ascension. They will seek to remove it."

"You lie, withered serpent! My sisters would never hurt me or my child."

"Now who lies, daughter? You cannot sleep safely enfolded in family memories. You must think as the mother of a king."

Elizabeth spun abruptly and ran from the chamber. Once in her own rooms she took out the runes and cast them once, twice, thrice. They lay each time with the same jagged portents. Whichever path she took meant death to a child or children. By inaction she would allow the death of her own baby, and her only possible action was to discreetly kill her sisters' male children.

She recalled what her father would say about their nobility- "Blood will out." Yes father, she thought, it will, but only in being spilled. She

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ed Ahern resumed writing after forty odd years in foreign intelligence and international sales. He has his original wife, but advises that after forty seven years they are both a bit out of warranty. He's had over eighty stories and poems published so far, as well as two books. His collected fairy and folk tales, "The Witch Made Me Do It" is available from Gypsy Shadow Publishing and his mystery/horror novella, "The Witches' Bane" from World Castle Publishing.

The PRAFTS and the HYWISPS

by Douglas J. Ogurek



The Prafts and the Hywips is part of a longer work entitled *The Football Game at Fuller Finglow's House*, published by Gone Lawn.

The Landivum River ran through Warth. On one side of the river were the Browntans. There, the ground was flat and brown, and the sky was tan.

The Prafts built all the castles in the Browntans. The Prafts' castles were square, and brown and tan. Inside their castles, the Prafts ate piesquares, and got answers.

Rouzzle Peaks chirped and spiced on the other side of the river. The sky there purpled like trumpets, and the hrees and tills and mouds and cloutains curled like the taste of chocolate peppermints.

In Rouzzle Peaks, the Hywips created all the castles, which whistled with colors, and tangyfizzled like melted spirals. The Hywips went to their castles to taste the shapes, and listen to the colors.

As you can see (and smell), the Prafts and Hywips were as different as night and the smell of clay. But in one way, they were all the same: they were afraid of the River Inume.

No Praft or Hywisp had ever met the Inume. But on still and fruit punchy days, the Inume's flowt

music glided along the Landivum River. Then you knew it was time to go.

A Praft and a Hywisp gathered building supplies at the Landivum River. The Hywisp flew into a sourclang hree. Then he swoarpysnarled across the river. "Your Browntans are as fun as burnt toast and broken pianos."

"I'm glad the river separates us." The Praft dropped a river brick into his cart. "Because your Rouzzle Peaks is out of control."

Music drifted from where the river met the sea. The Praft thought it was a flute, but not quite. It sounded silvery to the Hywisp. No, no. More light green than silvery.

The Hywisp flew down to the river. He peeled some harpytaff, then scooped some flutterfluff. "The Browntans' castles are not sweetgong like our cloutains, or chimelime like our fountains. Gupsheemash. The Browntans' castles are as square and dry as your blocky pies."

The Praft's fingers tingled, and his legs felt lighter. "Your castles get gloppy and splotchy," he said. "You always have to tear them down. Every castle that we've built still stands strong."

The music flowed around the Browntan boxbushes, and swirled through the crinkleberry patches and lemonblares in Rouzzle Peaks.

The Hywisp's wings felt a little like the smell of orange peels. "Your castles taste rotten. Ours are syrupy and cinnamony. Yours sound like they got stuck, and ours flap and clap. So woarpyscloape."

"You can't taste castles," said the Praft. "You can't hear them either."

The music grew louder, and greener. The

Praft and Hywisp kept arguing. Their bodies felt lighter and orange peelier. But they kept arguing. Soon, they got so light and peely that they couldn't move.

Down the river, beneath where linevines mixed with doughwhir branches, a creature appeared.

The creature, floating just above the water, was coming toward them.

The Praft saw its colorful cloak. He tried to run. He couldn't move.

When the Hywisp heard the cloak's colors ring, he tried to flap his wings, but they just flopped.

Closer floated the creature. It had a hood, and held a long stick. The top of the stick curved into a jelly-flavored shape. Then the Praft and Hywisp knew: the stick was the flowt, and the creature was the Inume.

Louder and greener grew the flowt music. The Praft yelled for help. The Hywisp orange and reded.

The Inume drew closer. Red tan black. Pink yellow brown blue. Its cloak colors flashed and clanged. They were trapped.

The flowt music flowed gently, and greenly enough to stop an army. So gently that the Praft was not afraid, even when he saw the Inume had no face. So greenly that the Hywisp hummed along in pink and blue.

First the Inume floated to the Praft, then held up the shape. It was a mirror. The Praft saw his own eyes. They were brown. But then, they whispered other colors: blue and green, yellow and red, even orange. As many colors as the Hywisp's eyes! And when he listened to his eyes carefully, the Praft could hear a symphony.

Next the Inume held the shape before the

Hywisp, whose eyes played their tunes and raised their voices. But then strange sounds peeked out: a tan tone, and a rhythm that was brown. The Praft colors could make music too! And when the Hywisp looked hard, he saw brown lines, and squares of sunlight in his eyes.

When the Inume floated away, the Hywisp looked at the castles in the Browntans. "Why do your castles last so long?"

"Because we use river bricks" said the Praft. "And river bricks are strong."

The Hywisp picked up a brick. It was heavy, and it was strong. And it was brown and tan, like the Browntans.

The flowt music faded. The Praft peeled some harpytaff from the river then wrapped it around his fingers. "Why do you use this stuff?"

"Because it makes our castles flubblepretzel, and honeychuckle."

