

FEVER DREAMS

SCIENCE FICTION * HORROR * FANTASY

ISSUE 3 * JULY-SEPT 13

PUBERTY AT THE STOKER'S HOUSE

by Philip Roberts

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MINDSALAD

by Dave Ludford

*

INTUITION

by J. Zartman

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PROPHETS FROM THE SKY

by Vincent Spada

*

SKELETON IN THE CLOSET

by A.J. Kirby

*

THE STINKY MEN

by Lou Antonelli

*

WHISTLING PINES

by Angus Stewart

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A CAPTAIN'S VIEW

by Jonpaul Taylor

*

HELL IS ONLY TEMPORARY

by Zachary Houle

*

CARAVAN

by Anna Sykora

*

CREATING FANTASY CREATURES

by Joseph Carswell

**BUMPER
FICTION
ISSUE**



WELCOME TO FEVER DREAMS ISSUE THREE

I seem to be always writing in my editorial about problems arising during the production

of every issue of Fever Dreams, and each quarter, when I see the magazine go live, I think that I've seen everything and next issue will be different. This quarter we have been plagued by gremlins infesting our e-mails and latterly our hosting service but here it is at last. We've had an abundance of poets, artists and writers sending in their work for consideration, and since we never like to reject anyone's work, unless we have absolutely no other choice, this is a bumper fiction issue. We have fantasy, science fiction, horror, poetry and, thanks to Joe, Martin and Ruairaidh, we even have our first article submissions by readers.

I can't let the editorial pass without thanking you all for your patience, and that thank you goes doubly for all the contributors who have had to wait a little longer than usual to see themselves on the cover. We hope it was worth the wait.

This issue will be the last for Matt, who is moving on to other things, so we wish him all the best. Al is moving away from the banks of the Silvery Tay to study Creative Writing, he will continue to work on the magazine, and we wish him all the best with his studies.

This issue also sees us remembering three



EDITORIAL by Peter Bennett

great writers who have sadly passed away since the last issue of Fever Dreams. We hope that our articles will encourage you to pick up one of their novels.

Lastly I'd like to say thank you to every one who has contacted the magazine in the last few months, either with submissions or simply to offer a few words of encouragement. Its you, our fans, that make the magazine what it is.

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FEVER DREAMS PUBLICATIONS

ARTICLE by Peter Bennett

Fever Dreams is currently undergoing some dramatic changes. I have to admit that I wasn't expecting the response that we've had to the magazine and I've been overwhelmed by it. Since Issue 1 our readership has been increasing steadily, and so have the number of submissions we receive. I take this as a positive sign that I am right in my assertion that there is no lack of aspiring speculative fiction writers, but there is a lack of places where they can make themselves heard. We are currently discussing some changes to the magazine for next year, including the possibility of making the magazine available bi-monthly. We'd love to hear your thoughts on this.

It's not just the magazine that will be undergoing changes, we are well aware that the website needs some serious work and as such it will be undergoing an overhaul during the festive period and we hope to begin 2014 with a new website.

These changes have come at a difficult time, however, as Matt Harris is leaving the magazine and Al Thomas is travelling far from the banks of the Silvery Tay to study Creative Writing. Al will continue to work on the magazine and will be joined by new contributors, the first of which is Ruairidh Cresswell, whose article features in the gaming section of this issue.

Our ongoing quest to produce a set of charitable anthologies is finally bearing fruit. Sadly several of the charities declined our

donations because they didn't want to be associated with horror anthologies. We do still have three charities that we are discussing the matter with and hope to have submissions available in January.

Philip and Glen have also finally decided on the material for the first official Fever Dreams Anthology and are looking into financial aspects before opening submissions. Keep your eyes on our social media feeds for more information.

Finally thanks to everyone who has made themselves known to us at conventions and e-mailed in to show support but please don't neglect our Facebook page.

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 two 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 two and we hope to receive the same support for future issues.

Letters to the Editor

BEATING THE BLOCK

I began writing a series of science fiction novels over two years ago. After an initial burst of creativity - nothing, well virtually nothing. I occasionally got the odd whiff of an idea or a catch of prose but nothing to help me out of the rut that I found myself in. Despite good advice and assistance from helpful friends and fellow writers I couldn't get myself out of the rut. I have now begun editing my work and have found myself out of the rut without even knowing it. What was the cure? Fever Dreams, in particular the articles on writing by Philip Meredith and Glen Kohler. Thanks boys, your articles have been invaluable. Have you ever considered doing a writing workshop?

BRIAN FAWKE
Leicester

CITY OF CULTURE

Most Brit's will be aware that Dundee is running for City of Culture in 2017 and I was reading an article on the literary past of the city. It surprised me to learn that Mary Shelley had once lived there and that it had inspired much of her work on Frankenstein, it surprised me even more to learn that while the city is eager to publicise its literary pedigree, flaunting its academic degrees and writers with connections to the city, at no point was it mentioned that one of the best upcoming speculative fiction magazines in the country has its home in the city. I think that this is a major oversight on the behalf of the city council and that this is a testament to the lack of recognition that speculative fiction receives in the UK. I hope that the magazine gets the recognition it deserves, I eagerly await the arrival of the magazine each quarter. Long may you continue in your work.

MARIE WATSON
Edinburgh

A LACK OF SELF-DOUBT

As writers, setting aside self doubt is the hardest thing we have to do. Harder than writing itself. I have abandoned many of my projects simply because of my internal critic. Thanks to the articles by Philip Meredith and Glen Kohler I have been able to make myself a promise that I would not abandon a single piece of work, and so far their advice has seen me complete three stories and I'm well on my way to completing my first novel.

Your advice has been invaluable. I now know my characters as well as I know my own family, and my fantasy world is my new favourite holiday spot. My grammar, spelling, punctuation and possibly sanity are all in doubt but I'm that much closer to achieving my goal. Keep up the good work.

T WILKINSON
Totton, Southampton

KEEPING THE FAITH

In March of this year I emailed two short stories to two different genre magazines (names removed -ed.) and I heard nothing. I reminded one of them in July. Still nothing. I was beginning to think that this wall of silence towards emailed submissions was the norm but then I heard about Fever Dreams. I have to admit I was sceptical at first but within days of my submission I received a letter from the editor pointing out what changes I needed to make and saying I should re-submit after I've done some editing. You've restored my faith in British genre publishing. Keep doing what you're doing.

DERYN COX
Pembrokeshire

SCIENCE FICTION : DON'T FEAR THE SCIENCE

ARTICLE by Glenn Kohler

I have instructed plenty of students over the years in the art of Science Fiction. One common problem I have encountered is that some writers are intimidated by or afraid of the word science.

If you are hoping that I'm going to tell you that you can write science fiction without knowing anything about science then you are going to be disappointed. Science is a necessary element in science fiction. It can be the source of the conflict or merely the background to the story, but for a story to be science fiction there has to be some element of science. I believe this is the reason that many writers are discouraged from writing in the field. Lets face it, it is difficult enough to write a story but it can be doubly so if you have to spend all that extra time worrying about the technical details. If this is how you feel then I have some advice for you:

The science part of your story should never supersede or replace the fiction part.

There are plenty of science fiction writers who create great stories without having to resort to detailed explanations and justifications of the science in their stories. Ray Bradbury wrote with such style and technique that as a reader you want to believe in his worlds, even if closer examination reveals that they are

impossible. On the downside, however, there is very limited room in the science fiction market for these non-technical writers and so you are going to need some science but science isn't that hard.

I guess right now that there are some readers who are questioning my background in science, possibly thinking that I have a postgrad in engineering or astrophysics, but I don't. I finished studying science at A-level and any further study has been purely motivated by a desire to write. The bulk of my knowledge is self-taught. It is certainly true that a significant number of science fiction writers work within the engineering, academic or scientific fields but you don't have to be a scientist to write science fiction.

I'm going to assume that if you have read this far into the article then you have the desire to write science fiction, and that is the foundation on which we are going to build. The first step towards building your story is to decide how much technical knowledge you are going to require. In time this will be intuitive but initially you are going to have to spend some time thinking about how strong the science element is. If the science is the background of your story then you are going to require less knowledge, just enough to provide flavour.

My best advice for using science for flavour is to rely on your own experiences to present

futuristic science in a contemporary way. Many writers have used their own air travel experiences to detail interstellar travel for example, but a little more detail is required than in a contemporary novel because you are showing your reader something that doesn't exist.

If the science is an integral part of the plot, especially if it is part of the conflict, then you will require significantly more detail. The science will become part of the characterisation, motivations and plot, and you will need to give it as much attention as you would any other element of your story. Just remember that too much science will make your reader turn off because the strength of the story is in the storytelling not the science. A reader will enjoy your story because of its characters and plot. The characters and plot derive their strength from the conflict which in turn depends on the science.

Once you have determined how much science you require for your story, you must acquire that knowledge. Unfortunately writers from rich scientific backgrounds have got an advantage here but gathering scientific information is often less time consuming and painful than you might think. If you read as many short stories and novels as I do then you may already have the knowledge you need or at least enough background to guide your research and help you understand the results.

There are three main ways that I recommend to new writers for obtaining the knowledge they need for their stories.

RESEARCH

Your first step should always be to head to your local library and then, with the aid of the librarian and the book catalogue, make a reading list. It is important to realise that, particularly when starting out, you will most likely not research everything you need to know because you are unfamiliar with the subject and this is where my next piece of

advice comes in.

CONSULT AN EXPERT

Whilst reading all those academic papers, journals and text books, keep your eyes open for contact details. If you can write to them then you will be in a better position to obtain the information you need.

When writing to an expert don't ask them to tell you everything you need to know on a subject or expect them to share information on their ground breaking technology. This is why you should do this AFTER visiting the library. Let the person know exactly what you are doing so that they can see what information you need to know. If they don't write back immediately don't harass them as they probably have work of their own to do. Be polite and leave it a few weeks before writing back and in the meantime get on with drafting your story. When they write back you may feel that they have provided you with too much information but remember that they are the expert and if they have sent you something it is because they feel it is important.

If email correspondence isn't working or something that you are comfortable doing then there are other ways to meet up with experts.

SOCIALISE

Being active in scientific social circles can be a useful way of getting in touch with an expert face-to-face. I have attended a number of science fiction conventions, writing workshops, presentations and book launches in order to fill the pages of my address book. Whenever I need to do some research I have a look in my address book and search for someone who might know what I need. If I don't find anyone in my address book or my regular experts don't have the information I need then I wander down to the local universities and ask around in the appropriate departments.

Now you have the information you need comes the most important step. Integrating the

information into your story is a lot like developing a character, that is to say that the reader should learn about and experience the science in the same way that they would in real life, NOT all at once.

Don't tell the reader everything you have researched and don't dump the information on the reader all at once. Remember what I said at the beginning of the article, your reader does not read science fiction for the science.

Science fiction stories are no different to any other story. They are told from the point of view of a character and that character, in order to be believable, is unlikely to spend every moment of his day thinking about the scientific details of the world in which he lives. Put simply, if you overload your story with science then you will lose the illusion of fiction. To avoid this only use detail that adds the necessary colour, moves the plot and helps the reader understand the events, characters and world (or worlds) of your story.

This is where some knowledge of storytelling will save you. Stories follow certain shapes and forms, and I can't remember ever reading a story that contained an unbroken passage of descriptive background that I enjoyed. The reader does want to hear all about your world but they also want to be entertained along the way.

There are several ways that writers have explained the science in their stories and not all of them should be copied. One of the most obvious is to have one character in your story explain the science to another. This type of scene is easy to spot and while these scenes can be entertaining more often than not the sole reason they exist is to inform the reader. Try to avoid such contrived scenes as they are disruptive to your story.

A better technique is through the use of narrative flashbacks. Frederik Pohl, who sadly recently passed away, used sections of mini-history in his story *Gateway* to great effect. As

a new writer you should be careful not to overdo this as excessive use of flashbacks can obstruct the progress of your story and ranks alongside dream sequences as one of the most overused literary techniques by inexperienced writers. While I firmly believe that dream sequences and flashbacks can be useful, many new writers misuse them. If you are tempted to use these techniques then be certain that they are truly necessary and don't include them merely to relay background information or bridge gaps in your story.

You should also try to avoid falling into the trap of full narrative backgrounding, which is often incredibly dull, but has been used by writers like Robert A Heinlein in *The Day After Tomorrow* exceptionally well. You should recognise this as a rare exception. This technique was commonly used by Victorian writers to create some truly tedious background chapters and it is thanks to their efforts in this area that we know not to do the same.

The best technique is to bring your science into your story in the same way that you do any other background, that is to show rather than tell. Have your characters use the science and technology in their environment and allow them to react to it naturally, in the context of your story. The science should be as commonplace as the microwave and television in your own house unless it generates conflict in some way. Keeping your science at this level will allow it to merge into your story, rather than reducing it to the level of a prop. If you do this then you should find that your story is a lot more satisfying to write and thus, in turn, more enjoyable to read.

DRAWING YOUR READER INTO THE SHADOWS

The primary goal of dark fantasy and horror is to tell a story that will

give your reader a chill or, hopefully, a scare or two. If you do not manage that then, simply put, your story does not work. The problem that most writers have is in setting up a situation that can deliver that scare, and it is in the method of delivering the scare that you can lose a significant number of readers. I have always preferred the threat of the blade over the crushing blow of the hammer. I like to draw my readers into the shadows rather than leave them in the light.

Some readers will take great delight in reading the gruesome details of an attack by an axe-wielding psycho but I believe that this insults the reader's imagination. I am fully capable of imagining a decapitated corpse, a mangled arm, the mass of intestines spilling out of the slashed stomach onto the floor. I do not need to know every detail and I am pretty sure most readers do not either. Over the past few years we have been bludgeoned with unimaginative television and films that have become so graphic that they are now more comedic than frightening. I am not saying that a well done shock is out of place in your story, if it is done properly, but it should not be the sole reason for the story. Shock is a tool, like any other, that you use to create a chill and deliver that scare. When it is appropriate, you use it but when it is not, then do not bother.

ARTICLE by Philip Meredith

If you want to deliver on that scare then there are three main areas of your story that you need to develop. If you develop these areas then the reader will be drawn unwittingly into your world until they find themselves alone in the shadows and this allows you to deliver a truly memorable scare.

Firstly are the characters you have used to populate your world. I am not just talking about your hero or heroine here either. The characters are how your reader interacts with your world so if you make them all unsympathetic then your reader is unlikely to care about the world you have created, though it is true to say that if you create a hero who is fundamentally unlikeable then you run the risk of your reader thinking that he/she deserves the gruesome fate in store for them. Always remember that fear will come through knowing that something terrible might happen to the character that your reader likes.

I am going to break with teaching tradition here and use the word person in place of character because I think it is important for a writer to think of everyone in their story as real, living human beings and not cardboard cut-outs like the red shirts in Star Trek whose sole role is to die on command. I encourage you to embrace each person fully, and when the time comes for them to die—kill them even

if you never planned to do so. Learning to be true to your story is one of the hardest things you will have to learn. You can not save every body and sometimes the people you have invested the most time and care in will have to die. Be brave and you will see the rewards in your work.

Your reaction to someone dying should mirror the reaction that you want your reader to feel. I find that in cinematic horror I find myself thinking "Glad that's not me!" or "That looks like it hurts" but I have no real sympathy for the characters because they are, quite often, stereotypical movie clones. If that is what you are aiming for then that is fine but I want to deliver more than a momentary spasm of revulsion. I want to chill my reader to the bone. To do that I need to create tension.

My English teacher would always use a storm as an analogy for creating tension. At first the sky darkens and the clouds move in. You can hear thunder over the horizon but you can not make it out and then suddenly the lightning flares over the trees, the air changes, the wind changes and the light shifts. You can feel a storm. You know it is coming before it arrives and you are powerless to prevent it— this is how to create tension and that is what you want to inflict on your reader.

So we come to the danger. I have often lamented the castration and over analysis of my favourite monsters. Many of the classics have been rendered impotent by modern incarnations or attempts to rationalize them. This means that if you want to give your reader a fright you need to find new monsters and that is not as difficult as you may think.

What is a monster?

It is a literalization of fear. So what are you afraid of? What makes your skin turn cold, your throat dry, your stomach churn and your pulse race? What makes you pull the blanket over your head at night?

On the big screen the answer seems to be

death, but that is an easy answer. Try to dig deeper. What about the things you face on a daily basis? Paying your bills, love, trust, failure, exposure, being different, conforming, sex, technology, getting older, weakness, illness, parenthood, being too powerful or not powerful enough.

I compiled this list by talking to friends and family, it is an extension of the basic answer. It is the unknown and what lies in wait for us.

For me, it is not the dark that frightens but what lurks within it. Shadows can move, change shape and come from where you do not. You can not see into them until a flash of light illuminates them and as that flash illuminates the shadows you almost do not want to see into them just in case there is something lurking inside. That feeling is tension, spilling into fear and that is what you, in my opinion, should really be aiming to achieve.

Literal shadows are too gothic for many writers but suppose you are writing about a family struggling to pay their bills, and a young girl realises that she can obtain the money in the oldest profession. What if someone has a crush on her and sees what she is doing but does not understand it. Jealousy overpowers his rational thought and he kills the man, and the next, and the next until the police suspect her.

This is an idea that I used in one of my first short stories and it illustrates how shadowy fiction can grow from out of the fears of the characters within the novel. In the first draft, which was a short story, the storm remained on the horizon but when I returned to it later and developed it into a book, the storm finally arrived and all hell broke loose but not until the end. Not until the people, the shadows and the tension had swollen up and primed my reader.

The story will dictate where to place your shocks and scares, and the people dictate the story. So work on the people and they will draw the reader into the shadows with them.

CREATING FANTASY CREATURES

There are in my mind, three main divisions of fantasy beings.

The first, and perhaps most obvious, are those based in folk and mythological sources. Then come the monsters and finally comes the imaginary creature.

Elves, dwarves and trolls have been around as long as we have and as such require little discussion from me. Likewise, monsters were invented by human minds to make sense of the world around them and there are better people to discuss them with than myself. Instead I would like to focus on the process of developing an entirely new creature.

There are two ways in which you can do this. The first is to start with the habitat and its characteristics and from that contrive a creature capable of living there. This requires a careful examination of the context and then we work backward from that to find the creatures characteristics. A little research and some common sense are all that is required.

If you were creating a Norse based culture that lived in a glaciated arctic tundra that was plagued with blizzards then what kind of wild-life would they hunt?

The easy solution is to look up arctic wildlife and copy it but lets say we want something new for our readers. The environment is cold

ARTICLE by Joseph Carswell

so the creature will most likely need to be large and have thick fur. The large size will provide extra body warmth and the fur stops it being lost through insulation. In the arctic there are issues with snow blindness and freezing of the eyes so the creature would also require a feature that functions akin to human snow goggles. There are numerous desert creatures with extra eyelids so we'll take that feature and adapt it for our needs. Lastly if we want it to be a herbivore then it will either need a feature to allow it to dig up tubers and roots from beneath the frozen ground or will live in a cave system and live off mushrooms and lichen because no vegetation will grow in the snow laden plains. If it is carnivorous then it will need a means to hunt and kill its prey.

Whichever route you decide to take will have an impact on your local inhabitants. A large camouflaged predator is something to be afraid of and may mean that children are forbidden from leaving the village, it could also affect the availability of other food sources for the villagers especially if it attacks their livestock. A large grazing herbivore may have a large horn on its head or claws for digging in the frozen earth making it difficult to bring down one on one, whereas a large herbivore who lives in caves prevents them from using spears and ropes but makes it easier to track and its mushrooms could provide a useful

accompaniment to its meat in the cauldron.

The demands of your story will probably have some bearing on which option you chose, as much as the context of the story. In either case the creature remains believable and will pass the scrutiny of the most hardened critic.

Sometimes this method isn't appropriate and you will need to adopt a different strategy. In some cases you will require a creature to be a certain way in order to fulfil its role in the story. In this case we should delve deeply into the nature of the creature and devise a context that could have produced such a creature.

Lets assume for our story that we are trying to create a form of genie or djinn. The creature is completely telepathic and has no verbal ability. It can fly, disappear into thin air and has the ability of discharging an electric discharge that can shock or kill at the whim of the genie.

Our story dictates an Arabian Nights flavour and so we already know that the genie has to come from a dry, desert environment. The electrical discharge and telepathic ability could stem from the same source if the creature was highly charged with electricity. This could be provided by static energy from constantly swirling winds or by electro-magnetic energy from the sun.

If the sun provides them with energy then much like reptiles they would be prone to sunbathing to charge themselves and would be significantly weaker during the night. I would prefer to take the ability to fly, disappear into thin air and wind providing static electricity together because it provides a different option. The genie could be made of charged sand that sticks together. In order to charge themselves they may inhabit areas where there are swirling winds which they ride in order to increase their static charge and prevent their bodies from literally falling apart due to lack of cohesive static cling.

This means that you have options for a race of sun worshipping genies or, my favourite, a

race of beings that swoop and dive through swirling desert twisters. I imagine that local inhabitants may even blame the genie for creating these winds and when they fall victim to a sandstorm would blame the genie for it.

In both these cases I have tried to show how the environment informs the character of your creatures and how in turn these creatures will inform the fantasy folk that live nearby. There are so many wonderful new creatures waiting to be created that there is no reason for a writer to reach for the same tired worn out stereotypes that we are familiar with. The secret lies in working with both your creature, the local people and the habitat together. Match the requirements with the needs of your story but don't sacrifice plot to explain your invention. It must fit into your story without stress and without undue explanation.

When you introduce a human character, you often need to illustrate his characteristics and your fantasy creature is no different. Don't use long strings of adjectives which will seem more like an inventory than a description but, as with you would with any character, let your creature act out of nature and allow its appearance and habits to be discovered through action.

Creating new creatures will enrich your world and help embellish the lives of its inhabitants. It isn't always easy but it is fun and it helps to make a wonderful difference between your work and that of other writers in the genre. You can even use this advice to create alien races and beings for your latest science fiction work but just remember that in speculative fiction, possibly more than any other field, keeping your characters consistent and logical is a necessity. The more fantastic you strive to be, the more precisely consistent and sensible you have to make the explanation.

HAUNTED HISTORIES

The Beast of Boleskine

ARTICLE by Philip Meredith

It does not really matter what name you call them, witches or warlocks, Satanists or necromancers.

The truth is that the annals of Scottish history are littered with them. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries it is estimated that nearly 4000 souls were accused of a variety of wicked deeds and abominations for which they were put to death. If you ever have the pleasure of visiting Edinburgh Castle then you should take the time to view the small plaque and serpent fountain that mark the location where over 300 people were burned to death.

Around 1736, under the watchful eye of the Presbyterian Kirk, the law changed and an individual could only be imprisoned for 'pretended witchcraft'. As one would expect the law was cruelly exploited and many naïve and luckless victims continued to fall into the witchcraft trap. Whether anyone believed you or not, it rarely mattered. People love to hate the bogeyman and, more often than not, the stigma stuck.

This law has never been repealed and as recently as 1944 a Perthshire woman, Helen Duncan, was imprisoned for conducting a séance. She was subsequently re-imprisoned for conducting another séance after she was

released. To modern readers this may seem absurd, and it should re-assure you that a petition was brought before Scottish Parliament demanding that she be granted a full pardon.

Both black and white witches continue to practice their arts as fervently as they did in the past, many of them for reasons they refuse to disclose. Whether we like to admit it or not, the practice of witchcraft and demonology is thriving, and to some extent is encouraged by the success of the *Harry Potter* books, but do people really understand what they are getting themselves into.

"Black Magic is not a myth. It is a totally unscientific and emotional form of magic, but it does get results. The recoil upon those who practice is terrific. It is like looking for an escape of gas with a lighted candle. As far as the search goes, there is little fear of failure."

*Aleister Crowley,
'The Worst Man in the World'*

Motorists driving along the B862 have their eyes fixated on Loch Ness and as such few would notice the bungalow that crouches on the rise above them. Yet less than 100 years



(above) Photograph of Boleskine House (P. Meredith June 2012)

ago this unassuming building, Boleskine House, was the power-base of notorious occultist, poet and drug-addict Aleister Crowley.

Aleister Crowley was born into a wealthy Methodist family in 1875 and had, by all accounts, an indulgent childhood. He claims to have lost his virginity at 14, and in his Cambridge memoirs discusses at length the voracious life style he indulged in with both men and women. Sex would be an important part of his life from that point onwards.

His memoirs tell of an epiphany that occurred whilst staying in a hotel in Stockholm. He awoke to a sensation of ghostly terror which, he attests, turned into the sensation of purest ecstasy. This epiphany persuaded him to become involved with occultist Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers and the Golden Dawn.

The Golden Dawn embraced the entire gamut of spiritual knowledge from Christianity to Kabbalah. Once initiated into the order as Brother Perdurabo, Crowley was instructed to

build an oratory. With his inheritance he purchased the eighteenth century farm building in Inverness-shire and prepared to perform a ritual from *The Book of Sacred Magick of Abra-Melin the Mage*. He describes the alterations to his home in *The Confessions of Aleister Crowley*, which was published in 1922.

"The first essential is a house in a more or less secluded situation. There should be a door opening to the north from the room of which you make your oratory. Outside this door, you construct a terrace covered with fine river sand. This ends in a 'lodge' where the spirits may congregate."

Crowley was determined that Boleskine House should become a focal point for magical energies, and while we will never be absolutely sure of what occurred within its walls, there is sufficient evidence to suggest that Gnostic masses were practiced. These masses were no doubt the inspiration for



(above left) Photograph of the entrance to Boleskine House opposite the cemetery and (above right) Boleskine Cemetery today with its dead resting in peace. (P. Meredith June 2012)

those found within the pages of *The DaVinci Code*.

The rites and rituals that Crowley performed will have been worrying to most but the location of Boleskine House, across from the cemetery and on the banks of Loch Ness, would have contributed to his reputation amongst the locals. The cemetery had a supernatural history before the arrival of Crowley. Local parish records tell of the minister, Thomas Houston, being roused from the manse to lay to rest the bodies of the dead. It is likely that this history was part of what drew Crowley to the house.

Local tales about the location were combined with Crowley's outlandish behaviour and local rumours, to create a terrible figure. Crowley's coachman rapidly turned to drink, his house-keeper fled the house, and a local butcher is rumoured to have sliced through an artery after having interrupted one of Crowley's rituals. It is no wonder that he earned himself the title of "The Beast of Boleskine."

Banished from the Golden Order and forced to sell his home, Aleister Crowley was forced to wander the earth and wherever he went rumours of demonic rituals followed. His

spectre has long since diminished since his demise in 1947 but has undergone a number of revivals. The purchase of Boleskine House by Led Zeppelin Guitarist Jimmy Page and his face on the cover of *Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* has helped him maintain some celebrity status and kept him in the back of our minds. Jimmy Page noted the sulphurous stench that pervades Boleskine House. "A man was beheaded there and sometimes you can hear his head rolling down," he said in a 1975 interview. "That sort of thing was there before Crowley got there. Of course, after Crowley there have been suicides, people carted off to mental hospitals." It is these subsequent stories that have revitalised the spectre of Aleister Crowley and brought him back to his home on the banks of Loch Ness.