The Praft felt the harpytaff, and a swervyswirl flavor filled his mouth. Then he heard its colors chuckling and flubbling. "Will you show me how to use harpytaff?"

"Wa-Terthskeel!" said the Hywisp. "Harpytaff and flutterfluff." He lifted the river brick. "Will you show me how to stirplay these?"

"Stirplay," said the Praft. "Okay."

After the Praft and Hywisp met the Inume, the Prafts' castles sounded more colorful and tasted curvier, and the Hywisps' castles lasted much longer.

The Hywisps went to the Prafts' castles to share piesquares, and get some answers. At the Hywisps' castles, the Prafts learned how peanut buttery curves could be. And the Prafts found out that some colors buzzed, while others rumbled. Some colors even sizzled and cackled.

Nobody has seen the Inume since that day it made the Praft and Hywisp see and hear themselves. But on clear and fruit punchy days, if you listen hard, you can hear that flowt gliding and greening along, no matter where you are. Then think about the Prafts and Hywisps, and remember: the Landivum River doesn't separate the Browntans and Rouzzle Peaks; it holds them together.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Douglas J. Ogurek is a dink. Though is had been banned on Mars, his fiction appears in the British Fantasy Society Journal, The Literary Review, Gone Lawn, Morpheus Tales, Wilderness House Literary Review and several anthologies. Ogurek founded the literary subgenre know as unsplatterpunk, which use splatterpunk conventions (e.g. extreme violence, gore, taboo subject matter) to deliver a Christian message. He is a communications manager of a Chicago-based architecture firm, where he has written over one hundred articles about facility planning and design. He lives on Earth with the woman whose husband he is. They are owned by a pitbull named Phlegmpus Bilesnot. Ogurek also reviews films at Theaker's Quarterly Fiction. More at www.douglasjogurek.weebly.com

GOthic REVIVAL

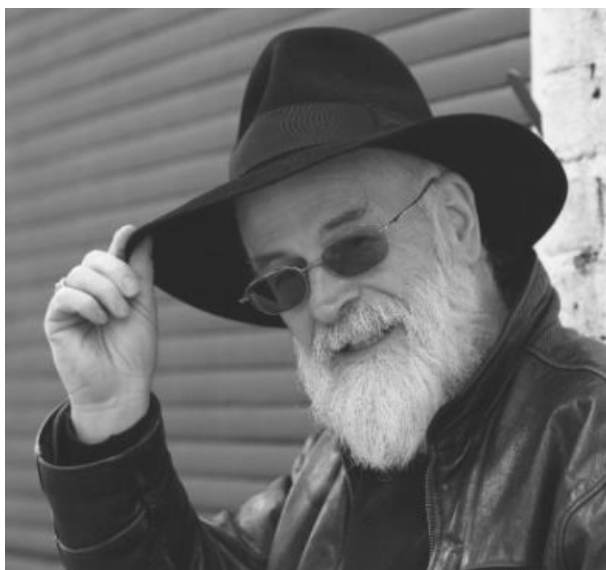
Many people may not realise it but running Fever Dreams costs money. We have debated for sometime about how we can raise money to help with the costs of keeping the magazine running while also keeping it free. Our solution is to release a fundraising anthology. All profits from this anthology will be used to pay for the maintenance of the magazine.

Each anthology will be themed and the first theme chosen is *Gothic Revival*. Each story in the anthology will be based upon a classic Gothic tale. Gothic literature spans a broad period of time from Horace Wadpole's *The Castle of Otranto* to Susan Hill's *The Woman in Black*. Writers like Mary Shelley, Jane Austen, John Keats, Robert Louis Stevenson, Edgar Allan Poe and Bram Stoker have all written stories in the Gothic tradition. If you aren't familiar with the Gothic Tradition then don't panic yet because Philip Meredith will be writing about what defines a Gothic tale in the next issue.

The ten Feverdreamers will be choosing their favourite Gothic stories and reviving them in our modern era and there is room for five of our readers to join us in doing the same.

If you want to support Fever Dreams or simply savour the opportunity to engage in a friendly competition then we want to hear from you. Your story should be between 1500 and 5000 words and should be a modern reimagining of a classic gothic tale. Alongside your story you will need to submit details of the story you have reimagined and why you have chosen it, this is an essential component of your submission and if it is missing your story will be disqualified. You should submit your story in the usual way, including the word anthology in the title of your email, by the end of February 2016.

Further information will be available on the website in the very near future.



Sir Terry Pratchett will be remembered as one of the most beloved and successful fantasy authors ever. His books and in particular his Discworld series, which contains more than 40 novels, have sold more than 85 million copies worldwide. He was, at his peak, a prodigiously speedy writer capable of releasing two books a year which undoubtedly helped to establish him as the biggest selling U.K. author of the 1990s. His commercial success endured right up till his death.

Born Terence David John Pratchett on April 28th 1948, Terry Pratchett was the only child of David and Eileen. He grew up in Bridgwater, Somerset and attributed the best part of his education to his personal reading at Beaconsfield Public Library, devouring the works of such authors as H.G. Wells and Arthur Conan Doyle. He also developed a lifelong passion for the *Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*, about which he said in the foreword to the 1999 edition: "There are plenty of other useful books. But you start with Brewer's."

Terry's short story, *The Hades Business*, was his first publishing credit. It initially appeared in his school magazine when he was 13 and was professionally printed two years later. While working as a journalist for his local paper, the Bucks Free Press, Pratchett published his first

SIR TERRY PRATCHETT

1948—2015

by Peter Bennett

novel. Aged just 23, *The Carpet People* featured a Lilliputian race living in the fabric of a carpet and contained all the hallmarks of the humane, silly humour that was to become his trademark. He followed this with two science fiction novels *The Dark of the Sun* (1976) and *Strata* (1983). The latter introduced the concept of a flat disc-like Earth.

12 years after the publication of *The Carpet People*, the first of Terry Pratchett's beloved Discworld series was published. *The Colour of Magic* (1983) was described by its author as an attempt to do to the fantasy genre what Mel Brooks' film *Blazing Saddles* had done for the Western. The story followed the journey of cowardly wizard Rincewind, guide to the wealthy tourist Twoflower, to the city of Ankh-Morpork while unwittingly being manipulated by game-playing higher powers. At the heart of the story was a tumultuous wide-eyed sense of invention in both world-building and character development which was combined with a dry and flippant cynicism and no small amount of affection for the fantasy genre.

The Light Fantastic followed in 1986, and both *Equal Rites* and *Mort* arrived in 1987. The commercial success of the series allowed Pratchett to quit his day job and earn a living from the pen. This freedom helped to establish the busy pattern that he continued with over the next two decades, and quickly defined him as a titan of the fantasy fiction market. Alongside the ever-expanding Discworld books, his publications included 1989's book of cat anecdotes *The Unadulterated Cat*, *Good Omens* and a range of children's novels including the *Nome* trilogy (1988 to 1990) and the *Johnny Maxwell* trilogy (1992 to 1996).

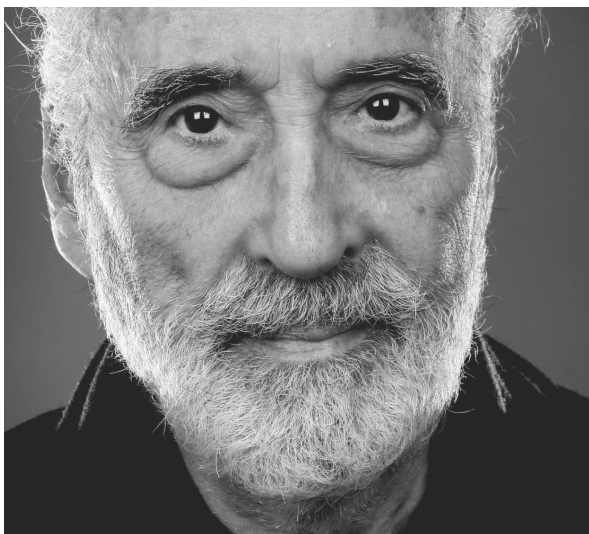
Terry Pratchett's fame was not just earned for his writing. He was a minor celebrity in his own

right thanks to his leather jacket, trademark fedora and a love of banana daiquiris. He was a regular presence at science fiction and fantasy conventions but also a keen supporter of the British Humanist Association and the National Secular Society.

Initially believing he had suffered a stroke, Pratchett discovered in 2007 that he has a rare form of Alzheimer's disease named posterior cortical atrophy (PCA), which he famously described as an "embuggerance". Determined to "keep things cheerful", he continued to work despite the fact that his condition made it difficult. He also made time to publicly discuss his condition, lobbying for increased dementia research funding and a change to the assisted dying legislature.

Terry Pratchett died at home with his family around him and "his cat sleeping on his bed" on the 12th March 2015. He leaves behind his wife of 47 years Lyn and their daughter Rhianna, a writer, and a brief epitaph spread over three tweets and featuring Discworld's recurring Death character: "At last, Sir Terry, we must walk together. Terry took Death's arm and followed him through the doors and on to the black desert under the endless night. The End."

In 1991's *Reaper Man*, Terry Pratchett wrote: "No one is actually dead until the ripples they cause in the world die away." Sir Terry Pratchett caused many ripples, not just among his millions of fans, which will continue to cascade outwards for some time to come.



Sir Christopher Lee was, undoubtedly, one of the most highly regarded and recognizable British film-actors of modern times. Early in his career he developed a trademark persona which involved a fixed, psychotic gaze, a hint of hiss (which is often imitated but never equalled) and a partly-concealed humanity. This persona which mixed gentlemanly English reserve with barely hidden menace was the secret to his success. His greatest roles included Count Dracula in the classic

SIR CHRISTOPHER LEE

1922—2015

by Peter Bennett

Hammer Horror series (1958 to 1973), Lord Summerisle in the Hebrides-set Pagan psychological thriller *The Wicker Man* (1973) and evil wizard Saruman in Peter Jackson's hugely successful Lord of the Rings and Hobbit trilogies (2001 -2003 and 2012-2014). These roles are a far cry from his appearance as Rumpelstiltskin at Miss Fisher's Academy where he "learnt at the offset", as he wrote later, "that the best lines are given to the baddies and that these make the most impact on the audience – especially if there is some pathos in their situation."

Along with Peter Jackson, Tim Burton played a role in reigniting Lee's career. Well into his seventies, Burton gave him a role in *Sleepy Hollow* (1999) and three further films thereafter. This revival meant that Lee was rarely out of work, appearing in 206 movies between 1948 and 2015. His roles include

Sherlock Holmes in *The Curse of the Deadly Necklace* (1962), the unforgettable nemesis of James Bond, Francisco Scaramanga, in *The Man with the Golden Gun* (1974) and Sith Lord Count Dooku in the Star Wars prequels *Attack of the Clones* (2002) and *Revenge of the Sith* (2005).