Crowley stated that he "was not content to believe in a personal devil and serve him... I wanted to get hold of him personally and become his chief of staff." It seems to me that in some ways he may have succeeded. The spectre of Aleister Crowley continues to haunt our minds, and perhaps that is not surprising. Necromancy and dark magic seems to have a vindictive way of clinging to its earthly habitat.

CARAVAN

by Anna Sykora



We didn't know
what lay beyond
our dunes of bones
our blackened cities

maybe a fringe
of land alive
maybe a gleaming lake
or valley

maybe a day without
the groaning storm
of grey dust
like an accusation

we didn't know
and if we had
we would have perished
one by one

and still the dream
of a dream beyond us
keeps us
trudging on

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Anna Sykora has been an attorney in New York and teacher of English in Germany, where she resides with her patient husband and three enormous cats. To date she has placed 126 stories, mostly genre, in the small press, and almost 300 poems.

Motto: eat your rejections like pretzels....

MINDSALAD

by Dave Ludford

It was advertised as a sensory deprivation experiment: you volunteered and they buried you alive beneath hard winter earth and left you there to rot. It felt good; now you can rest, sleep.

You were told the neighborhood was perfectly safe at night, safe enough to walk out after dark unmolested. You went, were mugged, ended up having your throat cut. You are resigned to your own stupidity.

You were assured that the android you'd hired was hardworking, human-friendly and would provide good company during those long lonely evenings. After a few hours in your apartment it took an electric heater into your bathroom, plugged it in and dropped it into the tub where you were relaxing, soaking away the day's troubles. Fried you to a crisp instantly. Peace, at last.

You were urged to bite off the head of the black serpent that protruded from your mouth; writhing, mesmeric, deadly- and you would become one who laughed and one who shone. So you bit, and the poison that spilled out killed you instantly. Never trust the serpent.

"I will never, ever leave you" she said, just days before abandoning you for another lover. Your brief but idyllic relationship lies in tatters. Bereft, heartbroken and in total, utter despair you throw yourself beneath the speeding tube train. Or you throw yourself from the top of the apartment block and hurtle toward the ground at body - breaking speed. It doesn't matter which; details are vague but you are dead anyway. No return ticket, and you cannot bounce. But you are incapable of conducting relationships and accept your fate.

Day six. You awaken from an incident-free slumber. No more nightmares. No more dreams of death and disaster. You are alive, but are incapable of living. You have become the living dead. Stressed, worn down, your life force is gradually ebbing away. But you are disturbingly aware that you are capable of dreaming your own demise. Your mind has become a summer salad riddled with worms; vile, corrupt, poisonous. Nothing is what it seems. How easily the dark side overwhelms you. How bitter are the fruits of the earth.

Then- you turn away from the apartment window, away from the bright start of a brand new day. And you think, recalling schoolboy Shakespeare:-

"Is this a dagger I see before me...?"

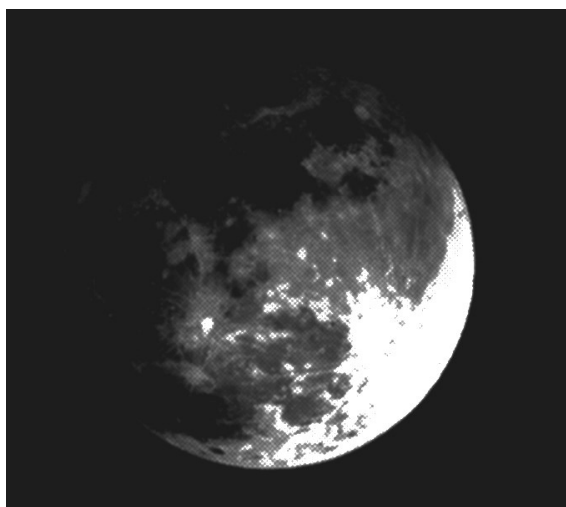
It is within reach.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dave Ludford is a 48 year old writer of poetry and speculative fiction living in Nuneaton, Warwickshire. He works for a small company manufacturing luxury soaps for a living. Until recently he wrote fiction entirely as a hobby, but has begun taking his writing more seriously in the past six months.

Prophets from The Sky

by Vincent Spada



The moon hadn't descended yet, still hanging low in the sky. Early morning was fighting, but could not finish it off. The first rays peaked over the horizon, although slowly, as if afraid. The air was cold, especially for the season. Everything seemed dead.

He staggered over a hilltop, clutching his chest with both hands. Stopping now and then to catch his breath, which was choked with loud coughs. Sitting down, he drew in deeply, to recalculate his physical clock. He twitched, as if bitten by an insect, looking both left and right. Standing, he moved on, his footprints trailing him in the dust. A strong breeze kicked up the landscape. The sun still did not rise.

At last came the outskirts of the village, animals lingering on the fringe. Zelon, who was on guard, noticed him

approaching while he was fetching water. Dropping the bucket at his arrival, he hurried over with a camel blanket. Wrapping it around the traveler's shoulders, they made their way to a fresh fire.

"Meloch, Meloch, are you all right? We hadn't heard from you in over a week. Are you thirsty? Hungry? Let me fetch you some food and drink."

Disappearing into a tent, he returned with bread and a bladder of wine. The traveler drank as if it were his last, wiping his mouth with a dirty hand.

"Meloch, what happened out there? We saw lights and columns of smoke. We thought perhaps you had been killed. We sent out parties but they could not find you."

The weary man drank again, wine running down his bearded chin. "You could not find me because I was not there. I was somewhere else."

"Where?"

"I don't know. Somewhere in the sky."

"The sky?"

"Yes....I think so."

Pouring the last drops down his throat, the traveler handed the bladder back to Zelon. "I don't know where I was. They took me to another place."

"Who took you? The Assyrians? We saw chariot tracks just a few days ago."

"It wasn't the Assyrians. They...they were different."

"What do you mean different? Their clothing? Their language?"

"They didn't have a language. They spoke without speaking."

The weary man leaned back against a rock, his eyes tired but wide. He seemed to be staring off into nowhere, trying to find his place again.

"Meloch, are we in danger of attack? Should I alert the elders?"

"That wouldn't do any good. No one can stop them....oh, heaven, if only you could have seen all the things they showed me."

"Meloch, what happened? What happened out there? The things you're saying...what was it?"

The traveler looked at him, as if half-expecting to vanish suddenly. His voice, when he finally spoke, was quiet and hollow. "I don't know, Zelon. I can't describe it. It goes beyond all the things my father taught me. I was out there in the desert praying, and then they arrived from above. Vehicles of burning fire. It was beautiful. Then the angels came and lifted me, and I was floating with them. I saw the stars in my soul. So close and so blinding. Then they touched my mind and told me. They told me what they wanted from me. To bring them gold to feed their chariots. To keep the fire lit forever."



Zelon looked away, not able to make sense of what he was hearing. When he turned back Meloch had grabbed his arm, his face now filled with terror.

"But it's not just that, Zelon. They wanted something more. Blood, my brother....they said they needed blood."

Zelon lowered him to the ground, cushioning his head and covering him with the blanket. "Rest now, Meloch. The heat has injured your mind. Rest. I shall call the women to come and attend to you."

He trotted off, leaving the weary man alone as the sun finally broke the horizon.

"They wanted more," he whispered in fear. "They said they wanted blood..."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Vincent Spada is the author of poetry and children's books, including "Said the Kitty to the Cat" (Children's title) and "One Under The Sun" (Poetry title). Vincent Spada is the author of poetry and children's books, including "Said the Kitty to the Cat" (Children's title) and "One Under The Sun" (Poetry title). He currently resides in Massachusetts, where he was born and raised, and hopes to release more titles next year (Sports trivia, horror fiction). If you are interested in finding out more about Mr. Spada or his books, check his name online (Google - Amazon> LinkedIn) or ask at your local bookstore or library.

PUBERTY AT THE STOKER HOUSE

by Philip Roberts

Sherry drove fourteen miles out from the city, through dense trees, near non-existent back roads, and the oppressive lack of man made lighting to reach the Stoker household.

Two facts gnawed at the back of her mind during her tedious drive: that she was going to so much effort for a babysitting job, and that at the age of twenty she was still forced to baby-sit to make enough money to get by.

The trees grew right beside the aged, two-story structure she stopped in front of, a rusted truck the only vehicle in front of the garage-less house. Unpainted, the building almost looked as if it had grown from the earth rather than been built by human hands, practically melding with the trees that nudged against it. Had the gruff voice on the phone not offered her as much per hour as he had, Sherry might've turned around right then to head on home.

A faint light glowed in the only visible window beside the front door, the only light Sherry had to see by as she stumbled up to the door. She found no doorbell, not that she was surprised, and for all she knew a doorbell was hidden somewhere in the darkness. Upon the first knock a chair creaked loudly and heavy footsteps trudged towards the door.

The man that greeted her was exactly how she imagined from the voice she'd heard. "Babysitter?" he asked.

She smiled nervously at the tall, heavysset man, his thick beard so long it stretched down to his large gut. The arms tearing loose from his shirt were nearly black with hair, and she could only see the hint of skin on his face through the beard, bushy eyebrows, and overgrown hair.

"Sherry Landers," she said as she shook his hand.



"Name's Bob Stoker. Come on in."

She followed him into the relatively clean living room, surprised at first to see the TV along the wall and the working lights overhead. As they neared a back hallway the pounding beat of rock music grew progressively louder until they stood before a closed, rattling door. Bob hammered his fist on it twice. Nothing happened.

He sighed and motioned for her to follow him back out into the living room.

"Cody is thirteen, going through a phase, you know? Puberty and all. Need to get out of the house for the night and didn't feel like leaving him alone. Hell, he might not even come out of the room, but if he does don't let him leave.

"Of course. How long do you think you'll be gone?"

"Oh, few hours. Not that late though."

He motioned towards the door and Sherry followed until they stood outside on the dark, front porch.

"Just keep an eye on him," Bob said.

"Don't worry. I've done this plenty of times before."

He laughed just briefly; body shaking a bit as he turned from her, drew a frown on Sherry's face. "Sure you have," she heard him chuckle more to himself than to her.

She let it go, let her annoyance sink back, watched him start up his truck and pull out into the darkness, vanishing in the trees almost immediately.

She slammed the door shut. "Everyone thinks their kid is different," she muttered, and right after the words were spoken she realized something had changed. The music was off.

She slowly approached the darkened

back hallway and the still sealed door. She couldn't see any light on beneath it, no music rattling the frame, just calm silence. She walked hesitantly up to the door and gently knocked. Someone shifted behind the door.

"You in there?" she asked. A light thud answered her.

She reached out to the knob, hesitated with her fingers wrapped around it, and then pulled back instead. Whatever problems the kid had were most certainly not worth dealing with. She had been babysitting for years, and she'd come to accept the need to take a step back and just keep things under control. Perhaps the kid needed someone to talk to, someone to reach out to them, but as cold as she knew it sounded, Sherry wasn't being paid to be a therapist.

She turned from the door and started back for the living room. Something loud slammed into the closed door. Her breath caught, choked her, and brought her back around to see the sealed door, barely lit by the light in the living room. A switch to her left flooded the hallway with near blinding light.

The door shook again, like a fist slamming into the other side of it. "Are you doing this just for show?" Sherry called out.

Something in her just needed to see him. The unknown got to her the most, made her step back up to the door, touch the knob again, but this time as she paused her eyes dropped to the wood flooring and the red seeping out from beneath the bedroom door.

The knob turned easily but the door resisted just a bit as she shoved it inward to reveal the bedroom covered in posters, magazines, CD cases, and clothing. She'd seen it all too many times before to even take notice, eyes dropping instead to the floor and the glistening red flap of something strewn across it. It commanded so much of her

attention she only noticed the open window across from her when a chilly breeze breathed across her face, brought her eyes up to the darkness staring back.

She ignored the window and the missing boy. She knelt down to touch the rubbery thing on the ground, lifted it up just enough to see the hair on the top end, the image of a hollowed out face staring back at her, stretching down into a neck and upper body. Discarded skin, her mind offered, brought a slight smile to her face, seemed to snap her out of the madness and lift her up.

"Not a bad one," she called out. She didn't honestly care if the boy had fled; that just made for an easier night. Wasn't as if she could've done anything to prevent it, done anything to stop him, and she'd be damned if the father tried to avoid paying her because of it. Still, she figured she needed to do something to try finding him.

Though she was loathed to do so she stepped back out into the black night and moved slowly around the outer perimeter of the house. Light poured from Cody's open window, let her see the tear in the wood, what looked like blood matting down the dead leaves surrounding the home. While she accepted the possibility that the boy had been attacked, that he had literally been dragged away, the rest of her shoved the thought aside, stood defiant before the dark forest, let the wind blow over her. Too many pranks and too many tricks had been pulled over on her before.

"I'm not going to come out here again," she shouted to the boy who was surely hunched just beyond the trees, watching and laughing.

The front door hung, shattered, from the hinges, froze Sherry before it, unable to comprehend the damage. She saw the

grooves in the wood, the bent metal where the hinge had snapped, and the streaks of red smeared across the surface.

She pulled out her cell phone with numbed, white fingers, stared dumbly for a few seconds at the lit screen, almost forgetting why she'd even grabbed it. Before she could dial she saw the lack of signal, smiled tightly through clenched teeth before letting her eyes swing back to the glowing doorway to the home.

Before she could think to run to her car she heard the crash, whipped towards her vehicle. She could just make out a shape hunched low on the hood outside the faint glow of the doorway's light. It darted away from the vehicle before she could move any closer, the glistening shape gone almost instantly back into the rustling trees.

She ran into the home rather than even check to see if her car had been harmed. She darted through the living room, swept through the small home in search of a phone, of any means of communication, but the one phone she found offered only silence. Paused by the back door with the useless plastic pressed against her ear she froze to listen, to adjust to the situation, but something creaked by the open door. Things were changing too fast to keep up with.

A row of steak knives ran along a magnetized strip on the wall. She pulled loose the largest one she could find and swung back towards the kitchen doorway, back pressed against the counter, gaze jumping between the door and another means of escape. Another smaller hallway snaked around the back corner of the room, but she couldn't see where it led.

When her eyes rushed back to the kitchen doorway she saw it, perched and motionless, hunched low to the floor as if it

had been there the whole time, large eyes fixated on her. The eyes took up half the head, pupils seeming to swim in a churning mass of round liquid embedded deep within the skull. Clear fluid streamed slowly from a small hole near where she supposed its chin was, but she couldn't say if it was a mouth or something else.

Two arms extended more from the chest than the shoulders, stumps rather than fingers on the edge of them; what she assumed were the feet had toes so long she suspected it could use them as hands. The entire nude body pulsed with veins beneath largely translucent skin. She almost thought it was crying, something pouring from the watery eyes, but she couldn't tell if that was just its natural state.

She aimed the knife at it as if the weapon could protect her. She almost broke out in a fit of laughter, body shaking at the sight of it in the bright kitchen lights, its head

mouths that snapped at her, dug into her exposed arm. She swung the knife again, cut a groove across its cheek, but it pinned her too much for her to jab it anywhere vital, those mouths darting in to take small chunks out of her.

Her arms swung wildly, eyes closed; pain flared across her whole body, her own cries of fear and pain mixed with the grunted exhilaration from her attacker. When her eyes did open she saw only the wet red splattering the walls, the thin tongues dancing from the gaping, slick mouths.

Somewhere far away she knew feet stomped heavily down the hallway, but she made no attempt to cry for help, closing her eyes off instead in preparation for whatever fate Mr. Stoker had in store for her.

Life ended with the thunderous explosion of a gun. For those first few seconds Sherry existed in a void of darkness and pain, images pouring slowly into her vision as if she

The entire nude body pulsed with veins beneath largely translucent skin.

leaned forward, studying her just as she studied it. She didn't realize she was crying until she felt the tears drip from her chin.

An engine rumbled in the distance, growing louder, drew both Sherry's and the things attention. The second its head turned she darted for the small hallway, heard a low, guttural sound of surprise followed by feet smacking wetly on the tiled floor. She rounded the corner, struck the washer and drier against the dead end, no window or escape visible.

She turned, her knife up, cutting into the things shoulder as it barrelled into her, knocking both of them to the ground. It brought up its stump hands, the middle of both splitting open to reveal twin, slobbering

swam up from beneath a deep, murky lake back to the world of the living. A weight held her down, made breathing difficult, while above her she saw Mr. Stoker's hairy face peering down with an expression she couldn't read.

She said nothing as he knelt closer, grabbed hold of the creature's shoulder, and pulled it away.

"Is that Cody?" she managed to ask numbly when the body was gone.

Mr. Stoker glanced down at her, his son's body still in hand, and nodded without expression. Tears streamed down his cheeks, or she assumed they were tears at first, until she saw the way his eyes wavered, pupils

somehow floating within his skull.

"It's a delicate time," he said, eyes fixed on his son. "Puberty is. A lot of changes, difficult ones to handle no matter how well you prepare them. If the madness takes hold, there ain't any way to remove it, and it's best to know early what you're going to have to deal with, right when it hits. Even a single day and he'd be a handful to take down. I should know. Done it before."

He set his son's body down in the corner and turned back towards her, eyed her, and Sherry didn't think she could move with those odd eyes latching onto her. "Don't look too bad," he said, "all things considered, at least. Mainly superficial."

He knelt closer to her, reached out his left hand for her to take, and she took it without thought, without the ability to think or consider the situation she found herself in, bloodied form nestled up against a washer and drier with the dead creature in front of her.

His expression never changed as he yanked her forward while bringing down the gun gripped firmly in his right hand. Sherry felt a brief, emotionless smile touch her face before the gun cracked her across the forehead and send her back to the floor. The world didn't fade just yet, her mind still swimming on the verge of consciousness, tinged just briefly with never before felt rage.

Her fingers tightened on the handle of the knife still clutched in her hand, and before Mr. Stoker could react she brought the blade down into his right foot, dug the metal into the flesh as some form of defiance, no hope of escape embedded in it.

A deep laugh shook his gut as he reached down and pulled the blade loose. "I like you," he laughed.

She smiled back as he grabbed hold of her hair and dropped her painfully into sleep with a hard right hook.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Philip lives in Nashua, New Hampshire and holds a Masters in Education and a Bachelors degree in Creative Writing. As a beginner in the publishing world, he's a member of both the Horror Writer's Association and the New England Horror Writer's Association, and has had numerous short stories published in a variety of publications, such as the *Beneath the Surface* anthology, *Midnight Echo*, and *The Horrorzine*. A full anthology of Philip's short stories entitled *Passing Through* can be found on the Amazon kindle store. More information on his works can be found at www.philipmroberts.com

INTUITION

by J. Zartman



With the darkness came a howling storm. The rain fell in torrents. The bitter wind lashed it and then froze it.

A thick fog rose from the ground, as if the ghosts of the suicidal raindrops wandered back toward the clouds. The wind caught the fog and tore it like a shroud, scattering the ragged bits before it. The lightning flickered, sullen at first, diffused by the fog; then it flashed savagely through the falling rain, striking a tree with a crack and splintering it.

The light of the next stroke showed wisps of smoke ascending from the charred wood. The clouds bellowed and raged as the thunder crashed and rolled; the skies poured out their fury on the wilderness, smiting trees, bending and tossing, beating the ground with cold rain. The temperature was then malevolently lowered by the screaming arctic winds and the driving rain was turned to snow, as if the clouds would bury the land their enemy. And as the snow covered the soaked and freezing land a bitter wind cast the snow into huge drifts.

In the darkness a light moved through the blizzard. It traced a straight line through the wilderness, as if moving with purpose. Two lights became distinct hovering above the surface of the snow. Red lights were then distinct, above and below the other two lights. There was a faint sound, a smooth and steady swishing as the dark shape of the vehicle passed through the night, intent on a

steady course through the howling storm.

* * *

"Great day for the resistance," Unk said.
"We've scored our biggest hit yet."

"Now what?" Kat asked.

"Phase two."

"Tell me?"

"Could, but I'd have to kill you."

She snorted. The articulate sounds of Scarlatti performed on a piano filled the hovercar. Thin lines of light stood out against the swirling whiteness on the other side of the glass. Unk held the yoke and kept his eyes on the schema of their progress, blue lines and their position marked by a moving red dot. They were moving at 200 MPH.

"Who's playing?" Kat asked.

"This is a recording Agatha made a few weeks ago."

"She's always very precise."

"She works hard at it."

Kat looked at the snowflakes streaking by her side of the window and vanishing into the dark. She listened in silence to the next piece while Unk continued to peer at the schema and to scan the instruments beamed onto the glass. He straightened his back in the leather seat; he relaxed his shoulders for the nth time; not being able to see what was coming still made him tense.

"How far do we have to go?" Kat asked.

"The hatch should be coming up soon. But we have to go up this canyon and then down another one at right angles."

"Do you want some coffee?"

"I'll wait till we get there. It might spill."

The schema blinked the upcoming canyon on the display. Unk dropped down to 150 and began to turn in a wide arc toward the mouth of the canyon.

"Why don't you ever use the autopilot?"

"I'd rather do it myself because it's more interesting and the autopilot would slow us down below a hundred."

The refined sound of Scarlatti continued to pour forth, delicate and glad.

Kat looked out of her side of the glass again and saw the side of the canyon streaming by in the reflected light of the headlamps. The car was accelerating. She reclined her seat and switched the overhead panel on, selecting the rear view first. The panel showed only red swirling snow. She switched to the ground view and watched the smooth snow passing beneath.

"Get ready," Unk said. He was sitting forward.

* * *

A man entered the control centre of an orbiting space station. He ripped an emergency panel off and began to trigger an override. He fired the thrusters and the orbital shuddered, lurched and then began to accelerate as it started falling. Inside the station, warnings began to plead with regular insistence. The solar panels on the outside sheared off of the orbital.

The station shook as if held in a great angry fist. Screws sprang loose, wires touched and fused with showers of sparks, panels popped and the oxygen levels dropped to zero making the ventilators gasp and whine.

The man had approached the airlock and now with a last twist he felt the door unfasten. But then it did not open, and he found he had overexerted himself, needed a breath desperately. He was on the wrong side of the door for oxygen, and the door was jammed. He shoved once more at it with desperate,

inhuman strength, but still it did not give. He looked around, and the station's interior was distorted in his wild vision.

He was running out of time. He was suffocating, having drawn in a breath of the exhausted air in the ship. He panted, but it did not help the choking sense and it made him feel much worse. He saw the fire extinguisher clipped on the far wall and ran for it, lightheaded. Spots were before his eyes. He wondered vaguely, as objects such as the walls appeared to move randomly in his field of vision, if the disorientation was more due to trying to hustle in zero gravity or because he couldn't breathe.

Returning with the extinguisher he blacked out, but the momentum carried him forward. He hit the door and the knock on his head revived him. He picked up the cylinder, stared wildly at the airlock, swung hard. At last the door flew open, sucking him clean out of the plunging orbital.

Gasping, he turned into the wind to look, to see how far he had to go before opening the parachute on his back. Doing so, he smacked face first into the cold North Sea.

* * *

Kat activated her safety harness. It was unnecessary, but she still liked to have it. In the event of a high speed collision the interior of the car would be instantly filled with evanescent safety-foam. She watched the screen. Suddenly Unk twisted the yoke and the car made a sharp right turn that pulled them abruptly against the left padding of their seats. Then Kat saw the passing ground beneath move sideways till the snow was replaced by the side of the canyon. The car turned itself ninety degrees in the effort to comply with the unusual instructions it received through the yoke. Then it swung back upright as they came out of the turn and they sped down the canyon and out again.

"I thought it would do that." Unk observed.

"Amazing!" He flicked on the travel line and on the schema appeared a red line, with the wide curve of the approach to the canyon and then the almost ninety degree turn they had just made. He zoomed in to the tight turn so that the blue lines of the canyon walls were more evident.

"I don't think I can take it any faster, we got as close as possible to the side when we came out of the turn."

"I thought that was the car."

"It is the car, but not by very much. I want it to have something to work with. Besides, when the wind is like this it's more tricky."

"I thought the car compensated for anything the wind did."

"Well, if you have something abrupt and strong it is going to take the car a split second sometimes. And when it's all concentrated on a turn like that it's like handling two crises at once. All the information might max the computer longer than we could afford—after all, the car's not a racing model. One second would be longer than we could afford."

"But you scanned the wind patterns?"

"No. But we were running straight at the north wall and too far below the top of the canyon for the wind to affect the turn."

A red warning blinked on the display.

"Now they're aware of the dangerous driving and will recall the car, Unk! Why did you have to do it?"

He remained silent, watching the red warning. In a few seconds, it stopped.

"Ha! The orbital just went offline." Unk said. "They'll be scrambling satellites but we've got our window. Time to put on some speed."

She shook her head. "You just had to figure it out that way, didn't you? I wonder if Bruce

She had all the latest implants; every year she got an upgrade to the fastest and most recent biotech stuff Crozer produced. And for that reason he had a kind of horror of her as well.

survived.”

The hovercar broke over 300 mph and rocketed over the snow leaving a tell-tale wake. Only time mattered now.

* * *

A tall woman of commanding presence dressed in a skirt suit and with a mysterious air of perfection walked into a panelled office. Behind an elaborate desk of glass and very expensive wood and in front of a panoramic view of a city sprawled under snow-capped mountains sat a young man. He looked up as she entered.

“Yes?”

“Mr. Crozer, orbital four has been taken out.”

“What do you mean, orbital four?”

She almost smiled. “Crozer’s earth-orbital stations, sir. Number four.”

“What, uh, exactly do you mean by ‘taken out’?”

That had been imprecise, she realized, and possibly unprofessional. If he noticed that last, he might also suspect she was gloating, and that would be tricky. “Crashed, sir,” she said. “Crashed and damaged. Its present location appears to be 852 meters below sea-level and sinking. North sea.”

Crozer leaned back, staring. “What? How?”

“Apparently someone manually overrode the emergency and used its correction thrusters to knock it out of orbit.”

“Who can have been on it?”

“That’s not known.”

He kept staring right through her, completely floored.

Agatha was his office secretary. She was now looking out of the window, probably watching a stream of data at the same time and making sure she had resources ready in case he had more questions. Of course, the thing he really wanted to know she would know nothing of—the why of it. Her function was secretarial, not executive and in no capacity did she advise him. She was fully wired and transmitted information to him in his office because he was the head of Crozer, was no connection slave, and worked in a luxuriously unwired office.

Still, Allan Crozer wondered what was going through her mind. Not that she’d withhold any information she could get that he might ask for—for that reason she had been his secretary as long as he’d had the job; he no more thought of mistrusting her than we would of mistrusting a computer terminal. She had all the latest implants; every year she got an upgrade to the fastest and most recent biotech stuff Crozer produced. And for that reason he had a kind of horror of her as well.

“When did the last capsule dock at the orbital?”

“Two months ago. All the crew was then evacuated.”

“Reason?”

“Severe respiratory complications later identified as exposure to mustard gas.”