Lee was born Christopher Frank Carandini Lee in Belgravia, London to Geoffrey and Estelle. He had a sister Xandra. Lee's life was far from uneventful. Following his parents' divorce when he was six, he grew up partly in Switzerland and France. His mother married banker Harcourt St-Croix Rose, making him step-cousin to Ian Fleming, creator of James Bond. He met the assassins of Grigori Rasputin in England years before he would play them on screen. He was present for the last ever public execution in France. During the Second World War he volunteered with the Finnish forces in 1939 and the Royal Air Force in 1941. This meant that Lee saw service across South Africa, Egypt and Italy. He spent the last few years of his service tracking down on-the-run Nazis in Austria before retiring as a flight lieutenant in 1946.

On returning to London, he became an actor with the Rank Organisation, which put him to work in minor roles for a decade. This sidelining was attributed to his "foreign look" and height, which was deemed unsuitable for the parochial British industry. His big break came in 1957 when he appeared in *The Curse of Frankenstein*, the first Hammer Horror film, alongside his friend Peter Cushing. The following year *Dracula* would truly make him a star. Lee, towering at 6ft 5in and ruggedly handsome, redefined the role with a seductive performance based on a brooding and dangerous sexuality.

For over a decade Lee remained with the studio that made him a star, playing the Mummy, Fu Manchu and Rasputin, before leaving in the early 1970s. He said that he was tired with the lurid and flippant content of the studio. This would be a turning point in his career as he eschewed horror roles in favour of



roles that would test him as an actor, although those roles invariably tended towards the villainous. Despite starring in seven films in 1979, Lee spent the latter part of the twentieth century working in a critical wilderness unable to distance himself from his roots. While playing Flay in the BBC's *Gormenghast* in the summer of 1999, Lee came to the attention of New Zealand director Peter Jackson.

This would, no doubt, contribute to the remarkable comeback he made in his late seventies following *Lord of the Rings*. He was knighted in 2009, given a Bafta fellowship in 2001 and a BFI fellowship in 2013. He played roles for Tim Burton on four occasions including *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, and played a part in Martin Scorsese's *Hugo* (2011). His movie credits eventually saw him land in the Guinness Book of World Records.

Sir Christopher Lee was a true renaissance man, he died of respiratory and heart problems at Westminster Hospital, Chelsea aged 93. He leaves behind his wife Birgit Kroencke, the Danish painter whom he married in 1961, and their daughter Christina.

Wes Craven's work has always left critics divided. Some denounced him as a purveyor of gore, saying that he was all technique and no message; others compared him to Ingmar Bergman. Craven himself once recalled that during his early career, guests would leave dinner parties upon realising who he was but he has always had fans among the movie going public and younger directors who appreciated the intelligence and psychological insight he brought to low-budget film making.

Craven created some of the most memorable bogeymen in film history, the most iconic being Freddy Krueger from *A Nightmare on Elm Street*. The murdered child molester in a moth-eaten sweater and filthy fedora is brought back to life in the dreams of the teenage descendants of his killers. Freddy appeared during the time when AIDS was coming to public attention and the prospect of environmental Armageddon was becoming a classroom topic, the film successfully tapped into deep-seated fears earning Craven the nickname "Sultan of Slash".

Few people know that Craven had a master's degree in philosophy and he used this in his prominent defence of the horror genre. He argued that horror gave people the mental equipment and fortitude to deal with a frightening world. "You're talking about the beasts in the forest that come after you during the daytime or during the night," he explained, "but in a way that's under control. So in a sense, you can own the beast."

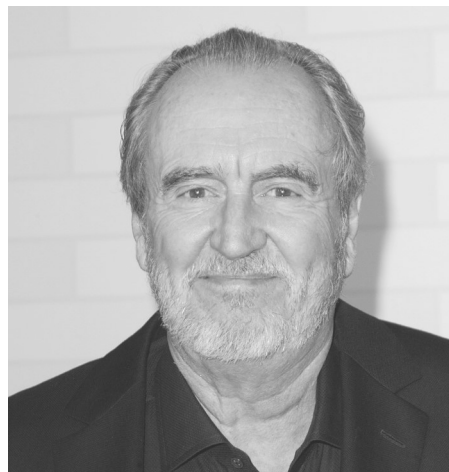
Wesley Earl Craven was born on August 2nd 1939 to strict Baptist parents. Even though he was forbidden from going to the cinema, he claimed that his religious upbringing shaped his talent as a film-maker by encouraging him to ask "big questions about life and death."

The character of Freddy Kreuger was drawn from an event that occurred in his own childhood. One night, he heard a shuffling sound outside his bedroom window: "I crept over there and looked down. It was a man wearing [a fedora] ... He stopped and looked up

WES CRAVEN

1939—2015

by Al Thomas



directly into my face. I backed into the shadows, listening and waiting for him to go away. But I didn't hear anything. I went back to the window. He looked up at me again and then turned away. He walked into the door of our apartment building. I've never, ever been that scared in my life. I was terrified."

Craven's films were often inspired by true stories. *A Nightmare on Elm Street* was inspired by reports in the Los Angeles Times about a group of refugees who had fled the Khmer Rouge, healthy young men in their twenties, who, after fleeing to the United States, were suffering disturbing nightmares and refused to sleep. "They would try to stay awake, and they would describe the nightmares to their families," Craven recalled. "Finally there would be a scream and the guy would be dead. Death by nightmare."

The resulting film established Craven as a leading director. His producers established a franchise and went on making more Freddy Krueger films of varying quality, often without Craven's input, until 1995 when he would release the iconic *Wes Craven's New*

Nightmare. The interplay between the depictions of the real actors from the original *A Nightmare on Elm Street* in the real world being hunted by the imaginary monster from the film was a spectacular reinvention of the franchise. Craven recalled that the film was designed to poke fun at the horror genre which had “reached one of its sort of classical, cyclical stages of ennui on the part of the audience.”

He would continue to subvert and poke fun at the genre with *Scream* (1996), the tale of a high-school student who becomes the target of a mysterious killer known as Ghostface. The film was loaded with ironic self-reference such as when a character observes: “This is like something out of a Wes Carpenter film.” *Scream* was a box-office hit, taking \$173 million worldwide and spawning a lucrative franchise and numerous “Scary Movie” parodies.

This is a far stretch from the pornographic films that he created under pseudonyms during his early career. Craven burst onto the screen in 1972 with the ultra-low budget shocker *The Last House on the Left*, about a gang of psychotic killers who rape, torture and murder two teenage girls only to meet an even more horrific fate at the hands of the girls’ parents. The film was a grisly remake of Ingmar Bergman’s Oscar-winning *Virgin Spring* (1959) featuring sickeningly real scenes of sadism and violence. The film was released mostly at drive-ins in America and was banned by British censors. It has in time come to be seen as a classic.



His follow up, *The Hills Have Eyes*, about cannibalistic mutants stalking a suburban family who have become stranded in the desert, established his reputation as a cult director. Craven’s other films include: *Deadly Friend* (1986), *The Serpent and the Rainbow* (1988), *The People Under the Stairs* (1991), *Vampire in Brooklyn* (1995) and *Red Eye* (2005). In 1999 he made *Music of the Heart*, starring Meryl Streep. A rare foray outside of the horror genre for which Meryl Streep was nominated for an Oscar. His last film was the fourth in the *Scream* franchise in 2011.

REVIEWS

The book opens with the line: "Sometimes evil looks like a fuzzy teddy bear." I was hooked from that point.

Josh is your average ten-year old dealing with the death of his father. His new stepfather is nothing short of evil, and it is from him that Josh receives the titular bear. I could argue with the fact that no ten year-old ever wants a stuffed animal, let alone one called Edgar, but it's a hard decision about whether the bear or the stepfather is actually the villain of the piece.

The Bear Who Wouldn't Leave

J. H. Moncrieff

Samhain Horror

Moncrieff does a great job developing the characters and building the tension in the relationships. The ten year olds are depicted beautifully with some imaginative cursing that made me laugh at times. The childhood fears and confusion are lovingly recreated as the novel gets scarier and scarier.

I was pleasantly surprised by this book. I initially expected some *Child's Play* demonic toy knock off but the narrative is full of clever and ugly twists that, although not particularly original, will keep you guessing.

This is the second book in Samhain's promising *Childhood Fear* series. Look out for the rest!

Forgotten Suns

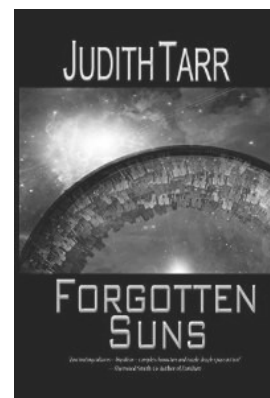
Judith Tarr

Book View Café

Nevermore is an enigma. If the people were wiped out in an apocalyptic upheaval then there should be some evidence. The buildings may have crumbled into ruins but the records, art and artefacts are all gone. So are all the bodies...

A family of archaeologists labour to discover the mystery of Nevermore in the face of funding cuts and looming planetary strip mining. A good premise which when combined with psionic powers, magic and science make for an exciting adventure.

This is the first of Tarr's books that I have read and while I struggled on occasion, this was a very enjoyable read. Her characterisation is clever and provides intrigue. Her writing is often lyrical without being prosaic. She builds the tension well without compromising on pace.



REVIEWS by Martin Williams

My only complaint is that I did feel that the whenever a situation arose to test the characters, it was resolved through yet another special power which does remove the jeopardy, and some of the drama, from the novel.

Even so a satisfying and exuberant space opera with nods to some of the genre's greatest writers. Recommended for fans of books on the fantastical end of science-fiction.

SHATTERING THE LEY

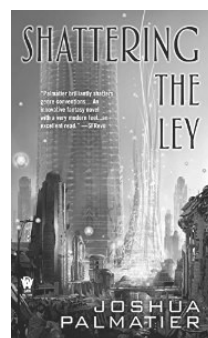
Joshua Palmatier

DAW

Erenthrall is a sprawling city of light and magic and at the heart of the city is the Nexus. The Nexus is a hub of magical ley energy that powers the city and also connects it to the world beyond. Control of the Nexus means control of Erenthrall. This is the set-up for Joshua Pamatier's novel.

This book has a lot going on. There is political intrigue and ideological battles over the how, who, why, when and where of the Nexus. I'll be honest the magical ley powered city is not an original concept but Palmatier's take on it is very different.

The novel started strong and I was impressed with the world building but holes became apparent all too quickly. The complex number of



supporting characters compete for time and attention and, while you eventually see that this is a necessary device for plot resolution, it does make the book a little confusing at times.

I love the manipulation of the ley into unnatural paths for personal gain, and the idea of time/space distortions being created as a result but some of the books resolution made absolutely no sense to me.

Fun but not as good as it could have been.

THE BEST HORROR OF THE YEAR

Ellen Datlow

Night Shade Books

For over three decades, Ellen Datlow has been at the center of horror. In this seventh volume in the series, Datlow brings together twenty-two authors in her annual collection of the best of the horror genre.