Ah, that was it! Someone had gotten on board back when the orbital was seeing traffic and used a very old trick to get everybody off. "That's some long term planning," he said out loud, and wished he hadn't. There was probably a fifth column in the corporation—in spite of all the measures taken already.

"Agatha."

"Yes, Mr. Crozer?"

"Set up the control room and summon the team leaders immediately."

She nodded once, and walked out of the office.

* * *

The wind howled over the piled snow. The lights of the speeding hovercar made a swiftly moving pool of light in the darkness. North of the moving light a mound of snow rose into the air. Red lights glimmered at the base of the mound of snow which parted from the ground revealing a man-made structure rising into the night. It was a cylinder, large enough to hold a hovercar. The top extended beyond the glass and steel sides. Laser illumination shone down from the ceiling of the structure, and in the light steam rose to meet the swirling snow.

The car was bearing swiftly down on the open hatch. The lamps approached the open side of the glass cylinder as if the vehicle meant to pass straight through it to the other side. Abruptly the lights shifted up and the forward progress of the car was halted as it strained toward dark sky, perpendicular to the ground. Then it fell back. The nose of the vehicle swung back parallel to the ground as the glass hatch unlocked with a small hiss, sliding back over the car.

A figure leapt from each side of the car. Both hurried out of the snow into the cylinder and turned to watch. The glass had sealed itself again and the car was turning. It headed back out into the storm, empty.

"Nice work," said Kat.

"It was a Crozer car—the best. Though who knows if they didn't put a self-destruct option into it."

"I think you're getting paranoid."

* * *

Agatha was back in her chamber. Her chamber was decorated in citrus colors: lime green, lemon yellow, orange chairs. It had, besides the chairs, screen possibilities, her ultra-secure wireless transmitter module, and an expensive espresso machine.

She sat back in her ultrarecliner and checked the other five Crozer orbitals. The satellites were being scrambled, but there was a three hour window. "Which ought to be enough," she said. If Unk made it with the code, the missiles would be launched and the remaining orbitals gone. That along with a few of the Whodeea orbitals would be a good day's work for the resistance, not to mention the plant already taken out yesterday.

Since she had time, Agatha switched on her stereo-retina display and became engrossed in catalogues of maternity supply, baby clothes and such items. She browsed there while waiting to be summoned. With the control room online, however, she was pretty sure Mr. Crozer would not call for her anytime soon.

* * *

The hatch began to descend and closed off the view.

Unk groaned, "We forgot the coffee!"

"I brought some ground, we can still make some."

The hatch stopped descending, rotating till the surrounding steel panels gave way to the opening. They had passed into the foyer before the hatch stopped moving. They

entered the cavern, standing at a balcony that looked down into the bunker. A sound of dripping water was all that could be heard. Unk and Kat went left along the gangway till they came to a spiral stair. They descended, counting, till they had passed 24 levels. On the 25th they ran down the gangway toward a passage cut into the living rock. They came to a metal door. It slid open sideways and revealed a pleasantly lit apartment. Three people reclined in the living room.

"Unk!" one of them said. "Put in the codes and send Crozer spinning into the red."

* * *

One by one and in stunned silence, Allan Crozer and the top tier of the corporation watched as the multi-million dollar orbitals were destroyed and a whole network of priceless information collapsed.

"Look at this," the PR lead said. "These newsfeeds over the underwire are saying Whodeea took some hits too. Not as many though."

"The local resistance, then," someone else concluded.

"How did they take out the orbitals?" another person asked.

"Looks like missiles by the last transmissions, but they're still working on decoding the signals."

"Where would they get missiles? We don't have missiles, do we?"

"Leftover ordnance from back in the day, I guess. They found an old silo or a dump or something."

Crozer was silent as the people in the room reacted. A response was required, some kind of containment. The resistance had gone too far. There were already plans for retaliation for the plant they'd destroyed first, but this required swift, decisive action. They had to be

wiped out or they could cost millions more. He looked over at his development lead. He tapped the screen in front of him.

"Agatha?"

"Yes, Mr. Crozer?"

"I need to use the sauna. Ten minutes from now, ok? Have it all blocked off."

"Done, sir."

Crozer got up. All eyes were on him in the silent room. He looked at the development lead and said, "Come with me, Martin."

* * *

"Unk?"

"Agatha! What's up?"

"I think Crozer suspects infiltration."

"Be a fool if he didn't, and he's not in charge because he turned out a fool."

"He's holed up with the development lead in a sauna."

"That's unanticipated. Not in the control room? I see what you mean . . . wait! Why the sauna?"

"Not wired. He's probably planning on pulling something out of the development vats. Decisive and nasty. And Unk?"

"You want to get out, Agatha?"

"Yes. And soon, Unk. It has to be very soon."

"Don't blame you. Hang in there and let me know if you get a window."

"Incoming," came a voice over the PA in the underground apartment. It was the rebel security chief, Druid.

"What's incoming?"

"Looks like a car of some sort. Large."

"Security," Unk said. "We're going to have to fight. See if Agatha knows."

They were still checking weapons when Druid ran in.

"What?"

"They've sent something special Agatha can't seem to get at," she said.

They watched the vehicle on the monitors. Out of it rolled twenty units, like motorcycles. The units fanned out and surrounded the entrance, taking out the surveillance with eerie precision; soon the Radicals sitting trapped and blind in their living room.

"Well," Unk said. "Now we wait for them. I must say they look pretty formidable—don't know what we can do. Maybe we'll just die. But we've got the orbitals down and others can follow up."

"Why do we do it, Unk? Remind me. Cause just sitting here waiting like this sucks."

He glanced over at her. "What, take shots at Crozer? Kind of late in the day for that." But he knew she hated the waiting part of a fight and needed a distraction.

"I know," Kat said, "I just want to understand it before I die, you know?"

"What companies like Crozer do is an invasion of the spiritual. They more or less have to, and they will because they're so big. But we have to resist it."

"The question not being that we resist, but how we resist, right?"

"Yes. The old question of what resistance is legitimate. We have to have a principle and resist on principle in a principled way. It won't work otherwise—it will just fizzle out and to their advantage. What we have to avoid is resisting on a passionately felt impulse alone. If we don't think it out, if we leave soft edges and fuzzy patches; we are just doing what the

corporations do.”

Kat shifted, scooting around behind the blasterwalls they’d dragged into the living space. “It seems counterintuitive, but that was the problem of the early resistance, wasn’t it? Indignation, certainly, but all froth and nonsense.”

“Big waste of effort and talent. Their procedure was not geometrical, not mathematical in its precision. They squandered their feeling instead of multiplying it exponentially through discipline. For that you need to think through your rationale and your ethics.”

“They always told me you were Byzantine, Unk.”

Unk’s round, slightly crooked features went into a smile.

“So the question,” Kat continued, “is of principle. How do you put it, again?”

“What eternal principle, what obvious truth do we use as metal with which to forge our sword?”

She waited. They could hear nothing going on outside, but did see that the communication feeds would go dead for every stage the Crozer units advanced.

“They’re doing the PA as they come,” Druid said.

“Yeah, but we have redundant systems from the bottom up too, right?”

“Right. And though they calculate, our systems here were not originally calculated. It is all jerry-rigged from A to Z. Spontaneous and completely ad hoc. Nobody is going to figure out everything of what we got here.”

Kat smirked, but she said, “go on with the principle Unk.”

“Right! The principle is an old one: dignity is freedom and freedom is self-determination.

The corporations manipulate. They try to control what is not theirs. If people voluntarily submit to the consuming way—what they used to call consumerism—fine. But what if we don’t want to live that way ourselves? If there is no room for us, we make it. Since they’ve opted for totality, we must destroy the instruments of their totality.”

“Besides the orbitals, what?”

“Whatever consolidates their hegemony. Which is the trick, you see, because things on the way to that do not qualify—and that’s the ethics of it: it wouldn’t be right to randomly destroy things there. If we are to be free, they must submit to competition: there has to be a fair playing field. Which they have decided to discourage at all costs—like this little confrontation right now.”

“Here they come!” Druid said. They heard a soft treading outside, but had lost all surveillance of the compound above the living quarters.

“Any idea what they are?” Unk asked.

Agatha came through at that point. “Unk, they’re super-enhanced humans. They’ve been taken since they were embryos and manipulated all along. The ultimate biotech.”

“What are they capable of?”

“Anything Crozer wants, I guess.”

Kat looked at Unk.

“See?” he said. “At the same time, it limits them. It has to.”

“How would it?”

“The limits of their creators. Boards are not all that imaginative. They sit on a pile of assets and are more inclined to preserve what they have than to take risks.”

“I feel there’s a flaw in your logic there, but I can never find it,” she said. “Anyway, what’s

Kat was silent for a moment, and then she said, “What do you want?” The tone of her voice was wondering, penetrating even.

our strategy now?”

“Even the playing field. We have to proceed by individual choice which is our strength, our only strength.”

“We need to divide them—” Kat said.

“No, they’ll overwhelm us that way. One is more because of the biotech. We have to reject,” Unk said frowning, “the underlying premise.”

“What’s that?”

“That will imposed by force is more powerful than will solicited by persuasion, I think.”

“Persuasion!” Kat said. “Persuade these post-human units of what?”

Unk stared at the door, which had by now almost been cut through. It was a curious suggestion—persuading the units. “I was thinking more of terminating them with superior force . . . if we have it. Will is not imposed by force without a lot of waste, but it is resisted with force often more efficiently.”

“Well, let’s hope the flame-throwers work.”

The door fell back and the units were in. They rolled noiselessly, gleaming, a bit like motorcycles. Lasers filled the apartment as the units immediately took out all the surveillance, methodically shutting down any information advantage as the Radicals waited from behind the rigged blasterwalls.

There were only five units in the room. They stood evenly distributed, upright. They had a humanoid shape. They were stopped, as if on

pause.

“Fire!” Druid yelled. Everybody turned flamethrowers on the units for exactly fifteen seconds, which was a mistake.

The units were fireproof. They used the opportunity to target the Radicals with wire nets which they fired, immobilizing five: all but Kat, who had ducked back behind her blasterwall without really trying to fire.

The Radicals lay on the ground in the wire nets which auto-tightened and held them helpless. The machines ignored them and concentrated on the place where Kat waited.

* * *

“What do they want?” Crozer said out loud but to nobody in particular. He was back in the operation room watching the raid, but for some reason his own question derailed his concentration and he thought back to a time a few weeks ago when he’d asked a similar question. “Agatha, what do you want?”

The immaculate woman had looked at him at the time and something had flickered in her eyes for a second. Then she had half-smiled and shook her head, as if she didn’t understand.

Agatha remembered that moment now—as she heard Crozer wondering about the resistance. She had almost let her answer out before the professionalism closed it down. I want to have babies—she thought again, and she thought of the man she wanted to marry, of Bruce, and wondered if he would make it out of the North Sea alive.

All their life they've been bred like animals, treated like machines on the basis of performance.

* * *

In the apartment in the bunker, one of the units broke the silence, "Please do not resist. You are outnumbered."

Kat was silent for a moment, and then she said, "What do you want?" The tone of her voice was wondering, penetrating even.

It sounded absurd, and Druid snorted derisively. "What do they want? Oh please." But something was happening to the machines. They seemed to grow still, as if considering the question.

"What do we want?" said the unit that had spoken. And the rest of them stirred in a way that seemed to the watching radicals uneasy. "How . . ."

In the operation room, Crozer turned to the head of development. "What . . . is going on?"

"I'm not sure . . ."

"Have these things been tested?"

"No, we just pulled them out of the vat on your orders."

Crozer scowled and stared at the scene the units were streaming back. What was wrong with them? Why were they considering the question?

Agatha, standing in the shadows by the door, suddenly realized what was happening and saw her chance. She stepped purposefully out of the room and let the door slide behind her. She had already called up the necessary information and was getting clearance as she stepped into a restricted elevator and waited for it to ascend to the correct floor.

* * *

Crozer watched the units. "What is going through their minds?" he asked aloud.

"Do they have minds of their own?" someone else, a woman, asked.

"Or course they do, they're still humans," said the head of development, irritated. Prejudice against enhanced humans at this level of the corporation really got to him. Crozer's expression, he noticed, registered disgust.

"Oh!" gasped the woman, realizing just now what Agatha had already figured out. "They're humans without proper emotional development and have never before been confronted with a real choice."

"What?" Crozer snapped.

"She's found the vulnerability," an older woman explained. "They're like teenagers or even children and don't know how to proceed. All their life they've been bred like animals, treated like machines on the basis of performance. Now for the first time they are considering the possibility of making a choice for themselves—and to judge by how it's going, it appeals to them."

Crozer swung to stare at the leader of development, the question unvoiced.

The leader stammered, trying to say it was not true. But he knew it was true. By pulling these models out of development untested, the obvious flaw in their development had been casually but effectively exposed at the critical moment. They had no emotional conditioning for this kind of situation.

"What will happen now?" Crozer asked.

"They can be persuaded," said the woman, watching the scene before them all of Kat talking the lethal biotech humans down, the nets coming off the Radicals, the latest Crozer technology choosing to go against the will of its own designers.

* * *

The pod streaked through the cloudless sky. It had originated in one of the unnumbered floors of Crozer headquarters from which it had shot out. It was a hovercar modified to withstand being launched as a missile, and by this means Agatha left her comfortable job and made her way to the resistance's new base.

No wind troubled the pod's flight. As it slowed and began to arc toward ground and the systems began to control its trajectory, Agatha checked to see if Crozer would override and control, ready to bail out at any moment. But she went unnoticed. She checked her own implants one more time, and then locked the already weak stream of information from Crozer's net out. A part of her went dark, and she felt a little sad, but she couldn't be hacked to divulge information now. She had reached the point of no return.

* * *

"Well," said Unk, "Here's to female intuition."

They all toasted the ladies. Snowflake, one of the female units from the Crozer's labs, looked around registering confusion.

"Intuition?"

"A sense of things that cannot be explained," Unk said.

"A valuable asset," said Bruce.

"A most valuable asset," Unk agreed. "It has been a good week for the resistance. You know what comes next thought, don't you?"

"What?"

"2.0 is what. The biotechs with emotional conditioning."

"We are not done resisting," Agatha said. "My career's behind me, but not the rest of life."

"To the baby," Unk said. And they all drank.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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A CAPTAIN'S VIEW

by Jonpaul Taylor

Hit the deck!" yelled the ensign. The hull of the Jenson had been breached

by an ion cannon, sending the ship spiralling towards the planet's surface. Everyone fell flat except for Petty Officer Gordon. He wasn't quick enough. I watched the panel in front of him burst like a firecracker, shooting metallic shrapnel into his body. He fell into a motionless heap on the ship's floor. Damn it! This was not part of the plan, and things were only gonna get worse. Soon, we'd break the atmosphere of Delta 2 and then everything would really go to hell.

I couldn't believe we were the first ones to go down in the battle. We were a small ship – just ten people. We were supposed to squeak past the enemy fleet while they focused on larger, more appealing targets like our inter-galactic destroyers. I don't know how they spotted us. It wasn't supposed to happen like that! But, there was nothing I could do to change it. What happened, happened. I could, however, make sure the rest of us made it out of here alive. I had to find a way to land the Jenson.

"Prepare for impact!" I ordered my crew. I tried to fight my way towards the control panel, but I was pinned to the deck. The entire crew was stuck. The speed of our descent was putting forces far stronger than normal gravity on all of our bodies. The reactor must have been damaged when the hull was breached. Otherwise, we wouldn't have had so much trouble. The crew was scared. I'm



sure they were all seeing their lives flash before their eyes. As I stared at the frightened faces of my small crew, I tried to show no emotion. A true captain – a true leader – fears nothing.

The ship slammed into what felt like a brick wall. I always hated breaking the atmosphere, even when I was safely strapped in. The force of the impact shook us all free from the ship's deck, and sent us soaring around like ragdolls. We were the balls in a pinball machine of death as we slammed into the different electronic panels that decorated the deck's walls.

All of us were alright once the jostling subsided, except for Lieutenant Anders. He was fried by one of the circuit boards as he was thrown around, leaving the stench of burning flesh and death in the air. We all gagged as the scent wafted through the air. I'll never forget that putrid smell. What an end to a good man.

Two members of my crew were dead. It

was unbelievable. These men were my friends. I had to keep my mind focused on saving the rest of the crew. The loss of both the lieutenant and the petty officer were tragic, but breaking through the atmosphere like that gave us all a chance at survival. After being tossed around like a child's plaything, I landed next to the control panel! I struggled to pull myself into the chair, but the extreme forces had returned the moment I hit the deck. I was sure that this was it, but I wasn't gonna give up. I fought with all my strength to stand, trying to wrestle out of the grasp that planned on holding me to the deck until I met my demise. Not this time. I found my grip on the side of the control panel and pulled myself into the seat before it. Turning the faintly glowing dials and grabbing the steering column, I tried to level the Jenson and slow us down. To my surprise, it worked. But, we were going too fast to save the ship. We were gonna crash – that was for certain. But, our lives still hung in the balance of a successful emergency landing. "Brace yourselves!"

We hit the planet's surface with an explosion that shook the ground for miles, but we all survived with only minor bumps and bruises. "Ready your blasters," I ordered them. "They'll find us here. We're too deep into their territory to go unnoticed." I kept my stern face while I stared at the cargo bay door towards the rear of the ship. It was the only way in or out. Then, I remembered the dignified, golden pin on my shoulder that distinguished me as a captain. I ripped it off and threw it to the ground, channelling my anger from the day's events into that small patch of sleeve that was torn away with my symbolic honour. The mission was more important. It could mean the end of the war. If I was caught with that badge, it could jeopardize everything we had fought for, along with putting other human lives in danger. My pride wasn't worth all of that.

"Captain," said Chief Petty Officer Liedmen. "How dare you throw your badge! That is not the way you honour your position!"

He sounded frustrated, like I had just disrespected him along with myself. He had always been outspoken. He was right, though. I had disgraced my position, but sometimes there are bigger problems than tradition and petty thoughts of a symbol.

"I know too much, soldier. I can't be caught with that on." I turned to the rest of my crew. "Now, all of you get ready for a fire fight! They won't be comin' in here to chat!"

"Yes sir!" they said in unison.

We heard a rumbling outside of the ship that sounded like a predator searching for its next victim. Just a few moments later, we heard the cargo bay door being wrenched open. Those bastards were strong. They were getting inside the Jenson, and there was nothing I could do about it.

When they reached the deck, we didn't put up much of a fight. Hell, I don't think any of us even got a shot off. They were too quick and we were no match for their size. One of their long, yellow, tentacle-like fingers, spanning as long as I am tall, reached through the door and seized me around the neck. It strangled me like a farmer throttles a chicken before supper. I never even saw its whole body. Its lanky arm reached through the door and grabbed me from five meters away. The last thing I remember is that son of a bitch dragging me off the deck and out into the bright sunlight. I hit my head on the way out.

I don't know how long I was unconscious, but, when I opened my eyes, my head was throbbing. I swear it was about to explode. I wasn't awake for long, though – just long enough to see a couple of the 12 meter monsters known as the Ohnilay surrounding me. I was strapped to a chair, unable to wiggle free. I watched as one of them heated a brand in a fire pit before he stamped it into my arm. My skin melted off that spot, and the smell of seared flesh filled my nostrils. They torturously branded me with a number – another one of

The Ohnilay fed on the fear that came from deep within the human heart. They were a race bred to torment.

their prisoners. It was excruciating, but I didn't make a sound. I would not let them enjoy my misery.

The next thing I knew, I was in a dark cell surrounded by a translucent force field. It wasn't a large cell – maybe only a few meters in diameter. It was, however, an Ohnilay prison. A cell like this was the worst place a human could be. There was no way to escape those monsters. They made sure of that. They wanted the chance to make their captives feel the worst agony imaginable. Torture was a past time of theirs, and they were extremely good at it.

Relations between the Ohnilay and the humans weren't always so terrible. In the early days, we discovered each other in the depths of space exploring the unknowns of the universe. Once we were able to communicate, we decided that we were going to share everything we found throughout the universe for the good of us both. But, the power of greed consumed both humans and the Ohnilay. The humans found some "precious" metals, and we weren't willing to share anymore. That's when the killings started. A hundred years later, and we were still fighting this war. But what for? I don't think anyone has known for a long time.

I was lost in thought when they threw another man into the cell. He crumpled into a foetal position, shaking all over. I could smell his anxiety in the air as a puddle of fright formed beneath him. What a poor soul – so weak and cowardly. The Ohnilay fed on the fear that came from deep within the human heart. They were a race bred to torment. I'm sure they loved this.

"Stand up and stop actin' like a beaten dog," I said to him. "You're gonna get us both killed!"

He picked up his head, locking his bloodshot eyes with mine. "What you talkin' 'bout, man! This is the death room! They gonna eat us like they done to some of the others! We next!" He was filled with the pain and suffering of a man who was experiencing fear unimaginable to most. The madness of his gaze burned a hole in my soul. It was only filled with pity for him.

"Get a hold of yourself and talk to me like a human being!" I had had enough. I wasn't going to listen to him wail like that, especially if death was knocking on my door. I wanted a conversation, not tears. "What's your name?"

His madness turned to the sobs. "T... T...Tommy. Lieutenant Thomas Lagar. Who are you?"

"Dillon Timms."

His eyes lit up with an inkling of hope. "As in Captain Timms?!"

"Be quite!" I whispered. "We don't want them to hear you!"

His tone lowered, but there was a sense of unexplained happiness in his voice. "You gonna get us out of here, right? That why you here! We prisoners heard what you did at a few other camps, and how you freed the humans from these horrible things!"

"Not this time."

"What you mean, Captain. You save everybody!"

I shook my head. "They got me this time. Nothing I can do now. Our fate is theirs to decide."

I saw despair overtake him. He was a gazelle on the run from a lion, but the lion had finally caught up. All happiness left him. "I'm gonna die here! No! It's not fair!"

I let him cry for a while. Everyone has the right to grieve, especially if the death is their own. But, after a couple of minutes I decided it was time to put an end to it. "Why you cryin,' soldier? You afraid to die?"

"Yes!"

I couldn't let him show such fear, especially in the presence of the Ohnilay. They would enjoy that too much. I knew I couldn't bare my feelings openly. I may have been a dead man – hell, I may have even been a little frightened too – but I was not gonna let the Ohnilay feel like they had any

favour. Don't show those damn long necked, yellow bastards that you're even a little scared of 'um. Don't give 'um the satisfaction of knowing they got to you."

He took a deep breath and released it, purging his body of all needless worry and anxiety. "Alright, I'll try," he said.

I wanted the topic of death off the table. No need to psych either of us out. "So, why're you here, Tommy."

"I was captured a few..."

He never got to finish. A couple of the Ohnilay came to our cell. The force field fell and each of them wrapped a tentacle-like finger around our necks, squeezing until we nearly passed out from lack of air. I followed my captor's lead without putting up a fight. There was no use in that. It would only make me seem afraid, and I wasn't going to give in that easy. Tommy was a different story. He

The force field fell and each of them wrapped a tentacle-like finger around our necks, squeezing until we nearly passed out from lack of air.

victory over me. Damn it! I wasn't gonna let them have that kind of victory over anyone! "Tell me, Tommy, is death good or evil?"

"It's evil! I want to live! What's the good in death?!"

"I wouldn't know," I said cockily. "I haven't died before. How would anyone know if it was good or evil? It's not often anyone comes back from the dead. Why are you so afraid of what you don't know?"

He paused for a second, momentarily ceasing his infant sobs. "I don't know."

"Can't worry 'bout what you don't know," I chuckled. "Now I want you to do me a

threw himself to the ground, squirming like a rat trying to escape the grip of a vicious snake. The Ohnilay were too strong to lose that fight. They dragged him across the floor behind us, smiling menacingly with each long stride. Damn it! I wished he would've listened to me. That was exactly what they wanted to see – a show.

A door opened in front of us, letting in blinding rays of sun. They stood Tommy up beside me, and he shook violently – a cow headed to the slaughter house. I don't know what I was. I guess I felt the same on the inside – dreading the fate that lay before me. On the outside, however, I kept calm. They would get no enjoyment from my death.

They continued to drag us into the light. Once my pupils had finally adjusted, I saw that we had been brought to a courtyard filled with Ohnilay. In the centre of them were two tables with chains for our hands and feet. They spat at us and hollered as Tommy and I were pulled along to our final resting place. After stripping us both, they chained us down with a limb at each corner of our tables. Tommy was wailing uncontrollably, thrashing about like a fish out of water.

Tommy's executioner licked his lips. It smiled menacingly, staring into Tommy's eyes. "Tell us any human plans you know of, and I'll make your death quick," it said.

Tommy turned his head to look at me. I shook my head at him. I hoped he would stay strong.

"I don't know nothin'," said Tommy.

The Ohnilay executioner nipped at Tommy's throat, coming close enough so that Tommy would feel its hot breath on his neck. "Come on, human," it said. "Let's hear something good!" It put Tommy's hand in its mouth and bit down slowly. Soon, blood began to run down the monster's lips.

Tommy finally snapped. "I'll tell you anything you want to know!" His words were like the squealing of a swine. "He's a captain! He's a captain! Let me go! I'm nothing to you!"

"Traitor," I sighed. What a fool. Did he really think he could save himself by selling me out? I'm not so sure. His efforts were a complete failure. The Ohnilay executioner bit down hard into Tommy's gut. His screams sent piercing needles through my ears. I couldn't bring myself to watch. Poor coward.

Staring into the face of my executioner, I felt the fear that Tommy had shared so openly. It sent tingles down my spine, but they weren't going to see that.

The creature that would be my end

**The Ohnilay executioner
bit down hard into
Tommy's gut. His
screams sent piercing
needles through my ears.
I couldn't bring myself to
watch.**

grinned as it towered over my constricted body. "A captain, aye?" it said in my own language. "Tell me something useful and I'll make this quick!"

I laughed. There was no way I would fall for their lies. No matter what I said, I was going to die. My fate was sealed, but the fate of my comrades was not. I wouldn't sell them out – not for anything. "A quick death would be nice," I said, "but I think I'll pass. I wanna see what you can do to a human body. Bet it's not as bad as I've heard!"

"Suit yourself," it said, smiling down on me. It nipped at my neck, but I made sure not to flinch. I wasn't Tommy. I was stronger. "Come on, human," it said. "Beg! I wanna be the last one to here you speak. What do you have to say for yourself!"

"Now I know how my dinner always felt. I guess it's a little ironic now." I laughed. I was going to go out on a smile on my face no matter what.

The monster dug its jagged teeth into my thigh, tearing the flesh and muscle from the bone. I cackled wildly. The pain was liberating. It was as if all of my fears and sorrows were released with each chunk of me it tore to shreds. Soon, however, the nature of my human body took over. Though I continued to show my joy in the pain, I felt my consciousness slipping away. The body still needs blood, and I had lost too much already.

My eyes closed and my breaths quickened. I could feel my heart thumping faster and faster in my chest.

Zoom!