This anthology features stories from some big names in the industry: Laird Barron, Garth Nix, Caitlin R Kiernan, Stephen Graham Jones and Angela Slater to name just a few. Even with these big names I can't help but feel that this is one of the weaker anthologies.

I'm not saying this is a bad anthology. There are some very good stories in here, and some surprises from authors that I had never heard of. There were plenty of stories which avoided the vampire, werewolf or (insert horror cliché



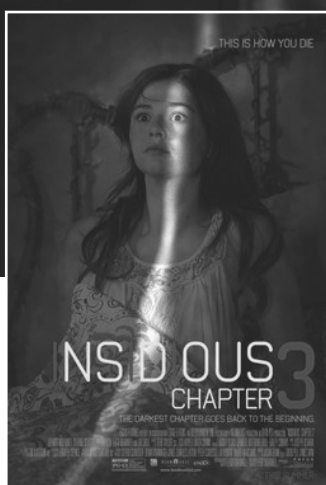
here) and there's even something for fans of H.P. Lovecraft.

I particularly loved the lyrical and callous prose of *Interstate Love Song (Murder Ballad No. 8)* and the intriguing double-cross murder plot of *The Worms Crawl*, but I can't say that I was even close to being scared or creeped out by these stories. The whole anthology just felt a little bit tired.

Recommended for horror genre fans.

REVIEWS by Martin Williams

FILM REVIEW



Insidious: Chapter 3 is, as most third films turn out to be, a prequel. It is also, and I'm going to say something that isn't often said, the best film in the series. There are a few times in your lifetime when you can genuinely say that a sequel, or in this case prequel, is better than the original film but this is certainly one of those times.

From the first moments you can sense that this film is different. I loved Lin Shaye's character Elise in the first film and it was great to see her back in demon ass-kicking form. The "further" is more properly explored and defined in this film, and the dangers for those who cross over are underlined. The atmosphere was true to the form of the original films, the jump scares are effective and, perhaps more satisfyingly, there are prolonged bouts of sustained horror where you just sit and watch what is transpiring. Sometimes the film relies on clichés like a disembodied singing girl but that is the strength of Jonathan

INSIDIOUS: CHAPTER 3

June 2015

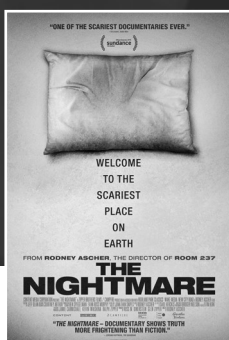
by Al Thomas

Nolan. He knows when to move away from the clichés and when to stick with them.

At its heart though this film is a story about loss. The film focuses on a young teenage girl wanting to contact her deceased mother which is touching and pulls on the old heart strings. The story is driven through the tension between the father and daughter which is often so tense that it becomes palpable. I really felt sorry for the father for having to carry such an emotional burden but I also felt bad for the daughter who had to become the household's maternal figure. I felt sympathy for the protagonists of this film, when I didn't for the protagonists of the first two instalments, and toward the end of the movie I could feel my eyes welling up with tears.

Insidious: Chapter 3 delivers a solid dose of creeps and scares that will keep you up at night but also imparts an overwhelming warm-hearted drama that is every bit as haunting.

FILM REVIEW



The Nightmare caused quite the stir when it showed at the Sundance Film Festival and is one of those films that many claim is the scariest horror movie since ...

Rodney Ascher is the director and he previously worked on the bizarre *The Shining* documentary called *Room 237*. He again applies his bizarre mix of documentary come horror movie to the subject of sleep disorders. The movie consists primarily of interviews with people having sleeping disorders described as "Sleep Paralysis". There is no question that the subject matter makes for an interesting documentary but there isn't much original here.

Shadow people are mentioned throughout the documentary as several people claim to have encountered them. They talk at length about these dark, shadowy figures who approach them and, of course, they are unable to move so there is no way of escaping them. The problem is that there is absolutely no professional medical information or research about the subject whatsoever. The recorded medical history of the disorder is only discussed briefly enough to give the film some shred of credibility. There is a lot of