Something snapped me back from the clutches of death. Thunder roared overhead, but not natural thunder. This sound was artificial, and I recognized it after a lifetime in the military. My fleet had made it through enemy lines! They were flying over the Ohnilay camp, buzzing like flies around the dead carcass that was the remainder of their monstrous army. My fellow humans had won the battle, and, though I would not have the opportunity to celebrate with them, I had the luxury of knowing that my mission here was complete. I could leave knowing I had done nothing to endanger the rest of the humans. My execution was not a day the Ohnilay would celebrate. It was the day that would be celebrated as the end of this long, pointless war. With a smile, I let my eyes close for what I thought would be the last time.

I don't know how long I was out. I don't know how long it took them to get me off that table. I don't know how many surgeries I went through to patch me up. Frankly, I never asked. I have no need to remember the weeks after the wars. All I know is, from what I've heard, my comrades cleared that camp quickly. They took no Ohnilay prisoners, especially after seeing what they did to Tommy and me. Poor Tommy. He didn't make it. He was one of the last casualties in that long, pointless war.

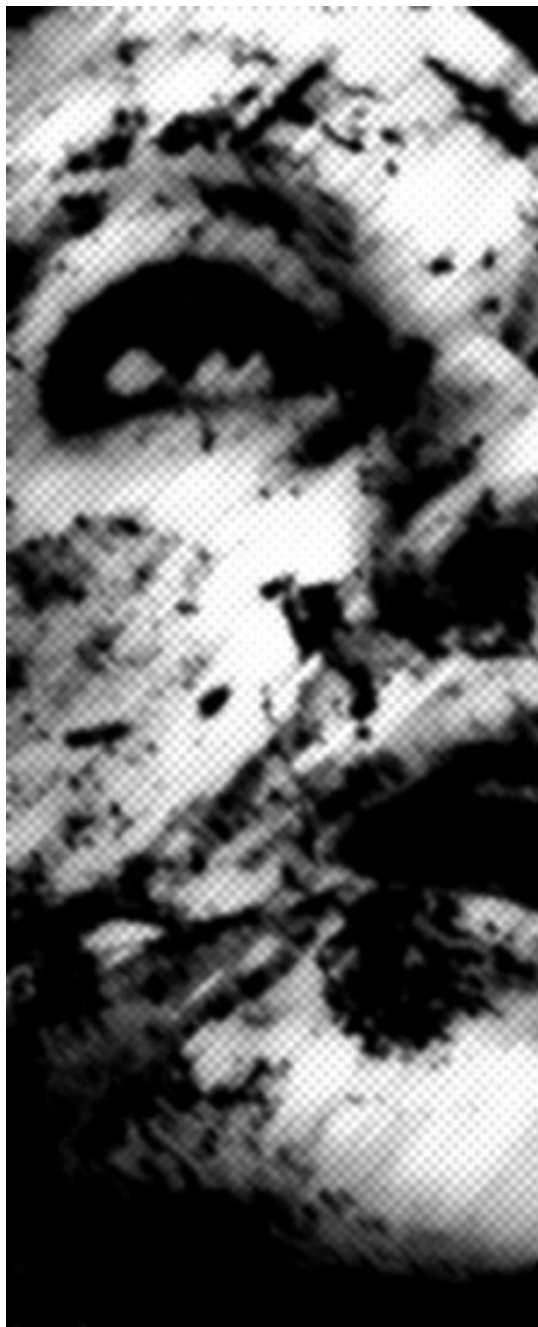
Now, we are finally at peace in the galaxy. I've seen my face in a couple books, a couple posters, and that sort of thing. They're callin' me "the Hero of the War." But, that won't last. Soon, there'll be another "Ohnilay" trying to take something that's "ours." We'll be fightin' again. There'll be some new "hero", and my name will be forgotten. That's how it always happens. It's our nature to forget, and repeat.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jonpaul Taylor is a speculative fiction writer and poet from Detroit, Michigan. He is also an English student at Wayne State University. Previously, Jonpaul's fiction has appeared in *Beorh Quarterly*, and his poetry in *Kalkion*.

Skeleton In The Closet



By A.J. Kirby

Though my view is distorted by the horizontal lines which criss-cross in front of my

eyes, I can see almost three-quarters of the bedroom. Though I have tried and tried not to look, I cannot resist, nor avoid taking a peek at what's going on in the room. My eyes attempt to bore through the distance between us and burrow into his psyche; I try to make him nervous.

From my vantage point I can see his hairy wrist handcuffed to the frame of the bed. The metal must chafe against his skin there. He could never wear the watch I bought him; claimed that the fools' gold irritated his eczema. He doesn't look as though he's complaining now though. A thick, vacant smile is slapped across his face and he appears to be breathing heavily. There is an arrogance in the way that his bare feet tap against the wood at the foot of the bed; expectant.

Anticipation is one of the qualities I've lost; I'll never feel the hairs on my arm stand to attention as I see his sausage fingers about to brush against mine. It's not like I've had a limb amputated, but rather that it was never there in the first place. My sense of touch is gone and now unimaginable. But I can feel cold. Or rather, I can taste its sourness within the very marrow of my bones. In here it's dark and lonely; I'd pay to listen to his stories now.

It feels as though I'm so far away, but actually, I'm still in the room, only somehow, I'm invisible, forgotten about. My ghostly breath chills the air and fills it with my brooding presence. I watch him betray me over and over again. I watch him sully the sheets of our bed. I watch him at his weakest moments when he cannot find the words to express his thoughts. I watch him as he descends into that moonlit depravity which he thinks nobody else can see or know.

Through the slats which cross in front of my wide-open eyes, I see him as nobody else can; he is a little boy, unsure of how to carry himself. I watch him struggle to dress, I watch him staring out of the window. I watch him as he really is. He prefers the company of the well-thumbed pages and the splattered criticism of his jism tells him which images to leaf through to. He whispers their names; 'Lola', 'Daisy'; they are always strangely quaint names which would remind me more of my grandmother. But his mind has been warped by

I am meek and not given to rash actions. And here I am, watching. I've let myself go. I don't wash my hair any more; clumps of it are starting to fall out. My sallow skin is starting to loosen over my bony body. I don't have breasts any more. I feel numb; unable to move, or to react. And his betrayals continue. I've seen that bitch in the room with him, her face pushed roughly against the pillow as he shouts out to her in his made-up alien language like a child with attention deficit disorder. He rips at her knickers, with otherworldly spittle foaming at his excitable mouth. He stops, as inspiration assaults him, and rushes to his desk to scribble some more of his ridiculous new story, his penis still erect, rests self-importantly on the edge of the paper- watching through one eye.

He's standing in front of the desk now. From my vantage point, he is side-on. His paunch is developing, and the coating of muscle which he was once so proud of, is turning to flab. He no longer has to rely on his body in order to woo women into here though, nor does he ever

I watch him as he descends into that moonlit depravity which he thinks nobody else can see or know.

pornography, so the only memories they spark for him are of surgically enhanced body parts, writhing flesh and matted tissue paper. I'm within those pages; those pages which contain the smell of sex and death. I've become a part of his fantasy world too; it's just that he just cannot see me.

He keeps tissues by his bed. They are concealed in a box which looks as though it has writing paper in it; image his prime concern as per usual. He's obsessed with the image he portrays. Right now, he is radiating a superior sense of pride, and he knows it; his bulbous red bell-end rings with it. Meanwhile, I am an empty vessel, free from bodily desires, or so I'd like to think. My back leans against the cold brickwork and I watch. I always watch. I feel that I am closer to him by watching.

have to explain his morbid fetishes any more. He is famous and he can do as he pleases. He thinks he is writing his autobiography... He'll fictionalise his life – make it erotic, as though he were whispering across the valley between the pillows in bed; as though he wanted to make the reader jealous of his sexual liberty.

I know the truth; that it is disgustingly normal. Right now in his story, he makes that woman savagely drag her fingernails across his chest. His brutal grin continues. Meanwhile, my fingernails are dropping out. It's very painful. It feels as though it's all part of his torture.

The monotony of the pornography which I'm forced to endure has now numbed me to the pain of seeing him with another woman. I still admire the breathless canine way he vibrates

his way in there, and then rolls away sated. It is a task to be performed for him, nothing else. Even he is bored. He unconsciously strokes his testicles as he uses his other hand to lever a cigarette from ash-tray to mouth. Then, his bowels loosened by the laxative qualities of nicotine he creeps to the bathroom.

Now, alone in the room, the naked woman starts to stroll around. She is what some people might describe as painfully thin; her rib-cage forms a larger mound on her chest than her breasts, her knees knock together when she walks, her hip-bones form a devastatingly unsubtle two-fingered salute. But I know the real bone-crushing ache of the skeletal frame; to me, this woman is fat.

She steals furtive glances at the writing he's been doing. She actually laughs at it, and I feel somehow protective of him - she shouldn't be doing that, right here, in his inner-sanctum where he's most vulnerable. Once, I laughed at his work... Then she moves closer to the closet, scrunching up her nose as though trying to sniff something out. She draws closer and closer. And then he's back in the room, and he is roughly dragging her away from the closet.

'Why does it smell so strange in that corner of the room?' I see her mouth moving, and I lip-read the words even from my distance.

'No reason. Get back into bed,' he drawls.

'But it does smell awful; it smells like something crawled in there and died,' she persists, not

noticing the menacing leer which has crept into his eyes.

'Why doesn't it open?' She has moved back to the door and is twisting at the handle. 'I'll clean it out for you if you need. You probably haven't got the time, spending all of your time writing or researching as you do...'

I will that she cannot open the door; I don't want to be discovered in here. At least here, I am kept alive, if only to be tortured by what I can see. I don't want to be found, but want to rot away in peace. This brash woman cannot find me out. I don't want to be nothing; here I am a bad smell, a memory; a skeleton in the closet.

Because she is now standing closer to the closet, it is easier to see the woman's whole profile through the slats. She looks a lot like I used to look, before I laughed at his work. I wish that I could close my eyes to the scene which plays itself out once again before my eyes, but I have no eyelids any more. Once again, I see him laugh right back at her, calling her fat. He's right, you know, she is fat, but she doesn't need to know this; the knowledge kills her. It makes her sick; she runs to the bathroom to throw up again.

Once again, I see my life end. I haunt one particular moment in time, a recurrent nightmare. If this is the only way I can live, then so be it. This will be his punishment; he knows now exactly what he is.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

AJ Kirby is the author of the novels *Paint this Town Red*, *Bully* and *Sharkways*, and the non-fiction book *Fergie's Finest*. His short fiction has been published across the web, and in magazines, anthologies and literary journals, as well as in two collections: *The Art of Ventriloquism* and *Mix Tape*. He was one of 20 Leeds-based authors under 40 recently shortlisted for the LS13 competition and his novel *Paint this Town Red* was shortlisted for last year's The Guardian Not the Booker prize. He blogs at <http://paintthistownred.wordpress.com/>

THE STINKY MEN

by Lou Antonelli

I was flipping through my textbook on native Texan culture when I realized I was being watched.

An older woman had turned sideways to see the photo layout that sprawled across my lap. I looked up. She knitted her brow and pointed with a bony finger. "They look like the stinky men my father once told me about."

I looked back down at the illustration. "The Karankawa Indians died out over 200 years ago." The old woman turned back around and shook her head. "My father saw some of them back before the war."

The bus lurched as it came to a stop and the textbook slid off my lap and onto the floor.

I stood up. "World War Two?" I asked as the woman walked away.

I could see the back of her head nod as she turned and exited. I wanted to follow, but I had to scoop up the book, and by the time I had, she was gone and the bus underway.

Less than an hour later I was telling Professor Waldrup about the encounter in his office at the University of Texas Anthropology Department. "The Karankawa supposedly died out before the Civil War," he said. He took off his wire-rimmed glasses and rubbed his eyes. "But who's to say they didn't survive until much later in remote swamps and thickets?"

"But until the middle of the 20th Century?"

He shrugged and smiled. "Where did she say her father saw these stinky types?"



"She didn't, she took off before I had a chance to ask more questions."

"Have you seen her before on the bus?"

"Many times. I just never paid any attention to her."

Professor Waldrup snorted. "You need to keep your eyes open and stop her the next time you see here," he said. "This sounds interesting."

I need to take a minute and explain that something the old woman said was significant. Being the young punk that I am--as the Ol' Professor might say--I might have dismissed what she said as some random ramblings except that she called the Indians "stinky".

The Karankawa lived deep in the swamps and thickets of the Gulf Coast of East Texas, and they dealt with the vermin problem the best way they could. To repel the mosquitoes and flies and such they smeared their nearly-naked bodies with alligator fat—which quickly went rancid in the sub-tropical heat.

Now, early explorers and pioneers were hardly paradigms of cleanliness, but even they held the malodorous Karankawa in poor regard.

It didn't help relations that the Karankawa were the only native North American cannibals.

Three days later I saw the old woman again, on the bus after it stopped at Congress Street. She was sitting down this time, and I walked over to her.

"Howdy, ma'am," I said with a smile. "Remember me?"

She looked up. "You're the young man with the picture book of the Indians."

I nodded. "I'm majoring in Anthropology at UT," I said. "I'm studying Native American cultures. Can I sit down?"

"Of course," she said, patting the seat next to

her.

I sat down and pulled out the textbook. "You said your father once saw Indians like these?"

"Yes, he told me that when I was a little girl. He said when he was very young, maybe 70 years ago. He had a job stringing telephone lines through the wildest parts of the East Texas thicket."

"When would that have been, then?" I asked. "About 1940?"

"Yes, that's right," she said with a smile. "It was in Clapham County."

In addition to being a large swamp, Clapham County is historically a no-man's land between Texas and Louisiana, on the Texas side of the state line.

"He was part of a three-man crew, and he stayed behind as the other two men went into town to buy some iced Dr. Peppers. He watched the equipment while they were gone.

She continued. "He said he was bored and climbed a ladder to string some wire by himself on a pole they had just put up. He was at the top of the ladder when he thought he heard a sound. He turned around and saw some honest-to-God injuns next to the pickup truck."

"Wow! That must have been quite a shock!"

"It was, he didn't know there were wild 'Injuns' left in Texas! He said he'd never forget the way they looked. They were very skinny and looked like they were all starving,"

"How many were there?"

"Only four, he said. They had little dirty leather loin cloths, and puny bows. He felt sorry for them, they looked so bad," she continued. "Also, even at a distance they smelled horrible."

"The Indians in the swamps used to smear themselves with animal fat to keep the mosquitoes off." I nodded for her to continue. "What happened to them?"

"He said when they saw he saw them, they

looked scared. One reached through the open window of the pickup and grabbed his lunch box. Then they all high-tailed it."

"Did he tell anyone, like the sheriff or any authorities?"

"Never had a chance. He and his friends were making extra money stringing wire on a Sunday. His friends came back from town and told him we were at war, the japs had bombed Pearl Harbor."

She stood up. "And that was that. Nice talking with you, son, this is my stop."

I got off one more question. "Where in Clapham County was this?"

"Five miles from Rockland, off Highway 875," she said as she walked off the bus. I sat back down, pulled out my iPad, and started pulling up maps.

I spent almost a week doing on-line research, and then spent eight hours--in an old car with broken air conditioning--driving to East Texas. The nearest town was the metropolis of Rockland, population 38 on good days--meaning when none of the indigenous rednecks were in the county jail for moonshining.

The town derives its name because it is where the layer of limestone which underlies the county is close to the surface. That's the reason drainage is so poor and the ground so sodden.

The original right-of-way which had been used by the telephone line now is used by a gas pipeline, so it was well-maintained. I drove five miles on a packed red dirt road into the middle of nowhere, and then set off on foot.

If you have ever done archaeological fieldwork--which I have--it's easy to pick out signs of Native American presence that go unnoticed by the layman. Grinding stones, trash middens, arrowheads and such are still relatively close to the surface, if not out in the open.

Thanks to protective clothing and DEET I didn't

need to smear myself with rancid alligator fat. My heavy rubber boots helped me move through the swamp at a steady pace, and after only two hours I found, on a small mound deep in an astoundingly dense area of thicket, the remains of an Indian encampment

The thin layer of organic material told me it had been abandoned less than 100 years earlier, perhaps before the start of World War I. The lack of any tent holes told me the inhabitants had degenerated to a low level of subsistence. The cracked human bones told me the worst accounts about the Karankawa were true.

I gathered up a small amount of material in plain plastic bags--strictly speaking this was an illegal dig--and traveled to the next county where there was a motel. I spoke to Professor Waldrup on my cell phone that evening while I had the evidence spread across the bed.

"That's both sad and amazing," he said rather deliberately. "It overturns everything we had assumed about the dissipation and extinction of Karankawa culture. We need to proceed cautiously, but we certainly need to start a bona fide excavation."

"To think they may have survived into the 20th Century," he said. "I wonder if they starved to death, hunted down, or died of disease?"

"I hope some day we find out," he said.

I left the motel the next morning for the long drive back to Austin. The sun was just beginning to rise as I passed back through Clapham County and down Hwy. 875. The sun was just peeking over the horizon and it was still pretty dark.

As I drove between two recently-harvested fields, something caught the corner of my eye. An animal had crossed the road and was running across a field into some thicket.

I turned and looked quickly, trying not to swerve in the road. I thought at first it was a coyote, but I realized it was much larger. Its legs were also too long and thin.

Whatever this thing was, it wasn't a coyote.

As it crossed the tree line into the woods, it turned and looked back towards me. Everyone in Texas knows coyotes never look back after crossing a road, they are terrified of cars.

I hit the brakes and pulled off the road. I climbed on the hood of my car and jumped over the barbed wire fence and took off across the field towards where I had seen the creature disappear. I really don't know what I was thinking, exactly. There was something in the face of the animal I had seen that was both sad and disturbing. I wanted, if at all possible, to find out what it was.

There was clearly an animal trail through the dense undergrowth, and I followed it--at times bent over, at other times scrambling on all fours. Filled with a kind of manic energy, I didn't stop to think whether I knew what I was doing.

After a while I entered a clearing. I stood up and looked around. There was a heavy canopy of overhanging tree limbs. Despite the fact it was now past sunrise, it was still very dark.

I pulled a flashlight off my belt and pointed it down. The heavy mattress of pine needle duff was littered with bones both small and large.

I could see from a mouldy dog collar that whatever lived there preyed on domestic animals. Then I saw the tattered and chewed remains of a man's leather wallet.

I got that feeling you have when you realize your heart has been cut out and packed in ice. Then I heard what sounded like a person growling.

I reflexively pointed my flashlight towards where the sound came from. I steadied my grip and began wave the light back and forth.

Something was out there and I could tell it was looking at me. During one pass I saw what seemed to be the corner of an almost human face, and I caught a fleeting glance of an eye. A non-reflective eye.

Most wild animals have reflective eyes. Hogs don't. Neither do humans.

"Oh dear God," I said to myself. I heard a soft crunching sound and I realized the creature was advancing towards me. I stuck my arm straight out and pointed the flashlight directly towards where I heard the sound. Whatever it was drew its head back to avoid the beam, but light illuminated a paw clutching the ground.

It looked like the scarred hairy back of a human hand.

I felt like I was about to faint, and then...

BANG!

BANG!

BANG!

The "paw" retreated at the staccato sound like gunfire. I snapped out of my swoon and looked around in the dim light. Sunlight was finally beginning to filter through the dense foliage.

East Texas is lousy with hunters, but how could someone be in this dense thicket? Then I realized the gunfire-like sound was coming from my belt.

Like so many people. I have special ring tones on my cell depending on who's calling. For Professor Waldrup-- Luddite that he is -- his ringtone is the clacking of an old manual typewriter.

That's what I was hearing in the stillness of the thicket

CLACK!

CLACK!

CLACK! it continued.

I turned and scrambled away as fast as I could, my speed fuelled by terror and adrenalin.

Yes, it is possible for a human to run on all fours.

I had my voice mail set up to pick up calls after a good ten rings, so I had time for the "gunfire" to cover my exit as I scrambled out of the forest.

As I fell into the sunlight at the edge of the woods, I lay on my back and gathered my

breath. I instinctively knew the creature would not follow me into the bright morning sunlight.

After maybe five minutes, I sat up and pulled out my cellphone. Professor Waldrup answered. "You have any luck? Find out anything?"

"Too much," I said, still somewhat out of breath.

"What do you mean?"

I paused. "Do you know any respectable crypto-zoologists?"

"Get back here as fast as possible," he growled.

Apparently there is a special unit at the National Institutes of Health that deals with genetic research related to in-breeding.

"I don't want to hand anything to racists who would talk about devolution," I told the Professor.

"This is being kept in the strictest confidence," said the man from the NIH. "We appreciate your confidentiality, also."

He stuck out his hand to shake mine. For a flash of a second, it looked like the hand/paw I had seen in the thicket. I shuddered violently.

Professor Waldrup put his hand on my shoulder. "It was quite an experience," he told the NIH man.

"I understand," the man said as he turned and left.

"How have you been sleeping?" Professor Waldrup asked me after the door closed.

"I really haven't," I said. "I keep seeing...."

He handed me a key. "This is the key of the door to the roof. Sleep up there tonight, out in the open, with the sounds and lights of the city around you."

That night was the first real night's sleep I had in two weeks. Since then, I sleep better when I sleep in the middle of the room, with the television and lights on.

Just yesterday I walked past a vacant lot on Cedar Street. The bushes were thick, and dark. I thought I saw an eye in the dark-- a non-reflective eye.

Then I thought I saw the scarred hairy back of a human hand clutching the ground and moving towards me...

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

A life-long science fiction reader, Lou Antonelli turned his hand to writing fiction in middle age; his first story was published in 2003 when he was 46. Since then he has had 80 short stories published in the U.S., U.K., Canada and Australia, in venues such as *Asimov's Science Fiction*, *Jim Baen's Universe*, *Dark Recesses*, *Andromeda Spaceways In-Flight Magazine*, *Greatest Uncommon Denominator (GUD)*, and *Daily Science Fiction*, among others. He has received eleven honourable mentions in the annual anthology *"The Year's Best Science Fiction"* edited by Gardner Dozois and published by St. Martin's Press for 2010, 2008, 2006, 2005 and 2004.

His steampunk short story, *"A Rocket for the Republic"*, was the last story accepted by Dozois before he retired as editor of *Asimov's Science Fiction* after 19 years. It was published in *Asimov's* in September 2005 and placed third in the annual Readers' Poll.

His collections include *"Fantastic Texas"* published in 2009 and *"Texas & Other Planets"* published in 2010. A collection of collaborative short stories co-authored with Oregon-based author Edward Morris, *"Music for Four Hands"*, was published in 2011.

He is a professional journalist and the managing editor of *The Daily Tribune* in Mount Pleasant, Texas. A Massachusetts native, he moved to Texas in 1985 and is married to Dallas native Patricia (Randolph) Antonelli. They have three adopted furbaby children, Millie, Sugar and Peltro Antonelli.

Whistling Pines

by Angus Stewart

Finn was known to be spending a great deal of time in the south end of Blackmoss woods. In the

the old stag clearings where the silver birch saplings gave way to mountainous pine colonies and red and black squirrels made war for territory, nearby the fast flow of the Abhainn cutting its way east horizonward. (Flòr would be there, he knew, doing whatever it was she did at the water's edge.) All morning he had been down at his favourite tree, carving in footholds. It was a giant in-the-making— a young rustwood whose branches pushed out firm and early from the sinuous trunk like infants' arms. When its outer bark fell away to his knife a faint scent of rotting blackberries would diffuse from the slick texture beneath. Finn stepped back and craned his neck, gazing into the viridian mass. Before harvest he hoped to build a platform up there, upon which he might sit out the chilly dawn hours with a companion (Flòr, perhaps) waiting for boar and other dangerous quarry. They'd strike the creatures from above and drag them home in triumph to the beer hall for salting.

Uncle Leir would be there now, holding his midweek hearing. He'd be nodding seriously and drinking slowly and speaking quietly, never pretending to be more than what he was. The news from Dirl was due today, so at least he'd be busy. Better him than me, Finn thought. Those meetings made his head spin. The chattering, the hard benches, the droning on and on and on...Finn returned to work and the sun burned him. Fine. He'd rather burn than have long, meaningless words forced on him by his fat old uncle in that musky beer hall. Why did the man bother? There were countless



eager heads in Dorbuie bobbing up and down, itching to be named successor. People who cared. Finn wasn't sure if he cared. He pressed on. When he finished his fifth foothold with a final limp chisel-blow he stopped for a minute's breath. His wiry frame was soaking in a first layer of sweat. He waited until his chisel-arm stopped shaking then climbed his tree to arrive at the spot elected to hold the platform. He shuffled out a few inches to straddle his favourite branch. He was careful to keep his fingers pressed firm into gaps in the bark and splayed wide like buzzard's claws. You wouldn't want to fall at this distance. At five men high it was possible to see quite far into the forest where the pines were not too thick. The roar of the Abhainn was sharper up here and through the net of trunks and branches you could make out some of its waters flickering fast along at ground level. Turn the other way through a wee clearing-gap you could see all the way back to the capital and its surrounding fields. Thinking of Flòr and her ice-flecked eyes Finn turned his gaze south, scanning the gaps in the trees for movement or maybe a flash of her rusty yellow plaid.

It was then the earth tremored. Small birds burst from trees crying and unseen mammals scattered and the air was filled with the rustle of countless needles, punctuated with the patter of tiny pinecones hitting the ground like raindrops. It was no cataclysmic eruption, but having had one hand up to his brow it was almost enough to dislodge Finn. In panic he took a skinny branch for a handhold and clung to it hard, knuckles whitening. He pressed his legs together into his straddling-branch as hard as he could. The shaking swung his torso about like a ragdoll. His back slapped into the tree trunk and a dead stub of bark punctured into his back.

He grunted and screwed up his eyes, gripping the pain hard in his mind. Once the shaking was over he jerked to press a hand into the wound and stem the bleeding. A little chunk of meat came away in his grip. He could see yellow swooshing across the ground toward his tree. Flòr must have heard him. Perhaps she had not been very far away at all. She was hopping over rocks and bracken stems, skirts

of plaid hoisted. She pushed back her ashy hair and tilted her head to watch him in his tree.

When she was in shouting distance she called up, "Finn you idiot, what have you done?"

Finn winced. "The ground shook and I stabbed myself on my favourite tree," he called back down. "You know. An everyday accident."

That got a laugh. Just a small one. "Are you bleeding, Finn?"

"Yes!" he yelled, and tried to add a comic, "Heeelp!" but it came out strangled, and a little too real. His chest was shivering slightly in shock.

Flòr let that go past her. "Climb down and I'll fix you."

"I'm going to come down one-handed. I need to keep one hand on the wound."

"Alright."

Finn grinned through gritted teeth. "So you catch me if I fall."

"Of course. In my arms, like the baby you are. Like a big fat squirrel."

Finn chuckled. "I'm hardly fat," he protested. "Look at me properly. I'm stunted. I'm a runt."

"You're not stunted."

"I'm a squirrel with no pinecones."

"Oh wheesht."

Finn smirked. He made slow progress downward. He'd hoped to take his usual route, but where more than one hand was required of him he was forced to diverge.

As he negotiated his seventh handhold Flòr called up again. "So why do you think the earth shook?"

"It wants me— ow— it wants me dead. I dunno. It hasn't shook before has it?"

"Not in our lifetime. And I've not heard stories either." Flòr shrugged. "Could it be The Silence?"

Finn lowered himself onto the first of his carved footholds. "Uncle Leir talks with that shaman from over by Windy Law sometimes. He's supposed to be good for these things but all he really ever says is just what anyone else will tell you. He says The Silence is nearly all gone from the world and it's all just Infheicthe we see now. I remember some of his words.

'No man can ever draw up a whole picture of the world. Where the world grows there is Infheicthe and in the gaps there is The Silence. Infheicthe is everything and The Silence is everything else. Show me a man who can draw up a picture of an everything. Show me a man who can draw up a picture of nothing. These men are pretenders. Don't try to understand the world. Live.'

Finn took a breath. He shook a little in pain. "He speaks it like a chant. Don't try to understand. Live."

Flòr mused. "That sounds sensible."

"Nobody understands you either," Finn added. Flòr launched a pebble at his head. He watched it bounce off the bark next to him and vanish downward. "You're like that shaman. Lurking in strange places. Doing things. You could be a shaman priestess. Easily."

"Don't jynx it."

Finn hopped off his second foothold to the ground. His back jolted on impact and he stumbled, then straightened up. "Which flower are you named after? I've never asked."

Flòr's eyes lowered but she smiled. "Ma never told." She turned her icy eyes back to Finn, flicking them up and down. "Turn around. Let's sort you."

Finn turned his back to her. "Ready? I'm going to let go of the wound."

The escaping blood was beginning to work its

way between the gaps in his fingers. Flòr quickly moved to pull up a bracken stem.

"Wait!" Finn pulled his hand away, shrugging his shirt off, and she darted to plug the hole. A surge of pent up blood escaped before she could.

"Finn you idiot!" she yelled, pressing the bracken in close, "You got your blood all over my hand!"

"Sorry," wheezed Finn. "I wasn't..."

She flicked what she could onto the ground. "It's alright, stupid. Just be careful. You're lucky I don't mind warm blood. Some clan women down south consider themselves too gentle to hunt, you know. Clan women. That's backwards. Truly." She rubbed the blood off into his back.

Finn laughed. "I could kiss you, Flòr. You're insane."

"Oh hell! You are ridiculous, Finn." Flòr leant her free hand round Finn's shoulder and planted a heavy smooch on his left cheek. His temperature quickly doubled.

She pulled back and said, "When Leir starts you hunting for a bride, maybe there will be a flower priestess waiting for you down on the Abhainn. We could marry on the beaver dam. Until then..."

Finn choked. "Are you joking?"

"...until then, hold still, shithead!"

Leir sat on the hard bench in his beer hall, waiting on the messenger coming up the western road. He hadn't spoken for an hour. His thighs hurt. The hall was by now close to empty, its high beamed roof stretching echoless over a cold mud floor and long bending tables decked out with abandoned cups, the last bubbles of froth vanishing from the minute gouges marking their worn rims. With the petitions and the tax reports and the



rest long done, few had seen fit to stay. Even Karlätz was gone, having shuffled out drunk just after midday, mumbling a stew of weird apologies in his native tongue. He wished Finn might have made the effort come along. He had asked after all. But then Leir was no good at persuasion, was he. And it was no good trying to force the boy, was it. That's when the shouting starts and shouting gets no-one anywhere. Shouting won't trick nephews onto the throne. A shame. Leir was certain the lad had it in him to master the beer hall courts-master them as well as his father once had. Finn was born for it- he had all the markings of a true Galén on him. The warm heart. The quiet smile. And the black curls- the black curls Leir would have killed for in his youth. Maybe was missing some of his father's fire, but Finn he had the Galén sense of humour, no doubt. There were no jokes here and now of course. Just Thòm-Patric leant over on the west wall, back straight and eyes forward. He didn't blink often. A few townsmen sat at the opposite benches consorting solemnly, occasionally giving the king and his bodyguard a glance no more perturbed than they'd perhaps grant a pair of trespassing sparrows.

"King Leir!" One had called out earnestly upon arriving, "How were the hearings?"

Leir glanced up. "Not finished yet." He gestured outdoors. "It's Galbraith. We're giving him till evening."

The man sighed. "A pity, aye. What is it they say about news. All the best..."

Leir nodded. "...comes from the west. Aye. And usually in Galbraith's pocket, you know."

The man smiled. "So I have heard. So it's no bother if we sit here?"

"Not at all. Get some beer."

Leir hauled himself up and lifted his legs over the bench. It was a struggle. I'm getting heavier, he thought glumly, heavier and slower. And sitting on benches all day doesn't help. I'll need to do a tour soon. See the other provinces. Maybe they miss me. I hope they

miss me. Maybe they won't recognise me. I'm getting heavier. Slower. Stretching a little before he could properly walk, he carried his cup over to lean on the old pine greatdoor at the hall's front end and panned an idle gaze across the wide green which spread itself from his feet to the old Fjurdic icehouse then down along market street and over to the geometrist's school he'd seen constructed over the last three summers. He scratched at the scraggy brown beard he'd been growing since three meetings back. Dead skin flakes bloomed from between the bone-dry hairs and floated groundward. Leir watched them fall. Then glanced up. There was movement on the green. A tall man was hasting over the trampled grass, a howling black lump cradled in his arms. Two chattering boys clipped along at his sides, occasionally stooping low as if to pluck up a rare daisy. People watched from the streets, some cheering. Leir swilled his beer. It was warm. He checked for clouds. A few over the mountains, no danger of rain. Good good. He felt Thòm-Patric's gaze on the back of his skull and turned.

"Galbraith isn't the only one running behind," he noted.

"Hm?" Thòm stepped away from his wall and poured a cup.

Leir nodded. "The older Miller brother. He's rushing his pregnant collie somewhere. He, um, he left it a bit late though- she's giving birth in his arms."

Thòm joined him at the greatdoor. "That's no good." He peered out.

Leir turned to peer with him. "It seems you've missed them now. His littlest sons were catching the pups as they spilled out. Before they touched ground- like juggling balls."

"Awful," Thòm said, taking his breath in sharp. "Quite likely fatal." He drifted back to his spot of wall in broad meandering steps. Perhaps his armour slowed him.

Leir flipped round to face him, scanning lazily for any ghost of a twitch playing Thòm's lips.

"Oh come on. You don't find anything in that funny?"

Thòm shrugged, eyes flat. "No. But...it is an absurd situation, I can see that— so perhaps comic for some. But not for me."

Leir tilted his head. "Do you laugh, Thòm?. It doesn't sting." At that moment a lazy gust coiled in through the doorway, tailed by a woman's shadow. Wisps of hair played the shadow's fringes, focusing sharp onto the ground like thin reeds on a lakebed. Its hands were hidden. The woman held back and listened. She heard voices and was careful to stay well on the inside of the half-propped greatdoor. Through the gap she was able snatching glimpses of the scene within. A near empty hall, black fizzling stains in the hearth, the scent of warm ale, long-faded pork, empty benches...even the dogs had cleared out. The day's parchments stacked up by Leir's favourite place, dangerously close to toppling into a beer puddle as the gust twirled inward. She held onto her plaid, lest it rustle.

Thòm shrugged again. "I laugh."

"Haha. When, I wonder."

Thòm frowned. "When it's right."

"I know, I know. Don't fret," said Leir. Smiling weakly he added, "You're a man of still passions. After my own heart."

Thòm nodded, eyes down. "It is the best way for a Border Guard to be." He took a dutiful swallow from his cup.

"I'll drink to that." Leir followed suit. "You do a good job. Other kings would shave their beards and charge naked into the Steppes to get a Border Guard stationed in their capital. In their court. I've told you that before." He nodded.

Thòm's brow softened. "Aye you have. I'm grateful."

"Living here beats sitting down the middle of some line in the dirt I'll bet."

"Without a doubt, Leir."

Glyn-Galén took that moment to slide past the greatdoor and reveal herself. Dorbuie knew her. The thin lips, grey eyes, the burnt timber locks now turning grey. The tallest Galén. The widow.

"Is this an epic romance? ...I'd not want to interrupt." She glanced to each man, feigning apology. Thòm reddened and returned to his straight-back and eyes-forward stance. She chuckled quickly, flashed them both a demure smile then sat herself on the bench nearest to Leir. He turned to face her and met her eyes with a smile. A technique he'd learned over time. She smiled back. "So your man in Dirl is delayed, and you've stretched out the hearings..." she span an open hand around the hall, "...and stretched too far by the look of it. Everyone's gone. Where did Karlätz go?"

Leir gave her a sardonic eyebrow. "Hammered before morning was out." Glyn-Galén snorted. "Mmm-hm. It was that boring, Glyn."

Glyn pushed her peppery hair up and paused, then tried a beer. It was warm, with some lingering flavour. "Hm. Great doctor Fjurd. Last man I'd take for a drunkard. Speaking of which I take it Old Kestrel stayed off the poison. I hope he did. We don't want the old Old Kestrel back."

"He did. ...And aye. I don't recall ever seeing Karlätz in over his head before."

"Are you sure? Hm." Glyn shifted on her seat and fixed her plaid. "No matter. The lesson here," she gestured around again, "is not to build meetings around unfixed arrivals. Something you keep doing, you poor fool," Leir squirmed. "And you don't have to commit yourself to propping up that door, big man, it can hold its own. "

Leir smiled. "This is true," he moved over and sat himself by Glyn. She turned to face him, and emptied her cup. "So what do you want to know? I'd guess that's why you've come— for information. The meetings are open of course. You can take part whenever you like, no need

to creep in for the leftovers. Oh— and um, how's my wee nephew? Have you seen him?"

"Well he's far beyond wee," Glyn corrected, tossing her cup. "and I'm not the woman to ask any more. I'd thought you might have seen him."

"I heard something about Blackmoss woods. Then he vanished. Whatever he's doing, it's not any of the duties I'm supposed to pester him about."

She tilted her head and turned her gaze upward, as if to inspect a concept. "Ah yes. Makes sense. I've a theory about Finn and Blackmoss that I'll tell later. But anyway. I want to hear all the news from the east."

Leir tilted to match her. "Are you asking just to be funny? Everyone wants to hear about the west. Haven't you heard, 'all the best— "

"Yes, I've heard. And no, I don't mean to annoy you, but it's a nice side-effect. I'm dead serious, Leir. The east is where we should be looking and listening, not the west. Amneia dwarfs Dirl fifty times over, you know that. Kellach a thousand times."

"And you know it's wrong to speak about Amneia as 'Amneia'. It isn't one unit. That's common knowledge. There is no vast empire bearing down from the east. It's just cities and farms and states, tyrants and demos, spreading their ideas. Squabbling. Everyone knows that."

"If one High Amneain state turned its eyes west it could flatten every army in the peninsula in a year. One Amneian legion could hold Kellach—

Leir choked. "Don't say that in front of the Old Kestrel!"

"Oh, come on..."

"If you did, and he accepted your scenario...bear with me Glyn," Leir shifted his weight and gripped his stubbly beard (Glyn sometimes envied him; wished she could own that beard), "I'm sure he'd just tell you we'd

beat them like we beat Dirl. Guerrilla fighting. Head into the valleys and drop rocks on their heads. He would know. He did it himself. That's why no army's have come since. It's a waste of men."

Glyn raised up her arms. Her sleeves slipped down, revealing tight sinews. "Alright. I could argue more but...given. My point is plain. All your fretting about modernisation is well justified, but..."

"We need to keep up"

"No, Leir. We need to catch up. Think on the difference for a moment. In Dirl they are still only learning about learning. Learning itself is an Amneian invention."

"Hang on, that's not quite true—"

"Consider. Nearly every text the scholars in Dirl are poring over is from over the sea, from the east. Taking a page from Dirl's books would be taking an Amneian page by proxy. Like buying a flower from a merchant by the meadow. Just pick your own flower."

Leir sipped his drink. "We've taken Amneian ideas before. The whole northwest is a full demos, guaranteed by charter. That puts us far ahead of Dirl, I reckon."

"Hmm...does it? What is it the Kestrel ever insists...'every charter we sign cuts up your power into smaller pieces'. Wait until the time comes to call the warbands, he says. See what the northwest does. They may be more interested in their demos than Kellach."

"The charters make Kellach. They don't divide us. They bind us."

"You have a talent for doublespeak, I'd forgotten. How else are we modernising? Beyond playing at demos?"

Leir smiled. "We have geometry."

"Aye," Glyn gave him a dead stare. "Over the road. Thank you. I swear I hadn't noticed."

"There's a West Amneian teacher set up in there you know, in the school."

Glyn's eyebrows raised a little. "Ohaye?"

"Aye. I'm surprised you haven't seen him about."

"What subjects does he teach?"

"First Principles of Form' and 'Geometrisation of Materials'. What these things might be still eludes me, but seniors say he's good at explaining them."

"They sound practical," Glyn tapped her pointed foot, "Maybe. Hm. West Amneian..." She refilled her cup. "Well it's not a High Amneian but it's a start. You should have him sit in on some hearings. Make a friend of him. You know. If we're to spread learning beyond the town square."

Leir laid a hand on her arm. Her eyes followed. "Small steps, darling. All I can do." He lifted it and sauntered over to his pile of papers. As he approached they began to topple. Leir saved them with a quick hand, then held them up to the light. He flicked through. "So do you actually want the news from the hearing?"

"Yes." Glyn rapped her fingers on the table and turned her head to follow him. "Where have we heard from?"

Leir tossed her the relevant papers. "West Amneia and nowhere else. Two birds from the ports on the warm coast and the papers given by a lone runner down from Anaxilos."

Glyn found his letters. "Brave man."

"Aye. And you should have seen his horse."

She sniggered. "These will take me a few hours to read, maybe you could..."

"Don't worry, all plain stuff. The first bird was to let us know they'll have poor trading for a week following some big storms. The second bird was to let us know we can expect a shortage of 'taro', 'hajimi' and 'curled yenmao fruit'." Glyn

peered over the reports. Leir raised her eyebrow. "Yes, uh, we didn't know what those were either. Karlätz thought hajimi might have been the name for...well, no matter. All fruits beyond piddling kings I reckon. Do you ever wonder how far those Amneian trade routes go?"

"To the end of the world probably."

"Most likely. Anyway the runner's letters were just as plain and ten times as lengthy. A lot of diplomatic inksplats mixed in with the usual well wishing to that skeletal ambassador who I've not seen for, umm, six months—"

"He's up at Inverbruick."

"Is he. Anyway there were also a few of those familiar reassurances that they have secured 'final' homage to the West Amneian crown from every single region in their kingdom. They say their south is..." he sought for the word, "developing."

Glyn flicked pages until she found one of the reassurances. She scanned it. "Pfft. They'll never take the Steppes."

"No?"

"Not for a lifetime. Not the horseback tribes. They're a hard people. Our kin."

"I suppose." Leir yawned, stretching himself upright, and stepped up and over the bench

with a great wooden groan to collect the papers from Glyn who rose with him. "Not a life I'd want to live- out on the Steppes- nor a land I'd seek to rule, but, well, every man to—"

There was a small rumble from far beneath them and the ground shook. Cups tottered, dashing sticky globs of ale about the table tops. Glyn grabbed at Leir, wobbling on his numb legs, and gathered him close for support. He almost collapsed into her. When the tremoring stopped and the drinkers in the hall ceased rattling in their chairs they turned to the king and his sister-in-law, who pulled apart. Leir caught their eyes and threw a puzzled glance out the open greatdoors, which they followed, necks craning.

"Nothing to cause you worry, lads. It's likely the work of my idiot nephew, battling demons out in the woods." The drinkers cackled then fell to whispering; proposing the first of many following theories on the day's unexpected tremoring. Leir sunk down to a table, propping his feet on the bench. He took up a cup and filled it with the last contents of the nearest jug. Glyn smiled and excused herself.

As he watched her pass through the greatdoors she turned a final time. "I dodge the meetings, by the way, to hear your summarised versions. I like them far better." He swilled his beer and gazed out after her. Noon light played the shadowless grass without. He stayed there all day, waiting on the messenger.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Angus is an aspiring writer, hobbyist photographer, and undergraduate student of English and Creative Writing at Manchester Metropolitan University. He is originally from Dundee, Scotland and has been living in Manchester, England since the summer of 2011. He recently self published a collection of short stories to the kindle ebook store, and is now working on his first novel. Rumours are it's in the fantasy genre.

In no particular order Angus enjoys beer, good friends, close family, peculiarities, and his small border collie named Jan. You can find his online hiding places here: www.about.me/angoos

HELL Is Only Temporary

Inspired by Jonathan Carroll's *The Jane Fonda Room* (1982)

by Zachary Houle

"This isn't what I expected,"
said Henry, wincing at the
pain in his feet as he and
Lou walked down what

seemed to be an infinitely long, white corridor. He glanced at Lou, who was practically gliding on air across the floor, whistling happily to himself. Henry was a bit envious.

"Yes, a lot of the new arrivals say that," said Lou. "But the whole caves of fire thing went out a long time ago. You'd think the Bible would be updated more often. But, 'Why tinker with a bestseller?'"

"God really said that?"

"You didn't hear it from me, but yes. He never listens to me. That was always His problem, but I'm blathering. This way."

The pair turned a corner at an intersecting tunnel, one that snuck up on Henry in the pure, blinding whiteness of Hell's corridors. Henry groaned. It was yet another long hall.

Henry had been anxious about his decision, even losing sleep the night before his first day at his new job in Hell. He expected the worst but had been relieved to learn the downtown office tower that was home to the underworld—fronted as a major bank—wasn't how they described Hell in Sunday school. In fact, the administrative offices looked like any other big business: lots of cubicles, bright white lighting, and a photocopy room every hundred feet or so. His new boss, Lou, didn't look like anything out of the Bible. He was dressed in business-

causal attire: cream-colored pants and a black business shirt with a silk Daffy Duck tie. Lou had a hint of a British accent, which made him seem more sophisticated.

Understandably, Henry was a kid in a candy store, curious about every little thing around him. He spent the entire morning being ping-ponged between departments to get the necessary work clearances and asking questions about the inner-workings of Hell. Some were answered: "Bathroom's down the hall, third door on the left." Other questions, like what job he would be doing here, were not. He felt a little uncomfortable, but at least Lou didn't keep his office staff chained up and working to the beat of a drum.

By mid-afternoon, Henry was tiring thanks to the blisters forming on his heels. He was wearing tight, flame-retardant work boots he'd bought specifically for the job.

"No worries. It isn't much further," said Lou, almost reading Henry's mind as the two passed by a door. Henry caught a glimpse at the sign above it—something about a Jane Fonda screening room—and shrugged as he tried to keep up with Lou.

Even the large university Henry just graduated from with a worthless anthropology degree paled in comparison to all the secret passageways and rooms of Hell. He was simply in awe of the place, and sore feet aside, he really needed to make next month's rent. The cash flow would also keep him from having to go on welfare or move back in with

It was also home to about a dozen of the underworld's most beautiful women frolicking in the near corner of a small pond. They wore bikinis so small they were mere millimetres from simply not existing.

his bickering parents. He'd rather swim in a river of molten lava than put up with them again.

"A lady at the temp agency said Hell was only temporary," said Henry. "Is that true?"

"Well, we have to move buildings every few years. The tabloid reporters start sticking their noses in. ... Ah, here we are."

Lou smiled as the pair stopped in front of a large, red doorway with AUTHORIZED PERSONNEL ONLY written on it.

"Bet you're excited about this," said Lou.

He twitched his forefinger, and the door slid open. Mist flooded the hallway from the open entry.

"Go on in," said Lou, pushing Henry gently into the room.

Henry nearly stopped dead in his tracks. The room was as hot as a sauna and filled top to bottom with just about every flowering, tropical plant known. It was also home to about a dozen of the underworld's most beautiful women frolicking in the near corner of a small pond. They wore bikinis so small they were mere millimetres from simply not existing. The girls ignored the two men as they entered, seemingly engaged in what appeared to be a game of water polo.

Henry swallowed.

He had just entered Lou's version of the Playboy Mansion.

"Uh, Lou, is it just me or is it rather, um, hot in here," stammered Henry.

"Ooooooh, he has wit," laughed Lou, slapping Henry on the shoulder. "You should have no problem fitting in with these ladies. They can be sharp with their tongues. Though, come to think of it, they're all kind of like that, aren't they?"

Lou laughed; Henry stood with a puzzled expression on his face.

"Anyhow, this is my recreation room. This is where you'll be doing most of your work."

"Work?"

"Yes. I think you'll find it to be rather pleasant. My servant girls, you see, come here to play water polo and relax after a hard day's work. They've been around since I had my falling out with the big guy upstairs."

Lou pointed upward, which Henry understood to be a reference to the Almighty himself.

"So you can imagine they've become bored playing the same old game for the past few thousand years or so and they just want someone to show them a good time. Naturally, I'd have no problem with this, but ... you know ... most of Hollywood is trying to renegotiate their contract with me—the writers, the actors, the lapdogs at the studio. And that's on top of everything else I have to get done. I just have too many hands on my time."

"So, that's all you want me to do?" asked Henry in disbelief. "Show them a good time?"

"That's it."

Henry paused and contemplated the offer in Hell's hospitality industry. The only sound in the room was the splish-splashing of water and an alluring giggle here and there. Normally, Henry would jump at such a one-in-a-million deal, but this was the King of the Underworld here, and he was tired. He didn't want to make too rash a decision.

"This is a trick, right?" said Henry. "All I have to do is sign on the dotted line and I"

"Look," sighed Lou, glancing at a gold Rolex that seemed to appear out of nowhere on his wrist, "I don't have a lot of time here to dicker over details. Either you want the job or not."

"And you're paying"

"Ten bucks an hour. Of course, the agency takes a large cut of that. But most guys would jump at the opportunity to ... you know ..." Lou nudged his head at the frolicking girls, "... for free," he whispered. "And they're not above mixing a little business with pleasure now and then."

Lou poked Henry in the ribs; Henry arched an eyebrow.

"Not to look a gift horse in the mouth, Lou, but doesn't the labour board have something to say about stuff like that?"

"I have no idea what you're talking about," said Lou, suddenly looking uncomfortable. "Do you want the job or not?"

"You didn't tell me those girls were so anti-social," said Henry, weary from an afternoon of caddying Lou around the private golf course—unofficially dubbed Hell's Back Acre—on the fringes of the city. "I think you kind of misled me there."

"Pish-posh. You shouldn't take anything they say too personally," shrugged Lou. "A tough guy like you should be able to handle them, no problem-o."

Lou smiled a devil-may-care grin at Henry then looked down at the ball in the dirt to line up a shot. As Lou swung the club backward Henry frowned. This was not the reaction he expected from his boss. This was a serious matter. As soon as Lou left on the first day, the girls simply eyed him with contempt.

"Oh, we know why you're here," snorted a cute blonde that Henry tried to strike up conversation with. "You're going to replace us if we start to slack off. Admit it. That's what Lou really told you, right?"

Henry denied it, but the girls didn't believe him and kept themselves enwrapped in their little game. They even forced him to sit with his back to the pond the entire time they were in the room. Henry wanted nothing more than to soak his sore feet in the water, but he agreed to their demands. He thought it might actually win them over if he played by their rules and was as unobtrusive as possible.

A few "accidental" water polo balls to the head seemed to kibosh that theory, not to mention the odd, well-placed insults behind his back. This frustrated him to no end. His first few days on the job—as a temp, no less—and already the hired staff was worried he was out to poach their positions. He put up with these unpleasant women for three days, a stretch that seemed mind-numbingly long because, well, he was doing nothing. He was thankful whenever Lou called upon his servants to perform an odd job. Toward the end of that third day, Henry decided he was useless at his appointed task and should quit. A little voice of guilt had crept into his head, telling him he could be actually earning that \$10 an hour elsewhere.

Lou appeared out of nowhere with the caddying job. Henry, eager to do something

useful, leapt to the challenge. So here he was on the fairway helping Lou practice for an upcoming invitational tourney in Heaven. He was already regretting his decision. In fact, his feet were practically on fire inside his boots. But he stayed silent, not wanting to offend the head honcho.

Lou's golf ball flew a couple hundred yards, bouncing a few times as it reached the end of the green. It seemed to be headed for an easy hole in one, but then eked to the right of the flag at the last possible second and slowly rolled toward a sand trap.

"Damn, damn, damn," whispered Lou under his breath. "Don't go there, do not go there. Please don't. Great. Just great. Could you pass over some Evian? Thanks."

Lou took a gulp of water, set the bottle down beside him and held his hand out. A soft pop and a whiff of smoke filled the air as another golf ball materialized in Lou's outreached palm. Henry stifled a yawn, and mopped his brow. He'd watched Lou make a mockery of himself on the golf course all day, but Lou had a seemingly unending reserve of energy. The tournament was obviously important to him—an annual dinner with Aphrodite was apparently at stake. Lou had also professed to Henry that he didn't want to be humiliated again by Jesus, who had beaten him at the game for well over four centuries, in front of the world's major deities. Lou was cramming like a student at exam time. He couldn't fool anyone with fancy tricks at a competition of gods.

That Lou couldn't play a decent round of golf shocked and astonished Henry to no end. Lou certainly would have had years of practice. But Henry bit his tongue when it came to Lou's golf game, as there was no need to tick him off with an unintentional insult.

"I think I'll just retake that shot," said Lou, dropping the ball to the ground. Henry yawned again, and tried not to concentrate on his feet.

Lou swung at the new ball. It too swooped into the air and slowly arched toward the same sand trap. Lou cursed under his breath, and dropped the club to the ground, narrowly missing the water bottle.

"That's it," Lou said in disgust. "Think I should call it a day." Lou picked up the water bottle and walked back toward the cart. Henry straightened out the clubs in Lou's golf bag.

"I really need to get Tiger Woods to sign on with me so I can get some half-decent lessons for a change," he grumbled. "If it weren't for his agents always wanting more money..."

He shook his head, placing his hand on his brow.

"Anyhow, you can meet me back here bright and early tomorrow morning. I have something else I need you to do for me by the end of the week."

Henry's eyes lit up at this, hoping the new job might involve sitting down. He added Lou's club to the bag. "Oh? What's that?"

"What's the matter?" asked Lou. "I mean, I had Sasha, John Digweed, Paul Oakenfold, and Max Graham give you private DJ lessons. You know how many kids would kill for that opportunity?"

Henry and Lou stood in a DJ booth in the middle of the Regressed Childhood Disco Room. It was a large black room lit with seizure-inducing strobes and filled well beyond capacity with animated corpses Lou had swiped from various graveyards around the world. There was also a large pile of dormant ashes in one corner representing cremated souls. Henry was dressed in blue cargo pants and a T-shirt that said Moonshine Records. He wore a backward cap and cool Italian shades. He was sweating profusely and was fanning himself with a slightly warped vinyl record.

"The clients aren't getting their fill of Strawberry Shortcake Rap and Disco Mickey Mouse. I cannot do my job properly."