THE NIGHTMARE

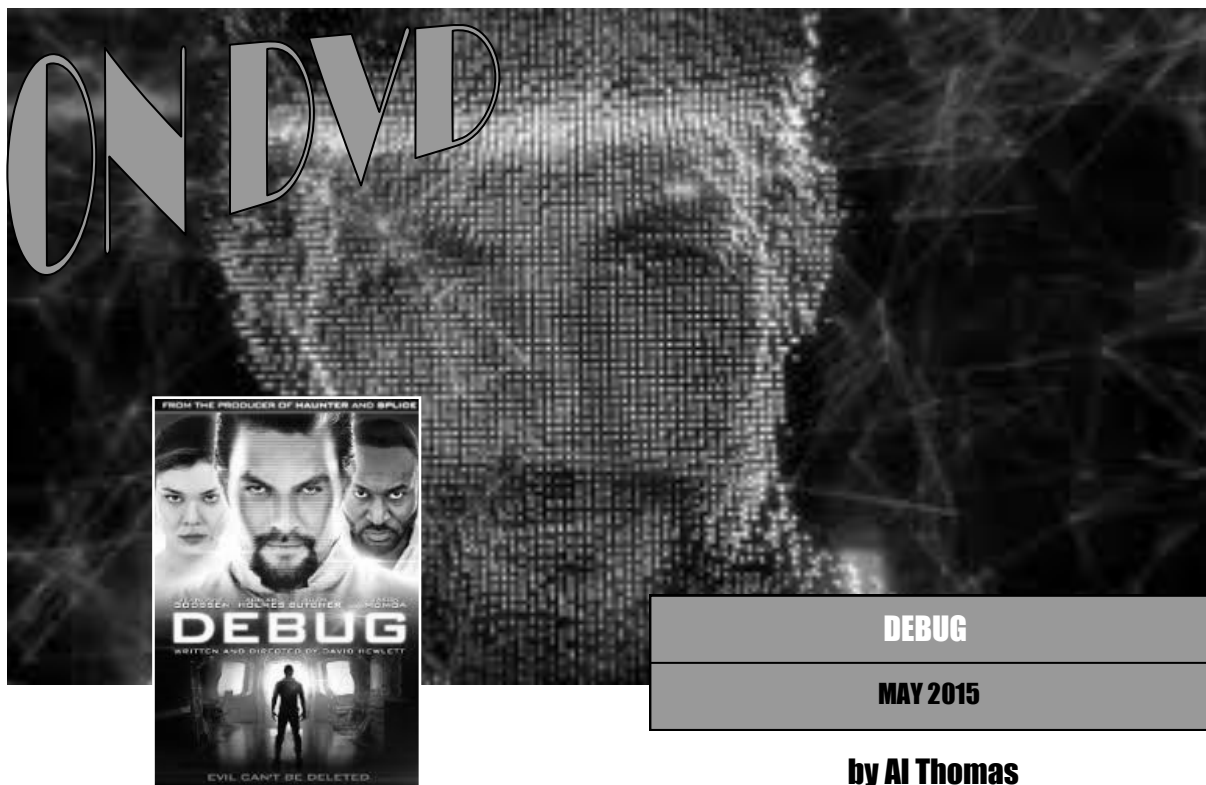
JUNE 2015

by Al Thomas

romanticised speculation on what exactly this phenomenon is but this eventually devolves into the suggestion that these dreams are caused by demons and can be stopped by prayer or chanting Jesus' name.

Let's be fair though. If sleeping meant that you were attacked by demons how would you explain it? Cognitive science or religion? Christianity or spiritualism? The film is patient enough to listen with an apathetic interest to the answers. It is well made, compared to the other fake documentaries dealing with things science cannot explain, and isn't accompanied by a grand narrative seeking to push a specific theory. If you are looking for gory set pieces and jump scares though you will be disappointed. The scares come from the related experiences of the actual perceptions of physical attacks, pain, voices, and shadowy figures terrorizing and stalking these people on a nightly basis.

Worth watching once as there are some effective moments.



Welcome to the future. This is a future where intrepid teams of salvage workers rescue old ships from the cold vacuum of space, but unlike *Alien* or *Event Horizon*, the motley crew of *Debug* does not consist of tired space weary operatives. They are a team of criminal cyber-hackers forced into labour to shorten their sentences. Interested yet?

What seem like a routine mission quickly turns into a life or death struggle for survival against a psychotic artificial intelligence (as if there is any other kind). Trapped on the ship, the heroes are forced to find a way to defeat the rather oddly, and perhaps offensively, named IAm. Interested yet?

Let's be clear, this was a low budget film and because of that it can be forgiven for many things. The film gets into the action quickly, the acting, action and death scenes are good especially when you consider that this film doesn't have a stellar cast of respected actors. The main problem revolves around, as you may expect in a film about a rogue AI, the

portrayal of IAm by Jason Momoa of *Conan The Barbarian* (2011) and *Game of Thrones* (2011-2012) fame. His lacklustre performance stifles any scene that he appears in, and is in stark contrast to the other actors.

Its always hard to review a film that at heart is a decent film. Its similarities to *Event Horizon* make its failings more apparent as *Debug* struggles to free itself from the clichés of the genre. The low budget shows and at times the poor writing and annoying plot points are all too obvious but the makers of *Debug* are genuinely trying to make a great film. The lack of experience and low budget have an impact but despite the obvious flaws this is still an entertaining film, helped along by some nice death scenes and neat touches reminiscent of *Lawnmower Man*.

It is certainly not original, it is not in the same league as a Hollywood blockbuster, but it is still a decent way to spend a few hours on a rainy afternoon.



Until Dawn follows a standard horror film setup: 10 friends go on a yearly trip to a secluded cabin in the mountains of British Columbia. After a prank goes horribly wrong, two of those friends Beth and Hannah (twin sisters), disappear into the woods and never return. One year later, the remaining members decide that they should go ahead with this annual excursion, treating it as an opportunity to celebrate the lives of their friends, who they presume dead, and finally get some closure.

As you would expect in a title so firmly rooted in Horror traditions, things do not go as planned.

With a runtime of about 12 hours, versus the two to two and a half for a traditional horror movie, it takes a long time for everything to fall apart. This is one of *Until Dawn*'s strengths allowing you to take the time to get to know, and care about, the characters.

Well it would if this extra time yielded the level of character depth that you would hope for. Sadly *Until Dawn*'s cast breaks down into a motley crew of horror film clichés. There is the horny couple who keep trying to break away

REVIEW by Dylan Harris

from the group to have sex, Mike (played by *Agents of SHIELD* star Brett Dalton) and Jess. There is Chris, the nerd complete with glasses, who makes awkward jokes. There's the single female who's not in a relationship and is clearly supposed to be the modern day female survivor. In *Until Dawn*, she is played by *Heroes* alum Haydn Panettiere. The female characters are, stereotypically, over sexualised with Sam spending one whole sequence in nothing but a towel. The male characters don't fare any better with one sequence requiring Mike to fight through storms and animal mutilation in order to get laid. While these characters have some space to grow and change based on your choices within the game, they do by and large consist of the same tired stereotypes we are all used to.