Lou, on the other hand, was dressed in a leisure suit and drinking a concoction of vodka and orange juice that he had picked off one of his serving girl's trays. She glowered at Henry as she delivered the drink.

The DJ gig was the fifth job Henry held this month. First came a short, meaningless stint standing guard in front of the Jackson Pollock room. Meaningless because the door had been welded shut ("Try staring at his stuff for an eternity without going a bit stir crazy," Lou had said at the time. "You never know when clients will try to escape from here.") Henry also spent a few hours ordering multiple 35mm film prints for the upcoming Pauly Shore and Steven Segal screening rooms. Just as Henry was finishing that job, Lou decided he needed more chairs in case he got a load of requests from the ex-mortals wanting into those theatres. Not just any seat would do, of course. Lou wanted the most uncomfortable chairs that could be found. Henry managed find some old, wooden ones with nasty-looking slivers. Lou then asked Henry to spend a few hours shredding outdated contracts. It was sort of an interesting job at first because Henry came across the names of a few prominent dead Hollywood stars and quite a few music biz names. He quickly discovered paper shredding was one of the most mind-numbing, soul-destroying jobs on the planet. All that paper, it kept coming. Non-stop.

"At least they've stopped throwing their glow sticks at you," said Lou.

"That's because I'm not playing music," sighed Henry, fanning himself with the waffle of black

plastic. "I only have one record. How am I supposed to mix with one record?"

"Didn't I set you up with more than that?" said Lou, taking a slurp from his screwdriver.

"I haven't received the shipment yet," said Henry. He waved his arm to a crowd of ex-mortals who were ecstatically mingling amongst themselves, talking about ways to tear down the door leading out of the room. "The clients aren't getting their fill of Strawberry Shortcake Rap and Disco Mickey Mouse. I cannot do my job properly."

"Hmmm," said Lou, putting a pensive finger to his lips.

"Can't you just wave your magic wand and get me a decent stack of vinyl?" said Henry, wondering if he could conjure up a balm for his feet.

"I would if I could, but after losing that golf tournament last week and suffering from that nasty bit of depression, it'd be a drain on my resources," said Lou, shrugging and turning to leave. "Besides, we can always put the Romper Room theme music into a continuous loop. And I'm sure I can come up with something just as interesting for you to do."

"Like what?" said Henry.

Henry limped bleary-eyed into Lou's space-age bachelor pad office, which resembled the inside of a giant egg—the devil had a soft spot for '60s kitsch. Lou looked up from his white plastic desk, now being

polished by one of his servant girls dressed in a cat suit.

"I'm sorry for interrupting," said Henry. "But if I project one more Jane Fonda film, I think I'm going to snap."

Lou smiled at the woman and said, "That's fine, dear."

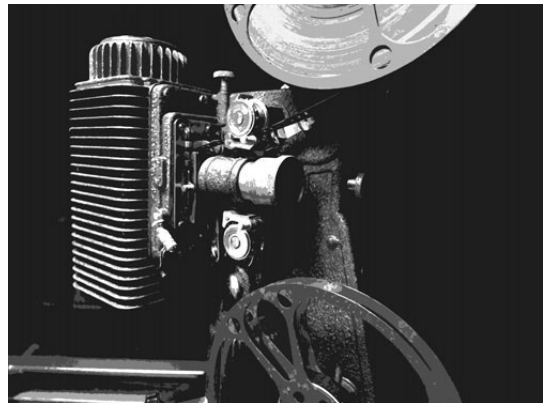
"But there's a little scuff right there."

"Yes, I know, dear," said Lou with a slight ahem! into a closed fist. "But it looks like I have some business to attend to."

He glared at Henry. The woman left the room, scowled as she passed Henry, and closed the door behind her. Lou got up from his desk, walked over to a small bar on one side of the office. He grabbed a shot glass, some brandy, and began pouring.

"So, working in the Jane Fonda Room is just not a cool enough gig for you?" said Lou. "I mean, I'm paying you \$10 an hour for the honour of screening some cinematic classics. Most guys just can't get enough of Barbarella. That's why I created the room."

Lou set the bottle back in its place on the shelf. He gulped the shot quickly, wincing.



"Lou," said Henry wearily, "I've already seen The China Syndrome like 90 times! I'm going to have my own nuclear meltdown if I don't start doing something more worthwhile."

"And screening Jane Fonda films is not worthwhile?"

"You're asking me to live the personal hells of your clients!" said Henry. "Even worse, I've become their bogeyman! Everyone in that theatre is booing me, not the films! Besides, my feet are killing me from standing all day!"

"Whoa, just cool down a second," said Lou.

Lou frowned at Henry as if he'd just done him a huge favour by putting him in the screening room. Henry stared at him contemptuously and said, "Jesus, Lou, I thought I'd have some benefits by now, or maybe a decent office job where I'm not dealing with dead people all day! Something air-conditioned with a comfy chair!"

"So thaaaaat's it," sighed Lou, throwing up his hands and spilling some of his drink on the shag carpet. "Just like everyone else, eh? Always complaining about the benefits package."

Lou rolled his eyes heavenward.

"Look, I've told you I can't hire you at this time. Business hasn't been expanding at quota since Purgatory started muscling in on our turf."

"Lou, if you're not serious about hiring, I can take my talents elsewhere," said Henry, pleasantly discovering a new, serious edge to his voice.

"Really?" snorted Lou, swallowing his drink. "This place has everything anyone would ever want, even Jane Fonda films. What other working environment could ever be as good as this?"

"Heaven," said Henry affirmatively.

"Heaven?" said Lou, seated lazily in a lawn chair on the rooftop patio.

"You're leaving all this behind for ... that place?"

"Yep."

"You're picking a fine time to tell me this," said Lou. "This is my coffee break, you realize."

"I'm sorry, Lou, but if I want the job, I have to take it right away. I figured it was better if you knew as soon as I got word."

"I see," said Lou.

There was a moment of awkward silence. Lou sucked back on his smoke.

"So what does Heaven have that I don't?" he finally offered.

Without having to think about it, Henry said, "Stock options. Benefits. Job security. The freedom to create my own work schedule."

"Christ," cursed Lou, taking an extra long drag of his cigarette. He got up out of his lawn chair, coughing and pounding his chest, before walking over to the edge of the building. He stared out over the city, his back turned to Henry.

"Heaven," Lou mumbled.

"Yes, Heaven. You look shocked."

Lou kept his back to Henry, almost refusing to acknowledge him. "I'm a little disappointed I guess," said Lou bitterly. "But it's not like I can't replace you or anything. I was going to hire you, eventually. When the time seemed right."

"Oh?" said Henry, trying to pretend this surprised him.

"You know, you could have had access to it all," said Lou with a wistful sigh. "The golf course. The pool room. The arcade. The pop machine. But, nuh-ooooh! Heaven."

Lou snorted in contempt and took another drag. Henry wondered if he should at least thank Lou for paying him a measly \$10 an hour--minus the outrageously high, soul-selling agency fees (which totalled up to \$6.70 an hour)--to put up with him for the past six months. He stood there for a moment, unsure if he should shake Lou's hand or send a thank you card in the mail.

"Well, thanks anyway for having me," said Henry in the politest voice he could muster. "Sorry for, well ... you know."

"Yeah, that's what they all say," sighed Lou, his back still turned.

"Um, so I can go now, right?"

"Well, you're not working here anymore."

"Um, I know. But shouldn't we shake hands or something? You know, like a business agreement or something?"

Lou sighed, shuffled his feet uncomfortably and took a puff of his cigarette, before finally turning around and extending his hand.

"Yes, yes, well, good luck with the new gig," he said lazily, as if he didn't mean it.

"Uh, thanks," said Henry.

"I'll now have one of the servant girls send you out," said Lou, snapping his fingers to summon one.

"That's OK," said Henry coolly. "I think I can find my way out."

"Good," said Lou, taking a drag, turning his back once more.

Henry shrugged to himself, and then walked back toward the door to the rooftop garden that would take him to the elevator. On the way over, he thought he could hear Lou muttering words under his breath that would have normally burned his ears. Not that it mattered much to Henry. He was thankful he

now had to endure only a temporary descent into Hell, back through the administrative offices in the above-ground part he'd last seen on his first day here, before heading back out into the light of day at street level.

Henry was looking forward to his new job with the man upstairs. He was going to help overhaul the Bible, make it hip for the 12 to 24 demographic. Working as a DJ in Hell had actually wound up looking kind of cool on his résumé, so being employed by Lou wasn't a wash—even if things got tense toward the end. So he did have something to thank Lou for: working in Hell somehow made him look cool.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Zachary Houle is a Pushcart Prize nominee for fiction and the recipient of a \$4,000 arts grant from the City of Ottawa for emerging artists. His fiction and poetry has been published in *Pindeldyboz*, *Word Riot*, *Dr. Hurley's Snake-Oil Cure*, *Thieves Jargon*, *the Danforth Review*, *Broken Pencil*, *Midnight Mind*, *Kiss Machine* and others. He is also the associate editor in the music reviews section of *PopMatters.com*, a web site that receives one million unique visitors a month. He also writes music and book reviews, and the occasional feature, for said site.

SUBMISSIONS

That is all the fiction for Issue Two. Thank you to all the authors who submitted their work and we hope you enjoyed it. If you have a story that you would like to see appear in a future issue then please have a look at the submissions guidelines on the web site:

fdzine.fever-dreams.co.uk/Submissions.html

SEX AND SCIENCE FICTION

by Sue McKenzie

Over the past few issues I have talked about how sex plays

an important part in modern science fiction. Sex isn't just

a matter of sexuality but also about gender and in this article I want to discuss a matter that is close to my heart. I have been at plenty of writing conventions and book signings where, as a woman, I am treated as the elephant in the room. The fact of the matter is that no matter how far we have come in terms of gender equality there are still plenty of people who believe that writing science fiction is the domain of men.

This is largely down to the public's attitude towards science fiction, in much the same way as the public's attitude towards video gaming influenced the development of the video games industry. Science fiction is often seen as the premise of a single male demographic but, unlike the video games industry which is starting to acknowledge the change in its demographic, change is much slower in the publishing industry. The source of this problem is down to the risk involved in the publishing industry. Most publishers are unlikely to take risks on work that strays to far from the genre norm,

and the genre norm is for women to adopt the role of an emotional and psychic provider for the male hero, a helpless victim or a non-physical antagonist. Where do these genre archetypes come from?

Many women that I have spoken to believe that these roles are a reflection of a fundamentally chauvinist industry but the truth is that these characterizations are deeply rooted in our consciousness.

In ancient Greek and Roman myths mortal women were commonly mothers and wives, and those that weren't were almost always evil. The men were heroes and Gods and formed the basis of most male archetypes in modern fiction. In time these stereotypes became the backbone of the fairy tales which we all grew up with. The dashing princes facing evil, old witches while helpless princesses watch in terror is a stereotype that we are all familiar with. Is it any wonder that when we start writing fiction that we follow these time honoured stereotypes.

These stereotypes are not necessarily a bad thing. As writers we can take advantage of these stereotypes to make influence our readers response to a character. Attractive women use their feminine guiles to lure men into danger, which he must battle as proof of his masculinity. He will, of course, succeed

because he is a man and weakness is a female trait. When the woman is on the side of the male hero then she becomes nurturing, emotional and supportive. Her role is to affirm the male lead's prowess. In the face of danger she will scream and run until the male rescuer arrives. Think about it, how many times have you ever read about a heroic woman saving a weak man?

When the writer tries to reverse this stereotype the merely revert to a different one. A woman is beautiful and graceful and as such when she begins to fight back it will be with feline scratching and biting. If you have ever seen woman fighting then you will know that this is rarely the case.

If, like me, you were raised in an environment that encouraged girls to grow up to be wives and mothers, and boys to take care of them, then reversing the stereotype can be difficult. *Conan* stories would probably not have achieved the same notoriety if they had been written by a woman but *Frankenstein* would have been very different if it had been written by a male writer. Women, according to the psychologists, are more openly emotional in their writing and it is this ability to express emotions that adds a dimension to the monster in *Frankenstein*. Many male writers are encouraged from an early age that a display of emotion is unmanly, and this shows in their writing. The characters they develop are stoic and brooding figures that display no emotion. It is this lack of emotional depth that keeps them apart from the reader.

Writers working in science-fiction have the chance to confront these stereotypes. The worlds that they create can depict settings where women don't have to outperform their male peers and women can assume less traditional roles but that doesn't mean that these traditional archetypes should be ignored. There are women who fulfil these saintly stereotypes, whose lives revolve around home and family. There will always be some women who will run and hide in the face

of danger. The problem is not in the fact that women are portrayed this way but rather in why they are portrayed this way.

As writers we are aware that there must be justification for a character's traits and quirks. Don't assume that your reader is going to accept that your female character fits one of these stereotypes simply because she is a woman, and the same is true for your male characters. Your characters' personalities must be unique and some of these traditional traits are bound to surface from time to time. To disregard these characterizations, or worse to feel a compulsion to include them, will result in characters that are unrealistic. Marion Zimmer Bradley once stated that there are two stereotypes that should be avoided: "The big, tough woman who is a spaceship captain but ALSO can cook, sew, and be completely orgasmic as soon as the right man comes along," and the "cutesy little girls who have learned to cuss and have sex". While these stereotypes may seem slightly extreme, they do illustrate the lengths that some writers will go to in order to try not to create a character that could be perceived as sexist.

I have met a number of female writers who believe that the sexism is not only present in the writing. When I first began writing it was certainly true that it would be easier to be published by a female editor than a male one, but things have changed. The publishing industry, like many industries, presents people with the problem of requiring a reputation to get a reputation. This is just as true for male writers as it is for female writers. It's all too easy for a woman just starting out in a male-dominated field to blame her lack of success on the prejudices of others but you should remember that there are many male writers who are struggling to get their work into print too. Good editors don't see women as inferior writers, they just see good and bad writers. Our very own editor said his concern was not about the gender of the writer but the quality of their work and ensuring that he maintains the balance of newer to experienced writers.

If editors are acknowledging the changing dynamics of the industry and readers are recognising the need for more three dimensional characters then it can be argued that a significant proportion of the sexism in the industry exists because writing women bring it into the industry themselves. I have been told by numerous women working in the speculative arena that they are "forced" to publish in vanity magazines because no-one will accept that a woman can write fantasy, horror or science-fiction. I was even once asked at a writing convention how it felt to sell out to the male establishment. I told them the same thing that I'm going to tell you now. There are numerous things that will prevent you from getting published - sloppy presentation, awkward style, overused ideas, boring characters who have appeared in the pages of thousands of stereotypical stories - but the gender of the writer will have little to do with any good editor's decision to print your

work.

I believe that if we, as woman, stop searching for sexism— whether it really exists or not— and focus on perfecting our skills as writers then editors will have no reason to say no to our work.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sue has celebrated her twenty first birthday a few too many times and has lost count. She lives in the Midlands with her husband, John, and works as a secretary. She states that she is and always will be a secretary because its much sexier than being a personal assistant

xkcd

by Randall Munroe

In case you don't understand the joke. This is the geek equivalent of the old horror story that ends with, "The calls are coming from inside the house!"

The 192.168/16 block is your home network.

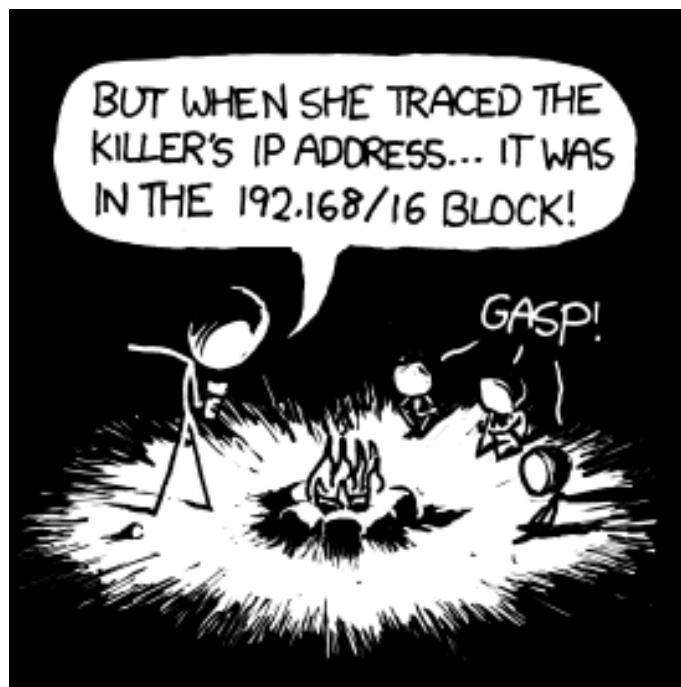


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I SHOULD BE WRITING...

IMPROVING YOUR WRITING WHILE HAVING SOME TIME AWAY FROM YOUR MANUSCRIPT

by Al Thomas

One of the most frequent questions we get here at Fever Dreams is:

“Why do you have video games and movie reviews in a short story magazine?”

The answer is that there is much that writers can learn from them, not only about storytelling but also about the speculative community.

One of the most common problems for new writers is in creating realistic dialogue. Many teachers will tell you that the best way to learn about dialogue is through eavesdropping but in many ways films and video games can be far more instructive. This is because the dialogue isn't real but crafted to sound real. For many people the dialogue in video games is stilted and obviously unrealistic and in some cases this is true, sometimes this is a natural side effect of the attempt to create a branching dialogue which the character can choose his path through and as such contains inconsistencies but for the most part the standard of dialogue in video games has improved vastly in recent years.

In television and film, dialogue can serve a

variety of purposes. The most obvious use of dialogue is to provide information relevant to the story. Many new writers have a tendency to overuse dialogue for this purpose and making their dialogue seem stilted and unrealistic. Try looking out for examples of dialogue that relate events in the past, present or future whilst watching your favourite films. Just be aware that low budget science-fiction and horror films are probably not the best source of rich dialogue.

Another valuable use of dialogue is to reveal information about characters, both within the scene and without, and potentially introduce you to a character before they actually appear on screen. One of the major ways you can develop a character is through accent and this is where films can really help you get a feel for a particular accent. Listening carefully to movies with strong regional accents is probably easier for most writers than travelling to the region in question. It is not just regional dialect that can be learnt this way, children and teenagers often use very different dialogue to adults. If you have children around the right age then that can be very useful but if you are a single, middle aged guy it could be a different matter. Looking at blogs online can provide you with the terms that they use but writers should be aware of the difference between spoken and written text.

While you are listening to dialogue, do so with a critical ear. As writers we have a tendency to remove all the extra stuff, all the 'ums' and 'ers' and cutting out the stuttering, waffling and repetition but sometimes these qualities are necessary to the character. It is also important to realise that, and I'm taking back a point here, that bad dialogue can be just as useful as good dialogue. If you are watching a film and feel that the writers have got the dialogue wrong then try asking yourself why. In time you'll start to acquire a few tricks of the trade which will make your own dialogue better.

Another important thing to realise is that films, television programmes and video games all have one advantage over script, they can draw on additional senses with greater ease than a writer can and this can help with your prose too. I know that when I started writing the biggest problem was with keeping my prose sparse. It is, I have been told, a common problem amongst newer writers who often feel the need to vividly describe every detail of every scene, thought and feeling. Even when the prose are expertly written this can be immensely boring. When you are playing a video game or watching a film be mindful of what important details are included in the scene but also what details they focus on. In a scene set at breakfast time it may be a frying pan containing bacon and eggs, a fresh pot of coffee or a bowl of cereal and a newspaper, but it's unlikely that it will focus on the cutlery or the colour of the microwave. Readers have imagination and as a writer you should give them the opportunity to use it.

It's not only the contents of the scenes but also the scene structure itself that can be a useful learning tool for a new writer. Where a novel is consumed over time, a film or video game has a much smaller window to grab and hold the viewer/player. Form is

vitaly important. In a film we may find our mind wandering or we may just set down our controller if we encounter a particularly boring scene. Readers may give you more leeway and skip ahead to the next chapter but they won't keep skipping ahead. Films and video games have got editing down to a fine art, we very rarely see the filler material. We won't necessarily see the breakfast being made instead the plate may arrive at the table where the character is sitting and the camera is unlikely to follow the main character walking to work or school unless something important happens on the way. The essential ingredient is drama, lots of drama and then the scene ends.

When you are writing your story, you can adopt many of these editing techniques to boost the quality of your writing. You may have been told this a lot but for new writers planning is paramount. Break down your story into scenes and then work out what is required for each scene. Decide who is present and where the scene is set but most importantly what the scene should accomplish. If a scene doesn't add to your story progression then you really don't need it. When you have your scenes, think about what each scene needs in terms of props, wardrobe, make-up or even special effects. As a writer you need to create all of these items and this is where the main advice for writing a story, that we can learn from those writing movies and video games, comes to bear. Show don't tell.

Your reader, unlike the viewer and the gamer, only knows what you tell them. The reader doesn't need know that the character you are introducing is the pilot of the spaceship or that they are on the main deck of the spaceship unless you tell them. They don't need to know what every button on every console does and where the escape pod, that plays not part in your story, is located. Have the figure sat in front

of a console punching a few buttons and checking readouts and we start to understand who this figure is and what role he performs.

If you aren't a planner, and I know some writers like to fly by the seat of their pants, you can still use these techniques when editing your work. Check the characters and scenes to ensure that everything is necessary to the story. Remember that for every scene in your favourite films there is probably several hours that made it to the cutting room floor. This is a useful reminder to writers that sometimes it is necessary to be brutal with our work. If you've got a DVD or two lying around then have a look at the extra scenes because these are often the scenes that were cut because the studio felt they were unnecessary. One of my favourite examples of this is when you get films with alternative endings. *28 Days Later* had a different ending in America than in Europe, for example, reflecting the differing attitudes of the movie going public.

The public response to a given film or video game can also be used to gauge the likely reaction of editors to your story. Popular trends in films and games are often reflected in the publishing industry and this is where keeping your eye on what is selling in these industries can be important to a writer. If the shelves of your local video games store are groaning with zombie games and the local cinema hasn't shown anything but zombie films for months then it's probably going to be an indication that your new zombie story will be a hard sell.

Reflecting on these issues can help you evaluate your story more objectively, think where you need to make cuts and craft a more engaging and enjoyable story. So next time that you are watching a movie or enjoying the latest video game don't neglect your writing. Be a little more analytical and, with a critical eye, you can improve your writing and relax at the same time.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Al is the second in command at Fever Dreams, if you don't include the Editor's wife, and a lover of the silver screen. He recently gave up his lifelong career at the cinema to study Creative Writing at university which he hopes will lead to a career in films.

He is a lover of science fiction and fantasy, his favourite films are Kubrick's *The Shining* and *2001*, which he claims are masterpieces in their respective genres.

SUBMISSIONS

We are always on the look out for articles pertaining to all manner of speculative fiction so if you have an article that you would like to see appear in a future issue then please have a look at the submissions guidelines on the web site:

fdezine.fever-dreams.co.uk/Submissions.html

IN REMEMBRANCE

by Peter Bennett

Frederik Pohl was born in New York City on November 26, 1919, and lived in Brooklyn for most of his childhood.

He dropped out of high school at 17 but continued to read broadly, his taste in books covering everything from Tolstoy to the early science fiction magazines of the time. He became involved in publishing, acting as a literary agent for his friends and editing a number of science fiction magazines, including *Astonishing Stories* and *Super Science Stories*, and books. In 1936 he was present in the back room of a Philadelphia bar for the world's first science fiction convention.

In the late 40s, after he returned from service in WWII, the public attitude towards science-fiction had begun to change and Frederik Pohl was able to sell science fiction to mainstream publishers. He was responsible for selling Asimov's first novel, *Pebble in the Sky*, to Doubleday. While working hard as a literary agent he had also begun work on the first of several collaborations with C.M.Kornbluth. The most famous of these collaborations was the anti-utopian novel, *The Space Merchants*, in which he imagined a future dominated by advertising executives who hook consumers on an interlocking chain of addictive products. *The Space Merchants* has been translated into more than 25



Beth Rooney for The New York Times
Frederik Pohl in 2009.

languages, sold millions of copies worldwide and presaged the works of writers like Philip K. Dick.

In the 60s and 70s he served as science fiction editor at Bantam Books where he gained a reputation for taking risks on science fiction that broke out of the Golden Age. This time was a period of great turmoil for science fiction due to the rise of the New Wave authors. These authors sought to elevate genre writing through an emphasis on literary style and character development. It was during this period that

Pohl published Joanna Russ' feminist masterpiece, *The Female Man*, and Samuel R. Delany's experimental novel, *Dhalgren*. Despite some initial resistance *Dhalgren* went on to sell more than a million copies.

The 70s also saw Pohl receive two Nebula Awards, in 1976 and 1977, and a Hugo Award, in 1978, for his own work. The Hugo Award was for *Gateway*, a science fiction novel about the Heechee which he considered to be the best work of his life. He went on to write four more novels and a book of short stories in the Heechee saga.

During his life Frederik Pohl published more than 65 novels and 30 collections of short stories. Almost half of the novels were written in collaboration with friends

like Kornbluth and Asimov. His last collaboration was with Arthur C Clarke on the novel *The Last Theorem*. He received his last Hugo Award in 2010 for his blog *The Way the Future Blogs* which was named after his memoir *The Way the Future Was*.

On September 2 2013 his granddaughter Emily Pohl Weary blogged confirming the passing of Frederik Pohl. He was 93 years old. He will be remembered for his editing acumen, his science fiction criticism and his witty and amusing blog, which he edited right up until his death. If we take anything from the life of Frederik Pohl it should be that the greatest contributions of any writer are made as part of a community and not in the solitary tasks before the keyboard.

James Herbert

Stephen King once said of his friend, James Herbert, that he "comes at us with both hands, not willing to simply engage our attention, he seizes us by the lapels and begins to scream in our faces." When he died on March 20 of this year, he was the author of 23 novels that had been translated into 34 languages and had sold 54 million copies but was always remembered for his first two.

He was 28 and working in an advertising agency when he began work on *The Rats*. It took him nine months to complete the manuscript which was to be rejected by five publishers before it would be accepted. Despite being met with mixed reviews the book sold 100,000 copies within the first three weeks. The controversy surrounding the book no doubt heightened its appeal to teenagers and before long sales had passed the million copies mark.



The Rats is a relatively short novel, just under 200 pages, but it crams plenty of sex, violence and gruesome action into those pages. Set in a derelict house by a canal, which functions as both the centre of the story and the scene of the horrible attacks, it starts with the gruesome death of a drunk who takes refuge in the house.

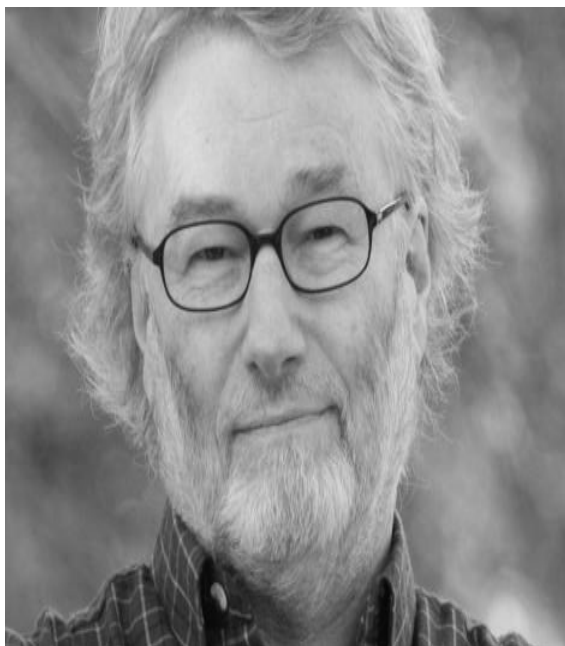
One of Herbert's tricks was to choose familiar settings which readers would have an emotional reaction to and then to ratchet up the tension with attacks that become gradually more and more gruesome. The epilogue sees the survival of just one rat and paved the way for the book's two sequels, *Lair* and *Domain*. The most controversial, and perhaps most relevant to modern readers, aspect of *The Rats* is the subtext of governmental neglect and lack of care towards those at the bottom of the social scale.

The Fog was the second book written by Herbert and cemented his reputation. The novel concerns a small Wiltshire village and the events that ensue when a creeping fog drives members of the community insane. The events of this novel are depicted in suitably graphic detail and,

much to the delight of his teenage audience, featured the deaths of numerous teachers.

Despite his success, James Herbert, was never satisfied with his literary status and, much like his friend Stephen King, claimed that his reputation as a horror writer was a hindrance to him being taken seriously as a writer. American critics were much quicker to acknowledge the success of King than British critics were of Herbert, and while it is true that Herbert's dialogue and characterisation were not of the highest order it is hard to ignore his success. Herbert's work was the stuff of nightmares, often spiced up with sex, and it is this combination that attracted and maintained his audience to the end.

Iain M Banks



It is not a widely known fact that Iain M Banks began writing at fourteen. The reason that this fact is not widely known is because his first two novels, *The Hungarian Lift-Jet* and *TTR*, never saw the light of day. His next three novels, written between 1974 and 1979, were all science-fiction and, despite the fact they remain unpublished in their original forms, led to Banks believing that science fiction was the genre he was meant to write. He described it as "the exemplary arena of the unfettered imagination." Banks' love of the genre meant that he quickly became the British champion of science fiction and defended the genre from "intellectual snobs," who he claimed were afraid of technology and the changes that it brought with it.

It was not a science fiction novel that enabled Banks to become a writer full time. In 1984 *The Wasp Factory* arrived, immediately establishing its author as an important voice in Scottish fiction. Despite being condemned as a work of “unparalleled depravity”, the book went on to become a bestseller. *The Wasp Factory* is the story of sixteen year old Frank Cauldhame, and its disturbing first-person narrative, matter-of-fact descriptions of brutal violence and grotesque humour are used to great effect by Banks to reveal the horrific workings of Frank’s mind. The really clever thing about the novel is how despite Frank’s monstrous actions the reader still feels sympathy for him. Banks would use this ability again in his later novel, *Complicity*, which featured grisly descriptions of ritual sacrifice and sado-masochistic behaviour.

The Wasp Factory was followed the following year by *Walking on Glass*. The work was composed of three separate narratives, one of which pointed clearly to Banks’ interest in science fiction but it was not until 1987 that he would become known for his science fiction novels. *Consider Phlebas* was the beginning of a highly popular sequence of science-fiction works. In contrast to many science fiction writers, Iain created a utopian society where money didn’t exist, people could choose their own gender and work was replaced with hobbies. Banks’ utopia was far from perfect, being filled with people who competed to the death, slavers and genocidal maniacs. This idea is a key factor in much of Banks’ work. While he was never comfortable defining the concept of Good in his work, Banks was always clear that genocide, torture and enslavement are always wrong.

For the rest of his literary career Banks would alternate between writing literary and science fiction works. The latter he

described as taking a vacation from the demands of literary writing. In his science fiction he would make use of the same skills that he showed in his literary works. He often featured interleaved narratives that moved both forwards and backwards in time. The relationship between these narratives would only become apparent at the end of the novel and usually contained a narrative twist that was characteristic of his work.

In *Consider Phlebas* Banks’ created The Culture, a society of galactic travellers run by powerful and benevolent machines. It featured in most of his subsequent science-fiction works. Its enemies were a religious humanoid race that resented the powers of The Culture. In this conflict, good and evil are not straightforward matters. Banks provides much discussion on the clash of ideas that results combined with galactic intrigue and action that earned him a reputation for writing “Astro-political” science fiction. Many critics have argued that The Culture’s mission to spread democracy, secularism and social justice throughout the universe was a reflection of Banks’ own values, yet he shows considerable sympathy for those who resist this imposition in his work.

On April 3 2013 Banks announced on his website that he had inoperable cancer of the gall bladder. The announcement provoked an outpouring of emotion from his readers, many of whom spoke with great fondness of their memories of meeting him. Banks was clearly an author who relished the closeness he shared with his fans.

Uncompromising and unpredictable, Iain Banks was distinguished by the boldness of his imagination which he allowed to run wild in his science fiction sagas and clearly defined the dark world that he would explore in his literary and genre fiction.

REVIEWS

Laird Barron has, thanks to his two previous award winning anthologies, established himself as one of the most original voices working in modern horror. His third anthology, *The Beautiful Thing That Awaits Us*, has much to live up to.

This collection of interlinked collection of cosmic horror stories is probably the darkest work he has done so far. The odd events, creeping terrors and eldritch horrors from the darkest places are sure to appeal to fans of H.P. Lovecraft. In fact this

THE BEAUTIFUL THING THAT AWAITS US ALL

Laird Barron

Night Shade

collection is heavily inspired by the work of the Master of Cosmic Horror. If you are expecting a straight forward story with well developed characters then you will be disappointed. In true Lovecraftian fashion, the characters are place in abstract and atmospheric locations with bleak prospects and you are always left with questions at the end of the story.

This leads me into a difficult position because this work is clearly at best an homage to the late, great H.P. Lovecraft, and so originality becomes difficult to assess. There has been a lot of work in the Lovecraftian arena produced of late and this is certainly amongst the best.

HAUNTINGS

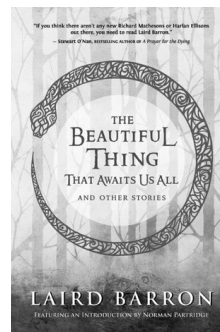
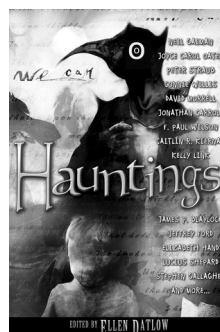
Ellen Datlow

Tachyon Publications

In my opinion Ellen Datlow is one of the foremost editors working in horror so when I picked up *Hauntings* I was very excited. As I scanned the list of contributors I was delighted to see names like Joyce Carol Oates and Neil Gaiman.

The problem is that this anthology relies a little too heavily on the use of ghost stories involving children, something I consider to be heavily over used and not particularly original. That is not to say that the stories are not well written or enjoyable but the overuse of this theme does make the anthology a little staid.

Datlow's anthologies are always superb and this anthology shows why she has earned her reputation. There are some great stories in this anthology but there are also some that I



REVIEWS by Matt Harris

found a little too light hearted and silly. I really enjoyed Gaiman, Oates, Morrell, Kiernan and Shepard's contributions but found the obsession with unborn babies in Wilson's work a little bit too heavy handed especially given that its essentially a story about man-eating furniture.

The good things about anthologies is that there is usually something for everyone. If you don't like ghost stories about children then stay clear.

DEADMAN'S ROAD

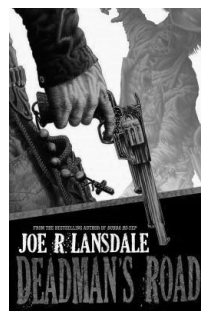
Joe R Lansdale

Tachyon

The Wild West becomes distinctly supernatural in this collection of short stories by Joe R Lansdale. I seem to recall having read some of these stories before but that doesn't stop them from being immensely entertaining.

This is old style pulp writing. The characters are crass, vulgar and immensely crude so if you are easily offended by non political correctness then this isn't the book for you.

The stories focus on the character of the Reverend Jedidiah Mercer and his battle with evil. He is an archetypal gun-totting man of god who is quick to draw in his quest to bring justice, but not necessarily salvation, to those besieged by evil in



its many guises. There are stories about zombies, werewolves, vampires and even goblins.

I wasn't particularly enamoured with the opening novella but I thought that the short stories were great and Lansdale's supernatural west is very enjoyable.

This mash up is sure to amuse anyone who likes horror, the wild west and pulp fiction.

A CLOCKWORK HEART

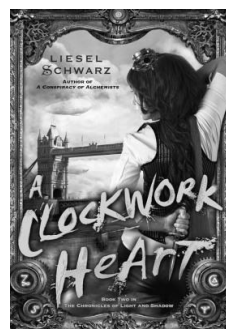
Liesel Schwarz

Del Ray

The sequel to *A Conspiracy of Alchemists* and the second book in the *Chronicles of Light and Shadow* series. I had high expectations for this novel. I have always had a fondness for Steampunk and jumped at the chance to review this book.

Schwarz, I'm glad to say, didn't disappoint. Ellie is still the same kick-ass heroine that she was in the first book, and her marriage to Hugh Marsh has not tempered her fierce character or independence in any way.

In *A Clockwork Heart* Hugh is one of a number of people who have recently disappeared. These people reappear with their hearts replaced with clockwork. The story starts off slowly but the action and adventure quickly



pick up pace. Some readers may find it hard to get into but you'll soon find yourself on the edge of your seat, engrossed in the story and caring about the characters.

It was an enjoyable read and I will eagerly await Elle's next adventures to see how she will solve her many problems and the threats looming in the dark. I heartily recommend this book to fans of urban fantasy and steampunk, just don't expect too much romance.

REVIEWS by Matt Harris

DOCTOR SLEEP

Stephen King

Scribner

Fans of Stephen King have waited an age for this book to arrive and now it's finally here. In *Doctor Sleep* King picks up with the characters from *The Shining*. He focuses primarily on Dan Torrance, who is now an adult, as he struggles with depression, alcoholism and his special gift.

There are inevitably two questions that must be confronted when discussing *Doctor Sleep*. Firstly can King muster the genius he used to create *The Shining* some thirty years later, and two, and let's be honest, it's a sequel and the words horror and sequel have a well deserved legacy of failure.

In this book King returns to what he does best. It's a gory and glorious battle of good vs evil that is sure to thrill millions of King's fans. I strongly recommend



that you re-read *The Shining* before you start on *Doctor Sleep* though it is necessary.

Many people seem to have reduced this novel to a simple story about psychic vampires preying on innocent young girls but, as is often the case with King's work, there is a strong theme of family running through this novel.

It has the gore, the scares and it's all wrapped up in one of the most enjoyable novels that King has produced in recent years.

REVIEW by Al Thomas

THE DEAD RUN

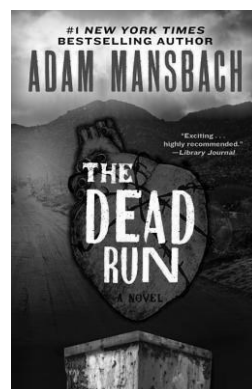
Adams Mansbach

Harper Voyager

New York Times bestselling author, Adams Mansbach's latest novel, *The Dead Run*, is a story about disappearing girls and smuggling on the Mexican/ American border.

I loved *Go The F**K to Sleep* and was really looking forward to *The Dead Run*. It didn't disappoint. The story is well paced, the action sequences are entertaining and the characters are both believable and engrossing.

The characters are one of the things that make this book stand out to me. There are no good characters in the book, everyone is either a shade of gray or bloody evil. In reality we all have a choice to live by the rules or follow our own personal code of conduct. A lot of *The Dead Run* is about watching Jess Galvan battle with the rules of the game he finds himself in while still staying within his own personal moral code.



The Dead Run is a decent light read that moves between literary and social commentary through out. The problem is that it's neither thriller nor horror. While the supernatural is a necessary part of the novel it is not heavily emphasized. While the horror elements may be enough for some, personally I felt that the horror elements were just part of the background and that was disappointing. It may not be a great novel but it's still an entertaining read.

REVIEW by Martin Williams

UPCOMING RELEASES

A Guide to upcoming book releases for the third quarter of 2013

This guide was compiled with the assistance of several authors and publishing houses, who have our thanks. This list is by no means complete and we hope to have a more complete list for Issue 4.

	TITLE	AUTHOR	PUBLISHER
AUGUST	War Master's Gate (Fantasy)	Adrian Tchaikovsky	Tor
	The Days of the Deer (Fantasy)	Liliana Bodoc	Corvus
	Swords of Good Men (Fantasy)	Snorri Kristjansson	Jo Fletcher Books
	The Glass Republic (Fantasy)	Tom Pollock	Jo Fletcher Books
	Deadman's Road (Horror)	Joe R. Lansdale	Tachyon
	Codex Born (Fantasy)	Jim. C. Hines	DAW
	The Crown Tower (Fantasy)	Michael J. Sullivan	Orbit
	Pirates of the Timestream (SF)	Steve White	Baen
	Kindred and Wings (Fantasy)	Phillipa Ballentine	Pyr
	The Fairest of Them All (Fantasy)	Carolyn Turgeon	Touchstone
	Dragonwriter: A tribute to Anne McCaffrey and Pern	Todd McCaffrey	Smart Pop
	Warbound (Urban Fantasy)	Larry Correia	Baen

	TITLE	AUTHOR	PUBLISHER
AUGUST	Walking In The Midst of Fire (Urban Fantasy)	Thomas E. Sniegowski	Roc
	Possession (Urban Fantasy)	Kat Richardson	Roc
	Box Office Poison (Urban Fantasy)	Phillipa Bornikova	Tor
	Gallow: Cold Redemption (Fantasy)	Nathan Hawke	Gollancz
	On Her Majesty's Behalf (Horror)	Joseph Nassise	Harper Voyager
	Blood of Tyrants (Fantasy)	Naomi Novik	Del Ray
	The Daedalus Incident (SF)	Michael J. Martinez	Night Shade
	Assault on Sunrise (SF)	Michael Shea	Tor
	Alien Hunter (SF)	Whitley Strieber	Tor
	A Clockwork Heart (Steampunk)	Liesel Schwarz	Del Ray
	Winds of Salem (Urban Fantasy)	Melissa de la Cruz	Hyperion
	Elysian Fields (Urban Fantasy)	Suzanne Johnson	Tor
	The Treasury of the Fantastic (Anthology)	David Sandner & Jacob Weisman	Tachyon
	Dragon Queen (Fantasy)	Stephen Deas	Gollancz
	The Beating of his Wings (Fantasy)	Paul Hoffman	Michael Joseph
	The Raven's Shadow (Fantasy)	Elsbeth Cooper	Gollancz
	Legion and The Emperor's Soul (Fantasy)	Brandon Sanderson	Gollancz
	Dust (SF)	Hugh Howey	Broad Reach
	The Third Kingdom (Fantasy)	Terry Goodkind	Tor
	Wrath-Bearing Tree (Fantasy)	James Enge	Pyr
	The Bone Season (SF)	Samantha Shannon	Bloomsbury
	The Lost Prince (Fantasy)	Edward Lazellari	Tor
	Children of Fire (Fantasy)	Drew Karpysyn	Del Ray
	Jack Cloudie (Fantasy)	Stephen Hunt	Tor

	TITLE	AUTHOR	PUBLISHER
AUGUST	Crux (SF)	Ramez Naam	Angry Robot
	The Exodus Towers (SF)	Jason M. Hough	Del Ray
	Your Brother's Blood (Horror)	David Towsey	Jo Fletcher Books
	The Anxiety of Kalix the Werewolf (Horror)	Martin Millar	Piatkus
SEPTEMBER	The Mammoth Book of Time Travel SF (Anthology)	Mike Ashley	Running Press
	Under a Graveyard Sky (Horror / SF)	John Ringo	Baen
	Isaac Asimov's I Robot: To Obey (SF)	Michael Zucker Reichert	Roc
	The Given Sacrifice (Fantasy)	S.M. Stirling	Roc
	Monsters of the Earth (Fantasy)	David Drake	Tor
	The Last President (SF)	John Barnes	Ace
	The Undead Hordes of Kan-Gul (Horror/ Fantasy)	Jon. F. Merz	Baen
	The Shadow Lamp (SF/ Fantasy)	Stephen R. Lawhead	Thomas Nelson
	Zero Point (SF)	Neal Asher	Night Shade
	The Grim Company (Fantasy)	Luke Scull	Roc
	The Best Horror of the Year: Volume 5 (Anthology)	Ellen Datlow	Night Shade
	The Beautiful Thing That Awaits Us All (Horror)	Laird Barron	Night Shade
	Reanimators (Horror)	Pete Rawlik	Night Shade
	Shades of Blue & Gray: Ghosts of the Civil War (Anthology)	Steve Berman	Prime Books
	23 Years of Fire (SF)	Joel Shepherd	Pyr
	Gideon Smith and The Mechanical Girl (Steampunk)	David Barnett	Tor
	Halloween: Magic, Mystery and The Macabre (Anthology)	Paula Guran	Prime Books

	TITLE	AUTHOR	PUBLISHER
SEPTEMBER	The Red Queen Dies	Frankie Y Bailey	Minotaur Books
	Marauder (SF)	Gary Gibson	Tor UK
	Gallow: The Last Bastion (Fantasy)	Nathan Hawke	Gollancz
	The Mallet of Loving Correction (Anthology)	John Scalzi	Subterranean Press
	Super Stories of Heroes and Villains (Anthology)	Claude Lalumiere	Tachyon
	The One Eyed Man: A Fugue with Winds and Accompaniment (SF)	L. E. Modesitt	Tor
	The Rose and The Thorn (Fantasy)	Michael J. Sullivan	Orbit
	Anno Dracula: Johnny Alucard	Kim Newman	Titan Books
	Doctor Sleep (Horror)	Stephen King	Scribner
	A Cold Season (Horror)	Alison Littlewood	Jo Fletcher Books
	The Dead Run (Horror)	Adam Mansbach	Harper Voyager
	On The Steel Breeze (SF)	Alastair Reynolds	Gollancz

BOOK NEWS AND REVIEWS

We are now looking for articles about fiction for Issue 3. If you are a writer with a book launch just over the horizon, or an avid reader who wants to share a book review, then we want to hear from you. If you have an article about the literary industry, some writing news or a book review then please check our submissions guidelines on the web site.

fdezine.fever-dreams.co.uk/Submissions.html

We are also keen to establish links within the publishing industry. If you are a publishing house and want your books included in next issues releases or a book reviewed then please get in touch.

WHAT TO WATCH

A Quick Look At Upcoming Cinema Releases by Al Thomas

Norse themed gorefest *Hammer of the Gods* will be getting a limited release at the beginning of July and is on the slate to appear at Frightfest. I'm sure there'll be something to appeal to Fantasy and Horror fans here but if Science Fiction is more your thing then you should wait a few weeks and catch *Pacific Rim*.

Pacific Rim is a modern take on the Japanese giant monster movie, Godzilla springs instantly to mind, and is directed by Guillermo Del Toro. I'm sure that, with his distinctive eye, there will be plenty to love about this film.

Released at the same time as *Pacific Rim*, *V/H/S/2* may suffer. The first instalment had people fainting at Sundance so I have high expectations of this collection of shorts. If you don't catch it in the cinema then it's slated for release on DVD around the end of September.

Jeff Bridges and Ryan Reynolds head up the cast of *R.I.P.D* towards the end of July. This tale about a secret organisation that protect the world from souls that refuse to rest in peace, has been given a PG-13 cert which means that horror fans may want to skip on this one though fans of the Dark Horse comic will probably enjoy it.

Comic book fans may also be happy to see Hugh Jackman returning as Wolverine in *X-Men Origins: The Wolverine* in July. This is the second Wolverine film to be made and sees our hero travelling to Japan where he will face off against deadly opponents in a 3D life or death battle.

August will see British Zombie Comedy *Cockneys Vs Zombies* arriving for a limited period on the big screen. This film is also on the Frightfest schedule so horror fans should check it out.

Blomkamp's *Elysium* will arrive around the middle of August and should delight fans of *District 9*. If you are looking for dystopian science fiction then you can't go far wrong with *Elysium*.

Fans of Simon Pegg will be clamouring for *The World's End* and the final piece in the cornetto trilogy. After a disappointing show with *Paul*, I'm glad to see the Pegg-Wright partnership return.

If you are looking for something for the family to watch then August will also see the arrival of the latest Percy Jackson and Mortal Instruments films. *Sea of Monsters* sees Percy Jackson on a quest for the golden fleece and is perfect for younger viewers, while *City of Bones* and its focus on Urban Fantasy, Vampires and Shadowhunters will appeal more to teenagers.

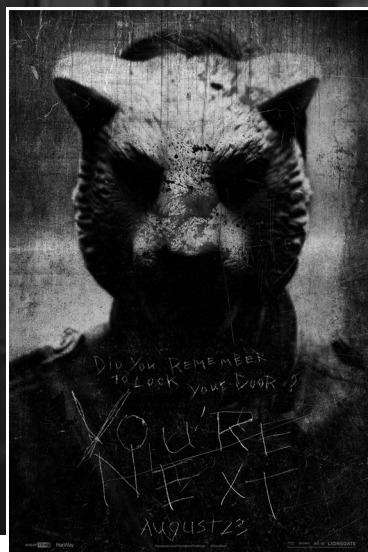
You're Next is a horror film to watch out for at the end of August. A gritty and gory home invasion movie focused on a family reunion, this film will appeal to fans of *Evil Dead*.

The horror continues into September as *Hell Baby*, *Butcher Boys* and *Insidious: Chapter 2* take to the screen. I loved the first *Insidious* so I'll definitely have this on my watch list.

If you'd rather avoid films about demon babies and cannibals then *Riddick* may be worth checking out. The latest in the series, that started with hit sci-fi horror *Pitch Black*, the film sees the eponymous hero trapped on a planet with Mercs and bounty hunters in a fight for survival that returns to the *Pitch Black* formula.

Definitely not one for the children is *Somo Lo Que Hay* inspired *We Are What We Are*. A graphic horror by director Jim Mickle that arrives at the end of September.

FILM REVIEW



YOU'RE NEXT

30TH AUGUST 2013

by Al Thomas

You're Next falls somewhere between Michael Sandager's *Festen* and French home-invasion film *Them*. Director Adam Wingard continues to build on his success in *V/H/S* and, *Fever Dreams* favourite, *The ABCs of Death*.

Upgrading his cabin in the woods, the primary location of *A Horrible Way To Die*, to an isolated country pile may seem to be insignificant, especially given that both locations are in the middle of forests, but the difference is crucial. The family reunion is a vital component of the film and holding it in such an isolated location sets the scene for a deliciously subversive and well designed gore-fest.

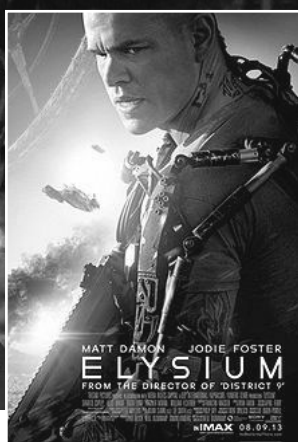
Speaking of Gore, *You're Next* boasts some genuinely shocking murders, that rival any recent film in the genre. The problem is, as I am often forced to point out, that the Davison family are hardly the most sympathetic of

characters and this means that initially you have little investment in them. As the death toll mounts and the family succumb to brutal attacks from animal-masked assailants, an unlikely hero does emerge. As the family members fight back you can't help but root for them.

Wingard deftly juggles gory horror and black humour, keeping the audience in the dark about the truth of the home invasion, and then Simon Barrett's script gleefully twists the blade, bringing the film to a satisfying conclusion.

While this film does not defy any genre conventions, Wingard's film about a dysfunctional family is an outrageous and gory crowd pleaser, proving that he is well on his way to becoming the next Sam Raimi.

FILM REVIEW



ELYSIUM

OCTOBER 2013

by Al Thomas

Neill Blomkamp follows up on his success with *District 9* with another satirical science fiction movie. In *Elysium*, Blomkamp creates a classic dystopia and adds to that the musclebound mechanoid imagery of the 80s and 90s. The future as Blomkamp imagines it is little more than a cartoon of modern society. Most of the world lives in squalor while Elysium, a 2001 inspired silver wheel, hangs above them whispering promises that they will never be able to obtain. In fact the plot could be boiled down to sick third world country tries to take down wealthy superpower to steal medical supplies that said superpower is keeping for themselves..

It is almost beside the point that the society he creates is impossible and the use of technology, at best, isn't credible. If technology existed to increase lifespan and renew health then there would be no reason for the wealthy to use it on their labour force

so that they can continue to work hard and keep them wealthy.

If you don't venture to deeply into the politics of the film there is much to love about *Elysium*. The comedic barbs are arranged between bursts of bloody movie action and soap opera style drama about sick children. The problem for me is that a little too much of the film was shot in a grubby hand-held camera style, but the action sequences and special effects, which include Robo-cop style murderous law droids and a scene where Kruger has his face regrown, are extraordinary.

Blomkamp proves once again that he is capable of creating gritty and uncompromising political science fiction but his characters lack depth and Damon's arrival on Elysium is anti-climactic. These complaints are really quite minor issues in this crash-landing explosive action movie.

ON DVD

If you think that fantasy films need to have elves, trolls and goblins then you may be disappointed by *Solomon Kane*. This film based on Robert E Howard's pulp fiction may not be the most accurate adaption of the stories but I'm not entirely sure it matters.

James Purefoy is perfect as the brooding and tortured hero. The director gives his character ample time to breathe and develop, which is far from a bad thing. The gritty, near monochrome visuals are evocative of great fantasy artists like Frank Frazetta, and are perfectly suited to the film.

SOLOMON KANE

That's not to say this film is without its problems. The CGI fluctuates from fairly good to sub par, and some of the scenes are a little to reminiscent of recent fantasy classics like *The Lord of the Rings* films. One common criticism of the film is its reliance on low budget special effects, and while some of the set pieces are reminiscent of *Conan*, there is still plenty to love about the action sequences when they get going.

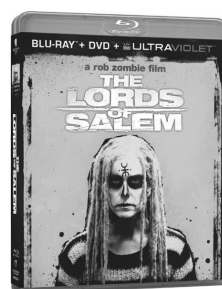
While this film is certainly not a rival to *The Lord of the Rings* place on the fantasy throne, it is more than capable of taking down similar films such as *Van Helsing*. This good vs evil fantasy film, with its darker take on religious themes, is highly recommended for fans of gritty fantasy.

THE LORDS OF SALEM

Writer and Director, Rob Zombie, outdoes himself in *The Lords of Salem*. The film is clearly influenced by the 70s Satanic Psychedelic Horror Trend and showcases the talents of Sherri Moon Zombie in the lead role.