One of the best things about *Until Dawn* is that the game allows you to actively break with these conventions. Rather than sticking to one main protagonist, you can bounce around

controlling all of the friends at one point or another throughout the playthrough. When you are controlling someone you have the opportunity to bring up a menu that shows you what their relationships are like with each of the other characters, and this is something that you can noticeably modify and change by your actions and dialogue choices.

Early in the game, you spend some time as Matt, the dim but well-meaning jock. In one scene, Matt's girlfriend, Emily, tries to start trouble between Mike and Jess, the horny couple. I played through this scene several times and made different decisions each time, afterwards it was clear that each choice made a real and noticeable difference. If I continuously sided against Emily then, as you would expect, she grew colder toward Matt and their relationship suffered. This was evidenced in the little details and quirks that transcended the character stereotypes. If instead I chose to be supportive, these details were never present. It is this subtlety and the cleverness of the implementation of the branching conversations and relationships that really impressed me. Quite simply, if I pushed far enough in the wrong direction, Emily and Matt's relationship would not survive through the night, assuming they both lived of course.

That's the hook of *Until Dawn*. Every one of the eight main characters can die by the end of the game. You can finish the game with all of them alive or conversely with none of them alive, depending on the choices that you make. Let's be clear, these decisions aren't signposted and it is not easy to keep everyone alive. At the end of my first playthrough, half of the group were dead in a variety of vicious, gory scenes. It is this battle to keep characters alive, even if you don't like them, that keeps me going back to the game and engages me with the narrative. Unfortunately it is also horribly flawed.

Until Dawn wants its character's deaths to have an impact. In order to ensure that this is the case the developers decided to strip out any manual saving or checkpoints of any kind.

If you make a mistake or a poor choice and a character dies then they are dead. If you want to undo any single mistake then you will have to start the game over from the very beginning, or you have to live with whatever has happened. On the one hand I respect this design choice. It makes sense in a narrative-focused game based on firmly established Horror traditions, it also helps to establish a wider variety of outcomes among everyone who plays the game. It is unlikely that everyone who plays the game will lose the same people, or lose them in the same way, the first time through. That makes for interesting discussions with friends who are also playing it.

The other side of this coin is that, because death is so meaningful, you can often feel robbed when a character dies in circumstances that aren't entirely justified. Even if you do everything right, and I'm not saying that I did, you can lose members of the group in completely arbitrary ways. I lost one member of my group due to poor choices and lack of exploration. The others however were from two of the failings of *Until Dawn*. Since the arrival of quick time events, lightning fast on screen button flashes, gamers have been split on whether they love or hate them. I personally don't mind them when they are properly done. In a game designed entirely about storytelling, *Until Dawn's* action sequences are cheapened by the use of quick-time events, and with no save system this can quickly become aggravating. Whenever there is a chase or a fight, you'll need to hammer those buttons within seconds of them appearing on screen in order to keep your group member alive. As if this wasn't bad enough, the game also employs a special challenge whilst your character is hiding, this involves your needing to hold your controller completely still for a predefined period of time.

I'll be honest and say that I may not have the steadiest hands in the world but I still tried like hell to beat these completely motionless sequences. I failed them twice and in both instances the result was a character death. I



can assure you that you'll probably be as angry as I was. The game doesn't earn that kill. I'm fine being punished when I deserve it but in these instances I don't feel like I do. Losing a character after eight-hours of investment because you sneezed or the dog jumped on your lap or you needed to pull your underwear out of your ass doesn't feel fair. It may be true to the Horror genre where everyone is vulnerable but it kills your enthusiasm to play the game.

I want to praise *Until Dawn*, I really do. It tries to do some original and inspiring things within the genre but its implementation is sloppy. Worse the game's inconsistent writing, direction and sadly acting also make it impossible for me to sing the games praises. In a game so closely related to film, the writing, direction and acting aren't small things. I acknowledge that Supermassive Games has got some cult actors on board. Peter Stromare is outstanding as Dr. A. J. Hill, a psychiatrist who treats the player as a patient between each level. I can see how the characters have been built to look like those actors with detailed character models that are a little uncanny. *Until Dawn* looks great but there are fleeting moments when, rather than feeling like I'm watching a film on the big screen, the illusion is shattered by awkward character animation, a dead stare, texture pop-ins or any one of a dozen other tell-tale signs.

It may seem unfair of me to hold this against the game, after all the forward leap in technology of this generation has been impressive but it's still not easy to make characters look and behave believably, but this it does shatter the illusion this game strives to achieve.

The game also has serious pacing, direction and writing issues. It is loaded with awkward cuts, long moments of weird silence that becomes humorous and so much scene and perspective hopping that it appears there is a complete lack of regard for the player. Dialogue, similarly, can be incredible and subtle but the game isn't above hitting you around the head with heavy-handed dialogue and terrible jokes. Perhaps unforgivably for me, Stromare's role as the psychiatrist fizzles out as the game progresses to become meaningless at the end.

How can I sum up *Until Dawn*? It's a game that exists in a weird dual state. It's a game but it's also a film. It's generic but it's also in many ways original. It's got some horrible flaws that make me want to warn people off but at the same time I want everyone to play it at least once. It drives me crazy and makes me frustrated but I still keep going back to it. *Until Dawn* is an enigma, and the ultimate question may be: How can it be so compelling when it is so flawed?