Sherri stars as Heidi, a recovering addict working as a DJ at a local radio station in Salem, Massachusetts. The Lords of the title send her a package, which she mistakenly believes is a gimmick from a band. Once the record plays it triggers a series of traumatic flashbacks and hallucinations.

I would venture that this is Sherri Moon Zombie's best acting role to date but she is sadly blown off the screen by her *Scream* Queen co-stars. Its great to see the faces of Dee Wallace, Patricia Quinn, Judy Geeson, and Meg Foster, even if they do steal all the scenes.



REVIEW by Al Thomas

Many fans of Rob Zombie will expect this to be his usual grindhouse gorefest, but may be disappointed. *The Lords of Salem* has a more artistic feel to it, reminiscent of Dario Argento's *Suspria* and the cinematography owes much to Kubrick's *Shining*.

This film has surprised and divided many of Rob Zombie's fans, and this is reflected in the mixed reception and lack lustre reviews that the film received. I think that fans of classical horror will find much to enjoy here though.

UPCOMING RELEASES

A look at third quarter DVD releases

Sci-fi thriller, *The Host*, makes it onto DVD in July to be accompanied by the remake of *Evil Dead*. If you missed my review last issue then you may be surprised to know that I won't be in any hurry to acquire this soulless cash-in. *The Host* has been universally panned as dramatically ineffective and poorly scripted. If you'd like to see for yourself then feel free to pick up a copy. If you ask me you'll be wasting your money.

A number of low budget horror films will pad out August. The titles that I'll be keeping my eye out for are the sci-fi thriller *Oblivion* and animated fantasy *Epic*. I have to admit that these films didn't appeal to me on paper but when I had the chance to view them on the big screen I thoroughly enjoyed both of them. Its worth noting that *Oblivion* was Tom Cruise's best opening weekend, aside from the *Mission Impossible* franchise and *War of the Worlds*, despite the fact that many viewers felt it was visual striking but poorly scripted.

Its September though that will be hard on your pocket. This summers blockbusters will be arriving on DVD. *Star Trek 2*, *World War Z* and *Iron Man 3* all did well in the box office and are worth spending your money on. If you liked *Shaun of the Dead* then I'd also invest in *Cockneys Vs Zombies*, which is a brilliant British zombie comedy (in case the title didn't help you realise that). The film premiered at Frightfest in London and has received positive reviews across the board.

Frightfest also showed *Hammer of the Gods* and *Frankenstein's Army* which also arrive on DVD in September. *Hammer of the Gods* is a brutal Viking movie that sees a King's son questing in search of his exiled brother. *Frankenstein's Army* is the tale of Russian soldiers who stumble across a Nazi secret weapons laboratory where Dr. Frankenstein has been hard at work. I loved both of these films when I saw them at Frightfest and will be keen to pick them up on DVD.

Also arriving on DVD this month is *V/H/S/2*. This collection of "found footage" shorts received decent reviews. I loved the clinical trials footage and the

	TITLE	GENRE
JULY	<i>The Host</i>	Sci-fi
	<i>Evil Dead</i>	Horror
	<i>Solomon Kane</i>	Fantasy
AUG	<i>Oblivion</i>	Sci-Fi
	<i>Aftershock</i>	Horror
	<i>Hatchet 3</i>	Horror
	<i>Epic</i>	Fantasy
	<i>No One Lives</i>	Horror
SEPT	<i>Lords of Salem</i>	Horror
	<i>Cockneys Vs Zombies</i>	Horror
	<i>Star Trek 2: Into Darkness</i>	Sci-Fi
	<i>Hammer of the Gods</i>	Historical
	<i>World War Z</i>	Sci-fi
	<i>Iron Man 3</i>	Sci-Fi
	<i>V/H/S/2</i>	Horror
	<i>The Walking Dead: Season 3</i>	Horror
	<i>Frankenstein's Army</i>	Horror
	<i>Doctor Who: Monster Collections</i>	Sci-fi

ARTICLE by Al Thomas

alien abduction slumber party is worth watching at least once.

The BBC are releasing a slew of *Doctor Who* collections at the end of September which are themed by the Doctor's monster co-stars. Look out for the Dalek, Master and Cyberman box sets, I will be.

GAME REVIEWS

THE BUREAU: X-COM DECLASSIFIED

2K GAMES AUGUST 2013



REVIEW by Al Thomas

The Bureau: X-Com Declassified is the latest in a long chain of X-Com games that I began playing in my teens and have loved since I finally grasped the intricacies of X-Com UFO Defence. In light of the success of Enemy Unknown last year, I was expected great things from The Bureau but it would be hard to ignore the tumultuous and prolonged development that the game has undergone and the shift to a Mass Effect style third-person shooter.

Graphically the game is incredible. '60s America has been lovingly and painstakingly recreated, but how could we expect anything less from the studio behind Bioshock 2. Small town life, with its homecoming parades and soda pop stands, face obliteration at the hands of alien creatures and their plague carriers, and all that stands in their way is a handful of chain smoking, fedora wearing agents who look like they were pulled straight

out of a glossy illustrated magazine. If the idea was to provoke outrage at the desecration of these quaint little communities then job well done.

Between missions you will find yourself in a Cold War bunker, complete with every kind of technology you would expect to find in a '60 B-movie, including a wavy-line covered monitor. Unfortunately there are no research facilities, no autopsies and an abundance of incredibly tedious dialogue trees to explore. The lack of meaningful activities at the bunker means that after the initial exploration you will quickly find yourself bored to tears as you spin your wheels waiting for your next trip out to small town America.

The removal of the research facilities is also reflected on missions where it is entirely



The Interface will be familiar to fans of the Mass Effect series

possible for you to arm your entire squad with plasma weapons simply by picking them up off the ground. This renders the existence of Dr. Heinrich, the alleged research director, completely pointless.

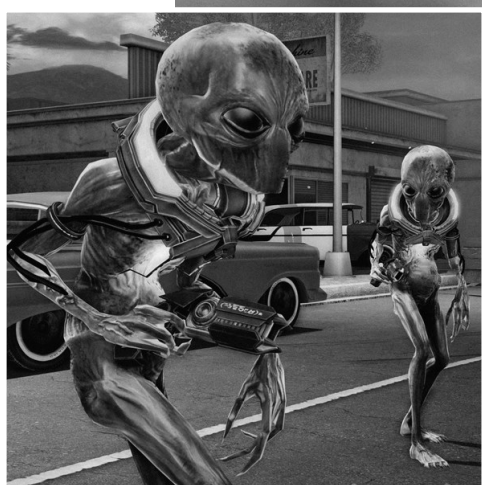
While the game merely pays homage to its predecessors in many ways, it does draw heavily from last year's *Enemy Unknown*, in terms of its combat system. It borrows heavily in terms of its user interface which helps to tie the games together but there are obviously going to be differences because of the shift to a third-person engine. Real time combat means that, unlike their futuristic counterparts, the '60s agents don't wait to fire but shoot on sight. This shift means that combat seems less tactical and more chaotic than in any of the previous *x-com* titles.

The agents are moved and their powers are activated via a radial menu. This allows you to move them into tactical positions so that you can flank an opponent and then queue up a sequence of actions. The powers vary according to the respective class of the agent. The long range recon class is perfect for sniping enemies and has the ability to call in

aerial strikes, for example, while the support class is all about shielding, healing and boosting your other characters performance through drugs. Much like in *Mass Effect* there are clever ways to combine these powers, such as using Carter's lift power to raise an enemy and allow them to get a clear shot.

Unfortunately there is a problem and that is that your team mates are incredibly stupid. They require constant babysitting, and you will often find yourself doing more than your fair share of the work on missions. This leads to the inevitable problem of ammo consumption. Even on the lower difficulties the game will throw you into back to back firefights with dozens of enemies that leave you with barely enough ammo. If you could depend on your teammates to, for example, not sit on a grenade then these fights would probably be exhilarating but their low capacity for independent thought and frequent disregard for orders makes the fights very frustrating.

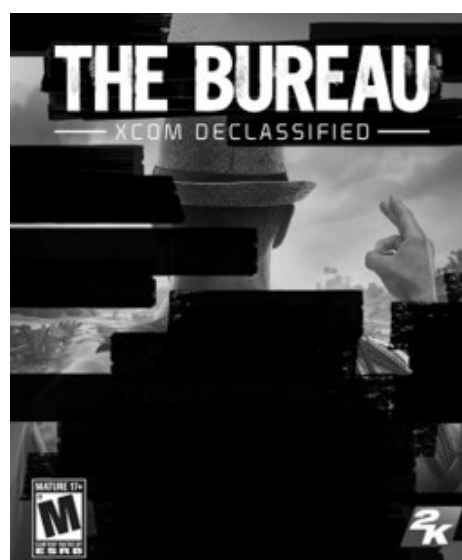
If you manage to run the gauntlet of waist-high cover without your ammo running out and your agents getting themselves killed, you will often find yourself drifting through areas of the map



that are curiously devoid of NPCs and aliens until you find your next firefight. This makes the pace of combat feel very uneven and can result in you entering a combat situation without being prepared, thus ensuring the problems I mentioned with ammo.

The Bureau pays lip service to the series essentials like permadeath and technology acquisition, but it fails to include these mechanics in the final product in a way that makes sense. The tactical choices, that the game has built its reputation around, are limited to a mission select screen where you can outfit your team mates and send other agents away for training on optional, experience quests. The base is devoid of meaningful activity relegating it to little more than the Normandy in Mass Effect. The biggest problem for me is that the consequences of my actions, something that made Enemy Unknown so fun, are absent here. How can I feel sorry about losing an agent who feels its ok to play catch with a grenade?

The simple truth is that this game will certainly disappoint fans of the X-com franchise. If you take it out of the franchise and examine it as a game in its own right that you have a passable squad-based shooter with an authentic look



and some interesting ideas. The Bureau won't compete with Enemy Unknown, which is by far the better game, but it does have a style and charm of its own. Fans of the X-Com franchise would do better to wait for the arrival of the cybernetically-infuse Enemy Within expansion due out on November 15. The expansion includes a staggering 47 new maps, the MEC (Mechanised Exo-skeleton Cybersuit) soldier class, Gene Mod agents and a whole host of new customisation options, including new projects to build in the Foundry.

DIABLO 3

BLIZZARD SEPTEMBER 2013



REVIEW by Al Thomas

Diablo has a mixed history when it comes to the console games market, and while there have been numerous Diablo clones on the current generation of consoles we've not had a true Diablo game since the millennium.

On the surface Diablo games aren't exactly deep, you explore a randomly generated map whilst under constant attack by hordes of monsters. The pacing of these battles is done perfectly with just the right combination of basic mobs to challenging mini-bosses that keep you on edge. The PC version was one of those games where you found yourself wondering why everyone else is asleep and then you realise it's four in the morning.

The five classes are sufficiently different which makes multiple playthroughs a slightly more appealing prospect. The wizard uses powerful arcane magic whilst the barbarian builds rage to fuel his devastating close range attacks. The monk is a close ranged martial arts expert, the demon hunter uses ranged weapons and the witch doctor leads an army of zombies into combat. Blizzard have

certainly learned a lot from the success of World of Warcraft and that knowledge is applied to Diablo 3.

Your interest in the game is maintained through a combination of a clever levelling up system and the search for loot. All of your actions in Diablo 3 are divided into categories and you can choose one skill from each category. Each skill has a number of unique runes that tweak or change the nature of the power allowing for hours of tinkering till you find the combination that best suits your style of play. While diehard RPG fans might not like the lack of skill points that was a feature of Diablo 2, this system is more generous and loses nothing in customizability.

That said the Diablo games have always been about the loot. The console versions lack the auction house so if you want to trade then you'll have to do it in person, and should avoid the repetition of the mistakes in Diablo 2.

All in all, the delay between the PC and console versions was well worth it. Play it now.

CASTLEVANIA: LORDS OF SHADOW: MIRROR OF FATE**KONAMI MERCURYTEAM MARCH 2013****ARTICLE by Ruaraidh Cresswell**

Like any other consumer of media, I have my share of franchises I can claim to be emotionally attached to. On the other hand, faced with a storied franchise I am always open to what a change of direction or a new set of eyes can bring. Ultimately I prefer a franchise to be a starting point for an adventure into uncharted territory rather than a routine journey. My criteria for success being my enjoyment of the game I end up with, rather than the game some may have been expecting. Sometimes it can be a little sad to see a game you enjoy unfairly derided due to legacy expectations. Castlevania: Lords of Shadow: Mirror of Fate is, in my opinion, one of these games.

The past generation has seen a number of well regarded Japanese game franchises having the development mantle of responsibility passed to western development studios in an attempt to expand beyond a loyal niche in the west. With the cost of producing a competitive HD game requiring a title to sell in the multi millions to even begin to turn a profit, appealing to an international audience is now seen as essential. Castlevania is one such series to have undergone this transition with Spanish developer MercurySteam making

Castlevania: Lords of Shadow their debut. A visually striking and critically well received gothic God of War style combat-heavy adventure, Lords of Shadow sold in the millions. Unfortunately this alone was apparently not enough to keep a fledgling developers doors open in todays gaming industry and MercurySteam was faced with closure had they been unable to secure a further project immediately following the completion of Lords of Shadow. If nothing else, Konamis approval of Mirror of Fate for the 3DS is what allowed the studio to remain in business and go on to develop Lords of Shadow 2, which will conclude the Lords of Shadow saga.

To my mind, Mirror of Fates' reception is highly reminiscent of Nintendo's Metroid: Other M. Both are very worthy games that have received a mauling from certain vocal fans for their deviations from the established formula. Samus' featured some unfortunate story elements that, according to this fanbase, were terrible enough to completely invalidate whatever good it may have accomplished as a slick, fast paced action-adventure take on the Metroid formula. Mirror of Fate suffered the misfortune of not following Koji Igarashi's

classic Symphony of the Night and its excellent GBA and DS offspring to the tee. Despite this, I found it to hit many of the right notes for my tastes, succeeding in ways I would not have expected and mostly avoiding pitfalls I was bracing for.

“Action adventure” games often fall too far on the side of action and not enough on the adventure for my liking. The Castlevania I was dreading would have been one of those games that railroads the player from combat arena to combat arena. Sealing off the player with locked doors or magical barriers that only fall once the player has hacked to death an arbitrary number of enemies spawning from the air or floor. Mirror of Fate features a little of this but does a surprisingly good job of letting exploration of the castle be its most rewarding facet.

Symphony of the Night and its ilk functioned as a fusion between a gothic Metroid and an action RPG. You would explore an interconnected castle. Kill its plentiful inhabitants and gather a plethora of weapons, skills and character upgrades hidden in the castle halls or randomly dropped by enemies. Mirror of Fate scales this back somewhat. You are restricted to a whip or “combat cross” (that behaves identically) and precisely 2 sub-weapons and magic skills that are determined by the character you are playing at the time. The story takes place across 3 acts and 3 playable characters (4 if you count the brief prologue). They all explore different areas of the castle (with some overlap) with their own unique discoverable upgrades over the course of different time periods. The purpose of the quest is pleasingly simple, kill Dracula, but the different protagonists adventures will intertwine and affect one another's fate with the gentle assistance of the oddly lovable but tragic Lost Soul. A representative of the titular mirror evocative of Spirited Away's No Face. Simon, Trevor, and Gabriel Belmont are all bound by a particularly terrible intergenerational conflict that forms the crux of the story. Overt storytelling is kept to a polite minimum, the delivery benefiting from the evocative consistency of the casts Scottish accents. Storytelling scenes employ a colourful cel shaded 3D style and slightly exaggerated animations to convey character

interactions. This works well despite the visual contrast with the gameplay and mitigates the fact that the in game character models, while serviceable at gameplay distances, don't fare well up close. Despite the dark tones of the game it still provides occasional geek references and shots of black humour.

It really is the castle that is the soul of the game here. The scope is smaller and tighter than the earlier games with their exaggerated 2D scale, but this is to the games benefit. The world is rendered in a grim gothic style that should not work on the small display and limited resolution of the 3DS but MercurySteam employ some artistic and technical tricks to more than mitigate this. Stereoscopic 3D carves out a fantastic sense of volume and depth from the earth brown and granite grey materials that make up much of the castles environment. Coloured lighting brings a contrasting warm and cool ambience to the weathered caves and exteriors as well as the more run down and utilitarian areas of the castle, helping both atmosphere, sense of depth and clarity. Interior environments are presented with surprising vibrancy and attention to detail. Art direction throughout possesses a feel reminiscent of Guillermo Del Toro's movies which is clearly a product of the games Spanish origins. Subtle contrast is a recurring theme. Even the more opulent areas are shot through with signs of decay and hidden nooks and crannies, which nearly always hide a secret or two.

Even with their open ended castle layouts, previous Castlevanias relied more on enemy item drops than hidden items for character progression. That Mirror of Fate relies on the latter gives it a sense of exploration more reminiscent of a Metroid game. You are never too far from a hidden scroll or upgrade chest and many of these will be inaccessible on the first pass until you return with the relevant skill. The combat cross becomes more than just a killing tool and is essential for traversal. Swinging from grapple points, abseiling walls and allowing use of the toymakers magnetic rail system for transport. Sadly the skills and upgrades themselves do not share the same inspiration as the levels that hide

them. Chests will carry health, magic and ammo capacity upgrades. Hidden magical scrolls record the last thoughts of ill fated knights and provide a boost of EXP that serves to unlock new combat abilities. Despite the game being split across 3 characters, you can return to a previous act once completed to mop up anything you may have missed.

Unfortunately combat is where Mirror of Fate disappoints a little. It's an entirely serviceable system but it is let down by enemy variety and combat options being scaled down

order, stun and grab finishers are present and correct and there is nearly always a way to rapidly dispatch an enemy that helps avoid tedium when you just want to explore. Each character presents themselves as having 2 unique secondary weapons and 2 magic skills but this basically equates to a direct projectile and area of effect weapon, while magic will either restore health, shield from damage or increase your own damage output. The combat performs solidly and can certainly prove entertaining but the limited choice on offer does hurt replay value.



When zombie meets axe, there can be only one winner.

considerably versus Koji Igarashi's games. This has its benefits. Loss of a random drop system will always go unmourned by me and some of the more bizarre enemies and weapons from the likes of Dawn of Sorrow wouldn't have fit the more serious tone of this game. Your whip/combat cross behaves in a manner similar to the Blades of Chaos from God of War, playing the role of an extensible melee weapon that appears to not so much tear your foes asunder as tickle them to death. You gain experience from hidden scrolls and kills which unlock new combat skills in a predetermined

A similar issue is found with enemy variety. You have your standard issue zombies, skeletons, puppets, werewolves, harpies and mermen among other archetypes but nothing living up to the creativity of the world they inhabit. Boss monsters go some way to make up for this with the plague-masked torch-bearing night watchman and his adorable scaven companions providing an early highlight. Simon's encounter with the succubus in her lurid male fantasy world is also grimly amusing. Unfortunately a couple of the later encounters with what should be

impressive foes are reduced to QTE sequence which feels like a missed opportunity.

Anyone who knows their Castlevania will be familiar with Michiru Yamane's musical backdrops. In the case of Mirror of Fate the shift in developer to Spain from Japan has brought with it a shift in musical style. Yamanes more upbeat style would not have fit the tone of Mirror of Fate like it did the older games. MercurySteam composer Oscar Araujo provides a fittingly sombre and sometimes beautiful and emotional soundscape that fits the visual atmosphere well. Sadly, its implementation with the gameplay does not live up to its quality. Tracks are generally not associated with particular environments but rather flip between a selection of ambient and combat themes seemingly at random, which hurts the games excellent sense of place a little and means you will tire of them sooner than you should.

Mirror of Fate is perhaps a little style over substance, but it happens to be the kind of style I can really enjoy. This is a game to play with the lights out, headphones on and the 3D slider at maximum. It is worth mentioning that noticeable performance issues in the eshop

demo version have been mostly improved in the final game. Additionally, a 3DS firmware update since the release of the game appears to have uncapped the 3DS' CPU with noticeable performance gains in a number of titles Mirror of Fate included, finally blessing the game with the smooth performance it deserves. At about 12 hours in length for a 100% first playthrough the game provides a satisfying adventure without overstaying its welcome. Sadly, there is little hard incentive for replay value aside from the harder difficulties that simply make you die faster. I personally found the games world enthralling enough to warrant a couple of repeat visits. As is the case with just about any handheld game not published by Nintendo, Mirror of Fate has received little to no marketing push from Konami. With the expected consequences for sales. The game will likely be found with a more fitting price tag before long which will hopefully prove a blessing. Like Metroid: Other M before it Castlevania: Mirror of Fate is a lovingly made yet misunderstood game that well deserves a play.



UPCOMING RELEASES

A look at third quarter game releases

This quarter kicks off with vampire stealth action in *Dark*. If you fancy taking on the role of a telekinetic vampire then *Dark* may be worth a look, though the game hasn't received much positive attention due to its poor combat system.

The king of MOBA arrives in its new incarnation in July, *DOTA 2* is certainly a game that will feature on my Steam download list, though admittedly I've been playtesting it for some time.

Other noteworthy games in July include *Time and Eternity*, a beautifully crafted RPG, and *Shadowrun Returns*. I pre-ordered *Shadowrun* last quarter and am eagerly awaiting this title. I'll see you in the slums, Chummer.

August releases include the much discussed third-person shooter *The Bureau: X-Com Declassified*. I've reviewed it this issue so I won't say anything else here. Also worth picking up are the new *Castlevania* and *Final Fantasy* games. Fans of these franchises won't be disappointed with these releases. Lastly is the next instalment of *Lost Planet*. The game has met with mixed responses and though I can't think of anything bad to say about it, I can't think of anything good either. If you like *Lost Planet* it's probably worth a punt.

September sees the long awaited arrival of *Diablo 3* on consoles, check out my review for more information. It also sees the sequel to *Amnesia*. *Amnesia* is one of those little known titles that every horror fan should have in their games collection. The original contained some of the most scary moments in video gaming history and *Machine for Pigs* has a lot to live up to.

The last title I'll discuss is the HD remake of *Wind Waker* which becomes available to Wii-U owners at the end of September. The *Legend of Zelda* games are always a great way to lose yourself for a few hours and this HD remake will make it worth doing all over again.

	TITLE	PLATFORM
JULY	<i>Dark</i>	X360, PC,
	<i>Dota 2</i>	PC
	<i>Deus Ex: The Fall</i>	iOS
	<i>Time and Eternity</i>	PS3
	<i>Earthbound</i>	Wii-U
	<i>Halo: Spartan Assault</i>	Win
	<i>Prince of Persia: The Shadow and the Flame</i>	iOS
	<i>Shadowrun Returns</i>	PC, iOS, Mac
AUG	<i>Dragon's Crown</i>	PS3, PSVita
	<i>The Bureau: X-Com Declassified</i>	PC, PS3, X360
	<i>Castlevania: Lord of Shadows</i>	Win
	<i>Final Fantasy XIV: A Realm Reborn</i>	Win, PS3
	<i>Lost Planet 3</i>	PS3, X360, PC
SEPT	<i>Diablo 3</i>	PS3, X360
	<i>Amnesia: A Machine for Pigs</i>	Win
	<i>Broken Sword: The Serpent's Curse</i>	PC, Mac, iOS
	<i>Dragon's Prophet</i>	Win
	<i>Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker HD</i>	Wii-U

ARTICLE by Al Thomas

UPCOMING EVENTS

Our Guide to upcoming conventions

JULY

Date	Name	Details	Location
5th—7th	London Film and Comic Con	Comics www.collectormania.com	Earls Court Two, London
20th-21st	London Anime Con	Anime and Gaming www.londonanimecon.com	The Rocket Complex, London Metropolitan Uni
25th—28th	Continuum	Gaming www.continuum.uk.net	University of Leicester
27th-28th	Trekology	Star Trek www.trekology.org	Trafford Hall Hotel, Manchester

AUGUST

Date	Name	Details	Location
8th—11th	Leakycon	Harry Potter www.leakycon.com	Great Connaught Rooms, London
9th-11th	Fantastiq	Horror, Science Fiction www.fantastiq.co.uk	QUAD, Derby
9th-11th	Nine Worlds	Geekdom ninemeworlds.co.uk	The Renaissance Hotel, Heathrow

AUGUST

Date	Name	Details	Location
9th-11th	Wadfest	Sci-fi Fantasy www.wadfest.co.uk	Trentfield Farm, near Retford
16th	Ayacon	Japanese Culture www.ayacon.org.uk	Warwick Arts Centre, University of Warwick, nr Coventry
18th	The Rift @ The Forum	Doctor Who www.norwich-rift.co.uk	The Forum, Norwich
Aug 30th— Sept 1st	Wolf's Bane	Teen Wolf www.roqueevent.co.uk	Hotel Renaissance, London Heathrow
Aug 31st— Sept 1st	CamCon 2013	Sci-fi and Fantasy thecamcon.com	The Junction, Cambridge

SEPTEMBER

Date	Name	Details	Location
5th—8th	Alcon	Anime www.alcon.org.uk	De Monfort University, Leicester
7th	TitanCon	Science Fiction & Fantasy www.titancon.com	Wellington Park Hotel, Belfast
13th—15th	Starfury: Serenity forever	Firefly www.starfury.co.uk	Renaissance Hotel, London Heathrow
13th—15th	The Asylum	Steampunk steampunk.synthasite.com	Lincoln
21st –22nd	Regenerations 2013	Doctor Who www.regenerationsswansea.co.uk	The Village Hotel, Swansea

OCTOBER

Date	Name	Details	Location
3rd-6th	Grim Up North	Horror and Cult Film grimmfest.com/ grimmupnorth	Dancehouse Theatre, Manchester
4th –5th	The 7th Starfleet/Klingon Banquet	Star Trek www.starbase24.co.uk/ index.php?pid=2	Holiday Inn, Peterborough
5th – 6th	DEF-CON 2	Sci-fi mini convention www.facebook.com/ events/414152898654201	Totton, Southampton
24th-27th	Bram Stoker International Film Festival	Horror Films www.bramstokerfilmfestival .com	Whitby
25th-27th	Hallowhedon 5	Joss Whedon TV Series massiveevents.co.uk	Hilton Metropole Hotel, Birmingham

NOVEMBER

Date	Name	Details	Location
30th Oct— 3rd Nov	World Fantasy Convention	Fantasy wfc2013.org	Brighton
1st –4th	Irish Discworld Convention	Discworld www.idwcon.org	Radisson Blu Hotel, Limerick
8th –9th	Autumn: Horror in the East	Horror Fiction www.horrorintheeast.com	Lowestoft

CONVENTION NEWS AND REVIEWS

If you know of a convention that is not on the list then let us know and we'll add it next issue. We would also like to hear from you if you attend one of these events. Although we may be offered the chance to attend events, it isn't possible to attend all of them at the moment. If you feel like telling us about your convention experience then please get in touch.

fdezine.fever-dreams.co.uk/Submissions.html